

THE ROLE OF JERUSALEM

by

Archbishop George Appleton*

Jerusalem! One of the loveliest sounding names on human lips. Jerusalem! the meeting place of three great religions. Jerusalem! revered and loved by millions of people all over the world. Jerusalem! symbol of the ideal city, the heavenly city, the final home of the human spirit. Jerusalem! the magnet that has drawn pilgrims and worshippers ever since David made it his capital and his son Solomon built the Temple there. Jerusalem: to which Jews have longed to come all down the centuries since Romans destroyed it in A. D. 70 and again in 135. "Next year in Jerusalem" – the longing prayer uttered at the end of each year's Passover, and now come true for Jews. The religious Jew stands in worshipping awe before the Western Wall, no longer the Wailing Wall, while the secular Jew feels his Jewishness stirring within him as he stands before those great stones of the Temple wall, so massive that they have survived siege after siege. Dear also to the Muslim, with the lovely Dome of the Rock built over the rock of Abraham's faith, and the equally beautiful Al-Aqsa mosque over the burning of which just over two years ago by a Christian fanatic and schizophrenic the whole Muslim world was moved by passionate anxiety and anger. Jerusalem dear to Christians because here Jesus worshipped and taught, died and survived physical death, and showed that nothing could defeat his love for his own people and for the world.

We all love Jerusalem, but we do not yet love our fellow men enough to be ready to find the right pattern for sharing it.

Let us look for a moment to its history: the prophet Ezekiel speaks of the mixed origin of Jerusalem in these words:

"Canaan is the land of your ancestry and there you were born; an Amorite was your father and a Hittite your mother" (Ez. 16:2).

Originally, continues the prophet, Jerusalem was a poor, neglected, unattractive place, until God had mercy on her, adopted and nurtured her, and made her his bride. It is religion that has ennobled Jerusalem and made her dear to every generation and to the whole world.

* These excerpts are taken from a paper given at the Centre of the Sisters of Zion in Rome on 9th December 1971. (Cf. note on p. 100).

Jerusalem is historically connected with the beginnings of three religions. That is why it is so dear. It takes us back to the creative days of our faith, to our spiritual youth, whether we be Jews, Christians or Muslims. "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the quarry from which you were dug", says Isaiah, "look to your father Abraham". Christians look in gratitude to Abraham in Jerusalem, and also to Jesus in Jerusalem; Muslims look to both and to Muhammad as well.

The possession of the Old City of Jerusalem is the key problem – and the party not in possession at any particular time seems to be more willing to share it than when it happens to be in possession!

Since 1967 the whole of Jerusalem has been under Israeli control. To my knowledge Israel has behaved quite fairly and properly towards the holy places.

Much criticism has been levelled against the many tall apartments that Israel is building north of the city, both on aesthetic and political grounds.

But Jerusalem is a living city and Jews are dynamic people, who find it difficult to put development into cold storage while there are no positive steps towards a peace conference. 20% of the new immigrants who come to Israel want to live and work in Jerusalem. Many Israelis, too, are anxious lest they should lose their rights in Jerusalem again, and they are resentful where criticisms are made about their plans and actions, which were not made about the Jordan regime.

What are the principles that seem to be emerging from the present controversy? They seem to me to be:

1. Jerusalem should be an undivided city. Nobody wants to go back to the pre-1967 division, with barbed-wire fences, armed guards, the Mandelbaum Gate.

2. Nobody wants an internationalised city. Both Jordan and Israel refused to co-operate with the internationalisation plan of 1948 under a Trusteeship Council, and since then have argued from de facto claims. Nobody wants an intrusion from outside, so to my mind the final plan must come from within.

3. The Old City should be entirely demilitarised.

4. There should be freedom of access for all to the Holy Places. This is the case at the present moment, as far as political conditions make it possible for people to come freely from their own countries.

5. Yet freedom of access will not satisfy the Palestinians or King Hussein, who want some sovereignty in the Holy City.

6. We need to discover the right pattern of sharing.

Soon after I arrived in Jerusalem a Benedictine monk came to me to suggest that there should be three municipalities in Jerusalem: West Jerusalem which would be the capital of Israel, East Jerusalem an Arab

Municipality and the capital of whatever Arab state came into being, either Jordan as before or a new state federated with Jordan, and thirdly the Old City as an inter-Faith Municipality, governed by representatives of the three religious bodies, public services being supplied from the West and East Municipalities by agreement. There might be a Lord Mayor or High Commissioner, appointed from Jerusalem or outside, by agreement between the three Municipalities, or by the UN if invited to do so.

I never cease to plead that some kind of condominium is the right answer and I do not believe that greater Jerusalem will be a city of true peace until a joint plan has been evolved and agreed for the Old City and whatever Palestinian state comes into being for the West Bank, whether it will be Jordan as before 1967 or a small state in some way federated with Jordan and related to Israel.

The Churches of Jerusalem have made little positive contribution to the search for peace, though they have refrained from the extreme statements which leaders of the Churches in neighbouring countries have sometimes made at moments of deep feeling. Perhaps the Churches will never be able to speak a unifying word until they themselves are united according to Christ's will and in the way that He will surely show us if we are prepared to pay the price of unity. Only then will the Churches be able to speak convincingly of the role of Jerusalem.

What is that role? The titles that we give to Jerusalem may possibly give us some light. We often call it the *City of God*, the city where God has placed his name, where his nature, character and will have been made known. It is the meeting place of three monotheisms which owe much to each other, either in the inheritance of faith or in the mutual reactions to each other. Clearly, the ecumenical movement among the Churches must extend to a wider ecumenical movement among religions.

Jerusalem is also called the *Holy City*. This is its name in Arabic, 'El Quds'. A city is made holy by the sacred events that have happened in it, by the worship that has been offered in it through succeeding centuries, by the holy places that have been built and set aside for that worship. But a city is maintained in holiness by the holiness of the people who live in it, who revere and love it.

If Jerusalem can accept its calling to be the city of God, the Holy City, it will soon live up to its name, so lovely in sound and meaning, the *City of Peace*. So once again the Law of the Lord will go forth from Zion, and God will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths, for men today are seeking an ethic relevant to the contemporary, by which to live. The promise to Abraham of a blessing to all nations, the vision of Micah and Isaiah of an age of peace shall be fulfilled. The tears of Jesus will be dried, if we recognise the things that belong to peace – forgiveness for past injuries, loyalty to truth, the search for justice, the re-establishment

in men's minds and consciences of the two great commandments of love. Given these radical requirements, which Jews, Muslims and Christians profess to accept, we should soon discover the right spiritual principles for the future of Jerusalem.

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