

Jerusalem

in modern Christian Thought

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Jerusalem is a city like no other. It is a city that two people view as their national capital while three religions call it holy. In this paper we shall look at Jerusalem in modern Christian thought. There is a vast array of data which demonstrates Christian statements, resolutions, and speeches regarding Jerusalem. To gain a clearer insight on the Christian discourse on Jerusalem, we chose to delve into it from three main axes: Jerusalem in the writings of the World Council of Churches, Jerusalem as addressed by the Holy See, and finally, Jerusalem in the statements of the Holy Land Heads of Churches.

a) Jerusalem in the statements ¹ of the World Council of Churches:

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was founded in 1948 as an expression of the modern ecumenical movement and as a counter reaction to World War II. Today, the Council has a fellowship of 349 churches, representing some 590 million Christians in about 150 countries across the world. WCC member churches include most of the Anglican/Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches. The Catholic Church is accredited as observer.

In the first year it was founded, the World Council of Churches, in cooperation with the International Missionary Council, examined the subject of Jerusalem. On 13 June 1949, the Council sent a Memorandum to the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine under the title “The Protection of Religious Interests and Activities in Palestine.”² This was in line with the document adopted by the General Assembly on 11 May 1949, stressing that when “studying the question of the internationalization of Jerusalem and the problem of the protection of the Holy Places and free access thereto,” the views of “the Holy See, the Orthodox Patriarchate, Moslem religious authorities and the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs”³ (including the WCC) should be taken into account. The Memorandum emphasized that for any political arrangement to be made in what concerns Palestine in general and Jerusalem in particular, there should be three required conditions. Those conditions are:

1 Most of the statements examined here were not published, but are available at the WCC archive in Geneva.

2 Kenneth G. Grubb & O. Frederick Nolde, Memorandum: The Protection of Religious Interests and Activities in Palestine, May 1949.

3 Ibid

1. "Human rights and fundamental freedoms, and, particularly, full religious liberty must be safeguarded for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion." ⁴

2. "The protection of Holy Places, religious buildings and sites in Palestine and free access thereto should be recognized as a matter of international responsibility." ⁵

3. "All church-owned and mission-owned properties in Palestine that have been occupied by either Arabs or Jews should be returned to their owners." ⁶

The Memorandum was issued upon internal discussions within the United Nations circles. Following the Arab Israeli war, the Nakba of 1948, and the Armistice Agreement, however, this subject was no longer put under investigation; neither at the United Nations, nor at the World Council of Churches. The question of Jerusalem was not deliberated again until after the end of the sixties. It was at the meeting between 12-22 August 1969 in Canterbury, England when the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches noted that it would recommend that "serious consideration be given by the appropriate department of the World Council of Churches to initiating discussions with Christians, Jews and Moslems as to the guardianship of the Holy Places, the status of Jerusalem and the people of the city." ⁷

Real concern for the status of Jerusalem started after the mid-seventies. At its meeting in Berlin in August 1974 ⁸, the Central Committee asserted that for there to be a satisfactory position with regards to Jerusalem, it should be considered that:

1) "Jerusalem is a Holy City for three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The tendency to minimize Jerusalem's importance for any of these three religions should (be) avoided."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ WCC Central Committee, Statement on the Middle East, Canterbury, England, 22-12 August 1969.

⁸ WCC Central Committee Statement, Berlin West, August 1974.

2) “Christian Holy Places in Jerusalem and neighbouring areas belong to the greatest extent to member churches of the WCC,” and any proposed solution as to their future “should take into account the legitimate rights of the churches most directly concerned.”¹⁰

3) “The question of Jerusalem is not only a matter of protection of Holy Places, it is organically linked with the living faiths and communities of people in the Holy City.”¹¹ Any solution on Jerusalem should thus “take into account the rights and needs of the indigenous peoples of the Holy City.”¹² The Central Committee confirmed its opinion that matters related to jurisdiction over Jerusalem will only find their lasting solution within the context of the settlement of the conflict in its totality.

The General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, at its meeting in Nairobi, Kenya in 1975¹³, reciprocated the motions of the Central Committee, adding that:

1. The monotheistic religions must cooperate to ensure that Jerusalem “is a city open to the adherents of all three religions, where they can meet and live together.”¹⁴

2. In any agreement concerning Jerusalem, it is crucial to abide by the “special legislation regulating the relationship of the Christian communities and the authorities, guaranteed by international treaties (Paris 1856 and Berlin 1878) and the League of Nations known as the Status Quo of the Holy Places.”¹⁵

3. It is essential to highlight that “the Holy Places should not become mere monuments of visitation, but should serve as living places of worship integrated

9 Ibid

10 Ibid

11 Ibid

12 Ibid

13 Statement by Nairobi WCC Fifth Assembly, 1975.

14 Ibid

15 Ibid

and responsive to Christian communities who continue to maintain their life and roots within the Holy City and for those who out of religious attachments want to visit them.”¹⁶

4. The future of Jerusalem can only be settled in a comprehensive Middle East context and under an international aegis and guarantee.

The Central Committee issued its First Statement, titled “Statement on Jerusalem,” at its meeting in Geneva in August 1980¹⁷. This was in answer to the Basic Law passed by the Israeli Knesset on 30 July 1980 to annex East Jerusalem to Israel.

In this Statement, the Central Committee expressed its opposition to the Israeli unilateral action of annexing East Jerusalem and declaring the city as its “eternal capital” under its exclusive sovereignty. The Central Committee conveyed that such a decision is contrary to all pertinent UN resolutions; it undermines all efforts towards reaching a just solution of the Middle East problem, and it dangerously threatens regional and world peace.

The Central Committee also emphasized that the issue of Jerusalem should be included in the agenda of official negotiations involving Israel and the Palestinian people on self-determination. Furthermore, the Committee expressed its intention to aid the churches in expressing the concerted and united Christian voice toward fully assuming their role as partners in determining the future character of Jerusalem.

The General Assembly of the World Council of Churches also addressed, at its meeting held in Vancouver in July-August 1983¹⁸, issues related to the Middle East that were mainly related to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the establishment of settlements in the Occupied Territories, and the political arrests and overall violations and discriminatory Israeli policies. This meeting’s Statement reaffirmed that issues cannot be resolved through the use of force, and stressed

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Central Committee Statement on Jerusalem, Geneva, Switzerland, August 1980.

¹⁸ Sixth Assembly Statement on the Middle East, Vancouver, Canada, July/August 1983.

on the importance of negotiations between Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the neighboring Arab states. They stressed the importance of the “implementation of the rights of the Palestinians to Self-determination including the right of establishing a sovereign Palestinian state.”¹⁹

On the subject of Jerusalem, the Statement stressed that Jerusalem “is a Holy City for the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The tendency to minimize Jerusalem’s importance for any of these three religions should be avoided²⁰.” They emphasized that dialogue on Jerusalem should be initiated together with Jews and Muslims towards political processes and a mutually acceptable agreement. Moreover, the Statement called the attention of the churches for the need of actions which will ensure a continuing indigenous Christian presence and witness in Jerusalem. It also called for wider ecumenical awareness of the plight of the indigenous Muslim and Christian communities who suffer from repressive actions of the occupying power in East Jerusalem, and those living in the West Bank and are prevented from visiting the Holy City.

Following the First Intifada [the Popular Palestinian Uprising] and the Haram Al-Sharif (Al-Aqsa Massacre), the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches made an appeal, on August 20th, 1988, to the United Nations Secretary General about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.²¹ In the appeal, the WCC General Secretary requested to convene the International Peace Conference on the Middle East so as to find a comprehensive solution to the issues pertained, including the question of Jerusalem.

The subject of Jerusalem regained momentum at the WCC timetable in the mid-nineties. After the signing of the Oslo Accords²², the Fundamental Agreement

19 Ibid

20 Ibid

21 Appeal by the Central Committee of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Hannover, FRG, 20 August 1988.

22 WCC Executive Committee, Statement on the Middle East, Sigtuna, Sweden, 20-14 September 1993.



between the Holy See and the State of Israel²³, and the Official Relations between the Holy See and the PLO, the World Council of Churches – in collaboration with the Lutheran World Federation, the Holy See, and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue – organized a conference on the Spiritual Understanding of Jerusalem (1994). The General Secretary of the WCC also visited the Holy Land in 1995²⁴, and the issue of Jerusalem was on top of the Central Committee’s agenda.²⁵

One of the most affirmative statements of the World Council of Churches, particularly in relation to Jerusalem, was adopted at the WCC Eighth Assembly meeting in Harare from 3-14 December 1998²⁶. This Assembly addressed the status of Jerusalem from the framework of International law, starting with the international treaties of Paris (1856) and Berlin (1878), the responsibility of the British Mandate vis-à-vis the Holy Places and the religious communities in Palestine, the UN Partition Plan (29 November 1947) in which Jerusalem was established as a “Corpus Separatum” (with precisely defined geographical

23 WCC Press Release, Comment on the new diplomatic arrangements between the Vatican and the State of Israel, 10. January 1994.

24 WCC Press Release, WCC General Secretary begins visit to Jerusalem, 17 May 1995.

25 WCC Central Committee, Statement on the Status of Jerusalem, Geneva, Switzerland, 22-14 September 1995.

26 WCC Eighth Assembly, Statement on the Status of Jerusalem, Harare, Zimbabwe, 14-3 December 1998.

boundaries,) and the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 that specified the special status of Jerusalem. The Statement from this meeting went on to note the fourth Geneva Convention that had defined the Occupied territories, and the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 303 of 9 December 1948, in which the General Assembly had reaffirmed that Jerusalem should be placed under a permanent international regime. Finally, the Statement gave mention to United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which had demanded Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories, including Jerusalem, thereby reminding the international community of its roles and responsibilities with respect to Jerusalem.

The Statement asserted the following principles regarding Jerusalem:

1. “The peaceful settlement of the territorial claims of Palestinians and Israelis should respect the holiness and wholeness of the city.”²⁷
2. “Access to the Holy Places, religious buildings and sites should be free, and freedom of worship must be secured for people of all faiths.”²⁸
3. “The rights of all communities of Jerusalem to carry out their own religious, educational and social activities must be guaranteed.”²⁹
4. “Free access to Jerusalem must be assured and protected for the Palestinian people.”³⁰
5. “Jerusalem must remain an open and inclusive city.”³¹
6. “Jerusalem must be a shared city in terms of sovereignty and citizenship.”³²
7. “The provisions of the IV. Geneva Convention must be honored with respect to the rights of Palestinians to property, building and residency; the prohibition of effecting changes in population in occupied territories; and the prohibition of changes in geographical boundaries, annexation of territory, or settlement which would change the religious, cultural or historical character of Jerusalem without the agreement of the parties concerned and the approval of the international

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

community.”³³

The last Statement on Jerusalem by the WCC came out in the context of the Camp David summit with President Clinton, Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Barack in the year 2000. In this “resolution” adopted by the Executive committee in September 2000³⁴, the committee encouraged the parties “to have the courage to abandon narrow, exclusive claims in favor of efforts to build an open, inclusive and shared city where free access to Holy Places and freedom of worship is assured for people of all faiths” while at the same time reiterating its conviction that “the solution to the question of Jerusalem is in the first place the responsibility of the parties directly involved, but that the Christian churches and the Jewish and Muslim religious communities have a central role to play in relation to (the) negotiations.”³⁵

The last statement by the WCC on Jerusalem came in a letter of its General Secretary, Olav Fyske Tveit, on December 6th, 2017³⁶; the same day that President Trump announced his plans to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The General Secretary declared that “Such a Step breaks with the longstanding international consensus, and almost seven decades of established American policy...It also pre-empts a negotiated resolution of this most difficult issue in any final peace agreement, which must be achieved between Israelis and Palestinians themselves.”³⁷ The General Secretary calls on the “US Administration to reconsider its position on this key issue, and to exert its maximum efforts in promoting renewed negotiations among Israelis and Palestinians for a genuine, just and sustainable peace.”³⁸

b) Jerusalem in the Statements of the Holy See:

33 Ibid.

34 WCC Executive Committee, Resolution on Jerusalem Final Status Negotiations, Geneva, Switzerland, -26 September 2000.

35 Ibid.

36 Olav Fyske Tveit, On US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s Capital, Geneva, 6. December 2017.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

The Holy See made no comments on Jerusalem until after WW I. “Referring to the Balfour Declaration, Pope Benedict XV, in the words of *Civiltà Cattolica*, warned that the Holy Places were in danger of falling into the hands of the Jews, supported by Anglo-Saxon Protestants, who wished to establish a Jewish republic in Palestine. Concern was expressed that Zionist rule might have the effect of Uprooting the local Christian Community.”³⁹ These two issues continued to be the main worries of the Vatican between the two world wars.

The changes resulting from WWII. forced the Vatican to change its stand on Jerusalem. In this second stage, the Holy See was demanding that Jerusalem and its vicinity should be legally accorded and guaranteed an international status. Following the Nakbah and the division of Jerusalem in East and West, Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical on Jerusalem (*In Multiplicibus*) stating that “it would be opportune to give Jerusalem and its outskirts, where are found so many and such precious memories of the life and death of the Savior, an international character which, in the present circumstances, seems to offer a better guarantee for the protection of the sanctuaries. It would also be necessary to assure, with international guarantees, both free access to Holy Places scattered throughout Palestine, and the freedom of worship and the respect of customs and religious traditions.”⁴⁰

This position was reiterated again in the cyclical *Redemptoris Nostri Cruciatu*s, written on 15 April 1949.⁴¹ The pope added: “We very much desire that the many Catholic institutions which have been erected in Palestine to help the poor, to educate youth and give hospitality to visitors, may be enabled, as is fitting, to carry on unimpeded the work they did so laudably in the past. Nor can we omit to point out that all rights to the Holy places, which Catholics during many centuries have acquired and time again defended valiantly, and which our predecessors

39 Stevens, Richard P., *The Vatican, the Catholic Church and Jerusalem*, in: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Spring, 1981), pp. 110-100.

40 Pius XII, *In Multiplicibus Curis*: Encyclical of Pope Pius XII on prayers for peace in Palestine. Castel Gandolfo, 24. October 1948.

41 Pius XII, *Redemptoris Nostri Cruciatu*s: Encyclical of Pope Pius XII on the Holy Place in Palestine, Rome, 15. April 1949.

have solemnly and effectively vindicated, should be preserved inviolate.”⁴² The encyclical concluded by asking the faithful “to be even more concerned about the conditions in Palestine,” and to have them “make their lawful requests known, positively and unequivocally, to the rulers of nations.”⁴³

“On December 9, 1949, the United Nations General Assembly again adopted a resolution calling for the internationalization of Jerusalem. The resolution was supported by all Catholic states, and the Soviet bloc, which welcomed the Vatican initiative for its own reason. The resolution was stoutly opposed by Israel, Jordan, Britain, the United States and the Scandinavian countries. By a vote of 38 to 14 the General Assembly voted for Jerusalem to be placed under a permanent international regime as a ‘corpus separatum’ to be administered by the United Nations for ten years. With Vatican assistance, a constitution was prepared for the city and a commissioner was appointed to implement it; the commissioner, however, never reached Jerusalem...A final effort to confirm the original partition plan of 1947, which provided for the internationalization of Jerusalem, was advanced by Belgium in 1950 and the Philippines in 1952. Both states were largely Catholic in population and enjoyed Vatican support. However, the United States and Britain vigorously opposed the resolutions, and thereafter the principle of Jerusalem’s international status was not placed at the United Nations agenda.”⁴⁴

After 1967 and following the occupation of East Jerusalem by Israel, it seems that the Vatican had dropped his original idea of the internationalization of Jerusalem. Pope Paul VI requested that “the people of Jerusalem – Christians, Muslims and Jews – be given a unique political status enshrining the principles of justice and the unique character of Jerusalem. This was obviously not a call for a supra-national body to be installed in Jerusalem but for a constitution, a legal framework, which would ensure freedom, justice, equality and the sacred character of the city. The Pope spoke of the inalienable rights of all persons in the city and condemned economic, religious and political pressures leading to the alarming exodus of Christian Jerusalemites.”⁴⁵

Yet after Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords, and in line with the political

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Stevens, p. 107.

45 Ibid, p. 109.

changes in the region, the Holy See took a new course on Jerusalem.

The Vatican signed the Fundamental Agreement with the State of Israel on 30 December 1993⁴⁶. It may be intriguing that the Fundamental Agreement did not have any article specifically on Jerusalem, yet this is indicative of the Holy See's recognition that East Jerusalem together with its Holy Places is an integral and irrefutable entity of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Thus, the continuing commitment to maintain and respect the "Status quo" in the Christian Holy Places was affirmed in this Agreement, as well as the protection of the Catholic Church's respective rights and sacred places, such as churches, monasteries, convents, cemeteries and their like. "The State of Israel affirms its continuing commitment to main and respect the 'Status quo' in the Christian Holy Places to which it applies and the respective rights of the Christian communities thereunder. The Holy See affirms the Catholic Church's continuing commitment to respect the aforementioned 'Status quo' and the said rights."⁴⁷

In accordance with this step, the Holy See developed – on 26 October 1994 – Official Relations with the PLO (the Palestine Liberation Organization) and established the Bilateral Permanent Working Commission for Palestine. This put into effect the Basic Agreement between the Holy See and the PLO. This Agreement was the premise upon which the PLO-Vatican Agreement took place on 15 February 2000⁴⁸, prior to the visit of Pope John Paul II to the Holy Land.

The status of Jerusalem was noted in the Basic Agreement's preamble (which is not a part of the constitution and therefore not enforceable). It reads: "Declaring that an equitable solution for the issue of Jerusalem, based on international resolutions, is fundamental for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and that unilateral decisions and actions altering the specific character and status of Jerusalem are morally and legally unacceptable."⁴⁹

The Agreement called for "a special statute for Jerusalem, internationally guaranteed, which should safeguard the following:

46 *Conventio Inter Apostolicam Seden Atque Israelis Statum: Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel, Jerusalem, 13. December 1993.*

47 Ibid.

48 Basic Agreement: Holy See – Palestine Liberation Organization, Vatican 15. February 2000.

49 Ibid.

1. Freedom of religion and conscience for all.
2. The equality before the law of the three monotheistic religions and their institutions and followers in the City.
3. The proper identity and sacred character of the City and its universally significant, religious and cultural heritage.
4. The Holy Places, the freedom of access to them and of worship in them.
5. The Regime of «Status Quo» in those Holy Places where it applies.”⁵⁰

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the Vatican’s position in this Agreement that is in favor of the internalization of Jerusalem. Abraham H. Foxman of the ADL (Anti-Defamation League) considered the Agreement as an intrusion that would deter bilateral negotiations between Palestinians and Israel. The Holy See held a second round of negotiations with Israel in the past years, and the talks (on the Last Supper site) apparently included topics related to Jerusalem and reached toward almost announcing a “historic” deal between the Holy See and Israel. Yet no articles for such a deal or agreement were officially declared.

**c) Jerusalem in the Statements
of the Holy Land Heads of Churches:**

The heads of the 13 officially-recognized Churches in Palestine, as of 1988, have been issuing public statements to the situation in Palestine & Israel⁵¹. The churches in Jerusalem could not remain untouched by the situation existing in the occupied territories after the outbreak of the first intifada. Although, based on their history, these churches had had little contacts with each other, they were more or less forced during the first Intifada to approach each other ad to jointly speak for Justice and Peace. The most important statements were signed by the Heads of the Christian Communities in Jerusalem. Signatures were from the following church representatives: The three Patriarchs of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Armenian Orthodox churches, respectively; the Custos of te Holy Land; the bishops of Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox; Ethiopian, Ethiopian Orthodox,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Raheb, Mitri, I am a Palestinian Christian, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995.

Greek Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran Churches.

The first Joint Statement of the Heads of Christian Communities in Jerusalem was issued in Jerusalem on 22 January 1988⁵² , followed by the second on 23 February 1988⁵³ . The Heads of Churches addressed this Statement by declaring that this is the voice of the Mother Church of Jerusalem.

We would see a visibly-clear difference in the tone of this Statement when compared with the third Statement that was issued by the Heads of Christian Communities in Jerusalem in June 1989⁵⁴ . The third Statement speaks of the deprivation “in Jerusalem and the whole of our country.” Reading this, we find that Jerusalem is no longer a mere reference point of religious identity, but it gained a geographic resonance. This transformation came in accordance with the Palestinian Declaration of Independence proclaimed by the PLO in Algeria on 15 November 1988.

The fourth statement, issued on 23 April 1990⁵⁵ , came in the aftermath of the AteretCohanim settler group’s forceful occupation of St. John Hospice’s property in East Jerusalem (on 11 April 1990). The Statement pointed out that this act of armed settlement “jeopardizes the integrity and the cultural and religious autonomy of the Christian, Armenian and Muslim Quarters, in violation of the centuries-old status and character of these quarters of the Holy City, honored by all previous rulers of Jerusalem,” and stressed that this action “further endangers the survival of all Christian communities in the Holy City.”⁵⁶ The Statement also demanded that the Israeli authorities effect the immediate removal of these settlers and secure the property for its legitimate owners, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. Furthermore, the Heads of Churches unanimously decided to close the doors of the Christian Holy Places on 27 April 1990.

The successive events thus urged the Heads of Churches to draw attention to issues related to Jerusalem. Their fifth Statement (of October 1990)⁵⁷ condemned the horrendous Jerusalem killings of the Haram Al-Sharif Massacre on 8 October

52 Ibid. 124-123.

53 Ibid, p 124.

54 Ibid, p. 125.

55 Ibid, p. 126.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid, p. 127.

1990. The sixth Statement, issued on 20 December 1990⁵⁸, warned of upcoming challenges, and opposed to the repressive actions and deliberate policies of changing the status and demography of Jerusalem. It also opposed to the unlawful violations and continuous practices that aim to cut historic Christian community ties, force taxes, and seize away Church properties therein.

The seventh Statement of 23 March 1991⁵⁹ warned of the dangerous threat emanating from the attempt to change the native and pluralistic character of the City of Jerusalem.

In the eighth Statement on May 30, 1991⁶⁰, the Heads of Churches denounced the media's attack on the Franciscan Order, and condemned the dissemination of biased news reports and anti-Christian slogans that were written on the walls of one of the monasteries.

The first ten statements were thus in response to the day-to-day events in the Holy Land in general and in Jerusalem in particular.

Meanwhile, the First Memorandum of the Heads of the Christian Communities with a focus on Jerusalem was issued on 14 November 1994⁶¹, six months after the signing of the Gaza-Jericho Agreement of 4 May 1994. The Memorandum had 15 points that I will try to summarize (using the original sources) as follows:

- 1) Jerusalem is a Holy City for the people of the three monotheistic religions, and its unique nature of sanctity endows it with a special vocation that is meant to call for reconciliation and harmony, and not for conflict and disharmony.
- 2) The Arab-Israeli peace process is on its way toward reaching a resolution of the conflict, and yet Jerusalem has been side-stepped in the process, and therefore it is crucial to reflect on the core issues for resolving the conflict.
- 3) The positions of both [Israeli and Palestinian] sides are divergent and conflicting.
- 4) History teaches us that Jerusalem "cannot belong exclusively to one people or to one religion. Jerusalem should be open to all, shared by all. Those who govern the city should make it 'the capital of humankind'."⁶² Hence Jerusalem has a universal and inclusive vocation.
- 5) The Memorandum considered the vision of Jerusalem in both the Old and New

58 Ibid, p. 128.

59 Ibid, p. 130-129.

60 Ibid, 131.

61 Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, Memorandum on Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 14. November 1994.

62 Ibid.

Testaments, and acknowledged its foundation for all liturgical traditions and pilgrimages.

6) Jerusalem has been home for Christians over the course of 2000 years, and the local church with its faithful has always been actively present in the City. This continuing presence of a living Christian community is thus inseparable from the historical sites. It is through the “living stone” that the holy archaeological sites take on “life.”

7) Jerusalem has two dimensions: On the one hand, it is a holy city due to its link with the history of salvation. On the other hand, it is a holy city due to its local community of Christians as well as its local Muslim and Jewish communities who were born in and live in the native city.

8) The Memorandum henceforth presents the legitimate demands of Christians in Jerusalem in this respect:

- The right for full freedom of access to the holy places, freedom of worship, as well as rights of property ownership, custody, and worship which churches have acquired through “firmans” and protected in the “status quo.”
- The right to come to Jerusalem to carry out pilgrimage.
- The human right of freedom of worship and of conscience; both as individuals and as communities.
- Civil and historical rights which allow them to carry out religious, educational, medical, and other duties of charity.
- The right to have their own institutions, such as hospices, institutes, and study centers.

The Memorandum highlights that these rights are not to be granted for Christians simply because they are Christian but rather because they are nationals who should have their basic social, cultural, political, and national rights and be on equal footing with the other monotheistic religions in the City.

9) The Memorandum notes that it is necessary to accord Jerusalem “a special judicial and political statute which reflects the universal importance and significance of the City.”⁶³

The Memorandum therein demands:

63 Ibid.

- For the association of the “representatives from the three monotheistic religions, in addition to local political powers, ought to be associated in the elaboration and application of such a special statute”⁶⁴ for Jerusalem.
- For the international community to find ways to be engaged in and guarantee the stability and permanence of this statute.

During the Camp David Summit, the Greek Orthodox, Latin, and Armenian Orthodox Patriarchs sent a letter on 17 July 2000 addressing President Bill Clinton, Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and President Yasser Arafat.⁶⁵ The letter practically summarized what was in the Memorandum of 1994, with the following additions: The Patriarchs appealed “to ensure that the Christian communities within the walls of the Old City are not separated from each other” (which was in answer to the suggestion for the Armenian Quarter to be joined to the Jewish Quarter). The letter noted that: “We regard the Christian and Armenian Quarters of the Old City as inseparable and contiguous entities that are firmly united by the same faith.”⁶⁶ The letter also suggested to have representatives from the three Patriarchates and the Custody of the Holy Land at the Camp David summit meeting where the future of Jerusalem was to be discussed, so as to safeguard their presence and maintain the rights of the collective churches.

The last Statement on Jerusalem, which was issued by the Patriarchs and Heads of the local Christian Churches on 29 September 2006⁶⁷, had a different context. At that point, the deterioration of the peace process and the forceful policies had simultaneously changed the discourse of the Church Leaders.

As such, the beginning of their Statement that year was about the unilateral political reality and the policy to Judaize the City and exclude the people from the precincts of the holy city. The Statement noted how Jerusalem, surrounded by walls, is no longer the heart of life “as she should be.”⁶⁸

64 Ibid.

65 Diodoros I., Michel Sabbah, & Torkom I. Letter to Bill Clinton, Ehud Barak & Yasser Arafat, Jerusalem, 17. July 2000.

66 Ibid.

67 Patriarchs and Heads of the Local Christian Churches in Jerusalem, Status of Jerusalem, Jerusalem 29. September 2006.

68 Ibid.

The Patriarchs and Heads of local Christian Churches in Jerusalem called for a concerted effort to search for a common vision on the status of the holy city of Jerusalem; a city in which God's design is for two peoples and three religions to live in together. They affirmed that in Jerusalem, holy places and human communities are inseparable, and that its future must therefore be decided by common agreement; it must be shared according to a principle of equality by both Israelis and Palestinians or divided "if this be the desire of the two peoples who live there."⁶⁹

The Statement ended with the recommendation to create an ad hoc committee to reflect on the future of the city, and wherein the local Churches of Jerusalem must be a part.

Although there have been no relevant statements issued about Jerusalem between 2006-2016, the subject of the Holy City regained prominence in September 2017. This statement⁷⁰ has come within the context of the supposed Jaffa Gate Deal, and in light of the legislation on the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee's agenda. The agenda relates to a previously proposed bill through which the State of Israel would be authorized to confiscate Church properties that are on a leasehold basis. The statement fiercely opposed the tax legislation and confiscation of properties bill, and it underscored that such acts are in flagrant violation of the existing Status Quo of the religious, governmental, and civil entities.

The statement stressed that such bills and legislations cause irreparable harm not only to one church but rather to all churches. They trample on "the delicate fabric of relations between the Christian community and the authorities for decades."⁷¹ Upon hearing the reports about "the possibility of changing how the United States understands and deals with the status of Jerusalem," the heads of Churches wrote an open letter to US President Donald Trump on 6 December 2017⁷². In this letter, the Christian leaders expressed their concern about how such steps regarding the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Patriarchs and heads of Local Churches in Jerusalem, Joint Statement from the patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem: "Learn to do good; seek Justice, rescue the oppressed..." Isaiah 1.17, Jerusalem, September 2017.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Patriarchs and heads of Local Churches in Jerusalem, Letter to President Trump, Jerusalem, 6. December 2017.

status of Jerusalem would ultimately yield increased hatred, conflict, violence, and suffering. The heads of churches appealed to Trump to continue recognizing the present international status of Jerusalem. They also expressed their hope that Israelis and Palestinians can work toward negotiating a sustainable and just peace, benefiting “all who long for the Holy City of Jerusalem to fulfill its destiny.”

Meanwhile, the latest statement was issued on 25 February 2018⁷³. It was signed by the heads of Churches that are in charge of the Holy Sepulchre and the Status Quo; namely the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem Nourhan Manougian, and the Franciscan Custos of the Holy Land Francesco Patton. This statement conveyed the systematic and offensive campaign that has reached an unprecedented level, “as the Jerusalem municipality issued scandalous collection notices and orders of seizure of Church assets, properties, and bank accounts for alleged debts of punitive municipal taxes.”⁷⁴

The statement further demonstrated that such a step is “contrary to the historic position of the Churches within the Holy City of Jerusalem and their relationship with the civil authorities.” It also expressed that these actions “breach existing agreements and international obligations which guarantee the rights and the privileges of the Christian presence in Jerusalem.” The greatest victims in this, the signatories emphasized, “are those impoverished families who will go without food and housing, as well as the children who will be unable to attend school.”⁷⁵

The sharp rhetoric observed in this Statement possibly makes this the first time that church leaders condemn such acts to the point of describing them as racist and discriminatory against the churches. The statement analogized to Nazism in pointing out that such an abhorrent bill “reminds us all of laws of a similar nature which were enacted against the Jews during dark periods in Europe.” Finally, it noted that “this systematic and unprecedented attack against Christians in the Holy Land severely violates the most basic, ab antiquo, and sovereign rights.”⁷⁶ As a measure of protest, the signatories recalled to their previous statement and decided to take the unprecedented step of closing the Church of the Holy

73 Theophilos III, Francesco Patton & Nourhan Manougian, Statement on Municipal threats and the discriminatory “Church Lands Bill”, Jerusalem 25. February 2018.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

Sepulchre for the period of three days.

It is clear that the last three statements come within a context unlike any that preceded them. Ultimately, they are in direct response to tax charges of churches, and in anticipation of the US transfer of its embassy to Jerusalem and its formal recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. One must also acknowledge the other local relevance of these statements, seeing that their timing could potentially salvage the Orthodox Patriarch from accusations of squandering and selling properties in Jerusalem. This last statement in particular has benefited the Patriarch's image, politically speaking, and reduced the recent discord within the Orthodox Church.

As presented, we may outline the position of the Churches and church bodies on Jerusalem as follows:

1) There are two types of Church statements on Jerusalem:

The first type declares the position of the Churches vis-à-vis Jerusalem in terms of its rights and its future character as a holy city. Such statements were often issued in conjunction with political movements on the regional and international fronts.

It was in this respect that one of the first statements on Jerusalem was issued in 1949. Pope Pius XXI wrote the encyclical, *Redemptoris Nostri Cruciatu*s, on 15 April 1949 only a few days after the Armistice Agreement took place between Israel and Jordan of 3 April 1949, and which was preceded by the agreement with Lebanon on 23 March 1949, and with Egypt on 24 February 1949.

The same applies on the letter of the World Council of Churches that dates to 13 June 1949.

The reflections soured after the signing of the Armistice Agreement, which turned out to be only a prelude to the peace talks that the United Nations and super powers would lead. It is well-known, however, that Israel at the time boycotted all the meetings which followed the agreement, and that the three major powers, namely the United States, the UK, and France, signed a trilateral agreement to preserve the current political situation.

The second type of statements the Churches made were in response to negative incidents that directly threatened the status of Jerusalem. Such examples include the WCC statements against the Israeli unilateral action of annexing East Jerusalem

(1980), against the occupation of St. John's Hospice (1990). Other examples include the statement denouncing the writing of anti-Christian slogans (1991), as well as those opposing the Israeli unilateral policies that discriminate against both the Muslim and Christian Arabs.

2) It is striking that no statements were issued by the Churches between the years 1949 and 1967, which was the Jordanian period.

3) In general, the demonstrated requirements of the Churches vis-à-vis Jerusalem can be summed up as follows:

a) To accord Jerusalem a special status (undefined), with an international guarantee.
 b) To maintain and respect the current "status quo," which is an integral component for the Christian communities. It is in this agreement that the Churches regulate the relationship with the authorities and safeguard the rights of the different churches at one spot (the Holy Sepulcher). It is also through the status quo that the churches maintain holy places in Jerusalem, and this is a point not to be underestimated. Any change to this can prompt serious financial repercussions and substantial loss.

c) To guarantee full freedom of access to the holy places, and to ensure the right of worship and pilgrimage.

On this point, the Holy See further demanded the human right of conscience, which is a point that has great significance for churches throughout the globe and for whom the human right of conscience between individuals and church communities is crucial. It is worth noting that this also has financial implications, since access to worship and religious pilgrimages are an essential resource for the Churches in the holy land.

d) The right to preserve the continuing presence of the Christian community in Jerusalem. The Churches are well-aware of the demographic challenges that necessitate for the Christian population to maintain itself in the future – so that the holy land Churches do not turn into stones with no living people.

4) The Churches' efforts were not so much directed at adopting political resolutions in the city so much so that they aimed to determine Jerusalem as a holy place for the three monotheistic religions. It was after the declaration of independence in 1988 that they added that Jerusalem is a city designed for two people.

It was only in 2006 when the Churches discussed political terms and expressed their preference for a shared Jerusalem that would be in accordance with a principle of equality by both Israelis and Palestinians. While this was their favored

preference, they also added that the City could be divided “if this be the desire of the two peoples who live there.”

5) When reviewing the statements and positions of the Churches regarding Jerusalem from 1949-2006, we would clearly see that the Churches’ position has been and continues to be relevant. It is up-to-date with what is going on in the ground, and in line with the international, regional, and local fronts. Ultimately, the ecclesiastic position cannot be separated from the day-to-day political reality.

Conclusion

Today, Jerusalem is undergoing a systematic campaign of Judaization that is led by the Israeli right-wing government, backed up by the Zionist lobby, and joined by American complicity and the involvement of Christian Zionists. Meanwhile, a new type of Islamic-Zionism is emerging, led by some Sunni clerics from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region outlining a Sunni-Israeli Axis over and against a Shiite-Iran threat.

It would be erroneous to assume that the conflict in Jerusalem is merely of a political or demographic nature. Besides its military occupation, Israel has been utilizing the academy to depict Jerusalem either as the City of David, or as the long-awaited Third Temple, or Mount Zion. Zionism has been active in monopolizing an exclusive religious narrative with regards to Jerusalem, while intentionally dismissing its significance for Christians and Muslims alike. This article showcases the centrality that Jerusalem has in Christianity; as a holy City that represents the salvation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. In Christian tradition, the Holy City of Jerusalem is the Mother of all Churches. For Christian Palestinians, Jerusalem is their home where their roots are. Their steadfastness thus makes them a community of living stones, and not dead wood. Christians in Jerusalem continue to hold on to their hope that this Holy City should be a city for two peoples and three religions who can live in peace in this their city they call holy.