

Past, present and future developments of Arab Christianity in the Holy Land
 By M. Avrum Ehrlich
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The identities of three religious civilisations are at play in the following discussion: they meet over complex issues of land and holiness, national identity, religion, loyalty and traditions all within the cradle of their youth. They effect the future of Christian – Jewish relations, Arab - Israeli relations and touch upon the essence of Christian thought and Jewish statehood.

Arab Christians are predominately unkindly disposed to the State of Israel. Many presently identify entirely with the Palestinian national movement and even though some have Israeli citizenship many continue to view Israel as a stranger unwelcome in the region. Historically Arab Christians led the struggle against Zionism and the judaisation of the Holy Land. They planted the first seeds of a uniquely Palestinian Arab state in distinction from the aspirations of pan-Arabism. They articulated the most virile opposition to Jewish immigration and were the first to established forums and societies to battle Zionism. Is this a product of the general anti – Israeli sentiment of Arabs? Is it because of an intense sense of Arab Christian loyalty to the Palestinian cause? It is because the State of Israel mistreated Christians under its sovereignty? Are their differences between Israeli Christian Arabs and those in the territories captured in 1967? Is this anti-Israel sentiment merely an extension of classic Christian anti-Semitism or is it a strain of replacement theology refusing to acknowledge the existence of Jews as a legitimate religious community? What other theological factors could be at work? Are there Arab Christians who are positively disposed to Israel? Can the ecumenical trend and sympathy towards Israel and Judaism amongst most Western Christian denominations affect the attitudes of Arab Christianity towards Israel? What is the future of Arab Christianity and its position towards Israel?

The following is a discussion of various historical, theological and political episodes that illuminate the development of Christian Arab attitudes to the Modern State of Israel. These range from events in the distant past from the Islamisation of Middle Eastern Christianity to modern Jewish immigration to Palestine that threatened the modest Christian economy. The influence which an array of national churches in 19th and 20th century Palestine and the effects that European nationalism had on Arab Christianity are also discussed along with events within local Palestinian politics. Theological issues must also be surveyed to ascertain whether they have positively or negatively effected the attitudes of Christian believers towards the Jewish State.

I discuss the transforming identity of a unique group of people as they are influenced by trends and attitudes of a radically transforming society along with the often-changing sovereignty over the Holy Land. I also discuss the potential for continuing developments within these communities in the wake of economic improvements, tourism, positive impressions of Israeli society, international Christian influence and the impending disappointment and isolation of Christians within the Palestinian autonomy.

Denominations, Populations and Figures¹

Some tables presenting the population figures and denominational groupings of Christian communities in Israel are in order.

RELIGIONS IN ISRAEL

	Christians	Muslims	Jews	Druze, others
Israel	90,000	615,000	3,611,000	75,000
East Jerusalem	12,000	115,700	Included in the 3,611,000	Included in the 3,611,000
West Bank	25,000	700,000	70,000	
Gaza	3,000	650,000	13,000	

CATHOLICS IN ISRAEL

	Israel	Jerusalem	West Bank/Gaza	Total
Greek Catholics	29,000	400	2,200	31,600
Latins	16,000	4,800	9,200	30,000
Maronites	3,800	50	50	3,900
Armenian Catholics	200	200	-	400
Syrian Catholics	30	70	150	250
Coptic Catholics	20	40	-	60
Chaldeans	20	-	-	20
TOTAL	49,070	5,560	11,600	66,230

ORTHODOX IN ISRAEL

	Israel	Jerusalem	West Bank/Gaza	Total
Greek Orthodox	33,000	3,400	16,500	52,900
Syrian Orthodox	50	200	1,700	1,950
Armenian Orthodox	300	1,200	100	1,600
Coptic Orthodox	500	200	200	900
Ethiopians	100	100	-	200
TOTAL	33,950	5,100	18,500	57,550

PROTESTANTS IN ISRAEL

	Israel	Jerusalem	West Bank/Gaza	Total
Anglican	500	250	1,150	1,900
Lutheran	150	450	1,150	1,750
Others	400	300	150	850
Total	1,050	1,000	2,450	4,500

Grand Total	84,070	11,660	32,550	128,280
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There are clearly many varied Christian communities in Israel and there are equally disparate views on the reasons for tensions between the Israeli State and Arab Christianity. They may roughly be divided into a Jewish view, an Israeli view and two varying Arab Christian views.

A Jewish Perspective on Arab Christianity

From a typically Jewish perspective, it seems peculiar that Bible believing Christians should not welcome the return of the ancient Jewish people back to the Biblical homeland viewing this as the long awaited realisation of Biblical promises and prophecy. They would argue that the Jewish Jesus loved his land and made pilgrimages to Jerusalem and observed Jewish religious traditions. The Old Testament's association of the Jewish people with the Land of Israel is unequivocal, and the New Testament abounds with references to the importance of the Land of Israel, symbolism to the land and to Jerusalem and to the traditions and laws peculiar only within the Land of Israel. It affords the Jewish people a unique role to be played in the redemptive process. And consequently the modern Jew might find it disingenuous for Christians to take an anti – Israeli stance – and insulting to do so in the name of Jesus and the Biblical writings. In the wake of the Western Church's apologies for the long history of Christian anti-Semitism and in lieu of ecumenical reconciliation, optimistic Jews expected that this should manifest in positive Christian attitudes and support for the Jewish homeland. A Christian who opposed Israel on grounds of his religion or under the guise of anti-Zionism was “unconsciously reverting to an old, inner sense that the Jews are dispensable now that Christ has come...a modern version of classic Christian anti-Semitism”².

Some Jews suspect that Church opposition to Israel emerges from a theological difficulty and frustration of witnessing the Jewish people reborn. This view is intolerable to Jews and much of the post WW2 ecumenical efforts were dedicated to restoring the legitimacy of Jewish peoplehood. Arab Christianity is viewed no differently from Western Christianity in this respect. Either it was sympathetic to Israel's success, or it was anti-Semitic. Arab Christianity, to this way of thinking, ideally ought to be bound by a Bible based theology that cannot but recognise the Jewish presence in the Land of Israel and at least be tolerant of the emergent Jewish homeland. For Christians to identify with Arab nationalism, Palestinian politics and to bind themselves in a pact with their former oppressors - Islamic radicals - against the Jewish people was to repay the historical and theological debt that Christianity owed to Judaism with hatred.

From a Jewish perspective all minorities and their religious faiths ought to be respected. The Gentile living in Israel should, according to religious scriptures, be treated with equal rights and privileges, a point the Bible goes to great efforts and repetition to emphasise “do justice to the sojourner in your gates for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”. This Biblical statement and others like it are a strong theological provision for the rights and equalities of minorities within the Jewish homeland. This will be discussed further at the conclusion of the paper.

An Israeli Perspective on Arab Christianity

On a more political level, the Israelis were startled at the stark enmity demonstrated by the Arab Christian population in the early 1900s and their fierce initiatives in leading an Arab movement to establish a Palestinian homeland. The Israeli government saw itself as a bastion of liberal tolerance and acceptance of minorities and maintained that the Christian and Muslim minorities with respect and equality as guaranteed in the Israeli declaration of independence and by its highly active judicial system and humanitarian groups:

“The State of Israel...will be based on the principles of liberty, justice and peace as conceived by the Prophets of Israel; will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction or religion, conscience, education and culture; will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and will loyally uphold the principles of the United Nations Charter.”³

This view is depicted by Saul Colbi who headed the Christian desk at the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs and wrote various authoritative works on the History of Christianity in the Holy Land⁴. He described Israeli efforts to ensure the integrity of the Christian communities by ensuring the status quo and the continuing practice of the millet system of administration via the already existing community frameworks established in Ottoman and British Mandatory days⁵. Israel wanted to show the world that it was better than the Ottoman, British and Jordanian rule and more tolerant of other faiths⁶. Israel also wanted to work through the churches to gain international support for its claims to Jerusalem. It certainly wished to prevent a Christian-Islamic alliance against Israel and therefore – on a purely political level - had every interest in maintaining only the best relations with the Christian denominations.

The government of Israel unfortunately ignored the feelings of the Arab Christian laity making few attempts to develop a dialogue with them preferring to negotiate with the church hierarchy. Perhaps the nature of an organised governmental structure assumes that the other side is equally represented. Perhaps the government thought it could ignore the will of the laity or more expediently gain favour with the leadership elite. Only later the government discovered that the hierarchy of these churches did not represent their constituency and could not bring them into line with its policies, rebellion ensued.

But interference in the internal affairs of the churches, be they secular or spiritual was not a consideration. The task of the minister of religions was to ‘aid, protect and counsel the Churches, to safeguard their historical rights and to work for harmony and mutual understanding within and between all Christian creeds in the State’. The state passed laws protecting the Holy Sites of all religions, putting heavy penalties against those that obstructed entry to them or insulted other faiths⁷. The State helped pay for the repair of dilapidated religious sites. Israel ensured the easy passage of Christian laity and clergy from Jordan into Israel for religious pilgrimages. The state of Israel recognised a plurality of religions in the state as evidenced from the name of the ministry – of “religions” –

including Islam, Christianity and Judaism. According to Colbi, Christian Arab citizens of Israel quickly assimilated into Israeli society, into the labour unions and work force. Hebrew was quickly learnt, clerics from different sects or countries often found Hebrew to be their only common language. The Israeli national radio broadcast religious services and music on Christian holidays and Sunday afternoons. Christian scholars attended the Hebrew University and friendly scholarly collaboration abounded. All the presidents of the State of Israel procedurally met with the heads of the Christian denominations especially on festival eves.

After the capture of eastern Jerusalem and the territories in 1967 Israel gained control over all the Holy Sites of Christianity, had doubled its Christian population, was now home to the heads of the Christian Churches. Colbi insists that Israel acted impeccably and describes how “Heads of the local churches acknowledged that Israel acted with the most reverent and solicitous concern for the safety and accessibility of the Holy Places”⁸. Immediately after the cease-fire the Israeli authorities began to restore life in eastern Jerusalem, applying Israeli law and services and standards throughout the city. Israel paid compensation to 15 churches for the damage sustained to them during the fighting. Many of the Christian sites were renovated or rebuilt, the Christian quarter of the old city was paved, the Via Delerosa was entirely repaired and stations built, archeological finds of old churches were turned over as church property.

In the territories infrastructure was set down, four universities were set up including Bir Zeit established by Presbyterian organisations and the University of Bethlehem sponsored by the Vatican (both of which subsequently evidenced strong support for the PLO). The treatment of Christians under Israeli sovereignty was notably superior to Jordanian rule, where universities were outlawed and restrictions on education and religious freedom were harsh⁹.

Colbi believed that many Israeli Christians were on their way to fully integrating into Israeli society. He certainly was aware of the difficulties that Christian leadership had with accepting Israel and the pressures from the more nationalistic camps mixed with real theological problems with the idea of a Jewish state. He believed that if the Jewish State provided them with a superior life style and equality, Arab Christians would accept it at least as they had accepted the Ottomans and the Mandate. Colbi concludes his research by 1983, either he clearly did not anticipate the Intifada uprising at the end of the 1980s and the role that Christians played in supporting it or the attitudes of Christians radically transformed within such a short space of time. Nevertheless, he clearly underestimated the intense need that Christian Arabs had for a national identity and did not appreciate how little Israel provided such an identity to its minority citizens. Indeed Israeli governments felt obliged only to provide equality and security for its minorities but not to treat them as an integral part of the Jewish State ensuring an ideological infrastructure integrateable with the exclusive Jewish nature of the State. It seems that the downfall of this policy lay in a general Israeli unwillingness to wholly relate to these minorities, and incorporate their aspirations into the national psychology providing an Israeli version of a Christian or Islamic consciousness beyond a mere formal recognition of their respective rights to possess one.

Degrees of Arab Christian Tolerance towards the State of Israel

It is difficult to trace the emergence of Christian nationalism and more so as it concerns its aspirations over the Holy Land. Sworn to universalism, the importance of a national identity manifest in a specific geographic area seems incongruous with Christian doctrine yet Christianity did certainly evolve within national identities. National sentiment towards the Holy Land seems even more incongruous, considering the early doctrinal rejection of the Jewish claim to the Holy Land, yet the crusaders led by the Knights Templar were unreservedly zealous in their feelings of possession and identity with the Holy Land maintaining such nationalistic fervour for centuries. Whether these feelings have trickled through to various Christian denominations and groups is entirely likely but difficult to trace. While this is not the intention of this paper, nevertheless in the following descriptions we might identify remnants of earlier thinking in present day ideologies.

There is division between various religious and class groups of Christians; those seeking to live peacefully on the land and others that supported revolutionary thinking. The former accepted the sovereignty of forces conquering the land while trying to live alongside them preserving their faith and traditions, their family life along with a connectedness to the holy sites. This camp did not call for revolution or national fervour, it did not identify with Islamic Arabism or with Palestinian nationalism. It aspired to preserve the status quo and suffered blows to the integrity of its family and social structures the of Palestinian national fervour. These were people that lived within Israeli borders and are referred to by Colbi as 'slowly integrating into Israeli life', much as they had earlier integrated into Arab Islamic life under the Ottomans.

Indeed a sizeable portion of the Arab population of Israel, both Christian and Muslim accepted Israeli sovereignty and worked to build their lives under the new regime. The Israeli government called upon Arabs to take part in the building of the land on the 'footing of full and equal nationality'. But many nevertheless believed they were second class citizens living under military rule. El-Assal points out that the compulsory conscripted Israeli army was a melting pot for Israeli citizens and while Christian Arabs were not required to join they could volunteer to its ranks, most however felt they did not belong and refused to join. El-Assal notes that now more than ever, Christians are enlisting due to economic duress, this might have implications for the future of Israeli Christian relations towards the State, as they gradually feel integral to its security and respected as Israeli brothers-in-arms¹⁰.

Theology and ideology did not play a role in this resolve but rather a pragmatism and acceptance of new political realities. The older more established churches which saw regimes come and go in the Holy Land tried to cooperate with the Israeli authorities most notable was the Greek Orthodox Church. They did so until internal pressures made it impossible. After 1967 when the churches and Christian populations were unified, the Israeli Christian population became more politicised as the Palestinian national movement spread from the territories into Israel proper. The results of this fission and

whether Israel can provide a suitable alternative to Palestinian nationalism is yet to be fully played out. Despite some indications of its possibility, a strong Arab Christian theology that welcomes Israel out of its own religious convictions never gained momentum. The evangelical pro-Israel sentiments of the American Southern Baptist communities for example, were never reflected in Middle Eastern Christendom.

There are indications that Palestinian Christians now experiencing the Islamic nature of the Palestinian autonomy are becoming doubtful of the merits of their Arab nationalist efforts. Many Christian leaders are scared to criticise the Palestinian authority for fear of reprisal on their body or on the churches they represent. It is entirely likely that a backlash of sympathy for Israel is possible but it is hardly likely to be openly expressed under Palestinian rule and if as unlikely for it to develop as a pro-Israel theology¹¹.

There were certainly Arab Christians that eagerly accepted Israeli citizenship becoming Israeli Christians who were not unhappy with the emergence of the Jewish State. They never supported the Palestinian national movement and were always dissatisfied with the islamisation of Arab life. They sought peaceful coexistence and a standard of living and welcomed any sovereign that provided this. Their motivation was not theological, it did not emerge from a love of Zion or the Jews but was anchored in pragmatism. Unfortunately, as life became more difficult and maintaining a Christian identity more challenging, this population was first to immigrate to places like Latin America, the U.S, Canada and Australia. Many still remain at bitter odds with Islam and are only able to express this hatred from the safe distances of their newly adopted homes abroad¹².

The Israeli government encouraged the migration of Arabs and many more Christians took up the incentives to leave than Muslims. An example in point is the work of Bishop Nichola Saba, vice chairman of the Palestinian Native Church Council in the 1950s who was said to be working on behalf of the Israeli government in convincing Anglican Arabs to leave Israel for Brazil¹³. Du Brul describes a wide Palestinian Christian Diaspora with members in Australia, Chile, California, Belgium, throughout eastern and western Europe, the former Soviet Union, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Morocco, Greece, Turkey, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the gulf states, India and Pakistan. Some are working, some are studying others have immigrated. He notes that very few Christians live in the Palestinian refugee camps¹⁴.

Clearly the rate of Israeli and Palestinian Christian migration is startling and real fears that the Christian population will be entirely depleted plague church leaders. By depleting middle class, peace seeking Christian Arabs, a vacuum was left to be filled by the more disenchanting Christian population or those already committed to the Palestinian national cause.

Palestinian Christian Nationalism and Israel

The second group of Arab Christians was influenced by a variety of causes from Pan Arabism to Western European nationalism and a sense that Holy Land Christianity was unique amongst all other Christianities and must be preserved. Even the success of

Zionism appeared to inspire like-minded nationalism amongst Christians. They were inspired to revolution as many were at that time and felt the surging excitement and almost religious satisfaction derived from belonging to a larger and potentially powerful national identity. The existence of the State of Israel provided sufficient ideological ammunition to inspire a broad alliance against it, each with their respective grievances and accusations of judaizing, colonialism, occupation and oppression. These feelings heightened after Israel captured the territories in 1967 and the Palestinian national feelings spread to the Christian population within Israel.

Many of the existing churches had originally cooperated with Israel since the State's emergence, as they had with other sovereign forces in the Holy Land. The leadership hierarchy was predominantly non-Arab and did not share the national feelings of their laity. Over a period starting from the early 1920s until the present there were growing pressures on the church hierarchies to incorporate Arabs into their decision making mechanisms. This was an initiative on the part of Palestinian activists amongst the laity to pressure the church against cooperating with Israel. They argued "Why should we be good priests and vicars and not make good bishops?". In this context, El-Assal reminded the Archbishop of Canterbury that St George, the patron saint of England was from Palestine and the Arab Bishops were just as good as the others. From the beginning of the century there had been tensions between the various Orthodox Church hierarchies and the local Arab constituency over control of church property, budgets and policy. This was particularly so in the oldest and most established Greek Orthodox Church, which, while catering to an entirely Arab population, constituted a clerical leadership almost entirely of Greek and Russians. Its property had been purchased or endowed by gifts from abroad and it feared that by involving local Arabs in the hierarchy they would take control of the Church and its wealth and use it for motives foreign to the interests of the historical church.

The issues intensified when the Church cooperated with Israel against the wishes of the Arab laity particularly in the sale of property to the State, this inflamed the local population who expected the Church to identify with their national struggle. During and after the Intifada, the chasm in the Greek Orthodox Church widened. Local Arab Christians took unprecedented steps to take control by establishing an Arab Orthodox Initiative Committee that resolved that the Patriarchate had usurped Palestinian national rights. It accused the Patriarchate of treason because it sold church property which, was an integral part of the Palestinian heritage, to Israel instead of investing on behalf of the community's benefit¹⁵.

At such a conference in 1992, which echoed statements from the beginning of the century, a resolution was passed urging the reform of the Greek Orthodox hierarchy to involve the Palestinian laity in decision making. It essentially identified Arab Orthodoxy a separatist to Greek Orthodoxy and claimed that it had suffered serious grievances and injustice at the hands of the Church, which needed to be redressed by the Patriarchate. It demanded more supervision of the church property overseeing all aspects of property and its budget and participation in all aspects of its administration. It clearly saw the function of the Church as an instrument of Palestinian nationalism and in some way believed that

the Church, despite its Greek national affiliations and oath to universalism must recognise the religious nature of the Palestinian cause. It may be suspected that the accusation of treason against the Patriarchate suggested that the Palestinian cause was held as a higher religious ideal than tradition till then had it. Perhaps the expectation that the Church participate in Palestinian independence indicates the belief that this was in fact a religious battle and not a cultural or political one. Nothing less could justify calling the otherwise apolitical church to arms against its host country. But certainly the balancing act between the Greek Orthodox Church its local constituency and the Israeli Government was becoming unstable and the Church hierarchy eventually capitulated to local pressures to support the Palestinian cause and criticise Israel.

It is interesting that since the election of a new Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Diodorus in 1986, the church has undergone a transformation becoming more popular. Du Brul notes that there appears to be an increased commitment of Christian Palestinians to the development of social and political movements. There is a resurgent respect for local Palestinian clergy as they claim the loyalties of the laity that were once held by foreign clergy. In this way he indicates the closing of the gap between the church and the Palestinian laity¹⁶.

Dumper points out that other Orthodox churches did not make the same mistake as the Greek Orthodox. They remained more closely attuned to the will of their constituency and incorporated local Arabs into the church clergy and hierarchy resulting in a refusal to sell land or closely cooperate with Israel preferring to antagonise the government, something they had not done to the Ottomans, British or Jordanians beforehand. Clearly the Church policy recognised that it could not afford to be an obstacle to local nationalist sentiments but should rather work with its population. The question remains why Arab Christians were so strongly opposed to Israel even while the Church hierarchy did not find cooperation contrary to its religious conscience.

Despite Israel's strong overtures to the Latin Patriarchate and to Roman Catholicism, the Vatican never recognised Israel or even its right to exist until after the Palestinians signed the Oslo Accords in 1993. This too might be attributed to the above mentioned incorporation of Palestinians into the local clergy particularly the appointment of the Palestinian Michel Sabbah in the 1987 as the Latin Bishop of Jerusalem. It might also be the result of a delicate balance that the Church plays in maintaining ties with Christian populations in other Arab countries and particularly the deferential status it receives in Lebanon¹⁷. The Latin Church has consistently refused to sell church property to Israel and despite international Vatican efforts at ecumenicism and reconciliation with the Jews culminating in the *Nostra Aetate* papers of Vatican II, its relationship with Israel has not been particularly warm. The visit of Pope Paul VI in 1964 strengthened Palestinian Christian nationalism. He made ecumenical gestures towards the Greek Orthodox trying to create a united Christianity in the Holy Land which was resoundingly anti-Israel. Du Brul views these events and the 1974 arrest, conviction and shortened sentence of Msgr Hilarion Capucci, vicar of the Greek Catholic Patriarchate of Jerusalem for smuggling arms into Israel to be used by Palestinian terrorists quite positively¹⁸. Since the Papal visit to Israel in honour of the millenium, relations appears to be changing, but this too

seems to be strictly contingent on the continuing peace accords with the Palestinian population.

Tensions have certainly increased with a domino effect. As more Palestinians entered the clergy influencing the Church to take a more active role in the Palestinian national struggle, the newly formed Israeli right wing government of the 1980s took measures to curb what it saw as church sponsored terrorism against the Jews¹⁹. Dumper points out that tensions with Israel reached a high with the Intifada and ironically brought the long history of internal squabbles and incessant division amongst the Arab Christians in the Holy Land to an end. By the end of the 1980s, motivated by their mutual dislike for Israel, the Christian communities united under the banner “Heads of the Christian Communities of Jerusalem” issuing a series of statements criticising the Israeli government and supporting the ‘Palestinian cause of justice’²⁰.

Perhaps the more politically involved clerics with their recently forged identities as Palestinians were inspired to dominate the more conservative clerics drawing them into local political conflicts. Clearly the more radical elements represented latent feelings amongst the general populace and were able to kindle the national agenda, which had earlier been restrained by the moderate leadership. By the start of the Intifida, even the most conservative Greek Orthodox Patriarch signed his name to public criticisms against Israel. Being that the integrity of the church was being challenged from within and needing to appease the local population and considering the pressure from Islamic organisations, it became prudent to side with the local Palestinian will. This served to protect the Church from local harassment and internal schism and might be helpful in the event that the Palestinians achieve their goals and the Church finds itself again under Islamic dominion.

A generation of vocal religious leaders emerged articulating a “Christian” ideology of – or against - Israel. Naim Ateek, a Palestinian Anglican theologian, who argued the need to develop a Christian theology that explains Palestinian nationalism in religious terms, exemplifies this²¹: *“For Palestinian Christians, the State of Israel has been the occupier of their land, usurper of their human and political rights, oppressor and dehumanizer. With the State of Israel, we must articulate a theology that addresses an agenda of justice and human rights. For Palestinian Arabs in Israel, we must address the issue of equal democracy. A theology is needed that challenges the history of Zionism and calls for a rewriting of the history of the state so that it can comply with truth. It has to be a theology that insists on the rights of Palestinians to repatriation or compensation. It has to challenge the unjust laws that have been enacted by the state in order to control and subject the Palestinians. It must be a theology that exposes the arrogance and built-in discrimination of the state”*²². By this statement Ateek identifies the core issue of a Palestinian Christian theology as being one that challenges the State of Israel and in this way it finds its place in a form of classic Christian replacement theology discussed below.

The Role of Theology in Defining Arab Christianity Attitudes towards Israel

Western Christendom has a varied and developed theology of Jews, Judaism and the Holy Land and has already developed many variant theologies regarding the emergent State of Israel.

For Palestinian Christians, theology can often lead to difficult conflicts of interest with the nationalism so intertwined in their sense of identity. To avoid possible dissonance between a religion that recognises a Jewish homeland and their own national aspirations to that same territory, different forms of censorship became commonplace from re-interpretation to omission²³.

While Du Brul points to a general awareness amongst Palestinian Christianity that Judaism is the source of their religion, he also points to the ways that Palestinians deal with this tension. There is a general resistance to study of the Jewish roots of Jesus amongst Eastern Christianity but particularly amongst Palestinians. Most Christian children never learn that “Israel” was the second name of Jacob. When hearing the words “Israel” during prayer people flinch and have to remind themselves that it refers to “New Israel”. In this reluctance to teach or talk about these texts however, Du Brul points out they “implicitly recognise that the literal or hyperbolic Zionist interpretations of the Old Testament texts are accurate”²⁴. While many church officials are unhappy with this form of censorship, they are reconciled with feeling that the State of Israel unfairly uses their Biblical education as propaganda to improve its image²⁵.

Nevertheless, he describes how, because of their faith, Palestinian Christians are potentially more open to the Jews than the Muslims, they do however, without exception believe that Zionism is a perversion of the Divine promises made to the Jewish people. The main reason for this belief is the discrimination that Zionism has for non-Jews and the subservient role they are relegated to within the Jewish State. For Christians the very essence of their faith is “citizenship in Israel” by virtue of their faith, any ideology that contradicts this in the name of God and the Bible is a perversion. While it took many centuries to build up their status in Muslim society, Palestinians Christians have lost hope that this is at all possible in a Jewish society.

A distinction is made between old and new generation Palestinians, the former, having known and been friendly with early Zionists have more developed and tolerant views, the latter consider the Jews to be foreigners and intruders. These overwhelm the older generation. The radical changes in society, the population growth of newly immigrated Jews and the education of occupation received under Jordanian rule between 1948-1967 have made the younger generation intolerant. Clearly the lack of contact between the new generation of Jews and Palestinians is a reason for mutual ignorance. There is a common distinction made between Jews and Zionists. The Jew was a merchant, was witty, he prays like them and wants to live in peace. The Israeli brandishes a gun, occupies and governs. Nevertheless Du Brul describes a kind of respect that the Palestinians have for the success of the Israelis, their strength and intelligence. Some hope that God will punish them for their manipulation of the Bible but are confused to see why God has given them so much till now.

Du Brul offers various archetypal opinions of Palestinian Christians on Israel: ‘God is punishing us by bringing the Jews back’, ‘the Jew’s return is bad for us but God seems to be with them’, ‘God has his plans and our day will come’, ‘these people have no connection to the Jews of Biblical times. The prophetic vision of return already took place at the return of the first exile. The Zionists are using the texts to propagate their own secular interests’, ‘there is a plot by the Jews and Zionists for world dominion as described in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion’, ‘Israel was established in the name of international imperialism, a pawn of the West’, Israel is doomed, a passing phase’, ‘International Christian support for Israel is the support of racists and as immoral as Christian support for the Nazi regime’, ‘we are divided and weak, our situation is ironic, our experiences are unique, we are a revelation waiting to be heard, if only someone would listen’²⁶.

Du Brul asks the question, whether there is religious significance to be gleaned from their predicament and can it be an opportunity for Jews and Christians to develop a repair? Can something greater than their social, political and economic plight grow out of this? Can cooperation and a greater religious understanding and shared sense of vision and togetherness transform this situation? While his answers are mixed they have some positive tones, but because they are unlikely to be adopted by most Palestinian clerics they make little impact. Other clergy prefer to focus on a style of theological polemic fueling the identity crisis rather than struggling to understand and resolve it with the existence of Israel.

Complicated, much debated and ever evolving, nevertheless there have been various pillars of faith at the base of mainstream Christian religion. For our purposes the most important of these is “replacement theology”. The belief that Christians have converted to become the new Israel, the true pilgrim nation and the spiritual heirs of all the Biblical promises is essential in preserving the integrity of Christianity. Ethnic Jews have lost their uniqueness, God’s promises no longer apply to them. To this thinking is added the idea of universal salvation by “grace” and not by “works”. Through faith and belief in the Bible and its teachings and in the Messiah, salvation is achievable because of the grace of God. The Biblical promises of earthly blessings such as rain and good harvest, or seeing Jerusalem rebuilt and the land flourishing were metaphorised. Christians would indeed reap a spiritual harvest and rebuild Jerusalem – in their hearts. The Christian believer could live wherever he might and if he were pious in his ways he would inherit the heavenly Jerusalem. Hence the Bible was de-territorialised and de-Judaised. “Works” referred to the Biblical commandments, which primarily revolved around the Land of Israel and the Temple. These were now redundant. Hence the importance of the land and Jewish observance of the literal Bible in God’s bidding was superseded by the act of faith²⁷.

However much Christianity proclaimed a universal vision of salvation, de-territorialising and de-judaising the Bible, it nevertheless clearly struggled with these issues and has never entirely resolved them as evidenced by its penchant for intermittent bouts of anti-Semitism throughout its history and its niggling military aspirations over the Holy Land.

Much literature discusses these attitudes, amongst them the ambitions of the crusader armies and their theological motives in conquering the Holy Land and establishing a crusader state with King and capital for over two centuries and maintaining a devoted Christian presence there until the present. The crusader centuries followed by devout pilgrimages, a constant European presence as well as an avid interest in modern day Israel might illustrate Christendom's active fascination with Israel²⁸. It is not the place to discuss the suppressed role of the Land of Israel in Christian theology, suffice to note that Christianity has not fully resolved its theological treatment of Judaism and the Land of Israel.

Karl Bart posited that the only way that Christianity could ever think of being united would be by its ability to develop a theology towards Israel and the Jews. In this way he tied the identity of the true church with its definition of Jews and Judaism and the Land of Israel as essential to Christian identity. Today there are Christian denominations that argue that the State of Israel is a geopolitical reality but has no Biblical significance²⁹. Rosenberg explains that the liberal Protestant churches of the USA had taken an active role in the Middle East throughout the early part of the century. They supported the establishment of the State of Israel for reasons of "justice" but, for the same reasons, they also supported the establishment of Arab states. Their work brought them into contact with Arab interests in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and tend to overwhelmingly support the interests of Arab Christians³⁰. But there are others who will argue that the establishment of the State of Israel is part of Biblical prophecy and must be supported as a matter of exclusive principle by Christians³¹.

Braybrooke suggests that international churches might get a satisfaction from criticising the Israeli oppression of Palestinians as it relieves a Christian guilt for having oppressed Jews. He argues that the Church should function as conciliators not as advocates for any particular cause and certainly not take sides in the Israeli – conflict. He notes that after 1967 when Israel was perceived as being strong, the mainstream international churches automatically moved to support the Palestinian underdog. He bemoans the inability of different denominations to develop a common position regarding Israel or at least provide a forum where Pro-Israel groups are willing to dialogue with pro-Palestinian ones and visa versa. But it is clear that the Western Churches are acting upon their long in developing respective theologies regarding Israel and the Jews.

But can it be assumed that Arab Christians developed an equally elaborate theology explaining their presence in the Holy Land and defining the association between themselves as "New Israel" and the Israelite Homeland? Surely they articulated a position regarding the role of ethnic Jewry, the role of the Church as the spiritual heir of the Land of Israel and the significance of the ancient land of the Hebrews to Christian life? If Western Europeans traversed the world to conquer the Holy Land is it feasible that Eastern Christianity, the people that lived in the Holy Land, did not preserve some of these Christian nationalist sentiments? Surprisingly, Eastern Christianity and particularly the Christianity dominant in the Holy Land hardly developed a methodic theology regarding the Holy Land or of Judaism considering the latter to be dead and irrelevant. It is generally recognised that little such theology exists. There is no instruction on how to

interpret the Bible and pastoral teachings, and therefore little basis from which to respond to the Jewish claims or the Christian Zionist claims in support of the Jewish State. Du Brul argues that such doctrinal constructs need to be developed to understand their woes if only to prevent Palestinian Christians from slipping into the age old habit of anti-Semitism and hatred.

The primary theology for a Christian presence in the Holy Land is for the sake of preserving the Holy Sites. This in itself commands explanation. Certainly, de-emphasising the latent national claims of Christianity over their land must have made life more tolerable under Arab rule. But the absence of a theology that distinctively connected them to the Biblical land or explained the role of the ethnic Jew, points to theological difficulties with the whole subject of the 'promised land' and 'chosen peoplehood'. With the political impotence of Jewry until the mid 20th century the latent dilemma was averted, a need to fit the Jews and the Jewish homeland into a theological context was not imperative. But because of the absence of a historical tradition, there could be no basis for Eastern Christianity to later develop a theology towards the new State of Israel. Arab and European nationalism and Christian anti-Semitism have arguably filled this void. In stark contrast, Eastern Christianity developed an elaborate Christian response and even sympathy towards the dominant Islamic religion in sharp contrast to Western Christianity's intolerance of Islam. Now that Judaism demonstrated that it was not dead and that a Jewish State had been re-established pressure existed to define this powerful entity within the religious world-view of Eastern Christianity.

Du Brul provides a modern example of a new theology of Palestinian Christianity. He claims that Palestinian Christians are unique from those of the world, even of neighbouring Syria, Lebanon and Egypt because of the sense of belonging to the Holy Sites and the Holy Land in general. This is the home of Christianity around which the religious calendar of feasts revolves. But in addition to that calendar a new calendar fuses; the national calendar of dates depicting the process by which Zionism destroyed its hopes. He also notes that Palestinian Christianity is unique because of its persecution by Israel and the Jews adding a "certain poignancy, and an irony, shaping the special nature of their challenge"³². They are now the Hebrews escaping persecution from the Egyptians.

Ateek argues that the development of a Palestinian Christian theology was certainly necessary yet he too seems unable to propose anything beyond an anti-Israeli, anti-occupation polemic with nothing constructive to say about the relationship with Judaism and the Jewish State. From his statements however it is possible to understand that Eastern Christianity, his own Anglicanism included, has developed a theology in a de facto response to threats against it, and did not develop principled - de jure doctrine. Only because the Jews were a powerful force likely to remain in the region was a theology of Israel and Zionism required. But because he believed that a Palestinian entity would soon emerge as the home of Palestinian Christian Arabs, a theology of Islam was prioritised to ensure Christian- Muslim coexistence. In so doing he identifies Islam as the more important and dominant partner for Eastern Christianity and declared it as the focus of Arab Christian attentions and favours³³. While this is understandable in light of the long

(but tense) history of Islamic and Christian neighborliness in the Middle East, it is not entirely understood in light of the positive and equitable treatment afforded them by the new Israeli neighbour.

The belligerence of the Arab Christian community towards Israel is unprecedented in the history of Christian relations towards sovereign states. The local Christians went further than expressing cultural affiliations with Arab nationalism by actively initiating revolutionary activities and using their religious convictions, quoting religious scriptures in their defense and rallying international interest in the Holy Land to advance their objective of destabilising Jewish sovereignty.

The frustrations of Arab Christians are manifold. Braybrooke describes how they were often ignored by Western Christianity as the “other” and hardly given a representative voice in the Christian world. They were often patronised or seen as not real Christians. This is illustrated by the following: “*As children we drank from Mary’s well, and the water was holy to us. We prayed...where Jesus is believed to have lived and prayed...we looked on Jesus as one of us, as one of our own, and were very surprised when missionaries from abroad came to tell us about him*”³⁴. Even though Christianity de-territorialised itself shifting from a geographic centre to a personal one, for Arab Christians living in the Holy Land this is not that easy. Like the relationship that Jews had to the land, Christians have developed their culture from the land. It is not that isolated sites are holy but the whole country had meaning for them. This frustration must be compounded as they live in the birthplace of Christianity and witness the land of Jesus first hand. While Western Christians mythologise the Biblical texts and the place names, for Arab Christians these places are homes and gardens. If the Christian tradition and Biblical texts inspired Christian armies to cross the seas to redeem the land then it is not entirely surprising that those that already live and breath there do not share a secret enthusiasm to reclaim the land of the Bible. They have become particularly resentful of some Christian groups that actively support the Jewish claim to the land feeling this to be a betrayal of their brothers in plight³⁵. The opportunity to mobilise international support and in effect lead an important Christian initiative – a crusade, was an opportunity too good to miss.

Ateek strongly advocated the use of Christian theology in battling Israeli occupation. He argued that the church must be the “conscience of the State” and lauded the participation of the various international churches in criticising Israel. Knowing that the local Church’s political involvement resulted from the pressures of the local Arab laity he argued for a theology that valued the contribution of the Arab laity, as an advisory body, on strategy and political activity. He argues that the church hierarchy was an elite clergy that controlled and refused to share and the time had arrived for a return to the style of horizontal leaders as characterised the early church 2000 years ago. He argued that lay people should begin to make the decisions for the church, and that unity would be forced on the church by grass roots phenomena. An example of which was the trend for lay Christians from variant denominations to celebrate Christmas and Easter on the same day despite their Church’s different calendrical calculations. Ateek essentially was arguing

that the laity's drive for Palestinian nationalism and its opposition to the State of Israel should be the official stance of the church.

While this practice echoes a resounding Protestant idea of individual interpretation, it did not come with the concurrent Protestant call to return to the words of the written Bible. This would have had a negative effect on the laity, reacquainting them with the Jew of the Bible, something their rebellion tried to blur. The Arab Christian reinterpretation of the Bible was undertaken out of distinctively political needs.

Ateek, had no qualms about encouraging international Christian involvement in this local conflict, realising that potential willingness to be involved rested solely on Christendom's particular interest in the Holy Land and not merely any local struggle between two nations. He realised that the international Church would never normally involve itself in local issues. By demanding the mobilisation of the international Christian community he did so in knowledge that he was calling on their unique Christian loyalties to the Holy Land above and beyond other areas. He drew upon the unavoidable imagery of the continued Jewish persecution of Christ and the need for international Christendom to intervene. Not since the Crusaders was the international Church called to become so heavily committed to defining its stance and commitment and mobilising its forces for the sake of the Holy Land.

Considering Ateek's emphasis on the importance of the Holy Land to Christendom it might be supposed that he viewed territory as being importance to Christian faith. Perhaps he felt that the Christian Church, as New Israel, had duties to claim the land for its own sanctity. But Ateek sends mixed messages as to the tenets of his theology. In doing so, however, he reawakened the suppressed issues of the integrity of replacement theology; of the specific locality of the Land of Israel and the role of the Jew in Christian doctrine. By calling for Christian support by the use of Biblical imagery, other Biblical images also come to mind. The identity of ethnic Jews and their association with the ancient homeland cannot be fairly avoided. Western Christianity long struggled to repress the centrality of Judaism in the Christian faith and excelled in de-judaising the religion. But by answering Ateek's request and responding to the Palestinian call to arms, Western Christendom was required to tread careful so as not to appear inconsistent. To respond to a call uniquely regarding the status of the Holy Land or help in preventing 'Jewish persecution of Christians' would reactivate the Jewish question. By responding to the Palestinian call while still holding by a universal de-territorialised, de-judaised Christianity left it open to accusations of double standards, hypocrisy and anti-Semitism.

On one hand Ateek lauded Christianity's "de-Zionisation" and "de-territorialisation" of the Jewish religion and Christianity's replacing the holiness of land with the holiness of the body of Jesus and the universal goal of salvation. He argues for de-territorialisation so far as it goes for the Bible and the Jews. In this respect he asserts, in the spirit of classic replacement theology, that there is no difference between Jews and Gentile and therefore there is no religious importance for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. Quoting from Acts he describes the respective homelands of the dwellers in Jerusalem who received the spirit of Jesus at Pentecost as "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of

Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs”³⁶. He ignores common Biblical interpretation that this refers to the pilgrim of Diaspora Jews from around the world to the Jerusalem Temple for the Jewish festival of Pentecost³⁷. In fact he admits that he prefers to use an old manuscript of the Bible – the Codex Sinaiticus that omits mention of “Jews” altogether from the above quotation and thus universalises the scene to include all peoples of the earth.

Ateek continues “...For Palestinian Christians today this rendering of the text is preferred because it is a more inclusive definition of the church of Jerusalem...”³⁸. Clearly it is important for him to de-Judaise the Bible while emphasising an Arab presence at Pentecost. By de-Judaising the Bible he reckoned that it may become more meaningful for Palestinian nationalism. Ateek diminishes the Jewish claim to Israel at the same time stressing the presence of Christianity in Jerusalem and the Holy Land over two thousand years. He claims that the Christian churches have ‘understandably developed a deep connection and love for Jerusalem’, and feel that ‘Jerusalem belongs to them and they belong to her’. He recognises how it is ‘natural for humans to need holy places’ and why they see Jerusalem as being special. He neatly resolves the obvious contradiction by asserting that it is not the innate holiness of Jerusalem – as claimed by the Jews - that makes it special, but rather a holiness derived from Jesus having walked, lived, died and risen there. And it is because of this that Christians should continue their struggle and connectedness to the Holy Land. This sentiment is generally echoed by Arab Christians. In 1977, the Patriarch of the Syrian based Antiochian Orthodox Church Elias IV visited the USA and at a conference noted that the Jews had little ‘historic connection’ with the territory of the State of Israel. He noted that he, as a Christian had more rights to the land being that Christianity was “New Israel”³⁹.

Ateek suggests that the international Church should help the Palestinian cause of justice even if it is at the price of involving itself in local skirmishes. He asserts that by doing so the international Christian Church along with local Palestinian Christians will learn what it is like to “suffer for Christ” (at the hands of Jews). This he declares is a Christian theology that recognises the importance of suffering for the cause of justice. It is unclear whether Ateek is using Christianity as an instrument for his own preformed Palestinian national agenda or whether he is himself unaware of the inconsistencies and grave issues he raises for his form of local – universal Christianity.

Du Brul says it more clearly “...the Israelis, by their oppression of Palestinian Christians... have unwittingly stepped into the role of some of the Jewish leaders in the gospel archetype”. He describes how Palestinians are using this to discover a Jesus that corresponds to their historical struggle. He admits that there were centuries of Christian persecution by other nations but in this case “...They are a hair’s breadth from identifying this generation of Jewish leaders with those who collaborated in the death of Jesus...”⁴⁰. He acknowledges that most of the Western churches have recently precluded this interpretation and even argued that the very suffering of Jesus brought him to offer

forgiveness and reconciliation with humanity (and by continuing the analogy with the State of Israel), but he nevertheless offers sympathy with this Palestinian tendency.

Another example of mixed identities is illustrated in an autobiography of the present Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, Riah Abu El-Assal. It provides insight into the mindset of a Christian Arab growing up in Israeli Nazareth along with the fledgling State of Israel and suffering the turmoil of a mixed identity as an “Arab, a Palestinian, a Christian and as an Israeli”. The process by which he negotiated his theological identity lends insight into the difficulties for Arab Christianity within the State of Israel⁴¹.

El-Assal learnt Hebrew by reading the Old Testament in the original which must have influenced his views of the Hebrew Nation⁴². He recounts his connection to the Biblical country “I wanted to go home. Bible stories had increased the significance of Nazareth in my own mind – they must have done...”. While he might have wanted to be a part of the Israeli-Jewish dream he felt that as an Arab he was unable to participate. “Ha-tikva, was the hymn of the Zionist movement. It expresses the yearning of the Jewish people for a land of their own. It is a beautiful song, but it is not mine, and never can be”⁴³.

But particularly insightful are the following quotes: *“Like most Christians, I suppose, I had always thought of the Biblical Israel not so much as the country of a certain tribe – the Jews or the Israelites – but as a symbol of God’s covenant with his people...as a child, like most Christian boys, I identified with David in the Old Testament. I loved hearing from my grandmother the story of the simple shepherd boy who won a great victory against the giant warrior Goliath, and became king”*.

“The Israelis took the image of David’s victory over Goliath to illustrate their fight against the Arab multitudes, and with it they took part of my childhood. Suddenly I was the Philistine of the Old Testament...it at least proves that my claim to this land is as least as old as the Jewish claim...at the time my world fell apart. Suddenly I could no longer relate to the Old Testament. Was I to understand that I was the enemy of God’s chosen people? Suddenly, to sing the psalms calling on God to strengthen Israel was to pray for him to strengthen my enemy. When I prayed to the lord of hosts, I was praying to the lord of the Israeli army”⁴⁴.

El-Assal’s knowledge of Hebrew and the modern day usage of Biblical language could not have helped his and other Israeli Christian Arab’s dilemma regarding their identity. The term “army” used in modern Hebrew is the same used in the Bible for “hosts”. It connotes both a spiritual and a real army and arouses associations with military government, curfews and harassment, which Hebrew-speaking Arabs would find hard to reconcile with their Christian faith, however much it was based on the Hebrew Bible. Reading the Bible literally would place the Christian Arab population in an untenable position, their identities as Christians and their faith in the Bible would be the source of their subjection and humiliation as second class citizens of the “chosen people” of Israel. Hence it was inevitable that theologians and leaders reinterpret and reinvent an Arab Christian identity placing them at the forefront of the Biblical saga as heroes and protagonists or alternatively to elevate the national Arab Palestinian identity into a

superior one to that as Christians⁴⁵. Both were done and the identity as Palestinians became a powerful tool in restoring Arab Christian pride.

El-Assal resolved his dilemma by positing that, as a Christian, he looked to the Old and New Testaments for the origins of his faith. As an Arab he is able to trace his roots in the New Testament where Arabs were present at the Pentecost⁴⁶. He argued that both Arab Muslims and Christians view themselves as heirs of the original covenant through Abraham's son Ishmael – not Isaac and Jacob. He continues that as a Palestinian he looks to the Philistines as his ancestors and in this way he justifies his existence saying: *“The Bible is not only our spiritual guide, but a record of our history and proof of our roots in the land. We have always lived side by side. How can my presence here now suddenly stand in the way of the fulfillment of the scriptures? And as a Palestinian Christian am I not also an heir to the Covenant through Jesus Christ, my Saviour? Is there really no room for me here?”*⁴⁷.

There are some interesting points of departure from classic Christianity in that El-Assal sees his forbears in Ishmael son of Abraham and not Isaac and Jacob. This indicates distinct Islamic influence and the employment of nation building theology. In addition he viewed the Bible as an historical record and a source to justify his national pride and connectedness to his land. That Christianity chasmed with Judaism on the very issue of de-territorialisation is lost in this approach. If El-Assal seeks to re-inject a dimension of history, ethnicity, locality into the Bible and arguing that this is legitimately Christian, then the Jewish claims to the land, based upon Biblical record, were equally valid.

Indeed El-Assal recognised Israel's right to exist alongside a Palestinian State, with the latter a requisite of the former. He appears to derive this understanding out of his reading of the Bible. But in his preparedness to interpret the Bible as a historical record to justify his Palestinian identity, he might be setting theological precedents and paving the way for an Arab Christian rediscovery of the Jews as the overwhelmingly dominant focus of that Bible.

It is curious that both El-Assal and Ateek both quote the same scripture – the single mention of an Arab in the New Testament – in an attempt to develop a theology for Arab Christianity. In doing so Ateek negates the hundreds of references to Jews and Israel and indeed the whole historical setting within a Jewish State. El-Assal however tries to use this verse to justify a Jewish-Arab co-existence. Both however are using the Bible to develop a Palestinian Christian theology that negates the sovereignty of the Jewish State over Jerusalem.

El-Assal's attempt to lend theological dimensions to his Palestinian national identity and justify his presence in the Land of the Hebrews relies on complex formulas and argumentation not at the disposal of more simple minded Arab Christians. More intuitively they resort to a simpler form of national Palestinian slogans to express their frustrations without reference to religious doctrine. It becomes clear that the overwhelming attitude of Palestinian Christian's towards Israel is now glistened from their political identities as Arab Palestinians and no longer from their religious identity as

Christians. This kind of nationalism has become far too compelling, young, vibrant and empowering to be counter measured by a decontextualised, de-jure religious theology. Their status as Arab Christians is secondary to what has become a kind of religious nationalism. In as much as it exists, Christianity is used in the service of their primary Palestinian identity. Perhaps the inability of some to negotiate the paradoxes between the hybrid form of Christian and Arab nationalism and the traditional form of doctrinal Christianity led so many Arab Christians to immigrate to countries where the dilemma was not so confronting.

El Assal and Ateek posit that after the Palestinian identity crisis is solved by the establishment of a Palestinian State, Arab Christians will have a different role in reconciliation with Israel. "...as an Anglican Christian educated in the European tradition, I believe that I and others like me are optimally placed to serve as a bridge between the 'occident' and the orient"⁴⁸. But no information or theological basis for this reconciliation is prescribed.

Amongst Palestinian Christians, theology seems to be a political tool and is unlikely to be a de jure guide for local believers so long as it contravenes Palestinian nationalism. If, however it compliments the spirit of revolution it is likely to be tolerated and even grow. A Christianity that compliments national empowerment and identity is likely to be activated in the service of revolutionaries. A Christianity that projects itself onto the historical and political circumstances of a recipient nation and empowering it with its symbolism is more likely to be accepted than one that curbs its national appetite and political agendas. The success of Christian liberation theory in Latin America and its promulgation by independence seekers throughout the world is testament to the power of this theology. Palestinian Christianity, as old as its traditions were appeared to be adopting many characteristics of the very new liberation theologies.

A change in Arab Christian relations to Israel is predicated on the ability, at some point in the future to distinguish between replacement theology and a theology that recognises the continued existence of the ethnic Jewish people and a living Judaism with aspirations to its Biblical homeland. To this way of thinking, the role of Christianity would seek a way to work in concert with the Jewish people and not as an obstacle to achieving its religious ideals. Such distinctions have been made by various evangelical groups inspired by dispensationalist theology but have not yet made headway into Eastern Christian theology. For Arab Christians to begin to view Israel in a positive light and in context of their religious faith, various theological shifts are necessary. To do so would require a re-rendering of replacement theology, recognising the Jews of today as the same Biblical Jews with an inherent right over the Holy Land. But by this measure they would be obliged to view themselves - Gentiles - as "the strangers in thy gates", and although the Bible assured the strangers equal rights and privileges it nevertheless is not as complimentary to their status as it is to Jews and is therefore unlikely to be wholeheartedly adopted. It seems then that a shift in Israeli thinking and attitudes towards minorities might in itself be a critical religious factor in setting down the theological infrastructure of change. This point is discussed at the conclusion of the paper.

Arab Christian Isolation and its Alliance with Islam

Christians in the Holy Land have lived alongside and have been influenced by Muslims since the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem by Caliph Umar in 636⁴⁹. In exchange for the capitulation of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the sole representative of Jerusalem's Christianity at the time, he was promised absolute control and rights over the Christian holy sites.

While Greek Orthodoxy's had been involved in debating the early doctrinal issues of Christendom, it saw its main function in Jerusalem as the keeper of the holy sites of Christianity and also to represent the ancient Greek role in the development of Christianity. But according to Roussos its most important contribution was its early encounter with Islam and developing a theology of Islam that permitted the religion's integration into a broader arabism. Because it has maintained a presence in the Holy Land from the beginnings of the religion it came to represent the local Arab community and its descendents that became Christian over the first few centuries. Roussos argues that Greek Orthodox Christianity took an apologetic posture towards Islamic doctrine and did nothing to prevent cultural interaction and later assimilation. Eventually the Church partially gave up the use of Greek names and language and adopted Arabic as the ecclesiastic language. In addition to the laity, monks and the clergy began to learn Arabic, translating the Bible, liturgical texts, hagiographies, patristic texts and other ecclesiastical works from the Greek and the Syriac into Arabic⁵⁰. Over centuries of Arab rule and invasions the use of Arabic and the arabisation of Christianity became widespread so that the orthodox communities were synonymous with indigenous Arab Orthodoxy⁵¹. Many Christian Arabs who by taking on Western and Greek norms had over hastily shaken off their Arabic identities might have in some way been grateful for the Islamic conquests that brought about a renewal of Arab pride and identity⁵².

In Palestine of the 8th century, various scholar monks wrote works confronting and treating Islam from a Christian perspective, these spread throughout Byzantine and influenced the Christianity of the whole region. But by the 9th century, Palestinian Christian scholars took a more tolerant approach to Islam, these works were written in Arabic and took an apologetic tone trying to defend Christianity and stave off the wave of Christian conversion to Islam⁵³. Conversion to Islam was seen by many Christians to compliment Christianity. Islam believed in the existence of Jesus but stressed the importance of God's unity and structured the religion with more laws and regulations much like the Jewish forbears. By the 9th century Christianity began to split into various denominations in the wake of the Latin and Byzantine divide. The historical division of Christianity is believed by modern Arab clergy to have been the reason for its degeneration in the Holy Land⁵⁴.

Presently it is clear that Christianity is dependent on the good will of Islam for its continued existence in the Middle East. There are approximately 14 million Arab Christians living in the Middle East amongst a general population of approximately 150 million Arabs. Even despite the Crusader wars that replenished the Christian population in the Holy Land, the Christian population has gradually dwindled in contrast to the

Islamic population. In order to survive, Christians de-emphasised their religious inclinations. The popular saying “praying like Muslims in a church” refers to Arab Christians who in many ways are indistinct from Muslims. Indeed, by 19th century the differences between the Islamic and Christian Arab communities would hardly be recognisable except by their clothing and headdress that could be altered at whim. An Ottoman document from 1807 indicates how Christians tried to hide their identity and pass as Muslims. The Ottoman administration subsequently forbade this kind of masquerading⁵⁵.

Arab Christians have various predicaments. They are generally more secular than Muslims. They have less fast days, less feasts, no stringent legal system, the dress codes for women are not as restrictive. Christians drink wine and are not restricted to eating hallal meat. They often view Islam with fear and awe and tolerantly try to accommodate its more demanding lifestyle. In addition Arab Christians are extremely divided. There are many denominations and churches and different calendars which put the feast and celebrations on different days. They have no united voice. They were strongly affected by international events and wars. With the advent of communism the Greek Orthodox Church lost a lot of its Russian Orthodox supporters and pilgrims come and go depending on the international climate. With the absence of a distinct Christian legal tradition, many Christian communities turned to Islamic-Sharia courts for adjudication⁵⁶. This in turn created a stronger affinity with Islam and associations of Islam with legitimate authority and sovereignty⁵⁷.

The attempts to appease dominant Islam seem to characterise many centuries of Christian life. Even contemporary Arab Christian leaders make great efforts to accommodate Islam fostering political and cultural alliances. Naim Ateek argues that it is of the highest priority to develop and proactively renew a Christian theology towards Islam and define its partner role in Arab nationalism.

“I would say that such a theology must be done by Palestinian Christian scholars. Our understanding of Islam is different. Our life with Muslims does not stem from academic exchanges, but from real, every day life...We must discover our own points of contact with Muslims. We can, therefore, discover on the religious, theological as well as the more practical level many points that can be the basis of understanding, mutual respect and cooperation. We need a theology that would ultimately express itself in real life situations rather than formal dialogue: a theology that can begin with practical issues and yet move to the more religious and theological: a theology that has practical implications as, for example, cooperating in the realm of human rights, and move on to share our understanding of the sovereignty of God: a theology that moves beyond coexistence and solidifies the relationship between us as equal citizens of the same land and people. A theology that helps us emphasize our common Palestinian heritage and our common nationality: a theology that capitalizes on our struggle for political freedom and independence and the unique contribution which each of us has given toward the achievement of this common o”⁵⁸.

Clearly he seeks an alliance with Islam using Israel as a uniting factor. The theological issues of the Christian trinity are recognised as possible obstacles to a common theological stance with the strict monotheism of Islam. Ateek asserts that the unity of God must be explained via his “triunitateness”, and the opportunity to educate Muslim exists via the Christian school system which has a majority of Muslim students enrolled. Ateek recognises the “inferiority complex” of Arab Christians and encourages a reclaiming of their pride in distinction from Islamic Arabism by educating a new generation of Christian Arabs. His harshest words against Islam were towards Islamic fundamentalism where he pleads that they should “take the time to understand Christianity”.

Various themes are apparent in the above statements. It is clear that he views Islam as a dominant culture with which a partnership is beneficial. But from his style it is evident that he is also motivated from fear. He believes that tensions with Islam would be devastating for the Arab Christian population of the Holy Land. He continues that “without democracy, our life with Islam could be difficult”. He stresses the commonality of their Arab backgrounds and describes how Christians in the Holy Land were Arabs before the Islamic invasion and that their sense of ethnicity can unite them in so many ways. The tone is apologetic and the source of their unity is clearly directed at their common dislike for Israel.

And it is in this point that the fears and concerns of a minority religion can be contextualised. The Middle East is entirely dominated by Islam where Christianity is only tersely tolerated. The more Palestinian Christians prove their Arabic affiliations and support the Arab national cause, the more they can vindicate themselves in the event of a Palestinian State. The smaller they get in numbers, the more dependent they become on Islam’s favours and the more anti-Israel they need to become.

This point is better illustrated by Bishop el-Assal: “*And maybe because we felt less certain than others of our identity, because as Christians we feared we were less Arab, and as Israelis we feared we were less Palestinian, we Christians in Israel became most fervently Arab and most ardently Palestinian*”⁵⁹. El-Assal explains that even though he is an Israeli citizen he continually identifies as a Palestinian, yet Palestinian Muslims increasingly disenfranchise him and discriminate against him as a Christian: “*My ethnic identity is Arab. My cultural and social roots are Arab, my mother tongue is Arabic...as an Arab I am bound by the traditions governing our society, with their emphasis on honour and shame, and reconciliation rather than negotiation as the means to resolve conflict...*”⁶⁰.

Yet he later laments: “*Unfortunately for Middle-Eastern Christians, we are perceived by some Muslims as stooges of the West. The extremists look on us as their enemies, just as they look on the Jews as enemies. I have heard fundamentalist groups in Palestine say ‘after Saturday comes Sunday’*”⁶¹.

Indeed Arab Christians are becoming increasingly less significant in numbers and influence in the Middle East. This is due to a lower birth rate, political repression, youth

that seek an education abroad and don't return and outright immigration in large numbers. El-Assal points out that from the ten or so Arab parliamentarians presently in the Israeli Knesset, none are Christian and none are in secure election places on any of the party lists and therefore no one looks after Christian interests in government. Despite his efforts to study Islam and the pains he goes to show how Islam is not heretical and Muslims should not be looked upon as infidels, Islam remains largely un-accepting of Christianity⁶².

El-Assal worked along with other Christians organising national Palestinian initiatives in the Israeli town of Nazereth. He was part of a trend amongst Israeli Arabs to identify as Palestinians in fraternity with their brothers in the captured territories⁶³. He arranged the first land day demonstrations which have become an annual event in Israel⁶⁴. He set up a Christian list for municipal elections, which succeeded but when in 1988 he set up a joint Christian and Muslim list it met with failure. When he showed sympathy for the Islamic list that won he was shunned by his own community. Yet despite his attempt to cultivate cooperation he bemoans the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and its hatred towards Christians and generally expresses a polite disappointment with Islam⁶⁵. *“Until now I have always... defined myself first as a Palestinian, because this is an aspect of my identity which is threatened. Nowadays I hesitate, because my identity as a Christian seems to be equally under threat”*⁶⁶. He finally says that although he is a religious man and it might seem strange, but he would prefer to live in a secular State where religion is practiced privately, clearly indicating his fear of Islamic coercion.

Christian Superiority and National Proactivity

In the eyes of Western visitors to the region, Arab Christian communities and their life style was perceived to be wealthier, more developed and enlightened than Islamic communities. Hummel describes how Christian historians visiting the Holy Land observed that “Christian villages thrive and grow, while the Muslim ones decay”. The Muslim village of Hebron was “stagnant as a deserted pool” and the inhabitant were mean and inhospitable, while the Christian village of Bethlehem was friendly and bright and an example of prosperity⁶⁷.

This may be due to a variety of reasons. The predominantly Syriac Christians that lived in rural settings and worked the land started moving to urban centres particularly to Jerusalem seeking to be closer to the Holy Sites and in the security of a larger Christian community⁶⁸. In this way they developed a more trade-based economy for themselves and because of their minority status they became more closely knit.

Christianity flourished in the West but maintained its interests in the less vibrant climate of the East. There remained a constant Western Christian presence in the Holy Land ranging from crusader armies to national churches and from the start of the 19th century foreign consuls. The existence of many national churches with their respective clergy and national representatives caused a strong relationship of Arab Christians with the West. Many residents of the Holy Land still maintained their foreign citizenship and were subject to the laws and protection of their countries of origin. The presence of foreign

consuls in the Holy Land and the growth in European nationalism from the beginning of the 19th century certainly impacted the Christian population and likely stimulated their own flirtation with their own brand of Arabic nationalism. The continuing pilgrimages from Western countries to the holy sites and Jerusalem ensured a continual cross pollination of culture and ideas, and the exposure of the local population to the people, thoughts and literature of the West. While certainly not entirely Western, and while seen by the West as primitive and superstitious, the Arab Christian population of the Holy Land was nevertheless more Western than their Muslim counterparts.

The long tradition of Christian pilgrimages provided local Christians with economic rewards. It compelled local Christians to maintain standards and services suitable for their guests including the supply of souvenirs, photos, handicrafts, medical attention and other more sophisticated services otherwise unnecessary. The indigenous Christians served as tour guides and liaisons between the pilgrims and the local populations. They were compelled to learn different languages and were concurrently exposed to a different lifestyle. International trade became more accessible via pilgrims and via the flow of international clergy, representatives and government officials coming through⁶⁹.

Du Brul describes an interesting dynamic amongst Arab Christians. Because of their responsibility towards the pilgrim visits, they historically play a more active role in public life than Muslims and were seen as possessing a certain status in Arab society by virtue of the pilgrims. But ironically they were also at the receiving end of international Christian charity and sympathy. As Arabs they both benefited from this but as Christians they resented their second class role. Fearing they will lose their status in society they continue to take on as much public responsibility as possible, unable to do this without help they continually ask for international support in a spiraling double bind⁷⁰.

Shomali describes how the Arab Christian population of Palestine was more advanced than their Muslim counterparts and how they were the first to establish printing. The period before the 19th century was stagnating but a renaissance occurred from 1900 known as al -Nahdah. Missionary schools, printing press and nationalist movements emerged. Russia, France, England Germany showed interest via their churches in the area. Education in these schools was in Arabic and while it stressed the Arabic history and culture of the region it was done under Christian auspices⁷¹.

Victor-Hummel describes the proliferation of photography and other associated technologies in the Holy Land via the Armenian Church and how groups of locals picked up the technology and spread it around the country⁷². A French missionary brought the printing press to Jerusalem in 1846, then the Armenian press was introduced in 1866 and then the British missionary society introduced its printing organisation in 1879. Primarily Christian Arabs were quicker to establish private presses. 281 books were published between 1892-1909, 83 were in Arabic. Soon afterwards, a variety of societies emerged advocating specific local interests. They started schools, had charitable projects, published books and nurtured a class of Arab intellectuals. These initiatives helped the Arabic language to become a major medium for the expression of modern ideas. Many

publications were translations of western works and helped disseminate western ideas into Arabic.

Then newspapers and magazines were popularised. Until the end of 19th century these had come from other Arab lands and stressed Arab nationalism but by the beginning of the 20th century they rapidly developed in Palestine exceeding in quality those of other Arab neighbours⁷³. In 1908 there was a total of 25 newspapers and periodicals, 19 of which were owned by Christians. The Muslims tried to counter this over time. A new Arabic style suitable for western information was developed.

European nationalism also seems to have had a critical influence on Christian thinking and affected its own aspirations for a national movement of their own. As mentioned, the existence of the Greek, Russian, Armenian, Serbian, French, English national churches and consuls in the Holy Land along with the many visiting dignitaries and pilgrims from these countries impacted the thinking of the local Christian communities. Many Arab Christians went abroad to study and returned armed with nationalist aspirations.

During the British mandate Protestantism and English nationalism played a crucial role in the Arab awakening via the various educational facilities established. The American University in Beirut and Arab girls school in Lebanon as well as the British Printing Society in Arabic left its mark. El-Assal describes that there were a disproportionate amount of Anglican Arabs in influential positions as Palestinian activists. Of the 1000 Anglicans in Israel, two had been members of Knesset, one representing Mapam and the other was Emile Habiby, a poet and winner of the Israel Prize for Arabic literature. There was the Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi and the founder of Bir Zeit University, Musa Nasser and Bishop Elia Khoury who was on the executive of PLO. There was Ibrahim Souss, the Palestinian representative to France and Ghazi Khoury, the Palestinian representative to Netherlands. Further more, many of the Muslim activists had been educated in Anglican schools.

Anti-Semitism is perhaps another Western import adopted by Arab Christianity. Despite El-Assal's argument that European anti-Semitism has not influenced Middle-Eastern views of Jews, there are reasons to suggest the contrary. He facetiously argues that he is not an anti-Semite because he and his Church members are Arab Semites. El-Assal argues that anti-Jewishness was a phenomenon common in European history and not shared or experienced in the Middle-East where antagonism to Israel derives from the recent political history of Zionism⁷⁴. But it is not unlikely that the East-West cultural exchange of Christianities involved the dissemination of European anti-Semitism and replacement theologies. Particularly as the exchange occurred in the traditional homeland of the Jews against a backdrop of the Ottoman-Nazi alliance, Jewish immigration to the Holy Land and the beginnings of Jewish nationalism. It seems obvious that an exchange of ideas should occur around this subject.

The term "judaisation" had often been derogatorily used by Western and Eastern Christians to shun certain undesirable practices particularly in reference to the observance of ritual law and the importance of land to religious observance. As part of

the Arab Christians partnering with their Western brothers and the need for union with their Arab neighbours, the derision of the Jews seemed to be a good starting point. It became particularly apt as Jewish Immigration to Palestine increasingly threatened Arab Christian livelihoods. But because of the Ottoman and Egyptian alliance with Germany throughout the world wars and the widespread anti-Semitic sentiments transferred to Arab lands, Christians might have found it a useful unifying factor with Arabs. This became even more useful as Palestinian nationalism became more important to their common identity.

It is particularly curious that among the plethora of Christian denominations in the Holy Land, there is a stark absence of the strongly evangelical school of dispensationalism or other “judaising” sects of Christianity. The former started in 18th century England and rapidly spread to the U.S and Europe, it advocated the important role of Judaism, Jews and a renewed Jewish homeland in Palestine. Its pro-Jewish appeal appears to have made it one of the few denominations not to make inroads into 19th and 20th century Arab Christian Palestine.

Christians as Leaders of the Palestinian National Struggle

Arab Christians were leaders of the emerging Arab national movement and subsequent Palestinian nationalism. While some of the reasons motivating their championing of the Arab cause have already been touched upon, the extent to which Christianity is singularly responsible for Arab nationalism is not fully appreciated.

The existence of many national representatives and churches in Jerusalem, the visits by royalty and heads of state, the increasing military interest in the Holy Land and the frenzy of European nationalism and imperialism awakened a local sense of national strivings. With so many national churches represented in Jerusalem each setting up their own establishments, schools and societies, each catering to the needs of the local Arab population or missionising other denominations by drawing them into their own institutions, it was only a matter of time before local Christians came to desire a national Church of their own. In essence they were all Arab Churches but Arabs were neither represented in the Church hierarchy nor was their national identity expressed through them. Ironically membership of the local Arab laity in these churches was a testament of the countries that sponsored them. This led them to feel estranged even from their denominational church, perhaps they could feel more comfortable fighting for a Palestinian home. Meanwhile membership in these churches served as windows to the world of national pride and fervour and contributed to the early formation of Arab nationalism.

Christians had earlier been strongly active in the pan-Arabian movement and Syrian nationalism, which took on a distinctly secular character which the secular Bath party presently rulSyria was its champion. For Palestinian Christians, the period of transition accompanying the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the involvement of Christian countries in the region provided a unique opportunity to “break the yoke of their marginality and create an ideology and community sufficiently broad to encompass them

as full and equal participants”⁷⁵. For them, nationalism was a new super structure that could incorporate different religious communities and ideas into it without impinging on one another. In advocating this new movement they were buying their equality with their Muslim counterparts without having to change their religious views.

In their participation in Arabic nationalism, an age-old Christian tradition of isolation from public life was now broken, but Christian society paid a difficult price. O’Mahony describes how Christians from now would have to accept that their religion was private and could not constitute the pillar of their society. They had to reject their religious communal organisations as their traditional representative body in favour of the national structure. He argues that this was a significant change from the past and must have caused a deep schism within the traditional community, which few observers realise, the extent⁷⁶.

Islam had already made a strong impact on the character of the national Arab movement, but from 1910 onward Christians started making longer strides. As an Arab movement, the Islamic contribution to its history had to be significantly recognised by Muslim and Christians alike, but as a national movement, an explicit association with Islam was avoided. Whether this agreement would be kept in light of a growing Islamic and diminishing Christian population is a fear that Christians are now realising.

Arab Christians had demonstrated their love for the Holy Land by their tenacious presence there over millenium. There had been Christian poets who sang of the land's beauty and expressing national feelings towards it⁷⁷. But it was a Syrian Christian, Najib Azuri, who, working as an assistant to the governor in Jerusalem, wrote his observations expressing first murmurs of Arab nationalism in a book published in 1905. He outlines the need for an Arab nation to be established in the Arab fatherland, as well as the critical importance of uniting all Arab Christians into one Catholic church praying in Arabic and eventually attracting all the other Orthodox sects into it. He implored the Pope to work in that direction.

He asserted that only then Arab Christianity would be a force to be reckoned with.

As early as 1891 Arab Christians were first to arrange demonstrations against Jewish immigration. Omahony and Roussos suggest that this was because they were most threatened by the deluge of immigrants sharing the same professions as artisans and traders and had the same ethic for education⁷⁸. But it is arguable that Western anti-Semitic sentiments were also a factor. By 1910 the Christian press proposed the idea of a Palestinian home, possibly in response to the Zionist aspiration for a Jewish homeland in the region.

Perhaps the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the presence of the French in Syria and the English in Palestine emboldened the Christian population. Perhaps they were encouraged by those Christian nations to develop a local Christian nationalism hoping that this would give Western Christianity a better accented sphere of influence in the Arab Middle-East. The advancement therefore of a Palestinian national movement distinct from Arab

nationalism was a product of Christian tenacity. They strongly advocated the Palestinian district separate from Syria or Lebanon setting the national tone for later more defined national aspirations.

Two important newspaper publications, “Filastin” founded in Jaffa in 1911 and “Al Karmil” established in Haifa in 1908 were owned by Orthodox Christians and led the Arabic antagonism against Zionism. They advocated a national Palestinian cause within a geographical and political entity distinct from Syria, defined as the area under the authority of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem⁷⁹. They played an important role in advancing the ideas of an Arab national movement and argued that the Arabs from Palestine must unite to identify their specific goals and improve their conditions in distinction from other Arab regions⁸⁰.

The role of Palestine was important for Christians because it was a portion of the Middle East with a distinct Christian history and a large Christian population making the chances of it becoming a safe haven of Christianity very high. The very name of Palestine as a political or administrative area is a very un-Islamic, Christian notion. The Greek Orthodox Church, extant from the days of Roman rule, traditionally administered the three Roman districts of Palestina Prima, Palestina Secunda and Palestina Tertia. The Latin Patriarchate and later the Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem also established their spiritual dominion over these traditional regions of Roman Palestine and thus preserved the un-Arabic name “Palestine” and generated a Christian affinity to it as a national region⁸¹. Seeking to re-establish this administrative region in a national context has strong Christian national undertones.

The Muslim Islamic mainstay was initially opposed to a particular Palestinian national movement distinct from pan-Arabism. In contrast, the major Muslim owned newspaper called “Southern Syria” was established in 1919 and as its name indicated advocated a movement to align the region to become part of a greater Syrian nation.

Despite these complex motivations, the basic inspiration for this movement, at least for the masses of Christian youth that joined its ranks remained an over brimming pride in their Arab identity above and beyond their affiliation with the Church. This is seen from the report of the Bertram and Young Commission established to resolve differences between the Greek Orthodox hierarchy and the local Arab laity. It eventually surmises that the tension between the Greek hierarchy is caused by a fierce sense of belonging to the Arabic nation. However much the hierarchy feels that the Arab Christian laity should be loyal to the Greek Church ‘they nevertheless feel more loyal to the Arab national cause... the dearest idea for them is their part in the Arab nation sharing an affinity with their Muslim fellow countrymen’⁸².

Under the British Mandate the Christian communities thrived. While the traditional Orthodox leadership aligned themselves with the British and had good relations with the newly established Anglican Church, the younger generation remained loyal to Arab nationalism. In 1923 the latter convened the First Arab Orthodox Congress in Haifa (possibly modeled on the series of Zionist Congresses). This initiative indicated the

growing power and arabisation of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem. They demanded more lay leadership and the appointment of Arabic clergy and control over church land⁸³. The congress stressed Arab unity and identity above a Christian one.

Dumper points out that the internationalisation of Jerusalem in 1948 provided an unprecedented opportunity for Arab Christianity in the Holy Land to dominate the city. With the promise of a homeland to Jews and the establishment of the Islamic Jordan, Jerusalem was well poised to become a Christian enclave. It was under the protectorate of European and Christian countries with a tremendous international ecclesiastical interest, a powerful Catholic vote in the U.N and a strong local Christian population concentrated almost entirely in Jerusalem. Yet by that stage Arab Christians sought an Arabic styled nationalism not one based on their religious affiliations and the window of opportunity closed shortly afterwards with the division of Jerusalem between Israel and Jordan.

The social and doctrinal efforts expended to strategically align with Islam have placed the Christian community somewhat at odds with Western Christianity and in a difficult position in wake of the sudden reality of the State of Israel. Time needed for adjustment and realignment, within healthy environment, cultural and ideological fusion usually takes place, but with the ascent of national fervour a natural process might be halted.

Future Directions for Arab Christianity

Under Palestinian autonomy Arab Christians may prosper in academic, business and social positions and perhaps form the backbone of Palestinian secularism but it is doubtful whether Christianity as a spiritual movement will be permitted to flourish. Traditional Christianity is likely to be preserved in an entirely personal – family framework with the necessary public provisions to host Christian pilgrimages at holy sites tolerated. Du Brul describes a transformation. Originally identifying themselves first as Christians, they responded to Israeli occupation by identifying as Palestinians and only secondly as Christians. Now there appears to be a reversal back to a primary association with Christianity⁸⁴. But this is likely to meet with Islamic intolerance. It is unlikely that Christianity will reap rewards or be given privileges proportional to its contribution to the Palestinian national movement, as the character of the Palestinian authority will be predominantly Islamic in practice if not in name. Christians will either transfer their self-identity to correspond entirely to a Palestinian one, working within existing secular parties and continuing to build an Arab identity, which wholly incorporates them too. The alternative is to remain suppressed and ideologically unfulfilled. As Christian religion is not growing even in free countries the difference might only be academic. Perhaps under such religiously oppressive circumstances a spiritual renaissance is even more possible and if so the theological directions this can take are rich and varied.

Du Brul describes four main attitudes of Palestinian Christianity towards their denominational affiliations⁸⁵.

1. Traditional Christianity based on family heritage without a necessary personal conviction. The elderly seem comfortable with this category.
2. Indifference resulting from suspicion that denominations have split the religion or because it seems secondary to a united Christian ethos. Palestinian youth generally view themselves here.
3. Suspicion of maintaining any religious position because this separates them from Islamic Arabism. This is also common amongst the youth.
4. Rediscovery. Du Brul advocates this as an important part of a Palestinian Christian revival

In addition he describes four options open for Palestinians.

1. Emigration to find a normal life elsewhere.
2. Admission of powerlessness.
3. Riding the situation with some degree of empowerment to adjust their identities and hope that the wave of evil will pass.
4. Violent or non-violent resistance.

But De Brul concludes that Palestinians should stop looking to the outside for their help, not to the pope or to the World Council of Churches, embassies or the Red Cross. They should be their own midwives giving birth to something new instead of an 'historic abortion'. They should assume responsibility for themselves. Palestinian Christians should enlist their intellectuals, professionals, educators, clergy to formulate a view of their situation, negotiating their Christian life with their national life. This includes approaching the difficult issue of Judaism and the Jewish people in the State of Israel. It includes dialogue with Jewish Christians and developing a brotherhood with them and reconfiguring the Eastern and Western churches⁸⁶. They are the first generation of Christians to ever live with Jews as governors, they live together with them not in a biblical context but in context of paying their electricity and taxes, watching television and in the complexities of their lives. He asks whether one day, reconciliation might be possible and whether Palestinians – as Christians - can put aside the hatred unseemly within the Christian church transforming it back to a type of legitimate anger that may be constructive. The opportunity to deal with historical problems of Jewish-Christian relations is great, perhaps, according to Du Brul a challenge orchestrated by God particularly in the Holy Land. Dealing with it becomes a religious duty.

Israeli Christianity, in contrast to Palestinian Christianity shares some of the same challenges. Numbers dwindle as a result of high immigration levels. Because of a sense of shared oppression many have more strongly affirmed their Arab national identity at the cost of their Christian identities. Others assimilate into Israeli society paying the same price of assimilation. Of course the universal spirit of secularisation has made considerable impact on the Christian community and many would prefer not to be recognised as a religious group at all. Often however, they do not have a choice. There are many that remain undecided and are hesitantly propelled by current trends, they remain largely unfulfilled citizens of a country they are ambivalent about. It is this area that must be addressed by Israel most seriously.

The Israeli treatment of minorities is in dire need of review. While it is incorrect to accuse Israelis of persecution or oppression of minorities living in the State, there is nevertheless widespread ignorance and intolerance of different religions and ethnic traditions, even within Judaism. This in turn generates estrangement and enmity. Israelis might be characterised as being unintentionally xenophobic. Perhaps a remnant carried through from Eastern European ghetto insularity and fear of assimilation, Israelis, however secular they might be are not well disposed to “strangers”. A peace treaty with the Arab nations and the Palestinians is desired by a majority of secular Israelis but day-to-day interaction and friendly socialisation is certainly not. Unfortunately, without a re-evaluation of the education system little is likely to change Israeli’s attitude towards Arab Christians. Their influence is not sufficient to inspire extreme reevaluation. The distinctions between Muslim and Christian are not appreciated, for the Israeli they make up part of the Arab Palestinian camp and in this capacity they are treated.

While this is not the place to elaborate on proposals for a revision of Jewish attitudes towards Christianity it is perhaps worthwhile to make a few important comments. Just as Ateek argued that Arab Christianity needed to develop a theology towards Islam and Judaism, indeed it may be time for Judaism to develop a theology towards Christianity and Islam. Even though Israel is a nominally secular country and need not make reference to religious tradition in defining its policies towards minorities, to do so from the depth of one’s culture has profound societal implications and endows the policy with cultural legitimacy. As it is the intolerance towards non-Jews believed to be at the foot of Jewish and Zionist thinking that De Brul blames for the hatred towards Zionism, remedying this within Jewish texts is apt.

The ideological kernel for such a task exists in Biblical and rabbinic writings, but their application within a modern context does not. Providing a religious Jewish framework where minorities can derive all they humanly need from their State seems to be a way to disengage the frustrations of minority communities. This does not just mean preaching tolerance, but something more profound. Israeli Muslims and Israeli Christians, to this way of thinking should derive a sense of essential belonging within the hub of the Jewish State. Such a theology must provide them with an identity and a role of integral importance for the existence of the State - not as optional extras but rather as a part of what constitutes Jewish society. Perhaps the same scriptures from Acts that Ateek quoted above to de-emphasise the Jewish presence in the Bible, can concurrently illustrate a tremendous multiculturalism and shared religious experiences under the roof of the Jewish State⁸⁷.

For this is to occur, however, the Biblical role of the “sojourner” would become a legal and theological basis lending itself to the development of an entire theological doctrine of minority status in Israel. By doing this it provides a base literature to develop and build upon while accommodating the psychological needs of human beings desirous of a national identity and sense of belonging to his/her country. Such a theology should of course also impart an expectation of its citizenry and responsibility, concern, love and patriotism towards the State. Of course the desire to become part of the Israeli nation

must start with the Arab population but a structure to allow this to occur and to encourage it must be part of the host mentality⁸⁸.

To achieve this however Israel and Judaism could not see themselves at odds with Islam and Christianity but rather as a superstructure able to accommodate and even compliment them. Much like the role that a secular state plays today in Christian Europe. Even though many are nominally or culturally Christian, their Christianity is not perceived as exclusive of other religions. This of course touches on the question of Jewish self-perception, whether Judaism is essentially a religion or a civilisation. Even assuming the former, modern Christian states in Europe demonstrate their universalism by embracing foreign cultures and peoples, viewing them as complimentary to their society and not as obstacles to them.

With this in mind, it might be worthwhile considering the establishment of an Israeli national Church that encourages Christians both in their religion and in their loyalty to the State. Much like the Chief Rabbi's Office of Britain, established by the Crown who is both Head-of-State and Head-of-the-Church of England. Subordination of the Chief Rabbi to the Crown does not impinge on his freedom to serve his religious constituency or hold ideological or doctrinal ideals different to those of the Crown. It does acknowledge that the religion practiced is one that supports the country and respects it, and prays for the Head of State, for peace and prosperity of all its citizens.

The symbolism of this move is obvious considering that the original church of St Peter was first established in Jerusalem. By now there are several thousand non-Arab Israeli Christians, many are Israeli Jewish converts to Christianity or Christians married to Jews. Others are new immigrants from Russia and Ethiopia as well as Western Countries. Mainly Protestant but some Catholics too. They are currently in an important transitional period, to whom they will offer their allegiances as Christians depends on how the Israeli government treats this phenomena. Many already speak and pray in Hebrew, they read the Old and New Testaments in Hebrew and many observe the sabbath day on Saturday instead of Sunday. Like the Anglican or Lutheran Churches they are loyal to their host country and the habits of that country's culture, they share a sense that the State is important for Jewish survival and often view themselves as Jews of the Christian religion. That they live in Israel and speak Hebrew only adds to the symbolism of the early church and the original Hebrew Christianity.

The establishment of an Israeli church and the incorporation of the various Christian communities into it resemble the suggestions of Naim Ateek and Najib Azuri to establish a Palestinian Church. Paralleling their proposals to the Jewish State, an Israeli sponsored church whose members are strongly integrated into the hub of Israeli society, accepted by Jews and accepting the State of Israel as significant to their identity may serve as a bridge to East/West Christianity. Their prayers for the welfare of the State of Israel, the doctrinal literature they develop and the Hebrew culture that is likely to grow from it could be an important contribution to the body of world Christian theology. The universal ethos of the proposed Israeli church would insure that all Christians of Israel are welcome into its membership, all denominations are important within it and all ethnicities equal.

While the above comments serve as ideas that potentially contribute to a redefinition of Israeli–Arab and Israeli-Christian relations, the political constellations, strong opposition from Christians and Jewish groups both within Israel and abroad, both religious and secular are likely to ensure the present status quo continues until unfortunate circumstances and despair dictate a logic of their own.

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- ² Eugene B. Borowitz, *Contemporary Christologies, A Jewish Response*, New York, 1980, p 24
- ³ Quoted from the Israeli Declaration of Independence
- ⁴ Saul P. Colbi, *History of the Christian presence in the Holy Land*, London, 1988, 163-184
- ⁵ Colbi
- ⁶ Michael Dumper, "Church-State Relations in Jerusalem since 1948" in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, (eds.) Anthony O'Mahony, London, 1995, p 275 quoting Jerusalem Mayor, Teddy Kollek.
- ⁷ See the Protection of Holy Places Law, enacted by the Knesset in June 1967 and chapter 11 of Colbi.
- ⁸ Colbi 281
- ⁹ Colbi 185-200
- ¹⁰ Riah Abu El-Assal, *Caught in Between*, UK, 1999, p 9
- ¹¹ Conversations with Palestinian Christian cleric requesting anonymity.
- ¹² Conversations with Israeli Christians living abroad.
- ¹³ El-Assal
- ¹⁴ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 122
- ¹⁵ Dumper 278 quoting "Recommendations and Resolutions of the Arab Orthodox Conference" held in Jerusalem in 23 October, 1992.
- ¹⁶ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 124 and 130
- ¹⁷ El-Assal recounts how after exhausting every other channel he received visas to enter Lebanon from the Catholic Mission.
- ¹⁸ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 124
- ¹⁹ Examples: Luft Laham to the Greek Catholic Bishopry, Samir Kafity and Riah Abu El-Assal as bishops of the Arab Episcopalian – Anglican church, Michel Sabbah as the Roman Catholic Bishop.
- ²⁰ Dumper 284
- ²¹ Naim Ateek, "Who is the Church? A Christian Theology for the Holy Land", *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, (eds.) Anthony O'Mahony, London, 1995. 311-320
- ²² Ateek 319
- ²³ See for example a Reuters article "*Censoring the Bible Creates Controversy*", 17-07-00. A Biblical song traditionally sung at the Beirut Baalbek festival in Lebanon was censored to exclude the Biblical reference to "mighty sons of Israel, all girt with sword and expert in war". The head of the Kaslik University criticised any censorship of the Bible.
- ²⁴ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 155
- ²⁵ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 129
- ²⁶ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 144
- ²⁷ An account illustrating this issue is found in letter 64 of the Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux, (trans) Bruno Scott James, 1953 p 90-92, as quoted by Zwi Werblowsky. An English crusader heads off to join the knights Templar invading the Holy Land. He arrives at the Monastery of Clairvaux. From there the abbot of Clairvaux sends a letter back to England stating that the crusader has reached Jerusalem and will remain there. The Jerusalem he arrived at was the heavenly one of the heart and he need travel no further.
- ²⁸ See M.A Ehrlich "*British Dispensationalism and its Influence on Political Zionism*", Paper given at the Conference of 18th Century British Culture, Manchester University, January 2000.
- ²⁹ An example is found in *Theology of Churches and the Jewish People*, WCC, Geneva 1988, p 117, a statement by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA that insists that the State of Israel is a geopolitical entity not to be validated theologically. Others churches argue that while they support Israel's right to exist this right must be governed by international legal guidelines not by theology.
- ³⁰ Stuart E. Rosenberg, *The Christian Problem*, New York, 1986 p 210
- ³¹ See for example, M.A. Ehrlich, *Towards a Jewish Christian Alliance*, and Ariel, Yaakov, *Christian Zionism* (1991), Halsell, G. *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War*, Wesport, Lawrence Hill: 1986. Hull, William. *The Fall and Rise of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954).
- ³² Fr. Peter Du Brul, p 123
- ³³ Ateek 316
- ³⁴ El-Assal 60
- ³⁵ Markus Braybrooke, *Time to Meet*, London, 1990, p 143
- ³⁶ Acts 2:9-11
- ³⁷ See *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, (eds) Bruce M. Metzger, New York, 1991 p 162, the term "Arab" is described here as "Jews who came from Arabia" and it is clear that the other guests arrived out of a religious Jewish obligation to travel to Jerusalem thrice yearly on the pilgrim festivals.
- ³⁸ Ateek 311
- ³⁹ Stuart E. Rosenberg, *The Christian Problem*, New York, 1986 p 211
- ⁴⁰ Fr. Peter Du Brul 126
- ⁴¹ Riah was born in Nazareth in 1937 when he was eleven he and his family escaped to Lebanon seeking refuge from fears of Israeli independence. He returned to Nazereth by himself a few years later and became active in public affairs and Christian religion. He had ties with the PLO and led the trend of Israeli Christians to identify as Palestinians.
- ⁴² El-Assal 29
- ⁴³ El Assal 6
- ⁴⁴ El-Assal 57
- ⁴⁵ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 126 the Palestinians are undergoing a new "trial of Jesus", the Jewish state is persecuting them and in response they are creating a new christology to understand this in theological dimensions.
- ⁴⁶ Acts 2.11

⁴⁷ El-Assal 57-58

⁴⁸ El-Assal, Introduction

⁴⁹ Sotiris Roussos, "The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and the Community of Jerusalem", in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, London, 1995, 211-224, p 213

⁵⁰ Anthony O'Mahony, "The Religious, Political and Social Status of the Christian Communities in Palestine c. 1800-1930", in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, London, 1995, 237-266, p 237

⁵¹ Roussos 211- 213

⁵² El-Assal 127

⁵³ O'Mahony, 238

⁵⁴ El-Assal 60 describes the denominational infighting, how they refuse to marry amongst each other, the three variant dates for Christmas; Western churches (Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Maronite and Protestants) on 25 December, the Eastern churches (Greek Orthodox, Coptic and Syrian) on the 7th January and the Armenian on the 18th January. Also two variant dates for Easter. He also describes the splinters in Nazareth; the Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Anglicans, Baptists, the Brethren, the Church of the Nazarene, the Church of God, the Seventh Day Adventists. He asks "Who would a Muslim convert with?"

⁵⁵ O'Mahony 244 quoting Amnon Cohen

⁵⁶ O'Mahony 258 describes that even though the Greek orthodox had adopted various Christian ecclesiastic systems the codes were in Greek and so the Arab speaking laity turned to the Sharia courts.

⁵⁷ The creation of an Arabic Christian legal code became one of the reformist aims of the First Arab Orthodox Congress held in Haifa in 1923.

⁵⁸ Ateek 317

⁵⁹ El-Assal 69

⁶⁰ El-Assal, Introduction

⁶¹ El-Assal 132, refers to Muslim persecution of Christians after they deal with the Jews

⁶² El-Assal 128 describes how Islamic belief holds that Jesus was not crucified but rather, he was raised up to heaven and never died at all.

⁶³ El-Assal 80-81

⁶⁴ El-Assal 78

⁶⁵ El-Assal 130-132

⁶⁶ El-Assal 140

⁶⁷ Thomas Hummel, "English Protestant Pilgrims of the 19th Century" in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, London, 1995, p 177 quoting pilgrim diaries.

⁶⁸ O'Mahony 243. Particularly during 16-19 century.

⁶⁹ Ruth Victor-Hummel, "Culture and Image: Christians and the Beginnings of Local Photography in 19th Century Ottoman Palestine", in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, London, 1995, pp 181-196

⁷⁰ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 129

⁷¹ Qustandi Shomali, Palestinian Christians: Politics, Press and Religious Identity 1900-1948, in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, pp 225-237

⁷² Ruth Victor-Hummel, Culture and Image: Christians and the Beginnings of Local Photography in 19th Century Ottoman Palestine, in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*. Pp 181-196 (p184-189). Photography meant travelling the country with expeditions and increased exposure and communications

⁷³ P 234

⁷⁴ El-Assal 143. In 1992 he was accused by the Church of Scotland in 1992 of being an anti-Semite.

⁷⁵ O'Mahony 247.

⁷⁶ O'Mahony 248, quoting others.

⁷⁷ O'Mahony 251

⁷⁸ Roussos 221

⁷⁹ O'Mahony 221

⁸⁰ O'Mahony 228

⁸¹ O'Mahony quoting Muhammad Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism*, New York, 1988

⁸² O'Mahony 248 quoting A. Bertram and J.W.A Young, Report of the Commission Appointed by the Government of Palestine to inquire and report upon controversies between the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Arab Orthodox Community, Oxford, 1926 p 57-58

⁸³ Roussos 221.

⁸⁴ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 125

⁸⁵ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 136

⁸⁶ Fr. Peter Du Brul p 152

⁸⁷ Acts 2:9-11 "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs"

⁸⁸ The "Root and Branch" organisation in Jerusalem was founded to encourage the universal Noahide creed amongst Muslims and Christianity. It fosters Islamic and Christian acceptance of the Jewish people's rights to the Land of Israel and reciprocal respect for their status as righteous Gentiles.