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WITHOUT JERUSALEM

The hullabaloo worldwide over Israel's enormity in deciding to build a housing project in its capital city should send an urgent warning to Israel's political leaders. They and their predecessors have persistently failed to confront the part played by the Christian world, not to mention traditional antisemitism, in supporting the Moslem Arabs' monstrous claim to "ownership" of Jerusalem. One of the great changes effected by the rise of Zionism, and accelerated by the establishment of the Jewish state, was the transference, by and large, of the thrust of antisemitism from the individual Jew as a non-person to the Jew as an equal, with a national state like everybody else.

Most actively hostile to Zionism has been the Catholic church, for whom the central element in the situation created by restored Jewish sovereignty has been the fear of Jewish dominion over Jerusalem. It is a real and understandable fear. Jewish rule over the Christian holy places constitutes a direct challenge to the almost preternatural assertion that (because of the Jews' rejection of Jesus) no Jewish polity would or could ever arise again in Jerusalem.

If, as in 1967, the church found itself confronted by actual Jewish rule in Jerusalem, it has naturally sought ways and means to break that hold. This does not mean that other Christian denominations have not been similarly guilty (remember how they all "stood by" when the Arabs in the Old City under Jordan systematically ravaged ancient Jewish graveyards and destroyed every synagogue in sight). But in this respect a vast gulf separates the religious establishment from the lay masses.

Indeed, among Israel's good friends are devout Christians of all denominations. This generation, moreover, has seen the growth of a great movement in non-mainstream Christianity which has become a redoubtable ally in Israel's struggle with its many enemies. It does not, however, command the corridors of power.

On the morrow of the Holocaust, the Christian nations, among them those who had refused to help save Jews, who could have been saved, from the Nazi inferno, agreed at the newly formed United Nations to sponsor the establishment of a tiny Jewish state in a part of Palestine. Excluded from the envisaged sovereignty was the city of Jerusalem, the time-hallowed capital of the Jewish people. It was to be "internationalized." Through successive vicissitudes, and as a result of a defeated Arab aggression, Israel finally gained control of its ancient capital.

Most of the Christian governments, admittedly following the lead of the American government, refused and continue to refuse to recognize Israel's right to Jerusalem. They all know the Bible, which dramatically records, and presages, the centrality of the city throughout Jewish history; which reflects its passionate relationship, going back 3,000 years, not only with the Jewish nation, but with the Jewish individual, his daily life and occasions. Yet neither the Bible nor the modern mandate for Palestine which reaffirmed that unique historic connection in legal terms; neither logic, nor common decency, nor even, now in the US, the decision of the legislature to transfer its embassy to Israel's capital has been strong enough to overcome the prejudice of executive government.

THE most brilliant maneuver of official America and of the European countries in promoting their own prejudice has been simply to ignore the unimpeachable Jewish truth, and to embrace the fantastic hoax of a Moslem religious overruling right and an Arab overruling political claim. They have actively and relentlessly collaborated with the Arabs in injecting a flagrantly rootless mendacity into ongoing history which, they insist, must supersede the Jewish truth. It was an American president who, when Israel had regained the Old City of Jerusalem from the Jordanians, described it as "occupied Arab territory." Persistent propaganda has widely planted the notion that Jerusalem is "a city holy to three faiths." Even the pope, in a recent speech, repeated this grotesque untruth.

Nobody, from the pope downward, through calculating politicians and tendentious media down to the last Arab propagandist, has been able to produce a single text in the Holy Koran containing even a mention of Jerusalem's name; nor any happening in history since then, to accord the remotest justification for this claim. Without Jerusalem not an iota would be changed in the texture of Islam, or in the personal life of the Arab or any other Moslem. He would continue to pray in the direction of Mecca, as he has always done.

But can you imagine Christianity without Jerusalem? Can one even conceive Judaism, or the daily life of any conscious Jew, if his Jerusalem were removed from his orbit? The enormity of the sin envisaged by the Christian collaborators of the Moslems was reflected in the pithy summing up by the British (Christian) writer and historian, Christopher Sykes: "To the Moslems," he wrote "it is not Jerusalem but a certain site in Jerusalem, which is venerated the majestic Dome of the Rock. To a Moslem, there is a profound difference between Jerusalem and Mecca or Medina. The latter are holy places containing holy sites.

Apart from the hallowed rock, Jerusalem has no major Islamic significance." It has often been suggested that the American promotion of the Arab-Moslem claim was born of the usual moral considerations, petrodollars, oil, Saudi Arabian and other Arab markets. This, however, does not tell the whole story. There is much earlier testimony which must be recalled.

When in 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration and asked US President Wilson to subscribe to it, he was advised by secretary of state Robert Lansing not to do so: "Many Christian sects and individuals," he wrote, "would undoubtedly resent turning the Holy Land over to the absolute control of the race credited with the death of Christ." It is not enough for Israel to reassert its exclusive sovereignty in Jerusalem. What our government must make clear is its absolute refusal to countenance any interference in the execution of that right - no less than the US in Washington, the UK in London, or Saudi Arabia in Riyadh or Mecca.