

The Holy City in Christian Thought

PAULA FREDRIKSEN

The importance of the city of Jerusalem within Christianity is the measure of the younger community's attachment to the traditions and scriptures of Israel. By tracing the history of the church's views on Jerusalem, we trace as well an intellectual and social history both of the religion itself and of its relation to other religions, most especially Judaism. During the formative period of Christianity, roughly from the first to the fifth century, the new Christian community forged its own identity, composed its foundational texts—which, by the second century, began to appear collected as a specifically Christian canon, the New Testament—and constructed its fundamental theology. To better understand why the early Christian texts and traditions about Jerusalem were what they were, we must place them within their historical context.

From Jesus to Paul

Jerusalem became holy to Christians because it was holy to Jesus. The founder of a messianic movement within Judaism, Jesus had preached the coming Kingdom of God from the beginning of his public activity.¹ His journey to Jerusalem for Passover was the crescendo of this preaching: perhaps he expected the Kingdom to arrive, beginning in Jerusalem, at or as the climax of his mission. We do not know whether he regarded himself as the messiah or whether any of his followers claimed that title for him during his lifetime (the evidence is extremely

ambiguous);² but, once in Jerusalem, he certainly died as if he had, crucified by Rome for sedition (“Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” John 19:19). In subsequent Christian tradition, Jerusalem's messianic status was enhanced by the miracle of Jesus' Resurrection. The Risen Lord stayed in Jerusalem for forty days to instruct his disciples further about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3); just outside the city, he ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives (1:9, 12).

This early postresurrection community was thus doubly bound to Jerusalem. As Jews, they cherished Jerusalem as David's holy city, the site of God's temple, and, in apocalyptic perspective, the city of the coming messiah (cf. Zechariah 9:9). As followers of Jesus, they esteemed the city as the site of the great redemptive miracle of his Resurrection, and as the place of his promised return in glory. The movement gave up its Galilean roots and adopted Jerusalem as its center, and it was from Jerusalem that the first apostles proclaimed the *evangelion*, the “good news” of the impending Kingdom of God, to be ushered in with the return of his Son, the crucified and risen messiah.³

Their gospel eventually moved out from Judea and the Galilee to the cities of the Mediterranean Diaspora, but Jerusalem retained its special authority and prestige. Even Paul, who was not part of the original group and who resented its challenge to his own authority (Galatians 1:12–2:9, 12–14; 1 Corinthians 15:1–10), attempted to coordinate his mission with the mother church (Galatians 2:1ff.; cf. Acts 15). And he saw his work among his own communities as “priestly service,” bringing their donations, like a sanctified offering to the altar, to “the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (Romans 15).

But against the expectations of the first apostles, time stretched on between the Resurrection of Jesus and his anticipated return, the *Parousia* (a Greek word for “presence” or “arrival”). The movement grew, but fewer and fewer Jews received their message. By the 50s, on the evidence of Paul's letters, the trend was clear: most believers were Gentiles. What, then, was to be these Gentiles' relation to the sacred obligations encoded in Torah, observed by Jesus of Nazareth and the apostolic community, and embedded in those Scriptures through which his followers increasingly expressed their postresurrection faith? Should they assume responsibility for the covenant—circumcision, food laws, Sabbath, behavior codes? And if not, how then

were they to distinguish themselves from their pagan world and express their new allegiance to Christ and thus to his father, the God of Israel?

Paul's letters provide our first view of this early controversy, and of his own part in it. Christ, he held, was the end-point or culmination (*telos*) of the Torah (Romans 10:4). Since God's spirit, through baptism, had passed to his Gentiles in Christ, it enabled them to fulfill the Law's requirements through their faith (3:31, and frequently). No need, then, for them to be circumcised, that is, convert to Judaism and so "be obligated to the whole Law" (Galatians 5:3). Gentiles had been saved through grace, as a gift.

The community in Jerusalem concurred with Paul: Gentiles in Christ need not convert to Judaism in order to participate in Israel's redemption (2:2-10; cf. Acts 15).⁴ So too did those apostles, whoever they were, who in advance of Paul established the *ekklesia* at Rome (Romans 1:10). But other Christians disagreed, urging these Gentiles, in the age before the end, to normalize their relationship to Israel and so convert to Judaism—for men, to receive circumcision.

Their position infuriated Paul. In letter after letter, he railed against "false brothers," "so-called apostles," and "circumcising dogs"—that is, these rival Christian missionaries. In his most intemperate epistle, Galatians, in full voice against his competition, Paul argued by evoking Jerusalem:

Tell me, you who desire to be under the Law, do you not hear the Law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, and the son of the free woman through promise. *Now this is an allegory. These women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery: she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia. She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.* For it is written,

Rejoice O barren one who does not bear;
Break forth and shout, you who are not in travail;
For the children of the desolate one are many more
than the children of her that is married. [Isaiah 54:1]

Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. But what does the scripture say? "Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brethren, we are children not of the slave but of the free woman.

Clearly Paul meant to insult and demean his opponents through this double allegory. Hagar, the first woman, stood for both the Sinai covenant and the earthly Jerusalem. Her children (by implication, Paul's rivals), who persecute the child of the free woman, are slaves: they shall be cast out. But the free woman (Sarah) represents not the flesh or slavery—Paul's code words for Gentile circumcision—but freedom and promise. She is Jerusalem above, the mother of Paul's community. These children, like her son Isaac, though persecuted by Hagar's children, are born of spirit and promise. They shall inherit; they, in Christ, are free (5:1).

Later generations of Christians, of course, did not read Galatians in this way—that is, as a moment of high polemic, embedded in a precise social context within the formative years of the movement. They read it instead as Paul's blanket condemnation of Judaism itself.⁵ All Jews, they held, not just Paul's Judaizing rivals, were the children of enslaved, earthly Jerusalem. They, the Gentile church, were born of a celestial mother, the free city, Jerusalem above.

Something more persuasive than Paul's rhetoric stood behind this later reading, however. The facts of history reinforced it. For in the year 66 CE, after decades of uneasy relations between the Jews and Rome, Judea erupted in open revolt. A long and bloody campaign ended when Titus' troops captured Jerusalem in the summer of 70. They slaughtered her inhabitants and leveled her buildings. The great Temple crowning Jerusalem was utterly destroyed.

Jerusalem Below

With the exception of Paul's letters, all the other writings eventually collected into the New Testament canon were composed sometime after the devastation of Jerusalem. Their authors regarded the destruc-

tion of the city in religious perspective: Why would God have permitted the destruction of his Temple, unless he was displeased with the Jews and their cult? They knew, further, the reason for God's displeasure: the Jews had failed to heed his Son. Worse: his death had been their work.

This conviction shaped the evangelists' presentation of Jesus' life and—even more—his death. We know that Jesus of Nazareth, around the year 30, died by crucifixion. From this fact we may infer two others: he was executed by Rome, and he was accused of sedition. But the gospels, composed sometime between 70 and 100, present a Jesus who died for religious, not political, reasons. Inheriting traditions of Roman fiat, the evangelists elaborate on Jewish initiative.⁶ The real agent in Jesus' death, in their view, was the High Priest (Mark, Matthew, and John), or the priestly court, the Sanhedrin (Luke). By comparison, and contrary to contemporary witness, Pilate, the Roman prefect, emerges as a sympathetic figure.⁷

The reader is prepared for this reversal of agency through the evangelists' device of the passion predictions. These inculcate not only the priests but also the city, which throws the sinister shadow of the cross over Jesus' Galilean ministry. "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed" (Matthew 16:21). Jerusalem is a place of death.

Knowing that the Jews will reject him, Jesus weeps over the city, "foreseeing" her desolation: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (Matthew 23:37-38; Luke 13:34-35). Condemning Jewish worship in the Temple as an offense to true piety (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46), Jesus subsequently "prophesies" its destruction: "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down" (Mark 13:2). Luke, writing a generation after Mark, is yet more precise: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you know that its desolation has come near . . . Alas for those who are pregnant or nursing in those days! For . . . they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive

among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles" (21:20, 23-24).

Finally, when through the machinations of the Jerusalem religious elite Jesus dies on the cross, the curtain of the Temple itself tears in two (Mark 15:38). The rending of garments, of course, was an ancient sign of mourning; and this is the meaning that some early Christians gave to this tradition. Jesus' death sealed the fate of the Temple: it too had to die. And so the curtain tore "as though mourning the impending destruction of that place" (*Clementine Recognitions* 1.41). Thus, concluded evangelical tradition, in attempting to destroy Jesus the Jews actually became the agents of their own destruction.

In the course of the following century, Jews fought, and lost, two more wars against Rome: one in 115-117 in the Diaspora, one under Bar Kochba in Judea, in 132-135. With this last defeat, Hadrian forbade Jews even to enter Jerusalem. He raised a new city, Aelia Capitolina, on its ruins, and dedicated a statue to Jupiter on the site of the former Temple.⁸ These events, for Gentile Christians, only confirmed the Gospels' claims.

Reading Jewish scriptures as their own, these Christians understood the prophecies concerning the destruction of the First Temple in light of recent history. "For the circumcision of the flesh," explained Justin Martyr shortly after the Bar Kochba revolt, "was given for a sign . . . that you [Jews] alone might suffer what you now suffer: that your land be desolate, your cities burned . . . and no one of you may go up to Jerusalem" (*Dialogue with Trypho* 16). Jews had compounded their guilt in killing Jesus by continuing to reject him, refusing the call of his church. And so, Justin continued, quoting Isaiah, "The city of your Holiness has become desolate; Zion has become a wilderness; Jerusalem a curse" (24).

As time passed and the period since the destruction of the city and the Temple lengthened, this empirical argument grew ever more central to Christian apologetics. A century after Justin, the great Alexandrian theologian Origen pointed to the same rough synchrony—the death of Jesus; the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple; and the end of Jewish national sovereignty—as proof of Christian claims: "What nation but the Jews alone has been banished from its own capital city and the native place of its ancestral worship?"

(*Against Celsus* 2.6). And in the early 300s, Eusebius began his *Ecclesiastical History*, on the growth of the church, by evoking the now-familiar theme of Jewish disaster, “to describe the calamities that overtook them . . . in consequence of their plots against our Savior.”

But empirical arguments are vulnerable to empirical disconfirmation. An unexpected turn in fourth-century imperial politics almost brought this tradition extreme embarrassment. In 361, Constantine’s nephew, Julian, became emperor. Julian had been raised Christian. Free, as emperor, to make his own choices, he converted from Christianity to traditional Graeco-Roman paganism. And with his insider’s knowledge, he resolved to lay to rest the Church’s historical argument that Jewish desuetude proved Christian claims. Julian began to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.⁹

Ultimately, his plan came to nothing: fires plagued the building site on the Temple Mount, and Julian himself died in battle shortly thereafter, in 363. The purple reverted to the church, and any hope of an independent Jewish religious presence in Jerusalem, let alone a third Temple, receded over the horizon of possibility.

A millennium and a half later, the Roman Catholic Church responded to the convening of the first Zionist Congress with an argument that would have been familiar to the Christians of antiquity: “One thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven years have passed since the prediction of Jesus of Nazareth was fulfilled, namely that Jerusalem would be destroyed . . . A rebuilt Jerusalem, which would become the center of a reconstituted state of Israel . . . is contrary to the prediction of Christ Himself” (*Civiltà Cattolica* 1897). The Balfour Declaration called forth similar reactions from secular governments. “Many Christian sects and individuals,” wrote U.S. secretary of state Robert Lansing to President Wilson in 1917, “would undoubtedly resent turning the Holy Land over to the absolute control of the race credited with the death of Christ.”¹⁰

Paul’s image of “Jerusalem below” as Hagar in slavery with her children had begun as a polemical allegory. Years after his death, the actual city’s confrontation with Rome turned allegory into reality. The idea of a vestigially Jewish Jerusalem would have a very long life in the symbolic universe of Western culture as a potent confirmation of Christian identity.

Jerusalem Above

Christian theology was born of the marriage of hellenistic philosophy and biblical narrative.¹¹ From hellenistic philosophy it inherited its sense not so much of the other-worldly but of the upper-worldly. For many thinking Christians, as for their educated pagan and Jewish counterparts, this physical world only imperfectly expressed the spiritual realities that were its true source: The material universe was a passing shadow cast by the world above. But from biblical narrative—the scriptures of Israel, which the church would adopt as its Old Testament—Christianity inherited its esteem of this world as the willed creation of God, and of history as the medium of God’s will. More specifically, it inherited these traditions as expressed in the historical drama of Israel: the promise of redemption; the Exodus from Egypt; the Exile and Return; God’s love of David and his house; the holiness of the Land of Israel, of Jerusalem, and of the Temple.

These traditions combine variously in later Christian thought. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, gave positive meaning to the Jewish practices and beliefs familiar to him from Scripture by transposing them into the key of popular hellenistic philosophy. Thus, for this author, the Temple in Jerusalem and the Levitical priesthood that served it had been good in their way; but they were only imperfect earthly copies of their heavenly prototypes. The many priests of the earthly tabernacle, merely mortal, had to repeat their sacrifices daily (7:8, 23, 27). But Christ, the unique and eternal priest, offered himself once for all as the perfect, enduring sacrifice for sin (7:24–10:12). “When Christ appeared as high priest . . . , then through the greater and more perfect tabernacle (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (9:11–12).

Israel’s worship had engaged only inferior copies of the heavenly realities now available to the believer through Christ. But those now in Christ must hold fast to their faith, like the witnesses whom the author proceeds to cull from the narratives of the Old Testament. He thus deftly renders the heroes of Jewish tradition into Christians *avant la lettre* who had been sustained by their faith—“the assurance of

things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (11:1). "By faith Abraham obeyed . . . By faith Isaac invoked future blessings . . . By faith Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph" (11:8–21). "By faith Moses . . . refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter . . . He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater than the wealth and treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the [eternal] reward" (11:24–26). The history of Israel thus becomes the prehistory of the church.

For the homeland of the church, as Abraham knew, is a heavenly country and a heavenly city, "the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God" (11:10, 16). This promised homeland the Christian now inherits: "You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:2). In this lower world the Christian is a sojourner. "Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (13:14), the Jerusalem above.

An other-worldly Jerusalem is a nonpolitical Jerusalem, removed from considerations of earthly power. But Christianity was built on the substratum of Jewish messianic hopes in a kingdom of righteousness established upon the ruins of current unjust authorities. The powers of earthly unrighteousness—"Babylon" in apocalyptic parlance—would cede to the power of God, encoded as "Jerusalem." Thus some Christians, stirred by evangelical and Pauline descriptions of the Second Coming, retaining the temporal sense of the Gospels' proclamation of the Kingdom, and encouraged by their reading of the prophetic books of Jewish tradition—Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel—continued to look forward to a Kingdom of God on earth. The descent of the heavenly Jerusalem would signal the completion of redemption.

This is the vision of the final things recorded by John of Patmos in the Book of Revelation. After terrible travails—celestial disturbances, plagues, and huge carnage; the persecution of the righteous by the apocalyptic Whore—John saw that Babylon, suddenly, would be no more (17–18). Those martyred for Christ would wake at the First Resurrection and reign with him for a thousand years (20:1–5). Fire from heaven would consume evil Gog and Magog, and the rest of the dead would be judged at the Second Resurrection (20:7–15). "And then," wrote John, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from*

God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:1–2). "The walls of the city were jasper, her buildings gold, her foundations crowned with jewels" (21:15–21). But unlike the heavenly Jerusalem of Hebrews, which enclosed the eternal tabernacle served by Jesus as High Priest, and unlike the restored Jerusalem of Isaiah (54), Ezekiel (40), and Tobit (13), whose visions our author echoes, this Jerusalem would have no temple, "for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" (John 21:22). Their presence will illumine the entire city. And when will these things happen? "Surely," concludes the Lord Jesus, "I am coming soon" (22:20).

John's vision proved fundamental to a paradoxically long-lived tradition of millenarian expectation: the belief that Christ was about to return soon to establish his Kingdom on earth. Embedded in this belief were doctrinal positions definitive of that stream of Christianity that history would deem "orthodox." Against more radical churches that, in rejecting Judaism, likewise rejected the scriptures of the Jews and the God they spoke of,¹² the orthodox insisted that these scriptures, though superseded by recent revelation, were sacred, too, to the church. And against the radicals' position that no divine being could or would assume a lowly body of flesh, and thus that resurrection was a matter solely of the spirit, the orthodox insisted that this world was good; that God had sent his Son in the flesh to redeem it; the saints would be raised corporeal at the end, to enjoy the fruits of redemption here, in the world that God had made.

Hence Justin Martyr—no friend, as we have seen, of Jewish hopes of restoration—nonetheless proclaimed a vision of Christian redemption drawn directly from the restorationist prophecies of the Old Testament. When his Jewish interlocutor asks, "Do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people to be gathered together and made joyful with Christ [the messiah] and the patriarchs?" (*Dialogue* 80), Justin readily concurs. The saints can look forward to "a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand year reign in Jerusalem" (80–81), the renewed center of God's eternal kingdom (117). The roll call of second- and third-century fathers—Irenaeus, Tertullian, Victorinus, Lactantius—affirms this belief. Jerusalem below, the Jewish Jerusalem, might rightly lie in ruin; but Jerusalem above, once descended in Judea, would signal the

bodily redemption of the saints and the final establishment of God's kingdom.¹³

City of Christ, City of God

Intellectuals among the orthodox were sometimes embarrassed by the literalness of millenarian expectation. They preferred to understand prophetic passages allegorically, as witness to timeless spiritual truths rather than future historical events.¹⁴ Thus Origen, in the early third century, dismissed those who believed in the resurrection of the body and a restored Jerusalem in Judea as carnal, unintelligent men "who reject the labor of hard thinking" (*On First Principles* 2.2, 3). "The sceptre of Judah" (Genesis 49:10), he observed, has passed to Jesus, the king not of fleshly Israel, the Jews, but spiritual Israel, the church. Quoting Paul and Hebrews, Origen concluded, "Israel is a race of souls, and Jerusalem a city in heaven" (4.3, 8). Such spiritual realities were not meant to "appear" physically on earth.

Origen's students were happy to continue his program of allegorizing scripture. But they were overtaken by events which forever altered the political context of Christianity. In 312, as the result of a victory, prompted by a vision, Constantine became the imperial patron of the church. The earthly Jerusalem, as a result, was very much back on the map.¹⁵

Emperors had always endorsed large projects of public building, and in this sense Constantine was little different from his pagan predecessors. To the earlier imperial repertoire of temples, theaters, and circuses, however, Constantine added grand churches, basilicas built to house the swelling numbers of new, perhaps opportune worshippers. First in Rome, then later, after conquering the eastern empire, in Byzantium, he poured his new religious allegiance into the forms of monumental architecture. Sometime in the 320s, he turned his attention to Jerusalem.

Since the early second century, Jerusalem had continued to serve as a magnet for Jewish pilgrims, who would come to mourn their ruined city. Christians, too, would sometimes journey to see the places mentioned in Scripture. But the new imperial patronage, accompanied by a lavish building program that reshaped the city according to sites sanctified by the passion of Jesus, encouraged the growth of a spe-

cifically Christian pilgrim piety. No longer valued primarily as the object of Christian *Schadenfreude* or the terrestrial counterpart to a more glorious heavenly city, Jerusalem now was venerated as itself a place holy to Christians. Devotion to Jerusalem was an expression of devotion to the humanity of Christ, and to the redemption worked by his Passion.

Christian Jerusalem sparkled with beautiful new basilicas built over sites hallowed by saving events—Golgotha, Christ's tomb, the place of his ascension. The new city centered not around the Temple Mount, as Jewish Jerusalem had, but around the glorious Church of the Resurrection (Anastasis), established over Christ's empty tomb—a new, Christian temple of prayer, as Eusebius called it (Figure 7). This language of a restored and resplendent city with a new temple in her midst drew upon the biblical prophets of Jewish restoration, as Eusebius intended. For the restored Jerusalem cohered theologically and politically with Eusebius' presentation of Constantine himself, the first Christian emperor and thus, as God's chosen one, a non-apocalyptic messiah. Isaiah's praises of the eschatological peace divinely established at the end of days thus transmute in Eusebius' rhetoric to descriptions of Constantine's government: the Kingdom of God had arrived on earth in the form of the *Pax Romana Christiana*.

By so closely identifying earthly politics and heavenly intent, Eusebius was mounting an empirical argument—and empirical arguments, as we have seen, are vulnerable to empirical disconfirmation. Alliance with the government brought the church some rude surprises, however. Constantine's sons, redividing the Empire, backed different contestants in the debate between Athanasius and Arius; then Constantine's nephew Julian traumatized ecclesiastical culture by reinstating paganism and attempting to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. But nothing was more traumatic than the fall of Rome to Gothic invaders in the year 410.

Rome's fall released a torrent of apocalyptic speculation.¹⁶ Earlier millenarians had been hostile to the Empire. Thus John of Patmos' apocalyptic Babylon, seated on seven hills, was clearly Rome (Revelation 17:9): at her fall the saints shout Hallelujah! (19). Ireneaus identified the fourth beast in Daniel's vision as the Empire (Daniel 7:7ff.), and the name of John's beast, encoded in the mystical number 666,

as “Latinus” (Revelation 13:18). Victorinus, commenting on Revelation, awaited “the destruction of Babylon, that is, of the city of Rome.” But even before Constantine, and certainly since, more prudent bishops had identified the fate of Rome with that of the church. The fall of Rome, accordingly, changed from something to be longed for to something to be dreaded: its collapse would occasion the appearance of Antichrist, and the terrors before the end.¹⁷

Jerusalem was the epicenter in these scenarios of Antichrist. According to interpretations of Daniel and 2 Thessalonians, he would set himself up in the Temple to be adored as a god. Of the tribe of Dan, that is, a Jew, he would inflict circumcision on those under his dominion. In this nightmare form of apocalyptic, the ruined Jewish Jerusalem would rise up to take its vengeance on the Christians of the Empire.

Julian had given the church a *mauvais quart d’heure*. But the invading Goths plunged the entire Mediterranean world, pagan and Christian, into deep shock. Christians calculated the times; pagans, meanwhile, observed that since the Empire had deserted the gods, the gods had deserted the Empire.

It was in and to these circumstances that Augustine, bishop of Hippo, responded with his masterwork, *The City of God*.¹⁸ Against the pagans he argued that Rome’s fortunes had fluctuated even when the gods had been worshiped; where Rome had succeeded, it was due to ambition for glory and love of power. Morally and religiously, then, classical culture had been a failure. Against Christian triumphalism, he argued that history was inscrutable: the hand of God could not be discerned in any extrascriptural occurrence, even if that occurrence happened to benefit the Church. And finally, against the millenarians, he insisted that the arrival of the end could in no way be known: it was futile, then, to attempt to calculate the times by matching scriptural prophecies to current events.

Augustine spread out his argument over a huge canvas—twenty-two books, written over thirteen years. The whole was united by his pursuit of a single theme: an analysis of the history of love. Ever since

Figure 7. Greek ceremony of washing the feet in the outside court of the Holy Sepulchre, ca. 1880.



Cain and Abel, all humanity has been divided up between two great cities according to the orientation of their love. Those who love carnal, lower things—and most insidiously of all, themselves—belong to Babylon, the earthly city, the *civitas terrena*; those who love God, to the heavenly city, Jerusalem above, the *civitas Dei*.

Imperial Christianity, as we have seen, had tended to appropriate that stream of Jewish Scripture that spoke of territory, triumph, homecoming. When Constantine built up Jerusalem, it was as if “the glory of the God of Israel” had returned to its ancient seat: “Perhaps,” wrote Eusebius, “this is the new and second Jerusalem announced in the prophetic oracles” (*Life of Constantine* 3.33).

Augustine, rather, recalled the psalmists’ and prophets’ language of exile, loss, and longing. His Jerusalem was a distant, heavenly homeland, glimpsed in this life only from afar. Humanity was separated from her by the first sin of the first man, Adam; by the weight of original sin afflicting each generation thereafter, disordering human love and hence human society; by the vast river of time, flowing on toward a future of unknowable duration.

Thus man in this world is *peregrinus*; his present life a *peregrinatio*. The English equivalents of these words are “pilgrim” and “pilgrimage,” but truer to Augustine’s tone is “exile.” Like the Jews of old unwillingly resident in Babylon, the citizens of the heavenly city sigh for their homeland, hearts heavy with “yearning” or “longing.” When will this exile end? Only when time itself ends, Augustine argued, asserting, against his millenarian co-religionists, that none can know the hour nor envisage the place. Raised bodily, the saints will ascend to “a place of eternal peace and security, ‘the mother, the Jerusalem which is free,’” Jerusalem above (*City* 17.13, a reference to Paul’s allegory in Galatians).

Against this evocation of distance and yearning, then, Augustine, again like the ancient Jewish seers he drew on, counterposed the certainty of God’s love and the divine promise of salvation. His huge work closed with a meditation on Jerusalem as the *visio pacis*, the vision of eternal peace. “Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they will praise you for ever and ever!” (Psalms 84:5; *City* 22.30). Redeemed and renewed, the community of saints will celebrate an everlasting Sabbath in the presence of God in his holy city.

The Kingdoms of the Earth

Both Rome and the earthly Jerusalem would face further shocks in the centuries after Augustine. In the West, successive waves of Germanic invaders broke over the remnants of empire, plunging Europe and North Africa into a cultural twilight zone. In the East, Christian Jerusalem fell to infidel invaders twice within a generation: once in 614, to the Persians; and again in 638, to Islam.¹⁹ Inexorably, the Christian East and the whole rim of Africa came under Muslim hegemony, while competing Arians, Catholics, and Teutonic pagans fractured the old Roman unity of Europe. The Empire, however, continued at the level of symbol, or fantasy: just before his coronation as “emperor” in 800, the Frankish chieftain Charlemagne received from the patriarch the keys to the city of Jerusalem.

With much greater difficulty than in centuries before, pilgrims from the West continued to make their way to Jerusalem. But as the year 1000 approached—a traditional date for the expected return of Christ—pagan Hungary converted to Christianity. This sudden opening of a cheap land route from Europe to Palestine, combined with the apocalyptic hopes stimulated by the date, swelled the volume of pilgrims journeying to the anticipated site of the Parousia. The sudden flood of foreigners provoked Fatimid Isma’ili, also known as Al-Hakim, the caliph of Cairo. In 1009 he demolished the Christian shrines in the city, including Jerusalem’s premier pilgrimage site, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

The convulsion of Christendom lasted generations. Chronographers described Al-Hakim in terms reminiscent of Antichrist. Jews, blamed for having encouraged Al-Hakim’s action, became the local target of Christian rage: in 1009 and again in 1095, Jewish communities were slaughtered when they refused to convert.²⁰ Apocalyptic convictions and long traditions of penitential discipline combined to turn Europeans eastward. A succession of pilgrimages, popular and elite, clerical and lay—1027, 1033, 1065—departed for Jerusalem; by 1095 these had transmuted to Crusades, led by armed warriors bent on liberating the Holy Land.²¹

The Crusader rule over Jerusalem endured from 1099 to 1187, when it fell in turn to Muslim forces under Saladin. Various waves of Western

military initiatives continued to batter the Levant in the succeeding centuries; most succumbed to internecine struggles among the Europeans, and between Roman and Greek Orthodox Christians. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, Mamluks and Muslim Mongols reabsorbed the last of the Crusader kingdoms. Painfully, even grudgingly, Europe relinquished the dream of reestablishing a Christian Jerusalem.

Powerful as Jerusalem was as a holy place, it was even more powerful as a religious idea. As such, it expressed in biblical idiom the hope of moral transformation, whether social or individual. Thus the oaths to peace sworn by Aquitanian warriors over the relics of saints before clerics and peasants put one eleventh-century chronicler in mind of Isaiah's vision of the end of days: "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob . . . for out of Zion will go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (2:2-4; Ademar, First Sermon, *Patrologia Latina* 141 col. 118). Medieval monasteries, efforts concentrated on sustaining harmonious community, saw in themselves a small reflection of the *visio pacis*. The monk, said Bernard, was a citizen of Jerusalem; the Cistercian order at Clairvaux, "ipsa est Hierosolym" (Epistle 64). But the perfected soul, too, was to be understood by "Jerusalem," wrote his younger contemporary, Aelred of Rivaulx, "the Jerusalem which the Lord Jesus . . . builds out of living stones."

The heavenly Jerusalem was brought to earth in a new kind of realized eschatology with the dazzling invention of Gothic architecture. Cathedrals, oriented on a west-east axis, propelled the approaching faithful in the direction of the altar, which faced toward the earthly Jerusalem. Entering through the main portal, the believer would pass under a tymphaenum whose sculpture announced the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgment. And with the Judgment behind him, the believer would come into a space bejewelled by the play of light through ten thousand panes of stained glass: an earthly vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, adorned like a bride for her husband, "having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel" (Revelations 21:11).

Finally, the prophetic vision of Jerusalem as the center of a morally renewed society eventually floated free of its ecclesiastical referents. The very name conjured the biblical images of justice and peace. Thus late renaissance Florence became Jerusalem to Savanarola; thus too

the bare coast of seventeenth-century Massachusetts, where John Winthrop looked forward to founding "a City upon a Hill, God's new Israel."²² And against the dark satanic mills of industrializing England, Blake summoned his chariots of fire:

I will not cease from mental fight
Nor will my sword sleep in my hand,
Till I have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.

Throughout the centuries and on into our own period, these multiple meanings of Jerusalem—historical, messianic, celestial, moral—have resonated in Christian tradition. But the systole and diastole of modern empires—the Ottoman after World War I, the British after World War II—and the subsequent reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty over the land and, especially since 1967, over the city, have combined to present Christian churches with a social reality unanticipated in New Testament texts and ecclesiastical commentary. A renewed Jewish Jerusalem is now a fact of history.

With the Second Vatican Council, Catholic Christianity began the difficult work of critically addressing its continuous and centuries-long traditions of theological and liturgical anti-Judaism. In 1964 the Church pronounced the Jewish people free of criminal responsibility for the death of Jesus, and moved to drop the prayer for the conversion of "the perfidious Jews" from its liturgy. Protestant churches, especially in the wake of the Nazi-sponsored destruction of European Jewry, have also worked to redefine their relationships to Jews and Judaism. All three communities—Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish—currently pursue vigorous and vital interfaith dialogue. Other traditions, meanwhile, continue ever new: as fundamentalist millenarian churches grow and spread with the approaching end both of the century and of the millennium, we see that the combination of current events and biblical apocalypses (presupposing, as they do, a Jewish presence in Judea, Samaria, and the Galilee) continues to exert its old appeal.²³ (Augustine would be annoyed, but doubtless not surprised.)

The historical and the theological roots of Christianity run deep in the matrix of Judaism. This fundamental connection between the two communities is nowhere more concretely expressed than in their mutual attachment to the city of Jerusalem: holy to Jews for what it

is, holy to Christians for what it witnessed; holy to both for the vision of peace it represents. Perhaps now, in the changed political circumstances at century's end and with the churches' repudiation of their ancient angers, the fundamental things both share—a love for Jerusalem and for the Scriptures that praise her—can serve, finally, to foster peace and goodwill between Christians and Jews.

The Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Islam

ANGELIKA NEUWIRTH

Any new attempt by a religion to define its particular relation to Jerusalem builds on the bedrock of a famous ancient text:

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning.
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
If I remember thee not;
If I set not Jerusalem
Above my chief joy! (Psalms 137:5–6)

Jerusalem, as evoked in these lines is the very guarantor of the psalmist's personal integrity, of his legal capacity.¹ Jerusalem, it appears, has never lost this aura of a divine token. In Judaism, it has remained a unique place of memory, a spiritual focus in diverse contexts, the most suggestive being the motto, "Next year in Jerusalem!" In neither Christianity nor Islam, it seems, does the believer face Jerusalem in a comparably personal way. Christianity, it is true, has accepted the Hebrew Bible into the canon of its Holy Scriptures, yet it holds—regarding the site of the central sanctuary of biblical history—a rather ambiguous position. For Islam the opposite is true: though censuring the Jewish and Christian Scriptures as not fit—at least in their preserved textual forms—to become part of the Islamic canon, Islam has taken over the *topographia sacra* that underlies those Scriptures, in particular the sanctuary of Jerusalem, which it considers a central symbol of the monotheist cultus inherited from the older religions and thus worthy to rank as an Islamic sanctuary.