

# Israel and the Palestinians

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**W**ILL ISRAEL, by sheer intransigence, drive the Palestinians and their Arab friends to the destruction of Israel, a new Holocaust? Most of the news that comes out of Israel seems to indicate just that. To those of us who are committed to Israel's existence the prospect is tragic, a prospect of hubris and self-willed destruction. A recent visit to Israel, in May, showed this writer another side of Zionist aspiration in Israel, one that is a sign of hope and that deserves to be better

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known than it is in Britain. This is the movement called *New Outlook*, with its monthly journal under the same title.\*

One must say at the outset, when one writes about Israel, where one stands. Otherwise, one is dismissed, if one criticises Israel as an anti-Semite or, if a Jew, as anti-Zionist. I write as one who could not walk through the Holocaust memorial at Yad Vashem without weeping. To be a Zionist it seems necessary to be Jewish, and only in that sense do I, as Christian, not qualify. Many of my friends, Arabs and Christians and especially people from Third World countries, regard the Zionist demand for a Jewish State as intrinsically racist. With this I cannot agree, as I see the necessity for the Jews,

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# The French Connection

invited by Pope Paul VI to concelebrate the Eucharist with him in St Peter's.

The history of these men, all of whom exercised enormous influence on mid-twentieth century Catholic theology, endorses von Hügel's view that truth only makes its way in human history with difficulty and much 'friction'. It also illustrates the extent to which that constricting uniformity of thought and vision which seemed to many both within and outside Roman Catholicism to be the trademark of modern Catholicism before Vatican II was, in fact, always an illusion. It was an illusion propagated in innocence (as ideologies usually are) by those who identified Catholic Christianity with one aspect of its post-seventeenth century development. In the climate in which these French theologians worked, it was not possible to be a 'fashionable radical'. But it was possible, at great personal cost, to recover and pursue a deeper vision, at once more ancient and with richer prospect for the future, of what Catholic Christianity might be and might mean.

The achievement of Vatican II was to give official expression, however uneven and tentative, to a vision of a reformed Catholicism which had for fifty years been

the preserve of a suspect minority. From now on this vision could enter into and profoundly influence the imagination, structure and conceptuality of the Catholic community as a whole. But a heavy price had been paid for the delay. The questions to which the Council Fathers addressed themselves were, at last, the questions to which the Modernists had addressed themselves, often maladroitly, half a century earlier. But the context, the 'world's agenda', had changed. It is this, I believe, which helps to explain why it was that, after the Council, the initial bewilderment on the part of some Catholics when confronted by the conciliar documents was soon followed by apathy and disillusionment with 'official' Catholicism on the part of many others.

It also helps to explain why many of those theologians — such as Bouyer, Daniélou and de Lubac — who had worked for so long to make a reforming Council possible should have reacted to the confusion and disarray which marked its aftermath with sadness and, in some cases, with bitterness. These men were the prophets and architects of a tragically delayed reformation. I do not share their pessimism, but only in the last of these talks shall I be in a position to indicate why.

*(Next month: Schillebeeckx's Jesus)*

after all they have been through in two millenia of wandering, after the persecutions, the pogroms, the Holocaust, to have a country that they as a people, a nation, control. But critical of the Jewish State I will insistently be.

Willy Gafni, the Managing Director of *New Outlook*, describes his movement as the only sane Zionists. They advocate a fully independent Arab State West of the Jordan and in the Gaza Strip. This position they take as advocates of the Jewish State, as Zionists, who believe there can be no permanent Jewish State, at peace with its neighbours and secure as a home for the Jewish nation, unless the Palestinians have their State too.

This creates a third basic position in Israel, among Zionists, as to how to solve the conflict with their Palestinian neighbours. The two dominant positions, which in fact occupy most of the political space in the Jewish population of Israel, are these:

The governing coalition, Likud, speaks of an autonomy of the Palestinians within the Israeli State. The language of the Camp David accord is progressively diluted, so that the 'full autonomy' spoken of there is now expressed as 'autonomy of the people, not of the land', whatever that means. It surely means, with a clarity that becomes brighter by the day, that the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip will not be the masters of their own fate. Attention is paid increasingly to such questions as the source of authority in the areas of autonomous rule, which is to be the Military Government according to Likud's plan. The autonomy settlement is to form no hindrance to further Jewish settlement in the disputed territories. We have seen just during this June the government's precipitate action to establish the new settlement of Elon Moreh near (and dominating) the Arab city of Nablus, the ancient Shechem, in the West Bank. This is the first new settlement since Camp David agreements, but more than that, it is intended to shift the balance. Up to now, only some 20,000 Jews have lived in the West Bank settlements among a million Arabs. Elon Moreh is planned to be a city of an additional 100,000. Whatever one may think of this plan for the settlement of the Palestinian question, say the *New Outlook* people, one thing is clear: it will never be accepted by the Palestinians, never be accepted by the Arab States, never be accepted by the rest of the world.

The Labour Party and its coalition partners, the opposition, plan for something they call an 'identity' of the Palestinian people. This is a response to the regular Palestinian demand for a passport. No more than half the Palestinians actually live in the land, the rest scattered in other Arab countries or around the world. But they live without a passport, an identity, a flag they can recognise as theirs, with United Nations papers or some

such substitute. But the Labour Party's 'identity' is not yet any real identity, as it keeps the Palestinians firmly under an Israeli authority which they want to protect by a strong line of fortresses the whole length of the Jordan valley. Again, say the *New Outlook* people, like this plan or dislike it, it suffers the same crippling, disability as Likud's plan: never will the Palestinians accept it, never will the other Arab States, never will the rest of the world. So unless Israel plans to live forever as an armed camp surrounded by enemies, who of course will eventually win, she might just as well forget both these plans.

IN THEIR OWN plan for the partitioning of the land, the establishment of two fully independent States West of the Jordan, the *New Outlook* people have their own differences. There are advocates among them of what is called a 'Jordanian solution,' which would see the Palestinian lands restored to the rule of Jordan. And there are those who advocate the 'Palestinian solution,' which would hand the land over to the Palestinians themselves, who could decide freely whether they wanted king or republic, total independence or association of whatever kind with Jordan or any other State. *New Outlook* sees itself as more closely identified with the Labour opposition than with the governing coalition, however little they accept the 'identity' solution officially espoused by the opposition parties. Still there is a tinge of the Labour opposition's military-security demands in the requirement of even a Willy Gafni for a token presence of some five Israeli garrisons to be accepted in the Jordan valley by an independent Palestinian State for a stated and agreed period of years. He sees this not so much as a military guarantee but as a sign of good will on the Palestinians' part.

Why is all this so important? The levels of incomprehension about the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab positions are startling. In Britain, not only is the existence of a movement such as *New Outlook* not well known, but the issues are seen in black/white terms. The radical Left tends to see in the Israelis only racists, oppressors, forgetting the Holocaust and the aspirations of the Israeli State. A more amorphous Right fails to see that there is a problem, thinks of the conflict as one between Israel and Arab States while hardly noticing the Palestinians, or blandly assumes that the Israelis know better what is good for the Palestinians than they do themselves, so they had better take what they get and be satisfied. This is worlds away from the situation one actually finds in the land.

Two years ago (August, 1977) this writer published an article in the *Month* on the Northern Ireland conflict, in which he used four-factor analysis of what happens in these majority-minority confrontations. The supposition

is that when one takes these conflicts strictly on their own terms, seeing only the conflicting claims of the two sides, one regularly comes up with the conclusion that there is no solution, a conclusion one constantly hears about Northern Ireland, about Cyprus, about Israel and other such conflicts. Each side makes a total claim to all it can get, and every gain by one side or other is merely a new grievance to the losing side, making the conflict yet more bitter.

But there are more factors. Normally I draw this in a small sketch, with two antagonists, a little fellow and a big fellow, squared off against one another, both standing within a square frame. The elements are numbered, a number 1 on the bigger antagonist, 2 on the smaller, 3 for the meeting between them and 4 for the frame. The first factor is the internal conflict, especially a conflict of conscience, within the majority or stronger party. If there is no such internal conflict in the majority, the most offensive minority will be in no danger whatever. If there is such a conflict, a minority even of saints will be accused of whatever crimes it is felt necessary to accuse them of before attacking them as a scapegoat. The majority's need for a scapegoat to ease its own burden of conscience is determinative of whether there will be violence, not anything good or bad that the minority can do. This first factor, then, is really first in importance.

The minority's grievance position is the second factor, less crucial in fact than the first, but important to understand if one is ever to communicate the minority's feeling and needs and come to any eventual solution. The actual confrontation between majority and minority is only factor number three, and as we have seen, one that we can't really attack head on with any expectation of success. And there is a fourth factor: the framework (of community convictions, of effective institutional structures, of principles by which the majority population identifies itself and its basic values) within which the entire situation occurs.

No sooner had I drawn this sketch for Willy Gafni (as I did for many others, Jewish and Palestinian, in Israel) than he saw, and drew in himself, what had to be the next step in the drawing: behind and looming over the minority figure in the sketch is another more shadowy figure, the greater majority. For in Israel, just as in Ireland, there is a double-minority problem. The Jews, like Northern Ireland's Protestants, are a majority in Israel (the post-1967 Israel) but a minority in the face of the whole Arab population of the region. They feel themselves both masters of the situation, as majority, and the threatened victims, as minority; the Palestinians, like Northern Ireland's Catholics (or the Turkish Cypriots), feel both the grievance of a minority and

the potential strength of an eventual majority from outside the narrowly defined territory.

IN NORTHERN IRELAND, I felt I could define what each of these factors was for each side: the grievance of each side as a minority, the framework to which each community responded as the principle of its own identity, the bad conscience that infected each side in its awareness of itself as a majority with eventual determinative power, and could see that that bad conscience, that ambivalence, was the eventual source of violence in the situation. It is not the purpose of this article to rehash the materials of that *Month* article of 1977, but when this Northern Ireland analysis was spelled out, either for Jews or Palestinians, in Israel, it suggested possibilities of comparison. When, in any of these situations, one side, in its consciousness of its strength, finds that it is untrue to its own most basic values in its treatment of the other side, then it can react in either of two ways. It can admit to its quandary, discuss it frankly within its own ranks, with its opponents and with neutral observers, and then the ambivalence, admitted, becomes a source of healing. Or it can try to suppress the knowledge, and then it will fester: it will have to attack whoever brings the knowledge of its bad conscience back to it, whether the minority group whose existence is so inconvenient a reminder (ignore them if possible, if that is impossible suppress them, or if that is impossible destroy them) or those on one's own side who admit (traitors!) what we know perfectly well but are reluctant to admit to ourselves.

I would not attempt, at least not with present knowledge, to identify what each of those four factors is for each side, Israeli and Palestinian, in this conflict. Perhaps those closer to the living situation can. But this I do know. For the Jews, and this I share with them wholly, there must never be another Holocaust. Nor must the people ever again wander, homeless and vulnerable and under constant threat of attack, persecution, the contempt of settled peoples, pogroms, for centuries among strange peoples. So what? Should it happen to some other people instead so that Jews may be spared? To the Palestinians? How can Jews think that, believe that, act on it?

Saying that, I know I touch the nerve, the thing that everyone in Israel knows is true and which may not be spoken. It is said here with love for Israel and commitment to the Jewish State which is the one security for the Jewish people, the nation, after all it has suffered. The Yad Vashem is the sign. It must never happen again.

I am used to finding the similarities among these conflicts of majorities and minorities, of contending racial or religious groups. But there is one startling con-

trast in the Israeli/Palestinian situation that differentiates it immensely from Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Southern Africa or any of the others I know. In almost all these conflicts there is an old story. In Northern Ireland the contention goes back 800 years. Cyprus has its own many centuries of conflicts between these two groups. And so in most of the comparable conflicts. In Israel, it is a new story. Not that there aren't old-story elements clustered about it. 'Next year in Jerusalem' goes back quite a way into history. But that is not a story about enmity between Jew and Arab. That history, Jews and Arabs, has been clean, especially when one compares it with the history between Jews and Christians, or between Christians and Arabs. The Jewish/Arab enmity is of this century, even of just the last few decades.

But hovering around it are a mass of other old stories that are not the history of Jews and Arabs with one another but other histories that haunt each party separately. For the Jews, there are the two millenia of persecution by Christians, and the Holocaust, so vast and traumatic a story that already after thirty five years it is old. For the Arabs, there is the story of the Crusades, that of the Turkish Empire, and that of British imperialism going right down to 1948. Each side looks at the other and sees these ancient scars, but they are not about their relations with each other. That should mean this conflict can be faced with more hope than can the others.

The Palestinians know, and admit very deliberately, that this is a conflict between cousins. They tell of their people's conscious goodness of heart, their ability to give the hand when the conflict is done and put it all behind them so that it will never be raised again.

These are remarkable people. They produce young people who are dishwashers so long as they are in Israel, but excel as journalists, academics, people of talent and creativity when outside. Out of their adversity they have created a ferment, not merely of the violence that is so conspicuously in the news, but of real creative politics. Their vision of the future is something new and better than the feudal past or the current military dictatorships of the surrounding Arab lands. As a result they are suspected and feared by the Arab States, not only by the old-style feudal ones but by the new-style military ones as well. If the negotiations for their future are not done with the Palestinians themselves but by the other Arab States for them, the Palestinians will be cheated.

**T**HE REALITY ONE finds in Israel — in Jerusalem, in Galilee, in Hebron, on the Golan Heights — is the constant and deep humiliation of the Palestinians. Everywhere there are groups, happy groups, of Jewish school-children, escorted by their teachers. The teachers carry heavy automatic weapons. Yes, Arabs are known to take pot shots at Jewish children in the streets, even of

Jerusalem, and the weapons are necessary. But the swagger?

The West Bank, before 1967, was the vegetable garden for all the Arab countries around. It was Palestinians who made the desert bloom then. Now the Jews of the settlements, their numbers not more than 20,000 among a million Arabs, use an amount of the available water that the authorities are reluctant to admit is as high as the five sixths. It cannot be far from that figure. The Arab lands of the West Bank no longer produce fruit and vegetables. Instead, if you travel the roads very early in the morning, five and six o'clock, you find them crowded with bus and lorry loads of *fellahin*, on their way as migrant farm workers to the Israeli farms of the Vale of Sharon. *Kibbutzim*, the signs of the nation's soul, are run that way now.

The life of the Palestinian Arab is a round of suspicions, searches. He is searched because he is suspect, always suspected and the prophecy can only be self-fulfilling. He feels it as search aimed to humiliate him. And there are all Leah Tzemel's stories, well researched, of intolerable things that happen to Arab suspects in the prisons.

Zefat, high in the mountains with its spectacular view out over the Sea of Galilee and the desert of Syria beyond, has beautiful associations with Sephardic Jewish refugees coming from Spain's persecution in the 16th century. Their 400-year-old synagogues are still there, associated with rabbis whose names are household words to all Jews. Holy place! Until 1948 it was a mainly Arab town. Then all the Arabs fled and it is a wholly Jewish town, full of art galleries: lots of Kitsch, some beautiful things. The main mosque in the centre of the old town, left behind by fleeing Muslims, has been made the public painting gallery. Now calculatedly can you offend the sensibilities of a people?

Behind the two impossible positions about the disposition of the Palestinians, the Likud government's autonomy that is no autonomy and the Labour's opposition's identity that is no identity, lies a supposition shared by both main coalitions of parties. Both believe there is an inexhaustible reservoir of new Israelis, the three million Russian Jews, of whom 150,000 have already come out of Russia and more are coming every month in the great *aliut*. These immigrants, the reasoning goes, will make it possible, by main force, to hold the land, hold the Palestinians down, hold the Arabs and the rest of the unaccepting world at bay.

But it is not true. The Russians are not coming to Israel. By their thousands they arrive every month in Vienna by train. Their Russian masters have learned what an embarrassment they are and are letting them out, for the time being, in ever increasing numbers. But 70%, once arrived in Vienna, refuse to go on to

Israel. They are sent on, for a three-months stay, to Ostia and Ladispoli outside Rome, where they are cajoled and shamed, called 'so-called Jews' and subjected to every form of unsubtle pressure to change their minds and go to Israel. They don't. They go to the United States, to Australia, Canada, elsewhere. There is much embarrassment about this in Israel. It is not going to make possible the coercion of the Palestinians.

The people of the *New Outlook*, small minority among the many Zionists but a minority with ideas, solvers of problems the others will sooner or later have to face, believe the only way to have the Jewish State is to have also a free and fully independent Palestinian State. They hear Mr. Begin say that there is no problem, because in a few years the West Bank and Gaza Strip Palestinians will all be Israelis with full citizenship rights. Their answer is two-fold. First, they don't believe

it will ever happen; it just isn't true. Then, even if *per impossibile* it were to happen, it would be the end of the Jewish State. They will not have a Jewish State in which citizenship and rights are given on grounds of racial discrimination. The only other way they see to have it is that the others also have their State. Partition the land.

At the Yad Vashem I bought myself a yamulka. I was crushed by the Holocaust memorial and its memories, wanted to keep them always alive for me. I am often enough in synagogues or celebrating with Jewish friends, and am usually given the little paper skull-cap that is kept about for strangers. I would rather have one of my own to bring, and will wear this one, as a reminder of the Yad Vashem, with pride and shame, with joy and with terror. The Holocaust or anything like it must never happen again. Not to Jews, not to any people. Not to the Palestinians.




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