

Jerusalem and the Church's Challenge

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I. Introduction

Different ways of approaching the scriptures in relation to this question of Jerusalem and its significance have emerged in previous chapters; but what does this mean for the Church resident in Jerusalem? Is there any one viewpoint of those so far expressed which has particular currency among the Christian people who daily live in the midst of Jerusalem's complexities? On the other hand, are there any approaches which are theoretically convincing, but practically untenable? What are the differing theological approaches to Jerusalem which are held by Christians resident in the city today, and how does the indigenous Church see its task in the light of these?

The 'indigenous Church' is a simplified term for what in reality is a very complex mixture of various Christian congregations living and worshipping in both 'East' and West' Jerusalem. In this chapter it will thus be necessary first to give a brief overview of these different churches and their concerns, before proceeding to describe their varying theological approaches to Jerusalem; in so doing four different understandings of Jerusalem will emerge, some compatible, some mutually contradictory. Finally, a brief re-examination of the early chapters of Acts will prepare the way for a concluding reflection on the Church's continuing mission in the city today.

II. The Jerusalem Church Today and its Concerns

It can safely be said that nowhere else in the world can such a bewildering variety of Christian communities be found within so few miles of each other. Inevitably, because of the undeniable place in Christian history which Jerusalem has as the city in which the Gospel message was both accomplished and then first proclaimed, the place where the New Testament 'Church' came into being, vast numbers of Christian denominations have found it attractive and compelling to maintain within Jerusalem a representative Christian congregation. This process, which can especially be seen in the

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last 150 years with the arrival of various Western Christian groupings, can also be observed among those ancient Christian communities which have been in Jerusalem for centuries. It is not simply a practical issue of wishing to have in Jerusalem a 'branch office' which can welcome any pilgrims who visit, making them feel 'at home'; for somehow the presence within Jerusalem of such a congregation lends a certain authenticity and credence to the claim of any denomination to be a true church of Christ; without such a presence, on the

other hand, a denomination might well feel more vulnerable concerning its apostolic credentials.

As a result, there are within Jerusalem not only the historic Christian denominations (Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Eastern-rite Catholics, Latin-rite Catholics) but also the Anglicans and various Protestant churches (Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, Reformed, and others such as the International Alliance Church, the Nazarenes, Mennonites, Pentecostals, Assemblies of God etc), not forgetting the growing number of Messianic-Jewish (or Hebrew-Christian) congregations.¹ Anglicans and Protestants, however, constitute perhaps only five percent of the total Christian population.

In the light of this multi-faceted situation, one possible task for the Jerusalem Church is clearly to strive together for a greater unity and working co-operation. Since one divine purpose, according to Ephesians 1:10, is to 'unite all things in Christ', any manifestation of disunity speaks more of the conquest of evil and the apparent victory of those 'powers' opposed to God's will.² Such an 'ecumenical' goal (which in other parts of the world might by some be felt to be of lesser importance than, say, the task of evangelism) is by no means unimportant in a city where the Christian Church is observed closely by both Jewish and Muslim neighbours and where all

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too often the very real lack of unity between Christians has been painfully evident in the past. Such disunity naturally has a very negative effect on any Christian witness.

Recent years have given cause for some encouragement on this score as the historic churches have been able to issue joint pronouncements on issues of practical concern to them all, whilst the various Evangelical groupings come together under the auspices of the United Christian Council of Israel (UCCI). Excluded from these, however, are the various Christian Zionist organizations, such as is the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ) and 'Bridges for Peace', whose theology is one from which the other churches (to varying degrees) wish to distance themselves.

A comprehensive survey of the churches in Jerusalem (as indeed for the whole of Middle East) can be found in Horner's helpful volume, which includes estimates of the size of the various Christian communities in Israel (within its pre-1967 borders) and 'East' Jerusalem/West Bank.³ Whilst most denominations are augmented by some sizeable ex-

¹ In preparation of sections II and III, the author visited Jerusalem, meeting various Christian leaders in the city and inviting responses to a questionnaire examining their respective attitudes towards Jerusalem and the Church's mission. Those approached included Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Latin Catholics, Greek Catholics, Anglicans, various members of the United Council of Christians in Israel (UCCI), the International Christian Embassy and members of both Messianic congregations and Evangelical Arab churches. Written responses were gratefully received from perhaps a third of these.

² Cf. above, p. 65.

³ N.A. Horner, *A Guide to Christian Churches in the Middle East* (Elkhart, Indiana, Mission Focus Publications 1989) esp. 9, 58, 66, 79, 84, 107 and 112. Perhaps the most authoritative guide (though not so

patriate communities, the majority are peopled by indigenous Arabs or Jewish-Christians. This is especially the case for the Eastern Orthodox (though its clergy remain, on the whole, Greek), the Greek Catholics, the Latin Catholics and the Anglicans—a fact which these churches are increasingly at pains to point out to those visiting the country, who might otherwise be unaware of the existence of Christian Palestinian Arabs.⁴

One of the chief concerns of such Christian Arabs is that in recent years there has been a steady emigration from among them. In 1947 Christian Arabs of all confessions would have numbered approximately 45,000, whereas by 1979 this had fallen to perhaps 10,000, and they continue to leave, chiefly

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through wishing to escape from living as second-class citizens under Israeli rule.⁵ Archbishop George Carey, when visiting the Anglican community in 1992 for the 150th anniversary of the Anglican Bishopric in Jerusalem, commented on the danger of Jerusalem becoming in Christian terms an 'empty theme park', a museum of Christian history rather than a centre for a living Christian community. Such words are not exaggerated, though the perspective is evidently from the Arab side alone: Messianic believers would wish to draw attention to the marked increase in their numbers in recent years.⁶ This points to the volatile situation of the Church in Jerusalem and how the relative ratios between Jewish and Gentile believers might change dramatically in the coming years, opening up a whole new episode in the Church's history in Jerusalem. Meanwhile it leaves some Arab Christian communities with a natural sense that 'survival' is perhaps their chief task, other considerations becoming quite secondary in comparison.

The current situation therefore lends itself to a natural concentration amongst Christians on the twin purposes of ensuring their basic 'survival' and fostering unity with the other Christian minorities within Jerusalem.⁷ But what about evangelism? Is this not an essential part of the Church's mission? More particularly in Jerusalem, if many Christians are tempted to emigrate, does this not mean that the Churches will need to consider again the importance of evangelism if they are to avoid disappearing altogether? Christians living far removed from the unique pressures on Christians in Jerusalem need to exercise caution here as they ask what might be perceived as an awkward, though necessary question. For the Christian churches find themselves 'caught in the middle' between two overwhelming majorities, Jews and Muslims, amongst whom evangelism has

readily available) is that found in the 1986 volume of *Perspectives*, published by the Middle East Council of Churches; this was drawn up with the full co-operation of the local churches. See also C. Amos, *A Many-coloured Mosaic* (London, CMS 1988).

⁴ The importance of introducing visitors to the local Christian Palestinians has been especially emphasized by *Living Stones*, an ecumenical trust founded recently for this purpose by one of the conference speakers, Dr Michael Prior.

⁵ See Horner, *op. cit.*, 84f.

⁶ *E.g.* David Dolan and Joseph Shulam in their responses; according to one source there are now seven Messianic congregations in Jerusalem, one of which meets on Anglican premises in Christ Church.

⁷ Christian leaders in Jerusalem list several other problems which face them to differing degrees. These include: shortage of finance and appropriate buildings; a lack of indigenous, trained leadership; and how best to cope with the numbers of visitors and expatriates.

throughout history proved especially difficult. On the one side, the Israeli parliament ('Knesset') passed legislation in 1977 prohibiting enticements to

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change religious affiliation (interpreted by many as an 'antimissionary' law), whilst, on the other, the Palestinian Muslims seldom convert to Christian faith, not least in today's climate because they judge many Christians, for either political or theological reasons, to be clear supporters of Israel. Such pressures on both sides frequently result, therefore, in evangelism being given a very low priority in Christian mission, if indeed it features at all; any evangelistic work (and it does exist, amongst both Jews and Arabs) is necessarily 'low-key'.

This 'downplay' of evangelism can be seen amongst Christians on both sides of the Jewish/Arab divide. On the one hand, many Christians supportive of Israel, eager to show solidarity with the Jewish nation in the wake of many centuries of 'Christian' anti-Semitism, espouse theologies which deny the need for Jewish evangelism, no doubt in some instances seeing such activity as in a strange sense a continuance of this anti-Semitic tendency.⁸ This may lead amongst some Christian Zionists to a 'two-covenant' theology, in which Christians are to respect and deem the 'Old Testament' covenant with the Jewish people as being equally 'salvific' for the Jewish people, as the 'New Testament' covenant is for Gentiles, thus rendering any Christian evangelism unnecessary and indeed contrary to God's will. Alternatively, it may be linked into some eschatological interpretation, whereby God himself will bring the Jewish people to faith in Jesus, their Messiah, at a time of his own choosing, and seemingly unaided by human assistance. One wonders what any of the first (all Jewish) disciples would have made of either of these two positions.

On the other hand, amongst Arab Christians and those who work alongside them, the natural tendency is for the various churches to adopt a non-proclamatory model of evangelism (appealing, no doubt, for an 'incarnational' approach) and to put their energies into other projects which witness in their own way to the truth of Christ. Much social work is done, for example, showing in important ways the love of Christ in situations often of extreme need.⁹ Meanwhile the

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prophetic ministry of appealing for 'peace and justice' for all is clearly timely and relevant, giving Christians the opportunity to be seen as agents of unity and reconciliation, rather than as the proponents of a third, potentially divisive creed. This latter emphasis has naturally been heard even more loudly in recent years, as the tensions of the *Intifada* have become manifest.¹⁰

⁸ For the presentation of this view, see above, ch. 5 (v).

⁹ For example, the Greek Catholic community is responsible for a housing project, several health centres, five youth centres and three schools; examples could no doubt be multiplied from each of the churches. For many (including Evangelicals), such 'relief work' is an essential part of the Gospel message.

¹⁰ It is well represented, from different angles, in chs. 6 and 7 above. See also e.g. M. Prior, 'Living Stones: Christians in the Holy Land', in *Doctrine and Life*, 42.3 (March 1992). Archdeacon Rafiq Farah draws attention to the importance of Jesus' programme of 'freedom for the oppressed' (Luke 4:18).

III. Visions of Jerusalem

Naturally, different parts of the Scriptures are drawn upon in order to legitimate these different perceptions of the Church's task in this city. This is, of course, not unique to Jerusalem. Throughout the world the same process of 'biblical authorisation' occurs whenever Christians seek to explain their particular emphases in mission or ministry. The biblical theme of 'liberation' has priority for some, the prophetic theme of 'justice' for others; some find their motivation from God's vulnerable love shown in the act of the Incarnation, others in the redemptive challenge to repentance and faith issued through the Cross.

All these theological inspirations (and many others besides) are present in Jerusalem in the same way as anywhere else. In Jerusalem, however, such sources of theological inspiration are inevitably supplemented by (or become attached to) particular theological convictions concerning the significance of Jerusalem within God's purposes. For example, Christians emphasizing God's desire for unity amongst his people might in other contexts have appealed to such verses as 1 Corinthians 12:13 ('for by the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body') or Galatians 3:28 ('all one in Christ Jesus'); in Jerusalem, however, they might well be tempted to cite one translation of Psalm 122:3 ('Jerusalem is a city which is at unity with itself') and assert that this remains a prime divine purpose for the continuing city of Jerusalem today, that it should be the place

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which manifests (despite all its profound difficulties) the unifying purpose and power of God.

Our task now is to explore this question further and to uncover, where possible, the theological vision of Jerusalem which undergirds each of the different understandings of the Church's task in Jerusalem. How do these different Christian communities understand God's present purpose for Jerusalem? What biblical texts incite them to action? Each of the authors in chapters 5 to 7 concluded with their 'hope for Jerusalem', expressing views which no doubt correspond to those of significant numbers of Christians living and working in Jerusalem. Our task now is to discover if there are any other visions of Jerusalem, and with all of them to press more deeply the question: what precisely is that vision and which particular scriptures can be appealed to for its justification?

To ask the often unexpressed but basic theological question on this issue: what precisely is God's will for Jerusalem? What place does it have in his purposes, and what is he doing to accomplish those purposes? Already in chapters 5 to 7 there have been at least three differing visions of Jerusalem. Is Jerusalem to be the renewed capital of his chosen people, the Jews? Alternatively, is it to be the place where members of all the three great monotheistic faiths-communities can show to the world that they can live together in peace and harmony with justice for all? Then again, could it be God's will that instead Jerusalem be the place where increasing numbers of

people come to personal faith in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, the only Son of God? Are these visions compatible? Are there other approaches? What scriptures underly them?

1) Jerusalem, city of the past

The first theological vision of Jerusalem might be termed the *supersessionist*. Adherents of this view, whilst acknowledging the central place of Jerusalem within the Old Testament purposes of God, would interpret the words of Jesus and the rest of the New Testament in such a way as to call into question whether Jerusalem continues to have any special enduring place within God's purposes in the time subsequent to the coming of Christ. In varying ways this is the conclusion

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reached by each of the authors in chapters 1 to 4.¹¹ It is a view which wishes to question severely the apparently more 'straightforward' reading of the biblical texts (especially in the Old Testament, but also in the New) which speak of God's special involvement with this earthly city, and to argue that the essential thrust of the New Testament (which must be taken as normative for all Christian thinking) is one which speaks clearly of God's decisive and completed judgement upon the city and his concern now for the universal spread of the Gospel away from its previously narrow confines in the land of Palestine.

Whilst Jesus clearly taught that he had come 'not to abolish, but to fulfil' the Old Covenant (Matt. 5:17) a case can be made for seeing Jerusalem as one of those aspect of the Old Covenant which had been intended to point towards Jesus and were therefore 'fulfilled' and outmoded by his coming. Key texts for the defence of such a position would include Jesus' several warnings of judgement upon the city (not least in the Apocalyptic Discourse), his prophecy concerning 'true worshippers' worshipping 'neither on this mount nor in Jerusalem' (John 4:21), the emphasis in the Epistles on the New or Heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4: 26, Heb. 12:22, Rev. 3:12, 21:2), the missionary mandate to the disciples in Acts 1:6-8 not to be concerned with the 'restoration of Israel' but to be Jesus' witness 'to the ends of the earth', the whole message of Hebrews that Christ is the one who fulfills all that the Temple (and therefore Jerusalem) had stood for, and the general lack of concern with the physical Jerusalem in theological terms throughout the New Testament.

Such a position seeks, perhaps above all, to give adequate consideration to the whole issue of the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, taking Jesus' words seriously concerning divine judgement, and interpreting them to mean that the significance of Jerusalem in strictly theological terms is now a thing of the past. Jerusalem therefore may retain a vital role as witnessing to the historic basis of the Christian faith and the emergence of the Christian Church, but God's purpose for Jerusalem is now no different than his will and purpose for any human city.

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¹¹ For the important New Testament argumentation of this view, see ch. 3 above.

It would be incorrect to infer from the proponents of such a view that they deny God has any purpose for Jerusalem. For they would counter that God has a purposive will for every human institution, which will can be discerned from reflection on other parts of the Scripture. Jerusalem, they would argue, cannot be deemed to have any extra or different role within God's purposes, simply because in the Old Testament period it clearly *did* have such a unique role, for the New Testament revelation brings that to an end; however, once this important point is grasped, there would be nothing inconsistent in looking prayerfully at the current situation in Jerusalem and reflecting on what God's unique will for this city might be, given its unique historical and contemporary realities (for example, that it is 'holy' to three religions, or that it is a place where the Jewish/Arab division might be healed in Christ). As such this view can be combined as a foundational element with some of the other 'visions of Jerusalem' to be examined below, denying to them only any suggestion that Jerusalem is somehow qualitatively different.

However, it needs to be said that such a view is not easily maintained by those resident in Jerusalem. Neither of the two authors in this volume who live in the Holy Land would subscribe straightforwardly to this view; as such it might be deemed the merely 'academic' position of Western theologians who are conveniently detached from the Jerusalem situation, with all its potency, poignancy and pain. For there seems to be something about Jerusalem, hard to define maybe, which stubbornly refuses to be thus dismissed; it is hard when contemplating the unique beauty and history of the city from the Mount of Olives to dismiss from one's mind the thought that somehow this city is different, that it is special in some way, perhaps even strategic within the divine scheme of things. Is this a spiritual reality to be recognised and conceded, or is it a temptation to be resisted? Jerusalem is so very alluring, and beckons us to give her a special place in our hearts and in our minds; are we to indulge her whim or not?

2) Jerusalem, city of the Incarnation

A second theological vision of Jerusalem may be termed the *incarnational* approach. Proponents of this view would base their understanding of Jerusalem's uniqueness, not on her role in the Old Testament period, but on the fact that the city

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'played host' to the great events of the New Testament, most notably the Incarnation of God the Son, but also including under this heading his Death, Resurrection and Ascension. Theologically speaking, a case might well be made that in fact this incarnational emphasis is in fact an Old Testament theme as well, since what did Jerusalem and especially the Temple come to symbolise but the presence of God *dwelling* amongst his people?¹² In this way, a golden thread might be extracted from the Scriptures, whereby Jerusalem is seen to point to God's desire to meet with his creation, and, though that meeting-place according to the New Testament is now Jesus himself, it is perhaps not inappropriate to think of Jerusalem too as continuing to have a part to play in this process.

¹² Cf. above p. 62.

Be that as it may, Christians who emphasize this incarnational understanding are wishing to say that the city which witnessed such unique events can never thereafter be treated simply on a par with any other city. God has here acted decisively and dramatically both to reveal himself and to save mankind.¹³ Jerusalem must therefore not only be accorded a special place in our human affections, prayers and responsibilities, but also acknowledged as retaining particular significance within God's purposes. What therefore happens in Jerusalem is of special concern to God himself.

Such an understanding is not based as such on any particular verses from the Bible, but is rather a reflection on the whole message of the New Testament concerning the Incarnation, that 'God was in Christ' (2 Cor. 5:19) and that the 'Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). This emphasis would be found (even if in different ways) in all the 'historic' churches within Jerusalem. Why is Jerusalem special to them, what is the mysterious truth which underpins all their liturgical celebrations and ministry to pilgrims? It is that this city was uniquely visited by none other than Jesus, the Son of God. It is this attitude no doubt that fires the imagination too of a vast majority of those who, whilst not resident in Jeru-

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salem, visit it as pilgrims in one form or another: Jerusalem, the 'city of Incarnation', the place where once He walked.

Those inclined to a supersessionist view of Jerusalem might rightly question whether this 'specialness' is merely in the 'eyes of the beholder' or whether it is truly an elemental part within God's current purposes for the city. Does what happened in the time of Jesus determine God's attitude now, or is this emphasis merely a reflection of Jerusalem's great historical role and the benefit which we as mortals derive from such historical associations?

Moreover, is it fair to emphasize the Incarnation as a theological truth to the detriment of a focus on Christ's Death and his redemptive work, a focus which might alter one's consequent understanding of Jerusalem. The 'city of the Incarnation' indeed rings positively, as does the 'city of the Resurrection', but what does it do for the specialness of Jerusalem in the present to refer to it (equally truthfully) as the 'city of the crucifixion', the place where Jesus was not welcomed but rejected?

Such an emphasis on the Cross indeed might modify this incarnational approach in several helpful ways. First, it would alert adherents of this view that the Christian Gospel is not simply about Incarnation, but also about Redemption, and that therefore the Christian task is not simply one of loving identification but also one of clear proclamation, calling people repentantly to meet their Crucified Redeemer. Christian mission is not to be identified simply with passive 'presence'; yes, Christians need to be incarnationally present, yet they also need to be prophetically outspoken. This presents the Church with a challenge which needs to be heard in

¹³ To this day, therefore, following the interpretation of Psa. 74:12 offered by Cyril in the fourth century, Eastern Christians think of Jerusalem as the 'navel' (ὀμφάλος) of the earth: see Lutfi Laham, *Jerusalem—the Holy City* (Jerusalem, 1991) 2.

Jerusalem as much as (if not more so than) anywhere else. It is wrong to take to oneself the comfort of the Incarnation without equally taking on board the challenge of our Redemption.

Secondly, an emphasis on the Cross might give us a window of understanding into an experience that is frequently noted by Christians in Jerusalem: namely that there is here a special sense of 'spiritual warfare'. Such language may seem unfamiliar to some, or unnecessarily 'supernatural', but we are reminded in the Scriptures that our dealings are 'not with flesh and blood, but with the principalities, powers and world rulers of this present darkness' (Eph. 6:12); in Paul's theology,

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moreover, the Cross of Jesus was (at one level of causation) the work of the 'rulers of this age' (1 Cor. 2:8), though eventually it was the place where Christ 'disarmed' them and 'triumphed over them' (Col. 2:15). Such verses would make legitimate the conclusion that Jerusalem was at the time of the crucifixion the scene of the most significant 'spiritual battle' of all time, the place where the powers of darkness revealed their worst, but were decisively defeated. If this be accepted, then some would suggest that it is not impossible for the repercussions and resonances of such an event still to reverberate through the city today. Whilst the power and goodness of Christ may be celebrated in Jerusalem, it is not hypothetically impossible that Jerusalem could also be a place where evil too holds sway, where the battle between good and evil is particularly heightened, even if the ultimate victory for Christ is assured through that historic Resurrection.

Whatever be made of this final point, it is clear that an emphasis on the Incarnation, however natural and appropriate for Christians when considering Jerusalem, is not necessarily straightforward. On further examination it serves only to reveal some of the complexities of the Incarnation itself and of the continuing city of Jerusalem.

3) Jerusalem, a city restored

A third theological vision of Jerusalem might be termed the *restorationist* approach. Unlike the incarnational emphasis which tends to focus on the past, this restorationist approach sees Jerusalem's significance as lying especially in the imminent future. Moreover, whereas the above incarnational understanding would generally be characteristic of Christians living in 'East' Jerusalem, this restorationist perspective would be the more natural approach of those living in, or closely associated with West' Jerusalem. This is very much the modern, new city, the part of the city inhabited by the Jewish people, built with all the attendant excitement of the Jewish people being restored to their 'capital' Jerusalem after nearly 2,000 years of comparative absence. Some Jewish Zionists with religious convictions might undergird this event with eschatological hopes of the Return of the Jewish Messiah, others with the contention that

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in the restoration of the Jewish people to this city God has, as it were, 'returned to his permanent address'.¹⁴

¹⁴ See e.g. R. Jonathan Blass in *The Jerusalem Report* (23 April, 1992), 34.

Christians surrounded by such sentiment, and wishing to empathize with this strong Jewish sense of restoration naturally approach Jerusalem, even as Christians, within a similar framework. They would repudiate any 'replacement theology' (which sees the Church as the 'New Israel') and a supersessionist approach to Jerusalem; instead they would be inclined to endorse Jewish understandings of the special significance of Jerusalem within God's eternal purposes: just as this was the centre of the Jewish nation from the time of David through to AD 70, so now it is appropriately the centre of a revived Jewish nation in the land today; inasmuch as this was the place which, according to so many verses within the Old Testament, God had especially chosen as a 'dwelling-place for his name' and where his people might meet with him in special ways, so today it is a place of special significance in God's purposes, and a place of potential spiritual blessing. This is indeed the 'Zion' so beloved of the Psalmist:

*You will arise and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to show favour on her;
the appointed time has come...
For the Lord will rebuild Zion
and appear in his glory (Psa. 102:13, 16).*

Moreover, any Jewish eschatological thinking, arising from such verses or other Messianic texts, would be endorsed by many Christian restorationists, though with the vital Christian distinction, that the Messiah to be expected is Jesus returning. Their prayer is that God will reveal himself in Jesus to Zion and thereby to the world at large; in this way Jerusalem will once again prove to be the 'epicentre' of God's purposes.

For obvious reasons, such a vision is based almost exclusively on the Hebrew Bible, the Christian's Old Testament; the whole stance is one designed to be as affirmative as possible of Jewish hopes and aspirations, both political and religious. The distinctively 'Christian' aspect is then added to this Jewish foundation in a variety of ways. Some would espouse an avowedly two-covenant approach, whereby such

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Jewish aspirations (so long as they are true to Judaism's essential ideals) can be affirmed without remainder: God is, as it were, working with two different modes of salvation (one for the Gentiles focused on Christ and the 'New Covenant', the other for the Jews, focused on 'Old Covenant' entities such as the Torah and presumably Jerusalem). As a result God has no higher purpose in restoring the Jews to Jerusalem, than that they should be assured of his promises fulfilled towards them and of their being able to worship him once more 'in the land' according to Torah.

Views of this kind are seen above in chapter 5 and are fairly common amongst people sympathetic with Christian Zionism. However, they would be keenly rejected by many others who yet remain distinctly sympathetic to the Jewish restoration to Jerusalem. These latter Christians (who would include the majority of Messianic Jews and those working in the field of Jewish evangelism) would see the return of the Jewish people to the Land as but a stage within

God's continuing dealings with the Jewish people, a prelude to the time when their hearts will be turned to faith in Jesus, their Messiah. Whether they understand this 'return' to be a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy or maintain a more open mind, they are united in the prayer that the Jewish people should turn to Christ; any physical return to the Land without this ensuing 'spiritual return' to the Lord (as revealed in Jesus) would be contrary to all their deepest hopes and prayers. They long for the spiritual restoration of Israel, not just the physical. As a result, though keenly aware that such a 'spiritual restoration' must be the work of God, they work to this end, being active (if discreet) in the work of evangelism amongst Jews and in the building-up of Messianic congregations, which they see as the 'vanguard' of God's work in bringing the Jews to faith in Yeshua, their Messiah. They would tend to distance themselves from those who, by contrast, relying on a particular brand of eschatology, believe it is acceptable in the interim for Christians simply to identify supportively with Israel, leaving their 'conversion' as such in the hands of God alone. Whilst they might be of the opinion that such 'pre-evangelistic' identification with Israel might eventually soften Jewish attitudes towards the Christian Church and its Gospel, they would

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deem it essentially wrong to emphasize eschatology to the detriment of evangelism.

For all such Christian 'restorationists', however, Jerusalem's significance is based first and foremost on the Old Testament revelation.¹⁵ Whilst New Testament themes can be introduced as well in different measures,¹⁶ the underlying bedrock of this approach is that God's purposes today towards Jerusalem are in direct continuity with those revealed within the Old Testament. As such this approach stands in marked contrast both to the incarnational one (which can be in danger of ignoring the Old Testament altogether) and to the supersessionist one which notes these Old Testament themes but interprets the New Testament in such a way as to see them as now superseded in Christ. We are thus presented with three visions of Jerusalem which, whilst all labeled 'Christian' and indeed 'biblical', stand in almost total contradiction of one another.

4) Jerusalem, city of unity

It is hardly surprising, therefore, since the city itself evokes such divergent responses in those people who seek to interpret its theological significance, that Jerusalem all too often brings forth from the Christian Church a clear manifestation of its evident disunity. In the light of this all-too-evident state of affairs, it is perhaps ironic that the fourth and final vision of Jerusalem espoused by Christians is that the city should be a place of unity. This unifying purpose would probably be endorsed by the vast majority of Christians in Jerusalem, and indeed can be superimposed on any of the three foundational perspectives outlined above. Yet again, however, it can take different forms.

¹⁵ In addition to those Old Testament texts already discussed above in chs. 2 and 5, Christians in Jerusalem tend to emphasize passages such as Jer. 31, Joel 2 and Ezek. 36.

¹⁶ The most common would be Luke 21:24 ('Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled') and Rom. 11:26 ('all Israel will be saved'), interpreted in the manner which is countered above (pp. 65-7).

As noted above, given both the vast array of different Christian communities resident in Jerusalem and their comparative smallness in the face of the Muslim and Jewish majorities, such an urge towards unity amongst Christians is under-

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standable; yet there remain many reasons from history as to why the path towards such unity and co-operation can be long and hard. Despite these great difficulties, however, the prayers of many would be for a fulfillment in Jerusalem of Christ's prayer, made to his Father in that self-same city, 'that they may be one' so that the 'world may know that you sent me' (John 17:21, 23; *cf.* 13.34). Looked at positively, Jerusalem, presents the Church with a unique opportunity for the different Christian traditions to recognise and accept one another, not minimizing their differences, but beginning the task of mutual understanding and the relinquishing of prejudice. Here East can meet West.

More poignantly still, here in a special way Jew can meet Gentile. This ancient division between Jew and Gentile, felt so keenly in the generations before the coming of Jesus and never subsequently healed, is, of course, heightened in Jerusalem today through contemporary politics into a tension between Israeli and Palestinian. The lines are hard-drawn between them. Yet for many this situation presents an exciting challenge to the power of the Gospel. With the emergence of Messianic congregations (where Christians from Jewish background can still endorse their Jewish roots and not find them dismissed in a predominantly Gentile culture) a situation pertains once again which is in some ways evocative of the New Testament era. Given the present political realities, it is by no means easy for Jewish and Arab Christians to worship together;¹⁷ yet Paul's vision in Ephesians 2 (based itself on a reflection concerning the Temple in Jerusalem and how Gentiles were not to trespass beyond the 'Court of the Gentiles' through the dividing wall) remains a powerful focus for Christian prayer in Jerusalem:

Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility... Through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:14-16; 3:6).

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An organisation called 'Musalaha' has recently been formed to help implement this Pauline vision and to enable Jewish and Arab Christians to meet together.¹⁸ To those who have this heart for reconciliation, Jerusalem can therefore come to be seen as the key to unity—the place where God will at last heal this ancient division between Jew and Gentile, with potentially dramatic results not only for the Holy Land, but also for the rest of Christendom.

¹⁷ At the 'Baptist village' (Petah Tikva), for example, there were occasional conferences for both Jewish and Arab believers before the *Intifada*, but not since.

¹⁸ This organisation was founded by one of the conference speakers, Salim J. Munayer, a lecturer at Bethlehem Bible College. 'Musalaha' is an Arabic word which stands for 'forgiveness and reconciliation'.

Yet obviously it is far from easy. This is not simply because of the many hurts inflicted between Israelis and Palestinians to which Christians themselves are far from immune and which need to be overcome for meaningful fellowship; there is also inevitably the fact that such *rapprochements* would easily be misconstrued politically by their fellow nationals on either side. For Jewish-Christians this is compounded by their awareness that, in the eyes of their fellow Israelis, the Church is inherently Gentile and 'conversion' is seen as tantamount to a denial of one's Jewishness. They are therefore eager not to give the wrong impression or to be over-compromising in a Gentile direction.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Arab Christians are naturally sensitive to the fears of Muslim Palestinians that Arab Christians are tacitly on the side of Israel. Yet the Pauline vision of a true 'unity in Christ', transcending ethnic divisions, abides as a lasting vision for Jerusalem: could this not be God's deepest desire for Jerusalem—that those who know him through his Son should reveal to the watching and waiting world that unity and peace which 'the world cannot give' (John 14:27) but which comes alone through Christ?

Yet Christians remain a tiny minority. For the above vision to become reality, Christians would need to work hard not only at the task of increased unity amongst themselves, but presumably at the even harder task of outreach to others. It is at this point, faced with the enormity of the Jewish and Muslim majorities on either side, that some Christians are naturally tempted to opt for a seemingly more feasible vision for

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Jerusalem: the unity that is God's will must instead be seen as residing, not among Christians alone, but among all the faiths represented in Jerusalem; in particular, Jerusalem has the unique opportunity of showing to the world how the three great monotheistic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) can co-exist peaceably alongside one another.

Such a vision of inter-faith unity again might entail different things to different people. Most Christians perhaps would endorse this at a political and social level, asserting that political or social discrimination between people on religious grounds is incompatible with the Christian revelation. They would thus advocate Jerusalem being recognised as the 'spiritual capital' of all the three religions, perhaps suggesting as a political consequence that the city should be given a special, 'international' status. The Catholic Patriarchs of the Eastern Churches, for example, pronounced in 1991:

We must develop an original formula which allows every believer—Christian, Jew, and Muslim—to feel at home in this Holy City on the same and equal rights with the others without distinction, without predominance of one party above the others. In that way, this Holy City, instead of being the city of conflict, of division, of dispute and inter-

¹⁹ This is seen, of course, even more clearly in the response of Messianic believers to the 'institutional' churches in Jerusalem.

religious fighting, can be the city of peace, of meeting, of brotherhood for all her inhabitants and a sign of hope for the whole world.²⁰

Many would endorse this as a practical vision but would question whether this could be accepted as a strictly theological vision: for, if freedom of religion needs to be preserved in this way as a practical principle, this should in no way detract from the theological conviction that Christ alone is the 'Way, Truth and Life' (John 14:6), and that God's purpose therefore remains to bring people to a recognition of his Son and to 'bring all things... under one head, even Christ' (Eph. 1:10). Others would reject this 'theological particularism' and argue that this unifying vision of Jerusalem needs to be based on a genuinely

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theological universalism of some kind, whereby Jerusalem would reveal how all faiths indeed can be seen to lead in their own way to God.²¹

This latter vision is naturally tempting for those confronted with the exceptional stresses of the Jerusalem situation, yet one wonders if it can genuinely claim to be an orthodox Christian option. As with Christian Zionism, there is the sense that such a route collapses too easily the necessary tension that Christians inevitably must experience of accepting Christ's unique claims upon their own lives, yet finding those claims ignored or dismissed by the majority. The apostle Paul, for example, knowing that people could be 'zealous for God' but that their zeal was not 'based on knowledge' of Christ (Rom. 10:2), experienced 'unceasing anguish' in his heart for his fellow Jews (Rom. 9:2), and asserted that God 'desired all men to be saved' (1 Tim. 2:4). Are we seeking to avoid this pain? Is this not what all Christians are called to, not least those who live in Jerusalem? Was not Paul's anguish a precious gift from God, reflecting the pain in the very Father-heart of God caused by the unbelief of mankind and the suffering of his people?

If so, then perhaps our vision of Jerusalem should be informed again, and in yet deeper ways, by the example of Jesus who revealed this divine anguish so clearly as he came in sight of the Jerusalem of his day:

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said: 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come when your enemies... will not leave one stone on

²⁰ Cited by Archbishop Dr Lutfi Laham (Greek Catholic Church in Jerusalem) in his letter *Jerusalem—the Holy City* (7 Nov. 1991). He argues there that, because Jerusalem is holy to all three religions, no exclusive sovereign control should be exercised over Jerusalem: 'I call upon them not to debase this holy city, making of it a political capital like all the capitals of the earth. Believers of the world, save Jerusalem, make of it the city of the Spirit'.

²¹ Space forbids a full discussion of this important, contemporary issue concerning inter-faith dialogue and worship: for a defence of 'particularism', see *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*, edd., A.D. Clarke and B.W. Winter (Grand Rapids, Baker; Exeter, Paternoster 1992, 2nd ed.); see also the Anglican discussions in G. Carey, *The Gate of Glory* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, revd. ed., 1992) ch. 13.

another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you' (Luke 19:41-44).

Christ's own vision of the Jewish Jerusalem of his day, must still be in some way foundational for any Christian vision of Jerusalem, albeit two thousand years later. Whatever be made

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of those more positive approaches to the city (represented by those who focus on Christ's incarnation, the city's restoration, or its potential for unity) this theme of anguish must remain: Jerusalem had been the place of the divine 'name', the 'city of God', but it was ignorant of God's coming and ultimately rejected him. In what ways and for what reasons, we may ask, would Christ's attitude to the city be different now?

IV. The Book of Acts: an Apostolic Precedent

The Book of Acts is not an easy work to apply to any contemporary situation. Its capacity to give us genuine guidelines for the Church's task today would be questioned by many: dispensationalists, for example, would not see it as normative for the Church in the post-apostolic period, whilst recent critical scholarship would raise questions as to its historical reliability or its theological relevance; its theology to many would appear either 'primitive' or else highly 'revisionist', presenting a Utopian ideal never realised in practice. These important and legitimate questions cannot be discussed here, though some of them will be treated in the sequel to this volume.²²

It is probably for these reasons that the Book of Acts seems seldom to be given a 'high profile' by Christians in Jerusalem today. Even so, with its description of the life and witness of the Early Church in Jerusalem, it remains a biblical text which is far from irrelevant for the modern Church in Jerusalem as it seeks to continue the Christian witness in that same city. Indeed, its very 'simplicity' and straightforwardness may be instead the source of its power and relevance, as it challenges the Christian Church, in Jerusalem as anywhere else, to a renewed conviction of the essence of the Christian Gospel. A brief overview of the themes of its early chapters (especially chs. 1-4) would therefore be appropriate as we conclude this enquiry into the various biblical texts which may inspire the theological vision of the Church in Jerusalem today.

In doing so, one is only too well aware that the atmosphere today in Jerusalem is indeed highly charged and the situation indeed far more complex than that which we

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²² See the sequel to this volume: *The Book of Acts in its First-century Setting* (Cambridge, Tyndale House Nov., 1993).

encounter in Luke's presentation of the first century; moreover, the pressures brought to bear upon the Church today are enormous and the future always uncertain. Nevertheless, the example of the apostles as recounted in these chapters may serve as a timely reminder of the apostolic message and come as an incentive to a renewed faith in God's power made available in difficult circumstances. Some might wish to go further and suggest that these early chapters in Acts are the place where one can see most clearly the purposes of the risen and exalted Christ for Jerusalem and his Church in that city.

Three themes of particular relevance to our present concerns can be detected within these chapters.

1) Jesus the Messiah-rejected but raised

It need scarcely be said, but a reading of Acts 1-4 alerts one afresh to the centrality of Jesus' Resurrection; this is the message with which these chapters throb. The message about Jesus' life is not forgotten (1:22; 2:22), but the whole significance of that important episode now comes into focus because of this startling and frankly unexpected reality: the Jesus who was crucified and laid in a tomb is no longer dead, but 'God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death' (2:24). This theme becomes the unmoveable centre of Peter's preaching and the unshakable foundation of his new boldness. Although we are familiar with this, Peter's example challenges us immediately to ask ourselves: is the Resurrection of Jesus a central theme in our Church life, do we sufficiently proclaim with real faith the reality of the Risen Christ, and could it be that our lack of boldness so often in the Christian enterprise stems from a failure truly to take this message to heart?

Yet Peter's courage is seen in a deeper way. For this was no simple and comforting message of 'new life', or of God's ability to bring good out of evil conforming to a pattern in our lives of resurrection through death, true though these thoughts be. What was it that 'cut his hearers to the heart' (2:37)? Partly, no doubt, it was because Peter spoke unashamedly of a brute historical fact;²³ yet more than that, it was because he consistently pointed out that this was the very same

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Jesus whom they (or their contemporaries) had effectively rejected and caused to be crucified:

this Jesus... *you crucified* and killed by the hands of lawless men' (2:23); let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom *you crucified* (2:36).

The essence of Peter's message can then be found in three important verses of his speech before the Jewish authorities, as recounted in ch. 4:

Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, *whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead*, by him this man is

²³ Note Peter's implicit challenge to his audience to investigate the tomb for themselves (2:29).

standing before you well. This is the stone which was *rejected* by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (4:10-12).

The power of Peter's message is therefore seen not simply in his proclamation of a historical Resurrection (remarkable in itself), but in his declaration that the One whom God had chosen to raise from the dead was the One whom mankind had, by contrast, chosen to reject. Drawing on imagery from the Psalms that Jesus had used of himself causing similar offence (Psa. 118:22-23, in Mark 12:10-11), Peter dared to speak of Jesus as the 'stone rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious' (his wording later in 1 Pet. 2:4).

The Resurrection is therefore the divine vindication of Jesus and all that he stood for, but it is also (and herein lies the rub) a declaration of God's divine opposition to all who are opposed to Jesus. God declares himself, in the Resurrection of Jesus, to be totally behind Jesus, fully endorsing his claims, and challenges people henceforth to be sure that they too side with Jesus as their 'Lord and Messiah'. This message challenges people in every age to consider as the most important issue of all: in God's sight, would I be considered amongst those who have accepted Jesus, or amongst those who have rejected him?

The simplicity of Peter's message is indeed alarming. Yet it is a straightforward challenge, rooted in the essence of the Christian Gospel and evident in its first proclamation, which we must respond to with honesty. A true embracing of this challenge would rekindle and inspire the mission of the Church in many places, yet it has particular repercussions in

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Jerusalem today. For it alerts the Church which bears Christ's name in that place to the fact that this awesome challenge is an integral part of its essential message. The glories of the Resurrection cannot be celebrated in that city without an acceptance of its obvious consequences; the 'comforting' corollaries of the Resurrection cannot be highlighted to the exclusion of those which are more challenging and 'confronting'. In Jerusalem, as anywhere else, many deny Jesus as the Messiah, many deny him as the Son of God, but the Resurrection declares that, notwithstanding such opinions, this Jesus, though rejected by men, has indeed been vindicated by God as both 'Lord and Messiah' (2:36). The Resurrection is a declaration in advance of the pattern of God's future judgement, but in the mercy of God opportunity is given to 'repent' (2:38). People in Jerusalem, then and now, together with people 'from every nation under heaven' (2:5) are invited to 'change sides' and to give their allegiance to Christ.

Peter's message is indeed a challenge to all. In today's Jerusalem, of course, with its Jewish and Muslim majorities, it would be particularly significant in its consequences. His uncompromising statement that 'there is salvation in no one else' (4:12) might, being but a single verse, be deemed by many as an insufficient authority for the necessity of evangelism to all; yet, seen in the light of the Resurrection of Jesus, the rejected but raised Messiah, it has a logic and power of its own. Christ's charge to his disciples was that they were to be his witnesses 'in Jerusalem...

and to the ends of the earth' (1:8), a commission which, despite their small numbers, they set about obeying without drawing up a list of exceptions.

Above all, any application of Peter's theology in Jerusalem today would need special care in view of the fact that Christians rightly wish to step back from the anti-Semitic charge made in times past that the Jewish people are to be seen as Christ's crucifiers. However, it has been argued above that a careful and proper reading of the New Testament 'cuts off at the root' such anti-Semitism.²⁴ Moreover, as just noted, Peter's own language subsequently of Christ being 'rejected ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων (1 Pet. 2:4) would seem to suggest that already at that time it was understood that Christ was 'rejected' not simply by those who happened to play a part in the events

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leading to his crucifixion, but also by all those who subsequently had heard the message of Christ but not responded to it. The message about Christ being rejected can therefore legitimately be 'universalized' and applied to us all; Christ was rejected 'by mankind'. No particular stigma attaches to the Jewish people; the charge stands against us all.

Moreover, there might be some validity in seeing this message of Jesus 'rejected but raised' as having important consequences for Jerusalem itself as a city. For as hinted at previously, the fact that Christ's crucifixion and Resurrection occurred just outside the city of Jerusalem does not necessarily redound to Jerusalem's glory.²⁵ On the contrary, God's vindication of Jesus is seen to be a deliberate divine reversal of Jerusalem's treatment of Jesus. As such the Resurrection could then be interpreted as a declaration of God's judgement upon Jerusalem, a judgement which then was realised in AD 70.²⁶ Again this would suggest that the positive connotations of the Resurrection for Jerusalem cannot be accepted without the negative ones as well.

Yet is this message in the early chapters of Acts simply one of challenge to the Christian Church? No, the message of Jesus, the Messiah rejected but raised, also includes great encouragement. For it holds forth the promise to those who currently are being mistreated and marginalised because of their commitment to Christ, who perhaps feel that they are being 'rejected' as was Christ himself, that they are yet on the 'resurrection' side. As Paul said in a different context, 'if we are united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his' (Rom. 6:5). The Christian Church can so easily be discouraged, and the prevailing pressures in today's Jerusalem would often make understandable any such feelings amongst its members. In this situation the message of Jesus' Resurrection brings new hope and indeed, as for Peter, a new courage to 'take the side of Christ' in witness and service. The daunting challenge of Christ's commission to be his 'witnesses in Jerusalem' remains unaltered, but the confidence in God's resurrection power is given to sustain.

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²⁴ Above, pp. 74f.

²⁵ Above, p. 86.

²⁶ For the suggestion of such a connection, see above pp. 63-4.

2) The Holy Spirit: source of power and unity

Christ's commission was given not just with Resurrection hope, but also with the promise of the Holy Spirit: 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you' (Acts 1:8). As for all Christians, it may be that the experience of this divine power is in some way proportionate to the preparedness to step out as Christ's witnesses: no witness, no power.

In the Jerusalem context of today, however, it should be noted that the power of the Holy Spirit is given, not simply for the important task of witness (already sufficiently stressed above), but also as that power which can bring unity in the face of deep diversity.

Since the Gospel is for all people without exception, its challenge must be taken to those living in both 'Judaea and Samaria' (1:8), to those who at that time were divided between themselves by deep racial enmity, something still experienced in the Holy Land today between Jews and Arabs. Yet, once the Gospel is received, how can such enmities be laid aside? The answer is given in the event of Pentecost, an event which reveals the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the ethnic divisions between people and nations.²⁷ A new unity, indeed a new humanity, was now possible through the reconciling work of Christ on the Cross and the indwelling power of the Spirit.

In much of our earlier discussion, the theme had emerged of the Jerusalem Church having a special opportunity to reveal again the unity of Christ's Church. Here in the first pages of Acts there is a reminder that such unity is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and can only come about as people are open to his working. Just as those first Christians 'waited' for this gift and 'devoted themselves to prayer' (1:4, 14), so too now it is appropriate, even though we live in the Age when the Spirit has been given, for us all, and especially when in Jerusalem, to pray earnestly for this gift, without which all attempts at

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Christian unity or witness will be impaired. A divided world needs so much to experience this unifying gift of God's Spirit.

3) Jerusalem: source of the Gospel, scene of opposition

Finally, the Book of Acts (despite its being criticized for its idealism) forbids us to look at Jerusalem idealistically. Jerusalem, for all its physical beauties and historical uniqueness, for all the biblical events with which it is associated, is seen in these pages to be a place where the Good News of Christ is met with unveiled opposition.

²⁷ Some would interpret Acts 2 as a theological reversal of the breakdown of human communication symbolised in the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). Yet, even if this was not in Luke's mind, the incentive towards unity is seen in Acts, not only in the 'shared life' of the believers (2:44ff.) but also in the importance attached to the apostolic 'council' called to overcome the emerging disunity between Jewish and Gentile Christians (15:1-35).

Christ's experience of being 'rejected' is matched too by his disciples. For all their experience of the Resurrection, they know too the pain of the Cross. For all the powerful blessings of Pentecost, the Church is thereafter prone to persecution and partial exile. Though it was surely necessary for the Gospel of Christ to be first proclaimed in this city (ensuring that the Christian Church could see itself as 'authentic Judaism' and not inherently 'marginal' or sectarian from the beginning)²⁸ the message of Acts as a whole is that the dynamism of the Church soon was relocated to other places. Somehow, despite its being the 'city of the Resurrection' and the scene of Pentecost, the Christian Church was evidently going to find it a difficult place in which to survive.²⁹

Such a description of the early Church in Jerusalem, of course, need not be prescriptive for all time to come. Yet it does cause us to face reality. It may encourage some to consider whether the place where Jesus was 'rejected' will ever substantially 'change its colours'. Others might deduce in similar vein that perhaps in Jerusalem the Church will ever have this painful experience of sharing in a special sense in the sufferings of Christ, a thought which ought to move all to a greater solidarity with those Christians who are called to live in the complexities of modern-day Jerusalem. Above all it should remove some of the unwarranted idealism concerning

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Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a city, faced with all the issues faced by other cities and many more peculiar to itself, and the Church which witnesses there will inevitably be caught up in those issues. The Church's task in Jerusalem will always be complex.

This brief review of Acts 1-4 has provided a useful insight into the Church's difficult task of following Christ in this city. The themes of witness, unity and suffering emerge most strongly. How these then inter-relate with the 'theological visions' of Jerusalem (outlined in III) is more complex: the vision of Christian unity is encouraged, but not that interfaith unity which denies the uniqueness of Christ; the vision of the incarnation's significance is confirmed in a qualified way, inasmuch as the Church must continue in the steps of her Master, but it is seen that this is inextricably entwined with the themes of bold witness and patient suffering.

As for the irreconcilable visions of the supersessionist and the restorationist, the evidence in these early chapters of Acts supports neither view conclusively: the apostles were working within an eschatological framework, being encouraged to expect the return of Christ from heaven (1:11) and evidently seeing themselves as living in the 'last days' prophesied by Joel (Joel 2:28 in Acts 2:17). Such language of the 'last days' occurs throughout the New Testament (e.g. 1 Tim. 4:1, 2 Tim. 3:1 etc.) and is understood by many to reflect the conviction that all the Christian dispensation subsequent to Christ is to be deemed as the 'last days'.³⁰ Questions would then be

²⁸ See e.g. F.F. Bruce, 'Paul and Jerusalem', *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968) 325.

²⁹ A reflection on the history of the Church in Jerusalem throughout the first century prompted John Wilkinson to conclude in *Jerusalem as Jesus knew it* (London, 1978) 176: the story of 'Christianity in Jerusalem makes depressing reading'; how could it be that 'in Jerusalem of all places in the world, Christianity could be so small and weak?'; see also my *HPHC*, 9.

³⁰ See O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (London, 1951).

raised of eschatological frameworks which suggest that particular events in and around Jerusalem today might be associated with the 'last days' in some other sense.

On the other hand, Peter speaks in Acts 3:21 of Christ remaining in heaven 'until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old'. Are the contemporary events in Jerusalem the fulfillment of those ancient prophecies, a harbinger of Christ's return, or does the New Testament teach (as argued above in ch. 3) that the prophecies concerning Jerusalem and the Land have now been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus?

Any conclusion would depend on an interpretation of that crucial passage in Acts 1:6 (already discussed twice) when the disciples ask Jesus, 'Will you at this time restore the

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kingdom to Israel?' and Jesus replies enigmatically, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons'. Does Jesus' reply indicate a forward reference to our own twentieth century, or does his immediate commissioning of the disciples 'to the end of the earth' suggest instead a radical revision of their understanding of 'restoration', with Israel being 'restored' precisely when at last it serves the function of being a 'light to the world' and a 'blessing to all nations'?³¹

V. Conclusions

The above chapters indicate the divergent views that exist concerning Jerusalem, its Christian significance and the appropriate mission of the Church in Jerusalem.

On this latter issue the different approaches can be reduced in essence to two. On the one hand, there is the *evangelistic* approach, drawn from a consideration of such biblical material as we have considered in Acts; this needs to be understood in quite a broad sense as the approach which is concerned that the *evangel* of Christ be central to the Church's purpose and that, where possible, it should be proclaimed with a view that people should come to faith in him and be incorporated into the Christian community. On the other hand, there are those approaches which focus more on *identification*, believing the Church's witness is best implemented by showing solidarity with those outside the Christian community.

At first glance, given the complexities and sensitivities of the Jerusalem situation, the identification model would appear to be the preferred option. Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely the presence of the Jewish and Muslim majorities in the city which reveals an apparent weakness in this approach; for, pushed to extremes, it can lead to mutually conflicting results. On the Arab side, Christian identification may find expression, not only in appropriate social concern, but also at the present time in the Christian conviction, shared with Palestinian Muslims, of the need to speak out politically and to work for justice for those in the region deemed to be 'under

³¹ On this passage, see above pp. 12 and 68.

occupation'. On the Israeli side, by contrast, a commitment to Christian identification would result in the stance of those Christian Zionists who show essential solidarity with the

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Jewish people and the political state of Israel. In other words, an over-identification with either side can lead to the Christian community being politically both for and against the State of Israel at one and the same time. While this may give the Church a unique opportunity to act as a 'bridge-builder' and an agent of peace and reconciliation, the Church can find itself over-stretched with its members upholding mutually contradictory viewpoints.

In seeking theological legitimation for their respective commitments to identification, those on the Arab side appeal to the Incarnation for their method and the *ethics* of the Old Testament for their message, whilst those on the Israeli side appeal to an eschatological theology of restoration and an outworking of Old Testament *prophecy*. Appeal is made to the same Bible, but irreconcilable convictions are the apparent result. Many pro-Palestinian Christians see themselves as having almost nothing in common with pro-Israeli Christian Zionists, yet strangely their viewpoints stem from a similar source, namely this principle of identification. The same can be said for those who, with a liberal theological basis, work for inter-faith unity: despite wishing it otherwise, their views turn out to have some unexpected parallels with Christian Zionism.

Seen in this light, the evangelistic approach offers a healthy corrective, re-alerting the Church to its primary function of proclaiming a spiritual message and not simply following a political programme.³² It acts as a reminder that the principle of identification can be taken too far, and that it is in Christ alone that ultimate spiritual unity will be found. Such an emphasis does not dismiss the value of the practical need for incarnational and supportive identification with those to whom the Church ministers; for in Jerusalem, for many historical reasons, there is an inescapable need to heal the hurts of the past, to disavow the stereotypes of the Church which have inflicted injury in time gone by, and to show in loving deed the truth and love of Christ. The visions of sensitive evangelism and loving identification are therefore not incompatible but complementary. Problems only emerge

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when identification ceases to be means to an end, and becomes an end in itself. As a result, the prayer of the first disciples, when facing opposition in Jerusalem to their message, might be re-echoed for Jerusalem Christians today: 'Grant to your servants to speak your word with boldness' (Acts 4:29).

This evangelistic emphasis seeks to preserve the distinctiveness of the Christian message. The contemporary climate is one in which in many quarters Christians are tempted to believe, paradoxically, that it is distinctively Christian to surrender that which is distinctively Christian. St

³² The former Dean of St George's, Jerusalem, has expressed elsewhere the pressing need for Christians in Jerusalem to emphasize again the refreshing themes of 'grace and forgiveness', not simply 'peace and justice' (*Yes*, CMS, 1992).

Peter W.L. Walker, "Jerusalem and the Church's Challenge," P.W.L. Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.175-204.

Paul indeed spoke of the need to be 'all things to all men', but his stated purpose was 'to save some' (1 Cor. 9.22). In concluding the conference, it was observed that in our deliberations we had perhaps allowed ourselves to lose the necessary focus on Christ himself, crucified but risen, and that this needed to be preserved as the centre of the essential Christian message—yes, even in Jerusalem. Unavoidably the Cross and Resurrection are distinctive and therefore potentially divisive, but without them there is a danger not only that the Church's message and activities become too closely identified with a sub-Christian agenda, but also that we lose the very source of unity and reconciliation which alone they can bring.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

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