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Jerusalem the Free

John M. Oesterreicher

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JERUSALEM THE FREE

by

Msgr. JOHN M. OESTERREICHER



ANGLO-ISRAEL ASSOCIATION

JERUSALEM THE FREE

PREFACE

I am glad to publish this Open Letter, written by a distinguished American, to the Jordanian Ambassador in Washington. Msgr. John Oesterreicher is the Director of the Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies in the U.S.A.

My attention was kindly called to it by one of our oldest members, Mr. Kurt Battsek, and we are indebted to him also for defraying part of the cost of publication.

April, 1973

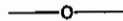
KENNETH LINDSAY

by

Msgr. JOHN M. OESTERREICHER

with an Introduction by

Dr. JAMES PARKES



Further copies of this pamphlet may be obtained at 30p. Details of earlier pamphlets in this series are to be found at the back of this pamphlet. All are obtainable from Research Publications Services, Ltd., Victoria Hall, East Greenwich, London, S.E.10.

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INTRODUCTION

by The Rev. Dr. JAMES PARKES

A few years ago King Hussein sent a gramophone record to all the Christian clergy in England claiming that the past and future of Jerusalem was a matter which lay between Muslims and Christians. Recently he has sent out the same—or a similar—record to “leaders of opinion” in the United States. The claim is not new. It was made by Charles Malik, representative of Lebanon to the United Nations and one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches, a generation ago. It is therefore appropriate that it should be a prominent and scholarly American Christian who should reply, pungently but courteously, to the royal message.

There are three levels in the contemporary controversy about this unique city. There is the material level, the clearing of slums, the rebuilding and re-planning that the city obviously requires. Then there is the historical level, the exploration of its millennial history, especially (but not exclusively) as new foundations are dug, as old areas are cleared. On these two levels Israelis are no more likely than any one else to satisfy everyone, or to be always right. There are similar controversies in every great and ancient city—witness the arguments about Roman and medieval London.

But there is a third level in which it is infinitely more important that right decisions should be taken, and that they should win general acceptance. That is at the politico-religious level, and its twin aspects cannot be separated. From the purely political point of view, Jerusalem became a predominantly Jewish city a hundred years ago, when its Jewish population came to outnumber its Christians and Muslims put together. From the purely religious point of view it is a city whose Jewish origin cannot obliterate the fact that Christianity and Islam are both there in their own right.

Israel has dealt justly with the religious aspect. Some recognition that Christian and Muslim Palestinians have a long communal association with the City, also with unique characteristics, can only take place when real peace between the inhabitants of the Land is established. I think that Msgr. Oesterreicher will share with me the conviction that, when peace comes, Israel will deal with this problem with wisdom and generosity.

**AN OPEN LETTER TO H.E. THE AMBASSADOR
OF THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN
IN WASHINGTON**

Dear Mr. Ambassador,

Several weeks ago, two friends of mine received from you a recorded message of His Majesty, King Hussein of Jordan, entitled "Jerusalem in Captivity." I understand that you sent the same record to members of Congress and "other leaders of public opinion." Though I was not so honoured, I assume that your personal request "to listen . . . carefully" was also addressed to me. From the moment I heard the King's voice, I lent him a willing ear. Yet, while I listened with an open mind, I felt more and more embarrassed; I felt I was eavesdropping on a soliloquy.

Still, King Hussein is dead serious: he wishes to win Christians to his side. I will not dispute his right to seek allies in his battle for regaining the power and reputation he has lost in the last four years but I question the means he employs. He tells his hearers that to Muslims, "both Christians and Jews are People of the Book." This is indeed Islam's stance. Yet, why does the King hide from us less friendly sayings of the Koran? There, Jews are seen as cursed, Christians as hate-ridden: Allah Himself is said to have stirred hostility and strife among various Christian communities, as a punishment for their refusal to accept the Prophet's message (V, 15). With the exception of a few, Jews are deceitful (V, 14). Worse than that, the Jews of Eilath, the Koran tells, not only broke the laws of the Sabbath but scornfully persisted in their wrongdoing; hence they were severed from society and "changed into detested apes" (VII, 167).

The Koran calls both Christians and Jews "infidels." Time and again, Allah's true followers are warned against making friends with them (V, 52). They are even bidden: "Believers, wage war against the infidels who dwell around you. Deal severely with them" (IX, 123). Please, do not think that I wish to cast aspersions on Islam's sacred book; I am sure there are mitigating circumstances for these harsh sayings. It is not the sayings themselves that gall me; what I object to are King Hussein's efforts at obscuring the Koran's fierceness toward non-Muslims.

Again, I am disturbed at King Hussein's attempt to win the support of Christians by telling them that "to us (Muslims) Jesus

Christ was more than a prophet." I cannot claim any special Islamic scholarship, Mr. Ambassador, but I can read. And this is what Allah is made to say in the Koran: "Jesus is nothing but a servant on whom I bestowed favor" (XLIII, 60). In fact, the Jesus of the Koran is little more than the forerunner of Muhammed: "I am . . . bringing the good tidings of an apostle who is to come after me, and whose name shall be Ahmed" (LXI, 7).

Stranger still is the way the Koran explains away the death of Jesus. The Koran considers it a monstrous falsehood to maintain that Jesus was crucified; it asserts that a double of his was slain instead. This is not said to protect Jews against the horrible accusation of collective guilt (IV, 159). The reason for this remarkable twisting of facts is Islam's firm opposition to any doctrine of redemption. However much Judaism and Christianity differ in their interpretation of redemptive events, they are one in their belief that God is not only the Maker of the universe and its Lord but also its Redeemer.

I have no intention of entering into a religious controversy or reviving the charges and counter-charges of the past. Yet, I cannot sink into silence when King Hussein woos Christians with alluring words that cannot stand careful examination. Unfortunately, the King does not stop at his selective use of the Koran, he also writes "optative" history. His recorded message proclaims: "My people and I regard ourselves as the guardians and custodians of Jerusalem on behalf of the entire Muslim world as well as on behalf of the Christian and Muslim population of the city and all Palestine." I have no doubt that this self-portrait is part of the King's dreams; mighty though their magic may be, they cannot be admitted as evidence. Who gave him the mandate he speaks of? When and how did he receive it?

The King seems to have forgotten that only a few years ago his country was largely barren land, physically and morally unable to make any claim whatever. In fact, it did not become a separate entity till the British Government in 1922 carved it out of Palestine—which the League of Nations had entrusted to it, as a Mandate for the express purpose of carrying out the Balfour Declaration—severed it from the area meant to become the Jewish national home and put Emir Abdullah in charge, one of the desert chieftains who during World War I fought, not over-successfully, the Ottoman army. Thus "Transjordan" came into being.

During the 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli War, the country's British-trained "Jordan Legion" occupied the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank of the Jordan river. By "legislative" fiat, the wasteland and the fertile grounds were united; in other words, Transjordan annexed the occupied territory, and the "Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan" was born. With Great Britain and Pakistan as conspicuous exceptions, the community of nations refused to accept the unilateral act of Transjordan—no plebiscite had ever been held to allow the native population to determine their own destiny. Much more disastrous for the King's claim is the fact that the "Arab League" vehemently protested against the annexation, that its members even considered Jordan's expulsion from their ranks. That the threat was not carried out, Jordan owes to the intervention of Iraq—today its most bitter foe. These facts certainly do not establish a claim to guard the Holy City, in the name of the Islamic world or of any other group.

The events leading to, and following on the creation of the State of Jordan, Mr. Ambassador, compel me to consider King Hussein's claim to be the appointed guardian of Old Jerusalem and its Holy Places illegitimate and thus unacceptable. Would that the King and his people had, at least, lived up to the responsibility that he wrongly maintains is theirs. The execution of this duty speaks an unmistakable language. During Jordanian rule, thirty-four out of the Old City's thirty-five synagogues were dynamited. Some were turned into stables, others into chicken coops. There seemed to be no limit to the work of desecration. Many thousand tombstones were taken from the ancient cemetery on the Mount of Olives to serve as building material or paving stones. A few were even used to surface the footpath leading to a latrine in a Jordanian army camp. With the financial assistance of Pan American Airlines, Jordan built the Hotel Intercontinental—a plush hotel on the hill of Jesus' agony! Obviously a road was needed, worthy of the triumphant showpiece. Of all the possible routes, the one chosen cut through hundreds of Jewish graves: they were torn open and the bones scattered. An Israeli collection of photographs of the mutilated graveyard bears this lament: "Because of this is our heart made sick; for these things our eyes are dimmed" (*Lam.* 5:17).

While Jordan controlled East Jerusalem and the West Bank, Jews were not permitted to approach, much less to pray at, the Western Wall of the Temple Court, Rachel's Tomb, or the Cave of Machpelah, the burial place of the Patriarchs near Hebron.

This prohibition not only violated the basic right of any man to worship according to his conscience but also the obligations Transjordan had taken upon herself when she signed the Armistice Agreement in 1949. In Article 8, Paragraph 2, the Jordanian authorities pledged themselves, among other things, to the "free access to the holy places . . . and the use of the cemetery on the Mount of Olives." In the light of the desecrations I have just described, the King's assurance: "It is thanks to us, for example, that the Wailing Wall of the Jews was preserved throughout the centuries of Muslim rule" appears to be highly ironic, not to say insulting. His "for example" is particularly graceless, since the Wall is the only example of an exclusively Jewish site of worship that was left intact. I am sure, Mr. Ambassador, that King Hussein did not wish to offend but it is exactly this insensitivity that compels me to write.

Space does not allow me to discuss in detail the various curtailments of Christian activities by Jordan. To mention only a few: petty restrictions were imposed on pilgrims; institutions were prohibited from acquiring new property; Christian schools were subjected to control of the education they offered. Nor can I do more than mention the crudity with which Jordan together with Saudi Arabia, for many long years barred their fellow-Muslims from making their traditional pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Medina and Mecca. But I must deal with the King's notion that destiny has forced the guardianship of the Holy City upon him. "For centuries our custodianship has been accepted by the Christian Churches. It was to Arab families of Jerusalem, for example, that the keys of the Holy Sepulchre were and still are entrusted. This is our responsibility, and we will not surrender it." As so often in his brief speech, the King writes his own history, one based not on facts but on wishful thinking.

In 636, Arab armies conquered Jerusalem for the first time. For a period, Christians in the Holy Land remained undisturbed. But like the rest of the non-Muslim population, they were treated as second-class citizens. They were forbidden to build new churches or display the cross; the supreme rule that governed their lives was not to offend Muslim susceptibilities. No Christian was allowed to marry a Muslim, ride on horseback, or carry a sword. Public prayer was restricted. No tapers could be kindled or church bells rung.

After the Arabs had ruled the Holy Land for a little more

than three hundred years, trouble broke out among their own ranks. Turkish generals rebelled against their Arab lords. In the struggles that followed, two churches were destroyed while the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was severely damaged. In the nine-hundred-sixties, the Byzantine emperor Focca defeated the Arabs in battle; in retaliation, Muslim assassins slew the Patriarch John VII in 966, thereby profaning the Church of the Holy Sepulchre once again. These few sketches do not quite square with King Hussein's boast: "The Arabs have for centuries been worthy custodians of the whole city. It was they who built and preserved . . . the Holy Sepulchre . . ."

King Hussein seems to believe—I have no doubt, honestly—that throughout the centuries the Christian Churches accepted Muslim custodianship. The big question is how the verb "accepted" is understood. If it means "tolerated," the King is right; if its connotation is "favoured," he is wrong. His story about the key to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is typical of his rewriting of history. When one listens to the King, one gets the impression that Christians eagerly committed the key to two Arab families. In reality, Christian communities constantly quarreled among each other about the time and duration of their respective services. Toward the end of the thirteenth century, the Saracen rulers of the time, tired of the persistent disputes, decided to put an end to them. They turned the key over to the Judeh family and charged the Insaibe family with opening and closing the door. The Muslim doorkeepers, occupying a divan in the vestibule of the Church, are reimbursed for their "work." Till 1831, they even exacted entrance fees from pilgrims. When I reflect on these, not exactly uplifting, realities I find the King's pathos, "This is our responsibility, and we will never surrender it," (I am sorry, Mr. Ambassador) a bit ludicrous.

Earlier in this letter, I spoke of the King's desire to regain the annexed territories he had lost during the Six-Day War. Now I wonder whether his motives are not much more psychological than political. I hope you will not take it amiss if I suggest that he wishes not only to secure again his hold on the Old City but, most of all, restore to his land a significance that goes far beyond its size or history. Created on a drawing board, the former Transjordan was the least important of Arab states: it could neither point to a great past nor boast of momentous achievements. Yet, if King Hussein could prove his claim to a providential mission, if he could once more pose as the protector

of Muslim, Jewish and Christian sacred sites, his country would assume the stature of a spiritual giant. Strong though this search for meaning and status may be, the King must at the same time realize that his title to the "possession" of the Old City and to his "mission" is vulnerable, indeed untenable. How else can we explain his use of "Jordanians," "Arabs," and "Muslims" as if these were interchangeable designations?

The King knows, of course, that Arab rule over the Holy Land after its conquest in 636 lasted only till 1099. The Mame-luks (1291-1517) who followed the Crusaders in holding sway over Palestine, but also over Syria and Egypt, were certainly not of Arabian stock, even though they firmly established the Islamic hold over the Middle East. The Turks who succeeded them (1517-1917) were Muslims, too. They appeared on the scene of history at the beginning of the 13th century, as a band of tribesmen whom the Mongols had driven from their native land in central Asia. In all likelihood, they were not mere victims of a Mongolian advance but rather "Ghazis," fighters for the faith, or, as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* puts it, "men sworn to wage ceaseless war on the infidel, through motives of religious zeal or greed for loot or both" (XXII, 590).

The warlike spirit of the Turks did not stop at the attempts of conquering Christian countries, the then Syria and Egypt were conquered as well and incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. Thus Arabs became the subjects of their fellow-Muslims, the Turks, exposed almost as much as the non-Muslim population to the harsh methods of Ottoman tax-collectors. The several periods of Muslim domination in no way strengthen the King's case; they offer the most tenuous argument, the most fragile basis for the King's alleged tenure as Jerusalem's warden of peace. The switch from "the Arabs" to "us Muslims" and then to "my people and I" is but a device to deaden our judgment.

Mr. Ambassador, since King Hussein has taken his case to the American public, I, too, think it my obligation to state publicly that I find his brief unconvincing. Far from having shaken my trust in Israel, it has confirmed my opposition to a divided Jerusalem. King Hussein begins his appeal to the sentiments of the Christians in the United States by accusing Israel of having annexed "Jerusalem against the repeated resolutions of the United Nations." This is a strange argument on the

King's part. Does he rely on the short memory of his listeners? Does he think that most of them will no longer remember how his grandfather annexed the West Bank and the Old City, even though the Armistice Agreement was then in force? Even Great Britain, Transjordan's fairy godmother, who gave her blessing to the union of the West Bank with Transjordan, withheld her approval from the inclusion of Old Jerusalem.

King Hussein regards the present status of Jerusalem with gloom. I do not. The King is, no doubt, entitled to the view that the unification of Jerusalem is a near disaster. Yet it ill becomes a king to decry, and blame others for, a situation that he brought upon himself. Most listeners to the King's message are, I fear, unaware of Prime Minister Eshkol's efforts to keep Jordan out of the Six-Day War. The late Prime Minister assured the King of Israel's peaceful intentions and warned him against making common cause with President Nasser. King Hussein brushed the warning aside, waged war on Israel, and lost. Instead of taking, with nobility and moral courage, the responsibility for having fired the first shells and bullets, he puts the blame on Israel. In his book *My War With Israel*, however, he admits that President Nasser did not hold him to their mutual "defense agreement": "Nasser never called on us. It was we who called on him."

This seems a rare admission, for the beginning of the Six-Day War is otherwise covered by a web of lies. In the spring of 1967, Egypt had closed all international waterways to Israel, in itself an act of war. Yet, a broadcast from Cairo's radio, "Voice of the Arabs," on May 23, made it appear that Arab integrity was being violated: "The gulf of Aqaba is Arab. To defend its Arab character is the responsibility of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Jordanian Kingdom, and all Arab states. We are determined to defend it—by destructive weapons—against any Israeli attempt or even an American attempt in favor of Israel which seeks to use the gulf and pollute (*sic!*) its Arab waters. We have prepared the gulf of Aqaba to be a graveyard for Israel and a graveyard, too, for American gangsterism against peoples. We challenge you, Israel. No . . . we challenge you, gangsters of the Bay of Pigs . . ." In this vein, the broadcast continued but after the Sinai desert had become the graveyard of the "invincible" Egyptian army, Nasser posed as an innocent victim of Israeli aggression.

Again, Nasser was only too eager to "believe" in a Syrian

alarm and Russian information that Israel was massing troops at the Syrian border. When one day, in the latter part of May, the Soviet Ambassador to Israel called on Prime Minister Eshkol, at dead of night, to deliver Moscow's protest, the Prime Minister offered to take him instantly to the Galilean border so that he could see for himself how untrue the charge was. The Soviet Ambassador, however, declined. I wish I could say that deceit stopped right then and there. But the game was carried to its bitter end.

When the Israeli High Command realized that Egypt was getting ready for total war, it knew that to save Israel it had to anticipate the Egyptian threat. It went all out to annihilate Egypt's fighting power. On June 5, the first day of the war, in a well-timed attack, Israel's air force hit Egypt's eleven key bases, pounding them steadily for eighty minutes and destroying over four hundred planes on the ground. Though the Egyptian authorities were aware of this mortal blow, they permitted Radio Cairo to continue its extravaganzas—if I may use this theatrical term, this expression of gaiety, for a most tragic propaganda. The "Voice of the Arabs" encouraged the soldiers in the field with wild fantasies of victory and illusions of omnipotence: "Welcome to the *jihad*, 'the holy war,' waged to recover Palestine. Your eagles, my brother soldiers, shot down twenty-three aircraft. Brothers, haul down the flag of Israel in Tel Aviv."

The climax of deception came on June 6. Unable to hide the defeat suffered the day before and unwilling to credit Israel with its superior strategy, President Nasser charged that United States and British planes had entered the war on Israel's side—a charge which the two powers promptly denied. Unfortunately, Mr. Ambassador, your King helped fabricate this story. On June 8, the Israeli government released tapes of an intercepted conversation between President Nasser and King Hussein, in which the two rulers agreed to denounce the United States and Great Britain as fighting side by side with the Israeli air force. If press reports are correct, the King later, when addressing the National Press Club, regretted his complicity in circulating the allegation.

To be candid, Mr. Ambassador, as I look at King Hussein's accusations, I am startled by their vagueness. The King charges that "the rights of (Old Jerusalem's) Arab population" are infringed upon. Which rights? One of the first acts of the

municipal government of the united city was to have the Arab inhabitants of East Jerusalem share in the water supply of West Jerusalem. The Jordanian administration had neglected to install a modern system of piped water. All public facilities, like sanitation, public health, electricity, serve Arabs as much as Jews. Histadrut, the Israeli Federation of Labor, sees to it that all Arab workers get a living wage, in fact, the same pay as Jews. Thousands, incidentally, have become members of the Federation. Jews and Arabs have embarked on joint commercial and industrial projects; they have banded together in clubs devoted to sports or cultural pursuits. Does this really give the impression that Jerusalem today is a city in which the rights of men are trampled on?

I think the King was ill-advised to speak of the violation of rights. Does he not remember the uprisings against his rule? On April 23, 1963, for instance, several demonstrations in favor of a Jordanian-Arab republic took place, which the Jordanian army suppressed ruthlessly. In Jerusalem alone, eleven demonstrators were killed and one hundred and fifty wounded, seventeen girl students among them. Or take the way Jordan ushered in its occupation of the Old City. In the words of an English writer, C. Witton-Davies: "It was the Arab Legion that advanced on (it) . . . What followed? The senseless and shocking destruction of Jewish houses that could have been used temporarily for Arab refugees, and the obscene desecration of Jewish synagogues . . . simply because they were Jewish" (*The Tablet*, London, June 12, 1971).

How does King Hussein dare blame the Israeli authorities for trying to reconstruct the Jewish Quarter of the Old City in which at the turn of the century 15,000 Jews lived? The ruins created by the Legion and the slums that sprang up around them had to be cleared. Incidentally, why should the Jerusalem municipality not undertake slum clearance? It is, after all, one of the major tasks of every decent city government. Thus housing is now being provided for Arabs and Jews whose homes are dilapidated. There are at least five thousand Arab and four thousand Jewish families who live in substandard dwellings. Jerusalem's Arabs do not seem to be as upset as the King by Israel's humane policy. Ten thousand of them, men and women, defied the threats of terrorists and voted in the municipal election. By the way, in the last election under Jordanian rule, only 3,500

went to the polls. In the eyes of all political analysts a decisive majority gave their vote to the Jewish mayor, Teddy Kollek.

Again King Hussein complains that "the religious sensibilities of over seven hundred million Muslims" are violated. Why? Because two shrines dear to Islam are on Jewish territory, in the land of the "infidel"? If this is indeed the King's feeling, he unwittingly undermines his own position. How can he, with an attitude like this, demand a return of the Old City to Jordan? Jews and Christians have their sensibilities, too. What if they followed the example of Muslims and considered offensive the location of their holy sites on "alien" territory? Perish the thought! For Catholics, it would mean a return to the Crusaders' mentality, a mentality contrary to the gospel and the spirit of the second Vatican Council.

With his preference for imprecise statement, King Hussein speaks of "thousands of acres of land belonging to Arab families and religious foundations (having) been expropriated." He gives no names, no exact figures, no location, nor does he discuss the question of compensation. May I ask you, Mr. Ambassador, to compare the obscure language of the King with the plain style of the Israeli government? A decision of that government, dated August 20, 1970, declares that the Minister of Finance has been empowered to expropriate "plots of land in the Jerusalem district of a total area of some 3,000 acres. They are located"—I am quoting verbatim—"in the Jerusalem commercial center, North, Northwest, Southwest, and Southeast Jerusalem, the proposed national park at Shama'a and Ramat Rahel." The government decree gives as its purpose "to permit the competent authorities to develop the Jerusalem district systematically and progressively. The development is designed to serve the overall population of the city—Arabs and Jews alike."

The decision goes on to promise "generous compensation," to explain the needs as clearly as possible, and to describe the plots in great detail. Most of the plots are unsettled and untilled wasteland. Of the houses in question, about twenty belong to Arabs, while the homes of three hundred and fifty Jewish families are involved. Neither agricultural land nor land belonging to the Muslim religious endowment (WAQF) are included in this plan; similarly, holy places and public property have not been part of this program. Whom am I to believe, Mr. Ambassador, your King with his obstructionist attitude or

the Israeli government with its creative outlook and its desire to heal? Have you ever seen King Hussein or his government propose any project that would help Jew and Arab alike? I am sure you have not, you could not have witnessed such care, for Jordan has, long ago, been made *judenrein*.

Christians did not fare well either. According to a statement by Israel's Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, in the Israeli Parliament, on June 30, 1971, Jerusalem harbored 25,000 Christians in 1948, that is, prior to the Arab-Jewish war. During the Jordanian occupation, the number of Christians dropped to 10,800. Since 1967, their numbers have risen: in 1970, there were 11,500 Christians in the Holy City. Some enemies of Israel like to tell that the government seeks to strangle Christian life. The opposite is true. Not only are the Christian shrines open to all who wish to pray there, the number of pilgrims is increasing from year to year.

Contrary to the assertions of hate-peddlers, the government of Israel and the municipality of Jerusalem have not hindered but helped the work of many Christian institutions. All those whose buildings were damaged by the war between Jordan and Israel—even those fired upon by the Jordanian army—seventeen in all, were compensated. Furthermore, many religious institutions have received financial aid. To speak only of the Christian ones, the Armenian and Greek Orthodox Patriarchates, Franciscan Friars and Sisters, the Sisters of Zion, for their convents in Jerusalem ("Ecce Homo") and in Ein Karem, the Catholic Church and Community Center at Beit Hanina, St. Peter in Gallicantu, the Lutheran Church at Beit Jalla, the American Institute for Holy Land Studies, and others have enjoyed official support.

Mr. Ambassador, when I keep in mind all the facts mentioned in this letter, I cannot but agree with those evangelical Church leaders who, on June 17, 1971, issued a statement in support of unified Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. They declared themselves "committed to the integrity of Jerusalem, the Holy City, the birthplace of our faith"; they thanked the State of Israel for the "scrupulous care" of "Christian places and people." "Since the Six-Day War," they continued, "all people are free to worship in the place of their choice, unlike the situation that pertained during the period from 1948 to 1967." I can testify to the truth of this statement from personal experience and join

the signers of this declaration in their demand: "The unity of Jerusalem must be preserved at all costs."

King Hussein has asked me, together with other believers in God, to raise my voice "to save our common heritage." I am happy to raise my voice but not to clamor for the restoration of Jordanian rule over the Old City. The Jerusalem of today is not a city "in captivity," as the King likes to think. It is free, as it has never been before. Whoever has walked its streets during these last four years, must have felt as I did that he was privileged to breathe the air of holiness, of God's special presence. He must have perceived that it was a city in search of peace, not one given to strife and hate. Of course, the city has problems; among others, it has to protect itself against the terrorists who have been threatening the lives of its citizens. I watched armed guards near the Western Wall search the briefcases, handbags, and bundles of those who wished to enter the area. I was moved by the delicate courtesy with which they handled their difficult task. I could not help feeling that the city was in *good* hands.

No, I cannot agree with the King that Jordan or the Arab world is the City's "rightful owner." Biblically speaking, Jerusalem is God's city, as the land is God's land. Men are but tenants. The glory of the Israelis is to have been good stewards, to have been worthy of His trust. Though the Holy City is indeed "the symbol of God's universal rule," it is a Jewish city. It was a Jewish singer, not a Muslim or Christian, who prayed:

"If I forget you, Jerusalem,
may my right hand lose its grip" (137:5).

Again, not Muslim or Christian but Jewish pilgrims pleaded:

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

May your friends be secure!

Salvation be within your walls,

And peace within your towers" (122:6, 7).

Finally, for generations, Jews, not Muslims or Christians, kept hope alive: "Next year in Jerusalem!" (*Passover Haggadah*).

Today, these words are no longer a devout wish; the people whom God made His own, out of sheer love, has gathered in Zion; the divided city is one again! And "what God has joined together, man must not separate" (*Mt* 19:6). Because this is my conviction, I must decline the King's offer to assist him in

his struggle for the return to Jerusalem; I must stand by the people of Israel, so that it may live within secure boundaries, and by the men, women and children of Jerusalem, Jews as well as Arabs, so that they may continue to dwell in peace and harmony. I must take this stand; it is not blind impulse but my conscience that makes me echo the passion of the prophet:

“For Sion’s sake I will not be silent,
for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet,
Until her right shines forth like sunrise
and her deliverance like a blazing torch . . .
You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the Lord,
a royal diadem held by your God”

(Is. 62:1, 3).

May I, despite our disagreements, ask that you kindly convey to King Hussein my thanks for his beautiful parting words in Arabic? May I answer with the Hebrew greeting: *Shalom u’berakhah!* God’s peace, salvation, and blessing be with us all!

Yours devotedly,

MSGR. JOHN M. OESTERREICHER.



EPILOGUE

In the preceding Open Letter, written in December 1971, I have taken issue with King Hussein’s views on the past and future of Jerusalem. Having been critical of the King, I think it my duty to applaud his public stand on the brutal slaughter of innocent pilgrims by hirelings of the “Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.” While most Arab opinion makers gloated over the Lod airport massacre, King Hussein stood out by his humanity.

The Cairo newspaper Al Ahram said in an editorial: “This operation which left 26 people dead and nearly 80 wounded in a

lightning attack proved that Israel could not immune herself against the renewal of commando operations. Every Israeli action aimed at undermining the will of the resistance movement will be met with vengeance with whatever available means . . .”

The Lebanese nationalist newspaper Al Yom wrote: “We rejoice because Israel now realizes that it is wide open to the will of the Arab international revolution . . . we rejoice because the right of the Palestinian revolution has now been planted in world consciousness.”

Still another Arab newspaper, Al Anwar, did not hesitate to cry out: “The greatness of the Lod operation is reflected in the fact that the Palestinians were able to persuade the Japanese heroes to die for their cause.”

In contrast to these glorifications of the murder and the murderers, King Hussein condemned the act as “a crime perpetrated by mentally sick people.” Amman Radio quoted the Monarch as saying that “quarters encouraging the commitment of such crimes must be themselves sick in mind in the full sense of the word.”

Whatever my disagreements with King Hussein, I respect and admire his moral sense and his courage in taking this lonely stand.

ASSOCIATION PAMPHLETS

1. **Arab-Israel Relations, 1963.** Anthony Wedgwood Benn. 25p.
A report on a symposium, held in Israel, in which both Jews and Arabs participated.
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