



## THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES OF JERUSALEM IN THE POST-OSLO PERIOD

MICHAEL DUMPER

*This article surveys the main trends in the relations of Jerusalem's historic churches with Israel and the Palestinians since the 1967 occupation and especially since Oslo. It examines the shift from cooperation with the Israeli state in the early period to a closer identification with the Palestinian nationalist position under the impact of Israeli actions and other factors, including pressures from the laity and an increasingly "Palestinianized" higher clergy, and details the growing cooperation among the churches themselves. The article ends with an examination of the various options for a future church role, especially in the light of the churches' proposal for a "special statute" for Jerusalem, and concludes that a holy places administrative regime under Palestinian sovereignty would be more likely to protect long-term Christian interests.*

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES of Jerusalem are in crisis. Demographically, their numbers have fallen to an unprecedented low, with obvious repercussions on their traditionally prominent social and cultural role in the city. Politically, their lay representatives still wield some clout through their involvement in Palestinian national affairs, but the religious leadership itself no longer constitutes an important force in Jerusalem's politics. The crisis of the churches culminated in the Israeli proposals put forward at Camp David in July 2000 that seemed to signal an accelerated erosion of their position in the city, specifically by the division of the Old City, the heart of their community.

The term "Christian churches of Jerusalem" as used in this article refers to the "traditional" or "historic" churches existing in the city prior to 1967. These include all the Eastern-rite churches—the Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox and Catholic, Syrian Orthodox and Catholic, Coptic Orthodox and Catholic, the Ethiopian, and the Maronite Churches—as well as Western-rite churches such as the Roman (Latin) Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran Churches.<sup>1</sup> The term does not include the more recent evangelical arrivals to Jerusalem associated with the International Christian Embassy, the Mormons, the Hebrew Christians (who, despite the strong

---

**MICHAEL DUMPER**, senior lecturer in Middle East politics, University of Exeter, UK, is author of *The Politics of Jerusalem since 1967* (Columbia University Press, 1996) and *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

support they receive from the Israeli state, are very few in number), or the Russian "Jewish" Christians who were able to emigrate to Israel either through marriage or by proving they have a Jewish grandmother.

The historic churches have long had to coordinate to a certain extent with each other over the holy places in and around Jerusalem, in keeping with what are known as the Status Quo arrangements. Dating to Ottoman times, these arrangements formally recognize the responsibilities of specific churches over certain Christian holy places, such as the Holy Sepulchre and the Tomb of the Virgin, as well as precedents in matters of ritual and access. In times of dispute between the churches, they are used as a reference point, although they are often subject to differing interpretations.

Such coordination has increased in more recent times. As of the mid-1980s, for example, the churches banded together to sign a series of statements supporting the Palestinian people and protesting Israeli measures during and after the intifada. Still, these churches often have different approaches to dealing with the Israeli government, partly owing to a situation existing in some of the churches wherein senior clergy are non-Palestinian or non-Arab, whereas the laity are either Palestinian Arab or identify politically and socially with Arab society. This is particularly the case in the Greek Orthodox community, but also exists in milder forms in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Armenian Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Indeed, it would be possible to correlate the numbers of non-Palestinian clergy in a given church with its position on the Palestinian issue. Nonetheless, such issues are beyond the scope of this article, which is confined to a discussion of the institutional church and the role of religious officials and leaders.

### TRENDS PRIOR TO THE OSLO ACCORDS

Since 1967, two main trends have emerged with significant impact on relations among the churches themselves and on the relations between the churches and the secular authorities of Israel, Jordan, and the PLO. The first trend is the clergy's increasing involvement in social and political issues, and the second is the greater coordination among the church hierarchies with regard to Israeli policy and issues concerning the future of the city. The emergence of a clergy *engagé* in the historic churches of Palestine can be attributed to two main factors: Israel's policy to "Judaize" Jerusalem and the Arabization or "Palestinianization" of the clergy.

The Judaization policies began immediately following the 1967 conquest, but it was not until ten years later that they began to impinge upon the Christian community. In the early years, Israel dealt with the Christian community through a variety of decision-making centers: the mayor of Jerusalem and his advisers in the Jerusalem municipality, the Christian Division of the Religious Affairs Ministry, the Department of External Christian Relations in the Foreign Ministry, and the district governor of Jerusalem. Representatives of

these departments met regularly to coordinate their dealings with the churches in keeping with Israel's overall policy in the city.

This policy had three main objectives: (1) to prevent any possibility of a Muslim-Christian religious coalition that would strengthen and protect the Palestinian nationalist leadership; (2) to discourage the creation of a united Christian front against Israeli policies in Jerusalem; and (3) to acquire or lease as much church-owned land as possible. The land acquisition policy had two advantages: not only would it provide additional space on which to build Jewish housing, thereby promoting Jewish demographic dominance, but it would also compromise the church leaderships in the eyes of their own laity and drive a wedge between the Palestinian Muslim and Christian populations. Because Israel controlled planning issues, immigration, and tourism, Christian leaders often felt compelled to acquiesce in or compromise with these policies so as to secure Israeli approval for many of their administrative and cultural activities. As a result, cooperative relations were established in the early years between Israeli officials and church leaders.

Following the Likud electoral victory in 1977, however, the pattern and network of relations described above were interrupted. Militant Israeli nationalists, secular and religious, were appointed to important positions in the Ministries of Justice, Religious Affairs, and Housing, as well as in the Israel Lands Administration (ILA). These were the key ministries and departments in the new government's strategic program of ensuring Israeli Jewish dominance over East Jerusalem, and their priorities overrode the patterns of dealing with the churches that had existed hitherto. Though the Likud fell from power in 1992, many officials sympathetic to its views remained in their positions. Indeed, the Likud-style approach became more firmly entrenched with the November 1993 election as mayor of Likudist Ehud Olmert, whose arrival coincided with the departure of many officials who had developed good working relations with the churches.<sup>2</sup> Olmert's attitude toward religious pluralism was made clear in his 1997 appointment of the controversial Shmuel Evyatar, a militant settler who had been involved in the takeover of St. John's Hospice from the Greek Orthodox patriarchate (see below), as his adviser on the Christian communities in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the appointment of officials patently less concerned about maintaining good relations with the Christian communities,<sup>4</sup> several other developments contributed to souring church attitudes toward Israel. Primary among these was the growing awareness of the extent to which the government was providing covert support for settler penetration into the Christian quarters of the Old City, which came to light especially during the settlers' occupation of St. John's Hospice in April 1990.

The hospice incident was a defining moment in relations between the Israeli government and the established churches of Jerusalem and a key factor in binding the historic churches together.<sup>5</sup> On Maundy Thursday of Holy Week, some 150 members of the militant Israeli settler group Ataret Cohanim entered the hospice with the claim that they had bought rights from a lessee.

The Greek Orthodox patriarch, Diodorus I, protested that this was illegal and led a demonstration to the hospice. Scuffles led to the patriarch being flung to the ground and Israeli police spraying the demonstrators with tear gas. To the dismay of the churches, the Israeli High Court refused to evict the settlers. The incident revealed a level of official support for the settlers that, even given the known orientation of the government, came as a surprise: Commerce and Industry Minister Ariel Sharon and Knesset Speaker Dov Shilansky spoke openly in support of the occupation, and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir himself intervened to delay an eviction order to give the settlers time to appeal.<sup>6</sup> It later was revealed that a grant of \$40,000 had been provided to the settlers.

For the churches, the prospect of a settler movement out of control in the Christian Quarter with the overt support of a right-wing government was a nightmare scenario, raising fears about which targets were next. The churches issued a joint statement announcing unprecedented measures, including the closing of Christian holy places in Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Bethlehem, a funeral bell toll, and a special day of prayer. One indication of the importance the churches attached to the occupation of the hospice was the fact that for the first time in 800 years the Holy Sepulchre was closed as a protest for twenty-four hours. If the church leadership had reservations about a Muslim-dominated Palestinian state, the St. John's Hospice incident suggested that it could be no worse than the current state of affairs.

The encouragement given to Christian fundamentalist supporters of Israel, particularly those operating under the umbrella of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ), also has contributed to the erosion of Israeli-church relations.<sup>7</sup> The primary function of the ICEJ, whose relations with the historic churches are marked by unconcealed hostility, has been to coordinate pilgrim tours and educational projects sympathetic to Israel. Many of its supporters, however, also channel funds to militant pro-Israeli organizations, such as the Temple Mount Foundation, which promotes the reconstruction of Solomon's Temple in the Haram al-Sharif compound and is supported by right-wing Christians, such as televangelists Jerry Falwell and Jimmy Swaggart.<sup>8</sup>

Another major development encouraging the churches' greater social and political engagement has been the growing Palestinianization of clergy.<sup>9</sup> As noted above, the higher clergy in a number of the historic churches has traditionally been non-Arab, creating situations of tension with the Arab laities that did not feel that their hierarchies reflected their concerns and aspirations. A significant trend in the last few decades has been pressure for greater accountability of the religious leadership, with stronger demands by an increasingly politicized Palestinian laity for greater involvement in the running of their respective churches, and heightened scrutiny of their clergy's stance on social and political issues pertaining to the conflict.<sup>10</sup> As a result of these pressures, and indicative of a deeper shift taking place within the churches, there were a number of crucial appointments of Palestinians as

senior clergy in the 1980s, including Bishop Samir Qafity for the Arab Anglicans, Bishop Lutfi Laham for the Greek Catholics, and Patriarch Michel Sabbah for the Latin Catholics. The theological and intellectual foundations of this trend have been underpinned by the formulation of a "Palestinian theology of liberation" led by Reverend Dr. Na'im Ateek and the work of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center.<sup>11</sup> This trend has strongly influenced the orientation of the clergy.

Efforts to Palestinianize the Greek Orthodox patriarchate have met with far less success. The conflict between the Greek Orthodox patriarchate, with its Greek and Greek Cypriot clergy, and its Palestinian lay members is centuries old but came to the fore in the late nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Despite reforms within the Greek Orthodox Church elsewhere in the world permitting greater lay and indigenous involvement, the patriarchate in Jerusalem has refused to alter its structures, insisting that, especially in the city of the Holy Sepulchre, it must act in the interests of the worldwide Greek Orthodox community and thus cannot be accountable to a small fraction of it, the Palestinian laity. Long-standing tensions between the hierarchy and the laity were greatly exacerbated when the issue of land sales surfaced in the mid-1980s. To the native Palestinian Orthodox laity, the patriarchate's sale of church property to the Israeli government was unacceptable. Against the background of massive settlement construction and the eroding Palestinian presence in Jerusalem, such sales triggered deep anger. Land sales also led, in 1992, to the establishment of the Arab Orthodox Initiative Committee, which pressed for reforms in the process of appointing bishops, greater accountability in the financial affairs of the patriarchate, and a say over the disposition of church property.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, a follow-up conference in Amman the following year received the support and recognition of the Jordanian government and the PLO, thereby increasing pressures on the patriarchate to distance itself from the Israeli government.

Of the remaining historic churches in Jerusalem, only the Armenian patriarchate has faced similar pressures.<sup>14</sup> Though there is no ethnic difference between the hierarchy and the laity, political divisions are reflected in opposing social clubs and benevolent societies. Despite the fact that the Jerusalem Armenian patriarchate has been exempted from the democratizing reforms experienced elsewhere in the Armenian Orthodox Church, the close living conditions of the community, based almost entirely inside the Monastery of St. James and in the immediate vicinity of the Armenian Quarter,<sup>15</sup> have meant that lay influence in the affairs of the patriarchate is strong. As for the remaining churches, most are very small or have no ethnic divide between the leadership and the congregation.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of these various trends, by the time the intifada erupted in 1987 the historic churches were already in the process of reevaluating their relations with Israel. The uprising resulted in the loosening of Israeli control and Jordanian influence in Jerusalem and significantly increased the pressures by the nationalist clergy and laity on the church leaderships to take a clear and

outspoken stand against the occupation. The result was an unprecedented degree of coordination among the churches and a marked change in the church attitude toward Israeli rule. The most public aspect of this change was seen in the publication of "Statements by the Heads of Christian Communities in Jerusalem" between January 1988 and December 1992.<sup>17</sup> There were also such actions as participation in strikes, boycotts, the closing of churches and shrines, concerted bell ringing to mark specific occasions, joint delegations to present church views to political leaders and visiting dignitaries, and the coordinated suspension of major services and ceremonies. For example, for three years running, from 1987 to 1989, Christmas celebrations were curtailed and public services suspended. These were significant steps not only in terms of expressing solidarity with the Palestinian national movement and the suffering of the people, but also in demonstrating the degree of intrachurch coordination.

As of the late 1980s, then, a new situation was in place. The network of bilateral relations assiduously constructed in the early years of the occupation by Mayor Teddy Kollek and his advisers had completely broken down. The churches, working together as never before, were issuing statements of protest against Israeli policy that would have been inconceivable even five

years earlier. Finally, Muslim-Christian coordination over Palestinian religious affairs had reached an unprecedented level. In short, Israel's policy of co-opting and segmenting Jerusalem's Christian community had suffered major setbacks. Moreover, whatever misgivings the churches may have had over the prospect of a Muslim-dominated Palestinian state were swept away by growing revelations of Israeli state support of settler incursions into the Old City.

The implicit calculation was that the Christian religious leadership was more likely to have influence in a bicommunal Palestinian state than an exclusivist Zionist one in which settlers were given free rein.

## POST-OSLO REPOSITIONING

The Christian communities shared the generalized euphoria that followed the signing of the Oslo Accord in September 1993. PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat received a tumultuous welcome in Bethlehem in the wake of the Israeli army's redeployment from West Bank towns, with Bishop Qafity likening the Palestinian leader's arrival to the entry into Jerusalem of the Caliph 'Umar, whose treatment of the Christians when he conquered the city set the tone for Muslim respect of their position in future generations. The newly created Palestinian Authority (PA) was quick to demonstrate its long-term intentions for Jerusalem and the Old City even though Jerusalem was technically off limits under the interim agreements. It established a Ministry for Re-

---

*Whatever the churches' misgivings concerning a Muslim-dominated Palestinian state, they were swept away by revelations of Israeli state support of settler incursions into the Old City.*

---

ligious Affairs, which immediately appointed a new mufti of Jerusalem and then opened an office in the Old City. It also appointed Ibrahim Qandalaft, a veteran lawyer of Greek Orthodox faith who lived in Jerusalem, as deputy minister for Christian affairs. As progress in the negotiations gave way to confrontation, closure, and stepped-up land confiscations, however, the future of Jerusalem was left hanging.

Although the overall post-Oslo trend was toward continuing the coordination embarked upon during the intifada, the period was nonetheless marked by several instances of unilateral action. The Greek Orthodox patriarchate, for example, still riven by internal dissension and with an aging patriarch incapable of addressing the concerns of the laity, suffered from severe financial difficulties that led to a reactivation of its program of disposing of church property. Rumors of the signing of long leases and land sales to the Israeli government, combined with ongoing passivity concerning the settler occupation of St. John's Hospice, led to growing suspicions of closer bilateral links between the patriarchate and Israeli government officials.

More dramatic was the signing, immediately after Oslo in 1993, of a Fundamental Agreement (FA) by the Vatican and Israel. The FA, which for the first time mandated the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Israel, elicited strong reactions from the other churches, where it was perceived as a dangerous breaking of ranks. While the FA's reaffirmation of the Status Quo arrangements in the Christian holy places was welcomed by the sister churches as a belated recognition of their rights and privileges concerning property and access, the agreement overall continued to alarm the other churches, Palestinian politicians, and the Christian laity, which in addition felt that the absence of any mention of Palestinian rights over the city undermined the Palestinian claim and gave credence to Israeli positions. These elements, plus an unpublished annex stating that the Vatican would have an equal place on any council of Christians participating in the future administration of the city,<sup>18</sup> fueled anxieties about an implicit quid pro quo in which the Vatican's recognition of Israel was to be rewarded by preferential treatment in any reforms of the Status Quo arrangements.

The Vatican-Israeli accord was followed in 2000 by one between the Vatican and the PLO, called the Basic Agreement (BA). The two agreements were markedly parallel. Both committed the two parties to respect freedom of religion and conscience (articles 1 in both agreements); to promote tolerance and understanding (articles 2); to recognize the right of the Catholic Church to carry out its traditional functions (FA article 3, BA article 5); to respect the Status Quo arrangements in Christian holy places (article 4); and, finally, to recognize the legal, economic, and fiscal interests of the Catholic Church (FA article 10, BA article 6). There were also some obvious differences between the two: unlike the FA, for example, the BA makes no mention of diplomatic recognition, though judging from other clauses recognition would be likely with the establishment of a Palestinian state. The FA also includes a condemnation of anti-Semitism, which would not be rele-

vant to the Palestinian context. Finally, the BA in its preamble commits itself to the "special statute" proposed by the churches in their 1994 memorandum (see below), which could obviously not be acknowledged in the FA since it had been signed earlier. The BA's preamble also calls for a solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on UN resolutions, a central Palestinian requirement for many years. While these last two items are not legally binding insofar as they appear in the preamble, they do reveal an evolution in the Vatican position, which in part was forced upon it by the strong reaction of the other churches to the FA. The change also reflected the intense lobbying by the PLO and its representative to the Holy See, Afif Safieh (a Catholic Jerusalemite), by the papal nuncio, and by the Latin patriarch, Michel Sabbah. In this context, the change also could be seen as a reassertion of the influence of the local church over Vatican diplomacy toward Israel and the PLO. By these agreements, the Vatican sought, and was largely able, to reestablish itself as the main Christian interlocutor over the future of Jerusalem with the state of Israel and the PLO.

### INSTITUTIONALIZING INTRACHURCH COORDINATION

Despite such instances of unilateralism, the overall momentum of the post-Oslo period was toward a gradual institutionalization of the coordinating process begun during the 1980s.<sup>19</sup> Such institutionalization evolved out of the protracted negotiations over repairs to the rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre. Frequent meetings over nearly two decades had laid the groundwork, and by the mid-1990s a monthly assembly of the heads of churches had been introduced. It was chaired by the Latin patriarch, Michel Sabbah, and had a prepared agenda with formal minutes. The Jerusalem Inter-Church Committee, which acts as the executive arm of the assembly dealing with logistical and practical issues, was established at the same time and meets on a fortnightly basis.

One of the most significant products of the closer coordination was the Memorandum on the Significance of Jerusalem for Christians, to which all the traditional churches subscribed and which was published in November 1994.<sup>20</sup> The memorandum was published in the wake of the signing of the Oslo Accord and the Israeli-Vatican Fundamental Agreement in 1993 and about the same time as the Israeli-Jordanian peace agreement. Given the rapidly changing political context and the consequent uncertainty of the old protections and alliances, the more farsighted church leaders realized that a concerted step on the role of the churches in Jerusalem was required.

The 1994 memorandum is the definitive reference point for any discussion of the Christian role in Jerusalem and as such it is a vitally important document. It expresses an inclusive vision of Jerusalem by recognizing the sanctity of the city for Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. It reaffirms the centrality of the Status Quo arrangements in their present form, thereby reassuring the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox patriarchates of the

Vatican's—and hence the Latin patriarchate's—commitment to those arrangements. Finally, the memorandum proposes a “special statute” for Jerusalem that spells out its vision of the Christian role in the city.

More recently, preparations for the millennium celebrations brought the historic churches together in unprecedented fashion. While much of the event was organized in Bethlehem in coordination with the PA's Bethlehem 2000 Project under the direction of Nabil Kassis (a Greek Catholic), the celebrations had a Jerusalem dimension as well. Here, a conflict broke out with the Israeli government over security issues involving the Holy Sepulchre. In order to accommodate the projected number of pilgrims during the millennium year, the Israeli government proposed to open a second door on the other side of the Holy Sepulchre to act as an emergency exit and as a way of channeling pilgrims in a single direction. While church leaders agreed that a second exit would address the issue of congestion, they feared that the Israelis would insist on controlling the exit, thus eliminating their own control over access to the Holy Sepulchre and perhaps leading to intrusive arrangements of the kind that had been imposed on the Haram al-Sharif.

Israel's proposal was totally unacceptable to the churches. Not only was the prospect of an Israeli foothold in the most important Christian site in the Old City unthinkable, especially in light of the Israeli government's involvement in the St. John's Hospice occupation, but the age-old tradition whereby the keys of the shrine were held by two venerable Muslim families of the city was seen, in the current political circumstances, to symbolize the Holy Sepulchre's inclusion as part of the Palestinian patrimony. To surrender the Palestinian monopoly of the site to Israel in the period leading up to the final status negotiations was therefore seen as fatally undermining the role of Christians in Palestinian society. In the end, having failed to reach agreement with the churches, Israel imposed its own solution by controlling the numbers allowed into the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>21</sup> The churches saw the whole incident as a demonstration of Israel's inability to act in the churches' interest or to arbitrate in disagreements over the management of the holy places. At all events, by coordinating their resistance to the Israeli government, they were able to retain their traditional position.

Israel's proposals for Jerusalem at the Camp David summit of July 2000 also had the effect of increasing coordination among the historic churches. Although the details of the proposals were not officially made public, the main configurations, as gleaned from various leaks to the press, indicate that they involved relinquishing control over the Palestinian-dominated suburbs of the city to the PA and devolving administration in the central areas of East Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif and the Muslim and Christian (but not Armenian) Quarters of the Old City, to Palestinian bodies. Israel, in addition to annexing all the large settlement blocs of the Jerusalem area, would retain overall sovereignty and security control over East Jerusalem, including the Old City.

These proposals represented the historic churches' worst nightmare. Splitting the Armenian Quarter off from its historical demographic hinter-

land would consign it to a slow death and make it even more vulnerable to further property loss. Aside from the arbitrariness of the proposals, which were judged deeply damaging, Israel's failure to consult with the churches, particularly the Armenian patriarch, was found deeply insulting to all the church heads, confirming Christian fears that Israel was bent on an exclusivist vision of Jerusalem. Instead of quietly repairing the damage to Israel-church relations caused by the St. John's Hospice incident, these proposals forced the churches into open opposition to Israel's positions.

In the midst of the Camp David summit, the patriarchs of the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Latin Catholic communities dispatched a vigorous public plea to American president Bill Clinton, Israel prime minister Ehud Barak, and PA head Yasir Arafat emphasizing that "the Christian and Armenian Quarters of the Old City [are] inseparable and contiguous entities . . . that are firmly united by the same faith" and urging that the negotiations "ensure that the fundamental freedoms of worship and access by all Christians to their holy sanctuaries and to their headquarters within the Old City are not impeded in any way whatsoever."<sup>22</sup> The letter also asked to send representatives to the summit and any other fora concerned with the future of the city. While couched in diplomatic language, the letter indicated categorical opposition to the Israeli and U.S. proposals.

The proposal to separate the Armenian Quarter from the Christian Quarter can be viewed as a strategic mistake by Israel in its relations with the historic churches. Any residual incentive for the historic churches to restore the close working relations of the 1960s and early 1970s would have been based on the perception of Israel's commitment (and ability) to enforce an open city. This incentive was wiped out by the proposals and the arbitrary, nonconsultative manner of their presentation. In this way, Israel's proposals for Jerusalem at Camp David appear to confirm the failure and the definitive abandonment of Israel's earlier policy aimed at co-opting the church leadership in its drive to gain international recognition for control over the city. A more recent clumsy attempt to intervene in the election of the new Greek Orthodox patriarch, following the death of Diodorus I in December 2000, further confirmed the gulf that separates Israel from the historic churches.<sup>23</sup>

## FUTURE OPTIONS FOR JERUSALEM'S CHURCHES

In the light of current developments, which have made clear that the Palestinians will not accept Israel's vision of Jerusalem as outlined at Camp David, there are two main possible political frameworks for the future of the city: (1) a continuation of the current Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, with some religious autonomy for the churches, and (2) some form of Pales-

---

*Israel's proposals for  
Jerusalem at Camp David  
represented the churches'  
worst nightmare.*

---

tinian sovereignty over at least the greater proportion of East Jerusalem and some form of Israeli sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall. As for the administration of the holy places, the questions to be asked are what are the options for the historic churches, and what contribution can they make to the current debate over the future of Jerusalem? More generally, what political framework would best serve their interests in the long term?

The closest the historic churches have come to making public their position on the future of Jerusalem is the above cited memorandum of 1994 and its call for a special statute. The special statute, as described in the memorandum, is to be drawn up by a body comprising representatives of the three monotheistic religions and representatives of the "local political powers" (presumably Israel, Jordan, and Palestine). The statute should include "international guarantees" for the freedom of worship, access to holy places, and the preservation of the Status Quo arrangements in their present form. Clause 14 concludes:

Experience shows that such local authorities, for political reasons or the claims of security, sometimes are required to violate the rights of free access to the Holy Places. Therefore it is necessary to accord Jerusalem a special statute which will allow Jerusalem not to be victimized by laws imposed as a result of hostilities or wars but to be an open city which transcends local, regional or world political troubles. This statute, established in common by local political and religious authorities, should also be guaranteed by the international community.

Significantly, the memorandum does not specify which geographical areas would fall under the statute. This leaves open the possibility that it could apply to an area greater than the Old City, perhaps extending beyond the area of the holy places themselves. What is clear is that the option of extra-territorializing the Old City or creating a special holy places administrative regime is not adopted as the only way forward. The memorandum also contains no explicit mention of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel or Palestine.

It is possible to distill from the memorandum, and from the various statements issued by the historic churches since the beginning of the first intifada, the following components of the historic churches' position on the future of Jerusalem:

- Jerusalem should not be the exclusive patrimony of any one religious community;
- the historic rights and privileges of the various religious communities should be respected and protected;

- the three religious communities and their leaderships should be involved in the creation and maintenance of a suitable framework to protect their interests;
- neither Israel nor an eventual Palestinian state should be the sole protector of any agreed framework; and
- the international community should be involved by providing legal guarantees and logistical support.

As for the Palestinian views on the administration of the holy places, it is important to note that no official position exists. The formal negotiating stance is that Israel should return to the 1967 borders and Palestinian sovereignty should be established in all of East Jerusalem, including the Old City. By implication, the churches would be subject to the laws of the Palestinian state and deal with a Ministry for Religious Affairs. The Basic Agreement between the PLO and the Vatican, however, indicates that a Palestinian government would respect the Status Quo arrangements in the Christian holy places.

Coming to the question of which of the political frameworks posited above—continuing Israeli occupation or Palestinian sovereignty over most of East Jerusalem—would best serve the historic churches' long-term interests, it should be noted that an important shift has taken place in the churches' positions in favor of the Palestinians. Nevertheless, not all of the churches—and by no means all of the Christian religious leadership—are committed to the Palestinian position. Many Christians, clergy and laity, have serious concerns about the competence of the PA and its officials. There are also concerns about the rule of law, particularly with regard to property acquisition by the PA, human rights abuses, and interference in the appointment of personnel. Finally, there are concerns about the possible influence of Islamic militants on a future Palestinian government and the extent to which an exclusive vision of an Islamic Jerusalem would have an impact.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the gradual reduction of the role and influence of the Jordanian government in Jerusalem, particularly since the death of King Hussein, has left many of the church leaders with little option but to seek support within the PA and PLO.

The special statute proposal embedded in the 1994 memorandum has far-reaching implications for the role of the Palestinian state in Jerusalem. As already mentioned, the memorandum makes no mention of East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, and the call for international guarantees for activities and property concerning the Christian holy places implies some infringement of Palestinian sovereignty. This may be no greater than it was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but it does signal to the PLO and PA that the issue needs addressing, possibly through Palestinian legislation protecting the principles of freedom of worship, access, and the Status Quo arrangements. The memorandum also implies that the wider Muslim world is entitled to be involved in formulating the special statute, which may not ac-

cord with the Palestinian position. Finally, while the memorandum supports the Palestinian position by denying Israeli sovereignty in East Jerusalem, it also offers the Jews the possibility of participating in the formulation of a statute covering Christian and Muslim holy places. Indeed, the adoption of a special statute implies the surrender by the ruling authority of certain elements of sovereignty, and given the weakness of the Palestinian position, the historic churches are likely to get a better deal under a Palestinian state.

A more compelling reason for the historic churches to prefer Palestinian to Israeli sovereignty, however, is the direct experience of the holy places under Israeli rule. The history of Israeli occupation shows how Israel has exploited its dominant military position to extend the interests and jurisdictions of Jewish sites and Jewish parts of holy sites. The bulldozing, in the immediate wake of the 1967 war, of the Waqf-owned thirteenth-century Magharib Quarter facing the Western Wall (al-Buraq), including a mosque and shrines, in order to extend the prayer area for Jews is still vividly remembered, as are the relentless Jewish encroachments in Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque and in the shrines at Nabi Daoud, Nabi Samwil, Nabi Yusuf, and Nabi Musa. The current precedent of Rachel's Tomb on the outskirts of Bethlehem, in which a joint Jewish-Muslim holy site was turned into an Israeli military fortress, highlights what can occur in times of conflict. Finally, with the St. John's Hospice still under occupation by settlers, with the protection of the Israeli legal system, the churches have no confidence that their interests concerning property and access will be safeguarded by the Israeli state.

## CONCLUSION

The historic churches of Jerusalem are approaching a decisive moment in their history in the city. They have played a prominent role there for centuries and have maintained, by deft maneuvering, an influential position despite the vicissitudes of thirty years of occupation. Despite a demographic weakness, the historic churches continue to control extensive property in Jerusalem and retain important international clout, while their laity continues to play a prominent role in Palestinian national affairs. For all these reasons, they still have a role to play in the peace process, particularly as it pertains to the administration of the city. Thus, despite an overall decline in their position, any Israeli-Palestinian agreement concerning the future of the city that fails to accommodate the interests of the historic churches is unlikely to be stable and workable.

The churches must give careful thought, however, to the direction they should take. They must consider the long-term security of their properties and holy places, while at the same time responding to the needs and wishes of the lay community. In light of precedents and current trends, the direction most likely to promote their interests is support for Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem. Within this framework, they can extract greater recogni-

tion of their administrative autonomy because a weak Palestinian state dependent on external support for its position in Jerusalem is more likely to make concessions on matters of substance, provided that the principle of sovereignty is accepted. On the other hand, because the churches' marked shift away from close cooperation with the Israeli state was in large part due to the Israeli Right's capture of policy in the city, it is conceivable that, in order to bolster its claim on Jerusalem in the international community, Israel could try to entice the historic churches away from their current pro-Palestinian position with concessions on administrative autonomy and interfaith religious councils. Nonetheless, the current extremist and exclusivist political climate in Israel makes this very unlikely.

NOTES

1. The following table shows the populations of the historic churches from 1967 to 1998.

	1967	1978	1990	1998	1998 (%)
Greek Orthodox	4000	3000	3500	3500	32.1
Armenian Orthodox	2000	1200	1500	1500	13.7
Armenian Catholic	100	210	150		
Syrian Orthodox	300	165	200	250	2.3
Syrian Catholic	40	60	50		
Coptic Orthodox	370	185	400	250	2.3
Coptic Catholic	30	35	32		
Ethiopians	50	53	50	60	0.6
Maronites	50	38	35	100	0.9
Greek Catholic	300	335	350	500	4.6
Roman Catholic	3900	4210	4800	3900	35.7
Lutheran	300	400	400	410	3.8
Other Protestant	250	300	300	440	4.0

Figures for 1967, 1978, and 1990 are from D. Tsimhoni, *Christian Communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank since 1948: An Historical, Social and Political Study* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), p. 26; Figures for 1998 are from Bernard Sabella, "Palestinian Christians: Realities and Hopes" (unpublished manuscript, 1998).

2. The most noteworthy departure was Amir Cheshin, former adviser to the mayor on Arab affairs, whose brief covered all of East Jerusalem.

3. Y. K. Halevi, "Squeezed Out," *Jerusalem Report*, 10 July 1997, p. 15.

4. In 1979-80, for example, Israeli militants and Jewish fundamentalists carried out a series of arson attacks and incidents of vandalism against church property. The Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion, the Christian Information Center near Jaffa Gate, and the Protestant Bible

Book Shop were all damaged while a Baptist Church in West Jerusalem was burned to the ground. Though there was a police investigation and several people were charged, church leaders had the impression that the government generally was uninterested and unsympathetic.

5. For further details, see Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), pp. 124-27.

6. Nadav Shragai in *Ha'Aretz*, 20 April 1990, cited in *News from Within*, 2 May 1990, p. 10.

7. One measure of the extent of official Israeli support for the ICEJ is the fact that the president and prime minister usually address its annual Feast of the Tabernacle celebration in Jerusalem.

8. The main beliefs of the ICEJ stem from Christian fundamentalist thought known as dispensationalism, which places present-day Israel in the center of world events by asserting that the "ingathering of the Jews" is a prelude to the "last days" and the Second Coming of the Messiah. Rebuilding Solomon's Temple in the Haram area will hasten the arrival of the Messiah.

9. See further Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Jerusalem since 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 182ff.

10. The high profile of Arab Anglicans, such as former Palestinian spokesperson Hanan Ashrawi and human rights lawyers Jonathan Kuttab and Raja Shehadeh, reflects the close identification by the laity with the Palestinian move-

ment. There is also a sense that Palestinian national identity has replaced a sectarian or religiously defined one.

11. See, for example, "The Jerusalem Sabeel Document: Principles for a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel," *Corner Stone* 19 (Summer 2000), pp. 4–7.

12. The main issues have concerned questions of lay and financial assets and the appointment of Arab clergy to senior positions.

13. See Recommendations and Resolutions of the Arab Orthodox Conference held in Jerusalem on 23 October 1992 (mimeographed text).

14. Since the Armenian Orthodox community is reputed to be the largest landowner in the Old City and one of the largest in Jerusalem, Israeli government interest in its affairs is also strong, and the Armenian Orthodox patriarchate's willingness to sell land and property to the Israel Lands Administration prompted disquiet within the community, leading to a public rupture between the patriarchate and the Israeli government.

15. V. Azarya, *The Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem* (London: University of California Press, 1984), chapters 4 and 5; see also K. Hintlian, *History of the Armenians in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Armenian Patriarchate Printing Press, 1989), pp. 46–50.

16. The smaller churches include the Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox and Catholic, Coptic Orthodox and Catholic, Ethiopian Orthodox, Maronite, Anglican, and Lutheran.

17. See G. Lindén, *Church Leadership in a Political Crisis: Joint Statements from the Jerusalem Heads of Churches, 1988–1992* (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 1994).

18. R. Friedland and R. Hecht, *To Rule Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 478.

19. See K. Hintlian, "Pathways to Christian Unity I," in *Jerusalem: What Makes for Peace!* ed. N. Ateek, C. Duaybis, and M. Schrader (London: Melisende, 1997), p. 25.

20. See appendix in Ateek, Duaybis, and Schrader, *Jerusalem*, p. 236.

21. R. Arnaout, "Israel to Limit Visitors in Holy Sepulchre," *Jerusalem Times*, 17 December 1999; See also *Jerusalem Post*, 24 December 1999.

22. "Patriarchs Demand Old City Stay United," *Ha'Aretz*, 20 July 2000.

23. "Greek Orthodox Church Fears Regional Entanglement in Pick of New Patriarch," *Ha'Aretz*, 5 January 2001.

24. See M. Lahham, "The Continuity of the Christian Presence in Jerusalem," in Ateek, Duaybis, and Schrader, *Jerusalem*, p. 21.