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Faith and Conflict in the Holy Land:

Peacemaking Among Jews, Christians,
and Muslims

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Let me begin on holy ground, Ireland. In 1931 William Butler Yeats concluded his short poem, “Remorse for Intemperate Speech,” with a stanza that speaks to me as the person I am, for better or for worse:

Out of Ireland have we come.
Great hatred, little room,
Maimed us at the start.
I carry from my mother’s womb
A fanatic heart.

Ireland is, indeed, a small place, and it has seen great fanaticism and hatred, although the temperature of Ireland as a whole has subsided dramatically since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, despite Boris Johnson. The whole island of Ireland today occupies 32,599 square miles. British-administered Northern Ireland includes 5,340 of those square miles. Combined Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland approximate the size of Indiana. The total population of the island of Ireland is 6.7 million people, about a half a million more than the population of Indiana.

There is another place of “great hatred, little room” that I wish to discuss this evening: the Holy Land, made up today of the State of Israel and the Palestinian autonomous regions of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The State of Israel, as it was defined by its pre-1967 borders, was a little smaller than New Jersey; the West Bank at the same time was

slightly smaller than Delaware, and the Gaza Strip twice the size of the District of Columbia. If you measure what was once British Mandate Palestine from the time that mandate was given by the League of Nations in 1922, the whole area would include 10,553 square miles, around the same size as either Massachusetts or Lebanon after 1920. The United Nations Organization estimates that Israel has a population of 6.6 million people and the two Palestinian territories a combined population of 4.7 million. Massachusetts has a population of just under 7 million. In so little room as the State of Israel and the Palestinian territories there is entirely too much hatred.

Notice that I call all three of these territories the Holy Land. We must keep in mind that all three of these territorial divisions are holy for Jews, holy for Christians, and holy for Muslims, but holy for each faith community in a different way. In this forum, I will concentrate on why this territory is holy for each faith community. I will also underline some efforts made in the past to make peace between these faith communities, as well as initiatives in that direction needed in the present and for the future.

ERETZ ISRAEL: THE JEWISH HOLY LAND

Nobody comes from nowhere. According to modern paleontologists, *Homo sapiens* as a species first developed in Africa, perhaps 300,000 years ago. Population growth and climate change hastened the movement of that species away from verdant plains that are now the Sahara. The Hebrew Bible, composed in a more symbolic vein, locates the origin of humankind as the Lord God's handiwork in "a garden in Eden, in the east" (Gen 2:8). The four rivers that flow from that garden include the Tigris and the Euphrates, rivers that define Mesopotamia—modern Iraq.

The people of Israel ascribe their origins to Abram, whose name was changed to Abraham, the grandfather of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel.¹ An ancient ritual formula for offering first fruits may refer to both: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous" (Deut 26:5).² Why are Abraham and Jacob called Arameans? The term denotes speakers of related languages in the Northwest Semitic linguistic family, the linguistic group to which Hebrew belongs. The first wandering Aramean, Abraham, came to birth in Ur of the Chaldeans, identified

today with Tell al-Muqayyar in the Dhi Qar Governorate of southern Iraq. Once Sumerian linguistically, by the early second millennium BCE that area was populated by speakers of Akkadian, a Semitic language. Terah, the father of Abraham, migrated from Ur to Harran, 600 miles north of Ur in what is now the Şanlıurfa Province of Turkey, but Harran was only a way-station on the route to Canaan, south and west of Harran: most of modern Lebanon, Israel, and the Palestinian territories.

Abraham migrated from Harran to Canaan, entering the land from the east. Exploring it he found that “Canaanites were in the land” (Gen 12:6). According to this first version of the call of Abraham in Genesis, God promised that Canaanite land to Abraham (Gen 12:7). In the second account of that call, the Lord specified the gift of a great deal of other peoples’ lands. “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites’”(Gen 15: 18-21).

The other wandering Aramean, Jacob, fled the wrath of his brother Esau and sought a suitable wife in Harran. Before leaving Canaan, however, he slept for a night at Bethel, and in a dream-vision the Lord assured him that the land promised to Abraham was still his: “[T]he land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring” (Gen 28:12). On returning to the Promised Land, Jacob also went down to Egypt in a more serious time of famine. His lost and found son Joseph—sold into slavery by his brothers—brought Jacob back to the Promised Land as a mummy (Gen 50:2-3), to be buried in the tomb in the field which Abraham had purchased from the people of Hebron (Gen 23:4-20).

Despite this formula for offering first fruits, the people of Israel did not define themselves primarily as Arameans or as natives of southern Mesopotamia. On the contrary, they found their most basic identity as a people once enslaved in Egypt and then delivered, “a great nation, mighty and populous” (Gen 26:5). Moses, an Israelite raised as an Egyptian, led them out. The successor of Moses, Joshua, repeated Abraham’s entry into the land of Canaan from the east. The Lord expanded for Joshua the parameters of that land, including territory as far west as the Mediterranean and as far east as the Euphrates in present-day Iraq (Jos 1:3-4). The Mediterranean littoral promised to

Joshua had been colonized by Sea Peoples from the Aegean (eventually called Philistines) in the late second millennium BCE, arriving on the coast around the same time as the dates assigned to the Israelite exodus from Egypt.³

The institution of kingship arose in Israel when the confederacy of Israelite tribes looked for united leadership to bind them together, especially in view of the threat posed by these coastal Philistines. David, the second king of united Israel, created a new capital for the twelve tribes at a previously Jebusite pagan site, Jerusalem in the mountains of Judah. Israel's experiment with kingship soured fairly soon under David's son, Solomon. Jerusalem, however, epitomized by the hill of Zion, became ever afterward the symbol of united Jewish nationhood surrounding the Temple built by Solomon. The northern and southern kingships of Israel collapsed respectively with the Assyrian conquest of Samaria in 721 BCE, and the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Post-exilic Judea, from the late sixth century on, survived under one colonial domination after another: Babylonian, Persian, Syrian-Greek, and Roman. The brief interval of Hasmonean independence (110-63 BCE) was the only exception. Imperial Rome suppressed anti-colonial uprisings in Jerusalem and Judea with massive force in the first and second centuries CE, finally exiling Jews from Jerusalem. In Galilee at first, but later in Babylonia (modern Iraq), the faith of the Jewish people evolved away from its Temple-centeredness until it became a religion of the book: the Torah, first of all, and the rest of the TaNaKH (the Hebrew Bible), and especially the Mishnaic and Talmudic elaborations of every aspect of the Torah.

The desire to return to the Promised Land—Mount Zion—lived on among Jews in their lands of exile, but that yearning became more mystical as the centuries passed. No Jew of later centuries exemplified this mystical orientation towards Zion more dramatically than the twelfth-century Spanish Jewish poet, Judah Halevi. Halevi's "Ode to Zion"⁴ is used in the annual Jewish commemoration of the Ninth of Av, the day in the Jewish calendar dedicated to mourning the destruction of both the First and the Second Temples.

Zionism in modern times, less mystical than Halevi's, bears a family resemblance to many other nationalist traditions of the late nineteenth century, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, but the Jewish theological orientation to Jerusalem and the hill of Zion makes it unique. Pogroms in the Russian Empire and prejudice against Jews in

Third Republic France created a new problematic for Jews in Europe in the late nineteenth century. In 1894, a loyal French Jewish military officer, Alfred Dreyfus, was accused of spying for Germany. *L’Affaire Dreyfus* dragged on for twelve years. This sordid travesty as well as other anti-Semitic provocations in the Austro-Hungarian Empire convinced the Viennese Jewish journalist, Theodor Herzl, that Jews in Europe needed to have a country of their own. From the beginning, Herzl wanted to create his Jewish State in what had been the land of Canaan.

The British, along with the French, had designs on the Ottoman Empire, which had gone into alliance with the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires in the First World War. As early as 1915, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, had been promising Husayn ibn ‘Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, eventual rule by his ambitious sons over the Arab territories under Ottoman suzerainty, on the condition that the Sharif would motivate the Arabs to join the British in the struggle against the Ottomans. During the same years, a British diplomat, Sir Mark Sykes, along with a French diplomat, François Georges-Picot, were working out a secret plan to partition most of the Ottoman Empire between Britain and France after the war.⁵ Late in 1917, moreover, with the war against the Ottomans still in progress, the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, issued what came to be called the Balfour Declaration. This brief letter addressed to the second Baron Rothschild, a Zionist himself and a close friend of the Zionist Chaim Weizmann, later the first President of Israel, assured Baron Rothschild that “His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” Later that month, when Lenin’s supporters overthrew the February Provisional Government in Russia, they revealed to the world the contents of the Sykes-Picot Agreement found in the Russian Imperial archives. Needless to say, the Sharif of Mecca felt betrayed, as did all the Arabs who had been fighting against the Ottomans in league with the French and the British.

Herzl may have begun the modern Zionist movement, but it broke into several movements quickly, all with diverse ideologies inviting Jews living elsewhere in the world to migrate to *Eretz Israel*. By no means were all Zionists religious, even if the religious word, *aliyah*, used in ancient times for pilgrims’ ascent to the Temple, was redeployed to designate immigration into Israel. The motivations for *aliyah* varied dramatically. I will not attempt an exhaustive taxonomy of Zionisms, but I will suggest a few important distinctions among the various

Zionist movements, naming prominent figures connected with each movement. The first two types of Zionism were classically the most important, at least at the beginning.

- Political Zionism, beginning with Herzl, sought to respond to the bigotry directed against Jews in late nineteenth-century Europe. Political Zionists wished to define a geographical territory in which Jews could settle and determine their own separate political identity, the whole process guaranteed by the major Western powers. When Political Zionists decided to establish the Jewish homeland in Ottoman Palestine, they did so in collaboration, at least partial, with the Ottoman authorities. When the Ottoman Sultanate-Caliphate was dissolved after World War I, some of the early Political Zionists allied themselves with the British administration in Mandatory Palestine.
- Cultural Zionism, on the other hand, was much more concerned with the revival of the Hebrew language as a *lingua franca* unifying all Jews and the establishment of Hebrew-speaking Jewish educational institutions, eventually in Mandatory Palestine. Cultural Zionists who had migrated to Palestine at that time did not seek to oust the Arabic-speaking indigenous population. Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg, better known by his assumed Hebrew name, Ahad Ha-'Am ("one of the people"), pioneered this Cultural Zionist tendency. The philosopher Martin Buber identified himself with this form of Zionism at the beginning, while he was still teaching in Europe. So also did Judah Magnes, a California-born Reform rabbi, who, as a young rabbi in New York, involved himself in planning the foundation of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem before he migrated to Jerusalem in the 1920s and headed up that institution until his death in 1948.

Besides those two early types of Zionism, other Zionist groups can be distinguished from one another.

- Labor Zionism, much affected by its socialist origins in Eastern and Central Europe, provided Israel with many of its first prime ministers, affiliated with different left-wing parties, separate and combined. Most notable among those prime ministers were secular Jews like David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, and Shimon Peres. Labor Zionism, originally committed to a secular egalitarian society in Israel, has proven very fractious over the past six decades and has gone into decline.

- Revisionist Zionism originated with Ze'ev Jabotinsky, a secular Jew who was not, however, anti-religious, and definitely not anti-capitalist. As a movement it produced Menachem Begin, the Israeli prime minister from 1977 to 1983. Begin, an observant Jew, promoted a more militant variety of Political Zionism, often quite confrontational with the British during the Mandate period and with the Palestinians in later times. The Likud Movement, mainly associated with Benjamin Netanyahu today, continues many but not all of the original goals of Revisionist Zionism, including its reluctance to compromise with Palestinians.
- Revolutionary Zionism, the ideology of a group called Lehi, aimed to re-establish Israel by any means possible, including terrorism. The most famous of those who began this movement was Avraham Stern; his more militant followers were pejoratively called the Stern Gang. One of Stern's companions in arms in the 1947-48 Israeli-Palestinian war was Yitzhak Shamir, later Likud prime minister from 1983 to 1984 and again from 1986 to 1992.
- Religious Zionism refers to a minority Zionist tradition led by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, an Orthodox rabbi who died in 1935. This Zionist tradition looks forward to the coming of the Messiah to re-establish the Torah in the land of Israel, but does not take action to pursue that eventuality. They do, however, assign religious value to the secular Jewish state, mainly as a harbinger of the messianic kingdom in the future.
- Realistic Zionism proposed the model of a bi-national state, Israeli and Palestinian, or finally, a confederation of adjacent Israeli and Palestinian states. The leadership of this movement formulated this hope for the first time in the 1925 *Brith Shalom*, "the Covenant of Peace."⁶ Among the founders of this Zionist movement were the philosopher Martin Buber and the historian of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem. Judah Magnes, a Cultural Zionist, never formally subscribed to *Brith Shalom*, but his religious and political project was not that different from the one outlined in their foundational document. Eventually Judah Magnes helped to found the *Ihud* (Unity) Association to promote the formation of such a bi-national state (or later) a confederation of Jewish and Palestinian states.

Much more could be said about varieties of Zionism, but this will have to suffice for the moment.⁷

TERRA SANCTA: THE CHRISTIAN HOLY LAND

The Holy Land is not, as such, a major theme in Christian scriptural sources. Luke's Gospel, once its theological Infancy narrative ends, traces the geographical progress of Jesus from Galilee through Samaria to Jerusalem.⁸ At the conclusion of Luke's Gospel, Jesus leaves Jerusalem "to be taken up," ascending into heaven from Bethany on the Mount of Olives (Lk 24:50-51). The Acts of the Apostles, the second volume in Luke's narrative, begins with an account of the ascension of Jesus that differs from the Gospel version. The ascending Jesus sets a geographical mission for his apostles: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Paul, especially, undertook the last-named task.

Early Christians coming from outside the Holy Land started to show interest in Jerusalem and its environs even before the Edict of Milan, in which the co-emperors, Constantine and Licinius, in 313 CE legitimized Christianity in both divisions of the Roman Empire. Eusebius of Caesarea, a fourth-century Church historian, records a visit to the Holy Land by Bishop Melito of Sardis (in what is now western Turkey) during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-80 CE). Melito traveled for research into the scriptures that made up the Hebrew Bible: "I came to the east," he declared, "and reached the place where these things were preached and practiced, and learnt accurately the books of the Old Testament."⁹ Eusebius also makes much of the pilgrimage undertaken in the first half of the fourth century by his imperial patron, Constantine, and Constantine's redoubtable mother, Helena. To Constantine we owe the location of the place in Jerusalem where Jesus died, was buried, and rose again—now the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.¹⁰ Helena is said to have built the original Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem and an oratory on the Mount of Olives, marking the locale where the disciples witnessed the ascension of Jesus.¹¹

Christian Europe, once defined as both shores of *mare nostrum*, the Mediterranean,¹² changed dramatically with the rise of Islam in the seventh century, and its spread across North Africa and into Spain by the early eighth century. Pope Urban II called for the First Crusade at Clermont in France in 1095. That Crusade was aimed at the rescue of the Holy Land from Muslim rule and also at supporting the Eastern Roman Empire based in Constantinople in its struggle against advancing Muslim forces. "All who die by the way," the Pope declared, "whether

by land or by sea, or in battle against the pagans, shall have immediate remission of sins. This I grant them through the power of God with which I am invested.”¹³

Note that the First Crusade was called *peregrinatio*, and its agents were called *peregrini*. *Peregrinatio* gradually came to mean pilgrimage, but originally the term had denoted exile as punishment for sins committed in one’s homeland; it was a typical penance of first-millennium Irish monks.¹⁴ Only later in the Middle Ages were *peregrini* transformed into *crucesignati*, those marked with the sign of the Cross on their uniforms. A curious, and indeed fatal, subjectivity came into play in such papal calls for struggle against Muslim depredation of Christian shrines and Christian communities in the Holy Land and the Byzantine Empire. That subjectivity manifests itself in the notion that such warfare, either in Europe or in the Holy Land against Muslims, could offer Christian knights a way of making up for their sins back in Europe. In the course of their *peregrinatio*, the cadet sons of European nobility set out for the Holy Land by an indirect route, murdering the Jews of Rhineland in 1096. In 1099, having arrived at Jerusalem, these penitent pilgrims gathered into the precincts of the Temple Mount or *Haram al-sharif* Jews and Muslims resident in Jerusalem and slaughtered them mercilessly. The perfect example of the decline of the Crusades into unabashed piracy came with the Fourth Crusade in 1204, when European crusaders sacked Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, the very Christian capital the original Crusaders had set out to rescue, along with Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

Two decades after the Fourth Crusade, the antithesis of the western Crusader was born, a troubadour and saint from Umbria, Giovanni Francesco di Bernardone—Saint Francis of Assisi. Francis harbored a desire to go to the Holy Land; in the year 1212, he set out from Italy to go to Syria. According to his first biographer, Thomas of Celano, Francis intended “to preach the Christian faith and penance to the Saracens and infidels.”¹⁵ Contrary winds prevented him from getting any nearer to Syria and its “Saracens and infidels” than the other side of the Adriatic from Italy, probably the coast of Croatia. His second attempt to preach to Muslims started Francis out on a trip from Italy to Morocco via Spain (1213–14). Francis probably saw in the Christian defeat in 1212 of the Moroccan-based Almohad dynasty an opportunity “to preach the Gospel of Christ to Miramolin.” Miramolin was the Italian version of *Amir al-mu’minin*, “Commander of the Faithful,” the title of the

Almohad rulers based in Marrakesh. The poor man of Assisi never got to Morocco because he fell sick in Spain and had to return to Italy.

Nothing deterred by these two misadventures, Francis began his third and final attempt to preach to Muslims by traveling in the year 1219 to Egypt, the scene of the Fifth Crusade. As much a disaster as the Fourth Crusade, this struggle ended in a stalemate between Christian and Muslim armies encamped around Damietta in the Nile Delta. The ruler in Egypt at the time, al-Malik al-Kamil, was the nephew of Saladin, who had rescued Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187. A Kurd, like his uncle, al-Malik al-Kamil wanted to compromise with the Crusaders, if a compromise could be reached. His brother, al-Mu'azzam, ruled Syria and the territory around Jerusalem. The two of them were willing to cede most of Jerusalem to Crusader control, in exchange for a Crusader withdrawal from Egypt.

Francis and one companion wandered out of the Crusader camp at Damietta, a place dominated by the intransigent and warlike Cardinal Pelagius, and found their way to the camp of al-Malik al-Kamil. Even if the Sultan's thuggish soldiers seem to have given Francis and his one companion a drubbing before the two friars had the opportunity to encounter al-Malik al-Kamil, this early source tells us that Francis had a much better reception from the Sultan himself:

[Francis] was nevertheless very honorably received by the sultan. The sultan honored him as much as he was able, and having given him many gifts, he tried to bend Francis' mind towards the riches of this world. But when he saw that Francis most vigorously despised all these things as so much dung, he was filled with the greatest admiration, and he looked upon him as a man different from all others. He was deeply moved by his words and he listened to him very willingly.¹⁶

Did Francis preach the Gospel to the Sultan? Perhaps, but it must have been through an interpreter who knew both Umbrian and Kurdish, or at least Italian and Arabic. As one whose homilies have been translated into local languages in West Africa, let me tell you that the interpretation in a local language is sometimes very different from what the preacher has spoken.

Did Francis deliberately court martyrdom in this encounter? In the year 1221, two years after Francis had preached to al-Malik al-Kamil, his fellow friars, many of them more fiery than Francis, drew up under

his not very dominating direction a version of the Franciscan rule, the *Regula non bullata*—a rule that was issued without Papal approval. That rule urged at least some friars to risk their lives in such preaching, while paradoxically urging others to go and live peaceably among “Saracens and other infidels.” The *Regula non bullata* never explains how you can have one community of friars in a Muslim land with some of the friars courting martyrdom, while others are trying to live at peace with Muslims. Whatever Francis may have thought of this *Regula non bullata*, the Papacy did not approve this rule, for which, I have no doubt, subsequent generations of Franciscans still thank God. The papally approved rule—the *Regula bullata* of 1223—is the Franciscan rule today: “Let those brothers who wish by divine inspiration to go among the Saracens or other non-believers ask permission to go from their provincial minister. The ministers, however, may not grant permission except to those whom they see fit to be sent.”¹⁷

It is said that the encounter of Francis with the Sultan, al-Malik al-Kamil, led to the creation of the Franciscan *Custodia Terrae Sanctae*, the Custody of the Holy Land. Franciscans through long years of Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman hegemony in the Holy Land have served as Latin Catholic guardians of the Christian holy places in and around Jerusalem. Iñigo de Loyola—Saint Ignatius of Loyola as we know him today—was a lay pilgrim who wanted to stay in Jerusalem at the end of a three-week pilgrimage in 1523. He was denied permission to do so by the Franciscans of the Custody, and for very good reasons. They had experienced too many imprudent religious types who had come on pilgrimage and stayed to upset the apple cart in Ottoman Jerusalem. “Many...had entertained a like desire,” Ignatius paraphrases the Franciscan Minister Provincial, “some of whom had been taken prisoner, others died, and...the [Franciscan] Order had been later obliged to ransom those who had been taken captive.”¹⁸

Jerusalem and the Holy Land remained under Ottoman Muslim rule until 1917; the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land continued more or less throughout those centuries. I shall return to these Christian holy places, and especially to the dramatic changes that occurred in the Holy Land during the past century.

AL-QUDS: THE MUSLIM HOLY LAND

The Qur'an speaks of human origins as the response to a divine command. "[God] created [Adam] from dust and then said to him, 'Be! and he is'" (Qur'an 3:59). The geographical locale of Adam's creation is not specified in the Qur'an, although extra-Quranic literature locates it in a garden not unlike the Biblical Eden. Ibrahim (Abraham in Arabic) in the Qur'an in no sense plays the role of the ancestor of the people of Israel. He is the first one who submitted to God (the first *muslim*),¹⁹ and has much in common with Muhammad in seventh-century Mecca, a polytheistic pilgrimage site and mercantile center. The Qur'an tells us little or nothing about the geographical origins of Ibrahim, although extra-Quranic traditions, influenced by Biblical narratives known through oral transmission, locate Ibrahim's youth in Mesopotamia. The child of Azar, an idol-maker, Ibrahim rejected his father's polytheism. Muhammad also rejected the polytheism of his forebears, including that of his deceased parents and grandparents. In the only notable narrative more or less common to both the Qur'an and the Torah, the Qur'an does not mention the name of Ibrahim's nearly sacrificed son. Both Ibrahim and his son submitted themselves (*aslama*) to God, thus becoming quintessentially *muslim* (Qur'an 37:102-105). Whereas Jews associate the near-sacrifice of Abraham's only son with Mount Moriah, the Jerusalem Temple site in later generations, Muslims traditionally locate that near-sacrifice of Ibrahim's only son at Mina, five miles east of Mecca. The Qur'an does not specify any locale.²⁰

The Qur'an, however, is quite specific in locating the Ka'bah in the hometown of Muhammad, Mecca. The Qur'an narrates how that sacred shrine was built or rebuilt by Ibrahim and his son, Isma'il, consecrated or re-consecrated to the worship of one God alone. "And when We [God] appointed the House [at Mecca] as a refuge for the people and a sanctuary, [We said:] 'Take Ibrahim's place of worship as your own.' We then contracted with Ibrahim and Isma'il that they should purify my House for those who circumambulate it and those who adhere to it, bowing and prostrating" (Qur'an 2:125). By the time of Muhammad's youth, however, the Ka'bah had become a shrine to multiple divinities. Ibrahim, in Islamic tradition, had taken up the role of opponent to such plurality in the Godhead, whether symbolized by multiple statues, or by the stars, the moon and the sun (Qur'an 6:74-79). In such opposition to polytheism, Ibrahim foreshadowed Muhammad in seventh-century Mecca.

The Quranic references to Jerusalem are ambiguous, but they have exercised great influence on the history of Islam from the beginning. The Surah of the Night Journey (Qur'an 17) starts with a famous paean of praise: "Glory be to the One who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Place of Worship to the Furthest Place of Worship, [a place] on which We [God] have bestowed blessing. Thus, We could show him some of our wonders. Indeed He [God] is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing!" (Qur'an 17:1). Muslims have understood that verse as referring to a double journey, the first from Mecca to Jerusalem (the *isra'*), and the second from Jerusalem to the highest heavens (the *mi'raj*). How literally these journeys are understood differs from Muslim to Muslim, but these two journeys make physical locations in Jerusalem sacred for Muslims. The Sacred Place of Worship (*Masjid al-haram*) is the ritual center of Mecca surrounding the Ka'bah; the Furthest Place of Worship (*Masjid al-aqsa*) is the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, although today the phrase mainly denotes the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the southern perimeter of the Temple Mount. What Jews call the Temple Mount, Muslims call *Haram al-sharif*, the Noble Sanctuary.

Also located within the *Haram al-sharif* is the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-sakhrah*), a stunningly beautiful octagonal shrine. Built over an enormous rock that can be seen from its internal balustrade, the Dome is sometimes said by Jews to mark the place where Isaac was nearly sacrificed. Jews also speculate that this place may represent the locale of the Holy of Holies in the ancient Temple. Muslims think of the same rock as the location where the *isra'* (the night journey of Muhammad) ends, and the *mi'raj* (the heavenly ascension of Muhammad) begins. The Dome of the Rock was originally built by the Umayyad caliph, 'Abd al-Malik, around 691 CE, probably to celebrate his caliphate's triumph over the Byzantines.²¹

Muslims often refer to Jerusalem as a whole as *al-Quds*, the Holy Place. Until a year and a half after Muhammad's migration (*hijrah*) from Mecca to Medina, Jerusalem and its Temple provided the *qiblah* or direction of worship for Meccan and eventually Medinan Muslims. Did this directedness only begin when Muhammad left Mecca, or was it the original direction of worship from the time Muhammad first received divine guidance? Muslim sources differ on this subject. Jerusalem-directedness in worship would have played an important role for the first Meccan Muslims, turning their religious attention away from the polytheistic Ka'bah towards a monotheistic shrine known only from

afar. The change of *qiblah* was made once the still pagan Ka'bah was sufficiently out of sight, more than two hundred miles south of Medina.

The Qur'an reacts to critics who caviled at the change. "Some foolish people will query, 'What has turned them away from the direction which they used to face?'" The Qur'an supplies a pungent rebuttal. "Tell [them]: to God belongs the east and the west. He guides whom He wishes to the straight path" (Qur'an 2:142). The Jerusalem-directedness of worship marked a distinction between the new Muslim minority in Mecca and their pagan fellow Meccans. "We appointed the direction of worship you first faced so that We could know who were following the Messenger from those who were turning their backs on him" (Qur'an 2:143). Less than two years after the arrival of the Meccan Muslims in Medina, especially when relations with the Jewish minority in Medina were deteriorating, God and His Messenger felt it was time to face Mecca and its still-to-be purified sacred place. Geographical distance from Mecca made the heart grow fonder: "We will make you [Muhammad] turn towards a direction that is dear to you. Turn your face towards the Sacred Place of Worship [in Mecca]" (Qur'an 2:144). Immediately on arriving back in Mecca in 630 CE, Muhammad had to cleanse the Ka'bah of every aspect of its pagan past to make it a fit direction of worship close up.

After the death of Muhammad, the Medinan Muslim leadership under Abu Bakr (r. 632-34) and 'Umar (r. 634-44) felt it necessary to divert the marauding energies of the peninsular Arabs from raiding each other, now subject to a *Pax Islamica*. Even though the Qur'an expressed sympathy for the cause of the Byzantines (*Rum*) in their struggle with the Persians in the early years of Muhammad's receiving revelation (Qur'an 30:2-5), both Byzantine-ruled Egypt and Byzantine-ruled Jerusalem lay open to the outer-directed military energies of the Muslim community in Arabia. Jerusalem fell to Muslim forces loyal to 'Umar after a siege that lasted several months, 636-37, or a year later, according to some sources. Tradition has it that the caliph 'Umar accepted the surrender of the city from the Jerusalem Patriarch, Saint Sophronius. 'Umar, however, refused the Patriarch's invitation to make the midday worship in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, lest that holy place, where Christians commemorate the death and rising of Jesus, become a mosque in later years in memory of 'Umar's worship there.

Jews, banned from Jerusalem first by the pagan Romans but then by the Byzantine Christians, were able to return to the Holy City once the Muslim Arabs came to power. Until 1099, when the first Crusaders

arrived, Jerusalem was populated by Jews, by Christians, and by Muslims living under Muslim rule. The Crusader conquest of the Holy City proved to be a disaster not only for the Muslims of Jerusalem, but also for the Jews, and for any local Christians who could not readily distinguish themselves by their dress from Muslims and Jews. The Christian pilgrim crusaders thought that the Dome of the Rock was the remains of the Temple of Solomon. A contemporary Christian chronicler narrates the results. “[T]he pilgrims entered the city, pursuing and killing the Saracens up to the Temple of Solomon, where the enemy gathered in force...the Temple was covered with their blood ...our men seized great numbers, both men and women, either killing them or making them captives.”²²

Within eighty-eight years, the Temple Mount and Jerusalem were rescued from Christian hands by the Kurdish conqueror best known in the West as Saladin. Despite two brief resumptions of European Crusader rule in Jerusalem during the early thirteenth century, from the middle of that century onwards, Jerusalem was included successively in empires ruled by the Mamluk slave soldiers based in Egypt, and, from the sixteenth century until the early twentieth century, by the Ottomans based in Istanbul. With the conquest of Jerusalem by General Allenby in 1917, Jerusalem and most of what I have defined as the Holy Land came under British Mandate rule, officially authorized by the League of Nations in 1922. Allenby attempted to placate the Jews, Christians, and Muslims who lived in Jerusalem with a statement pledging to preserve and protect all of their holy places.²³

Despite some earlier inter-communal violence between Jewish settlers and Palestinians, it was only in 1929 that outright Palestinian rebellion against Jewish immigration into Palestine broke out on a large scale. Late in 1947, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine west of the Jordan into two sinuously interlocking states, Israeli and Palestinian. War ensued between Israelis and Palestinians, each backed up by outside supporters, resulting in the formal establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. After some controversy, Israel was admitted into the United Nations a year later, in May 1949. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan took the opportunity of Israel’s victory over the Palestinians to annex the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank. The Palestinians got nothing out of all of this, in some cases losing their homes in areas allocated to Israel. In June 1967, Israel conquered the West Bank within six days, unifying the city of Jerusalem for the first time since 1948. Annexation of the Old City, and of East Jerusalem, as well as annexation of much of the West Bank, seems to be the policy of recent Israeli

governments. Change will not happen soon, since no Israeli political party has managed to form a majority coalition in the Knesset, even after two elections held during the past year.

Muslims throughout the world look on the State of Israel since 1948 as a western colonial outpost. This attitude has made life difficult for Jews who lived for centuries in Egypt, North Africa, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran. Many migrated to Israel, but some departed for Europe and the Americas. Starting in the late 1950s, Palestinians, Muslim and Christian, gravitated politically towards the secular *Fatah* movement as their principal military-political agency. From 1964 on, Yasser Arafat led the Palestine Liberation Organization, also a secular movement open to Palestinian Muslim and Christian adherence. After the first Oslo Accords (1993), Arafat headed up the Palestinian National Authority, based in Ramallah on the West Bank, from 1994 until his unexpected death in 2004. Mahmoud Abbas has replaced him. Muslim Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip, have in the past decade embraced the decidedly Islamic ideology of HAMAS (the Movement for Islamic Resistance), which describes itself as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brothers. Even more militant than HAMAS is the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, a group much given to launching rockets into Israel.

As of today, both Palestinians, divided among themselves, and Israelis, also divided among themselves, face many political quandaries.

CONCLUSION

Holy places become museum pieces when the people whose faith has made them holy are dispersed. The Roman dispersal of the Jews from Jerusalem and its environs, as well as the later Christian Byzantine dispersal of Jews from Galilee, adversely affected the Holy Land in the faith tradition of Israel. By the early seventh century CE, the last years of Christian Byzantine rule in Jerusalem, the site of the destroyed Second Temple had degenerated into a garbage dump. Muslims saw in that abandoned site the first destination of Muhammad's night journey; they restored the site for sacred purposes by building the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock on the ancient Temple platform. The nearby Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, dating from the era of Constantine, was destroyed in 1009 CE by the mad Fatimid caliph of Cairo, al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah. It was desecrated again by the Turks of Khawarazmia in the thirteenth century. Its main problem today is

the number of Christian communities laying angry claim to it. The Al-Aqsa Mosque has been attacked many times, most notoriously in 1969 by a mad Australian with a mix of messianic and apocalyptic notions in his head. Palestinian Muslims blamed this occurrence on the Israeli government that had tolerated the man's coming to Israel in the first place to work in a kibbutz and learn Hebrew. The Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron/*Khalil*—sacred to Jews and Muslims alike—was attacked by Brooklyn-born Dr. Baruch Goldstein in 1994, resulting in the deaths of 29 Palestinian Muslims, as well as the death of Dr. Goldstein. Five years ago this month, the Kehilat Benei Torah Synagogue in west Jerusalem was attacked in early morning by two Palestinians, unaffiliated with any group. They killed five congregants and an Israeli Druze police officer. Holy places are not exempt from violence.

Abraham and Jacob were not the only wanderers in what we now call the Middle East. Later Jewish descendants of Abraham and Jacob after the sixth century CE wandered eastward into Babylonia and even south Asia, as well as westward into Europe and the Americas. The disciples of Jesus, emboldened by the Spirit, wandered off to Samaria, to Damascus, to Antioch, to Rome, to the ends of the earth. The ancestors of Palestinians, Christian and eventually Muslim, stayed right where they were, gradually changing over from Aramaic-speaking to Arabic-speaking. Muhammad and his first followers migrated from Mecca to Medina in search of peace to practice their faith. From Medina, after the unification of Arabia, they moved north to Syria, west to Egypt and North Africa, northeast to Iraq, Iran and India. Nobody comes from nowhere, as I said earlier, and all of us are both native and immigrant. Migration makes up much of the history of humankind, despite what some political troglodytes in modern America and Europe may suggest.

Many populations have moved to places different from their places of birth, and they have done so for various reasons: seeking economic opportunity, seeking political refuge, seeking space in which to live their lives of faith. Cultural Zionists like Ahad Ha-'Am, Martin Buber, and Judah Magnes recognized this reality in *Eretz Israel* a century ago, but they also recognized the reality of those Palestinians, Muslim and Christian, living in Ottoman and British Mandatory Palestine. Cultural Zionism and its later descendant, what I have called Realistic Zionism, have few adherents today in the State of Israel, or anywhere else, but it might be time to revisit the ideals of Realistic Zionism today.

During his 2014 pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Pope Francis met the Grand Mufti, the chief legal expert of the Muslim community in Israel and Palestine. In his address to the Grand Mufti, the Pope reflected on the model that Abraham provides for all uprooted people, for all wanderers. That description applies both to Israelis and to Palestinians over the past century. Jews were uprooted from Europe during the *Shoah*; they were uprooted from the Arab and Iranian world later on. The description also fits Palestinians, uprooted from their farms and grazing lands after the 1947-48 Israeli-Arab war,²⁴ or after the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank. The uprootedness of pilgrims—people destined for ‘foreignness’ (*peregrinatio*), whether they want to embrace it or not—has applied to Jews and to Christians and to Muslims in the Middle East since the beginning of the twentieth century. Pope Francis meditated on this reality with some profundity:

At this moment I think of Abraham, who lived as a pilgrim in these lands. Muslims, Christians and Jews see in him, albeit in different ways, a father in faith and a great example to be imitated. He became a pilgrim, leaving his own people and his own house in order to embark on that spiritual adventure to which God called him. A pilgrim is a person who makes himself poor and sets forth on a journey. Pilgrims set out intently towards a great and longed-for destination, and they live in the hope of a promise received... This was how Abraham lived, and this should be our spiritual attitude...Nor can we forget that the pilgrimage of Abraham was also a summons to righteousness: God wanted him to witness his way of acting and to imitate him...Dear brothers, dear friends, from this holy place I make a heartfelt plea to all people and to all communities who look to Abraham: may we respect and love one another as brothers and sisters! May we learn to understand the sufferings of others! May no one abuse the name of God through violence! May we work together for justice and peace!²⁵

Pilgrimage, as I have noted above, is a word loaded with meaning, not all of it very savory. The penitential *peregrinatio* that was the First Crusade did little to expiate the sins of those who took up the pilgrim’s cross; it did a great deal more to weigh them down with what we would today call crimes against humanity. Pope Francis has gone on pilgrimage to the Holy Land as did Pope Benedict XVI, Pope John Paul II, and Pope Paul VI before him. Conscious and freely-accepted *peregrinatio*—living as a foreigner in a foreign land—can contribute to our development as human beings, or can be disastrous, as in the

case of terrorists, medieval or modern. With the pilgrim Francis of Argentina and his Argentinian Jewish friend, Rabbi Abraham Skorka, and his Argentinian Muslim friend, Imam ‘Umar Abboud, let us embark on *peregrinatio*—unarmed pilgrimage, barefoot pilgrimage, repentant pilgrimage, pilgrimage where we are willing to share our faith with others but never impose our faith on others.

The apocalyptic prophet Joel talks of a future time promised by God, a time of fresh perspectives: “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young people shall see visions” (Joel 2:28). I have shared with you this evening my dream—an old man’s dream—in the hope that some young people here will see visions, visions of peacemaking in the Holy Land, peacemaking in every land.

Shalom Aleichem. Pax Vobiscum. As-Salam ‘Alaykum. Peace be with you.

NOTES

- ¹ For the sake of simplicity, I will always call Abram by his later name, Abraham, and Israel by his earlier name, Jacob. Both patriarchs are better known by those names.
- ² Jewish commentaries usually interpret Deut 26:5 as referring only to Jacob, and some of them translate “wandering” as “collapsing.” See Rashi’s commentary on this verse, available at www.sefaria.org.
- ³ The Sea Peoples were probably speakers of an Indo-European language in the Mycenaean family, but after settling on the Mediterranean littoral, by the early first millennium BCE they became speakers of a Semitic language in the same family as Phoenician and Hebrew. See Jonas C. Greenfield and S. David Sperling, “PHILISTINES,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: MI: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 16:53a. Further references to this scholarly source will be abbreviated EJ2, with the volume and page(s) specified.
- ⁴ See Raymond Scheindlin, *The Song of the Distant Dove: Judah Halevi’s Pilgrimage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 172-77.
- ⁵ Russia also had an interest in the division of the Ottoman Empire.
- ⁶ See *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 72-75.
- ⁷ On the varieties of Zionism, see Gideon Kouts, et al., “ZIONISM,” EJ2, 21:539a-626a.
- ⁸ According to Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., a specialist on the Lucan writings, “[t]he overarching geographical perspective in Luke-Acts can be seen as the author’s preoccupation with Jerusalem as the city of destiny for Jesus and the pivot for the salvation of mankind.” See *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*. The Anchor Bible, 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 164.
- ⁹ See *The Ecclesiastical History*. The Loeb Classical Library, 153. (Cambridge, Mass/London: Harvard University Press, 1926), 393/IV.xxvi. 4.26.14.

- ¹⁰ See Eusèbe de Césarée, *Vie de Constantin*. Sources chrétiennes 559. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2013), 384–401/III.25–40.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 401–407/III.41–43.
- ¹² On the more ancient, Mediterranean definition of Europe, derived ultimately from Herodotus, see Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), “The Spiritual Roots of Europe: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” in Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, tr. Michael F. Moore (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 52–53.
- ¹³ Pope Urban II as quoted in Fulcher of Chartres, *Gesta Dei per Francos*, tr. and ed. Oliver J. Thatcher and Edgar Holmes McNeal, *A Source Book for Medieval History* (New York: Scribners, 1905), available online at <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu>.
- ¹⁴ See John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 11.
- ¹⁵ Thomas of Celano, *St. Francis of Assisi*, Part I: The First Life of St. Francis (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1963), no. 55 (30a).
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no 57 (31b).
- ¹⁷ As John Tolan, in his study, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, puts it succinctly: “No doubt Ugolino [the cardinal protector of the Franciscans, later Pope Gregory IX] and [Pope] Honorius thought that the Franciscan missionaries could be more usefully employed in serving the Church than in engaging in pious suicide.” See *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10.
- ¹⁸ *Saint Ignatius’ Own Story*, tr. William J. Young, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1956, rpt 2009), 33.
- ¹⁹ Other Muslim sources claim that Adam was the first Muslim.
- ²⁰ See Heribert Busse, “ABRAHAM,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, Eds: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 25 October 2019 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0165.

²¹ See Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 4. The Dome of the Rock has been refurbished so much since the late seventh century that what we see today is largely of later provenance.

²² *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, an anonymous Latin text written ca. 1100-01 by a follower of Bohemund of Antioch, as quoted in August C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 256-57.

²³ Allenby issued the following proclamation: “Since your city is regarded with affection by the adherents of three of the great religions of mankind and its soil has been consecrated by the prayers and pilgrimages of multitudes of devout people of these three religions for many centuries, therefore, do I make it known to you that every sacred building, monument, holy spot, shrine, traditional site, endowment, pious bequest, or customary place of prayer of whatsoever form of the three religions will be maintained and protected according to the existing customs and beliefs of those to whose faith they are sacred.” See Renee Ghert-Zand, “100 Years later, Allenby returns to Jerusalem,” *The Times of Israel*, 11 December 2017, available online.

²⁴ On this subject, see Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land: the Triumph and Tragedy of Israel* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), esp. 101-32.

²⁵ “Visit to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem: Address of Pope Francis,” Building of the Great Council on the Esplanade of the Mosques (Jerusalem), Monday, 26 May 2014,” available online at www.vatican.va.

Jewish Response to the Annual Fall McGinley Lecture

Rabbi Abraham Unger, Ph.D.

I thank Father Ryan, and express my admiration, for allowing us the space here for a trialogue that advocates for reflection upon a conflict that remains elusive in its resolution. I appreciate the work of my colleague here tonight, Dr. Ebru Turan, as we sift through the variables we each consider most salient to this discussion. I value deeply the welcome granted to all voices of faith by University President, Father McShane. Though my own voice in faith emerges from the Jewish experience of its sacred texts and lived history, I pray that the ideas I put forth this evening resonate with all people earnestly seeking to bring peace to the Holy Land.

The words I will soon say, after the first part of this presentation, will be hard to speak, both to Jew and Gentile. They will likely be even harder for some to hear, but, they need to be said. We are in the midst of a changing global order. Its volatile transformation is felt everywhere, from employment patterns to identity politics. Jews have not historically fared well from any side during worldwide disruption, so permit me this commentary on why we find ourselves at this juncture, as people of faith, regarding what can be done to realize peace for the Holy Land.

By way of framing this trialogue, which Father Ryan has already indicated through a tour de force of each of the Abrahamic faith communities' historic attachments to the Holy Land, we are dealing with two planes of discussion: the political and the existential. I am both a political scientist and theologian, so I'll address each level of the conversation discretely.

The political dimension, I believe, can be resolved with relative dispatch. Regarding the seemingly intractable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I submit here a statement from my student years uttered by one of my most formative college professors, Middle

East expert Dr. Gregory Gause, then at Columbia University, and now Head of the International Affairs Department, Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University. Dr. Gause advised his students that he didn't focus on this issue because, in essence, it is a very simple problem: two ethnic groups want the same piece of land.¹ For Dr. Gause, a political scientist, the conflict we are tracing here holds no interest, because there is no subtle geopolitics to make of it. In recent communication, Dr. Gause confirmed he still maintains this position. I too am a political scientist, and on *that* level of understanding the subject under consideration at its starkest, I agree. This relentless territorial conflict holds no mystery; Jews and Arabs prefer the same Middle Eastern enclave.

If the politics of the topic at hand are fundamentally uncomplicated, then it might be concluded there is not much to say. But clearly there is, because this question continues to captivate the world's concern, whether covered almost daily by *The New York Times*, or addressed by the Pope. Why then all the attention to this issue?

For an answer to that question, politics is not enough. There is no on-the-ground puzzle to solve here, as hard as any noble diplomat may try. Dennis Ross, President Clinton's Middle East envoy to the Middle East, came closest to ending this tension in December 2000. The borders of Jerusalem itself, and a settlement regarding return of Palestinian refugees, were finally on the table at that last, most serious round of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Camp David.² No agreement resulted. A lasting peace seems just as far away now—and perhaps even farther—than it was almost two decades ago. To expand upon Dr. Gause's comment, the conflict itself is not only simple: the upshot is simple too. After a multigenerational effort at peacemaking, it is evident that political analysis and suggestion is not enough to solve the riddle of Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking.

The answer as to why this issue has grabbed us can't lie then only in geopolitics. Rather, I suggest the conflict reaches into the existential nature of the Jewish people itself, both for Jews and for the rest of the world when thinking about Jews. This earthly battle represents something even more significant for the West than a local disagreement about how much area Jews and Arabs ought to respectively get out of the Holy Land. The conversation for the West, and the reason we are here tonight, is something more than a regional concern with the Middle East. We are really here because we are unresolved as to the

global place of the Jew, both concretely and existentially. Is the Jew ever native or ever foreigner?

Father Ryan has powerfully just stated that “Nobody comes from nowhere...and all of us are both native and immigrant. Migration makes up much of the history of humankind.” I take that statement as two-pronged. First, it is practical. Populations migrate. Territories’ demographics are forever in flux. It is absurd to try to trace back which group was really first on any land anywhere. That conversation can only end in recrimination, as demonstrated by the conflict we are working through tonight.

But then, there is the existential component to population movement. This past Sabbath’s Torah portion, recounting Abraham and Sarah’s journey to Canaan, puts forth that paradigmatic narrative of the human quest for more meaningful lives tied to migration.³ But, it is the Jew, stemming from Abraham and Sarah, who has historically been viewed as the perpetual migrant, both by himself and by the Gentile. Yet Abraham, upon arriving at his not native, but most authentic home, in Canaan, where he and his nascent community can be free to be their monotheistic selves, is immediately forewarned of the exile and bondage of his descendants.⁴ And just as the Exodus was forecast to Abraham by G-d upon Abraham’s migration to the Holy Land, one need only recall the statement from the Passover Seder’s liturgy exhorting Jews to remember at their annual Passover Seder, “In every generation all are obligated to see themselves as if they individually had gone out from Egypt, as it is said: And you shall tell your child on that day, “It is because of this that G-d did for me when I went out from Egypt.”⁵ The Jew, even when at home, lives through an annual ceremony of migration from servitude. There is no better practical illustration of this lived out liturgy than the last century’s transformation of the Jewish tradition to keep one suitcase packed in anticipation of the Messianic age, to the contemporary threat of persecution in longtime Diaspora homes.⁶ The Jew is at once native and foreign, at home but remembering flight. There is a vast literature on the Jew as the quintessential marginal outsider.⁷ The early Zionist goal of “normalization” of the Jewish condition through sovereignty did not end questions about the nature of collective Jewish identity.⁸

The Jew expresses his lack of security in his freedom each year at the Passover table, and for good reason. For the recent escapee from Egypt, the marginalized outsider, oppression seems never to be far behind. The

ongoing story of anti-Semitism, sometimes dormant, sometimes alive, but always lurking, makes that Biblical paradigm all-too-real. That quote from the Passover Seder recitative reminds the Jew just how he is seen by others in good existential fashion: as the eternal exile, perhaps newly arrived, but still a migrant, one generation away from someplace else, never fully native. Speaking painfully, this is the discomfort some Jews have felt in their own skin, especially those who were assimilated. The troubled work of Jean Amery, Jewish only on his father's side, yet made aware of his outsider status by the Nuremberg laws and subsequent Holocaust, takes on this issue, and the philosopher himself only ended his struggle with suicide.⁹

The Jews' insecurity, of which G-d warned Abraham at the very start of Jewish history, has been cruelly and continuously reinforced by the broader world in numerous times and places. If the West cannot fully look at the Jews in its midst without seeing them in any way whatsoever except, at bottom, as an "other," then the country of the Jews, namely Israel, located on parts of the soil of the Holy Land, will also seem somehow foreign to its own Biblical terrain, never at home, mirroring its ultimately homeless Diaspora counterpart.

Now we can recognize why prosaic diplomatic negotiation has not resolved a simple territorial dispute. That is because the dispute, at least as regards Jewish claims to the Holy Land, reaches deep into perceptions of the Jew as basically alien, no matter where he or she resides. But maybe, there is a hopeful response that a public theology can offer which mere politics cannot. Let us recount a piece of Rabbinic hermeneutics on the Passover text we cited earlier. The verse from Exodus mysteriously stated that "It is because of *this*" that the Jew was liberated from Egypt. The most popular Biblical exegete in the classical Jewish canon of Bible and Talmud, Rashi, comments that the "*this*" in the verse represents the doctrine that the Children of Israel were freed from Egyptian bondage for no other reason than to fulfill G-d's *mitzvot*, His commandments.¹⁰ Deliverance has a meaning and a mission. Moses, just prior to his passing at the end of the migratory process from Egypt, and right before the epoch of Jewish sovereignty, reminds the people Israel that the purpose of the observance of the *mitzvot* is *Imitatio Dei*, the replication of G-d's ways.¹¹ Living between exile and freedom makes one acutely aware of justice and compassion. That was Moses' final message to the exiles he led to the edge of the Jordan River.

I think then what we need is a new framework for peacemaking in the Holy Land. Since politics has failed, and phrases such as land for peace seem faded and hollow, a new language to work out some degree of viable, ongoing peace in the Land is required. Minimally, there is nothing right now to lose, in this period of stalemate and frustration on all sides. We can go past the existential quandary I've described by looking towards *why* the Jews were exiled and liberated rather than *how* that process impacted the way they are perceived. A look at that factor may be just as liberating for Jews as it might be for Gentiles when thinking about the Jews. As Passover reminds us, the Jews were freed to sustain G-d's presence on earth. All religious groups believe that about themselves. In this, the Jews are the same as all others. Whether foreign or native, it doesn't matter if in fact the ultimate point is only to be kind like Him, and to seek out goodness.

Heschel reminds us in no uncertain terms, and especially in times of radical upheaval, that "*no religion is an island.*"¹² He argues that all faith communities are inextricably bound up with each other, because the opposite is a fatal "nihilism" for all.¹³ *A fortiori*, how much more so in this time of globalism, and, however threatening its retreat, technology compels us to acknowledge an ever-shrinking space between us as represented by this dialogue tonight. On the most basic human level, we cannot avoid the other that the post-Holocaust ethicist and Talmudist Levinas bids us to notice.¹⁴ It does not matter who is native and who is not. What matters is, no matter the difference, that we recognize the other *as fundamentally the same*. Jewish theology posits that we leave one home for another home in order to strengthen our commitment to Divinity. That place of pilgrimage is what makes the land upon which it takes place holy, or, in the literal sense of the Hebrew word for holy, *Qadosh*, unique. The Holy Land, what Jews call *Eretz Israel*, the land of Israel, is unique precisely because of the spiritual meaning of going there. On that, I think we can all agree, and maybe that is the beginning of a public theology that can heal woundedness on all sides, and move us to a more understanding, peaceful conference of hearts and minds. Perhaps then, once the telos of faith intervenes in this seemingly political dispute, its resolution becomes even simpler.

NOTES

¹ F. Gregory Gause, 111, personal communication, October 28, 2019.

² <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-aftermath-of-camp-david-2000>, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/oslo>.

³ Genesis 12:1-5.

⁴ Genesis 15:13.

⁵ Passover Haggadah citing Exodus 13:8.

⁶ See, as popular examples of the social context of this tradition, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/rabbis-without-borders/is-your-suitcase-packed/> and https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jews-always-have-a-bag-pa_b_6899304.

⁷ See, as an early example, Thorstein Veblen's article "The Intellectual Pre-eminence of Jews in Modern Europe," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Mar., 1919), 33-42.

⁸ See, as an early Israeli reckoning with this concept, Mati Meged's article "The Normalization of Israel," <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-normalization-of-israel/> *Commentary Magazine*, American Jewish Committee, September 1961.

⁹ Jean Amery, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

¹⁰ Rashi on Exodus 13:8.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 28:9.

¹² Abraham Joshua Heschel, (*italics author's own*), "No Religion is an Island," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Part 1, (January 1966), 117- 134, 119.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. by Annette Aronowicz, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

Muslim Response to the Annual Fall McGinley Lecture

Ebru Turan, Ph.D.

I thank Father Patrick Ryan for this beautifully written and illuminating lecture. Father Ryan has pointed out that the sanctity of the Holy Land in Islam is concentrated in one particular spot in Jerusalem called the Noble Sanctuary, known in Arabic as *al-Haram al-sharif*, and in English as the Temple Mount. The area corresponds to the vast quadrangular enclosure located at the southeastern end of the Old City, traditionally accepted as the site of the Second Jewish Temple, destroyed by the Romans in the year 70. From the original Temple complex, only a small segment of the ancient wall, on the western flank of the mountainous platform, known as the Wailing Wall and deemed by the Jews as the holiest site on earth, has survived.

The Noble Sanctuary houses two of the most sanctified and majestic monuments of Islam: the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Dome of the Rock is the first consciously created masterpiece of Islamic art and the earliest monument erected by the Arabs following their conquests in the Near East. Located virtually at the visual center of the Haram, the building boasts a gilded large dome set over a huge rocky outcrop, identified in the Jewish tradition as the Foundation Stone and the site of the Holy of the Holies, from which God left the Earth after creating it, and where Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. The al-Aqsa Mosque, translated in English as the Farthest Place of Prayer, is a huge congregational mosque situated along the western part of the southern wall of the Haram. As Father Ryan has remarked, the sanctity of the Noble Sanctuary in Islamic religious tradition is derived from two miraculous events in the prophet's lifetime, namely, the *isra'* and *mir'aj*, which, respectively, denote Muhammad's night journey from Mecca to the farthest mosque and his subsequent ascension to heaven.

Although the city of Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Qur'an, Islamic authorities drawing on prophetic traditions have identified the place of the farthest mosque with the al-Aqsa Mosque on the Noble Sanctuary. It is also widely accepted that it was the Rock on the Temple Mount from which Muhammad ascended to heaven. The Islamic tradition professes that the monuments of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque were built to commemorate these two holy incidents in Muhammad's prophetic career.

Building on Father Ryan's observations, I want to focus on the political and religious context of the late-seventh and early-eighth centuries, in which these two Islamic edifices were constructed. As shown by Islamic art historians such as the late Oleg Grabar, the Muslim traditions associating the Noble Sanctuary with the *isra'* and *mir'aj* of the Prophet Muhammad seem to have originated in a much later period, postdating the completion of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Therefore, the Islamization of the Temple Mount and the making of Jerusalem into the third holiest place in Islam need to be understood within the dynamics of seventh- and eighth-century Syria, during which time the possession of the Holy Land and most particularly Jerusalem was still highly contested between the Islamic and Christian (that is, the Eastern Roman) Empires.

Called in Islamic parlance *Bayt al-maqdis* or *al-Quds*, which means "the city of the Temple" or "the sanctuary," Jerusalem was conquered by the Muslim armies during the reign of the second caliph, Umar, in 638. When the Muslims captured Jerusalem, they found the area of the Temple Mount mostly empty. Some sources say that it had been used as a rubbish dump and deemed a place accursed since the destruction of the second Jewish temple by the Romans. Reportedly, Caliph Umar ordered a cleanup of the mountain top, and soon after, a mosque of simple construction was built at the southern end of the esplanade, the location where the al-Aqsa Mosque now stands.

The caliphal attention to Jerusalem grew significantly after 661, when the Umayyad clan of Mecca came to power after a six-year-long civil war and transferred the capital of the Islamic Caliphate from Medina to Damascus, in Syria. It was in Jerusalem that the first Umayyad caliph, Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan (r. 661–680 CE), received the oath of allegiance in a ceremony staged in the mosque built by Caliph 'Umar on the Temple Mount. The Muslim civil war had shaken the Islamic caliphate to its foundation, giving rise to hopes among the Christians,

who still constituted the dominant religious culture and population in the region, of the imminent downfall of the Muslim empire. These hopes were accompanied by apocalyptic speculations that the early Arab conquests were divinely ordained to punish the Christians for their sins and that once the Christians were purged of their corruption and wrongdoing, a God-sent eschatological Christian emperor would arise to destroy the Muslim empire and restore the Holy Land, along with the other lost Christian territories, to Christian rule. Such expectations reached a fever pitch after 680, when another civil war broke out in the Caliphate following Muawiya's death. It was right after the conclusion of the Second Civil War that the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik, who defeated the other claimants to the caliphate and restored the unity of the Muslim community, built the Dome of the Rock, in 691.

The creation of the Dome of the Rock was an effort on the part of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik to assert the strength and durability of the Islamic faith and empire against Christianity and its political embodiment, the Roman Empire. This argument can be supported by an analysis of the particular spot chosen for the monument and its distinct artistic and architectural characteristics. It is known that since the second half of the seventh century, Muslim traditions, no doubt drawing heavily on Jewish eschatological legends, had identified the Noble Sanctuary with the future locus of the events of the End Time. According to these traditions, on the Day of Judgment, God will return to Jerusalem, where he will resurrect the dead and gather them for judgment. The angel Israfil will blow the trumpet from the Holy Rock to announce the Day of Resurrection and summon the dead. God will set up his throne on the Rock and judge people from there, granting eternal bliss to the good and punishing the wicked with his eternal damnation. Moreover, the so-called Bridge of Sirat, which will be erected over Hell to separate the righteous from the unrighteous, will be placed on the Noble Sanctuary, extending across the nearby Valley of Hell to the Mount of Olives, which lies to the east of the precinct. In some traditions, the eastern perimeter of the Haram complex, which also constitutes the eastern border of Jerusalem, is identified as the gated wall referred to in the Qur'an (57:13) that will separate believers from hypocrites on the day of the Final Judgment. According to some others, paradise will be brought to Jerusalem like a bride along with the sanctuary of Mecca in the Last Days, and Jesus, who did not die and was taken up to heaven from Jerusalem, will return there and defeat the Antichrist.

With its dazzling beauty and imposing architectural presence, the Dome of the Rock not only affirmed the religious and imperial power of Islam, but also proclaimed that despite Christian speculations and expectations to the contrary, the lands that the Muslims had conquered from the Christians, most particularly, the Holy Land and the Holy City therein, were to remain in Muslim hands forever, in fact, until the end of times. The Islamization of the site intimated that when God would return to Earth and come to the Rock to judge mankind on the Day of Judgment, the Islamic shrine, the Dome of the Rock, would serve as his seat.

Furthermore, the unique artistic and architectural characteristics of the building point to the artistically and religiously competitive discourse of the Dome of the Rock with Christianity and its sacred structures in the city, most notably, the Holy Sepulcher. The construction of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount represented an act of appropriation of the heart of Jerusalem for Islam and the proclamation that Islam represented the final and undistorted expression of the divine revelation, superseding the earlier monotheistic faiths, most especially Christianity. This message finds its strongest expression in the lengthy inscription running along the interior walls of the building. The inscription contains numerous Quranic passages that define the position of Jesus in the theology of the Islamic faith. Although the selected verses emphatically stress the prophethood of Jesus, his status as the son of God and his divinity are denied. For example, the inscription contains the Quranic verse 4:171:

O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. And do not say, “Three;” desist—it is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs.

Curiously, the Dome of the Rock asserts its superiority over Christianity by employing a distinctly Christian artistic language. It appears that the Muslim patrons of the monument wanted to assert the superior power, beauty, and durability of Islam over Christianity by adopting and mimicking Christian art and religious symbols. For example, the

plan of the monument, which features two octagonal ambulatories around a dome-covered cylinder, belongs to the architectural tradition of Byzantine art and, more specifically, to the Christian *martyrium* tradition of Jerusalem buildings such as the Holy Sepulcher and the Church of the Ascension. In addition, the measurements of the large dome covering the structure, which is about 20 meters in diameter and about 25 meters high, follow almost perfectly those of the Holy Sepulcher. Byzantine artistic culture also informs the building's sumptuous decorations. In addition to extensive marble paneling, lavish mosaics were used inside to cover almost all wall surfaces above the capitals and the cornices of piers and columns. Originally, the exterior walls were also decorated with Byzantine-style mosaics. However, these were replaced with cobalt blue Iznik tiles in the sixteenth century during the reign of Ottoman Sultan Suleyman, during which time the building underwent a comprehensive renovation.

The building's competitive discourse also sheds light on the erection some twenty years later of the second Islamic monument on the Haram, the Aqsa Mosque. Supported by a combination of columns and arches, the roof of the Aqsa Mosque boasts a dome sitting on the central nave, covering the *mihrab*, or the *qiblah niche*, embedded on the southern wall. Although built in a later period, the *qiblah* of the Aqsa Mosque is aligned with that of the Dome of the Rock. This proves that the two structures were planned together from the very beginning and designed to form a religious complex composed of a congregational building and a commemorative shrine. This is yet another Muslim attempt to emulate the connection between the Holy Sepulcher and the Chapel of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives, the site traditionally believed to be the earthly spot where Jesus ascended into heaven after his resurrection.

The Muslim attention paid to Jerusalem declined during the period of the 'Abbasid caliphs, who destroyed the Umayyads in 750 and transferred the center of the caliphate from Damascus, in Syria, to Baghdad, in Iraq. The shift of the Islamic capital to the east undermined the importance of Syria and, by implication, that of Jerusalem, in the Islamic Caliphate. It was no longer the frontier region whose domination was regarded as vital for the survival of the Islamic empire and faith. Likewise, the strategic and ideological significance of the imperial and religious conflict of Islam with Christianity and the Roman Empire declined for the Muslims. However, Jerusalem recovered

its fundamental importance for the Muslim community in the late-eleventh century, when the First Crusade conquered it and established four crusader states in the region of Syria-Palestine. Jerusalem remained in Christian possession until 1187, when the Muslim champion Saladin regained it after his victory at the Battle of Hattin.

It was during this crusader era that the sacred status of Jerusalem began once more to receive vigorous attention from Muslim scholars and intellectuals. The period witnessed the rise of a new literary genre called the Merits of Jerusalem, known in Arabic as the *Fadail al-quds*, in which the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islamic tradition was emphasized and praised. As Carole Hillenbrand has remarked, in the twelfth century, works of this kind were often read out aloud in the mosques in Syria to arouse the faithful Muslims to the prosecution of *jihad* and to stimulate them into action for the repossession of the holy city.

This brief historical overview shows that throughout the medieval era, the religious and spiritual importance of Jerusalem for the Muslims was intimately connected to Islam's political and ideological competition with Christianity and its various political representations in the region. Perhaps this observation may help us to reevaluate the contemporary Muslim obsession with the sanctity and Islamic identity of the city and the role of religion in the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict in the region. Religious conflict and animosity between Islam and Judaism have often been evoked as the leading reason driving the conflict. But historical evidence suggests that at least as far as Islamic tradition is concerned, the opposite is actually true. The sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam appears to have always drawn the special attention and interest of the Muslim community whenever the political domination of Islam over the region was challenged and threatened by other faiths and powers. Seen in this light, religion, manifested in the heightened Muslim infatuation with the city in our present time, should not be considered the cause but the direct outcome of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, drawing on competing and conflicting claims of sovereignty over the same piece of land.

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This National Geographic special issue starts with the geography of the Holy Land itself, including modern-day Israel and Lebanon, parts of Jordan, Syria, and northeast Egypt. By looking at the rise of early cities, like Jericho and Ugarit, we see the combination of commerce, culture, and politics that shaped early regional civilizations. Then the issue moves into the This National Geographic special issue starts with the geography of the Holy Land itself, including modern-day Israel and Lebanon, parts of Jordan, Syria, and northeast Egypt. The issue concludes in the 20th century, connecting the history of the Holy Land with contemporary religion, and sets the stage for the conflicts that continue today. ...more. Get A Copy. Amazon. I hope that this Holy Land can serve all three religions and be a global showcase of how different faiths can live together in peace. Hope is important, and if we lose it there is risk that individuals turn to violence. Or that people give up and leave Palestine. People sometimes have unrealistic expectations that the conflict can be solved in a short time and then they lose hope. We need to look at the long-term perspective of building inter-communal relations on the ground and when we do that we gain hope easily. It is like the stock market: it sometimes goes up very quickly and then down very quickly. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the ongoing struggle between Israelis and Palestinians that began in the mid-20th century. Various attempts have been made to resolve the conflict as part of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, with only partial success, as at the end of 2019. The origins to the conflict can be traced back to Jewish immigration and sectarian conflict in Mandatory Palestine between Jews and Arabs. It has been referred to as the world's "most intractable conflict," with the ongoing