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## ***Jerusalem in Islam and For Palestinian Christians***

**Naim Ateek**

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### **I. Introduction**

The holiness of one place and its significance to the life and worship of a particular people is one of the oldest treasured beliefs of nations. Yet due to the passage of history certain places have become sacred to more than one group, resulting often in conflict and violence. Moreover, the way a people perceive that holiness becomes ingrained in their historical memory and religious consciousness. That holy space becomes uniquely theirs. It gives them identity and is hard to share; so it must be guarded and controlled.

Jerusalem is such a place. The surrounding land of Israel / Palestine is a beautiful country, but, because of its strategic location, it has been like a corridor—endlessly used by armies and people, open to constant attack, vulnerable to neighbouring powers. Its history reflects the constant movement of people. A great part of the pain and suffering in the Middle East today is caused by this long and changing history. For as a result, Jerusalem today is a unique place in the history of humankind, revered by millions. Yet this city has all the ingredients of driving people apart, because its sacredness to one group has somehow negated the others rather than included them.

The great challenge before us is whether humans can transcend exclusive historical claims and divisive religious understanding so that they can share sacred space. Or is it still impossible for sacred space to be shared in our modern world?

The following is a Palestinian Christian perspective on Jerusalem. Its purpose is both to explain a Palestinian approach to this subject and to show that Palestinians, though insisting on truth and justice, are working and hoping for a political solution that can be inclusive to all of Jerusalem's inhabitants rather than exclusive to one group.

Initially, some Western readers may find this approach to the land of Israel / Palestine somewhat strange. Yet there is a

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real sense in which, from a certain historical perspective, it can be claimed that Palestine has always been part of the land of the Arabs. Some scholars argue that the people of the Middle East originated in the Arabian peninsula.<sup>1</sup> the Canaanites, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians and Hebrews (Israelites) were people who populated the whole of the Middle East as a result of different waves of immigration arising from the Arabian peninsula. If so, this historical perspective emphasizes the common Arab roots of the people of the Middle East before they diverged into tribes and nations. It also encourages an awareness that in the land of Palestine there has been a constant influx of new

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<sup>1</sup> P.K. Hitti, *A History of the Arabs*, 10th ed., (New York, St. Martin's Press 1970) 3.

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ethnic groups, resulting in a population that throughout history has been both indigenous and foreign at the same time. Foreign elements have mixed with the indigenous population and have themselves in time become indigenous, whether Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Crusader, or whatever group came into Palestine.

The significance of Jerusalem for the ancient people of Israel and for Jewish people ever since has been covered elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> In the following we will examine: first, the role of Jerusalem within Islam; secondly, the significance of Palestinian Christians and the theological basis for their distinctive approach to Jerusalem; finally, the modern problem from a political perspective, with a concluding section outlining a vision for Jerusalem in the future.

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## II. Jerusalem in Islam

There are at least three bases for the significance of Jerusalem to Muslims.<sup>3</sup> First there is the *theological* basis. Islam recognizes Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jonah, Jesus and others as 'prophets', and acknowledges that Moses was sent by God to the Jews with the Torah, and Jesus to Christians with the Gospel. Yet, according to Islam, both Jews and Christians corrupted their Scriptures. Islam therefore comes as the last and final religious revelation, fulfilling what came before it; Muhammad is the final prophet and apostle.

Moreover, Muslims believe that the Qur'an contains the exact words of God. As a result, where there are discrepancies in the way the Qur'an relates stories from the Old and New Testaments, compared with the biblical texts, Muslims assert categorically that these are due to the changes or corruptions which Jews and Christians have made in their Scriptures. The Quranic text alone is authentic. As a result Islam sees itself as the legitimate inheritor of both religions; indeed it points out their wrongs, since it is the final, correct and complete revelation of God. With this attitude, Muslims have never deemed it religiously wrong to build their religious shrines on places holy to Jews or Christians.

This affinity—especially between Muslims and Jews, and seen in their shared prophets—explains why it was natural for Muslims at the height of their power to build impressive religious shrines on sites that were equally holy to Jews, most notably the Dome of the Rock (on the site of Solomon's temple) and the Abrahamic Mosque in Hebron (over the tombs of the Patriarchs). Muslims did not consider themselves unlawfully impinging on the rights of the Jews; on the contrary, they saw themselves (and still do) as the valid and God-given inheritors of these sites from people who had corrupted their Scriptures and failed to keep God's law as originally given. In addition, since these

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<sup>2</sup> See above chs. 2 [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_wright.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_wright.pdf)] and 5 (ii) [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_brearley.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_brearley.pdf)]. To those accounts it is worth adding that Jerusalem evidently had a religious significance long before David's conquest; for it was the home of Melchizedek, who was subsequently described in the written tradition as 'King of Salem,... priest of God Most High' (Gen. 14:18). Moreover, Jerusalem's unique place within Israelite religion was augmented by its association with the 'Moriah' where Abraham was to have sacrificed Isaac (Gen. 22:2). On David's development of Jerusalem as a symbol of his rule and of Israelite sovereignty, power, and identity, see the excellent study by R.B. Coote and D.R. Ord, *The Bible's First History* (Philadelphia, Fortress 1989).

<sup>3</sup> A full paper on this theme was given at the conference by Dr. Taysir Kamleh (available from the editor). See also O. Hasson, 'Jerusalem in Islamic Literature', in L.I. Levine, ed., *Jerusalem Cathedra* (Jerusalem, 1981).

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same prophets are equally prophets of Islam, these holy sites are as much holy to Islam as they are to Jews. This same understanding then relates to the 'holy city' of Jerusalem.

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Secondly, there is the *political* basis. A very interesting phenomenon developed in Islam almost from the very beginning: Muslims perceived an unbreakable and inseparable link between being an Arab and being a Muslim.<sup>4</sup> At the time of the advent of Islam, a number of Arab tribes had already been Christian and Christianity was flourishing in many places in the Arabian peninsula.<sup>5</sup> Yet Islam soon became indissolvably connected with Arabism. Muhammad was himself an Arab, and the Qur'an was for them God's own language, dictated from heaven in Arabic. This gave Islam its distinctive Arab rootage. Islam quickly coloured everything that was Arab, with the result that what was Arab but not Muslim was eventually marginalized and negated. Although Christianity among the Arabs in Arabia and the Middle East had preceded Islam by several centuries, it was soon disavowed as authentically Arab. Islam and Arabism were now intrinsically linked.

Furthermore, the Muslims were able within a relatively short period of time to conquer all the countries of the Middle East. Although in many places Christians remained numerically prominent well into the time of the Crusades, the Arab Muslim factor became predominant, with many Christians converting to Islam. The Arabic language and Islamic culture thus became imprinted in the lives of all the people of the Arab East. These countries became Arab Islamic countries, with Palestine being considered an integral part of them.

The 'Middle East' is therefore special in the eyes of its Muslim inhabitants. Whilst, it is true that Muslims see Islam as a world religion and many Muslims today are not Arab, the Middle East is for them essentially both Arab and Muslim. Jews and Christians can exist there as *Ahl-Al dhimmah*<sup>6</sup>. Any predominance or outwardly visible success of either Judaism or

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Christianity in the Arab world can be perceived psychologically by the Muslims as an infringement on the superiority of Islam. The point to emphasize here is that Palestine—and therefore Jerusalem—constitutes an integral part of the Arab world which is basically Muslim, and therefore, significantly theirs.

Thirdly, relating more specifically to Jerusalem, there is the *religious* basis. For Muslims believe that Muhammad miraculously left Mecca in a night journey to Jerusalem riding on a horse, and that

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian* (Westminster, John Knox Press 1991) 13-29.

<sup>5</sup> Christian monasteries and churches were familiar phenomena: for example, the large Church building in San'a, Yemen, was a very popular place of worship for Christian Arabs. See J.S. Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, Longman 1979); I. Shaid, *Rome and the Arabs in the Third Century* (Dumbarton Oaks, Washington 1980), *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Dumbarton Oaks, Washington 1984), *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Dumbarton Oaks, Washington 1990).

<sup>6</sup> On this status of non-Muslims, see also ch. 5. n. 2 [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_brearlet.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_brearlet.pdf)] and ch. 7 n. 20 [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_maoz.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_maoz.pdf)].

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from the large Rock of Abraham he went up on a visit to heaven.<sup>7</sup> On this rock, Caliph 'Abd al-Malik then erected in AD 691 the magnificent Dome of the Rock. Furthermore, at the beginning of Muhammad's mission, he asked his followers to face Jerusalem every time they prayed. In other words, he considered Jerusalem was already a 'holy city'. Later, according to *Surah 2.142-150*, Muhammad was divinely directed to change the direction of prayer (*Qiblah*) from Jerusalem to Mecca; having emigrated from Mecca it was necessary to keep the city of his birth and of Abraham's *Ka'bah* clearly in his sight. Yet Jerusalem was not forgotten, becoming the third holiest city of Islam after Mecca and Medina. The miraculous visit of Muhammad to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem to heaven, combined with the fact that Jerusalem was the first *Qiblah*, sealed the holiness of Jerusalem to Muslims and indelibly imprinted its link with Islam.

Though much more can be said, these three factors—the theological, the political and the religious—are the major reasons for the significant status which the land of Palestine and the city of Jerusalem have traditionally held for Muslims.

### **III. Jerusalem and Christian Palestinians**

Palestinian Christians feel that many Western Christians are ignorant of the roots of their faith in the land of Palestine. Frequently it is assumed that Palestinian Christians must have been converted recently to Christianity from Islam. But where did the Church start?! Moreover, many Western Christians seem to have a subconscious feeling that Jews have a greater right to Israel / Palestine than Christians.

It must be emphasized therefore that Palestinian Christians do not consider themselves foreigners in Palestine.

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They are not newcomers or converts from Islam. On the contrary, Palestinian Christians would wish to trace their ancestry to the original Christian community of Apostolic times that has lived in Palestine ever since.<sup>8</sup> The early Palestinian Christian community was not purely Jewish; it was composed of all those who accepted Jesus as Lord. This outreach of the Gospel beyond the Jewish people has been shown above to have been an integral part of Jesus' own mission.<sup>9</sup> Here it may be added simply that in his earthly ministry Jesus evidently related as well to Samaritans, Romans, Syrophoenicians, and others. Although there is no specific mention of Arabs, Jesus must have certainly been in touch with them:

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<sup>7</sup> Qur'an, *Surah 17.1*.

<sup>8</sup> On this complex issue, see e.g. Trimingham, op. cit., and Cragg, op. cit., chs. 1 and 2. Part of the complexity, as there noted, rests on the issue of defining 'what is an Arab?'. Arabic was imposed as the principal language in Palestine only in the 690's, so that those speaking Greek or Aramaic previous to that time were of the same stock as those who spoke Arabic later; they can thus be termed 'Arabs', but only retrospectively. Moreover, the fact that many Christians in the early Christian centuries used Greek names does not necessarily mean that they were themselves Greeks; it is equally possible that they were indigenous 'Palestinians' (whether Jews or Arabs or others).

<sup>9</sup> See above ch. 1, p. 15 [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_wright.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_wright.pdf)].

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Jesus withdrew his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed; also from Judea and Jerusalem, and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from about Tyre and Sidon a great multitude... (Mark 3:7-8).

A great number of those who lived 'beyond the Jordan' were the Nabatean Arabs, and the Idumeans were Arabs who had adopted Judaism as a religion.<sup>10</sup>

Evidently, then, from the outset the early Christian community was composed of those who were ethnically diverse; they were Jews, Greeks, Romans, Samaritans, Arabs, and whoever else whose home was Palestine and its vicinity. This Christian community, speaking mainly Aramaic or Greek has never totally left Palestine; if some left, then other Christians moved in.<sup>11</sup> The importance of the Holy Land to Christians

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in the fourth century, as seen in thinking of Bishop Cyril, has already been shown;<sup>12</sup> and by the fifth and sixth centuries, Palestine could claim to be predominantly Christian, with hundreds of churches and monasteries built throughout the country. This was the situation when, in the seventh century the Muslim Arabs arrived, and the Christian community in Palestine became gradually Arabized in both language and culture. Yet it remained on its own soil, and though some Christians converted to Islam in order to avoid taxes and hardships, others remained loyal to their Christian faith.

These facts of history must be made clear to those who do not know them. Much of Western Christian support for Israel has been based on the assumption that Jews had a right to return to their country and that Palestinians were all Muslims and late-comers into Palestine-intruders on a Jewish territory. Many did not even realise that Palestinian Christians exist, that their Christianity goes back to apostolic times, that Palestine has always been their home, and that in the early years of Palestinian Christianity many of them suffered at the hands of non-believing Jews.

These important truths are easily missed by many Western Christians. From one perspective, it is possible to argue that Palestinian Christians are seemingly penalized by Western Christians because they have accepted the Messiahship of Jesus. If they had remained 'Jewish', they would be supported today by the West and would have a claim to Palestine. The fact that they have become believers in Christ and members of the Church, has almost seemed to forfeit them their right to their land. This seemingly ridiculous way of arguing only brings to light the comparative ignorance of many Western Christians when considering the Middle East—not least the so-called Christian Zionists. The Christian

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<sup>10</sup> The Roman province of 'Arabia' was not far away but immediately adjacent to the south-east of 'Palestina', including the city of Petra and much of what is now in modern Jordan.

<sup>11</sup> Jewish Christians were indeed forced to leave Jerusalem under Hadrian's edict in AD 135, but the Gentile Church which continued in the city thereafter was conscious of a direct tradition going back into the first century: see e.g., Eusebius, *EH*. 4.5, 5.12 and 7.19.

<sup>12</sup> See above ch. 4 [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_walker.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_walker.pdf)].

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community of Palestine is not a foreign population that has been brought into the land to replace a Jewish one. With its multi-ethnic background it can legitimately claim to have always been in Palestine.

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#### **IV. Jerusalem and the Land: A Palestinian Christian Theology<sup>13</sup>**

Anywhere else in the world a conflict like the present one in Israel / Palestine would have been considered a primarily political one. From a Palestinian perspective, the events leading up to 1967 are seen in the following terms: a people, living in their own country, were overrun by a group of people who came from outside; this was a violation of the political and human rights of the indigenous population. It had no special religious significance. As a result, arbitration should be based on international law.

Yet in this conflict, unlike any other, the Bible is brought into play. It is quoted in such a way as to give the primary claim over the land to Jews. For many religious Jews and for some Christians, the solution to the conflict lies in Palestinian recognition that God has given the Jews the land of Palestine 'forever'.<sup>14</sup> Palestinians are asked to accept this as a basic truth. Any settlement that is not based on such a foundation is seen by such people as contrary to the promises and covenant of God with the Jewish people.

Palestinian Christians are therefore forced to tackle the issue of land from a biblical perspective, not because they believe the religious argument over the land to be the very essence of the conflict, but because they are driven to it as a result of the religious-political abuse of biblical interpretation. This section offers some pointers towards a counter Palestinian approach to the theological issues of Jerusalem and the land.

In doing so, it will be immediately observed that there is a great difference between the outlooks of the Old and New Testaments on this issue. The issue of the land is very much

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bound up with the life of the people of the Old Testament; the same is not true for the New Testament. Given the general political abuse of the Old Testament material today, we would do well to emphasize the following points:

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<sup>13</sup> Most of this section has been reproduced from N.S. Ateek, M.H. Ellis, and R.R. Ruether, eds., *Faith and the Intifada: Palestinian Christian Voices* (New York, Orbis 1992) 108-16.

<sup>14</sup> Much has been made of this word, 'forever'. As indicated above (ch. 1, p. 6 [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_wright.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_wright.pdf)]) the Hebrew original does not necessarily carry a literal meaning that deals with an unending duration of time; sometimes it only applies to the length of a person's life (Deut. 15:17). The words reflect a Semitic Eastern expression—still used today in the Middle East—indicating a lengthy period of time but not an indefinite period. This is surely the meaning of the words in 1 Sam. 1:22. See D.M. Beegle, *Prophecy and Prediction* (Ann Arbor, Pryor Pettengill 1978) 183; see also W.W. Baker, *Theft of a Nation* (West Monrow, Jireh Publications 1982) 84-86.

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### a) The Developing 'Universalism' of the Old Testament<sup>15</sup>

The Old Testament makes it very clear that the land belongs to God.<sup>16</sup> Many times in the Old Testament God is portrayed as the owner of the land. Indeed in one place the divine claim to the land is so emphasized that the Israelites are themselves regarded as strangers and foreigners:

Land will not be sold absolutely, for the land belongs to me, and you are only strangers and guests of mine (Lev. 25:23; cf. Jer 16:18).

Moreover, the Israelites were not supposed to defile the land. Yet in Jeremiah it is clear that this had already happened:

But when you entered you defiled my country and made my heritage loathsome (Jer. 2:7).

Those who live in the land must, therefore, obey the owner. Disobedience of God defiles the land. If the land is defiled, the inhabitants will be thrust out in consequence (see Lev. 20:22; Deut. 4:25-26; 28:63; Josh. 23:15-16).<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, a reading of the Old Testament in its entirety reveals that the God who was initially thought to be one among many gods (Psa. 95:3) and then the greatest God above other gods, was eventually perceived as the one and only God who had created the world (Psa. 96:5; 97). There is a development in the Hebraic understanding of God and the extent of his sovereignty. In the light of this God is seen no more as the owner of the land of the people of Israel, but as the owner of the whole world. The whole world becomes sanctified because it is his:

To Yahweh belongs the earth and all it contains, the world and all who live there (Psa. 24:1).

In all this God can be seen as seeking to teach the ancient Hebrews the importance of understanding his promises correctly. Yet the Bible gives ample evidence of how they were

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misunderstood. Chosenness, which was intended to be a responsibility for service, was interpreted instead as a privilege to hoard. From this point of view the first exile from the land can rightly be seen as God's way of shattering the people's narrow concept of himself and of the land. They had to learn that God existed without the land and outside of it. They needed to learn that God is concerned about other people besides themselves (a point eloquently expressed in the story of Jonah and God's concern for the people of Nineveh—that is, the Assyrians, who were one of the deadliest enemies of ancient Israel and Judah). The exile was meant to help them mature in their

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. above, ch. 1, pp. 1-3,15 [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_wright.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_wright.pdf)].

<sup>16</sup> N.S. Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (New York, Orbis 1989) 105-9.

<sup>17</sup> Discussed more fully below in ch. 7 (ii) [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_maoz.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_maoz.pdf)].

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understanding of God. One observes that some post-exilic prophets now put the emphasis, not on the land itself, but on the people who are returning to it; the promises of God to the people after the exile are not about land and nationhood, but rather about the outpouring of God's Spirit on the people.

For I shall pour water on the thirsty soil and streams on the dry ground. I shall pour out my spirit on your descendants, my blessing on your offspring, and they will spring up among the grass, like willows on the banks of a stream (Isa. 44:3-4).

If the people are to be a 'light to the nations', then they have to be the carriers of that blessing, rather than hoarding it to themselves.

Unfortunately, however, the lesson of the exile was never fully learned: they lacked the realism that was needed to accept this important truth. Thus they continued in their attempt to restore the old dream, and to recreate their kingdom but to no avail. Politically the land was continuously vulnerable to outside powers, but this narrow theology of God and the land became fixed in the minds of many, leading eventually to the destruction of the nation in AD 70. Again, the people were given another chance to learn the lessons of history and the period extended to eighteen hundred years. Sadly, however, many Jews seem not to have been willing to learn that it is wrong to put one's heart on the land. To do so is to invite disaster and another exile.

In sum, within the pages of the Old Testament itself there is evidently a developing understanding of God and the land. There is a movement—albeit in a 'zigzag' way—from a

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narrow concept of God and the land to a broader, deeper, and more inclusive concept.

## 2. More than one Exodus

The famous exodus, when the children of Israel came out of Egypt, is not the only 'exodus' in the Old Testament. There was another when the exiles returned from Babylon in the sixth century BC. To many the first exodus is very familiar and its dramatic stories about the wonderful acts of God for his people cherished by many. The second exodus, however, is given little prominence—perhaps because it is quieter: it is significantly less dramatic than the first. Yet prophets like Jeremiah thought that it would be a greater exodus than the first:

The days are coming when people will no longer say, 'As Yahweh lives who brought the Israelites out of Egypt; but, 'As Yahweh lives who led back and brought home the offspring of the House of Israel from the land of the north and all the countries to which he had driven them, to live on their own soil' (Jer. 23:7-8).

One of the greatest points of contrast between the first and second exodus concerns their respective attitudes toward the indigenous peoples who were already living in the land. In the first exodus, these are entirely negative. Every time the indigenous people are mentioned, the language is very hostile: they are supposed to be displaced or destroyed, and there is no room for them in the land among the chosen people of God to whom the land was promised. The second is totally different.

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The returning exiles showed greater realism, being far more accepting of the people around them. In fact, one of the greatest biblical passages from after the exile is from the prophet Ezekiel, who spoke this word of the Lord to the people:

You must distribute this country among yourselves, among the tribes of Israel. You must distribute it as a heritage for yourselves and the aliens settled among you who have fathered children among you, since you must treat them as citizens of Israel. You will give the alien his heritage in the tribe where he has settled (Ezek. 47:21-23).

What a remarkable contrast with the hostile language of Joshua! With the second exodus there is a new understanding of the people's relationship to the land. There is an acceptance of the changes of history. Certain demographic changes had taken place, and the prophet pronouncing the

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word of God exhorts the people to accept these changes and to share the land with those who are living on it.

Why then has the pragmatic nature of the second exodus not been emphasized? Why has so much emphasis been placed on the first war-like exodus, with its violent treatment of the indigenous people? In our own century many have tried to draw their inspiration from the first exodus—instead of living up to the ideal and realism of the second! This is, indeed, a tragedy. The 'third exodus' has glossed over the second, which expresses a greater understanding of the world. Instead it has clung to the first.

Part of the problem seems to relate to the central position of the Torah within Judaism. Although the Torah has in it a seed of a broader concept of God, much of it reflects a more exclusivist understanding of God. The book of Deuteronomy, for example, has made it impossible for a good Jew to live outside the land. Yet, we know that Jews had to live outside the land during the first and second exiles. In the nineteenth century some Jews in the Reform Movement were ready to break away from the land-bound faith and emphasize the prophetic and ethical demands of the Jewish faith; but they have been swamped by Zionism. The tragedy today is that there is very little use of the great prophetic material and its insistence on God's demand for justice; also that many Jews and (worse!) Christians have received their inspiration from the vocabulary of the first return to the land, rather than from the spirit of the second return. The first saw the indigenous inhabitants as those who had to be displaced. The second saw them realistically as those with whom they should be content to share the land; in fact, the returning exiles were happy to accept a very small territory between Bethel and Hebron.

### **3. The New Testament, Jerusalem and the Land**

As a matter of plain observation, the New Testament is not preoccupied with the issue of the land as was the Old Testament. While scholars explain this in different ways (perhaps the evangelists 'depoliticized' their writings so as to decrease any tensions with the Roman authorities, or perhaps they intentionally 'de-Zionized' the tradition), this writer contends that the gospels reflect faithfully the message of Jesus and that the lack of interest in the land therefore stems from

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the very nature of the gospel and its basic difference with an Orthodox Jewish outlook.

Though some scholars have suggested that Jesus was a revolutionary or Zealot, others scholars have argued more convincingly that Jesus knew very well the position of the Zealots, but rejected it and consciously chose to go in another direction.<sup>18</sup> This throws new light on many biblical passages. For example, Jesus' third temptation (Matt. 4.8-10), which speaks about gaining authority over the kingdom of this world by following the strategy of the devil, can be interpreted as the attractive message of the Zealots that Jesus considered and was confronted with but, at the outset of his ministry, decisively rejected. Though this temptation resurfaced at other junctures, he was able to resist it. The gospel writers have surely remained faithful to the basic message of Jesus. The land was of very little significance to them.

Thus the New Testament in many places views the land, Jerusalem, and the Temple quite critically and negatively.<sup>19</sup> One way to illustrate this is by considering the four places in Jewish life that had an ascending order of significance: the land of Palestine, Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Holy of Holies. Working in reverse order, one notes first how at Jesus' death the veil in front of the Holy of Holies was rent from top to bottom (Mark 15:38): the way between God and humans has been opened in Jesus Christ, and so the Holy of Holies has lost its significance for the church.

Secondly, as predicted by Jesus, the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, being now redundant in the minds of Christians. Jesus had talked about his own body as a temple: 'destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2:19). So, for Christians, Christ takes the place of the Temple. Paul talks of Christians as constituting the temple of God when the Spirit of Christ dwells in them (1 Cor. 3:16). Again, he is calling attention to the significance of people who carry the witness of God by the Spirit in their life, rather than the witness of a geographical place. Thirdly, the city of Jerusalem was also destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. Jesus himself predicted its destruction and wept over it because it did not

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know 'the things that make for peace' (Luke 19:42). As a result, the whole land of Palestine is no longer of great significance, because no one area of the world is more holy than another; instead there is the holiness and presence of Christ. So the New Testament message transcends the land, Jerusalem, and the Temple. The significance and holiness of place has been replaced by that of a person, Jesus Christ.

Two further important points need to be emphasized. First, the ministry of Jesus was very much preoccupied with the concept of the 'kingdom of God'. Considered in our present context, this

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<sup>18</sup> See J. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1972).

<sup>19</sup> I am heavily indebted to the excellent work of W.D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley, University of California 1974).

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concept of God's kingdom implies Jesus' radical understanding of God's relationship with the world: it is the true corrective for any misunderstanding of God's concern for one land. For the kingdom of God stresses the reign of God in the hearts and minds of people, whoever or wherever they are. This is not dependent on one place or one region, but is dependent on faith: where Christ is acknowledged as Lord, there God reigns. The concept of the Kingdom of God, therefore, shatters any narrow concept of the land. Jesus' frequent use of this concept was intended to lift people's ideas and thoughts from a concentration on the land to the universality of God and his reign. This becomes an inclusive concept, fitting the whole spirit and ethos of the New Testament.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, the New Testament is concerned with the spreading of the gospel into the whole world. The narrow concept of the land is replaced by a worldwide vision of God's concern for people in every country of the world. What started in the land in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ had now to be transported to every other place under the sun; the gospel must move from the vicinity of Jerusalem and reach the capital of the Roman Empire. In other words, the dimensions of the gospel have shattered the geographical focus on the land of Palestine. God's love for the world in Christ now encompasses all people (see e.g. John 3:16; Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 3).

With the coming of Christ, therefore, Palestine is revealed as having been paradigmatic for the world. It is a microscopic replica of the way God is relating to the whole

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world. Yet the replica has no privilege over what it represents. 'God so loved the world'; not 'God so loved the Land of Israel' or 'Palestine'. Admittedly, one can only discover this truth when looking back from the vantage point of fulfillment. Yet it needs to be made clear and continuously emphasized.<sup>21</sup>

Thus God's concern is no longer for one land and one people, but rather for all lands and all peoples. The focus on one place may have been a necessary stage within God's economy (or due to the 'hardness of the human heart'?), but it was one that then needed to be transcended as human understanding of God's purposes matured. No longer is it a matter of the sacredness of the city of Jerusalem; it is the sacredness of the people of God wherever they are. No longer is it a matter of the physical presence of an impressive Temple, but the presence of 'living temples' of God in whom God's spirit dwells. It is not the holiness of one space but the whole world which has become sacramental. It is no more the Jewish people who are the focus of God's activity in the world but what God has done in Christ for the whole world.

Later in the life of the church the land of Palestine did indeed resume a greater significance. The church, after all, lives in the world, and geography is significant because of the incarnation. Bethlehem, Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee, all have unique associations for followers of Christ, and Jerusalem, above all, as the place of Christ's death and resurrection and the church's 'birth' at

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<sup>20</sup> The words of Jesus, 'The Kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21), reflect this same view. People carry within them the seed of the kingdom in their faithfulness and obedience to God. The land is no longer the focus, but people.

<sup>21</sup> See more fully above in ch. 1 [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_wright.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_wright.pdf)].

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Pentecost. So the land gradually became important once again, because the church lives in history and because God in Christ had taken history very seriously. Though recent studies have shown that this shift in Christian attitudes to the land did not begin really to take hold until after Constantine,<sup>22</sup> Christians from early centuries have made pilgrimage to the land, because this land alone hosted the Holy One.

Despite this, the theological foundation of the Christian faith, as revealed in the New Testament, still resists being contained and tied down to certain 'holy places' or to Jerusalem. These have a limited benefit, reminding the believer of

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the historicity of the faith and the incarnation of the Holy One, but they are not places to which Christians should cling.

What does all this have to do with the whole issue of the land today in the Israel / Palestine conflict?

a) Many Jews have come to understand their identity as being very much bound up with the land and Jerusalem, emphasizing this link from a religious understanding; some would go further, concluding that there is no room for the Palestinians in the land. Such groups therefore need to be confronted with the challenge of a deeper investigation and study of their own Bible, so that they can discover that their *own* tradition has provided answers to this present dilemma: the land *can* be shared, one *can* live away from the land and still maintain faithfulness to God. The more open understanding of God and the land as it is found in the Bible must be encouraged, not the more narrow and limited view.

Sometimes the State of Israel gives the impression of selectively denying history—pretending that there was no history in Palestine between 135 AD and 1948.<sup>23</sup> However, the message of Ezekiel 47 (quoted above), as God speaks through the prophet, is effectively: 'do not deny history; there are now other people living on the land, and they also have a right to it'.

b) For Palestinian Christians the conflict over the land of Palestine is not on their side a religiously motivated conflict. Yes, Palestinian Christians cherish and pride themselves in the fact that they live in the land where Jesus was born, died, and raised to new life: such a historical fact has great significance for many of them. At the same time, this is not the reason which is paramount when they defend their right to the land. For most of these Christian Arabs the land is simply their *watan*, their homeland. This is the land of their birth. It is the land which God in his wisdom has chosen to give them as *watan*; just as God has chosen to give other peoples their own *watan*. Palestinian Christians are fighting to maintain the God-given right to their own land. Any *watan* is obviously a responsibility given by God to all the people of any country; it is not

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<sup>22</sup> See P.W.L. Walker, *Holy City? Holy Places? Christian Attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, OUP 1990).

<sup>23</sup> This is very clear when you visit the Israeli museum, for example: every period of Israelite history is well covered except the period between 135 and 1948—almost as if nothing had happened inbetween.

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that they own their country, for in the final analysis God is really its owner, as God is the owner of the whole world. Yet because

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they have been given the land, they have a responsibility for it before God. So they would like to live on their land not only in dignity as human beings, but also as good stewards.

c) Many Israeli Jews must come to accept the fact that, in order to live their religious faith, they do not have to have exclusive political control over the whole of Israel / Palestine or indeed of Jerusalem. For even at the height of Solomon's reign there were certain parts of the land still not under Israelite control.<sup>24</sup> Palestinians would like to assure Israelis that, just as it is important to have a continued physical presence of Christian and Muslim communities in this land, they acknowledge it to be equally important to have a continued presence of a Jewish community. Yet, in the same breath, they must emphasize that, in order to live in the land and to fulfil one's religious duties here, no one party need have an exclusive political control over it all. The challenge before us is a challenge to hammer out a new understanding of our relationship to the land. We *can* achieve a full expression of our religious life by sharing the land. Once this principle is affirmed, then justice is not far off, and peace and reconciliation will become a welcome reality.

## **V. The Modern Political Problem: Two Conflicting Stories**

The issue of Jerusalem and the land, however, is not simply a religious or theological one. A broader perspective of the general political context will now be given, emphasizing the crux of the conflict as perceived by Palestinians.

The Israel / Palestine conflict has brought together the stories of two nations that otherwise might have remained quite separate. Each story has carried the passion and legitimacy for its own group. Each has needed a solution to its problems and a fulfilment for its aspirations. Unfortunately, the two stories have become interlocked in our modern history, resulting in grief to countless thousands. These are the stories of the Jews and the Palestinians. If we exercise honesty and integrity, the legitimacy of each of these stories cannot be denied. Unless we are prejudiced and blind, we should be

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driven to empathy for both, and strive as best as we can to point to a solution that can restore justice and dignity to both groups who have suffered in the process. At the same time honesty compels us to make certain judgements. We should name the wrong and call it as such. Yet that

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<sup>24</sup> Parts of the western coastal area were not part of the Israelite kingdom during Solomon's reign.

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should not prevent us from looking at the situation pragmatically today and suggesting possible compromises and solutions. Let me briefly reflect candidly on these two stories.<sup>25</sup>

### a) The Jewish Story

At the time of Jesus a sizable number of Jews were living in Palestine. Yet Jewish life was not only confined to Palestine. Already, substantial Jewish communities had for centuries been living in the diaspora, in Egypt, Iraq and Syria as well as other countries of the Middle East; many were also scattered throughout Asia Minor and other parts of the Roman Empire.

With the failure of the two Jewish revolts against Rome in AD 70 and 135, many Jews left Palestine and settled in other parts of the Middle East as well as Europe—though some settled in other parts of Palestine, away from Jerusalem. After the rise of Islam, Jews and Christians living in the East were both dependent on the whim of Muslim rulers. The life of minorities in those days, and even today, has never been easy. They survived by living cautiously, wisely, and shrewdly.

In the West, and as Christianity grew into Christendom, religious prejudice against Jews became evident. They were blamed for the death of Christ and their suffering and marginalization was attributed to God's judgement on them. This prejudice produced what eventually became known as anti-semitism—a venomous attitude of hate and prejudice directed against Jews for being Jews. By the nineteenth century, Jewish leaders had become concerned about this phenomenon—especially when the ghetto walls were breaking down and Jews were free to move into European society. Some of their leaders concluded that the movement in the European countries of 'liberty, equality, and fraternity', as declared by the French Revolution, was not a guarantee that Jews would be treated as equals. Some Jews felt that the only way open to

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them was conversion to Christianity; others would have opted for a return to ghetto life.

Others, however, such as Theodore Herzl, felt that Jews must have a place where they could have their own State, and run their own affairs away from the prejudice and bullying of Christians. Herzl assumed that Jews constituted a 'nation' in the European sense of the word; so they needed a country to go to, and the sponsorship of a European power. He was thinking in the context of colonialism and was sure that a place on earth could be found to accommodate Jews. He felt that Jews would be pleased to go to such a place and that their host countries would be glad to see them go. He saw the problem as real and acute, requiring urgent answers. Not being able to foresee the development of constitutional democracies in Europe as an answer, he wished to seize the moment. So he started his 'shuttle diplomacy' seeking the support of a government that would help him bring his Zionist dream into fruition.

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<sup>25</sup> For a contrary perspective on Zionism and Palestinian nationalism, see above ch. 5 (iv) [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_brearley.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_brearley.pdf)]and below ch. 7 (ii and iv) [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_maoz.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_maoz.pdf)].

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It gradually became clear to Herzl that if his dream was ever to see the light of day, it would stand the greatest chance if it was linked with Palestine. This was a spark of genius. Some of his Christian friends were already encouraging him along these lines: Palestine was, after all, the original home of Jews; it would, therefore, make sense to the Western Christian leaders, and would be supported by many Christians, especially among those Protestants who had already concluded from their study of the Bible that the Jews must return to their ancient homeland. It was a perfect idea which Herzl set out to implement. After several unsuccessful discussions with other countries, Britain eventually offered the promise for sponsorship. Recent studies have shown that some of the British leadership who were responsible for the Balfour Declaration were already influenced by a Christian form of Zionism.<sup>26</sup>

It is really at this point that the Jewish story became intrinsically connected with the Palestinian story, and the clash between Jews and Palestinians became inevitable. Jews were coming from Europe to impose their dream on a Palestinian

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population that was itself looking for independence and freedom. Undoubtedly, what eventually hastened the fulfillment of the dream was the tragic events of the holocaust when between four and six million Jews were killed by the Nazis. Though many European and North American countries did not wish to absorb the Jewish refugees, in a sense this suited the purposes of the Zionist leadership which wanted the refugees to come to Palestine; and come they did. The fate of the two groups—Jews and Palestinians—was tragically sealed for many years with strife and blood.

### b) The Palestinian Story

The Palestinians were, as the rest of the Middle East, a part of the Ottoman Empire for four hundred years, a period considered by Arab historians as by and large an age of decadence and frequent Ottoman brutality. By the mid-nineteenth century, European powers were gaining influence in the Middle East, and the flow of ideas between East and West was increasing. There was already agitation among many Arabs for greater political freedom and by the beginning of the twentieth century Arab nationalism was very much on the rise.

The Arabs were willing to support the Allies during the first World War against Turkey in exchange for their freedom and independence. They made a significant contribution only to find themselves, after the war, simply experiencing colonial rule in place of the Ottomans. Meanwhile, Palestinian nationalism, though a part of the general trend of Arab nationalism, developed unique features which gained momentum as Zionist aspirations became clearer. Palestinians were aiming for independence from the British Mandate as well as from the greater creeping menace of Zionist presence in Palestine. Thus the two nationalisms-Zionism and Palestinianism—had to clash.

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<sup>26</sup> H. Haddad and D. Wagner, edd., *All in the Name of the Bible* (Chicago, The Palestine Human Rights Campaign, 1 Quincy Court, 220 South State St, Suite 138, Chicago, Ill 60604, Report No. 5, April 1985) 16-17. See also above ch. 5, iv [[http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem\\_brearley.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jerusalem_brearley.pdf)].

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The Palestinians saw themselves as having no part in the development of anti-semitism in Europe. They had nothing to do with what was going on in Christian Europe in previous centuries and, later, they had nothing to do with the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe. Yet they felt that the world wanted them to pay the price for European atrocities. The lot had been cast. It was Palestine and Palestinians who were expected to bear the brunt. Soon Palestinians were being blamed for even resisting the onslaught of the Zionists.

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The Zionists proved to be better equipped than the Palestinians. They were able to occupy approximately 77% of the area of mandated Palestine. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled in terror as the Zionists moved in, while hundreds of thousands were forced out of their homes by the Zionists. A total of 750,000 Palestinians, both Christian and Muslims, were displaced to make room for the many Jews who were coming into the country. Hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns were razed to the ground by the Zionists—a deliberate policy of the Zionists, preventing the Palestinian Christians and Muslims from returning to their homes.

Many people throughout the world were not aware of the tragedy of the Palestinians at the time; they were pleased that the Jews had finally been able to return to their 'rightful home'. Many were delighted that the world had found a solution to the Jewish refugee problem after the second World War; it appeared that the evils of anti-semitism were at long last being addressed effectively.

Many people today still blame the Palestinians for refusing the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan of Palestine. They ask the Palestinians: 'Why did you reject the division of Palestine into two states—a Jewish and a Palestinian? Are you not today asking for much less than what you would have received then? Would you not have saved yourselves and others all the bloodshed and violence of the last 50 years?'

Such people would make poor Solomons. The wise King realised that the mother who was willing to see the baby divided into half was the false mother (1 Kgs. 3:16-28). The true mother resisted the partitioning of her child. Similarly, in 1947, the Palestinians refused the partitioning of their country and called for the establishment of a single State of Palestine where Muslims, Jews, and Christians could live together. But the world, through the United Nations, reversed the wisdom of Solomon and declared the true mother to be the Zionists who wanted the partitioning of Palestine. Many Zionists were interested in getting a legal foothold that would allow them to usurp the whole of Palestine and the surrounding area in accordance with their original Zionist scheme of 1919.<sup>27</sup> There then followed the tragic events of 1948 and after.

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<sup>27</sup> In 1919 the World Zionist Organisation submitted to the Versailles Peace Conference an official plan which specified the minimal territory which was required for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This included 'the headwaters of the Jordan river in Syria and Lebanon, the south of Lebanon up to the town of Sidon, the southern Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, the Hauran Plain in Syria, and the control of the Hijaz Railway running north-south considerably east of the Jordan from Derra in Syria to Amman and Aqaba in Jordan'; cited in Frank Epp, *Whose Land is Palestine?* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1970) 15.

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Palestinians therefore claim that the State of Israel has clearly been founded on injustice, an injustice which first and foremost is political, not religious. They believe their country of Palestine was overrun by outsiders who were determined to transform it into a Jewish state against the will of the majority of its Palestinian population.

No one should deny the evil of anti-semitism and the grave injustices done to Jews in Europe. But the solution should have been resolved in the development of political democracies in Europe, in which Jews would have been considered as human beings entitled to full human rights and democratic freedoms. No doubt Palestine could have absorbed some Jewish refugees to live as Palestinian Jews in a country sacred to the three monotheistic religions. That, however, is totally different from carving a Jewish state out of Palestine, negating Palestinian identity and existence, and denying Palestinians the right and international legitimacy to independence and freedom.

The stage was Europe, the problem a European one. The victims were the Jews, but the victims were transferred to the unrelated stage of Palestine. On this stage a new tragedy was enacted and the Palestinians became the new victims. In essence, Palestinians see themselves as the scapegoats of a guilty Europe; they have been asked to pay for the Jewish problem. One injustice had been solved, but another created.

Since 1967, when Israel occupied the rest of British-mandated Palestine, there has been a strengthening of Palestinian identity, as the population of the West Bank and Gaza has naturally reacted to being under Israeli occupation; this has spilled over to the Arabs living in Israel. The continuing existence of Palestinians was seen by many as an obstacle to the fulfilment of the Zionist dream; they therefore needed to be controlled—by the confiscation of Palestinian land, the building of illegal settlements, and many other things which denied

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them their humanity and dignity. Not surprisingly, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, like a pressurized powder-keg, exploded in the events of the *Intifada*, when the Palestinians tried to 'shake off the yoke of Israeli oppression and to send a clear message to the Israeli government and the international community.

Since the end of October 1991, the Palestinians, and some Arab States, have entered into peace negotiations with Israel. The Palestinians are asking for the implementation of the United Nations resolutions regarding Palestine, insisting that Israeli forces should withdraw from the area of the West Bank and Gaza, and after a transitional period of a few years, that a Palestinian State be established on the remaining 23% of the area of Palestine. They know full well that the only possible peaceful solution is to share their country with Israeli Jews. They are struggling to achieve that peacefully and are ready to normalize relations with Israel. For the sake of peace and the future of their children, the Palestinians are willing to carry the scars of a painful and unjust past, accept a small state on one fourth of the area of Palestine, and live in peace with Israel.

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## VI. Jerusalem: Hope for the Future

Jerusalem lies at the heart of the conflict and probably its solution is a key to the solution of the whole. Whatever one's personal conviction as to religious truth, the present situation in regard to Jerusalem and the land of Israel / Palestine is now such that there can be no prospect of peace if in the realm of politics any one religious viewpoint or any one nation predominates to the exclusion of others. The city of Jerusalem itself, in light of its long multinational, cultural, religious and historical background defies any one group which dares to view it exclusively. In other words, its innate inclusivity will defy, frustrate and exasperate all attempts to impose the dominance of one group. Such an action would only defer the problem, project it into the future and prolong the conflict.

This is precisely what Israel has been doing since 1967. Palestinian land has been confiscated in and around East Jerusalem and throughout the Occupied Territories. A ring of illegal Jewish settlements (according to international law), has been built around Jerusalem, and every possible attempt made to create new facts on the ground, 'Judaizing' the city. Jewish

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extreme religious groups have been using all sorts of immoral means to purchase Palestinian homes in Jerusalem, especially inside the Old City.<sup>28</sup> Yet the very nature of Jerusalem will surely resist such attempts in the end.

The way forward for Jerusalem is the way of sharing. There is no future that can last for long if it is imposed by force—in Jerusalem or anywhere else. There has to be a change of attitude vis-a-vis Jerusalem. There has to be a recognition of the past, rich, and yet painful mosaic of the city. There has to be an acceptance of the equal rights of others. There has to be an abdication of the use of force as a means of imposing sovereignty. There has to be an understanding of the equal significance of the city to Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, both for those who live in the Middle East and for the millions who live in the rest of the world.

It is this new mental framework and attitude, more than anything else and before everything else, that holds the key to the future of Jerusalem today. It is, however, an attitude that does not lend itself easily to many people. Therefore, it has to be taught, preached, explained, and emphasized to all, in mosques, synagogues, churches, schools—and opportunities such as this. It is an educational process that must start now.

The burden today lies primarily on the shoulders of Israel. How can Israel, which has conquered Jerusalem by force, annexed it, and considers it to be the eternal capital of Israel, share its sovereignty over Jerusalem with others?

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<sup>28</sup> One of my parishioners and his family have been the victims of such harassment, as Jewish settlers, eager to gain more footage within the city, have been trying to force him out of his house.

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Some might even ask, 'had Jerusalem been in the hands of Arab rule, would they have been willing to share sovereignty with others'? This is a good question and the answer is probably 'no'. Yet the fact has to be emphasized that Israel's control of Jerusalem has never been accepted by the international community. In fact, Jerusalem, including the Old City, is as much a part of the Occupied Territories, just as the rest of the West Bank and Gaza are. Moreover, in the interest of peace, one needs to be innovative, forthcoming, and willing to take risks. Today, there is a climate for peace and we must seize the moment. The following are some suggestions:

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- 1) As indicated just now, Israel has been constantly 'Judaizing' the Old City, thereby creating more tension and deepening the injustice. This should now stop. Israel should recognize that in order to exist in the Middle East, it cannot persist in this kind of action. Her continued existence can better be guaranteed by acting according to what is right, than by might. Jerusalem cannot be totally Jewish, with all others marginalized. Israel now has the opportunity to take the initiative, along with the world community, and to legalize the status of the city for the three religions that will never leave it.
- 2) The significance of re-building the temple in Jerusalem must be recognised. For many Jews this is an urgent necessity, but its ancient site is now covered by the Muslim Dome of the Rock. If Jews wish to build their temple they should make it as magnificent as they desire, but they must accept the changing facts of history. The Dome of the Rock has stood on that site for the last 1300 years—a period longer than the duration of the Jewish temple. This fact cannot be reversed. Is it quite inconceivable that a Jewish temple could be built next to the Western Wall, within the Jewish Quarter, and as close as possible to the original place? Is such a possibility categorically rejected by Jewish theology and the Jewish scriptures (our Old Testament)?<sup>29</sup> Is it beyond the realms of theological possibility for Jewish rabbis and scholars to argue for the building of the temple close to where it once stood? Such a religious site could gradually become an important focus for Jewish faith. It would also put the Muslims' mind at ease that the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque were not under threat, and set an important new trend in religious relations.
- 3) The unique character of Jerusalem's Old City should be established and preserved, making it a model for religious tolerance. The following suggestions should be considered:

- a) The boundaries of the four quarters (Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Armenian) should be clearly defined and respected. Any attempt to change them should be resisted and reversed.
- b) Needed renovation work, similar in part to what was done within the Jewish Quarter, must be carried out in all parts of

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<sup>29</sup> Isaiah (1:10-17) expressed God's displeasure with people's sacrifices because of their injustice; evidently God was less concerned with where the temple stood, more with justice and morality.

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the Old City so that the city's unique character and special status can be preserved.

c) A special formula must be found for Jerusalem's jurisdiction and governance. This should be shared by the three religious communities, Israel, the Palestinians, and the United Nations.

4) The city of Jerusalem must remain open and united. However, its unity has very little to do with the issue of sovereignty. Excluding for now the Old City and the special constitution that should govern it (above 3 c), we need to look at different stages of development for the wider city. As a first stage, the West and East parts of the city might be administered under two municipal areas of control—the former Israeli, the latter Palestinian. Both would have to work together, coordinating many practical issues. It would be one City with two municipalities and two flags. Such a scheme should be a part of a second and broader vision that looks down the future to a period when Jerusalem will be governed by one municipality, equally representative of its inhabitants and with no discrimination, a municipal council which is elected democratically, and where the dynamic of its rule is not that of an occupier and occupied, but fellow citizens with equal rights.

A further vision down the road of history could be that of making Jerusalem the federal capital of a federation of states of the Middle East that would bring together Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, thus raising the city's political status to a new height<sup>30</sup>

Whatever the precise details, any alternative that would give one group dominance over others will never bring peace to our area. The present period has been a long and devastating nightmare. It must be replaced by a period when old and young are dreaming dreams and seeing visions of a better future, when people 'beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks' (Isa. 2:4). This land requires dreams and visions that can be translated into real strategies of justice and peace that would restore to the peoples of Jerusalem and the land of Israel / Palestine the dignity and humanity that God has given them. It is only then that people will experience peace, stability and reconciliation.

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<sup>30</sup> This point is elaborated more fully in my *Justice and Only Justice*, 170-175.