

- 17 B.J. Malina, 'From Isis to Medugorje: Why apparitions?', *Biblical Theological Bulletin*, 20,2 (Summer 1990), p.81.
- 18 See also H.J. Drewal, 'Interpretation, Invention and Re-presentation in the Worship of Mami Wata', in R. Stone, ed., *Performance in Contemporary African Arts*, Indiana University Folklore Institute, 1988.
- 19 Fabella & Oduyoye, *Passion and Compassion*, p. 43.
- 20 Catherine, *Dialogue*, p. 106, 96, 65.
- 21 G. Cavallini, *Catherine of Siena*, G. Chapman 1998, p. 73-4.
- 22 Catherine, *Dialogue*, p. 78.
- 23 Cavallini, *Catherine*, p. 72.
- 24 Oduyoye, *Hearing*, p. 9, 116-119. And p. 22-24 on Berbers and Donatism.
- 25 Cavallini, *Catherine*, p. 54.
- 26 Catherine, *Dialogue*, p. 308.

## Israel's Historic Suspicion of the Vatican

Kevin L. Morris

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

*Psalm 137*

They say, 'Come, let us wipe them out as a nation;  
let the name of Israel be remembered no more.'

*Psalm 83*

It has been remarked that the Israelis have a 'slightly morbid fascination with things Roman Catholic, especially in relation to the Holy See'.<sup>1</sup> Until 1993 a meeting between the Pope and the Grand Rabbi of Israel was vetoed because the leader of Catholicism was regarded as a 'source of impurity'.<sup>2</sup> Since Israel is the focus of one of the most combustible problems in the world, it is important to understand every filament of that beleaguered nation's anxieties, one of which is its anxiety about Catholics. Well-known is its concern about the Church's role during the Nazi era, and its historic contempt for Jewry. Perhaps less familiar is Israel's anxiety about the Church's supposed historic antipathy towards Zionism and the State of Israel. Such amorphous perceptions are the stuff of the Middle Eastern scene, which is a mirage built on sand, an ocean of propaganda,

designed to conceal the drive for domination. Are there any grounds for Israeli suspicions that the Church has looked for a greater role in Israel/Palestine without announcing it, and that it has been hostile to and worked to undermine Israel? Church policy towards Israel can always be presented by the Vatican in terms of true Christian concern; but the question here is: what do Jews see, and how do they see it?

The strength of the Catholic Church's negativity towards the Zionist enterprise should not be overstated: it has been, of course, as nothing compared to the anti-Israel efforts of the Arabs, the Muslims and even the British Establishment; nor has historic Catholic anti-Jewish rhetoric been any stronger than the Muslim. On the other hand, nor should Israel/Jewry be seen as uniquely sensitive to the Vatican: for example, when, in the later 1980s, the Pope spoke up for the Christians of Lebanon, he was accused by Muslims of delaying a solution to the Lebanese civil war, of being partial to the Maronites, of declaring war on Islam at the behest of the Western powers, and of never expressing sympathy with the Muslims of Palestine.<sup>3</sup> But it has historically been ideologically opposed to Jewish nationhood: for centuries the Church taught that the Jews' loss of nationhood was part of God's punishment for their act of 'deicide', and for their infidelity to the Covenant. Such as Innocent III and Aquinas said the Jews were destined to be slaves, not rulers. In *Piers the Ploughman*, Faith tells the Jews: 'you shall become serfs, and . . . never have land or dominion'. Bossuet preached that the Jews are 'visibly fallen, banished from the Promised Land, having no land to cultivate, slaves wherever they are, with no status as a people.'

World War I was a catalyst of anxiety about the status of the diverse Christian communities in the Holy Land: amidst the jostling for status amongst the Christian denominations arose the additional threat of Zionism. French Catholics were alarmed, not least because the French thought they had special interests in Palestine. In 1916 Mgr. Charmetant, director of the *Oeuvre d'Orient*, published a manifesto against plans 'to sell Palestine to the Jews'.<sup>4</sup> Hilaire Belloc told the story of how, in June 1916, he visited Benedict XV, who was moved by the sending of Jews to the Holy Land. He kept on saying to me, 'C'est une honte, c'est une honte'. I told him that it would bring its own reward."<sup>5</sup> As Jews began to make for the Holy Land, the fear arose that they might acquire control of the Holy Places, the sights most closely associated with the life of Christ: a scandal to those who believed that the Jews were unclean because of their responsibility for Christ's death. There was a fear for the safety of the holy sites, expressed in the 1919 American King-Crane Commission: 'the places which are most sacred to Christians . . . are not only not sacred to Jews, but abhorrent to them. It is simply impossible . . . for . . . Christians

to feel satisfied to have these places in Jewish hands.' The deicide myth was fresh in the Catholic mind in a symbolic way: the murder of Christ was supposedly played out over and over again in Jewish ritual murder of Christian children, a legend perpetuated by the Vatican-based periodical *Civiltà Cattolica* from 1881 to 1914.<sup>6</sup> From the beginning, the status of the Holy Places was seen to be vital: when the Zionist leader Nahum Sokolow visited the Vatican in 1917, his purpose was to discuss the Holy Places.<sup>7</sup> At least Sokolow made some progress with Benedict XV, whereas when Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, had met Pius X, in 1904, that Pope declared: 'We cannot give approval to this movement. We cannot prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem but we could never sanction it. . . The Jews have not recognised the Lord, therefore we cannot recognise the Jewish people.'<sup>8</sup> The Israelis do not forget such statements, because they represent an underlying truth.

After World War I, Benedict XV seemed to be looking for Catholic religious dominance in the Holy Land: worried on the one hand about Protestant advances in Palestine, he said 'It would be a cruel blow to Us . . . if a privileged situation should be made for the infidels in Palestine, and much more if the most revered monuments of Christian religion were handed over to those who are not Christians.' Particularly, in an allocution of 10 March 1919, he expressed the anxiety that 'the Hebrews' might achieve a position of predominance and privilege in Palestine. He was particularly concerned lest the control of the Holy Places pass out of the Church's hands. Later, in his consistorial allocution of 13 June 1921, he said it was 'clear that so far from improving, the position of the Christians in the Holy Land is worse than before, owing to new laws and political institutions which . . . tend to deprive Christians of the position they have held there hitherto, in favour of the Hebrews': their rights 'certainly should not prevail over the rights of the Christians'.<sup>9</sup> Following the 1919 statement, an *Association des amis de la Terre sainte* was formed, with Cardinal Mercier as its honorary president, to 'campaign vigorously against the formation of any confessional (Jewish) state in Palestine', and against the supervisory power having any commitment to Zionism [i.e. not Britain]: there was to be open access to the Holy Places, the Holy See alone having a privileged position.<sup>10</sup> In view of such opposition, it is interesting to note that some observers thought the delay in granting the Palestine Mandate to the apparently pro-Zionist Britain was due to objections provided by (Catholic) France, Italy and the Vatican.<sup>11</sup> With regard to Italy, in 1919 the British Palestine official Richard Meinertzhagen reported that 'Italian Roman Catholic organizations in Palestine have been active in furthering Italian popularity and Cardinal Giustini's recent visit to Jerusalem assumed an ill-concealed political role. It is also known that the

Vatican is violently opposed to Zionism.<sup>12</sup> The concern for the Holy Places was, of course, partly a matter of mere prestige: as Sir Ronald Storrs, the Governor of Jerusalem, observed in 1919: 'The Christian communities have no idea of allowing Jerusalem to lose any of its prestige as the centre of the Christian religions, and are far from sympathetic to my efforts to place the Jews in every way upon an equality with the others.'<sup>13</sup>

At this period, Vatican signals about Zionism were conflicting. Sokolow was assured by the Vatican that it did not oppose the British Government's Balfour Declaration of 1917, by which some sort of Jewish homeland in Palestine was assured; though, according to Storrs, Rome indicated 'early though not immediate reserve' about it.<sup>14</sup> Part of the reason for 'reserve' was the presence of numerous Arab Christians in the area. At this time, 'Palestine' meant the Palestine Mandate, which included what is now Israel and Jordan (from 1923 known as 'Transjordan'), where lived Christian Arab tribes, who would have Mass in their bedouin tents. There were Arab religious, such as the Sisters of the Rosary.<sup>15</sup> There were also substantial numbers of Arab Christians in urban Palestine west of the Jordan. Storrs went to Rome in 1922, when he met 'Cardinal X' [Vatican Secretary of State Gasparri?], who said he did not mind the mass Jewish immigration to Palestine so much as Jews occupying high positions there.<sup>16</sup> The implication is that, like the Arabs, Rome was concerned about Jews having power in Palestine. This concern about Jewish power was reflected in Cardinal Gasquet telling the British Minister to the Holy See, Count de Salis, in February 1922 that Zionism meant converting the Holy Land into a happy hunting ground for financiers and concessionaries. It has been suggested that it was Vatican disapproval of the Rutenberg Concession—by which development of electrical power in Palestine was granted to the Zionists—which influenced the drafting of the last sentence of Article 11 of the Palestine Mandate of 1922, restricting Jewish profits in Palestine.<sup>17</sup>

There was early friction in Palestine between Latin Christianity and Zionists. With support from the French Hierarchy and the Curia, the Latin Patriarch, Mgr. Barlassina, was a rigid proponent of a Latinising proselytisation—a sort of ideological imperialism—which made him the object of attack from Zionists, as well as non-Catholics.<sup>18</sup> In the early 1920s, the Zionists seem to have habitually put their difficulties down to Arab and Vatican opposition.<sup>19</sup> Chaim Weizmann, one of the founding fathers of Israel, observing that by 1921 'the most serious political opposition to the Balfour Declaration policy seemed likely to emanate from the Vatican', added: 'we knew that the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Monsignor Barlassina, was strongly opposed to Zionism, and that for some reason he held us responsible for the unsatisfactory settlement of the question of the Holy Places. It was in vain that we declared that we were

completely uninterested in this problem, that we fully realized it to be something to be settled between the Christian powers and the Vatican.' He further noted that the French and Italian establishments were making much of the problem, and that Catholics in Palestine especially resented the giving of the Mandate to a Protestant power, which he supposed 'lent a special edge to the discussion of the question of the Holy Places'.<sup>20</sup> On 7 February 1922 Von Bergen, Germany's Ambassador to the Holy See, reported that Barlassina 'uses every opportunity to express himself against the Jewish colonies, and sides openly with the Arabs ... he represents the interests of the Christian Arabs politically. . . . his influence will greatly contribute to a Vatican stand hostile to Jewish settlement . . . both spiritual reasons, concerning the power of the Church, as well as secular reasons, concerning the friendship for Italy, have induced the Curia to take a stand hostile to the concept of Jewish colonization.'<sup>21</sup>

Pius XI opposed Zionism. At the beginning of his papacy, a Vatican *aide-mémoire* of 4 June 1922 was sent to the League of Nations, accompanied by an explanatory note from Cardinal Gasparri, strenuously objecting to the eventual preponderance of Jews in Palestine, and calling for drastic modification of the Balfour Declaration.<sup>22</sup> The level of contempt during his reign is indicated by an early-1925 report in the Vatican newspaper *Osservatore Romano*, wherein its Jerusalem correspondent deprecated the quality of Jewish immigrants: most were 'parasites hoping to make a livelihood on the assistance of the special Zionist funds.'<sup>23</sup> The atmosphere may be further judged from a memorandum sent by the Italian Christian Association for the Defence of the Holy Places in 1924 to the Italian Government and the Permanent Mandates Commission, which declared its members' shock that 'the filthy Jewish rabble; the race of murderers of the Lord' had begun to invade the Holy Land, and expressed the urgent need to defend Palestine against the Zionist movement, 'whose aim is war on Christianity and the profanation of the Holy Places'. In 1938, *Civiltà Cattolica* (2 April) stated that the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine was utterly misconceived, that Jews should drop their claim to Palestine, and leave the country.<sup>24</sup>

The attitude of the Vatican to Zionism during Pius XII's reign may be indicated by a letter of Archbishop Amleto G. Cicognani, the Apostolic Delegate to the U.S., of 22 June 1943, to Myron Taylor, U.S. representative to the Vatican, in which he says: 'if the greater part of Palestine is given to the Jewish People, this would be a severe blow to the religious attachment of Catholics to this land. To have the Jewish People in the majority is to interfere with the peaceful exercise of these rights in the Holy Land already vested in Catholics.'<sup>25</sup> Knowledge of the Holocaust had no discernible effect on Catholic—or Arab or British—attitudes either to Jews or to

Zionism—a fact which has been hurtful to Israelis. As Conor Cruise O'Brien related, Catholics who disliked Jews before the Holocaust continued to dislike them after it: in 1946 he met with the Vatican representative at the International Refugee Organization in Geneva, and this Monsignor talked obsessively about the Jews: 'I'm not anti-semitic,' he said, 'I just hate them.'<sup>26</sup> From which it would seem there was little sympathy in Vatican circles for Jewish refugees wanting to get to Palestine.

The next great crisis in Catholic-Zionist relations was the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. The Vatican's bias was naturally for the Arabs, since there were many Arabs who were Catholic; and various Catholic Arabs had supported Palestinian nationalism throughout the 1930s and 1940s. This bias will have been given an extra twist by the belief that Christian Arabs were at risk from the Muslims, who would need to be placated by a Catholic anti-Zionism. As the Chief Secretary to the Palestine Government, Sir Henry Gurney, remarked in his diary on 23 March 1948, 'the Christian Arabs [of Palestine], some 120,000 of them, are in an unenviable minority position and believe that they will get no more consideration from the Moslem brethren than they had under the Turks.'<sup>27</sup> On the eve of the 1948 war, the Arabist Sir John Glubb, who led the Transjordanian Arab Legion, observed: 'The Catholic Christians may well be influenced by the general disapproval with which the Catholic Church regards Zionism'; and added: but 'there are many Christians . . . who fear Moslem domination almost but not quite as much as they fear Zionist.'<sup>28</sup>

In November 1947 the U.N. General Assembly approved a plan for the partition of Palestine, between Jews and Arabs, with Jerusalem to be set under an international regime. It was Vatican policy that Jerusalem become a '*corpus separatum*', thereby excluding the city, with its major holy sites, from Jewish hands. It was Vatican influence, particularly with the Catholic Latin American countries, which ensured—along with Soviet and Muslim/Arab influence—that the U.N. voted effectually to exclude Jewish power from Jerusalem. As James G. McDonald, the first U.S. Ambassador to Israel, observed: 'the greatest single factor in [Israel's] failure [over the vote] was the Vatican, which used its diplomatic influence in favour of internationalization of the Holy City. That influence was sufficient to carry the day.'<sup>29</sup> David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, believed that Vatican policy was defined by Catholic opposition to a Jewish Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup> At least one leading Israeli, Dov Joseph, believed that at this time there was also a Catholic ambition that the Church have some sort of power in Jerusalem. (Even in 1993, an Episcopalian bishop in Jerusalem warned against Vatican 'ecclesiastical colonialism'.<sup>31</sup>) He recorded how René Neuville—in 1948 French Consul-General in Israel—passionately wanted Jerusalem internationalized so that the Christian Holy Places would

be under Christian control; more specifically, he wanted to save 'the Holy City for the Holy Church'. Dov Joseph also believed that Catholic Belgium wanted to exclude Jerusalem from the Jewish State in order to protect its Christian character.<sup>32</sup> In the few years preceding the founding of Israel, the American Catholic press had delivered an overwhelmingly anti-Zionist message: they feared that Zionism was communistic (many European Catholics had believed in 'Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik' world-conspiracy theories, which implicated organised Jewry in Bolshevism), and wanted to preserve the Christian character of Palestine. Anthony Bruya, a Franciscan based in Jerusalem, fed the American Catholic press with anti-Zionist stories; and Bruya was supported by Mgr. Abraham Assemani, representative of the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem to the U.S., who wanted Christians to have absolute sovereignty over all the Holy Places. Bruya and his fellow Catholics in Palestine were also supported by the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, established in 1926 by Pius XI, its president then Cardinal Spellman.<sup>33</sup>

In the event, the Arab Legion of Transjordan launched a major assault on Jerusalem, and took the eastern part of it by force of arms, and with great destruction. U.S. intelligence reports of 1949 referred both to Cardinal Spellman, the Vatican and French Catholics regularly reaffirming that they wanted the 'complete internationalization of Jerusalem, its environs and all the Holy Places in Palestine', and to the success of the 'Russian-Vatican-Muslim combination' achieving in the U.N., in December 1949, the reservation of Jerusalem to a U.N. Trusteeship Council being a shock to Israel.<sup>34</sup> Spellman's Catholic Near East Welfare Association had as its National Secretary Mgr. Thomas J. McMahon. McMahon also represented the Vatican politically (Spellman authorized him to represent Christian interests in Palestine at the U.N.); and, according to James McDonald, he 'argued fervently [in Palestine] that only internationalization of the Holy City and its adjacent territory would make possible the repatriation of the Christian population of the city, and without that population the shrines would be lifeless museum pieces.'<sup>35</sup> Indeed, McMahon feared that a Jewish State would expel Christianity from the Holy Land, and advocated the internationalization of the whole country.<sup>36</sup>

On 14 April 1949 the Holy See issued a statement, *De Sacris Palaestinae Locis*, requiring the whole city to be internationalized and the Holy Places safeguarded. The ironies within this position have never ceased to trouble the Israelis, for the Vatican seemed oblivious to the Israeli perception that the Arabs—having bombarded Jerusalem in the 1948 war—were careless of non-Muslim sites and access to them in the Jordanian-occupied West Bank: the perception that, under Jordanian rule, in Jerusalem and Hebron Jewish religious sites were systematically desecrated or destroyed, while



Christians suffered restrictions.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, the Israeli Government—and leading Zionists before them—vowed to protect the holy sites, to guarantee access to them, and accepted international safeguards and controls for them. In 1948 the Pope was disinclined to value Zionist expressions of solicitude for the Holy Places.<sup>38</sup> As Jews observed, ‘During the years of Jordanian occupation of Jerusalem, when Jews were forbidden access to their Holy Places, when ancient synagogues and cemeteries were wantonly desecrated, there was no record of Vatican intervention or concern for the protection of religious rights.’<sup>39</sup> Yet the Vatican appeared to continue in an historic ‘straight line’, with its insistence on internationalization with a view to safeguarding the Holy Places, before, during and long after the 1948 war, apparently continuing to incorporate in its policy what was always implicit in the 1920s and 1930s: that Jewish power had to be kept out of Palestine in order to protect Catholic interests there. Israelis have regarded this policy as a tacit insult: the implication being that the Church is always at risk from Jews in the Holy Land. Israelis have also suspected the internationalization of Jerusalem policy because it has been one favoured by Arabist anti-Zionists, such as Major-General Sir Edward Spears (1886–1974), who was a British representative in the Middle East in the 1940s. In early 1950, Arab leaders in Jerusalem thanked the Pope for his efforts to safeguard the ‘rights’ of the Palestinians, and asked him to press for the internationalization of Jerusalem, saying: ‘the internationalisation of Jerusalem and Bethlehem expresses the will of the inhabitants’.<sup>40</sup> As late as 1988 Arabist propaganda was still using the Holy Places issue in an anti-Israel sense: Henry Cattán said: ‘Israel’s usurpation and its continued occupation of the Holy City constitute a danger to Islamic and Christian Holy Places. They put in peril the religious heritage of Christianity and Islam.’<sup>41</sup>

After the 1948 war, the Vatican, according to McDonald, ‘held aloof during the early months of the new State; talks with Israel were out of the question.’<sup>42</sup> The Vatican refused to recognise Israel, and continued to do so until the ‘Fundamental Agreement’ of 1993. The Israeli writer Amos Elon was offended by Vatican attitudes following the war. He related how the Vatican did not protest the occupation of East Jerusalem by Jordan, presumably because it was accustomed to Muslim rule in Jerusalem; but seemed to dislike it when Israel decided to place its capital in West Jerusalem—he thought because the Vatican held the theological view that Jews should be excluded from Jerusalem. He relates how Mgr. McMahon in 1949 told Ben-Gurion that had the Catholic countries known that Israel would establish its capital in Jerusalem, they would have voted in the U.N. earlier that year against partition, and Israel would never have been established.<sup>43</sup> Elon was echoing the feeling of Walter Eytan, the Director-



General of Israel's Foreign Ministry, who wrote on 8 June 1948: 'The Catholic Church is opposed to the custody of the holy places being vested in the Jews, the Protestants, the Greek orthodox, and the Moslems—in this order; i.e. the Moslems, although not exactly desirable, would be in the eyes of the Church the least objectionable custodians.'<sup>44</sup> In 1949 the organ of French Catholicism *Documentation Catholique* propagated the idea that 'Zionism is a new Nazism'; while the *Bulletin* of the Vatican's Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith carried the Catholic news agency FIDES's 9 May 1949 view that Zionism might be 'spiritually inspired by a 2000-year-old revenge against Christianity'.<sup>45</sup> It has even been suggested that part of the Vatican's motivation then was due to the aspiration of the Vatican itself to take over Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup> This may be incredible, but it is surely true—commonsense would suggest it—that in pressing for the internationalization of Jerusalem, the Vatican envisioned itself as playing a leading role in such an international supervisory body: that is, as having power in Jerusalem.

The next major episode in Catholic-Israel relations concerns John XXIII's rapprochement with the Jewish world: the opposition it encountered undoubtedly helped to sustain Israeli suspicion of the Catholic world. The Vatican Council decided to review the Church's relations with Jewry in a friendly direction, a process led by Cardinal Bea in the earlier 1960s. Though he carefully reassured the Catholic, Arab and Muslim worlds that any resulting expression of friendship for Jewry had no bearing on Zionism or the State of Israel, the movement was fiercely opposed by patriarchs from the Arab countries: Cardinal Tappouni, the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, for example, completely opposed it on the ground that it would cause serious difficulties for the Hierarchy and the faithful in many places. The level of debate was represented in Jewish eyes by Cardinal Ruffini, who urged that Jews should love Christians and desist from 'offensive practices', adding that anti-Catholic Freemasonry was supported by Jews. Theologians such as Bishop Carli of Segni insisted that the Jews were still a rejected people, under God's curse. Pressure was successfully put on the framers of the first official statement, of November 1963, to exclude an exoneration of Jews from the charge of deicide. Protests from Arab governments and Christians flooded in, both before and after the promulgation of the declaration: the Syrian Minister of Religious Trusts complained that the confirmation of the Schema would strengthen Israel, and 'will arouse the Zionists to further crimes against the Palestinian peoples'; it was feared that the Schema was a step towards the Vatican's recognition of Israel; and the threat was raised that its adoption would risk the well-being of Middle-Eastern Christians. The Vatican was awash with viciously anti-Jewish Catholic literature.<sup>47</sup> Ninety-nine of the Council

Fathers rejected even the watered-down declaration on the Jews, while another 242 expressed reservations.

Vatican-Israel relations continued to be rather frosty. At the time of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the Vatican reiterated its desire that Jerusalem—which was being reunified by Israel, and regarded by Jews the world over as the true Jewish capital—be internationalized. Paul VI's subsequent communications with Middle-Eastern powers were regarded by Israel as biased towards the Arabs. The frostiness was there when the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir visited the Pope in January 1973, when he expressed concern about Arab refugees and the Holy Places, and, according to the Vatican statement, commented on 'the sacred and universal [i.e. 'not Jewish' ?] character of the city of Jerusalem'. According to Meir, 'the Pope said to me at the outset that he found it hard to understand how the Jewish people, which should be merciful, behaves so fiercely in its own country.' The Pope also made it clear that his visit to Israel in 1964 in no way constituted full recognition of Israel. The Vatican press officer Mgr. Frederico Alessandrini pooh-poohed the significance of the meeting.<sup>48</sup> Paul VI expressed his solidarity with the Arabs in 1973 by setting up in Bethlehem for Arab Catholics a university, which became a centre of Palestinian agitation. (This was ironic: when Chaim Weizmann met Cardinal Gasparri in the 1920s, Gasparri told him that, while he was not anxious about Zionist colonization, he did fear the Jewish university in Jerusalem.)<sup>49</sup> Thus Paul VI continued a policy of material support for the Palestinians initiated by Pius XII in 1948. During his pontificate, the Holy See repeatedly urged—either implicitly or explicitly—that the Palestinian refugees be allowed to return home; and in July 1974 the Pope for the first time made it clear that the Palestinians were a people, and that he wanted them to have a homeland.<sup>50</sup>

Catholic anti-Zionist activity continued in the 1970s: in 1974 Archbishop Hilarion Capucci was convicted by the Israelis of gun-running for the Palestinians. After the Pope achieved his release, he continued with his work for the PLO, then widely regarded as a terrorist organization. Apparently, Paul VI met Arafat: he had certainly met PLO representatives by the end of 1977.<sup>51</sup> Another straw in the wind of sympathy was the publication in 1970 of Lucas Grollenberg's *Palestine Comes First* (revised edition 1977, enlarged edition printed in English 1980), which—alongside article 20 of the Palestinian National Charter—denied the validity of Jewish nationalism, and compared the Israelis to Nazis. This was a particularly bold anti-Israel broadside, in view of his being a Dominican, and the historic connection of his Order with the persecution of Jewish people in the days of the Spanish Inquisition. The book was remarked upon in a Jewish account of Christian anti-Zionism, and criticized by other

Jews.<sup>52</sup> A Jewish historian noted how in 1973, just after Israel had nearly been destroyed, and the Arabs had inaugurated their great manipulation of the oil supply in their ongoing campaign against Israel, the Vatican spokesman Mgr. Alessandrini praised the 'unifying power' of oil, saying Arabs were entitled to use the oil weapon, especially since Jews had long mobilized financial power.<sup>53</sup> By the end of the 1970s Jewish observers were concerned that the Vatican, like the Arabs, tended not to use the name 'Israel', while apparently having no scruple about using the word 'Palestine', even though Israel manifestly existed, while there had never been an Arab state called 'Palestine'. They were also concerned that the Vatican—with the long-term guidance of Fr. Ibrahim Ayad, a delegate of the Palestine National Council—began a relationship with the PLO (at virtually the same time as the British Government), appeared to disparage the Camp David agreement, and spoke up for 'Palestinian rights'.<sup>54</sup> This worried Israel because it was then quite clear that the PLO was a terrorist organization, whose purpose—other than the then often-stated one of destroying Israel—seemed to be the arbitrary murder and terrorizing of Jews—not to mention the dreadful suffering they inflicted upon the Christians of Lebanon from 1976 to 1982. Prominent in Israeli minds were PLO actions such as the murder of 22 Jewish children at a school in Ma'alot, in northern Israel, on 14 May 1974, and the murder of 39 bus-passengers at Herzliya, on the Israeli coast, on 11 March 1978.

The Vatican opposed the 1980 declaration of unified Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. On 15 Sept 1982—three months after the PLO had shot the Israeli Ambassador to Britain—Pope John Paul II met Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the PLO and leading representative of Palestinian nationalism; and the Vatican issued a statement expressing papal support for 'a recognition of the rights of all peoples and in particular those of the Palestinian people for their homeland'. Jews could not remember any pope ever encouraging Jewish national aspirations in this way. The Israeli Government described the meeting as 'revolting', expressing shock that the Pope had received the leader of 'an organization of murderers'. The spirit of this statement appeared to Jews to be perverse in the context of a statement of the Pope reported in *The Jewish Chronicle* of 28 Feb 1986: to the effect that 'the God of the Covenant does not restrict His promise to any specific terrestrial homeland, to any temporal dwelling. And no temporal condition of human existence can accomplish God's promise.' If the Pope did indeed say this, and if his meaning was what it appeared to mean, then the question does arise of why the papacy should have promoted secular Arab nationalism but marginalized—perhaps even denied—Jewish Bible-based nationalism. In order to understand Israeli bitterness about such parleying, it is important to remember that in the later

1970s and earlier 1980s, the PLO and the Arab world generally were repeatedly declaring their intention of destroying Israel, and of having Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital, with no question of the city's 'internationalization' or any 'international status'.

Shortly after this, the Catholic journalist Clifford Longley noted how strongly Jews felt about the Vatican's non-recognition of Israel, suspecting that its real reason was pro-Arab, pro-Palestinian sympathy; and he suggested that for the Church to accept the notion of the Jews returning to the Promised Land would mean 'an alteration in a basic element of Christian theology'.<sup>55</sup> When Cardinal John O'Connor of New York visited the Middle East in early 1987, though he met Arab leaders and did the usual tour of the Palestinian refugee camps—which always carries the message of condemning Israeli 'depredations'—he had Vatican orders to avoid meeting Israeli leaders, on the grounds that such meetings would be interpreted as recognition of the State and endanger thousands of Christians in the Middle East.<sup>56</sup> That year, for the first time, a Palestinian—Archbishop Michel Sabbah, rector of the Catholic University of Bethlehem (which had been such a thorn in Israel's side)—was appointed as Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, a move observed to mark a politicization of Christianity in the Holy Land, and to be a blow against 'injustice and oppression': 'This advocacy of a theology of justice rather than of reconciliation follows the appointment ... of a Nazareth-born Arab priest as Latin Patriarch.'<sup>57</sup> Sabbah duly joined Archbishop Hilarion Capucci in supporting Palestinian nationalism, thereby incurring the wrath of the Israeli authorities.<sup>58</sup> Shortly afterwards, Yitzhak Shamir, the Israeli Prime Minister, refused to meet the Pope when he visited Rome. Next year, the Chief Rabbi of Rome accused the Vatican and the Catholic media of likening Zionism to Nazism<sup>59</sup>—a commonplace of communist, Arab and British propaganda. In 1991 a Vatican spokesman referred to 'the difficult situation of the Catholic Church in Israel'.<sup>60</sup> In the same year, the chairman of the World Jewish Congress accused the Vatican of insulting Israel by refusing to enter into diplomatic relations with it prior to the second stage of the Middle East peace process.<sup>61</sup>

In view of such a history, it was quite consistent that when, in December 1993, the 'Fundamental Agreement' between the Holy See and Israel was eventually signed, the Vatican insisted on keeping the ceremony as low-key as possible; and subsequently, the Holy See rejected Israel's appointee as first Ambassador to the Vatican.<sup>62</sup> And when, in June 1994, diplomatic relations were fully established, the Pope emphasised that it was not uniquely special: that it went *pari passu* with similar developments *vis-à-vis* Jordan, and the 'significant development of dialogue with the PLO'. At first, the Vatican refused to site its nunciature in Jerusalem,<sup>63</sup> and

continued to insist that Jerusalem should have an internationally-agreed status: which to Israelis implied that Catholics thought the Holy Places were not, after all, safe in Jewish hands.<sup>64</sup> In July 1994 the astounding rumour was floated that the Holy See was proposing Jordan as the governing authority for Jerusalem.<sup>65</sup>

The Church always expressed the reasons for its policy towards Zionism and Israel in the most diplomatic and reasonable terms—the Holy See could not recognize Israel because it did not recognize states whose borders were undefined, etc.; but, given the broad historical scope of Catholic anti-Jewish feeling it was understandably difficult for Israel to feel comfortable with Catholic policies towards it: there was a perceived spirit of permanent grudgingness towards the Jews, of increasingly explicit warm support for the Arabs. They suspected that the perversity of Catholic anti-Semitism still lingered. The dispute about the alleged indifference of Pius XII to Nazi persecution of the Jews, and Vatican aid to Nazis, continued to flare up during the 1980s and 1990s; and Jewry wondered if the fact that French Catholic clergy for almost half a century protected—apparently with the backing of the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Villot—the Catholic Nazi war criminal Paul Touvier—who had persecuted Jews—had a bearing on Vatican attitudes. Truly, not many Catholics have shared Jacques Maritain's view, that "'Anti-Israelism' is no better than anti-Semitism", because it is the wish to see Jewry again reduced to nothingness: quite the reverse, for Catholics—along with Western liberals—tend to buy into the Arab and Muslim view that all their problems—including terrorism—are the fault of Israel—an uncanny echo of the old view held by the Christian world of the Jew as scapegoat. Following the 11 September atrocities in Washington and New York, an editorial in the leading Catholic news periodical *The Tablet* pointed the way, saying it was necessary to get to the 'root' of the Islamic challenge: 'The United States does not begin to understand why it appears to significant parts of the Arab world—particularly in its policies towards Israel—to be the Great Satan.' And in the same issue a contributor says that Israel, that 'violent island of Western hate in the middle of Islam's continent is the match that sets the fire alight.'<sup>66</sup> Most Catholics—along with Western liberals—only have eyes for the Palestinian refugee camps, and the killing of Palestinians, and sympathize with the Arabs, especially since some of them are Christians. But then the Arabs have always looked to the abolition of the Jewish State, and particularly to the dispossession of Jews in Jerusalem: a goal surely not distasteful to many Catholics, as the above evidence suggests. What is clear is that it has never crossed the mind of the Church to suppose, with Jewry, that the Bible gives sanction to the existence of Israel; which in turn suggests that the Church has never really

believed that Israel has a right to exist: as *Osservatore Romano* stated at the very moment of Israel's founding, 'modern Zionism is not the true heir of Biblical Israel, but a secular state ... therefore the Holy Land and its sacred sites belong to Christianity, the 'true Israel.'<sup>67</sup> Israel's 'morbid fascination' with the Church is a function of what looks like the Church's morbid fascination with both Jewry and status within the Holy Land.

- 1 *The Tablet* 12 Nov. 1977, p.1080.
- 2 *Catholic Herald* 16 Apr. 1993.
- 3 Eg. see *Catholic Herald* 5 Sept. 1986, *Crescent International* 16 Sept. 1989.
- 4 Roger Aubert et al. *The Church in a Secularised Society* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), p. 496.
- 5 Cited A.N. Wilson *Hilaire Belloc* (Penguin, 1986), p.229.
- 6 See Charlotte Klein 'Damascus to Kiev: Civiltà Cattolica on Ritual Murder' *Wiener Library Bulletin* vol.XXVII, NS. No. 32 (1974), pp.18–25.
- 7 Sokolow *History of Zionism 1600–1918* (Longmans, Green, 1919), vol.II, p.53.
- 8 *Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, cited Barnet Litvinoff *The Burning Bush* (Collins, 1989) p.417.
- 9 Cited in Henry E.G. Rope *Benedict XV The Pope of Peace* (John Gifford, 1941), pp.211, 275–6.
- 10 Aubert op. cit., p.497.
- 11 Eg. Sir Ronald Storrs *Lawrence of Arabia, Zionism and Palestine* (Penguin, 1940), p.69.
- 12 Meinerzhagen *Middle East Diary 1917–1956* (Cresset Press, 1959), p.59.
- 13 Storrs op. cit., pp.83–4.
- 14 Storrs op. cit., pp.51, 52; and see Herbert Samuel *Memoirs* (Cresset Press, 1945), p.153.
- 15 See Sir Alec Seath Kirkbride *A Crackle of Thorns* (John Murray, 1956), pp.20–1.
- 16 Storrs op.cit., p.68.
- 17 Christopher Sykes *Cross Roads to Israel* (Collins, 1965), p.113.
- 18 Aubert op. cit., p.497.
- 19 Storrs op. cit., p.109. n.1.
- 20 Weizmann *Trial and Error The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann* (East & West Library, 1950), pp.353, 354, 356.
- 21 Cited Pinchas E. Lapide *The Last Three Popes and the Jews* (Souvenir Press, 1967), p.269.
- 22 Esther Feldblum 'On the Eve of a Jewish State: American-Catholic Responses' *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* vol.64 (Dec.1974) No.2, p.109.
- 23 Cited Martin Gilbert *Jerusalem in the Twentieth Century* (Chatto & Windus, 1996), p.111.
- 24 Cited Lapide op. cit., pp.91, 276.
- 25 Feldblum op. cit., p.109.
- 26 Conor Cruise O'Brien *The Siege* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), p.266.
- 27 Unpublished Diary 15 March to 14 May 1948, in Middle East Centre, St. Anthony's College, Oxford.
- 28 Glubb 'Minorities in the Arab World', Glubb Papers, Middle East Centre, St. Anthony's College, Oxford.
- 29 McDonald *My Mission to Israel 1948–1951* (Victor Gollancz, 1951), p. 187.
- 30 Ben-Gurion *Israel A Personal History* (New English Library, 1972), p.381.

- 31 *Catholic Herald* 15 Oct 1993.
- 32 Dov Joseph *The Faithful City* (Schocken Publishing House. Tel-Aviv, 1960), pp.273, 274.
- 33 Feldblum op. cit., pp.109–111.
- 34 *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1949, vol. VI (United States Government, Washington, 1977), pp.1309, 1533.
- 35 McDonald op. cit., p.188.
- 36 Feldblum op. cit., p.112.
- 37 Eg. Chaim Herzog *Who Stands Accused? Israel Answers Its Critics* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978), pp.30–2, 86.
- 38 McDonald op. cit., p.32.
- 39 *Jewish Chronicle* 27 June 1982.
- 40 *The Universe* 3 Feb 1950.
- 41 Cattan *The Palestine Question* (Croom Helm, 1988), p.267.
- 42 McDonald op.cit., p.187.
- 43 Elon *Jerusalem City of Mirrors* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1990), pp.241–2.
- 44 Cited Lapidé op. cit., p.284.
- 45 See Lapidé op. cit., pp.286–7.
- 46 Lapidé op. cit., pp.291–2.
- 47 See Yehoshafat Harkabi *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (Valentine, Mitchell, 1972), pp.288–90, and “‘Conspiracy Against the Church’ By ‘Orthodox Catholics’”, *Wiener Library Bulletin* vol. XVIII no. 3 (July 1964), p.38; also Marie Louis-Gabriel ‘New Vision at the Vatican’ *Wiener Library Bulletin* vol XX no.1, n.s. no.2 (Winter 1965–6), pp.1–6.
- 48 See *My Life By Golda Meir* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), pp.340–3, Peter Hebblethwaite *Paul VI* (Harper Collins, 1993), p.606.
- 49 Weizmann op. cit., p.354.
- 50 See Livia Rokach *The Catholic Church and the Question of Palestine* (Saqi Books, 1987), pp.39–40, 46, 112, 168.
- 51 *The Tablet* 29 Jan 1994, p.120; 12 Nov 1977, pp.1079, 1080.
- 52 Henri Stelman ‘Christian Anti-Zionism’ *Wiener Library Bulletin* vol.XXIV NS. Nos. 53/54 (1981), p.134; *Catholic Herald* 25 Jan 1980.
- 53 Walter Laqueur *Confrontation The Middle-East War and World Politics* (Wildwood House/Abacus, 1974) p.211.
- 54 Eg. *Jewish Chronicle* 2 Oct 1979.
- 55 Longley ‘Christianity’s struggle to find a place for the Promised Land’ *The Times* 31 Mar 1986, p.14.
- 56 *The Times* 2 Jan 1987, p.6; *Catholic Herald* 9 Jan 1987.
- 57 *The Independent* 25 Jan 1988.
- 58 Eg. *Catholic Herald* 7 Feb 1992.
- 59 *Catholic Herald* 8 July 1988.
- 60 *Catholic Herald* 1 Feb 1991.
- 61 *Catholic Herald* 6 Dec 1991.
- 62 *The Tablet* 8 Jan 1994, p.25; 22 Jan 1994, p.88.
- 63 *Catholic Herald* 17 Dec 1993.
- 64 *The Tablet* 25 June 1994, pp.814–5.
- 65 *Catholic Herald* 15 July 1994.
- 66 Maritain *On the Church of Christ* (Notre Dame UP, 1973), p.171; *The Tablet* 22 Sept 2001, pp.1323, 1325; and see *ibid.* 1328, and *The Tablet* 29 Sept 2001, p.1361.
- 67 Lapidé op. cit., p.282.