

CHRISTIAN-JEWISH
DIALOGUE

A READER

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With a Foreword by Dr Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of the
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faiths, as God's partners, working in mutual respect and cooperation for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

[*'World Council of Churches Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People: Report'*, Siguna, 1988, pp. 8 & 10]

The Orthodox Church

The final extract has been taken from a paper delivered at a World Council of Churches' meeting in Budapest in 1989. It provides an valuable insight into how the Orthodox Church responds to the plurality of faiths. Her mission is defined in terms of an ethical witness with other faiths to bring about the kingdom of God:

Our relationship with God and our mission to the world cannot be separated from our relationship with our neighbour. In the pluralistic societies of today "my neighbour's faith and mine" do not simply co-exist, they interact and correlate. In fact, we always remind ourselves in our ecumenical pilgrimage that the unity of the church and the unity of humankind are interdependent and that there exists a growing interaction between the living faiths. We have also come to realise that the transformation of the world and the building of the world community are no longer a one-way track. It implies mutual openness, mutual listening and a common partnership.

[*'Unity and Mission in the Context of the Middle East'*, a paper delivered to the Plenary Commission on Faith and Order, Budapest, Hungary, 1989.]

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CHAPTER FIVE

ISRAEL

The land of Israel has always been a focal point for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Jews believe it to be the land God gave his people; Christians acknowledge it as holy because Jesus lived and died there; and Muslims revere Jerusalem as the third holiest city in Islam. For the majority of Jews today, whether religious or secular, Israel is central to their identity; a necessary safe-haven from a world that has often shunned and persecuted them. The twentieth century has certainly taught this much.

Judaism teaches that the land was promised to Abraham by God in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is a promise which forms the central thread throughout Jewish scriptures and writings. If the prophets wished to call Israel to repentance, they would often threaten God's withdrawal of his presence and the loss of the land. There has always been a Jewish presence in the land even during the periods in history when the majority of Jews were exiled from it; nevertheless the hope of a return to the land was a constant reality in Jewish thought and prayer. In the Orthodox siddur there is a prayer for the peace of Israel as people, sung during the shabbat service "Establish abundant peace upon Your people Israel forever, for you are King, Master of all peace. May it be good in Your eyes to bless Your people Israel at every time and every hour with Your peace." There is also a prayer for the welfare of the state of Israel, the first line of which reads, "May He who blessed our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, bless the State of Israel and make the glory of His kingdom manifest in the land which He swore unto our fathers to give us." Israel as land and people is central to synagogue liturgy and religious life.

For Christians, the land is special, holy, because it was the place of Jesus' birth and death. It was the place on earth where God chose to Incarnate Himself in human form and provide salvation for the world. The Christian attachment to the land tends therefore to be spiritual

and theological rather than a terrestrial one. There has traditionally been little concern for the physical land, except as a place of spiritual pilgrimage. Since the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 there has been a gradual shift towards an overt concern for the current situation, particularly *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians. Alongside this shift there has also been, in some churches, a recognition of the importance of Israel for Jewish self-identity. Although it is not possible to separate totally the political from the religious, the extracts in this chapter will focus primarily on the religious significance of the land.

Often when Jews and Christians come to dialogue there are tensions *vis-à-vis* the land. Christians are often unable to appreciate fully the importance of Israel for Jewish identity, whilst Jews cannot comprehend some Christians who exclusively identify with the Palestinian cause. This has, and continues, to cause tension in Christian-Jewish relations. Things are changing now: the peace accord between the Israeli Government and the PLO might ease this tension. However, thinking through the significance of the land remains a difficult theological and political issue. The following extracts capture some of the main positions in the debate.

H.P.F.

CENTRAL TO IDENTITY

In the first extract Harold Kushner, a Reconstructionist Rabbi in the United States and populist religious writer, explains that Jewish attachment to the land goes beyond religious, political and social boundaries. It is emotional and perhaps irrational, and yet that attachment is central to Israel as people and land. The two are inextricably linked. Kushner is typical of much diaspora North American Jewry. His commitment to Israel is passionate and as an American citizen he expects the United States Government to do everything it can to support Israel.

Over the years, I have found that the issue that puzzles non-Jews the most about Judaism is the role that Israel plays in our minds and souls. It has no analogue in the Christian world. It cannot be compared to the Catholic's feelings toward the Vatican, or the Lutheran's to Germany. It is different from the emotional attachment of Italian-Americans to Italy or Irish-Americans to Ireland. The ancestors of most American Jews came from Europe, not Israel. Few of us can trace our ancestry back far enough to identify a forebear who lived in the Middle East.

Moreover, the attachment is emotional, not nostalgic or theological. It cuts across all religious and social borders. Religious and nonrelig-

ious Jews, orthodox and liberal, rich and poor are more united by their love for Israel than by any other single subject on the Jewish agenda (except perhaps antisemitism). How shall we understand this?

The attachment is not political. Every Jew I know makes a distinction between the idea of a Jewish homeland in Israel (to which we are passionately and wholeheartedly committed) and the political state of Israel (of whose government we may or may not approve—not that different from most Americans who are totally committed to the idea of America as a democracy but may think that the policies of a current president are misguided). American Jews are citizens of only one country, the United States.

Neither is the attachment religious; nonreligious Jews feel as strongly about Israel as do our more religious neighbors. (For many of them, love of Israel virtually is their religion.) Nor is it exactly historical; statistically, more Jewish history has happened outside Israel than within its borders, from the giving of the Torah in the Sinai desert to the codifying of the Talmud in Babylonia to the philosophical writings of Maimonides in Spain and the insights of Freud and Einstein in Europe.

What, then, is the nature of this attachment? Partly, our love for Israel, like all love, is irrational and does not lend itself to being explained and understood. But parts of it, I think we can understand.

When God and Israel entered into a Covenant at Sinai, God asked the people to live a distinctive lifestyle, to be a model nation, and the people promised that they would. What was God's part of the Covenant? What did He promise in return? Not a life of ease and splendor. God's promise was, first, a sense of His presence, the feeling that we were a unique, special people, and second, that we would have *a land of our own*. And later in the Bible, when the prophets want to threaten Israel with the worst fate imaginable as a punishment for faithlessness, what do they say? They warn Israel that God will withdraw His presence from them and make them ordinary, and that they will be driven out of their land.

Israel symbolizes for us the idea that we are a people, not only a belief system. It has been one of the recurrent themes of this book that Judaism is rooted more in community than in theology. A theology can exist in the pages of a book. It can be adhered to by individuals wherever they may live, and those individuals may choose to gather in a church from time to time to affirm their solidarity. But a people is not an abstraction; a people has to live somewhere. Marriage as a legal concept can be confined to the pages of the law codes, but when a man and a woman get married, they have to find a home and furnish it.

We relate to Israel in such a complicated fashion in part because the notion of Israel overlaps several otherwise distinct ideas. On the one hand, Israel is a state, a political entity, with a Jewish majority but a significant Moslem and Christian population and representatives of other religions as well. (Israel contains one of the major shrines of the Baha'i faith and has welcomed a number of Southeast Asian Buddhist refugees.) But at the same time Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people, even those who do not live there and are uncompromised citizens of another country. The blue and white flag with the six-pointed star on it, the anthem 'Hatikvah' (The Hope), are the flag and anthem of the state of Israel but also the flag and anthem of the Jewish people worldwide. They have a Jewish-religious significance as well as an Israeli-political one. When a Jewish organization opens or concludes a meeting singing 'Hatikvah', it is as members of the Jewish people, not as citizens of Israel, that they do so. (Had the state of Israel chosen as its national anthem the 137th Psalm—'By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion ... If I forget thee, O Jerusalem ...'—the psalm would still have been a religious poem and page from Scripture even while serving as an anthem of a political entity.)

In traditional Jewish sources, the term *Israel* is used interchangeably for the land and for the people. When I officiate at a wedding, the ceremony calls for the groom to say to the bride, 'Be thou consecrated unto me by this ring as my wife, according to the laws of Moses and Israel', that is, the Jewish people, the children of Israel. To avoid confusion on the part of the congregation, lest they think that Jewish weddings follow the laws of the state of Israel rather than the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I instruct the groom to say, '...according to the law of Moses and the Jewish people'.

Beyond that, the existence of the Jewish state of Israel is an expression of the world's willingness to let the Jewish people live. It is nearly impossible for non-Jews to appreciate the meaning of the scar that the Holocaust and the centuries of persecution leading up to it, have left on the Jewish soul. I don't know of any other people that wakes up virtually on a daily basis wondering if the world will let them live. Perhaps African-Americans, perhaps members of other oppressed minorities share this sense of vulnerability. But after the Nazi experience, Jews understand that no matter how economically successful or socially integrated we are, we can never feel totally secure. Even as I write this, the newspapers carry reports of prominent politicians expressing opinions verging on the antisemitic, of sick minds denying that the Holocaust

ever happened, of synagogues being vandalized and skinheads threatening violence against Jews and others whom they dislike. When the children in my congregation would hear about such things and be frightened, I would try to reassure them that there are sick and mixed-up people in all countries, but in America, unlike Nazi Germany, the government and the police are on our side and are working to protect us. International acceptance of Israel delivers that same message on an adult, global level. It says to us, 'Despite the haters and the sick minds out there, there is a place for the Jewish people in the world'.

This, I suspect, is why so many of us react so defensively when Israel is criticized: because we are always afraid that criticism will lead to a withdrawal of approval of Israel's right to exist at all. It is not paranoia on our part to note the disproportionate amount of energy the United Nations puts into judging Israel. It is not hypersensitivity on our part to notice that no other country is called on continually to justify its right to exist. (Does anyone call on the dismantling of Pakistan and giving the land back to the tens of millions of Hindus who were displaced when a Moslem state was created there in 1947?) There can certainly be valid criticism of the actions and policies of modern Israel. I have engaged in no small amount of it myself. But because of its symbolic importance to us, we become sensitive to the difference between saying, 'Israel is not perfect; it should be pressed to improve', and saying, 'Israel is not perfect; therefore it should not be protected against its enemies, it should be taken away from its Jewish inhabitants and given to others.' The first is geopolitical commentary; the latter is antisemitism, punishing the Jewish state for things that other states would not be held accountable for.

[Harold Kushner, *To Life: A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking*, Little, Brown & Company, 1993, pp. 243-249]

Kushner stresses the 'emotional' links between Judaism and the land. Moshe Greenberg, an Orthodox Jew living in Israel, is much more rational. He traces the historical identification with the land and argues that the State is essential for Jewish survival in the post-Enlightenment age:

The possession of land, the possession of a land in sovereignty and freedom was, in classical Judaism, an indispensable condition of self-fulfillment—fulfillment of that pattern of life which was fundamentally communal and social and involved not merely the individual but

joined him or her to fellow Jews. That fulfillment necessitated a land in which Jews exercised sovereign control and enjoyed the freedom to live the pattern of life given in the Torah.

Dispossession and powerlessness, which resulted from the political and military disasters that befell the Jews twice in their ancient history, generated a life-giving protective response whose core was a burning metaphysical hope of return and restoration. This hope was grounded in the idea that it was a divine necessity to restore Israel, and a line can be traced from Ezekiel to the mystical idea that in the exile of His People God Himself is exiled. It was necessary for God's self-vindication that the scattered, defeated and degraded people who went by His name be restored. Something of His dignity and glory is diminished, and therefore the restoration of the Jewish People is a restoration of full divine dignity as well.

The vision of the messianic righting of wrongs, its idea of restoration in the Land, is monarchical because that was the political order of states and countries in which Jews moved and first found themselves—sovereignty was embodied in a sovereign. Hence the messianic hope clung to the figure of a sovereign, a king like David.

The sense of the election of Israel and its moral superiority was nurtured on a quasi-ascetic personal and social life in which the discipline of the Torah was generally accepted in the Jewish Diaspora. This gave a psychological compensation for the political helplessness of the Jews, as it to say: 'Although we are helpless in our external relationships, we are totally in control of ourselves and are not falling apart spiritually.' Through a regimen of spiritual exercises in the name of law, Jews generated internal energy and morale; through the acceptance of an ascetic pietism, it was possible for Jews to maintain, in the face of universal contempt, a sense of their worth. The Promised Land became a symbol of redress of all wrongs. The contrast between the sense of Israel's self-worth and the external contempt it received would vanish when the People would be restored to the Land; all that was awry would then be set right.

The European Enlightenment had as its professed goal the brotherhood of humanity and acceptance of the equality of all human beings, including Jews. Particularly the Jews of Western Europe, where the Enlightenment began and flourished, regarded it as a new solution to the Jewish problem. They hoped that Jews would no longer be considered outcasts but be fully accepted as part of humanity—the problem of Jewish existence in the Diaspora thus might be settled by gradual acceptance of the notion of universal brotherhood and the realization of such slogans as

'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.' But the course of events quickly brought Jews to despair of finding in the European Enlightenment a solution to their anomalous existence. They found that even if they gave up messianism and limited their identity to its minimal features as a religious community, that was not a sufficient surrender of particularity to enable the gentiles of Europe to accept Jews as equals. Consequently a movement of 'auto-emancipation' arose. Jews said, 'As we are not being emancipated or given equal status by the nations, we must act for ourselves.' The outcome was a movement of national liberation combined with a Jewish form of Irredentism which came to be called Zionism.

In the past, the Jewish will to live generated the messianic hope of redemption and the unifying ascetic discipline of life by Torah. These two now were transmuted in Zionism: instead of messianism came the idea of redemption (reconstruction and normalization) of the people through redemption (recovery and revitalization) of the Land—by peaceful means it was originally hoped, but eventually by force despite the reluctance of many Jews to use it. In place of the discipline of law came the mobilization of spirit, energy, idealism and material to create a state. The same kind of ascetic self-discipline that was characteristic of Jewish piety throughout previous centuries in the Diaspora, could be seen in the stoical, Spartan life of the *balutzim* (pioneers) on communes in the Land of Israel during the first part of this century.

In other words, Jews took their destiny into their own hands and stopped hoping for a supernatural solution to their predicament. It was a break with the Diaspora strategy of survival which advocated quietistic endurance of the status quo as part of an understanding with God: Israel would not press for the messianic age, and God would make Diaspora life just tolerable. This understanding broke down in Europe during this century, and a Jewish state offered the best hope for Jewish survival and self-fulfillment. Such self-fulfillment needed a land in which a full range of responsibility for our individual and communal lives could be exercised in accord with the classical concept of Jewishness. Jewishness is not a matter merely of individual expression—it is expressed in the total life, including the political arena, and only in a Jewish state can the struggle to realize Judaism as an all-embracing teaching for life, *torat hayyim*, be carried forward. Here Jews are on their own in a decision-making position on all aspects of life.

To this day it is only in the State of Israel that Jews have to deal as a people with the problems, institutions and temptations of power—economic, political, and military. These issues, which are at the heart of

mature societies, can be dealt with Jewishly only here; Diaspora Jewish communities leave them to the secular, gentle political order. In France Jews do not have to run a prison system and a police force for the Jews of France and face the problems of how to rehabilitate prisoners or control riots. Only here can Judaism be challenged to see whether it has an answer, not only a better answer but any answer, to such questions in its store of values. Only here can Judaism's applicability to the complex problems of modernity be tried. I give three such examples:

1. The problem of a democratic political system, endowing the people with power and responsibility and protecting the minority from the tyranny of the majority. Does the Jewish heritage suffice? Will it meet the test of a democratic society?
2. Pluralism, accepting the co-existence and legitimacy of a variety of life patterns and values—given that these various life patterns all share the common goal of upholding the State. Short of legitimating groups whose aim is to destroy the State, can Jewish heritage sustain, justify and enhance the ideal of pluralism?
3. The challenge of equality under the law of sexes and creeds, including varieties of the Jewish religion and, of course, ethnic groups among its citizens.

The great value of the Land and the State is that they allow the ultimate experiment with Judaism, testing whether Judaism can supply the ideology and wisdom to engage modernity. This involves a severe restraint on messianism, that is, on the view that the State of Israel is the beginning of the eschaton, the beginning of the final age—in Aramaic *athalta de-geula*, the beginning of redemption—a concept incorporated in the prayer for the State composed by the Chief Rabbinate.

This messianic view of the State in effect is a mandate to pursue national egotism, because all rules are suspended if we are living at the beginning of the final age—all normality, rationality and common morality are suspended if we are living in the eschaton. My view of the State as the great experiment to see whether Judaism can face the rest of politics, economics and social amelioration in modern terms demands a restraint of messianism. We cannot say what current history means, we cannot interpret it in terms of reward and punishment, in terms of the covenant idea literally understood. Military victories are not simply portents of divine approval or a license to do what national egoism would lead us to. Defeats are not simply portents of divine

disapproval or warnings to be more single-minded, not to say fanatical in observance of the rituals of Torah.

Jews have a pattern of life consecrated by a religion containing tenets, precepts, rules and admonitions which are socially positive. Judaism lends significance to the daily life of the individual and the community. Although this pattern of life does necessitate a living space, and a living space means recognized and reasonably secure borders, the significance of Judaism ought not be reduced to defending specific borders nor tied to a particular definition of the geographic boundaries of the Jewish State.

[Moshe Greenberg 'Theological Reflections—Land, People and the State', *Immanuel* 22/23, 1989, pp. 26–29]

Jonathan Romain writes from the perspective of a Reform Jew living in Great Britain. Within his extract he has quoted the resolution issued by the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain (RSGB) during their conference in 1988. The resolution is remarkable because traditionally Reform Judaism has distanced itself from both the Zionist movement and the state of Israel. For Reform Jews today Israel is seen as part of their identity and a necessary haven from persecution:

At the RSGB Annual Conference in 1988, a resolution on Israel was passed unanimously which declared:

'Meeting in Annual Conference in the fortieth year of the State of Israel the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain reaffirms its total support of the Jewish people's right to its own independent State within secure borders.'

The members of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain regard the State of Israel as a unique expression of our people's faith and history. It is the homeland of our people as well as home to our spirit and our soul. We are concerned partners in the struggle for its peace, its security and its future.

The RSGB calls upon its constituents to renew and increase their efforts to strengthen the State of Israel, especially through *aliyah* and through support for the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism. We believe that by strengthening Israel we will also enrich Jewish life in the Diaspora through close contact with the land, the people, the language, the history and the problems of modern Israel; in turn, a strong Diaspora will manifest the universal values of Judaism and

constitute the primary source and strength and support for Israel leading to the Diaspora and Israeli Jewry working together in harmony towards the achievement of Judaism's Messianic hope".

For Reform Jews today, Israel has a multi-faceted significance: it is the scene of much of the early religious history of Judaism; its memory has been enshrined in Jewish prayer for the last two thousand years; it is one of the few places in the world that has had a continuous Jewish presence since biblical times; it has witnessed a remarkable re-awakening of Jewish consciousness in modern times; it holds an increasingly large percentage of the world's Jewish population; it is a haven for Jews suffering persecution in any other country; and it has become a centre of Jewish creativity and achievement. Without doubt, it occupies a special place in the hearts of all Reform Jews.

[Jonathan Romain, *Faith and Practice*, Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, 1991, p. 202]

CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE LAND

The Christian approach to the land is very different from the Jewish one. This is evident from the extract by Marcel Dubois, a Catholic priest at the Ecumenical Theological Fraternity in Jerusalem. Naturally, there is no sense that Israel is part of being a Christian: instead for Christians there is no particular homeland in this world; the emphasis tends to be on Israel as a place of pilgrimage:

For Christians, as such, there is no homeland in this world. The entire earth has become the holy land. For Christianity, Jerusalem remains a spiritual center, the holy place par excellence, but this link with the city does not involve any terrestrial possession or national belonging. After Constantine, when the Roman empire became officially Christian, Jerusalem, with all its holy places, the holy sepulchre in particular, became a spiritual center of devotion and pilgrimage.

In short, throughout history we can see that, despite some aspects of Byzantine rule or of the Latin kingdom, Jerusalem is not a political or even a terrestrial reality at all for Christians. To the Christian faith, this city is, at the same time, both a holy place sanctified by the mystery of salvation which took place in it, and a symbol of another, transcendent and spiritual, reality, the celestial Jerusalem, ultimately the sacrament of the kingdom of God, whose Christ is the Lord.

So we can observe the process of spiritualization of the meaning of Jerusalem which has resulted in the ambiguity, or the ambivalence, of 'sacramentality'. We have observed this oscillation between the two dimensions of Jerusalem, according to different emphasis: celestial or terrestrial, eternal or temporal, transcendent or immanent. For Christianity, beginning with Christ himself and the early Christian community, Jerusalem is no longer the center of a nation in this world, a terrestrial homeland, because the church is universal, extended to the whole 'oikumene', including all nations, all races, all cultures, all civilizations. This means that Jerusalem is, above all, a spiritual reality. Thus, in the book of Revelation, Jerusalem appears as a bride coming down from heaven, as a city in the heavens (Rev 21). And in the first epistle of Peter, the church is a temple, a spiritual construction of which Christians are the living stones. In such a perspective, Jerusalem is a new and heavenly city beyond space and time, the center and the symbol of the kingdom of God in eternity.

This new significance of Jerusalem for Christianity is so evident and so fundamental that, during the middle ages, even at the time of the crusades, the terrestrial pilgrimage to the holy land was considered vain and useless. According to this medieval conception, the true home of a Christian is the celestial Jerusalem. Such was already the thought of many church fathers, like Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, and Augustine. The kingdom of God is inside your heart, and the only true pilgrimage should be an interior one; the only urgent itinerary is the road to holiness, whose goal is the meeting with God in the Jerusalem of the heart.

We find a typical and beautiful manifestation of this spiritual meaning of Jerusalem in the Christian liturgy for the dedication of the churches. As a temple in which dwells the divine presence, every church is a symbol, more precisely a sacrament, of the celestial Jerusalem, and also a symbol of the temple which is in every baptized person. This liturgy includes all the terminology of the Bible which relates to the dedication of the temple or the sanctity of Jerusalem—'*urbis Sion unida*' (unique city of Zion) and '*mansio mystica*' (mystical home), '*condita caelo*' (built in the Heaven) and prayers, antiphons and hymns filled with references to the book of Revelation.

This poetic symbolism is magnificent: the city of Jerusalem is indeed the model of every church, but it refers, in the final analysis, to the celestial Zion. One must beware of suppressing the realistic existence of the symbol in order to preserve the transcendence of the meaning. This was too often the tendency of the fathers of the church: a tendency to a kind

of Platonism, a platonizing way of considering the signified reality without paying enough attention to the consistency of the symbol.

The mistake would be to stress so much the purely spiritual meaning of Jerusalem that one would come to forget that this city is also a city of this world, with a worldly and terrestrial life, a day-to-day history, flesh-and-blood citizens. Here we touch the very root of the attitude of some Christians who, in this present-day situation, fail to attach any terrestrial or existential value to the fact that Jewish identity and Jewish destiny are connected with the historical Jerusalem. In such an approach, Jerusalem retains its beautiful spiritual significance but, as a sacrament without matter, a eucharist without bread and wine, a poem without reference.

A balanced conception of the relationship between place and history, between past and memory, could overcome such a danger. It could be said, on this point, that Christian pilgrims rediscover the role of spiritual memory in the approach to the holy places. To visit a site or a landscape of the Hebrew Bible or the gospel is an occasion for remembering, just like the custom of the Jewish people during the celebration of Passover: *'Be'khol dor va'dor ...'* 'In every generation one is obliged to regard himself as though he himself had actually gone out of Egypt ...' The recollection of the very night of the exodus is a way of being present at its permanent actuality. In the same manner, a pilgrimage to the holy places of the Bible is an occasion to recollect, to remind, to re-present, to make present, through the memory of faith, the actuality of the deeds and events which took place there.

We could express this 'sacramental' attitude by quoting a verse from the book of Genesis: *'Vayigal bamaqom'* (28:11). And [Jacob] touched the place. 'You know whom Jacob encountered during this night and what is the significance of *'Maqom'* in Jewish tradition, Jacob got in touch with God; he touched God through the place, whereupon stood the ladder connecting earth and heaven. Such an expression aptly describes the pilgrimage to Jerusalem: an experience in which the pilgrim, on this spot, in the earthly framework of this city, remembers the reality of the presence of God for our faith.

[Marcel Dubois, 'Israel and Christian Self-Understanding' in *Voices From Jerusalem*, edited D. Burrell and Y. Landau, Paulist Press, 1992, pp. 86-88]

THE CELESTIAL CITY IN ORTHODOX TRADITION

Many Christians either see the land as a place of pilgrimage or as a spiritual image. The spiritualizing of Jerusalem is a popular way that Christians use the 'Old Testament' so Jerusalem as the celestial city is found in most Christian traditions. It figures prominently in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. The Orthodox theologian George Papademetriou illustrates this well. There is virtually no interest in the earthly Jerusalem. Instead the focus is on the theological significance of the city rather than its historical importance. The city becomes the sign of eschatological fulfilment and the final goal:

The notion that this new Jerusalem is the initial Paradise reestablished or the Christian Church, especially in its triumphal aspect, is the typical point of view represented by the theology and the exegesis of the Orthodox Church. 'The Jerusalem of above is no other than paradise,' said Gregory of Nyssa expressly. 'Hasten to have your name inscribed in the heavenly Church,' wrote Saint Makarios of Egypt, 'in order that you may be found at the right hand of the Most High. Hasten to enter the Holy City, into Jerusalem made peaceful and very high, where Paradise is.'

Celestial Jerusalem, Paradise, and Church form a unity in the theological thought of the exegetes of the East, of whom some admitted the total identification of these realities, and others characterized the Church as 'the image of this city of God' (Eusebios of Caesarea) or the New Jerusalem as the type (the model) of the Church (Andreas). Whatever may be said of it, celestial Jerusalem is the object of the desires of the Christian, as the earthly Jerusalem in the Old Testament was the most desired place for the exiled Jews. Psalm 136: 5-6 expresses the Jewish sentiment in the following words:

If I forget you, Jerusalem,
may my right arm dry up!
May my tongue be stuck to my palate
if I lose the memory of you,
if I do not put Jerusalem
at the peak of my joy!

For the Christian, the celestial Jerusalem becomes the ardently desired object evoked by this Psalm. The road to this city of Paradise has been opened by Jesus Christ. In an ecclesiastical chant for the Great

Monday of the Orthodox Church, we read: 'Lord, you are going to your Passion willingly, and you said to your apostles as you went along the way: "Here we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered up, according to what is written of him." Then let us go, also; let us accompany him, with a purified spirit, let us be crucified with him, and let us die with him to the pleasures of life in order that we may live with him and that we may hear him say: "I am no longer going to Jerusalem to suffer, but I go up toward my Father and your Father, my God and your God, and I will cause you to come up toward Jerusalem with me, into the kingdom of heaven".'

In another paschal hymn, the poet is talking to the Church and to the Mother of God and says: 'Shine forth, shine forth, New Jerusalem; for the glory of the Lord is risen on you. Rejoice, and hope, Zion; and you pure Mother of God, rejoice in the resurrection of your Son.'

We shall sum up what has been said before about the place of Jerusalem in the theological thought and in the life of the Orthodox Church. The historical understanding of the city of Jerusalem given by the ancient Church, in spite of the explication of its destruction by the Romans, continues to be in the consciousness of Orthodox peoples the 'Holy Land' which draws pilgrims to it; in Byzantine iconography, Jerusalem very early took on considerable importance. But in the theological thought of the East, we have noticed a tendency to pass from history to theology. It is not the earthly Jerusalem which shaped the object of theological developments, but the celestial Jerusalem, the eschatological Jerusalem. This celestial Jerusalem is presented, at the same time, as an eschatological hope and as a living reality in the actual (earthly) Church militant.

The differences between Judaism and Christianity can be seen here. For both, Jerusalem is the final goal, and, as such, Jerusalem constitutes a message of full hope for our world which is a world without hope. For Judaism, this goal is to be attained in the future, whereas for Christians, it is the realization that it already has begun in the Church and will be consummated at the end of time.

[George Papademetriou, *Essays on Orthodox Christian-Jewish Relations*, Wyndham Press, 1990, pp. 82-84]

'THIS PROPERTY BELONGS TO GOD'—THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAND FOR PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS

One of the most difficult issues vis-à-vis the state of Israel is the relationship between Jews, Palestinians, and the land. It is this issue which causes most tension in the *diapora* Christian-Jewish dialogue. The land provokes much passion as Christian groups tend to be either fervently pro-Jewish or pro-Palestinian.

It seems clear to me that Palestinian and Jewish voices must each be heard if the Christian-Jewish Dialogue is to be credible. It is important for all sides to listen to the pain of 'the other' and to seek a deeper understanding of their different perspectives. This cannot mean total agreement or syncretism but granting theological space to 'the other'. Peace and reconciliation cannot be imposed from outside, particularly from 'the West'. As further progress is made in the Middle East Peace Process, perhaps Jews and Palestinians will feel more able to meet and share their respective religious world-views. This has already begun through small local dialogue groups, but it is not the norm.

Naim Ateek is a representative of the indigenous Palestinian Christian community and one of the few Palestinians who has been involved in the dialogue. For him, as for his Palestinian sisters and brothers, the land is seen ultimately as the property of God. The land is of supreme importance to Palestinian Christians because it is the place where they were born and represents their natural homeland. It is also the place where God provided salvation for humanity through the person of Jesus Christ. By their continued presence in the land they see themselves as the faithful witnesses to the event of the resurrection:

One of the most beautiful customs that a visitor can observe among Arabs in the Middle East is the way they give recognition to God's ownership of the land. When people build their houses, many of them ask the builder to engrave on a stone in bold Arabic one of two phrases that will usually appear above the front door of the house: either *Almille lillah*, which means 'property belongs to God', or *Halha min judi Rubbi*, 'this house has been built as a result of the beneficence of my Lord'.

Having conceded that all of life and all land belong ultimately to God, Palestinian Christians, like all other Palestinians, cherish the land and are loyal to it because it is the land of their birth and the land of their ancestors. It is their homeland, *watan*.

Those of us who have been born and brought up in Israel-Palestine recognize that it is indeed a privilege to have been born in the land that has witnessed some of the greatest events of history. The land is

sacred to the three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Each in its own way, and by using its own vocabulary of faith, must express the significance of the land to its adherents and to the millions who choose to visit it.

As part of a theology of liberation for Palestinians, I would like to call attention to the significance of the land for its Christian population, especially at a time when the presence of indigenous Christians is rapidly dwindling because of emigration. There are three significant things that define and inspire Palestinian Christians' devotion to the land:

The Land of Palestine Hosted the Great Event of the Incarnation

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, was baptized in the Jordan River, lived most of his life in the Galilee, was crucified, died, and was buried in Jerusalem. Jesus Christ's resurrection took place in Jerusalem. Therefore, the first witnesses to the Resurrection were Palestinians; the Church was born in Palestine as the early disciples and followers of Jesus were Palestinians. In Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out, the Gospel of the living Christ was first proclaimed in Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem his witnesses went out to the ends of the earth.

The Palestinian Christians of today are the descendants of those early Christians, yet this is no cause for *hubris*. With a humility that befits their Lord, they accept it as a privilege that carries with it a responsibility for service. Palestinian Christians of today are the present generation of that great cloud of witnesses to Jesus who came before them, and who will, God willing, come after them until Christ comes again. They and their ancestors have maintained a living witness to Jesus and his Resurrection from the beginning of the Church, and they should see themselves dynamically continuing such a witness in the land, witnesses to the Resurrection.

The Witness of Our Land to Scripture

A seminal biblical scholar of the nineteenth century, when visiting Palestine in 1860–61, called it a 'fifth Gospel'. He saw a "striking agreement of the texts with the places, the marvellous harmony of the Gospel ideal with the country." "The direct personal knowledge and experience of the land of the Bible can supplement the accounts of the Gospels by enriching and deepening the faith and devotion of the believer."

In his *Catechetical Lectures*, St Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 304–386) consid-

ered the various places of Palestine as bearing a true witness to Christ. Such sites as the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, and the Mount of Olives were for him an eloquent witness to Jesus Christ. What was true for St Cyril, the archbishop of Jerusalem in the fourth century, is still true today in the experience of countless pilgrims. Palestine is a fifth Gospel to them. Indeed, the faith of the pilgrim can come alive through visiting holy sites, from being where Jesus had been, and walking where he had walked. It is, however, equally important for Christian pilgrims to meet the living stones of the land—the Christians. To visit the holy sites is a very moving experience for many; meeting the 'holy' people can be a very rewarding and enriching experience for both. Visiting museums can give a person an important sense and appreciation for the past; but to visit the churches of the land, to worship with the indigenous Christians, and to meet them personally can give the pilgrim both a sense of appreciation for the present and an invaluable experience and insight into the life of the living and pulsating Christian communities of the land, who with their ancestors before them have borne a continuing witness to Christ for the last two thousand years.

Indigenous Christians who are privileged to live in Israel-Palestine today have a responsibility to Christian pilgrims from all over the world—to make their pilgrimage a revitalizing experience of their faith. Their responsibility and privilege is to be host to their brothers and sisters from abroad.

Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace

Christians believe that the message of the only true authentic peace first resounded from the hills of Bethlehem:

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace
among men (and women) with whom he is pleased!

Palestinian Christians, therefore, recognize their responsibility as peacemakers. As will be made clear in chapter 6, they should be actively involved in the work of justice, peace, and reconciliation, calling to remembrance the words of Jesus,

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called sons (and daughters) of God.

[Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, Orbis, 1989, pp. 112–114]

THE ENCOUNTER WITH LIVING JUDAISM

Naim Ateek highlights the importance of Christian pilgrims meeting the indigenous Arab Christians in the 'Holy Land'. It is important also to remember the other indigenous Christian groups. Often very small Christian communities have managed to survive for centuries: the Greek Orthodox Christians, the Armenians, the Copts, the Ethiopians, the Latin Catholics, the Greek Catholics—to name but a few. They are all small, yet, significant. Encountering the diversity of Israel is important. For every Christian group, there are numerous different Jewish groups. The following extract from David Hill (1959–1995), an English Catholic and co-founder of the Exeter and Southwest Council of Christians and Jews in England, stresses the diversity of Judaism. It comes from his unpublished reflections on his first and only visit to Israel as part of a Young Leader's study Tour with the Council of Christians and Jews. His encounter with Orthodox Jews in Israel itself was to have a profound impact on him. His reflections succinctly capture the atmosphere of Shabbat and indirectly the importance of Christians encountering the dynamic expressions of Judaism:

Friday evening: to the Western Wall:

The site at the Wall is fascinating and moving. Hundreds of men in black coats and hats, all swaying and reading and chanting. Some were chatting, some were dancing. All were happy. Lots of onlookers, everyone friendly.

The wall has a separate area for women. This was less populated (though crowded nonetheless) which reflects the Jewish law which places no burden of duty on a Jewish woman to pray.

Meah Shearim and the Tisch:

After the first meal of Shabbat, to Meah Shearim for a Tisch. This is a ceremony where, in liturgical format, the remains of the Rabbi's Shabbat meal are eaten by his followers. The Rabbi is seen as the source of all spiritual life and the crumbs from his Shabbat meal have a special significance—part of the Kabbala (mystical tradition). The songs were quite extraordinary: chanting like a football crowd, a great rush of men in black and gold with long side locks all very excited and happy. There were little boys shouting the songs too.

I was fascinated by the enthusiasm and zeal of his community. Some would say it is fanaticism, but I see little of exception in the belief, especially when seen in context of the traditional Christian (non-Protestant) belief in the *real presence*.

Tour of synagogues in west Jerusalem:

This is an area of traditional Judaism—orthodox, but not ultra-orthodox. The synagogues of the Sephardic areas are very small, big enough for perhaps 20 men. Some with no space for women. Many, particularly from Syria, are intricately decorated inside. Each synagogue will have its own courtyard wherein lives the community: Ashkenazi, Iraqi, Syrian, Jerusalem. Each has its own particular way of praying. All are basically the same form however, and all are orthodox. We looked into about ten synagogues in a tiny area, some with fifty worshippers, some with just ten. The Sephardi communities are very tactile in their liturgies: much kissing of the scrolls, much blessing of each other.

What a contrast to the Great Synagogue: cathedral like proportions, with a beautiful cantor who sang the service while the rest read along in their books.

[David Hill, from 'An Annotated Description and Personal Experience of the Council of Christians and Jews Young Adults Israel Study Tour, 18–29 July 1993', unpublished material]

THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND ISRAEL

We have looked at the Jewish commitment to the land and some of the political problems within it. We now link these issues with the overt theological problem. In this commissioned piece for the Reader Ian Markham (lecturer in Theology of Religions and Philosophy at the University of Exeter, England) argues that a traditional faith can help the dialogue and not hinder it. In this respect, he is typical of a growing number of participants in the dialogue (for example, David Novak in New York and Keith Ward in Oxford) who want to affirm their own faith and yet explore both the similarities and differences between the faith traditions. Remarkably Ian Markham illustrates this approach by examining the role of providence with respect to the State of Israel. For most people talk about Israel as a divine action seems very unhelpful, however he believes that this could provide the way forward.

What sort of God do we believe in? To many the God of Interfaith dialogue is quite different from the God revealed in Scripture. The Interfaith God must not do anything to offend any other religious traditions. So Christians are told that the particularity of the Incarnation must go; Muslims are chastised for daring to talk about the final and infallible revelation of God in the Qur'an; and Jews are

frowned upon if they have the temerity to imagine that they are a covenant people who have been given Israel. Mutual understanding for those involved in dialogue seems to need the eradication of difference. The final revelation of Jesus for Christians or the Qur'an for Muslims seems derogatory to other claims to revelation; a covenant revelation involving a land leaves the Palestinians as a people opposed to God. The only solution, so it seems, is to reduce theology to a bare minimum, John Hick's 'Real'—an objective entity about which we know nothing.

But perhaps there is another way. Instead of denying difference; we should confront the differences and search for the similarities. When traditions agree, then it is good evidence that it is revealed from God; disagreements should be understood and grappled with. God is the Creator of the whole world so it is highly likely that God has made himself known to the whole world. By listening and learning from each other we can move forward in our own faith. And when it comes to the topic of 'what sort of God do we believe in', the three traditions speak with one voice: 'we believe in a God who is active and intervening, a God who cares for his people, a God far removed from the impoverished Interfaith God'.

Israel, ironically, illustrates this agreement. The theme of the Land dominates the Hebrew Bible. It is a land that God promised to Abraham (Genesis 12); it is a land that God gave to suffering people who were oppressed in Egypt (Exodus 3); and it is from the land that God both exiles and then returns the Jewish people (Isaiah 45). The God the Jewish people discovered is a God of history who requires of his people the highest ethical standards. Christians and Muslims inherited this idea of God; and the story of God's dealings with the Jewish people documented in the Hebrew scriptures became a part of the Christian and Islamic traditions.

Both traditions supplemented this inheritance by particular and distinctive links with the Land. For Christians, God himself was born, taught, and most amazing of all, died in Israel. For Muslims the Prophet made the *Isra*—the night journey on a winged horse to Jerusalem. It was from Jerusalem that Muhammad ascended through the Seven Heavens. God, so it seems, has made Israel a sacred place for all three Abrahamic faiths.

Many sensitive believers in all three traditions are shocked by the idea of providence. A God controlling history seems rather strange in a post-Enlightenment age where history is explained by political, social and

economic factors. What are the mechanisms by which God works? And if God intervenes in human affairs occasionally, then why does he not do so more often? So many nations are suffering; why doesn't the omnipotent, loving God of theism intervene and relieve that suffering?

These are difficult questions. The temptation is to surrender this shared vision of God and turn God into the Creator, who simply provides the framework in which we all exercise our autonomy. However, it is important to resist this temptation. Instead we should grapple with our tradition. And as we do so, the following picture emerges. Primarily (although not exclusively) God's agency is through the hearts and minds of those who are open to him. God cannot both respect that freedom and constantly override it. God enlarges vision and frustrates evil. Prayer opens us to the divine perspective; prayer for others is the hope that the gentle and firm persuasion of love can transform the other's perspective.

As we reflect on the events of this century, I am certain that the emergence of the state of Israel is a divine action. It took many millions of people to see that a Jewish homeland is a necessity. One of the many horrific elements to the holocaust experience was the discovery that a Jew who was settled for many centuries in Europe was not allowed to consider it home. There was no security here. And the Jew had nowhere to go. The Jews, it seemed did not belong anywhere. It was wholly right that the world finally realized the Jewish aspiration for a small patch of the globe to be theirs.

Yet our scriptures also teach that God expects the highest ethical standards of his people. The Palestinians have their own tragic story. They are victims of national and global insensitivity. We must find a way of embracing the Palestinian. It looks as if Israel is required by God to become an experiment in the affirmation of diversity. The survival of the state depends on the accommodation of different religions, diverse languages, and contrasting ways of life. Secularists insist that tolerance requires a rejection of religion: for Israel this is not an option. Israel will always attract the religious. Europeans managed to achieve tolerance by insisting on uniformity; this too is not an option. The Jewish, Palestinian, and Christian communities subdivide into hundreds of different cultures all coexisting in Israel. Many of these communities are very small, and understandably paranoid. Israel must find a new way; she must discover tolerance by embracing diversity.

To interpret events in Israel providentially does not add to the problems, but in fact can become the foundation of hope. We hope because

we trust. We trust because we are called to live our lives open to the leading of God.

[Ian S. Markham, Professor of Theology, Liverpool Hope University and author of *Plurality and Christian Ethics*.]

THE VATICAN RECOGNIZES THE STATE OF ISRAEL

Until recently the Catholic Church had not recognized the state of Israel de jure. It had only recognized it de facto. This had caused considerable tension and misunderstanding in Catholic-Jewish relations. Whilst huge progress was being made in other areas of the relationship, particularly in Catholic teaching, the issue of the status of Israel remained a sore point. In December 1993, the Vatican formally recognized the State of Israel. Although this may be viewed solely as a political move on the part of the Vatican, there are major theological implications. Not least the repudiation of the myth of the Wandering Jew. Since the time of Augustine the Church had taught that the Jews had lost their land for rejecting Christ. As a result of their refusal to accept Christ they had been destined to wander the earth until the end of time. The significance of the recent recognition of the State of Israel should not be underestimated. Geoffrey Wigoder, an American Jew who is actively involved in the Jewish-Catholic dialogue, has summed up this significance in an article published in the Jewish Chronicle:

Seen in its historical perspective, yesterday's scheduled signing of an agreement of mutual recognition between the Vatican and Israel, with the declared intention of exchanging ambassadors in the near future, is a revolutionary development.

Ninety years ago, Theodor Herzl had an audience with then Pope Pius X, who told him: 'If you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we shall have churches and priests ready to baptise all of you.' Thereafter the Vatican was consistent in its hostility to Zionism, while trying to get a foot back into the Holy Land.

With the expulsion of the Muslim Turks in 1917, the Vatican lobbied for the Mandate over Palestine to be given to a Catholic power and not to Protestant Britain. When the British were about to leave in 1947, it managed to have the internationalisation of Jerusalem incorporated in the UN partition proposal. After 1967, the Vatican worked for an internationally guaranteed status for Jerusalem and the holy places. All these efforts proved to be non-starters, but this did not put an end to the Vatican's hope of establishing a presence in the Holy Land.

After the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Vatican refused even to utter its name. When the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra played before Pius XII in 1954, the Vatican communiqué stated that he had received 'a group of refugee Jewish musicians', while Paul VI spent a whole day in Jerusalem in 1964 without uttering the 'I' word.

The change in attitudes began in the late 1960s, when Israeli Premiers and Foreign Ministers were received by successive Popes. In the early 1980s, the present Pope, John Paul II, not only referred to Israel by name, but also stressed the right of the Jews to a secure homeland. The failure of the Holy See to accord *de jure* recognition before now has been one of the main obstacles in the international dialogue between Jews and Catholics. It appeared even more important to world Jewry—especially those living in countries with Catholic majorities—than to Israel, for whom the issue was never a priority. Whenever the Pope met Jewish leaders, in the Vatican or on his travels, they invariably put relations with Israel high on the agenda. Dutch Jewish leaders refused to meet him until the issue had been resolved.

Jews long suspected that the refusal to recognise Israel was due, at least in part, to theological considerations. The Roman Catholic Church had always taught that the Jews had been exiled from their land as a punishment for not recognising Jesus and would not return until they had done so. However, the Vatican's claim that this was not the problem was confirmed in an official statement in 1987, which asserted that the obstacles were purely political. Fear of reprisals by Arab countries—in which there are many Catholic and Church interests—played a major role. The Vatican frequently stressed that relations with Israel could be established only after the question of Palestinian refugees and the status of the West Bank and Jerusalem had been resolved. Then, 18 months ago, the Vatican announced that it was willing to negotiate an agreement, with the eventual intention of exchanging ambassadors. The negotiations dealt with local matters, such as the legal status of the holy places and of Catholic communities in Israel, and their exemption from taxation. There was no mention of the status of Jerusalem and other 'big problems'.

The sudden change was the result of the Israel-Arab peace process, launched in Madrid at the end of 1991. The Vatican foresaw the likelihood of major changes in the Middle East and did not want to be left out. Moreover, with Israel establishing relations with Russia, India, China and Egypt, and talking to many Arab states, the Vatican's post-

tion was no longer tenable. In the event, the non-Catholic churches kept a close watch on the Vatican's efforts to strengthen its position in the Holy Land. These churches have always been jealous of the Vatican and expressed the fear that the Catholic Church might achieve some preference. The Israeli government has been at pains to pacify these churches and assure them that any concessions to the Catholics would apply equally to all other churches.

For Israel, the importance of the Vatican's recognition lies in its message of legitimacy that will be carried to Catholics the world over. For Jews, the significance is in the implicit acknowledgement and rectification of a long, historical and theological distortion. Indeed, there is a profound symbolism in the mutuality of the agreement, in which the Jewish state has officially recognised the Vatican.

[Geoffrey Wigoder, 'Israel-Vatican Agreement Signals an End to "theological distortion" by Catholic Church', *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 December, 1993, p. 7]

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The following extract has been taken from an official statement of the World Council of Churches, made in 1982. To express such a statement is an amazing achievement given the diversity of Christian world-views which make up the World Council of Churches. It quite clearly affirms the importance of Israel for Jewish self-identity and expression:

2.4: Through history there are times and places in which Jews were allowed to live, respected and accepted by the cultures in which they resided, and where their own culture thrived and made a distinct and sought-after contribution to their Christian and Muslim neighbours. Often lands not dominated by Christians proved most favourable for Jewish diaspora living. There were even times when Jewish thinkers came to 'make a virtue out of necessity' and considered diaspora living to be the distinct genius of Jewish existence.

2.5: Yet, there was no time in which the memory of the Land of Israel and of Zion, the city of Jerusalem, was not central in the worship and hope of the Jewish people. 'Next year in Jerusalem' was always part of Jewish worship in the diaspora. And the continued presence of Jews in the Land and in Jerusalem was always more than just one place of residence among all the others.

2.6: Jews differ in their interpretations of the State of Israel, as to it

religious and secular meaning. It constitutes for them part of the long search for that survival which has always been central to Judaism through the ages. Now the quest for statehood by Palestinians—Christian and Muslim—as part of their search for survival as a people in the Land, also calls for full attention.

2.7: Jews, Christians and Muslims have all maintained a presence in the Land from their beginnings. While "the Holy Land" is primarily a Christian designation, the Land is holy to all three. Although they may understand its holiness in different ways, it cannot be said to be "more holy" to one than to another.

[*Ecumenical Considerations on the Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, Geneva, 1982; in *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, World Council of Churches Publication, 1988, pp. 39–40]

INTER-FAITH RELATIONS AND THE DIALOGUE IN ISRAEL

The two official Church statements above are representative of those communities which live outside the land of Israel. They are involved in a very different form of the Christian-Jewish dialogue from those living in the land itself. The final extract focuses on the dialogue-scene in Israel itself. In it David Rosen highlights the fact that the dialogue in Israel is very different from any Western dialogue. He locates this difference in the non-democratic and pre-modern outlook which is the experience of most of the religious communities in Israel. David Rosen has had many years of experience in interfaith relations and works as an Orthodox Rabbi in Jerusalem and a member of 'Clergy for Peace'. He is a key figure in the international scene of Christian-Jewish relations, having negotiated with the Vatican on its recent recognition of the State of Israel. He is passionately committed to the improvement of Jewish-Arab relations and dialogue between the indigenous communities in Israel:

Jerusalem today is a mosaic—a beautiful mosaic—made up of individual little squares/components, each separated from those around it by a cement border—often quite impenetrable. Most religious communities in Jerusalem live in splendid isolation of the others. This is partly due to theology and politics but it seems to me that the mind-set is primarily determined by sociology.

The observer notes with some perplexity that within Jerusalem's different Christian denominations, for example, social relations are

often strained. However, even when they are not, there is rarely any theological dialogue. Such an idea is often viewed with horror. I believe that this reserve stems substantially from what may be described as a pre-modern view of the world.

Each of these denominations believes that it alone is the authentic bearer of true Christianity and that Christianity is the only ultimate truth. For them it is obvious that there cannot be more than one truth. Therefore, if I am right, the other cannot also be right. Thus, as I am the only right one, then what can any other denomination, let alone faith, have to offer me? The only basis for our exchange is persuasion or polemic.

A pluralist approach that actually seeks out and supports dialogue as a process of growth and enrichment is generally a modern expression born out of an acceptance and even affirmation of the diversity and pluralism of contemporary life. The long-standing Arab Christian communities in the Holy Land, as well as its much larger Arab Muslim population, are overwhelmingly of a mind-set that may be described as pre-modern. For the majority, pluralism is at best an undesirable necessity and inter-religious dialogue is a waste of time, if not worse.

However, the same goes for the vast majority of Jews in Israel. Israel is something of an optical illusion. She is a modern democracy and has made amazing strides in science, technology, and the arts. This is all the more remarkable when one takes into consideration not only that Israel is located in a highly undemocratic region, but also that the vast majority of Israelis do not come from democratic, pluralistic cultures. I refer not only to the majority of Israel's Jews who came from Islamic lands, but even those from Eastern Europe. Moreover, given the military, political and economic pressures that could have torn a mature democracy asunder, the development and maintenance of Israel's democratic institutions is even more impressive.

Israel's Declaration of Independence guarantees freedom of religious expression to all. Assuredly, most of the State's founders genuinely believed in this principle. It is to Israel's enormous credit that despite the conflict in which she was born and has had to contend, she has ensured equality of franchise, the rule of law and not only the freedom of worship, but even the advancement of the different religious minorities in the State, in accordance with her Declaration of Independence.

However, I believe it is fair to state that most Jewish Israelis, precisely because of their pre-modern cultural background, see the

principle of freedom of religion as a favour which the magnanimous majority provides for its minorities as long as the latter know and keep their place. For the vast majority of Israeli Jews, there is no logical reason whatsoever, why they should encourage a growth of religious expression of other Faiths.

We should not forget that well over ninety per cent of Jewish Israelis have never met a Christian—especially not a modern Christian. Even when Israelis travel abroad and meet non-Jews, they rarely encounter believing Christians. Most Israelis take their image of a Christian from the long and tragic historical experience. A Christian is widely seen as someone who wants at best to steal my soul, if not to actually wish me physical harm. And even if most Israeli Jews see Islamic 'fundamentalism' as the greatest threat and may well recognise it as such for Christians also, this does not wipe out the historic suspicion of Christianity. The burden of the past weighs heavy on all religious groups in our land. It is not unusual (as was the case during the Gulf War) to hear pejorative references to the crusades or to the most intolerant periods of Islamic rule. All of us in the Middle East see ourselves as victims; as the 'other', in some way.

Interfaith relations here are often at best a fragile matter of 'live and let live', in which the members of each group, believing in their exclusive claim to "truth", are prepared to tolerate the existence of others. There is some social intercourse amongst representatives of the different denominations at official gatherings, but hardly anything that touches the lives of the rank and file and little or no theological exchange. That is not to say that there is no cooperation between people from different communities. According to a survey by the Abraham Fund, there are over two hundred organizations in Israel promoting Jewish-Arab coexistence. Moreover, where communities have been able to grow up alongside each other relatively untroubled by the political tensions, such as in parts of Galilee, Haifa, Acre and in Jaffa and Beer Sheva, one finds significant cooperation and joint ventures. Yet most of this takes place on a 'secular' basis and rarely involves the most religiously committed elements from either community.

The major religious presence that has laboured in the interfaith vineyard has been disproportionately Christian, but not primarily from the Arab Christian communities. The principle religious impetus for interfaith relations has come from expatriate theologians and scholars. Their predominant western background reflects again the importance of the socio-cultural factors that lend themselves to interreligious dialogue. Yet,

despite their limited number, their significance must not be underestimated. The non-Arab Christian presence in Israel has served as a small but significant bridge between communities. Also they have a great number of contacts among pilgrims and fact finding tours. Their role is of great importance in developing greater understanding between Christian Arabs and their Jewish fellow citizens.

[David Rosen, 'Letter From Jerusalem' in *Common Ground*, no 1, 1994, pp. 20-21]

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CHAPTER SIX

THE JEWISH JESUS

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