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We welcome:

Papers, Articles on any aspect of Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa Mosque and those worshipping therein, with particular references to History, Politics, Architecture, Religion, International Law, Human Rights violation and the present dangers to Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Letters on any related topics are also welcome. The Editor reserves the right to edit letters for the purpose of clarity and reasons of space.

Views on relevant topics are also welcome but must not exceed 1000 words.

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Editorial

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Praise be to Allah, The Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds, who has created men as equals: may Allah's blessing be upon all His Prophets, from Adam to His final Messenger, Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Welcome to the Journal of 'Al-Aqsa' which has been named after one of the earliest houses of worship on earth, second only to the Ka'ba in Makkah.

Within the illegally annexed East Jerusalem lies the precinct of Al-Aqsa (also known as Bayt al Maqdis, al Haram al Shareef or The Noble Sanctuary) with its magnificent and imposing qubbat al sakhra (The Dome of the Rock) in the centre and a Mosque built by the Great Calipha Umar R at the southern end also called the Al-Aqsa. The sanctuary of Al-Aqsa has not only provided the religious ambience but also the heart and soul of Al-Quds (Jerusalem) for over thirteen hundred years.

Since the Israeli occupation of Al-Quds the Al-Aqsa has been in danger of being razed to the ground by Jewish extremist groups under the banner of the 'Temple Faithful.' The Israeli state turning a blind eye if not covertly supporting the actions, irrespective of being against their own Jewish religious laws.

The wanton desecration and destruction of non-Jewish Holy Shrines is part of a larger plan aimed at the Judaisation or ethnic cleansing of Al Quds. The zealots are not only intent on wiping out Palestinians from Al Quds but also destroying Palestinian culture, heritage and customs. In order to achieve their goals they have embarked on a policy of destroying all the evidence that proves the Palestinian inheritance to the land.

In order to achieve a Judaised Al-Quds the state has stooped towards draconian policies of apartheid. Land expropriation, harassment, restriction of movement, violation of personal and basic human rights have all been imposed upon the Palestinians and all bear remarkable similarities to the policies of the discredited apartheid regime in South Africa.

The apartheid policies of Israel may at present be punishing only the Palestinians but the long term consequences are dire, with repercussions the whole world will have to face. Even if the Israelis manage to construct a Judaised Al-Quds, equitable and principled members of the world community and in particular, the Palestinians are not likely to forgive and forget the right to reclaim their homeland.

The seeds of the present troubles were sown by the British government. The pluralist status quo of Palestine was maintained up until Britain, playing 'owner,' decided to gift wrap it for European Jews. Britain, a third party, captured Palestine from the second party, the Ottomans, and gave to the fourth party, namely the Jews, thus depriving the first party, the Palestinians, of their homeland. Britain's role in the creation of Israel gives it a moral duty to see the beneficiaries abolish apartheid.

It is the aim of this journal, which is independent, that besides providing an organ for disseminating information on the status of Palestinians, it will provide a medium for concerned individuals throughout the world to express their views and ideas that will form agendas in forums attempting to achieve a peaceful solution to this most challenging problem of our time. In doing so, it is hoped to create a momentum with policy makers that will usher in a pluralist society, for Jews, Christians and Muslims alike to enjoy the fruits of this glorious Holy land, as they did during the era of Muslim rule of Al Quds - Insha'Allah.

Ethnic Cleansing in Jerusalem

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Tim Llewellyn

Tim Llewellyn was the BBC Middle East Correspondent from 1976 to 1980 and 1987 to 1992. Mr Llewellyn Covered this region for 24 years. Since 1992 he has worked as a freelance journalist mainly for the BBC. Most recently, to mark the 50 years of Palestinian/Israeli conflict the BBC radio 4 & World Service broadcast his programme entitled 'Your Land Is My Land.'

If any country in the world, let alone a self-styled parliamentary democracy, were to attempt and carry out a ruthless programme of ethnic cleansing under the cover of military occupation, the air would be thick with international condemnation, United Nations security council resolutions acted upon and sanctions imposed. Further, a military intervention would be demanded and expected. Any country, that is, except Israel.

Ethnic cleansing is not a phrase that is used often, if ever, in the Western media to describe Israel's continued expansion into the occupied territories of the West Bank and Jerusalem. But that is most certainly what it is, in its most blatant form. Ironically, I first heard it used by an Israeli Jewish lawyer, who described the Palestinian residents of Arab East Jerusalem as, 'walking ghosts in the city of their birth and of their ancestors.'

The 'cleansing' has taken many forms, from intense pressures applied on Arab residents to leave by use of draconian Byzantine bureaucratic restrictions. The denial of land for extension or building. The paucity of municipal services for Arabs such as sewage and roads. The immersion of the Arab areas themselves by subsidised Jewish housing, to the massive urban planning that is already inundating Arab land with Israeli new towns, highways and infrastructure.

Since the Israelis occupied East Jerusalem in June, 1967, they have seized more than 7,000 acres of municipal land. During that time, the Jewish population has grown from almost nothing to nearly 200,000, so that there are now a majority of Jewish citizens in 'Arab' Jerusalem (the Arab population is about 155,000).

Jewish settlers have been and are of course still encouraged by subsidy and tax break to move into East Jerusalem and its environs. They are free to expand their sites and buildings with the usual formal permissions. Arabs, on the other hand, are severely restricted. Permission to expand is rarely granted and in a few exceptional circumstances, if permission is granted then the limitations of height and space imposed on any home or building extension are severe.

The pressures, thus, on any naturally growing family are immense. The measures are geared towards forcing Palestinians out of Jerusalem, and towards the West Bank, or even further afield, to Jordan or abroad, which is precisely what the Israelis want. Once out of Jerusalem, however, there is no return. Palestinians, no matter how long their Jerusalem lineage, only have rights of residence, not citizenship, in Jerusalem. Once a resident is coerced into moving out his right to Jerusalem (East Jerusalem, of course. West Jerusalem is Exclusively Jewish and has been since 1949) is as eternally forfeit as the Holy City itself is claimed to be eternally the 'unified' Jewish-Israeli capital. One family I visited, whom I cannot name for safety reasons, lives in the shadow of Mount Scopus, in a two-storey house. There are two sons, both married, with babies, and an unmarried daughter, in her thirties. To retain their Jerusalem status, the brothers have housed their new families in an illegal extension to their father's home. If the authorities discover this violation, they will not only order the extensions to be destroyed and this relatively poor family fined, but the young families will also be made homeless and be forced to leave Jerusalem. Unfortunately this family's plight is not unique but is replicated in thousands of cases all over East Jerusalem.

Not a few hundred metres from this family's home is a tented camp where people forced from their homes in similar conditions, many of them women and children, have taken up residence on waste ground in permanent and visible protest against the municipal authorities and a reminder to the wider world of its neglect to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians. Unfortunately the protest has fallen on the deaf ears of the wider community to the delight of the Israelis.

To move the few score yards from Jewish West Jerusalem to Arab East Jerusalem is to move from the developed first world to the underdeveloped third world, with badly surfaced roads, inadequate drainage, overcrowding, poor health and welfare facilities. As the famous former Mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, who ran the city from its occupation and annexation in 1967 until the late 1980s, put it quite publicly, just after he left office: 'For Jewish Jerusalem I did something in the past 25 years. For East Jerusalem? Nothing! ...Sidewalks?.. Nothing! Cultural institutions?.. Not one.' He had put in a sewage system, he said, but only to protect Jews in the Arab area from possible cholera.

The arrogance of the Israeli approach is breathtaking and under the mayor who replaced the supposedly liberal Kollek, Ehud Olmert, a militant member of the ruling Right-Wing Likud Party, things have deteriorated. Under him, during both a Labour and Likud Government, the settlement programme in the city has expanded rapidly. There are many scams: public land is declared 'green' so that Arabs cannot build on it. Trees are grown to substantiate the 'greenness'. As soon as Jews want the land the trees are cut down.

But even assuming the Arab has his home and the basic facilities, even there the process of ethnic cleansing does not stop. The Israeli rule is that for a Palestinian to qualify for a residence permit, no matter how long he or his family have been living in Jerusalem he or she must also prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that 'the centre of his life' is in Jerusalem. 'Centre of life' is up to the whim of the bureaucrat. A relatively wealthy Jerusalem woman I know has a home in London, where her children live with their father part of the year and attend school. She likes to divide her time, naturally, between her home in Jerusalem and her other home in London.

The Israelis have ruled that this means Jerusalem is no longer the centre of her life. In order to maintain her residence in Jerusalem, she has had to sacrifice the family and now can pay only fleeting visits to London.

For all residents there are strict requirements as to bank accounts, receipted utility bills, local tax forms and family details that must be produced regularly for the renewal of the residence permits. If a Palestinian living in Jerusalem were to be caught outside of the city with no permit, he could lose his right to live in his own city. Leah Tsemel, an Israeli lawyer, and other civil rights workers are of the opinion that the intense

prosecution of such measures could during the next few years reduce the Arab population of East Jerusalem to a meagre few score thousand. If a Jerusalem resident wishes to marry someone from outside the city, the Israelis will usually not allow the spouse from outside to enter East Jerusalem to set up home there, especially if it is a resident woman marrying a male from elsewhere.

East Jerusalem is not only penetrated by its Jewish majority now, and aggravated constantly by the building of new settlements at strategic points along highways and between Arab districts, but surrounded as well. The new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim, for example, southwest of the city on the way to Bethlehem, is one of a ring which encircles the Arabs. They are enclosed by Jews whichever way they look or travel.

These are not ergonomic extensions to the city, or piecemeal developments to absorb expanding populations. They are part of a massive and long-term tactical plan, which has three main aims:

1) To create a Greater Jerusalem, with plans to double its size, much of it in the Occupied Territory, as well as annexed East Jerusalem, in which Israelis will dominate the centre of the city, including the holy places and the old Arab areas of East Jerusalem. The planned Jewish settlements will not only form vast suburbs inside the old municipal areas but also in the occupied West Bank, surrounding the city and interspersing the enclosed Arab districts. The Arabs will be either contained and suffocated in the city centre or pushed further and further away from it.

2) To Judaize the centre of Jerusalem, and, in effect, eventually, the whole Greater Jerusalem region.

3) To isolate Arab East Jerusalem, with the Al-Aqsa Mosque, from its Arab hinterland and, by creating a massive, urbanised, Jewish-dominated metropolitan area in the centre of the West Bank, effectively cutting the territory into a northern and a southern sector, threatening any easy or guaranteed communication between the Palestinians of the northern cities such as Nablus, Tulkarim, Jenin and Ramallah, and those to the south, in Bethlehem and Hebron.

Concerning point one, the building of Jewish settlements in and around East Jerusalem is already well advanced. The roads that connect these settlements, or suburbs, intersect Arab areas and can be easily used to cut the districts militarily in case of trouble.

The isolation of central, or municipal Jerusalem, from the West Bank is already almost complete, as Jerusalem residents can move in and out of the city with relative ease, but those residing in the West Bank can only reach their old capital city, their economic, spiritual, cultural and political heartland, by obtaining permission from the Israeli authorities. These permits can be denied or granted at the whim of an Israeli bureaucrat, usually in the name of security. In reality, these restrictions are in furtherance of inconveniencing the Palestinians' life, business, and separating Jerusalem from its Arab hinterland. Even with a permit, any 'West Banker' who sets off for an appointment, to see a relative or even pray at Al-Aqsa mosque or Holy Sepulchur church in East Jerusalem has little idea whether he will make it. 'You see that soldier down there?' A Palestinian woman said to me recently, pointing down to an Israeli checkpoint on the road about halfway between Ramallah, in the West Bank, and Jerusalem proper, a distance of some nine miles. 'I can just wait until he goes to the lavatory or take his lunch, and I can easily slip past him and get to Jerusalem. If I am caught I may get a fine. But if my husband is caught, he faces a jail sentence.' People do slip past, on foot, dodging bored young soldiers or using back roads, all the time. This permeability of the military ring round Jerusalem proves to me one simple thing: that the committed activist or terrorist can easily penetrate Jerusalem if he so wishes. The security excuse for disrupting the lives of the Palestinians is, therefore, a weak one. The people these restrictions most affect and are most intended to affect are the majority of the ordinary citizens, the businessmen, labourers, students, doctors and teachers trying to go about their peaceful existence under the strains of Israeli apartheid laws.

The Israeli Anschluss in the Occupied Territories continues apace, growing bigger and faster. A new Israeli plan, E-1, approved by the Israeli Cabinet just over a year ago, will be the first development scheme to tie Jerusalem directly to a major West Bank settlement of Ma'ale Adumim. A new town with a population of some 21,000 Jews, midway between Jerusalem and the River Jordan, about three miles east of Jerusalem's present eastern municipal boundary.

Nine square miles of land on Occupied Territory will be given over to roads, institutions, public facilities and housing including 10 hotels with 2,400 rooms. This block will connect, in effect, a Jewish-dominated

Jerusalem to Ma'ale Adumim, which will have an area bigger than that of Tel Aviv (23 Sq. miles). This in turn will connect to a string of Jewish settlements continuing as far as Jericho, near the River Jordan, and thus effectively bisecting what is left of any notional Palestinian state.

Needless to say, the road networks that these vast urban expansions will need to serve them will further lacerate Palestinian territory and in many cases substitute for road routes the Palestinians need for their own inter-city communication.

The Israelis are in the process of Judaizing Jerusalem and creating a new metropolis on top of, around and amongst the Arabs that will be almost irrelevant to them except insofar as it attempts to bury their identity, their economy and their sense of nationality or even community. Israel will continue to interpose among Jerusalem's Arabs at will, but Arabs will remain outside the Israeli door, patronised, supplicatory, and the hopeful recipients of any residual largesse the Israelis might choose to grant. That is the Israeli formula, anyway.

It is not one the ordinary Palestinians look like accepting meekly, however feeble the tactics so far of the new autonomous rulers of the nascent Palestinian state, and however ineffective the protests of the supposedly concerned members of the international community. To these, this whole process, from its beginning in 1967 to the rapidly accelerating juggernaut it is today, is flagrantly in breach of international law and United Nations resolutions.

But Palestine is not: Iraq, Kuwait, Bosnia, nor Rwanda. It is Israel. Everyday that goes by every fact that is built on the ground, especially in and around Jerusalem, illustrates the world's impotence in trying to deal with Israel and the futility of the various formulae so far in an attempt to reach a peaceful compromise.

Masjid Al-Aqsa: A Historical Perspective

7

Dr. Daud A. Abdullah

The author is a researcher at the Palestinian Return Centre (London), and editor of its Return Review. He was awarded his doctorate by the University of Khartoum for a thesis entitled; "Imperialist Competition and Conflict in The Blue Nile Valley, 1885-1941." He previously lectured in history at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria and taught Islamic Studies at Manarat Islamic School, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He has published several articles on Islamic and Palestinian affairs. Among his publications is The Key to Medinah (Jeddah:1995, Abul Qasim Publications).

Masjid Al-Aqsa is Islam's second oldest place of worship. It is the name often used to refer to the entire area within the four walls of the Holy Sanctuary which extends for about 500 metres long and has a width of 300 metres. This area contains a number of domes, schools, rostrums and other religious monuments. It was initially built by Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, forty years after he built the Ka'ba in Makkah [1]. Situated as it is in the center of Palestine, Al-Quds (Jerusalem) with Masjid Al-Aqsa's history has always been shaped and influenced by Muslim, Christian, and Jewish interests in the city. Hence, while the Medieval Crusaders claimed that it was built on the ruins of the New Church of Mary, modern Zionists similarly profess that Masjid Al-Aqsa was erected on the site where Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, tried to sacrifice Ishaq (Isaac) and also the ruins of the Temple built by Prophet Sulayman, peace be upon him.

To understand the roots of the current problem it is necessary to identify and briefly review some of the most important landmarks in the history of this region. Due to persistent famine and harsh living conditions in the Arabian peninsula, several Arab tribes migrated north to Bilad al Sham (presently known as Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon) about 3,000 years BC. Foremost among these tribes were the Phoenicians who settled on the Mediterranean Sea coast and the Yabusiyun who inhabited Jerusalem. Others included the Canaanites who came about 500 years later and settled on the West Bank of the Jordan River. Thereafter, this land was often referred to as the Land of Canaan. Still a few hundred years before the birth of Christ, another tribe, the Filistines, migrated from the island of Crete and settled in Yaffa and Gaza. They freely mixed and intermarried with the Canaanites and remained in that area which became known as Filistine (Palestine) [2].

Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, the great patriarch of the three monotheistic faiths, lived during this period of migration and demographic upheaval. Born in the city of Ur (in what is now Iraq) he migrated first

to Haran (presently situated in south-eastern Turkey) and then to northern Syria. From there he later moved to the Land of Canaan, about 1900 BC [3]. He settled at Shakeem near Nablus before moving on to Ramallah, Al-Quds, Hebron, and Bir al Sab'u where he stayed for some time before going to Egypt, the Hijaz (to build the Ka'ba) and then returning once again to the Land of Canaan. Upon his return, he received revelation that Allah would make this land the inheritance of his off-spring. To show his gratitude, Ibrahim, peace be upon him, built Masjid Al-Aqsa as a place of worship. Both classical historians Ibn Kathir and Ibn Taymiyya record in their histories that this sanctuary was first built by Ibrahim, peace be upon him, and then developed and embellished by Prophet Sulayman, peace be upon him.

The Jewish invasion

Palestine which was now predominantly inhabited by the Filistines, Yabusiyun and other Canaanite tribes was invaded toward the end of the Bronze Age (2000-1550 BC). The attack came from the Jews who had been led out of Egypt by the Prophet Musa (Moses), peace be upon him. The latter died before entering the holy land and their leadership was assumed by a certain Yush'a ibn Nun. He led them across the Jordan River and occupied Jericho about 1190 BC. From there they tried without success to capture Al-Quds. Despite many years of fighting the Jews were never successful in conquering all of Palestine [5]. Under Prophet Dawud (David), peace be upon him, however, they managed to conquer Al-Quds around 995 BC. Thus began what was subsequently known as the Golden Age of Jewish history. The combined rule of Dawud, and his successor, Sulayman, peace be upon them, lasted for eighty years (1003-923 BC) [6]. The latter forty years over which Sulayman, peace be upon him presided was characterized by economic organization and prosperity marked by elaborate architecture and construction. He established trading relations with the Arabs as far away as the southern part of the Arabian peninsula (Yemen).

During his rule, Sulayman, peace be upon him restored the house of worship known as the Temple in Al-Quds. Jewish sources have described in great detail both the contents and splendor of this Temple. This, from an Islamic point of view, was consistent with the prayer which he Sulayman, peace be upon him made "O my Lord forgive me and grant me a Kingdom which will not be granted to any other after me; verily You are the Grantor of Bounties." [7]

Except for the brief period of Dawud, peace be upon him and Sulayman, peace be upon him, there was never an ancient Jewish state in the history of this region. After the latter's death a succession dispute led to the division of the Kingdom into two mutually hostile states, Israel and Judea. The northern state Israel took Shakeem as its capital while the more southern of the two, Judea, took Al-Quds as its capital. In 721 BC Israel was razed to the ground by the Ashurite King, Sirjun. In 608 BC the Pharaoh of Egypt attacked Judea and occupied it before subduing Israel. The new King of Babylon, Bakhtanasar (Nebuchadnezzar), was greatly disturbed by this development and thus decided to dislodge the Egyptians by capturing the two states. This was a major turning point in Jewish history for it marked not only the beginning of their captivity in Babylon but also the destruction of the Temple in 587 BC [8].

Persia's subsequent defeat of Babylon naturally led to their preeminence over Palestine. By 538 BC the Persians had allowed the Jews to return as a people but without a state. Some of them resettled in Al-Quds and rebuilt the Temple. It remained in existence under Alexander the Great (320 BC) and the Romans after they had captured Al-Quds around 63 BC. Meanwhile, several other prophets including John the Baptist, Zakariya, and Jesus, peace be upon them, were sent to the Children of Israel. The Roman Emperor Titus however destroyed Al-Quds in 70 AD and with it the Temple. This latter destruction was seen by many scholars as the fulfillment of a prophecy as portrayed in the Bible: Jesus left the Temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.' [9] This was the second destruction of the Temple, the first being that carried out by Bakhtanasar. On the face of it, the event was seen as a form of divine retribution for their beheading of John the Baptist and Zakariya and their unswerving determination to kill I'sa (Jesus), peace be upon them.

Although Titus did sack Al-Quds and demolish the Temple he did leave the ruins in their place. In 135 CE, however, his successor Hadrian flattened the city and removed all physical traces of the Temple, installing in its place a pagan temple called 'Jupiter' after the Roman god [10]. The latter was in turn subsequently destroyed by Emperor Constantine. From that time onward, the site of the Temple remained empty for the rest of the Roman Christian era until the Islamic conquest led by Umar ibn al Khattab in 636 CE. It is significant to note that when this occurred the Jews had absolutely no presence in Al-Quds, for the Christian

Patriarch of the city, Sophrinus, had actually stipulated that he would only hand over the keys to the city on condition that the Jews were not allowed to return.

The Islamic era

Although there are several varying historical accounts concerning the date of Umar's entry into Al-Quds, they are, nevertheless, unanimous on the fact that he did so peacefully after its population had surrendered to the Muslims following the Battle of Yarmuk in 636 CE. Ibn Taymiyya records that Umar R entered the sanctuary through the same gate which Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him used during his Nocturnal Journey and he offered prayers on the Noble Stone from which the Prophet peace be upon him had ascended. While in Al-Quds, Umar built a mosque in front of the Stone facing the Qibla (direction of prayer in Makkah). Since then, Masjid al Aqsa is also referred to the structure constructed by Umar [11] on the derelict site as well as the whole Noble Sanctuary. Except for the 90 years in which it was occupied by the European Crusaders (1099 - 1186), Al-Quds and Masjid Al-Aqsa remained continuously under Muslim control until it was occupied by the British in 1917.

That Masjid Al-Aqsa occupies a unique and cherished position in the psyche and culture of Muslims is unquestionable. This is well substantiated in Quranic texts, prophetic traditions and canons of Islamic history. In referring to it the Qur'an declares:

Glory to (God) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night. From the Sacred Mosque (in Makkah) to the Furthest Mosque (Masjid Al-Aqsa). Whose precincts We did Bless- in order that We Might show him some Of Our Signs: for He Is the One Who Hearth and Seeth (all things). (17, 1)

Accordingly, the early Muslims used to pray toward Masjid Al-Aqsa while they were in Makkah and for about 16 months after their arrival in Medina. Then they were ordered to pray in the direction of the Ka'ba in Makkah. Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him had himself informed the Muslims that: 'Do not specifically undertake a journey except to three mosques; the Holy Mosque, my Mosque (in Medina) and Masjid Al-Aqsa [13].

The Zionist threat

Long before their capture of Al-Quds in 1967, Zionist intentions toward Masjid Al-Aqsa had been well documented. Having extracted the national home declaration from the British government the previous year, Chaim Weizmann, President of the English Zionist Federation wrote to Foreign Secretary Balfour in 1918 urging 'the handing over' of the Wailing Wall to the Jews. Using the same argument which succeeded in bringing forth the declaration, Weizmann argued that the Wailing Wall would rally the Jews in Russia America and elsewhere under the banner of 'Jewish Palestine under British auspices [14].' Realizing the obvious difficulties entailed in the demand, Balfour ordered his interlocutor to approach the Muslim authorities in Al-Quds with utmost tact because not only did the Wall constitute the western enclosure of the Noble Sanctuary but it was also the site where Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him tied his celestial steed (al Buraq) during his miraculous Nocturnal Journey. Indeed, after its liberation from the Crusaders, Salahuddin al Ayubi's son, al Afdal, dedicated this area as a religious foundation trust (waqf) in perpetuity. As a mark of religious tolerance, successive Islamic governments allowed pious Jews to stand on a pavement in front of the Wall in order to wail and meditate. They believed it was part of the last Temple.

With the advent of Zionism, attempts were made to claim more than the customary access to prayer. This gave rise to Muslim fears that the real objective was to take possession of the Sanctuary and built a Temple in it's place. Tensions were, indeed, exacerbated when Weizmann sent an Arabic-speaking Jew to the Mufti of Al-Quds offering to 'buy' the site [15]. In August 1929 violent Arab-Jewish clashes erupted outside the Wall when thousands of Jews gathered there for special prayers. An international commission of inquiry set up after the disturbances confirmed the Islamic position but when the Israelis seized the Wall in 1967 they obliterated the waqf and dispersed its beneficiaries in total disregard of Islamic and international law. Former Prime Minister David Ben Gurion rightly summed up the Zionist attitude when he declared: 'There is no value to Palestine without Al-Quds and no meaning to Al-Quds without the Temple.' [16]

With at least 20 different organizations committed to the destruction of Masjid Al Aqsa and the rebuilding of the Temple on its site, Zionist aggression against the Sanctuary has never ceased since 1967. Since the

beginning of the occupation, they have made numerous excavations underneath the Masjid Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock in the guise of archeological studies but are covertly weakening the structures. This threat to Islam's third Holy Sanctuary will continue for as long as Al-Quds itself remains captive to Zionist occupation. The growing influence of Israel's religious extremists must in the present circumstances, therefore, be a cause for international concern. Surely, there can be neither peace nor stability in this region unless and until the Palestinian and Islamic rights to Al-Quds are restored.

Palestine in the British Media

Ibrahim Hewitt

15

Mr Ibrahim Hewitt is the development Officer of the Association of Muslim Schools, Freelance journalist and the Editor of 'al-Madaris'.

The headline was bold: 'Israelis shoot dead eight Arabs [1].' In its own way, this illustrates one way that the media treats the Zionist Problem, also inaccurately albeit more frequently referred to as the 'Palestinian Problem'. Jews are 'Israelis', Muslims and Christians alike, are 'Arabs'. Why didn't the sub-editor use 'Israelis shoot... Palestinians' or 'Jews shoot... Arabs'? The politics of recognition in the latter half of the 20th century mean that 'Arab' has a lower level of esteem in the average person's eyes and thus a greater degree of acceptance in usage. That this is so is in part due to general apathy towards such details and in part due to a belief in the existence of a 'Zionist media' and the resigned acceptance thereof.

Much has been said about Zionist control of the media and conspiracy theories abound on this subject. Can there be smoke without fire though? As long ago as 1981 Edward Said wrote that, 'there is a consensus on 'Islam' as a kind of scapegoat for everything we [the West] do not happen to like about the world's new political, social, and economic patterns [2].' The 'consensus' Said refers to is between 'the media and the experts.' Judging by today's media coverage it would be easy to assume that little has changed in the ensuing years.

However, I believe that change is happening, albeit slowly, and chinks are beginning to appear in the Zionist propagandists' armour. It is a challenge for the Ummah (Muslim Community) to defend Al-Aqsa and monitoring the media is one way to do this. Objective presentation of the issues through articles and programmes aimed at educating the masses on this sensitive but vital subject is another. Actually doing this in an effective way is potentially the greatest challenge of all.

From the day I became aware of the importance and centrality of Masjid Al-Aqsa in Islam, I have done what I can to 'help'. This sounds rather pathetic on the scale of things, especially for an issue as hot as Al-Aqsa and Palestine in general. However, since 1988, when I paid my first visit to Palestine (The Occupied Territory), this has meant direct efforts through watching the media and seeking to counter extensive Zionist propaganda. It is, you will not be surprised to learn, an uphill struggle, given that many Jews and pro-Zionists appear to be active media-watchers whereas Muslims talk a lot but do little.

"Did you see that programme about Palestine last night? It was terrible, very biased, we should do something!" "Did you call the BBC to complain?" "Well, not exactly, but it was really bad." "So why didn't you ring the BBC? If enough people call they take notice. If nobody calls they think it is OK and the same thing will happen again." "But I'm very busy, couldn't you do it?"

Does that sound familiar? Our frightening ability to do nothing is one reason why Masjid Al-Aqsa, an Aya [3] of Qur'an and the first Qibla remains in Zionist hands and the media feels free to report the issue as it sees fit. Under the present status quo it is rare for the media agenda and the Muslims' agenda to be compatible, resulting in biased, let alone Islamically positive reporting, but I think we must accept some blame for this because we do not interact with journalists in a sufficiently positive way to swing coverage towards Islam and Muslims. The fact that, in Britain at least, there is no legal or moral equivalent of 'anti-Semitism' to keep anti-Muslim journalists and broadcasters in check must also be influential.

Nevertheless, examples of how the media can be used as a propaganda tool are many. For instance, the media frequently refer to Al-Aqsa as the 'Temple Mount', indicating support for Zionist claims to the site and sending clear signals to the viewers/readers/listeners that the Jews' claim to the area is legitimate. The third holiest site in Islam is thereby branded a temporary blot on an otherwise impeccable Jewish landscape. That is what we are supposed to deduce from the information given and, sadly, many if not most people who

actually take notice of such things do. It is even sadder to note that Muslims seem to be resigned to regarding as a lost cause what is the only mosque apart from the Haram in Mecca mentioned in the Qur'an by name. As a community we are apparently content to let it be occupied, desecrated and abused by settlers and journalists alike.

The situation in the Middle East is not, however, simply 'black and white'. There are a lot of greys in-between so it is easy to get confused. Ostensibly religious matters surrounding the fate of Masjid Al-Aqsa are inextricably linked to the general political situation and media treatment of the area reflects this. Muslims too should view the issue in its wider context if any real sense is to be made of it.

However, despite headlines like that mentioned above, all is not entirely lost. It is possible to discern some disenchantment with the Israelis and their supporters who have for years appeared to have the upper hand as the occasional excellent article sneaks past the censors. Robert Fisk, a journalist who can be relied upon to be reasonably objective, highlighted in one article the 'double standard' of reporting the Middle East 'peace process [4]'. On another occasion the headline 'Life and travel coloured by pass laws [5]' was a wonderful play on words likening the situation of Palestinians seeking work in Israel with non-whites under South Africa's apartheid regime. Such a thinly-veiled accusation that Israeli is a de facto apartheid state and Zionism is indeed a form of racism still cuts deep into the psyche of the country's apologists. Nevertheless, such a trend is slow to develop and although I tend, out of personal preference, to focus on the print media, I have no doubt that what we read in the newspapers is reflected on television and radio.

Paradoxes abound in the way the Western media cover Palestinian issues. For example, the text underneath the 'Israeli... Arabs' headline does in fact speak of 'Palestinians' so does the headline reflect editorial policy - unlikely in the light of the text - or the prejudice of the sub-editor responsible? Or was the sub-editor simply being lazy? It is hard to decide, especially when the same newspaper publishes such gems as Edward Said's article 'One land but two peoples [6]'. Said is perhaps the most eloquent intellectual promoter of justice for the Palestinians and the fact that he is a lecturer in the United States, the major supporter of Israel, gives a sharper edge to his work.

In his article Said again exposed one of the great myths of Israel, most famously expounded by the late Israeli premier, Golda Meir, that, 'There was no such thing as Palestinians... they did not exist.' [7] Said's retort was straight to the point: 'Israel's constant demands for security conceal the country's original sin - the fact that there was always another people in Palestine, and that every village, kibbutz, settlement, city and town had an Arab history.' In stating this, Said is simply reiterating what Meir's predecessor and Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, is reported to have said: 'I don't understand your optimism. Why should the Arabs make peace? If I was an Arab leader I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural; we have taken their country [8].'

Said uses 'Arab' in a way that we can understand. He is writing as a Palestinian Christian with Arab roots and the Arabic language shared with Muslims. Why, then, do we get so upset when it is used in any other context? The answer lies in the demonisation of a whole race of people - the Arabs - as part of the overall denigration of Islam and Muslims. A classic example of the media's role in this process was the way that The Sunday Telegraph's Con Coughlin reported on "the likeliest culprits" for the explosion that brought down TWA Flight 800. We now know, of course, that the most likely culprit was a peacetime equivalent of United States' "friendly fire" now subjected to a State Department cover-up, but for Coughlin it could only have been Arab Muslims [9].

The whole demonisation process has its roots in antiquity and finds modern outlets not only in the popular media but also in school textbooks. One history book in use in Israeli schools states, '[The Arabs] are extremists and we are moderates. They murder indiscriminately, and we defend ourselves [10]'. This is consistent with Israeli government policy way back in 1974. The Israeli Minister of Education was quoted in an Israeli newspaper thus: 'It is important that our youth should know that when we returned to this country we did not find any other nation here and certainly no nation which had lived here for hundreds of years [11]'. Propaganda, lies, news, call it what you will but ask yourself if the media is to blame for reporting it, or to be thanked for bringing it into the open?

What lies behind such statements is a belief that the Arabs of Palestine and their institutions count for nothing. The claim made in the Israeli Declaration of Independence that the country 'will ensure complete equality...irrespective of religion, race or sex' and 'will guarantee freedom of religion' and 'safeguard the holy

places of all religions' is a sham [12]. Consider the following as a prime - and disgusting - example of what this means in reality.

A British Member of Parliament who visited Jerusalem after the Six-Day War of 1967 described his meeting at the Knesset (Israeli parliament) thus: 'After lunch, the Chairman of the [Israeli] Foreign Affairs Committee spoke with great intemperance... about the Arabs. When he drew a breath, I was constrained to say, 'Dr. Hachohen, I am profoundly shocked that you should preach of other human beings in terms similar to those in which Julius Streicher (a Nazi] spoke of the Jews. Have you learned nothing?' I shall remember his reply to my dying day. He smote the table with both hands and said, 'But they are not human beings, they are not people, they are Arabs [13].'

That is the sort of context that 'Arab' is all too often used and, more often than not, it refers to Muslims.

But back to the issue of Al-Aqsa. Many Muslims labour under the mistaken belief that the Dome of the Rock is Masjid Al-Aqsa, in part because of the media coverage. Television images of the former are often accompanied by commentary describing the latter. Newspaper articles add to the confusion and misinformation. In The Times, for example, an article headed, 'Palestinians open new battleground at Temple Mount' begins: 'A new archaeological time bomb is set to explode on Temple Mount, the site holy to Muslims and Jews...[14]' [my emphasis]. What sits on top of the 'Temple Mount'? The Dome of the Rock, of course, but while the whole Al-Aqsa compound is sacred to Muslims, the popular image focuses on the Dome of the Rock, leaving Masjid Al-Aqsa ? uniquely vulnerable. It doesn't take much to imagine how easy it would be for Zionists to destroy Masjid Al-Aqsa (and many have already tried) and, in the face of protests, show images of the Dome of the Rock Mosque to set the Muslim world's mind at rest that "Al-Aqsa" is undamaged.

Robert Fisk's article mentioned above is titled 'Israelis can be terrorists too,' and although Israel seeks to divert attention away from its own murky past with its condemnation of 'Islamic terrorism' the truth will always come out, sometimes in the strangest of places. The Sunday Telegraph, a newspaper not exactly noted for its support of Islam and Muslims (see above) reported, 'as Yitzhak Rabin's widow, Leah, suggested, a country that came to independence partly as a result of terrorist attacks such as the bombing of the King David Hotel, and which elected the man responsible as its prime minister [Menachim Begin], should certainly understand the terrible efficacy of violence as a political weapon [15].' And, it has been reported, Israel is 'an insane country[16]' so should we be surprised at what happens there, or what is reported about it?

The treatment of 'the Arabs' and Islamic holy places such as Al-Aqsa are linked, whether Muslims like it or not, because anyone opposed to Israeli oppression is usually labelled as 'Islamic extremists whose terrorism has jeopardised the peace process [17]' or any one of the many variants of such phrases. The fact that Palestinians like Yasser Arafat are said to use similar descriptions further complicates the matter [18].

The religious angle to the issue is underscored by the dangers facing Al-Aqsa. A report in The Observer in 1997 suggests that journalists are finally waking up to the fact that threats to Al-Aqsa threaten everyone, Muslim and non-Muslim alike [19].

Whatever happens, Muslims should determine to be more aware of the media and more pro-active. There are sincere journalists out there and it is up to the Muslim world to encourage them to be objective, at least, if not actively pro-Muslim. (If journalists in the Muslims could also be persuaded likewise that would be a bonus.) That alone would be an achievement to build on and it is not impossible. The rest, as they say, is up to us. But Allah knows best

Footnotes

[1]. The Guardian, 15th May 1998.

[2]. Edward Said, *Covering Islam*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, p xv. Interestingly, the sub-title is, "How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world."

[3]. A verse of the Qur'an.

[4]. The Independent on Sunday, 27th Feb. 1994.

[5]. The Guardian, 20th November 1996

[6]. The Guardian, 16th August 1997.

[7]. The Sunday Times, 15th June 1969.

[8]. David Ben Gurion, quoted by Nahum Goldmann in *The Jewish Paradox*, 1978, p99.

- [9]. The Sunday Telegraph, 21st July 1996.
 [10]. The Times Edu. Suppl. 11th April 1997.
 [11]. Ha'aretz, 9th September 1974.
 [12]. Facts About Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Infor.Division, Jerusalem, 1985.
 [13]. Parliamentary proceedings reported in Hansard, 18th October 1973.
 [14]. The Times, 11th October 1996.
 [15]. The Sunday Telegraph, 21st Sept. 1997.
 [16]. Yitzhak Rabin's sister, Rachel, in an Israeli Army Radio broadcast reported in The Guardian, 5th November 1997.
 [17]. The Times, 3rd February 1997.
 [18]. Ditto.
 [19]. Julian Borger, "When this holy beast finally goes up in flames, pray to God there'll be no millennium mayhem" in The Observer, 6th July 1997.

Views

15

Often Ignored Historic Muslim Jerusalem

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I went on my first visit to Jerusalem in 1986, chiefly to find out more about the conditions under which Palestinians lived and worked at that time and not to see the religious and historical places, but in between meetings and appointments, I snatched a few hours to wander the streets of the city. It is rich in Muslim buildings, particularly from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. I had no guidebook with me, but readily recognised Mamluk architectural styles in a fountain and arcades near the al-Haram al-Shareef and I knew, from my history books, that the walls of golden stone which embrace the Old City were raised by the Ottoman sultan, Suleyman the Magnificent. The great majority of western visitors to Jerusalem of Christian background go there to see its Biblical sights: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Via Dolorosa and others. They might admire the Dome of the Rock, which dominates the Old City, but otherwise, they give scarcely a thought to Jerusalem's Islamic monuments. Sadly, most Muslim visitors do not fully appreciate what a treasure of Islamic creativity is to be found there. Knowing where the main interest of tourists lies, local Palestinians generally do little to point out the physical remains of 1300 years of Islamic civilisation in the city (naturally, I omit the century of Crusader control from my reckoning). The more ideologically blinkered supporters of the modern State of Israel clearly feel some discomfort at these reminders of the duration of the Muslim presence. They sweep past them, paying attention only to what they see as being of Christian or Jewish significance. This denial of reality reaches absurd lengths. On a subsequent visit, I found myself walking behind an American family who, from the way father talked, were obviously of a Christian Zionist persuasion. We had just passed the building where the Khalidi library was kept, and were standing a few yards from a building which had been erected during the Mamluk period some 500 years ago to house a religious school. With a sweep of his arm, 'father' declaimed to his children, 'There was nothing here before the Jews came back, but now the Arabs say it is theirs.' I should know better by now, but such wilful disregard for facts can still astound me.

Why Did We Not Claim Our Land? (The contribution Muslims around the world failed to make)

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In his book 'A Brutal Friendship - The West and the Arab Elite' Said K. Aburish writes: 'The Palestinians, justifiably among the world's leading exponents of conspiracy theories, blame Christianity, the Western powers, Arab governments, their leaders and endless combinations of these elements for their misfortune.' To this list of culprits should have been added the masses of ordinary Muslims all over the globe. Jerusalem has a special status in the scriptures; it should also have a special status in the hearts of believers. Jerusalem is a barometer of God's pleasure or displeasure with His people. When the Israelites were the chosen people of God, He guided them towards the land of Palestine. When they transgressed, He delayed their entry for forty years. Once they had settled, their stay was conditional on abiding by the divine law, and through their disobedience they lost their entitlement, as Mica 3.9-12 declares: 'Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong. Its heads give judgement for a bribe, its priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, 'Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us.' Therefore because of you Zion shall be ploughed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain

of the house a wooded height.' The Muslims, as the best Ummah raised for mankind, the faith-community to replace the Israelites and Christians as the chosen people are no different in this respect. Islam's claim to Jerusalem was established well before the Hijrah with Muhammad's S night journey to the furthest mosque. The physical conquest of Jerusalem took place before a generation had passed. The brutal interlude of the crusaders' occupation until Jerusalem's liberation under Salahuddin lasted less than a hundred years, with another very brief period of occupation by Christian forces after his death. Until Salahuddin re-united the Muslim forces and spurred on their spirits, it was not so much the crusaders' strength but the Muslims, spiritual weakness which ensured their continuing occupation. Reports of the time give the unmistakable picture of utter disinterest in the fate of Jerusalem amongst the surrounding populations. The Muslims in the then centres of the Islamic world, Damascus and Baghdad, were far too self-centred and decadent to be perturbed about the alien presence in control of God's blessed land of al-Aqsa. The same appears to be the case today. The half-century-long occupation of Palestine by non-Semitic Jews from Eastern Europe counts for nothing in terms of history. Their claim to the heritage of Abraham is fake in that neither are they his descendants nor was Abraham, as the Qur'an clearly points out, a Jew or a Christian, considering that the Torah was only revealed long after him. The time of their presence in Palestine is diminutive in comparison to their periods of absence from it, and the length of their stay insignificant vis-a-vis that of the almost uninterrupted sovereignty over the region by Muslims afterwards. Yet the myth of the inherited Jewish homeland is swallowed wholesale due to a well-oiled propaganda machine. The same propaganda successfully portrays the Jews and the Christians as the people of God, and the Muslim Arabs as the intruding heathen fanatics, overlooking the fact that Moses, the law-giver of Israel learned his religion from the Arab Jethro (Shu'aib), whose-equally Arab daughter was the mother of the generations of Levites, the priesthood cast of the Israelites. The invincibility of the Israeli defence forces is another of those propaganda myths, when history reveals clearly that they owed their success mainly to skilful political manipulations which made their enemies entirely dependent on non-forthcoming British military supplies. For any serious student of the recent history of Middle East the historic reality is one of the most amazing intrigues on behalf of the occupiers and their supporters coupled with a long string of missed opportunities by the victims of this occupation, whose rulers were carefully handpicked by their own enemies. So why did we deliberately close both eyes and, ignoring all facts to the contrary, believe the fairy-tales? The truth is simple: we really couldn't be bothered. In a fast-moving world of material advancement and ever new illusions of achievement, a desert land held little promise for us. Palestine was a problem for the Palestinians, and the Dome of the Rock was to look good on postcards and calendars. It did not penetrate our hearts. So we let things happen the way they did, and found excuses for ourselves. We abandoned God's land, the land His prophets had walked upon, and He abandoned us. No lamenting of our situation would change this sad state of affairs. The Prophet of the World S, had recommended the visit to three important places of worship: the house of God in Mecca, his own mosque in Medina, and the furthest mosque in Jerusalem. Imagine if four million Muslim pilgrims would make Jerusalem a stop-over during the Hajj season every year, and further millions would do so throughout the year when performing Umrah. The sheer numbers of Muslims present in the holy city would shift the balance of power in no time at all. Imagine further that they would return home with the love for Jerusalem firmly embedded in their hearts. Their profound experience of the place would increase their longing for it once returned, as much as their painful memory of having witnessed the alien and arrogant occupation of this holy mosque would lead them to energetically challenge and defeat the premises of Zionist propaganda. Next year Jerusalem would suddenly have become our slogan, and before Israel had sobered up from her boastful birthday party, she would feel the pinch. But for as long as we ourselves have abandoned that which we claim to be ours, we can hardly complain when others pick up the spoils.

The Forgotten Homeless of Palestine

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The struggle of the Palestinian refugees is one of the longest and the most cruel ever recorded in history. The majority of refugee problems are resolved within a few years. Whatever the reasons for the existence of refugees in the first place, when the 'conflict' is resolved the refugees can usually return to their homes and start afresh. It may take up to ten years but normally their hopes are realised. They rightly expect the International Community to uphold the rule of law and negotiate a passage for their right to return, the right to reclaim their homes, businesses and land. However, the case of the Palestinians, tells quite a different story. The inequality meted out to them has meant that the number of Palestinians now living outside their home land is greater than those residing inside Palestine: There are nearly 6.5 million Palestinians in total, of which 4.6 million are currently refugees. There appears to be no conviction on the part of the International Community to resolve this problem, a UN resolution 194 and international condemnation of the oppressors

fails to go beyond words. The rights to return and to reclaim their land and homes or to be compensated for their loss if they decide not to return, are still being neglected. The report of sufferings endured by the Palestinians could fill volumes, from the tortures and torment of eviction, poor treatment in refugee camps, neglect by the International Community to inhumane treatment by the Israeli within Palestine itself. The cut in the budget of UNRWA (an agency looking after the welfare of Palestinian refugees), has increasingly made things difficult, with the excuse given that the international community's priority is to support the self-rule zone in order to stabilise the peace process. But is it realistic to think that such a 'peace process' can be stabilised when there are still millions of refugees who are prevented from returning to their homes; when the freedom of movement of local Palestinians is severely restricted; when families are not permitted to build new homes as their families expand; when those living in Jerusalem, who get married to people in other areas can not get permission for their partners to join them and, if they leave to join their spouses, they lose their rights of return to the holy city; - in short the treatment of Palestinians closely resembles if not surpasses the terrible oppression of the black population of South Africa under Apartheid? Unfortunately the subject of refugees has not really been tackled realistically in any of the peace negotiations. Time and again when meetings have been called to discuss it they have been cancelled or delayed. Indeed the refugee issue was relegated to the last stage of recent negotiations and even then the various parties were drawn towards other peripheral issues which only served to cloud the subject and make things ever more complicated. What should be made of a peace agreement, which has no mention of nor any proposed, practical solution for over 4 million displaced people whose dearest wish and right is to be able to return to their home land from which they were so violently torn? How can there be peace when Palestinians are still treated like third class citizens in a land, 80% of which is rightfully theirs (according to the UN)? Indeed there can be no such thing as a stable peace settlement while the oppression of the masses continues

Christian Zionism: A British Perspective

19

The Revd. Dr. Stephen R. Sizer

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At its simplest, Christian Zionism has been defined as 'Christian support for Zionism [1].' Central to Christian Zionism is the belief in the abiding relevance of the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, 'I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you [2].'

Christian Zionists tend to see themselves as defenders of, and apologists for, the Jewish people, and in particular, the State of Israel. This support involves opposing those deemed to be critical of, or objective towards Israel. It is rare therefore to find Christian Zionists who feel a similar solidarity with the Palestinians.

The most well known and influential British Christian Zionist organisations include the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People, also known as The Israel Trust of the Anglican Church (CMJ or ITAC); Christian Friends of Israel (CFI); Intercrossers For Britain (IFB); Prayer Friends of Israel (PFI) and the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ). These are all part of an international coalition of Christian Zionist organisations which includes Bridges for Peace (BFP); The American Messianic Fellowship (AMF); The Messianic Jewish Alliance America (MJAA); Jews for Jesus (JFJ); and of course, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ). These organisations are part of a broad coalition, which is shaping the content of the Christian Zionist agenda today.

Several contemporary British Zionist have had a considerable influence in popularising an apocalyptic pre-millennial eschatology and Zionist vision on the British Evangelical scene in particular.

That their teachings warrant the description "Armageddon theology" [3] is evident from the provocative titles of some of their publications [4]. In offering a definition, Louis Hamada traces what he sees as the correlation between Jewish and Christian Zionism.

The term Zionism refers to a political Jewish movement for the establishment of a national homeland in Palestine for the Jews that have been dispersed. On the other hand, a Christian Zionist is a person who is

more interested in helping God fulfil His prophetic plan through the physical and political Israel, rather than helping Him fulfil His evangelistic plan through the Body of Christ [5].

CMJ was the first Christian Zionist organisation in Britain, founded in 1809 under the name 'The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews'. The less accurate description of 'London Jews' Society' (LJS) eventually proved more popular [6]. At its inception LJS had a fourfold mission agenda.

- 1) Declaring the Messiahship of Jesus to the Jew first and also to the non Jew.
- 2) Endeavouring to teach the Church its Jewish roots.
- 3) Encouraging the physical restoration of the Jewish people to Eretz Israel - the Land of Israel.
- 4) Encouraging the Hebrew Christian/Messianic Jewish movement [7].

During the last Century, in response to changing attitudes toward the Jews, LJS modified its name several times, first to 'Church Missions to Jews' [8], to 'The Church's Mission to the Jews', then, 'The Church's Ministry Among the Jews' [9], and finally in 1995 to 'The Church's Ministry Among Jewish People [10].' Their promotional literature now indicates a more subtle and less explicit three-fold strategy,

The aims of CMJ are:

Evangelism: To be workers with God in his continuing purpose for the Jewish people, both in Israel and world-wide, especially in seeking to lead them to faith in Jesus the Messiah as their only Saviour.

Encouragement: Supporting Jewish believers in Jesus in all possible ways. **Education:** To help Christians to appreciate the biblical, Jewish roots of the Christian faith [11].

This third aspect of their ministry was further modified in 1995 to emphasise not merely the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, but its living abiding relevance now, together with their concern, like the Council for Christians and Jews (CCJ), to confront anti-Semitism. The third 'aim' therefore now reads, To help Christians to appreciate the biblical, Jewish roots of the Christian faith and life. The concern to combat anti-Semitism [12].

Whether this justifies defending the State of Israel from criticism for its continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is a controversial and sensitive point within CMJ. Material obtained in 1990 from Emmanuel House in Jaffa indicates that the commitment of some members of CMJ leadership to 'restorationism', that is, the active encouraging of Jewish people to move to Eretz Israel, including the Occupied Territories, appears to remain an important, if not explicit or well publicised aspect of their ministry. Their leaflet explaining the ministry of Emmanuel House states, ITAC, as the London Jews Society is known today, has always believed, proclaimed and worked towards the return of the Jewish people to Zion. This policy is rooted in a firm belief in the message of biblical prophecy which has accurately foretold these things [13].

In the 1996 Annual Report of CMJ, their General Director explicitly and unequivocally identifies CMJ with restorationism and with the State of Israel.

Not to be out done by Christian Zionist organisations preoccupied with the fulfilment of biblical prophecy in Israel during what are regarded as the 'End Times', under the section of the Report outlining 'CMJ Issues', and in the context of the primary tasks of evangelism and encouragement, Walter Riggans writes, Within this focus we need to be aware that God's concern is with the Jewish people the world over. In our day there seems to be in some Christian circles a restriction of interest to the State of Israel and to the significance of various events for the unfolding of Biblical prophecies relating to the end times. CMJ has always been at the forefront of teaching about God's restoration of the Jewish people to and in Israel, and we are continually excited by, and watchful of all that is happening. We are humbled by what the Lord is doing among Israeli believers. In other words, our prayerful interest in the State of Israel is as constant and committed as ever [14].

Perhaps this is why Walter Riggans defines the term 'Christian Zionist' in an overtly political sense as '...any Christians who support the Zionist aim of the sovereign State of Israel, its army, government, education etc.; but it can describe a Christian who claims to support the State of Israel for any reason [15].'

In a 'Resource Pack' produced in? 1996 for group study as well as to answer objections to the work of CMJ, material is included under the bold heading, 'The State of Israel: Why should we support it [16]?'

Christian Friends of Israel (CFI) likewise insists on the unconditional necessity of 'Standing with Israel' and bringing blessing to her as a nation, though in their case, primarily through prayer and humanitarian projects rather than by evangelism.

We believe the Lord Jesus is both Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the world; however, our stand alongside Israel is not conditional upon her acceptance of our belief. The Bible teaches that Israel (people, land, nation) has a Divinely ordained and glorious future, and that God has neither rejected nor replaced His Jewish people [17].

The Council of Christians (CCJ) may also be regarded as a Zionist organisation. While prohibiting proselytism of Jews by Christians associated with CCJ, they nevertheless have shown more concern to defend the actions of the Israeli Government than with the claims of Christ. For example, when the book *The Forgotten Faithful* by Said Aburish was published in 1993, Beryl Norman wrote a fierce rebuttal in the *Church Times*, criticising him for being, '...part of a major campaign now being waged to win over Christians in the West to the Palestinian cause, and ensure that Israel loses Western Christian support [18].'

When invited to elaborate in correspondence, she did not substantiate these claims, but made further allegations. In response to a request for evidence she claimed that, 'Militant Palestinian groups - PLO, Hamas - are using the churches. It is very easy to identify this - same vocabulary, same phrases, same stories. Our friends in Israel see this at first hand [19].'

Of all the Christian Zionist organisations, the International Christian Embassy (ICEJ) is probably the most influential and controversial, having many supporters in the UK. It is significant that many of the staff working for the International Christian Embassy apparently worship at the Anglican Christ Church, near the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem, coincidentally the headquarters of the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People (CMJ) in Israel. Ray Lockhart, the vicar of Christ Church, when invited to comment on the work of ICEJ, refused to express any criticism of them [20].

In what is a useful summary, Walter Riggans, General Director of CMJ, claims Christian Zionists generally agree on three cardinal beliefs, allowing for a wide diversity of views as to their theological significance eschatologically, as well as their implications for Christian practice.

The return of Jews to the land in the last 100 years and the establishment of the State of Israel should be (or can be) interpreted as a fulfilment of Old Testament promises and prophecies concerning the land, or at the very least as signs of God's continuing mercy and faithfulness to the Jewish people. For many Christians today the greatest visible sign of God's faithfulness is the survival of the Jewish people. God has preserved them, cared for them, directed them, against all the odds. And so, in a sense, the greatest sign of all is the State of Israel, and Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Israel; such is a classic Christian Zionist position... The establishment of the State of Israel has special theological significance because of what it means for the Jews, or because of what it means in the sequence of events leading up to the turning of the Jewish people to their Messiah and the second coming of Christ. Christians should not only support the idea of a Jewish state, but (at least in general terms) support its policies...in the most modest of ways I would suggest that Christians as Christians must give support in principle to the State of Israel as a sign of God's mercy and faithfulness, and as a biblical mark that God is very much at work in the world... [21]

Karen Armstrong is not alone in tracing in Christian Zionism evidence of the legacy of the Crusades. Fundamentalists have, she claims, 'returned to a classical and extreme religious crusading.' Ruether also sees the danger of this kind of Christian Zionism in its, [22] 'dualistic, Manichaeic view of global politics. America and Israel together against an evil world [23].' Bishop Kenneth Cragg writes, It is so; God chose the Jews; the land is theirs by divine gift. These dicta cannot be questioned or resisted. They are final. Such verdicts come infallibly from Christian biblicists for whom Israel can do no wrong-thus fortified. But can such positivism, this unquestioning finality, be compatible with the integrity of the Prophets themselves? It

certainly cannot square with the open people hood under God which is the crux of New Testament faith. Nor can it well be reconciled with the ethical demands central to law and election alike [24].

Christian Zionists have aggressively imposed an aberrant expression of the Christian faith and an erroneous interpretation of the Bible which is subservient to the political agenda of the modern State of Israel.

The Christian Zionist programme, with its elevation of modern political Zionism, provides the Christian with a world view where the gospel is identified with the ideology of success and militarism. It places its emphasis on events leading up to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today [25].

Christian Zionism had no place in the Middle East and should be repudiated by the universal Church. It is 'a dangerous distortion' and significant shift away from orthodox Christocentric expressions of the Christian faith.

(This is) ...a fundamental disservice also to Jews who may be inspired to liberate themselves from discriminatory attitudes and thereby rediscover equality with the Palestinians with whom they are expected to live God's justice and peace in the Holy Land [26].

Christian Zionism is a devious heresy and an unwelcome and alien intrusion into this culture, advocating an ethnocentric and nationalist political agenda running counter to the work of reconciliation, and patient witness among both Jews and Muslims [27].

As one leading Anglican cleric described it, 'Making God into a real estate agent is heart breaking...they are not preaching Jesus any more [28].'

They are, in the words of another Palestinian clergyman, 'instruments of destruction [29]' Another senior churchman was equally forthright, Their presence here is quite offensive.... projecting themselves as really the Christians of the land... with total disregard for the indigenous Christian community [30].

Similarly outspoken criticisms of the Israel Trust of the Anglican Church (ITAC) have been made by Palestinian Anglican clergy.

CMJ are propagating Zionism rather than Christianity. It is working against the interests of the Anglican Church in Israel [31].

Essentially, Christian Zionism fails to recognise the deep seated problems the deep seated problems that exist between Palestinians and Israelis; it distorts the Bible and marginalises the universal imperative of the Christian gospel; it has grave political ramifications and ultimately ignores the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of indigenous Christians. It is a situation that many believe Israel exploits to her advantage, cynically welcoming Christian Zionists as long as they remain docile and compliant with Israeli government policy[32]. Consequently, Local Christians are caught in a degree of museumization. They are aware of tourists who come in great volume from the West to savour holy places but who are, for the most part, blithely disinterested in the people who indwell them. The pain of the indifference is not eased insofar as the same tourism is subtly manipulated to make the case for the entire legitimacy of the statehood that regulates it [33]. Cragg offers this astute critique of Christian Zionism, The overriding criteria of Christian perception have to be those of equal grace and common justice. From these there can be no proper exemption, however alleged or presumed. Chosen-ness cannot properly be either an ethnic exclusivism or a political facility[34].

Christian Zionism offers an uncritical endorsement of the Israeli political right and at the same time shows an inexcusable lack of compassion for the Palestinian tragedy. In doing so it has legitimized their oppression, regrettably in the name of the Gospel.

Footnotes

1[1] Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land, Israel or Palestine?* Rev. Edn. (Oxford, Lion, 1992), p.277.1

[2] Rob Richards, *Has God Finished with Israel?* (Crowborough, Monarch, 1994), p.177f.1

[3] Donald Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon*. (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, Herald Press, 1995)1

- [4] Notably, Hal Lindsey, *The 1980's Countdown to Armageddon* (New York, Bantam, 1981); *The Road to Holocaust*. (New York, Bantam 1989); *The Final Battle*. (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front. 1995); Charles C. Ryrie, *The Final Countdown* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1982); Mike Evans, *Israel, America's Key to Survival* (Plainfield, New Jersey, Haven, n.d.); John F. Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1990); Moishe Rosen, *Beyond the Gulf War, Overture to Armageddon* (San Bernardino, Here's Life Publishers, 1991); Dave Hunt, *Peace, Prosperity and the Coming Holocaust* (Eugene, Oregon, Harvest House, 1983).1
- [5] Louis Bahjat Hamada, *Understanding the Arab World*. (Nashville, Nelson, 1990), p. 189.1
- [6] George H. Stevens, *Go, Tell My Brethren: A Short Popular History of Church Missions to Jews*. London, Olive Press, 1959, 131
- [7] Kelvin Crombie, *For the Love of Zion: Christian witness and the restoration of Israel*, (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), p.3.1
- [8] Stevens, *Go.*, p.131
- [9] Crombie, *For.*, p.260
- 1[10] Church's Ministry Among Jewish People (CMJ), *Shalom*, 3, 1995, p.11
- [11] CMJ, *Shalom*. 3, 1994, p.1.1
- [12] CMJ, *Shalom*. 3, 1996, p.1.1
- [13] Israel Trust of the Anglican Church, *Immanuel House, Tel Aviv 1866-1990*, (Tel Aviv, ITAC, 1990)1
- [14] The Church's Ministry Among Jewish People. *General Director's Annual Report 1996*, (CMJ, St Albans, 1996).1
- [15] Walter Riggans, *Israel and Zionism*, (London, Handsell, 1988), p. 19.1
- [16] The Church's Ministry Among Jewish People, *Always be Prepared to Give an Answer Resource Pack*, (CMJ, St Albans, 1996).1
- [17] Christian Friends of Israel, *Standing with Israel*, information leaflet, n.d.
- 1[18] Beryl Norman, 'The Churches in the Middle East' *Church Times*, 18 June 1993
- 1[19] Beryl Norman in correspondence, following her letter to the *Church Times*, 1993 1
- [20] Interview with Ray Lockhart, vicar of Christ Church, Jerusalem, 1994.1
- [21] Q quoted in Chapman, *Whose*, p. 278.1
- [22] Armstrong, *Holy*, p.377.1
- [23] Ruether, *Wrath*, p.176.1
- [24] Cragg, *Arab*, p.238.
- 1[25] MECC, *What*, p.13.1
- [26] MECC, *What*, preface.1
- [27] MECC, *What*, p.1.1
- [28] Based on interviews with Palestinian clergymen (Interview 1993:3.9)
- 1[29] (Interview 1994:3.23)1
- [30] (Interview 1993:3.12)1
- [31] (Interview 1994:3.23)1
- [32] Chapman, *Whose*, p.277.1
- [33] Cragg, *Arab*, p.28.1
- [34] Cragg, *Arab*, p.237.

Why did 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan Build the Qubbat al-Sakhra (Dome of the Rock)?

25

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Dome of the Rock

On the 27th Rajab[1] Muslims all over the world commemorate Prophet Muhammed's (peace be upon him) al-Isra' (the Night Journey) from Makkah to Al-Quds (Jerusalem) and al-Ma'araj (his ascension through the seven Heavens) and the Beatific Vision. This momentous event in Islam is undoubtedly for Muslims associated with Masjid Al-Aqsa (not to be confused with the mosque, at the southern end, also called Al-Aqsa) also known as Bayt al-Maqdis al-Haram al-Sharif or the Noble Sanctuary). In Particular it is linked with

the qubbat al-sakhra (The Dome of the Rock), the third most sacred Muslim site, located upon a raised platform in the centre of the Noble Sanctuary.

The Qubbat al-Sakhra is most likely the first major artistic endeavour of the Umayyads. Built between 72-73 AH (691-692 CE), the reasons for its construction have entered into political realms to, undermine the Umayyads and, in particular, the Calipha 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan.

Being in vogue to undermine Islamic heritage of Al-Quds Western scholars began to exploit 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan's critics to their advantage and began to raise questions on whether the current identification of this monument dates from the time it was built. They have proposed their hypothesis by refereeing to a great extent on the monument itself which is more or less preserved in its original state and is the most reliable contemporary evidence we possess. Its location, architecture and decoration have been examined in an attempt to define the meaning of the structure at the time of its construction.

A theory introduced by Goldhizer, asserts that 'Abd al- Malik sought to divert the Hajj from Makkah to Al-Quds, and that he intended to establish there a new political and religious centre, with the aim of replacing Makkah and the Ka'ba, which at that time was under the control of a counter-Calipha 'Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr. This theory has been adopted by Creswell and more recently by Amikam. Their evidence is largely based on texts of a Muslim historian Ya'qubi (c. 874) , and of an orthodox priest from Alexandria, Euty chius (d.940). In order to justify their theory they propose that the plan of the rock with the two ambulatories around the rock itself, originated with the liturgical requirements of the Tawaf, (the formal circumambulation that is one of the rites of Muslim pilgrimage).

Goitein and Grabar have argued, quite convincingly against this interpretation. For instance, some earlier and reliable historians such as, Tabari and Baladhuri and the geographer Muqaddasi do not connect 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan's initiative in building the Qubbat al-Sakhra to Ibn al-Zubayr. It can also be demonstrated that the histories of al-Ya'qubi and Euty chius were biased, and although Creswell cites other Muslim historians reporting the tradition in question, most if not all were of Shia persuasion. Amikan questions the extent to which the bias of these early historians affects their reliability. In his view, 'pro-Alid bias cannot tilt the balance against the tradition, and certainly does not demand that it be totally rejected.' He suggests that there are similar reports based on sources independent of al-Ya'qubi and Euty chius. However his justifications are inconclusive. Furthermore, as Grabar puts it, it would have been 'politically suicidal' for 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan to have even contemplated modifying the Hajj, a sacrosanct religious duty imposed by God and the fifth pillar of Islam. In fact if 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan had contemplated such heresy, about shifting Hajj, then Muslim scholars and his own subjects would have revolted. The mere suggestions of shifting Hajj a fundamental Islamic rite ordained by God, is an indication of the profound lack of Islamic knowledge and values Muslims aspire to by the critics. It is important to note that at no time during Ibn al-Zubayr's reign were restrictions imposed on people to perform Hajj. Finally, it is argued that had 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan wanted to replace Makkah as a place of pilgrimage he would have chosen a type of structure similar in plan to that of the Ka'ba.

A further hypothesis suggests that 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan built the Qubbat al-Sakhra as a testimony to Islam's victory over Judaism and Christianity. Grabar is in support of this theory. He turns to the internal contemporary evidence of the Qubbat al-Sakhra so that its location, architecture and decoration serve as the basis of his argument. He attempts, first, to define the importance of the Rock at the time of the Muslim conquest. According to Jewish tradition, the al-Haram area was considered as the site of Solomon's Temple, the place of Abraham's sacrifice and Adam's creation and death. The Bayt al-Maqdis's holiness for Muslims derives not only from its association with the Old Testament Prophets, who are also prophets in Islam but also its direct reference in the Holy Qur'an, being the first qibla, the spot of al-Ma'araj and from ahadith (authentic sayings of Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him) which reports the Al-Aqsa Mosque to have been built 40 years after the Ka'ba in Makkah [2]. During the Roman and Byzantine period the whole al-Haram al-Shareef area was used as the city's refuse tip, as a mark of contempt towards the Jews. In 637-8 the Calipha 'Umar went to Al-Quds to sign the treaty of assurance, where he toured the city with the patriarch Sophronius. All sources agree the first request 'Umar made was to be taken to Bayt al-Maqdis. What he saw there once he arrived was a desolate dump yard, which he instantly began to clear with his own hands and commanded his followers to do likewise. By dawn the area was cleared. 'Umar called Ka'ab al-Ahbar, a Yemenite Jew converted to Islam, and asked, 'Where do you think we should establish the place of prayer?' 'Ka'ab said, 'Towards the Rock'(Meaning, to stand in such a place facing the Ka'ba so that the Rock lay in front of them). 'O! Ka'ab, you are imitating the Jewish religion!...Take care of your own affairs, we were

not commanded to venerate the Rock, but we were commanded to venerate the Ka'ba,' replied Umar [3].

Grabar focuses on the decorative themes, and in particular on the jewel decoration of the inner face of the octagonal colonnade and of the drum. Amongst the wide variety of jewellery are crowns and tiaras which Grabar illustrates as being the crowns of the rulers vanquished by Islam [4]. Thus in the decoration of the Qubbat al Sakhra, there is supposedly a conscious use of symbols belonging to the defeated opponents of the Muslim state. He says that the location can be explained as an attempt to emphasize an event of the life of Abraham, a character who, in Islamic tradition is neither Christian nor Jew, but a Hanif and equally holy to the three religions. The inscriptions, which are in the spirit of an anti-Christian polemic, are a statement of Muslim Unitarianism and a proclamation of the final truth of Islam. On this basis Grabar concludes that 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan wanted to affirm the superiority and victory of Islam, and that the primary purpose of the building was to be a monument for non-Muslims.

A third hypothesis proposed by Rosen-Ayalon, claims that the underlying significance of the Qubbat al-Sakhra is in the architecture and decoration. She accuses Grabar of not taking into consideration all the aspects related to the inscriptions. For instance, the fact that Christians were forbidden to even enter the premises, meant that the inscriptions were aimed at Muslims. She criticizes Grabar for failing to recognize the profound complexity and symbolism of the decorative scheme of the Qubbat al-Sakhra. She fully exploits the decorative aspects in an attempt to reveal their symbolic messages.

The two most important decorative elements are the glass mosaics and the carved marbles. The marble slabs evoke the image of rippling water and the winged motifs are a non-figural interpretation of angels and not crowns as suggested by Grabar. The specific theme of the mosaics is predominantly floral motifs, consisting of stylized trees bearing a profusion of fruits and flowers. She relates the iconography of mosaics and other ornamentation in the Qubbat al-Sakhra with the theme of Paradise and finds support of this in other artistic traditions. In Sasanian art she finds the motif of a continuous series of floral ornament on a bronze Sasanian platter, a motif that has long been identified as an expression of Paradise. She considers the relationship between Coptic art and Umayyad art, and delves into the Christian as well as Muslim paradise iconology, drawing out the essential concepts apparent in each.

The principle components of Paradise in the Muslim tradition are trees, gems, jewellery, special metals and flowing rivers, and Paradise in Gnostic literature combines the concepts of the Tree of Life, Judgement Day, and Resurrection. All these elements, she argues, are translated into a visual form in the Qubbat al-Sakhra and can be identified in various monuments such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Al-Quds. She draws parallels between a bejewelled cross found in the decoration of the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem and the tree motif in the Qubbat al-Sakhra. So that in Islamic art, this Cross takes the form of a tree motif. Furthermore, the mosaic in the octagon of this church, which belongs to the original Constantinian church, displays circular medallions and octagonal shapes, intertwining ropes and ribbons in which are plants and fruit, all of which recall the decorative programme in the Qubbat al-Sakhra.

Rosen-Ayalon also explores the numerical features of the Qubbat al-Sakhra. The octagon or number eight has a symbolic value in connection to the Resurrection in Christianity. In Muslim eschatology, number eight occurs in descriptions of Paradise. In the Holy Qur'an, the number seven is related to the theme of Paradise and in the Qubbat al-Sakhra is represented by the seven bays. The Anastasis of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which is the traditional place of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection, has also been used for sacred rock. As for the 240 metre long inscription in the Qubbat al-Sakhra, it fits well in her plan. It mentions Jesus with reference to his birth, and Resurrection, and also alludes to Day of Judgement. In addition, she translates the cornucopia, as being the trumpets of Judgement Day. Thus she concludes, the symbolic messages of Paradise, Judgement Day and Resurrection are all 'umbilically' interlocked with the Rock at the centre of the al-Haram al-Sharif and that architecturally the functions assigned to the octagonal building built by 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan parallel the similar symbolic context represented by the Anastasis.

On the face of it Rosen-Ayalon's arguments may appear to make sense, however, objective analysis indicates she has read too much into the 'symbolism.' It is as if the Muslim tradition at the time of 'Abd al-Malik had completely absorbed Judeo-Christian ideas. First of all it is not generally accepted by Muslim scholars that Judgement Day will take place in Al-Quds and this probably was the view held during 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan's reign. It is interesting to note that she thinks that at such an early stage of Islam, such a complex and sophisticated Paradise iconography had developed. Especially when Grabar states, '...in the early period

of Islam the religious system and the spiritual life of the faithful were yet too simple- or too disorganized- to allow as definitive and complete a system of religious- topographical associations as appears in later writing [7].'

The hypothesis quoted need objective scrutiny. They all have something in common in that they refute the claim of the majority, that at the time of construction, the Rock was not considered as the place from whence the Prophet ascended into heaven. Grabar refutes this interpretation on the basis that the great traditionalists such as Bukhari and Tabari do not accept the identification of the Qubbat al-Sakhra as the only possible one. Furthermore, he questions the purpose of the domed martyrium of the Ascension, the qubbah al-ma'araj. Saying that if the Qubbat al-Sakhra was to commemorate the Ascension of the Prophet, there would be no need of a second one. However, the differences of opinion as shown by Tabari and Bukhari are not prevalent and the generally accepted view is that the al-Isra' and the al-Ma'araj occurred on the same night and from Al-Quds [8]. As for the qubbah al-ma'araj it can not be dated, neither do we know when it acquired this name. As Grabar states, as early as the middle of the eighth century, the biographer of the Prophet, Ibn Ishaq, connected this Night-Journey with the Ascension of Muhammad, and claimed that Masjid al-Aqsa was in fact in Al-Quds. Even if we were to take the most reliable contemporary document, the building itself, there is nothing inside it which conflicts with this theory. It is possible to argue, using Rosen-Ayalon's own explanation, that the decoration within the Qubbat al-Sakhra has everything to do with the Prophet's Ascension, as it relates clearly to the theme of Paradise. The Prophet was supposed to have visited seven heavens. This accords perfectly with the point she raised concerning the symbolic value of the number seven. As for the trumpets, even though clearly linked to the Judgement Day theme in the Qur'anic text of the inscription, it is not necessarily linked directly to the rock, but could be a warning to its intended audience, the Muslims. Even though the 240 meter-long inscription does not refer directly to the Ascension, neither is there any reference to Abraham, who plays a significant role in Grabar's explanation.

The fact that the architecture is clearly in the tradition of the Christian martyria, suggests that the Qubbat al-Sakhra was erected in commemoration of the Prophet Muhammed's (peace be upon him) Ascension. The Church of the Ascension which was built in the second half of the fourth century was octagonal, just as there is an octagon at the Church of the Nativity. 'The Anastasis, the Ascension, the Octagon at Bethlehem, were all built to glorify a sacred spot, tomb, rock or grotto, and the central plan was dictated by the intention of the building.' This is further proof, as suggested by Rosen-Ayalon, that the rock at the centre of the Muslim shrine was not intended to provide a spot for Tawaf as anti-Umayyad sources and those with invested interest to deflect the centrality of Al-Quds in Islam seek to suggest.

It is valid to argue that the identification of the rock being the point of the Prophet's ascension, could have been so well known that there was no need to indicate it by an inscription.

At the time of 'Umar, Al-Aqsa mosque was the name given to the whole area. Still to this day Muslims prostrate themselves in worship everywhere inside the Noble Sanctuary, so that the Qubbat al-Sakhra becomes an extension of Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Amikam was right to say that the Qubbat al-Sakhra was a place of 'pilgrimage', but goes too far by saying that 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan intended to replace the Ka'ba and that the Rock provided the spot for Tawaf. When Muslims come from all over the globe to the Haram al-Sharif, they do feel like they are on a 'pilgrimage', but this cannot be compared with the Hajj. It is well known that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'Go to it and worship in it for one act of worship there is like five hundred acts of worship elsewhere.'

Ultimately it is possible that 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan had more than one motive for constructing this building. There is no doubt that he was clearly aware of his opposition, both Muslim and non-Muslim. His buildings, which still dominates the skyline of the holy city, would have served as a reminder to all of the authority and power of the newly established religion and its leader. It is also certain that he intended to sanctify the Rock. We have seen that the Qubbat al-Sakhra can accommodate a variety of explanations and until new evidence surfaces the debate will continue on this building, that remains one of the most remarkable architectural achievements of Islam.

Footnotes

[1] This is the 7th month of the Islamic Hijra calendar

- [2] Sahih Muslim.
- [3] Al-Tabari, The History of al-Tabari, Vol XII, The Battle of al-Qadisiya and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine. Trans. Yohanan Friedman. State Uni. Of New York Press. 1992.
- [4] The winged motif is Sasanian in origin and often symbolized the Sasanian crown.[5] Rosen-Ayalon, M. The Early Islamic Monuments of al-Haram Al-Sharif: An Iconographic Study, Jerusalem, 1989 p16.
- [6] Bonfioli, M. "Syriac-Palestinian Mosaics in connection with the decorations of the mosques in Jerusalem and Damascus", East and West, X, 1959 p68.
- [7] Grabar, O. "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock", Ars Orientalis, 3, 1959 p.33
- [8] see The concise Encyclopedia of Islam Glasse, C, London 1991 pp.101-103,208 and Hajjaj, A. The Isra and Miraj: The Prophet's Night Journey and Ascent into Heaven Dar al-Taqwa Ltd. 1993 pp15,53.
- [9] 'today it is a much later monument, with many reused Crusader elements, and before being discussed it requires a thorough architectural and archaeological investigation', Rosen- Ayalon p.70
- [10] Crowfoot, J.W. Early Churches in Palestine, London, 1941 p.91.

Threats to Al-Aqsa - A Summary Report

31

In the autumn of 1996 the Israelis opened an ancient tunnel along the Western Wall of Al-Aqsa and nearly triggered all-out war in the Middle East. After several days of confrontations in which more than 70 died and the Palestinian police used their weapons to defend their own people for the first time, the tension was somehow diffused. The Palestinians once again demonstrated their willingness to defend Al-Aqsa at any cost. At the time the then new Israeli government demonstrated a disturbing arrogance and ignorance of the delicate issues involved, its policies in the handling of similar incidents in and around the Noble Sanctuary since this time has shown no signs of change.

All of the hundred plus attacks on Al-Aqsa since Israeli tanks and soldiers first entered the site in 1967 have been hallmarked by a certain recklessness and fundamental lack of understanding of the issues at stake. However, until the recent opening of the Western Wall tunnel these attacks were at least officially discouraged by successive Israeli governments who were conscious of the terrible consequences of tampering with Al-Aqsa, both within Palestine and throughout the entire Muslim world.

With the capture of East Jerusalem in 1967 the realisation of the Jewish national dream to rebuild the Third Temple, which many Jews believe originally stood on the site of Al-Aqsa, seemed suddenly within their reach. But according to the Halachah, the Jewish code of law and doctrine, the most critical requirement for rebuilding the Temple, the coming of the Messiah, had yet to be fulfilled. Hence, the construction of the Temple until then would actually be in violation of Jewish beliefs. Further, according to international law the proposed building site, the al Haram al Sharif, a place of worship for Muslims for nearly 1300 years and the third holiest site in Islam, clearly belonged to the Muslims and any attempts to violate its sanctity would be under the scrutiny of nearly one billion Muslims throughout the world. Hence, until the present government, the cause for rebuilding the temple fell into the domain of those whose enthusiasm outstripped their knowledge; Jewish extremists and their followers and their parallels in the 'Zionist Christian' fundamentalist movements. Orthodox Jews with a deep understanding of the requirements of their religion were aghast at the idea, secular Jews were terrified of its consequences, and the Israeli government played a wait-and-see game of official disapproval and unofficial tolerance.

Seeking to establish the principle of the Noble Sanctuary (al Haram al Sharif) as a place of Jewish worship, these extremist groups began performing Jewish prayer services in the area of Al-Aqsa after 1967, despite the prohibition by the Chief Rabbinate of Jews of even setting foot in it (for fear of violating its sanctity according to Judaic law). Fearing retribution from the Muslim World the Israeli Attorney General banned such acts in the spring of 1969. Four months later the entire south wing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque was destroyed by fire. Fire fighters from Jerusalem and the West Bank answered the alarm, but not soon enough to prevent damage that would take more than twenty years of concerted effort to repair. When the Fire was finally extinguished, the Qibla wall, Mihrab and dome were destroyed and with them the minbar commissioned by Nuradeen over 700 years earlier and installed by Salahuddin when the Crusaders were driven out in the twelfth century.

Reaction from the Muslim countries was strong and swift. A protest strike and demonstration was called in Jerusalem. Others followed throughout the Muslim world. An emergency meeting of the UN Security Council

was called, and Israel's control of Jerusalem put into question. The Israeli representative to the council put Israel's position about rebuilding the Temple on public record, 'according to the Halachah, the Temple will be rebuilt when the Messiah appears. It is therefore inconceivable that we ourselves should make any plans for rebuilding the Temple.' The man found guilty of setting the fire, an Australian with evangelical Christian credentials who had sought refuge in a coastal kibbutz, was set free after receiving psychiatric counseling.

Nearly three decades later, work on the restoration of the damage caused by this fire is almost complete. Supported by Muslims throughout the world, and winning international awards for excellence, the restoration has nonetheless disrupted worship in Al-Aqsa since 1969.

In 1970 the Gershon Salomon group, the Temple Mount Faithful, an ultra-fanatic group dedicated to demolishing Al-Aqsa and rebuilding the temple on its site, forcibly entered the Haram. They were repulsed by the Muslims who suffered casualties from Israeli troop gunfire.

Attempts to establish Jewish prayer services within the Sanctuary continued. In 1976 Israeli Central Courts passed a law permitting them to pray. Two weeks of demonstrations by Muslim Law students and the subsequent resignation of members of the municipal courts in the West Bank resulted in their repeal. Other attempts to establish these services were renewed two years later. In September 1979, fifteen extremists Jews blocked the way to one of the Sanctuary's gates on the day of the Friday congregational prayer, pointing a gun at one of the Muslim security guards. In May 1981 the Adhan was prohibited from the minaret overlooking the West Wall because of Jewish celebrations. The following month the Hakam of the Wailing Wall petitioned the Minister of Religious Affairs in Jerusalem for permission to pray in Al-Aqsa. Harassment and acts of sabotage escalated in 1981. In August an Israeli helicopter hovered at low altitude over Masjid Al-Aqsa preventing worshippers inside from hearing the Khutba (Sermon). That same month a tunnel dug by workers from the Ministry of Religious Affairs was uncovered in the Sanctuary leading to the Western Wall. The government immediately ordered the tunnel sealed because of the political sensitivity of the issue.

Despite warnings by some Israeli archaeologists against digging beneath the Sanctuary, and UN resolutions against them, excavations continued, leading to dangerous cracks to buildings adjoining the Western Wall. Engineers and archaeologists were prohibited by Israeli authorities from revealing anything about their digs beneath Al-Aqsa. In September Arab students entering one of these tunnels to seal it off were injured in an encounter with a group of Israelis. A general strike was called by the Supreme Muslim Council to protest against the excavations. Muslims were prevented by Israeli Security forces from entering Jerusalem the following Friday for fear of large demonstrations.

The following spring armed Israeli religious students clashed with Muslim security guards. This time the Minister of Defence was petitioned for permission to perform Jewish services at Al-Aqsa. Excavations beneath Al-Aqsa continued with Israeli archaeologists claiming the discovery of Jewish ruins under the Mosque. In April of 1982 a parcel with a fake bomb and threats signed by Jewish extremists was discovered at one of the gates leading to the Sanctuary. Two days later Muslims mobilised a large demonstration in Al-Aqsa to protest against attacks on holy places. The following day an ex-Israeli army regular opened fire with his military assault rifle, killing two Muslims and filling the interior and exterior of the Dome of the Rock with bullet holes. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza rioted in protest. Less than a month later shots were fired into the Sanctuary by a sniper on the rooftop on the Madrassa Amriyya, and a group of Israelis tried to enter the Sanctuary with leaflets inciting Jews to take over the mosque. In nearby Khalil, armed members of Kryat Arba entered the Ibrahim Mosque and performed prayer services with the support of the military.

In June the Awqaf received a letter from Jewish extremist groups confirming their intention to continue in their attempts to establish Jewish services in the Sanctuary and to blow up Al-Aqsa. A month later an Israeli was arrested for the attempted bombing of the Sanctuary. In January 1983 the Temple Mount Fund was established in Israel and America to raise funds for rebuilding the Second Temple on the site of Al-Aqsa. In February the Awqaf received a letter from Europe warning that this Fund was trying to buy up waqf property adjacent to the Sanctuary. In March Muslim security guards discovered explosives in the entrance to the Sanctuary on the day of the Friday prayer, four armed Israelis were discovered attempting to enter the Sanctuary through Solomon's Stables, and arms and plans for rebuilding the temple were found in the house of an extremist group leader. The same month a group of Jewish fanatics armed with Uzi's and M-16s and carrying a cache of explosives were caught attempting to enter the Sanctuary. Radio Israel reported that they were prepared for a prolonged siege. Six months later they were acquitted in Israeli courts. In January of 1984 a group of Jewish terrorists carrying ladders and explosives were stopped in the Sanctuary by Muslim

security guards in the middle of the night. Four days later time bombs were discovered at one of its gates. They were detonated by explosive experts.

By the spring of 1984 armed Israeli guards were patrolling the Sanctuary twenty-four hours a day, their presence and behavior inimical to the sanctity of the Mosque. The Supreme Muslim Council petitioned the Israeli Prime Minister repeatedly to withdraw the soldiers but to no effect. With no response forthcoming from the Israelis, the Supreme Muslim Council petitioned the UN in May 1984 to pressure Israel to withdraw its troops from Al-Aqsa.

Despite continued demands for their withdrawal, Israeli soldiers continue to patrol the Sanctuary on the pretence of protecting it from attack. In reality it is the Muslim-run Aqsa Security force, underpaid, understaffed, and unarmed, whose vigilance has provided the only protection for the Noble Sanctuary in virtually all the acts of terrorism against it. The UN Security Council has passed more than 20 resolutions condemning Israel's annexation of old Jerusalem and its military occupation of the West Bank. Repeated violations of human rights led directly to the Intifada in the winter of 1987. Recognising the Intifada's roots in the revival of Islam, the Israelis increased their attacks on places of worship throughout Palestine. On June 15th 1988 Israeli troops stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque, firing tear-gas into groups of worshippers. A month later the discovery of new excavations adjacent to the Sanctuary led to more civil disorder. Less than one year later soldiers were forced from the precincts of the Noble Sanctuary by more than 20,000 Muslims who gathered in Al-Aqsa for the first Friday prayer in Ramadan. Road blockades were set up around Jerusalem the following week and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza were barred from the mosque.

On October 6th 1990 Israeli troops opened fire on Muslims gathered inside the sanctuary, killing 22 and wounding hundreds more, including the doctors and paramedics who arrived in ambulances to attend to the casualties.

Since then, the aspiration to rebuild a Jewish Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock has become more and more open, despite the Judaic injunctions against it. On 20th October 1997, the Temple Mount Faithful group brought a 4.5 ton rock to the Damascus gate of the Old City. The stone specially prepared in the desert of Ramon, is to be the cornerstone for the Third Temple. The Sunday Telegraph reported in March 1997, that the religious Jews were celebrating the birth of a red heifer as a sign from God that work can soon begin on building the Temple. The heifer when 3 years old (coinciding with the new millennium) will be used in a ritual sacrifice.

Almost every day Jewish extremists enter Al-Aqsa as tourists to perform Jewish prayer ceremonies within the Sanctuary. The government is regularly petitioned to permit Jews to pray in the courtyards of Al-Aqsa, through the willful misinterpretation of an Israeli law originally legislated to protect the rights of worshippers by guaranteeing them free access to their own places of worship. Jewish extremists have decided that this law should guarantee them the right to pray in Al-Aqsa, based on their belief that it was the original location of the Jewish Temple. That the site was twice destroyed because of the Jews' own wrong actions, or that it remained vacant and desolate for 500 years before the Muslims entered Jerusalem in 638, or that it has been an important centre of worship and education in Islam for more than 1300 years, does not seem to impinge on their ethnocentric vision of history.

Every day the pressure increases. The Jewish extremists' historically and theologically challenged viewpoint is working its way into the mainstream and is actively being taken up by parallel groups of Zionist Christian extremists who believe that the construction of the Temple would herald the 'End-Times' and the return of Jesus, peace be upon him. They could be right, at least in so far as the conflagration that would surely follow any destruction of Al-Aqsa might very well usher in the final days of the planet, as we know it.

Al-Aqsa Mosque has been under siege since 1967. Every day that goes by brings renewed dangers to it. The Zealots are confident that a Temple will be rebuilt on the site of Al-Aqsa and have prepared all the necessary work for its construction. It is up to the Muslims and the international community to check their advance.

Amnesty International Report

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There have been hundreds of reports against Israel for the torture of Palestinians by Amnesty International since 1948. Below is a summary of the most recent reports, with reference numbers for those who wish to study the subject further:

Killing by Israeli Forces: In May 1993, following an upsurge in killings since Dec 92, an AI (Amnesty International) delegation visited the Occupied Gaza Strip. They looked into a number of cases, including four cases of children shot by Israeli soldiers where the victim was not involved in any violent activity. Rana Abu Tuyur, aged 11, was shot as she went out for milk after lifting of a curfew. Ra'edah Umar 'Abed al Qarra, aged 13, was shot while she was playing with her brother in the courtyard of her home. Maher Na'im 'Umar al Maja'idah, aged 8, was shot while walking in al Bhar street, a few days before the feast of Id al Adha. Fares Muhammad, aged 20 months, was shot with his father in Jabalia Refugee Camp. (AI Index-MDE 15/8/93)

Doctors and Interrogation Practices: Palestinian political detainees held by the Israeli continue to be subjected to methods of interrogation which constitute torture or ill-treatment. Israeli physicians and other medical personnel have apparently been involved in certifying detainees' fitness to undergo some of the methods of interrogation used; in examining and providing treatment to victims before allowing them to be returned to interrogation; and in covering up abuses by interrogators.....(AI Index-MDE 15/9/93)

Torture and Ill-treatment of Political Detainees: Abd al Samad Harizat was detained and died in custody in April 95. A subsequent autopsy found that he had died due to intra-cranial trauma after violent shaking of the head. The use of violent shaking by the General Security Service (GSS) was sanctioned by a Ministerial Committee and the Landau guide lines which allow "moderate physical torture" in the interrogation of "security" detainees. Proposed legislation intended to incorporate the UN Convention on Torture into Israel law is being put forward but appears to be written to allow ill-treatment to continue. (AI Index-MDE 15/3/95)

Report Synopsis Covering Jan to Dec 1996: At least 1,600 Palestinians were arrested on security grounds by Israeli authorities. At least 1,000 Palestinians received trials before Israeli military courts, whose procedures did not meet international fair trial standards. A total of 1,155 Palestinians were freed in the context of (Oslo) peace agreement, but more than 3,500 others, including 2,000 sentenced to prison terms in previous years, remained held at the end of the year. Torture and ill-treatment of Palestinians during interrogation continued to be systematic and officially sanctioned. At least 80 Palestinians, including 60 civilians were killed by Israeli forces, some in circumstances suggesting extrajudicial executions or other unlawful killings. At least seven houses were destroyed as punishment.

In June 96, the Ministry of Justice announce that an interrogator who had shaken 'Abd al Samad Harizat and subsequently died had been acquitted on most counts by a disciplinary court and returned to his post. He was said to have been convicted of "not carrying out his duty", but no information was given as to what this entailed.

The Israeli forces used helicopter gunships which on some occasions reportedly shot at crowds. Palestinians unlawfully killed include Ayman al Dakaydak, Ibrahim Ghanem and Jawad Bazalamit, who were shot with rubber bullets or live ammunition outside the Al'Aqsa Mosque in circumstances where the lives of the security forces were not in danger.

In March 96, the Israeli army carried out the punitive destruction of at least seven houses of Palestinians accused on involvement in suicide bombing. Other houses were sealed.

The security forces continued to enjoy virtual impunity for past human rights violation. In November 96, four members of an undercover unit of the Israeli Defence Force were each fined one agora (about half a US cent) for "negligently causing the death" in 1993 of Iyad Amali, a passenger in a car which had stopped at a check point.

Celebrating Our Oppression

Shaykh Ibrahim Bham

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Had it not been for Divine Intervention to instil in humankind the abhorrence for apartheid, then the year 1998 would have been frustrating for those of us resident in South Africa. The world would have been forced to take witness of the anniversary celebration marking the 50th year of official Apartheid. We thank Allah for the abolition of this dehumanising policy, which at least, does not find a place in the statute books any more. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of Palestine.

The year 1998 marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel. No sooner that we complete this sentence, but facts demand a reappraisal, as this marks 50 years of oppression of Palestinians in their own lands at the hands of the Israelis.

The issue of Palestine generally and of Al-Quds in particular, has been a very difficult pill to digest for the Muslim Ummah. The tragedy in the loss of Palestine for the Muslim Ummah is only second to the downfall of the Caliphate (Ottoman Empire). It is not strange that the two events are strongly interlinked. For the creation of Israel is a direct result of the loss of the Caliphate.

The Jews are unrepentant when it comes to their own deeds and are prone to jump on the 'anti Semitic' bandwagon. However, history bears testimony to their actions in our own era and earlier times, which have been immortalized in the Holy Qur'an. It presents a profile which embodies both positive and negative dimensions. When they honoured the covenant, they were blessed and their betrayal resulted in retribution.

The Bani (children of) Israel were a people tremendously favoured and blessed by Allah.

"Children of Israel! Call to mind the (special) favour which I bestowed Upon you, and fulfil your Covenant With Me as I fulfil My Covenant With you, and fear none but Me." (2, 40)

Allah in the Holy Qur'an reminds the Bani Israel of His favours. How He delivered them from the tyranny of Fir'awn (Pharaoh), who killed the male infants and spared the female, only to enslave them thereafter. Causing the sea to part and enable their escape from Fir'awn. Whilst they were wandering in the wilderness, as punishment, Allah provided for them shade in the form of a cloud. To satiate their pangs of hunger, Allah provided them with Manna and Salwa (honeydew and quails) and to quench their thirst, Allah instructed Prophet Musa, peace be upon him, to strike a rock with his staff, resulting in twelve streams of fresh water gushing forth.

One would be inclined to think that if a people are abundantly blessed, then they surely must have been obedience personified. However, history records otherwise. They disobeyed the commands of Allah on a regular basis and on occasions even blatantly rejected His rules.

One such incident is captured in the Qur'an. Allah ordered them to go to war with a certain people to free their land. When hearing the military prowess of their enemy, they flatly refused to engage in Jihad. Instead, they told Musa, peace be upon him, 'you and your Lord go to battle. As for us, we are to sit here.' They are even guilty of killing Allah's Prophets.

Then later, in history, instead of accepting the message of 'Isa (Jesus), peace be upon him, as per the teachings of Musa, peace be upon him, they rejected his Prophetic mission. As if rejection was not enough, they even conspired with the Romans to kill him. They were confident in their minds that they succeeded in their mission. However, the Qur'an clearly refutes their claim.

In earlier times the Jews used to inform the Arabs of an imminent Prophet and a Divine Book through which they would achieve dominance. But when the final Messenger, Muhammed, peace be upon him came they rejected him.

The people of the Book know this as they know their own sons; but some of them conceal the truth which they themselves know. (2, 146)

The people of the Book failed to implement the knowledge from their own scriptures which foretold the coming of the Prophet as their hostility towards truth blinded them from realising the consequences of their conduct.

A people who earned for itself such an infamous track record that a proclamation, the nature of which is immortalised in the Qur'an, is neither out of place nor surprising.

Behold! Thy Lord did declare. That He would send against them, to the day of Judgement, those who would afflict them with a grievous penalty... (7, 167)

History records the Prophecy of this verse. In 721 BC, the Assyrians overran the Bani Israel. In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar razed Al-Quds to rubble. In 70 CE, Titus, the Roman commander destroyed Al-Aqsa and expelled all the remaining Jews. In 135 CE Hadrian constructed a Temple dedicated to 'Jupiter' on the site of Al-Aqsa. The anti-Semitic campaigns throughout Western Europe in the 13th, 14th & 15th Centuries culminated in the expulsion of Jews from Spain. The atrocities at the hands of Nazi Germany have become all too common knowledge to need re-iterating.

Shame is pitched over them (like a tent) wherever they are found, Except when under a covenant (of protection) from Allah and from Men....(3, 112)

This verse dispels any doubt that may arise concerning the State of Israel. Muslims find it difficult to reconcile two things. The Qur'an appears to indicate the Bani Israel will not have a sovereign state, whereas they are at present in control of Palestine and have established the State of Israel. The transient anomaly becomes apparent as one realises the State of Israel is the product of colonial powers, mainly Britain, France and the USA. Thus, Israel is in existence, as the Qur'an states, 'under a covenant from men.'

Up until the First World War, Palestine was part of the greater Islamic Ottoman Empire. There were no defined borders to map out Palestine. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire paved the way for the British Imperialists and other colonialists to sharpen their carving knives. They dissected Palestine away from greater Al-Sham (Syria, Jordan and Lebanon) and for the first time in history, Palestine became a country with borders defined by colonial powers. At the time Britain created the Palestinian problem:

--Arabs accounted for more than 90 per cent of Palestine's population. Jews numbered only 56, 000. ·

--Arabs in Palestine owned 97.5 per cent of the land. The Jews owned 2.5 per cent.

By 1947, when the British absconded from their responsibility and involved the United Nations, the Jews still only owned 6 per cent of the land in Palestine.

Notwithstanding these facts, the General Assembly of the UN recommended that a Jewish State be established in Palestine. To exasperate the matters further the UN granted the 'proposed state' 54 per cent of the total area of the country. Furthermore, the UN recommendation in favour of a Jewish State was outside of the competence of the Assembly under the Charter of the UN.

Israel's desire to create Eretz (Greater) Israel has moved on unabated, with land being usurped over the years to fulfil their dream. Israel has been condemned 5 times by the Security Council and 6 times by the General Assembly for military attacks on neighbouring countries, whereas the Arab countries have never been condemned by any organ of the UN for military attacks on Israel. Despite this fact, the West and USA continually patronize Israel and herald it as a peaceful nation.

Israel is created on the most racist foundation. Israel belongs to any individual who is a Jew even if he happens to have been born in Argentina. Non Jews born in Israel, irrespective of the hundreds of years of their lineage there, are not entitled to the same freedoms as a Jew born outside Israel. The principle of Israel as a Jewish state is firmly entrenched by law, prohibiting any political party which proposes to change it by 'democratic' means.

Official policy discriminates against non Jews in all domains of life-residency rights, work rights, equality before law, freedom of movement, freedom of speech and many others that we South Africans had to endure during the dark years of apartheid. In order to achieve long term sustainable peace in Al-Quds and Palestine in general the whole area needs to revert back to its rightful owners. I base this on the following grounds:

1. Only Islam respects and officially acknowledges the people of the 'Books' (Jews and Christians).

2. The Arabs existed in Palestine, including Jerusalem long before the Jews. The Yabusiyan Arabs founded Jerusalem almost 3,000 BC, followed by the Canaanites 500 years later. A few hundred years later the Filistines occupied it. The Jews came to Jerusalem only around 995 BC. Even as late as 1967, Jews were in a minority in Palestine. Only during the period of Prophet Dawud and Suleyman, peace be upon them, were they perhaps in a majority.

3. Nearly 1,400 years of Muslim rule over Al-Quds was only broken by the 90 years of Crusade rule. Muslims managed the affairs of all creeds and races in an exemplary way. Jews and Gentiles flourished under the Muslim rule of Al-Quds. It is ironic for the just rulers of Al-Quds to be evicted by colonialist and Zionist aggression.

4. History has proven that only Muslim rulers have provided the environment for a pluralist society to exist in Al-Quds.

Over and over again history informs us that Al-Quds does not tolerate those who break the covenant. It will not accept as its custodian, those who do not live up to the terms of the covenant. Jerusalem in our century has thrown a challenge, the response is our choice.

Jerusalem As A Biblical Shrine: An Evangelical Christian Perspective

PART I: The Old Testament

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As an Evangelical Christian, I regard the Biblical data to be inspired by God and thus reliable and authoritative. As much of the controversy surrounding Jerusalem depends on the historical picture of Jerusalem as depicted in the Bible, so a detailed study is crucial for deciding the future of the city.

Abraham and Jerusalem

Genesis 12:1ff presents Abraham as being called out of Mesopotamia to a place YHWH [1] will show him, which turns out to be Canaan. At this stage, there is no emphasis on Jerusalem, beyond the encounter in 14:18-20 with Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem, which seems to be the same place as Jerusalem, since Psalm 76:2 equates Salem with Zion [2]. Abraham is blessed by Melchizedek and gives him a tithe.

Hence, it is useless for those who want to build a new temple on the site of the Haram-al-Sharif to claim historical priority over the Arab and Muslim presence on the so-called Temple Mount. Leaving aside the fact that the Palestinians are the descendants of every ethnic group who have ever inhabited the land, just as the modern British are the descendants of every ethnic group who have inhabited these islands, it is instructive that ethnic and historical priority in Jerusalem lies with the Palestinian Gentile worshipper of the One God, not the Levitical priesthood. The pattern is of equal ethnic co-existence, not racial supremacy. Beyond this incident, the only role (albeit significant) that Jerusalem plays is the attempted sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac at Mount Moriah.

The Conquest

Jerusalem maintained its independence as a Jebusite kingdom until David captured it and it became 'the City of David'. However, there is no record of either a massacre, expulsion or oppression of its Jebusite inhabitants. This is demonstrated by Zechariah 9:7, where it is prophesied that the Philistines, and more especially the city of Ekron, will become part of Judah in the sense that they will become worshippers of God like the Jebusites. Thus, what happened in Jerusalem was both ethnic co-existence and convergence. It seems that the Jebusites must have converted to the faith of Abraham, and it is likely that ethnic inter-

marriage took place, since in later texts they slip out of view.

This is also likely in view of the origins of the Temple. In 1 Chronicles 21:7 David is punished by God for carrying out a census, probably for revenue purposes, and after David's repentance, he is commanded to build an altar to YHWH on the threshing floor of Ornan (Araunah) the Jebusite, v18 (cf. 2 Samuel 24:18). This shows that Jebusites were still living in peace in the city. David then offers to pay for the site, refusing Ornan's offer of a gift, vv23-24. It is significant that the land is not expropriated. In 22:1-2, David declares the site to be the house of YHWH, and it becomes the place where Solomon builds the Temple, 2 Chronicles 3:1.

The Place of God's Name *The Significance of Theophanies*

When Abraham entered Canaan, he did not locally restrict his worship in any way. Instead, we find that wherever YHWH appears to him (a phenomenon known as 'Theophany'), or where he pitches his tent, he builds an altar: Shechem (modern Nablus) Genesis 12:7; near Bethel, 12:8; Hebron, 13:18, and of course, Moriah, 22:9. Yet Moriah has no permanent status in his life, and after the Isaac incident he returns to Beersheba, 22:19.

Later, Isaac builds an altar there after the appearance of YHWH, 26:24-25. Jacob, after a particular manifestation of YHWH at Luz, erects a pillar to YHWH, 28:10ff, especially vv16-19, and declares that the place is the House of God, v17, v22 ('Bethel' means 'House of God'), and significantly, it is at this place that Jacob promises YHWH a tithe. The fact that it is described as the 'House of God' is strikingly reminiscent of the terminology used of Ornan's threshing floor, and probably for the same reason: a significant Theophany.

This demonstrates that the basis for special places of worship in the Bible is the manifestation of the Divine Presence.

Accompanying this fact, we should note that there appears to be a temporary nature to the liturgical significance of a particular shrine. Most importantly, there appears to be no permanent locative restriction to Divine shrines, and they even occur outside Palestine, such as Mizpah, Genesis 31:45ff; Mahanaim, 32:1-2; and Peniel, 32:30 (where his name becomes 'Israel'), all in Transjordan. Thereafter we learn of shrines established in Palestine by Jacob at Shechem, 33:20, and again at Bethel, 35:14.

Obviously, during the Israelite sojourn in Egypt, the dwelling-place of YHWH slips out of view, but it re-emerges again in a most unexpected place - Sinai. In Exodus 3:1-5 Moses encounters a theophany, and YHWH reveals Himself in Covenantal terms as the God of the Patriarchs, v6. What is significant is that Moses is commanded to remove his shoes because the place is 'holy'. The same experience occurs to Joshua in Joshua 5:13-15 near Jericho. Yet neither Sinai nor Jericho became the permanent Israelite shrine, and the first at least was even outside the bounds of the Promised Land. Once the theophany departed, the land returned to its ordinary significance.

The Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant

During the Exodus, a theophany again occurs at Sinai, Exodus 19:3ff, and it is there that Moses receives Divine Injunctions, notably the Ten Commandments, and one injunction forbids ethnic oppression, 23:9. The place becomes so holy that touching the mountain is fatal, v12, yet the mount is described as the place of Divine-human meeting, v17. Moses builds an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the tribes, 24:4, and then goes up again, upon which the Glory of YHWH rests on the mountain, v16, appearing like a fire, v17. It is at this point Moses receives the command to build a sanctuary, a tabernacle or tent [3] for the purpose of God's dwelling among His people, 25:8, which would be the seat of the Ark of the Covenant, the container of the Decalogue Tablets, v21, and which would also be the place of Divine-human encounter, v22. Professor John McKenzie writes

As the ark of the covenant, the ark symbolizes...the presence of Yahweh among his people...The Temple was the symbolic palace of the deity; like the tent, it was his residence [4].

Exodus 33:14-15 promises that the people will be led into Canaan by the Presence, indicating the mobility

of both the Divine Presence (i.e. the fact ? that it was not locally restricted), and of the Tabernacle itself. This mobile sanctuary became the pattern for the later fixed temple structure. However, two points should be noted. Firstly, the Divine Presence was not locally restricted to Palestine, still less to Jerusalem at this point. Secondly, the structure was never meant to be permanent. Professor Walter Kaiser writes '...was not Moses warned that he was not given the real, but only a "pattern" (Ex. 25:40) or a model and shadow of the real? - presumably until the time that the authentic had come!' [5] This is precisely the point that the letter to the Hebrews makes, 8:5-6, where the temple is described as '...a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned, when he was about to erect the tabernacle...', and then quotes Exodus 25:40.

The Shiloh and Gibeon Shrines After the Exodus, Deuteronomy 12:5, 11 speak of the place YHWH would choose for His Name to dwell, and that this would be the place for liturgical worship and the gathering of tithes [6]. In vv13-14, it is commanded that this would be the unique liturgical centre, other shrines being banned. However, there is no indication in the text that Jerusalem is the intended place, and Professor R. K. Harrison notes in the light of Deuteronomy 27:2, 4ff that Mount Ebal was the only shrine to be built with the instructions of Moses, and this actually occurred under Joshua, Joshua 8:30ff [7]. Certainly the provisions of Deuteronomy 27:1ff strongly resemble those of 12:5ff, although neither Mount Gerizim nor Mount Ebal are explicitly designated as 'the place God would choose to put His Name'. Harrison boldly suggests that Mount Gerizim, also mentioned in Deuteronomy 27:12 and Joshua 8:30ff was the place Moses intended as the central shrine, rather than Jerusalem, not mentioned in the Pentateuch [8].

In fact, the next central shrine we encounter is at Shiloh, when the Tent of Meeting is established there, Joshua 18:1. In Judges 18:31 the Shiloh shrine is described as 'the house of God', and 1 Samuel 1:3 records the presence of a sacrificial system and priesthood there. In v9 of the same chapter the shrine is described as a 'temple', and in v24 as 'the house of YHWH' (cf. 1 Chronicles 22:1-2). It is clear from 4:4 that the ark of the covenant was located there.

However, the ark was lost to the Philistines in battle, 4:11, leading to the lament that the Glory of YHWH, i.e. the manifest Presence of God, had departed from Israel, and though the Philistines later returned it, it ended up in Kiriath-jearim, 6:21, where it remained for twenty years, 7:2. Significantly, Kiriath-jearim was a Canaanite city, one of the Gibeonite towns which had, albeit deceitfully, entered into an arrangement with the conquering Israelites under Joshua, Joshua 9:3ff, (especially v17 with respect to Kiriath-jearim). Shiloh ceased to operate as the central shrine because the Divine Presence/Name no longer indwelt it, and it is clear from both Psalm 78:56-60 and Jeremiah 7:12, 14; 26:6 that this was regarded as a Divine judgment for Israel's sins. This demonstrates from a different perspective that God was not tied to any earthly sanctuary, and that ethics will determine God's attitude to even a holy shrine.

Thereafter there was a temporary cleavage between the ark and the tabernacle, with the latter ending-up in nearby Gibeon. This is significant, since, as we have seen, Gibeon was a Canaanite city. It should be noted that when Joshua discovered how the Gibeonites had tricked him, he sanctioned them by making 'hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God, Joshua 9:23, and v27 refers to the 'altar of YHWH' at 'the place which He would choose', although this remains indefinite in geographical terms. Therefore, we see again a Gentile Palestinian association with a shrine. From 1 Chronicles 16:39 it seems that the tabernacle of YHWH continued to exist at Gibeon even after the ark was brought to Jerusalem, and it remained there at least until the construction of the Jerusalem temple, as 2 Chronicles 1:3ff, which parallels 1 Kings 3:4ff, records the visit of Solomon there for the purposes of sacrifice, and YHWH appeared to him in a dream there.

It is recorded in v4 that David had previously brought the ark to Jerusalem and pitched a tent for it. This story is related in 1 Chronicles 13:5ff, and we read that because of a mishap, the ark is left on the way in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite for three months, where it blesses his family. This is significant because 'Gittite' denotes a resident of Gath, a Philistine city. If Obed-edom was a Philistine, then we have another case of a Palestinian Gentile association with a shrine object, and later Obed-edom and his family became the official gate-keepers of the ark at Jerusalem, 16:38.

The Temple

A Temporary Temple?

Under Solomon the Temple was finally built in Jerusalem and the Glory/Presence filled the Temple, 2 Chronicles 6:1; 7:2, and the priests could not enter the Temple because of it. This is the cause of great rejoicing in 6:6 and in later Scriptures, such as Psalm 132:13, where it is stated that YHWH chose Zion as His habitation. Isaiah 14:32 states that YHWH had founded Zion. Increasingly, Zion is both seen as the habitation of YHWH and identified with Jerusalem and the city with the entire Land, Psalm 76:2; 99:2; 137:1, 5; 147:12; Isaiah 2:3; 33:20; Joel 3:17; Amos 6:1, etc. Yet right from the start there is an expressed scepticism that the majesty of God could ever be so-restricted, 2 Chronicles 2:6; 6:18, since even the entire heaven and earth could not contain God.

Indeed, in 2 Chronicles 6:21; 30 (1 Kings 8:30, 39, 43, 49) it is stated that Heaven is the dwelling-place of God, a thought repeated in Ecclesiastes 5:2, and is also implied by the frequent references to YHWH 'looking down' from Heaven, e.g. Psalm 14:2. Yet in Psalm 11:4 YHWH is presented as simultaneously in the temple and heaven. The institution of the tabernacle and the temple point to the transcendent and immanent attributes of God, yet any shrine could only be a imperfect replica of the heavenly sanctuary.

Moreover, McConville points out that Isaiah 66:1-2 declares that '...heaven [and not the city in Palestine] is my throne, and the earth is my footstool', which he notes is in contrast to Psalm 132:7, 13, where Jerusalem and its temple possess these functions [9]. God states 'Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is the place that I may rest [10]?' The implication is that the temple is too small for God's presence, and at any rate is created. As Marie Isaacs states, the passage '...inveighs against any such earthly limitation of God...[11]' She also notes that this passage, like Psalm 11:5, depicts heaven as the seat of Divine sovereignty [12].

This has tremendous implications both for the New Testament depiction of the reign of Christ and for modern political issues in Jerusalem. It should be remembered that the construction of the Temple united both cultic ('religious') and political functions in Jerusalem. The Isaianic passage follows a prophecy of the 'new heavens and new earth', Isaiah 65:17, linked to a new Jerusalem, and is repeated in 66:22. Hence, the implication is that the Temple was meant only to be temporary, and in some way the new heavens and new earth would supplant its functions, and thus the role of Jerusalem as a Biblical shrine. The new entity, rather than the physical Jerusalem, would be the abiding home of the Divine Presence.

For All Nations

2 Chronicles 6:32-33 reveals that the Jerusalem temple, undoubtedly in keeping with the universalistic emphases of the Patriarchal Covenant, was not meant for Israel alone, but was to be a place of worship for all nations, and the temple itself was to be Divine revelation of YHWH and his covenant with the house of David. It is noteworthy that the Presence of God effects successful 'mission', causing Gentiles to become part of God's people, Zechariah 2:10-13. The eschatological vision of Isaiah in 2:2-4 envisages the Gentiles worshipping at the Temple Mount, under the universal rule of YHWH, a thought repeated in Micah 4:1ff. Indeed, Isaiah 56:7 states that the Temple is a 'house of prayer for all nations', quoted by Jesus in Mark 11:17. The prediction of the new heavens and new earth follows the prophecy that Gentiles would not only worship at Mount Zion, v20 (cf. 2:2ff), but would also become Levites, v21. Hence, unless a future Levitical temple in Jerusalem included Gentile priests, it would contradict Scripture. A Temple restricted to one ethnic group was never in the Divine Plan.

Much of the pressure on the Al-Aqsa Mosque is based upon an interpretation of certain passages in the Book of Ezekiel. To understand the context, we must remember that the original temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians, in punishment for the sins of the people. This is presented in Ezekiel as the departure of the Glory from the Temple, 10:18; 11:2 [13]. After the seventy-year exile a much less grand structure was built, although in the time of Herod a more imposing edifice was constructed. It is sometimes claimed that Ezekiel is looking forward to an ultimate Temple, because of the grand picture presented in 47:1ff, especially vv 5, 9, 11. A river flows from the restored temple, bringing 'life' and 'healing' to the Dead Sea, which becomes like the Mediterranean. It needs to be asked whether this picture should be taken literally, and McConville argues that it should not [14]. This is likely to be the case, since the genre of the material is apocalyptic, which frequently uses imagery, especially extraordinary, extravagant or exaggerated pictures to reinforce a point [15]. It is even more likely when we consider the New Testament

treatment of Jerusalem as a shrine.

Before considering the New Testament picture, we should note two enigmatic texts in the Old Testament relevant to our theme. The first concerns Isaiah 19:19ff, which states that after Divine judgment, an altar and a pillar to YHWH will be constructed in Egypt, and that sacrifice and offering will occur. This seems to be in tension with Deuteronomy 12:4, 11, 13-14, where the Place of Worship is rigidly restricted in location. Alec Motyer suggests that the shrines are reminiscent of the altar built by the Transjordanian Israelite tribes to emphasise their common membership of the People of God despite the river Jordan, Joshua 22:34, and sees this as a symbol of the Gentiles being included in the People of God [16].

This symbolism is likely, since in vv23-25 Assyria, Egypt and Israel are depicted as a common worshipping community, and in the Prophets, Assyria often stands for the nations [17]. Hence, it is probably the case that the Egyptian shrines and sacrifices should also be seen as symbolic [18]. Thus, once again, we see the association of Gentiles with a Biblical shrine, and also the idea that the temple-worship of YHWH was not restricted to Jerusalem; essentially we should see Isaiah 19 as a prophecy of the temple functions bursting the bonds of Zion, Jerusalem and Palestine, so that the entire globe becomes a temple place [19].

The second text is Malachi 1:11, wherein is the prophecy of 'incense' and 'pure offering' being presented to YHWH 'in every place' - and that by the Gentiles ('nations', i.e. 'goyim') in the World, not just Palestine. Yet Isaiah 2:2-3/Micah 4:1-2 declare that the 'goyim' will come to a renewed, glorified Jerusalem - Isaiah 2:1 and 3, to Mount Zion - v 3, to the 'house of the God of Jacob', and Judah - v 1, all of which are to be identified, Jerusalem standing for Judah in the way in which London stands for the UK. Again, we see here a symbolic prophecy of the functions of the Jerusalem temple being reproduced throughout the globe, and that by Gentiles. This only makes sense if the Jerusalem temple was only meant to be a temporary phenomenon, as was the idea of Jerusalem as a shrine at all. In the Messianic Age, the whole earth would take on its functions - essentially, become Jerusalem and its temple, and the priesthood would be open to Gentiles. Everywhere would be Zion and Jerusalem (and Palestine), and everywhere would thus be the Temple. Everyone of any ethnicity worshipping YHWH would be a priest, and similarly everyone would be an Israelite.

Footnotes:

1[1] This is the name of God in the Bible, but classical Hebrew had no consonants, so it usually rendered *Yahweh*. However, the Israelites thought the Divine name too Holy to utter, so they usually referred to the 'Lord' when they read it.

1[2] McConville, J. Gordon, *Abram and Melchizedek: Horizons in Genesis 14*, in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12-50*, Hess, R. S., Wenham, G. J., Satterthwaite (eds.), (Tyndale House/Paternoster, Carlisle, 1994), second edition, p. 97.

1[3] *mishkan* - 'dwelling-place'.

1[4] McKenzie, John L., *A Theology of the Old Testament*, (Geoffrey Chapman Publisher, London, 1974), p. 51.

1[5] Kaiser, Walter, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, (Moody, Chicago, 1985), p. 147.

1[6] The issue of tithing provides a link with Abraham's action to Melchizedek.

1[7] Harrison, R. K., *Old Testament Times*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1970), pp. 303-304.

1[8] Gerizim became, and remains, the Samaritan shrine.

1[9] McConville, Gordon, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, in *Jerusalem Past and Present*, p. 36.

1[10] 'Rest' in this case would not refer to the cessation of activity but to the act of indwelling.

1[11] Isaacs, Marie E., *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (JSNT Supplement Series 73, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1992), p. 83.

1[12] Isaacs,., *Sacred Space*, p. 206.

1[13] McConville, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, p. 40.

1[14] McConville, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, p. 50.

1[15] Two excellent popular books relating to this subject are those by Green, Joel B., *How to read prophecy*, (IVP, Leicester, 1984), and Morris, Leon, *Apocalyptic*, (IVP, London, 1973)

1[16] Motyer, Alec, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, (IVP, Leicester, 1993), p. 169

1[17] McComiskey, Thomas Edward, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants*, (IVP, UK edition, Leicester, 1985) p. 50n.

1[18] It is true that Jewish shrines were built in Egypt at Elephantine (constructed by Jewish refugees in the early sixth century B.C.), and Leontopolis, built by the legitimate high priest Onias IV after his flight to Egypt in 163 B.C., the priesthood of which lasted two hundred and thirty years. Neither shrine receives Biblical attention, and they are not relevant to Isaiah 19 since it is not *Jews*, but *Egyptians* who are envisaged as worshippers of YHWH in the passage.

1[19] Muslims can no doubt appreciate this, since there is a hadith which states that the whole world has been made a mosque or place of prostration

The Great Israel Land Grab

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For the first time, Israel has embarked on a plan to sell the land of the 1948 Palestinian refugees (92% of Israel) to Jewish individuals. Clearly this is in violation of international law. It will also make the refugees' return and compensation more difficult technically. The UN should appoint a Custodian of the refugees' land in Israel.

The great Israel Land Grab is not a headline of a Palestinian newspaper or a title of a Palestinian memorandum to the UN. It is a headline of an article published by an Israeli newspaper (Ha'aretz, February 1, 1998) decrying the riches which have been amassed by the Israeli farmers who sell Palestinian land. Israel is now embarking on a dangerous and far reaching plan to sell to Jewish individuals Palestinian land from which the owners were uprooted and made refugees. This plan would put obstacles in the path of their return. Although these obstacles can be removed, it would make the task technically harder.

Imagine tenants living in a large apartment building and paying very low rent. The caretaker of the building proposes to each tenant that, since the caretaker made sure the owner is kept away and will not be allowed to return, the caretaker and the tenant would share the apartments between them. Each tenant would be allowed to register in his own name 25% of the apartment against compensation provided that he forfeits the right to the lease of the rest for the caretaker's own use and sale. What would you call this? Plain robbery and fraud. Unfortunately this could work as long as the owners is kept a refugee abroad. That is what Israel's policy was and is today

For 50 years Israel kept the Palestinian land it took by force in 1948 (18,643 sq. km. out of 20,325 sq. km., or 92% of Israel's area) under the Custodian of the Absence (Landowners) property. Through a legal maze designed to remove the accusation of land robbery and the responsibility before international law, the Custodian transferred this property to a 'Development Authority' which can exploit the land to the benefit of Jews only, even though they may not be residents of Israel. In an agreement between the Government and the Jewish National Fund (JNF), Palestinian land and JNF holdings are to be administered by Israel Land Administrations (ILA) under JNF rules, i.e., exploitation by Jews only.

The great majority of Palestinian land is leased to the Kibbutz and Moshav for 49 years (i.e., expiry date is 1998). The Israeli 'farmers' number today about 154,000 Jews (2.7% of Israel's population) and control the land of 4,500,00 refugees. In the period 1948 - 1967, Israel left these lands with minimum interference pending a peace settlement with the Arabs. Following the 1967 War, Israel felt emboldened and introduced a set of laws (e.g. expropriating 'mawat' land as State land) which made the recovery of these lands more difficult according to Israeli law. Now, with the ill-fated Oslo Agreement and the evident weakness of the PNA, a frenzy of land grabbing, engineered by Sharon and Eitan, using the vehicle of the Ministry of National Infrastructures, started in earnest.

With the abject failure of the Kibbutz as an ideology and an economic engine, Kibbutz farmers were allowed to own and build on a portion of the land leased to them. In return for the use of 'their land', they would be compensated generously for not less than 20% of the land. Ordinance 533, later replaced by 611, which was enacted when Sharon was minister of housing, gave the farmers the best deal. As Russian immigrants began pouring in, housing was needed, and it was convenient to direct them to the near empty Southern District and mainly Arab Northern District. The farmers were given an extra incentive. They were allowed to buy back the land for 15% of the compensation value they received for it. They were thus transformed from bankrupt farmers with outdated ideology to rich 'farmers' who owned a lot of real estate. The sudden wealth of the farmers aroused criticism of old Zionists, such as the JNF, who insisted that Palestinian land

should be the property of 'the Jewish People everywhere in perpetuity.' Sale to individuals, they say, may encourage some to sell land back to Arabs. Recently, Jewish extremists at Lydda terrorized a Jewish neighbour who sold his villa to a Palestinian Israeli family.

To resolve this dispute, a series of ordinances were passed (640 and 727) and finally a committee headed by Prof. Boaz Ronen was formed to determine the land percentage, the mechanism and procedure of selling Palestinian land leased by ILA to Kibbutz farmers. In June 1997, the recommendations of the committee were approved to the obvious pleasure of Sharon. As a result, 'ownership' of 600,000 apartments shall be transferred from the State Custodian to the tenants.

The Israeli government, through the ILA, earned \$700 million in 1997 alone for its share in the proceedings. (This sale of a small portion of Palestinian land shows the fallacy of Israel's argument that the whole of Palestinian land and property are not worth more than \$300 million if compensation is to be paid). In 1997, National Infrastructure Minister Sharon planned to build 50,000 housing units; 30,000 have been sold, 3,130 remain unsold, the rest are at various stages of tendering. It is noteworthy that the first stage of construction is designed to break the Palestinian monolithic continuity in Israel by building around Arab towns such as Amr and Taibah. Moreover, construction of the long planned 399 km \$2 billion Trans Israel Highway has started. In February 1998, a contract was signed with a large Canadian-Israeli consortium to build it. This highway runs inland parallel to the coast. It starts in Galilee and ends in Beer Sheba. It cuts across the Palestinian population concentrations in Galilee, the Little Triangle and Negev. It is part of the 'Star' plan concocted by Sharon to break and expropriate Arabs lands, to prevent Israel's return to the 1967 Armistice Line and to provide housing for Russian immigrants in Arab areas in Israel. All these activities are contrary to international law. Property of 'Absentee' (i.e. expelled) owners should not be fragmented or sold to Jews anywhere in the world. It should remain in custody as the property of all those to whom the (Palestinians') Right to Return applies. In order to prevent this plain unabashed robbery of property-in-custody, the UN should send a commission to Israel. Bodies such as the UN Palestine Solidarity Committee, and the Arab League, and last but not least the PLO should press for its formation. The mandate for this commission could be:

1. To determine and document the present status of Palestinian land (Israel minus Jewish land in 1948).
2. To obtain copies of all records of Palestinian land kept by ILA. (The Purchase, Ownership and registration Division and the Information Division, Database)?
3. To recommend to the UN the appointment of a Custodian of Palestinian Land and to propose measures to prevent its unlawful disposition.

Such a custodian has already been proposed at the UN when Jarvis, the Land Expert of the Conciliation Commission on Palestine, presented his documentation of Palestinian property in 1964. There are many other similar precedents. It behoves the Arabs, and particularly the PLO and PNA, to take action now at a time when the World Jewish Restitution Organisation is whipping European countries to recover and repossess (not compensate) for Jewish property in Europe without as much as the benefit of one of a pile of UN resolutions which the Palestinians have in their favour.