

A Liminal Church

Open Jerusalem

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A Liminal Church

*Refugees, Conversions and the Latin Diocese of
Jerusalem, 1946–1956*

By

Maria Chiara Rioli



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Cover photo: A Franciscan friar walks past the monastery of Notre-Dame de France, Jerusalem, June 1948. John Phillips, The *LIFE* Picture Collection, via Getty Images

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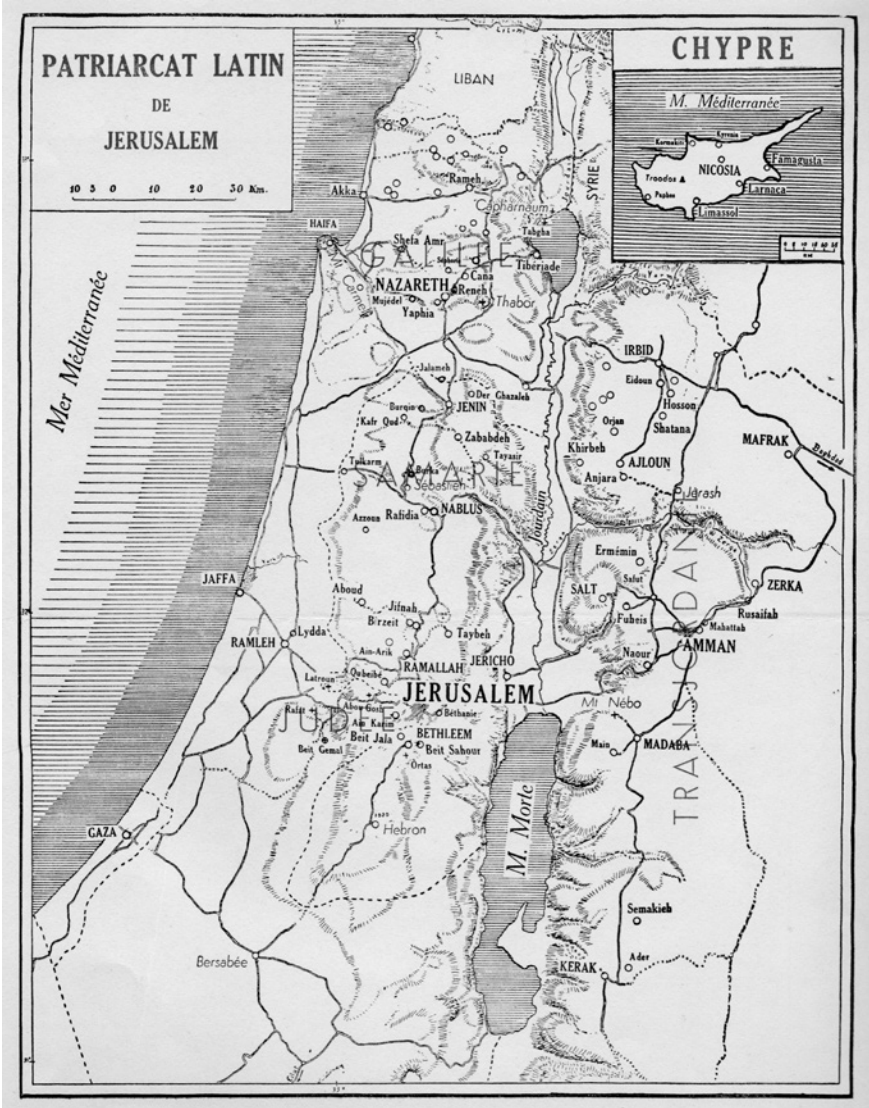
AAAJ	Archives of the Augustinians of the Assumption in Jerusalem (Archives des Augustinians de l'Assomption à Jérusalem), Jerusalem
AANY	Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, New York
AAS	Acta Apostolicæ Sedis
AAV	Vatican Apostolic Archives (Archivio Apostolico Vaticano), Vatican City
ACAES	Archives of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs (Archivio della Congregazione per gli affari ecclesiastici straordinari), Vatican City
ACC	Archive of the Custodial Curia (Archivio della Curia Custodiale), Jerusalem
ACGOFM	Archives of the Generalate of the Order of the Friars Minor (Archivio della Curia generalizia dell'ordine dei frati minori), Rome
ACNEWA	Archives of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, New York, New York
ACO	Archive of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (Archivio della Congregazione delle Chiese Orientali), Rome
ACPF	Archives of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Archivio della Congregazione de Propaganda Fide), Vatican City
ACSCJB	Archives of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bétharram (Archives de la Congrégation du Sacré Cœur de Jésus de Bétharram), Bethlehem
ADAGP	Archives of the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem and Palestine (Archivio della Delegazione apostolica in Gerusalemme e Palestina), Vatican City
ADSS	Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la seconde guerre mondiale
AEBAF	Archives of the French Biblical and Archaeological School (Archives de École biblique et archéologique française), Jerusalem
AGT	Archives of Gustavo Testa (Archivio di Gustavo Testa), Bergamo
AHAP	Historical Archives of the Archdiocese of Paris (Archives historiques de l'archidiocèse de Paris), Paris
AHC	Arab Higher Committee
AIY	Jerusalem Municipal Archives (Arkhiyon ha-'Ir Yerushalayim), Jerusalem
AJA	American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati
AMCP	Archives of the Melkite Catholic Patriarchate (Arshif Batriyarkiyat al-Rum al-Malakiyyin al-Kathulik), al-Rabwa
AMGAA	Archives of the Generalate of the Augustinians of the Assumption (Archives de la Maison généralice des Augustinians de l'Assomption), Rome

AMGMA	Archives of the Generalate of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa (Archives de la Maison généralice des Missionnaires d'Afrique), Rome
AMTL	Archives of the Trappist Monastery of Latrun (Archives du monastère trappiste de Latrun), Latrun
AOSJ	Archives of the Association of Saint James (Archives de l'Œuvre St Jacques), Jerusalem
APDF	Archives of the Dominican Province of France (Archives de la Province dominicaine de France), Paris
APET	Private Archives of Eugène Tisserant (Archives privées d'Eugène Tisserant), Montferrer
APIB	Archives of the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Archivio del Pontificio Istituto Biblico), Jerusalem
APLJ	Archives of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Archives du Patriarcat latin de Jérusalem), Jerusalem
APNDS	Archives of the Fathers of Notre-Dame de Sion (Archives des Pères de Notre-Dame de Sion), Jerusalem
APRN	Private Archives of René Neuville (Archives privées de René Neuville), Jerusalem
ASCTS	Historical Archives of the Custody of the Holy Land (Archivio storico della Custodia di Terra Santa), Jerusalem
ASDMAE	Italian Ministry of Foreign Office Archives (Archivio storico-diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri), Rome
ASFMMJ	Archives of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Archives des Franciscaines missionnaires de Marie), Jerusalem
ASJ	Association of Saint James
ASNDS	Archives of the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Sion (Archives des Sœurs de Notre-Dame de Sion), 'Ayn Karim
ASRS	Historical Archives of the Section for the Relations with the States of the Secretariat of State (Archivio Storico della Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati della Segreteria di Stato), Vatican City
ASS	Acta Sanctæ Sedis
AUNRWA	Archives of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Amman and Gaza City
AVIPLJ	Archives of the Vicariate for Israel of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Archives du Vicariat pour Israël du Patriarcat latin de Jerusalem), Nazareth
AWWC	Archives of the World Council of Churches, Geneva
BAM	Angelo Mai Library (Biblioteca Angelo Mai), Bergamo
BS	Library of Le Saulchoir (Bibliothèque du Saulchoir), Paris

CADC	Diplomatic Archive Center of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve), La Courneuve
CADN	Diplomatic Archive Center of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes), Nantes
CNEWA	Catholic Near East Welfare Association
CO	Colonial Office
CZA	Central Zionist Archives (ha-Arkhiyon ha-Tsiyoni ha-merkazi), Jerusalem
EBAF	École biblique et archéologique française
FO	Foreign Office
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
ISA	Israel State Archives (Arkhiyon shel Medinat Yisra'el), Jerusalem
JPC	Jordanian Communist Party (al-Hizb al-Shuyu'i)
MECA	Middle East Centre Archive, Oxford
MPC	G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Washington, DC
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC
PMP	Pontifical Mission to Palestine
SHU–ASCC	Seton Hall University–Archives and Special Collections Centre, South Orange, New Jersey
TNA	The National Archives of the United Kingdom, London
UNA	United Nations Archives, New York
UNCCP	United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRPR	United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Refugee Works Agency
UNSCOP	United Nations Special Committee on Palestine
USHMMA	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Note on Transliteration

The transcription of Arabic, Hebrew and Ottoman Turkish generally follows the transliteration guidelines of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) and the Library of Congress. Diacritics – except for ‘ayn and non-initial hamza – have also been omitted in personal names, place names, names of political parties and organizations, as well as in the titles of books and articles. In cases where names of people and places have a standardized spelling in English, I adopted it. All technical terms from languages written in non-Latin alphabets have been italicized and fully transliterated with diacritical marks, except for those found in *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* or in the *IJMES* word list.



MAP 1

Map of the Latin patriarchal diocese of Jerusalem
 PIERRE MÉDEBIELLE, *LE DIOCÈSE PATRIARCAL LATIN DE JÉRUSALEM*
 (JÉRUSALEM: PATRIARCAT LATIN, 1963)

INTRODUCTION

From Jerusalem to the Archives

Written history must be contrapuntal, not harmonic.

CHARLES MAIER



A black-and-white photograph that exists in duplicate in the archives of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem shows a group of children seated at a table, looking toward the photographer, with pieces of bread in their hands, while a nun distributes more bread (fig. 0.1). The caption reads “Group of children in a refugee camp”. In fact, on closer inspection, the image turns out to be a snapshot of the preparations for a first communion ceremony, celebrated in Amman in 1951, which is also confirmed by the presence in the background of some little girls dressed in white with wreaths on their heads. As symbolized by the ambivalence of this picture, for the Latin Church of Jerusalem the decade that followed the 1947–49 Palestine War, and particularly the shattering events and harsh battles of 1948, was taken up with aiding refugees and the difficult



FIGURE 0.1
“Group of children in a refugee camp.”
In another album, captioned “First communion in
1951” in Amman
APLJ/AEBAF

task of resuming the ordinary daily life of a community of the faithful, punctuated by its liturgies and celebrations of the sacraments.

The community of the Latin-rite Roman Catholic patriarchal diocese of Jerusalem constitutes one of the most important components in the complex reality of the Catholic and, in a wider perspective, Christian world of the so-called “Holy Land”. The Catholic Church in the Middle East is composed of seven churches, all of them under the authority of the pope: the Eastern Catholic churches – the Melkite, Maronite, Chaldean, Coptic, Syrian and Armenian – and the Roman Catholic Church, most of whose adherents are under the jurisdiction of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The former preserve the various Eastern rites (hence their description as “Eastern Catholics”) while the latter follows the Western Latin rite (and therefore its members are called “Latins”). Geographically, at the moment of its reestablishment in 1847, the borders of the Latin Patriarchate were delimited to the north by the Ras al-Abyad promontory up to the southern tip of Mount Hermon, to the east by the Syrian desert, to the south by the al-‘Arish river, and to the west by the Mediterranean Sea, including the island of Cyprus. Nowadays, the Latin Catholic diocese extends through Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Jordan and Cyprus, comprising some 293,053 faithful.

On the eve of the 1947–49 Palestinian War, the Latin community was one of the largest Christian groups in Palestine and Transjordan.¹ The diocesan territory comprised around 35,000 faithful, with 51 parishes, 138 religious houses, 32 schools for boys with more than 7,300 pupils, 65 schools for girls with more than 10,500 pupils, and 43 charitable institutions. Within this network of operations, then as now, there was the vast, centuries-old religious, educational and charitable presence of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, established in 1217 and whose main task was and still is the safeguarding of the Holy Places.

1 According to the British Mandatory census in 1931, the largest Christian community in Palestine were the Greek Orthodox (39,727), the Catholic Latin (18,895, the majority of whom were female) and Melkite (12,645) communities. See Eric Mills, *Census of Palestine 1931*, vol. 1, pt. 1, *Report* (Alexandria: Government of Palestine, 1933), 99. Rough estimates for the Latin population in Palestine after the Second World War refer to around 25,000–30,000 faithful. According to patriarchal data, in 1947 Transjordan had a total population of around 400,000 inhabitants, who were mostly Muslim. The Christians in Transjordan numbered around 40,000, of whom 11,094 were Catholic (7,343 Latins and 3,751 Melkites). See Adolphe Perrin, *Centenaire du Patriarcat latin de Jérusalem, 1847–1947* (Jerusalem: Patriarcat Latin, 1947), “Remarques,” unpaginated. The most populous Latin parishes were those of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Amman.

1 A Battleground of Narratives

The history of the Latin Patriarchate cannot be fully understood outside the broader picture of Christianity in the Middle East. Since the 1990s, historical studies in this field have experienced rapid growth.² These new narratives rejected the description of Eastern Christians as “victims” and “symbols”, as presented in contemporary Western media and political discourse.³ They also marked a revision of the historiographic paradigms that, in previous decades, had consigned the Christians to the parameters of the *ahl al-dhimmi* within the *millet* system of the Ottoman era, isolated from other majority communities, or subject to the service of Western powers.⁴ Thus, moving beyond these

-
- 2 For a bibliographical review of some of the principal studies on the Christians in the Middle East, see Cesare Santus, *Trasgressioni necessarie: communicatio in sacris, coesistenza e conflitti tra le comunità cristiane orientali (Levante e Impero ottomano, XVII–XVIII secolo)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2019); Andreas Schmoller, ed., *Middle Eastern Christians and Europe: Historical Legacies and Present Challenges* (Münster: LIT, 2018); Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens d'Orient* (Paris: PUF, 2017); Giorgio Fedalto, *Le Chiese d'Oriente: Sintesi storica* (Verona: Mazziana, 2016); Heyberger, *Les chrétiens au Proche-Orient: De la compassion à la compréhension* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2013); Anthony O'Mahony, and John Flannery, eds., *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East* (London: Melisende, 2010); O'Mahony, ed., *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics* (London: Melisende, 2004); Heyberger, ed., *Chrétiens du monde arabe: Un archipel en terre d'Islam* (Paris: Autrement, 2003); Andrea Pacini, ed., *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future*, trans. Fiona Tupper-Carey (New York: Clarendon, 1998); Ronald G. Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey* (Rome: Orientalia Christiana, 1995); Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994). For an analysis of the relationship between Christians, Jews, and Muslims, see Heather J. Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Heleen L. Murre-van den Berg and Sasha Goldstein-Sabbah, eds., *Searching for Common Ground: Jews and Christians in the Modern Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); and Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 3 See Paul Sedra, “Writing the History of the Modern Copts: From Victims and Symbols to Actors,” *History Compass* 7, no. 3 (2009). As Bernard Heyberger summarizes it poignantly: “News abounds regarding violence and injustices committed against Christians in various countries and about their ever-shrinking numbers due to emigration. However, this approach, which depicts Eastern Christians only as victims, prevents us from understanding their actual situation in the home countries or in the diaspora.” “Eastern Christians, Islam, and the West: A Connected History,” *IJMES* 42, no. 3 (2010): 475.
- 4 See the controversial thesis of Bat Ye'or in *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians Under Islam*, trans. David Maisel, Paul Fenton, and David Littman (London: Associated University Press, 1985) and *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude*, trans. Miriam Kochan and David Littman (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996).

sectarian categories and, instead, recognizing the Christians as agents (and no longer as victims of political persecution or as collaborators with foreign powers), a connected history of the Christian communities of the Middle East has emerged, and is being continuously enriched by new contributions.⁵ As regards the late Ottoman era, the Christian contribution to the *nahḍa*, the cultural renaissance in the second half of the nineteenth century, and to the formation of Arab nationalism is becoming ever clearer.⁶

There has also been a renewal in the study of the Palestinian and Jordanian Christians, particularly in research on the late Ottoman and Mandate periods, which has unpacked the contribution of the Christians in the construction of a new political, economic and cultural middle class, and their participation in the creation of the emerging Arab identities and, at the same time, in cultivating global links.⁷ This historiographical rejuvenation is a consequence of

5 Besides the already quoted pioneering works of Bernard Heyberger, see Akram Khater, *Embracing the Divine: Passion, Politics and Gender in the Christian Middle East, 1720–1798* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Paul Rowe, “Building Coptic Civil Society: Christian Groups and the State in Mubarak’s Egypt,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 1 (2009); Fiona McCallum, “The Political Role of the Patriarch in the Contemporary Middle East,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 6 (2007); Peter Makari, *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), and Sana S. Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

6 See Salim Tamari, *The Great War and the Remaking of Palestine* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 89–90.

7 See Stéphane Ancel, Magdalena Krzyżanowska, and Vincent Lemire, *Le moine sur le toit: Histoire d'un manuscrit trouvé à Jérusalem (1904)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2020); Yusri Khaizran, “Difference, not Fragmentation: Christians and Druze in Mandatory Palestine,” in *The British Mandate in Palestine: A Centenary Volume, 1920–2020*, ed. Michael J. Cohen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); and numerous chapters in Angelos Dalachanis and Vincent Lemire, eds., *Ordinary Jerusalem, 1840–1940: Opening New Archives, Revisiting a Global City* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), in particular Stéphane Ancel, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Community in Jerusalem: New Archives and Perspectives on Daily Life and Social Networks, 1840–1940”; Lora Gerd and Yann Potin, “Foreign Affairs through Private Papers: Bishop Porfirii Uspenskii and His Jerusalem Archives, 1842–1860”; Angelos Dalachanis and Agamemnon Tselikas, “The Brotherhood, the City and the Land: Patriarchal Archives and Scales of Analysis of Greek Orthodox Jerusalem in the Late Ottoman and Mandate Periods,” and Konstantinos Papastathis, “Diplomacy, Communal Politics, and Religious Property Management: The Case of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Early Mandate Period”. See also the important contributions by Karène Sanchez Summerer, “Linguistic Diversity and Ideologies among the Catholic Minority in Mandate Palestine: Fear of Confusion or Powerful Tool?” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 2 (2016); Noah Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine: Communalism and Nationalism, 1917–1948* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011); Paolo Maggolini, *Arabi*

and has incentivized the ordering of numerous archives belonging to several Christian communities in Jerusalem, albeit with greatly varying degrees of rigor in the cataloging process, the extent of the inventorying and the accessibility to scholars. Countless topics for research remain open. The historiography of the Christians in the Palestine War is still limited, is not sufficiently grounded on archival sources and is frequently based on ideological convictions that portray the various Christian communities as monolithically aligned with anti-Israeli and anti-Muslim positions, although they are internally divided on confessional issues and on the management of the Holy Places. A closer look reveals the limits of these interpretations and a much more complex reality. After the end of the Second World War, the Latin Church of Jerusalem faced burning and dramatic questions: the beginning of the debate on the role of Pius XII and Catholic representatives and organizations during the Shoah; the burden of decades of tension and suspicion between the Holy See and the Zionist movement; as well as the Latin Patriarchate hierarchy's uncertain stance on Arab nationalist demands and on the transformations resulting from the announcement of the end of the British Mandate over Palestine and Transjordan.

My contribution aims to analyze the variety of actions that matured within the Latin Church of Jerusalem in the decade marked by the resumption of the discussion concerning the partition of Palestine in 1945, the Palestine War, the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, the Jordanian annexation of the West Bank in 1950 and the consolidation of the Hashemite Kingdom, up to the Suez crisis in 1956. In this changing scenario, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem engaged in multiple and sometimes contrasting pastoral initiatives, humanitarian missions, theological reflections, political relations and liturgical responses.

As it is well known, the reconstruction of the events and interpretation of the circumstances that led to, concerned and followed the “long 1948” has been approached by different and opposite historiographies and narratives.

Cristiani di Transgiordania: Spazi politici e cultura tribale (1841–1922) (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2011); Géraldine Chatelard, *Briser la mosaïque: Les tribus chrétiennes de Madaba, Jordanie, XIX^e–XX^e siècle* (Paris: CNRS, 2004); Anthony O'Mahony, ed., *The Christian Communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land: Studies in History, Religion and Politics* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), and O'Mahony, ed., *Palestinian Christians: Religion, Politics and Society in the Holy Land* (London: Melisende, 1999). On the relations between Christians, Muslims and Jews in Palestine from the end of the nineteenth century to the First World War, see Erik Freas, *Muslim-Christian Relations in Late Ottoman Palestine: Where Nationalism and Religion Intersect* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), and the seminal book by Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

Since the 1950s, Arab authors have published numerous appraisals that aim to highlight Israeli responsibility for the Palestinian disaster and refugee problem.⁸ These accounts, often marked by nationalist and apologetic intentions, are lacking in historical accuracy. In parallel, Israeli historiography in its first decades was an expression of Zionist nationalist aims. Since the 1980s, there have been changes in and divergences from the historical narrative of the events of 1948, brought about in particular through the use of sources contained in the Israeli archives that were hitherto inaccessible. Numerous works, especially those of the “new Israeli historians” reviewed and dismantled the “founding myths” elaborated by Jewish Israeli nationalist scholars on the 1948 war,⁹ although with aporias and opaque aspects.¹⁰ New fresh research by Palestinian and non-Middle Eastern scholars has contributed to the historicization of the political, humanitarian and identity watershed of 1948.¹¹

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- 8 Some Arab authors published seminal works in Arabic, such as Constantine Zurayk, *Ma'nat al-Nakba* [The meaning of the catastrophe] (Beirut: Khayat, 1948); 'Arif al-'Arif, *al-Nakba: Nakbat Bayt al-Maqdis wa al-Firdaws al-Mafqud, 1947–1952* [The catastrophe: the catastrophe of Jerusalem and the lost paradise, 1947–52], 6 vols. (Beirut and Sidon: Al-Maktaba al-'Asriyya, 1958–60); Faliḥ Khalid 'Alī, *al-Harb al-'Arabiyya al-Isra'iliyya, 1948–1949, wa Ta'sis Isra'il* [The Arab-Israeli War, 1948–1949, and the establishment of Israel] (Beirut: al-Mu'asasa al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirasat wal-Nashr, 1982).
- 9 Examples of this revisionism are Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis*, trans. Arlen Neal Weinstein, new ed. (New York: Free Press, 2018); Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2014); Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press: 2008); Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006); Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947–51* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1992); Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), and Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon, 1987). For a contextualization of the new Israeli historiography and sociology, see the collection of essays edited by the main and most controversial – given his radical change in thinking after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000 – Israeli historian Benny Morris, *Making Israel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).
- 10 The potentials of the post-1980s Israeli historiography are clarified in the introduction of Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). A 1989 but still valid Palestinian appraisal of these studies by Israeli scholars is Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, “The War of 1948: Disputed Perspectives and Outcomes,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 2 (1989).
- 11 See the works by Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017* (New York: Metropolitan, 2020); James L. Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge

Concerning the role of Christians, and Catholics in particular, historiography generally concentrated on the relations between the Holy See and Israel. The dialectic between the new state, the Kingdom of Jordan and the local Catholic Church remains largely unexplored, particularly with respect to its principal institutions, the Latin Patriarchate¹² and the Franciscan Custody.¹³ An analysis of different documentary typologies from dozens of archives around the world allows for a reconstruction of the church's complex relations with Israel and Jordan and with the social, religious, and material changes resulting from the epochal 1947–49 war. These records reconstruct a composite narrative of the Latin Church, showing how it related to Israel and Jordan and to the social, religious, and material changes occasioned by the epochal war through the redetermination of the categories that, up to that point, had defined the traditional Catholic hostility toward Zionism and the ambiguous and fluctuating support for the Arab Palestinian cause, largely motivated by fear of Muslim reprisals against Christians.

Some historians have presented the Latin Church as the most hostile Christian component to the State of Israel.¹⁴ However, a more careful historical

University Press, 2013); Thomas Grant Fraser, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 3rd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Salim Tamari, ed., *Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighbourhoods and Their Fate in the War*, 2nd rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies; Bethlehem: Badil, 2002); Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford; St. Martin's, 2001); Henry Laurens, *Le retour des exilés: La lutte pour la Palestine de 1869 à 1997* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1998); Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992); and Elias Sanbar, *Palestine 1948: L'expulsion* (Paris: Les Livres de la Revue d'études palestiniennes, 1985).

- 12 On the institutional history of the Latin Patriarchate, see in particular the studies by Paolo Pieraccini, *Il ristabilimento del Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme e la Custodia di Terra Santa: La dialettica istituzionale al tempo del primo patriarca Mons. Giuseppe Valerga (1847–1872)* (Cairo: Franciscan Centre of Christian Oriental Studies; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2006); Pieraccini, "Il ristabilimento del patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme (1842–1851)," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 27, no. 3 (2006).
- 13 On the Custody of the Holy Land in the contemporary period, see Giuseppe Buffon, *Les Franciscains en Terre Sainte (1869–1889): Religion et politique; une recherche institutionnelle* (Paris: Cerf; Editions franciscaines, 2005); Paolo Pieraccini, *Cattolici di Terra Santa (1333–2000)* (Florence: Pagnini e Martinelli, 2003); Andrea Giovannelli, *La Santa Sede e la Palestina. La Custodia di Terra Santa tra la fine dell'impero ottomano e la guerra dei sei giorni* (Rome: Studium, 2000).
- 14 On this thesis, supported by Uri Bialer and Daphne Tsimhoni, see especially Tsimhoni's arguments in *The Christian Communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank Since 1948: An Historical, Social and Political Study* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 10. Tsimhoni is the most prolific Israeli scholar on Palestinian Christians. See her "ha-Notsrim be-Yisra'el: Bein

examination cannot limit itself to such a reductive interpretation of the complex relations between the Latin Church and Israel. Indeed, in a context of tense and delicate connections, there were elements of innovation and partial disruption; an example is the group of priests and laymen organized in the Association of Saint James, a reflection within the patriarchate of the necessity for a new era in the relations between Jews and Catholics, in light of the foundation of the Israeli state. The study of these contrasting tensions, contained within the same ecclesiastical horizon, enables a better comprehension of the successive transformations in the relations between the Catholic Church and Jews, but also with the Muslim world, around the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and its reception in following decades.

2 Diocesan History: Renewing the Paradigms

The examination of this period also makes it possible to shed new light on the history of a city, Jerusalem, which, in the modern and contemporary period, has often been circumscribed and reduced to the status of a battleground or site of the Holy Places. The need for a different perspective on the urban space of Jerusalem is reflected in the importance of taking account of the Christians, men and women, laity and clergy – both diocesan and religious – who lived in the city.¹⁵ Equally, the history of the various religious communities has

Dat le-Politika" [The Christians in Israel: between religion and politics], in *ha-'Aravim ba-Politika ha-Yisra'elit: Dilemot shel Zehut* [The Arabs in Israeli policy: dilemmas of identity], ed. Elie Rekhess (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University, 1998); "ha-Ma'arah ha-Politi shel ha-Notsrim" [The political configuration of the Christians], in "ha-'Aravim be-Yisra'el: Bein Tehiyah Datit le-Hit'orerut Le'umit [Arabs in Israel: between religious revival and national awakening], special issue, *ha-Mizrah ha-Hadash* 32 (1989); "The Status of the Arab Christians under the British Mandate in Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 4 (1984); "The Armenians and the Syrians: Ethno-Religious Communities in Jerusalem," *Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 3 (1984), and "Demographic Trends of the Christian Population in Jerusalem and the West Bank 1948–1978," *Middle East Journal* 37, no. 1 (1983).

15 For important suggestions on and new methodological approaches to the study of the history of Jerusalem and Palestine in the late Ottoman and British periods, see Rashid Khalidi and Salim Tamari, *The Other Jerusalem: Rethinking the History of the Sacred City* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies; Jerusalem: Khalidi Library, 2020); Vincent Lemire, *Jerusalem 1900: The Holy City in the Age of Possibilities*, trans. Catherine Tihayni and Lys Ann Weiss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Lorenzo Kamel, *Imperial Perceptions of Palestine: British Influence and Power in Late Ottoman Times* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Jonathan Marc Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors: Religion, Race, and the Early Zionist-Arab Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University

frequently been compartmentalized and consigned to rigid, noncommunicative categories, following the ethnic construction of Middle Eastern identities elaborated in the long nineteenth century by European and American diplomats and intellectuals.¹⁶ The significance of considering the Catholic component within a broader context and accounting for its own multiformity opens the way to a revision of the interpretative paradigms that have thus far described the forms of contemporary Christianity in Palestine, Israel and Jordan during and after the Palestine War.¹⁷

Exploring the history of the Latin patriarchal diocese means researching the Christians, particularly the Latin Catholics, tracing their itineraries within the parishes and as refugees, and, at the same time, reconstructing the evolution of the relationship between the Catholic hierarchies in Jerusalem and in Rome, but also in other Middle Eastern and European countries, in the United States and in Latin America. Thus, it demands a study that distinguishes itself from the approach to the history of international relations frequently adopted in other works. The methodological approach chosen in this work stands out within religious history, and particularly the history of Christianity, privileging the particular heuristic path that is the history of the diocese.¹⁸

Press, 2014); Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Johann Büssow, *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem, 1872–1908* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem between Ottoman and British Rule* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Lemire, *La soif de Jérusalem: Essai d'hydrohistoire (1840–1948)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2010); Roberto Mazza, *Jerusalem: From the Ottomans to the British* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Catherine Nicault, *Une histoire de Jérusalem (1850–1967)* (Paris: CNRS, 2008); Gudrun Krämer, *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel*, trans. Graham Harman and Gudrun Krämer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

16 For an innovative and archival-based appraisal of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century process of the Western creation of the modern Middle East and the “racialization” of the Middle Eastern people, see Lorenzo Kamel, *The Middle East from Empire to Sealed Identities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

17 Although the research mainly focuses on these areas, the history of the Cyprus Catholic community and its specific features deserve further study. A seminal contribution is Paolo Pieraccini, *The Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land in Cyprus (1191–1960): Its Educational, Pastoral and Charitable Work and Support for the Maronite Community* (Milan: Terra Santa, 2013).

18 See Christian Sorrel, “Échelles et espaces: le diocèse. Réflexions sur l’historiographie française contemporaine,” in *L’histoire religieuse en France et en Espagne*, ed. Benoît Pellistrandini (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2004); Gérald Chaix, ed., *Le diocèse: Espaces, représentations, pouvoirs (France, XV^e–XX^e siècle)* (Paris: Cerf, 2002), and Michel Lagrée,

The latter constitutes a branch of the history of Christianity that has undergone progressive marginalization in recent decades. Widely practiced in the medieval and modern ages (as shown by the diocesan chronicles that recorded events and activities within the diocese and its parishes), it has undergone various transformations since the nineteenth century, as the professionalization of the historical discipline redefined the tools and methods of historiographical research.

In the post-French Revolutionary Europe marked by the secularization process, the application of the historical-critical method to the history of the Catholic Church required a long and tortuous journey. The Catholic Church feared that resorting to the methodologies of modern historical science would amount to a revocation of the transcendent component in the history of Christianity. Therefore, it continued to reject the historical-critical method during the nineteenth century. The suspicion on the part of the Vatican hierarchy toward the modern historical-critical method reached its acme during the modernist crisis at the turn of the twentieth century. Historians of a Catholic orientation struggled to free themselves from the authority and control of the Holy See. However, since the Second Vatican Council, the definition of the epistemological status of the history of Christianity and particularly of the Catholic Church has moved structurally in the direction of autonomy from ecclesiastical control, in a constant effort to avoid a confessional characterization of their investigative discipline, and with some overt problems and contradictions.¹⁹ The distancing from the apologetic intention and from the subjection to theology – through a process that developed despite the resistance, opposition and also wavering on the part of the protagonists themselves – has thus permitted the development of a modern history of Christianity that is no longer limited to the study of Catholicism and is able to offer an in-depth diachronic and synchronic analysis.

In the middle of the twentieth century, too, the diocesan monography produced in the academic context began to be based on a more rigorous and

“La monographie diocésaine et les acquis de l’historiographie religieuse française,” *Études d’histoire religieuse* 61 (1995).

19 See Jean-Dominique Durand, “Le parcours de l’histoire religieuse dans l’évolution culturelle européenne,” *Lusitania Sacra*, 2nd ser., 21 (2009); Luc Courtois, Jean-Pierre Delville, Eddy Louchez, Jean Pirotte, Françoise Rosart and Guy Zélis, eds., *Écrire l’histoire du catholicisme des XIX^e et XX^e siècles: Bilan, tendances récentes et perspectives (1975–2004); Hommage au prof. Roger Aubert à l’occasion de ses 90 ans* (Louvain-la-Neuve: ARCA, 2005); Jean-Dominique Durand and Régis Ladous, eds., *Histoire religieuse. Histoire globale – histoire ouverte: Mélanges offerts à Jacques Gadille* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1992), and Giuseppe Alberigo, “Méthodologie de l’histoire de l’Église en Europe,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 81, nos. 3–4 (1986).

attentive methodology, thus inaugurating a new religious historiography. The areas of focus slowly departed from the tradition of the medieval and modern diocesan monograph, formerly confined to the biography of illustrious bishops, to embrace modern historical research. In France – and subsequently beyond its borders – the contribution offered by the revolution sparked by the Annales school can also be discerned in this field, too; thanks to the works of Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel, among others, economic and social history, as well as the history of mentalities and geography, have rightfully joined the methodologies that guide the act of making the history of the diocese, paving the way to long-term periodization.²⁰

The principal topic in this context continued to be the history of French dioceses, monumental works composed of over twenty volumes, the first of which was published in 1967.²¹ This *Histoire* represented the first relevant attempt to apply religious sociology with a historical bent to modern religious history, making an effort to surmount erudition and confessionism, in a process that is still underway.

Although it may be true that numerous “histories of dioceses” exist in the European context, the research in religious history seems to have progressively abandoned this object of study since the 1960s and 1970s and to have confined itself mainly to the area of local history. This does not mean that there is a lack of works of great interest and value as regards the history of the clergy and of Catholic institutions. However, the growth in diocesan history has not kept pace with the general growth of religious historiography. Still too few diocesan monographs have taken advantage of the methodological developments proposed by recent contributions in the blossoming of cultural and religious studies,²² including the study of the liturgy, religious practices and Catholic movements, with some important exceptions, especially concerning research on dioceses during the First World War.²³ From the geographical point of view, moreover, most research is focused on European or North American case

20 One of the first histories of dioceses that relies on the impulses produced by Annales historians was the volume by Christiane Marcilhacy, *Le diocèse d'Orléans sous l'épiscopat de Mgr Dupanloup, 1849–1878: Sociologie religieuse et mentalités collectives* (Paris: Plon, 1962).

21 The *Histoire des diocèses de France*, founded by Eugène Jarry and Jean-Remy Palanque, published four volumes in the first series and twenty-two in the second, is now edited by Bernard Plongeron and André Vauchez.

22 See Massimo Faggioli and Alberto Melloni, ed., *Religious Studies in the 20th Century: A Survey on Disciplines, Cultures and Questions* (Münster: LIT, 2006).

23 This is the case of Matteo Caponi, *Una Chiesa in guerra: Sacrificio e mobilitazione nella diocesi di Firenze, 1911–1928* (Rome: Viella, 2018), and Xavier Boniface and Jean Heuclin, eds., *Diocèses en guerre, 1914–1918: L'Église déchirée entre Gott mit uns et le Dieu des armées* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2018).

studies, while studies that apply the methodology of the history of the diocese to other continents and cultural and religious traditions are very rare.²⁴ The Catholic world of Asia, Africa and Latin America has remained the object of the history of missions, through the reconstruction of the penetration of religious congregations in the colonial and postcolonial eras, neglecting the evolution of the dioceses in these contexts.

The first issue requiring action is the definition of terms, first and foremost that of *diocese*. From the point of view of Roman Catholic canon law, the diocese is a portion of the faithful, territorially limited, under the control and administration of a bishop.²⁵ It is divided into vicariates and parishes, which represent its principal units. To study a diocese is to move on uneven terrain, to concentrate on different actors, analyze the personalities who comprise its governance (mainly the bishop, vicars and episcopal curia) and the forms of synodality, but also the behavior and ideas of the clergy and of the male and female faithful, as well as the religious institutions that contribute to the life of the diocese in its complexity. The forms of worship, piety, devotion, customs and pilgrimages constitute other elements that define and shape Christian life at the diocesan level and elsewhere. A historical work that asks questions about the life of a diocese in a precise period cannot do so without the investigation of the territory in which the diocese exists and of its historical, economic and demographic characteristics.

A further element that must not be neglected concerns the relations between the local church and the central authority. The relationship with the Vatican, expressed not only in the direct relations between the bishop and the organs of the Roman curia, but also by impulses in terms of initiatives and forms of worship proposed by the center and received and elaborated on further out, constitutes an interesting subject for examination. In the same way, the relations with political institutions and the other religious denominations active within the diocesan territory, in particular in contexts in which the Catholic presence constituted a minority, represents a significant element.

24 See Terry Golway, ed., *Catholics in New York: Society, Culture and Politics, 1808–1946* (New York: Fordham University Press; Museum of the City of New York, 2008); Thomas J. Shelley, *The Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of New York, 1808–2008* (Strasbourg: Signe, 2007); Christine Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles dans le diocèse de Saint-Hyacinthe, 1820–1875* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1996), and Pierre Guillaume, ed., *Le diocèse au Québec et en France aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles* (Bordeaux: Centre d'études canadiennes; Maison des sciences de l'homme d'Aquitaine, 1990).

25 The nature and structure of the diocese are established in cann. 368–572 of the Codex of canon law.

The 1940s and 1950s, and especially the period from the 1947–49 war to the 1956 Suez crisis, represent a chronologically restricted but crucial phase that poses complex questions relating to the role of a diocese during an armed conflict and to the aid effort for thousands of refugees caused by the fighting and in relation to the new state forms ratified by the armistices. Above all, this period brought the church in close contact with the Jewish Israeli and the majority-Muslim Palestinian and Jordanian Arab societies. Through this confrontation born of tensions and contradictions, the very face of Catholicism in the region was transformed.

From a methodological perspective, the study of the Latin Church of Jerusalem also involves an attempt to depart from Eurocentric and Orientalist approaches which, albeit in very different ways compared to the past, still permeate some areas of church history. The case of the Latin patriarchal diocese of Jerusalem is particularly useful in this regard. This, indeed, is a local Latin-rite church, directly subordinate to the Holy See, but, at the same time, a *global diocese*, composed of Arab and foreign clergy from all around the world and mostly attended by Arab faithful and a small group of Catholics of Jewish origin. This cultural multiformity mandates a polyphonic historical reconstruction that takes account of the differences – and, in the political context, of the divisions – without, however, overlooking the general tendencies that characterizes Christian life in Israel, Palestine and Jordan. The apparent homogeneity of an object of study such as a diocese reveals, in fact, a plurality of realities, situations and visions. And these differences are expressed through the various sources with which the history – the *histories* – of the Jerusalem diocese can be reconstructed and narrated.

2.1 *Newly Released Archives, Histories to Unpack*

Essential to this research has been work conducted within some ecclesiastical archives in Jerusalem. Working with ecclesiastical institutions requires the establishment of a relationship of trust, to break the suspicious attitude toward scholars, to go beyond the “negligence and secrecy” that often surround the archival practices in the Middle East.²⁶ Archives are not inert *loci* of storage. They act as knowledge producers and not only as source containers.²⁷

26 Karène Sanchez Summerer, “Entre négligence et secret: Entreprises archivistiques en Palestine,” in *Archiver au Moyen-Orient: fabriques documentaires contemporaines*, ed. Christine Junguen and Jihane Sfeir (Paris: Karthala, 2019).

27 On the passage from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject, see Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1–2 (2002).



FIGURE 0.2 Seat of the Latin Patriarchate, Jerusalem
APLJ/AEBAF



FIGURE 0.3 Archives of the Latin Patriarchate, 1962
APLJ/AEBAF

Archives have their own history, a history that in Jerusalem has often encountered conflicts and dispossessions, dispersal and incertitude.

For the history of people gravitating in the Jerusalem Latin diocese and the events of the mid-twentieth century, some archives are particularly crucial. The archives of the Latin Patriarchate are located in the patriarchal seat, near Jaffa Gate, in the so-called Christian Quarter of the Old City (figs. 0.2–0.3). At the initiative of the Latin hierarchy, these archives were reorganized and catalogued – although a detailed inventory does not exist – in a process that was completed at the beginning of this century under the patriarchate of Michel Sabbah (1987–2008), a Palestinian Israeli and the first non-Italian patriarch. The irregularity with which access is granted to researchers means that it is not possible to appraise with precision the consistency of the documentation gathered since 1847. It is certainly a valuable archive, albeit heavily

lacunose: it contains baptismal and marriage registers, parochial archives, correspondence with the patriarchal organs and the Roman curia, as well as with the local and imperial authorities and foreign consulates, relations with other religious congregations and with the other churches of Jerusalem, and the private papers of priests. The exploration of these sources, composed from the lives of men and women who constituted the Latin community, could contribute to the historical appraisal. The sources from this archive relating to the 1940s and 1950s consulted for this research are almost entirely unpublished.

The Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, the other principal Catholic institution in Jerusalem, is a different story; the enormous documentary heritage from over 800 years of Franciscan presence in the region is contained in the archives of the Monastery of Saint Saviour, near the New Gate within the Old City, not far from the patriarchal archives. The immense work of reorganization and evaluation of the custodial archives culminated in the publication of a monumental, three-volume inventory totaling over 1,600 pages.²⁸

Other essential archives for researching the Catholics in the Holy Land are the archives of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) at Saint Anne's; the archives of the Assumptionists, formerly in the Notre-Dame de France complex and now at Saint Peter's in Gallicantu; the archive of the Fathers of Sion deposited at Ratisbonne Monastery, and those of the Sisters of Sion contained at 'Ayn Karim Convent. The archives of associations also represent fundamental heritage. This is the case for the Association of Saint James, now the Hebrew-speaking Catholic Vicariate (Netsigut Ya'akov ha-Tsadik la-Katolim ha-Dovrim 'Ivrit be-Yisra'el) within the patriarchate, collected by Yohanan Elihai and now transferred to the seat of the *kehilah* – the vicariate community – on Rabbi Kook Street.

Diocesan archives relating to Jerusalem are also to be found outside that city. This history is disseminated among the Middle East, Europe, the United States, Canada, Latin America, Africa and Australia. The archives of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), which in 2018 were transferred to the archives of the Archdiocese of New York, constitute a most precious source for the reconstruction of the global history of the Palestinian refugees and of the humanitarian aid network developed by the Catholic Church. The British, French, Italian, Israeli and US diplomatic archives show the connections between global history and the history of a diocese, that of a global city like

28 Andrea Maiarelli, ed., *L'Archivio storico della Custodia di Terra Santa, 1230–1970*, 3 vols. (Milan: Terra Santa, 2012).

Jerusalem, and demonstrate the persistence of colonial attitudes and visions also after the end of the British Mandate for Palestine.²⁹

The opening of the archives on the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–58) on March 2, 2020, a year after a related announcement by Pope Francis, has inaugurated unprecedented possibilities of enquiry for scholars working on the Christians in the Middle East. The full scope of what the archives reveal – not only about Pius’s wartime role – will only emerge after years of study by historians.³⁰ This documentation will open up new questions, reframe hypotheses and challenge former interpretations.

Concerning the Jerusalem Roman Catholic diocese during the Palestine War and its aftermath, three archives are particularly relevant for this study: those of the Vatican Apostolic Archive, of the section for state relations of the Secretariat of State in Vatican City and of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches in Rome. Firstly, the archives of the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem and Palestine, preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Archive, shed light on the activities of the pontifical representative in the region during the Second World War, its connections with the Vatican and other delegations concerning the Holy See’s initiatives during the Nazi extermination of the Jews. Moreover, these archives furnish the historian with new information regarding the church’s actions and reactions in the new scenario determined by the 1948 war. Secondly, the archives of the Vatican Secretariat of State, which were in the process of being released at the time of writing, especially for the period from 1949 to 1958, represent a fundamental documentary depository concerning not only the Holy See’s diplomatic actions and the question of Jewish emigration to Palestine to escape Nazi extermination, but also the Vatican’s role during the debate on the partition of Palestine and the status of Jerusalem, as well as the attitude of the church toward Israel and Jordan during the Cold War. Thirdly, the archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches reveal the complex relations between Rome and Jerusalem, the dramatic conditions of the patriarchate during the war and the actions undertaken for the relief of Palestinian refugees via the CNEWA and the Pontifical Mission for Palestine (PMP), as well as the conflicts and attempts at unity between Latin and Eastern Catholics in the 1940s and 1950s.

29 Vincent Lemire, ed., *Jérusalem: Histoire d'une ville-monde des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 2016).

30 See Nina Valbousquet, “L’ouverture interrompue des archives de Pie XII: une enquête en suspens,” *Entre-Temps*, May 11, 2020, and David I. Kertzer, “What the Vatican’s Secret Archives Are About to Reveal,” *The Atlantic*, March 2, 2020.

The overlapping and cross-referencing of some fonds from the Pius archives with other ecclesiastical, diplomatic and private archives allows for a more complex and nuanced appraisal of the church's pastoral actions, its internal debates and the political relations with the Israeli state and the Jordanian kingdom.

However, this is also a history of missing fragments. The unsatisfactory preservation conditions and irregular access to the archives of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), due to the organization's political and financial crises, reduces the availability of reliable data on Palestinian refugees and prevents a complete historical reconstruction of the diaspora of the Palestinian Catholics after 1948.³¹ Their closure is an urgent matter that needs to be addressed immediately. Moreover, the difficulty in accessing the Jordanian state archives remains a major problem for scholars, highlighting the peril of studying a country "from without,"³² only through foreign sources, mainly located in Israel, Europe and the United States. However, the consultation of Jordanian parish archives and the local press has partially mitigated this risk.

This documentary variety has made possible an attempt to reconstruct not only the institutional history of the Jerusalem Latin Church but also the evolution of political, social and religious behavior during and since the 1947–49 war, of the liturgy, of popular and ordinary forms of worship and piety, thus opening up a perspective capable of hybridizing religious, political and social histories as well as retracing the multiple trajectories taken by Catholic actors during and after 1948.

2.2 *Jerusalem's Connections and Global Entanglements: a Roadmap*

Diocesan monographs generally favor *longue durée* and structure with respect to articulation, to use the language of the *Annales*. In this case, however, the chosen periodization covers just a decade – a chronologically brief time span marked by crises and transformations, accelerations and bars to progress.

31 On UNRWA's historical archives in Amman and Gaza and the importance of Palestinian refugee archives, see Nur Masalha, "Decolonising Methodology, Reclaiming Memory: Palestinian Oral Histories and Memories of the Nakba," in *An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba*, ed. Nahla Abdo and Nur Masalha (London: Zed, 2018); Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 118–47, and Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik, eds., *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis* (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2001).

32 Eugene L. Rogan, "Archival Resources and Research Institutions in Jordan," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 23, no. 2 (1989): 169.

Symbolically, however, it is a very long period: the 1947–49 war represents the apex of a conflict that had dragged on from the end of the nineteenth century, one that remained unresolved in the decades that followed, to become exacerbated right after the transformations set in motion in 1948.

After unpacking the relations between the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Zionist movement and the Middle Eastern Arab world from the nineteenth century to the Second World War, chapters 1 to 3 focus on the 1947–49 conflict, retracing and interpreting it using a host of sources, especially contemporary accounts offered by men – and some women – who were members of or had ties to the Jerusalem diocese, written in the course of events or in the immediate postwar phase. The international discussion on the partition of Palestine at the end of the Second World War, the role of the churches in the debate undertaken by United Nations organizations, the anxieties and fears of a possible establishment of a Jewish state and of a Muslim reaction to it are some of the themes addressed. The bloody battles of 1948, the refugee exodus, the closure of parishes in the territory that now forms part of the State of Israel, and the reorganization of the dioceses following the arrival of thousands of Catholic refugees in Transjordan provoked profound transformations in the life of the Latin community. In those months, the death in 1947 of Patriarch Luigi Barlassina, who had assumed the position in 1920, and the delay in selecting a successor on the part of the Holy See, in such a dramatic phase, sharpened the perception of isolation and radical upheaval which the war had produced in the minds of the clergy and faithful of the patriarchate. The nomination of the new patriarch, despite the rumors of a possible creation of a single diocese for Latin and Eastern Catholics, came at the end of 1949. The Franciscan Alberto Gori, *custos* of the Holy Land from 1937, found himself at the head of a diocese that was on its knees due to the conflict. The first emergency was that of providing aid for the refugees, for which the Holy See organized a specific agency, the PMP, in which the patriarchal diocese was an essential actor.

The first half of the 1950s, the focus of chapters 4 and 5, places the ecclesiastical institutions and their faithful in the foreground of the transformations sparked by the conflict of 1947–49. The church swung into action to contest laws by means of which the Israeli and Jordanian states, in the process of consolidating their own structures, intended to circumscribe and limit the activity of Christian organizations, especially aid and educational entities. The Latin diocese, and the congregations that operated within it, reacted to what they saw as an attack on the religious freedom of the Christian minority. In this context, the intervention of European diplomacy with traditional links to the Holy Land proved largely ineffective, putting an end to any possibility of restoring

an indirect capitulatory regime and the beginning of a new phase marked primarily by the rise of nationalisms.³³

In Israel, the debate over the importance of the Christian presence in the country became extremely tense, within a context rent by internal divisions among various Jewish components in the country. The specter of mass conversions from Judaism to Christianity, a scenario circulated by the Israeli press, drove the Israeli parliament – the Knesset – to elaborate a particularly harsh outline of bills regarding converts. In parallel, the theme of Jewish converts became the object of a lengthy negotiation between the Holy See and the Latin Patriarchate, leading to the birth of the Association of Saint James, a community that emerged from within the Latin diocese for converts and Christians of Jewish origin. The group of priests and laymen within the Association of Saint James inaugurated an experience of relations between the Jewish and Christian worlds with unprecedented and important consequences for the Latin Church of Jerusalem and the international panorama of relations between Jews and Catholics.

Chapters 6 to 8 place the history of the Jerusalem Latin diocese in a global context. The relationship between the Vatican and Jerusalem, especially regarding the troubled projects to unite the Latin and Eastern Catholic churches, but also the spiritual references and politicization in the area of devotion and cults, all contributed to the placing of the Latin Church of Jerusalem in a broader scenario. The rhetoric of a “crusade” for the Holy Places opened up new spaces for action in sectors of the US, Latin American and European Catholic world (especially in France, Italy and Belgium), which, during and after the 1947–49 war, were mobilized into campaigns of prayer and manifestations aimed at influencing the diplomacy of their respective countries to induce them to vote for the internationalization of Jerusalem, as wished by the Holy See. In

33 *Ahdnâme* was the term used by the Ottoman chancery to define all the agreements that the Sublime Porte stipulated to rule its relations, alliances, international trades, privileges (*imtiyâzât*) with *harbî* countries as well as the condition of foreigners, the jurisdiction in matters of personal status of non-Muslim subjects within the empire. On September 8, 1914, Sultan Mehmet V proclaimed the abolition of “all the existent foreign privileges known as financial, economic, juridical and administrative capitulations”. See Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi* (Istanbul: Turk Tarik Kurumu, 1940), 162. After the First World War, the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) restored the capitulations, but the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) stipulated their definitive abolition. For a complete analysis, see Maurits H. van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls and Beraths in the 18th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), and John Edward Wansbrough et al., “Imtiyâzât [Capitulations],” in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

the 1950s, the relaunching of the Marian cult with an anticommunist register assumed a great degree of importance, marked in the Jerusalem diocese by the construction of the Basilica of the Annunciation at Nazareth. The story of this tortuous project reveals the differences and distances in interpretations and meanings between the local church and the central authority within a politicized aspect of Marian devotion. All this sheds light on the fragmentation that existed between the Vatican and Jerusalem in the panorama of religious intentions and objectives.

From the geopolitical perspective, the bipolar conflict resulted in a redefinition of center and periphery. The year 1956 took on a paradigmatic importance: the Suez crisis placed the Middle East at the center of the global checkerboard. For the church, the events at Suez foregrounded in all clarity the instability of the political framework that resulted from the 1947–49 war, the very aspect in which it was laboriously searching for its own place and role. At the same time, a new phase was beginning. All of this was manifested more clearly in the actions of the Latin Patriarchate during the Second Vatican Council and, a few years later, in the upheaval following the war in June 1967.

Thus, this book weaves diocesan history with global history. Overall, in the decade from 1946 to 1956, the Jerusalem Latin diocese, as split between Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Cyprus, seems to have been a laboratory of different and sometimes divergent conceptions and tensions. Its multiformity, occasioned by the presence of Arab faithful and clergy, of European, American, Asian and African religious and, finally, a minority of converted Jews, stands out within an even more variegated panorama composed of the Christian confessions, the Muslim component – both Palestinian and Jordanian – and that of Israeli Jewish society, itself in turn reflecting further fragmentations (between Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jews, immigrants from the late Ottoman and Mandate period and those who arrived after 1948, orthodox and secular, to name but a few reductive and simplified categories). In the tangle of the epochal and periodizing historical events that followed the Second World War in the Middle East, the approach and considerations typical of Western Orientalism historically elaborated by Western clergy in relation to the Arab world underwent new changes and remodeling. In the same way, and concurrently with the upheavals of war, the anti-Western opposition of the Palestinian and Jordanian clergy also manifested itself at this time, especially in their call for an Arab patriarch after the death of Barlassina and in the 1950s. The anti-Jewish sentiments shared by the Western clergy and the Arabs now served as a precarious cohesive force between the two most important components of the Latin Church. However, here too something was moving: the tormented genesis within the patriarchate itself of a community – the Association of Saint

James – animated by assumptions that largely dismantled the traditional attitude of suspicion and hostility toward the Jews present in the Catholic Church, reveals the necessity for a historical perspective capable of accommodating diverse histories and developments within the same, liminal, community.

These narratives, different and often conflicting – in counterpoint, so to say, and not in harmony³⁴ – reveal the richness of an area of study, that of diocesan history, showing how it can be resumed and renovated.



Historical work is often perceived as an individual, solitary enterprise. On the contrary, sharing research experience, debating and receiving corrections and help have constantly marked the preparation of this book.

Paolo Pieraccini, with his abundant availability and tenacious interest in sources, supported me in identifying and exploiting unexplored archives. Daniele Menozzi, who supervised my doctoral thesis on which this book is based, taught me to be patient in approaching and analyzing documents and enriched this work with fragments of his expertise.

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Angelos Dalachanis and Vincent Lemire, who agreed to publish this book in the Open Jerusalem series, did not spare themselves in identifying errors,

34 Contrapuntal history aims to retrace diverse plot threads, following the itineraries of the diverse actors who compose a social reality animated by tensions, dialectics and contradictions, therefore creating a polyphonic narration that does not attempt to recombine irreconcilable elements into a false synthesis, or harmony as such. For this theorization and the connections between contrapuntal reading and liminality, the contribution by the Palestinian intellectual and theoretician of Orientalism Edward W. Said is seminal, especially in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), notably 18–19, 66–67 and 318.

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Throughout this journey from Jerusalem to the archives and back, I have always been accompanied by Riccardo, whose firm presence and brilliant intuition to locate hidden sources anticipated many steps of my work and life. Giacomo and Filippo make this joint journey into the future such a bright one.

Nostalgia for an Invented Past and Concern for the Future: the Latin Diocese of Jerusalem from Its Reestablishment to the Second World War (1847–1945)

The Latin Patriarchate, the Franciscan Custody and the religious orders in the Holy Land have a long history. The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem was established in 1099 in the course of the First Crusade, in the context of the clash between the crusaders and the Seljuk Turks, with the goal of reconquering the Holy Places, and of the rupture between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches with the schism of 1054. The first Latin patriarch of Jerusalem was Arnulf of Rohes, Robert II of Normandy's chaplain. After the Muslim reconquest in 1187, the patriarchate was reconstituted in the coastal stretch between Tyre and Jaffa and its seat located at St. John of Acre. A new phase of redefinition of the Latin Church was accompanied by the growth in the presence of some religious orders, guarantors especially of the conservation of and officiation over the sanctuaries of the Holy Land.

Among the religious congregations present in Jerusalem, the Franciscans assumed a role of primary importance. The Franciscan presence in the region was due to the will of Francis himself, who attributed particular importance to the vast province of the Holy Land (which included the Byzantine Empire, Palestine, Syria and Egypt) since the first general chapter of the Franciscan order in 1217. With the reconquest of Jerusalem by the crusaders, the Franciscans established themselves in the Holy City (1230). However, following a Muslim victory in 1291, the Franciscans were forced to flee to Cyprus. The emergence of the Mameluke dynasty marked the definitive defeat of the crusaders and the end of the Latin Patriarchate, until it was reestablished in the nineteenth century.

In 1333, the Neapolitan sovereigns Robert of Anjou and Sancia of Majorca reached an agreement with the Egyptian sultan, Muhammad al-Naser, that granted the former the property in the area of Jerusalem where the Cenacle stood. They transferred it to the Franciscans, who were also granted the right to establish themselves in the Holy City within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, at the tomb of Mary, and at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. A decade later, in 1342, two papal bulls issued by Clement VI (*Nuper charissimae* and

Gratias agimus) laid the groundwork for the juridical recognition of what would become the Custody of the Holy Land. In the following centuries, the Franciscans were assigned particular privileges regarding the safeguarding of the Holy Places, caring for pilgrims, and pastoral and educational work; they also took on an increasing role in relations with foreign powers.¹ In 1746, Benedict XIV laid down the internal organization of the custody in the apostolic letter *In supremo militantis Ecclesiae*, establishing a structure that would remain in force until the revision of the statutes undertaken during the twentieth century.

In these centuries, the history of the custody was marked by bitter internal conflicts, especially between Italian and Spanish friars because of the financial regime – inaugurated with a decree by Charles III of Spain in 1772, the *Cédula* – that favored the Spanish. The frequent intervention of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, as well as the dispatch by popes of apostolic visitors, was not sufficient to mend these breaches.

The nineteenth century represented an age of crucial transformations for the Middle East. In this phase, the principal European powers tried to increase their presence in the region, which formed part of the Ottoman Empire, mostly through the installation of political representations – like the establishment of permanent consulates in Jerusalem by Britain, France, Russia, the United States, Austria-Hungary, and Spain, between the 1830s and 1850s – and cultural institutions, but also through the penetration of religious congregations of European origin and the foundation of new missions.

The Catholic Church participated in this process with a renewed interest in Palestine.² France vied to present itself as a guarantor of the interests of the Latin Catholics in the region. Prussia also committed itself to reinforcing its presence and influence through the arrival of new religious institutions and

1 For a history of the Christian Holy Places, see Raymond Cohen, *Saving the Holy Sepulchre: How Rival Christians Came Together to Rescue their Holiest Shrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Daniela Fabrizio, *La questione dei luoghi santi e l'assetto della Palestina (1914–1922)* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2000); Paolo Pieraccini, *Gerusalemme, Luoghi Santi e comunità religiose nella politica internazionale* (Bologna: EDB, 1997); Sélim Sayegh, *Le statu quo des Lieux-Saints: Nature juridique et portée internationale* (Rome: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1971), and Bernardin Collin, *Le problème juridique des Lieux-Saints* (Paris: Sirey, 1956).

2 On the attitude of the Holy See toward the question of Palestine, see Paolo Zanini, “Vatican Diplomacy and Palestine, 1900–1950,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 71 (2017); Agathe Mayeres-Rebernik, *Le Saint-Siège face à la “Question de la Palestine”: De la Déclaration Balfour à la création de l’État d’Israël* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2015), and Henry Laurens, “Le Vatican et la question de la Palestine,” in *Nations et Saint-Siège au XX^e siècle*, ed. Hélène Carrère d’Encausse and Philippe Levillain (Paris: Fayard, 2003).

the creation of an Anglican-Lutheran diocese in Jerusalem, the product of a joint initiative of the Prussian Evangelical Church and the Church of England in the 1840s.³ In 1843, Russia began to carve a presence in Jerusalem, establishing the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, thus challenging Greek influence over Orthodox Christians through the control of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.⁴

This complex process has been termed “the invention of the Holy Land”.⁵ As European powers reestablished interest in Palestine and the Levant as a whole, characterizing the region as culturally homogeneous and, above all, a “sacred” area, they sought to establish religious institutions and to perform a civilizing mission, of which the spreading of Christianity was a cornerstone.⁶ Along with the Ottoman administrative reforms (*Tanzimat*) and the new importance attributed to the Jerusalem sanjak,⁷ this process contributed to the formation of the unitary idea of modern Palestine among its Arab inhabitants that would later form the basis of Palestinian nationalism, together with the

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- 3 On the establishment of this diocese and its aftermath, see Roland Löffler, *Protestanten in Palästina: Religionspolitik, Sozialer Protestantismus und Mission in den deutschen evangelischen und anglikanischen Institutionen des Heiligen Landes 1917–1939* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), and Rafiq A. Farah, *Troubled Waters: A History of the Anglican Church in Jerusalem, 1841–1998* (Bridport: Christians Aware, 2002). The archives of the MECA of St Antony’s College, Oxford, and the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology contain a vast body of documentation on this community. On German Catholic institutions in late Ottoman Palestine, see Haim Goren, *Katolim Amityim ve-Germanim tovim: ha-Germanim ha-Katolim ve-Erets Yisra’el, 1838–1910* [Real Catholics and good Germans: German Catholics and Palestine, 1838–1910] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005).
- 4 See Derek Hopwood, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843–1914: Church and Politics in the Near East* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969). The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem was officially recognized in 1858, after the Crimean War, but in December 1843 Archimandrite Porfirii Uspenskii commenced his secret mission to Jerusalem, which lasted until August 1844.
- 5 Henry Laurens, *La question de Palestine*, vol. 1, *L’invention de la Terre sainte (1799–1922)* (Paris: Fayard, 1999); Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *The Rediscovery of the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979).
- 6 For an effective synthesis of the connections between colonialism and missionary activity, see Claude Prudhomme, *Missions chrétiennes et colonisation, XVI^e–XX^e siècles* (Paris: Cerf, 2004).
- 7 At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Ottoman Greater Syria was divided into four provinces (*eyālet*): *eyālet* al-Sham (Damascus), *eyālet* Tarablus (Tripoli), *eyālet* Saida (Sidon) and *eyālet* Halab (Aleppo), with the sanjak of Jerusalem under the authority of the *eyālet* of Sidon. In 1831 the *eyālet* of Dimashq al-Sham, Tarablus and Saida came under the authority of the Ibrahim Pasha’s government in Damascus, with the sanjak of Jerusalem under the *eyālet* Dimashq al-Sham. Following the end of Egyptian rule in 1841, the Jerusalem sanjak started to enjoy a higher status and in 1872, the sanjak of Jerusalem was detached from the *eyālet* Dimashq al-Sham and placed under the direct control of Istanbul.

conception of Palestine as a specific administrative entity, the sense of belonging to Palestine as the *al-umma al-filistiniyya*, and the opposition to foreign intervention.⁸

In the case of the Latin Catholics, these transformations were accompanied by a revival of the church's past in this region, forging a link between the "myth of medieval Christendom", the age of the crusades, and the newfound interest in the Levant in the mid-nineteenth century – a link that was reinforced by the intervention of France in favor of Lebanese Christians after the massacre by the Druze in 1860.⁹

Beginning at the end of the 1830s, the Holy See, and especially the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, discussed the possibility of sending a Latin bishop to Jerusalem as part of the missionary reorganization promoted by Gregory XVI (1831–46). The Vatican supported the revival of the idea of a crusade in defense of the Eastern Catholics, with the goal of "liberating" them from Muslim Ottoman rule.¹⁰ The institutional and economic crisis endured by the custody from the late eighteenth through to the first half of the nineteenth centuries reinforced the proposal to reconstruct the Latin Patriarchate, which became an integral part of Gregory XVI's policy of reorganizing missionary activity under the control of the Holy See. His successor, Pius IX (1846–78), showed a strong interest in an apostolate to serve the Eastern Christians, motivated also by the desire to counteract French influence.

With the growth of the Latin Catholics in the area and the necessity for an institution to lead and administer them – and which would not be limited to the protection of the Holy Places, as was the case with the custody – on July 23, 1847, Pius IX promulgated his apostolic letter *Nulla celebrior* and thereby reestablished the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, nominating Giuseppe Valerga (1847–72) as the first patriarch in the contemporary history of the Jerusalem diocese. The reorganization of the patriarchate sparked a dispute with the Franciscans, who saw their secular privileges and rights put up for discussion and downsized upon the refoundation of the patriarchal diocese. After about two decades marked by tension between the patriarchate and the custody, the 1860s saw the beginnings of a progressive improvement in relations. Under

8 See the foundational text by Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, new ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), esp. chap. 5–6.

9 For a broader historical contextualization of the search for a return to a *respublica christiana* on the eve of the French Revolution within the nineteenth century, see Daniele Menozzi, *La Chiesa cattolica e la secolarizzazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 34–43.

10 See Dominique Trimbur, "Les croisades dans la perception catholique française du Levant, 1880–1940: entre mémoire et actualité," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 27, no. 3 (2006).

Valerga's leadership, the Latin Patriarchate facilitated the arrival from Europe of numerous male and female religious congregations, the foundation of the first and only Palestinian order – the Sisters of the Rosary – and the establishment of new missions, some of them on the other side of the River Jordan.¹¹ Meanwhile, the definition of the Status Quo of 1852 ratified an informal, although controversial, system of coexistence between the Christian churches concerning the ownership, usage and liturgy of the Holy Places.¹²

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the position of the Holy See seemed to oscillate between two different tendencies regarding relations between Latin and Eastern Catholics. Leo XIII (1878–1903) moved in the direction of paying significant attention to Eastern Catholics, with the goal of counteracting the long-term tradition of opposition among the Catholic communities in the Arab world, and so interrupting the drive for Latinization, while his successor, Pius X (1903–14), did not continue on this path.

Between the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, the governance of the Latin Church of Jerusalem was exercised by patriarchs Vincenzo Bracco (1873–89), Luigi Piavi (1889–1905), Filippo Camassei (1906–19) and Luigi Barlassina (1920–47). The missionary efforts in the Levant and the attempt at creating unity between Latin and Eastern Catholics that characterized the pontificate of Leo XIII and were summarized in the apostolic letter *Orientalium dignitas Ecclesiarum* of 1894 were resumed under Benedict XV (1914–22)¹³ and Pius XI (1922–39). In this phase, politically marked by the British Mandate for Palestine (1920–48) and Transjordan

11 Willy Jansen, "Arab Women with a Mission: The Sisters of the Rosary," in *Christian Witness Between Continuity and New Beginnings: Modern Historical Missions in the Middle East*, ed. Martin Tamcke and Michael Marten (Münster: LIT, 2006).

12 The Status Quo refers to the recognition of custodial rights and privileges of six Christian denominations (Roman Catholic Latins, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox and Ethiopian Orthodox) over the Christian shrines in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, defined in 1852–53 by Sultan Abdülmecid (1823–61) in firmans. Sayegh and Pieraccini propose a distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* status quo. The first one, the *de facto* status quo, is related to the period from 1634 to 1852 when the complex system of possessions, rights, liturgical habits and consuetudes in the Holy Places shared by different religious communities was subject to frequent changes, following the decisions of the Ottoman authorities. The second one, *de jure* status quo, was the legislation at the mid-nineteenth century that the Sublime Porte defined as "definitive" in order to resolve the conflicts and quarrels between the Christian communities. See Sayegh, *Le statu quo des Lieux-Saints*, and Pieraccini, *Gerusalemme, Luoghi Santi e comunità religiose*, 127–30.

13 See Agnes de Dreuzy, *The Holy See and the Emergence of the Modern Middle East: Benedict XV's Diplomacy in Greater Syria (1914–1922)* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016).

(1921–46), the Latin Patriarchate and the Franciscan Custody found themselves faced with the growth of the Zionist movement. After having spent the first decades of its existence trying to define a *modus vivendi* with the custody, the Latin Patriarchate, under Barlassina's leadership, now entered a phase of consolidation and growth, but also one of direct confrontation with Arab and Zionist aspirations in the region.

Palestine and Transjordan in Transition (1945–47)

1 Framing the Background

1.1 “*Non possumus*”? *The Alternate Relations between the Holy See and the Zionist Movement (1897–1939)*

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Holy See’s concern about the situation of Catholics in the eastern Mediterranean was not limited to the rivalry among European powers to achieve greater prominence and recognition in Jerusalem. By the end of the nineteenth century, a new actor had appeared on the scene: the Jewish nationalist movement, Zionism, whose significance seemed to be on the increase all over Europe after it had defined its program and as the number of Jews emigrating to Palestine after the first aliyah (1882–1903) became more consistent.¹

The Zionist leaders soon made an attempt at mediation and rapprochement with the Holy See.² Indeed, the Vatican’s backing would have been

1 From the vast bibliography on Zionism, see, in particular, Arturo Marzano, *Storia dei sionismi: Lo Stato degli ebrei da Herzl a oggi* (Rome: Carocci, 2017); Walid Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem until 1948*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2005); Alain Dieckhoff, *The Invention of a Nation: Zionist Thought and the Making of Modern Israel*, trans. Jonathan Derrick (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Georges Bensoussan, *Une histoire intellectuelle et politique du sionisme, 1860–1840* (Paris: Fayard, 2002); Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Schocken, 1989); Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1959).

2 On the relations between Zionism and the Christian churches – and specifically the Holy See – since the nineteenth century, see Dominique Trimbur, “The Catholic Church’s Thought on Judaism, Zionism and the State of Israel: Mid-Nineteenth Century–1965,” in O’Mahony and Flannery, *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, 225–36; Uri Bialer, *Cross on the Star of David: The Christian World in Israel’s Foreign Policy, 1948–1967*, trans. Haya Galai (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); Paul C. Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), esp. 134–60; Silvio Ferrari, *Vaticano e Israele dal secondo conflitto mondiale alla guerra del Golfo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1991); Sergio I. Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism: Conflict in the Holy Land, 1895–1925*, trans. Arnold Schwarz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Meir Mendès, *Le Vatican et Israël* (Paris: Cerf, 1990); Andrej Kreutz, *Vatican Policy on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: The Struggle for the Holy Land* (New York: Greenwood, 1990); George E. Irani, *The Papacy and the Middle East: The Role of the Holy See in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1962–1984* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). Although the historiography is mainly in English, Italian and French, some works in Hebrew (in addition to the original editions of the Minerbi,

highly symbolic and would have constituted a significant card to play in political negotiations with other governments, which the leadership of the Jewish nationalist movement was conducting in parallel. Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), the founder and first president of the Zionist Organization, was convinced of the importance of a meeting with the pope to attempt to extract a word of approval for the Zionist colonization that had commenced. Herzl sought to obtain a meeting with Pope Leo XIII and his Secretary of State Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro, in the conviction that both would support the Zionist Organization once they received a detailed briefing from himself personally. The papal audience did not take place: despite the pope's constant focus on the Catholics of the Middle East, the birth and development of Zionism did not seem worthy enough of his particular interest.

After the death of Leo XIII and the election of Pius X to the papacy, Herzl renewed his efforts to arrange a meeting with the new pope. As a result, one of the founders of Zionism, who was nearing the end of his life, visited the pope in January 1904. On this occasion, too, the Zionist hopes turned out to be ill-founded. The pope did not intend to alter the church's longstanding position of hostility and suspicion toward the Jews and their initiatives. The Jewish nationalist aspirations toward Palestine were no exception and the pope's stance was even reinforced by ancient stereotypes that were remodeled in light of the new political context. In any case, the encounter between Herzl and Pius, preceded by the former's meeting with the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val, did not achieve anything; the pope responded to the request for papal support for the Jewish national cause by reiterating the impossibility of the church supporting Zionism for as long as the Jews continued to deny Jesus as the Messiah. Pius's *non possumus* signified a setback for the Zionist leadership's hopes for an alliance with the Holy See, or at least for convergence on some points. It did not signify an a priori end to requests from the Jewish world; suffice it to mention the letter *Poloniae populum*, issued on December 3, 1905, addressed to the Polish episcopate, whom Pius joined in condemning the pogrom against the Jews in the territory under Russian control.³ At the same time, the pope did not intend to give the impression that there would be any change in the Vatican's stance on the Zionists' requests.

Bialer and Mendes books) have appeared: see Moshe Ma'oz, *Rav ha-Nistar 'al ha-Galui: ha-Nazirut ha-Katolit ha-Latinit be-Erets-Yisra'el ba-'Et ha-Hadashah (1799–1914)* [More unknown than known: Latin Catholic monkhood in the Land of Israel in the modern period (1799–1914)] (Tel Aviv: Hotsa'at Gama, 2018); Rami Degani, *Kenesiyot, 'Edot u-Misadarim Notsriyim be-Yisra'el* [Christian churches, congregations and orders in Israel] (Jerusalem: Ari'el, 1999).

3 ASS 38 (1905–6): 321–27.

Meanwhile, the Catholic press nurtured suspicions and raised strong criticisms of the Zionist movement, beginning with the First World Zionist Congress held in Basel in August 1897. Articles in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Jesuit-edited journal reviewed by the Vatican Secretariat of State before publication,⁴ commented on the initiatives and proposals by the Jewish nationalist movement using markedly hostile arguments and tones, heaping on Zionism the arsenal of anti-Jewish prejudices, laced with antisemitism, that the church had elaborated and updated over the centuries.⁵

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- 4 On the anti-Judaic and antisemitic stance of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, see Nina Valbousquet, “Transatlantic Catholic Responses to Fascist Anti-Semitism: The Racial Laws of 1938 in the Jesuit Press of *America* and *Civiltà Cattolica*,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2019); David Lebovitch Dahl, “The Anti-Semitism of *La Civiltà Cattolica* Revisited,” in *“The Tragic Couple”: Encounters Between Jews and Jesuits*, ed. James Bernauer and Robert Aleksander Maryks (Leiden: Brill, 2013), and Ruggero Taradel and Barbara Raggi, *La segregazione amichevole: La “Civiltà Cattolica” e la questione ebraica (1850–1945)* (Rome: Riuniti, 2000).
- 5 On the intricate debate over the definition of categories like anti-Hebraism, anti-Judaism and antisemitism, we limit ourselves to considering anti-Hebraism as a generic aversion to Jews, detectable in historical details and cultural contexts far removed from one another; anti-Judaism, meanwhile, is hostility toward Jews on religious grounds and particularly located in the Roman world; antisemitism is connected with a political definition of Jews as an element to be despised – and even eliminated – on racial, biological grounds, which was developed during the nineteenth century and manifested in the twentieth century in its most violent expression with the Shoah. On the necessity to avoid a rigid separation and distinction when considering the three categories, see Giovanni Miccoli, “Antiebraismo, antisemitismo: un nesso fluttuante,” in *Les racines chrétiennes de l’antisémitisme politique (fin XIX^e–XX^e siècle)*, ed. Catherine Brice and Giovanni Miccoli (Rome: École française de Rome, 2003). Among the most important contributions on Catholic antisemitism, see the collection of essays on these themes by Miccoli, published over the course of two decades, *Antisemitismo e cattolicesimo* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2013), and the foundational *I dilemmi e i silenzi di Pio XII: Vaticano, Seconda guerra mondiale e Shoah*, rev. ed. (Milan: Biblioteca universale Rizzoli, 2007). Other important treatments include the volumes by Emma Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican: Pope Pius XI and the Speech That Was Never Made*, trans. Carl Ipsen (Cambridge: Polity, 2011); Hubert Wolf, *Pope and Devil: The Vatican’s Archives and the Third Reich*, trans. Kenneth Kronenberg (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Renato Moro, *La Chiesa e lo sterminio degli ebrei*, new ed. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009); Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930–1965* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); David I. Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican’s Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Vintage, 2001). For an outstanding long-term contextualization of the role of the churches in the history of the ideas, practices and dissemination of anti-Judaism and antisemitism, see Magda Teter, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020). For the Italian case – useful for an understanding of the education and thought of many religious in Jerusalem’s Latin diocese – see Simon Levis Sullam, “Per una storia dell’antisemitismo cattolico in Italia,”

Despite the negative public Catholic attitude, the Zionist leadership did not give up on planning another visit with the pope. Nahum Sokolow (1859–1936), secretary of the World Zionist Congress, made another attempt a decade later. With the First World War at its peak, Pope Benedict xv agreed to a meeting, to be held on May 4, 1917, preceded by two discussions, with Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, and Eugenio Pacelli, apostolic nuncio to Bavaria. The timing was particularly delicate: the British had recently entered Palestine, which, according to secret Anglo-French negotiations – the so-called Sykes-Picot agreement, named after the two diplomats, Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot, who drafted it – was to be internationalized. The agreement, finalized in February 1916, provided for the division of the Middle East into areas assigned to the direct or indirect control of France and Britain. As per the negotiations, a large part of Palestine (including Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth) would be placed under international administration in view of their religious importance for the three monotheistic faiths. This was not a new idea; it had in fact been conceived of in the nineteenth century and was even supported by Zionist leaders, including Herzl himself.⁶

During the First World War, this proposal acquired new relevance. The project of internationalizing the Holy Land had a particularly welcome ring for the Holy See, which hoped that, in this manner, Palestine would be assigned to the control of a Catholic authority, and not to the Muslim, Jewish or even Christian Orthodox authorities. The meeting between Sokolow and Benedict in 1917 thus occurred in this context, around which an agreement, albeit generic, was facilitated between the Holy See and the Zionists, which stood in contrast to the climate in which the previous meeting between Pius x and Herzl had taken place. In the eyes of Benedict, the internationalization proposal excluded the possibility of a Jewish state but indirectly charged the Zionist movement with the important task of containing Muslim pressure on Christians in the region. In the light of these considerations, the pope expressed his conviction to Sokolow that the Jews and Christians in Palestine would be “good neighbors”. For the pope, then, the meeting was to be understood as part of a mediating initiative aimed at facilitating a swift end to the First World War.⁷

On November 2, 1917, six months after Sokolow’s visit, the British cabinet-approved declaration by Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, contained in a letter

in *Cristiani d'Italia. Chiese, società, Stato (1861–2011)*, ed. Alberto Melloni (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2011).

6 See Ferrari, *Vaticano e Israele*, 9–11.

7 Laurens, “Le Vatican et la question de la Palestine,” 310.

to Lord Walter Lionel Rothschild, shattered the Vatican's fragile enthusiasm.⁸ The document confirmed British support for the realization of a "national Jewish homeland" in Palestine, dashing the Holy See's hopes for the imminent internationalization of the territory. Barely a month after Balfour's letter, on December 11, 1917, British troops, under General Edmund Allenby, entered Jerusalem. Catholic fears that this would be followed by the foundation of a Jewish state seemed increasingly well founded.⁹

While the terms of the peace treaty that would mark the definitive dismantling of the Ottoman Empire were still under discussion at the end of the First World War, in March 1919 Benedict clarified the Holy See's position and affirmed its opposition to the establishment of a non-Christian government of the Holy Places. The San Remo conference of 1920, which decided to partition the territories of Greater Syria (*bilad al-sham*) between Britain and France, decreed the establishment of the British Mandate for Palestine, which the League of Nations confirmed two years later. The British transferred the eastern bank of the Jordan River to the control to 'Abdullah ibn Husayn (1882–1951) of the Hashemite dynasty, appointing him emir of the Emirate of Transjordan in recognition of his support during the First World War. In 1922, the League of Nations confirmed the separate status of Transjordan, which, however, would remain under indirect British rule (and the object of Zionist immigration and colonization efforts) until its full independence in 1946.¹⁰ The idea to internationalize Palestine became even more distant, creating alarm in Rome at the danger of the Holy Land being governed by a non-Catholic monarchy that would be supportive of the demands of the Zionist movement.

Meanwhile, the first reports began to reach the Vatican from Jerusalem, prepared by the influential Melkite bishop of Acre, Grigorios Hajjar, expressing

8 For more information on the Balfour Declaration, see Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (London: Jewish Chronicle, 1983). For recent readings of its long-term reception and interpretation, see Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, and Jonathan Marc Gribetz, "'This Shameful Document': Early PLO Intellectuals on the Balfour Declaration and the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 8, no. 1 (2018).

9 On the churches in Palestine during the First World War, see Roberto Mazza, "Churches at War: The Impact of the First World War on the Christian Institutions of Jerusalem, 1914–20," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 2 (2009).

10 For the history of the formative years of Transjordan, see Ma'an Abu Nowar, *The History of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, vol. 1, *The Creation and Development of Transjordan, 1920–29* (Oxford: Ithaca, 1989), and vol. 2, *The Development of Trans-Jordan, 1929–1939* (Reading: Ithaca, 2006).

concerns over the growing Jewish presence in Palestine.¹¹ Moreover, Catholic officials in Jerusalem and the European diplomats in the city disagreed on various issues. The Franciscan Custody, whose statutes stipulated that it must have an Italian-speaking custos, competed with the French government, which aimed to reinforce French religious and political influence in the region after the ending of the French religious protectorate over the Latin Catholics.¹² Meanwhile, Luigi Barlassina (fig. 1.1), the Latin patriarch (1920–47), whose motivations were anti-Protestant and anti-Zionist, mostly moved in the direction of overt conflict with the British Mandate and later the Jewish Agency, established in 1929 by the World Zionist Organization to deal with the British government and the League of Nations. The rejection of Jewish immigration was widespread among Palestinian Catholics, Latin, and Eastern. From the beginning of his tenure as patriarch, Barlassina encouraged these tendencies among the Latin population and clergy;¹³ he raged against Zionism, issuing numerous appeals to the Holy See to take a position against the Jewish nationalist movement and declare in favor of the Arab Palestinian cause.¹⁴ Although Barlassina was in conflict with the

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- 11 ASRS, *ACAES, Benedetto XV, Asia, Africa, Oceania*, 69, Hajjar to Gasparri, Haifa, June 25, 1920. Born in southern Lebanon, Hajjar (1875–1940) was ordained in 1901 and then appointed bishop of Acre in 1901, maintaining the post until his death. See Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 33–34, and Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, 26–27 and 35.
- 12 The capitulations in 1740 between Sultan Mahmud I and King Louis XV declared the privileges given to France as permanent. In article 34 France was granted the protectorate over the Latin Catholics in the Ottoman Empire. Two years later, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith directed that the custos offer liturgical honors to French dignitaries during religious ceremonies, in particular in the Holy Sepulcher. The San Remo conference, the Sèvres and Lausanne treaties of 1920 and 1923, respectively, and the end of the liturgical honors for France in the Holy Places in early 1924 signaled the end of the protectorate. See Catherine Nicault, “The End of the French Religious Protectorate in Jerusalem (1918–1924),” *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem* 4 (1999).
- 13 Born in Turin, Luigi Barlassina (1872–1947) was ordained in 1894. On August 4, 1918, he was nominated auxiliary to the patriarch of Jerusalem and was consecrated bishop four days later. In October of the same year, he came to Jerusalem to fill the position of vicar general and, then, apostolic administrator after the death of Patriarch Camassei. See Paolo Pieraccini, “Il Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme (1918–1940). Ritratto di un patriarca scomodo: mons. Luigi Barlassina,” *Il Politico* 63, nos. 2 (1998) and 4 (1998).
- 14 ASRS, *ACAES, Benedetto XV, Asia, Africa, Oceania*, 69, unnumbered report, Barlassina to Gasparri, August 4, 1920. On the history of Palestinian nationalism, see Helga Baumgarten, “The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948–2005,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 4 (2005); Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih,



FIGURE 1.1 Patriarch Luigi Barlassina (center) with members of the clergy, 1920s–30s
APLJ/AEBAF

Palestinian and Jordanian patriarchal clergy over their claims for a more relevant role and financial assistance within the patriarchate, he increased the Catholic presence on the committees, composed of Muslims and Christians, that were formed at the end of the 1910s to create a united Arab front in opposition to Zionist immigration to Palestine.¹⁵ It was not the patriarch's primary intention, but the Christian participation in these committees also highlighted the Christian sense of belonging to the Palestinian Arab community, opposing the sectarianizing policies pursued by the British authorities that reversed the daily life of socioeconomic and religious intercommunal mixing in Ottoman Palestine.¹⁶

and Reeva S. Simon, eds., *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). On the historiography of all aspects of nationalism in the Arab Middle East, see James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, eds., *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

15 On the formation of this Muslim Christian association, see Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 38–50.

16 See Noah Haiduc-Dale, "Rejecting Sectarianism: Palestinian Christians' Role in Muslim-Christian Relations," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 26, no. 1 (2015). On sectarianism in the Middle East, Ussama Makdisi's book *A Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) opened a new historiography challenging the orientalist narrative of a Middle East divided along rigid and religious lines. On the interconnectedness of religious communities in late Ottoman Palestine, see Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*.

Realizing that the attitude of the local church and of the Holy See was becoming ever-more critical of Jewish colonialism in Palestine, Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization, went to Rome in 1922 to meet with Pius XI. In the previous year, an Arab delegation had explained to the patriarch the reasons for the rising tide of Palestinian nationalism. Secretary of State Gasparri met with Weizmann and told him that the Holy See did not support the idea of a Jewish state. This position was reiterated on December 11, 1922, when Pius issued the consistorial address *Vehementer gratum*.¹⁷ Gasparri also affirmed this position in a letter to the League of Nations in May of the same year.

The Holy See's diplomatic initiatives are not the only elements that must be considered in evaluating the relations between the Catholic Church and Zionism. After an interruption in the antisemitic campaigns at the beginning of the century, the Balfour Declaration and the Russian Revolution ushered in a new phase of attacks on Jews in the Catholic press, renewing the rhetoric of a "Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy" that saw Zionism as a dangerous "threat". The matter of the Amici Israel (Friends of Israel), a Catholic association that came into being with the goal of changing the hostile relationship between Christians and Jews, was a sign of the times. This society's efforts ended in 1928 when the Congregation of the Holy Office decreed its closure.¹⁸

Historiography has shown that the attitude of Catholics toward the Jews was divided into three main tendencies within the Catholic sphere. The first was markedly antisemitic, bolstered by intransigent counterrevolutionary antimodernism;¹⁹ the second – minority – tendency featured a certain openness toward the Jewish world that was aimed at overcoming antisemitism and attaining a greater degree of mutual familiarity; the third was marked by a general lack of attention to the Jews, based on a traditional Catholic outlook.²⁰ These three different attitudes toward the Jewish world were also apparent among the Latin Catholics in the region; the tendencies that emerged in Europe permeated the clergy and religious who originated in Europe and had been sent to Palestine. But, here, there was an additional element: the perceived "Jewish threat" was linked in particular to the arrival of Jews immigrants to the region. Palestinian Arab reaction to Zionism and the anti-Judaism and antisemitism of more specifically European Catholic sectors now mingled

17 AAS 14 (1922): 609–14.

18 See Wolf, *Pope and Devil*, 98–128.

19 On Catholic intransigence between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Menozzi, *La Chiesa cattolica*, and Giovanni Miccoli, *Fra mito della cristianità e secolarizzazione: studi sul rapporto chiesa-società nell'età contemporanea* (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1985).

20 See Miccoli, *I dilemmi e i silenzi*, 286–87.

with the views of the Jerusalem's Latin diocese clergy and faithful, not without a reaction from the organizations of the Yishuv, the Zionist settlement.

One of the most significant episodes occurred in January 1926, with the appearance of a review of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the journal *Raqib ahiyyun Sa*, the Arabic-language periodical of the Latin Patriarchate.²¹ The text – one of the most notorious hoaxes in the history of antisemitism – was widely disseminated in Palestine after its translation into Arabic.²² In the article, the *Protocols* was described as an authentic document providing evidence of a global Jewish conspiracy. It triggered the reaction of the World Zionist Organization, which protested directly to Rome.

The outbreak of violence during the 1920s and in particular the Arab-Zionist clashes at the Western Wall in August 1929 marked a progressive marginalization of the political role of Palestinian Christians.²³ For the Vatican, the clashes in Palestine at the end of the 1920s, and even more so the revolt of 1936–39, were further confirmation of the incendiary situation taking shape in the region. In April 1936, the newly formed Arab Higher Committee (AHC), led by the grand mufti of Jerusalem, hajj Amin al-Husayni,²⁴ proclaimed a general

21 Paolo Pieraccini, "Il Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme, la Santa Sede e il sionismo di fronte alla prima traduzione dei Protocolli dei savi di Sion in lingua araba (1925–1926)," *Qualestoria* 45, no. 2 (2017); Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (New York: Norton, 1986), 199.

22 On Arab antisemitism and anti-Zionism during and after the Shoah and 1948, besides the already cited Bernard Lewis, see – with positions with very different features to Lewis's ones – Gilbert Achcar, *Les arabes et la Shoah: La guerre israélo-arabe des récits* (Arles: Sindbad–Actes Sud, 2009), in particular, for the period central to this study, 277–336. See, also by the same author, "Le reazioni all'Olocausto nel Medio Oriente arabo," in *Storia della Shoah: La crisi dell'Europa, lo sterminio degli ebrei e la memoria del XX secolo*, vol. 2, *La memoria del XX secolo*, ed. Marina Cattaruzza, Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam, and Enzo Traverso (Turin: UTET, 2006).

23 See Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 98–103. On the 1929 riots and their consequences, see Hillel Cohen, *1929: Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, trans. Haim Watzman (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2015).

24 During the 1930s a number of Palestinian political parties were constituted, among them the National Defense Party, established in 1934 by the Nashashibi family, and, one year later, the Palestine Arab Party, ruled by the Husayni family and led by hajj Amin al-Husayni. In 1936 all the parties joined the AHC, set up to coordinate protest. However, the opposition between the parties, especially the Husaynis and the Nashashibis, was apparent during the Arab revolt of 1936–39 and represented an element of structural weakness on the Palestinian side with respect to the Zionist institutions. During the Second World War, the Husaynis consolidated their superior position over the Nashashibis, but various leaders were forced into exile by the British authorities: some went to Germany, where they made contact with various representatives of Nazism. On their return to Palestine, the Husaynis consolidated their position of rejecting any mediation with the Zionist

strike throughout Palestine, which would last six months. During that summer, the Jerusalem Committee, established in the city to run the strike, tried to obtain the custody's support with a letter to the custos, Nazzareno Jacopozzi (1931–37), calling for the schools run by the custody to close. The custody avoided pronouncing in favor of one side or the other. In this dramatic crisis produced by the 1936 strike, the Franciscans preferred to support many families in Jerusalem with food and monetary assistance, and also allowed several monasteries to be occupied by British troops, who intervened in the autumn to put down the revolt.²⁵

In an attempt to find a solution to the increasingly violent reality in Palestine, the British established a commission charged specifically with drafting a report on pacifying the territory. The plan to divide Palestine into two states, an Arab and a Jewish one, proposed in the Palestine Royal Commission Report – the so-called Peel Commission led by Lord William Peel – met with opposition from both the Arabs and the Vatican, as well as the strong rejection of Patriarch Barlassina, who was decidedly hostile to the British government and its political mandate.²⁶

The British plan for partition brought Barlassina's concerns to light regarding the Zionist aspirations toward Palestine. Together with the Melkite Hajjar, the Syriac and Armenian Catholic patriarchal vicars and the Maronite priest of Haifa, the patriarch sent an appeal against the proposed division of Palestine to the Vatican Secretariat of State in July 1937. The text denounced one point in particular: if the plan were put into action, the Jews would take possession of the area around Nazareth, where most of the Christians of Palestine were settled.

authorities. In 1946 they also resumed hostilities with the Nashashibis, in response to which the Arab League decided to form a new AHC, led by al-Husayni, and so compelled the opposition formed by the Nashashibis to dissolve. On the controversial figure of hajj Amin al-Husayni, see Lorenzo Kamel, "Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the 'Creation' of a Leader," *Storicamente* 37, no. 2 (2013), and Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). For al-Husayni's controversial alliance with the Third Reich, see Barry Rubin and Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), and David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

25 For a new appraisal of the British system of control and repression in Palestine, see Matthew Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine: The British Army, the Colonial State, and the Arab Revolt, 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

26 See Paolo Zanini, "The Holy See, Italian Catholics and Palestine under the British Mandate: Two Turning Points," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 67, no. 4 (2016).

If the political horizon outlined by the Peel Commission did not meet Catholic expectations, the publication of the so-called “White Book” in May 1939 conflicted with the Peel Report, to the huge satisfaction of Barlassina. The Nazi-Fascist persecution of the Jewish population that had begun in the 1930s caused a significant growth in Jewish immigration to Palestine, triggering an ever-more violent reaction from the Arabs, as shown by the 1936–39 revolt. The “White Book,” produced by British Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald, proposed a strict containment of the migratory influx, establishing a quota of a maximum of 75,000 people over the following five years. Here, Britain’s policies appeared in all their contradiction and ambiguity: if London had initially encouraged the foundation of the Jewish state with the Balfour Declaration, it was now preventing the arrival of new Jews right at the very most tragic moment in their history, opening the way to illegal immigration, the so-called *aliyah bet*.

The Second World War and the Nazi-Fascist extermination also revealed all the ambiguities in the attitude and actions of the Holy See and of the local churches as regards the Jews. The Catholic Church pledged to support and rescue individual Jews and groups of Jews in Europe and elsewhere, but at the same time, the papacy of Pius XII hesitated and finally refused to speak out against the antisemitic persecution, as witnessed by the hidden, unpublished encyclical *Humani generis unitas* on racism and antisemitism and by the subsequent public silence regarding the Shoah.²⁷ For the Catholic institutions of Palestine and Transjordan, the war ushered in further transformations of the political and social scene.

1.2 *The Storm of the Second World War*

The outbreak of the Second World War did not immediately affect the Palestinian region. Its partial isolation relative to the theaters of war was shattered in 1940. Italy’s entry into the war alongside the Axis powers pushed the British authorities to take restrictive measures at the expense of residents in Palestine originally from countries that were now enemies of the British;²⁸ the Italian clergy in Palestine, along with Germans and Hungarians, were

27 See David I. Kertzer, *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe* (New York: Random House, 2014), 288–89 and 358–73; Giovanni Miccoli, “L’enciclica mancata di Pio XI sul razzismo e sull’antisemitismo,” *Passato e Presente*, no. 15 (1997), and Georges Passelecq and Bernard Suchecky, *L’encyclique cachée de Pie XI: une occasion manquée de l’Eglise face à l’antisémitisme* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995).

28 On relations between Britain and the Holy See during the Second World War, see Owen Chadwick, *Britain and the Vatican During the Second World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).



FIGURE 1.2 Allied military camps near Latrun during the Second World War
ACSCJB/AEBAF

consequently interned in religious houses. The Italian priests of the patriarchate were compelled to remain in Rafat Monastery. Other religious were confined to Jerusalem, Tantur and Bethlehem.²⁹ A British-run prisoner-of-war camp was set up near the Trappist monastery in Latrun (fig. 1.2). The difficulties occasioned by the displacements, as well as the need to assist refugees and civil and military prisoners, put the Catholic institutions to the test, especially the Latin Patriarchate and the Franciscan Custody.

The biggest problems faced by the representatives of the Latin Church of Jerusalem was their difficult relationship with the British. This was nothing new for Barlassina; since the 1920s and to an even greater extent, in the following decade one rumor followed the other regarding the imminent transfer of the patriarch to another seat because of his disagreements with the British Mandate administration.³⁰ From the British perspective, Barlassina was the representative of an overtly pro-Italian stance which, during this period, translated into support for Mussolini's expansionist aspirations in the Levant, the encouragement of the establishment of Italian foundations and institutions in Palestine and the exacerbation of tensions with the local population and clergy, who perceived the new arrivals as usurpers.³¹

29 See AAV, *ADAGP*, 9, 42, 1, "Brevi appunti sulle visite agli internati civili," fols. 14–20.

30 See the documents in TNA, FO 371/1411/65.

31 In reality, the relations between the patriarch and Mussolini's regime were complex and uneven, as testified by the conflicts between the patriarch and the Italian consuls in

Barlassina was not the only cleric criticized by the Mandate administration. The British also closely watched the custos, Alberto Gori,³² and the apostolic delegate, Gustavo Testa.³³ The latter had been made head of the Apostolic Delegation in Palestine, Cyprus and Transjordan in 1934, which had been united with that of Egypt in that year.³⁴ The choice of Testa was initially positively received by the British, who saw in him the potential to mediate with Barlassina.³⁵ However, the British authorities' faith in Testa was progressively eroded in the following years, paving the way for calls for a new apostolic delegate, with pressure for the incumbent to be a prelate of British origin.

During the Second World War, Testa's name also became associated with propaganda activities and the passing of confidential information to the benefit of the Axis powers.³⁶ Convinced of these suspicions, the British appealed to the Vatican to remove several prelates, including Barlassina, Gori and Testa. In the case of the latter two, the evidence accompanying this request did not

Jerusalem, Antonio Gauttieri (1925–26), Mario Zanotti-Bianco (1926) and Orazio Pedrazzi (1927–28).

- 32 A friar from Pistoia, Alberto Gori (1889–1970) arrived in Palestine in 1919. He was director of the Franciscan College of Aleppo from 1923 to 1937, when he was chosen to head the Custody of the Holy Land, a role he fulfilled until 1949, when he was appointed Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, which he remained until his death.
- 33 Gustavo Testa (1886–1969) became secretary at the nunciature in Vienna and was then sent as special Holy See representative to the French-occupied regions of the Ruhr and Saar in 1923–24. In 1934, he became apostolic delegate for Egypt, Arabia, Eritrea, Abyssinia, Palestine, Transjordan and Cyprus and titular Archbishop of Amasea. He returned to Rome in 1941, only to go back to the Middle East a few years later. After the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Delegation was reorganized, on February 11, 1948, the delegation in Palestine, Transjordan and Cyprus was separated from Egypt and constituted autonomously, with its see in Jerusalem. Testa became the first delegate, and then the regent of the Latin Patriarchate. He was also a friend of Angelo Roncalli, whom he had known since boyhood from their common hometown of Bergamo.
- 34 Up to this point, the nominal jurisdiction of Palestine was with the Syrian delegate. Since the end of the 1910s, Rome had discussed the establishment of an apostolic delegation specifically for Palestine. The proposal was abandoned, only for it to be decided, on March 11, 1929, that the Catholics of the Jerusalem Latin patriarchal diocese should be separated from the authority of the Apostolic Delegation in Syria, to be placed under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Delegation in Egypt, Arabia, Eritrea and Abyssinia, led by Valerio Valeri (1927–33). On June 15, 1934, Testa was appointed apostolic delegate in Egypt, Arabia, Eritrea, Abyssinia, Palestine, Transjordan and Cyprus. See Paolo Zanini, "The Establishment of the Apostolic Delegation to Palestine, Cyprus and Transjordan (1929): Cause or Effect of the Changes in Vatican Middle East Policy?," *Church History* 87, no. 3 (2018).
- 35 As witnessed by communications from the British legate to the Holy See. See for example TNA, CO 733/262/1, E 7113, Wingfield to Simon, Rome, November 23, 1934.
- 36 TNA, FO 371/30199, R 10534, Lampson to the Foreign Office, Cairo, December 10, 1941.

refer to direct propaganda or espionage activities; instead, they were charged with being responsible for still not having instructed the Italian priests under their charge to halt their pro-Nazi and pro-Fascist activities. In Palestine the British concentrated their attention on Testa. Despite Vatican resistance, in 1941 and 1942 Britain expelled the Holy See's main representatives of Italian origin in the Middle East and Eastern Africa, including Testa, who was replaced by Arthur Hughes as *chargé d'affaires*, then as regent, at the Apostolic Delegation. Hughes would remain in the position until 1948.³⁷

During the Second World War, Zionist leaders in Palestine addressed various appeals to the Holy See, as well as to the Apostolic Delegation and the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, in an effort to bring Jews to safety. The recent opening of the Pius XII archives allows for a deeper analysis of the role of both these institutions and to formulate first hypotheses, although a full understanding still requires the cross-referencing of various collections and the appraisal of historians.

As clarified by the new documents and the sources already published by the Holy See in the *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la seconde guerre mondiale*, Testa, writing from Jerusalem in the fall of 1940, described to the Vatican Secretary of State Luigi Maglione (1939–44) some episodes that revealed the tragic efforts of thousands of Jews to immigrate “to this land, which they claim to be their homeland”.³⁸ A few months later, the Secretariat of State forwarded to Testa the requests from the apostolic nuncio in Berlin, Cesare Orsenigo (1930–46), to whom European Jews directed their appeals to receive news of their relatives. They were seeking information about some refugees who were on the French ocean liner *Patria* that on November 25, 1940, was accidentally sunk by the main Zionist paramilitary organization, the Haganah, in the port of Haifa.³⁹ On board were around 1,800 Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe whom the British Mandate authorities were deporting because they lacked entry permits. After making some enquiries, the apostolic delegate sent information on some of these families to the Vatican.⁴⁰

37 See ASRS, *ACAES, Pio XII*, 1, *Africa Egitto*, 66, fols. 2–32 and 66–118. On these events, see John Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914–1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 322. For a better understanding of the Fascist inspiration in the Levant, see Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933–40* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

38 ADSS, *Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre, mars 1939–décembre 1940*, 1972, vol. 6, doc. 384, Testa to Maglione, Jerusalem, November 29, 1940, 485–86: 485, translation from Italian.

39 See AAV, *ADAGP*, 9, 42, 2, fols. 65 and 69, Vatican, Montini to Testa, May 28, 1941.

40 See AAV, *ADAGP*, *ibid.*, fols. 67 and 72, Testa to Montini, copies, September 18, 1941.

Before his forced return to Italy, Testa also received letters from Jews interned in the concentration camp in Ferramonti di Tarsia, in Calabria.⁴¹ He transmitted the correspondence to Guido Tedeschi, an Italian Jew and law professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, so that the Jewish Agency could identify the addressees.⁴²

In December 1942, the Apostolic Delegation transmitted to the Secretariat of State the text of an appeal to Pius XII for an end to the “massacres en masse which are being perpetrated on our people in the Nazi-occupied territories”, a document that the chief rabbis of the Holy Land – Yitshak Herzog and Me’ir Hay ‘Uzi’el – had sent to various governments.⁴³ Herzog, the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Jerusalem, addressed himself to the Apostolic Delegation around the same time to seek the Vatican’s intervention to impede the deportation to Poland of the Jews interned in Castelnuovo di Garfagnana camp, in Tuscany,⁴⁴ and of the chief rabbi of Oslo, Julius Samuel, who had been arrested by the Nazis.⁴⁵

During the Nazi-Fascist extermination of the Jews, the Vatican Secretariat of State remained unenthusiastic about the prospect of Jews escaping to Palestine. Regarding Jewish immigration to Palestine, Maglione wrote to Hughes in February 1943 that the arrival of Jews in the Holy Land could not be encouraged because of the “strong implications for the problem of the Holy Places, in whose freedom the Holy See is so vividly interested”.⁴⁶

41 On the internment of Jews in Ferramonti di Tarsia, see Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, *Mussolini’s Camps: Civilian Internment in Fascist Italy (1940–1943)*, trans. Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

42 See AAV, *ADAGP*, 9, 42, 2, fol. 73, copy, Jerusalem, August 23, 1941. The reply by Tedeschi to Testa is in AAV, *ibid.*, fol. 75, Jerusalem, September 15, 1941.

43 ADSS, *Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre, janvier 1941–décembre 1942*, 1974, vol. 8, doc. 565, Apostolic Delegation to the Secretariat of State, Jerusalem, December 10, 1942, 748–49.

44 See AAV, *ADAGP*, 9, 42, 2, fol. 97, Herzog to Hughes, Jerusalem, December 22, 1942.

45 Francesca Di Giovanni and Giuseppina Roselli, eds., *Inter arma caritas: L’Ufficio Informazioni Vaticano per i prigionieri di guerra, istituito da Pio XII (1939–1947)*, vol. 2, *Documenti* (Vatican City: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, 2004), doc. 39, Herzog to Testa, Jerusalem, December 30, 1942, 681.

46 ADSS, *Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre, janvier–décembre 1943*, 1975, vol. 9, doc. 60, Maglione to Hughes, minute, Vatican, February 23, 1943, 137, translation from Italian. On the Vatican Secretariat of State’s desire to maintain the traditional position of hostility toward Zionism and Jewish immigration to Palestine even during the Shoah, see the acute observations of Miccoli, *I dilemmi e i silenzi*, 89–94.

During 1944, Herzog met twice with the apostolic delegate to Turkey and Greece, Angelo Roncalli,⁴⁷ a close friend of Testa's, begging for his intervention to save 55,000 Jews interned in Romania. The rabbi went directly, in person, to Rome on behalf of these Jews to seek the help of the Holy See.⁴⁸

The patriarchal archives reveal some attempts by rabbis in the Holy Land to approach Barlassina. Herzog tried repeatedly to organize a meeting with the patriarch to discuss a "matter ... of the most vital importance and of the greatest urgency".⁴⁹ This meeting was finally set for February 24, 1943. During the same period, Barlassina received calls from the National Council (ha-Va'ad ha-le'umi) in the Yishuv for international action to put a stop to the extermination of the Jews.⁵⁰ Herzog was unable to participate in the meeting, but he was represented by 'Uzi'el, the Sephardi chief rabbi. The next day, Barlassina wrote to 'Uzi'el: "You requested me in your own name and that of Chief Rabbi Herzog to write ... in favor of the Jewish people." Faced with this request, the patriarch responded that he felt "unable to deviate from what I have told You verbally yesterday ... that Bishops have nothing to add to the venerable words of His Holiness the Pope".⁵¹

With this problematic answer, Barlassina probably wanted to stress that his role as a bishop of a patriarchal diocese did not grant him special authority to make a request to Pius on behalf of the Jews. At the same time, his charge was not in an ordinary diocese, but Jerusalem, giving him a great symbolic importance for the Jewish world during the antisemitic persecution and, at the same time, exposing him to the reactions of both Christian and Muslim Arabs.

In the years immediately after the end of the war, neither Patriarch Barlassina nor Custos Gori seem to have referred to their action toward the

47 On the relationship between Roncalli, the Jews and the Israeli state during and immediately after the Second World War, see Paolo Zanini, "Angelo Roncalli *Nuncio* to Paris and the Establishment of the State of Israel," *Israel Studies* 22, no. 3 (2017), and the articles of David Bankier, "Roncalli e gli ebrei prima di Israele," and Ilaria Pavan, "Roncalli e gli ebrei dalla Shoah alla *Declaratio Nostra Aetate*: Tracce di un percorso," in *Lora che il mondo sta attraversando: Giovanni XXIII di fronte alla storia*, ed. Giovanni Grado Merlo and Francesco Mores (Rome: Storia e letteratura, 2009), 263–73 and 275–300, respectively.

48 ADSS, *Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre, janvier 1944–juillet 1945*, 1980, vol. 10, doc. 80, Roncalli to Maglione, Istanbul, February 26, 1944, 154.

49 APLJ, *LB, Sionisme 1, 1921–1947*, Herzog to Barlassina, Jerusalem, February 22, 1943.

50 APLJ, *ibid.*, Yitshak Ben-Zvi to Barlassina, February 23, 1943. On April 8, 1943, Ben-Zvi, chairman of the National Council and future president of Israel (1952–63), submitted a new appeal to Barlassina, in which he wrote: "The outcry of the people of Israel is rising with increasing agony ... We call you, all the nations of the world: ... how long will you stand against the blood of Israel, which is shed like water? ... Help! Save, for the end is nearing!"

51 APLJ, *ibid.*, Barlassina to Me'ir Hay 'Uzi'el, copy, Jerusalem, February 25, 1943.

Jews during the Shoah in their writings, at least not in the documents that have been made available to scholars. However, the subject of the Holocaust would resurface in the letters of the clergy in Palestine a few years later, reinterpreted in the light of the clash between the Latin Church of Jerusalem and the new State of Israel.⁵²

1.3 *In the Crossfire: Barlassina's Concerns Regarding Jews and Muslims*

With the end of the Second World War a new phase opened, weighty with unanswered questions about the future of the quarter of a million Jewish displaced persons (DPs) who had survived the Holocaust, hosted in the refugee camps run by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.⁵³ Between 1945 and 1946, numerous Jewish leaders and organizations made appeal to the Holy See to ask the pope to raise his voice in favor of the resettlement of the Jewish DPs in Mandate Palestine. Events in Rome regarding the relations between the Holy See and the Jewish world did not pass unnoticed in Palestine's press. On April 10, 1945, Pius XII received a delegation from the Jewish Agency, led by Moshe Shertok. A few months later, in September 1945, the pope met Leon Kubowitzki, secretary general of the World Jewish Congress (1945–48). But it was the audience between Pius and a delegation of the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, on November 29, 1945, that received special attention.⁵⁴ The audience took place at the end of a convention held by the committee in Rome with the goal of finding a solution to the question of the thousands of Jewish refugees and survivors of the Shoah who were now in Italy. Their uncertain status was compounded by the unclarity regarding a political solution to the situation in Palestine and also by the issue of immigration quotas for Jews – DPs or not – to enter the Yishuv.

On December 2, 1945, the Hebrew-language daily *Haaretz* covered this audience with a report from Rome dated November 29, which the Arab press

52 On the recasting of the extermination, see Saul Meghnagi, ed., *Memoria della Shoah: Dopo i testimoni* (Rome: Donzelli, 2007), and especially the considerations expressed by Renato Moro in his essay "L'elaborazione cattolica della Shoah in Italia," 15–34, useful in the identification of some tendencies that were also present among the Italian clergy in the Holy Land.

53 On the broad issue of Jewish DPs in Europe, see Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945–1951* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

54 See Mario Toscano, *La "porta di Sion": L'Italia e l'immigrazione clandestina ebraica in Palestina (1945–1948)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 60–62. On the Jewish DPs in Italy, Arturo Marzano, "Relief and Rehabilitation of Jewish DPs after the Shoah: The *Hachsharot* in Italy (1945–48)," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 18, no. 3 (2019); and Silvia Salvatici, "Between National and International Mandates: Displaced Persons and Refugees in Postwar Italy," *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 3 (2014).

republished.⁵⁵ The Hebrew paper's version of the audience drew the attention of Patriarch Barlassina, who immediately wrote to the Secretariat of State. The patriarchate's Italian translation of the *Haaretz* article noted that the pope was quoted as offering words of encouragement and support for the immigration of Jewish DPs to Palestine.⁵⁶ The patriarch asked the Secretariat of State whether the remarks attributed to the pope were true, warning of the "insinuations" and the "possible inexactitudes" within "this tendentious piece of reporting".⁵⁷ Barlassina was concerned about the Muslim reaction and the risk of possible reprisals on Christians if there were to be an alignment of the Catholic position with Jewish aspirations. He did not conceal his fears from the Holy See, indicating that the declarations reported by *Haaretz*, "would compromise the good relations that we Catholics are at pains to maintain with the Muslims".

In reality, according to the version of the discussion that appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Pius made no reference to immigration to Palestine during the audience with the refugee group. The pope had mostly concentrated on the church's actions in aiding and rescuing Jews during the Nazi-Fascist extermination; thus, for Pius, the visit by the Jewish delegation represented an opportunity to respond to the criticisms that accused the Holy See of remaining silent in the face of the extermination that decimated the Jews of Europe.⁵⁸ The pope did not express an opinion on the arguments of the Zionist movement, nor did he take a position on the thorny reality of Palestine, merely expressing the generic wish for a "the solution to the questions ... according to justice and equity".⁵⁹

This last phrase of the pope's statement was reiterated in February 1946 in two letters from the Secretariat of State to Barlassina: the first, from the Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, Domenico Tardini, contained a copy of *L'Osservatore Romano* with the pope's comments to the Jewish delegation,⁶⁰ and the second, from the chargé d'affaires in Egypt, Arthur Hughes. On his return to Rome, the latter was given the task of reassuring

55 "ha-Apifior mavtiah litmokh be-'Aliyah Le'i" [Pope promises to support aliyah to Israel], *Haaretz*, December 2, 1945.

56 APLJ, LB, *Secrétairerie d'État, 1931–1947*, Barlassina to Montini, copy, Jerusalem, December 5, 1945.

57 *Ibid.* (translation from Italian).

58 "Confortatrici ed illuminate parole del Sommo Pontefice in risposta all'omaggio riconoscenza di ebrei profughi" [Comforting and illuminating words from the Supreme Pontiff in response to the grateful homage of the Jewish refugees], *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 30, 1945.

59 *Ibid.*

60 APLJ, LB, *Secrétairerie d'État, 1931–1947*, Tardini to Barlassina, Rome, February 8, 1946.

Barlassina that Pius did not intend to make a political statement in favor of the Zionist movement and of the Jews in general.⁶¹

Meanwhile, Barlassina sent several letters to Moshe Shertok (later Sharet), the head of the political department of the Jewish Agency, to intervene in favor of a Palestinian Christian, Jamil Abyad, who had some economic issues with the Jewish National Fund.⁶² Abyad, in his own words, was the conduit through which Barlassina had met Shertok himself during the Second World War.⁶³ Abyad had appealed for help and presented his case not only to the patriarch, but also to representatives of the Jewish Agency, including the chairman of the executive committee, David Ben Gurion.⁶⁴ Writing to Barlassina, he emphasized the Arab world's reception of the reports linking Zionism and the Holy See, especially after the meeting between Pius and Shertok. Abyad impressed on Barlassina the necessity for the Vatican to publicly intervene against Jewish immigration and Zionist policies.⁶⁵ According to Abyad, the absence of a public pronouncement by the Holy See on events in Palestine was widely interpreted as a sign of tacit Vatican support for Zionism.⁶⁶

61 APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Hughes to Barlassina, Cairo, February 16, 1946.

62 See the documents contained in APLJ, *LB-GB, Correspondance laïcs dans le diocèse, 2*, Abyad to Barlassina, Haifa, 1945. Abyad was probably a member of Haifa municipal council, elected in 1927; see May Seikaly, *Haifa: Transformation of an Arab Society, 1918–1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 202.

63 “You remember, Monsignor, that it was I who introduced Mr. Moshe Shertock to Your Beatitude; I believed at that moment that this people ought to be aided, that this people created by the Good Lord did not deserve the suffering that the Nazis had imposed on them. When I did that ... I was thinking of nothing but to do good, ignorant of how great a degree of villainy was in the soul of the Marxists, Trotskyites and other categories of that genre, a composition conjoined to the Jewish soul in the desire to possess and to attain dictatorial domination ... hidden behind the face of Judas.” APLJ, *ibid.*, Abyad to Barlassina, Haifa, March 6, 1945, translation from French.

64 Writing to Ben-Gurion, Abyad presented himself thus: “I am 58 years old, I am familiar with Europe, which I have visited on several occasions, I am of the East, I know my own country as well as its neighbors.” APLJ, *ibid.*, Abyad to Ben-Gurion, copy, Haifa, March 3, 1945.

65 “I appeal to Your Beatitude, praying that you intervene at the Vatican to reveal to him the reality of what has happened in Palestine and give us the support of his power, us Catholics in Palestine, his faithful. I speak of the Vatican because at this moment, as has already been the case for some years, our Holy Father ... has given his support to this people, whose whole effort is concentrated on eliminating us. A people which, seen with its true face, deserves no mercy, because it is evil incarnate.” APLJ, *ibid.*, Abyad to Barlassina, Haifa, March 6, 1945, translation from French.

66 APLJ, *ibid.*, Abyad to Barlassina, Haifa, October 9, 1945, translation from French.

Abyad's letters to Barlassina attest to how ever-more acute resentment of the Jews was spreading among the Palestinian Christians; they reflect a narrative in which tight economic and personal relationships between Christians and Jews had been shattered by the latter's "lie", and they shed light on the widespread fear resulting from the image of Pius XII – portrayed in these letters as a friend and ally of the Jews during the Nazi persecution – remaining silent as Zionism grew stronger, or even supporting the creation of a Jewish state.

In parallel, the fears of a Muslim reaction against the Catholics and of a revision of the privileges of the religious institutions in Palestine increased in the mind of the Latin Patriarch, too. On the eastern bank of the Jordan River, the Latins welcomed with hope and concern the signing of the Treaty of London in March 1946 that marked the conclusion of indirect British rule over the Hashemite Emirate, which became the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan.⁶⁷ In the face of the changing Palestinian and Transjordanian scenario, Barlassina decided to appeal to the Holy See directly for explicit intervention on the part of the Vatican in support of the Arab position. According to the patriarch, after the meeting with Shertok and the audience Pius had held with the delegation of Jewish DPs, it was now necessary to hold a meeting with some representatives of the opposing side, to ensure that the Catholic position would not be confused with or assimilate Zionist claims.

Meanwhile, some members of the AHC were also on the way to Rome. As had already happened with the mixed committees – supported by Barlassina – formed from 1919 in order to organize Palestinian opposition to Zionist projects, there were also some Christians active within the AHC. The audience of Palestinian representatives, Muslim and Christian, with Pius XII, followed a letter from the patriarch to Tardini introducing some AHC representatives to the Vatican so that the pope "would deign to take to heart the situation of the Palestinian Arabs, so serious as it is at present".⁶⁸

During the audience, which took place on August 3, 1946, the pope underlined that the attitude of neutrality chosen by the Holy See on Palestinian questions was not to be interpreted as indifference. Indeed, the church's intention was to commit, as far as it was able, to the creation of an "effective cooperation of all interested parties", with the goal of reaching an order that

67 See APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946–1953*, Sim'an to Barlassina, January 28, 1946.

68 Barlassina reported the names of Amin 'Abd al-Hadi, head of the Supreme Muslim Council of Palestine; Nakhla Qattan, head of the Arab Greek Orthodox Council; Yusif Sahyun, Greek Catholic, member of the AHC; Hanna 'Atallah, Latin Catholic, member of the AHC; Ahmad 'Abd al-Rahim, Muslim; Rayya 'Isa, Orthodox, identified in the patriarch's letter as "secretary". APLJ, *LB, Secrétairerie d'État, 1931–1947*, Barlassina to Tardini, minute (originally to Montini), Jerusalem, July 13, 1946.

would guarantee a secure existence and dignified “physical and moral conditions” for all the parties to the conflict.⁶⁹ A week after the meeting, Barlassina wrote to Tardini again, thanking him for the AHC delegation’s warm reception at the Vatican. The patriarch implied that he interpreted the meeting between Pius and the Palestinian representatives as a show of support from the pope for the Arab cause; Barlassina emphasized that the patriarchate had already prepared a translation into Arabic of the text of the audience that was “accurate to the letter”, so that it could “also” be published “in the Muslim papers”.⁷⁰ Thus, Barlassina saw to it that the meeting between the pope and the AHC was presented to the press and public opinion in the Middle East as an emblematic example of Vatican support for the Palestinian cause. It was the patriarch’s desire and intention that the audience would break the sense of isolation and abandonment often bemoaned by many sectors of the Arab Catholic world. It was also meant to reassure Muslims as to the Vatican’s support and to allay Christian fears that the Muslim population would exact reprisals.

On closer examination, the text of Pius’s speech, as disseminated by the Holy See, does not seem to have especially addressed the Arabs’ requests. Indeed, the document opens with a passage reproving “fanatical antisemitism”, confirming that in the past the church had condemned the persecution of the Jewish people many times.⁷¹ This emphasis on Catholic opposition to hostility toward the Jews aroused a certain response in the Arab audience because of the use of the term “antisemitism”, a word that had never appeared in Vatican documents before, all the more so because it was made more specific through the use of the adjective “fanatical”, as if to suggest that there were legitimate and unacceptable degrees of antisemitism.

Pius’s direct reference to antisemitism can perhaps be best understood by considering that, since the end of the Second World War, he had received numerous appeals to speak out publicly in favor of the immigration to Palestine of Jewish DPs. The November 1945 audience with the delegation of the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy did not put an end to these requests. In the discussion with the AHC, the pope mentioned that just a few days previously, he had received such requests from various quarters. Although

69 AAS 38 (1946): 322–23.

70 APLJ, LB, *Secrétairerie d’État, 1931–1947*, Barlassina to Tardini, copy, Jerusalem, August 11, 1946.

71 “Il est superflu de vous dire que Nous réprouvons tout recours à la force et à la violence, d’où que ce soit, comme aussi Nous condamnâmes à plusieurs reprises, dans le passé, les persécutions qu’un fanatique antisémitisme déchaînait contre le peuple hébreu. Cette attitude de parfaite impartialité, Nous l’avons toujours observée dans les circonstances les plus variées, et Nous entendons Nous y conformer aussi à l’avenir.” AAS 38 (1946): 322.

not directly quoted, Pius was maybe making reference to the audience with Jacques Maritain, French ambassador to the Holy See, on July 18, 1946.⁷² The philosopher, who already sent a document to the Secretariat of State on July 12, had asked the pope to make the voice of the Roman Catholic Church clearly heard in the condemnation of antisemitic persecutions.⁷³ The pope responded that the position of the church had been explicitly stated in November 1945 during Pius's audience with the delegation of the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy. The use of the expression “fanatical antisemitism” before the AHC delegates was perhaps intended to represent a veiled concession by Pius to Maritain's request, although, of course, it was not an official declaration specifically dedicated to the Shoah and the Catholic Church's responsibility in the Jewish extermination.

In this context, in any case, Patriarch Barlassina and the Latin Church of Jerusalem in general attributed a more external significance to the visit to the pope by the AHC delegation – avoiding any comment on the reference to Catholic opposition to the extermination of the Jews.

Barlassina closely monitored the press – local and international – regarding its treatment of events relating to the Holy See and the Catholic world. In the summer of 1946, some Jewish papers also addressed the theme of the activities of the Catholic church during the Shoah. On June 22, 1946, the patriarch addressed the Secretariat of State again, sending Giovanni Battista Montini a letter containing a copy of an article published on June 14 in *Yedi'ot ha-Yom*, a German-language Jewish daily in Tel Aviv.⁷⁴ According to Barlassina, this article was “very insidiously anti-Catholic, attacking the Holy See as if it were the cause of the disasters that afflicted the Jews”. Barlassina contemplated making an intervention as patriarch, but he also hoped that the Vatican would take a direct position on the matter “in the *Osservatore*, or perhaps better, in the *Univers* or the *Tablet*”.⁷⁵

72 See Richard F. Crane, *Passion of Israel: Jacques Maritain, Catholic Conscience, and the Holocaust* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2010).

73 ASRS, *Asterisco, Stati Ecclesiastici*, 575, fols. 2404–9. Some months after Maritain intervention, forty-one Jews were massacred in Kielce, Poland. In order to urge the pope to condemn these antisemitic attacks, Rabbi Philip Bernstein, advisor on Jewish affairs to the US European theater commander, visited Pius in September 1946. See NARA, RG 59, 28, Bernstein to McNamee, September 14, 1946, also quoted in Phayer, *The Catholic Church*, 180–81.

74 “Nochmals Schalom Asch zum Artikel von Meir Faerber,” *Yedi'ot ha-Yom*, June 14, 1946.

75 APLJ, LB, *Secrétairerie d'État, 1931–1947*, Barlassina to Montini, copy, Jerusalem, June 22, 1946, translation from Italian.

The patriarch wrote a response to the article, threatening the daily with legal action, and also wrote to Shertok on the matters.⁷⁶ In his response to Barlassina, the spokesman for the Jewish Agency, Walter Eytan, denied any connection with the opinions expressed in *Yedi'ot ha-Yom*, declaring that they had no wish to attack the Catholic Church.⁷⁷ At the same time, Eytan warned the patriarch against accusing the entire political Zionist world or the Jewish press in all its complexity of engaging in anti-Catholic propaganda just because a few of them had expressed criticism of the church.

The events in the summer of 1946 made Barlassina even more concerned. The bombing on July 22 of the southwest wing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, which, as seat of the Chief Secretariat and army headquarters, was the heart of British rule in Palestine, and one of the main political, economic and cultural meeting places in the whole Middle East, represented a turning point in the escalation of violence.⁷⁸ The aim of the attack, which was organized by the Zionist paramilitary group Irgun, was British policy and the further destabilization of an already chaotic reality.⁷⁹ Of the ninety-one victims of the attack, forty-one were Arabs, with several Catholics among them. This reinforced the patriarch's conviction that Christians would be the first targets in clashes between Arabs and Zionists.

A few days after the carnage, the Secretariat of State received a telegram, sent by the Franciscan Albert Rock, from the "Latin parish of Jerusalem mourning the death of his high representatives" in the "Zionist terrorist attack". He pleaded with the Holy See to intervene "with the British government [to] end the shedding [of] innocent blood".⁸⁰ The patriarch also sent Hughes an impassioned text in which he furnished "some details on the criminal action of the Zionists".⁸¹ The letter's most delicate passage had to do with the proximity of

76 CZA, Z4/11-31121, Barlassina to Shertok, Jerusalem, June 28, 1946.

77 APLJ, LB, *Secrétairerie d'État, 1931-1947*, Eytan to Barlassina, Jerusalem, July 8, 1946.

78 See Motti Golani, *Palestine between Politics and Terror, 1945-1947* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2013), 141-63. For an architectural history of the King David Hotel, which had opened its doors in 1931, see Daniella Ohad Smith, "Hotel Design in British Mandate Palestine: Modernism and the Zionist Vision," *Journal of Israeli History* 29, no. 1 (2010): 102-10.

79 See J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror Out of Zion: The Fight for Israeli Independence* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1996).

80 AAV, ADAPG, 9, 42, 4, fol. 435, copy, translation from Italian. On July 29, 1946, the telegram was transmitted to Hughes.

81 "We Catholics have had lamentable losses ... The people are indignant, and one small spark could suffice to provoke, one might say, the most disastrous fire, all the more so because the majority of the victims were Arabs." APLJ, LB-AG, *Délégué Apostolique, 1943-1955*, Barlassina to Hughes, copy, Jerusalem, July 27, 1946, translation from Italian.

Palestinian Christians and Muslims. Barlassina, however, hastened to stress the risk that this empathy would be quickly extinguished and transform into rivalry and overt hatred.⁸²

The fear of a Muslim reaction against Christians was not the only element that solidified Barlassina's anti-Zionist sentiments; the patriarch actually thought that the Jewish nationalist movement was spreading Bolshevism in the Middle East, and in the Holy Land in particular. These ideas were not new for him, but the risk that the Zionist authorities were on the verge of realizing their objectives increased both his fears and his hostility. Barlassina did not conceal these convictions when he wrote to the Secretariat of State; if he failed to secure the intervention of the Holy See by emphasizing the danger of Muslim reprisals, the patriarch perhaps thought that Rome would not remain immobile if faced with the risk of communist atheism expanding via the Jews, especially in the land of Christ. In any case, at the turn of 1946 and 1947, the bishop's hopes to bring about the Vatican intervention to protect the Christian population seemed unlikely to succeed.

Barlassina was not alone in appealing to the Holy See. The Melkite bishop of Acre, Georges Hakim (1943–67),⁸³ also mobilized in support the claims of the AHC. In 1946 he sought a permit to travel to the United States with a AHC delegation in order to plead the Palestinian cause. After meeting Tisserant's refusal,⁸⁴ Hakim tried to address Pius XII directly. In 1947 the pope received the Melkite bishop, who gave him a letter from hajj Amin al-Husayni (fig. 1.3).


In this document, the grand mufti of Jerusalem wished "to reinforce the friendly bonds" (*tawthīq al-ṣilāt*) between the Holy See and the "Arab and Islamic worlds" in order to "avoid together the dangers of the such destructive

82 "In this circumstance there was an exchange of sympathy, brought about by the grief at the many funerals taking place every day, as soon as the victims were pulled out, members of all the religions came to help without distinction. I'm much afraid that this harmony, unfortunately, will prove precarious, and that one day soon we must find ourselves caught in the crossfire; may the Lord protect us!" Ibid., translation from Italian.

83 Born in Tanta, Egypt, in 1908 to Syrian parents, Hakim studied in Cairo and at St. Anne's Seminary in Jerusalem. Ordained in 1930, he was appointed bishop of the Melkite Eparchy of Acre in 1943, which became an archeparchy in 1964. In 1967 he became patriarch of Antioch as Maximos V, a role he fulfilled until 2000, a year before his death. He participated in the Second Vatican Council. His action during the 1948 war and his mediation with the Israeli authorities for the return of Melkite refugees remains the subject of historical debate.

84 "In no way is it possible to give the green light for such a thing, that has exclusively political character". AAV, *ADAGP*, 10, 46, 3, fol. 180, Tisserant to Hughes, Rome, May 9, 1946, translation from Italian.

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 المعهد العربي العالي
 فلسطين
 القاهرة
 في ٢٣ تموز ١٩٤٧

حضرة صاحب القداسة البابا بيوس الثاني عشر الجليل الطوبى .
 تقدم الحياة العربية العليا المعلم لجميع فطيمه الامم قدسكم السبي اقبل اجملها وأفر
 اهدتمها ، وهي ترموه للادعالي انه يكون عهد قدسكم عهد خير وسلام للعالم اجمع ، اما بعد فاننا تقدم
 لقدسكم دفتر فطيمه الذي انتدبه الحياة العربية العليا برياسة صاحب السيادة المطران بادر حوسن
 لمرانه حيفا وكما سائر الجليل ليزج لقدسكم لنا بنا هذا
 والله الحياة العربية العليا لعلقه بأنه قدسكم تتفاضونه باعادة مهجة الوفاء الرعاية التي تتحق
 هذه المهمة لصلتها بالبلاد المقدسة وبالسلام العام
 والله أهل البلاد المقدسة الرب من حبيبه وسببه ليعلموه ليرادون على عطف قدسكم الذي سببوه
 له أعظم الأثر في الأقطار العربية والإسلامية .
 وأنا نقصد لتوسيع الصلات بين مقامكم السبي وبين العالمين العربي والإسلامي الأمر الذي نرغب فيه
 من صميم قلوبنا ونسئله بكل جبروتنا ليعونه له الأمن الناتج في التقادير لدرؤ أقطار المبادئ الصالحة
 الخيرة التي تهدد جميع أديانه والمعاني والأفكاره وتند بأفزع المصائب والشور .
 والله مؤازره الأديبي البابوي السبي للقضية العربية في فلسطين سيجعل العالمين العربي والإسلامي
 يتفهمون البه نظرة مبنية بالهدوء وعزانه الجليل ، والتقدير البالغ ، ويبعث فيها غيبة اليد للتعادله
 فيما فيه غير الانسانية ونضعها ، وأهمل الحرح ورفع العدوانه في العالم
 وتفضلوا يا صاحب القداسة بقول صادرة اجملنا داعيا مناك
 من الحياة العربية العليا لفلسطين



1104/47 prot.

FIGURE 1.3 Letter from hajj Amin al-Husayni to Pius XII, July 23, 1947 ASRS

principles (*akhṭār al-mabādi al-haddhāma al-khaṭīra*) that threaten all religions, all beliefs, and all morals”.⁸⁵ For al-Husayni, without never mentioning Zionism, “the support of the Venerable Pontifical See for the Arab cause of Palestine” would generate the “vivid gratitude” of the Arab and Islamic worlds. Hakim accompanied this letter with some notes presenting the Jerusalem mufti as a potential ally of the Holy See in the Middle East.⁸⁶

The pope’s response came in a letter, sent by the Secretariat of State, stating “the interest that the Holy See has never stopped to have for this holy land of Palestine” and wishing “a just and real peace through comprehension, mutual agreement, respect for the rights of everyone”. The letter closed with the commitment of the pope, “as he always tried strived to do, to promote from the His high authority and within His spiritual mission the establishment of the harmonic order on which everybody’s happiness depends”.⁸⁷

While the Holy See was receiving requests to intervene from the Jewish and the Arab sides, the political discussion about the fate of Palestine accelerated, producing new transformations in its wake.

2 The Jerusalem Churches and the Partition of Palestine

The situation in the Middle East was also changing with respect to the positions taken by the principal powers in the geopolitical framework that took shape after 1945. At the end of the Second World War, the British Foreign Office’s chosen Middle Eastern strategy appeared to be aimed at maintaining a central position in the region; in any case, London was aware of the increasing influence and control in the region on the part of the United States and the Soviet Union. British policy contained all the ambiguities it had demonstrated in the preceding decades. Faced with the question of whether to support the creation of a Jewish homeland that would receive the Jews who escaped extermination or to defend Arab interests, after 1945 Britain aligned itself with the pro-Arab strategy. This decision translated into opposing the immigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine and, thus, denying the partition of the territory that would provide for the creation of a Jewish state.

85 The original letter in Arabic is preserved in ASRS, *ACAES, Pio XII*, 2, *Palestina*, 2, fols. 170, Cairo, July 23, 1947. The French translation by Hakim is in ASRS, *ACAES*, *ibid.*, fol. 171, Rome, July 26, 1947.

86 AAV, *ADAGP*, 10, 46, 3, fols. 167–68, Rome, July 28, 1947.

87 AAV, *ADAGP*, *ibid.*, fol. 163, Tardini to al-Husayni, copy, Vatican, August 11, 1947, translation from French.

However, the British objectives conflicted with the political enterprise of US President Harry Truman, who was on a trajectory of offering clear support for the Jewish requests. The disagreement between Britain and the United States over Jewish immigration quotas to Palestine began contentiously and appeared all the more dramatic because of the condition of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who had survived the concentration camps and were now forced to stay in refugee camps. At the end of the Second World War, the enormous waves of illegal immigration to Palestine and the parallel hardening of British policy expressed in the “White Book”, which sought to check the influx of Jews into Palestine by means of rigid quotas, further increased Foreign Office opposition to the Zionist organizations, on the one hand, and Jewish refugee associations, on the other. In 1946 and 1947, Irgun and Stern carried out several attacks on British installations in Palestine, as in the case of the King David Hotel in July 1946.

The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry regarding the problems of European Jewry and Palestine, established to find a solution to the question of the thousands of Jewish DPs who had survived the Nazi-Fascist extermination, was forced to face, and attempt to resolve politically, the delicate situation in the region.

2.1 *The Churches before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry*

The Anglo-American Committee called not only the representatives of the two conflicting parties to testify before it but also the heads of the principal religious communities, including Patriarch Barlassina, who were invited to present the perspectives of the various denominations in the country. The patriarch’s appearance was set for March 13, 1946, at the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) building in Jerusalem, where the depositions were being taken. Some days before the appointment, Barlassina delivered a written response to the committee, stating that he would not be able to present his testimony in person. The patriarch briefly listed the points that concerned him, including the safeguarding of Christian institutions and organizations.⁸⁸

On March 14, a day after Barlassina’s scheduled appearance, a representative of the Franciscan Custody, Anthony Bruya, was due to speak. He had been called on by the custos, Alberto Gori, to read a document summarizing the

88 APLJ, LB-GB, *Correspondance laïcs dans le diocèse*, Barlassina to Beeley, Secretary of the Committee, copy, Jerusalem, March 8, 1946.

key points of the Franciscan position.⁸⁹ The text, which Gori had prepared, focused specifically on maintaining the Status Quo with respect to the Holy Places, of which the friars had been the chief Catholic guardians over the centuries. Gori's first request was for a commission to be established for the Holy Places, as already provided for, but never realized, in the fourteenth article of the British Mandate. The custos asked that precise rules be defined with respect to the Holy Places. On such terms, the Catholics would feel that their rights had been recognized with respect to the Status Quo. Gori also hoped that a permanent council would be formed, composed of representatives of the various Christian denominations in Jerusalem, including the Orthodox and Armenian patriarchs, with the custody representing the Catholics. The custos also requested that the restoration and repair of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher be carried out jointly by the three communities (Orthodox, Armenian and Catholic). Finally, as regards the question of Jerusalem, the custos expressed his fears at how difficult it would be to reach a mutually acceptable solution due to the "ingrained fanaticism" that he believed was integral to the "Muslim and Jewish mentality".⁹⁰

All in all, the positions expressed by the Latin Church were nothing new and did not display any great degree of confidence in the commission's effectiveness. The commission concluded by presenting a report containing recommendations for a peaceful solution to the conflict. The document provided for the continuation of the British Mandate for Palestine and rejecting the idea of partition. However, Britain would have to agree to an increase in the immigration quotas for Jews and to accept 100,000 new immigrants. Reflecting the requests of the representatives of the religious denominations, the report stressed the necessity for international protection of the religious interests of the Christian communities in the Holy Land.

In his comments on the commission's proposals to Hughes, the apostolic delegate, the patriarch disputed the apparent inclusion of the Protestants among the Christian denominations that were to jointly administer the Holy Places: "Why should the Protestants interfere with the Holy Places," considering that "they were never allowed there?" he asked rhetorically.⁹¹ Thus, the work of the Anglo-American Committee added to the patriarch's doubts and

89 ACGOFM, *Segreteria generale, Custodia di Terra Santa*, 761, doc. 344, "Statement made to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, Jerusalem, March 14, 1946 by Very Rev. Albert Gori, OFM, Custos of the Holy Land," and AAV, *ADAGP*, 14, 58, 2, fols. 64–70.

90 Ibid.

91 AAV *ADAGP*, 14, 58, 2, fol. 72, Barlassina to Hughes, Jerusalem, July 31, 1946.

anxieties; not only were future initiatives of the British, Arabs, and Jews an issue, but also the delicate inner-Christian balance of power in Jerusalem.

2.2 *The Religious Interests before the UNSCOP*

The inconsistency of the Anglo-American Committee's proposals in the face of an exacerbation of the current situation also revealed the divisions between Britain and the United States and the impossibility of getting all stakeholders to agree. To avoid new losses for the British army in Palestine, and taking into account the rejection by the Palestinians and Zionists of the proposals identified up to that point, on February 14, 1947, London announced the decision to end the Palestine Mandate at midnight, May 15, and to entrust the entire question to the United Nations.⁹²

This extremely delicate moment brought to light all the various interests of the powers involved in the Middle East. In the six weeks between the February 14 communiqué and the official letter with which Britain offloaded the Gordian knot of Palestinian affairs to the international organization, a heated debate about the options on the table developed between UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie and the British, US and Soviet representatives. Britain's announcement that it could no longer sustain its support for the government army in the Greek Civil War in the course of Washington's formulation of the so-called Truman doctrine, according to which the United States pledged to oppose Soviet expansion through the policy of "containment", clearly demonstrated how British colonial power was disintegrating at an accelerating rate and the United States and the Soviets were taking over as key players in the Middle East as well as elsewhere, placing the region within the complex map of the emerging bipolar opposition.

On April 28, 1947, the UN General Assembly convened and entrusted the issue of the Palestinian question to a special commission, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), composed of 11 members.⁹³ The Arab and Zionist delegations opposed the formation of this committee, but their opinions did not count for much, as on May 15 the resolution to establish the UNSCOP was passed. The new committee was to present its proposals

92 See Alon Kadish, *The British Army in Palestine and the 1948 War: Containment, Withdrawal and Evacuation* (Abingdon: Routledge: 2019).

93 The UNSCOP was formed by representatives from countries not involved in the Palestinian question: the Netherlands, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Canada, Australia, India, Iran, Peru, Guatemala and Uruguay. Due to political pressure, especially from the United States, the principal powers were not represented, in particular the Soviet Union, whose position had recently shifted from overtly pro-Arab to a responsiveness to Zionist requests, to the point that it was becoming a divisive force between Britain and the United States.

in September. Following requests from the religious representatives to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, the resolution that created the new UNSCOP specified that it should take account of the “religious interests of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity in Palestine” (article 2).

After a visit to the country, the members of the committee spent June and July gathering depositions from the principal organizations and communities in the region, including the Christian communities. In the Catholic context, one of the most significant participants in the commission was the Catholic Near East Welfare Association,⁹⁴ founded by Pius XI in 1928 and now led by Cardinal Francis Spellman, Archbishop of New York. Its submission to the commission, dated June 5, 1947, was prepared by the secretary of the CNEWA, Thomas McMahan.

The text was premised on the argument that no description of the situation in Palestine and its attendant problems could ignore the religious dimension. If the church’s primary concern was to guarantee the interests of Christians and their organizations, McMahan immediately declared that the church intended to maintain neutrality with respect to the conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. As evidence, he cited Pius XII’s meeting with the AHC delegates in Palestine in August of the previous year and highlighted the fact that during the audience, the pope had reaffirmed the church’s rejection of antisemitism.

The insistence with which McMahan affirmed that “our interest is not at the political level” led him to declare that it made no difference to the Catholic Church what form of government the commission recommended, so long as the interests of Christendom were taken into account and safeguarded. With an attentiveness that Patriarch Barlassina would not have appreciated, he specified that all Christians should be protected: Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox. It would follow from this, in McMahan’s opinion, that the Catholic world was not fighting for a specific political solution. The internationalization of Jerusalem, which was central to the Holy See’s demands in the preceding two years, was not even hinted at. What was important was the protection of Christians, their interests and their traditional privileges; the church would welcome a political authority, whatever its composition, that would guarantee these conditions. There was a clear difference between this position and the

94 The English text of McMahan’s letter is contained in AANY, ACNEWA, document sent by McMahan to UNSCOP, New York, June 5, 1947. The Italian translation appeared in the bulletin of the Servizio Informazioni Chiesa Orientale (SICO) of August 1, 1947, available in the ASCTS, ACC, *S. Congregazione pro Ecclesia Orientali*.

intransigent defense of the proposal to internationalize the Holy City, which would be pursued by Vatican diplomacy a few months later, after the UN resolution of November 1947 that allowed for the partition of Palestine.

The conclusion of McMahan's document made clear what the Christians expected of the new government; according to the US prelate, the Palestinian Catholics and their institutions hoped not only for a general guarantee of their religious freedom but, more specifically, for absolute freedom of worship and association, preserving the rights – including the fiscal rights – to build churches, run schools, and establish hospitals, orphanages and other service organizations. Catholics wished to be secure from any type of social, civil and economic discrimination. Thus, McMahan was not so much requesting that the UNSCOP affirm vague principles of religious freedom but that it make certain specific guarantees to the Christians; he seems to have been more concerned about the concrete future of Christian institutions, particularly to do with education and healthcare, than the statute concerning Jerusalem and the Holy Places. These works were the true lifeblood that had allowed the Christian communities to continue their action in the region, even in the face of significant political transformations. McMahan's fear that one day the Christian schools in the region would be treated as "foreign schools" and opposed by the government induced him to request clearly defined conditions guaranteeing the continued existence of the Christian communities and their institutions. McMahan was thus taking a leap forward with his arguments, attempting to secure a political guarantee from the UN that the Christian communities would be protected and would not be forced to emigrate. Rather than focusing on the statute concerning Jerusalem or the Holy Places, his major concern was the concrete future of the Christian minority.

In the weeks that followed, other Christian denominations made presentations to the UNSCOP. On July 3, it was the turn of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. In addition to requests related to monasteries and charitable organizations, the memorandum reveals Orthodox fears that the Status Quo of the Holy Places would be up for discussion. A few days later came the turn of the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, whose requests also centered around access to the Holy Places.

The custody also participated in the work of the UNSCOP. The Franciscans held a private meeting with the commission on July 15, at the YMCA in Jerusalem. Bonaventure Simon, a friar at the custody who was British in origin, read the memorandum prepared by Custos Gori. The latter's requests had not changed from those presented to the Anglo-American Committee. In view of the increasing conflict in recent months, on which Gori expressed a position

of neutrality,⁹⁵ he called even more urgently for international measures to protect the Holy Places. The proposal to create an enclave for the Holy Places, limited to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, drew his opposition: what would become of places like Nazareth? In this text, as in the deposition to the Anglo-American Committee, the Franciscans reiterated their request for the establishment of a special committee dedicated to the Holy Places.

At the end of his presentation, Simon responded to some questions from the UNSCOP members. Asked to clarify the intended nature of a special committee on the Holy Places, the friar said he hoped that a committee would be formed of representatives of the Christian churches in Palestine which, together with representatives of the Western powers, would strive for agreement with the new government that would be instituted in Palestine. On the question of the Holy Places, he then specified that the custody hoped that a long list of places would be protected and safeguarded by international guarantees; these places, even if they were not all “of equal value”, should all receive “equal consideration”. Even if there were to be a new “non-Christian” state, their status as sanctuaries solely for religious communities should be recognized. On this last point, on the commission’s request, a few days later Gori sent a list of the Holy Places – more extensive than that covered by the Status Quo – for which the custody requested protection to be guaranteed under the rights of extraterritoriality.⁹⁶

Some representatives of other denominations expressed different positions from that of the custody, such as by city’s Anglican and Presbyterian leaders in June, some weeks before the custody’s audience.⁹⁷ Weston Stewart, representing the Anglican Church of England in Jerusalem, and Clark Kerr, of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, supported the idea that the key to resolving the conflict lay in religious accord, given the fact that Palestine was sacred to the three monotheistic religions. In particular, Stewart agreed with

95 “We are indifferent to the political tug-of-war that is now raging in Palestine and which has riveted world-wide attention.” UNA, *Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly, Supplement No. 11, UNSCOP, Report of the General Assembly, Volume IV, Annex B, Oral Evidence Presented at Private Meetings*, Lake Success, New York, Testimony of the Custody of the Holy Land to the UNSCOP, Jerusalem, July 15, 1947, A/364/Add.2 PV.31.

96 See UNA, *United Nations Special Committee on Palestine Files, Heads of Catholics of Different Rites*, S-0613-0002-14, Gori to Victor Hoo, personal representative of the UN secretary-general to UNSCOP, Jerusalem, July 19, 1947.

97 See Dan Bitan, “L’UNSCOP et l’internationalisation de Jérusalem,” in *De Balfour à Ben Gourion: Les puissances européennes et la Palestine, 1917–1948*, ed. Dominique Trimbur and Ran Aaronshon (Paris, CNRS, 2008), 444–45.

the suggestions of Emil Sandström, the UNSCOP president, who had aired the possibility of making Palestine a state uniquely guaranteed at the international level, governed by twelve representatives to be selected by the United Nations and the country's religious communities. Stewart's position is particularly interesting in light of the discussion with Patriarch Barlassina, held some months previously. Barlassina, having refused to address the Anglo-American Committee the previous year, now chose to present the perspective of his diocese to the UNSCOP.

Since the beginning of his pastoral work in 1920, Barlassina had displayed his anti-Protestant sentiments on various occasions, reinforced by the fear – which the Holy See shared – that the British Mandate would incentivize the establishment and development of new Protestant institutions and service organizations, which would lure many Catholics away from their church. In particular, the patriarch feared the growth of Protestant-run schools and associations for Palestinian youth, which were often culturally more prestigious and financially more solid compared to the precarious conditions of the patriarchal educational system, which was still rather disorganized upon its reopening after the First World War.

Barlassina's concerns of a growing "Protestant danger" were not assuaged in the following decades. At the end of the Second World War, with the political future of the region in question, he suspected that the Protestants would take advantage of the fluid phase in the emergence of the new order in Palestine to advance requests and claims, especially with regard to access and the right to conduct liturgy in the Holy Places. During the Anglo-American Committee, Barlassina openly discussed his fears regarding the future role of the reformed churches with the apostolic delegate, Hughes. However, the instability of the actual situation in Palestine, the silence of the Holy See and the arrival of the UN representatives in Jerusalem surprisingly pushed the patriarch to assume a position that was closer to that of the Protestant leaders, with the intention to reinforce the position of the Christian world with respect to the international debate over the "Holy Land".

2.3 *Seeking Unity: the Failed Christian Attempt at a Joint Memorandum*

The proposal to submit a joint memorandum from the Christian world to the UNSCOP was evidence of these connections. The initiative did not come from Barlassina; it was Weston Stewart, Anglican bishop in Jerusalem since 1943, who went to Barlassina on June 2, 1947, to discuss the possibility of presenting a single document to the UNSCOP fact-finding committee that was coming to Jerusalem. The Anglican leader's initial proposal was to draft a text to be signed by Jewish organizations and Muslim committees as well; when he saw the draft,

however, Barlassina immediately stated his “astonishment that the Christians of Palestine should unite with Jews and Muslims to protect their own rights”.⁹⁸ The patriarch decided to take a few days to reflect on the proposal. During this time, Barlassina became convinced of the possibility to compose a document that spoke for all Christians, dealing with their analogous interests, but he rejected the idea of “making common cause with the Muslims and the Jews”. The patriarch stood firm in his conviction not to agree to participate in an audience in which Catholic representatives would be subjected to “questioning and cross-examination” by the UNSCOP, as had happened in the case of the custody’s deposition to the Anglo-American Committee the year before.

On June 3, Barlassina informed the Anglican bishop that he was ready to sign a document on behalf of the Christian churches only. The two prelates reviewed the draft proposed by Stewart and removed all references to the claims of Muslims and Jews. In particular, Barlassina deleted a passage in the text that referred to the right of Jewish refugee survivors of the Nazi extermination or refugees from other nations to enter Palestine, fearing that reference to this subject could be interpreted by the Muslim population as Christian support for Jewish colonization: “in conclusion, we must refer solely to this double concept[:] the protection of ‘Souls and Shrines’, whatever form of government is adopted for Palestine.”⁹⁹ Ultimately, the two Christian representatives decided that, in the case of the joint memorandum, no denomination should participate in an audience with the UNSCOP, being especially apprehensive about what statements the Orthodox might make.

The second draft of the text, which resulted from the June 3 meeting, was then discussed within Jerusalem’s Protestant circles. A third draft was prepared and sent to Barlassina by the Anglican archdeacon for Palestine, Syria and Transjordan, Campbell MacInnes. On June 7, the patriarch responded with his next round of corrections.¹⁰⁰ After further discussions and revisions, the drafting of the document stalled due to the reservations of Greek Orthodox Patriarch Timotheos, who feared alienating Arab public opinion by signing a text addressed to the UNSCOP, an entity that the local population and Palestinian leaders strenuously opposed. Timotheos’s concern can be seen in the more general context of the deep crisis that had gripped his community for decades as a result of the conflict between its Greek and Arab components.

98 APLJ, *LB-MS*, *Luthériens, 1927–1996*, “Memoriale da presentarsi dalle varie confessioni cristiane alla Commissione Fact-Finding,” anonymous typescript, Jerusalem, undated, translation from Italian.

99 See APLJ, *ibid.*, typescript text, undated, translation from Italian.

100 APLJ, *ibid.*, Barlassina to MacInnes, copy, Jerusalem, June 7, 1947.

After the possibility of a joint Christian perspective was thwarted, Barlassina did not abandon the attempt to unite at least the Catholic voices. The patriarch secured the agreement and the signatures of Butrus Saba, vicar general of the Melkite Patriarchate, P.H. Ghiragossian, vicar of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate, P.G. Sa'd of the Maronite Catholic Patriarchate, and Ephrem Haddad, the Syrian Catholic vicar. The memorandum was delivered to the UNSCOP members as they were concluding their hearings in Jerusalem.¹⁰¹

The document started from the UNSCOP's invitation to the Latin Patriarch to present the "desiderata of the Catholics in Palestine". The text underlined the desire to maintain continuity with the past; the sole Catholic request was that the rights granted under the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate should be guaranteed by whatever authority would govern Palestine and Transjordan.¹⁰² They reiterated, first, the request for guarantees of full religious freedom, with particular attention to public liturgies held within the Old City. Second, the Catholic leaders asked for the protection of converts against all violence or revenge on the part of fanatics. The reference to converts was perhaps derived from the submission prepared by the Anglican and Presbyterian representatives, who had dedicated a whole section of their text to the subject. The request to maintain the Catholic courts was another request; it was presented as a moral preoccupation, especially related to marriage and the education of children. The memorandum concluded with a claim for all Catholic institutions to be exempt from taxation.

The drive to mediate between the different Christian denominations in view of the hearings before the commission acquired a special significance: although probably not fully recognized as such by all the parties involved, it was an effort – pursued in a highly significant phase – to break the rigid sectarian system shaped and imposed by the policies of the British Mandate, which not only affected Muslim-Christian relations but also relations within the Palestinian Christian world.¹⁰³ For the Latin Patriarchate, it would be Barlassina's final political intervention. On the evening of September 27, 1947, the seventy-five-year-old patriarch, who had led the Jerusalem diocese for twenty-seven years, died following a heart attack. His death left the diocese

101 The text of the document ("A Memorandum to the UNSCOP Submitted by the Heads of Catholics of Different Rites," dated July 1947) is preserved in APLJ, *LB-GB, UNRWA (réfugiés), 1947–1975*, and in UNA, *United Nations Special Committee on Palestine Files, Heads of Catholics of Different Rites, S-0613-0002-14*.

102 Ibid.

103 On colonial sectarianism on Mandate Palestine, see Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, 9–11.

without a leader amid an era of upheaval and change and faced with questions about the immediate future.¹⁰⁴

3 Toward the Palestine War

3.1 *Financial Problems and Political Strategies*

The final months of Barlassina's life were marked by several questions. First was the patriarchate's financial situation. Since his appointment in 1920, Barlassina had been concerned that the diocese did not have the financial wherewithal for the upkeep of the patriarchal institutions and organizations. To this end, he founded the Association for the Preservation of the Faith in Palestine (Opera per la preservazione della fede in Palestina) to solicit donations from all over the world to be invested in projects for the growth of the diocese, such as constructing schools and charity organizations. At the behest of Pius XI, in 1928 the association was merged with the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher. At the end of the Second World War, the stipends for the patriarchate's clergy, the maintenance expenses for the parishes and the funds required to repair war-damaged structures resulted in new and extraordinary financial demands.

The financial problem was tightly bound up with the issue of the patriarchate's relations with Rome, especially with the Congregation for the Oriental Church, established in 1917. Pius XII's *motu proprio Sancta Dei Ecclesia* of March 25, 1938, extended the Congregation's jurisdiction to all the Eastern and Latin Catholics, including the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which were previously under the administration of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.¹⁰⁵ Since the end of the 1930s, relations between the head of the Jerusalem diocese and Cardinal Eugène Tisserant,¹⁰⁶ secretary of the Oriental

104 Few days before his death, Barlassina wrote to Tardini to express again his fears about the future of the Latin Church after the conclusion of the British Mandate. ASRS, *ACAES, Pio XII*, 2, *Palestina*, 2, fols. 14–16, Jerusalem, September 22, 1947.

105 AAS 30 (1938): 154–59.

106 Eugène Gabriel Gervais Laurent Tisserant (1884–1972) was ordained in Nancy in 1907. During his studies, he spent time in Jerusalem at the biblical and archeological school founded by the Dominicans and directed by Marie-Joseph Lagrange. Thanks to his linguistic competence, he was invited to work on Oriental manuscripts preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Library. He participated in the Palestinian campaign during the First World War. In 1936, he was nominated cardinal and secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Church, which he headed until 1959. For a historical biography of Tisserant, see Étienne Fouilloux, *Eugène, cardinal Tisserant (1884–1972): une biographie* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2011).

Congregation, had become increasingly tense. The two prelates had opposing visions regarding the role of the Latin Patriarchate in the in Orient; the French cardinal and scholar, who was deeply versed in Middle Eastern languages and culture, strove for the coming together of Latin and Eastern Catholics, with the ultimate objective of a unification of the diverse Catholic components. This would mean a merger into a single patriarchate. Tisserant opposed any form of proselytism between the two aspects of Catholicism in the East; in his reading of the Middle Eastern situation, rapprochement and unity between Catholics was desirable, not the transfer from one rite to the other. Barlassina, on the contrary, maintained with conviction a variety of reservations about and prejudices against the Eastern Catholic components, the Melkites in particular. The profound divergences between the prelates were also reflected in the patriarchate's financial administration. The patriarchate's priests who lived in impoverished conditions sent petitions to the Oriental Congregation, denouncing Barlassina's lack of attention to their miserable situation and seeking material aid from Rome.¹⁰⁷

The conflict was even apparent in places far removed from Jerusalem and the Vatican, as in the case of the CNEWA's headquarters in New York. The CNEWA was among the principal financiers of the Oriental Congregation. In the mid-1940s Tisserant asked the CNEWA to send money and food supplies to the patriarchal curates. McMahon in New York examined the patriarchate's real financial necessities, which caused the bad blood between Barlassina, the patriarchal clergy and Tisserant.¹⁰⁸

It was widely believed within the CNEWA that Barlassina had received extensive funding through the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher under its grand master, Cardinal Nicola Canali, without the full knowledge of Rome. In any case, the knights also turned to Cardinal Samuel Stritch, archbishop of Chicago and one of the American clergy most involved in financial support for the Catholics of the region, to request new donations for the Latin Patriarchate.¹⁰⁹

107 See ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 125/47, doc. 1, petitions from thirteen Patriarchal priests lead by Bernardino Merlo, curate of al-Zababida, against Barlassina to Hughes, December 29, 1946 and doc. 10, Merlo to Tisserant, March 13, 1947.

108 Some months later, after the outbreak of the Palestinian war, McMahon arranged, in accordance with Tisserant, to send regular monthly food supplies from the CNEWA to the patriarchal priests. See ACO, *ibid.*, doc. 26, McMahon to Tisserant, New York, December 29, 1947.

109 See AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Stritch, copy, New York, September 3, 1947.

Both Rome and the American bishops who were involved in conspicuous donations increased their calls to examine the patriarchate's accounts and their demand that Barlassina reveal all donations and expenses. The patriarch's death halted the wrangling over the financial fate of the patriarchate, without a solution having been reached. The questions would resume shortly after the appointment of a patriarchal successor.

3.2 *A Flock with No Shepherd*

The protracted conflict with the Congregation for the Oriental Church was not the only problem that the patriarch had to deal with in his final years. Barlassina's concern was that the political discussions at the UN and the rapid evolution of the situation in the direction of a British disengagement from Palestine – but without any clear alternative government – would lead to an open conflict between Arabs and Jews. However, given the circumstances, the patriarch sought to be more open toward the British authorities. His hope was to rally a group of Western powers in support of the Christian arguments, an aim that now ran the risk of being forgotten. It is in this context that the effort to come to terms with the Protestant world during the activities of the UNSCOP should be understood.

The patriarch's heart problems, from which he had been suffering since 1945, initiated a phase of uncertainty as to the fate of the Jerusalem diocese. In November of that year, rumors circulated that the Holy See was about to nominate a Canadian bishop as Barlassina's coadjutor; he would then succeed in the event of the patriarch's sudden death. These rumors were not borne out in any decisions in Rome. However, the patriarch's health issues impelled him to nominate Adolphe Perrin as patriarchal provicar, a role that he held from March 1945 to Barlassina's death. The French priest took over part of the diocese's administration so as to lighten Barlassina's workload. The two years between his nomination and the patriarch's death passed without other significant changes to the hierarchy of the Jerusalem Church.

During the summer of 1947 Barlassina prepared the document to be presented to the UNSCOP. A few days after submitting the Catholic leaders' memorandum, on July 27, the Latin Patriarchate marked the centenary of its reestablishment. Barlassina celebrated a pontifical mass to mark the occasion, which was attended by some senior British officials, among them the High Commissioner for Palestine, Alan Cunningham, as well as the consuls of the countries that historically had closer ties to the Catholic Church (France, Spain, Belgium, Italy and Czechoslovakia).

To coincide with the centenary, the patriarchal press issued a short work, produced by Perrin, presenting the history of the diocese in a tone of apologetic

self-justification.¹¹⁰ The narrative was inspiring: according to Perrin, since its reestablishment in 1847, the road taken by the Jerusalem Latin Church – and especially by its patriarchs and priests – had led to the foundation of dozens of new parishes, a growth in the numbers of faithful and the affirmation of the prestige of Catholicism in the region. The portrait of Barlassina described a bishop who was indefatigable in his pastoral work. While he alluded to the current political uncertainty and especially the difficult relations with Jews and Muslims, Perrin appeared confident in the overall future and in the continued growth of the diocese.

Exactly two months after the patriarchate's centennial celebrations, Barlassina had another heart attack, which proved fatal. And so died one of the most important patriarchs in the modern history of the institution. If the patriarch had always been a thorn in the side of the British, relations had improved in his final months as a result of his cautious convergence with the Mandatory power. Barlassina's irreducible anti-Protestantism was diluted with conciliatory tones with the prospect of a possible common advantage, as in the case of the joint effort with the Anglican representative to produce a common text for the UNSCOP. From the French point of view, Barlassina's work had certainly been marked by his brusque and authoritarian temperament, which had caused friction on several occasions with Paris's representatives in Palestine, although he had later forged a relationship of particular trust with consul René Neuville.¹¹¹

His disagreements with the Vatican were no secret, nor was his aversion to the Zionist movement. His death did not pass unremarked in the Jewish press: the daily *ha-Boker* characterized Barlassina as a fervent supporter of Arab claims, adding that the recently deceased patriarch had done much to help the AHC and had given his support to the Muslim-Christian anti-Zionist front.¹¹²

Custos Gori officiated at his funeral. With the position of patriarch now vacant, the situation of the diocese was more uncertain.

3.3 *Which Future? Questions and Divisions*

Barlassina's death left the Latin community leaderless and with severe internal divisions. Part of the Latin Catholic hierarchy questioned Perrin's initiative to

110 Perrin, *Centenaire du Patriarcat latin*.

111 See CADC, *Levant, Palestine (1944–1952)*, 426, *Questions religieuses, 1947*, Landy to Bidault, Jerusalem, October 4, 1947.

112 "Halvayat ha-Apatri'arkh ha-Latini" [Funeral of the Latin Patriarch], *ha-Boker*, September 30, 1947.

govern as capitular vicar. The canons of the patriarchal chapter sent a telegram to Hughes, the apostolic internuncio in Egypt,¹¹³ declaring that Perrin had assumed the position of provicar on his own initiative, without any intervention by the chapter, as provided for by the instructions of Pius IX in 1847. Perrin defended himself from this charge, addressing his response directly to the Congregation for the Oriental Church. He declared that he had assumed the powers of vicar capitular at a time when it was not appropriate to convene the patriarchal chapter.¹¹⁴ Perrin's request was that an apostolic administrator be nominated beside him. Hughes also discussed the question with the Holy See. In early October, Tardini informed Tisserant that Pius XII had appointed Mansur Jallad "apostolic administrator of the sede vacante Patriarchate."¹¹⁵ Some days later, the patriarchal chancellor, Theodor Maat, notified Henry Gurney, chief secretary of Palestine, of the decision.¹¹⁶

The tensions and uncertainties within the patriarchate did not escape the notice of the region's consular representatives. On October 23, the French consul in Haifa, Pierre Landy, noted that after Barlassina's death, the Mandate authority and the Arab Christian community both seemed opposed to the nomination of a new Italian patriarch, as was traditional for the head of the Jerusalem diocese.¹¹⁷ For some time now, the Arabs had been calling for a successor of Middle Eastern origin, emphasizing that the possibility of electing an Arab patriarch had been discussed since the papacy of Leo XIII. The concrete opportunity provided by the patriarchal vacancy seemed to offer a vague glimmer of hope that this request might be realized.

The political situation in Palestine and the concern that the United Nations would make a decision that sacrificed Arab claims contributed to increasing

113 The Holy See created the apostolic internunciature of Egypt on August 23, 1947. See AAS 40 (1948): 72–73.

114 Perrin referred to part of Pius IX's instructions, where he established: "In case of a vacant patriarchal seat, for whatever the reason, a vicar general will preside with the powers of a vicar capitular, until other provision has been made by the Holy See, over the Patriarchate of the Jerusalem Church and the abovementioned region." ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 553/47, doc. 11, Perrin to Tisserant, October 1, 1947, translation from French.

115 ACO, *ibid.*, doc. 6, Tardini to Tisserant, Vatican, October 3, 1947. Mansur Jallad (1885–1968) (frequently referred to in the documents with his name Italianized to Vincenzo or Gallicized to Vincent Gelat), originally from Jaffa, was ordained by Patriarch Camassei in 1908. From 1935 to 1940, he was patriarchal vicar of Transjordan and then fulfilled the role of president of the ecclesiastical tribunal until 1945.

116 See ISA, M/24/4312, Maat to Gurney, Jerusalem, October 17, 1947.

117 See CADC, *Levant, Palestine (1944–1952)*, 426, *Questions religieuses, 1947*, Landy to the French Foreign Ministry, Direction d'Afrique-Levant, Jerusalem, October 23, 1947.

anti-Western, and particularly anti-Italian sentiments, among the local clergy.¹¹⁸ The patriarchal vicar of Transjordan, Ni'ma Sim'an, may have been the candidate with the most support among the Palestinian and Transjordanian faithful and clergy.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Italian consulate worked to ensure that an Italian would fill the role of patriarch once again, as was traditional, but opened up the possibility of an Arab coadjutor.

Sim'an's concerns, as expressed to the apostolic administrator, confirmed that the situation in the patriarchate's parishes was difficult in this phase devoid of spiritual leadership, especially given the high degree of political instability and growing poverty due to the financial crisis. On November 21, 1947, eight days before the UN resolution to partition Palestine, Jallad wrote to the vicar in Amman that "it is an inopportune time to lose heart; we must endure this time of transition with patience."¹²⁰

The divisions between Latin and Melkite faithful and clergy came increasingly to the fore, coinciding with repeated rumors of a possible union between the two rites into a single Catholic patriarchate. The silence of the Holy See and the absence of a successor to Barlassina were interpreted as confirmation that Rome was preparing to abolish the Latin Patriarchate. In this phase of deep uncertainty, the political situation in Palestine rapidly came to a head.

118 For a historical appraisal of the Arabization process within the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, see Paolo Maggiolini, "Changes and Developments of the Latin Patriarchate and the Melkite Catholic Church in the Post-Great War Lands of Palestine and Transjordan," *Social Sciences and Missions* 32, nos. 3-4 (2019); and Paolo Pieraccini, "Catholic Missionaries of the 'Holy Land' and the *Nahda*: The Case of the Salesian Society (1904-1920)," *Social Sciences and Missions* 32, nos. 3-4 (2019): 311-41.

119 Born in al-Rama, Sim'an (1908-81) was ordained in 1932 and then did his pastoral work in the parishes of Madaba, al-Karak, al-Husn and Amman. He was appointed patriarchal procurator of Transjordan in 1940, "cum facultatibus vicarii generalis" (with the powers of a vicar general).

120 APLJ, *LB-AG*, *Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946-1953*, Jallad to Sim'an, copy, Jerusalem, November 21, 1947.

Into the Breach

1 From Lake Success to Palestine: the UN Partition Plan

1.1 *Another War*

After its initial activities in Lake Success and upon gathering information and hearing from the principal political, social and religious actors in Palestine, the UN Special Commission for Palestine went to Beirut and then Geneva to draft a final report. The path to finding a political formula that would make partition acceptable to both sides seemed arduous. Seven of the eleven UNSCOP member countries – Sweden, the Netherlands, Canada, Uruguay, Guatemala, Peru and Czechoslovakia – came together to elaborate on a territorial division that was supposed to take account of two factors: first was the demographic question, separating Palestinians and Jews and avoiding the creation of enemy enclaves within the future Palestinian and Israeli states as much as possible; the second centered on territorial continuity. The division was outlined by the vice president of the UN commission, the Swedish diplomat Paul Mohn: the Jews were to receive 62 percent of Palestine, specifically, the coastal plain from Haifa to Rehovot (including Tel Aviv and Jaffa), eastern Galilee (including Tiberias and Safed, both holy cities for the Jews) and the Negev desert; the Palestinians should receive the remaining 35 percent, including central and western Galilee (where the Palestinian cities of Acre and Nazareth are located), the region of Hebron, a holy city for Muslims and Jews, and the areas of Nablus and Jenin. The zone containing Jerusalem and Bethlehem was to constitute a *corpus separatum*; it would be constituted as an enclave under international control. The governor of the city under the international regime, assisted by a special police force, would be in charge of protecting the Holy Places.

The Zionist leadership did not react favorably to the idea of a *corpus separatum* for Jerusalem as it would be obliged to give up direct control of some of the most important Holy Places for Judaism located within the Old City. Furthermore, based on this proposal, the western part of the city, some of whose quarters were mostly inhabited by Jews, would not be administered by the Jewish Agency. The area of the *corpus separatum* contained about 205,000 inhabitants – a little less than half of whom were Jews and the rest Arabs (including 40,000 Christians). The municipality of Jerusalem outside of the walls contained a clear Jewish majority, while *intra muros* the Palestinian Arab

population formed the majority.¹ At the same time, the solution contained in the proposal for partition, namely the creation of an Israeli state in a territory that was rather more than half of Palestine, inclined the representatives of the Jewish Agency to support the project, despite not being fully satisfied with the solution laid out for Jerusalem. The same principle of territorial continuity allowed the Zionist leadership to envisage a scenario in which Jerusalem would be joined with the Negev region and the coastal zone to the south of Haifa.

Within the UNSCOP, the minority grouping – Yugoslavia, Iran, and India – opted for the creation of a single, federal, binational Arab and Jewish state. The Zionist leadership was decidedly against this proposal; its implications on the demographic level were an Arab Palestinian majority within the country and strict controls on Jewish immigration. The partition proposal enjoyed the consensus of the majority of the commission's members and the Zionist leadership but faced the opposition of the Arabs. In any case, both sides within the commission agreed on certain principles – reflected in chapter 3 of the final report – relating to the Holy Places, religious rights and minorities: freedom of access and of worship were to be guaranteed and the sacred character of the Holy Places preserved.²

The main point on which the entire commission agreed was the necessity to bring the British Mandate to an end as soon as possible. The British cabinet signaled its agreement to this recommendation on September 20, 1947, some days after the UNSCOP's report was disseminated; Britain decided to abandon Palestine, without committing itself to any solution for the next stage.

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- 1 According to the estimates formulated by the British authorities in the survey prepared for the Anglo-American Committee and based on the 1931 census, the population of Palestine grew from 750,000 in the census of 1922 to 1,765,000 at the end of 1944. In this period, the Jewish part of the population rose from 84,000 to 554,000 – from 13 to 31 percent of the total – while the Arabs, though their proportion of the total population was falling, had increased to 1,179,000 (the Muslim community grew from 589,000 in 1922 to 1,061,000 in 1944, while the Christians went from 71,000 to 136,000 in the same period). Within the Jerusalem municipality, there were around 10,000 Muslims, 7,000 Christians and 4,000 Jews living intra muros, with approximately 95,000 Jews and 23,000 Muslims and 24,000 Christians outside the walls. See Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, *A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December, 1945 and January, 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1991), vol. 1, 142–43 and 151.
 - 2 UNA, *United Nations Special Committee on Palestine Files: Report to the General Assembly*, Documents A/364, vol. 1, chap. 3: “Religious Interests and Holy Places,” September 3, 1947. See also Joëlle Le Morzellec, *La question de Jérusalem devant l'Organisation des Nations Unies* (Brussels: Bruylant, 1979), 63–77.

The orientations of the majority group within the commission characterized the recommendations made in the document that it presented to the UN General Assembly on September 3, 1947. Despite strong Arab protests threatening an immediate, violent response if it were resolved to divide Palestine, the majority proposal for partition was sent for discussion by the General Assembly. On September 23, an ad hoc commission, composed of representatives of all UN member states, formed with the task to study the UNSCOP report, define the end of the British Mandate and resolve the question of Palestine's future. This new organ was in turn subdivided into three subcommissions tasked with resolving various issues in order to finalize the resolution, which would be put to the vote of the General Assembly.³

In the months following the first discussions at Lake Success to the voting on the final text, the Holy See demonstrated significant restraint.⁴ The plan to internationalize the Holy City, which became the Vatican's aim in the 1949–50 discussions, cannot be attributed to the Vatican. Rather, it was some European and Latin American countries which sought to protect Christian interests, with the objective to maintain a role in the Middle East, particularly given the clear danger of open warfare between Arabs and Zionists and the risk of Soviet penetration. Therefore, the Holy See refrained from taking a definitive position; in a politically unstable situation, favoring the internationalization project would have risked compromising relations with the Arab world, which strongly opposed this solution, thus endangering the Christian minority. In Jerusalem, after Patriarch Barlassina's death in September 1947, the Palestinian Latin Catholics' perception of political developments became even more complex. The confusion mingled with the uncertainties surrounding the absence of a patriarch. There was uncertainty about the next steps that Rome would take and increasing apprehension about the political and military consequences of an impending outbreak of hostilities.

On November 29, the UN General Assembly's approval of resolution 181 transformed these fears into a dramatic reality. Thirty-three states voted in favor, thirteen against, and ten – among them Britain – abstained. Thus, the United Nations gave the go-ahead to partition. According to the resolution, 55 percent of the territory of Palestine would be given to a "Jewish State" and 42 percent to an "Arab State", with the latter containing 63 percent of the

3 On the work of the ad hoc commission on the Palestinian question during the UN General Assembly in autumn 1947, see Le Morzellec, *La question de Jérusalem*, 78–95.

4 For a detailed reconstruction of the wait-and-see strategy chosen by the Holy See in this phase with respect to the discussion on partition of the Holy Land, see Ferrari, *Vaticano e Israele*, 115–17.

existing population. The text of the resolution provided for a British withdrawal “as soon as possible, but in any case not later than 1 August 1948”. The principle that a *corpus separatum* should be created in Jerusalem (whose boundaries were identified as Abu Dis, Bethlehem, ‘Ayn Karim, and Shu‘fat) was reaffirmed, as was freedom of access to the Holy Places for the various religious communities.

Some narratives present the two sides as being diametrically opposite in their reactions: the Palestinians as rejecting partition and responding to the vote with violent protests, and the Zionists, on the other hand, as elated with the result. In reality, the two sides were far from monolithic. The Arab front was internally divided into various opposing factions; furthermore, the most consistent and organized army, that of Transjordan, was dependent on orders from a sovereign, King ‘Abdullah, who had secretly confirmed to the Jewish Agency that he would not go through with an invasion of Palestine.⁵ The Zionist side, too, was split between the Jewish Agency leadership, which was keenly aware of how crucial this moment was, and paramilitary groups like Stern and Irgun, which interpreted the UN resolution as a defeat as it did not deliver possession of what they considered to be the whole “Land of Israel” (*Erets Yisra’el*).

The AHC announced a three-day general strike. A violent Zionist response followed all over the country. These were the first sparks of the civil war that would explode a few weeks later and consume the months that followed. Meanwhile, thousands of Arab volunteers entered the country to join the Arab Liberation Army. In this climate of imminent open conflict, Britain announced that it would withdraw from the territory by May 15.

This phase of growing violence added to Christian anxieties. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Jerusalem spent the first Christmas after Barlassina’s death without a leader and in fear. In his Christmas message on December 24,

5 In November 1947, after several secret contacts between King ‘Abdullah and Golda Meir, the Hashemite monarchy and the Jewish Agency agreed to divide Palestine between themselves after the end of the British Mandate. Israeli historian Avi Shlaim has reconstructed the history of relations between the Zionist leadership and ‘Abdullah in *Collusion Across the Jordan*, and the preface to the new, revised edition of the volume, *The Politics of Partition: King Abdullah, the Zionists, and Palestine, 1921–1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), vii–xvi; see also Yoav Gelber, *Jewish-Transjordan Relations, 1921–1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); and Mary C. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For a history of modern Jordan to contextualize the connections with the Jewish Agency, see Joseph Nevo and Ilan Pappé, eds., *Jordan in the Middle East: The Making of a Pivotal State, 1948–1988* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Philip Robins, *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Kamel S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1993).

Pius XII called for an end to hostilities in Palestine.⁶ Writing to him from what he termed the “tortured Holy Land,” Jallad, apostolic administrator of the Jerusalem Latin Patriarchate, thanked the pope for the prayer in his radio message, to which he and the patriarchal curia had “listened, with emotion, before setting off for Bethlehem” on Christmas Eve.⁷ A few weeks later, from Egypt Internuncio Hughes expressed his concern to Jallad that “the news that is coming from Palestine holds our soul in suspense”.⁸ The apostolic administrator answered that “all contact between Arabs and Jews is impossible for the moment, and endangers life, as has happened in numerous cases”.⁹

The first evacuations of Arabs from various parts of Jerusalem soon began. The Arab Christians would also flee en masse from the quarters of Lifta, al-Shaykh Badr, Romemah, al-Talibiyya, Talpiyot, Mekor Hayim, Bayt Safafa, al-Shaykh Jarrah, Musrara, Abu Tur and Katamon in early 1948, terrorized by Zionist attacks and the possibility of Muslim reactions, and by internal Palestinian clashes between the Husaynis and their opponents, the Nashashibis.¹⁰ Since December, about two hundred families seeking refuge had occupied the Franciscan casa nova (hospice for pilgrims) at the Jerusalem monastery of St. Saviour.¹¹ The Haganah bomb on the night of January 5 that gutted the Hotel Semiramis, in the rich Jerusalem quarter of Katamon, which was thought to be a hideout of the commandants of Arab irregular troops, was a further blow to the Christian world in Jerusalem. The attack also made an impression on global public opinion, especially because the Spanish vice-consul was killed in the blast. The hotel – which the Mandate authorities denied was harboring Arab militias – was the property of a Christian Jerusalem family. The explosion killed some Catholics, and the event caused great alarm among the local community. Commenting on the attack, Jallad wrote to Cardinal

6 Pius XII, “Radiomessaggio natalizio ai popoli del mondo intero di Pio XII,” December 24, 1947, in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII*, vol. 9 (Vatican City: Poliglotta Vaticana, 1948), 391–401.

7 APLJ, *LB-GB, Secrétairerie d’État, 1949–1987*, Jallad to Pius XII, handwritten minute, Jerusalem, December 26, 1947, translation from Italian.

8 APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Hughes to Jallad, Cairo, January 14, 1948, translation from Italian.

9 APLJ, *ibid.*, Jallad to Hughes, copy, Jerusalem, January 24, 1948, translation from Italian.

10 Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 150–56. On Palestinian fragmentation and political divisions, see Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939–1948* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991).

11 See Maria Chiara Rioli, “Catholic Humanitarian Assistance for the Palestinian Refugees: The Franciscan Casa Nova of Jerusalem During the 1948 War,” in *Christian Missions and Humanitarianism in the Middle East, 1850–1950: Ideologies, Rhetoric, and Practices*, ed. Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Karène Sanchez Summerer (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

Tisserant, secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Church, that “our Christians are in agreement with the Muslim compatriots” and hence were targets “in the Jews’ retaliations”.¹² Describing the ever-more critical situation in Jerusalem, the apostolic administrator revealed his pro-Arab sentiments: “matters are worsening; day and night one hears the fusillades and bombs,” and even in the patriarchate “the shots come in through the windows”. Fear of Zionist attacks mingled with the dread of Arab reprisals against European and American clergy; for them, Jallad continued, “we distribute a kind of identity card in Arabic, signed by the patriarchate and recognized by the Arab Committee, especially designed to protect those persons that could be taken by the Jews, and to permit them to access the city gates, which are closed and controlled by the Arab civic guard.”¹³ The reality in Jerusalem was thus one of division and open conflict.

While neither side seemed to have the upper hand initially, during February and March the Arab militia carried out numerous attacks on Haganah’s truck convoys. The situation in Jerusalem alarmed the Zionist leaders most. As it turned out, the Arab attacks were especially significant along the road that linked Tel Aviv and Jerusalem; in the first phase of the war the most intense fighting took place in Jerusalem, Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jaffa, the most important cities in Palestine. The horror of seeing the Jewish population of Jerusalem under threat drove the Zionist leadership to change strategy and switch to the counterattack. At the end of February, Jallad, writing to the vicar of Transjordan in Amman, Ni‘ma Sim‘an, described life in the city: “here, things are not improving, and just today a bomb fell nearby ... and this evening machine-gun fire was loud between the city and Mount Zion”.¹⁴

Outside Jerusalem, the situation was equally dramatic. From Nazareth in Galilee, where nights were lit up “by ... the moon and ... passing bombs”,¹⁵ Antonio Vergani, patriarchal vicar for Galilee, wrote to the apostolic administrator that the condition of the priests could “already be called desperate”.¹⁶ He denounced the soaring price of commodities due to the difficulty in

12 APLJ, *FC-AG, S. Congregatio Pro E. Orientali, 1919–1953*, Jallad to Tisserant, copy, Jerusalem, January 9, 1948, translation from Italian.

13 Ibid.

14 APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946–1953*, Jallad to Sim‘an, Jerusalem, February 24, 1948.

15 APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Jallad, Nazareth, March 9, 1948, translation from Italian.

16 Ibid. Antonio Vergani (1905–60) arrived at the Jerusalem Patriarchate when he was just 15 years old. Ordained by Barlassina in 1927, he was then nominated curate of Bir Zayt, al-Salt and Bayt Sahur. In 1946, the patriarch chose him as vicar general for Galilee, a role he fulfilled until 1958.

transporting them, and the resulting palpable increase in poverty. The parishes were also in extremis; the priests' salary was not enough to cover basic needs. Vergani therefore appealed to Jallad to increase the payments sent by the patriarchate. He did not balk from criticizing the church, asking: "Does it seem to you that the Patriarchate today honors the priests in its charge? Or does it want to drive the priests to take desperate measures?"¹⁷

As for Haifa, the most important city in Galilee, the exodus of the Arab population had been underway since the approval of partition in November 1947. In March and April 1948, after initial opposition, the AHC coordinated the transfer of Haifa's citizens to Lebanon and Syria. The Christian notables, members of the city's upper middle class, were among the first to leave. The evacuation of the Christian population was organized with the help of the Melkite bishop of Acre, Georges Hakim. The flight from the city reached its peak with the battle of Haifa on April 21–22.¹⁸ From Acre, Fr. Alberto Rock reported the arrival of "a flood of people" from Haifa.¹⁹

On the west coast, including Jaffa, the population, the vast majority of which was Arab, had been ready to flee since November 1947. The partition plan provided for the city to become an isolated Arab enclave within the State of Israel. Here too, the Christian population abandoned the city, which was besieged and subjected to heavy attacks by Haganah from February to April 1948.²⁰ The inhabitants mostly headed for Gaza, Egypt, Lebanon and "triangle" formed by the cities of Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarm.

Meanwhile, the situation in Jerusalem remained critical. Although the Holy Places were safe for the moment, the concern that even these most important religious structures could also be violated pervaded the minds of the patriarchal hierarchy. On March 13, a fire damaged the great window that covered the cupola of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Jallad, who happened to be there at the time, was struck by falling glass. The incident made such an impression on him that he denounced it to Internuncio Hughes, suggesting

17 APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Jallad, Nazareth, March 9, 1948.

18 On the exodus from Haifa, see Walid Khalidi, "The Fall of Haifa Revisited," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 37, no. 3 (2008): 30–58; Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 99–109; and Khalidi, "The Fall of Haifa," *Middle East Forum* 35, no. 10 (1959).

19 "Around 10.15 a.m., sailboats and motorboats began to arrive at Acre, full of people. What had happened? The Jews had made an assault on the city of Haifa, with twelve thousand armed men, forcing the Arab population, betrayed by the British army, to flee." ASCTS, *ACC, Miscellanea, Guerra arabo-israeliana, Attività del custode* (July 1947–September 9, 1948), "Esodo di Haifa," typescript by Fr. Rock, chronicle for April 22, 1948, translation from Italian.

20 On the events at Jaffa, see Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 109–16.

that the event was a sinister harbinger of an imminent spike in the conflict, which, he said, would spare no institution or place of worship in Palestine.²¹

In early March, the Arab press reported that Christian leaders in Jerusalem had met to formulate a joint protest against partition. Christian representatives had attempted mediation since January 1948 but now it seemed these efforts were being coordinated with a view to issuing a shared declaration.²² Hughes asked Jallad for more specific information about these rumors.²³ A public document in the name of the Arab Christians, signed by the Catholic authorities of Palestine, would have been in plain contradiction to the policy of caution adopted by the Holy See when the United Nations voted.

According to Jallad, the proposal for an assembly of Christian representatives had been made by the AHC.²⁴ In the weeks preceding the joint declaration on the “deplorable condition of Palestine resulting from partition”,²⁵ the Christian leaders had met several times, with the secretary of the AHC presiding over some sessions.²⁶ The representatives of the Latin Church were not officially involved, but a priest of the patriarchate, Ibrahim ‘Ayyad,²⁷ who had long been close to Palestinian political leaders, received a personal letter inviting him to participate in the discussion of the text. Likewise, Bonaventure ‘Aqiqi, a Franciscan priest in the Latin parish of St. Saviour in Jerusalem, took part in the meetings without having been formally delegated by the custody. When the time came to sign and issue the communiqué, ‘Ayyad presented a copy of it to Jallad for more detailed examination. There were some considerations that mitigated the diocesan hierarchy’s misgivings at the possibility that ‘Ayyad would sign on behalf of the patriarchate: according to Jallad, the Latin Church “could not fail to cooperate” with the Palestinian Arab Muslims, “and this was urgent, inevitable and appropriate” because the declaration represented “the actual general opinion of the Catholic population; and fundamentally, various elements of the population are asking for peace”.²⁸ Thus, the goal was to break the silence and hesitation of the patriarchate and of the Catholic world as to what position the Christians would take – especially the Arab Latins – and

21 APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Jallad to Hughes, copy, Jerusalem, March 13, 1948.

22 See ASDMAE, *Affari Politici (1946–1950), Palestina*, 4, Silimbani to the Italian Foreign Ministry, Jerusalem, January 31, 1948.

23 APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Hughes to Jallad, Cairo, March 4, 1948.

24 AAV, *ADAGP*, 9, 42, 5, fol. 454, Jallad to Hughes, Jerusalem, March 8, 1948.

25 Ibid. Translation from Italian.

26 Here, Jallad was probably referring to Imil Ghuri, secretary of the AHC.

27 Originally from Bayt Sahur and ordained in 1937, ‘Ayyad (1910–2000) was appointed president of the ecclesiastical court of Jerusalem in 1945.

28 Ibid.

to stand alongside the Muslim population in opposition to partition. ‘Ayyad initially signed the declaration and appended the qualification “representative of the Latin Patriarchate”. ‘Aqiqi did the same thing for the custody, without the formal approval of the *custos*.²⁹

The text of the document, addressed to “all world religious and political bodies”, took a clear stance “in unequivocal terms” against the plan for partition, judging it “a violation of the sacredness of the Holy Land which, by its nature and history, is indivisible and represents an encroachment on the natural rights of the Arabs, the people of the country”.³⁰ The declaration never directly referred to the Jewish population in Palestine or the Zionist leaders by name; but reading between the lines, the Christian representatives discounted any possibility for mediation or compromise with their Jewish counterparts and only recognized the Arabs as the legitimate inhabitants of the region.

On the other hand, there was explicit mention of the Muslims, assuring that all the Christian denominations were “in complete agreement, in principle and deed, with their Moslem Brethren in their endeavour to resist and ward-off any violation of their rights or any encroachment on their country”.³¹ The intent of the declaration is clearly apparent in these words; it was to serve to consolidate the internal Arab (Muslim and Christian) front, reassuring and placating the Muslim element’s fears and rancor toward the Christian side, which had been accused of mostly voting for partition because of the support they received from the Western powers. On this point, according to Jallad, the document had the desired effect. Writing to Hughes, Jallad – probably to justify the patriarchate’s involvement in such a politically sensitive declaration – stated that “this collective declaration produced the best impression throughout the country; it calmed the spirits and increased good relations” between Christians and Muslims.³² This document also came to the attention of the consular representatives in Jerusalem, who interpreted the text for what it was: clear support for the Arabs from the Christian world of Palestine. Its impact was increased by

29 In the copy of the declaration contained in ASCTS, Gori’s manuscript note reads “method of action disapproved”. See ASCTS, *ACC, Miscellanea, Guerra arabo-israeliana, Attività di gruppi o individui* (March 3–July 27, 1948), “Statement by the Committee of the Christian Union of Palestine Addressed to All World Religious and Political Bodies,” text in Arabic with English translation, Jerusalem, March 3, 1948. The text of the appeal is also contained in AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 42, 5, fols. 451–53; APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, 2, and in AWCC, 301.5694.1, 4.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Jallad to Hughes, copy, Jerusalem, March 8, 1948, translation from Italian.

the fact that Faris al-Khury, speaker of the Syrian Parliament, read the appeal at the session of the UN Security Council at Lake Success on March 24.

At the same time, in the United States, Clarence Pickett and Rufus Jones, the leaders of the American Friends Service Committee, took action with regard to events in Palestine; their requests did not favor a specific political option but instead stipulated a “treaty of God” for the city of Jerusalem.³³ The two Quaker representatives sought to convince bishops and representatives of all the Christian denominations (including Thomas McMahon, the CNEWA secretary), and also Jews and Muslims, to comply with their petition. In Jerusalem, Rabbi Yitshak Herzog welcomed the appeal. On March 28, some religious leaders in Jerusalem read it as part of a day of prayer for peace in the region. Other appeals followed, from internationally recognized intellectuals like Martin Buber, Judah Leon Magnes, Albert Einstein and Leo Baeck, aimed at inducing the Palestinian and Zionist leaders to enter mediation.

From February to March, then, Christian representatives undertook various initiatives for a ceasefire, but without any real coordination. These efforts had an extremely limited impact; there was no end in sight to the hostilities. At the same time, from the first months of the conflict, these initiatives revealed the judgments and convictions emerging in the Christian world with respect to the situation.

1.2 *The Zionist Counteroffensive (March–May 1948)*

The spring of 1948 marked a turning point in the civil war. A new exodus of Palestinian refugees got underway in late March, with the displacement of around a hundred thousand Arabs. These were mostly members of the bourgeois upper middle classes of Jaffa, Haifa, the Old City of Jerusalem and the Jordan valley, who, seeing the conflict escalating, relocated to Nazareth, Nablus and Bethlehem. Most of them considered the flight from their homes to be temporary, expecting to be able to return once the political situation had stabilized; many were Christian families, including Latin Catholics. The first signs of this movement of people had been visible since the beginning of December, in the days immediately after the UN vote of November 29. The letters from priests and the correspondence of the patriarchal hierarchy make it possible

33 The AFSC was a charitable Quaker organization which, in previous decades, had allied against antisemitic persecution, collaborating with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. On the Quakers' efforts at mediation in the first phase of the Arab-Israeli conflict, see Nancy Gallagher, *Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Dilemmas of NGO Humanitarian Activism* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 29–33.

to determine when the first departures of Latin Catholics took place, amid all the confusion of the situation from December 1947 onwards.

The fear strongly harbored by Ben-Gurion that Zionist defeats could compromise the international community's support for the formation of a state, along with concern that the Arab attacks could constitute the premise for an invasion by the armies of neighboring countries, convinced the Zionist leadership to switch to the offensive.³⁴ There were several reasons for this change. At the end of March, Arab soldiers had launched heavy attacks on Haganah troops, which seemed to forebode an imminent defeat. After three defeats in the zone of Jerusalem, on March 27 there was an intense clash along the road at Gush 'Etsiyon, between Bethlehem and Hebron. In addition to these battles, there were daily incidents in Galilee. The siege of Jerusalem, the difficulty in supplying necessities to the Jewish quarters and the danger of a massacre of the Jewish population convinced the Zionist leaders of the necessity to change their military strategy.³⁵

Ben-Gurion's chief concerns centered on the US position. Some declarations by President Truman in March were viewed as holding open the possibility of renegotiating partition in favor of a new mandate, this time by the United Nations, to begin on May 15. Ben-Gurion was deeply worried at the possible loss of American support. The Zionist leader feared an Arab advance, especially on West Jerusalem, and the blockade of the country's main transport arteries. Accordingly, it was necessary to prepare for change so that, when the British withdrew in mid-May, there would already be a stable scenario that favored Zionist plans.³⁶ The mass arrival of new weapons from Czechoslovakia substantially reinforced Jewish military capacity at a crucial moment.

The principal change in Haganah's military strategy concerned its policy toward the Palestinian civilian population. When hostilities began in late November 1947, Zionist politicians and commanders did not have a clear stance on noncombatants. Up to the end of March 1948, Haganah had generally avoided destroying villages and using violence against Arab civilians. In the weeks that followed, this strategy changed in favor of increasingly resorting to the forced displacement of the Arab population.

This change was linked to the approval, in late March, of Plan Dalet, devised by a group of Zionist functionaries led by Yig'a'el Yadin.³⁷ The plan provided for

34 See Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 65–68.

35 See Morris, *1948: A History*, 108–12.

36 See Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 163.

37 See Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 86–126; Walid Khalidi, "Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine," in "Palestine 1948," special issue, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 1 (1988).

the transfer of “enemy forces” outside of the borders of the State of Israel. The crucial point was the categorization of the Arab civilian population as enemies to be expelled. The implementation of the plan opened the way to the destruction of Palestinian villages and the forced deportation of their inhabitants, and thus, to the mass exodus of refugees. It was put into action at the beginning of April with the decision to destroy the villages closest to the communication points and roads central to the control of the territory, in particular along the roads connecting Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv and Haifa, and Jenin and Haifa.

Plan Dalet found its first expression at the beginning of April with Haganah’s attempt to break the siege of Jerusalem (Operation Nahshon)³⁸ and remove enemy troops and villages along the road connecting the Holy City to Tel Aviv. The battles began at two central points on this road, in the areas of al-Ramla and al-Qastal. On April 9, over a hundred inhabitants of the village of Dayr Yasin, near al-Qastal, west of Jerusalem, were killed by members of the Zionist forces. The village had signed a nonaggression agreement, but its proximity to the village of al-Qastal, where a battle was raging, made Dayr Yasin extremely important from a strategic perspective. The violent massacre of April 9 did not spare women and children. The entire village was effectively destroyed, its buildings blown up. The response to the Dayr Yasin attack was immense, including in the Christian world, where the fear of additional massacres increased.³⁹ Haganah’s new offensive strategy, implemented through a widespread deployment of force, had produced results. The subsequent battles concentrated in the area of Mishmar ha-‘Emek; the Arab villages around this kibbutz were razed to the ground, and the inhabitants fled or were driven away. Many refugees sought safety in the Shifa’amr area, but in late April, they were forced to abandon that village.

The cities, too, were the scene of battles; the first to fall was Tiberias, which, up until a few months previously, had numbered four thousand Arabs and six thousand Jews. Between April 9 and 11, the conflict became ever more violent. On the night of April 16, Haganah launched a decisive attack. In the days that followed, the Arab inhabitants who had not already fled were transferred to

38 See Nathan Krystall, “The Fall of the New City, 1947–1950,” in Tamari, *Jerusalem 1948*, 95–96.

39 For contemporary observers, the events at Dayr Yasin constituted a veritable watershed in the general perception of events in Palestine, and the Christian representatives did not remain indifferent. In October 1948, in a long memorandum addressed to Pius XII, Custos Gori stated that the massacre of Dayr Yasin was the event that had accelerated the flight of the Palestinians from their own homes. ASCTS, ACC, *Carteggio, Segreteria di Stato*, “Pro-memoria sulla Palestina presentato dal P. Custode di Terra Santa al Santo Padre Pio XII,” Rome, October 8, 1948.

Transjordan or in the direction of Nazareth. The Latin Catholics were also expelled. The parish of Tiberias, which had existed since 1932 and was operated by the Franciscans, no longer had any congregants and decided to close, while the *casa nova* sustained damage.

Haifa, too, was targeted in the Zionist assault. The situation came to a head with the AHC's decision to favor the evacuate the city's Palestinian civilians, and the Jewish Karmeli brigade's implementation of Plan Dalet in the city, with the objective of expelling the Arab population. On April 21, after a series of attacks from both sides, the British troops abruptly abandoned their post in the city center. The rush to occupy their vacated positions led to a pitched battle. Haganah troops, well-organized and well-armed, faced the disorder of the Arab militias. The bombardments and the contradictory announcements by the Arab Committee drove the population of Haifa to flee the city in the days that followed. Tens of thousands of people left their homes. The number of congregants of the parish of Haifa, which had existed since 1831 and was operated by the Carmelites, was drastically reduced. Thousands of refugees – many of them Christians – made for the cities to the east, especially Nazareth. In late April and early May, the city's only Franciscan monastery took in hundreds of families.

Following the Zionist conquest of Haifa, the war shifted to Jaffa, the important port in Palestine. The city was already partially emptied of inhabitants, who had fled since the start of hostilities in December 1947. News of the events in Tiberias and Haifa led to another flight. The Zionist assault on Jaffa, which began on April 25, was initially directed at the quarter of Manshiyya. This was followed by a heavy attack that lasted until April 27 and resulted in the departure of thousands of people. Concerns in London that there would be a repeat of an exodus of the scale of that of Haifa or a massacre like the one at Dayr Yasin obliged the British army to take military action to break the Jewish siege. A nonbelligerence accord was established, which only lasted until mid-May, when Jaffa was occupied by Zionist forces. Here too, the Franciscan parish, founded in 1717, saw a strong decline in the number of congregants, but it remained open.

The news on the battles underway in Tiberias, Haifa and Jaffa, and reports on the situation at Nazareth, which spread like wildfire from one part of Palestine to another, fueled the flight of terrified populations. The refugees that left the coastal plain and the north primarily moved eastward, especially toward the area of Nazareth and the cities of Jenin, Tulkarm and Nablus.

In correspondence with Jallad, Vergani revealed his growing concerns for the situation of the refugees and the uncertain evolution of the conflict. On April 22, the priest wrote to the apostolic administrator that

life was becoming constantly more difficult here; already there are 15,000 refugees and that number is increasing every day; after the tragedy of Tiberias, now it is the turn of Haifa. Where will it all end? Provisions are becoming ever scarcer and prices are rising all the time; one cannot find anything at the market anymore, except for weapons and ammunition ... On Monday I was at Shifa'amr, which is the most dangerous place here, for now ... I'm afraid that if the Arab leadership does nothing decisive in the next days, now, within ten days, the inhabitants of Shifa'amr, Turan, Cana, al-Rayna, Ma'alul, Mujaydil, Jaffa of N[azareth] will all flee here to Nazareth, together with their priests and nuns. May God help us. Let us pray in turn.⁴⁰

While communications became increasingly difficult in Galilee, news of new church appointments came from Rome. On April 24, Pius XII appointed Apostolic Delegate Gustavo Testa as regent of the Latin Patriarchate. In this way, while the future of the patriarchal see remained unclear, its leadership was temporarily merged with that of the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the pope appointed Jallad titular bishop of Menoia and vicar general of the patriarchate.

The urgency in appointing a leader for the diocese, notwithstanding the vacancy in the patriarchal see, was due to the dramatic changes experienced by the local church, and not only affecting the villages and cities where the principal battles of the Arab-Israeli conflict were taking place. Indeed, the arrival of refugees transformed life in the parishes in the months preceding the scheduled date for the end of the British Mandate on May 15. Some churches lost all their parishioners, who had fled the fighting and their destroyed villages, while others were populated with new congregants arriving from various parts of Palestine.

The upheavals in the daily reality of Palestine fueled the concerns of the clergy, as reflected by Domenico Veglio, a priest in Lydda, an important junction on the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. His letters to Jallad clearly reveal the anguish of the Christians and their sense of impending doom. They highlight how the Christian population, too, expected to be displaced or have to flee at any moment: "here on the plain matters are worsening. A general panic pervades the inhabitants, since it is quite possible that one day the Jews

⁴⁰ APLJ, LB-AG, *Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Jallad, Nazareth, April 22, 1948, translation from Italian.

will attack the Arab villages with cannons and aerial bombs. This has already happened in some places ... whoever can, leaves".⁴¹

In villages where the patriarchate's missions were active, priests and clergymen were faced with the question of whether they would stay or leave in the event of an attack. Another question concerned the future of the patriarchal institutions, especially schools: should they be closed? And in the event of an enforced closure, how should the priests behave toward the teachers?

The priests, then, were looking for precise guidance on how to respond and what action to take should the Zionist forces arrive, which was deemed imminent. And they wanted money. If the aid supplies from Rome and the CNEWA were delivered at all, they were very slow in arriving because of lengthy checks at the port of Tel Aviv and blockades on transport. Moreover, the patriarchate had little to spare in terms of funding.

In the run up to May 15, the apprehension increased about the impending British withdrawal. Arab villages continued to fall, fueling the refugee flow. The Zionist forces consolidated their control of the villages in eastern Galilee and conquered the city of Safed during Operation Yiftah. In early May, Zionist troops arrived at Baysan (Bet She'an), an important town with a Latin Catholic community. The village was bombarded on May 12. In the days that followed, the inhabitants who had not yet fled were expelled; the Christian minority headed for Nazareth. The priest, Hanna al-Nimri, forced to leave the village after the population was expelled, was taken prisoner, but in late May, he managed to head to al-Husn, Transjordan, where his family lived. The Latin parish of Baysan, which was founded in 1920, thus ceased to exist.

From the humanitarian perspective too, the population was in extremis. Jerusalem had been under siege for some weeks and expected a further escalation of violence. Jallad, in despair, wrote to the internuncio: "We are cornered, and I do not know if we will manage to make some impression; I have suggested to the Vicar of Amman to be able to pay the masters to make some loan little by little; I do not know if he will be able. The BOXES OF SUPPLIES are blockaded at Tel Aviv!!!"⁴²

Meanwhile, Jerusalem was filling up with refugees. In the city, "the inhabitants of the quarters outside the walls are taking refuge within the walls; in the Patriarchate, too, we have several poor families ... The future is very obscure and not very reassuring."⁴³ Religious communities whose buildings had been

41 APLJ, *Paroisses, Lydda*, Veglio to Jallad, Lydda, April 20, 1948, translation from Italian.

42 AVV, *ADAGP*, 9, 42, 5, fol. 455, Jallad to Hughes, Jerusalem, May 5, 1948, translation from Italian, capitals in the original.

43 Ibid.

occupied or destroyed took refuge in the seat of the patriarchate within the Old City, near Jaffa Gate. The Carmelite priests of Katamon also moved into patriarchal structures after the quarter was the target of a Haganah attack that led to the Zionist occupation of the area on May 1.

Church administrative buildings were also hit. When the palace of the Apostolic Delegation on Mount Zion was bombarded, Testa was forced to abandon his palace and take refuge in Bethlehem and Amman.⁴⁴ The attack on the delegation profoundly affected the mood among the patriarchal hierarchy; no one felt safe anywhere anymore, especially in Jerusalem.

1.3 *May 14–15: Two Days, Multiple Narratives*

Just days before the scheduled British withdrawal on May 15, on May 12–13, Jaffa, which had been subjected to extensive bombardment, fell to Zionist troops. Chaos ensued. Among the Catholics in Palestine, both members of the hierarchy and simple parishioners, the sole remaining hope was for the Holy See to intervene in defense of the Christian refugees and of those who, although they had stayed in their homes, were terrified at the possibility of further battles and expulsions. There was also great concern about the protection of Jerusalem and the Holy Places. As Jallad made clear to Cardinal Tisserant, “we are blockaded and without mail; we cannot communicate with the missions ... The situation is deteriorating ... The inner part of the City is full of refugees from the outer part of the City; we have them in the Patriarchate too.”⁴⁵ Regarding the movement of the population, “Refugees from Jaffa and Haifa have entered Transjordan and the villages of Palestine; our houses and schools are open to refugees. The future is menacing.”⁴⁶

Jerusalem’s religious orders received civilians of all faiths; the White Fathers accommodated over two hundred people, Palestinian Christians and Muslims, who had had to abandon their quarters when they came under attack. The Melkite seminary of St. Anne was occupied by displaced families.⁴⁷ The Fathers of Sion, in particular, took in Jews fleeing Arab bombardment.

44 The attack on the Apostolic Delegation occasioned the loss of part of its documentary archive. A note inside the archive of the Apostolic Delegation, deposited in the AAV, states that the cards relating to the administration of Valerio Valeri were not present in the trunk or the two suitcases in which Hughes placed the documents to protect them during the Palestine War; perhaps they were forgotten in the palace and then destroyed by Transjordanian or Israeli troops. AAV, *ADAGP*, 1, 1, 2, fol. 38.

45 APLJ, *FC-AG*, *S. Congregatio Pro E. Orientali, 1919–1953*, Jallad to Tisserant, copy, Jerusalem, May 4, 1948, translation from Italian.

46 *Ibid.*

47 See AMGMA, *GEN* 375, *Maison Mère et Annexes Jérusalem (2): Correspondance reçue de Jérusalem (1947–53)*, doc. 375049, Portier to Durrieu, Jerusalem, May 4, 1948.

As the fighting in Jerusalem became ever more violent, the Fathers of Sion in Ratisbonne Monastery, located next to the Jewish Agency building, in the Rehavyah neighborhood, opened their doors to around three hundred Jews who had been left homeless.⁴⁸ In particular, the priests received civilians from the 'Etsiyon block, which had been attacked by the Arab Legion earlier that month. The monastery also put its own well at the disposal of the local inhabitants, at a time when water had become scarce in Jerusalem.

Events in the middle of the month marked a new turning point in the conflict. On the afternoon of May 14, the entire Zionist leadership, with the exception of Chaim Weizmann, met in Tel Aviv Museum. Ben-Gurion took to the podium to read the declaration that would mark the official founding of the State of Israel. After referring to the biblical origins of the Jewish people and their ties to the "Land of Israel" and summarizing the history of Zionism, Ben-Gurion focused on the theme that another Shoah must never be allowed to happen, and concluded by declaring that the State of Israel had been born. The news was accompanied by the near-immediate recognition of the new state, on the same day, by the United States and the Soviet Union. While the Jewish population celebrated, Ben-Gurion was conscious that the Arab reaction would be immediate and that the founding of Israel would lead to a new escalation of conflict.

At the end of April, the leaders of the Arab League countries, established in 1945, had met in Amman and agreed on the invasion of the new state. The attack by an Arab League coalition composed of armies from Transjordan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, with two contingents from Saudi Arabia and Yemen, got underway the day after Ben-Gurion's declaration. As the Arab armies entered the country, the battle in Jerusalem flared up. At the moment that the British withdrew, the 'Etsiyoni brigade launched Operation Kishon, with the objective of occupying the Arab quarters within the Old City.⁴⁹ On the morning of May 15, Israeli troops occupied the Assumptionist monastery of Notre-Dame de France, the convent of the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix, and the Italian and French hospitals. Most of the Reparatrix sisters initially

48 See "Refuge at Ratisbonne," *Palestine Post*, September 12, 1948. An account of these weeks is contained in a letter from a Jewish couple, Gisèle and Shlomo Arazi, in which they wrote: "The last six months in Jerusalem have been terrible, and it is a miracle of the good Lord that we have all escaped, for hundreds of our friends in the City have fallen, women and children ... St Peter of Sion has some scratches and scars that show that we were in a battlefield ... Hundreds of refugees are living with them [the priests of Notre-Dame de Sion], who have lost their homes." א"י, 2686, *Père P. de Condé*, Gisèle and Shlomo Arazi to Fr. de Condé, copy, Tel Aviv, November 30, 1948.

49 See Morris, 1948: *A History*, 162–63.

took refuge in the patriarchate and then in the convent of the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Sion, while the rest found quarters in the French hospital, where the Assumptionists had also taken refuge.

The next day, the Israeli army launched an offensive on the Old City. Fearing the loss of such a crucial area as the Old City, which contained important Holy Places and religious buildings, King ‘Abdullah sent a new contingent. The battle that followed was the fiercest yet, with the Old City and the Jewish Quarter coming under heavy bombardment. On May 18, the Israeli troops occupied some religious buildings on Mount Zion: the residence of the Apostolic Delegation, the abbey of the German Benedictine monks at the Dormition, the Franciscan monastery, and the Comboni Missionary Sisters convent. The Israeli combatants fired on the city from these positions.⁵⁰

In the days that followed, the fighting remained intense, and on May 28, the Arab Legion got the upper hand and succeeded in conquering the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. The violent clashes claimed many civilian victims and damaged numerous religious buildings inside the walls, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Some patriarchate priests and clergy from several other congregations were also wounded or killed in the fighting.

Haganah's occupation of some religious buildings fueled the anti-Jewish resentment of various members of the Latin Church, especially those of Arab origin. Jallad presented the battle in Jerusalem as an example of the Arabs' respect for Christians and the Holy Places, whereas he saw the Israelis as showing disdain for the Christian world and its symbols, including the Vatican flag. Writing to Sim'an, the vicar of Transjordan in Amman, he described the events of those days from the patriarchate's palace. Jallad hastened to affirm that the Arab troops had avoided the destruction of Jerusalem: "The Holy City, within the walls, has been the target of continuous fire from the Jews, and, had the Arabs not arrived in time to defend it, it would have been destroyed by the Jews."⁵¹

50 See APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946-1953*, Jallad to Sim'an, manuscript letter in Arabic, Jerusalem, May 28, 1948 and AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 55, 10, fols. 384-85, "Informazioni prese dalla lettera del Rev.mo Mgr. Gélat scritta al Vicario Latino di Amman, in data 28 maggio 1948," Amman, May 30, 1948. Sim'an responded to this letter the next day, updating Jallad on the situation of the Christians in Transjordan.

51 AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 55, 10, fols. 384-85, "Informazioni prese dalla lettera del Rev.mo Mgr. Gélat scritta al Vicario Latino di Amman, in data 28 maggio 1948," translation from Italian. In one of the reports that followed (one of the few in Arabic), Sim'an affirmed the necessity for the Catholic world to publicly acknowledge the respect displayed by the Arab troops. See APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946-1953*, Sim'an to Jallad, Amman, June 1, 1948.

On the other side, Jewish leaders appealed to the pope to denounce the Arab attacks: in a telegram to Pius XII, Yitshak Herzog and Me'ir Hay 'Uzi'el, chief rabbis of Israel, enumerated the Arab damages against Christian churches and monasteries, appealing the pontiff to "do put end [to] these incredible barbarities".⁵²

Despite the heavy losses it suffered in Jerusalem, in late May Haganah recorded a series of victories in the course of Operation Ben-'Ami, aimed at annexing western Galilee to the new State of Israel. On May 18, there was an assault on the city of Acre, where some of the refugees who had fled Haifa had taken refuge. The attack on Acre caused a new wave of evacuations and violence. The city's parish, operated by the Franciscans since 1692, also suffered damage and was left with only a few congregants. The almost daily entries in Franciscan Albert Rock's chronicle of the time⁵³ describe a Palestinian leadership in disarray,⁵⁴ a sense of betrayal on the part of the Arab population, an attempt at mediation by various clergy together with some shaykhs and notables, who ran the risk of being branded as collaborators by their own side,⁵⁵ battles and the surrender of Acre.

The third objective in this phase of combat, after Jerusalem and Galilee, was Latrun. The strategic centrality of these two cities was due to the importance the Arab Legion placed on controlling the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The goal was to blockade the supply of arms to the Zionist forces, which were trying to occupy Jerusalem.

1.4 *The Bees of Latrun*

Situated in a small village midway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, near ancient Emmaus, the Trappist monastery of Latrun stands on a hillside atop of

52 ASS, *ACAES*, *Pio XII*, 2, *Paestina*, 5, fols. 465–66, May 29, 1948.

53 ASCTS, *ACC*, *Miscellanea*, *Guerra arabo-israeliana*, "Cronaca di Acri, P. A. Rock (1948)". This is an extremely interesting source, but one that requires careful treatment. The typescript transcription in Italian probably dates from after the events, even if the text seems to have been composed in 1948–49.

54 "Also our mayor, who spoke for resistance enthusiastically yesterday, has taken off, well supplied with grain and money." *Ibid.*, chronicle for May 11, 1948.

55 "Around 5 p.m. they asked me again to go to the Jews. I refused. There is already talk in the city of betrayal on the part of those who are willing to hold discussions with the Jews. It was difficult for me to bear this silence ... Around 6 p.m. A huge crowd gathered by the monastery wanting to go to discuss with the Jews. I went in search of the only shaykh remaining in the city, Musa *effendi* Tabari, and brought him to the monastery ... in the end a commission was formed for the discussions, comprising me, al-Shaykh Musa; Mithqal Jarrar, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Musulmani al-Husayni; Ahmad 'Abduh, Ahmad Idilbi, and Ahmad al-'Adluni." *Ibid.*, chronicle for May 17, 1948.



FIGURE 2.1 Trappist Monastery, Latrun
APLJ/AEBAF

which is a crusader fortress (fig. 2.1). Like numerous other congregations, the Trappists had arrived in late the nineteenth century. Construction of the modern monastery was completed in 1925. The place had strategic value because of its geographical location; during the British Mandate it was augmented by a detention camp placed at the gate to the monastery and a police station, both built by the British. During the Second World War, the monks took it upon themselves to provide religious services to the soldiers stationed in the area. They also offered aid and spiritual comfort to the Italian and German clergy interned in Rafat and al-Qubayba.

Since the beginning of the war, the clergy in the area had been conscious that, were the conflict to spread, the village and the abbey would become targets. With the announcement of the British withdrawal, the community spent three weeks on high alert. Haganah battalions targeted the monastery with artillery and succeeded in occupying the abbey and the surrounding grove, with the conquest of the whole village as the ultimate objective. In late 1947 and early 1948, incidents multiplied between Arabs and Jews in the area.⁵⁶

56 The events around the monastery of Latrun during the first Arab-Israeli war are described at length in a memoir titled *Histoire de l'abbaye d'el-Latroun par un moine d'el-Latroun (1890-1960)*, conserved in AIY, 2686-2, *Latroun 1890-1965*. Chapter 11 contains a text dated September 1, 1948, that practically comprises a diary of the events of the preceding months of war.

However, despite signs of an imminent escalation of the conflict, the abbot of Latrun noted that “life continues, the community remains calm, construction work continues in slow motion ... We take precautions, but we put ourselves in the hands of divine providence.”⁵⁷

The situation worsened in April, as the belligerents concentrated their troops around the monastery. The fighting on April 20 cut the road between Jerusalem and Latrun. Eight days later, the British abandoned the detention camp, located a kilometer from the monastery, while Arabs and Jews raced to raid it. At the beginning of May, the Zionist forces erected defenses in the area, surrounding the abbey and sowing panic among the Palestinian population. On May 10, Haganah’s occupation of the monastery seemed imminent. According to the monks, Haganah’s conquest that day was prevented by an enormous swarm of bees that attacked the Israelis. The monks cast the episode in a providential light; spread by word of mouth, even decades later the legend holds that “bees saved the monastery”,⁵⁸ providing a strong symbolic image.⁵⁹

Despite the deferral of the occupation of the monastery, the bombardment of it was relentless (fig. 2.2). On the afternoon of May 14, the monks noticed an interminable convoy of three hundred armored vehicles going toward Jaffa; it was the British, who had abandoned both the area and Palestine as a whole. The police station that the British army had operated was immediately occupied by the Arabs. The next day, the Zionist forces entered al-Qubayba, four kilometers from the monastery; the road to Jaffa was also blocked. On May 16, the day after the Arab invasion of Palestine, the monk’s nighttime prayer for Pentecost was accompanied by fusillades and artillery.⁶⁰ In the following weeks, the community found itself in the crossfire of the Arab and Israeli troops. At the end of May, the battle ended in defeat for the Israeli army, which incurred heavy losses both strategically and in terms of human life.⁶¹ Latrun would remain the greatest loss for Israel in the Palestine War of and it represented the last phase of Arab dominance in the conflict.

57 Ibid, translation from French. Paul Couvreur, a French monk, was appointed abbot of Latrun in 1937, remaining in the position until 1952.

58 Ibid.

59 Described as if it were a new “plague” of biblical memory, the invasion of the bees at Latrun represents a reversal of the story of Exodus; in the interpretation of the conflict elaborated by some Trappist monks, the Israeli troops took the role of the pharaoh’s army, which should leave if it did not want to incur divine punishment, while the Arabs became the modern-day Jews, to be granted freedom and control of the “Promised Land”. Furthermore, in Deuteronomy (1:44), the Amoraeans who chased the Israelites out of their territory are compared to a swarm of bees.

60 Ibid.

61 See Morris, 1948: *A History*, 224–30.



FIGURE 2.2
Damage to Trappist
Monastery, Latrun, 1948
AATL/AEBAF

In these dramatic circumstances, the monks met to consider their options. Provision was made for any monk in danger to take refuge, and a team, composed of younger monks, brought aid to the wounded and extinguished fires. Religious ceremonies in those weeks were punctuated by battles. In one account, a monk recorded the run-up to a truce that would begin in all Palestine on the morning of June 11 and was designed to last 28 days, until July 9:

Since the morning, the sick have been arriving at the dispensary. A little before 8 o'clock, the shells were raining down, the poor people were terrorized; we had to interrupt their care and put everyone in the shelter. No other option than to put them in the basement, close to the community. Some shells fell after 8, showing how unwillingly the fighting stopped.⁶²

In the month of June the Israeli initiatives during the ceasefire would change the fate of the conflict.

1.5 *Mediation Attempts*

Late May also saw fighting on the northern front, where Iraqi troops had been stationed since the end of April, representing the northeastern wing of the Arab Legion. On May 15, the Iraqis attacked the kibbutzim in the Jordan valley near Geshar. After alternating successes between the Iraqis and Israelis, Tsahal troops⁶³ succeeded in driving their enemy back across the Jordan. At

62 AIY, 2686–2, *Latroun, 1890–1965*, memoir titled “Histoire de l’abbaye d’el-Latroun par un moine d’el-Latroun (1890–1960).”

63 Tsahal is the acronym for Tsva’ ha-Haganah le-Yisra’el.

this point, the Arab soldiers decided to go down along the eastern bank of the river. The Israelis then proceeded with a counterattack, with some battalions of the Karmeli and Golani brigades launching an offensive on the city of Jenin. The Israelis succeeded in occupying the center of the city, but a counterattack by Arab troops from Nablus forced Tsahal to retreat. The battle of June 3 left hundreds of dead, mostly Iraqis.

During the march on Jenin, the Israeli army had occupied some villages in an area that contained Latin Catholic communities, including Jalama and Dayr Ghazala. The curate of Jenin, Antun Hihi, wrote to Jallad that “after the disaster of Jenin, the center of several of our little surrounding missions, I find myself compelled to leave my position ... for at Jenin itself my residence was ... destroyed.”⁶⁴ The priest subsequently moved to the small parish of Burkin, southwest of Jenin, but the Israeli troops too made this village “into a fearful target”. “I had to spend part or all of several nights under the trees,” reported Hihi, who eventually decided to move to Nablus.⁶⁵

During these latest events too, one of the most damaging aspects for the Latin Catholics in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine was the substantial silence on the part of the Holy See regarding the fighting. In a letter to Jallad, three priests – Hanna al-Nimri, Zakariyya Shumali and Bishara Farwaji – called for the pope to pronounce on “the atrocity” being committed against Christians and Muslims by the Zionists.⁶⁶

Pius XII expressed himself in his encyclical *Auspicia quaedam* of May 1, 1948.⁶⁷ Recognizing the actions being taken by the international community toward creating a new order between the nations directed at peace after the horrors of the Second World War, the pope underlined the necessity for prayer for the defeat of those who, in his reading of the political situation, were a threat to the realization of this new global asset. The encyclical continued with the proposal for a consecration to the Sacred Heart of Mary and to ask her to intercede for peace, freedom and the prosperity of the church and of the world. In this same text, the pontiff underlined the invitation to pray to the Virgin Mary for world peace and for a solution to the problem in Palestine.

The pope also dealt publicly with the Palestine War in a discourse to the College of Cardinals on June 2. “How could the Christian world look on unconcernedly, or in fruitless indignation,” as Palestine was “trampled by troops of

64 APLJ, *Paroisses, Jenin*, Hul to Jallad, Jerusalem, September 2, 1948.

65 Ibid.

66 APLJ, *Paroisses, Nablus, 1860–1950*, al-Nimri, Shumali and Farwaji to Jallad, February 2, 1948, translation from Arabic.

67 AAS 40 (1948): 169–72.

war and bombed from the air”, Pius asked.⁶⁸ However, Roman Catholic officials in Jerusalem did not consider these pronouncements in any way sufficient. What they were asking for was mediation between the two sides in order to come to a treaty, and many of them in addition sought condemnation of the aggressive actions on the Israeli side.

The papal speech determined the response of Rabbi Yehuda Leyb Fishman, Israel's first Minister for Religious Affairs, who wrote to Pius of being “deeply sensible of the importance of your eloquent appeal against the world's indifference to the bloodshed and suffering in the Holy Land”, but pointed out that “ancient Jewish synagogues have not only been hit ... but have been deliberately destroyed by Arab forces”, while “after the Jewish surrender in the Old City all Moslem Holy Places in Jewish controlled areas have been scrupulously respected.”⁶⁹

Meanwhile within the Latin Church, Jallad's role “in expertise and loyalty,” as Testa also endorsed,⁷⁰ was confirmed by the Holy See with his consecration as bishop, on June 27 in the co-cathedral of the Latin Patriarchate, by Testa, who had just returned to Jerusalem for some days. The war meant the consecration had to be done “in such a hurry”; Internuncio Hughes was not able to participate, and the only other bishop present was the Melkite Bulus Salman, archbishop of Petra and Philadelphia (1932–48), together with Custos Gori and the Trappist abbot Dom Paul Couvreur (fig. 2.3).⁷¹

On the same day as Jallad's consecration, Count Folke Bernadotte, the UN mediator, proposed the basis for a peace accord to the two sides. A truce had been in place since June 1, after months of requests from the international community and the Christian world. On May 29, the UN Security Council had approved a resolution requesting a four-week ceasefire and imposing an arms embargo on both sides. The Israeli failure to take Latrun and Jerusalem and, at the same time, the hopelessness of Arab efforts to turn the conflict in their

68 AAV, *ADAGP*, 11, 49, 6, fols. 142–46: 145, “Allocution of His Holiness Pius XII to the Sacred College,” June 2, 1948, now also in Pius XII, *Discorso al Sacro Collegio nella festività di sant'Eugenio*, June 2, 1948, in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII*, vol. 10 (Vatican City: Poliglotta Vaticana, 1949), 115–22.

69 ASS, *ACAES*, *Pio XII*, 2 *Palestina*, 5, fols. 463–64, Tel Aviv, June 4, 1948.

70 APLJ, *AG*, *Gelat*, 1948–1968, manuscript autograph document by Testa and Patriarchal Chancellor Theodor Maat reporting on Jallad's nomination as vicar general, Jerusalem, June 20, 1948, translation from Italian.

71 APLJ, *LB-AG*, *Délégué Apostolique*, 1943–1955, Jallad to Hughes, copy, Jerusalem, June 30, 1948, translation from Italian.



FIGURE 2.3 Episcopal consecration of Mansur Jallad by Gustavo Testa, June 27, 1948
APLJ/AEBAF

favor, forced both sides to accept the truce. Thus, at the beginning of June, the UN resolution suspending the use of arms went into force.⁷²

Bernadotte worked hard to reach an agreement during the four-week truce. The basis of his text acknowledged the need for a triple recognition: the Arabs had to recognize the newly founded State of Israel; the international community had to recognize the Transjordanian conquest of territory originally seen as part of a future Palestinian state, and the UN partition plan had to be recognized as impracticable and thus renegotiated within the new parameters. Bernadotte's designs for a single, binational state did not find favor with either side.

2 A Summer of Battles

On balance, Israel maintained the upper hand in the first weeks after the Arab invasion; the truce served to consolidate this advantage, reinforced by the massive arrival of new arms for Tsahal troops. Despite the Israeli army's failed assault on Latrun and failure to penetrate Jerusalem, it benefitted from the internal divisions and differing objectives in the Arab camp, which became abundantly clear during the truce. On the opposite side, the Israeli

⁷² On the formulation of the truce, see Morris, *1948: A History*, 264–67.

political and military leadership seized the opportunity to review and reinforce their strategy and, even more importantly, they doubled troop numbers and increased their arsenal with weapons from Czechoslovakia or acquired in the United States and in Western European countries.

The resumption of hostilities did not wait for the end of the 28-day truce on July 9. Egyptian troops broke the ceasefire the day before, in an attempt to penetrate the area near the road connecting Bayt Jibrin and Majdal, in the outskirts of Hebron. As the conflict recommenced, there were several decisive fronts, especially the central line, with battles close to the cities of al-Ramla and Lydda, and the Tsahal operation in Galilee to consolidate its control in the north of the region and to occupy Nazareth, one of the symbolically most important towns of the region.

2.1 *The Israeli Capture of al-Ramla and Lydda*

Lydda, a small town about twenty kilometers from Tel Aviv, had very ancient origins. It was important for Christians because it was the location of the tomb of Saint George, conserved by the Greek Orthodox church in the village. While a Latin patriarchal mission was established in 1857, its presence was actually more recent in origin as it had reopened in 1924 after being closed for a time. Regular religious service was only guaranteed after 1942. Domenico Veglio was the first Latin priest to be permanently based in Lydda, where he moved in early 1945. There was also a community of the Sisters of the Rosary in Lydda. During the Second World War, many soldiers, especially Poles, were detained in the town's chapel.

The town had experienced significant population growth as a result of the nearby railroad station, where trains passed through from Egypt toward the principal cities of Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and, ultimately, the most important European capitals. The connection greatly facilitated contact and exchange between Haifa, Jerusalem and Jaffa. No less significant was the presence of two airports, one civil and the other military.

In the mid-1940s, its population numbered around twenty thousand inhabitants, comprising eighteen thousand Muslims and two thousand Christians. Of these, 250 were Latin Catholics,⁷³ consisting mostly of parishioners native to the place and those who had moved there to work at the railroad station and airport. The mission reestablished by Patriarch Barlassina also included

73 See APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, memorandum titled “Mission de Lydda,” prepared by Fr. Veglio, July 1945. The data is also to be found in the statistics on the patriarchal parishes (updated to December 1946), contained in the appendix to the volume by Perrin, *Centenaire du Patriarcat latin*.

two schools, one for boys and one for girls, which together had around 160 Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim students in 1945. Lydda was one of the poorest parishes in the patriarchate, and over time the rectory had become “a hovel”, not fit for habitation even for the priest himself.⁷⁴ According to Veglio, rivalry between Catholics and Orthodox was particularly strong, and the parish, fearing an increase in “schismatics”, appealed to Barlassina for financial assistance, convinced that the mission had “a good future”.⁷⁵ Al-Ramla, three kilometers away, was a town with a population of about eighteen thousand. Its mission had a longer history than Lydda’s. Established in 1664, it was operated by Franciscans, led by Fr. Giulio Bichi. Its school grew substantially in the 1940s, with male students increasing from 70 to 350. The Roman Catholic communities of Lydda and al-Ramla were located in a decidedly majority Muslim area. Veglio remarked in particular on the rivalry with the Muslims and the Christians of other denominations, voicing his dissatisfaction to Barlassina over the years on the difficulties on developing effective pastoral services.

The projects and the hopes of the priest and his community were wiped out as the fighting between Arabs and Zionists arrived. In early 1948, terror at the prospect of an Israeli attack on the village precipitated the flight of some of its inhabitants. In addition, the two towns had seen their populations increase as a result of the arrival of tens of thousands of refugees, mostly from Jaffa. The communities’ fears proved well-founded. General Yig’al Alon, commander of the Palmach, the elite units of the Haganah, had used the opportunity of the truce in June and July to develop a plan to attack Lydda and al-Ramla, aiming at the military conquest of the areas occupied by the Arab Legion on the road between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. On July 10, Operation Dan got underway, with a huge number of Israeli brigades pitched against the Transjordanian army, led by General Sir John Bagot Glubb.⁷⁶ Ben-Gurion himself had ordered that the two towns be destroyed, sowing panic that would force the collapse of the Arab troops.⁷⁷

Led by Lieutenant Colonel Moshe Dayan, on July 11 the Palmach began an artillery assault on Lydda, encountering no real defense from the Arab

74 APLJ, *Paroisses, Lydda*, typescript memorandum on Lydda by Fr. Veglio, undated.

75 APLJ, *ibid.*, Veglio to an unknown “Eccellenza Reverendissima” from the Congregation for the Oriental Church, Lydda, July 11, 1946.

76 The recent accession and opening by the MECA at St. Antony’s College in Oxford of the papers of British army officer John Bagot Glubb have facilitated new documentary-based studies, like Matthew Hughes, “*The Conduct of Operations: Glubb Pasha, the Arab Legion, and the First Arab-Israeli War, 1948–49*,” *War in History* 26, no. 4 (2019), and Graham Jevon, *Glubb Pasha and the Arab Legion: Britain, Jordan and the End of Empire in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. 104–8.

77 On Operation Dan, see Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 423–36.

Legion, which was stationed some distance away from the town. According to Veglio, the buildings of the Latin Patriarchate were not spared in the bombardment.⁷⁸ The Muslim inhabitants gathered in the mosque, while the Christians sought refuge in the Orthodox church of St. George. More than 250 people were killed in the attack.

On July 12, al-Ramla was captured by the Israeli army. On the same day, a new battle took place in Lydda. This second attack was particularly fierce, with the Israeli troops firing grenades and bazookas at the village, especially the mosque. On the next day, the Israeli troops expelled the population of both towns, forcing them to march about twenty kilometers in the heat, with many children and elderly people dying on route. One estimate puts the number of deaths from the fighting and expulsion at around 1,300.⁷⁹ The population expulsion added to huge number of Palestinian refugees, especially from the cities of Jaffa, Haifa, Safed, Tiberias and Baysan – about a hundred thousand people – who had previously fled to Lydda and al-Ramla themselves, and who now, after the battles of July 11–12, were forced to flee again. Many of them, including the Christian population, headed toward Ramallah and Har Efrayim, and to Transjordan.⁸⁰ Only about a hundred people remained in the town. While the Roman Catholic parishes of Lydda and al-Ramla lost the vast majority of their congregations, they did not close. In the case of Lydda, the church buildings had also been destroyed. The few dozen Christians who stayed celebrated Mass in the homes of some parishioners who lived close to the railroad station.

The conquest of Lydda and al-Ramla took on enormous importance in the evolution of the conflict, which inflicted heavy losses on the Arab side. In addition, Israeli troops also extended the corridor in the direction of Jerusalem, occupying some cities in which Latin Catholics lived. In 'Ayn Karim, whose Roman Catholic parish was served by the Franciscans, the expulsion of the Palestinian inhabitants, initiated in April after the massacre of the neighboring village of Dayr Yasin, took place at the same time as the battles for Lydda and al-Ramla. The Latin Catholic community of the church of St. John the Baptist

78 From the United States, in summer 1949 Count Luigi Criscuolo, Grand Officer of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, writing to Léandre Girard, mentioned that he received a letter from the curate of Lydda requesting funds for the mission destroyed during the war. APLJ, *Paroisses, Lydda*, Criscuolo to Girard, New York, August 23, 1949.

79 See Henry Laurens, *La question de Palestine*, vol. 3, *L'accomplissement des prophéties (1947–1967)* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 144–45.

80 See Pierre Médebielle, *Birzeit. Histoire d'une localité et de sa mission latine dans la montagne d'Ephraïm* (Jerusalem: Patriarcat Latin, 1976), 85–87.

was reduced from 256 to around ten, mostly women and elderly.⁸¹ While these events were underway, the Israeli offensive moved to attack one of the most important centers of Galilee and of Christianity: Nazareth.

2.2 *The Warfare in Nazareth*

For months, thousands of refugees had fled to the town of Nazareth. The immeasurable growth of its population made it difficult to provide aid to the refugees and increased fears of an attack by Zionist forces. From that spring, the news reaching Galilee had become particularly dramatic. Vergani wrote to Jallad that “today Nazareth has more than thirty-three thousand inhabitants – and those are the registered ones; and every day there are hundreds and hundreds that arrive from all directions”,⁸² The situation came to a head after the truce in mid-July 1948, when the Israeli Operation Deḳel targeted the Arab Legion in western Galilee, where the majority of its troops were stationed, and in particular, the Nazareth area.

The attack on the town was preceded by the occupation of some surrounding villages. Some of these had Christian inhabitants and Latin Catholic parishes. One was Shifa’amr, a mixed village inhabited by Muslims, Druze and Christians of various denominations. The Latin mission was founded in 1879; in 1946, the small community numbered ninety congregants. There was also a religious community of the Ladies of Nazareth, which ran a school in Shifa’amr attended by students from various rites. In those wartime months, the priest, Fr. Marc Dalmedico, a convert from Judaism, feared he would fall victim to Arab attacks.⁸³ Here too, the population had been on high alert since the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli War; since April, hundreds of Palestinian refugees from western Galilee had poured into the area around Shifa’amr. Israel’s aim to occupy the village was part of its overall Nazareth mission.

The fate of Shifa’amr was linked to an Israeli-Druze pact, with the village at the center of a surrender negotiation between the Druze leadership and the Israeli military command.⁸⁴ A Druze-Zionist alliance was established in the

81 ASCTS, *Status descriptivus*, 1951, 99.

82 APLJ, LB-AG, *Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Jallad, Nazareth, April 22, 1948, translation from Italian.

83 As Vergani wrote, “Fr. Marc [Dalmedico] is very excited; the children insult him in the street and he can no longer leave the house; he has already packed his things and requests to be replaced, saying that in any case, he can do little for the parish, given his origins, in the current predicaments and general state of excitement.” Ibid.

84 The events surrounding the conquest of Shifa’amr by the Israeli forces are among the most studied in the historiography of the first Arab-Israeli war. See, in particular, the fundamental contributions of Laila Parsons, *The Druze between Palestine and Israel, 1947–49* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), and “The Druze and the Birth of Israel,” in *The War*

expectation that the Druze would respond to the Israeli attack with a feigned defense that would enable a swift capture of Shifa'amr by Tsalal forces. In exchange, the Israeli army undertook not to expel the Druze citizens. The agreement was implemented; Shifa'amr was conquered bloodlessly on July 13–14, although bombs struck the convent of the Ladies of Nazareth, damaging it. The small Latin Catholic community remained in the village.

Mujaydil was another village that was attacked in the course of this operation. Like Shifa'amr, it had a Latin Catholic component to its population, which had a local parish, opened in 1904 and operated by the Franciscans. Before the conflict, the village had a population of about two thousand people, more than half of them Muslim, with the rest comprising Orthodox and Latins. During the war, control of Mujaydil enabled the Arabs to command the road that connected some important Jewish colonies, especially between Nahal and al-Afula, fundamental for east-west communications of the troops moving toward the conquest of Nazareth. In mid-July, Zionist forces attacked and occupied Mujaydil. Writing after the events, Italian religious reported that the village had under bombardment for some weeks and other religious buildings had also been hit.⁸⁵ The Israeli attack of July 15–16 destroyed large areas of Mujaydil. Its inhabitants were expelled; some of them went to Nazareth, where they were received by the Franciscan casa nova in the city.

Nazareth itself was the Israeli forces' next objective. The news from the neighboring villages terrorized the population of the town and alarmed the notables. The Israeli command was aware of its symbolic importance for the entire Christian world, and they knew that they could not deploy the violence that they had used on neighboring villages. Ben-Gurion himself gave the order not to strike the religious symbols of Nazareth.

Both sides – the Israeli military and the Arab notables – shared fears of a bloody battle, and the evident superiority of the Israeli forces over a volunteer corps mustered by the increasingly overstrained troops of the Arab League drove the two sides to seek an accord. On July 16, Zionist forces entered the

for Palestine. In her studies, Parsons deconstructs Morris's thesis on the Israeli-Druze accord; for a presentation of Morris's interpretation, see Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 415–18.

85 "On the night of July 3–4, a bomb dropped from a Jewish airplane was let fall on our school building"; in the days after July 16, Israeli soldiers visited the Sister and the priest of Mujaydil in search of weapons, while "there were a few Arabs from the village, old and sick, and ... nothing else". The soldiers damaged and requisitioned "all the things deposited there by our Christians and by some Muslim family ... wardrobes, mirrors, mattresses, domestic utensils, provisions." ASCTS, ACC, *Miscellanea, Guerra arabo-israeliana, Rapporti di religiosi* (August 12, 1948–January 22, 1949), Fra Pietro Tusa and Sr. M. Sebastiana, Mujaydil, August 12, 1948, translation from Italian.

town. The surrender was almost immediate, with scores of inhabitants abandoning their homes in panic. The Christian clergy stayed in Nazareth, as did most of the refugees who had fled there from the fighting. The Franciscan *casa nova* was the primary recipient of refugees; since the eve of the surrender of Nazareth and on the day itself, the monastery opened its doors to thousands of people of any religion. "In less than two hours" the Franciscan school was emptied of furniture to make room for about thirty families. Apart from two Christian families who arrived that night from Tiberias, all the rest were Muslim.⁸⁶

The religious congregations and the priests of the patriarchate made great efforts to accommodate the refugees. Besides the aid supplied by Belgian bishops, coordinated by a young priest, Léon Naveau, who had earmarked Nazareth for funds, the existing foundations and orders had mobilized before the Israeli occupation. The Franciscans contributed to these initiatives: the custody monastery made various locations available to the foundation created by the Belgian bishops to be used as depots. Further, the Franciscans took care of the sick and of malnourished children, seeking the pro bono assistance of doctors. The Franciscan Third Order prepared a center for aid distribution. The number of refugees "of every rite" in receipt of aid from the Franciscans of Nazareth in those dramatic months "climbed to 6,417".⁸⁷ Over four hundred refugees from Mujaydil and surrounding villages were housed in the orphanage of the Sisters of Jesus the Adolescent.

Vergani was a key player among the Latin Catholics at that time in Nazareth. Barlassina had transferred the priest there in June 1946, nominating him patriarchal vicar of Galilee. The experience he acquired in Nazareth in the two previous years was of great value in July 1948. When the town went "into torment", abandoned by the Arab troops and surrounded by Israeli battalions, he sought to ensure that his parishioners were guaranteed decent living conditions.⁸⁸ The priest, "always in the breach",⁸⁹ committed himself to helping the foundation of the Belgian humanitarian mission to Nazareth. In the summer of 1948, Vergani also undertook to ensure that by autumn, the Catholic schools would reopen.

86 In the following years, Giacinto Faccio, Custos from 1950 to 1955, described the period of the surrender of Nazareth. See AAV, *ADAGP*, 17, 68, 2, fols. 22–25, Faccio to Massignon, copy, September 10, 1951, translation from Italian.

87 Ibid.

88 See Pierre Médebielle, "Mgr Antoine Vergani (1905–1960). In Memoriam," *Jérusalem: Le Moniteur diocésain du Patriarcat latin* 26, nos. 3–4 (1960).

89 Ibid. Translation from French.

The fall of Nazareth assumed a powerful symbolic significance. The town's importance and value for all of Christianity attracted worldwide Christian attention to the Israeli-Palestinian war, investing the conflict with a level of publicity it had not received in the preceding months. For this reason, Vergani knew that his voice would be heard much more.

A few days after the conquest of Nazareth, Louis Massignon published an article titled "Nazareth et nous, Nazareens, Nasara" (Nazareth and us, Nazarenes, Nasara) in the important French Christian journal *Témoignage chrétien*, republished in October by the periodical *Vie franciscaine*.⁹⁰ In this article, the French orientalist presented a heartfelt denunciation of the silence and disinterest which, in his eyes, "Western Christianity" had shown toward the fate of the Holy Places, the Christians in the region and the town of Nazareth. According to Massignon, the European Christian world was in fact to blame for having "betrayed" the Palestinian Christians with respect to the advance of Zionist forces, especially in the city of the Virgin. The centrality assigned to Nazareth served Massignon's chosen rhetoric of bringing together Christianity and Islam in an anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist capacity. Ultimately, he demonstrated the sort of response that news of the conquest of Nazareth could arouse in a European observer, albeit one with very close ties to the Arab world, and what firm ideas and images could be evoked by Tsalal's entry into one of the most important cities of Christianity.

2.3 *"Diabolically Desecrated": Accusations of Profanation*

On the night of July 17, 1948, the Israeli troops also occupied the village of Rafat. Bordering a Jewish colony, it was very close to two more. The patriarchate owned an estate of about 1,200 hectares in the village, which also had two monasteries and a sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady Queen of Palestine, which Barlassina had built in the 1920s. According to Albino Gorla, parish priest of Rafat since 1937, after the beginning of conflict in November 1947, the religious community, comprising three priests and nine nuns, all of them Italians, had opted for "the strictest neutrality" and had not suffered particular harm.⁹¹ Nonetheless, the situation continued to escalate. Arab forces used the wall surrounding the presbytery as a vantage point to shoot at Israeli convoys, which provoked a violent response from Tsalal. The priests' residence became the target of machine-gun fire and aerial bombardment. On July 13–14, the Israeli

90 The text is contained in Louis Massignon, *Opera Minora* (Beirut: Dar al Maaref, 1963), 3:490–93.

91 ISA, G/7/5805, Gorla to Ya'akov Herzog of the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, Tisserant and Testa, Dayr Rafat, December 12, 1948, translation from Italian.

army occupied the neighboring village of Sar'a, where the patriarchate also owned land. The conquest of Sar'a drove the inhabitants of Dayr Rafat into fear as well, with most of them deciding to flee. Fifteen dependents of the patriarchate chose to take refuge in the two monasteries with their families.⁹²

On the night of July 17–18, Israeli soldiers entered the two monasteries. In his correspondence, Gorla emphasized their “smiles and comments in the dormitory of the Sisters at the sight of the crucifixes, crowns of thorns, and sacred images”. A few days after the occupation of Dayr Rafat, on July 21, the Israeli soldiers assembled the Palestinians who had found refuge in the monastery and took away seven men from among them; “despite all our efforts we could not get any news on these men,” Gorla recounted. On the following day, Chaim Wardi, advisor to Ya'akov Herzog in the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs,⁹³ arrived at Dayr Rafat to announce that the army intended to occupy both the two patriarchal monasteries and the buildings attached to them. The priests objected to this plan and unsuccessfully requested that the military contact Testa, the patriarchal regent, regarding ecclesiastical property. On July 24, “without any warning, numerous vehicles arrived with soldiers and ‘soldieresses’; they had come to occupy the two monasteries etc.... The order to evacuate homes within two hours was peremptorily given.”⁹⁴ The rest of the Arab population of Rafat and Sar'a had fled in the meantime.

Taking a strong anti-Israeli stance, Vergani circulated some reports he had prepared among the diplomatic representatives of the principal powers involved in the region, in which he denounced the occupations of religious structures by the Israeli army and protested against some acts of violence – defined as “desecrations” – they had committed.⁹⁵ Vergani's documents, disseminated through the press, evoked a strong response in Europe and the United States,

92 Ibid.

93 Since the 1930s, Wardi (1901–75) had tried to bring about a rapprochement between the Catholic Church and the Zionist leadership. See USHMMA, *Archive of the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem and Palestine*, RG-76.003, Serafino Mazzolini to Barlassina, al-Zamalik, January 22, 1934. Ya'akov Herzog (1921–72), son of Rabbi Yitshak and head of the Christian communities department at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, oversaw intense efforts to establish early relations between Israel and the Holy See after 1948.

94 ISA, G/7/5805, Gorla to the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Oriental Congregation and Testa, Dayr Rafat, December 12, 1948, translation from Italian.

95 See ASDMAE, *Affari Politici (1946–1950)*, *Palestina*, 2, typescript report in Italian from Vergani on his visit of July 22, 1948 to the religious institutions in the district of Tiberias, July 27, 1948. Vergani sent another report, dated August 15, 1948, on the situation of the religious communities. This document was widely disseminated by and quoted in the European, Israeli and Arab press. A copy of the text is located in ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: affari generali*, 457/48, 1, doc. 87.

receiving particular attention from the US episcopate, which was paying close attention to the events in the region. Cardinal Spellman had received a copy of the letters from Latin and Melkite priests of Jaffa and of texts from the patriarchal vicar of Galilee. The Melkite vicar Gabriel Abu Sa'da had written to the archbishop of New York appealing for his intervention against the "abominable profanations" conducted by the Israeli army against Catholic structures.⁹⁶ Spellman's response came by way of action from the CNEWA; McMahon sent an appeal to the UN secretary-general, Trygve Lie, requesting that the UN establish an inquiry into "criminal acts against twelve Latin Catholic institutions in the north of Palestine".⁹⁷ McMahon's text to Lie was immediately published by various international newspapers, triggering an Israeli reaction. Elyahu Ben-Horin, a prominent member of the American Zionist Emergency Council, accused the CNEWA secretary of "atavistic antisemitism".⁹⁸

From Haifa, Fr. Pierpaolo Podagrosi, writing to the Custos, denounced the damage inflicted by Israeli soldiers on the Franciscan hospice: "all that is most sacred to the hearts of Christians was diabolically desecrated."⁹⁹ There were also protests at the army's actions from Dayr Rafat. A series of letters addressed to the Ministry of Religious Affairs denounced the behavior of the Israeli soldiers toward the patriarchate's monastery. Once again, Gorla was behind these denunciations.¹⁰⁰ On September 14, 56 days after the village's occupation, the village itself was blown up, while the convents were evacuated in November and the priests forced to leave.

2.4 *On the Frontline: the Conflict Around Notre-Dame de France*

Following the first truce, Jerusalem remained a key theatre in the fighting between the Israeli army and Arab troops. After the Jewish Quarter of the Old City surrendered to the Arab Legion on May 28, the city was split in two: west Jerusalem, on one side, was in Israeli hands, while the eastern part and the

96 AANY, ACNEWA, Abu Sa'da to Spellman, Jerusalem, August 16, 1948.

97 AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Trygve Lie, New York, August 20, 1948. Here, McMahon quoted Vergani, who spoke of the monasteries and parishes "in the north of Palestine": the more-or-less conscious refusal to use the term "State of Israel" in these documents and in much of the correspondence of the patriarchal clergy after 1948 is noticeable here, also because of the absence of recognition by the new state on the part of the Vatican.

98 The comments were reported in AANY, ACNEWA, memorandum for Cardinal Spellman from McMahon, New York, August 24, 1948.

99 ASCTS, ACC, *Miscellanea, Guerra arabo-israeliana, Rapporti di religiosi* (August 12, 1948–January 22, 1949), Podagrosi to Gori, Haifa, August 29, 1948, translation from Italian.

100 See Maria Chiara Rioli, "The 'New Nazis' or the 'People of our God'? Jews and Zionism in the Latin Church of Jerusalem, 1948–1962," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 68, no. 1 (2018): 90–91.



FIGURE 2.4 Notre-Dame de France, late nineteenth–early twentieth century
AAAJ/AEBAF

area within the walls was under Arab control.¹⁰¹ The battle to take positions on the border between the two zones lasted several months. Some religious buildings were at the center of the struggle, putting their religious inhabitants in the crossfire of the two sides. One of the most important of these positions was certainly the Assumptionists complex of Notre-Dame de France, north of the New Gate (fig. 2.4).

Since its foundation at the end of the nineteenth century as part of France's diplomatic ambitions in Jerusalem, Notre-Dame de France had been one of the principal places to receive pilgrims to the Holy City for decades, and thus represented a privileged observatory for the sociopolitical transformations in Palestine.¹⁰² Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Assumptionist community had pondered the sequence of events and attested to the fears of part of the European Catholic population in Jerusalem, faced, first, with the prolonged decline of the Ottoman Empire and, later, with the institution of the Mandate, and finally the escalating conflict between Arabs and Jews. In the course of the war of 1948, its position on the border between the Arab and Jewish sectors, a no man's land delineated in November of that year, put the Notre-Dame de France complex at the center of the fighting for the conquest of the city. The war split the community of Assumptionists in Jerusalem in two. Notre-Dame de France and St. Louis hospital fell within the

101 For a historical reconstruction of the events and transformations undergone by Jerusalem in the course of the Palestine War, see Tamari, *Jerusalem 1948*.

102 See Dominique Trimbur, "Une présence française en Palestine: Notre-Dame de France," *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem*, no. 3 (1998).



FIGURE 2.5 Salon of the French Consulate in Jerusalem, 1948
APRN/AEBAF

new state, while the clergy of St. Peter in Gallicantu were in the territory controlled by the Arab Legion.

Notre-Dame de France witnessed the drama of the conflict at close quarters. One of the priests, Pascal Saint-Jean – who would become the community’s superior in 1948 – reported on the course of events with precision, evoking a clear picture of the fighting within the city and of the state of mind of the clergy confined within it. The French complex had already experienced military occupation in 1939, when, at the outbreak of the Second World War, British troops seized it. News of the abandonment of the Assumptionist building by the British army on the night of May 13–14 was received with surprise by Saint-Jean, who saw it as an unexpected and hasty departure. Faced with this situation of great uncertainty, the priest met with the French consul, René Neuville, who was trying to prevent attacks on the Jerusalem consulate (fig. 2.5). With Saint-Jean, the consul determined that, in order to safeguard the building, two flags should be hoisted, on the house of the Franciscan priests and on the neighboring St. Louis hospital: a French one and a Red Cross one. Saint-Jean’s conviction that relations between Arabs and Jews were about to deteriorate would be confirmed. On the same day, a group of irregular Arab combatants burst into the area around the hospital.¹⁰³ The occupation was

103 The attempt by the Assumptionist priest to oppose their entry, “making a rampart out of my chest against them repeatedly,” was unsuccessful. AAAJ, *Rapports avec les autorités militaires*, 4, *Correspondance avec les autorités militaires israéliennes, 1947–1948*, account

followed by the sacking of the building by the Arab militia and the first violent exchanges of fire with nearby enemy troops on May 14–15.

On the next morning, Saint-Jean was summoned to the French hospital, where some Israeli officials informed him that they would shortly try to occupy Notre-Dame de France. A few hours later, about fifteen soldiers stormed the Assumptionist house, breaking doors and windows. Inside the building, a firefight broke out between the Arabs, shielded by their positions, and the enemy troops. The fighting lasted for four days. In the middle of the night on May 19, the clergy were awakened by another round of fighting, followed by the Israelis' occupation of the Assumptionist complex. Nine Arab soldiers died in the course of the assault. The southeast wing of the hospital in front of the New Gate was blown up, while the Israeli troops transported sandbags to create redoubts within the building (figs. 2.6–2.7).

The incessant fighting that followed prevented the clergy from leaving their rooms for several days. Saint-Jean was struck in the eye by a piece of shrapnel and, on May 20, Fr. Mamert Vionnet, the community superior, was killed in his study after he was hit by a projectile. His body was buried in a trench in the



FIGURE 2.6 Notre-Dame de France, 1948–49
APRN/AEBAF

by Fr. Saint-Jean to the Israeli authorities of Jerusalem, titled "Occupation et siège de l'Hôtellerie de Notre-Dame de France en Mai et Juin 1948," Jerusalem, June 11, 1948.



FIGURE 2.7 New Gate, barbed-wire fence in no man's land with Notre-Dame de France to the rear, 1948
ASFMMJ/AEBAF

hospital garden, together with the nine Arab soldiers killed on the previous day. The desperate conditions of living under continuous fire from machine guns and artillery forced the clergy to move to the French hospital to avoid further danger.

During those weeks, the Assumptionist community also hosted the Anglican archdeacon of Palestine, Syria and Transjordan (and later archbishop of Jerusalem), Campbell MacInnes, who was wounded during the fighting in Jerusalem. He and his wife went to St. Louis hospital, where he was operated on. Observing through the windows of the French complex, his terrified wife compiled an account that sheds further light on the course of events and how they were perceived by direct observers.¹⁰⁴

At the end of May, the Israelis struck the convent of the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix, destroying most of it, with the aim of preventing the Arab army from using it as a defense post (fig. 2.8). On the night of May 26–27, MacInnes's wife was awoken by the reflection of flames coming from the convent; the Israelis also took over the French hospital, placing sentinels on it with rifles and machine guns. On June 11 came the announcement of a truce, with few

¹⁰⁴ TNA, FO 371/68511, E 8525, copy, sent by Eric Mills to David Balfour, from the diary kept by Mrs. MacInnes in St. Louis hospital during the fighting, 12 typescript pages, strictly confidential, Jerusalem, May 17–June 16, 1948.



FIGURE 2.8 Reparatrix Convent near Notre-Dame de France, 1948
APRN/AEBAF

observers expecting the peace to last. Saint-Jean displayed a realist streak in the face of the ceasefire, asking, “for how long?”¹⁰⁵

In the months that followed, aside from the damage to the entire complex, the Assumptionists were most upset about the desecration of the chapels within the premises. The attacks galvanized hostile sentiments, focusing it even more intently on the Israeli army. The tone and arguments were similar to those used by the patriarchal clergy who had witnessed desecrations in Galilee. As the war drew to a conclusion, Saint-Jean, who wrote that they had “transformed a house of prayer into a W.C.,” summed up the impression of the Catholic population of Jerusalem of Tshah troops.¹⁰⁶

2.5 *Women Within the Walls: the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Sion in the Ecce Homo and Ayn Karim Convents*

The female religious within the Old City also mobilized in the face of the events taking place in Jerusalem. Among the best-known of these were the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Sion, founded in the mid-eighteenth century in Paris by brothers – and Jewish converts – Théodore and Marie-Alphonse Ratisbonne. They created a religious community composed of female and

105 AAAJ, *Rapports avec les autorités militaires*, 4, *Correspondance avec les autorités militaires israéliennes 1947–1948*, report in French by Fr. Pascal Saint-Jean to the Israeli authorities of Jerusalem, titled “Occupation et siège de l’Hôtellerie de Notre-Dame de France en Mai et Juin 1948,” Jerusalem, June 11, 1948.

106 AAAJ, *ibid.*, Fr. Saint-Jean to Bernard Joseph (later Dov Yosef), military governor of Jerusalem, copy, Jerusalem, December 13, 1948, translation from French.

male branches, with the specific goal of being an apostolate for the conversion of Jews to Catholicism. Marie-Alphonse Ratisbonne himself went to Palestine to establish a branch of his congregation to serve as an apostolate for the Jews of the region. In 1858 he opened the convent for the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Sion on the ruins of the Ecce Homo Arch, on the Via Dolorosa near al-Asbat Gate, in the Muslim Quarter in the Old City. The Ecce Homo Arch is one of the most important symbolic sites in the Christian tradition, which identified it as the site of Jesus's condemnation to death. In 1862, a school and an orphanage for girls were also opened in the convent, which became one of the city's most important educational institutions. In those years, another convent was founded on the hills of 'Ayn Karim (fig. 2.9). In Jerusalem the Fathers of Sion also built St. Peter's Monastery in the Rehavyah neighborhood (fig. 2.10).¹⁰⁷



FIGURE 2.9 'Ayn Karim, ca. 1927
ASNDS

107 On the history of the congregation in Palestine, see Karène Sanchez Summerer, "La réception et les impacts de l'action éducative et sanitaire des sœurs de Saint-Joseph et des sœurs de Sion par les populations musulmanes rurales et urbaines en Palestine ottomane et mandataire (1870–1940)," *Histoire et Missions chrétiennes*, no. 22 (2012); Sanchez Summerer, "Ouvrir les trésors de la charité aux enfants dévoyés d'Abraham: L'action éducative des sœurs de Sion en Palestine ottomane et mandataire (1860–1948)," in *L'enseignement français en Méditerranée: Les missionnaires et l'Alliance israélite universelle*, ed. Jérôme Bocquet (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010); Mona Hajjar Halaby, "School Days in Mandate Jerusalem at Dames de Sion," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 31 (2007): 40–71; Olivier Rota, "Notre-Dame de Sion en Terre sainte: Évolutions parallèles des maisons de l'Ecce Homo et d'Eïn Karem. Vers des lieux de rencontre et de dialogue (1948–1967)," *Tsafon*, no. 47 (2004).



FIGURE 2.10 Ratisbonne Monastery, 1916
MPC

During the Mandate, most of the pupils of the Ecce Homo school were Palestinian Arabs, while the sisters mostly came from Europe, France in particular. The school also enrolled Jewish girls ready to receive the Christian sacraments. In the early 1940s, meanwhile, the school of the Fathers of Sion was attended by about three hundred pupils, most of them of Jewish origin, thanks to the activism and philosemitism of Fr. Pierre de Condé. The sisters also opened a high school, attended by British girls, in the Katamon Quarter. The community's archives, housed in the 'Ayn Karim convent, are a rich documentary source for the educational, social and religious life of the community and its relations with the surrounding territory and institutions. One of the most interesting sources is the journal of the Ecce Homo convent, which notes the daily events and opinions of the nuns, of their pupils and religious family throughout Palestine (fig. 2.11).

The chronicles of 1947 reflect the anxieties and uncertainties of a female religious community in the face of political upheaval. They viewed the King David Hotel bombing as "a catastrophe".¹⁰⁸ The victims included some of

108 "A terrible test was enjoined today upon the Holy City and threw us into consternation! At 12:30 p.m., a bomb set by the Jews blew up part of the King David, where the English offices are located and where an important meeting of the principal government functionaries was to be held. A great number of victims are already known about, but many are still buried under the rubble. The dead include Mr. Gres, a father of four children that we had at the boarding school; two are still there – children who have already lost their

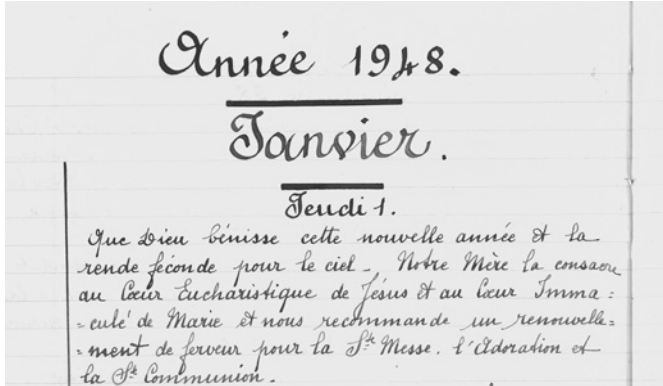


FIGURE 2.11 Ecce Homo journal, 1948
ASNSD

the city's important political figures, in particular 'Atallah Mantoura, assistant district commissioner and a friend of the community. The sisters note that "the political situation ... is becoming more and more unsettling here; the bombs, the assassinations are multiplying".¹⁰⁹

The order to repatriate women and children who were British subjects emptied the Katamon school. On the eve of battle, only about twenty pupils remained. The Palestinian children were also returned to their parents' villages. As barbed wire and checkpoints sprung up in Jerusalem, the sisters became increasingly convinced that the city would soon be under siege. Amid this uncertainty, the chronicles describe the ordinary activities that continued despite the political situation: the lessons and exams, the games and entertainments prepared by the boarding girls (called "les bleuettes" on account of their uniform) for the children of the orphanage, the life of prayer, the community gatherings and meetings with other clergy.

In June 1947, the announcement of a strike by the AHC against the UNSCOP's works also affected the Sisters of Sion. As reported by the community's chronicle, the committee sent a letter to the superior demanding the suspension of lessons. On November 29, the nuns viewed the UN resolution to partition Palestine as "all to the advantage of the Jews".¹¹⁰ The agitation in the city

mother three years ago. Mr. Mantoura is among the missing – many other families known to us have also been touched by this catastrophe" (July 22, 1946). ASNSD, *Ecce Homo, Journal de la communauté* (July 1, 1946–December 31, 1947), translation from French.

109 Ibid., December 2, 1946.

110 "They are indulging in excessive rejoicing all day long: the unhappy Arabs are preparing for a three-day strike" Ibid., November 30, 1947.

induced the educational institutions to close for a week. The nuns, in contact with the French consul, Neuville, continued to accept girls; the chronicle notes anxious telephone calls from parents and their gratitude to the nuns for their assurances that they would keep their daughters. A few days later, the announcement of the British withdrawal from Palestine led the nuns to decide that the students from Jaffa, Tel Aviv and Haifa should leave, so that they could travel while the roads were still controlled by the military. Meanwhile, communications between the nuns in Jerusalem and the sisters in 'Ayn Karim were also becoming ever more difficult.

The following year opened with new bereavements: the names of former pupils who had died in the bombings fill the pages of the chronicle. The escalation of conflict also necessitated some modifications to the school timetables and the organization of the community space. The timetables were made shorter to enable day pupils to return home, avoiding the most dangerous quarters. Borders were gathered in two rooms.

During the fighting, the nuns repeatedly complained to the Yishuv authorities: the mother superior presented herself several times at the offices of the Jewish Agency to denounce the damage by Haganah on the convent's high school. These meetings allowed for "some good clarifications regarding the Arabs' sentiments toward them [the Jews], in response to their odious conduct of recent weeks."¹¹¹ Meanwhile, the nuns characterized the AHC's behavior as "perfectly correct."¹¹²

Liturgical life continued, but here too the conflict necessitated changes. Some of the Easter ceremonies of 1948 were canceled, among them the traditional Palm Sunday procession at Bethphage, while some liturgies were placed under the escort of Arab troops (fig. 2.12).

It was the arrival of the first individuals and families requesting the nuns' aid that really transformed their daily life. Spaces once reserved solely for the nuns were now also populated by men: not only were clergy forced to stay for a few nights because the streets were impassable, but refugees too as the battle continued to focus increasingly on Jerusalem. School classes, already attended by very few pupils, were adapted to accommodate the displaced. The term "refugee ladies" (*dames réfugiées*) appears for the first time in the entry for April 25, 1948, but already in January there was reference to families being hosted at the Franciscan Monastery of the Flagellation. Meanwhile, a portion of the convent's lay staff left their jobs and Palestine altogether.

111 ASNDS, *Ecce Homo, Journal de la communauté* (December 1–31, 1948), January 18, 1948.

112 *Ibid.*, February 25, 1948.



FIGURE 2.12 Patriarch Barlassina leaves the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, escorted by Arab Liberation Army leader 'Abd al-Qadr al-Husayni, 1948
APLJ/AEBAF

The sisters in the Ecce Homo convent followed the fighting around 'Ayn Karim, concerned for the fate of their sisters and expressing explicit support for the Arab forces.¹¹³ Their admiration for the Palestinian commanders is clear,

113 "A great battle at al-Qastal in the neighborhood of St. John; first taken by the Jews, this village was then recaptured by the Arabs. Great shows of enthusiasm in the afternoon in

as in the case of 'Abd al-Qadr al-Husayni, the Arab Liberation Army leader, who fell in the battle of al-Qastal, where, according to the chronicle, he had fought "bravely and heroically". On the opposite side, Haganah was blamed for "atrocities against women and children".¹¹⁴ The 'Ayn Karim convent chronicle portrays al-Qadr al-Husayni¹¹⁵ and the Zionist attack on Dayr Yasin¹¹⁶ in a similar light. While the 'Ayn Karim nuns hosted up to three hundred refugees, some of whom had brought their furniture with them to save it,¹¹⁷ news arrived of the Jewish capture of Haifa. "The Jews ... have begun the same massacres that they have performed in the villages," the *Ecce Homo* chronicle commented.¹¹⁸

The mounting pressure on Jerusalem is also increasingly evident in the nuns' community diary. The Haganah occupation of the Sisters of Sion high school fueled their anti-Jewish resentment.¹¹⁹ In mid-May, the departure of the British nuns ordered by the Mandate government, the request for hospitality from refugees from Dayr Yasin, the expectation of the arrival of the Transjordanian army, and the fears of a new world war gave rise to great anxiety.¹²⁰ The nuns at the *Ecce Homo* convent maintained close contact with the Arab Committee and hosted some prisoners of war at the latter's request. About thirty beds were assigned to the wounded. In June, the convent hosted the office for the exchange of prisoners of war.¹²¹

this quarter, the staff of the Arab army being established in front of us, in the old Muslim school." *Ibid.*, April 8, 1948.

114 *Ibid.*, April 9, 1948.

115 The Palestinian commander, nephew of the mufti, was described as a "valiant chief", whose death was judged in the chronicle as a "very great loss". ASNDS, *'Ayn Karim, Journal de la communauté 1948*, April 8, 1948.

116 "In Dayr Yasin, a small village that we see from our class windows, the Jews attack and commit atrocities against the women, children, kill the men, they throw them in a tank, they cut the children's hands, they undress the women and they lead them to Tel Aviv." *Ibid.*, April 9, 1948.

117 "In the afternoon we are invaded by women and children, bringing mattresses, pillows, covers for the night. Around 300 came. They are scared, the Jews come to al-Qastal. We gave them the big rooms in the old house. It filled quickly." *Ibid.*, April 1, 1948.

118 ASNDS, *Ecce Homo, Journal de la communauté* (December 1–31, 1948), April 23, 1948.

119 "Dawd comes at midday to warn Our Mother that the Jews forced open the doors to the high schools, took up positions, and were in the process of dancing with us, to the accompaniment of the radio!" *Ibid.*, May 3, 1948.

120 "Several persons have still asked us to receive them ... Mlle Hind al-Husayni here, on the instructions of the committee that deals with the orphans of Dayr Yasin, the village taken by the Jews last month, asks us if we could receive 45 of those poor children; the quarter in which they had been installed being under heavy bombardment, one cannot let them stay there. Our Mother responds affirmatively." *Ibid.*, May 14, 1948.

121 "In the evening, Our Mother received 'Abd al-Qadr al-Husayni, general of the Arab Liberation Army, accompanied by the Rev. Fr. Ibrahim 'Ayyad of the Latin Patriarchate, as well as one of the heads of the Arab League, who came to ask for hospitality for a Jewish female. The Jews having taken an Arab family hostage, the Arabs in turn took a Jewish

In July Tsalal took over some villages southwest of Jerusalem, displacing and expelling three more populated villages in that area, 'Ayn Karim, al-Malha and Lifta.¹²² The battle, which started after the end of the truce, lasted some days. In the 'Ayn Karim chronicles, the Sisters of Sion wrote that "the Jews will enter St. John's tonight, or maybe tomorrow? Is it true? Anyway, it's time to ... submit to God's will."¹²³ On July 18, the army entered the convent, stating they were occupying the village. A group of 35 soldiers billeted in a room for some days: "They are all very correct, very polite, telling us do not be afraid, we will look after you better than the Arabs."¹²⁴ This positive judgement on the army's behavior,¹²⁵ as well on the Israeli police officers and the engineers and architects of the antiquities department that visited the village,¹²⁶ contrasts with the tone of the chronicles of the nuns in the Transjordanian side of Jerusalem.

Indeed, the *Ecce Homo* journal for the summer of 1948 highlights the increasing fears that the Israeli troops would prevail, which would bring "the triumph of communism and irreligion", to which they added the prayer "that God ... grant victory" to the Arab side.¹²⁷ As news arrived of the Israeli army's expulsion of the civilian populations of Lydda and al-Ramla,¹²⁸ the *Ecce Homo* community viewed the truce and the peace proposals with skepticism.

At the end of the summer, the nuns reopened their schools and boarding schools, although few students reported for the beginning of class. Meanwhile the nuns agreed to the request to host 'Abdullah al-Tall, the Arab Legion colonel responsible for Jerusalem during the war. In the autumn, some refugees vacated the rooms provided to them by the convent as the violence flared up again in the autumn, with no end in sight.

family so as to be able to make an exchange. This Jewish family included a young girl, and the Arabs did not deem it appropriate to make her spend the night in camp; thus they asked Our Mother to be willing to take her in for the night while waiting for the formalities with the Red Cross of Geneva to be concluded. Our Mother willingly agreed to what was asked and took this young girl in." *Ibid.*, April 6, 1948.

122 See Salim Tamari, "The City and its Rural Hinterland," in Tamari, *Jerusalem 1948*, 71–74.

123 ASNDS, *'Ayn Karim, Journal de la communauté 1948*, July 13, 1948.

124 *Ibid.*, July 18, 1948.

125 "They don't stop thanking us, they make us visit the room so that we can see that they leave everything in order." *Ibid.*, July 20, 1948.

126 "An engineer with his map ... says: 'We don't want the war, but to create a country flowing with milk and honey, like at the times of Moises, and of Jesus Christ.'" *Ibid.*, July 26, 1948.

127 ASNDS, *Ecce Homo, Journal de la communauté* (December 1–31, 1948), July 8, 1948.

128 "The Jews, despite the truce, have seized the neighboring villages, Lydda and al-Ramla, from whence they have expelled all the inhabitants, who are wandering on the roads." *Ibid.*, August 3, 1948.

3 “A State of Anxiety, Not to Say Fear”: Catholics at the End of the War

3.1 *The Final Wave of Refugees*

On September 16, Count Bernadotte submitted his second report to the UN secretary-general. Both parties rejected Bernadotte's proposal. The next day, the Stern Gang assassinated him in Jerusalem.¹²⁹ After the UN mediator's killing, the possibility of maintaining the second armistice seemed increasingly weak. The situation deteriorated on October 15 following a new clash between Egyptian and Israeli troops in the south. In the following weeks, the Israeli army managed to occupy several strategic positions, thus considerably increasing the territory under its control. During Operation Yo'av, the most important regions conquered by the Israeli troops were the southern coastal strip, the city of Beersheba, the area around Hebron, including Bayt Jibrin, and some of the villages to the south of the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The mass of Palestinian inhabitants who were expelled or fled their homes headed south, especially toward the Gaza Strip, but also in and around Hebron and Bethlehem.

Apart from the south, battles raged elsewhere; Galilee became the center of conflict once again, under Operation Hiram. In late October, Tsahal faced off the troops of the Arab Liberation Army and a Syrian contingent. The result was a heavy defeat for the Arab side, followed by the Israeli occupation of numerous villages and a new – fourth – wave of expulsions. Some of the conquered villages were inhabited by Muslims and Christians, and others had a large Christian, predominantly Melkite, majority, such as al-Jishsh, 'Aylabun, al-Rama, Iqrit, and Kafr Bir'im. The occupation of these villages was not without bloodshed, and Christian civilians were among the fatalities. Some tens of thousands of people sought refuge in Lebanon. Others, mostly Druze and Christians, remained in their homes. Operation Hiram also involved Israeli incursions into southern Lebanon, with the specific goal of impeding the return of Palestinian refugees to their former villages.

At al-Rama, a village on the Lebanese border, an Italian priest, Michele Demaria, found himself entrusted with the care of the Melkite population after the Greek Catholic curate fled to Lebanon with other refugees. The Sisters of the Rosary were also present in the parish, which had a hundred congregants in 1946; they operated a school which had about a hundred students on the eve of the conflict. The capture of the village, in October 1948, was accompanied by raids on the homes of Latin parishioners and others. Witnesses spoke of

129 See Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 39.

mass graves.¹³⁰ Vergani and McMahon had visited the area about two months before the fighting, bringing money and aid.¹³¹ There were also some refugees from Iqrit in the village, most of them Melkites. The parish of al-Rama swelled with the arrival of refugees from the surrounding area; by 1950, there were 147 parishioners.

As Vergani himself related to McMahon on his journey to the north of Israel, the village that had struck him the most was 'Aylabun.¹³² Mostly inhabited by Christians, it was occupied on October 30, while the inhabitants took refuge in the church. Fearing violence and expulsions, they hoisted a white flag. Twelve youths were killed, and the approximately eight hundred inhabitants were forced to march toward the Lebanese border. Some managed to escape. Just five old people remained in the village.

Impelled by the terrible news from 'Aylabun, Vergani sought permission from the Israeli authorities to visit the village, receiving a permit one month after the attack. Upon arrival, he found the old people who had stayed in the village wandering the streets, suffering from hunger. The houses had been sacked. The patriarchal vicar now pledged to intercede with the Israeli authorities to allow the inhabitants to return, and obtained permission for 150 of them. Vergani described to McMahon the scene of desolation that he encountered in 'Aylabun; the latter, in turn, reported this to Cardinal Spellman. The story of this village spread rapidly abroad, especially among US Catholics. A few months later, in January 1949, McMahon met refugees from the village in Tyre.

In this phase, too, it is not clear whether the Israeli army was given orders to treat the different religious components differently, particularly Muslims, Christians and Druze. If the Druze leaders were substantially aligned with Israel's military and political designs and had negotiated a nonbelligerence agreement that enabled the Druze population to avoid the expulsions and remain in their homes, it is more difficult to reconstruct the relationship between the Israeli command and Christian church representatives with respect to the fate of coreligionists in the villages. With Hakim, the Melkite component had a capable negotiator with Israel since the outbreak of the 1948 conflict; the Greek Catholic bishop succeeded in avoiding the expulsion of his

130 This information reached the international Catholic press, as evidenced in a letter from Frank A. Hall, director of the National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC) news service, to Moses Jung, of the American Jewish Committee. ISA, G/14/5826, Washington, May 25, 1949, copy. On the events in al-Rama, see Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 476–77.

131 AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, copy, December 12, 1948.

132 ISA, G/14/5826, Hall to Jung, Washington, May 25, 1949, copy. Concerning 'Aylabun, see also Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 479–80.

congregants in a few cases, but more frequently he had engaged in intense mediation aimed at ensuring that the refugees would be allowed to return to their homes at the end of the war. The Latin situation was different. Without a patriarch, and with the regent, Testa, far away from Jerusalem and even farther from Nazareth, it was impossible to attempt any real mediation between the Catholic hierarchy and Israel. Vergani was the sole point of reference, but he had neither the legitimacy nor the concrete opportunity to develop a real political diplomatic strategy and, in this phase, he had decided to devote his full attention to offering concrete assistance to the refugees. And, thus, in general the Latin Catholics shared the fate of the Muslims (who were considered the main enemy of the Jewish world), and were transferred and forcibly expelled, unless they fled first from the Israeli occupiers. For the Latin Catholics, the time for political negotiation would come a few months later, with the end of the fighting and the appointment of a new patriarch. Israel was, however, aware that the expulsion of the Catholics risked reinforcing the opposition of the Holy See and augmenting the Vatican's arguments in the UN discussions. In any case, Vergani once again affirmed that he was on the verge of collapse, exhausted by the "continuous activity demanded by the terrible conditions right now." The priests and nuns, who were "often the only survivors" in contexts where the population had been expelled or had taken to flight because of the fighting and violence, continuously appealed to the vicar general for aid "and, most of all, moral support".¹³³

In Jerusalem, the Catholic institutions were assessing the damage (figs. 2.13–2.14). The Roman Catholic leaders complained that here was "an overall plan [to] gradually to replace Christian institutions", evidenced by the conversion of the schools of various congregations into offices, hospitals and Israeli military command posts.¹³⁴ At the end of 1948, Palestinian Latin Catholics, too, were in the grip of uncertainty.¹³⁵

133 APLJ, AG, *Vicariat Nazareth, 1948–1961, Mons. S.E. Kaldany*, Vergani to Girard, Nazareth, October 22, 1948, translation from Italian.

134 "The Christian, not without reason then, lives in a state of anxiety, not to say fear, while he awaits the outcome of the Palestine Problem, and the Problem of Jerusalem." ASCTS, ACC, *Miscellanea, Guerra arabo-israeliana, Rapporti di religiosi* (August 12, 1948–January 22, 1949), transcript of a declaration by Fr. Patrick J. Coyle and Fr. Theophane Carroll, Terra Sancta College, Jerusalem, September 30, 1948). Like the reports of Vergani, this communication by the two Franciscans was the subject of considerable international attention and dissemination.

135 For a study of the history and anthropology of Arab and Jewish memories of 1948, see Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, *Remembering Palestine in 1948: Beyond National Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).



FIGURE 2.13 View from the Pontifical Biblical Institute: on the top left the Lasallian College, St Saviour's Monastery and the seat of the Latin Patriarchate, 1948–49
APIB/AEBAF



FIGURE 2.14 Aftermath of the bombing near the Franciscan St. Saviour's Monastery, September 12, 1948
APLJ/AEBAF

3.2 *Armistices, Not Peace*

In the final phase of the conflict, Tsahal committed itself to creating conditions that would impede the return of refugees and Arab “infiltrators”, as they were defined in Israeli military documents. The expulsion of the villages on the northern border of the State of Israel was complete. Next came the requisition of the property of the Arabs who had fled or left of their own accord. At the same time, the Israeli forces made efforts to seek out and expel not only the inhabitants of the zone bordering Lebanon and Syria, but also anyone who had attempted to return to their homes in Galilee. The same process went on in the south of the country. Here too, the Israeli army was committed to expelling most of the Arabs. At the end of December, the Israeli army launched Operation Horev, aiming at a decisive victory over the Egyptian troops.

In January, after a series of defeats, Egypt sought an end to the hostilities. The ceasefire came on January 7, 1949, by which time Israel had completed the conquest of the Negev. Egypt, however, remained in control of the Gaza Strip. Just a week later, on January 13, the Israelis and Egyptians discussed the terms of the armistice on Rhodes, where the negotiations were mediated by Ralph Bunche, appointed UN chief mediator after Bernadotte’s assassination.¹³⁶ Separately, these negotiations also included Transjordan, Lebanon and Syria. Egypt was the first to conclude an accord with Israel, signing an armistice on February 24. During the following months there were talks with the other Arab states involved in the conflict, with the exception of Iraq. The final accord to be signed was the one with Syria, on July 20.

Despite the talks, there was a return to arms. At the beginning of March, Israeli troops occupied the southern Negev and conquered the city of Eilat and the Gulf of Aqaba. This operation was intended to further strengthen Israel’s borders through additional *faits accomplis* (or *‘uvdah* in Hebrew, as reflected in the name of this military operation). Egypt did not intervene in defense of the area, which thus passed under Israeli control.

The most significant and difficult accord was that reached between Israel and Transjordan on April 3. The agreed territorial disposition represented a notable modification of UN partition arrangement of November 1947. At the end of complex negotiations, the two states arrived at a compromise on the principal points, which were that the Jordanians should cede to Israel the zone between Qalqilya, Wadi ‘Ara and the area to the north of Jenin, while the Hashemite Kingdom would receive a small territory to the south of Hebron. Moreover, a demilitarized strip would be established along the border

¹³⁶ See Elad Ben-Dror, *Ralph Bunche and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN, 1947–1949*, trans. Diana File and Lenn Schramm (London: Routledge, 2016).

for about ten kilometers. A special Israeli-Jordanian committee was established to resolve some issues such as access to the Holy Places in Jerusalem and the control of the area around Latrun, but this did not achieve any results.

One of the fundamental features of the accord between Israel and Jordan was the recognition of Jordan's control over Arab Palestine and, thus, the negation of the UN resolution providing for the creation of a Palestinian state. In this sense, the armistice of April 1949 reflects the opportunist logic that had guided the agreement between Golda Meir and King 'Abdullah since 1947.

In the geopolitical reorganization that resulted from the armistice negotiations, the patriarchal diocese of Jerusalem found itself divided between Israel, Jordan¹³⁷ and Egypt, as well as Cyprus. This new phase was redolent with fresh uncertainty. The Latin Catholics of the area were vividly aware of the death of Palestinian hopes, of divisions on the Arab front, and of the dramatic fate of the refugees. Parishioners and clergy had lived through these tragic months of war and expulsions in anxiety and terror. Hundreds of thousands of people had been expelled or had fled as a result of the fighting; there were now about 750,000 Palestinian refugees. There were no reliable figures on Arab deaths – civilians and combatants – although they probably numbered in the several thousands, while the losses on the Hebrew side were around 5,700–5,800, a quarter of them civilians. The Latin Catholics spent the period from November 1947 to early 1949 in confusion and with a constant, marked feeling of isolation in the absence of a patriarch.

Although Jallad, writing to Cardinal Tisserant at the beginning of May 1948, expressed his certainty that “that the Holy See will not abandon us”,¹³⁸ in reality there was a widespread belief that Rome would forget the Palestinian faithful. The Israeli political and military leadership noted the widespread disappointment with the Holy See shared by a large part of the congregants and clergy during the war; Gorla observed that “even the local Jewish authorities find it very strange”.¹³⁹ The Israeli leadership amplified the resonance and scope of this discontent to reinforce the idea that the Vatican was not terribly interested in the fate of the Catholics in the Middle East.

In April 1949, Pius XII published the encyclical *Redemptoris Nostris* dedicated to the events in Palestine, in which he said that

137 Transjordan changed its name to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on June 2, 1949.

138 APLJ, *FC-AG, S. Congregatio Pro E. Orientali, 1919–1953*, Jallad to Tisserant, copy, Jerusalem, May 4, 1948, translation from Italian.

139 APLJ, *LB-MS, Deir Rafat*, Gorla to Girard, Dayr Rafat, September 1948.

although the actual fighting is over, tranquility or order in Palestine is still very far from having been restored. For We are still receiving complaints from those who have every right to deplore the profanation of sacred buildings, images, charitable institutions, as well as the destruction of peaceful homes of religious communities. Piteous appeals still reach Us from numerous refugees, of every age and condition, who have been forced by the disastrous war to emigrate and even live in exile in concentration camps, the prey to destitution, contagious disease and perils of every sort.¹⁴⁰

Hughes commented on the document in a letter to the Melkite patriarch, confirming that in the previous weeks he had forwarded to the Holy See the Egyptian government's request that the pope express himself in favor of the internationalization of Jerusalem and the return of the refugees.¹⁴¹

Notwithstanding the appeals to Rome, in Jerusalem the end of armed conflict inaugurated a new phase in the life of the diocese. It was now faced with the difficult task of reconstruction and with new political actors. Above all, however, was the complex problem of defining the nature of the humanitarian and pastoral activity for the Palestinian refugees.

140 AAS 41 (1949): 162.

141 AMCP, *Internonciature apostolique Egypte, 1902-1957*, Hughes to Maximos IV, al-Zamalik, Cairo, April 17, 1949.

A Wounded Diocese: the Patriarchate of Refugees

1 The End of the “Ill-Omened Vacancy”

1.1 *A Disorienting Silence: Insistent Demands from Clergy and Faithful*

It was clear to many observers that the cessation of hostilities in 1949 and the terms of the armistice agreements did not spell the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but only of the first chapter of the war. The failure to conclude a true peace treaty between Israel and the Arab states demonstrated the impossibility of reaching a lasting peaceful solution. At the end of the conflict, the predominant mood among Palestinian Latin Catholics was one of skepticism and distrust. In January 1949, Pasquale Appodia, the Italian curate of the parish of ‘Abud near Ramallah, was convinced that the new phase that was opening up would be “worse than 1948, given that the Arab states are completely in discord among themselves”.¹ Faced with the unprecedented emerging political reality, the Catholics, now divided between different state entities and their enemies, found themselves lacking a religious representative capable of promoting their demands and claims. Some emergencies demanded a rapid response, especially the refugee situation, but there was also the issue of reparations and the goods requisitioned by the Israeli army during the war. The demand for a new patriarch, therefore, became ever stronger.

The patriarchal clergy – Arab and European – were the most disappointed, sensitive as they were to the situation of their compatriots who had had to live through the drama of flight or expulsion from their villages in the previous months. Chief target of their criticisms was the apostolic delegate, Gustavo Testa, the Vatican’s principal representative in Jerusalem. He was accused of having abandoned his congregants and having fled to Bethlehem and, then, Amman in fear of bombardment. From Cairo, Internuncio Hughes admitted, “Nobody seems to know what [Testa] is doing” or “whether he would ever visit any Refugee centres”.² Meanwhile, Fr. Albino Gorla wrote from Rafat: “We are constantly expecting a visit from Msgr. Testa, but in vain. And that is the most grievous thing of all for us, to feel abandoned by our own.”³ From Notre-Dame

1 APLJ, AG, *Paroisses, Abud*, Appodia to patriarchal procurator Léandre Girard, ‘Abud, January 27, 1949, translation from Italian.

2 See AANY, ACNEWA, Hughes to Wycislo, copy sent to McMahon, Cairo, September 28, 1948.

3 APLJ, LB-MS, *Deir Rafat*, Gorla to Girard, Dayr Rafat, September 1948, translation from Italian.

de France in Jerusalem, writing to Fr. Gervais Quenard, superior general of the Augustinian Assumptionists, Fr. Pascal Saint-Jean did not disguise his profound disappointment at the news of Testa's nomination as apostolic delegate for the new delegation in Palestine, Transjordan and Cyprus, with its seat in Jerusalem, in February 1948.⁴

The manner of Testa's arrival in the Middle East after his nomination heightened the Catholics' ill feeling toward him. His delay was met with incomprehension in Jerusalem. On June 16, Saint-Jean visited Testa in Amman and appealed for him to come to Jerusalem. In the end, he arrived in time for Jallad's consecration as bishop, on June 27. But he stayed just for a few days; the new outbreaks of fighting in the city induced Testa to abandon it again in favor of a more sheltered location in Bethlehem. For a large part of the Roman Catholic Church of Jerusalem, Testa's decision to leave again was further confirmation of his inability to fulfill his role.

In reality, although the apostolic delegate and patriarchal regent's choices seemed questionable, he was active from Bethlehem and took action to aid the refugees arriving in the area of Bethlehem, Bayt Sahur and Bayt Jala. In any case, clergy and congregants were loudly demanding that Testa travel and visit communities stricken by the battles, expelled refugees and parishes emptied of their members because of the flight. Given his official role as representative of the Holy See, Testa could have quite easily obtained permission to move from one area to another from the Israeli and Transjordanian authorities, so why did he confine himself to Bethlehem when he could have been delivering aid to the Catholic populations in the middle of the fighting?

The reservations expressed about the apostolic delegate reached Hughes and Cardinal Tisserant. The secretary of the Oriental dicastery, informed from various quarters of Testa's "sorry retreat" to Bethlehem, declared himself profoundly disappointed by the very unflattering evaluations presented.⁵ Appeals were reaching Rome from all over Palestine; most common was the request for aid for the refugees and the call for mediation on the part of the Vatican to bring an end to the conflict. At the end of the hostilities, the additional predominant theme in letters sent to the Holy See was the call for an immediate appointment of a new patriarch. An example is a petition dated August 12,

4 See AAS 41 (1949): 298. The Assumptionist superior general, Gervais Quenard, sent Tisserant a copy of the letter received in Jerusalem from Fr. Pascal Saint-Jean, which also reported the very harsh judgments of Testa expressed by the Benedictine Anselme Chibas-Lassalle. The cleric also attested to a strongly critical reaction by the Catholics of the Eastern rite, especially the Armenian and Syriac patriarchal vicars. See AMGAA, doc. PJ 65, Saint-Jean to Quenard, Jerusalem, March 3, 1949, and APET, V10.

5 APET, V10, Tisserant to Quenard, Rome, May 3, 1949.

1949 sent to the pope by a group of 47 of the 59 priests of the patriarchate; their request was to put an end to the “ill-omened vacancy” that left the Roman Catholics of the Jerusalem patriarchate ever more “disoriented”.⁶

From Amman, Sim'an wrote to Giovanni Battista Montini, substitute secretary of state, that “both the people and the Clergy feel profoundly ... disoriented in their work by the lack of a patriarch, their Father and Pastor”, drawing attention to the fact that “by delaying we run the risk of losing not only our rights but also the high prestige held by the Patriarch of Jerusalem”.⁷ A group of Palestinian notables also addressed Rome, among them Hanna 'Atallah, a representative of the AHC who had participated in the audience with Pius XII in August 1946. In a telegram, the notables petitioned the Holy See to hasten the nomination of a new patriarch.⁸

By the end of the summer, two years after Barlassina's death in September 1947 and after many months of clashes and battles fought on Palestinian soil, the Holy See had not pronounced on the fate of the diocese of Jerusalem, leaving the Latin Church without a leader.

1.2 *Meanwhile in Rome*

While the Holy See had appeared silent since Barlassina's death, behind the scenes discussions were taking place in the Vatican as to the issue of his successor. Furthermore, not only was the name of the new head of the Latin Church of Jerusalem in question, but the very survival of the patriarchal institution itself. Indeed, Barlassina's death had led to an increase in the demand for a patriarch of Arab origin, which would mean breaking the tradition of an incumbent of Italian origin. Back in Jerusalem, it was now believed that the Oriental Congregation had proposed that the Latin and Eastern Catholics should merge and thus replace the Latin Patriarchate; the patriarchal seat

6 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 553/47, doc. 31, Jerusalem, August 12, 1949, translation from French. A copy of the letter is also in APLJ, *AG, Elezione e consacrazione di S.B. Mons. Gori a Patriarca di Gerusalemme*. Among the reasons mentioned for the urgency of the nomination, in addition to the political motivations, the priests especially concentrated on the “prestige of the Catholic Church in Palestine”, the “defense of Catholic interests” and the “reaction to Protestant activity”.

7 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 553/47, doc. 30, Sim'an to Montini, Amman, August 15, 1949, translation from Italian.

8 ACO, *ibid.*, doc. 36, telegram in French to Pius XII from a group of Arab notables, Jerusalem, May 29, 1949, transmitted by Tardini to Tisserant, Vatican, May 30, 1949. The document bears the signatures of Salim Abu Suwan, “ingenieur arts et manufactures”, Salim bey Ayyub, “officier St Sepulchre”, Amin bey Abu Sha'r, “député”, Dr Hanna 'Atallah, Wasif Pasha Bisharat, “membre du Sénat”, Kristiyan Kurdi, Imil Kurdi, Jurj Farwaji, Bishara bey Ghasib, “ex ministre justice”, Dr Ziad Hajj, Tawfiq Qattan, Tawfiq bey Marar, “vice ministre travaux publics”, Antun Nazzal, Salama Twal, “ex député”.

could then be given to an Eastern Catholic candidate and supported by a Latin apostolic vicar.

A troubled Jallad sent a report to Antonino Arata, assessor of the Congregation for the Oriental Church, in which he inquired about “rumors about the future systematization of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem”. The document noted that it was “most opportune to encourage the Oriental Rite” but “with the presence of a Patriarch of the Latin Rite,” a figure who – according to Jallad – was still essential to the region’s Catholic Church for several reasons. In the opinion of the prelate, a union mandated by Rome would only serve to fuel already existing divisions which were due not to religious but to ethnic and political issues.⁹ As regards the Latin component, Jallad insisted that these were not “foreigners” or “neophytes,” but “present for centuries, since the Crusades.” Faced with the prospect of the abolition of the Latin Patriarchate, “these Latins would change rite; and they would be humiliated and deluded for want of a Patriarch like their non-Catholic compatriots”.¹⁰ The matter was particularly delicate because it affected not only the organization of the secular clergy but also the relationship and balance of power between the patriarchate and the congregations of European origin.

Taking similar positions to Jallad, Salim Hadwa, director of the Jerusalem Latin diocese’s schools, wrote to Tisserant to share his fears about the rumors of the suppression of the Latin Patriarchate and express his view on the importance of the Latin rite, while wishing at the same to introduce Arabic in the liturgies “to facilitate the comprehension by the faithful.”¹¹ In the Vatican, Tisserant considered the rumors as mere speculations and he intended to resolve the confusion that had arisen concerning the future of the Latin diocese.

Since Barlassina’s death, the Congregation for the Oriental Church was aware of the urgency to appoint a regent for the Apostolic Delegation and for the patriarchate. For the latter, the regent could have a coadjutor Arab prelate, with the possibility to design him as an auxiliary bishop.¹² This idea was

9 “I dare to repeat here the words of a Melkite bishop that he spoke to me regarding the divergences between the Oriental and Occidental clergy: ‘It is not a question of rite, but of nationalism.’ And those of a Latin English prelate: ‘It is not a matter of rite but of awakening of the blood.’ To these words I add no comment.” ACO, *ibid.*, doc. 16, “Rapporto sul Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme” by Jallad, Jerusalem, December 11, 1947, translation from Italian.

10 *Ibid.*

11 ACO, *ibid.*, 858/49, 2, Hadwa to Tisserant, Jerusalem, January 25, 1949.

12 Few months before his death, Barlassina had already formulated to the pope the request to have an Arab auxiliary bishop because “it would make an excellent impression; it’s among the popular desiderata, often expressed, in these times of very evident nationalism”. Barlassina identified Fr. Salim Hadwa as a potential candidate. In 1945 he had

presented to the pope on November 22, 1947.¹³ The outbreak of the war further complicated the scenario and reinforced the regency option. Testa was identified for that position. Tisserant proposed to the Secretary of State to postpone Testa's nomination as patriarchal regent after Jallad's appointment as auxiliary bishop and vicar general.¹⁴ Pius XII agreed: Jallad was appointed on April 10, 1948 and Testa two weeks later.

According to the delegate for French affairs at the Holy See, at a time when the UN was deliberating on the future political face of Palestine, the Vatican had aligned itself in support of a middle-ground solution: the nomination of a European patriarch with an Arab vicar alongside him.¹⁵ In any case, various observers highlighted that within the Vatican curia Barlassina's death had reopened the debate about the future of the Latin Patriarchate. It was expected that the patriarchate would be entrusted to an Italian, as was tradition, and probably to a Franciscan, or to a cleric from one of the other European powers historically involved in the region. This side left open the possibility that the functions of the patriarch and of the apostolic delegate could be entrusted to the one individual. In 1948, this was the path taken with Testa's double appointment as apostolic delegate and regent of the Latin Patriarchate. The criticism that Testa encountered may have been among the elements that discouraged the Holy See from pursuing this approach further. The French consul in Jerusalem, René Neuville, also expressed his doubts about the concentration of both roles in a single figure; if the delegation had been created about fifteen years previously partly to resolve rivalries between the Latin Patriarchate and the Eastern Catholics, why weaken one of the very reasons for its existence by identifying it with the Jerusalem diocese?¹⁶

It is possible that the patriarchate's precarious financial situation since the final period of Barlassina's incumbency had raised questions at the Vatican as to its economic sustainability. The war and urgent requests from Jerusalem for money may have driven the Holy See to a thorough reconsideration of the future of the patriarchate. In this case, a union of the Latin and Eastern Catholics could infuse energy – and money – into a church that was ever more clearly in difficulty.

already proposed Ni'ma Sim'an for this role. See ACO, *ibid.*, 287/40, doc. 18, Barlassina to Pius XII, Jerusalem, June 19, 1947, translation from Italian.

13 See ACO, *ibid.*, 553/47, doc. 17, "Per l'udienza del Santo Padre. Provvedimenti per la Delegazione apostolica di Palestina ed il Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme."

14 See ACO, *ibid.*, 224/44, doc. 10, Montini to Arata, Vatican, January 28, 1948.

15 CADC, *Levant, Palestine (1944–1952)*, 426, *Questions religieuses, 1947*, Bourdeillette to Bidault, Rome, November 26, 1947.

16 See CADC, *ibid.*, Neuville to Bidault, Jerusalem, December 2, 1947.

Meanwhile, European diplomats also submitted requests to the Vatican. The Spanish embassy to the Holy See expressed its wish to see a Spanish Franciscan friar at the head of the diocese.¹⁷ Other diplomats made speculations: according to the French ambassador, a name on the lips of clergy involved in the Middle East was that of Thomas McMahon.¹⁸ From 1948 to 1949, the secretary of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association made two trips to the Middle East and so acquired a deep knowledge of the situation in the various parishes of the patriarchate and of the dramatic plight of the refugees. Recognizing McMahon's determination, the Catholics of the region had high expectations for the CNEWA economic aid: the "hopes of many are great, maybe too great for the financial possibilities" of the prelate, wrote the secretary of the Apostolic Delegation.¹⁹ Furthermore, McMahon's US citizenship was seen as an advantage as it would enable the patriarchate to maintain close contact with religious and political circles on an international scale, but it was also a hefty limitation: the Arab Catholics – and others – would have interpreted his nomination as favoring Israel, given the support it enjoyed from the United States.

None of the most favored hypotheses and rumors in circulation in 1948 (an Italian patriarch, a single Arab Melkite patriarch, a Franciscan patriarch) seemed likely to become a reality. In particular, the plan to fuse the Latins and Melkites into a single patriarchate fell apart due to well-founded fears of a heightening of tensions between the Latin and Eastern Catholic clergies. Other, political considerations may also have been in play: the instable Palestinian political situation was not the ideal testing ground for a new asset for the Catholic Church. As the French consul saw it, while the Latin Church was overtly opposed to the new State of Israel, the Greek Catholic clergy – especially the Melkite bishop Georges Hakim – showed a greater willingness to adopt a conciliatory attitude toward the Israeli leadership in order to secure the return of some of the refugees and the reparation of confiscated property.

Even the Israeli Jewish press showed interest in the succession issue in the Roman Catholic Church of Jerusalem: in late July 1949, *ha-Boker* wrote of McMahon's imminent nomination as a substitute for Hughes, hypothesizing a reunification of the Egyptian internunciate and the Apostolic Delegation in

17 See ASRS, *ACAES*, *Pio XII*, 2, *Palestina*, 4, fols. 5–11.

18 See CADC, *Levant, Palestine (1944–1952)*, 426, *Questions religieuses 1949*, D'Ormesson to Schuman, copy, July 20, 1949.

19 AAV, *ADAGP*, 12, 52, 7, fols. 136–37: 136v, Enrici to Testa, July 11, 1949, translation from Italian.

Jerusalem, Palestine, Transjordan and Cyprus, and thus Testa's replacement by the CNEWA secretary.²⁰

1.3 "Our Beatitude": Gori's Appointment and the Voices of the Refugees

After almost two years of waiting, on November 22 the press agencies broadcast the news that the pope had nominated Alberto Gori, custos since 1937, to lead the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, without any changes being made to its jurisdiction.

A few weeks before the appointment, the Secretary of State had expressed the view, shared by the Congregation for the Oriental Church, of the urgent need to appoint a Latin Patriarch for the Jerusalem diocese.²¹ The two dicasteries agreed on the choice of Gori, due to "his prudence, comprehension, compassion" and to the "large esteem held everywhere", particularly in the Christian, Muslim and Israeli environments, by the Franciscan.²²

This was not the first time that a Franciscan was nominated to head the diocese;²³ however, it is also true that since the patriarchate's reestablishment in 1847, Rome had hitherto never chosen the sitting custos to be bishop of Jerusalem. This decision was probably linked to the desire to entrust the diocese to a figure already deeply acquainted with the region, a crucial requirement at such a dramatic juncture at the end of the war.

The diocesan faithful, who had just seen the end of conflict, welcomed Gori's nomination with relief and celebration. The appointment was especially celebrated in Jordan, where Gori was already known for his directorship of the prestigious Terra Santa College in Amman. The Latin vicar for Transjordan, Sim'an, confirmed the joy that there was finally a new patriarch to lead the diocese.²⁴ The dean of the patriarchal chapter, Filippo Talvacchia, wrote to Tisserant that within the clergy Gori's appointment had ended "the nightmare that Barlassina would be the last Patriarch of the Latin rite in Jerusalem".²⁵

20 "Mk-Mahon yitmane natsig ha-Vatikan ba-Mizrah gam Alberto Gori yavo' mahoratayim le-Yisra'el" [McMahon to be appointed Vatican envoy to the East and Albert Gori to arrive in Israel the day after tomorrow], *ha-Boker*, July 25, 1949.

21 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 553/47, doc. 32, Tardini to Valeri, Vatican, October 8, 1949.

22 ACO, *ibid.*, 1235/65, "Per l'udienza del Santo Padre. Patriarcato Latino di Gerusalemme: Provista di Titolare" by Carlo Perico, former auditor of the Apostolic Delegation in Egypt and Palestine, November 10, 1949, translation from Italian.

23 The Franciscan Luigi Piavi was patriarch from 1889 to 1905.

24 APLJ, AG, *Félicitations pour le nouveau Patriarche*, 1949, Sim'an to Gori, Amman, December 18 1949.

25 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 1235/65, Talvacchia to Tisserant, Civitella del Tronto, November 23, 1949, translation from Italian.

The reactions of the European consular representatives were also very positive. For the Italians, this was a success: the pressure for a non-Italian patriarch had been confounded, with tradition respected and preserved. The French, too, although they had had clashed with the custos in the recent past over the UN discussions on Palestine, declared themselves fully satisfied by his nomination. However, there were worries among the Franciscans for the future of the custody now that its leader for the previous twelve difficult years had been called to a new position.

Gori himself was keenly aware of the importance and delicacy of his new role. He was not an ambitious man and had accepted his nomination as custos twelve years previously with great deal of apprehension and genuine hesitation.²⁶ During the 1948 Palestine War, at the end of his second term, Gori appealed to Pacifico Perantoni, Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor (1947–52), for a new custos to be nominated immediately: “I need to be peaceful and far removed from concerns,” he lamented to his superior.²⁷ But the hoped-for substitution did not come; instead, his term was extended for another six months. The situation in Palestine was so delicate that this was not considered opportune for a change at the head of the most ancient Catholic institution in the region.

A year later, in summer 1949, Testa informed Gori of the decision to confirm him as custos for three more years. The extension of his term garnered a reaction from the Franciscan: why had the apostolic delegate, and not Perantoni, told him this important news? Why such uncertainty and confusion, especially at such a dramatic moment?²⁸ That autumn, this impasse was broken; Gori was urgently summoned to Rome for the announcement of his appointment. On November 21, the custos received the news of his nomination as patriarch by Pius XII from Tisserant. Despite his doubts and fears,²⁹ Gori restated his obedience to the papal will. Obedience was the virtue to which Gori appealed in a difficult moment for him as he accepted his new position: “obedience is a great virtue, as the example of our Divine Savior has taught. But this time, it is

26 APLJ, AG, *Félicitations pour le nouveau Patriarche, 1949*, Gori to Father General Leonardo Bello, Aleppo, March 4, 1937.

27 ACGOFM, *Segreteria generale, Custodia di Terra Santa*, 761, Gori to Perantoni, Jerusalem, July 14, 1948.

28 APLJ, AG, *Elezione e consacrazione di S.B. Mons. Gori a Patriarca di Gerusalemme*, Gori to Gérard Lunter, Franciscan secretary general for the missions, Jerusalem, September 22, 1949.

29 “Conscious of the great difficulty of the present moment and of my insufficiency to be elected to such a high charge, I remained confused and perplexed at the announcement of my new mission.” APLJ, *ibid.*, Gori to Pius XII, handwritten minute, Rome, November 2, 1949, translation from Italian.

hard. I had to bow my head, and just when I was anticipating a bit of peace," he wrote to Sim'an.³⁰ In the same letter, Gori also alluded to "having seen so many vain suppositions regarding our dear Patriarchate fall by the wayside", possibly a reference to the negative rumors circulating in Rome regarding the Latin diocese and the ideas for its reorganization.

Gori's imminent arrival was the first occasion in which the diocese, now divided between Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Cyprus, came together spiritually for a festive occasion.³¹ After his consecration as bishop by Tisserant on December 27, Gori made his official entry into the Church of Holy Sepulcher on February 18, 1950. In his address, Jallad said that the diocese, still wounded ("vulnerata") by recent tragic events ("tribulationis tempore"), entrusted itself to the new bishop for succor and consolation.³²

The new patriarch immediately found himself obliged to tackle some extremely thorny political questions. On the one hand, he was the first patriarch tasked with managing relations with the new State of Israel. Furthermore, the Kingdom of Jordan had extended its boundaries considerably and was now in control of some of the regions in which the Latin Catholics traditionally concentrated (like the areas around Bethlehem and Ramallah). King 'Abdullah made his approval of Gori's nomination known to the Latin vicar of Transjordan,³³ while for the Israelis Chaim Wardi of the Ministry of Religious Affairs sent a congratulatory telegram.³⁴ However, relations between the custos and the Israeli authorities, which had already been difficult during the 1948 conflict, seem to have been particularly tense. The most delicate question for the new patriarch was that of the Palestinian refugees: in the first place, securing aid for this humanitarian emergency, but also intervening politically on behalf of Catholic refugees to secure the release of their confiscated property and their return to their villages.

30 APLJ, *ibid.*, Gori to Sim'an, Rome, January 6, 1950, translation from Italian.

31 The feelings of many Catholics in the Holy Land were summarized by the parishioners of Bir Zayt, near Ramallah, who sent Gori a letter of congratulation: "we have awaited a Father of the diocese for two years and lo, Providence has heard the prayers of all of us and we have come to receive your blessing with immense joy." APLJ, *AG, Elezione e consacrazione di S.B. Mons. Gori a Patriarca di Gerusalemme*, letter from the parishioners of Bir Zayt to Gori, Bir Zayt, February 23, 1950, translation from Italian.

32 APLJ, *AG, Ingresso di S.B. Mons. A. Gori in Gerusalemme*, address for the entry of Gori to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher pronounced by Auxiliary Bishop Mansur Jallad, February 18, 1950, translation from Latin.

33 APLJ, *AG, Félicitations pour le nouveau Patriarche 1949*, Sim'an to Gori, Amman, December 18, 1949.

34 APLJ, *AG, Elezione e consacrazione di S.B. Mons. Gori a Patriarca di Gerusalemme, Felicitazioni per l'elezione di S.B. Mons. A. Gori*, telegram from Wardi to Gori, March 1, 1950.

Some individual refugees and groups of refugees wrote letters to Gori upon his election. An ex-seminarian of the patriarchate wrote from the medical faculty of Saint Joseph University of Beirut to express his hope that the new patriarch would be able to help those who had left their villages during the war, adding a critique of those in the Latin hierarchy – he was probably referring to Testa and Jallad – who were not very concerned about the fate of their faithful.³⁵

The refugees called not only for material aid but also for the intervention of the patriarch to bring about their return to their homes, as in the case of a letter from a woman, Soufi Nahhas, who demanded Gori's intervention so that she could go back to her home in Jaffa.³⁶ Others hoped that the prelate's help might secure their children's admission to the patriarchate's schools, as in the case of some refugees in Burqa who were originally from Haifa.³⁷

The patriarch did not only receive requests from Christians; the principal of the important Omariyya School, attended by many refugee children, requested Gori's aid in acquiring textbooks for his pupils.³⁸ In another document, the governor of Jerusalem, Ihsan Hashim, presented Jallad with the request that he take on Jamil Khayr al-Din as the patriarchate's taxi driver, supporting this request with the additional note that he had opposed the Israeli troops during the war of 1948.³⁹ The memory of the fighting appeared in other documents: war wounded receiving care in Lebanon appealed to the patriarch to meet their travel expenses.⁴⁰

35 "We were truly orphans, and see how Rome has made us the gift of a priest, and what a priest, a pastor, and what a happy choice! ... In sum, we always hoped, Beatitude, to draw upon ourselves your paternal solicitude better yet than did our predecessors, to lift us up spiritually and materially in these so difficult times." APLJ, *AG, Félicitations pour le nouveau Patriarche, 1949*, Georges Soudat "et les étudiants palestiniens" to Gori, Beirut, February 14, 1950, translation from French.

36 APLJ, *Aides*, Sufi Nahhas to Gori, autograph manuscript letter in Arabic, Bayt Jala, May 29, 1950. In a subsequent letter, addressed to Beltritti and dated August 23, 1951, the women threatened to embrace the Orthodox community if her requests were not heard by the Latin Patriarchate.

37 APLJ, *ibid.*, Jamil Yusuf Dahir and 'Abd Allah Yusuf Nasr Allah to Gori, autograph manuscript letter in Arabic, Burqa, September 9, 1950.

38 APLJ, *ibid.*, Muhammad (surname illegible) to Gori, autograph manuscript letter in Arabic, Jerusalem, October 24, 1950. A list of books requested is appended to the letter, among them texts on Arabic syntax, history and geography.

39 APLJ, *ibid.*, Ihsan Hashim to Jallad, typescript with autograph manuscript signature in Arabic, Jerusalem, March 2, 1950.

40 APLJ, *ibid.*, Muhammad Khalil 'Abd Allah to Gori, autograph manuscript letter in Arabic, Jerusalem, March 8, 1950.

Others who did not see themselves as refugees also requested financial assistance from the new patriarch by means of letters, petitions and more. Oudeh Samawi from Mafraq sent the newly elected patriarch a rhymed composition in which, citing Dante, he narrated his misfortunes and appealed for alms.⁴¹ Faced with requests of this sort, Giacomo Beltritti, Latin patriarchal chancellor (1949–70),⁴² noted on some of the documents the type of response to be sent: “His Beatitude will do all he can,” “1 lira was given through a priest,” “I recommended him to the priest.”

Finally, from the beginning of his incumbency, Gori had to address conflicts between priests and refugees, which had broken out since the beginning of hostilities, as in the case of Rafidiya and Nablus.⁴³ Disagreements between congregants and priest also surfaced at Bayt Jala, where a group of parishioners sent petitions to the new patriarch to complain about Fr. Georges al-Qadr.⁴⁴

In any case, the sources demonstrate that some Latin Catholics invested great hope in Gori. The new patriarch had to face a political reality that was difficult to assess and a diocese in full-blown upheaval due to the conflict and the refugee exodus.

2 Reshaping the Diocese

2.1 *The Redefinition of the Vicariate of Galilee*

At the time of Gori’s appointment, according to patriarchate data, the Jerusalem diocese had about forty thousand faithful within its boundaries. Of these, 5,275 were within the new State of Israel, 18,408 were in the so-called West Bank now under Hashemite control, while 15,439 lived in Transjordan.⁴⁵ In July 1949, the Palestinian Christians in Israel numbered around 36,000, with 80,000 in the Arab zone (30,000 of them refugees), making a total of 116,000, compared

41 APLJ, *ibid.*, ‘Awda Samawi to Gori, autograph manuscript letter in Arabic, Mafraq, September 15, 1950.

42 Ordained in 1933, Beltritti (1910–92) studied in the Latin patriarchal seminary in Bayt Jala, where he moved in 1926 from Italy. After becoming chancellor, he was appointed coadjutor patriarch in 1965 and became patriarch in 1970, after Gori’s death, leading the diocese until 1987.

43 See APLJ, *Paroisses, Nablus, 1860–1950*, Salim Musa Sudah to Jallad, December 6, 1948, and APLJ, *ibid.*, Bishara Farwaji to Jallad, December 26, 1948, both manuscript signed letters in Arabic.

44 APLJ, *Paroisses, Beit Jala*, autograph manuscript petition in Arabic by a number of Latin community parishioners to Gori, Bayt Jala, June 15, 1950.

45 See APLJ, *AG, Élection, félicitations, vœux, textes, Parrocchie e missioni del Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme*, statistical data from January 1, 1951.

with 140,000 in 1947.⁴⁶ The wartime situation had made it very difficult to clarify the data on the Catholics who had passed from the Israeli to the Jordanian sectors or toward the borders with Lebanon and Syria. Testa had made this point in autumn 1948 when, in a letter to Tisserant, he conceded that it was impossible to find reliable information and figures on the situation because of the dispersal of communities among different countries and the fact that “Catholic refugees are mixed with Muslim refugees”.⁴⁷ According to imprecise statistics presented by Hakim to Pius XII during an audience in November 1948, there were at least one hundred thousand Palestinian Christian refugees, of whom fifty thousand were in Lebanon, fifteen thousand each in Syria and Transjordan, ten thousand in the West Bank and two thousand in Egypt.⁴⁸

For the Latin diocese in Jerusalem, there is no doubt that the state of play at the end of the war featured a patriarchate that was substantially split in three, with the Israeli sector on one side, the territory under control of the Jordanian monarchy on the other, and Gaza, administered by Egypt. The first had seen the Catholic presence collapse because of flight and expulsions during the conflict, while the second and the third now included several thousand faithful who had fled Israel.

According to British estimates, in 1946 in Mandate Palestine there were forty-five thousand Catholics (Latin and Eastern, mostly Melkite), out of a total of 145,060 Christians. No estimates were given for each Christian and Catholic community, but the tables on the population distribution by cities and villages allows for an estimate of about one hundred thousand Christians within the boundaries of what two years later would become the State of Israel. The Israeli registration of the population, carried out between November 1948 and January 1949, provides some figures on the postwar scenario: in January 1949, 16,630 Catholics were registered, out of a total of 32,355 Christians (11,764

46 These data, which come from the General Monthly Bulletin of Current Statistics and from UNICEF, were reported by Louis Massignon in his section of the report on “Mission d’information à Béthléem”, produced together with Jean Rodhain and Louis Salleron: “Rapport de la mission d’information envoyée auprès des réfugiés de Bethléem en Terre Sainte par le comité catholique de secours (1949),” in Massignon, *Opera Minora*, 3:495–508, also contained in CADC, *Levant, Palestine (1944–1952)*, 427, *Comité de secours aux réfugiés arabes de Béthléem*, “Mission d’information à Béthléem”; AAV, *ADAGP*, 14, 59, 4, fols. 90–131, and ACO, *Oriente, Varie: Missione “Pro Palestina”*, 10/61, 2, doc. 247. Massignon gave a copy of this text to McMahan who commented to Tisserant that “several unfortunate misunderstandings had arisen” from this publication. ACO, *ibid.*, doc. 252, January 4, 1950.

47 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: affari generali*, 457/48, 2, doc. 93. Testa to Tisserant, October 14, 1948, translation from Italian.

48 ACO, *ibid.*, doc. 109, “Les réfugiés de Palestine,” Rome, November 27, 1948.

Orthodox, 985 Protestants and 2,936 Christians of other denominations).⁴⁹ However, the Israeli authorities estimated that about fifteen thousand Christians would return to Israel from 1949 to 1950. This explains the fact that the Israeli statistics mention 4,113 Latins for January 1949 but the Latin Patriarchate reported 5,275 Latins in Israeli territory at the beginning of 1951. From this data, two main observations can be drawn: first, the number of Christians in Israel significantly decreased as a consequence of the war; second, moreover, the Catholic population became the largest Christian component in Israel (with a predominance of the Melkite), outnumbering the Orthodox.

The situation with the Melkite Catholics confirmed the transformation that was underway. Whereas the Melkite diocese of Acre counted around twenty-five thousand faithful in 1947, two years later, the Israeli authorities estimated the Melkites in the territory at around 11,500. The rest had moved to Lebanon, Syria and Transjordan. Thirteen Melkite churches were closed during the conflict.⁵⁰

Particularly significant was the growing percentage of the Christian population compared to the Muslim population. Whereas in 1946 the ratio was one Christian to every 7 to 8 Muslims in Palestine, in 1949 the percentage was 1 to 3 in Israel.⁵¹ This figure could be explained by the fact that there was a greater proportion of Palestinian Muslims than Christians among the refugees.

The Latins' situation in Israel at the end of the war was not simple. In the first months of conflict, a large part of the Latin Catholic population in the coastal plain (the parishes of Jaffa, al-Ramla, Lydda) and of the cities of Haifa, Safed, Tiberias, and Baysan – which had once constituted a significant percentage of the faithful in the diocese overall – had fled or been forcibly expelled to the Nazareth area and the zone of Bir Zayt and Ramallah. When the fighting reached even this area, and especially after the fall of Nazareth in the summer of 1948, a portion of the refugees was displaced again in the direction of Bethlehem and then toward the cities of Jordan. Thus, a percentage of the Latins became internally displaced people (IDP), refugees in areas that remained within the State of Israel, while the remainder was outside of the so-called green line established by the armistices in 1949. Of the small Latin Catholic communities in the north of Israel, some escaped or were displaced

49 See Chaim Wardi, ed., *Christians in Israel: A Survey* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1950), 30–31.

50 See Pierre Médebielle, *L'Eglise catholique aux Lieux Saints* (Jerusalem: Patriarcat Latin, 1961), 9.

51 Wardi combined the Muslim and the Druze population, due to origins of Druzism in Isma'ilism. The Israeli government would designate the Druze as a distinct ethnic community in 1957.

over the Lebanese border and others moved to countries outside the Arab world, especially to Latin America.

The statistics prepared by the patriarchate on the Latin Catholics registered within the diocese at the beginning of 1951 reveal the extent of the consequences of the war.⁵² The parishes within Israel were the most affected by the conflict: 'Ayn Karim now had only 7 faithful; Lydda's parishioners dropped gone from 250 to 35; Mujaydil, Tiberias, and Baysan (which had 190 Latin Catholics in December 1946) were now without congregations.⁵³ The movement of the Palestinian Roman Catholic population also affected other parishes, especially al-Ramla, Acre, Haifa, and Rafat.⁵⁴ In Jaffa, 320 Latins were left. The Franciscan parish in the Israeli sector of Jerusalem now had 300 congregants.

From Acre, the Franciscan Alberto Rock called on the pope to intervene with aid, especially milk, which had become scarce after the local Arab committee had interrupted the distribution of basic necessities. Rock, who had cooperated with the AHC during the dramatic days of the city's capture but criticized its management of aid, hastened to declare: "It is grievous to state that the Arabs themselves have cooperated with the Jews in a policy of impoverishing our compatriots."⁵⁵ In late 1948, McMahon described Acre as a "ghost city".⁵⁶

Conditions in Tiberias and Capernaum were also dire. In the former, which overlooks the lake of the same name, many religious buildings had suffered damage, among them the chapel of the Franciscan casa nova, the hostel of the Franciscan nuns on the Mount of Beatitudes, which the religious were forced to leave; and the Benedictine's building in al-Tabigha was occupied by Israeli troops.⁵⁷ The few inhabitants of Capernaum were put to flight; an Italian friar remained, isolated, guarding the ruins of the two important archeological sites.

52 APLJ, AG, *Élection, félicitations, vœux, textes, Parrocchie e missioni del Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme*, statistical data from January 1, 1951.

53 In the parochial statistics these are marked with two asterisks, as "annihilated parishes left devoid of faithful". For the information on Mujaydil, ASCTS, *Status descriptivus*, 1951, 120.

54 Differently from the preceding places, these are defined in the statistics as the parishes "most damaged by the forced exodus of the faithful". In the patriarchate's data from the beginning of 1951, al-Ramla had 250 Latins, Acre 62, Haifa 610 and Rafat 5. For al-Ramla, the custody's statistics reported 200 Latin faithful. See ASCTS, *Status descriptivus*, 1951, 105.

55 "As for the Arabs, they should have saved whatever could be saved for the refugees. In truth, they have saved a lot from the Israelis, but not so as to keep it until the return of the refugees, but to use it or sell it or give it now to this person and now to that one. The absentees, in their view, which is also the Israelis' view, do not have the right to anything." ASCTS, ACC, *Miscellanea, Guerra arabo-israeliana*, "Cronaca di Acri, P.A. Rock (1948)," chronicle of July 1948, translation from Italian.

56 AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to O'Connor, copy, December 12, 1948.

57 AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, copy, s. l., December 13, 1948.

Within Israel, the area most impacted by the wartime upheaval was that of Nazareth; here the greatest number of Latin Catholics fleeing the battles was concentrated. Before the outbreak of war, the town and surrounding villages had had around two thousand Latin Catholics; in 1951, there were 2,889.⁵⁸ Nazareth was the destination for Catholic refugees in the first months of the war; after its conquest by the Israeli army in July 1948, a portion of its original inhabitants abandoned it, while the refugees who had arrived in the preceding months remained. The surrounding villages were hit hard, including al-Rayna, where, during the months of fighting, the priest died and the only religious left were the Sisters of the Rosary. There, the Latin community grew from 100 to 157 with the arrival of refugees from elsewhere in Palestine.

Close to al-Rayna, Cana, a parish founded by Franciscans in 1881 with a sanctuary where Jesus had performed his first miracle, had 170 Latin faithful by the end of the war. The pastoral care of the Catholics was entrusted to a Franciscan, Giuseppe Leombruni, from 1946, which the community recognized as a strategy to save the population from expulsion after the destruction of neighboring Saffuriya by the Israeli army.⁵⁹ Following the Franciscan's mediation, the Israeli military authorities did not commit acts of violence in other villages; he negotiated the bloodless surrender of Cana.

Saffuriya⁶⁰ had been attacked as part of Operation Dekel, a few days before the Nazareth offensive. The population was expelled and numerous village buildings were damaged. The Basilica of St. Anne was also damaged by the bombardment.⁶¹

The concentration of Latin Catholics remaining in Israel in the area of Nazareth meant that the patriarchal vicariate of Galilee, led by Antonio Vergani, took on a particularly politically important role for the Jerusalem Latin Church, despite the fact that most of its faithful were now in territory controlled by Jordan.

2.2 *The Growth of the Parishes in the West Bank and Transjordan*

If the Latin Church in Israel had experienced a collapse in the Catholic presence due to the 1947–49 war, the parishes in the Arab zone witnessed extraordinary growth with the influx of Palestinians refugees. After months of fighting, the situation in the parishes under Arab control became ever more

58 The small neighboring parish of Jaffa of Nazareth grew from 120 to 185 faithful.

59 Several years later, the same Franciscan priest related the story of Cana in an article in *L'Avenire d'Italia* on February 16, 1964.

60 An important center in the Roman period, tradition identifies it as the location of the house of St. Anne, mother of Mary.

61 On the events at Saffuriya, see Khalidi, *All That Remains*, 350–53.

dramatic. At the end of hostilities, it was clear that the Latin Church was facing an enormous task in absorbing the refugees and adjusting to an increase in their congregations that had brought many parishes to their knees.

A portion of the Roman Catholic refugees concentrated in the area fell under Jordanian control: the eastern part of Jerusalem, the villages in the area around Bethlehem (including Bayt Jala and Bayt Sahur), Ramallah (‘Ayn ‘Arik, Bir Zayt, al-Tayba, ‘Abud) and Jenin (al-Zababida). Some figures reveal the scale of population increase in the parishes: the congregation in Bayt Jala went from 735 in 1946 to 1,248 in January 1951; in Bayt Sahur from 360 to 550; Ramallah from 950 to 2,250; al-Tayba from 510 to 679; ‘Abud from 80 to 460; the small area of Jenin counted 184 faithful. In this case too, there are some discrepancies in the figures; for example, the data on the parish of St. Saviour in Jerusalem vary from 5,600⁶² and 6,600,⁶³ while in the case of the parish of Bethlehem, the custody described “7,000 refugees counted as faithful to the Latin rite”, while the patriarchal statistics mention 4,456 faithful.⁶⁴ Overall, however, the Latin Catholic population in the West Bank grew appreciably; according to patriarchate data, in January 1951 it comprised 18,408 persons. There was even more significant growth in the parishes of Transjordan, which included 15,434 congregants in January 1951.⁶⁵

Prior to Gori’s appointment, the people most aware of this altered reality were the Franciscan Terence Kuehn, the vicar for Judea, and Ni‘ma Sim‘an, the vicar for Transjordan. The latter described the territory’s emergencies and the continuous stream of people arriving at the vicariate to ask for aid. The patriarchate’s structures and agencies were not equipped to manage such a situation: “One must realize ... that the number of Catholics, most of them of the Latin rite, has doubled in Transjordan and that the greatest number of refugees and the poorest of them are installed here ... the hope of returning to the Jewish zone to live and stay is very low.”⁶⁶

In the course of a few months, some cities had been transformed on an enormous scale due to the arrival of the refugees. The masses of refugees

62 APLJ, AG, *Élection, félicitations, vœux, textes, Parrocchie e missioni del Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme*, Statistical data from January 1, 1951.

63 ASCTS, *Status descriptivus, 1951*, 27.

64 *Ibid.*, 72.

65 In Transjordan, in 1950 the Melkites numbered 5,899; Orthodox, 26,620; and Protestants, 1,266. The Muslim population amounted to about 144,000 persons. APLJ, LP-AG, *Pontifical Mission – CNEWA, 1948–1961*, “Dati delle missioni del Vicariato Patriarcale Latino di Transgiordania,” Amman, April 30, 1950.

66 APLJ, LB-AG, *Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946–1953*, Sim‘an to Jallad, Amman, September 26, 1949, translation from Italian.



FIGURE 3.1
Construction work on
the new church and
vicariate in Amman,
1950s
APLJ/AEBAF

prompted Testa and Gori to open three new missions in Jordan: in 1949, in al-Zarqa', Irbid and, in the following year, Amman. Due to the Palestinian exodus, the third became the biggest parish in the diocese. The Jordanian capital saw the arrival of over three thousand Palestinian refugees of the Latin rite who, added to the Transjordan faithful already present, increased the numbers in the local parish to about seven thousand people.⁶⁷ Ten years earlier, in 1940, the faithful had numbered around five hundred. Amman's Latin community had thus experienced extraordinary growth, while the structures available to the Christians were still few and poorly organized. The construction of new buildings became an urgent matter to respond to the needs of the Catholic population (fig. 3.1); the patriarchal schools in Amman could accommodate only a quarter of the refugee children. The chaos ensuing from the conflict, the socioeconomic upheaval that resulted from it, the absence of land and industries in the rest of the kingdom and the high birth rate meant that Amman's population was largely young, active and forming new families. These were the circumstances in which most of the displaced Catholics of the patriarchal diocese found themselves.

The second center into which the refugees flooded, al-Zarqa', was a more complex case. Located 25 kilometers northwest of Amman, it had just been a

67 See APLJ, *ibid.*, plan by Sim'an for Gori to respond to the "urgent necessities" occasioned by the "continuous development of the parishes of the Latin Patriarchate in Transjordan", Amman, March 7, 1950, translation from Italian.

small town before the Palestinian refugees arrived. After the events of 1948, it experienced a phase of vertiginous growth so that in the 1950s it went from a city of six thousand to more than a hundred thousand inhabitants. A parish was opened for the Latin Catholic nucleus of around eight hundred members in 1950. However, it did not have a church, and the Latin vicariate repeatedly requested an allocation from the Oriental Congregation and the CNEWA so that one could be built. Work was begun in 1955 after protracted wrangling between the vicariate of Amman and Cardinal Tisserant, who adopted a more cautious position in granting extraordinary funds to the patriarchate given the consistent amounts provided by Rome for Catholic works in the region.⁶⁸ Irbid also saw the immigration of about fifty thousand refugees, and another 88 small villages surrounded the city. In 1950, the Latin parish comprised 240 Catholics. Like Amman and al-Zarqa', it was one of the most developed centers in Transjordan and therefore became the destination of thousands of people seeking work.

However, the Palestinian refugees concentrated in the south and north of Amman, in the Quweira plain, in the area southeast of al-Zarqa', and to the north of Irbid. Madaba was also the destination for thousands of refugees, who formed an encampment to the southwest of the city, along the road toward Main.

The data on the demographic growth of these principal centers in Transjordan make clear an important point: the displacement of the Palestinian population, including thousands of Latin Catholics, did not only involve refugees fleeing or expelled from Israel. At the end of the war, Arab Palestine was in a state of deep economic crisis which occasioned the migration of a mass of people seeking work. Sim'an had been aware of this since 1949, stating that "as well as refugees in the strict sense of the word, there are refugees in a second category coming from Bethlehem, Bayt Jala, Jifna, Bir Zayt, and al-Tayba to look for work, and there are very many Latins among them". He added: "At the time of this invasion, our churches, schools, and priests were scarcely adequate for the Transjordanian population" and so there was a need for more extensive actions and resources.⁶⁹ This picture of the new reality outlined by

68 The demographic growth of al-Zarqa' would continue throughout the 1950s, and that of the Latin parish with it; at the beginning of the 1960s, it had about three thousand faithful. See Médebielle, *L'Eglise catholique*, 13.

69 "One has to recognize this new situation in order to be able to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the spiritual needs of the Catholics both in the churches and in the schools ... We therefore wish to be realistic, and in order to react in time to the ever-increasing Protestant activity, it will be necessary to provide for the continuous development of the following centers with new schools and churches and parochial houses."

Sim'an allows for an understanding of two points. The first has to do with the fact that the ecclesiastical structures were receiving thousands of refugees, Catholic and otherwise. This interreligious element is joined by a further point: it was not only the refugees who were displaced within the territory, but also a growing mass of dispossessed who were looking for housing and work, who migrated from the war-torn Arab Palestine area that was economically on its knees. The work of the church would focus on both these fronts – refugees and dispossessed – in the following decade.

2.3 *Gaza's Isolation*

Within the patriarchal diocese, Gaza was one of the towns hardest hit by the war.⁷⁰ Now under Egyptian control, the town's territory rapidly filled up with hundreds of thousands of refugees throughout the war, especially after the battles of autumn 1948. Some statistics mention two hundred thousand refugees in a territory of a few hundred square kilometers. Thus, Gaza, including its Latin parish, was overwhelmed with refugees.

The Latin Catholic mission had opened in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷¹ The political events of the next decades, and especially the bombardments during the First World War, had hit Gaza hard, driving its inhabitants to leave the town. Even the elderly priest, the Austrian Georg Gatt, was forced to flee. The town was occupied by the British on November 6, 1917, opening a new phase for Palestine and for Gaza itself.

Upon Barlassina's nomination in 1920, the priest asked to be allowed to return to Gaza and to renew the missionary effort in the area. A girls' school was in operation after 1918, but the parish was almost devoid of congregants; the patriarchal procurator who visited Gaza in November 1920 saw eleven persons attend his first Sunday mass. Only three years later did Barlassina resolve

APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946–1953*, Sim'an to Jallad, Amman, September 26, 1949, translation from Italian.

70 For Gaza's involvement in the war, see Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Gaza: A History*, trans. John King (London: Hurst, 2014), 57–79.

71 Gaza assumed a special importance in the history of Christianity in the first three centuries because of the extraordinary diffusion of monasteries in its environs. This Christian presence was then progressively reduced and gradually replaced by Muslim expansion. After some short-lived earlier attempts, a Franciscan establishment in Gaza took shape in the mid-nineteenth century. Two decades after the reestablishment of the Latin Patriarchate in 1847, Fr. Morétain, the initiator of the first Patriarchal mission to Bayt Jala and then to Bayt Sahur, took on the project of opening a Catholic house in the Gaza region. In the summer of 1869, Morétain was established there along with two assistants. The first results of the mission were not encouraging. The definitive opening came ten years later through the work of an Austrian missionary, Georg Gatt.

to send a missionary to the town, Jubra'il Suwaydan, a Latin priest originally from the Transjordanian parish of al-Husn.⁷² In 1926 it was the turn of a new priest, this time an Englishman, Ernest Bundy, who found 57 Catholics of all rites living in Gaza. In the revolt of 1936–39, Gaza was one of the most violent centers of Palestinian insurgency. The Christians here also joined the Muslims in anti-Zionist demonstrations and formed Islamo-Christian committees. The Second World War also struck the area. At the time, Gaza had about 19,500 inhabitants, 720 of them Christian. The population had grown in recent decades, expanding into the few kilometers separating the town from the sea and then along the coast.

The war broke out a few months after the arrival of Fr. Shukri Surur in Gaza. Especially after spring 1948, the area was at the center of the conflict; it was not one of the principal theaters of war, but it was in the front line as a destination for tens of thousands of refugees fleeing from Galilee, Jaffa, Lydda and al-Ramla. Furthermore, during the autumn, clashes between Egyptian troops and the Israeli army in the area of Beersheba in the south of Israel set off a new wave of refugees in the direction of Gaza.

At the end of hostilities, Gaza was a subject in the armistice between Egypt and Israel. The so-called Gaza Strip was created *de facto* in December 1948: a zone of 362 square kilometers, 54 kilometers long and a little over 5 kilometers wide, hugging the coastline and delimited to the south by the cities of Rafah and Khan Yunis. The negotiations between Egypt and the Israeli government placed the strip under Arab control.

The war was a dramatic time for the parish of Gaza and especially for its priest, Surur. The arrival of thousands of refugees, the vast majority of them Muslim, required an enormous aid effort, especially in proportion to the meager resources of the small Latin community. However, the local Catholics and their curate did not shrink from involvement in aiding the refugees. In December 1948, as the fighting continued, an Israeli bombardment struck the Latin mission cemetery. During Operation Horev and the subsequent influx of a new wave of refugees, Gaza's rectory housed dozens of families. In the parish complex, Surur accommodated about 150 nuclear families, totaling eight hundred people. About 150 of them were Catholics (figs. 3.2–3.3). Another hundred families were housed in tents on the Latin mission's property.⁷³

72 See Pierre Médebielle, *Gaza et son histoire chrétienne* (Jerusalem: Patriarcat Latin, 1982), 87.

73 In the small volume produced by the PMP titled *Le Pape et la tragédie palestinienne* (Beirut: Pontifical Mission to Palestine, 1950), reference is made to a total of 270 families accommodated by Surur between the house, the church, and the tents at the parish's disposal.



FIGURE 3.2
Refugees outside Gaza's Latin
church, 1948–49
APLJ/AEBAF



FIGURE 3.3
Shukri Surur with refugee
children in front of Gaza's Latin
church, 1948
APLJ/AEBAF

In 1948, Gaza's population grew from 90,000 to 300,000. The refugees were concentrated in nine camps that mostly consisted of tents, to be later substituted by flimsy brick huts. The small parish of Gaza, once attended by a few dozen persons, now also found itself with hundreds of refugees of various origin and faiths. The impossibility for a single priest to attend to this dramatic situation and the importance of pastoral work in a frontier zone increased the appeals for Gori to send a new priest to assist Surur.⁷⁴ These appeals were disregarded, but the priest did not let up in his requests and heartfelt testimonials on the situation. At Easter 1950, Surur wrote to the patriarchal chancellor, Beltritti:

74 See APLJ, *LP-AG, Pontifical Mission – CNEWA, 1948–1961*, McMahon to Gori, Beirut, August 15, 1950.



FIGURE 3.4 Shukri Surur and Hanna al-Nimri with military and civil authorities in Gaza, October 1950
APLJ/AEBAF

“I would like to take a short trip up there [to the patriarchate]; but how to do it? Truly, we are separated from everyone. Jerusalem is forbidden to us, and Egypt does not want to know ... I am so busy here and begin to feel exhausted. What to do? I am alone.”⁷⁵ However, Surur’s letters did not leave the patriarchal hierarchy in Jerusalem completely unmoved by events in Gaza; Beltritti himself expressed his respect for the curate’s work in transforming the Latin mission in the strip into a “monastery refuge.”⁷⁶ For health reasons, Surur was replaced by the Jordanian Hanna al-Nimri on October 1, 1950. Al-Nimri continued the work of aiding the refugees initiated by Surur and strengthened relations with the Egyptian military administration of Gaza (fig. 3.4).⁷⁷ He would head the parish of Gaza until the dramatic events of 1956.

75 APLJ, *Gaza*, Surur to Beltritti, Gaza, April 1, 1950, translation from Italian.

76 The expression is found in an issue of the journal *Proche-Orient* (6, no. 1 [1950]: 25–26), in which an image of Surur with a group of refugees at Gaza also appears. See APLJ, *LB-GB*, *UNRWA (réfugiés), 1947–1955*, and APLJ, *Paroisses, Gaza*, Beltritti to Surur, copy, Jerusalem, May 19, 1950.

77 See the messages in Arabic left in the Gaza parish register by Muhammad Najib, governor-general of Gaza, and Mustafa al-Tawaf, deputy governor general, transcribed by al-Nimri. APLJ, *ibid.*, al-Nimri to Gori, Gaza, June 15, 1951.

3 The Holy See and the Palestinian Refugees

3.1 “Solidarity in This Delicate Cause of Palestine”: the Origins of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine

Throughout 1948 the Holy See received requests to intervene on behalf of the refugees, especially in connection to the bloodiest battles and the most sizeable population transfers. Along with the demand for a new patriarch, the incessant requests for humanitarian aid from Rome were a common feature of letters from clergy and faithful in the Holy Land to those responsible for the Church of Jerusalem and to Rome. In Europe and the United States too, various sectors of the Catholic hierarchy and laity were conscious that the question of the Palestinian refugees was taking on significant dimensions; in the years and decades that followed, the Middle Eastern Arab world would undergo a profound social, economic and political transformation, reshaping the very identity of the Palestinian people.⁷⁸

As fighting began in the aftermath of the UN resolution of November 1947, the CNEWA redoubled its shipments of food and medical supplies to Palestine. Some conferences of European bishops, especially in Belgium and France, also began to raise funds for Palestine. However, the expulsions and fighting complicated the work of managing the humanitarian emergency. It was clear to the Latin Church that something had to be done, and as soon as possible. Priests were the most sensitive to this reality as they were faced on the ground with a situation that would be difficult to sustain for long. Some priests also appealed to other local institutions, especially the AHC. This can be seen especially in the case of Acre, where the relations between the Franciscan Alberto Rock and the committee were well established, but also in the experience of Jaffa, where the committee itself addressed Luigi Stellacci, curate of the Latin parish, asking him to find a community of clergy prepared to work in a hospital that the British authorities had ceded to the local Red Cross. For the Italian priest, this was an “opportunity to show our solidarity in this delicate cause of Palestine”.⁷⁹

After the events of May 15, humanitarian intervention became even more urgent and, at the same time, complex. The situation was particularly

78 See Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 177–209; Helena Lindholm Schulz with Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003); on Palestinian identity as a “border construction”, see Lindholm Schulz, *The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), esp. 119–43.

79 APLJ, *Paroisses, Giaffa, 1950–*, Stellacci to Jallad, Jaffa, March 11, 1948, translation from Italian.

delicate and difficult in Jerusalem, due to the city's division. During the first truce between June and July 1948, the Red Cross organized the distribution of provisions – several thousand kilos of nutrition per month – within the Israeli sector; among those who benefited were also numerous Christian communities of various denominations who absorbed the refugee civilian Arab population. The Red Cross was assisted in this action by the Franciscan Patrick J. Coyle.

During the summer of 1948, Jallad begged Testa to recognize the importance of a rapid intervention on the part of the church to aid the refugees;⁸⁰ according to the Palestinian bishop, the Catholics, unable to access the forms of aid made available by other Christian denominations and by the Muslim world, were increasingly isolated, although the network of parishes throughout the patriarchate's territory – if not in a uniform manner – had itself been able to form an effective aid network for the local Christians of all rites. However, Jallad was not only concerned about the growing poverty and difficult living conditions of the faithful. For the vicar general, the state of crisis had produced a general disorder against which the church seemed powerless: “the material misery provokes moral misery, and both are increasing.”⁸¹ Thus, Jallad feared that recognizing that the absence of a concrete response by the Latin institutions to a chaotically transforming reality could drive Christians to abandon the church and embrace other rites and denominations. Jallad's expectations of an intervention by the Holy See were thus linked to fears of a hemorrhage of faithful.

A few months later, on October 24, Pius XII pronounced on the question of Palestine in his encyclical letter *In multiciplibus curis*, in which he made direct reference to “thousands of refugees, lost and unshod”, who “wandered far from their homes in search of shelter and bread”, affirming that the Holy See was doing concrete work to aid the refugees.⁸²

Meanwhile, Vergani sent an appeal to Rome from Galilee “on behalf of the dispossessed of Nazareth”⁸³ to “make the anguished cry of so many hungry

80 “Everyday more we feel the misery and the indigence of the population displaced from their homes ... this is the opportunity to show the charity of the Church; the longer the longer the delay will last, the worse it will be.” AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 55, 8, fol. 225, Jallad to Testa, Jerusalem, July 20, 1948, translation from Italian.

81 APLJ, *LB-AG*, *Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Jallad to Testa, copy, August 13, 1948, translation from Italian. Around those months, Rock had used similar phrases regarding Acre: “the city's morale is beginning to fall!” ASCTS, *ACC*, *Miscellanea, Guerra arabo-israeliana*, “Cronaca di Acri, P.A. Rock (1948),” chronicle of July 1948.

82 AAS 40 (1948): 433–36, here 433.

83 APLJ, *LB-AG*, *Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Jallad, Nazareth, November 5, 1948.

people reach the Holy See”.⁸⁴ In heartfelt phrases, the text reviews the condition of the refugees massed together in what had until recently been “the flower of Galilee”. The patriarchal vicar was close to Jallad’s thoughts; the central ecclesiastical authority should intervene with urgency on behalf of the refugees, not only to help the Catholics economically and materially. Otherwise, said Vergani, the church could say “goodbye to faith and good customs”, thanks to the activity of the “usual intriguers”, who “capitalize on these desperate circumstances to sow the weeds of anticlericalism and communism among the hungry”.⁸⁵ Vergani feared that communist ideas would spread among the thousands of refugees in Nazareth: “what a shame it would be for us before the Catholic world when they learn that right there in Nazareth communism has wrenched the Catholic workers away from the masses,” he wrote emphatically.⁸⁶

In 1948 the major Catholic ecclesiastical institutions in the region – the Franciscan Custody, Latin Patriarchate and Apostolic Delegation – began a series of initiatives, albeit not well organized or coordinated. The custody organized soup kitchens that fed thousands throughout the territory, while the case nove – intended for pilgrims – opened their doors to the refugees. The patriarchate and the delegation handled the aid from the Oriental Congregation and the CNEWA. Utilizing the network of parishes and the funds from Rome, the two institutions formed groups, called “committees”, to aid refugees, beginning in the summer of 1948. Testa, along with the internuncio in Egypt, Hughes, and the nuncio in Lebanon, Marina, redoubled his appeals to the bishops and priests in their regions of origin to send more aid. As Gori noted after a meeting with Hughes in Cairo on September 9, Cardinal Spellman had sent the Holy See \$50,000 for the Palestinian refugees, to be divided between Testa and Hughes.⁸⁷ The latter acquired a thousand bed sheets and six hundred boxes of milk. The religious congregations also mobilized to receive refugees and to assist them with food, medical care and instruction. Finally, the church began to collaborate with UN agencies, particularly UNICEF, which was dedicated to children, and, after its foundation in December 1949, the UNRWA (United

84 AANY, ACNEWA, text of Vergani’s appeal titled “Nazareth la città della S. Famiglia minacciata dalla fame,” sent to Tisserant, Nazareth, June 24, 1948, translation from Italian.

85 Ibid.

86 APLJ, LB-AG, *Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Jallad, Nazareth, November 5, 1948, translation from Italian.

87 ASCTS, ACC, *Miscellanea, Guerra arabo-israeliana, Attività del custode (July 1947–September 9, 1948)*, manuscript notes by Gori, Cairo, September 9, 1948.

Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), brought into being specifically to aid the refugees in the Middle East.

Even though there was movement on many fronts by many parties within the church, the events of summer 1948, the new expulsions and the flight of refugees into neighboring countries revealed the immediate necessity for more effective coordination and an extensive and multipronged intervention. This was all especially clear when the events at Nazareth were considered. After the outbreak of conflict, the most important center of Galilee became the primary destination of aid efforts organized by the Belgian Catholic community, led by the bishop of Liège, Louis-Joseph Kerkhofs.⁸⁸

At the beginning of the summer, with news that Nazareth was filling up with refugees and about to be occupied by the Israeli army, various voices in the Catholic world called for mobilization in support of the Christian population of Galilee. The Belgian bishops now decided to make the journey to Palestine to gain a direct understanding of the needs and necessities of the inhabitants of Nazareth and of the refugees. If the 1947–49 war had spelled a setback for Christian travel in Palestine, this recommenced cautiously in 1949, with new forms of travel to the Holy Places devoted to humanitarian assistance to the refugees. A young Belgian seminarian, Léon Naveau, visited Nazareth under Kerkhofs' mandate. Perturbed by the fighting taking place and the misery of the population, Naveau decided to stay in Galilee, committing himself especially during the dramatic days of fighting in July 1948 and coordinating an aid network.⁸⁹ The Belgian volunteers in the city distributed food to thousands of people every day and supplied more than five hundred tons of clothing in those months. A group of fifteen doctors and nurses served the refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria. However, even the Belgian aid action had its limitations, especially in the context of the cities of Galilee.

In any case, since the outbreak of conflict and albeit with great difficulty, a complex humanitarian machine had been set in motion that was continually growing and being improved on. Much of the aid came from the CNEWA and the Belgian mission. The monetary donations amounted to millions of dollars,

88 Bishop of Liège for 34 years (from 1927 to 1961), Kerkhofs (1878–1962) hid several hundred Jews in his home and thus saved them from the Nazi deportations. This rescue work earned him the title of "Righteous among the Nations".

89 See ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: affari generali*, 457/48, 1, "Rapport sur la situation religieuse a Nazareth et en Galilée" prepared by Naveau, doc. 66, divided into two parts dated July 16, and August 18, 1948. The report was sent to the Secretariat of State and Tardini forwarded it to Tisserant on September 16, 1948.

while the various types of goods, especially food items, were worth more than half a million dollars.⁹⁰

The humanitarian Catholic aid also took the form of guaranteeing access to food for the refugees, especially in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Beirut and Damascus. Additionally, religious congregations and groups of laymen were involved in distributing milk supplied by UNICEF. Members of the medical faculty of Saint Joseph University of Beirut, operated by the Jesuits, swung into action for the refugees. Another context for intervention was the creation of jobs for refugees: in Jerusalem, the parish created a women's cooperative that did knitting work, while in Nazareth the Salesian agricultural school took on some refugees.

It was not just the Catholics who mobilized; aid from Protestant groups like the Church World Service in Jerusalem and the Lutheran World Relief in Bayt Sahur was also distributed to Catholic refugees. At the same time, the Catholic aid also helped Protestants, Orthodox and Muslims. The Quakers were especially active in Gaza.

The belief took hold that effective work of assistance to the refugees would demonstrate the Catholic Church's connection to the Christians in the Middle East and counter the frequent rumors, which were also connected to the lack of a patriarch, that claimed that the Western Catholic world had forgotten Palestine. This argument was used especially frequently by the Israeli authorities to dismiss Catholic protests against the occupation of religious structures by the Israeli army, suggesting that these were primarily motivated by entrenched antisemitism rather than by genuine attachment to the Palestinian people.⁹¹

Meanwhile, US bishops were discussing a plan to aid the refugees in the Middle East through the War Relief Services of the National Catholic Welfare Conference.⁹² The request had come directly from the UN mediator, Count Bernadotte; other UN officials, too, were afraid that the funds sent to the

90 AANY, ACNEWA, report by McMahon titled "Report on Relief Done for Palestinian Refugees Independently and in Cooperation with the United Nations' Relief Committee", n.d. [ca. 1949].

91 The Franciscan Terence Kuehn wrote to the cardinal archbishop of New York: "We are told over here that the Christian West has abandoned the Holy City and its Shrines and so it is left to the New State to protect them." AANY, ACNEWA, Kuehn to Spellman, [Jerusalem], August 12, 1948.

92 The National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC) was established in 1919 to continue the work of the National Catholic War Council, an aid organization founded by American Catholic bishops during the First World War. The NCWC – in 1922, the word "council" was modified to "conference", and it later became the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) – played an important role in relations between American Catholics and the US government.

Middle East from various humanitarian agencies would merely overlap, without there being an effective distribution of all the aid received. The Swedish mediator wished to define a plan of intervention that would guarantee a constant supply of aid for at least the following four months. The United Nations and the US State Department asked the American bishops to form a “temporary committee for American interests in the aid of Arab and Jewish refugees” through which to manage the aid in the Middle East. Significantly, this request envisaged an organ that would work both for the Palestinian and the Jewish refugees. Furthermore, as expressed in a memorandum to Spellman from Aloysius J. Wycislo, assistant executive director of the War Relief Services, there was also talk of creating a permanent committee to work together with the State Department and the United Nations in a long-term aid program for the Middle East.⁹³ Wycislo saw room for all the principal Catholic groups to participate in this future organization. In September, Count Bernadotte estimated there were around 350,000 refugees, but other sources spoke of more than 500,000.⁹⁴

3.2 *Between Diplomacy and Charity: McMahon’s Mission*

The situation in Palestine and in the refugee camps in the Middle Eastern region only seemed to become more critical. McMahon – entrusted by the CNEWA with the task of dedicating himself completely to observing the situation’s evolution and coordinating ecclesiastical aid – did not fail to notice that the money being sent was insufficient for the gravity of the emergency. For this, the Catholic bishops of the War Relief Services resolved to create a new institution – a plan also supported by Cardinal Spellman. Now they had to await approval from the Holy See.

In September 1948, McMahon, the CNEWA secretary, updated Cardinal Tisserant on the debate within the American episcopate regarding the question of Palestine.⁹⁵ McMahon now proposed to undertake a journey to the Middle East with the aim of observing on the ground what the church could do for the refugees and to supply a clearer picture to Pius XII of what needed to be done.⁹⁶ The Holy See approved McMahon’s proposed mission; it was decided

93 See AANY, ACNEWA, memorandum from Wycislo to Spellman, [Washington], September 1, 1948. In 1960, Wycislo (1908–2005) would become auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Chicago and then participate in the Second Vatican Council.

94 See AANY, ACNEWA, Hughes to Wycislo, copy sent to McMahon, Cairo, September 28, 1948.

95 See AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Tisserant, copy, September 22, 1948.

96 See AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, copy, October 29, 1948.

that he would leave New York on November 21, make a stop in Rome to meet with Pius XII, and then continue to Palestine.

The approach of winter brought new concerns regarding the fate of the refugees. On the eve of the CNEWA secretary's departure, Spellman wrote to Tisserant to emphasize that McMahon was not going to the Middle East on behalf of the recently established American Appeal for the Holy Land Refugees but "to safeguard Catholic interests and to reinforce the Catholic position."⁹⁷ McMahon's trip to the Middle East should thus be seen by the Holy See as a visit by one of its own representatives.

The Oriental Congregation was aware of the importance of McMahon's journey, the first visit by an external representative to the church of the Holy Land amid the new political landscape that had emerged from the conflict. Valerio Valeri, the assessor of the congregation, assured Spellman that he would try to assist McMahon on his journey as much as possible.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Relief Committee for Palestine was taking shape in Jerusalem. Presided over by Testa, it was based in the Latin Patriarchate and composed clergy and laity from various Catholic communities in the region.⁹⁸ The committee sent and disseminated appeals on behalf of the refugees and impoverished Palestinians, received donations, acquired and distributed goods according to necessity, and formed local subcommittees to help the central committee reach the refugees. All the donations in money and in goods received were immediately made available to Testa. While the apostolic delegate's power was thus theoretically significant, it was strongly curtailed by geographical distance.

As planned, McMahon departed for Europe and then for the Middle East. In late November, he held talks in Paris with some representatives from the UN and from the Jewish world. Then, in Rome, he gave one of a series of talks "de rebus Palestinensibus", in what was for him "a peaceful interlude before the 'storm'".⁹⁹ He met with Pius XII, who encouraged him in his task, blessing what had been done up to that point in the CNEWA. Within the Oriental Congregation too, various members of the curia, Tisserant foremost among them, expressed respect for the aid work that the US prelate had done and

97 AANY, ACNEWA, Spellman to Tisserant, [New York], November 13, 1948.

98 The vice president was the Franciscan Eugene Hoade, the secretaries were the Melkite vicar Gabriel Abu Sa'da and Antonio Albina, the treasurers Léandre Girard and Albert Alonzo, and the members Bonaventura 'Aqiqi, Hanna Qyumjiyan, Hanna 'Atallah, Jurj Ilya, Juzif Zaydan, Najib Talatiniyan. See ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: affari generali*, 457/48, 2, doc. 95, "Comitato Cattolico di Soccorso per la Palestina".

99 See AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to O'Connor, Rome, November 28, 1948.

was about to take on.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, at the Secretariat of State Montini and other Vatican officials met to examine the Holy See's intervention in favor of the Palestinian refugees. They all agreed on the importance of establishing "a Pontifical Mission, to stimulate and organize charity", to offer relief the refugees and "to affirm, indirectly, the Catholic Church's rights to the Holy Places".¹⁰¹

In early December, McMahon arrived in Israel. After a few days in Jerusalem and a meeting with the Franciscans in the custody, he continued to Galilee. In Haifa, he met with the director of the Christian department at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ya'akov Herzog.¹⁰² In a tense encounter, McMahon and Herzog addressed the problem of the internationalization of Jerusalem. The prelate focused less on the UN debate, insisting instead that the recently announced decision by the Israeli government to declare Jerusalem the capital of the new state should be immediately retracted on pain of a head-on clash with the church and the cancellation of anything so far achieved or suggested by the Israeli authorities up to that point regarding reconciliation with the Christian world.¹⁰³

The meeting with Herzog is to be interpreted within a bigger picture; indeed, one of the most important aspects of McMahon's journey was that it was the first visit to the new State of Israel by a Catholic prelate of international standing and that his trip enabled him to meet with members of the government. Another significant feature of the trip was that it also represented the first meeting of an international representative of the church with the communities affected by the 1948 war. His visits to the parishes hardest hit by the fighting left the CNEWA secretary deeply troubled. The general poverty, the desolation of the closed churches and parishes of the villages whose populations had fled, as well as the sense of isolation he found in the few clergy living in the area, already worn out by the war and by the effort to reach the more

100 See AANY, ACNEWA, Tisserant to McMahon, Rome, December 3, 1948.

101 ACO, *Oriente, Varie: Missione "Pro Palestina"*, 10/61, 1, doc. 1, "Relazione," November 27, 1948, translation from Italian.

102 See AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, copy, [Nazareth], December 10, 1948. Two months earlier, Herzog and Chaim Wardi had gone to Rome and met with various members of the Vatican curia including Count Enrico Galeazzi, Pietro Sigismondi from the Secretariat of State and Valerio Valeri from the Congregation for the Oriental Church. See Bialer, *Cross on the Star of David*, 12–13.

103 McMahon reported what he had declared to Herzog to Spellman: "I said I had been reading the papers here for the past few days and hoped that some of the statements on Jerusalem as the capital would not get outside the country, to spoil the other fine things the State planned to do for religion and the religious minorities." AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, copy, [Nazareth], December 10, 1948.

isolated communities, all gave McMahon a firsthand understanding of the difficult reality of Palestinian Christians.

On his travels, the secretary visited symbolic cities for Christianity like Nazareth, as well as little villages whose names had become important because of the battles that took place over them, such as Mujaydil, and then, on the way back to Jerusalem, centers like Lydda and al-Ramla. The sight of Tiberias, Capernaum, al-Rama, Iqrit and 'Aylabun made an impression on the prelate. McMahon's bitterness in reporting the desolate reality was sharpened by the fact that, in Vergani's words, granting the right of return for refugees and the permission to cultivate their own lands would solve all their problems, including from an economic perspective. Writing to his secretary, Harry O'Connor, McMahon described the living dire conditions of the population of Iqrit and the dramatic conditions of "poor Ailabun". He had visited this village, located near the Syrian border, and, sitting on the floor of the dilapidated residence of the Melkite curate, listened to the accounts of a few old people who had stayed. He sent them flour and other forms of aid, aware, however, that "not all the money in the world could put hope back in their hearts".¹⁰⁴

The CNEWA secretary then contacted various church aid groups and heard the reports from the congregations involved in helping the population at this delicate time. A strongly approving and apologetic picture emerges from his correspondence regarding the actions taken by church groups to aid Palestinian civilians, both Christian and Muslim (fig. 3.5).¹⁰⁵ In the opinion of those clergy and of McMahon himself, the support guaranteed by church entities represented the first true contact for many parts of the population with Latin congregations, and thus constituted an effective instrument of apostolate and proselytism.

104 AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to O'Connor, copy, December 12, 1948.

105 "The saddest scene today took place at the Salesian House of the Boy Jesus way up on the highest hill of Nazareth. About three hundred Moslem refugees from 'Aylut, a town near here, are living in this former hermitage, in common with four very impressive French Salesians, who superintend the food and work with the Moslem men on the land. The four great men brought me around and the sights of the poor people living in common in the rooms were pitiful. The priests were proud of the fact that these people from a wholly Moslem village were having for the first time in their lives contacts with priests and the Church. They told me the children were coming regularly to their Masses, that even the older people were fascinated by the Liturgy, and also that these were remarking that their Moslem leaders had deserted them while the Christians were the only ones doing any charity. Good from evil here certainly. This struck me all around: the Church is alone interested in the plight of the people." AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, copy, December 11, 1948.



FIGURE 3.5 Thomas McMahon distributes aid packages to child refugees, 1950s
APLJ/AEBAF

As McMahon visited the desolate villages, he became convinced of the necessity for decisive intervention by aid organizations directed by the Holy See and operated on the spot by the church of the region. He made sure to emphasize the importance and urgency of such a plan to Spellman, while remaining aware of the enormous difficulties involved in creating and maintaining a complex aid machine of this sort. As the situation in Israel “became clear before his eyes”, McMahon noted that the church ought to focus even more on aid work for the Palestinians who had remained within the State of Israel.¹⁰⁶

On December 21, before visiting the religious houses in the Old City of Jerusalem under Transjordanian control, McMahon dined with Moshe Dayan, the commander of the Israeli part of Jerusalem. Once again, they discussed the desecration perpetrated by the army and the issue of reparations; on the one hand, Dayan presented himself as having fought to keep in check Haganah’s violence toward religious institutions from the outset and assured that the

106 “I think we must do even more here in Israel, where only 72,000 Arabs are left. Significantly most of the Latin Catholics remain and less than half the Greek-Catholics have fled to Lebanon and Syria. Ergo, the Catholic problem is very much here, and there is a very good reason for working hard on it ... At any rate, what relief we do will keep our poor people alive in this State, where they belong and where they are the only symbols of our great stake here.” AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, copy, December 13, 1948.



FIGURE 3.6
Entry to Bethlehem of
Mansur Jallad (center),
with ‘Abdullah al-Tall
and Thomas McMahon
(left), 1948
APLJ/AEBAF

government was willing to come to a peaceful solution with the Christian world; on the other hand, McMahon reiterated the condemnation of the acts of vandalism.

After leaving Israel, the American prelate visited some parishes in Palestine and Transjordan and met with Testa and Jallad and a group of Red Cross representatives in Bethlehem (fig. 3.6). Then, at the beginning of January 1949, he headed for the refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria, from where he finally passed into Egypt and returned to Rome, on February 4. The journey as a whole reinforced his conviction that “there should be a special ‘Opera’ of the Holy Father, which would combine all previous efforts and also elicit more aid from Catholics in countries which have not yet given to this all-important cause”.¹⁰⁷ In a report to the Congregation for the Oriental Church, McMahon reviewed the most urgent findings, including the need for more interaction between religious staff, the apostolic delegates and the nuncios with respect to the necessary work, a larger-scale dispatch and distribution of donations arriving from the CNEWA and other organizations, strict levels of control, and direct attention to the interventions with frequent monitoring of its beneficiaries.¹⁰⁸

The reception of McMahon’s visit was very positive. In late January, the nuncio in Lebanon, Alcide Marina (1947–50), wrote to Spellman expressing the hope “that a special mission will be instituted to oversee our work of aiding the refugees, in the name of the pope and with the leadership of Msgr.

107 AANY, ACNEWA, “Report of Msgr. Thomas J. McMahon on Palestinian Refugees,” undated [ca. 1949].

108 AANY, ACNEWA, “Observations to Serve for Work of Oriental Congregation in Near East,” undated [ca. 1949].

McMahon".¹⁰⁹ Marina further expressed his request that a papal mission be founded to combat Protestant proselytism, a line of argument also to be found in Jallad's letters. According to the nuncio, "the Church would lose much if it were a visible presence in the aiding of refugees. The Protestant danger in the Orient is greater than one might think and would become alarming if the Protestant sects were to do more than the Catholic Church."¹¹⁰

The importance of establishing a papal mission was not only connected to the desire to highlight the work of the Catholic Church among the Palestinian refugees by giving it the papal seal of approval. Nor was it solely motivated by the desire to increase the amounts of donations and aid supplies that would accrue with the formation of an official organization willed by Rome and directed by papal emissaries. Above all, the foundation of the papal mission was rooted in the need to gather under a single umbrella the many and various charitable initiatives, more or less consolidated and structured, that had originated in various parts of the Catholic world to address the problem of the Palestinian refugees, and currently lacked any coordination.¹¹¹

Three aid committees had in fact been created at the behest of the local hierarchy: one for the area of Arab Palestine and Transjordan, led by Testa; another in Lebanon, under Marina's direction; and the third in Egypt, under Internuncio Hughes. At the same time, as has been seen, the Belgian bishops were also active. The Belgian work – renamed Palestina – represented the first real foreign aid entity for Palestinian refugees in the Catholic context. This primacy contributed to the rapid creation of a full-blown apologetic around the Belgian mission, which was described as the organization that had "saved" and "adopted" Nazareth.¹¹² In October 1948, Hakim went to Belgium to thank the diocese of Liège for the aid it had sent and to request more donations.

Aside from the Belgian involvement and that of the US bishops, as expressed in McMahon's journey and activity, other countries were also taking action. Aid came from Switzerland for the Palestinian population, especially in Lebanon and Bethlehem. The French church also did notable work, with

109 AANY, ACNEWA, Marina to Spellman, copy, Beirut, January 26, 1949.

110 Ibid.

111 The Holy See's double goal to raise funds and unite and lead all the Catholic actions for the return of the Palestinian refugees was outlined in the "Istruzione" sent by Valeri to twenty pontifical representatives in Europe, America, Asia and Australia. See ACO, *Oriente, Varie: Missione "Pro Palestina"*, 10/61, 1, doc. 50, Rome, June 18, 1949. Immediately after this communication, dioceses and conferences of bishops across the world – and particularly from North and Latin America – mobilized to send money, food, medicines and clothes. See ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: affari generali*, 457/48, 3, doc. 147, Montini to Valeri, Vatican, April 13, 1949.

112 See Pontifical Mission to Palestine, *Le pape et la tragédie palestinienne*, 8.

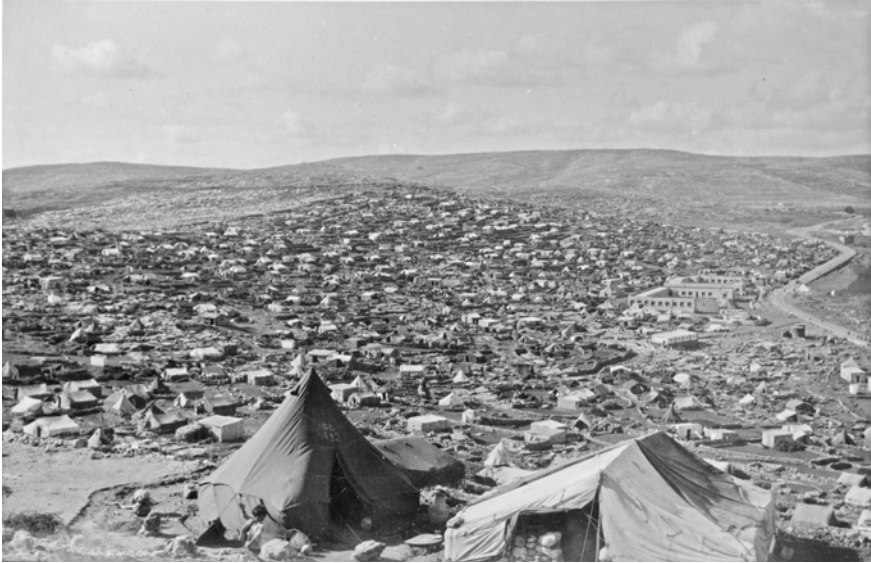


FIGURE 3.7 Dheisheh refugee camp near Bethlehem, 1960
APLJ/AEBAF

some of its representatives attentively following the news from the region. These were not only bishops; the Belgian example also drove first-rate intellectuals to action, like Louis Massignon. After dedicating several articles to the situation of the Palestinian refugees, the French scholar, who already had a deep knowledge of Palestine, became convinced of the need to go in person to help the refugees who were pouring into the area around Bethlehem (fig. 3.7). During 1949, Massignon was the principal instigator of the city's aid committee. This came into being after the French episcopate decided to send a fact-finding mission composed of the cleric Jean Rodhain, secretary general of *Secours catholique* – the French section of *Caritas Internationalis* – along with Massignon, the *Témoignage chrétien* journalist Robert Barrat, and the Institut Catholique de Paris professor Louis Salleron, who arrived in Palestine to ascertain the most urgent needs of the population in the Bethlehem area.

Thus, numerous Catholic aid organizations arrived in the Palestine region in 1948 and 1949. After the initial phase of establishment and organization, however, numerous problems arose. In the spring of 1949, the Belgian mission was increasingly in financial difficulty and was prepared to leave Nazareth, while the first steps of the French committee in Bethlehem were difficult and badly organized.

McMahon considered the situation pragmatically; while praising the work of the various groups, he drew attention to their limitations and inability to reach large sections of the Palestinian population. Furthermore, the lament from some clergy that the refugees were being helped by Belgian or US bishops, but not by the pope and the Vatican, increased CNEWA pressure for the establishment, as soon as possible, of an organization supported by the Holy See. The moment had come to join forces and to unify structures.

3.3 *The First Steps of the Pontifical Mission to Palestine*

McMahon's conclusions did not fall on deaf ears. In March 1949 the Secretary of State and the Congregation for the Oriental Church agreed on the urgency to constitute the Vatican agency for Palestinian refugees, to be funded by the CNEWA, the War Relief Services, the Franciscan Custody and the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher. The following month, Pius XII officially established the Pontifical Mission to Palestine (PMP). The CNEWA secretary was nominated president of the new organization, whose headquarters were established in Beirut. A few months later, Jules Creten, rector of the archdiocesan seminary in Malines, Belgium, was made secretary of the mission, with the Franciscan Raphael Kratzer chosen as the president's assistant.

The work of the PMP was structured around the following activities: the protection of thousands of refugees in religious houses, the operation of public refectories, the distribution of clothing, the assistance in finding work, the provision of free education to refugee children, the provision of health assistance, the contribution of aid via individual parishes, and the involvement of about a thousand clergy – priests and nuns – including in the ranks of institutions such as the Red Cross and UNICEF. In September 1949, the mission estimated that it had provided aid to about 300,000 persons, 45,000 of them Catholics and the rest Orthodox, Protestants and Muslims, although – at least at the beginning of its works – McMahon would have wanted to focus on Catholic refugees.¹¹³ The countries covered by the mission's work were Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria and Iraq.

113 AANY, ACNEWA, "General Report of Pontifical Mission" published by McMahon, September 8, 1949. "We shall remember that the Mission is to occupy itself above all and primarily with our own – the domestic fidei, even though there are cases in Transjordan and in Israel, where Moslems and Orthodox are being helped. Speaking of helping our own, although this cannot be done openly, the attempt has been made here, through our funds supplied by Msgr. Marina, to move Christians from otherwise entirely Moslem camps. This is very good and very much indicated," McMahon wrote to Tisserant. ACO, *Oriente, Varie: Missione "Pro Palestina"*, 10/61, 1, doc. 49, Beirut, June 11, 1949.

One of the areas in which the mission made the greatest efforts in the first months of its existence was the task of unifying the various Catholic aid agencies under its umbrella. The Swiss group accepted the proposal to join the mission, as did the Secours catholique. Meanwhile, the French committee for the support of Bethlehem found this policy of centralizing the aid effort difficult to embrace, but in the end Rodhain agreed to follow PMP guidelines.¹¹⁴ Naveau, of the Belgian organization, also concurred with the Holy See's decisions. However, despite their formal involvement in the mission, the various organizations continued to manage the aid they received autonomously. McMahon was aware of this substantial independence, which was, however, limited to those with direct access to the funds. In the case of donations and aid sent to parishes and priests by the PMP, the aid distribution had to be regulated by the mission's committees themselves.

The PMP took shape between 1949 and 1950, spawning a complex organizational network that included hundreds of parishes, refugee camps, schools, religious institutions and hospitals. In the 1950s, the mission encountered numerous obstacles to its functioning, due to the difficult relations between Catholic representatives,¹¹⁵ conflicts among Latin and Melkite prelates, and above all the waning possibility of an immediate resolution to the question of the Palestinian refugees.

3.4 *The Representations of Palestinian Refugees in the Western Catholic Imagination*

For the church, the refugee question in the Middle East was not only a humanitarian problem. Aside from the material needs demanding an urgent response, the issue also constituted a political problem that obliged the Catholic world to deal with Israel and the Arab states, despite reciprocal distrust and hostility. The Holy See's position of not being open to any form of relationship with the State of Israel was not practicable in the face of the emergency, in which, in fact, political mediation was just as urgent as aid assistance on the ground. This was another reason for McMahon's journey to Israel at the end of 1948 and his meetings with government representatives during those delicate weeks.

114 See some documents of the correspondence between the Oriental Congregation (namely Valeri and Tisserant) and Rodhain between 1949 and 1951, contained in CADC, *Levant, Palestine (1944–1952)*, 427, *Comité de secours aux réfugiés arabes de Béthléem*.

115 Already in 1949–50, tensions arose between McMahon and Testa, with Tisserant and Montini acting as mediators. See ACO, *Oriente, Varie: Missione "Pro Palestina"*, 10/61, 1, doc. 54, McMahon to Tisserant, June 14, 1949; AAV, *ADAGP*, 14, 59, 1, fols. 14–15, Testa to Montini, copy, February 20, 1950, confidential, and fol. 16, Montini's answer, April 29, 1950.

The same was true for relations with King ‘Abdullah, despite the fact that the Vatican’s position toward the Hashemite king had been mostly conciliatory.

A further aspect was emerging. The church’s approach toward refugees comprised an increasingly diverse kaleidoscope of images. The refugee theme was at the focus of interpretations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among the various members and representatives of the Roman Catholic Church of Jerusalem. This theme also brought to light the representations of the war as read through the lens of the humanitarian emergency. This process of updating the Catholic imagination concerning the Palestinian conflict was based on news and travel accounts about the refugee situation. This new thinking around Palestine influenced and sped the establishment of the PMP. McMahon’s travels in the region and his reports to cardinals Spellman and Tisserant, the articles published in the Catholic press, the accounts of pilgrims and volunteers, both famous and not, contributed to the definition of the contours of the figure of the Palestinian refugee in this emerging picture.

The reports published in the Catholic media presented a humanitarian disaster. The authoritative *Documentation catholique* described the flight or expulsion of the refugees from Israel and their dramatic situations.¹¹⁶ The goal to appeal to the reader’s piety also stemmed from the wish to incentivize donations to the dioceses and church organizations that were responding to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian refugees. The “crusade” for Palestine invoked by Pius XII, as has been seen, did not translate solely into a call for prayers and supplications for the safety of the Holy Places, but also into the request for donations and contributions to help the refugees.

As evoked by the photographs taken by members of the Latin Patriarchate, Palestinian refugees were described as a people in misery awaiting foreign international charitable intervention (figs. 3.8–3.10). Refugees’ voices and narratives, their petitions and their organizations were absent in the Catholic documents and press, which rather reflected a humanitarian essentialism conveyed by a continuous request for donations.¹¹⁷ The disastrous situation of

116 *Documentation Catholique*, no. 46 (1949): 652, reported in Edmond Farhat, ed., *Gerusalemme nei documenti pontifici* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987), 314.

117 Commenting the newly published brochure *The Pope and the Palestine Tragedy* by the PMP, Testa wrote to McMahon that this publication “in a few pages, knows how to highlight in a truly touching way, both the work of the Holy Father, as well as the needs and sufferings of the poor refugees. The photographs are also excellent and well chosen and are always full of eloquence in their silent language.” AAV, *ADAGP*, 14, 59, 1, fol. 18, copy, September 22, 1950, translation from Italian. On these topics see Issam Nassar, “Photography and the Oppressed: On Photographing the Palestinian Refugees,” *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 8, no. 1 (2020).

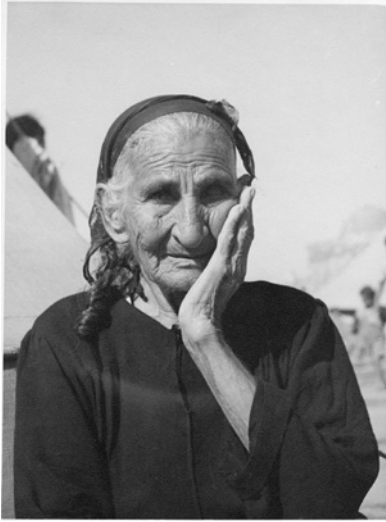


FIGURE 3.8
“A typical refugee in Gaza,” 1950s
APLJ/AEBAF



FIGURE 3.9
“A young refugee in Gaza,” 1950s
APLJ/AEBAF



FIGURE 3.10 “Amman, assistance to refugees,” 1950s
APLJ/AEBAF

the Palestinian refugees, whose image as victims of Israel was conveyed also through the inclusion of photographs of refugee children in the articles, was one of the most utilized arguments used by Catholic figures to move the reader to donate to the PMP, but also, although indirectly, as evidence of the Israeli responsibility for the refugee flight. After the condemnation of the desecration carried out by the Israeli army during the war of 1948 and reports of what was described as the threat of an Israeli occupation of the Holy Places, the attribution of responsibility for the refugee situation almost entirely to the new state added potency to anti-Israeli arguments.

The *Proche-Orient* review pushed these considerations even further. In an issue dedicated to the Palestinian refugees, an anonymous essayist explained that the Holy Places risked falling into the hands of the Jews, who were the sworn enemies of the two greatest civilizations: the Christian and the Muslim.¹¹⁸ The condition of the refugees showed how Israel was conspiring not only against the Arabs but, the author continued, against Europe and the United States, on a large scale, to the point of a global conspiracy that was now appearing in embryonic form in Palestine and would be extended to the rest of the world.

Although for figures like McMahon (and to some extent, Vergani), the question of aid for the refugees had led to contact with the Israeli government and started a dialogue, albeit a difficult one, capable of working around Rome's silence toward the Israeli government,¹¹⁹ other sectors of the Catholic hierarchy and public opinion saw the refugees as a new polemical front around which ancient anti-Jewish prejudices – a Jewish financial world eager to take possession of the vital arteries of “Western civilization” having destroyed those of the Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land – could coalesce.

Massignon proposed another elaboration of the role of the Palestinian refugees in the Arab-Israeli conflict. During his travels in the Middle East from 1948 to 1951, he became convinced of the centrality of the refugee problem for a resolution of the conflict. The French orientalist did not think this crucial problem was solely political or humanitarian; as previously on the issue of the capture of Nazareth in July 1948, in this case Massignon also brought biblical references and eschatological echoes to bear. With respect to the situation of the Christian Palestinian refugees, Massignon made initial efforts to sound

118 The issue, sent for the attention of the new patriarch, Gori, is contained in APLJ, *LB-GB*, UNRWA (*réfugiés*), 1947–1955.

119 The theme of charity toward the poor as a point of convergence between the Catholic Church and democracy represents a long-term historical problem, as is clear from the example of the Christian-democratic project in the age of the French Revolution. For a detailed examination of these aspects, see Daniele Menozzi, *Chiesa, poveri, società nell'età moderna e contemporanea* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1980), 177–78.

out an alliance between the Arab Muslim world and the Arab Christians. In May 1949, he wrote to French President Vincent Auriol about the need for a plan for the Palestinian refugees, a project that he defined as interdenominational, and thus destined both for Muslim and Christian refugees, and “could even include Jewish refugees”. He viewed the project as inseparable from the plan to internationalize the Holy Places.¹²⁰

For Massignon, the refugee question could not be divided from considerations on a spiritual level, which should even take precedence over the material plane. The “Holy Land”, in his eyes, since the time of Abraham, was a land of hospitality, asylum and pilgrimage. These qualities held for all three great monotheistic religions. Thus, the challenge was not to break what he defined as the “interdependence of Muslim refugees and Christian refugees”.¹²¹ In his analysis, political Islamo-Christian solidarity was born alongside Arab nationalism in the early twentieth century, while from a cultural point of view it could be traced back to the *nahḍa*. The alliance between Arab Muslims and Christians could have been further reinforced by anti-Jewish feelings after the foundation of the State of Israel, if not for the “subtle Zionist propaganda” that “is working, at this moment ... to break this solidarity by allowing the Christian refugees to reenter the Israeli State, to the exclusion of their Muslim brothers in misery”.¹²² From the political perspective, Massignon deplored the negotiations underway between Melkite Archbishop Hakim and the Israeli government to concede the right of return to some Christian refugees from villages in northern Galilee. This mediation ran the risk of deepening an already existing rift between Christian and Muslim refugees.

The French orientalist’s perspective on the refugees would deepen. It found its most complete expression in an article, “Le problème des réfugiés arabes de Palestine”, published in 1951.¹²³ At that time, the Israeli political leadership had made it known that the right of return would not be granted because it was considered a threat to the security of the new state.¹²⁴ Furthermore, the Israeli army was involved in military action to counter the Arab infiltrators who were trying to reenter the villages they had abandoned during the war of 1947–49. According to Massignon, Israeli policy was nothing more than a

120 CADC, *Levant, Généralités (1944–1952)*, 8, *Orientalistes et Rapports Massignon*, Massignon to Auriol, Paris, May 26, 1949, translation from French.

121 Massignon, “Rapport de la mission d’information.”

122 *Ibid.*, 503.

123 “L’Amandier fleuri,” no. 9 (1951): 74–76, republished in *ibid.*, 526–28.

124 See Nur Masalha, *Israeli Plans to Resettle the Palestinian Refugees, 1948–1972* (Ramallah: Palestinian Diaspora and Refugee Center, 1996).

form of colonialism, comparable to French rule in the Maghreb or apartheid in South Africa.

Faced with this situation, Massignon proposed to consider the question of the Palestinian refugees not only in a Middle Eastern context but within the framework of international security and the defense of the rights of refugees, of those expelled from their own homes, of stateless persons with no homeland. Here, he expected the convergence between the international rights of refugees and the Abrahamic model regarding the care of guests and strangers; the new form of justice that would result from this had a biblical and messianic resonance and could be translated concretely into Israel's granting the right of return to their homes to the Palestinian refugees, so opening the way to a new concept of a binational, Arab-Jewish state. This reading combined political, religious and mystic elements, together with a negative interpretation of Zionism and praise for Israel.

An aspect that forcibly emerged, beyond Massignon's story, was that the 1947–49 war and its consequences had profoundly influenced reflection and praxis within the Catholic world. The 1940s ended replete with questions regarding political and religious implications that would weigh on the Roman Catholic Church in the decades to come.

After 1948: the Difficult Mediation

1 Palestinians in Israel: Citizens or Enemies?

1.1 *The Tug-of-War over the Parishes*

The Palestine War left numerous unresolved questions regarding Israel and Jordan; principal among these were the condition of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees and the problem of the relations between the Israeli and Jordanian populations; the issue of the Palestinian population still inside Israel; and the failure to conclude genuine peace treaties between Israel and the Arab countries, with the consequent threat of a new war.

In the aftermath of the conflict, about 160,000 Palestinians remained inside Israel. Around 400,000 lived west of the Jordan river, in the so-called West Bank, which was annexed by King 'Abdullah in April 1950, when the name of his country changed from Transjordan to Jordan. About half of the refugees were settled in the rest of the kingdom (also called the East Bank); the territorial expansion and population growth following the arrival of the refugees triggered profound transformations in the local society and economy.¹ On the one hand, these brought clear advantages: the increase in available land, along with the assimilation of a trained workforce, which the Palestinians generally were, contributed to the development of Jordan. On the other, however, the integration of the Palestinian population, most of them refugees, was never completed. During the 1950s, there was a profound strengthening of antimonarchist sentiment and the identification of the Hashemite crown with the betrayal of the Palestinian cause due to its coming to terms with the Zionist leadership and maintenance of close ties with Britain. Among the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, the growing awareness of Jordanian opposition to the constitution of a Palestinian state and the claims for rights favored the spread of pan-Arab ideals. Palestinian refugees in Jordan enjoyed more rights than those granted to refugees by other governments; beginning in December 1949,

1 On the story of the Palestinian population in Jordan, see Musa S. Braizat, *The Jordanian-Palestinian Relationship: The Bankruptcy of the Confederal Idea* (London: British Academic Press, 1998); Avi Plascov, *The Palestinian Refugees in Jordan, 1948–1957* (London: Frank Cass, 1981); and Shaul Mishal, *West Bank/East Bank: The Palestinians in Jordan, 1949–1967* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978); On the question of the civil rights of Palestinian refugees in the Arab states, see Abbas Shiblak, "Residency Status and Civil Rights of Palestinian Refugees in Arab Countries," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 3 (1996).

they received Jordanian citizenship while also maintaining refugee status. Of course, inequalities remained. The Roman Catholic Church in Jordan, which comprised Jordan, Palestinian and European clergy and laity, was also caught up in these political and social tensions. The accusation that some Latins had participated in 'Abdullah's assassination emphatically demonstrates the tensions experienced by the Latin Catholic population.

But the situation of the Palestinians in Israel was just as difficult.² In a country inhabited by 716,000 Jews, they represented a minority that was considered hostile to the state. In the aftermath of the conflict, the management of Palestinian property seized during the war transformed into outright requisitioning, justified by the so-called absentee law approved in 1950.³ The law classified those Palestinians who had abandoned their homes after November 29, 1947, as "absentees", including those who had remained within Israel or had returned (the so-called present absentees). The overwhelming majority of the Palestinian population fell into these two categories; thus, they saw their property requisitioned and entrusted to the so-called custodian of enemy goods, who, in turn, in most cases transferred the land to the Jewish National Fund.⁴ If the Roman Catholic Church's property escaped the law through its international protection due to its jurisdiction under the Holy See – with the exception of German Catholic, as well as German Protestant, property that from November 1939 was considered "enemy property" – the general rule was in force for the possessions and homes of Christian families, which significantly threatened the material conditions of the Christian Palestinian population that had remained in Israel. Aside from the economic perspective,

2 In the vast bibliography, see the contributions of Nadim N. Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, eds., *The Palestinians in Israel: Readings in History, Politics and Society* (Haifa: Mada al-Carmel Arab Center for Applied Social Research, 2011); Ilan Peleg and Dov Waxman, *Israel's Palestinians: The Conflict Within* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Laurence Louër, *Les citoyens arabes d'Israël* (Paris: Balland, 2003); As'ad Ghanem, *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948–2000: A Political Study* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000); As'ad Ghanem, Nadim N. Rouhana and Oren Yiftachel, "Questioning 'Ethnic Democracy': A Response to Sammy Smooha," *Israel Studies* 3, no. 2 (1998), and Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996). For a sociological examination of the identity of the Israeli Palestinians, see chaps. 7–8 in Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 159–210.

3 See Terry Rempel, "Dispossession and Restitution in 1948 Jerusalem," in Tamari, *Jerusalem 1948*, 200–50.

4 See Michael R. Fischbach, *Records of Dispossession: Palestinian Refugee Property and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

they were influenced by a series of provisions that threatened their freedom of movement and association; the Israeli government decided not to abolish the emergency legislation in force since the British Mandate. Limitations on movement, membership in trade unions and the creation of economic and commercial concerns characterized the life of the Palestinian population in Israel until 1966.

The Palestinian population in Israel was now fragmented among the villages of Galilee, while the resident percentage in urban conglomerations (Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, Lydda and al-Ramla) fell from 36 to 26 percent. Nazareth became the principal Palestinian center in Israel. Thus, management of the “Arab problem” was among the pillars of Israel’s process of state formation and consolidation, with a chosen strategy of control, requisition and segregation – apparent in the education system as well – through the deployment of a juridical machine that enabled the de facto repression of the Arab population.

In addition to these issues, there was the political and military problem of the so-called infiltrators; most of the Palestinians who had abandoned their homes moved to areas bordering the new state in the hope of being able to return to their homes and lands. And so, thousands of persons tried to enter Israel illegally. They were motivated by personal reasons (to visit their nearest and dearest who had remained within the state) and economic reasons (to recover the harvest and cultivate their fields). Some of them tried also to smuggle weapons and attack Israeli military and civil targets. The great majority of infiltrators were refugees and farmers; however, the fear of weapons smuggling, together with the goal to reinforce the powerful image of Tsahal as a deterrent to new conflicts, led the Israeli political and military leadership to mount an outright border war on the infiltrators.⁵ This action escalated between 1949 and 1956, peaking in 1952, and cost the lives of several thousand Palestinians.

The army’s destruction of entire villages in the northern part of Israel, where the refugees had tried to return – as in the cases of Iqrit and Kafr Bir’im – should also be understood in light of the desire to combat the return of refugees and militias. The infiltrator phenomenon had serious political consequences, as shown by the events at Abu Ghush (discussed below). This led some elements of the Israeli leadership – including high-level figures like Yehoshua Palmon, Ben-Gurion’s special advisor on Arab affairs – to consider that the repression policy adopted toward the Palestinian population had

5 See Avi Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations* (London: Verso, 2009), 84–92, and Benny Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars, 1949–1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

failed and there was a need to identify new strategies beyond those of containment and the curtailment of liberties.

Roman Catholic officials were involved in these events. Reconstructing parishes that were damaged and closed during the conflict, securing reparations for requisitioned property, and especially safeguarding the rights of Christians were aspects of the effort by church leaders and the clergy in Israel to understand and respond to the emerging new reality.

Among the concerns of the leading representatives of the Latin Church, the question of reconstructing the parishes that had been closed or depopulated during the conflict was one of the most salient. Concerning the restoration and the reopening of the Latin churches most damaged by the fighting in the war, Patriarch Gori played a significant role in relations with the Israeli authorities during the 1950s. The most complex cases were those of Baysan, Tiberias, Mujaydil, Lydda, al-Ramla, Haifa, 'Ayn Karim and Jaffa. The first five had been closed during the conflict, while the other three had seen their congregants diminish drastically. The patriarch ascribed responsibility for the closure or reduction of these parishes to Israeli decisions that compelled the population to flee or expelled them, to damaged religious buildings and to the failure to grant those affected the right to return to their homes and property.

During the conflict, Gori, as *custos*, had sent messages to the Israeli authorities seeking permission and concessions for the return of refugees and the reopening of the churches. The Franciscan had also tried to secure the support of the Holy See on these matters. Writing to the secretary of state about his visits to the parishes operated by the Franciscans in the first part of 1949, just after the armistice, he reported that "on my journey I seemed to be passing through a series of so many concentration camps: al-Ramla; Jaffa; Haifa; Nazareth; Tiberias; and systematic ruins of entire Arab villages (Christian and Muslim). Why? To remove the desire to return, it seems to me."⁶

Upon his appointment as patriarch, Gori openly called upon the Israeli authorities to address the situation in the parishes. Due to the absence of formal relations between the Holy See and Israel and during the debate over Jerusalem's status at the UN General Assembly, the Vatican secretary of state identified the patriarch as the person to deal with political authorities about the war reparations.⁷ In March and May 1950, the patriarch made his first

6 ACGOFM, *Segreteria Generale, Custodia di Terra Santa*, 762, doc. 28, Gori to Tardini, copy, Jerusalem, April 29, 1949, translation from Italian.

7 Addressing Tisserant, Tardini wrote that "this Secretary of State shares the thought of Your Eminence that the moment is ripe to demand to the government of Israel the restitution of the buildings belonging to religious orders and congregations, not only promised orally and in writing, but also communicated to the press as it was already accomplished ... However,



FIGURE 4.1
Alberto Gori's first visit
to Nazareth as patriarch,
March 23, 1950
APLJ/AEBAF 0927

pastoral visit within Israel (fig. 4.1). During this journey, Gori met with the director general of the foreign ministry, Walter Eytan, handing him a memorandum addressed to Foreign Minister Moshe Sharet and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In this text, Gori listed all the requests of the Latin Church with respect to the situation of the Christians in Israel. The first chapter was dedicated to the parishes, making particular reference to those that had been closed or “decimated” during the war of 1948.⁸ Gori did not specify what he meant by “decimated” parishes, a particularly strong adjective that implies killings and crimes. He asked for these parishes to be reconstituted as a matter of urgency, also since the refugees from these villages were now settled in Franciscan casa nova in Nazareth that were intended for pilgrims, buildings

this Office considers it to be difficult to make an official step to the Israeli authorities, especially in this delicate moment. It seems, on the contrary, that the numerous practices can and must be pursued by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, that has jurisdiction over the whole Palestine.” ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: affari generali*, 457/48, 4, doc. 208, Tardini to Tisserant, Vatican, December 1948, translation from Italian.

8 “As a result of the events of 1948, five (5) parishes of my diocese have disappeared: BAYSAN, TIBERIAS, MUJAIYDIL, LYDDA, ‘AYN KARIM, and three (3) others have been decimated: HAIFA, JAFFA, AL-RAMLÄ.” APLJ, AG, *Gouvernement Israël, Ministère des Cultes, 1950–1967*, “Pro-memoria di mons. Gori per il ministro degli affari esteri Sharet,” copy, Jaffa, May 20, 1950, translation from French, capitals in original. Domenico Enrici, chargé d'affaires ad interim at the Apostolic Delegation, sent a copy of this memorandum to the Vatican Secretariat of State. Tardini replied that “the serious inconveniences reported in it fully justify the apprehensions and fears that H.E. Msgr. Patriarch has for the future of Catholic life in the Jewish state. It will be necessary that Msgr. Gori continues in the vigilant surveillance work, not failing to raise his voice.” AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 57, 3, fol. 145, Vatican, June 28, 1950, translation from Italian.

that should be returned to their original and intended use, especially given the growing influx of pilgrims into Israel during the Holy Year of 1950. Gori's document acknowledged the fact that the Israeli authorities had allowed some Christians who had fled during the fighting – most of them Melkites, thanks to the accord between the army and the Melkite bishop Georges Hakim – to reenter the State of Israel, but he stressed that they had not been allowed to return to their villages, homes and property.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry's reply came in January 1951. In a lengthy nine-page report, Eytan rejected Gori's charges that Israel had employed a policy of discrimination against the Palestinian Christian population within Israel; if anything, he was hoping that the churches could mediate in the peacemaking efforts between Israel and the Arab countries.⁹ Eytan stood firm on a crucial issue: the right of return did not apply to the Palestinian refugees who had left during the conflict. The reasons he offered had to do with the security of Israel; for the government, the key question went back to the beginning of the refugee exodus, which had resulted not from Israeli actions, as various church representatives had repeatedly claimed, but from the conflict caused by the Arab countries that had attacked Israel at the moment of its foundation. Given these considerations, Eytan responded that the disappearance of the parishes to which Gori referred in his memorandum was also to be attributed to the Arab attack and the disastrous results that it had brought on the Arab population itself. The director general of the Foreign Ministry recalled that during 1950, an agreement had been made with Hakim to grant reentry to some Greek Catholic communities originally from the strip occupied by Israel near the borders with Lebanon and Syria who had fled to those countries during Operation Hiram. To the contrary, in the case of the Latin communities, Eytan declared himself embittered by the fact the

9 ISA, G/13/5826, Eytan to Gori, Hakirya, January 19, 1951. A copy of the same document is contained in ISA, HZ/11/5954, and includes an initial paragraph in Hebrew titled "Yedi'ot le-netsiguyot Yisra'el be-ḥu"l mispar 206 'Al ha-Notsrim be-Yisra'el u-ve'ayotehem (igeret le-Monsinyor Gori)" [Dispatches for Israel's Representatives Abroad, No. 206, Regarding the Christians in Israel and their Problems (A letter to Monsignor A. Gori)]: "Monsignor Gori visited Israel last year, and at the end of his visit he had a conversation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs in which the two discussed the relationship between Israel and the Catholic Church. In this conversation Msgr. Gori raised a number of problems that the Church wishes to solve in order to facilitate its work. The minister asked Msgr. Gori to file his claims in a special memorandum. The letter enclosed here is the detailed reply to that memo. This letter was prepared by the Western Europe Department, in collaboration with the department for Christian Affairs in the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the consultant for Arab Affairs in the prime minister's office. The letter was given to Msgr. Gori during his recent second visit to the country. Copies have been sent to Msgr. Vergani and Msgr. Hakim."

Israeli government's repeated offer to the Latin representatives to resettle the refugees hosted by the Catholic institutions of Nazareth in territories to be put at their disposal by the government had been unequivocally rejected by the Catholic officials.

The policy he mentioned referred to the possibility aired by Israel of assigning some lands in the Shifa'amr zone to Latin Catholic refugees. The proposal met with firm opposition from the church; the property in question had been requisitioned from Palestinian Muslims who fled during the capture of the town in July 1948. The opposition to this option can be explained by the refugees' desire to return to their own homes and not to property belonging to other refugees, as well as by the Catholic officials' fear of reprisals against Catholics by the Muslim population, who would accuse them of conniving with the Israeli authorities. The patriarchal vicar for Galilee, Vergani, explained this point in a letter to Gori commenting on Eytan's missive:

the "constructive solutions" applied by the government of Israel consisted in the intention to send these people, who were expelled from their own lands to Shifa'amr, giving them the land of the "absent" Arabs, most of whom were Muslims; imagine if the Christians were to accept such a compromise and set off God knows what kind of reprisals between Christians and Muslims in foreign countries!¹⁰

Some months later, Gori reiterated the patriarchate's requests, in a memorandum delivered by Terence Kuehn, the Franciscan vicar for Judea, to the minister for religious affairs.¹¹ Referring to the parish of Mujaydil, the patriarch specified that the faithful had left their village, homes and property "by force" – this added in Gori's own hand.¹² In the same weeks, an agreement was reached concerning the payment of reparations for the damages suffered by the parishes of Baysan and Rafat.¹³ Although the case of Mujaydil was not included, it had also been considered during the meeting between Gori and Eytan in November 1951. During that encounter, a new possibility was discussed: that Israel allow the refugees from Mujaydil to return to their homes, in exchange

10 APLJ, AG, *Gouvernement Israël, Ministère des Cultes, 1950–1967*, Vergani to Gori, Nazareth, January 31, 1951, translation from Italian.

11 ISA, G/13/5826, typescript memorandum from Gori sent by Kuehn to Herzog, Jerusalem, June 16, 1951.

12 Ibid.

13 At the end of a negotiation conducted by Vergani, the patriarchate received 2,000 and 2,900 Israeli lira as an indemnity for the war damages suffered by the Latin parishes of Baysan and Rafat, respectively.

for the patriarchate's cession of Dayr Rafat monastery.¹⁴ Subsequently, the diocese would effectively surrender the building, but the refugees would not be able to return to the village. In the meantime, new events disturbed the Latin Church and diminished hopes of resolving the Mujaydil situation.

In February 1952, the inhabitants of the Maronite village of Kafr Bir'im, on the border with Lebanon, were evicted by the Israeli army. There were fears that this action presaged the destruction of the village, as had already happened in the case of the neighboring town of Iqrit, blown up by Tshal troops on Christmas Day 1951. The Israeli maneuvers in the area also alarmed Vergani. During a meeting with the French consul in Haifa, Paul Péquin, the patriarchal vicar for Galilee reiterated his willingness to pursue any possible means to secure the return of the inhabitants of Mujaydil. In Péquin's account, the priest declared himself convinced that the church itself was now coming to the end of negotiations that would lead to the reinstatement of the evacuated inhabitants. The French representative did not fail to note that in the event that the requests of the Latin Catholic world were realized, it would be the first case of the "rebirth" of a village and its parish in Israel that had been evacuated and destroyed during the war of 1948.¹⁵ Vergani seemed determined not to let up on the pressure on the government, even during Sharet's trip to Rome in late March 1952, when the foreign minister met Pius XII in the first meeting of a representative of the Israeli government with the pope (although the content of the meeting was much less significant).¹⁶

As time passed, the Israeli government gave no grounds for hope of a positive resolution to the Mujaydil question.¹⁷ The question of Dayr Rafat, which was

14 Copy of a letter from Vergani to Sharet, not dated, attached to dispatch no. 65 from Simon to Gilbert (both documents as copies), Haifa, April 23, 1953, in CADC, *Levant, Israël (1953–1959)*, 49, *Relations avec les églises chrétiennes*.

15 CADC, *Levant, Israël (1944–1952)*, 24, *Communautés religieuses en Israël* (December 7, 1949–May 26, 1952), Péquin to Schuman, Haifa, March 7, 1952.

16 On this audience, see Bialer, *Cross on the Star of David*, 52 and ASDMAE, *Affari Politici (1951–1957)*, *Israele (Palestina)*, 812, Italian ambassador to the Holy See Antonio Meli Lupi di Soragna to the Italian Foreign Ministry, March 31, 1952.

17 "During Your absence, I allowed myself to draw the attention of the Minister with my letter of March 16 to the fact that the question of Mujaydil, in which you interested His Beatitude Patriarch Gori in the interview of last November, seems lately to have encountered the unexpected opposition of the Military, and this notwithstanding the fact that the Patriarchate, as it had promised, giving credit to the government, did hand over its monastery at Dayr Rafat to the Minister for Social Affairs on January 1." APLJ, *AG, Gouvernement Israël, Ministère des Cultes, 1950–1967*, Vergani to Sharet and copied to Colbi, copy, Nazareth, April 8, 1952, translation from French.

closely connected to that of Mujaydil, was a source of new tensions between the Latin Church and the Israeli government.¹⁸

1.2 *The “Exchange” of Mujaydil and Dayr Rafat*

One of the Latin Patriarchate’s most important properties was Dayr Rafat, located not far from Bet Shemesh, near ‘Artuf railway station on the Jaffa–Jerusalem line. The little center, covering a surface of about 6,000 dunam,¹⁹ was cultivated in olives, grape vines and figs; in fact, half of it belonged to the Latin Patriarchate, with the rest being the property of the residents of Sar’a. Acquired by Patriarch Valerga in 1872, the monastery of Our Lady of Palestine was built on the land at Dayr Rafat at the behest of Barlassina and inaugurated in 1928 (fig. 4.2).

As the literature has made clear,²⁰ the question of land ownership was among the principal reasons for the conflict between Arabs and Jews and it directly involved the Christian churches in the Mandate period.²¹ For the Latin Church, the events at Sar’a and Rafat were part of this complex picture. During the 1930s, Rafat was at the center of complicated negotiations for which the

18 “In the visit that I made together with You to His Excellency Mr. Sharet, the Foreign Minister, about two years ago, he examined the need for housing from the government and the possibility of allowing the return to Mujaydil of the inhabitants taking refuge in the Casa Nova of the Franciscan Fathers at Nazareth. His Excellency Minister Sharet promised his own effective intervention to facilitate the return to Mujaydil of the refugees in Nazareth. Following this discussion, the Patriarchate leased a great house at Dayr Rafat to a government entity. However, I am very sorry that our request in favor of the inhabitants of Mujaydil who have taken refuge in Nazareth remains without any kind of result up to the present moment. I therefore wish to beg you to remind those responsible about the promise, so that a decision may be reached without further delay.” ISA, G/13/5826, Gori to Colbi, letter no. 788, Jerusalem, November 20, 1953, translation from Italian. A copy is also contained in APLJ, AG, *Gouvernement Israël, Ministère des Cultes, 1950–1967*.

19 A unit of land measurement utilized in the Arab world since the Ottoman period, corresponding to a variable extension that fluctuated between 900 and 1,000 square meters in different historical periods and geographical locations. According to the documents of the Latin Patriarchate from the 1940s and 1950s, a dunam was equivalent to 930 square meters.

20 Many authors express this idea, as Gelvin does over several paragraphs in *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*.

21 The selling of Greek Orthodox property is the most explored case. See Konstantinos Papastathis and Ruth Kark, “The Politics of Church Land Administration: The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in late Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine, 1875–1948,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 40, no. 2 (2016). On the management of Catholic property, see Seth J. Frantzman and Ruth Kark, “The Catholic Church in Palestine/Israel: Real Estate in Terra Sancta,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 3 (2014), which sparked a wider debate.



FIGURE 4.2 View of Rafat, probably late 1920s
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available sources do not provide a full picture. However, some elements are clear: the scanty returns from this property had induced the patriarch to look into the possibility of effecting a division between the patriarchate and the village, with the goal of separating the two parties. In this way, Barlassina intended to assign the area under diocesan control to other cultivators.²² The AHC tried to persuade the patriarch to cede the land to the inhabitants of Sar'a. In 1937, the Supreme Muslim Council and the Awqaf Department in Jaffa reclaimed the area of the sanctuary of Dayr Rafat, declaring that it was a waqf.²³ When attempts to find an agreement between the patriarchate and the committee failed, the matter became a legal dispute at a special committee established in Jaffa by the British High Commissioner. A solution still had not been found in 1947, despite both sides agreeing on the need to reach an accord to avoid creating further bad humor between Christians and Muslims.

There were also some Zionist landowners interested in purchasing the property. In 1919, the suggestion was made at a meeting of the patriarchal clergy in Jerusalem "to tell the countryfolk to guard their lands". It was widely believed that resistance to Zionist offers to buy the land would create a "union between Christians and Muslims to oppose the Jewish tide that threatens to

22 See APLJ, *LB-MS, Deir Rafat, 1941–2007*, anonymous report on a property of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, undated [ca. first half of the 1940s].

23 See ISA M/10/30 and Ruth Kark and Michael Oren-Nordheim, *Jerusalem and Its Environs: Quarters, Neighborhoods, Villages, 1800–1948* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 333.

submerge us all".²⁴ Barlassina reiterated his opposition to selling to the Jews on many occasions, along with his wish to recruit institutions and private individuals "in Italy and in America" to acquire property in Palestine in such a way as to prevent the Jews becoming "the masters of the land, and doing violence to their debtors, the victims of usury, and paying freeholders handsomely to induce them to sell".²⁵ News of sales circulated in the Arab press in 1947 but were denied by the patriarchate.²⁶

Dayr Rafat was also caught up in the 1947–49 war. The stationing of Israeli troops in the area and the damage sustained by the complex compelled Gorla to undertake lengthy negotiations with the Ministry of Religious Affairs in the immediate aftermath of the war to secure reparations for the war damage so as to finance the necessary repairs. In this phase, furthermore, the Jewish National Fund also expressed interest in acquiring part of the Sar'a and Rafat lands. Gorla made it known that the Latin Church could be interested in a sale to the fund, provided that the negotiations remained completely secret. He was afraid that news of a possible negotiation with Israel to sell part of the lands of Dayr Rafat could arouse a Muslim reaction.²⁷ Testa responded positively to Gorla's suggestions, remarking on the need for negotiations with the Israelis to be conducted "in a totally *safe* manner", that is, in secret, given how delicate the issue was.²⁸ In 1950, two hundred hectares of Dayr Rafat land were leased for three years to the Israeli Jewish village of Kfar Uriyah.²⁹ Two years later, the patriarchate sold a thousand dunam of Dayr Rafat land.³⁰ The decision divided the patriarchal clergy.³¹ At the same time, there was a dual motivation for the

24 ACPF, NS, vol. 658, rubrica 126, "Réunions Ecclésiastiques au Patriarcat Latin 28, 29, 30 Décembre 1919 Matin 9h – Soir 2h½," fols. 14–24.

25 ACPF, *ibid.*, copy of Barlassina's report "Situazione odierna in Palestina" of August 4, 1920, fols. 422–40.

26 See the article "Ila Batriyarkiyat al-Latin: Hal bi'at aradi Rafat wa-Sar'a?" [To the Latin Patriarchate: Have the lands of Rafat and Sar'a been sold?], which appeared on August 28, 1947, in the weekly *al-Wahda*, published in Jerusalem from 1945 by Ishaq 'Abd al-Salam al-Husayni, and the following article, published three days later, with the same title, that reported Barlassina's denial of the sale.

27 See AAV, *ADAGP*, 15, 61, 11, fols. 473–81, Gorla to Testa, Dayr Rafat, April 30, 1949.

28 APLJ, *LB-MS*, *Deir Rafat, 1941–2007*, Testa to Gorla, Amman, May 6, 1949, translation from Italian, emphasis (doubly underlined) by hand in original.

29 See APLJ, *ibid.*, Gorla to Gori, Dayr Rafat, July 20, 1952.

30 See the authorization for the sale, without specifying the buyer, in APLJ, *ibid.*, Tisserant (and Coussa's signature) to Gori, Rome, October 1, 1952.

31 Gorla stressed that "the instructions of the Holy See were that he should hold firm, that he should not alienate anything; the relations between the Holy See and Israel being a little tense, he was not to do anything that could signify, even minimally, a show of support for the state, etc. etc. It seems to me that these reasons persist yet, exacerbated by the fact

sale. On the one hand, it would benefit the patriarchate's coffers, which were perennially in difficulty. On the other, Gori proposed it as part of an agreement with the foreign ministry with the goal of securing the return of the Mujaydil refugees and the reconstruction of the parish.

The questions surrounding the future of Rafat and the Mujaydil refugees would long remain unresolved; in any case, this incident demonstrated that, despite the long silences in the relations between the Holy See and Israel, the reality facing the Latin Church forced Catholics to take account of the concrete impact of the existence of the new state. The search for grounds for mediation and the continuous negotiations and renegotiations of the conditions of the Catholic community and its property, given also the difficult relations with the Arab Muslims, would be among the most complex efforts and maneuvers facing the Latin Patriarchate.

1.3 *The "Fifth Column": the Abu Ghush Affair*

It was not only the patriarchal clergy who became caught up in the creeping conflict during the 1950s between the Israeli army and government, on the one hand, and the Palestinian population remaining in Israel on the other, with the addition of the infiltrators who tried to reenter the country over the borders. Some religious congregations also found themselves in the midst of the conflict, which at times transformed into outright military operations. The religious congregations and parishes in Israel – especially those in the areas along the borders of the new state with the territory assigned to Jordan – were caught up in the conflict. They often employed Palestinian dependents in their monasteries and institutions and were geographically located close to villages which refugees were trying to reenter. The case of Abu Ghush combines all these problematic issues and adds a further element of complexity: its connection with France. In 1873 the Sublime Porte had assigned this property to Paris and the policy pursued by the Quai d'Orsay influenced subsequent events.³²

Located a few kilometers from Jerusalem on the road to Tel Aviv, the village of Abu Ghush was of significant historical importance. Situated close to the hill of Kiryat Ye'arim that the Bible designates as the location of the Ark of the Covenant, the place had also been identified as Emmaus, where the Gospel relates that Jesus appeared to his disciples after the Resurrection. At

that now we ourselves are the first to sell." APLJ, *ibid.*, Gorla to Gori, Dayr Rafat, April 7, 1953, translation from Italian.

32 See Dominique Trimbur, "Religion et politique en Palestine: le cas de la France à Abou Gosh," in *De Bonaparte à Balfour: La France, l'Europe occidentale et la Palestine (1799–1917)*, ed. Dominique Trimbur and Ran Aaronsohn (Paris: CNRS, 2001).



FIGURE 4.3 Abu Ghush, 1940–46

MPC

the end of the nineteenth century, the French foreign ministry was engaged in restoring the cruciform basilica, which became one of the symbols of French expansionism in the region (fig. 4.3). Indeed, France was presenting itself as the principal European power in the area (in competition with the growing Russian and German presence) and intended to leverage the guarantees, rights and traditional privileges of the Catholics in this capacity.³³ This also explains the painstaking research conducted by the foreign ministry to identify a religious congregation with which to entrust the abbacy, who would manage it as a standard-bearer of French interests. After a long research phase, the choice fell on the French Benedictines, who were also engaged in new foundations.

Under the British Mandate, Abu Ghush was considered nonhostile to the Zionist settlement and capable of good relations with the nearby kibbutz at Kiryat ‘Anavim.³⁴ Subsequently, Abu Ghush acquired a certain importance during the hostilities because of its strategic position. At that time, the Benedictine community was led by the charismatic figure of Alexandre Lannes, who had

33 Similar considerations apply to the French attitude in this period with respect to the church of St. Anne and the complex of Notre-Dame de France.

34 On this event see the Morris, “The Case of Abu Ghosh and Beit Naqquba, Al Fureidis and Jisr Zarka in 1948 – Or Why Four Villages Remained,” in *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 257–89.

arrived at the beginning of the 1900s and over the years become a point of reference for the local population. During the fighting of 1948, the monk opened the gates to the Muslim inhabitants of the village of Abu Ghush. This episode remained in popular memory in the decades that followed and created great support for Lannes. At the same time, he developed good relations with the Jewish populations on the nearby kibbutzim.

During the first months of the war, Abu Ghush continued to opt for neutrality between the two sides, which led to the village being spared from attacks and expulsions by the Israeli army in May 1948. A month later, the situation changed. The belief permeated the Israeli leadership that it was necessary to remove all Palestinians, including the inhabitants of Abu Ghush. The news spread rapidly, and by the beginning of July the vast majority of the village's residents had left their homes to avoid expulsion.

Once the war was over, part of the population tried to return to their homes. Contrary what happened in other villages, the army initially chose to grant the right of return to the inhabitants of Abu Ghush and thus not to deem them "absent" or to confiscate their property. With the new division, the village, the vast majority of which was Muslim, was near the border between Israel and Jordan. At the beginning of the 1950s, fear of renegade Arab infiltrators arriving in the village drove the Israeli army to place the surrounding area under control, adding to the pressure on Abu Ghush's inhabitants.

Meanwhile, the presence of Lannes, the only monk who had stayed behind, was also put in doubt with the departure of the Benedictines. The excessive costs and scarce numbers of available clergy discouraged various congregations from seeking to take over as guardians of the basilica. The French consulate in Jerusalem negotiated with various Catholic orders with the objective of guaranteeing a French presence at Abu Ghush. The negotiations intensified in 1952 among the parties, which included the Assumptionists, White Fathers, Trappists of Latrun and Carmelites, without any agreement being reached. There was also a possibility that the Franciscans would become involved. However, the French consulate viewed with suspicion the possibility of installing a Franciscan mission in Abu Ghush, fearing a consequent growth in the power of the Italian clergy. Although this was a profoundly different political period compared to that in which the Benedictines had developed at Abu Ghush, it is clear that the French representatives in Jerusalem – particularly Consul Bernard de la Sablière – were still attached to a nationalist vision of the role of Paris in the Levant, based on maintaining traditionally French missions. The anachronism of this approach is clear, given the Arab-Israeli context and the cold winds of war that were beginning to blow once again in the

Middle East; at the same time, this was a political and religious strategy that many other consular representatives of the principal European political powers in the region were still pursuing to some extent.

While negotiations to install a religious community at Abu Ghush continued, the village found itself at the center of political events and of military attention. During the summer of 1953, the discovery of weapons inside the village led the Israeli military authorities to forcibly transfer the Palestinian notables on the charge of having performed acts of sabotage, with the belief that a huge arsenal was hidden in the village. The decision caused Lannes to fear that new and even more rigid provisions would be imposed on the entire village.³⁵ Besides the huge coverage in the national press, these events had important political repercussions: after the events at Abu Ghush, Palmon announced his resignation as advisor for Arab affairs.

As for the Benedictines, Lannes's departure, announced in 1952, came three years later.³⁶ After the last French Benedictine abandoned Abu Ghush, the need for a decision about the new religious community became more pressing. Cardinal Tisserant had strong reservations about the proposal to create a new settlement of Dominican nuns.³⁷ Patriarch Gori shared the concern about entrusting the basilica to a group of clergy in an entirely Muslim context.³⁸ Ultimately, the Lazarist community prevailed and managed the basilica until 1976.

The case of Abu Ghush sheds light on some aspects of the situation of Palestinian citizens in Israel and of the actions of the Catholic world in the face of repression by the Israeli government. In the first place, it shows the extent to which the war of 1948 transformed relations between the various components inside Israel, exacerbating and sharpening them. A Palestinian community that once maintained substantially peaceful relations with its Jewish neighbors was now requisitioned by the Israeli army, which saw it as a den of weapons and infiltrators. The paradigmatic value of the Abu Ghush case is also demonstrated by Palmon's resignation in the aftermath of the forced transfer of the village's notables. Faced with this situation, the Roman Catholic

35 See CADC, *Levant, Palestine, 975, Domaine nationale d'Abou Gosh, 1953–1959*, De la Sablière to Bidault, Jerusalem, September 2, 1953.

36 In 1958, on his death, two sales deeds in the French Benedictine's name would come to light: one to an Israeli Palestinian citizen, a member of the village, and the other to a kibbutz near Abu Ghush.

37 CADC, *Levant, Palestine, 975, Domaine nationale d'Abou Gosh, 1953–1959*, D'Ormesson to Pinay, Jerusalem, May 14, 1955.

38 CADC, *ibid.*, Laforge to Pinay, Jerusalem, June 6, 1955.

Church seems to have been substantially incapable of taking the initiative in favor peaceful Israeli-Palestinian relations, while also being unable to find a religious community to whom to entrust the basilica. Neither the patriarchate nor any congregation came forward as an effective political mediator. Ultimately, the search for French clergy pursued by the consulate in Jerusalem revealed the extent to which the defense of national interests still dictated the political agenda, even in religious matters.

1.4 *The Israeli Battle against the “Infiltrators”: the Case of Iqrit and Kafr Bir‘im*

Aside from Abu Ghush, two villages in the north of Israel on the border with Lebanon became very important in the 1950s: Iqrit and Kafr Bir‘im. They became flashpoints for Palestinian refugees trying to return to their homes and for the Israeli policy of repression. Their complex and intricate story, which unfolded over several decades, involved a series of political and religious actors, including the Catholic Church.³⁹

Iqrit was a majority Greek Catholic village (numbering about 500 faithful), covering an area of about 21,000 dunam. Kafr Bir‘im comprised about 12,000 dunam, with a population of about 950 people, most of them Maronite Christians. As in the case of Abu Ghush, before 1948 these two villages had not been in conflict with neighboring Jewish settlements.

These relations changed in the course of the conflict. Although the inhabitants refused to provide protection and help to the Arab troops, the two villages were occupied by Tshal soldiers in late October 1948 under Operation Hiram. On November 5, the few remaining inhabitants – most had moved to the al-Rama area – were ordered to abandon the territory. In 1949, the entire zone was then declared a military area and the inhabitants were transferred from Rama to al-Jishsh. Despite continuous demands to grant them the opportunity to return to their homes, the inhabitants were denied on the grounds of possible infiltrations by militants and trafficking in weapons. Refusing to give in, the inhabitants invoked Pius XII’s intervention,⁴⁰ then addressed Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and appealed to the Israeli Supreme Court. In 1951, the court recognized their right of return, but the government refused to apply the court’s

39 On the story of these two villages from 1948 on, see Nur Masalha, “A Galilee without Christians? Yosef Weitz and ‘Operation Yohanan’, 1949–1954,” in O’Mahony, *Palestinian Christians*, 199–201, and Joseph L. Ryan, “Refugees within Israel: The Case of the Villages of Kafr Bir‘im and Iqrit,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, no. 4 (1993).

40 ACO, *Oriente, Varie: Missione “Pro Palestina”*, 10/61, 1, doc. 45, telegrams by the Iqrit and Kafr Bir‘im’s refugees to Pius XII, transmitted by Montini to Valeri, Vatican, July 4, 1949.

decision, referring to special laws governing the “defense areas” on the borders between Israel and neighboring enemy Arab countries. The government and army’s will to prevent the return of the refugees manifested itself further in the decision to destroy Iqrit. On Christmas Day 1951, the village was mined and blown up. The surrounding land was confiscated by the army and classified as “abandoned property”.

The annihilation of Iqrit was a hard blow for the Catholic world in the Middle East and elsewhere. The image of the Melkite church, gravely damaged by the Israeli troops on Christmas Day, was interpreted as an attack on Catholicism as a whole. Hakim reacted with strenuous protests to the Israeli authorities. For the Melkite bishop, the incident represented not just the devastation of a blown-up village but the destruction of promises that had been made over months and years. After the Supreme Court’s verdict and Palmon’s assurances that the inhabitants would be allowed to return to their homes, the events of December 1951 – a “Christmas gift covered in ruins” – revealed, as Hakim put it, the true face of the State of Israel.⁴¹

The European and American Catholic press also followed the events at Iqrit. On October 25, 1951, *La Croix* published the text of Hakim’s complaint. In reply, Morris Fisher, the Israeli ambassador to Paris, sent a letter of protest to the Assumptionist daily, declaring that the Catholic faith of the inhabitants of Iqrit was not among the reasons for the military operation; Israel was interested in the security of its borders, not in the religion professed by the population that lived there.⁴² A few months later, the story of Kafr Bir‘im was added to that of Iqrit. This second village shared the same fate; on September 16, 1953, it too was blown up.

After these events, Hakim tried to achieve the greatest possible level of consensus, including within the Latin Church, in his campaign to apply political pressure on Israel for a return of the refugees. The Melkite bishop hoped for the intervention of the Holy See on behalf of the Greek Catholic population in Israel.⁴³ In order to obtain a pronouncement from the Vatican, Hakim sought Vergani’s help to present the claims of the Eastern Catholics as part of the same battle being fought by the Latins to reconstruct their parishes. A few days after the Kafr Bir‘im events, the Melkite bishop prepared a note on the situation of the Arab Catholics in Israel, focusing especially on the two villages that had just been destroyed. The document was sent to the diplomatic representatives of France, the United States, Britain and Turkey. The text emphasized that

41 ISA, G/10/5844, Hakim to Herzog, copy, Haifa, January 10, 1952, translation from French.

42 ISA, G/2/5814, Fisher to the editor-in-chief of *La Croix*, copy, Paris, October 30, 1951.

43 See AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 57, 3, fols. 158–59, Enrici to Tardini, copy, January 19, 1952.

since the end of the war, the only two villages to have been destroyed by the Israeli army were composed of Eastern Catholics while nothing comparable had befallen the Muslims in Israel.⁴⁴

Meanwhile Hakim sought alternative solutions to present to the government. The Greek Catholic bishop addressed the proposal to form an “Arab canton” in Galilee, which would include the approximately hundred thousand Arabs in the area of Nazareth and confer on them a special status and greater freedoms despite the emergency laws. Once again, Hakim tried to secure Vergani’s involvement in this project, but the Latin vicar was reluctant to support this idea, as indeed it was difficult to imagine that the Holy See would support this option. In any case, once this project was leaked to the press through an article in the *Jerusalem Post*, it was swiftly abandoned by all who had expressed an interest in furthering and supporting it.⁴⁵

In this context, the Holy See continued to follow the events of the two destroyed villages. In October 1953, the inhabitants of Kafr Bir‘im appealed to Pius XII for his intercession with the authorities to give them the right to return or else grant a series of indemnities.⁴⁶ A year later, during a trip to the Middle East, the Secretary of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, Thomas McMahon, visited Iqrit and Kafr Bir‘im, accompanied by Hakim, and was deeply struck by the condition of the populations of the two destroyed villages. The documentation contained in the archives of the Melkite Patriarchate of Antioch attest to the fact that in the 1960s too, the Iqrit and Kafr Bir‘im affairs continued to be a source of conflict between Hakim and the Latin hierarchy.⁴⁷

Despite being the subject of a long judicial and political process, the cases of Iqrit and Kafr Bir‘im remain unresolved. Historically, they show the complexity of the mediation undertaken by various Catholic representatives concerning the condition of refugees within Israel, as well as the competitions and conflicts that these actions unleashed. It reveals also the Israeli’s government decision to “divide and rule” the Palestinian Christian population and to treat

44 Note by Hakim of September 24, 1953, attached to dispatch no. 154 by Simon to Gilbert, Haifa, October 15, 1953, both documents as copies, contained in CADC, *Levant, Israël (1953–1959)*, 48, *Minorités non juives, May 1953–December 1959*.

45 See CADC, *ibid.*, Simon to Gilbert, copy, Haifa, November 23, 1953.

46 The text of the appeal is contained in the note by Hakim of September 24, 1953. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith informed Abba Eban of the publication of this document in various American Catholic papers. ISA, HZ/30/354, Sidney H. Sales to Aba Eban, October 19, 1953.

47 See AMCP, *Archevêché Acre 2 (1957–1966)*, Hakim to Kaldany, copy of the letter sent also to the Vatican Secretariat of State and to Gori, January 14, 1965.

its Palestinian citizens as members of minority religious entities rather than as an ethnic minority.

2 Israel and Jordan in the 1950s: Expectations and Questions

The conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and Israel and Jordan over the situation of the Palestinian Christians in the two states and the church property confiscated during the 1947–49 war and consequent reparations, as well as the dispute over access to the Holy Places, are pieces of a larger puzzle that involved the relations between the various actors in the early 1950s. The attitude of the patriarchate toward Israel and Jordan can be understood in greater depth through an analysis of the actions, but also of the ideas and representations, that certain protagonists of the Latin patriarchate developed regarding the two states and their governments. The most significant character was certainly Alberto Gori, first in his long incumbency as the Franciscan Custos (1937–49) and then in his role as patriarch of the Jerusalem diocese until 1970.

2.1 *Gori's View of the New State*

During the 1947–49 war, the Franciscan prelate referred to the Israeli political and military leadership in very harsh terms. He was not alone in this stance; large segments of the European component in the Jerusalem Roman Catholic Church – especially the Italian and French clergy, who were among the classic upholders of Catholic intransigence in the nineteenth and, partly, twentieth centuries⁴⁸ – considered the Jews among those chiefly responsible for the de-Christianization of society that characterized postrevolutionary modernity,⁴⁹ a viewpoint now translated and adapted to the new context of the State of Israel. Here too, the Jews, now united by the Zionist movement into a state entity, were presented as the principal responsible party for the worsening conditions of Palestinian Christian life and for the desecration of the Holy Places. As had already happened in this history of the Zionist movement before 1948, Catholic anti-Jewish prejudices were grafted onto a secular

48 For a classic analysis of Catholic reaction against modernity, see Menozzi, *La Chiesa cattolica*, 15–71.

49 Giovanni Miccoli has written a deep and fundamental work on the relationship between the antimodern and antisemitic Catholic reaction. See especially the essay “Santa Sede, questione ebraica e antisemitismo fra Otto e Novecento,” in *Storia d'Italia. Annali n/2. Gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), also in *Antisemitismo e cattolicesimo*, 39–263.

tradition, reshaped and sharpened in light of the church's critique of the State of Israel's policies. Additionally, there was concern that the secular privileges of the Catholic institutions would be threatened, in particular those to do with education and welfare. Finally, the lack of recognition of the new state on the part of the Holy See further legitimated, in the eyes of many, the attitude of suspicion and opposition toward Israeli political and military decisions.

All these elements are clearly traceable in Gori's writings. In September–October 1948, he met in the Vatican with Domenico Tardini and Pietro Sigismondi at the Secretariat of State.⁵⁰ At the end of the talks, the Franciscan presented the pope with a four-page report on the “chaotic and bad” situation in Palestine.⁵¹ Regarding the acts of war, Gori declared that “both sides have committed excesses”, but “the Arabs only in isolated cases and before having the regular troops available”, while “the Jews have terrorized the population, massacring an entire village, Dayr Yasin (near Jerusalem) before the British left Palestine”. Regarding their conduct toward the church, “the Arabs have shown themselves and show themselves very respectful and correct; they do not fire on churches, which are transformed into attack posts by the Jews”. The latter, he added, “are a people without any religion”. In particular, “the so-called Irgun and Stern, which are quite numerous, are true terrorists; they show hostility toward the Christian religion, committing all kinds of excesses and vandalism”. As in numerous other clerical accounts of the time, the custos negatively commented on the presence of women in the ranks of Tsahal.⁵² Regarding the actions of the Franciscans during the battles, Gori reaffirmed the choice of neutrality with respect to the two sides, but specified that the custody “during the conflict, called upon by the Jews to mediate, has worked to bring about peace, but with negative results due to the maleficence of the Jews”.⁵³

50 See ASCTS, ACC, *Miscellanea, Guerra arabo-israeliana, Attività del custode (July 1947–September 9, 1948)*, manuscript notes by Gori, Rome, September 30, 1948.

51 ASCTS, ACC, *Carteggio, Segreteria di Stato*, “Pro-memoria sulla Palestina presentato dal P. Custode di Terra Santa al Santo Padre Pio XII,” Rome, October 8, 1948, translation from Italian.

52 “Among the Jews, women and men fight mingled together and it is often the women who lead the assault.” Ibid.

53 It has not been possible to recover further information on this event, except with reference to the siege of Jerusalem in May 1948. In his notes during his visit to Rome in September–October 1948, Gori sketched a brief chronology of some of the essential facts of the war waged from December 1947 through July 1948. He noted: “May 17: request for mediation by the Fr. Custos for the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. Bears all the signs of an Israeli trick ... as a negative result for their cause.” ASCTS, ACC, *Miscellanea, Guerra*

For Gori, the refugee issue was the principal emergency. Responsibility for this situation lay with “the terroristic system of the Jews” which, according to the custos, pushed the population to flee. The Dayr Yasin events were presented to Rome as a censure of Israel’s conduct of the war.⁵⁴ In this humanitarian emergency, the custos presented a request to the Holy See for political and charitable intervention on behalf of the “Arabs (Muslim and Christian).”⁵⁵ As to the future face of the region, he expected to see Palestine under the mandate of a power appointed by the United Nations. In addition, given the current situation, he anticipated that Jerusalem would be recognized as an international city. On his return to Jerusalem, Gori recorded some thoughts on the “Jewish artifice and efforts” with respect to Islamo-Christian relations, especially the strategy of “dividing Christians and Muslims.”⁵⁶

Some months later, in a letter addressed to Tardini, the custos assessed relations with Israel in the light of his visit in January 1949 “to our religious who are located in that strip of Palestine that is now called the State of Israel.”⁵⁷ After lamenting the lack of access to the Cenacle despite the Israeli government’s declarations on religious freedom, Gori ended the letter with a very harsh conclusion: “Judging from the facts, it seems to me that there is little point in counting on the false promises of this rabble of a race.”⁵⁸ The image of the Jew as a cheat and an atheist and idolater, who preaches freedom of worship but practices policies hostile to the Christians, is joined in this text with a concern for the life of the Christian clergy and institutions in Israel.

arabo-israeliana, Attività del custode (July 1947–September 9, 1948), manuscript notes by Gori, Rome, September 30, 1948, translation from Italian.

- 54 From the custos’s notes: “the barbarism perpetrated in March 1948 by the Israelis at Dayr Yasin, near Jerusalem, is unfathomable and unpardonable. They sowed panic among the Arab populations, and their flight is due to the approach of the Israelis.” Ibid.
- 55 They “show themselves desirous of some gesture of sympathy on the part of the Holy See, especially in favor of the refugees. We remain highly conscious of the aids received from the representatives of the Holy See in Palestine and Lebanon.” Ibid.
- 56 On the news of Muslim reprisals against the Christians, including rumors of the fate of the curate of Cana, the Franciscan Giuseppe Leombruni, accused of having agitated in favor of the Israeli troops, the custos wrote that “the threatened reprisals would do them great harm with public opinion.” Ibid.
- 57 ASCTS, ACC, *Carteggio, Segreteria di Stato*, Gori to Tardini, copy, Jerusalem, April 29, 1949, available also in ACGOFM, *Segreteria Generale, Custodia di Terra Santa*, 762. The absence of a direct reference to Israel, substituted by expressions that did not imply formal recognition of the new state by the Holy See, is characteristic of pontifical documents until John Paul II. The use of the term “State of Israel” in a text with the papal seal would not come until the apostolic letter *Redemptionis anno* of April 20, 1984. See AAS 76 (1984): 627.
- 58 ASCTS, ACC, *Segreteria di Stato*, Gori to Tardini, copy, Jerusalem, April 29, 1949.

At the end of the war, the Israeli authorities were alarmed about some pieces in the media expressing the opinions of the Catholic world. These were not the first publications to comment on the foundation of the State of Israel and the actions of the government and army,⁵⁹ but they were the first to come out after the end of the 1947–49 war and at the peak of the Holy See's diplomatic efforts to obtain the internationalization of Jerusalem and of the Holy Places. In the spring of 1949, some broadcasts on Vatican Radio spoke of the grievous desecration of monasteries and religious institutions by the Israeli army.⁶⁰ On May 7, 1949, Fides, the Propaganda Fide news agency, published an anonymous report dated April 20 on the situation of the Roman Catholic Church in Israel. It characterized Zionism as a serious threat to Christians.⁶¹ The acts of vandalism that had taken place during and after the war of 1948 were evidence of inflamed anti-Christian hatred, provoking reactions in the Jewish press and also among Catholic representatives.⁶² To complicate the picture further, a text by the custos was then released a few days after the first anniversary of the foundation of the State of Israel.⁶³ A circular letter sent by Gori to the brethren of the custody, it came into the possession of the Israeli authorities. It harshly criticized the policies pursued by the Israeli government toward the Catholic Church and contained a controversial reference to the Shoah.⁶⁴ The Israeli delegation currently engaged in negotiations at the UN in

59 On the Catholic press and the establishment of the State of Israel, see Elena Mazzini, "Terra Santa, Luoghi Santi, tali restano integralmente per il Cristianesimo: Lo Stato di Israele nella stampa cattolica italiana (1948–1967)," in *Roma e Gerusalemme. Israele nella vita politica e culturale italiana (1949–2009)*, ed. Arturo Marzano and Marcella Simoni (Genoa: ECIG, 2010), and Paolo Zanini, "L'Osservatore Romano' e la nascita dello Stato d'Israele," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 73, no. 1 (2007).

60 See Ferrari, *Vaticano e Israele*, 60.

61 The text of the bulletin of May 7, 1949, is reproduced DC, no. 46 (1949): 645–48. Also in Farhat, *Gerusalemme nei documenti pontifici*, 307–9.

62 McMahon wrote to Tisserant asking that Fides would stop to publish anti-Israeli articles because the news agency was "stepping out of its sphere". ACO, *Latini*, 10/61, 1, doc. 98, McMahon to Tisserant, Jerusalem, July 21, 1949.

63 See Alberto Gori, *Lettera circolare n. 11 del R.mo P. Alberto Gori, Custode di Terra Santa*, May 12, 1949 (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1949). Enrici sent a copy of the letter to the secretary of state. See AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 57, 3, fols. 120–21, Enrici to Tardini, copy, Amman, May 16, 1949.

64 "In the face of repeated official statements by the new state, we believed at a certain moment that there would be nothing to fear. But the experience of these first months, the bitter disappointments in front of so many false promises made us perplexed and almost suspicious. The refusal to allow us to exercise our most sacred rights, the attempts to invade our possessions, the systematic refusal to our requests for the movement of religious personnel, the open hostility toward some of our religious, perhaps because they

Geneva on the question of Jerusalem protested to the Holy See because of the letter's hostile content concerning Israel.

On June 8, the Israeli daily *Haaretz* published a wire from the United Press in Rome. It reported on excerpts from Gori's letter, noting especially the custos's harsh tone regarding the desecration of Christian buildings by the Israeli army. Gori's letter and its subsequent publication demonstrated two important aspects. The first was Gori's anti-Israeli-oriented arguments and the second the response that internal documents from the ecclesiastical world could evoke from the Israeli and even the international public, thus requiring church representatives to take particular care in the preparation of their texts. In this climate of heavy mutual suspicion, the nomination of Gori as patriarch did nothing to improve relations between the Latin Church and Israel.

The patriarch's two visits in Israel in spring 1950 gave Gori the opportunity to encounter the isolated communities and the ones most affected by the fighting in the previous years, and also to meet some government representatives, especially representatives from the ministries of religious, internal and foreign affairs. Many rumors circulated as to the outcomes of these meetings. The Italian minister in Amman, Pierluigi La Terza, reported on Gori's observations during his stay in Jordan, after the patriarch's pastoral visit within Israel. In correspondence with his foreign minister, La Terza wrote that the patriarch said: "the Jews have a single aim, to do away with the Christians in general and the Catholics in particular".⁶⁵ The case of Nazareth had made a particular impression on Gori; the controls to which the inhabitants of Galilee were subjected as they entered and left the city brought him to compare the territory under Israeli military control to "a great concentration camp". In response to assurances from the Israelis guaranteeing freedom of access to the Holy Places for Christians and others, Gori, according to La Terza, commented that he "was more interested in souls than walls!"

In any case, the first real moment of confrontation between Gori and the Israeli authorities came with the pastoral visits of the spring of 1950. After the first visit in March, he reported to the Congregation for the Oriental

have known and know how to protect their own rights and those of the poor population that remained under their care, pain us seriously and have taken away all trust toward people who should have at least felt a certain duty toward those who exposed their lives, in very recent times, to save and protect them." Gori, *Lettera circolare n. 11*, 6–7.

65 Gori's comments, as reported by La Terza in a dispatch of April 24, was retransmitted by the general directorship of political affairs (DGAP), Office I, in dispatch no. 11/09776 sent to various embassies. ASDMAE, *Affari Politici (1946–1950)*, *Santa Sede*, 18, Rome, May 12, 1950.

Church that the attitude of the Israeli authorities he met during his journey had been “very correct and full of respect and deference” to him. According to the patriarch, “they promised to take into due consideration what I will observe concerning the Church’s rights,” expressing to the Congregation’s secretary, Tisserant, the wish that “the facts would correspond to the promises.”⁶⁶ A few weeks later, Gori’s submitted to the Israeli foreign minister the aforementioned memorandum formulating the demands of the Latin Church on the Israeli government regarding the reconstruction of the parishes that were closed and destroyed during the war, the granting of the right of return to the Christian refugees and the confiscated lands that were declared the “property of absentees.”⁶⁷

As already mentioned, the government’s response to Gori’s memorandum came in January 1951.⁶⁸ Vergani was harsh in his assessment of the letter: “the response is evasive and negative on virtually all points, and there are several lies.”⁶⁹ The vicar’s scathing words were reflected in Gori’s equally trenchant considerations. For the patriarch, the slow response and especially the failure to accept the priorities indicated by the Latin Church were signs of a lack of will on the part of the Israeli leadership to come to better terms with the Catholic hierarchy, both in Jerusalem and Rome: “Faced with this heap of fine phrases, there is little to change our opinion ... It took 8 months and some pestering from their ambassador at Rome!! On we go, on we go ... We know who is to blame for the refugees.”⁷⁰

The analysis of internal patriarchate sources, especially the correspondence between Gori and Vergani, shows that, even in the phase of meetings between the heads of the Latin Church and Israeli representatives, the language in private communications was still heavy with prejudice and exhibited little faith in the Israeli authorities. The characterization of Israeli politicians, whom Vergani ironically referred to as “the friends”, is a clear example. During 1951 and for several years, the public debate between the church, the Israeli press and the government was highly inflamed, becoming especially strident

66 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 1235/65, Gori to Tisserant, Jerusalem, March 30, 1950, translation from Italian.

67 APLJ, AG, *Gouvernement Israël, Ministère des Cultes, 1950–1967*, “Pro-memoria di mons. Gori per il ministro degli affari esteri Sharet,” Jaffa, May 20, 1950, translation from French, capitals in original.

68 See ISA, G/13/5826, Eytan to Gori, Hakirya, January 19, 1951.

69 APLJ, AG, *Gouvernement Israël, Ministère des Cultes, 1950–1967*, Vergani to Gori, Nazareth, January 31, 1951, translation from Italian.

70 APLJ, *ibid.*, Gori to Vergani Jerusalem, February 5, 1951, translation from Italian.

around issues such as the schools operated by the church or by Catholic congregations, marriage laws and Jewish converts. These issues show the difficulty in communications between the Latin Church and Israel and the longstanding persistence of anti-Jewish thought patterns and styles. On the other hand, after 1948 the Israeli government seemed more concerned by the action of the Vatican in the international arena in discussions on Jerusalem and the arrangements for the Holy Places. Among the Israeli politicians most involved, Paolo Colbi, advisor and then director of the department on Christian Churches in the Ministry of Religious Affairs, seems to have been the Israeli official most attentive to the actions of the patriarchate and the custody.⁷¹ Colbi was confirmed as Israel's direct interlocutor with the Catholic world, and in the years that followed, he would distinguish himself among the supporters of an effort to normalize relations between the church and Israel in a period that also came to be defined in terms of the relations between the Catholic hierarchy and Jordan.

2.2 *The Holy See and Finding a Modus Vivendi with Jordan*

As regards the territory under Jordanian control, as has been seen, during the war of 1948 various members of the Latin Church, and not only those of Arab origin, had very different appraisals of the conduct of the Israeli army and that of the Arab troops. In the majority of cases, the Arabs were considered respectful of the Holy Places and religious institutions, while the Israeli forces were identified as an army that profaned ecclesiastical property and the symbols of the church.

Likewise, after the end of the conflict, the Hashemite Kingdom was considered a substantially peaceful front as far as the religious freedom of the Christians in the state was concerned. The patriarchal archives preserve some documents concerning the relations with the municipality of East Jerusalem after 1948, including a list of those invited to the solemn entry of Gori after his appointment,⁷² requests to the patriarchate for economic assistance from the mayor, the Palestinian 'Arif al-'Arif,⁷³ invitations to participate in visits with

71 A Jew from Trieste, Saul Paolo Colbi (1908–2002) directed the churches department for 27 years, replacing Ya'akov Herzog, who, in 1951, joined the Foreign Ministry as special advisor on Jerusalem affairs. He authored various publications on Christianity in the Israeli state, including *Christianity in the Holy Land: Past and Present* (Tel Aviv: Am Hassefer, 1969). For an autobiographical profile, see Sergio Della Pergola and Paolo Colbi, "Ricordo di Paolo Colbi," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 68, no. 3 (2002).

72 APLJ, AG, *Ingresso di S.B. Mons. A. Gori in Gerusalemme*, "Invitati all'ingresso solenne di S.B. Mgr. A. Gori in Gerusalemme, 18 febbraio 1950."

73 APLJ, LB-GB, *Municipalités Jérusalem Béthleem, 1920–1987*, al-'Arif to Gori, typescript in Arabic, Jerusalem, March 13, 1951. Gori responded that the patriarchate's difficult financial conditions precluded a positive response to the Jerusalem municipality's request.

King ‘Abdullah,⁷⁴ political commemorations,⁷⁵ and meetings to discuss the situation of the city and the international debate concerning it⁷⁶ as well as requests for recommendations for city employees.

The Holy See saw ‘Abdullah as a nonhostile figure to Vatican interests, as is shown by the fact that in the years of confrontation with the UN on the question of Jerusalem, some prelates – including James Griffiths, who was Cardinal Spellman’s auxiliary bishop in the archdiocese of New York and titular bishop of Gaza from October 1949 – upheld the possibility of creating an Islamo-Christian front, with the aid of the Hashemite king, which would presuppose the internationalization of the city and the Holy Places. In reality, the idea of an Islamo-Christian front had already been suggested and discussed in the 1930s under the British Mandate, in view of the growing Zionist movement and the Palestinian revolts. Even more than Zionism and Arab nationalism, the real fear here was communism. During the pontificate of Pius XI, the proposal for an anticommunist front shared among the different religions had matured in this way.⁷⁷ At the end of the 1930s, the need for Catholicism to revise its traditional hostility to Islam was evidenced by the formation of a provisory commission – born at the behest of the Oriental and Propagation of the Faith congregations – to consult with the bishops regarding some questions regarding the Catholic apostolate in majority-Muslim areas. The responses that came from various dioceses were used to create an outline of an approach to Islam, through study and the spread of a spirituality that tended to be of a monastic cast, based on dialogue between the two faiths, modeled on the experience of Charles de Foucauld and based on the findings of French Orientalist Louis Massignon, which sought a rapprochement between the adherents of the great monotheisms. The research of the coexistence of Christianity and Islam, especially urgent in the Mediterranean area, was halted in the 1940s by the Second

See APLJ, *ibid.*, Gori to al-‘Arif, typescript in Arabic, Jerusalem, March 28, 1951. On the Jerusalem municipality under the Jordanian rule, see Haneen Naamneh, “A Municipality Seeking Refuge: Jerusalem Municipality in 1948,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 77 (2019).

74 APLJ, *ibid.*, invitation from the president and members of the Jerusalem Municipal Council to Jallad to take part in the reception of King ‘Abdullah in the village of al-‘Ayzariyya, typescript in Arabic, Jerusalem, April 17, 1950.

75 APLJ, *ibid.*, invitation for a ceremony in commemoration of Raghīb al-Nashashibi, previous president of Jerusalem Municipality who passed away on April 10, 1951, Jerusalem, undated typescript in Arabic.

76 APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, invitation from the mayor of Jerusalem to Jallad to attend a meeting to be held in the town hall, typescript in Arabic, October 25, 1949. The document bears the manuscript note “Internazionalizzazione Jerusalem?”

77 See Andrea Riccardi, “Introduzione: La Chiesa cattolica e gli altri,” in *Le Chiese e gli altri: Culture, religioni, ideologie e Chiese cristiane nel Novecento*, ed. Andrea Riccardi (Milan: Guerini, 2008), esp. 14–15.

World War, but also by the progressive affirmation of Arab nationalism. After the end of the war, the reopening of the Palestinian Question induced the Holy See and the Western bloc, which were increasingly concerned about the spread of communism in the Middle East, to form an instrumental alliance with kings Faruq of Egypt and ‘Abdullah.⁷⁸ Part of the Muslim world encouraged this type of convergence, in the hope of stronger international opposition to Israel and its projects.

The discussion on Jerusalem in the United Nations facilitated more frequent meetings between Arab delegates – especially Egyptian and Jordanian – and representatives of the Holy See. In Amman, La Terza informed Rome of comments by the mayor of Bethlehem, ‘Isa al-Bandak, regarding secret negotiations between Jordan and the Holy See during the UN discussions at Lake Success. According to La Terza’s sources, under discussion was the “known question of a united Christian-Muslim front” and the project of establishing regular diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Amman.⁷⁹

The real problem was the divergence in positions on the internationalization of Jerusalem; while the Holy See strenuously supported this, Jordan was strongly opposed. However, the removal of the real possibility of acquiring the status sought by the Catholic Church favored the convergence, albeit in secret, of the Vatican and Amman. The Italian representative was not alone in querying the content of this relationship. London, too, enquired whether a possible accord between the two states was under discussion and what was the role of the Catholic episcopate, and especially of Cardinal Spellman.⁸⁰

‘Abdullah’s assassination on the morning of July 20, 1951, further complicated the picture. The king was shot at the entrance to al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem, where he had gone for Friday prayers. The death of the Hashemite king had significant and diverse repercussions. First, internally, the king’s murder sparked violent scenes in the Arab sector of Jerusalem. A state of emergency and curfew were proclaimed. For days, there were clashes between various factions of supporters and opponents of the Jordanian crown.

78 The historical importance of Faruq’s reign (1936–52) is due to the fact that he was the last Egyptian sovereign before the Free Officers Revolution, which led to the proclamation of the republic, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. During his reign, Faruq placed particular importance on relations with the Holy See, with the intent to build an anticommunist bridge in the Middle East. Contact with the Vatican led to the arrival, in 1947, of the first Egyptian plenipotentiary minister to the Holy See, Tahir al-‘Umari bey. On these events, see *Documenti diplomatici italiani*, 11th ser. (1948–1953), vol. 4 (January 27, 1950–July 25, 1951), doc. 62, Soragna to Sforza, Rome, March 18, 1950, 73–75.

79 ASDMAE, *Affari Politici (1951–1957)*, DGAP (1950–1957), *Giordania*, 723, La Terza to the Italian Foreign Ministry, Amman, December 5, 1950.

80 See TNA, FO 371/82191, EE 1018/211, Perowne to Furlonge, Rome, November 30, 1950.

The death of the king also opened a long succession crisis; according to the Jordanian constitution, the crown now went to Abdullah's eldest son, Talal. He was on bad terms with his father and had, for years, been showing signs of mental illness. For this reason, his reign was particularly brief and controversial; after a year on the throne, during which he sought medical treatment in Switzerland and an attempt at constitutional reform, in August 1952 he abdicated in favor of his sixteen-year-old son Hussein, who ascended to the throne in May 1953.⁸¹

The crisis sparked by 'Abdullah's death was not only dynastic. The king's assassination revealed the deep rifts that permeated Jordanian society as it struggled to absorb thousands of Palestinian refugees.⁸² The rivalries between the Jordanian and Palestinian populations, sharpened by the sense of betrayal that the Palestinians felt toward the Hashemite monarchy, which it considered responsible for the "catastrophe" of 1948, could be seen clearly in the violence following the king's death. He had ensured a precarious equilibrium between Jordanians and Palestinians; his loss spelled the explosion of conflict within Arab Palestine and in the rest of the kingdom. Further, his death marked the failure of a political strategy that had long been pursued, the idea of creating a "Greater Syria", an Arab state formed from the union of Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. To this end, Abdullah's father, Hussein, had supported Britain in the anti-Ottoman revolt of 1916, with the promise that London and Paris would then support the Hashemite king's pan-Arab expansionist plan. In reality, neither Hussein nor his son succeeded in realizing this plan, and the death of the latter marked its definitive end.

Moreover, in second place, the king's death meant a new phase of renegotiating relations with Israel. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion initially considered the possibility of recommencing armed conflict for the annexation of the West Bank.⁸³ However, this military option was immediately discarded. From the Israeli point of view, the death of the king and the delicate question of the succession primarily marked the loss of their principal ally within the Arab world; fears linked to the uncertainty and possible worsening of relations with Jordan and the rupturing of the delicate equilibrium created with the neighboring

81 Hussein would rule for forty-six years, until 1999. He was a protagonist of major historical events, from the June 1967 war to the signing of the Israel-Jordan peace treaty in 1994, and left a profound mark on Jordan and modern Middle Eastern history. For a historical biography, see Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

82 See Salibi, *Modern History*, 161–66; Clinton Bailey, *Jordan's Palestinian Challenge, 1948–1983: A Political History* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1984).

83 See Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 70–71.

Hashemite Kingdom increased Israel's desire to reopen the hostilities, interrupted in 1949, against the Arab countries.

In third place, the events of summer 1951 also perturbed the Western powers most involved in the region, especially Britain. Fear over the growth of nationalist impulses, especially among the Arab Legion, which was considered an instrument through which the British government maintained indirect control over the country, and of greater convergence between Jordan and other Arab countries, nurtured British concerns about a new conflict with Israel and a possible positioning of Jordan within the Afro-Asian countries that were breaking their ties with their former colonists and would attend, some years later, the Bandung Conference (April 18–24, 1955), organized by the nonaligned states.

Within Jordan, 'Abdullah's murder was followed by an investigation into who was responsible. The assassin, a Muslim fanatic, was killed immediately after he shot the king. However, it quickly came to be believed that the assassination had been hatched by a broader conspiracy aimed at destabilizing the kingdom. Thus rumors began to circulate as to the possible principals in this plot. The weight of suspicion fell on the former grand mufti of Jerusalem, hajj Amin al-Husayni, an enemy of the Hashemite monarchy because of the relationship it had formed with the Zionist leadership.

The Christians in Jordan, and especially the Roman Catholic Church, were also caught up in the affair of the king's assassination. Their Muslim opponents and some supporters of 'Abdullah viewed the Christians with suspicion and growing aversion; they considered them a minority more loyal to the Western powers than to the Jordanian people. The reactions of the Arab Christians from some cities were presented as an additional reproach of the Christian population's ambivalence. In Israel, the Palestinian Catholic population had greeted the news of the king's death with satisfaction; many of them hoped that it would facilitate an overthrow of the current reality.

At the same time, other Catholic officials in Jordan had not forgotten 'Abdullah's special regard for the Christians. During the war, he had insisted that Christian buildings not be violated by the troops of the Arab Legion; on May 31, 1948, he met with Testa in Amman, proposing himself as an ally of the Holy See and sent a telegram to Pius XII;⁸⁴ and he was directly involved in the restoration works on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher after a fire on 23 November 1949 caused extensive to the dome (figs. 4.4–4.5).

84 ASRS, *ACAES, Pio XII, 2, Palestina*, 5, fols. 212–14, Testa to Tardini, Amman, June 1, 1948, and fol. 141, 'Abdullah to Pius XII, May 31, 1948.



FIGURE 4.4
Patriarch Gori visits King ‘Abdullah,
April 17, 1950
APLJ/AEBAF



FIGURE 4.5 Fire in the dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, November 23–24, 1949
APLJ/AEBAF

Immediately after the king’s murder, the Latin vicar for Transjordan emphasized this link between the Catholics and the Hashemite monarchy.⁸⁵ In his sermon the Sunday after the assassination, Sim’an did not hesitate to highlight the “Gifts of this Great and Magnificent Sovereign.”⁸⁶ The apostolic delegate also spoke of the “great impact of the murder of the king: he was a good person, and Catholics had nothing to fear under him.”⁸⁷ In any case, beyond the

85 AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 55, 1, fol. 12, Sim’an to Testa, Amman, July 23, 1951.

86 APLJ, *LB-AG*, *Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946–1953*, Sim’an to Gori, Amman, July 25, 1951, translation from Italian.

87 APLJ, *LB-AG*, *Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Testa to Gori, Jerusalem, July 26, 1951, translation from Italian.

church's parallel pursuits of monarchic loyalism and Arab nationalism at this delicate juncture, the event that brought the Latin Catholics to the center of the political conflict within Jordan came five days after the assassination. It was the arrest of Ibrahim 'Ayyad on suspicion of participation in a conspiracy to murder 'Abdullah. About a dozen people were arrested on the same charge along with him. However, 'Ayyad was the only cleric implicated.

This was not the first time the priest had been involved in political issues. A member of the AHC, he had participated in drawing up the philo-Arab appeal of the Christian Union for Palestine on March 3, 1948. His support for the former grand mufti of Jerusalem was well known both within the church and outside of it, to the point that the British had dubbed him "the political priest".⁸⁸ His link to the AHC was also known to foreign prelates, including McMahon.

The priest's arrest occasioned great concern in the patriarchate. If a Latin priest were to be convicted, it would have a strong impact on public opinion and would identify Catholics with the forces hostile to the monarchy and close to hajj Amin al-Husayni. Pierre Médebielle, a French priest of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Bétharram and author of numerous studies on the history of the Latin Patriarchate, wrote in his subsequent (and not too reliable) memoir that, on the news of 'Abdullah's assassination, the patriarchal chancellor, Beltritti, rushed to 'Ayyad's room to remove any compromising documents about his political activity, in an effort to prevent the police, who arrived at the patriarchate a little later, from finding evidence of his participation in the plot.⁸⁹

It seems probable that 'Ayyad had made connections with Palestinian elements hostile to the king. He was great friends with 'Abdullah al-Tall, who abandoned his position of military governor of East Jerusalem in 1949 in protest at the king's conciliatory attitude toward Israel. Al-Tall took refuge in Egypt, where he continued to maintain regular correspondence with the priest. After the king's assassination, the ex-colonel was also accused of involvement in the conspiracy.⁹⁰

At the trial of the defendants in August, 'Ayyad was declared innocent and freed in late September.⁹¹ However, he was ordered to leave the country, on charges of anti-Hashemite activities that continued to dog him. A patriarchal

88 TNA, FO 371/91839, ET 1942/47, Monypenny to FO, Jerusalem, August 1, 1951.

89 Pierre Médebielle, typescript text dated September 16, 1992, 25–26, contained in APLJ.

90 CADC, *Levant, Palestine (1953–1959)*, 650, *Questions religieuses*, de la Sablière to Bidault, Jerusalem, March 14, 1954.

91 AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 55, 1, fols. 34–35, "Resoconto sull'azione svolta dal Patriarcato Latino nel caso di Don Ibrahim Ayyad," anonymous but probably by Jallad, Jerusalem, August 3, 1951.

decree prohibited him from having any political activities and contacts.⁹² His acquittal was probably significantly influenced by the intervention of Sir John Bagot Glubb, the British commander of the Jordanian army, and Alec Kirkbride, the British ambassador in Amman, as Prime Minister Abu al-Huda would have preferred to have condemned the Catholic priest. In reality, the Hashemite crown also needed the support of the Catholics, especially the Palestinians, and certainly had no interest in mobilizing a campaign against them.

The story of 'Ayyad reveals, on the one hand, that the connections made between the Palestinian Catholics of the Latin rite and the AHC during the 1930s, in the period of the Great Arab Revolt, had continued even after the events of 1948. The war and the tragedy of the refugees accentuated Palestinian resentment of the Jordanian monarchy, which manifested itself in the king's assassination. Furthermore, 'Ayyad's trial made clear the extent to which the Catholic Church itself was split internally. The Jordanian Latins were not at all in a similar position to 'Ayyad and the other Palestinians. In this context, however, the strongest fears had to do with the Muslim population; the Jordanian press strongly criticized 'Ayyad's anti-Hashemite position, and his arrest served to further inflame the anti-Christian feelings that were on the rise in Jordan.

Shortly after Talal assumed the throne, on October 9–10, 1951 the Latin Patriarch Gori met with the new sovereign and visited 'Abdullah's tomb (fig. 4.6). Talal expressed his intention to continue and amplify the "benign attitude" of



FIGURE 4.6 Patriarch Gori visits King Talal, October 9–10, 1951
APLJ/AEBAF

92 AAV, *ADAGP*, *ibid.*, fol. 32, copy of the decree no. 41/51 by Gori and Beltritti, Jerusalem, September 15, 1951.

the monarchy toward the Christians and their institutions. However, after a few months, this generally congenial climate would change drastically.

3 State-Building and Christian Institutions

3.1 *Jordanian Nationalism and Catholic Interests*

The conflict between the Christians and the Jordanian monarchy and government originated in a series of draft laws discussed during the 1950s that threatened the autonomy of religious institutions – schools, hospitals, aid organizations – active within the territory under Hashemite control. The Roman Catholic Church had concerns about the future of its institutions since the war of 1948. The anxiety about their destiny was reflected in pontifical documents in which Pius XII pronounced on the Middle Eastern crisis.

The question of Catholic schools and state intervention was also being raised at the same time in Lebanon and Syria. The Jordanian case took on particular importance because of the combination of actions by the Christian leaders and Western political representatives to combat the legislation under discussion. This also revealed the full extent of the tensions occasioned by Muslim nationalist impulses and anti-Christian feeling.

In 1950, the Jordanian government had made it known to Christian schools that they were obliged to close on Friday instead of Sunday. The protest generated by this decision induced the king to retain the possibility for Christian schools to close on Sunday.⁹³ Three years later, the conflict over education between the church and the Hashemite Kingdom erupted. In October 1952, the ulema of the country had lodged a protest with the prime minister demanding the closure of Catholic-run schools and hospitals.

Two laws affecting the church were enacted in February and April 1953: one on “charitable societies” and the other on the possession of immovable goods on the part of moral entities. Both were attempts to regulate the activity of aid organizations by placing them under tight government control. Additionally, in the same months, deliberations began on legislation concerning private and foreign schools that would prohibit new foundations and the expansion of existing Catholic schools.

93 “Tawhid al-‘Uṭla al-Usbu‘iyya li-l-Madaris” [Standardization of schools’ weekly holidays], *al-Difa’*, May 18, 1950, and “Jalalat al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam Yasdur Amrahu al-Sami bi-Stibqa’ ‘Uṭlat al-Ahad li-l-Madaris: Barqiyyat al-Shukr li-Maqam Jalalatihī wa-li-Samahat Wazir al-Ma‘arif ‘ala Hadha al-Ijra” [His Majesty the King decrees that Sunday will remain a holiday for schools: telegrams thanking his Majesty and his Excellency the Minister of Education for the measure], *Filastin*, May 23, 1950.

Once he realized the danger to the institutions affected by these government provisions, Gori initially adopted a policy of forming a common front with all the Catholics, which he tried to extend to other Christian churches. The proposal to unify Latin and Melkite voices came from the Latin vicar for Transjordan, Sim'an, who expected that action that included Arab prelates would be better received by the government than one led solely by the Italian Gori. By virtue of this agreement between the various rites, all the heads of the churches would be present at a meeting with the prime minister to explain to him the drawbacks of the legislation and propose a solution acceptable to all stakeholders. The importance of the educational question was also connected to numbers; in 1952, the Catholic schools in Jordan had twenty-six thousand students of various faiths and denominations.⁹⁴

In June 1953, Gori presented a memorandum to Prime Minister Fawzi al-Mulqi, who in May had replaced Tawfiq Abu al-Huda, proposing some changes to the bills under discussion. The concept he propounded was that of the "national Jordanian character that the patriarchate gives to all the Catholic institutions existing in the country".⁹⁵ For Gori, the patriarchate and the religious institutions obeyed an external religious authority – the Holy See – but this did not deprive the Catholic entities of their "Jordanian character", which contributed "to the good of the people". Regarding the possible laws on instruction being discussed in the press, the patriarch explicated the notion of Christian education as a banner of Jordanian nationalism: "the Catholic Church follows the general principle of respecting the religious freedom of its pupils in all the schools and of giving all the pupils a true national culture, for the love of the fatherland proceeds from religion".⁹⁶ A few months later, on October 10, Pius XII received Hussein in a private audience, reminding him about the Catholic faithful and institutions within his kingdom.⁹⁷

In 1954, the conflict between the Jordanian authorities and the Christian representatives (supported by various diplomats) deepened. That spring, laws

94 Statistical tables on the pupils in the patriarchal schools and of the PMP in the patriarchal diocese in the 1950s are contained in APLJ, *LP-AG, Écoles. Statistiques Transjordanie, 1904–1958*. For an analysis and statistics of the education of Palestinians in some Arab countries, see Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, "Educating a Community in Exile: The Palestinian Experience," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, no. 3 (1973).

95 The text of the document is preserved in APLJ, *ibid.*, *Questioni scolastiche in Giordania*, "Memorandum presentato a S.E. Il Dr. Fauzi el Mulqy, primo ministro del regno giordanico, da S.B. Mgr Alberto Gori patriarca latino di Gerusalemme," no. 420/53, Jerusalem, June 2, 1953, translation from Italian.

96 *Ibid.*

97 See AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 55, 3, fol. 66, Montini to Henri Lemaître, Vatican, October 23, 1953.

on classroom instruction were proposed that would place foreign institutions, including schools operated by the church and the religious congregations, under the control of the education ministry. Gori then decided to work on a new memorandum, which he presented to the Jordanian government in autumn 1954.⁹⁸ The denunciation of what he considered as government interference now had a new element. The patriarch intended to convince the government that the Christian schools not only represented a bulwark and bastion of Jordanian nationalism but constituted the best protection and means to counter the penetration of subversive ideas, notably communism.

On March 13, 1955, the bill on instruction was voted in “as if by surprise”, in an amended form that represented a halfway house between the original text and the changes desired by the Christian communities.⁹⁹ The law came into force on April 16. Some of the observations formulated by Christian representatives and accepted by the Ministry of Education were included in the definitive text.¹⁰⁰ In any case, the Catholic hierarchy remained dissatisfied with numerous elements.¹⁰¹ That autumn, a letter from Jamil ‘Arif al-Budayri, education inspector in the Jerusalem district, invited the principals of the Christian schools to respect the new education law, particularly the clause stating that “a civil or foreign school may not teach a student a religious or national creed that violates his faith or violates the laws and constitution of the Kingdom”.¹⁰² A few months later, the heads of the Christian communities complained to the

98 APLJ, *LP-AG, Écoles. Statistiques Transjordanie, 1904–1958*, Gori to Abu al-Huda, copy, Amman, November 18, 1954 (in Arabic).

99 ASDMAE, *Affari politici (1951–1957)*, *Giordania*, 1013, *Legge giordanica 26 sugli Enti di Beneficienza*, Secco Suardo to the Italian Foreign Ministry, Amman, March 28, 1955, translation from Italian.

100 See the supplement to the issue of July 1955 of the diocesan periodical *Jérusalem: Le Moniteur diocésain* about “La nouvelle loi jordanienne sur les écoles,” written by Pierre Médebielle, 3–9.

101 See the letter in Arabic from the chairman of the Administrative Committee of Latin Patriarchate schools in Jerusalem to the education inspector in Jerusalem regarding the problem of the obligatory school vacation on Friday instead of Sunday, the control over the nomination of teachers, and government approval of curricula and textbooks, APLJ, *LP-AG, Écoles. Statistiques Transjordanie, 1904–1958*, Amman, Jerusalem, October 21, 1955. The protests of the Christian teachers faced with the impossibility of attending the Sunday mass also included the schools run by the UNRWA, as attested by a letter to Gori from some teachers from the district of Hebron and the exchange of letters in Arabic that followed in March–April 1956 between Beltritti and ‘Abdullah Salah, director of the UNRWA education department in Jerusalem, preserved in APLJ, *LB-GB, UNRWA (réfugiés)*, 1947–1975.

102 APLJ, *LP-AG, Écoles. Statistiques Transjordanie, 1904–1958*, al-Budayri to the principals of non-national schools, Jerusalem, October 8, 1955, translation from Arabic.

Jordanian education minister about the “threatening and warning” letters that they had received from the education inspectors in some districts.¹⁰³ Overall, this new law was a sign, according to the Christian representatives, of a growing “anti-Christian spirit”.¹⁰⁴

The passage of laws on charitable institutions and the discussion of the laws on instruction sparked a political conflict, involving not only the Christian churches in Jordan but also the representatives of European powers. The reactions of Italy, France and Britain, which feared these laws presented a threat to the interests of foreign associations and of Christian institutions in the country, influenced the political mediation process, which lasted several years. This revealed, above all, the various conceptions of religious freedom upheld by the church and the government. Furthermore, this long period of wrangling raised the problem of redefining the role of what had been the principal European powers in the area, as well as the traditional guarantees of the interests of the Catholics in the Middle East. The fundamental question became clear in the course of the discussions about the laws. After Jordan’s independence from Britain in 1946, what space and significance could the Western countries assume in a political and social context under such rapid transformation? In a situation that was changing in the direction of the gradual marginalization of the foreign role and influence, the interest in these laws expressed by various consular representatives revealed, more generally, the attitude of the powers that had once ruled the Middle East.

This process has been underway for a number of decades, and by the 1950s interventions of this type were becoming anachronistic. Furthermore, the Arab populations and governments considered them to be outright meddling. The fact that some actions, especially those undertaken by Britain and France, were aimed at safeguarding the traditional privileges of Christian institutions and congregations highlighted the general conviction, disseminated also by the Jordanian press, that “Christian” was synonymous with “foreigner”. In contrast, Muslim charitable works and organizations were depicted as authentically “national” and “Arab”.

The political battle fought by France, Britain and Italy over the initiative to nationalize the Christian schools and associations – with the Holy See in the background following the events through the reports from apostolic delegates

103 APLJ, *ibid.*, Head and patriarchs of Jerusalem to the Jordanian education minister, January 19, 1956, typescript in Arabic.

104 ASDMAE, *Affari politici (1951–1957)*, *Giordania*, 1013, *Legge giordanica 26 sugli Enti di Beneficienza*, Secco Suardo to the Italian Foreign Ministry, Amman, March 28, 1955, translation from Italian.

Testa and, later, Oddi¹⁰⁵ – thus provides a better understanding of a longer-term development. Whereas the Second World War signaled the decline of France and Britain and the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union, in the Middle East the consequences of the Cold War were felt increasingly strongly, as the Arab countries became involved and took positions within this new framework. The 1950s revealed the full extent of these local and international tensions. The spread of Arab nationalism – with more or less socialist connotations – saw an initial phase of pan-Arabism aimed at uniting the various Arab communities and also at overcoming the religious differences between Muslims and Christians.

In fact, these initial objectives did not come to pass, either in Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt or in the other member countries of the Arab League, established in 1945. Instead, a broad nationalist particularism was upheld, which accentuated, rather than overcame, the differences within the Islamic world between Shiites and Sunnis, and also between Muslims and Christians, with a progressive increase in hostilities and violence between the different communities within a single nation. The spread of anti-Christian elements and sentiments was manifest in Jordan precisely in the political and public importance acquired by the discussion over Christian schools and associations.

In the end, the debate over Christian entities in Jordan turned out to be particularly important when compared with the parallel conflict on the same themes – the existence, legal status and social importance of Catholic associations, schools and entities – being waged in the same years within the State of Israel.

3.2 *The “Kulturkampf” between the Roman Catholic Church and the Israeli State*

In the 1950s, certain legislative provisions adopted by the Knesset also raised questions regarding the civil status and religious convictions of the population resident in the state, as well as the functioning of some Catholic institutions and entities. In order to fully understand the importance of the discussion about the presence and role of Christians in Israel, one needs to consider the transformations and fractures of Israeli politics and society during this period.

The young state experienced extremely rapid population growth. After 1948, the population rose exponentially. Israel presented itself as the Jewish state that intended to welcome and unite Jews from all over the world. About seven hundred thousand Jews resided there in 1948, which was about 6 percent

105 See AAV, *ADAGP*, 19, 79, 5–7.

of the global Jewish population; by 1951, that number had doubled.¹⁰⁶ Jews arrived in the new state from the Eastern bloc,¹⁰⁷ but there were also Sephardi and Mizrahi¹⁰⁸ Jews, who had lived in majority Arab countries for centuries that had now become a hostile environment, especially after the establishment of the Israeli state.¹⁰⁹

This massive immigration flow was accompanied by various and sometimes contradictory attitudes and provisions. On the one hand, Zionist policy encouraged the growth of the Jewish population within the country; Israel was presented as the state that would ultimately receive and defend all the Jews of the world after centuries of persecution and would, thus, also keep in check the parallel population growth of the Palestinian component within Israel, whose birth rate was higher than that of the Israelis.

From the economic point of view, at the beginning of the 1950s, the Israeli state allocated a generous portion of its budget to absorbing the enormous influx of immigrants, who often arrived extremely poor. The state took on the basic support of the new arrivals and also organized the journey from their countries of origin to Israel and the transit camps where they had to stay. Some individual agricultural communities, the moshavim, received new immigrants. Despite all this, they still ended up at the bottom of the social ladder and found themselves in very precarious economic conditions. The growing inflation due to increased injections of money by the government, the economic difficulties linked to the costs of the recent war with the Arab armies, and the enormous military investment undertaken by the young state in a context of great uncertainty with respect to the growing Arab hostility, which brought fears of a new

106 See Dvora Hacoen, *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and its Repercussions in the 1950s and After*, trans. Gira Brand (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

107 See Zvi Y. Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). In two other periods in its history, the USSR would assist a mass emigration of Russian Jews to Israel: first in 1970 and then in the 1990s, when first the opening of the frontiers by President Mikhail Gorbachev and then the collapse of the Soviet system remarkably accelerated the emigration, with over a million Jews leaving the former Soviet Union for Israel. See also Gitelman, "The 'Russian Revolution' in Israel," in *Critical Issues in Israeli Society*, ed. Alan Dowty (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

108 For a sociological examination of the *Mizrahi* identity, see chaps. 9–10 of Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 211–56. See also Peter Y. Medding, ed., *Sephardic Jewry and Mizrahi Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

109 See Georges Bensoussan, *Juifs en pays arabes: Le grand déracinement, 1850–1975* (Paris: Tallandier, 2012).

war, were some of the most dramatic challenges experienced by Israel in its first years.

On the societal level too, the demographic acceleration brought about various transformations. The differentiation between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jewish components within Israel that would crystallize in the following decades first emerged. The former had comprised the majority of the Jewish population in Palestine and the Zionist leadership and thus had more political and economic clout than the Jews from the Middle East and North Africa. The arrival of thousands of Mizrahi Jews was perceived by other Jewish communities as a negative turn when compared to the other *‘aliyot*, which mostly involved the immigration of Europeans. The ideal of the sabra – the “new Jew”, a Zionist and enterprising pioneer – was now contrasted not only with the “old Jew” of the diaspora who stayed behind in Europe, but also with the post-1948 immigrants.¹¹⁰ Thus, during the 1950s, a veritable “Oriental question” took shape that left deep marks on Israeli society. The distinction between a mostly Ashkenazi middle class and the population of Mizrahi Jews who generally lived in more difficult conditions deepened a rift that was not just economic, but also sociocultural.

The Zionism professed by the Mizrahi Jews also differed from that prevalent among the European Jews. For the latter’s image of a Zionist, socialist, secular and nationalist pioneer, the Mizrahim substituted a Zionism of a strongly religious cast. The foundation of Israel was identified with the fulfillment of the biblical promise of the Jewish return to the land promised to them by God, instead of being the historical result of a movement that had not spared any effort in making “the desert bloom”, a movement even capable of skilled maneuvering in international politics that had thus succeeded in obtaining the consensus of the great global powers for the foundation of Israel. If Zionism in Europe had been painstakingly making its way within traditional Judaism since the end of the nineteenth century and creating a lay and nationalist identity for itself, the Zionist ideology embraced by the Mizrahi Jews reinserted Zionism into a religious setting.

Of the country’s leaders, Ben-Gurion seems to have been aware of the challenges at play. During those years, the prime minister defined his ideology based on *mamlakhtiyut*, or Zionist statism, according to which the various

110 On the creation and elaboration of the image of the “new Jew” in Mandate Palestine, see Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, trans. Haim Watzman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Synthetically, see also the reflections of George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 151–53.

Jewish identities within Israel should be homogenized as much as possible to the point of achieving unity, which would be essential to face the internal challenges and the external Arab threat. This assimilationist policy should be applied first toward immigrants, and especially the Mizrahi new arrivals, who were more inimical to the prevailing Ashkenazi Zionist model. The legislation of the period assumed particular importance in the realization of this plan; the debate over the laws on instruction, for example, should be seen fundamentally in light of the fact that the school was considered the laboratory for excellence through which to achieve the “fusion of the exiled”.

There was resistance to this program from various directions, leading to a further fragmentation of the social differences within Israel. The decisive unanswered question had to do with the Jewish character of the new state. This was accompanied by another question that was central to facing the phenomenon of the mass of immigrants coming into Israel: “who is a Jew?”¹¹¹ This question dominated the political and public debate in the early years of the state and also in later phases. Then as now, it went to the heart of the definition of Israel itself as a Jewish state; was Jewishness meant to refer to a religion and thus define Israel as a religious state? Or did being a Jew indicate a nationality, so that Israel was a national state? While the Zionists in Palestine prior to 1948 tended to support the second position, the religious Zionists embraced the first. Questions that had been debated for centuries within the Jewish world were now rendered politically and socially crucial by the foundation of Israel. Matters such as the law on issues of citizenship and civil status depended on it, as did relations with minorities within the country, especially the Arab, Muslim and Christian components.

Jewish law – halakhah – establishes that Jewishness is transmitted matrilineally; a Jew is the offspring of a Jewish mother. During the nineteenth century, the Enlightenment Jewish movement born in Germany – *Wissenschaft des Judentums* – revised this very rigid conception of Jewishness, extending the definition and tying it more to cultural than biological factors. Thus, a Jew was someone who accepted and adhered to Jewish civilization, history and religion. With the foundation of Israel, the need to define who was a Jew was dramatically restated. To incentivize Jewish immigration to the country, reinforce the structures and the army and challenge the Palestinian demographic preponderance, on July 5, 1950, the Knesset voted in the “law of return”, which guaranteed the right of all Jews from any country to immigrate to Israel. They would receive citizenship as soon as they arrived, with one exception: not if

111 See Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 85–91.

they were considered a threat to state security. However, the new law did not define “Jew”. Moreover, the law of return did not specify the policy on mixed families: during the 1950s no restrictions were imposed on the immigration of mixed families, and many of them immigrated to Israel during that phase.

Ben-Gurion’s complex attitude toward Jewish religious tradition and his attempts at the “normalization” of relations between secular and orthodox led to some concessions to the orthodox wing; since June 1947, the chairman of the executive committee of the Jewish Agency wrote to the leaders of the Agudat Yisra’el party guaranteeing them that the state about to come into existence would observe the Sabbath as a day of rest, would safeguard the religious education system and would put marriage under the control of the rabbinic courts.¹¹² After May 14, 1948, this very delicate balance was rapidly lost. The discussion of the laws on instruction, civil status and exemption from obligatory military service for ultra-Orthodox youth led to frequent crises in the government. Ben-Gurion’s awareness of the danger of a *kulturkampf*¹¹³ – to use a contemporaneous expression – drove him to try to reach an agreement with the religious parties. The failed effort to realize a draft constitution shared by the gamut of parties in the Knesset reflected the utter impasse between secular and orthodox; the latter were demanding a constitution modeled on the Torah, but were opposed by the secular members who feared a drift into theocracy. The Muslim and Christian minorities resident in Israel also have their place in this mosaic. The latter were particularly involved in some draft laws discussed in the early 1950s: the laws on matrimony, on education and the intense debate about conversions from Judaism to other religions, particularly to Christianity.

Regarding the marriage laws, these must be seen in the context of the civil status laws discussed at the beginning of the 1950s. Three laws were approved

112 See Maurice Kriegel, “Religieux et laïques: entre confrontation et transaction,” in *L’État d’Israël*, ed. Alain Dieckhoff (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 176.

113 See Aviezer Ravitzky, “Religious and Secular Jews in Israel: A Cultural War?,” in *Creating the Jewish Future*, ed. Michael Brown and Bernard Lightman (London: Altamira, 1999); Yeshayahu Leibowitz, “A Call for the Separation of Religion and State,” in *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, ed. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, trans. Eliezer Goldman and Yoram Navon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Emile Marmorstein, *Heaven at Bay: The Jewish Kulturkampf in the Holy Land* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). For a broader contextualization of religion and ideology in the Israeli public sphere, see also Guy Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Yaacov Yadgar, *Secularism and Religion in Jewish Israeli Politics: Traditionists and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2011); and Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

regarding personal status: the first, in 1950, established the minimum age for contracting a marriage, raising it to 17; the second, enacted in 1951, enshrined the equality of women on the level of rights; and the third law, from 1953, declared that marriage and divorce should be under the control of the rabbinic courts and not of the state. The third law was the result of a pressure campaign by the ultra-Orthodox parties, who threatened to leave the government and foment social conflict in Israel if it were not approved. They thus secured that marriage should be regulated by the halakhah; there would be no provision for civil marriage in Israel, and thus too, a mixed marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew would be considered null and not legally binding.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, the law did not recognize conversion from Judaism to another religion; for this reason, the Jews who had converted to Christianity continued to be considered Jews from a formal point of view and could only get married before a rabbinic court, for which, according to the church, they would incur excommunication *latae sententiae*. The priests and the Latin vicar, Vergani, unsuccessfully sought a solution that would circumvent this law. However, they did manage to obtain special permission from the Holy See to refrain from excommunication.¹¹⁵ After the laws were discussed in the Knesset, Vergani sent his protests against them several times to Patriarch Gori, terming the legislation a “true systematic persecution.”¹¹⁶

There was another issue surrounding the marriage question on which the interests of orthodox Jews and of the Catholic institutions converged: that of the instruction of children of mixed marriages. The chief Jewish concern was that Christian mothers married to Jews could educate their children in the Christian faith and enroll them in schools run by Catholic congregations and, thus, remove the children from the synagogue in favor of the church.

114 See Susan M. Weiss and Netty C. Gross-Horowitz, *Marriage and Divorce in the Jewish State: Israel's Civil War* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2013), and Ron Harris, “Hizdamnuyt Historiyot ve-Hahmatsot she-be-Heseah Da'at: 'Al Shiluvo shel ha-Mishpat ha-'Ivri ba-Mishpat ha-Yisra'eli be-'Et Hakamat ha-Medina” [Absent-minded misses and historical opportunities: Jewish law, Israeli law and the establishment of the State of Israel], in *Shne 'Eyre ha-Gesher: Dat u-Medina be-Reshit Darka shel Yisra'el* [On both sides of the bridge: religion and state in the early years of Israel], ed. Mordechai Bar-On and Zvi Zameret (Jerusalem: Yad Yizhak Ben-Zvi, 2002).

115 APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, minutes of the eighth meeting of the priests of Israel, Haifa, November 4, 1954. See also APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo, 1954–1959*, “Mémoire soumis à Sa Béatitude Mgr. A. Gori, Patriarche Latin de Jérusalem sur le problème du mariage de Juives converties en Israël, par le Comité Central de l'Œuvre Saint Jacques,” signed by Antonio Vergani and Jean-Roger Héné, Jerusalem, November 8, 1956.

116 APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Gori, Nazareth, February 4, 1951, translation from Italian.

The theme of Catholic education of Jewish children was the true battleground between the church and the Israeli government and created the most intense conflict between Jews and Christians in Israel in the 1950s.

Instruction constituted a central element in the building of a national state and the process of nation building. The discussion around the definition of an efficient school system had gone on for decades before 1948. In Europe and Palestine the leaders of various forms of Zionism considered the issue of educational institutions for the Jewish population in Palestine.¹¹⁷ In the transition period toward the State of Israel between the UN resolution of November 29, 1947, and the declaration of May 14, 1948, the question of education was among the first to be addressed. It was necessary to review the school system that up to that point was divided into three principal types: religious schools affiliated to the religious Zionist parties Mizrahi and ha-Po'el ha-Mizrahi, recognized since 1920; the labor movement, affiliated to the two parties with a socialist ideology, Mapam (Mifleget ha-Po'alim ha-Me'uhedet) and Mapai (Mifleget Po'alei Erets Yisra'el), and the orientation followed by the General Zionists.¹¹⁸ In the May 14, 1948, declaration, the commitment was affirmed to guarantee "freedom of religion, conscience, language, instruction and culture".

In 1949, the law governing the Israeli educational system was approved. The discussions that preceded the vote were focused on the definition of the school system for Arab children in Israel; indeed, the question of instruction opened up the larger and more complex question of the political and legal status of the Palestinians within Israel. In those same months, the citizenship laws were being discussed, which also featured the key question of the form of recognition to be ascribed to the Palestinian population. There were two distinct orientations within the majority Mapai party; the first considered Palestinian citizens as enemies within the state to be defended against by means of rigid controls; the second, more liberal view looked to the integration of the various components living in the new state, including the Arab population.

117 For a historical recognition of the debate on the school system within the Yishuv, see Daniela Fabrizio, *La battaglia delle scuole in Palestina: Tradizione e modernità nell'educazione giovanile ebraica* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2003).

118 See Aurélie Smotriez, "Frontières externes et fractures internes entre Juifs et Arabes: aux sources de la ségrégation scolaire en Israël (1947–1953)," *Vingtième Siècle* 103, no. 3 (2009); Smotriez, "Émancipation, sionisme et éducation: aux origines du système scolaire israélien," *Labyrinthe* 28, no. 3 (2007); Zvi Zameret, *The Melting Pot in Israel the Commission of Inquiry Concerning Education in the Immigrant Camps During the Early Years of the State* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002); Haim Gaziel, *Politics and Policy-Making in Israel's Education System* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1996); Majid al-Haj, *Education, Empowerment and Control: The Case of the Arabs in Israel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995); and Sami K. Mar'i, *Arab Education in Israel* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1978).

The law of 1949 effected the principle of extending obligatory instruction to the Palestinians within Israel; the law provided for Hebrew-language and Arabic-language schools. In the second case, no flexibility was allowed regarding the curriculum. As far as the Jewish population went, the law confirmed the differentiated educational system that had been experimented with before 1948. Next came the need to establish state regulation of the various educational systems existing within the State of Israel, including the schools run by Christian, and specifically Catholic entities, attended by Arab – Muslim and Christian – and Jewish children.

The political events conspired to consolidate the issue of the Catholic schools as a question of great urgency. In November 1951, the Israeli government instituted a commission, composed of representatives from the ministries of religion, foreign affairs, education and justice, to “examine the activity of the missionaries in Israel and their results”.¹¹⁹ Three weeks later, the commission’s report denied the possibility of any “danger” from the Christian schools: according to the commission, only six hundred Jewish children were attending them, there were no cases of conversion from Judaism to Christianity and no pressure in this regard either.

The commission’s conclusions did not put an end to the conflict. The topic of Jewish children being educated by Christian institutions in Israel had a symbolic value that went beyond its numerical reality. Even if the dimensions of this phenomenon in Israel were extremely limited, the collective construction of a Catholic specter that busied itself looking for children to convert in the new state was nurtured on centuries of forced conversions, as well as the echoes of more recent events. The most burning example was the case of thousands of Jewish children whose parents entrusted them to European Christian congregations to escape the antisemitic extermination during the Second World War. After the end of the conflict, some of the orphans were entrusted to Christian families. Numerous Jewish personalities and organizations were engaged in requesting that the children be entrusted to Jewish communities and not to the church.¹²⁰ In 1946 Yitshak Herzog, Ashkenazi rabbi of the Holy

119 See Bialer, *Cross on the Star of David*, 102.

120 Referring to the baptisms performed on Jewish children during the Shoah, Angelo Treves, representative of the Italian Jews at the World Jewish Congress, wrote to Stephen Wolkowicz in the final months of the Second World War, “this wholesale conversion campaign, is the spiritual completion of the Nazi plan of physical extermination of the Jewish people”. CZA, S25/11-6606, March 7, 1945, underlined in original.

Land, petitioned Pius XII for his “support in ensuring that these children be all restored to our people.”¹²¹

The conflict continued even after 1948 and directly involved the State of Israel, to which some of the parents had moved and were requesting a reunion. Given the intense interest in Israel in the international case of the brothers Robert and Gérard Finaly,¹²² calls to ban Christian institutions, especially Catholic ones, from taking in Jewish children became louder, feeding the *kulturkampf* between church and state at the beginning of the 1950s.¹²³

In 1952, an association was formed to push Jewish parents to withdraw their children from Christian schools.¹²⁴ In 1953, a new law (State Education Act) further reformed the state school system. The system used in the first four years of the state’s existence was abandoned in favor of a different organizational method. While the new educational structure nominally intended to follow an egalitarian and universalist logic, in reality it translated into a further accentuation of state control over the Palestinian population. The antimissionary campaign that rested on the issue of Christian schools became more inflamed, as demonstrated by the numerous articles that appeared on the subject in the Israeli press and by the tone they took, as well as articles in the Catholic media.

Despite the recommendations formulated a year earlier which had shown that the education offered by the Christian schools involved a very limited number of Jewish children, in 1953 the Knesset reopened the possibility of a law on Christian instruction, just as parliament was discussing an antimissionary law.¹²⁵ A further turn in the education question from the political perspective came early in the following year, when the debate over schools became intermeshed with the theme of Jewish converts to Christianity. A

121 ASRS, *ACAES, Pio XII, Asterisco, Stati Ecclesiastici*, 575, fols. 2539–60: 2540, “Esposto al papa del Rabbino di Gerusalemme Isaac Herzog,” Jerusalem, March 12, 1946.

122 On the impact of the Shoah on the Israeli Jewish politics and identity, the seminal work is Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

123 See Catherine Poujol, *L’Église de France et les enfants juifs: Des missions vaticanes à l’affaire Finaly (1944–1953)* (Paris: PUF, 2013); Poujol, *Les enfants cachés: L’affaire Finaly (1945–1953)* (Paris: Berg International, 2006); Poujol, “Positions divergentes des prélats catholiques sur le baptême des enfants Finaly,” *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem*, no. 16 (2005).

124 See “Misyonim ha-Sho’afim Lenatser Yehudim” [Missions striving to convert Jews to Christianity], *Ma’ariv shel Shabbath*, November 14, 1952.

125 “Portera-t-on une loi contre “la Mission” en Israël?,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 4, no. 1 (1954). Between 1954 and 1956 Oddi sent to the Secretariat of State several excerpts of the Israeli press review translated from Hebrew to French and published by *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, the periodical of the White Fathers of St. Anne, launched in 1951. See AAV, *ADAGP*, 20, 81, 3.

bill tabled in February called for a ban on Jewish parents from sending their children to Christian schools. The religious part of Jewish public opinion in particular saw a danger of new conversions in education by Christian institutions. In the context of reinforcing the Jewish percentage within the State of Israel, the converts were now considered a threat to the unity and stability of the nation. They were perceived similarly to the Arab population; if the Palestinians within Israel were identified as a “fifth column” threatening the country’s equilibrium, the converts from Judaism to Christianity were now designated a “sixth column”.

While the Holy See was attentively following the Israeli public and political debate,¹²⁶ the question of converted Jews also featured in relations between the Latin Church and the government. This can be seen in the case of the Association of Saint James, a patriarchal association that came into being in the early 1950s with the specific goal of providing spiritual assistance to converts to Christianity and catechumens. In 1955, a member of the association, Elias Friedman, a Jew from South Africa who had converted to Christianity before becoming a Carmelite monk, was denied a renewal of his visa having arrived in Israel the year before, appealing to his Jewish origins and the law of return. The authorities’ refusal to renew his visa was met with his own protests and those of Vicar Vergani to Paolo Colbi, advisor in the department of Christian affairs in the religion ministry.

Colbi’s response went to the heart of the question as to who was to be considered a Jew while, at the same time, it revealed contradictions within the Jewish thought: “one who effects the passage to another religion ought to know that he ... has ceased to belong to Judaism”.¹²⁷ Friedman’s experience was repeated in the 1960s with the case of the Carmelite Oswald Daniel Rufeisen, which had a much bigger political impact.¹²⁸

126 See AAV, *ADAGP*, 18, 75, 1, “Istruzioni per Sua Eccellenza Reverendissima Mons. Silvio Oddi,” signed by Tardini, November 1953, fols. 3–23 and esp. 12–13.

127 ISA, G/8/5808, Colbi to Vergani, Jerusalem, February 4, 1955, translation from Italian.

128 A Polish Jew who converted to Catholicism during the Second World War, Oswald Rufeisen (1922–98), who then became Brother Daniel, entered the Carmelite order and was sent to Israel at the end of the 1950s. He entered the country declaring that he was a Jew and referring to the law of return. His demand for citizenship was then rejected by the Israeli authorities on the grounds that he was a convert and therefore had renounced his Judaism. On Ben-Gurion’s initiative, the case of Rufeisen – who then asserted his identity as a Jewish Christian – ended up with the government and then the Israeli Supreme Court, which confirmed the government’s decision to deny the Catholic monk permanent residency in Israel in 1962–63. A year later, however, he obtained citizenship via naturalization, spending the remainder of his life in Israel.

However, these issues remained unresolved and formed underground currents that periodically and violently reemerged in Israeli public debate. In particular, the laws on religious instruction and on conversion came up for discussion again in the mid-1960s. In 1965, a new law prevented the conversion from Judaism to Christianity for children without the permission of both parents. The harshest law from a religious perspective was enacted in 1977, banning evangelism and the distribution of aid materials by way of proselytism, with a penalty of up to five years' imprisonment.

Neither the government nor much of Jewish society could probably have imagined the difficulty with which the Latin Church itself faced the question of Jewish converts to Catholicism during those decades. The history of the Association of Saint James bears witness to this painstaking encounter between Catholics and converted Jews within the Jerusalem Roman Catholic diocese.

The Association of Saint James: a Hebrew-Christian Church in Israel

1 The Apostolate to the Jews within the Latin Patriarchate

1.1 *Barlassina and Jewish Converts*

The political discord that erupted in the 1950s over the laws governing Christian institutions was just one aspect of a more complex constellation. At its core was the laborious process of building the State of Israel and the unresolved nature of the new state's Jewish character. The subject of conversion from Judaism to Christianity raised the specter of a lurking internal enemy beyond the Palestinian population that remained within Israel's borders.

For various reasons, the Jerusalem Latin diocese was also exercised by the question of conversions from Judaism to Christianity. After 1948, the Catholic hierarchy's opposition to the politics of the Israeli government and its clergy's traditionally anti-Jewish sentiments made relationships increasingly difficult between the Arab-majority community of faithful and the part of the Catholic congregation that was Jewish in origin. Immigrants to Palestine who arrived after fleeing years of Nazi-Fascist antisemitic persecution and extermination included individuals and families of Jewish origin who had converted to Christianity long ago, the offspring of mixed marriages as well as those who embraced the Christian faith after their arrival. Precise information on their number was difficult to obtain, although the Latin Patriarchate estimates that in the mid-1950s it included between two thousand and four thousand people, mostly represented by Catholics married to Jews and only some hundred converts.¹ The milestone of the foundation of the State of Israel and the demographic, social and economic transformations this then imposed on the administration and pastoral work of the local Christian churches represent central events in the life of the Christian world of Jerusalem and of the wider region. Thus, for the church, the 1950s marked the beginning of a long and tortuous path to the recognition of the Jewish converts within the Latin patriarchal diocese.

1 See APNDS, *P. Stiasny*, minutes of the meeting of the Association of Saint James, November 11–12, 1955.

Historically, pastoral attention to the Jewish world had been central to the missionary activities of various Christian congregations and denominations – both Catholic and Protestant – that began to arrive in Palestine at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Protestants were most active among these groups: several evangelical environments, especially in Britain, saw millennial hopes and expectations combining to invest Palestine with a new level of importance.² Although a tiny fraction compared to the Protestant initiatives, there was also a millenarianist strain within Catholicism, mostly influenced by Jansenism, that embedded itself in eighteenth-century pro-Judaism and continued to take hold in the nineteenth century.³ Some watershed events in the history of Europe – chief among them the French Revolution – were interpreted as signs of the imminent return of Christ. Within this frame of reference, the conversion of the Jews and their return to Palestine were reimagined as phenomena that would accelerate the impending manifestation of Christ and the end of days. This consideration put proselytism at the center of missionary attention in various congregations, especially British ones, notably the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, also called the London Jews' Society, founded in 1809.

Within a context of the arrival of numerous missionaries to Palestine in the decades that followed, the foundation of the Protestant diocese of Jerusalem in 1841, on a joint Prussian and British initiative, was a remarkable event. The goals of the episcopal see included as a primary objective an apostolate to convert Jews, as exemplified by the action undertaken by the first Protestant bishop of Jerusalem, Michael Alexander – himself a converted Jew – and his successor, Samuel Gobat. The new diocese built hospitals and schools and provided employment; these institutions were intended, first, to create a point of contact with the Jewish population that would be conducive to their conversion and to the instruction of neophytes; and second, the evangelical organizations were intended to respond to requests for work from those who had converted from Judaism to Christianity. The opposition to Christian proselytism contributed to the converts' isolation – not only individually and socially but also

2 For a characterization of Christian millenarianism and its repercussions for the Jews, see Sarah Kochav, "Beginning at Jerusalem: The Mission to the Jews and English Evangelical Eschatology," in *Jerusalem in the Mind of the Western World, 1800–1948*, ed. Yehoshua Ben-Arieh and Moshe Davis (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997); Stephen Orchard, "Evangelical Eschatology and the Missionary Awakening," *Journal of Religious History* 22, no. 2 (1998); and Mayir Vreté, "The Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought, 1790–1840," *Middle Eastern Studies* 8, no. 1 (1972).

3 See Véronique Alemany, *La dernière solitaire de Port-Royal: Survivances jansénistes jusqu'au XX^e siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 2013).

economically – with respect to their community of origin. Consequently, these neophytes did not preach their new Christian faith to their families. Despite the fact it became ever more structured, the Protestant proselytism effort among the Jews of the region did not achieve particularly significant results. Bishop Gobat's efforts to convert the Jews progressively dissipated, to be replaced by those of other Christian denominations, particularly the Latin Catholics.⁴

The emergence of the Zionist movement represents a major turn in this story. From the second half of the nineteenth century, for some millennialist Protestants, belief in the imminent return of Christ and consequent necessity for the rapid conversion of the Jews in Palestine was galvanized by their embrace of Zionism, which was seen as a movement that would enable the return of the Jews to the Holy Land. These two aspects combined to produce the Christian support for the Zionist cause that began to develop during this period.⁵

As for the attitude of the Catholics in Palestine regarding the question of proselytism and the conversion of Jews to Christianity, the pastoral care of converts was not the subject of a specific and coherent action by the patriarchate for several decades after the reconstitution of the Latin diocese. The information as to who the catechumens were, who dealt with them, and according to what pastoral lines is scant. The correspondence between the patriarchate and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith does include some references to Jews seeking conversion, especially in the context of disputes over marriage dispensations.⁶

4 See Heleen L. Murre-van den Berg, "Simply by giving to them macaroni ...": Anti-Roman Catholic Polemics in Early Protestant Missions in the Middle East, 1820–1860," in *Christian Witness Between Continuity and New Beginnings: Modern Historical Missions in the Middle East*, ed. Martin Tamcke and Michael Marten (Münster: LIT, 2006); and Thomas F. Stransky, "La concurrence des missions chrétiennes en Terre Sainte, 1840–1850," trans. Dominique Trimbur, in eds. Aaronsohn and Trimbur, *De Bonaparte à Balfour*.

5 The history of Christian Zionism has not yet been comprehensively studied, although the subject constantly draws major attention in the media and political rhetoric, fueled by ideological interpretations. For an outline of the fundamental features of the phenomenon, see Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), and Paul C. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism, 1891–1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1998).

6 ACO, *Latini, Delegazione Apostolica Palestina: affari generali*, 446, *Dispense matrimoniali, 1923–1928*. In ACPF see also "one such Jew, Leone Spire, born in Jerusalem, who has traveled through large parts of Asia, Africa, and Europa ... in order not only to be baptized, but also taken on as a missionary" a few years before the reestablishment of the patriarchate. Vol. 18,

In 1908 Patriarch Filippo Camassei established the Association of Prayers for Israel, placing the community under the superior of the Fathers of Sion in Paris. Its goal was to pray for the conversion of Jews to the “unity of the Catholic faith”, the “light of truth”.⁷ Some decades later, Barlassina dealt with the subject of the pastoral to converted Jews. In a letter to Apostolic Delegation Regent Hughes, the patriarch referred to the case of a Romanian called Talvy, “a converted Jew of about twenty years’ standing”, praising him for “the intense and efficacious apostolate he performs to the Jews and intellectual Protestants”.⁸ Barlassina’s words make clear, first, that in postulating the essential traits of long-term adherence to Catholicism, he characterizes the neophyte as someone who should work particularly diligently to convert his community of origin. Second, however, he expresses his wish that the converted Jew’s activity should not be limited only to his former coreligionists but should also be directed at non-Catholic Christians, specifically Protestants.

Later, pastors wrote to the patriarch asking how they should behave toward Jews who approached them seeking to receive the sacraments. In response to a direct request to Barlassina from an Italian Jew in Palestine, Adolfo Levi, who wished “to receive instruction to become a Christian”, the patriarch asked the curate of Jaffa to deal with the matter. In so doing, he emphasized the necessity for the Christian education of catechumens to be “firm and deep”, imparted over “several months”; it was important “to habituate him to Christian practice immediately, especially as regards the intentions of his actions and his inner life”.⁹ Furthermore and significantly, Barlassina conceived the foundation of a religious congregation, the Ancelles de Notre-Dame de Palestine (Handmaids of Our Lady Queen of Palestine), whose conversionist intent was to be dedicated to the “truly missionary and apostolic work ... especially to the Jews and Muslims, where a most promising field is opening up”.¹⁰ Barlassina asked the

fols. 553–54, Auditor of Nunciature Gaetano Bedini to Propaganda Fide, Vienna, July 31, 1841, translation from Italian.

7 APNDS, *Annales* 120, “Statuts de la confrérie,” 1908. On the history of this Brotherhood, see Olivier Rota, “L’association de Prières pour Israël (1903–1966): une association révélatrice des orientations orthodoxes de l’Église face aux Juifs,” *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem* 13 (2003).

8 APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Barlassina to Hughes, copy, Jerusalem, undated (ca. summer 1946), translation from Italian.

9 APLJ, *Paroisses, Jaffa, 1950–*, Barlassina to Stellacci, copy, Jerusalem, January 2, 1947.

10 “Since Providence sent me there, I have always bemoaned a deep rift; although there are many communities that, to a greater or lesser extent, receive some of those who request admission to Catholicism, no one has thought to go out and look for them. Meanwhile, the Protestants unleash their deaconesses and ministers all over the region and proselytize greatly; should we alone stand aside, yielding up a position that was entrusted to

Sisters of Notre-Dame de Sion to include the Ancelles within their congregation and an agreement was reached in 1936.¹¹

In 1945, following Barlassina's request for a catechism for Jewish converts, the Franciscan Printing Press published *Or va-Osher* (Light and happiness). The authors were only identified by their initials (A.M., D.G., V [ve in Hebrew] and M.V.), but it is possible that these letters stand for the Catholic motto "Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam et Mariae Virginis", representing an attempt to avoid censorship, preserve the complete anonymity of the author and hint at the imprimatur of the Latin Patriarch. The author was most likely Jean-Marie Paul Bauchet, who, after gaining a solid foundation in Hebraic studies in France and Iraq, moved to Jerusalem in 1941 and took up studies at the Hebrew University. The 360-page catechism was written in modern Hebrew, with parts in Latin, Greek, German, French, Italian and, in three final pages, Arabic, and included Bible extracts, prayers, theological explications and articles from the contemporary German, Italian and French press. Tisserant followed the writing of this work, corresponding with Bauchet and directly reported to Pius XII.¹² Bauchet would write some other books in Hebrew: in 1946 he anonymously published a 55-page prayer book and a 71-page book on the life of Saint Francis.¹³ Just before the outbreak of the Palestine War, the Apostolic Delegation proposed to entrust Bauchet with the care of converted Jews, but this idea, supported also by the rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, Augustin Bea, was then abandoned.¹⁴

the Holy Gospel?" ACO, *Latini, Patriarcato Latino, Propaganda Fide*, 493, Barlassina to Cardinal Willem van Rossum, May 12, 1930, translation from Italian. On the history of this congregation, see Olivier Rota, *Apostolat catholique et travail social en milieu juif: Les Ancelles de Notre-Dame de Sion (1926–1964)* (Paris: Cerf, 2019); Paule Marx, "Les Ancelles à la recherche d'une modalité de présence chrétienne en milieu juif," *Sens* 410 (January–February 2017); and Sanchez Summerer, "Ouvrir les trésors de la charité aux enfants dévoyés d'Abraham."

11 ASNDS, *Ancelles*, "Per Mariam ad Jesum," copy, undated.

12 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 855/49, 1, doc. 10, "Per l'udienza del Santo Padre". Tisserant annotated by hand that the pope wanted the book to be examined by a competent person before publication. The secretary of the Oriental Congregation proposed Jean de Menasce.

13 *Liber Precum in honorem Sancti Francisci* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1946) and *Gephen Poriyah: Divre ha-Yamim shel ha-Frantsiskananim va Kitsur shel Hayye Frantsiskus ha-Kadosh* [Fruitful vine: a summary of the life of Saint Francis and of the history of the Franciscans] (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1946). Both the books have the same official ecclesiastical approval dates: March 13, 1946, for the patriarch's imprimatur and March 22, 1946, for the custos's nihil obstat.

14 "Whatever the future political situation of Palestine will be, the Church will face hundreds of thousands of Jews to whom it will have to stretch out its maternal arms to welcome

The foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the nomination of Alberto Gori as Latin patriarch a year later do not seem to have brought much change to the pastoral care of converted Jews on the part of the patriarchate. However, Rome, especially the Congregation for the Oriental Church and its secretary, Eugène Tisserant, highlighted Jerusalem's apparent immobility with respect to these issues.

1.2 *Tisserant's Concerns*

Tisserant was particularly attentive to events surrounding the foundation of the State of Israel. From 1948, he established contacts with several important international representatives of the Jewish world and of the Israeli government. In a phase of extremely critical relations between the Holy See and Israel, Tisserant was Rome's principal communicator of the Israeli government's positions. And his attentiveness to Middle Eastern affairs was not limited to religious and political questions. Deeply versed in Semitic languages and cultures, the French cardinal maintained direct contact with Jewish intellectuals. He monitored the Middle East closely, convinced that the clash of the three great monotheistic religions in the region could lead to the triumph of atheistic communism.¹⁵

Within this highly complex picture, the question of converted Jews seemed particularly relevant to Tisserant. In his reading of events, in the post-1948 scenario these people could represent a cohesive force between the Arab Christian community and Jewish society, as well as initiate action for the apostolate within the State of Israel after decades of nonintervention. Furthermore, the creation of a Catholic community of converted Jews constituted an effective example of Jewish-Catholic dialogue in the period after the Shoah, when signs of innovation and revision began to emerge from a long tradition of hostility and conflict.

Tisserant was not alone in attributing an important role to converts from Judaism on the rocky path that bridged these two worlds. Historically, not only had these converts been a proselytizing force – as in the case of the neophytes

them into the truth and redemption. So far, unfortunately, it must be confessed, little or nothing has been done in this sense in Palestine by the Catholic side ... The person of the Rev. Fr. Paul de Jésus et Marie is truly the most suitable religious – not to mention the only one – who, animated by a true sense of Christian charity and knowing not only the modern language but also the serious spiritual problems facing by so many good Jews, could direct this new form of active apostolate." *ACO, Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 855/49, 1, doc. 45, Apostolic Delegation to the Oriental Congregation, attachment A, July 14, 1947, translation from Italian.

15 See Fouilloux, *Eugène, cardinal Tisserant*, 421–54.

within the homes of catechumens – they had also been the mouthpiece for a different consideration, inspired by greater charity and fraternity toward the Jews on the part of the church. But it was precisely for this reason that the converts were viewed with suspicion by various fundamentalist Catholic groups. For example, Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val, secretary of the Congregation of the Holy Office, denounced the *Amici Israel* (Friends of Israel) society, formed in the 1920s to promote an innovative apostolate to Israel within the Roman Catholic church, although without completely abandoning the intent to convert, as a cover for a movement that intended to overthrow not only the secular order – following the Jewish conspiracy topos – but also the church itself, from within.¹⁶ Clearly, this type of historical precedent could hamper the inauguration of new basis for dialogue.

However, these considerations did not prevent the opening up of new spaces of encounter between Jews and Christians after the Second World War. One of the most significant of these opportunities was the Seelisberg Conference. Organized on the instigation of the International Council of Christians and Jews in the Swiss town of Seelisberg, the meeting, which was held in the summer of 1947, brought some seventy Jewish and Christian (both Protestant and Catholic) participants together to confront the origins of Christian antisemitism and to discuss means to counter it.¹⁷ Jules Isaac headed the Jewish members, while Catholic representatives included Charles Journet,¹⁸ Paul Démann¹⁹

16 See Wolf, *Pope and Devil*, 106–7.

17 For an analysis of the Seelisberg Conference and the role of Jules Isaac within it, see Norman C. Tobias, *Jewish Conscience of the Church: Jules Isaac and the Second Vatican Council* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 104–17.

18 A Swiss Catholic theologian, Charles Journet (1891–1975) dedicated much of his life to the teaching of dogmatic theology. Attentive to Jewish-Christian relationships and a friend of Maritain, he was the author of the important volume *Destinées d'Israël: A propos du Salut par le Juifs* (Paris: Egloff, 1945). In 1965, Paul VI made him a cardinal, and he participated in the Second Vatican Council.

19 Originally from a Hungarian Jewish family, Paul Démann (1907–2005) converted to Christianity in the 1930s and became a priest in 1944, joining the order of Notre-Dame de Sion. During the war, he pledged to save some Jews, and after the end of the conflict he created the *Cahiers sioniens* (1947–55), a magazine aimed at expanding the dialogue between Christians and Jews. He participated in the Seelisberg Conference. He left the congregation in the 1960s but remained one of the protagonists for the new course of contact between Jews and Christians after the Second Vatican Council. His most important work is *Les Juifs: Foi et destinée* (Paris: Fayard, 1961). For a short overview of Démann's importance in Jewish-Christian dialogue, see Olivier Rota, "Dépasser les cadres du philo-sémitisme: La vision œcuménique de Paul Démann," *Archives juives* 40, no. 1 (2007).

and Jean de Menasce.²⁰ At the end of the conference, a document was ratified for presentation to the church that outlined the ten points presented by Isaac during the meeting.²¹ The concluding text of the meeting also contained the reflections of Jacques Maritain, who – although unable to attend – had sent a letter to the conference secretary, Pierre Visseur, in which he expressed his fears of a rekindling of antisemitism in Europe and his proposals for a new course for Jews and Christians.

In Rome, Tisserant was in contact with some of the promoters of the Seelisberg Conference. He also followed the activities of Jewish-Christian friendship associations that were springing up in France (one came into existence in Paris in 1948), Switzerland and the Netherlands. In this context, he began to pose the question of dedicated pastoral care for the Jewish world and in the State of Israel on the part of the patriarchate, the custody, and other historically important religious congregations. Since the establishment of the Apostolic Delegation and Gori's elevation to the patriarchate, Tisserant hoped to see these issues addressed by the apostolic delegate and the former custos.²² The secretary of the Oriental Congregation admitted that he had received complaints from baptized Jews originally from Eastern Europe, especially Bulgaria and Hungary, that there were no priests in Israel they could turn to for spiritual services. Tisserant suggested that the patriarch should request the help of the Assumptionists, requesting that their superior general commission

20 From a Jewish family of Egyptian origin, Jean de Menasce (1902–73) converted to Christianity and entered the Dominicans. He took part in the Seelisberg Conference and committed himself to Jewish-Christian dialogue. A student of Chassidism and an ardent philo-Zionist, he was the author of an important work titled *Quand Israël aime Dieu* (Paris: Plon, 1931). See Michel Dousse and Jean-Michel Roessli, *Jean de Menasce (1902–1973)* (Fribourg: Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire, 1998).

21 Jules Isaac (1877–1963) was born into a Jewish family in Lorraine. He studied modern history at the Sorbonne and worked as a history teacher until the Second World War, when he left Paris for the south of France. He lost his wife and children in Auschwitz. The tragedy of the Shoah drove him to ask himself how it was possible for Christian Europe to become a theater for the extermination of the Jewish people. In 1948, he published *Jésus et Israël*, which would become profoundly important in the history of Jewish-Christian relations. In the book, Isaac lays out his thesis, based on the conviction that there was an enormous gap between the manner in which the New Testament was presented to the Jews and the subsequent teaching of the church, which was hostile to the Jews (what Isaac called the “teaching of contempt” (*l'enseignement du mépris*), which became the title of a work he published in 1962. See Tobias, *Jewish Conscience of the Church*; André Kaspi, *Jules Isaac: Historien, acteur du rapprochement judéo-chrétien* (Paris: Plon, 2002).

22 Tisserant listed the “apostolate for the conversion of the Jews” among the first “most serious questions” for Testa's charge after his appointment as apostolic delegate in Jerusalem, Palestine, Transjordan and Cyprus. See AAV, *ADAGP*, 12, 52, 2, fol. 4, Tisserant to Testa, Rome, April 26, 1948, translation from Italian, and fols. 5–13, “Istruzioni per S.E. Mons. Gustavo Testa, Delegato Apostolico della Palestina”.

a clergyman who spoke Bulgarian to “make inquiries of the baptized”.²³ For Tisserant, providing religious care to Jewish catechumens or Jews who had already been baptized and desired “to conserve their character as Christians” was an “absolute duty”, but he conceded that this obligation was not easy to fulfill.

The French cardinal formulated a concrete proposal to “create a center for those converts, not by any means to group them all together, but to provide a basis for an official organization”.²⁴ He hereby intended to engage diverse religious actors: not only the patriarchate, but also the custody and other religious congregations, particularly clergy who historically had close relations with the Jewish world. The importance of bringing linguistic competence to bear alongside various pastoral sensitivities necessitated the creation of a network of figures and institutions within the Latin Church dedicated to these purposes. Ultimately, the pastoral care *in* Israel and *to* Israel required the development of a new attitude, a different view on the part of the Catholic world, to overcome the traditional hostility toward the Jewish world as well as the previous patterns of philosemitism.²⁵

Tisserant’s proposal was probably influenced by the exchanges he had with Paul Démann. The Father of Sion had sent Tisserant a report written by two young converted Jews, Renée Bloch²⁶ and Myriam Kleinberger,²⁷ who had been helping him in his cultural and pastoral work over the previous two years. In the summer of 1950 they spent some months in Israel in order to commence apostolate activity. They traveled the country, where they had contact with some

23 APLJ, FC-AG, *S. Congregatio Pro E. Orientali, 1919–1953*, Tisserant to Gori, Rome, August 29, 1950, translation from Italian.

24 Ibid.

25 See Jean Dujardin, *L’Eglise catholique et le peuple juif: Un autre regard* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2003). On philosemitism, see Olivier Rota, *Essai sur le philosémitisme catholique entre le premier et le second Vatican: Un parcours dans la modernité chrétienne* (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2012), and especially, for the material central to the present study, 181–261. See also Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe, eds., *Philosemitism in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), and William D. Rubinstein and Hilary L. Rubinstein, eds., *Philosemitism: Admiration and Support in the English-Speaking World for Jews, 1840–1939* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

26 Renée Bloch (1924–55), who converted when she was seventeen years old, was a brilliant student of theology and Semitic languages in Paris. After meeting Démann, she wrote for and edited the *Cahiers Sioniens*, publishing pioneering articles on the history and meaning of the midrash, before her tragic death when El Al Flight 402 was shot down by the Bulgarian air force on July 27, 1955.

27 Born into a Belgian Jewish family, during the Second World War she was rescued by nuns. In the 1950s she entered the community of the Little Sisters of Jesus and moved to Israel, where she spent the rest of her life.

Catholic representatives, notably Georges Hakim. At the end of their journey, the Melkite bishop wrote to Tisserant to propose that he grant an audience to the two women.²⁸ At the meeting, the two women made a very good impression on the cardinal (“they are two converts of excellent spirit and zeal”),²⁹ who asked them to submit a report on their opinions and ideas on the role of the Catholic Church in Israel. They sent the document via Démann in late August. In their lucid text, they described the Jerusalem Catholic Church as an “unadapted Church”, incapable of dealing with the new situation presented by the 1948 war and the establishment of the Israeli state.³⁰ In this situation, the church could choose between “an effort of reorientation and adaptation” or “a sterile regard for a past that will never return”. To renew the Jerusalem Church, Bloch and Kleinberger recommended the foundation of a new community of “apostles, priests and laity” for the converted Jews and for the opening of a new dialogue between Catholics and Jews. They proposed to create “a small group, next year, in Tel Aviv”, with some converted Jewish girls they frequented during their journey. In Bloch and Kleinberger’s view, this presence should maintain discretion and not at all be oriented to proselytism. To prepare this apostolate, the two women planned to study modern Hebrew, Judaism and theology for one year before their departure.

This document impressed Tisserant and influenced his thought. Thus, two young women – lay, converted Jews – participated in the very first steps of what would have become the Association of Saint James.

1.3 *The Custody’s Intervention and Gori’s Fears*

In addition to Tisserant’s requests, the custody discussed appeals from other clergy who had taken steps to meet with and follow catechumens and Christians of Jewish origin in Israel. In November 1950, the Franciscan minister general, Pacifico Perantoni, wrote to the custos of the Holy Land, Giacinto Faccio, to report on a visit he had received from three priests, “converted Jews, one of them a Father of Sion, one an Assumptionist, and the third a Benedictine – there was also a Dominican priest – who requested our collaboration, the Franciscans in Palestine, to convert the Jews”.³¹ The priests asked the custos to assign “two fathers, or even three, from among the clergy of the custody ... willing and able to collaborate in this way”, with the ancillary goal

28 See ACO, *Melchiti, Haifa*, 151/50, 4, doc. 95, Hakim to Tisserant, Haifa, August 10, 1950.

29 Ibid., handwritten note by Tisserant to Hakim’s letter.

30 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: affari generali*, 457/48, 4, doc. 221, “Enquête sur les problèmes chrétiens en Israël,” Paris, August 28, 1950, translation from French.

31 ACGOFM, *Segreteria Generale, Custodia di Terra Santa*, 762, doc. 85, Perantoni to Faccio, November 10, 1950, translation from Italian.

of forming an association in Jerusalem, which Perantoni dubbed a “laudable initiative”.³²

It is most likely that the priests Perantoni referred to were Démann and the Assumptionist Jean-Roger Héné,³³ the Benedictine Leo Rudloff³⁴ and the Dominican Jean de Menasce. The fact that Perantoni described the proposal as dedicated to the “conversion of the Jews” and judged it “laudable” casts some doubt on his understanding of the project formulated by these clerics, whose positions and aspirations were not geared toward proselytism but rather the creation of an opening to the Jewish world in Israel and a change in the relationship between Arab Christians and Jewish Christians. Furthermore, Perantoni proposed to Faccio the possibility of sending to Israel Laetus Himmelreich, a Dutch friar and important name in the recent history of relations between Catholics and Jews:³⁵ he was among the founders of the Amici Israel society.

The society’s project also included the request to reform the Good Friday prayer for the Jews (the “*oremus et pro perfidis iudaeis*”), eliminating the reference to the “*perfidis iudaeis*” and to “*judaicam perfidiam*” (“perfidious Jews”, “Jewish perfidy”). In February 1928, Himmelreich was to have presented the proposal to reform the antisemitic elements of the Good Friday liturgy at a meeting of the society. But Cardinal Merry del Val – who had originally joined the group in the belief that it was a proselytism effort aimed at the Jews, prohibited the meeting from taking place; once had he understood the various intentions of the Amici Israel, he withdrew from it.³⁶ A decree issued by the

32 Ibid.

33 Son of an Alsatian Protestant father and a German Jewish mother, Jean-Roger Héné (1918–79) studied in the United States and in France, where he embraced Christianity and entered the Assumptionists during the Second World War. During the Vichy regime, he worked to bring Jewish civilians to safety. A few years after his ordination, in 1952 he was sent to Israel, where he became one of the founding figures of the ASJ.

34 Leo Rudloff (1902–82), originally from a German Jewish family, converted to Christianity and became a Benedictine monk. He became prior of the Abbey on Mount Zion and a protagonist of the series of Jewish-Christian dialogues that culminated in the Second Vatican Council declaration *Nostra Aetate*. Together with Démann, he also participated in the meetings in the Dutch city of Apeldoorn in 1958 and 1960 to prepare the *De Iudaeis* document.

35 On Himmelreich, see Marcel Poorthuis and Theo Salemink, “Laetus Himmelreich OFM (1886–1957): Zwischen München, Jerusalem und Dachau,” in *Widerstand – Martyrium – Erinnerung: Franziskanische Reaktionen auf den Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Michaela Sohn-Kronthaler, Paul Zahner and Eduard Prenga (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2017), and Poorthuis and Salemink, “Chiliasme, anti-judaïsme en antisémitisme: Laetus Himmelreich OFM (1886–1957),” *Trajecta* 9, no. 1 (2000).

36 On this episode, see Renato Moro, “Chiesa e antisemitismo,” in Riccardi, *Le Chiese e gli altri*, 42, and Wolf, *Pope and Devil*, 101–2.

Holy Office on March 25, 1928, dissolved the priestly union. Himmelreich resisted the decision but was unable to overturn it.³⁷ During the Second World War, the Dutch priest was interned in Dachau concentration camp. At the end of the war, he returned to the Netherlands, where he expressed to his superiors his desire to leave for Palestine, an intention that was redoubled with the founding of the State of Israel. However, Perantoni did not mention Himmelreich's connection to Amici Israel in his letter to the custos, far less the sympathies expressed by the Franciscan and other members of the group for the Zionist project.

In this scenario, with several religious converts from Judaism making requests and Tisserant committed to seeing the Latin Church in Israel guarantee spiritual guidance to converted Jews and catechumens, Custos Faccio's response brought things to a halt. He considered it an impossibility to open up a space for this kind of pastoral provision in Israel, maintaining that the lack of religious freedom in Israel did the most harm to converted Jews, not the lack of pastoral care or any prejudice coming from the church.³⁸ However, the custos's response was not exhaustive; he failed to specify which pastoral modalities would be used to realize the apostolate performed by the priests he mentioned, and he did not clarify any guidelines and directives, if indeed these existed.

Faced with this resistance from Faccio, Tisserant decided to take the situation in hand and directly proposed a priest to attend to the question of Jewish converts to Catholicism. This time too, the nominee was Himmelreich, whom Perantoni had advocated two years previously. But the provincial father of the Netherlands and the secretary general to the missions rejected the assignment of the Dutch priest to the monasteries of Tiberias or Mount Tabor to supervise the care of converted Jews and catechumens. And in any case, any definitive decision to assign Himmelreich to Israel would not have spelled the

37 See Theo Saleminck, "Cardinal Willem van Rossum and Amici Israel (1926–1928): The Conversion of Jews and the Debate on Zionism," *Trajecta* 19–20, nos. 1–2 (2010–11); and Menahem Macina, "Essai d'élucidation des causes et circonstances de l'abolition, par le Saint-Office, de l'Opus sacerdotale Amici Israel' (1926–1928)," in *Juifs et chrétiens: Entre ignorance, hostilité et rapprochement (1898–1998)*, ed. Annette Becker, Danielle Delmaire and Frédéric Gugelot (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Université Charles-de-Gaulle-Lille 3, 2002).

38 "There is no real and true freedom of religion in the State of Israel. The converted Jews refuse to declare themselves as such for fear of oppression by fanatics ... It has been reported to me that a rumor has reached Rome that the Catholic priests despise the converted Jews. If 'Catholic priests' refers to the Franciscans, I declare that this rumor is absolute slander." Faccio's sentiments are contained in a letter addressed by the minister general Augustin Sepinski to Tisserant, dated December 20, 1951, contained in ACGOFM, *Segreteria Generale, Custodia di Terra Santa*, 762, doc. 49, translation from Italian.

end of the discussion about the spiritual support for the Jews. The Franciscan visitor Barthélemy Héroux, having seen the custody's monasteries from the inside within the new state, expressed the conviction that undertaking this task should not be postponed any longer, citing the importance of a "wholesome proselytism".³⁹ Héroux did not specify what he meant by this term; perhaps he believed that the friars should refrain from forced conversions, which after all were impossible to execute in a state where the majority of the population was of the Jewish religion and which defined itself as Jewish. Or that they should operate an intensive apostolate which favored conversion. What guidelines could steer priests in approaching Jews? What differences should there be in how the apostolate treated catechumens and those who had already converted? And most important of all: should the church take steps to encourage conversion or just deal with those who approached the parishes and convents of their own free will? And how could all this be translated into concrete action? There were no answers, which itself was a further sign of how difficult it was to develop a shared vision on the spiritual care of converted Jews and catechumens. Conversely, the deep-seated differences among the various protagonists of this debate began to be more clearly defined: the clergy of Jewish origin – who had initially turned to Perantoni to address these issues – were motivated by a rejection of conversionist activity and the desire for a redefinition of the relationship between Catholics and Jews that would overcome the traditional hostility, motivations that Tisserant shared in large part. Custody representatives ascribed a positive, missionary connotation to the term *apostolate*, unaccompanied by coercive measures: this was where some, like Héroux and Faccio, could hope for the reinforcement of a "wholesome proselytism" by the Catholics in Israel. However, this second position, which was historically closer to the Catholic tradition of being a force for converting Jews, appeared in a rather nuanced and shaded form.⁴⁰ As it turns out, Faccio does not seem to have discussed anything to do with the pastoral praxis current among the Franciscans in Israel, while Héroux recognized the necessity to train the clergy to be open to a new way of considering the Jews, their

39 ACGOFM, *ibid.*, 764, doc. 25, Héroux to Sepinski, Jerusalem, April 23, 1953, translation from Italian.

40 In the vast historiography on conversions from Judaism to Christianity, see Marina Caffiero, *Forced Baptisms: Histories of Jews, Christians, and Converts in Papal Rome*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Fausto Parente, *Les Juifs et l'Eglise romaine à l'époque moderne (XV^e-XVIII^e siècles)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007). For the present topics, see esp. John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

history, culture and religion, acknowledging the entrenched hostility among Catholics and highlighting the urgent need to eradicate it.⁴¹ Thus, Hérroux openly supported the need to assign a prominent place to the pastoral care of the Jews because “the time has come, or rather we are coming late to organizing an effective apostolate, since other orders have already done more work than we have. It would be a true sin to pass up these times that seem to be the hour of grace for this people, according to the view of the experts.”⁴² The “hour of grace”, which was not specified, was perhaps a vague reference to the connected idea of the identification of the foundation of the State of Israel with the Jews’ “return to Zion” which would have prefigured and accelerated their conversion, a vision shared – so it seems – in various Christian contexts, especially within Protestant denominations. However, this conviction did not meet with the agreement of many Roman Catholic priests in the region; in any case, Hérroux expressed himself in an ambiguous manner, perhaps in order to supply additional arguments in support of placing this pastoral care in the hands of some of the friars.

If opinions differed within the custody and, in any case, remained vague and sketchily demarcated, within the patriarchate the predominant response was silence. Patriarch Gori was conscious of the need to address the question of the converted Jews, and he had been discussing it with Tisserant at the time of his appointment as Latin patriarch. On these matters, the key word at the patriarchate was “prudence”.⁴³ Regarding the Jewish Christians, Gori proposed a threefold distinction: Christians married to Jews, converted Jews, and Jews who intended to convert – three categories of very different proportions, motivations and pastoral care from the patriarchate. The patriarch’s wording was characterized by vagueness too, however. By late spring 1953, at least, the patriarch did not seem to have had any plans to handle the situation of the catechumens and converts.

41 “Several clergy have little sympathy for the Jews; some of them, besides nurturing such sentiments, are not afraid to express them in public ... This attitude ... seems to me absolutely improper for the missionary state ... It seems to me that all the clergy who do not sympathize with the State of Israel and the Jews should be transferred elsewhere.” ACGOFM, *Segreteria Generale, Custodia di Terra Santa*, 764, doc. 25, Hérroux to Sepinski, Jerusalem, April 23, 1953.

42 Ibid.

43 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 858/49, 2, doc. 111, “Memorandum circa lo stato dei Cristiani e dei Cattolici in Israele,” Rome, October 27, 1950, translation from Italian. In APLJ, *FC-AG, S. Congregatio Pro E. Orientali, 1919–1953*, the typescript draft reports Gori’s manuscript notes.

2 The Foundation of the *Ḳehilah*

2.1 *The First Protagonists*

Given the lack of direction, some religious clergy (close to those who went to Perantoni in 1950) now resolved to take action autonomously from the Catholic Church, albeit in contact with the apostolic delegate to Jerusalem, Gustavo Testa, and the Vatican dicastery for the Oriental Church. These were mostly Assumptionists, Dominicans, Notre-Dame de Sion clergy and Carmelites. The main protagonists of the community that would be approved as the Association of Saint James (ASJ) were the priests Joseph Stiassny,⁴⁴ Jean-Roger Héné and Bruno Hussar.⁴⁵ To understand their work, it is important to appreciate the environments from which they originated.

The cultural premises of the ASJ are evident in the relationship between the Catholic and Jewish worlds in the aftermath of the Second World War. Discussion of the Catholic role in the antisemitic extermination and affirmation of the need to reconsider the church's attitude toward the Jews comprised the fundamental points of alignment for a composite movement comprised of diverse components and institutions. Some, like Paul Démann, founder of the *Cahiers sioniens* (1947), were primarily motivated by the desire to kindle an internal Catholic debate on these issues which should involve important personalities in the church hierarchy such as Tisserant. Furthermore, driven by Jules Isaac's reflections and initiatives to inaugurate a new era of dialogue between Jews and Christians, the *Amitiés judéo-chrétiennes* (Judeo-Christian Friendships) came into being in 1948 at the behest both of Isaac himself and of the bishop of Aix-en-Provence, Charles de Provençères.⁴⁶ A third factor involved a heuristic drive toward the renewal of theological studies, including reflection on Catholic thought concerning Israel. This engagement was part of the theological renewal defined by the *nouvelle théologie*, as inaugurated by Henri de Lubac, who proposed a return to the sources (*ressourcement*) of Christian tradition, especially to the church fathers, in order to overcome the

44 Originally from Hungary, Joseph Stiassny (1920–2007) lost his family to the Nazi extermination. After study in Paris and joining the Order of the Fathers of Sion, he was sent to Jerusalem in 1947.

45 André (later Bruno) Hussar (1911–96) was born in Alexandria, Egypt, to a Hungarian father and French mother, both of them Jews. He moved to France during his studies. In Paris, he converted to Christianity and entered the Dominicans, which, in 1953, sent him to Israel with the task of opening a center for Jewish studies.

46 Charles-Marie-Joseph-Henri de Provençères (1904–84) was appointed archbishop of Aix-Arles-Embrun at the end of 1945, remaining in this post until 1978. Attentive to Jewish-Christian dialogue, he participated in the Second Vatican Council and also contributed to the debate on the *Nostra Aetate* declaration.

neoscholastic attitude that informed the majority of scholarly research of the period. The return to original Christian studies also involved the study of Judeo-Christianity, which indeed became one of the principal objects of interest of the Jesuit theologian Jean Daniélou, editor of the journal *Études* and a friend of de Lubac. This reflection was not confined to theological speculation and the movement for liturgical reform but extended throughout the contemporary landscape in its demand for a rediscovery of the distant Jewish roots of Christianity.

The 1950s was an initial laboratory for these reflections. The Jewish world picked up on the fact that some events were underway; within the State of Israel too, representatives of the government and of Jewish organizations were following the emerging debate attentively, especially in France. In 1951, Imil Najjar, president of the Egyptian Zionist Federation and advisor to the Egyptian ambassador in Paris, met with some Catholic French figures, including Daniélou and Démann, at a conference dedicated to the “Signification et réalité d’Israël”.⁴⁷ In a report to the Israeli ambassador in Paris, Maurice Fisher, Najjar remarked on the interest with which his words were received, and Fisher himself underscored this open-mindedness, viewing it as an interesting snapshot of how French Catholics were so different from the prejudicially closed-minded “clan Tardini”.⁴⁸

In 1953, Yohanan Lavi, a member of the information department of the World Zionist Organization and of the Jewish Agency, also met in Paris with some of the principal intellectuals and philosophers of French Catholicism – including Daniélou once again, as well as Gabriel Marcel (another Jewish convert), François Mauriac and Démann – to gain a better understanding of the developing attitude toward Israel. He also made a stop in Switzerland, where Journet awaited him. As a result of these conversations, Lavi made the connection between the theological and philosophical reflections laid out to him, on the one hand, and the question of the relationship of Christianity to Israel, on the other, including its political manifestation as realized after 1948. For Lavi, the “retour aux racines” was at the center of these reflections: “at the roots, one finds us, one finds us again, us, Israel”.⁴⁹

The religious orders that were most conspicuous in the context of this debate in France were those that historically had a presence in the

47 ISA, HZ/12/170, Najjar to Fisher, “Rencontre avec des catholiques,” copy, Paris, February 11, 1951.

48 ISA, *ibid.*, Fisher to Avner, confidential, Paris, February 12, 1951.

49 ISA, *ibid.*, Yohanan Lavi, “Notes complémentaires à propos de contacts dans les sphères d’intellectuels chrétiens (mai/juin 1953),” translation from French.

Jewish world, especially the clergy of Notre-Dame de Sion, along with the Assumptionists and Dominicans. Therefore, it is not surprising to find these congregations among the orders to whom the founder members of the ASJ belonged: Stiassny, Héné and Hussar. These three clergymen were united by their Jewish origins and their conversion to Catholicism, followed by the decision to take holy orders. They had studied in Paris and had come into contact with the thought of Maritain, Isaac, Démann and Daniélou.⁵⁰ The tragedy of the Second World War and the Axis occupation of France had given the three priests firsthand experience of antisemitic persecution: Stiassny lost his family to the concentration camps, while Hussar was forced to flee Paris. The Shoah left an incalculably deep mark on their paths to conversion and formation as Christians; they came to interpret the antisemitic extermination, along with the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, as watershed events not only in popular Jewish history, but also in the historical evolution of relations between the Catholic Church and the Jews.⁵¹ Animated by a desire to acquaint themselves with the new reality of Israel and its composite and complex society, they travelled to the new state after 1948.

Once in Israel, the three religious rapidly immersed themselves in different environments from which Roman Catholic priests had kept their distance. They visited several kibbutzim; they studied Hebrew at Israeli ulpanim; they

50 On relations between Jews and Christians in France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Paule Berger Marx, *Les relations entre les juifs et les catholiques dans la France de l'après-guerre, 1945–1965* (Paris: Cerf, 2009), and Pierre Pierrard, *Juifs et catholiques français: D'Edouard Drumont à Jacob Kaplan, 1886–1994* (Paris: Cerf, 1997).

51 See Claire Maligot, “Cesser d’être étranger? Les stratégies de reconnaissance identitaire de la communauté catholique hébreophone en Israël (1948–1967),” *Siècles* 44 (2018), <http://journals.openedition.org/siecles/3311>; Danielle Delmaire and Olivier Rota, “L’Œuvre Saint-Jacques: un nouveau modèle missionnaire en Israël dans les années 1950?,” in *La mission catholique aux juifs: Émergence, renouvellement et critique du XIX^e siècle à nos jours*, ed. Danielle Delmaire, Marie-Hélène Robert and Olivier Rota (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2016); Maria Chiara Rioli, “Chiedere perdono: Un appello da Gerusalemme,” in *Un mestiere paziente: Gli allievi pisani per Daniele Menozzi*, ed. Andrea Mariuzzo, Elena Mazzini, Francesco Mores and Ilaria Pavan (Pisa: ETS, 2017); Rioli, “L’Opera San Giacomo: Una Chiesa ebraica nello stato d’Israele,” *Materia Giudaica* 19, nos. 1–2 (2014); and Delmaire, “La communauté catholique d’expression hébraïque en Israël. Shoah, judaïsme et christianisme,” *Revue d’histoire de la Shoah*, no. 192 (2010). On the French component of the membership, see Martine Sevegrand, *Israël vu par les catholiques français (1945–1994)* (Paris: Karthala, 2014), 75–96. On converts during the Shoah, see Frédéric Gugelot, “Conversions du judaïsme au christianisme en temps de persécution, 1940–1950,” in Becker, *Juifs et chrétiens*. For the preceding period, see Philippe Chenaux, “Du judaïsme au catholicisme: Réseaux de conversion dans l’entre-deux-guerres,” in *La conversion aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles*, ed. Nadine-Josette Chaline and Jean-Dominique Durand (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 1996).

started to pray in Hebrew;⁵² they met with political and diplomatic representatives of the new state. The Assumptionist Héné obtained permission to celebrate Mass at a kibbutz he frequented together with his Hebrew class. In their first years of activity in Israel, these priests sought contact with known converted or converting Jews in Jerusalem or in kibbutzim. This was a mostly hidden form of pastoral care, limited to direct and personal contacts, without any formal organization. Hussar had spent the initial portion of his stay in Israel as a chaplain with the De La Salle Christian Brothers in Jaffa, where he came into contact with some Jewish converts and so came to know their stories and their difficulties. One of the main problem areas was ensuring that they could celebrate Mass: to attend the parish Eucharist would be to expose themselves to the eyes of Palestinian Christians and Israeli Jews. So, Hussar tried to find a way to officiate at a private Mass. This situation clearly reveals the network Hussar was in the process of weaving. He had developed a friendship with an employee of the US embassy, and he began to meet with the converted Jews and celebrate the Eucharist at this man's house in Ramat Gan, close to Tel Aviv.

Meanwhile, Sr. Magdeleine Hutin, inspired by the spirituality and example of Charles de Foucauld, founded a fraternity of the Little Sisters of Jesus in 1939. Ten years later, Magdeleine, together with other two sisters (one of whom was Myriam Kleinberger), came to Israel, a place of special importance for the community. Indeed, de Foucauld had spent three years in Nazareth (including a few months in Jerusalem), which he later considered crucial for his spiritual journey. René Voillaume, the founder of the Little Brothers of Jesus, accompanied the Little Sisters on this first trip. In Israel, this embryonic community of nuns and brothers soon came into contact with some converted Jews. Then, in 1953, the Little Brother of Jesus Jean Leroy (later Yohanan Elihai) arrived from France. His first months were dedicated to studying Hebrew and working in kibbutzim (especially Tse'elim and Sde Eliyahu). During this time, he created strong connections with the protagonists of the ASJ. Leroy and Hussar met in Jaffa and began to imagine how they might create a community (fig. 5.1).

Beginning in 1953, this network of contacts held regular private meetings in Jerusalem with the authorization and support of the new apostolic delegate, Silvio Oddi (1953–57), and Tisserant.⁵³ At the end of 1953, Leo Rudloff

52 See the AOSJ, 1945–1959, “Sefer tfilot (kolel nosah se’udat ha-Adon)” [Prayer book, including a copy of the Mass], published in 1948 in Jerusalem at the St. Pierre Institute.

53 “During these first weeks of my Palestinian stay I took care to make contact with that group of priests – whom Your Most Reverend Eminence knows very well – who are occupied with, or rather preoccupied with, doing something in favor of the numerous Catholics, converted or not, currently living in Israel. I also attended two of their meetings, and I had



FIGURE 5.1 Jean Leroy and Bruno Hussar, Procession of the Cross at 'Ayn Karim, Good Friday, 1957
ASNDS/AEBAF

became the president of this monthly meeting.⁵⁴ In the autumn of 1954, news of these gatherings also reached the patriarchate. In the spring of the same year, Vergani, who was already acquainted with Hussar and had met with him, discussed the situation of converted Jews with Tisserant and the Oriental Congregation assessor Gabriel Coussa during a trip to Rome.⁵⁵ In the course of this meeting, the secretary of the Oriental Congregation lamented Gori's lack of interest in this subject, adding that Démann had reported to the French cardinal the patriarch's surprise at the celebration of the confirmation of a group of converted Jews. Vergani defended Gori's behavior, explaining that the diocese had adopted an attitude of "prudence and seriousness", which, according to the vicar for Galilee, was greatly appreciated by various Israeli

the impression that these are excellent elements." ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 855/49, 2, doc. 164, Oddi to Tisserant, Jerusalem, February 2, 1954, translation from Italian.

54 See ACO, *ibid.*, doc. 162, Stiassny and Héné to Tisserant, Jerusalem, November 9, 1953.

55 APDF, BS, *Hussar*, V 840, 14, confidential report from Hussar to the Dominican provincial Albert-Marie Avril, Paris, September 11, 1954. He wrote that his relations with the patriarchal authority were "excellent" and that he kept the vicar informed of his ministry "in broad outlines".

representatives, including Colbi.⁵⁶ This did not mean abandoning the apostolate to Israel; to prove this, the vicar of Galilee spoke of the “conversion of 20–25 persons per month (Jews or Hebraized Christians)”. Gori later wrote to Vergani that, as regards the Jews, “we desire their conversion and cooperate as zealously as possible”.⁵⁷ Toward the end of 1954, the patriarch asked Vergani to participate in meetings between priests and catechumens being held in Jerusalem and to report back to him with his observations.⁵⁸ In a certain sense, the patriarchate was obliged to get involved in the affairs of the ASJ, given the active interest of Tisserant as well as the apostolic delegate and some religious orders in Jerusalem. However, most importantly, the meeting in which Vergani participated constituted the founding meeting of the ASJ. The period of private meetings was over; the group now became an association of the patriarchate, albeit little known and almost hidden within the diocese.

2.2 *The Birth of the Association of Saint James*

The meeting at which the ASJ was founded took place on November 12, 1954.⁵⁹ The discussion started with an analysis of the situation of Catholics of Jewish origin in Israel. To respond to the needs of a “group of Judeo-Christians in Israel”, the attendants discussed the plan to open up in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Jaffa “the HOMES,⁶⁰ intended to receive persons who desire to work and live (orph[ans] and widows of Jewish husbands, women of advanced age, homeless

56 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 858/49, 2, doc. 143, Vergani to Coussa, Strambino (Turin), June 17, 1954, translation from Italian.

57 APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Gori to Vergani, Jerusalem, July 7, 1954, translation from Italian.

58 Addressing Gori, Vergani appended a letter in which he wrote: “Truly, I felt that there had to be something plotting, but I could never be quite sure; today, I know it: during my visit to Rome, Cardinal Tisserant and the Assessor insisted to me that Y[our] B[eatitude] did nothing for the conversion of the Jews. Now I have come to know that in Jerusalem, for more than a year, His Excellence the Apostolic Delegate has met at the Biblical Institute with several clergy who applied for an apostolate to the Jews and, naturally, the minutes were sent to the Congregation; since then neither the Patriarch nor the Vicar figured, here is the accusation of lack of interest. I tell you in all conscience that I never knew anything of these meetings.” APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo, 1954–1959*, Vergani to Gori, Haifa, December 12, 1954, translation from Italian.

59 APLJ, *ibid.*, report of the founding meeting of the ASJ: “Opera S. Giacomo ap. Seduta I,” typescript text with autograph signature of Vergani, Jerusalem, November 12, 1954, translation from Italian. The minutes of the meeting were also sent to the apostolic delegate to be delivered to Tisserant. See ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 855/49, 2, doc. 178, Oddi to Tisserant, Jerusalem, December 22, 1954.

60 APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo, 1954–1959*, report of the founding meeting of the ASJ, capitalized in original. The Italian word “focolari” is the translation of the French word “foyer” that would be used in the association’s documents.

youth, families who have lost their livelihoods due to their conversion until they can be accommodated)". Outside the State of Israel, the plan was to establish "MIXED CIRCLES OF FRIENDSHIP, that is, of Judeo-Christians, wherein an atmosphere of understanding relating to matters Israeli could be cultivated, where the simple oppositions could be dispensed with; where funds could be raised to help the Judeo-Catholic community in Israel; where cultural, social, educational, and aid initiatives for the same can be supported."⁶¹ In the minds of the founders, the ideas behind these circles should be propagated by means of a report "suitable to inform and rectify public opinion on Israel, both to the outside world concerning the Judeo-Catholic community in Israel, and in Israel itself in an atmosphere of mutual understanding".⁶²

With these objectives in mind, some fundamental questions remained open. In first place was the problem (pointed out by Stiasny) of reconciling diverse goals and activities: raising funds for the converted Jews in Israel, supporting them from an economic and material standpoint, by way of addressing the social isolation to which they were subjected; and building a bridge between the church and Israel in order to increase "respect and understanding".⁶³ On this last point, the issue was that it would be difficult to build a relationship of mutual trust between Christians and Jews if Jewish society perceived the ASJ as an entity that financed converts to Christianity.

There were no immediate answers to their questions. Several members of the founding committee requested that the nascent association should present and develop a profile of itself as a group of laity rather than clergy; they thought that in this way they would be able to avoid too close an identification between the Latin Church and ASJ members. In any case, the emphasis on the association's lay character – which would continue as a central element in its history – would accompany the questions around the connection between the ASJ and the local church.

Furthermore, with the foundation of the association, another fundamental set of issues emerged as it developed: the question of the *foyers*, the homes for converted Jews. Generally founded by priests of the nascent association, these

61 Ibid., capitalized in original.

62 The intention was to circulate this document in Israel to affirm that "the converts are not a fifth column for nothing; they are loyal citizens of Israel ... the Catholic Church has never made use of material means to attract Jews", and its work should not be confused with the proselytizing action undertaken by Protestant missionaries and agencies. APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo, 1954–1959*, minutes of the foundational meeting for the ASJ: "Opera S. Giacomo ap. Seduta I," typescript text with autograph signature of Vergani, Jerusalem, November 12, 1954.

63 Ibid.

were conceived in response to the sense of isolation experienced by converts. As such, they were private spaces where the converts could meet, hold discussions and celebrate the Eucharist.

The inaugural meeting of the society concluded with the nomination of a provisional committee, which would meet once a month, consisting of Vergani, Stiassny, Héné and Joshua Bergman, leaving open the possibility of participation by Hussar and the Carmelite Elias Friedman. The name of the association was also approved; Bergman requested that a saint be chosen as the group's protector, and Vergani proposed it be dedicated to Saint James the Apostle, the first bishop of Jerusalem in the biblical tradition. Thus, he intended to further highlight the connection between the just-formed group of converted Jews and the Judeo-Christian community of early Christianity. In fact, references to the ASJ as modern Judeo-Christians of sorts also permeated the founding statutes of the association.⁶⁴

2.3 *The Complex Drafting of the Statutes*

Vergani's inclusion in the founding group of the ASJ was intended to guarantee a presence – and, in a sense, also the control – of the Latin Patriarchate in such a delicate pastoral care environment as the Jewish world. The other committee members were aware that the freedom of action and lay character with which they intended to invest the association would be limited by the guidance exerted by the patriarchate. In any case, the desire not to compromise relations with the local church, which were already complicated by the hostility toward Jews of the Arab and European clergy, led them to exercise special caution and to be especially open to requests from the patriarchate.

On February 11, 1955, Gori approved the ASJ *ad experimentum*, constituted, as the patriarchal decree specified, “to organize and coordinate the apostolate's diverse activities and to provide assistance in Israel to Christian families and families who have converted from Judaism.”⁶⁵ The bishop provisionally authorized the association for one year, at which point its future would be decided upon. Besides the institution of a central committee, local groups were created shortly thereafter in the cities that received the greatest number of Christians of Jewish origin or converted Jews.

What exactly was the association proposing? What were the goals and motivations of its founders? The association's central committee responded to these

64 The definition of the group as an “incipient Judeo-Christian community in Israel” recurs at least eight times in the text of the minutes.

65 APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo, 1954–1959*, decree no. 4/55, typescript document with Gori's autograph signature, Jerusalem, February 11, 1955, translation from Italian.

questions by elaborating its statutes in a document that inspired and guided its subsequent actions. Creating the statutes required several months of work; various versions were discussed and compared, and it was produced with meticulous attention to detail.⁶⁶ Throughout 1955, the association's members were absorbed with the task of ironing out the various topics under discussion.

The first part of the statutes dealt with the aims and activities of the ASJ, which were to "preserve and uphold Christianity in Israel, particularly the Catholics converted from Judaism". However, it "did not intend to replace any existing associations, but wished to respond to the needs resulting from the demographic changes that had taken place in the country".⁶⁷ In the second version of the statutes, drafted in September 1955, this last phrase is worded differently, affirming that the association "is to be considered among existing associations that focus on Arab Christianity".⁶⁸ This formulation clarifies more precisely that the ASJ did not intend to address the Arab Christian world, but would not oppose it either. This allusion to the Arab component of the Catholic Church does not appear in the next draft of the statutes, probably out of fear that it could provoke more tension than dialogue within the Jerusalem diocese, which would generate opposition to the association.

After laying out the goals, the statutes moved on to describe the association's activities. The wording of this portion was one of the most heavily discussed, beginning with the first draft in June 1955. It explained that the association had a dual purpose, spiritual and social. In the first category, the text lays out a series of direct intentions aimed especially at defending the church from accusations from on the Israeli side. It also refers to preaching and the promotion of popular missions in the country's various languages. The keen attention paid to the "study of the problem of Israel", along with the diffusion of a "Judeo-Christian culture" and spirituality, is significant.⁶⁹

The versions that followed proved to be highly diverse; they no longer emphasized the necessity for public intervention in defense of converted Jews on the part of the association and made no further mention to the *problem of Israel*. In its place was the *mystery of Israel*, a much weightier formulation that took account of the Maritain perspectives.⁷⁰ The association, then, aspired

66 See APNDS, P. Stiasny, confidential report titled "Compte-rendu de l'Œuvre, novembre 1954-mai 1956," drafted by Vergani and Héné, Haifa, May 14, 1956.

67 APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo, 1954-1959*, "Statuts," translation from French. The AOSJ also contains a handwritten copy of the statutes in Hebrew ("Mif'al Ya'aqov ha-Tsadiq Taqanon").

68 APNDS, P. Stiasny, "Projet de statuts," September 11, 1955, translation from French.

69 APNDS, *ibid.*, "Projet de statuts," Haifa, June 19, 1955, translation from French.

70 "The association will develop a solid Christian spirit among its members. Efforts will be made to acquire intelligence concerning the mystery of Israel; training in the Bible will

to give rise to a spiritual consciousness capable of linking the Christian and Jewish traditions. The founding figures of the nascent association were aware that they were embarking on an extremely delicate and complex experience while, at the same time, affirming their intention not to propose a rule of communal life and prayer that was extraneous to or different from the teachings of the church. In any case, emphasis on the struggle against antisemitism “in all its guises”, and on the activity that the statutes anticipated, showed that in fact they were pursuing paths and goals up to that moment unheard of by the church of Jerusalem and, for the time being, abandoned by the Vatican, as is shown by the dissolution of the Amici Israel.⁷¹

When it came to social activities, therefore, the ASJ requested that the Israeli state guarantee the freedom of religion and of education. Proselytism by converts did not appear among the association’s objectives; to the contrary, the convert had the responsibility to demonstrate, through his testimony of faith and way of life, the possibility of conjoining Christianity and Judaism, but not to renounce his proper national Israeli affiliation.⁷²

The decision to remove the name of Alphonse Ratisbonne from the list of the association’s patrons further clarified, on the one hand, the fears that any part of the statutes could nurture the polemic against Catholic proselytism in Israel. On the other, it demonstrated the growing will on the part of the association to abandon the conversionist activities historically pursued by the church in the name of a new encounter with Israel and the Jewish world.

The correction regarding Ratisbonne brought the drafting of the statutes to an end (fig. 5.2). These had in fact already been presented to Gori in February 1956, at the end of the ASJ’s probationary year. He accepted the statutes and formally approved the association.⁷³ On the same day, February 11,

be insisted upon, and we will strive to promote a Judeo-Christian culture and accompanying spirituality ... We will do all in our power to dissipate the prejudice whereby a Jew who has embraced the Christian religion has abandoned his people ... Far more, as a Christian issuing from Judaism, he should recognize his special vocation within the Church and among his people and assume the responsibility that follows.” APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo 1954–1959*, “Statuts.”

71 “In its desire to be a link between the Jewish people and Christianity, the association will combat antisemitism in all its guises and make efforts to develop mutual understanding, sympathy, and amicable relations between the Catholic world and Israel.” Ibid.

72 The first draft refers explicitly to the “absolute loyalty to the State of Israel and its laws” on the part of the association’s members. APNDS, *P. Stiassny*, “Projet de statuts,” 1, September 11, 1955.

73 See APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo, 1954–1959*, decree no. 7/56, signed by Gori and Beltritti, Jerusalem, February 11, 1956.



« LUMEN AD REVELATIONEM GENTIUM ET GLORIAM PLEBIS TUÆ ISRAEL »

OEUVRE SAINT JACQUES L'APOTRE

STATUTS

FIGURE 5.2 Statutes of the Association of Saint James,
cover page, 1956
AOSJ

Vergani was nominated president of the association. The apostolic delegate, Oddi, also communicated to the patriarch the pleasure of Pius XII at the establishment of the association. With papal approval, a new phase of work began for “this little kernel that has scarcely seen the light”.⁷⁴

3 “Fraternal Life”

3.1 *The Communities and the Foyers*

One of the most important priorities identified in the first year of the ASJ’s existence was that of opening up spaces – *foyers* – to receive, in a more-or-less stable fashion, the nascent communities of Jewish converts to Catholicism. Meeting places had to be found to hold prayer meetings and Bible study sessions but also for sociopolitical purposes. Responding to this urgent need would touch on various issues, especially the fact that most of the Catholics of Jewish origin in Israel “live in isolation, in fear, they feel themselves separate

74 APLJ, *ibid.*, Vergani to Gori, Jerusalem, May 8, 1956, translation from Italian.

from the community of their Jewish brothers while not being fully integrated into that of the Church".⁷⁵

It was not just the need for a private space in which to freely express their faith that drove the search for new environments. The desire for a shared space for catechumens and converts also responded to another need inherent in the process of identity formation that the young community of Catholics of Jewish origin was undergoing. The sharing of spaces and moments of encounter, and of meals like the Eucharistic celebration, reflected this image of the Judeo-Christian protocommunity toward which the converts in the State of Israel were inspired. Finally, for the converts to be able to identify with a specific space in which they would eventually reside would follow a longstanding historical tradition; suffice it to mention the houses of the catechumens, established for converts which received (and confined) neophytes, particularly Jewish ones in Italy and elsewhere from the mid-sixteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries, so that they could receive instruction in Catholicism. The *foyers* of the ASJ, although they came into being with profoundly different goals and methods, thus constituted a space where the converts could develop in the faith and meet one another.

The first *foyer* was established in Ramat Gan, near Tel Aviv and Jaffa, under Hussar's pastoral care.⁷⁶ After a suitable apartment was found, its rooms were allocated for use as an oratory, a library, a meeting room for about sixty persons, a laboratory and an office for the chaplain's secretary. The *foyer's* premises were blessed on February 14, 1956, and it was dedicated to Saint Simeon, a biblical figure who also featured in the association's statutes.⁷⁷ From its beginnings, the *foyer* hosted various types of activity. Over the course of 1956, Mass was

75 AOSJ, 1945–1959, brochure on the ASJ, September 15, 1956.

76 Oddi had required the custody to let two rooms to Hussar in St Peter's monastery in Jaffa, but the Franciscans refused. Oddi reiterated a request for aid to the custody to cover the rent of the foyer, a proposal that the friars accepted. See AAV, *ADAGP*, 20, 81, 5, fol. 267, Teofilo Bellorini, Custodial president, to Oddi, Jerusalem, August 18, 1955.

77 The statutes open with this biblical verse: "A light to lighten the gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel." APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo, 1954–1959*, "Statuts." This is a significant quotation from the "Nunc dimittis", or Canticle of Simeon (Luke 2:29–32). Like the ancient figure in the Gospel story, the members of the association, too, were Jews who had recognized the divinity of Jesus. At the same time, it is interesting to note that in this verse it was not the Jews who would be illuminated by divine grace, but the gentiles. In the "Nunc dimittis," as in the association's statutes, then, the Jews were not represented in the image of a people blind to the Christian revelation, a symbolism that had dominated for centuries, nurturing Catholic anti-Jewish prejudice. To the contrary, the verse refers to Jesus's Jewishness and to the election of Israel that the Christians, too, were required to acknowledge.

celebrated there every Sunday evening with about twenty people in attendance. The second reading and the Gospel were read in Hebrew, and the sermon was delivered in Hebrew and French. There were also weekly meetings for spiritual instruction. Concerts of sacred classical music and French lessons were also organized, and a small library was set up.

On the cultural level, particular attention was devoted to organizing a series of conferences. Insights were presented relating to church history as well as to events in Zionist history. There was also a cycle of lessons on biblical themes dedicated to the “fates of Israel”, a phrasing that echoed the volume published in 1945 by Charles Journet.⁷⁸ These conferences were offered in English and were attended by around twenty members of the US, Canadian, British and Australian diplomatic corps, which formed a group called the Friends of Saint James.⁷⁹ Here, the political implications of the association’s activities were revealed for the first time; these would be reinforced over the years and would address themes linked not only to church history and relations between Christians and Jews but also to analyzing the fundamental features of Zionism. In this way, the nascent association proposed to open up a deeper reflection – limited to just a few persons for the time being – concerning the historical significance of the establishment of the State of Israel for the church, overcoming the hostility or indifference that had characterized the Catholic hierarchy and the majority of those who had expressed a view on these matters. This particular sensibility of the members of the association was born of internal conflict, but also resulted from external suggestions, especially those of some rabbis and numerous pilgrims who had come to Israel and, when visiting the *foyer*, had questioned its members on the possibility of overcoming the separation of the association from the Catholic Church and from Israeli society.

Building upon the experience of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, the association looked into the possibility of opening a *foyer* in Haifa led by the Carmelite Elias Friedman. A member of the central committee of the ASJ, he was actively engaged in preaching on Jewish-Christian relations to diverse religious communities. In some of these religious communities, the practice of praying in Hebrew had become commonplace.

As the association’s various centers organized and grew, certain tendencies emerged more and more clearly. In Tel Aviv, the primary motivation was to create and consolidate the “fraternal life” of a group attuned to the spiritual and

78 *Journet, Destinées d’Israël.*

79 AOSJ, 1945–1959, brochure on the ASJ, September 15, 1956.

material needs of its own members.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, in Haifa, the association's work focused primarily on religious congregations already existing in Galilee, organizing meetings and lessons that would stimulate new reflections on the relations between Christians and Jews. Finally, in Jerusalem, the political and cultural aspects were to the fore, albeit in an extremely prudent and cautious manner so as to avoid the accusation of pro-Israeli attachments on the part of the local church or polemics on the Jewish front. This explains the private networking that was done with some representatives of the Israeli state. In 1956, ASJ representatives, led by the Bible scholar and Dominican Raymond-Jacques Tournay, visited Israeli President Yitshak Ben-Zvi, presenting him with a copy of the Bible edited by the *École biblique et archéologique française*. Some of the association's priests who lived in the Holy City also initiated a collaboration with a group of pilgrims – both Jewish and Christian – with the aim of presenting the small and hidden reality of Saint James to visitors as well. Hussar then met with various religious communities in Israel for spiritual retreats and conferences. Finally, the Assumptionist Jean-Roger Héné was chosen to celebrate Mass in some kibbutzim in the Negev desert in the environs of Beersheba. In fact, it was the interest in the experience of collectivism in Israel that had attracted several members of the association and induced them to develop an unprecedented experience in the life of the young community.

3.2 *A Catholic Kibbutz for Converted Jews*

Reflection on the forms of communal life within the ASJ was not limited to establishing the foyers; it drove them to consider opening a Christian kibbutz for families of converts or of Christians of Jewish origin. The proposal boasted some especially original features, particularly given the interest the Catholic world had developed about the Jewish agricultural cooperative model that had arisen in Palestine and developed further after the establishment of the State of Israel. In the course of his pastoral incumbency, Barlassina had identified the Jewish collectivist movement as the clearest token of the danger of the spread of communism within the diocese. In the eyes of many in the Latin Church of Jerusalem, kibbutzim were thus synonymous with atheist collectivism and materialism.⁸¹ In the last months of Barlassina's life, rumors spread within the patriarchate of an imminent opening by a Protestant society of a kibbutz for Jews who had converted to Christianity. The locus of the intended reform

80 APLJ, VB-GB, *Dominicains, 1874–1980*, Hussar to Gori, Jaffa, August 1, 1955.

81 For a historical appraisal of the Jewish collectivist movement, see Henry Near, *The Kibbutz Movement: A History*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992–97).

congregation would be the property of the Benedictines at Abu Ghush. In any case, the initiative was not followed through.

At the end of the 1940s, the proposal to establish a Catholic kibbutz for converted Jews resurfaced. This time, the Secretariat of State intervened, despite Testa's reservations:⁸² informing the Vatican that "the Jews, with the intention to take over the Catholic properties in Palestine, were making attractive propositions to the religious congregations to sell their land", the secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, Tardini, relaunched the idea of giving work in these lands "to the converted Jews, whose situation is so precarious".⁸³ Vergani shared the idea of founding agricultural colonies, particularly in the area of Rafat. According to the Latin vicar for Galilee, political reasons impeded these kinds of foundation for Jews already in Israel, while it was better to focus on "young European people coming to Israel with the religious nationalist ideal of the PIONEERS, that is REAL ZIONIST CHRISTIANS".⁸⁴

Gori was unenthused at the prospect of a Catholic-collectivist enterprise and had serious reservations about the project. However, it found new life with the establishment of the ASJ, although in other forms. Some priests and laity among the ASJ founders did not share the reservations and fears of the vast majority of clergy in the Jerusalem Latin diocese. Their perception of the complex reality of the new state had passed through the experience of the kibbutz – many of them had spent significant time studying Hebrew and doing agricultural work in them – and they remained profoundly fascinated by it. The result was an idealized vision of the Jewish collectivist agricultural movement according to which the kibbutz expressed an egalitarian model of the division of goods, tolerance between inhabitants and respect for natural resources. Hussar, Héné and also some lay members like Joshua Bergman, identified the Israeli cooperative agricultural life with the Gospel ideal of sharing resources and living communally. Furthermore, some members of the association – especially the members of the Little Brothers of Jesus – were influenced by their experience of priest workers in France;⁸⁵ thus, the reality of the kibbutz seemed to them to

82 According to the apostolic delegate, the idea, "beautiful in itself", was impossible to realize due to the "fanaticism of Israel". ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 855/49, 2, fol. 121, Testa to Tisserant, Jerusalem, November 17, 1949, translation from Italian.

83 ACO, *ibid.*, 858/49, 2, fol. 92, Tardini to Valeri, Vatican, April 21, 1950, translation from Italian.

84 ACO, *ibid.*, fols. 101–4, Vergani to Tisserant, Nazareth, June 30, 1950, translation from Italian.

85 The phenomenon of worker priests (*prêtres ouvriers*) had its beginnings during the Second World War, when some priests were sent to work in the industries in France under Nazi occupation. This enabled them to acquire first-hand experience of the condition of

correspond to the various experiences from within the Christian environment as well. In those years, interest in the kibbutzim was also growing in Catholic contexts outside Israel. In his meetings with intellectuals in France and elsewhere, Yohanan Lavi had noticed a marked sensitivity toward certain aspects that were defined as “pre-Christian” or even thoroughly “Christian” in the lives of the Jewish communities in Israel.⁸⁶

The next step was to contemplate the possibility of creating a kibbutz for Jews who had converted to Christianity. Even before the priests of the ASJ suggested it, Latin priests in Israel and Vergani himself had explored the feasibility of the idea. The priests discussed this project during a meeting in autumn 1950.⁸⁷ The choice of Dayr Rafat as the location of a kibbutz to be run by the families of converted Jews was also supported by Georges Sfeir, a Lebanese medical doctor who lived in Jaffa and was interested in renting part of the patriarchate’s property in order to create a “Catholic collective”.⁸⁸ Sfeir’s proposal was presented as a conglomeration that would combine collectivism and the retention of private property. The patriarch himself seems to have been very diffident about this “kibbutz sui generis”, dubbing it “a chimerical project”.⁸⁹

the working class, which was generally unknown at that time in the Catholic Church. The publication of the book *France, pays de mission?* (Paris: Cerf, 1943) by two French priests (Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel) and the establishment, a year later, of the Mission de Paris for the working classes and their families by the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Suhard, represented the beginning of a historic phase in which priests were sent to work in factories, divested of their religious habits and quickly became engaged in trade unionist struggles. This social and political involvement was immediately viewed with suspicion by Rome, fearful of procommunist sentiments within the clergy. Pius XII decreed an end to the experiment in 1954. Despite the papal prohibition, the worker priest movement did not come to an end. It was rehabilitated in the 1960s by Paul VI after some priests who had been involved in the experience, among them Paul Gauthier, who was well acquainted with Israel and the members of the ASJ, participated in the Second Vatican Council. For a historical treatment of the phenomenon, see Émile Poulat, *Les prêtres-ouvriers: Naissance et fin* (Paris: Cerf, 1999).

86 See ISA, HZ/12/170, Lavi, “Notes complémentaires à propos de contacts dans les sphères d’intellectuels chrétiens (mai/juin 1953),” translation from French.

87 APLJ, LB-AG, *Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, “Riunione dei parroci latini in Israele,” 1st session, typescript, Haifa, November 8, 1950.

88 APLJ, LB-MS, *Deir Rafat 1941–2007*, “Projet,” unsigned typescript document in French, undated (ca. second half 1950). The scarcity of information found in the patriarchal archive related to this figure makes it hard to trace its full outlines. It is probable, however, that it was the same Dr. Georges Sfeir who, a few years later, operated on Hussar in Jaffa and whom he recalls “as a friend”. See Bruno Hussar, *Quando la nube si alzava: La pace è possibile* (Genoa: Marietti, 1996), 49.

89 APLJ, LB-MS, *Deir Rafat, 1941–2007*, handwritten note by Gori on the Sfeir project, translation from Italian.

The initiative appears to have been realized to a certain extent, given that three years later, after his trip to the Middle East, Thomas McMahon could refer to a kibbutz created by the patriarchal curate in Rafat, Domenico Veglio, and composed of about 50 converted Jews at that time. The PMP president judged the project one of the most innovative experiments put into action by the patriarchate toward the “Nicodemus Christians”, the converted Jews who were otherwise hidden within the Latin church.⁹⁰ In McMahon’s analysis, the utility of this experiment was further legitimated by the fact that the “Jew”, unlike the “Arab”, was intrinsically inclined to collective work and was thus particularly receptive, once converted, to the goals and methods of Catholic social doctrine.⁹¹

Sources on the experiment begun by Veglio are scarce and lacunose; in any case, it is certain that the opening up of agricultural enterprises run by converted Jews and oriented to the collectivist Jewish model attracted a certain amount of attention from other clergy and represented an ideal cherished by various religious congregations and the ASJ itself. This is demonstrated by the fact that the nuns of Saint Joseph of the Apparition, probably together with Hussar, decided to rent out their holding at Bet Dagon, in the environs of Ramat Gan, to a group of converted Jews, initiating an experiment that lasted only a few months. Oddi, the apostolic delegate, took an interest in this case; he judged that “the failure of this effort should not, however, be discouraging; they can make other attempts both in the agricultural context and in other sectors”.⁹² Meanwhile, the patriarch reiterated to Oddi the possibility of an agricultural school at Bayt Jimal, where the Christians of Jewish origin could be employed, but this suggestion does not seem to have been followed through.

Reflection on these subjects would continue within the ASJ. Hussar termed it “the most seductive aspect, because [the rural communities] corresponded most closely to the pure Zionist ideal, and at the same time to the communitarian religious ideal of some young Christians and catechumens”.⁹³ The laity in the association were particularly active in the realization of a kibbutz for

90 AANY, ACNEWA, “Report on Journey of Msgr. Thomas J. McMahon in Middle East – Oct. 18 through Nov. 12 1953,” written by McMahon himself. He expected that this type of project could be extended to be actualized elsewhere in Israel and aired the possibility of opening another kibbutz on Salesian property in Bayt Jimal, not far from Dayr Rafat.

91 “The Arab is an individualist; the Jew is not. Imbuing the Arab with the social encyclicals will be a long, hard road.” Ibid.

92 APLJ, LB-AG, *Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Oddi to Gori, confidential, Jerusalem, February 15, 1955, translation from Italian.

93 APDF, BS, *Hussar*, V 840, 14, confidential report from Hussar to Avril, Paris, September 11, 1954, translation from French.

converted Jews. Even before the foundation of the ASJ, Bergman had made known his desire to open a kibbutz for Jewish Catholics in Israel, an idea in whose service he mobilized friends in Europe and the United States.

Along with Bergman, a couple had also long been interested in establishing a Catholic kibbutz. The wish to open up an environment that would guarantee a Christian education for their children united the couple and other laity in the association who were already living in kibbutzim.⁹⁴ The willingness of the nuns of Notre-Dame de Sion to place a piece of land at 'Ayn Karim at their disposal enabled them to open up a Christian community, founded by a group of lay converted Jews. In January 1957, Héné and a family of converted Jews inaugurated this presence at 'Ayn Karim, which would become one of the association's most important focal points for prayers and meetings (fig. 5.3).⁹⁵ This opened a new phase in the life of the association; after the first years of clandestine meetings and uncertain steps, the ASJ membership grew and initiated a communal life that was unique in the Latin Church of the period.

3.3 *"The Love of Israel" or "The Return to Christ"? The Identity Formation of the "Jewish Christians"*

One of the fundamental questions faced by the ASJ in its first years of existence was the form the apostolate should take in Israel, both toward those who

94 See APNDS, *P. Stiassny*, minutes of the meeting of the Committee of the ASJ, 'Ayn Karim, June 14, 1957.

95 On the eve of the beginning of this new experience, Héné wrote to Tisserant: "We will try to remain faithful to our ideal of Christianity within our people [Israel] and for that we will remain affiliated to the Union of Workers (Histadrut), etc.... We must make our people understand that a Christian can very well be a good citizen and a good patriot." ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 855/49, 3, doc. 318, Tse'elim, January 23, 1957, translation from French. At the end of the 1960s, the ideal of community life, animated by Christian principles but also influenced by the experience of the work of the Zionist pioneers, would influence the birth and development of the Arab-Israeli village of Neveh Shalom–Wahat al-Salam (NSWAS), on the outskirts of Latrun, founded by Hussar and a group of laymen, some of whom – like Rina Geftman – came from the experience of the ASJ. The NSWAS project differed from the attempted enterprise at 'Ayn Karim because the goals included not only the realization of a Catholic-oriented kibbutz for converted Jews, but also the creation of a mixed Arab-Jewish village, thus demonstrating the possibility of peaceful cohabitation between the two peoples who were in conflict. In any case, within this "dream," as Hussar termed it, diverse elements came together that characterized first the association's *foyers* and then the 'Ayn Karim project. For historical insight into the events related to NSWAS, see Maria Chiara Rioli, "A Christian Look at the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Bruno Hussar and the Foundation of 'Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam," *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, no. 5 (2013).



FIGURE 5.3 Association of Saint James meeting at 'Ayn Karim, 1957
ASNDS

approached it to request the sacraments and toward those who, despite their Jewish origins, had belonged to Christian families for generations.

A passage from a discussion on the *problem of Israel* – the term initially proposed in the drafts of the statutes, as was seen above, and later referred to as the *mystery of Israel* summarizes the association's new approach. The rejection of expressions like *Jewish problem* or *question*, with their historical baggage permeated with anti-Judaism and – from the nineteenth century on – antisemitism, and working, on the contrary, toward an approach to the Jewish world that was respectful and not oriented toward conversion, represented one of the ASJ's principal contributions within the greater context of change in the relations between Jews and Christians, and of the Christian perception of the Jewish world that had emerged in the mid-twentieth century.

The association's founder members were aware, to varying degrees, of these transformations in the traditional Catholic attitude toward the catechumens. In a document probably dating from 1956, ASJ members reflected on the necessity to distinguish between "active" proselytism, in their view absolutely to be avoided in Israel and also not appropriate for the Jews of the diaspora, and "passive" proselytism, identified in the Jews who approached the association to request the sacraments, which was also problematic in the Israeli social context. The association's chosen structure also defined the evangelizing strategy that they would adopt, in a direction aimed at overcoming both forms of proselytism, in order to channel the association toward another type of pastoral care: the "apostolate of presence", of "rapprochement". This was based on "a new encounter between the Jewish people and the Church of God" with the purpose of "improving Judeo-Catholic relations based on areas of

shared interest: the country of the Holy Land, the Bible, the Revelation".⁹⁶ As Stiassny stated,

the precondition for the apostolate of presence is sympathy. To be present to someone, to achieve a true spiritual presence, we must love ... as long as there remain in our subconscious traces of antisemitism, of feeling of superiority, we will not arrive, by an effort of love, to identify ourselves with the spiritual (and not political) destinies of Israel.

Echoing Paul, he concluded that "you have to be Greek with the Greeks, Hindu with the Hindus and Jewish with the Jews".⁹⁷

The fact that conversionist activities were not encouraged is also demonstrated in the content of some letters from Hussar to Patriarch Gori in which the Dominican argued for his choice of focusing on those who had already completed the conversion process, especially by preparing catechumens for baptism. The energies of Hussar, himself a convert, were also directed to the study of Judaism, with the purpose of gaining insight into its origins and those of the members of the Jaffa community.⁹⁸ He also hoped to create the opportunity for an encounter with representatives of Jewish politics and culture and to discuss with them the toughest questions related to the presence of converts in Israeli society. It is clear, therefore, that the proposal for a Jewish-Christian dialogue also necessarily entailed unprecedented and significant historical-political problems: not only was the relationship between the two faiths under discussion, but also the Catholic attitude toward the State of Israel, which was moving away from its broad-stroke hostility toward the Jewish nationalist movement's philo-Zionist orientation.

From the time of its establishment, two fundamental tensions animated the association. In the first place was the reconsideration of Jewish-Christian relations: this was not only aimed at promoting a generic interreligious dialogue but constituted the desire to create a new community (*kehilah*), inspired by the Judeo-Christian example and especially by the ASJ interpretation of the way of life described in the Acts of the Apostles (2:42–47). There was explicit

96 APNDS, *P. Stiassny*, document titled "Idées pour notre chaliah," undated (ca. 1956), translation from French. The term *shaliah* mentioned in the text indicates the envoy or representative. This is the word used in the Bible to refer to an apostle.

97 AAV, *ADAGP*, 20, 81, 2, fols. 145–53; 152, "Le problème missionnaire en Israël" by Stiassny, Jerusalem, September 8, 1954, translation from French. The Pauline reference is 1 Corinthians 9:20.

98 APLJ, *VB-GB*, *Dominicains, 1874–1980*, Hussar to Gori, Jaffa, August 1, 1955.

reference to this; for example, when the local committee for Tel Aviv was formed, it was established that the members should follow “the example of the first Christians” and, in particular, would contribute a percentage of their monthly income to the community chest.⁹⁹ The ASJ members thus proposed to return to the origins of Christianity and, in particular, to its Jewish roots; the community which they outlined, and especially the case of the foyers and the Christian kibbutzim, retraced distinctive features of the first church that formed around the apostles after the death of Jesus. These characteristics – earnest prayer, sharing resources in common, responding to the needs of those in distress – were reintroduced as foundational elements and goals for the association. It is clear how their studies in Judeo-Christianity influenced this elaboration, with an idealized representation of the origins of Christianity also part of the picture. However, the concrete realization of this cherished ideal would not proceed without tensions and conflicts. After a long discussion on the association’s economic management, it was decided that the money gathered by each group in the various cities should be left at the disposal of individual committees and not be pooled among all the association’s members.

All these considerations led to a second point. The much-desired construction of a Judeo-Christian identity to be applied to the converted Jews did not only signify an anachronistic repurposing of the past: political reflection on the present time, especially in the light of the foundation of the State of Israel, was highly salient among the association’s founders. The consideration of this event as a historical fact was one of the elements that marked a new turn and a break between the association and other contemporary groups advocating Judeo-Christian friendship.¹⁰⁰ Stiassny was particularly conscious of the political implications inherent in the patriarchal group’s desire to reconstruct a Judeo-Christian model: aside from the “necessity of returning to the living sources of the religion ... is there any more original revitalization than that which is realized by a part that is qualitatively important to the Jewish people,

99 AOSJ, 1945–1959, minutes of the foundational meeting of the local committee of Tel Aviv, January 31, 1956, translation from French.

100 From its foundation, the association questioned “Israel as a historical fact, the continuity of its existence in the history of humanity: before and after Christ and during the history of the Church – up until modern times, considering in the same way concerning the existence of Israel, how the people have newly returned to their country of origin, and have made their appearance in history and on the global political stage as a Nation, constituted as a State.” AOSJ, 1945–1959, report titled “Projet schématique pour une publication périodique sur Israël,” Jerusalem, November 12, 1954, translation from French.

making a return to the Land of Israel?" he asked.¹⁰¹ This historical fact was the realization of the Zionist project in the foundation of the State of Israel. As the founders of the association saw it, this was an extraordinarily significant event both politically and religiously, for it signified the "return from exile" for the Jews, but it was also important for the Catholic Church and in particular for the Jewish converts to Christianity in Israel.¹⁰² The establishment of Israel was now seen as one of the "signs of the times": for most members of the association, the realization of a state for the Jews was a historic new page in the book of the *mystery of Israel*. No attempt was made to ascribe the foundation of Israel to divine right or to adopt a Zionist Catholic perspective similar to the Protestant version. It was most important to offer a contrast to the Catholic rejection – including that of the Holy See – of the State of Israel and to assign the events of May 1948 to a new chapter in Jewish-Christian relations: for the members of the association, the foundation of Israel was now a component in dispelling the mystery of Israel in the history of salvation. This stage was mysterious in itself: the association's founders did not ascribe a uniform significance to the establishment of the Israeli state, nor did they believe that they knew and understood all its political and religious implications. In any case, their reflections aimed to mark a break with traditional interpretations offered in the Catholic arena and to signal the first step in a new phase of relations between Jews and Christians.

In the context of the communities of Christians of Jewish origin in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Beersheba and the other centers in Israel, the association's members developed an awareness of their own unconditional, albeit problematic loyalty to the State of Israel, a state whose Jewish character was as fundamental as it was disputed. This translated into a dual affiliation, as affirmed several times in the writings of various members of the association: first, the love of biblical Israel and the profession of a new awareness for all Christians and for the Catholic Church in particular, of Romans 9–11 (and the Maritainian interpretation of these chapters). There was the grounds for the necessity to reestablish the ecclesiastical self-consciousness with respect to

101 "Are we not in the presence of a new fact in the history of salvation, a fact which enters history and simultaneously reorders it?" in Joseph Stiasny, "Le problème religieux en Israël (1956)," in *Recueil en hommage à Joseph Stiasny*, ed. Elio Passeto (Jerusalem: Religieux de Notre-Dame de Sion, 2007), 4, translation from French.

102 In 1955, Jean-Roger Héné wrote that "the unique historical fact of the restoration of the State of Israel is of great significance for the Catholic Church and ... the small group of Catholic Jews in Israel is urgently in need of being supported and sustained by the whole Church". AAAJ, R 80, *Jean-Roger Héné, Œuvre St Jacques 2*, document on an initiative by the Dutch Catholics in support of the ASJ, undated (ca. late 1955).

the Jewish world, with the latter representing the basis for reestablishing ecclesiastical self-consciousness itself, in the conviction that the mystery of Israel was an integral part of the theological identity of the church. In second place was the link with historical Israel as realized in the state that came into being in 1948, and whose full political legitimacy the association upheld. Hussar's and Leroy's requests to receive Israeli citizenship were not only a response to the need for a practical solution to the problems relating to the periodic need to renew visitor's visas. Much more profoundly, it signified their commitment to a political project – Zionism – and affirmed the need for the church to acknowledge Israel's statehood not just from the perspective of international relations, but theologically as well. It also implied constant awareness of the danger that criticism of Israel could conceal underlying motives and prejudices that were anti-Jewish and antisemitic in character. For the *kehilah*, the State of Israel, being only a few years old, still had to take stock of numerous questions and should not therefore be judged hastily. In the difficult construction of a Jewish identity in the period after the Shoah, and in the light of the foundation of Israel,¹⁰³ the members of the association identified themselves as modern Judeo-Christians, loyal to the Catholic Church and to the new State of Israel.

The positions expressed by the ASJ on all these topics were not univocal and monolithic; if there was substantial agreement among the members on these issues, there were also differences within the association. The most significant were those relating to the evaluations of Zionism, specifically whether it was an ideology or a project historically realized in the foundation of the State of Israel. The members generally shared a profound fascination with Zionism and its evolution; in their eyes, the new state was the expression of a “miracle”, the product of resourceful pioneers capable of transforming a desert area into a flourishing landscape. The “return to Zion” had a mystical ring to it, corresponding to the *mystery of Israel*, but it was not the subject of an

103 See Joel Peters and Rob Geist Pinfeld, eds., *Understanding Israel: Political, Societal and Security Challenges* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Alain Dieckhoff, “Nationalisme et religion en Israël,” in *Lenjeu mondial: Religion et politique*, ed. Alain Dieckhoff and Philippe Portier (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2017), 117–27; David Tal, ed., *Israeli Identity: Between Orient and Occident* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Yosef Gorny, and Yaakov Ro'i, eds., *Contemporary Jewries: Convergence and Divergence* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Dieckhoff, “Israël: la pluralisation de l'identité nationale,” in *Nationalismes en mutation en Méditerranée orientale*, ed. Alain Dieckhoff and Riva Kastoryano (Paris: CNRS, 2002); and Naftali Rothenberg and Eliezer Schweid, eds., *Jewish Identity in Modern Israel: Proceedings on Secular Judaism and Democracy* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute; Urim, 2002); Yosef Gorny, *The State of Israel in Jewish Public Thought: The Quest for Collective Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

apocalyptic-messianic vision like that maintained by the movements that supported Christian Zionism. For the association's members, the foundation of Israel did not imply the imminent coming of Christ and the end of times. For this reason, too, there was no wish to drive conversionist activities in the direction of accelerating the adherence to Christianity within Israel.

The association's documents from its foundation years do not contain any examination of the various currents that comprised the Jewish nationalist movement, even if perhaps this kind of understanding was not lacking in the meetings dedicated entirely to Zionism that were held in the Saint Simeon *foyer* in the mid-1950s. The association's members maintained a critical view of certain measures taken by the Israeli government, especially regarding the status of the Arab population as well as of the new Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. For all these reasons, in the first phase at least, the expression "Catholic Zionism" should perhaps be replaced with "philo-Zionism" to describe the political position of various members of the *kehilah*.¹⁰⁴ Then, in the decades that followed, the orientation of some of the association's founders shifted toward a more emphatic support for Israeli policies and the embracing of Zionism, as in Hussar's case.

From its beginnings, the ASJ was a laboratory within which a new identity was defined and molded: that of *Jewish Israeli Christians*. With this combination, the members of the association acknowledged themselves as Jewish converts to Christianity who wished to conserve their Jewish origins. The association, then, is not to be confused with Messianic Jews – Jews who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, placing them halfway between affiliation to Judaism and to Protestantism.¹⁰⁵ The association emerged and developed within the Catholic Church and remained attached to it. The Christian identity

104 The only one who wrote openly about Catholic Zionism during this phase was John Friedman (1916–99). In 1947, the year in which he entered the Carmelite order and took the name of Elias, he published a volume titled *The Redemption of Israel* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1947), in which the young Jewish South African convert to Christianity prefigured the foundation of Israel as a necessary "solution to the Jewish question", which, however, should be joined with the conversion of the Jews to Catholicism. For Friedman, Jewish history was demarcated by three great exiles: the Egyptian, the Babylonian and that of the Diaspora, which would only end with the embrace of the Catholic faith. To this end, Zionism too would have to be transformed into "Catholic Zionism" (115–17). Upon his arrival in Israel, Friedman participated in the ASJ for several years, but later distanced himself from it and founded a new group called the Association of Hebrew Catholics.

105 See David Rudolph and Joel Willits, eds., *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013); and Edward Kessler, "Messianic Jews," in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

predominated over the Jewish component, even in the desire to form a community that demonstrated the need for the church to take account of its own Jewish roots.

The association's origins embodied the will to open up a movement in the church that would propagate the recognition of Judaism as the basis of Christianity, striving to overcome the long history of Catholic prejudice against and rejection of the Jews. Within the Latin Church of Jerusalem, ASJ members presented themselves and strove to be *frontaliers*, bridges of contact between the two communities.¹⁰⁶ This characteristic of affiliation with two communities – the one of origin and the one of choice – is in the nature of the convert, while at the same time he never fully identifies with either one. In the case of the ASJ, the designation *Jewish Christians* precisely signifies this hope, this *utopia*, of linking the two communities, Jewish and Catholic, that were historically implicitly conjoined and were radically divided at the present time. The search for a space, for a *foyer* or a Christian kibbutz, also seems indebted to the need to inhabit a place that could give form to the utopia, the no-place, in which they were really situated, bridging one and the other faith without being fully recognizable in one or the other camp. The claimed affiliation to the State of Israel acquired an additional complexity in this already complex picture. All these aspects that appeared in embryonic form at the foundation of the ASJ community became manifest over time.

Certainly, in the construction of the identity of the association's members as Jewish Israeli Christians, the common choice and the question of adherence to Zionism were not the only elements at play; to these should be added reflections on the liturgy in the direction of Catholic worship in Hebrew, which constituted one of the areas in which the ASJ's founders were most committed ever since its establishment.

3.4 *The Path to a Hebrew Liturgy*

The question "how to pray?" has surfaced throughout the history of the ASJ. Since its foundation, its members gathered for spiritual retreats, especially at the most important points in the liturgical year.¹⁰⁷ Acknowledgment of the central role of the liturgy in the life of the ASJ and the conviction that the

¹⁰⁶ See Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother*, 63–64.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, the documentation on the retreat held with the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Sion at the community of Saint John in the Wilderness at 'Ayn Karim in Holy Week 1957, contained in ASNDS, *St Jean in Montana, Eglise en Israël, 1949–1964*, "Qehila". The chronicles of the St John in the Wilderness convent mention the first AJS retreat at 'Ayn Karim on June 15–16, 1955. ASNDS, *ibid.*, *Journal de la maison de St Jean du 1er septembre 1954 au 15 octobre 1955*.

heart of the nascent community of faithful could be found in prayer, according to the ancient principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the content of prayer is also the content of the faith), led the members of the association to devote special attention to the question of what liturgy to adopt. Prayer and song in Hebrew were part of the community's life since its foundation.¹⁰⁸ The debate as to what rite and language to choose for the new community, and the subsequent issue of translating the missal, carried out both internally and between Jerusalem and Rome, dealt with delicate questions that went beyond their liturgical context and brought other issues in their train.

Two principal questions emerged. The first revolved around the issue of how the ASJ community would be able to replicate and accept as their own certain prayers containing formulations and expressions that were imbued – historically and theologically – with styles and propositions that were hostile to the Jews or were markedly anti-Jewish. The case of the invocation recited within the so-called “universal prayer” on Good Friday (and particularly the two passages “*oremus et pro perfidis judaeis*” and the reference to “*judaicam perfidiam*”) is the most obvious. At the first Easter celebrated together by members of the association at ‘Ayn Karim, Leroy recited this passage hastily, trying not to draw attention to it, but in truth revealing the extent of the embarrassment and difficulty for the young community of converts and Christians of Jewish origin in repeating prayers describing the Jews as *perfidis*.¹⁰⁹

This problem was not confined to the Latin Catholic liturgy. The studies begun by Leroy and other founders of the ASJ found that the modes and prejudices of Christian anti-Judaism were also present in the Eastern Catholic liturgy, especially in the Eastern Syriac rite that was initially identified as the most suitable for the new community to follow in its prayer. Thus arose the need to rethink the liturgy in order to overcome this tradition – at least in part – by proposing novel solutions which, in any case, would not place them outside of the bounds of liturgical experimentation as permissible and authorized by the Holy See.

The need to research and attempt new formulations while remaining within the Latin Patriarchate gave rise to the second question. The tricky

108 AOSJ, 1945–1959, “Tfilat ha-Mishpaḥah be-yame ha-Tsipiyah” [Family prayer during Advent] and the sheet music and words of various prayers and songs composed between 1955 and 1957: “Shir Miriyam, Romema Nafshi” [Song of Mary, My Soul Will Exalt, Magnificat]; “Shalom lakh” [Ave Maria]; “Shir le-Ḥag ha-Molad: Yeshua’ yish’enu” [A song for Christmas: Jesus will save us]; “Be-Derekh yisurekha” [On the path]; “Bo na, ruah ha-ḳodesh ha-bore” [Veni creator]; “Matai yavo ha-Mashiah?” [When will the Messiah come?].

109 See Maria Paiano, “Il dibattito sui riflessi dell’antisemitismo nella liturgia cattolica,” *Studi storici* 41, no. 3 (2000).

integration of the ASJ within the life of the Jerusalem Latin Church due to the preexisting separation between the Arab Catholics and those of Jewish origin was in danger of becoming even more complicated thanks to liturgical differentiation. Would substituting the Latin rite with a liturgy closer to the sensibilities and life of the Jewish-Catholic community spell a split in the Latin Church? The responsible members of the association answered in the negative; one of the association's goals was to overcome the breach between Arab Catholics and those of Jewish origin within the patriarchal diocese of Jerusalem that had arisen as a result of the conflict. At the same time, according to the association's founders, this did not mean renouncing the "dream" of a Jewish church in Israel that could form a bridge to the Arab Latin community as well as to other Catholic communities that followed the Eastern rites.

From a historical perspective, the effort to create a liturgy that would gradually incorporate prayers or even entire sections in Hebrew had already been underway since the foundation of the State of Israel. In 1948, the clergy of Notre-Dame de Sion in Jerusalem translated the Credo into Hebrew. The Little Brothers of Jesus were also heavily engaged and active on the liturgical front. In 1954, in discussing the possibility of founding a community in Israel, Prior General Voillaume and Cardinal Tisserant expected that Mass would be celebrated in Israel following neither the Latin nor the Byzantine rite, but with a Semitic rite such as the Syriac, in Aramaic. Furthermore, the secretary of the Oriental Congregation had tasked Voillaume with reporting to Leroy that he had been studying Syriac, suggesting the possibility of translating some passages of the missal into Hebrew.

These recommendations were put together in Tisserant's authorization, dated autumn 1955, for Voillaume to found a fraternity of the Little Brothers in Israel,¹¹⁰ connecting it explicitly to the ASJ; the new community was required to cooperate with the ASJ and to help it take its first steps. The secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Church also allowed for the future community of Little Brothers to use the Syriac rite, thus placing it under the jurisdiction of the Syrian patriarch of Antioch, Cardinal Ignatius Gabriel Tappouni. Elsewhere, the community of Little Sisters of Jesus led by Sr. Magdeleine had already opened a fraternity in Israel, but this followed the Byzantine rite. The experiment with the Syriac rite on the part of the Little Brothers responded to the desire to check the possibility that the community of Christians of Jewish origin could use this rite for their liturgical celebration. Both in France and even after his arrival in Israel, the Little Brother Leroy studied the Syriac rite and its suitability for the liturgy of the young community.

110 See AVIPLJ, *Opera San Giacomo*, Tappouni to Gori, Beirut, December 15, 1955.

During 1955, Leroy met with Tisserant, who further encouraged him to work on a translation of the Mass, while also conceding that the breviary could be read in Hebrew. The Little Brothers of Jesus allowed praying with the Syriac Antiochian rite for three years. Leroy studied the Syriac liturgy attentively, recited the office of prayers and the Mass according to the Syriac rite, and sought counsel and opinions in Israel and France. After a year and a half, at the invitation of Apostolic Delegate Oddi and Prior General Voillaume, Leroy sent his reflections to Tisserant.¹¹¹ He reported that he had proceeded with the translation into Hebrew of parts of the Syriac Mass that were recited aloud in Arabic or Malabari, which had then been reviewed by Stiassny and Tournay of the *École biblique et archéologique*. The resulting Mass was then proposed to the ASJ and other Jewish Christians in Israel, who received this new liturgy very positively, even preferring it to the Byzantine rite.

If the features of a rite from the Semitic area such as the Syriac, with its frequent references to the Old Testament, might recommend its selection, Leroy did not omit to underline that the “modern and Western” Jewish world was by now alienated from some categories of thought peculiar to the biblical Jewish system. Furthermore, he acknowledged that the hierarchy of the Syriac rite was composed of Arabs who, even if “they were very well intentioned”, were part of the state that was at war with Israel, and that, in particular, there were passages with a strongly antisemitic tone in the Office and the missal that made a decision in favor of the Syriac rite impossible. The Latin rite, despite its various limitations, was already in use among Jewish Catholics in Israel and, according to Leroy, had less political complications.

After analyzing Leroy’s considerations, Tisserant accepted the concerns about the unsuitability of an Aramaic rite for the Jewish Christians. Despite Oddi’s disagreement,¹¹² the secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Church authorized some ASJ members “to translate the Latin Mass into Biblical Hebrew from the beginning up to the Offertory, which was excluded”. Tisserant

111 AOSJ, 1945–1959, “Compte-rendu sur l’emploi du rite syrien d’Antioche en Israël,” Leroy to Tisserant, Jerusalem, Jaffa, June 1956. Leroy sent a copy of this text also to Oddi. See AAV, *ADAGP*, 20, 81, 5, fols. 331–33, July 5, 1956.

112 The apostolic delegate met Leroy, whose “linguistic knowledge and supernatural spirit” made an “excellent impression” on him. However, Oddi considered that in his “humble and subordinate opinion it is a mistake to introduce a new liturgy in the Middle East, which already has many liturgies, perhaps too many!”. AAV, *ADAGP*, *ibid.*, fols. 327–30: 328, Oddi to Tisserant, copy, Jerusalem, April 9, 1956, translation from Italian.

requested a translation that was correct “from the linguistic rather than the dogmatic standpoint”.¹¹³

Tisserant’s decision was the first important indication of the attention Rome was paying to the little group of Jewish Christians in Israel. The authorization of a partial vernacularization of the missal opened the way to a Hebrew liturgy within the Latin Church of Jerusalem and anticipated the conciliar liturgical reform some years later. The liturgy would constitute one of the most significant elements in the formation of the identity of the fledgling community and in the subsequent history of the ASJ.

113 AOSJ, 1945–1959, Tisserant to Voillaume, Rome, February 15, 1957, translation from French. See also AVIPLJ, *Opera San Giacomo*, Vergani to Gori, Haifa, March 19, 1957.

Between Rome and Jerusalem

1 The Role of the Congregation for the Oriental Church

1.1 *Mutual Suspicion: the Relationship with the Patriarchate and the Custody Prior to 1948*

An important line of investigation is the question of relations between Jerusalem and the Vatican. The principal protagonist in the relationship between these two parties was Congregation for the Oriental Church, the Vatican dicastery responsible for relations with the Catholic world in the East. It was founded in 1917 when Benedict XV removed the Eastern Catholics from the authority of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in his *motu proprio Dei Providentis*, establishing a separate organ dedicated to them.¹ At that time, Cardinal Eugène Tisserant was undoubtedly the leading figure in relations with Jerusalem within that organization.

As soon as he took up office in the dicastery, he initiated a series of changes. After his nomination as secretary in 1936 – a position which he kept until 1959 – he adopted a course of reform with the agreement of Pope Pius XI. Tisserant intended to overcome the rivalry between the various communities in the Oriental Catholic Church and to proceed in the direction of genuine unity. Accordingly, he proposed a revision of clerical training in order to put an end to the tendency for Latin clerics to Latinize the Eastern Catholic faithful, a tendency already condemned by Leo XIII in his apostolic letter *Orientalium dignitas* of November 30, 1894.² This program placed him

1 AAS 9 (1917): 529–31. See also Edward G. Farrugia, ed., *Da Benedetto XV a Benedetto XVI: Atti del simposio nel novantennio della Congregazione per le chiese orientali e del Pontificio istituto orientale (Roma, 9 novembre 2007)* (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 2009); Farrugia, ed., *The Pontifical Oriental Institute: The First Seventy-Five Years, 1917–1992* (Rome: Orientalia Christiana, 1993); Michael Moran, *The Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches* (PhD diss., Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1971). On the Holy See's relations with the Eastern Churches in the Holy Land, see Mayeres-Rebernik, *Le Saint-Siège face à la "Question de Palestine"*, 269–424.

2 Leonis XIII Acta 14 (1894): 358–70. On the politics of Leo XIII toward the Oriental Catholics, see Philippe Levillain and Jean-Marc Ticchi, eds., *Le pontificat de Léon XIII: Renaissance du Saint-Siège?* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2006); Giorgio Del Zanna, *Roma e l'Oriente: Leone XIII e l'Impero ottomano (1878–1903)* (Milan: Guerini, 2003); and Joseph Hajjar, *Le Vatican, la France et le catholicisme oriental (1878–1914): Diplomatie et histoire de l'Église* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979).

in overt competition with Patriarch Barlassina and Custos Gori, who jealously guarded the oversight of their own clergy and were especially prone to resentment and the suspicion that Rome intended to favor the Eastern Catholics, to put an end to the patriarchate and to threaten the custody's prestige. In 1940, Barlassina and Tisserant clashed over their differing interpretations of the *motu proprio* of 1936 and the dicastery's jurisdiction in the territory of the Latin Patriarchate. The differences in perspective between Tisserant and the new pope, Pius XII, made this episode even more delicate.³

After Barlassina's death and the Gori's nomination to replace him, tensions between the patriarchal hierarchy and the French cardinal continued. The foundation of the State of Israel and the Arab-Jewish war had signaled a watershed in the Catholic world in the Middle East, introducing an additional, political breach between Gori and Tisserant. The latter took up the position of principal intermediary between the Israeli government and the Holy See in the difficult immediate aftermath of 1948, which was marked by the silent and overt opposition of the two parties to each other. Gori's anti-Israeli attitude and fears of possible Muslim retaliation if the Catholics were to support Israel ensured that Tisserant's overtures were ill-received by the clergy of the Jerusalem diocese.

In truth, Tisserant had been lukewarm about the foundation of the State of Israel.⁴ He was equally afraid of the extremism of the Zionists and of the Arab Muslims. After the events of May 1948, the French cardinal shifted his support to Israel, expressing his opposition to a pan-Arab invasion and voicing opinions on events in the Middle East that were not typical of the Vatican curia. The thesis that Jerusalem and the Holy Places should be internationalized – energetically supported by the Vatican Secretariat of State – left him puzzled.

The 1950s were marked by other aspects affecting the relations between the Jerusalem Church and the Holy See. The most relevant of these were the financial issue, relations with the Eastern Catholics, and the function of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine dedicated to assisting refugees.

1.2 *The 1954 Crisis*

At the beginning of the 1950s, Tisserant's priorities for the governance of the Jerusalem diocese diverged from those of Patriarch Gori. The Franciscan's continued insistence on obtaining large-scale financing clashed with the French cardinal's agenda, which sought a dual objective for the diocese: first, to find

³ See Fouilloux, *Eugène, cardinal Tisserant*, 289–91.

⁴ See *ibid.*, 443–45.

real and solid grounds for unity with the Greek Catholics⁵ and, second, to establish a new calm and attentive course of study of the Jewish tradition and a new system of engagement with and apostolate to the Jews in Israel.⁶

Concerning the first point, in 1953, an argument between Latins and Melkites at Shifa'amr spurred Tisserant to propose to Gori to seek an agreement and the unification of Latin and Melkite communities in certain Israeli localities, as had already been attempted in recent years in Transjordan, but with little success. The project met with the patriarch's flat refusal; in his "humble and frank opinion", it was "useless" to speak of a single jurisdiction.⁷ These positions collided more forcibly in 1954, when Tisserant issued a ban on the building of new churches and scholastic and service facilities. The Oriental Congregation's decision was communicated to Apostolic Delegate Silvio Oddi. It was especially harsh in its expression regarding the actions of the diocese and the Franciscans of the custody, who had not only undertaken "unjustified expenditures, some of them contrary to the interests of the Catholic Church, both in the foundation of new 'missions' in places where other 'missionaries' already existed and in the construction of new religious buildings that were not necessary or were out of proportion to the needs of the religious community", but furthermore had provoked "displeasing frictions between the various communities and attracted unfavorable comments from non-Catholics".⁸

5 Tisserant underlined to Jallad the importance of good relations with the Melkites. For the secretary of the Oriental Congregation, the Latin priests' mission "ought to consist in aiding the Easterns to elevate themselves, for the apostolate to care for the dissidents and not to proselytize in favor of the Latin rite ... It is for this reason that the Sacred Congregation has no difficulty in granting the power to celebrate the rite both in Latin and in Greek to the Latin priests who ask for it; to the contrary, it is the Congregation's pleasure." APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946-1953*, Tisserant to Jallad, typescript transcription of an extract from a letter, Rome, July 9, 1948, translation from French.

6 Regarding relations with Israel, at the beginning of 1950, the Israeli ambassador to Paris, Maurice Fisher, reported to Foreign Minister Sharet that Tisserant had advised establishing good relations with the newly elected patriarch, Alberto Gori, within an overall policy of convergence between the Holy See and Israel that should be conducted in three-way discussion between the Vatican, Jordan and Israel. See ISA, HZ/9/2516, telegram from Fisher to Sharet, Paris, February 3, 1950.

7 APLJ, *FC-AG, S. Congregatio Pro E. Orientali, 1954-*, Gori to Tisserant, copy, Jerusalem, March 20, 1953, translation from Italian.

8 AAV, *ADAGP*, 19, 77, 4, fol. 20, Tisserant (and Coussa's signature) to Oddi, Rome, February 20, 1954, translation from Italian. Faced with a new request for money from Gori, Tisserant stepped up his criticism of the patriarchate's economic management: with \$128,642 received in subsidies in 1953, he commented that "there is no other ecclesiastical precinct dependent on this Sacred Congregation that receives so significant a sum or that can compare to it even distantly!" APLJ, *FC-AG, S. Congregatio Pro E. Orientali, 1954-*, Tisserant to Gori, Rome, May 11, 1954, translation from Italian.

The patriarchal chapter decided not to respond to Tisserant's instructions.⁹ In May 1954, Antonio Vergani attempted to mediate with the Oriental Congregation by going directly to Rome. There, the patriarchal vicar for Galilee met with the congregation's assessor, the Greek Catholic Gabriel Acacius Coussa (1953–61), to whom he justified the continuing requests for money, citing the growing cost of living, the increasing numbers of Catholics in the region, and the schools' expenses. Furthermore, the Latin vicar for Galilee stressed that the Latin Church denounced the poor cultural and spiritual level of the Melkite clergy, who were more concerned with their own interests than for the good of their communities, all aspects which the congregation had had to consider attentively before deciding to create a special Oriental diocese in Jerusalem.¹⁰ The vicar did not return with good impressions of his journey to Rome; in his eyes, Tisserant was a prelate whose cordial manner was matched by a stubborn determination, while Coussa revealed himself to be "not just aggressive, but outright brutal."¹¹ Vergani's depiction provoked a harsh reaction from the patriarch on the secretary and the assessor of the Oriental Congregation: Gori concluded that the only thing left to do was to recognize that they were "facing bad faith and predetermined notions, preconceptions, and passion" on the part of Rome.¹²

The year ended with a new reduction in the funds disbursed by the Oriental Congregation to the patriarchate, a decision Tisserant explained as a "question of justice" toward other dioceses.¹³ The dispute over funding would continue, albeit without the bitterness exhibited in 1954. Despite the tensions with the patriarchate, the secretary continued to support its agenda. This was reflected in the recommendations to the new custos, the Franciscan Alfredo Polidori

9 "On mature reflection, it was decided that no response would be made. It was better to ignore a private communication that lacked any juridical basis and to avoid shocks that are damaging for us with the Sacred Congregations. When the possibility arises, one would act as though this communication did not exist." APLJ, *ibid.*, "Osservazioni di mons. Patriarca", manuscript memorandum with Gori's autograph, Jerusalem, June 11, 1954, translation from Italian.

10 Vergani had already manifested anti-Melkite prejudices. In 1940, when he was curate of al-Salt, Testa described him as a "good and zealous priest", but "unfortunately one of the main opponents to the concord between the two rites, as it would be his duty." ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 174/52, doc. 3, Testa to Tisserant, Cairo, April 26, 1940.

11 APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Gallée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Gori, Strambino (Turin), June 17, 1954, translation from Italian.

12 APLJ, *ibid.*, Gori to Vergani, Jerusalem, July 7, 1954.

13 APLJ, *FC-AG, S. Congregatio Pro E. Orientali, 1954–*, Tisserant (and Coussa's signature) to Gori, Rome, December 16, 1954.

(1957–62), of “two principal points in particular: to inaugurate a climate of support for the Melkite clergy and to inquire into how to support the secret Catholics in Israel”.¹⁴ Further problems arose regarding the first of these aims.

2 Quarrelsome Brothers: Latins and Melkites

From the late 1940s through the first half of the next decade, the lives of the Latin Catholics in the Jerusalem diocese were not only impacted by the political, social and economic changes triggered by the Arab-Israeli conflict. The clergy and laity also had to reckon with the historically difficult coexistence of Latin and Eastern Catholics, which now became even more challenging with the complexities of the post-1948 period.¹⁵

For the Latin clerics, the passage from a conception of its apostolate to the Eastern Catholics as proselytism to a redefinition of pastoral care that rejected Latinization and encouraged unity between the Catholic groups represented a paradigm shift that was difficult to accept. Leo XIII had already prohibited proselytism by Latins of the Eastern Catholic faithful in a series of provisions, but in many respects these had not been implemented. Papal interest in the Catholics in the Middle East had grown during the nineteenth century, evidenced by the missionary reorganization undertaken by Gregory XVI and the creation of a new Oriental section within the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith by Pius IX in 1862 – which later became the curia dicastery for the Oriental Church – and especially, the new era inaugurated by Leo XIII. He effectively recast the connection between the Eastern and Latin Catholic churches, shifting the emphasis away from a *unionist* tendency (which aimed at reunification of Eastern and Roman Catholics through a missionary drive and proselytizing activity toward non-Catholic Christians) to what came to be called *unionismo*, aimed at developing the Eastern Catholic component and which was averse to Latinizing tendencies, while maintaining a strong distance

14 ASCTS, ACC, S. *Congregazione pro Ecclesia Orientali*, Polidori to Tisserant, Jerusalem, December 13, 1957, translation from Italian.

15 On the Melkite Catholics, see Paolo Maggolini, “The Influence of Latin-Melkite Relations in the Land of Transjordan From the Rebirth of the Latin Patriarchate to the Foundation of the Archdiocese of Petra and Philadelphia (1866–1932),” *Living Stones Yearbook: The Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust* (2012); Ignace Dick, *Les melkites: grecs-orthodoxes et grecs catholiques des patriarchats d'Antioche, d'Alexandrie et de Jérusalem* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994), and Joseph Chammas, *The Melkite Church* (Jerusalem: Emerzian, 1992).

from other Christian denominations, unlike the later ecumenical movement.¹⁶ If the papal magisterium had taken some important steps in the direction of unifying the churches in the East, the Vatican rules fell far short of changing patterns of thought among the Latin clergy. For one thing, proselytism did not only affect relations between Jews and Christians, but also between Christian denominations themselves, and even between the different Catholic rites. A radical change from the attitude of mutual suspicion and disdain between the Catholics would also require the development of religious training for young Arabs, the encouragement of local clergy, and a scaling back of European power.

In Jerusalem, some of the directives from Rome aimed at greater unity between the Catholics would have particularly influenced the Latin Patriarchate: the most outstanding of these were the attempt to unify the Catholic schools of Transjordan in the late 1930s and the agreement on parish management in 1950.¹⁷

2.1 *Laborious Unity: the Failure of the Catholic Union of Schools of Transjordan*

One of the historic areas of conflict between Latins and Melkites was that of education. The control exerted by the Latin Patriarchate and by the Melkites over the education of thousands of students who attended their schools offered the opportunity to come into contact with and influence thousands of Catholics, reinforcing the identity boundaries of each community and more or less directly inducing many families to change rite or remain faithful to their existing one. It was for this reason that both sides expressed strong reservations about the Holy See's directive to unify the educational system, as both feared that this would mean one community predominating over the other.¹⁸

16 See Étienne Fouilloux, "De l'unionisme à l'œcuménisme," in *Les enjeux de l'unionisme: Catholiques et orthodoxes dans le sillage de Balamand*, ed. Comité mixte catholique-orthodoxe en France (Paris: Bayard; Fleurus-Mame: Cerf, 2004), and Mauro Velati, *Una difficile transizione: Il cattolicesimo tra unionismo ed ecumenismo (1952-1964)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996).

17 See Robert Focà, "L'Union Catholique des Écoles en Transjordanie," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 1, no. 1 (1951).

18 The Melkites of the region numbered 4,308, subdivided into 30 missions and administered by 17 priests, all of them Palestinians. They had 16 schools (14 for boys and 2 for girls), with 550 pupils. The Latin Catholics in turn numbered 5,798, subdivided into 29 missions and administered by 17 priests and 29 nuns. Their 28 schools (16 for boys and 12 for girls) had 1,876 pupils. Thus, in a total population of around 300,000 persons, the Catholics numbered 10,106; the Orthodox 19,894, and the Muslims around 270,000. See CADN, *Jérusalem Consulat Général*, B, 159, memorandum on the "état des écoles et du

In 1938, Rome decided to unify the supervision of the Transjordan schools, a policy that received the backing of Apostolic Delegate Testa. Oversight of the Latin and Melkite educational institutions in Transjordan was entrusted to a French Jesuit, Geoffrey de Bonneville. Barlassina's reception of this Rome-inspired operation was frosty; the Latin patriarch was openly opposed to this type of unification and made no secret of it to Testa and Tisserant. Nevertheless, this consolidation of the school systems was set in motion. At the time, the union comprised almost exclusively elementary schools, except for three high schools. The opportunity to teach and educate the country's children – not only Catholics but also Muslims and Orthodox – spurred the competition between the Catholic confessions to establish control over the Catholic education system. The governance of the union initially followed that of the Latin Patriarchate schools; this required the existence of a directive committee composed of a Melkite priest and a Latin priest, who would work side by side with the director. The committee operated for two years. The economic functioning of the union's schools was controlled by the patriarchate for the Latin schools, while the Oriental Congregation covered the costs of the Melkite institutions.

The union immediately presented many problems: it was a project mandated by the Holy See, but it was hostage to the difficult realities in the Middle East of Catholics of both rites. De Bonneville's weak presence in the field, the disagreement among the Latins and Greek Catholics on the nominees of the teachers, and the growing tensions undermined the possibility of success from the outset. In 1940, the French Jesuit resigned. New areas of conflict, once again centering around financial management, led to a series of changes of direction up to 1948, when the directorship was taken on by Robert Focà, a French White Father. His approach, however, attracted much criticism from both sides, especially for his effort to break the clientelist model that followed family and tribal lines and dominated the organization.¹⁹ The *Filastin* daily also questioned why a French priest had been chosen: "is there no qualified Arab priest on the two banks of the Jordan?" the paper asked rhetorically.²⁰

clergé catholique de Transjordanie au mois d'avril 1938." On the project of educational unity in the 1930s, see Mayeres-Rebernik, *Le Saint-Siège face à la "Question de Palestine"*, 340–47.

19 APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946–1953*, Testa to Sim'an, transmitted from Sim'an and sent to Beltritti, October 26, 1948.

20 "Limadha la Yunsab Kahin 'Arabi li-Ri'ayat Ittihad al-Madaris al-Kathulikiyya bi-l-Urdunn" [Why not appoint an Arab priest to oversee the Union of Catholic Schools in Jordan], *Filastin*, October 1, 1949. Criticism of Focà had already appeared in the issue of *Filastin* of September 6, 1949, in an article titled "Shu'un al-Balad: Hatta Anta ya Brutus" [Town affairs: Et tu Brutus].

The reductions Focà made to the salaries of some teachers drew further protests from al-Husun.²¹ From the same city, secondary school students sent Gori a protest by telegram, denouncing that Focà had “ruined” them.²²

Other events further exacerbated the crisis. From an internal perspective, it was decided to make some organizational changes. Initially, the director – who visited the schools only rarely – was accompanied by an academic committee composed of two members (one Latin and one Melkite), who performed the concrete management of the internal academic system. After 1948, a move was made to a more intense form of direction through the endowment of greater powers. This transformation was also relevant from an economic perspective: the Latin schools within the union were now financed by the Congregation for the Oriental Church, and no longer by the patriarchate.

Apart from anything else, 1948 was a year of extreme violence. The waves of refugees and the sociopolitical upheavals also had a profound impact on the educational system. Even if the PMP schools absorbed most of the refugees, the growth in population in the Kingdom of Jordan triggered a rise in the number of students at the union’s schools.²³ In 1951, there were around 5,800 students divided among 57 schools with 150 teachers.²⁴ After the war, the number of Latin schools surpassed that of the Melkites both in terms of congregants and of priests. The number of priests emerging from the Latin seminary of Bayt Jala was far greater than that of the Melkites trained in the White Fathers seminary of St. Anne, even though the latter certainly received

21 APLJ, *LB-AG 1.1–1.1*, *Scuole dell’Unione in Transgiordania, 1938–1952*, Turki al-Yusif, Sa’id Suwaydan and Hazza’ Suwaydan to Tisserant, manuscript letter in Arabic, Al-Husun, September 10, 1951.

22 See APLJ, *ibid.*, telegram in Arabic signed by “the pupils of the secondary schools of al-Husun” to Gori, al-Husun, date illegible but probably 1951.

23 APLJ, *LB-AG*, *Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946–1953*, Sim’an to Jallad, Amman, October 24, 1949.

24 The Latins constituted the majority of students in the union’s schools: in 1951, statistics list 2,404 Latins, 1,288 Melkites, 1,335 Orthodox, 835 Muslims. See Focà, “L’Union Catholique des Écoles,” 118. For an overview of the situation in the Christian schools in Transjordan – not including those of the union – the Franciscan College of the Holy Land in Amman received 352 pupils at the beginning of the 1950s (a third of whom were Catholic, a third Orthodox and the rest Muslim); the De La Salle Brothers ran an institute in the Hashemite capital with 123 students, most of them Catholic; the congregation of the Dames de Nazareth – present in the Holy Land since 1858 – had about 400 pupils in Amman, these too a homogenous mix of Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims; the Armenian Catholic school hosted 107 students, while the non-Catholic Armenians had about 280. The Greek Orthodox and the Protestants had about ten schools, while the school for refugees managed by the papal mission had about 2,000 students. The United Nations managed some institutions where several thousand children studied. Finally, the government schools had about 230.

a superior level of education. The change in the demographic equilibrium within the Catholic population in Jordan had significant consequences, as it rewrote the balance of power between the different Catholic rites and sharpened tensions over the management of the schools. In 1952, Focà's replacement as union director by Bernardino Merlo did not solve the structural difficulties of the project. The tense relationship between the priest and the Melkite Eparch Mikhayl Assaf, archbishop of Petra and Philadelphia (1948–70),²⁵ the Melkite accusations that the union's directorship favored the construction of Latin schools and that it indulged requests for money on the part of the Latins at the expense of the Eastern Catholics, and the Latin accusations that the poor quality of the Melkite schools determined the transfer of students to Orthodox, Protestant or government schools led to the collapse of the union. The consequence of the dollar crisis²⁶ and the crisis in the schools of Mafraq and al-Husn demonstrated the impossibility of continuing with a project that only reflected Rome's desires but not in the intentions and will of Latins and Melkites on the ground. By 1957, the organization was largely dysfunctional, and on May 16, 1962, Apostolic Delegate Giuseppe Sensi announced the dissolution of the Union of the Catholic Schools of Transjordan.²⁷

Although the attempt to bring the Latin and Melkite communities together on the educational front failed, another move to bring the two communities together was set in motion.

2.2 *The Agreement on the Division of Parishes*

The project to unite the Latin and Melkite schools was part of a wider design through which Rome hoped to bring the Catholics of Transjordan together. The region became a laboratory for the unification of the network of parishes that followed the Catholic rites, an experiment carried out during the 1950s with the support of the Congregation for the Oriental Church. Like the experience with the schools, the agreement on the parishes also encountered strong resistance from the clergy and congregations and lukewarm support from the Latin and Melkite leaders.

The proposal to reorganize the parishes not only reflected the desire to create a spirit of collaboration and harmony between Latin and Eastern

25 Born in Damascus in 1887, Assaf was ordained in 1912. In 1948 he succeeded Bulus Salman as head of the Melkite Greek Catholic Archeparchy of Petra and Philadelphia in Amman. He participated in the Second Vatican Council. He died in 1970.

26 See ACO, *Melchiti, Transgiordania*, 670/49, 5, doc. 5, Merlo to the Oriental Congregation via the Apostolic Delegation, Amman, June 13, 1953.

27 See APLJ, *LB-AG, Scuole dell'Unione in Transgiordania, 1938–1952*, Sensi to Gori, Jerusalem, June 8, 1962.

Catholics. There were also practical motivations, particularly the economic rationalization of available resources for managing the Transjordan missions and the optimization of the deployment of priests in various parts of the country. An agreement between Apostolic Delegate Testa, Patriarch Gori and Melkite Eparch Assaf was signed in September 1950.²⁸ The agreement, which was subsequently ratified by the Oriental Congregation, stated that some places would be exclusively Latin or Melkite in affiliation, while some other missions would continue to host both rites.²⁹ What emerges between the lines is that this agreement implied the reciprocal ceding of some parishes from one rite to the other.³⁰ The second point in the agreement was especially significant: it established that the deal had to be kept secret, at least temporarily.³¹ These clauses demonstrate that the Catholic representatives must have been well aware of the resistance that they would encounter, while trusting that the decision would serve to “endow the Catholic life of Transjordan with a new atmosphere”.³² However, it is difficult to understand how they could have hoped that this agreement could be kept secret, given the displacement of parishes and the practical changes involved.

Na‘ur was the first mission to be transferred from the Melkites to the Latins. Gori tried to speed the passage of the other missions, while Assaf preferred a slower strategy, postponing the transfer of the parishes until the spring of 1951. Difficulties quickly arose, most of them linked to the postponed transfer from the Melkites to the Latins of the parish of al-Simakiyya. Indeed, Gori and Assaf initially declared themselves satisfied with the changes accomplished and the priests’ and congregations’ reception of the transformations. Assaf, addressing the Latin Patriarch, remarked on the importance of the progressive

28 APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, memorandum no. 1841/50, Jerusalem, September 12, 1950. The document was drawn up the day after the meeting between the three Catholic representatives.

29 The localities entrusted exclusively to the Latin Patriarchate were Idun, Khirba, ‘Anjara, ‘Ajlun, Safut, Na‘ur and al-Simakiyya. The parishes entrusted exclusively to the Melkite Eparchy were al-Sarih, al-Rafid, al-Tayba, Kufribil, Khanzireh, Judayta, ‘Inba, ‘Urjan, Farah, Shatana, Jarash, Ma‘in, Adir and Hammud. The parishes where both rites could continue to work were Hosn, Irbid, Mafrq, Amman, al-Salt, al-Fuhays, al-Zarqa’, Madaba and al-Karak.

30 The localities transferred to the Latins by the Melkites were Shatana, Ma‘in and Adir, while al-Simakiyya and Na‘ur were left to the Greek Catholics.

31 “It is agreed that this convention should remain secret, to avoid the difficulties that could arise among the faithful who, as it is known, are too much inclined to disturb the peace, especially if the priests do not demonstrate the necessary patience and obedience.” APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, memorandum no. 1841/50, Jerusalem, September 12, 1950, translation from Italian.

32 Ibid.

abandonment of Latinization on the part of the patriarchate's priests and the assistance, in his view, that this gave the Catholic cause in the Holy Land by increasing conversions to Catholicism by Orthodox and Protestants.³³

In reality and in hindsight, the concord between Gori and Assaf was fragile and precarious. The Melkite bishop was fearful that his clergy would not accept the agreement with the Latins. To further protect himself from internal accusations or from claims from the Latins, in February Assaf submitted several amendments to the September deal in a note to the Latin patriarch and the apostolic delegate. The Melkite representative called for the Latin congregations to abandon all conversionist efforts to drive the Orientals to change rite,³⁴ an implicit accusation that the Latin patriarchate dryly refuted. Assaf further requested that the patriarchate's priests should celebrate in both rites, Latin and Greek, in the parishes in their charge, justifying this request by affirming that this was Tisserant's desire. It had become clear how the Latins and Melkites, respectively, were examining and interpreting the words and actions in light of the mutual schemes and historically rooted prejudices among both clergy and congregants.

If these considerations were still muted, during the summer the differences over the agreement developed into outright fractures, especially regarding the parishes in the south of Transjordan. Al-Simakiyya and Shatana were at the center of the clash: the Latins claimed the two parishes, including the canons, while the Melkites appealed to a different interpretation of the agreement, refusing to remove the locals from the two missions.³⁵ A year after the signing of the agreement, Gori wrote to Testa that the pact between the Latins and Melkites was on the rocks; the Latin patriarch attributed full responsibility for the difficulties encountered to the Greek Catholic side. Faced with this impasse, Gori threatened to withdraw from the agreement.³⁶ The tensions

33 APLJ, *LB-AG, Melkites Jordanie, 1938–1972*, Assaf to Gori, Amman, March 26, 1951.

34 Addressing the Sisters of the Rosary, the first Palestinian Latin congregation, founded in 1880, Assaf wrote: "HE the Apostolic Delegate is desired to recommend to the Sisters of the Rosary that the congregants should engage with both the rites present where they exercise their apostolate. It is the spirit of their new government and the desire of the Holy Apostolic See. That they not be purely Latin, and especially that they not Latinize ... The Arab world has evolved. Having become papalists, it is necessary that they leave their small sphere in order to be of service to all the Catholics, and even to the dissidents, to win them over to Christ." APLJ, *ibid.*, "Supplément explicatif" to the agreement concluded on September 12, 1950, February 1, 1951. On the Sisters of the Rosary, see Jansen, "Arab Women with a Mission," in Tamcke and Marten, *Christian Witness Between Continuity and New Beginnings*.

35 APLJ, *ibid.*, Assaf to Gori, Amman, July 3, 1951.

36 AAV, *ADAGP*, 16, 67, 1, fols. 49–50, Gori to Testa, Jerusalem, September 12, 1951.

dragged on until 1956, when a new draft of the agreement was discussed, but without anything being accomplished.

Little remained of the union of the schools and the agreement on the parishes. The tortuous and irresolute process toward a rapprochement between the two majority Catholic communities revealed the distance between the impetus of the Oriental Congregation toward unity and the reality on the ground in Transjordan, where Latins and Easterns viewed one another with marked hostility. Real signs of change in the relations between the Catholic communities would have to await the nomination of local ecclesiastic representatives motivated by a real will to cooperate, the emergence of a new generation of Arab priests, and the consequences of subsequent conciliatory pronouncements.

2.3 *The Rivalry between Vergani and Hakim*

The confrontation – and, in some cases, the clash – between Latins and Melkites did not only involve the parishes across the Jordan. In Israel too, relations between the two communities were not at all peaceful. Like the Latins, the Melkites witnessed a strong exodus in 1948, particularly in urban parishes.³⁷ Whereas most of the Latins took refuge in the West Bank and Jordan, the Melkites primarily migrated to Lebanon and Syria.

The central issue was the attitude of the Catholic representatives regarding the situation of the Palestinian population in Israel: the oscillation between a position of rejecting any initiatives from the Israeli government and seeking for a more or less secret agreement was a particular feature of the Melkite stance, but also, partly, of the Latins, which led to mutual tensions. The most prominent figures involved in the negotiations were certainly Antonio Vergani and Georges Hakim. The latter, in particular, was a central figure among the Catholic leaders in the region for several decades. The successor of another protagonist of the troubled Melkite-Latin and Christian-Muslim relations in the Mandate period,

37 Some figures, although uncertain and different from the Israeli statistics, on the geography of the Melkite parishes in Israel: according to Hakim, Haifa in 1948 had 15,000 Melkites, but only 2,000 in 1951; Nazareth grew from 2,500 to 3,500 faithful; the parish of Tiberias, which counted 350 Greek Catholics, was closed; Baysan, too, was left without parishioners; Acre went from 680 to 150 people. In the area of Jaffa, Lydda, al-Ramla and West Jerusalem, 500 were left from 1,750 Melkites. In total, according to this data, there were 30,775 Melkites in 1948, which reduced to 17,690 by 1951. Of the eparchy's refugees, there were 10,000 in Lebanon and Syria; in Jordan, 2,585; in Egypt, 500. See Georges Hakim, "L'éparchie Melkite Catholique de Galilée," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 1, no. 2 (1951).

Grigorios Hajjar,³⁸ Hakim appears in the historical perspective as a religious leader who defies superficial characterizations. During the long debate over the partition of Palestine after the end of the Second World War, the Egyptian bishop fought for the rights of Arab Christians, expressing his determined opposition to the Zionist movement and to the foundation of Israel. Hakim's attitude was met with disapproval by the Holy See, especially in light of the fact that the bishop had relations with the controversial grand mufti of Jerusalem, hajj Amin al-Husayni, and had spread word in the Egyptian press that the Vatican supported the Palestinian Arab stance between 1945 and 1948.³⁹ Additionally, he had drawn the criticism of the French consul in Jerusalem, René Neuville, despite the fact that Paris had traditionally taken on the role of protector of the Oriental Catholics and was close to the Melkite hierarchy. Neuville accused the Greek Catholic bishop of guile and self-interest, who was little interested in the well-being and safety of his own congregants.⁴⁰ Neuville's description of Hakim needs to be properly deconstructed, as it seems to contain a reversion to old stereotypes associated with a generic *oriental type*: guile, careerism and the pursuit of one's own personal or familial interests, to the detriment of the rest of the community. In any case, the charges expressed by the consul do feature in other characterizations of the Melkite bishop by other contemporary political and ecclesiastical representatives.

Hakim was also involved in some disagreements with Barlassina. The patriarch rebuked the Melkite bishop for making hostile references to the Latins in the first edition of the journal *Al-Rabita*, published in 1946. Hakim responded that these were normal considerations about the situation of Catholicism in Palestine, where the priests of the patriarchate had been imbued with a proselytizing vision to encourage the Melkites to change rite. This approach, he added, openly contravened the rules prescribed by the Holy See.⁴¹

During the 1948 Palestine War, Hakim returned his focus to the actions of the Zionist authorities. The bishop chose a double register, progressively shifting his position from the previous sharp rejection of Israeli aspirations toward

38 See Mayeres-Rebernik, *Le Saint-Siège face à la "Question de Palestine"*, 358–64.

39 See "Un message de Sa Sainteté Pie XII aux Chrétiens d'Orient," *La bourse égyptienne*, December 20, 1945, and "S.S. le Pape manifeste sa sympathie aux Arabes," *Le progrès égyptien*, December 28, 1945. Commenting these articles, Tardini wrote to Hughes that they did not "correspond to reality, as it is evident to those who know the extreme delicacy of the matter and the secrecy that here it's used to maintain on these subjects." AAV, *ADAGP*, 10, 46, 3, fol. 153, Vatican, February 1, 1946, translation from Italian.

40 Neuville cast Hakim as an "a cunning and quite selfish oriental." CADC, *Levant, Palestine (1944–1952)*, 426, Neuville to the French Foreign Ministry, Jerusalem, June 18, 1946, translation from French.

41 See APLJ, *LB, Melkites Galilée, 1920–1925*, Hakim to Barlassina, Haifa, March 10, 1946.

a more conciliatory attitude; in the course of the conflict, Hakim condemned the Israeli army's expulsions of the Palestinian population but, at the same time, mediated secretly with the Israelis, obtaining agreement for the return of the Melkite refugees, especially those who had fled to Lebanon and Syria, upon the conclusion of the hostilities.

In the spring of 1948, Hakim played an important role in organizing the evacuation of the civilian population of Haifa and other centers in Galilee. In the months that followed, as the conflict neared its end, the Greek Catholic bishop was in direct contact with Yehoshua Palmon, Ben-Gurion's special advisor on Arab affairs, regarding the Palestinian Catholics' requests. According to Israeli military sources, the two reached a secret agreement whereby several thousand Christians would be able to return to their homes, while Hakim would pledge public support for the State of Israel.⁴² The following year, Palmon authorized the return of some Melkite communities to their homes in Galilee and northern Israel. Despite the agreements, the Israeli political leadership continued to harbor grave doubts about the bishop. Many Israeli representatives had certainly not forgotten his proximity to the mufti of Jerusalem,⁴³ so that in 1949 the Israeli press defined Hakim as "the Christian companion of the mufti of Jerusalem."⁴⁴ On the other hand, within his own community, he was described as an indefatigable priest, committed to supporting refugees within and beyond the boundaries of Israel and Lebanon, an image that corresponds to Vergani's presentation of his actions in the same months.⁴⁵

Despite Israel having granted most of the Melkite refugees the possibility of returning to their villages, the so-called "Arab question" affected the Greek Catholic community to an equal extent: some property was confiscated, churches and cemeteries were profaned, military action was taken against "infiltrators", and there were unresolved problems surrounding the inhabitants of the Melkite communities of Iqrit, Suhmata and Fassuta, who were still unable to return home. Hakim put renewed pressure on the government, frequently reminding it that he had publicly praised it but had not received the same consideration in return.⁴⁶

42 See Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 480.

43 ISA, HZ/9/2516, Fisher to Schuman, Paris, December 13, 1948.

44 An article especially severe in tone toward the Greek Catholic bishop appeared in the Hebrew daily *Ma'ariv* on May 31, 1949. See ISA, G/12/5804, Hakim to the Minister for Religious Affairs Yehuda Leyb Fishman, Haifa, June 17, 1949.

45 ISA, G/9/5804, Basil Lahham, secretary to Hakim, to Fishman, Haifa, January 20, 1949.

46 ISA, G/8/5804, Hakim to the Military Governor of Acre and copied to Herzog and Palmon, Haifa, September 17, 1949.

In sum, in this first phase after the end of the war of 1948, Hakim's chosen strategy responded to the necessity that he serve as an authoritative interlocutor with Israel while avoiding any markedly pro-Israeli positions that would create problems for the Melkite community with their Arab Muslim neighbors. As far as the Tel Aviv government could see, Vergani also shared a willingness to establish lines of communication with Israel, despite the silence of the Holy See.⁴⁷ The two Christian representatives both engaged in political efforts to obtain the right of return for the refugees of 'Aylabun. However, this fragile alliance would not last long. The difficulties between the two men were apparent to astute observers like McMahon and would manifest themselves clearly in the internal tensions of the PMP.⁴⁸

The relations between Hakim and the Israeli and Arab authorities also remained vexed. During 1955, the Melkite bishop was at the center of a controversy: within a (clearly apologetic) publication drafted by the Israeli government on the conditions of the Palestinians in Israel, it was reported that Hakim had declared that the Arab authorities were responsible for the refugee exodus.⁴⁹ The daily *Al-Difa'*, published in the sector of Jerusalem under Jordanian authority, bitterly attacked the Melkite bishop for his comments.⁵⁰ A few months later, in January 1956, the journal of the Melkite Eparchy of Acre, Haifa, Nazareth and Galilee published an editorial arguing that Hakim's position on the Israeli government, which the Arabs considered too warm and complicit, should not be understood as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause, but, on the contrary, as

47 Herzog to Eban, classified, Tel Aviv, October 13, 1948, in ISA, *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel, May–December 1949*, vol. 4, no. 335, 537–41.

48 In a letter addressed to the archbishop of New York, the CNEWA secretary wrote that Hakim was still in Beirut: "While I rejoice that he has done so well for his own people, we cannot hope for real cooperation from him ... He is now making an official representation to the Israel government for return to Haifa. In a way I fear his return because he has the tendency to take the lead without advice. This may jeopardize Vergani's dealings with the government. But even Vergani is sometimes impetuous, so a balance may be good. At least I tried to impress Archbishop Hakim on the necessity of Greek and Latin standing together down there. What fruit, we shall see." AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, copy, Beirut, January 14, 1949.

49 In this short volume one reads: "'The refugees' – the Archbishop [Hakim] said – 'had been confident that their absence from Palestine would not last long, that they would return within a few days – within a week or two. Their leaders had promised them that the Arab armies would crush the 'Zionist gangs' very quickly and that there was no need for panic or fear for a long exile.'" Israel Office of Information, *The Arabs in Israel* (New York: Israel Office of Information, 1955), 5.

50 See CADC, *Levant, Israël (1953–1959)*, 49, *Relations avec les églises chrétiennes, Mgr. Hakim Archevêque de l'Eglise grecque-catholique April 3, 1951–December 31, 1956*, Laforge to Pinay, Jerusalem, October 10, 1955.

an attempt to open up negotiations with the Zionist government with the aim of ameliorating the actual living conditions of the Palestinian population.⁵¹ In the 1950s the theme of the refugees would become a central point in the relations between the Latin diocese of Jerusalem, the Melkite Eparchy and the Holy See.

3 The Humanitarian Machine in the 1950s

Throughout the 1950s, the Roman Catholic clergy in the Middle East were pre-occupied with questions surrounding aid for the Palestinian refugees. Aid also came directly from Rome: after the establishment of the PMP in 1949, humanitarian action in support of the displaced population became one of the most important loci of intervention of the Holy See in the Middle East, both from the economic perspective (substantial funds were sent to support the refugees) and as regards the complex web of actors on the ground. The Oriental Congregation in Rome, the CNEWA headquarters in New York, the central seat of the PMP in Beirut, the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem and the Melkite eparchies in Galilee and Jordan composed an intricate web of aid workers that was not devoid of conflict.

In decade following the 1947–49 war, the church developed an organizational network capable of responding not only to the immediate humanitarian crisis during phases of war but especially to the demands of a long-term state of emergency. Israel's strong opposition to the right of return for displaced Palestinians, together with internal divisions among the Arabs and the Jordanian opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state, all resulted in the refugee problem in the Middle East becoming chronic.

The structure of the PMP's activities was based on the network of parishes (fig. 6.1): aid was distributed to the parishes, which then had the task to distribute what they received according to requests submitted to special commissions that met on a monthly basis. The meetings of the patriarchal committee of the PMP depict a diocese still on its knees months and years after the end of armed conflict. This humanitarian machine sought to recuperate the time lost in the first months of the conflict, during which aid provision to the fleeing population was disorganized due to the lack of a patriarch and other reasons. The Vatican insisted on the importance of not wasting the aid supplies that had been sent and of improving organization and distribution; the patriarchate and its clergy played a central role in communication work and in identifying

51 See CADC, *ibid.*, Simon to Gilbert, copy, Haifa, January 24, 1956.



FIGURE 6.1
Men at the Greek Catholic
Church sort donated clothes
to distribute on Christmas
Day in Bethlehem,
1950s–1960s
AUNRWA

concrete and specific needs. As McMahon confirmed to Gori: “It is up to the Patriarchate to inform us of such needs by means of well-written missionary documents, with photographs attached where possible, with the name of the place and parish and graphically detailed description of the circumstances.”⁵² The rationalization and management of aid supplies responded to the need for greater efficiency in the actions of the local PMP representatives, especially in the face of the Oriental Congregation’s criticism that the money sent from the Holy See was not being correctly used.

The letters from the refugees to Gori and the minutes of the meetings of the PMP committee established within the Latin Patriarchate contribute to a more precise definition of the work of the mission. Not only did the committee receive requests from parishes and congregations for money to be distributed as aid or to rebuild churches and chapels, it also received requests from individual congregants. The minutes of the committee thus register the needs of Latin Catholics: clothing and food; medicines; the education of refugee children; the costs for surgical operations, obstetricians or funerals; funds for parishes to perform the sacraments. Each tile of this mosaic represented communities and families that, after the end of the hostilities, were attempting to start over amid a daily reality punctuated by more-or-less urgent material needs, but also by a religious aspect marked by the liturgy, sacraments and feasts, which had to be observed despite the upheavals of the war. Thus, the Catholic world in the Latin Patriarchate territory was revealed in the committee’s meetings: its parishes and its congregants, the mother of eleven children, the

52 APLJ, LB-AG, *Pontifical Mission – CNEWA, 1948–1961*, McMahon to Gori, Beirut, July 1, 1950, translation from Italian.



FIGURE 6.2
Palestinian refugee boy, Pontifical Mission for
Palestine, Latrun
AMTL/AEBAF

paralytic, the baby who needed surgery for a tumor, the father looking for work.⁵³

As regards the parishes, the aid arrived in lots; it was up to the clergy to divide and distribute it in packets according to need. Parish autonomy in distributing aid represented a point of heated discussion within the committee.⁵⁴ This was just one of several problems that impeded the functioning of the PMP during the 1950s.

3.1 *“We Refugees”: Protests to the PMP*

The organization and distribution of goods sent from all over the world through the PMP’s network represented a tough challenge, especially given the territorial remit of the mission (Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria and Iraq). Even at the level of the Latin Patriarchate, the geographical distance and the political and administrative divisions between Israel and Jordan significantly hampered the arrival of aid supplies.

The conflicts around the mission’s activities affected many areas. In the first place, the PMP and parishes were accused of distributing aid according

53 The available documents are preserved in APLJ, *ibid*.

54 APLJ, *LB-AG, Pontifical Mission – CNEWA, 1948–1961*, account of the meeting of the Committee General of the Pontifical Mission, Jerusalem, May 20, 1952.

to favoritism and clientelism rather than the real needs of the recipients. The patriarch and apostolic delegate received numerous letters from congregants accusing the PMP and the clergy of misconduct and arbitrary behavior.⁵⁵

On the other hand, some priests accused their own parishioners of banding together against the PMP, especially in the Cisjordan area. At 'Abud, a group of about one hundred Latins claimed the right to distribute food and clothing sent by the Holy See's organization. The curate, the Italian Pasquale Appodia, reserved very harsh judgments for the faithful, clearly demonstrating the distance between Western priests and Arab congregants. The breach was forcibly outlined when the Latin congregants demanded to access the aid directly, without its passing through the priest's "foreign hands", and insinuated that the PMP existed solely to "profit on the backs of the poor".⁵⁶ Around the same time, a member of the Latin community in Rafidia was found to have stolen aid parcels and similar incidents also took place in Jifna. Tensions and quarrels were also reported in Bayt Jala, 'Ayn 'Arik and al-Zababida. Another recurring argument centered around the threat by groups of Catholics to abandon the Latin community in favor of other Christian denominations such as the Protestants (who were perceived as wealthier) unless they received more aid supplies.⁵⁷ Patriarchal Vicar General Mansur Jallad also raised

55 For example, a member of the faithful wrote – in shaky Italian – to Testa lamenting the attitude of Zakariyya Shumali, curate of Nablus: "His holiness sent alms for the poor and needy, and the papal commission entrusted it to the curates to distribute these alms impartially to the poor of their flock, but what happened was the contrary, the curates gave the better portions to the rich families and the leftovers to the poor, saying that that was all that they had received." APLJ, *Paroisses, Nablus 1951*, Salim Sudah to Testa, Nablus, March 29, 1952. Two years later, the priest of Nablus was accused again, of selling clothing, milk, and cheese donated by the PMP. APLJ, *LB-AG, Pontifical Mission – CNEWA, 1948–1961*, Shumali to Gori, August 31, 1954. See also the petition against the decision of the PMP in Jerusalem to "deprive the refugees in Bethlehem of the aid and the reduction of their monthly allowances", in APLJ, *ibid.*, typescript petition in Arabic with autograph manuscript signatures addressed to Gori, Bethlehem, March 22, 1952.

56 APLJ, *Paroisses, Abud*, Appodia to Gori, 'Abud, April 7, 1951, translation from Italian.

57 This is clearly evidenced in the final line of a petition sent by a group of self-styled "Catholic refugees of Bethlehem", addressed to the patriarch: "we refugees find ourselves in a critical position and lacking work, our sons are naked, they suffer from the cold and hunger and the owners of the houses ... threaten to hound us down and throw our families out on the street ... The diseases of poverty on the one hand and hunger on the other threaten us from all sides and the Ponti[fi]cal Mission ... gives us no aid, neither medicine nor supplies ... Life is a bitter cup and we refugees, this century forces us to drink it down to the depth. God wishes to make of us the second Job ... And there are many among us who ... might fall into the Devil's traps." APLJ, *LB-AG, Pontifical Mission – CNEWA, 1948–1961*, letter from Catholic refugees to Gori, Bethlehem, March 22, 1952, in Arabic and in a poor Italian translation.

the much-discussed danger of congregants leaving the church, using it not against the priests but as leverage to request more aid from the Holy See.⁵⁸

The tensions between the various Christian denominations, and not only among the Catholic rites, were apparent at a congress dedicated to the theme of refugee aid organized in Beirut in May 1951 by the World Council of Churches, which had been founded just three years earlier. In attendance were various representatives of the Church of Jerusalem, including a member sent by the PMP.⁵⁹ During the work sessions, the Anglican bishop of Jerusalem, Weston Stewart, denounced the proselytism of various Christian components while aiding refugees. The congress also revealed the existing divisions between the Christian representatives from the Arab countries and those who originated from the Western world; the latter thought it impossible to effect the right of return for Palestinian refugees and asked the Arab countries to accept refugees and guarantee them citizen rights. In contrast, the Arab delegates did not accept the Israeli refusal to grant Palestinian refugees the right of return.

In any case, within the Latin Church the opinion was that the distribution system presented structural problems and that the priests enjoyed too much say in it. The PMP was aware of the danger that supplies could end up in underserving hands. For their part, the priests rebutted every accusation. In 1952, Léandre Girard, the treasurer of the Jerusalem committee of the PMP, questioned the parish curates on how they would prefer to receive the food and clothing. The clerics responded that it would be up to the priests themselves to continue to distribute the aid packages based on need.⁶⁰

58 "Given the invasion of modern civilization and society in the East, we are no longer dealing today with rite or liturgy – these take second place – but it takes work and energetic development with staff well trained for the situation on the ground; otherwise, the Protestant activities, which increase from one day to the next, will find a clear playing field well prepared for their development." APLJ, *ibid.*, Jallad to McMahon, Amman, May 18, 1950, translation from Italian.

59 "Chronique, Liban, Congrès pour les réfugiés palestiniens," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 1, no. 2 (1951): 256–57.

60 The priest of 'Ayn 'Arik, the Jordanian Bishara Shweihat wrote to Girard that "the people *are content* with my distribution; it is only I who becomes nervous from the many requests!!" APLJ, *LB-AG*, *Pontifical Mission – CNEWA, 1948–1961*, Shweihat to Girard, 'Ayn 'Arik, May 9, 1952, translation from Italian, emphasis (underlined) in the original. The Ramallah priest Michel Karam was in a different position: this is how he privileged the division in his area: "otherwise the murmuring would be too great, because those in Jerusalem, unaware of the features of the persons here (fat, thin, tall, short), will not do better than someone who does it here." Significantly, he added that it was better that the general portioning out of the aid convoys for Latins and Melkites should be done in Jerusalem in order to avoid creating further friction and envy in the parishes. "It is

Tensions between Latin and Melkite priests began to spread and the “standing calumny of the Mission, namely, that it had used its funds to “latinise” the Melkites began to circulate.⁶¹ In some cases, like in Ramallah, the level of conflict escalated to a point that the ecclesiastical authorities became involved. Girard and Abu Sa’da’s attempt to bring about reconciliation between the Latin and Melkite clergy did not bear fruit. The situation became so serious that the apostolic delegate, Oddi, had to intervene.⁶² Discord between Latins and Melkites peaked in Transjordan, just as the Oriental Congregation was trying to piece together a semblance of unity between the Catholic communities. In 1954, the PMP decided to redefine the distribution of food supplies, moving away from the ratio of two-thirds for the Latins and the rest for the Melkites toward an equal division of aid.⁶³ However, the rivalry was not limited to the Melkites; the Syrian Catholics were also involved, as demonstrated by some correspondence from parishioners.⁶⁴ The problems with the Eastern Catholics remained a difficult aspect of the management of the aid system initiated by

better that the ‘bales’ be divided in Jerusalem, so much for the Latins and so much for the Melkites.” APLJ, *ibid.*, Karam to Girard, Ramallah, May 8, 1952, translation from Italian.

- 61 Already in 1950 McMahon admitted that, although “in forming our relief committees from all the rites, we have achieved some unity of Catholic action ... We have been beset by manifold difficulties. For example, I can never plan any work which affects only one rite, or if I do, then I must immediately proceed to satisfy the others.” ACO, *Oriente, Varie: Missione “Pro Palestina”*, 10/61, 2, doc. 336, McMahon to Tisserant, July 2, 1950.
- 62 See APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Oddi to Gori, Jerusalem, December 9, 1954.
- 63 Sim’an and Gori reacted harshly to this decision, which, according to both of them, did not take the larger numbers of the Latins into account. The Latin vicar for Transjordan contested the decision and addressed a letter of protest to Tuohy, the special assistant of the PMP: “in the latest statistics on all the Catholic schools of Amman ... we have the proportion of 1,137 Latins, to 297 Melkites, so less than a third, almost a quarter ... The refugees arrived in Transjordan mostly from Judaea, where the Melkites are a small minority ... In conscience, one cannot remove part of a poor man’s portion to give someone else a double and triple portion. Distributive justice is an indispensable condition for the Pontifical Mission to be able to pursue its aims and correspond to the desire of the Holy Father and the intentions of the good benefactors. To give too much to one part and too little to the other will not only arouse jealousies between the Catholic communities, especially in the villages; it will set very dangerous speculations in train.” APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946–1953*, Sim’an to Tuohy, Amman, March 26, 1954, translation from Italian.
- 64 For example, Fa’iq Bayuq, a Roman Catholic refugee originally from al-Ramla who had taken refuge in Bethlehem, wrote to the Latin Patriarch to thank him for the aid provided “in this century of steel”, but also to denounce the fact that “the bales (second-hand clothing) that His Holiness the Pope sent to aid the refugees to cover our nakedness have been put in the hands of Syrian Catholic and Greek Catholic priests, and they open up the bales and choose out the good clothes for their parish and leave the torn clothes for the Latin

the PMP. The long-anticipated agreement between the parishes of the two rites regarding the management of aid never came about.

Aside from these difficulties, the real issue was the confusion that reigned regarding the recipients of the PMP's intervention. Since the outbreak of the conflict, the Catholic parishes and congregations had pledged to help the first waves of refugees without making distinctions as to the religious denomination among those who sought help. But it immediately became clear that it was not only the fleeing or expelled population that was in a state of emergency; the war had made living conditions very difficult even for those who had been able to remain or who had managed to return home. At the end of the conflict, the Latin hierarchy was acutely aware of the immediate need to handle a variety of emergencies. In the documents and correspondence of the Christian leaders, the refugees proper were joined by a second category: the impoverished population and those who had emigrated to Transjordan in search of work, generally identified with the designation "economic refugees", which mostly meant the disinherited – whether they had stayed in their dwellings or abandoned them to the devastation of the war – who were now looking for work and, in many cases, a home.

Louis Massignon highlighted this aspect on his first trips to the area. In his reports on the aid work of the French committee in Bethlehem, the Orientalist noted that it was important not to confuse the aid supplied by the church with the number of Catholic refugees alone (fifty thousand, including both Latin and Eastern, according to estimates available to him at the time): calculations should instead include hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, Christians and Muslims, and, indeed, "economic refugees" who had lost everything during the war. Within the Catholic institutions responsible for supplying aid, the PMP primarily, the fear was that the aid system would not be able to cope in the face of the thousands of demands on it. Furthermore, there was widespread concern that the refugees, for whose assistance the PMP had been founded, would be neglected in favor of thousands of other people in miserable conditions. McMahon was aware of these problems, as shown by the fact that he expressly asked the Latin priest of Gaza, Hanna al-Nimri, to focus on aid for refugees rather than for the other poor people who came to the rectory seeking help (fig. 6.3).⁶⁵

refugees." APLJ, *LB-AG, Pontifical Mission – CNEWA, 1948–1961*, Bayuq to Gori, Bethlehem, February 3, 1953, translation from Italian.

65 In autumn 1950, the Franciscan friar Raphael Kratzer, assistant to McMahon, wrote to al-Nimri affirming that the PMP president was very satisfied with his work, and one aspect in particular: "He [McMahon] also wrote me that you may certainly help the deserving poor, but keep in mind that the first obligation of the Pontifical Mission is the Palestinian



FIGURE 6.3 Thomas McMahon, Joseph F. Connolly and Hanna al-Nimri among Gaza refugees, January 24, 1951
APLJ/AEBAF

The same priests were seeking ways to respond to the huge numbers of aid requests that came to them, and not only from refugees. The Italian curate of Bir Zayt, Antonio Buso, asked the patriarch if it was not the moment to “treat the cases of the poorest among the sick with the Pont(ificial) Com(mission)”.⁶⁶ His letter reveals the confusion that reigned over the differences in how refugees and the poor were to be treated and demonstrates that, in the priests’ view, it was time to enlarge the PMP’s scope of work to cover the poor and sick, and not just the refugees.

refugee,” thus confirming that the principal purpose of the pontifical organization’s work must be aid for refugees. APLJ, *Paroisses, Gaza*, Kratzer to al-Nimri, Beirut, December 12, 1950.

- 66 “Winter has come with all its troubles. I’m certain, Your Beatitude, that if he had the possibility to assist for one week in the discussions that are taking place every day between the priest and his parishioners, he would exclaim with the greatest commiseration: ‘poor priests! What harsh necessity! There are families that are really suffering from hunger. Sick people who have absolutely no chance of receiving a visit and even less to acquire medicines. The worst is when an unfortunate poor person has urgent need of an operation and there is no hospital that will receive them free of charge. No government aid work is concerned with these unfortunates.’ APLJ, *Paroisses, Bir Zeit, 1869–1975*, Buso to Gori, Bir Zayt, January 20, 1953, translation from Italian. In the letter’s margin is added in handwriting: “informed the Pontifical Mission”.

The extension of PMP aid to anyone who approached the parishes not only created confusion as to the objectives and problems of the organization, it also expanded the scope of charitable interventions to an excessive and uncontrollable degree. In consequence, and after new tensions had emerged, in November 1953 changes were made in the PMP secretariat as regards the patriarchate's territory with the appointment of new members. An important decision was reached in 1954, when it was established that the PMP would no longer hand out money on request except in particular, mostly medical, cases. Further, the priests and local committees were to present a concrete plan for essential interventions. The general committee would evaluate each such project and, where cases were approved, the priest would receive a sum of money by way of a loan.⁶⁷

The application of these new arrangements met with critical reception among those Palestinians who had relied on monetary aid from the parishes that came from PMP funds. Congregants in Bethlehem wrote to Gori denouncing the fact that in September, the refugees had only received powdered milk – “a type of acid that [h]as deepened our wounds” – and no money. They bemoaned their inability to pay their rents and the risk of becoming homeless.⁶⁸ Leveraging a tragic description of the life of the refugees in the Bethlehem area, they appealed to the patriarch to reinstate the monetary aid.⁶⁹

There was also no lack of conflict between the patriarchate and the PMP. In McMahon's view, the clergy's ingratitude could be traced to anti-American sentiments, which the American prelate judged particularly risky in the context of Arab-nationalist currents at play within the church.⁷⁰ In 1953, a controversy sparked by the publication in the diocesan bulletin of an article on the

67 APLJ, *LB-AG, Pontifical Mission – CNEWA, 1948–1961*, report of the meeting of the PMP general committee, Jerusalem, August 31, 1954. See also APLJ, *ibid.*, communiqué in Arabic from Eugene Hoade, March 27, 1954, and the regulations, including the principles of distribution of the aid to the poor people, communicated by Hoade, typescript in Arabic, undated (but datable to 1954).

68 APLJ, *LB-AG, Pontifical Mission – CNEWA, 1948–1961*, letter to Gori signed by about 25 persons, Bethlehem, September 20, 1954.

69 “What is a refugee? A refugee is the human being who is obliged to flee his own home, his own property, in order to save his children his family from death the refugee is the person who currently ... does not possess anything who sees his children hungry, naked, who sees the complaints the diseases of all kinds, who cannot find work. He is the desperate person.” *Ibid.*, translation from Italian.

70 See AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Gori, New York, April 14, 1953.

Catholic schools in Amman by Pierre Médebielle demonstrated that the Holy See's aid effort had no shortage of critics.⁷¹

The PMP did not only have to deal with ecclesiastical actors; it also had to liaise and coordinate with a ramified and complex web of international institutions. This was an alliance motivated by the necessity of providing more efficient resources on the ground, but this, too, unraveled in the face of difficulty and conflicts.

3.2 *Competing for Aid*

As a result of the war and the international significance of the conflict, the Middle East became the theater for numerous international organizations involved in aid work for refugees. In 1948, the UN inaugurated a specific action program for Palestinian refugees: the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR). More than anything, this was an operation to coordinate the UN agencies and the nongovernmental organizations already engaged in the humanitarian emergency. The need to form a specific aid plan to avoid the unequal distribution of supplies into the tight web of local and international associations, groups and organizations involved was also tied to the lack of intervention on the part of the International Refugee Organization, which had already been occupied with Jewish refugees but whose mandate was limited to Europe. Within the UNRPR, three organizations in particular were charged with aid distribution: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC),⁷² the League of Red Cross Societies (that contained the national Red Cross groups around the world), and the American Friends Service Committee.⁷³

The Red Cross was closely linked to Catholic humanitarian work for Palestinian refugees. It was responsible for dispatching food supplies from

71 Pierre Médebielle, "Les écoles catholiques d'Amman," *Jérusalem: Le Moniteur diocésain*, no. 3 (1953). The French priest provides a description of a refugee school in Amman, founded by the PMP, attended by around 400 children. He criticized the school management because, three years after its opening, the pupils still had no desks. He reserved an especially harsh word for the Franciscan Anthony Bruya for neglecting the refugee school, but not the Franciscan College of Terra Santa which, in contrast, was endowed with modern equipment. This controversial reference did not escape Bruya himself, nor McMahan; it left them deeply irritated. The American prelate addressed a letter to Gori in which he sharply criticized the lack of recognition by one part of the patriarchal clergy of the PMP's humanitarian activities.

72 Catherine Rey-Schyr, "Le CICR et l'assistance aux réfugiés arabes palestiniens (1948–1950)," *International Review of the Red Cross* 83, no. 843 (2001).

73 Asaf Romirowsky and Alexander H. Joffe, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Jerusalem – several tons of food per month – within the Jewish sector; the beneficiaries also included many Christian communities of various denominations who absorbed Jewish and Arab refugees. A Franciscan, Patrick J. Coyle, the PMP's delegate on this front, assisted the Red Cross in this action. The vital nature of this distribution for the various communities of Jerusalem is demonstrated by a letter sent in spring 1950 by Christian representatives in the city to Paul Ruegger, president of the International Red Cross, whom they implored to continue to send aid not only for refugees, but also for those who were without means of sustenance as a consequence of the war.⁷⁴ However, this letter had another, more important purpose: as some humanitarian associations were leaving the Middle East and others were merging or being absorbed by international agencies, the Christian leaders were worried about a failure in the aid supply. With the end of the emergency of the armed conflict and the absence of a possible political solution to the refugee problem, the representatives of the Christian world were afraid that the refugee situation would be progressively forgotten. The letter to Ruegger appealed to the International Red Cross not to abandon the Palestinian refugees, especially at a time when the international debate over refugee aid cast doubt on the continuation of aid shipments. The reports produced in late 1949 by the economic study mission to the Middle East, instigated in that summer by the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine, affirmed that humanitarian aid had not led to a resolution of the refugee problem. The UNCCP also pointed to the necessity to encourage the development of working activities conducive to the refugees' gradual economic autonomy and independence.⁷⁵ The most important aspect was the recommendation to create a new agency within the United Nations specifically dedicated to the Palestinian refugees.

In the spring of 1950, a reduction in the aid distributed by the UNRPR provoked a violent reaction on the part of the Palestinian population of Jerusalem, which demanded the continued delivery of food aid not just to refugees but to those otherwise destitute amid this drastic situation. The letter from the Christian leaders to Ruegger explained this too. The upheavals in Jerusalem coincided with the UN discussion on the creation of an agency to be specifically dedicated to the Palestinian refugees. On the basis of the recommendations of the economic mission report, on December 8, 1949, the UN voted on resolution

74 APLJ, *LB-GB*, *UNRWA (réfugiés)*, 1947–1955, Christian community leaders to Ruegger, letter no. 139/50, Jerusalem, March 31, 1950.

75 UNA, "Premier rapport provisoire de la Mission économique d'étude pour le Moyen-Orient" (A/1106), New York, UNCCP, November 17, 1949 and "Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East," New York, UNCCP, no. A/AC.25/6, December 28, 1949.

302 (IV), which provided for the foundation of an organization dedicated to assisting refugees, especially with sanitation, education and social issues. Thus, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) came into being.⁷⁶ The goal was to guarantee the socio-economic settlement of Palestinian refugees in the countries in which they had taken refuge. To achieve this objective, the UNRWA included among its priorities the establishment of relationships with the Arab governments of the region with the goal of eventually and gradually tapering off international donations, with the Arab countries then assuming responsibility for the refugees within their territory.⁷⁷

In any case, the objectives of the UN agency, which commenced operations in May 1950, very soon ran into political contradictions related to this work and the organization's own mandate. The most obvious and dramatic problem had to do with the clear difficulties connected to the UN's ambiguous attitude. From one perspective, resolution 194 had affirmed the Palestinian refugees' right of return to their own villages – including those that now fell within the State of Israel – or, failing that, their right to reparations and compensation. On the other hand, the UNRWA mandate implied negotiations for the settlement of refugees in the Arab countries. If the agency claimed that its scope of activity was exclusively humanitarian, it was immediately implicated

76 On the history of UNRWA, see Francesca P. Albanese and Lex Takkenberg, *Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Kjersti G. Berg, "The Unending Temporary: United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Politics of Humanitarian Assistance to Palestinian Refugee Camps, 1950–2012," PhD diss., University of Bergen, 2015; Berg, "From Chaos to Order and Back: The Construction of UNRWA Shelters and Camps, 1950–1970," in *UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees: From Relief and Works to Human Development*, ed. Sari Hanafi, Leila Hilal and Lex Takkenberg (London: Routledge, 2014); Ghassan Shabaneh, "Education and Identity: The Role of UNRWA's Education Programmes in the Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 4 (2012); Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi, eds., *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Riccardo Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2009); Berg, "Gendering Refugees: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Politics of Relief," in *Interpreting Welfare and Relief in the Middle East*, ed. Nefissa Naguib and Inger Marie Okkenhaug (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

77 Paragraph 7 of the UN resolution confirms that the agency's goals should be: "(a) To carry out in collaboration with local governments the direct relief and works programmes as recommended by the Economic Survey Mission; (b) To consult with the interested Near Eastern Governments concerning measures to be taken by them preparatory to the time when international assistance for relief and works projects is no longer available." UN doc. A/Res/302 (IV), par. 7, December 8, 1949.

in choices and actions with hefty political consequences, like the settlement of refugees in Arab countries.⁷⁸ The fundamental contradiction in the UNRWA's work (and other such decisions taken by the UN) is fully apparent in the effort to fulfil a humanitarian task that was contrary to the wishes of the refugees, who wanted to return to their own homes.

The agency came into being in a way that underlined its temporary character; the 1950s would in any case clearly reveal the impossibility of ending the aid effort. In sum, an organization was formed for a specific term of office and rapidly found itself in a situation of stagnation, with its disbandment delayed from one year to the next. In this regard, its experience was somewhat analogous to that of the PMP.

The history of the UNRWA in the 1950s was thus marked by a progressive awareness of the impossibility of achieving a humanitarian solution without facing up to the political issues surrounding the refugees and the consequent impasse in defining a functional operating strategy for either of these objectives. The agency was caught between two opposing imperatives: on the one side, the refugees and the emergence of a Palestinian liberation movement; on the other, the Western donor countries, which preferred that the UNRWA refrain from taking on any political connotations, instructing it to maintain control over the refugees and to combat instability and the possible spread of communism.⁷⁹

In any case, the UNRWA's effort in the early 1950s to create stable settlements for the refugees in the Arab states where they had sought asylum while retaining their Palestinian identities failed spectacularly.

3.3 *The Search for a Common Strategy*

The work of the UNRWA soon became intertwined with that of the PMP, and frequently in a confrontational manner.⁸⁰ Some months before the UNRWA took over from the UNRPR in December 1949, the UN announcement that it was suspending the aid distributed by the UNRPR, provoking the criticism of Christian representatives in Jerusalem, including Jallad. In a letter addressed to the UN secretary-general, representatives of the local Christian churches did not mince words in declaring that the suspension of aid planned for the end

78 See Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 230–33.

79 See Jalal al Hussein, "Réfugiés 50 ans après: l'évolution de la représentation du réfugié palestinien dans le discours officiel de l'UNRWA," in *Images aux frontières: Représentations et constructions sociales et politiques: Palestine, Jordanie, 1948–2000*, ed. Stéphanie Latte Abdallah (Beirut: IFPO, 2005), 109–10.

80 According to the current catalog, the UNRWA archives contain the correspondence with the PMP from the 1960s. See AUNRWA, *Contributions, Pontifical Mission*.

of November would amount to “genocide”.⁸¹ In the same weeks, similar letters were addressed to the heads of the International Committee of the Red Cross. From Geneva, its vice-president, Martin Bodmer, confirmed that, after months of humanitarian effort, it was becoming ever clearer that aid activities alone could not offer any definitive solution to the refugee problem; a swift political intervention that was also oriented toward humanitarian aid would be necessary on the part of the United Nations. The Latin patriarch also thought that political involvement would be necessary, and he was confronted on this point by the Maronite archbishop of Tyre, Bulus Butrus al-Mi’ush. For Gori, the primary responsibility for the current situation lay with the Israeli government. According to the Latin patriarch, the only solution could be indemnification, while he judged the prospect of return unachievable.⁸²

From an organizational standpoint, the actions of the PMP were based on two binaries: it managed both the structures established by the church itself and by congregations involved in assisting refugees, and also some centers established by the United Nations, which the mission ran on its behalf. McMahon tried to coordinate effectively with the UNRWA, UNICEF and World Health Organization. There were many difficulties on the ground with representatives of the local church in the management of aid supplies. One of the areas in which visions differed had to do with the definition of the category of Palestinian refugee. In its first phase, the UNRWA did not clarify how it understood the term “refugee”, meaning there were diverse interpretations of how to determine the legitimate beneficiaries of aid. The resulting inconsistencies can be seen clearly in the fact that the UN’s economic mission registered 720,000 refugees, while the beneficiaries of UNRPR aid was in excess of 950,000 people.⁸³ In parallel, exclusion from aid led some Latins to protest to the patriarch, fueling the resentment of the UNRWA’s operational methods.⁸⁴

81 APLJ, *LB-GB, UNRWA (réfugiés), 1947–1955*, representatives of the Christian churches of Jerusalem to Trygve Lie, Jerusalem, August 6, 1949.

82 “What must be done? You know better than I do whose hands hold the key to this situation. And one word will suffice to provide the solution. But the calculus of egoism too often extends to iniquity. At least the refugees should be told no longer to think of returning, since this will not be possible, and let them be indemnified for this.” APLJ, *ibid.*, Gori to al-Mi’ush, copy, Jerusalem, July 1, 1950, translation from French. According to this document, eighteen thousand Catholic refugees were now living in Lebanon.

83 See Bocco, “UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees,” 237.

84 This is shown, for example, by a petition sent by a group of representatives from the Latin community of Bayt Sahur asking the patriarch to give assistance to the people of the community after UNRWA stopped granting them aid because they were not refugees. They expressed their fear that the sons of the church could turn to other churches because of

In the course of 1951, uncertainty as to who could be considered a refugee led to tensions between Vergani and UNRWA representatives in Galilee.⁸⁵ Adding to the confusion as to who could rightly be considered a refugee were reservations expressed by some members of the UN agency concerning the behavior of the Roman Catholic refugees, who were accused of reselling international aid that had been delivered to them on the market. For his part, Vergani responded that UNRWA dependents had also been accused of illicit activity: agency employees “have picked out all the best clothes for themselves and sold whatever they did not keep for their own use”.⁸⁶

In 1952 Palestinian refugees were defined as “those who had habitually resided in Palestine for a minimum period of two years prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1948 and who, in consequence of the conflict, have lost their homes and normal means of sustenance. Furthermore, they must be resident in one of the territories in which the UNRWA conducts its activities, and be listed in the agency’s registers.”⁸⁷ This categorization had some obvious limitations; for example, this definition excluded those who had taken refuge in countries outside of the UNRWA’s area of activity and also established a very rigid temporal interval (June 1, 1946–May 15, 1948), which excluded the successive waves of refugees from the battles in the summer and autumn of 1948. A further point of discussion had to do with the children of refugees: these were automatically registered with the UNRWA, even in cases in which they would normally have been excluded (for example, if they had previously obtained citizenship in some state).

In this evolving framework, the difficulties with the Catholic world were not only connected to the patriarchal hierarchy but also to some congregations of European origin and the diplomatic representatives of those countries. The Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, for example, complained to the

poverty and hunger. APLJ, *Paroisses, Beit Sahour*, autograph manuscript petition in Arabic by a number of Latin community parishioners to Gori, November 1, 1950.

85 “They pretend that the ENTIRE quantity of clothing that was transported through them should be given to the REFUGEES, and they pretend that their lists of refugees should be used and not ours; and therefore they say that we did not stick to the conditions. We, now, when they asked us to take charge of the distribution of the clothing to ALL the refugees ... made a compromise with them: and thus we cede to them a quarter part of the entire shipment ... so that they would think of their refugees and we have continued to think of ours: also because the following criteria for making the lists of refugees are not equivalent.” AANY, ACNEWA, Vergani to McMahan, Nazareth, December 22, 1951, translation from Italian, capitals in original.

86 Ibid.

87 The territories were: West Bank, Jordan, Gaza, Syria and Lebanon. Centro di informazione delle Nazioni Unite, *Annata mondiale del rifugiato* (Rome: UNIC, 1959), 10.

UNRWA that they had received very few beds from the agency despite their grave need for them. The French consul, Bernard Rochereau de la Sablière, decried the UN agency's "veritable boycott of the French hospitals", despite substantial donations from Paris to the international organization's coffers.⁸⁸

In 1951, the PMP's schools became part of the Union of Catholic Schools of Transjordan.⁸⁹ This move significantly boosted the aid supplied to the church's schools for refugees, which now received aid from the Oriental Congregation and from the UNRWA, as well as from the PMP. The management of these funds was not seamless; it generated tension between those responsible in the mission and the director of the union, Merlo. Every initiative of the PMP secretary in this regard was interpreted by the priest as undue interference. For Merlo, "in dealings with the UNRWA, any useless dualism would be harmful".⁹⁰ In a provocative fashion, he added the request to the PMP secretary "not to meddle in any way in questions to do with the schools". This turn of events shows the difficulty in assigning and dividing duties between the patriarchate and the PMP concerning aid work for the refugees.

In the course of 1953, McMahon received various appeals and complaints from groups of refugees hoping that Rome would intervene in support of improving the living conditions in the refugee camps, especially in Jordan and Syria. The letter writers were mostly Muslim refugees; during this phase, thanks to the actions of the PMP, the great majority of Catholic refugees were no longer living in refugee camps, except in Lebanon. Despite the requests that arrived from all directions, McMahon was clear in his mind that the work of the PMP and the Catholic humanitarian associations in general should be temporary in character,⁹¹ with a precisely determined end point: they should wrap up at the same time as the UN agencies dedicated to the refugee crisis. At the end of 1953, McMahon speculated on the continuation of the mission

88 CADC, *Levant, Israël (1944–1952)*, 28, *Frères des écoles chrétiennes de Haifa et Hôpital français de Béthléem*, de la Sablière to Schuman, Jerusalem, October 9, 1952, translation from French.

89 AAV, *ADAGP*, 16, 66, 10, fols. 389–94, "Agreement regarding the consolidation of the Pontifical Mission schools for Palestinian refugees in Jordan with the Catholic Union of schools in Jordan," signed by Testa and Joseph F. Connolly, PMP vice president, June 26, 1951.

90 See APLJ, *LB-AG, Délégué Apostolique, 1943–1955*, Merlo to Gori, Jerusalem, December 20, 1954, translation from Italian.

91 Since the early steps of the PMP, McMahon was aware that "subsidies from a relief mission, already limited in funds, is necessarily temporary." ACO, *Oriente, Varie: Missione "Pro Palestina"*, 10/61, 1, doc. 128, McMahon to Tisserant, September 2, 1949.

for another period of two to five years. The impossibility of reaching a political resolution to the refugee question, the new open conflicts that broke out after 1956 and the continuous postponement of the disbandment of the UNRWA led to a delay in the PMP also bringing an end to its activities, with this date postponed indefinitely.

Cults and Politics in the Shadow of Holy Places

1 The Politicization of Catholic Cults in the Holy Land: a Specific Instance within a Historic Itinerary

The connections between the Latin diocese of Jerusalem and the Holy See did not only concern relations between the local ecclesiastical hierarchy and the Vatican curia. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Holy See committed itself heavily at an international level with the intent of actualizing the project to internationalize the city and the Holy Places, which were symbols of Christianity. The failure of the Vatican's objectives did not spell the end of Catholic political, religious and cultural mobilization toward and within Palestine/Israel. This was no longer solely mediated through institutional channels and bound up with diplomacy in the international realm but passed through various contexts. The most important of these lay in the area of religious practice. Rites, liturgies and forms of worship encouraged by the Holy See assumed or resumed political significance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and were then reelaborated and partially transformed by the Latin Patriarchate and the Franciscan Custody.

These forms of *politicization of the religious* were implicated in a context marked by various stratifications of the *sacralization of the political*:¹ in the case of Israel, its own leadership successively disintegrated due to the divergence between political parties who supported largely secularized visions of the state that they wished to implement, on the one hand, and religious currents, on the other, that conceived Israel as inseparable from the Jewish religious character. The life of the new state would be scored with tensions and contradictions for decades as a result of this foundational ambiguity. Likewise, but in different forms, in Jordan, too, the Muslim religious element exerted a growing influence on the organization of the Hashemite Kingdom. Relations with the Christian churches and, in particular, with the Roman Catholic institutions, represented a sounding board for the two states to measure the

1 For a historical contextualization of these issues, see Daniele Menozzi, "La chiesa cattolica," in *Storia del cristianesimo*, ed. Giovanni Filoramo and Daniele Menozzi (Rome: Laterza, 2001), 159–66. For a distinction between these two phenomena applied to Catholic symbols in the Holy Land, see Trimbur, "Religion et politique en Palestine."

exquisitely delicate equilibrium between a policy oriented toward strong religious imperatives and the toleration of minorities within Israel and Jordan.

If religion was thus a strong presence in the political lives of the two states, the inverse phenomenon also held true in this context: the various faithful present in the two countries, including the minority Christian denominations, ascribed eminently political goals and significance to their cult practices. Both the Vatican and Jerusalem proposed and supported popular forms of devotion and religiosity, public celebrations and individual prayers to convey messages and orientations that would influence not only the spiritual life of the faithful but also the sociopolitical evolution of the local situation. In a general context of uncertainty and with the looming risk of a new war between Israel and the Arab neighboring countries, the Christians on the two shores of the Jordan river – and all over the world, albeit with some significant divergences – were invited to address their own prayers and supplications for a transformation of the balance of power in the Palestinian region in a direction that favored the Holy See's aspirations.

The qualification and resignification of religious practices in a political vein is an old phenomenon within the Catholic Church, arising in profoundly different historical, geographic and social contexts. In the first half of the twentieth century, this assisted a new spread in devotion to the Sacred Heart. Historically, this was one of the principal expressions of the intransigents' form of piety and was firmly anchored to nationalist aspirations. This also explained acts of consecration to the Sacred Heart by armies and even by whole nations. The goal of reconstructing the "social kingdom of Christ", reverting to devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Virgin, was pursued not only in Europe but also in the missionary context. In Palestine, it acquired a particular resignification through the actions of Patriarch Barlassina aimed at spreading the cult of Mary as "Our Lady Queen of Palestine" through the construction of the sanctuary on patriarchal land at Dayr Rafat, completed in 1927, and the establishment of a yearly feast dedicated to the "Regina Palæstinæ" (fig. 7.1). His successor, the Franciscan Gori, following the invitation of Pius XII in the encyclical *Auspicia quaedam* (May 1, 1948) to make a renewed consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in a bid for peace for Palestine and the Holy Places,² consecrated the custody to the Immaculate Heart. The consecration would be repeated a year later, in May 1949. In the custos's thinking, the Marian cult should elicit divine intervention to spare the Holy Land – and especially the Christians – from further bloodshed.

² AAS 40 (1948): 169–72.



FIGURE 7.1
Notre-Dame de Palestine, Rafat, ca. 1935
APLJ/AEBAF

The invitations to the consecrations, cult practices and prayers for peace in the Holy Land did not only involve Rome and Jerusalem. During this phase, there were others who received proposals from the Vatican regarding the Palestinian question and who suggested and worked out new plans of action. The Catholic institutions of three countries – Italy, France and Belgium – were the protagonists of this process.³

The failure of the Vatican's design for Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum* did not spell the end of the intensive politicization of cults. In the 1950s, these were reignited by new impulses from the Vatican and then found local modes of manifestation in Israel and Jordan. The first of these initiatives was certainly the declaration of 1950 as a Holy Year, which was immediately linked to the

3 For the Italian mobilization see Paolo Zanini, *Aria di crociata: I cattolici italiani di fronte alla nascita dello Stato d'Israele (1945–1951)* (Milan: Unicopli, 2012), 105–66. For the French bishops' appeal and the "March of the Cross", see AHAP, *Card. Suhard*, 1D 14,14 *La "marche de la croix" et les Lieux saints (Palestine)*; *Card. Feltin*, 1D 15,14 *Sauvegarde des Lieux saints, "L'appel des Lieux saints."* For the Belgian action, see "Œuvres patronnées spécialement par l'évêque (la Palestine)," in André Deblon, Paul Gerin and Ludovic Pluymers, *Les archives diocésaines de Liège: Inventaires des fonds modernes* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1978). On these topics, see also Maria Chiara Rioli, "1948 Between Politics and Cults: Liturgies and Calls for a Crusade During the War for Palestine," *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 32 (2019). For a contextualization of the reference to the crusades within the papal discourse in the second half of the twentieth century, see Marco Giardini, "The Reception of the Crusades in the Contemporary Catholic Church: 'Purification of Memory' or Medieval Nostalgia?," in *The Crusades in the Modern World: Engaging the Crusades*, vol. 2, ed. Akil N. Awan and Mike Horswell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

Holy Land. In deciding to proclaim a jubilee year, Pius XII had some specific goals in mind. These included “action for the peace and safeguarding of the Holy Places”.⁴ This element was part of a broader spectrum of significant features with which the jubilee year was invested by the pope and the Vatican curia, as well as by religious congregations and various movements involved in the organization of events connected with the Holy Year, not to forget the reception and reelaboration that the faithful absorbed and produced.

During the Holy Year, on November 1, 1950, the pope made a significant gesture: he defined the dogma of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven. In Israel and Jordan, this had various consequences: it served above all to reinforce and intensify the Marian cult that had been relaunched after the 1947–49 war. During the 1950s, the Catholic Church in Israel strongly politicized this cult with an anticommunist gloss and shifted its geographical center from Jerusalem to Nazareth.

2 Anticommunism and the Marian Cult

The church's opposition to communism throughout the era of totalitarianism in the first half of the twentieth century was heightened by the outbreak of the Cold War, especially in the face of repression suffered by Catholic communities in the Eastern bloc; forms of devotion and piety were duly inserted and mobilized in the Catholic anticommunist arsenal, which constituted the central axis in the Holy See's attitude to the international political scenario for several decades.

During this phase of Pius XII's pontificate, the Catholic Church opted to support Western democracies more decisively than it had in the past. For the church, however, the rejection of and struggle against communism did not amount to a full identification with the United States and its proposed socioeconomic model; the pope countered secularization and the ideology of scientific and technological process with an ideal of Christian civility that, while maintaining various elements proper to Western democracies, was founded in the traditions and teachings of Catholicism. Pius XII was well aware that, in order to reach this objective, it would be necessary to direct and orient the Catholic masses, influencing their political and social choices.⁵ The relaunch in devotionism in connection with the Second World War responded precisely to

4 “Le intenzioni dell'Anno Santo,” *Bollettino ufficiale del Comitato centrale anno santo 1950*, no. 1 (1949).

5 See Menozzi, “La chiesa cattolica,” esp. 210–18.

this goal: religious practices were to be a vehicle for the requalification of the social order in a Christian direction. The Holy Year of 1950 already represented a key moment in the manifestation of Catholic anticommunism through the exaltation of the church, its history and its capacity for mobilization and cohesion, thus placing it in competition with Marxist atheism.⁶ The cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and that of the Immaculate Heart of Mary even more so, underwent strong growth during those years, thanks above all to the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary in 1950 and the celebration of the Marian Year of 1954, in the course of which the liturgical festival dedicated to the regality of the Virgin was established (May 31).⁷

This Marian revival was reflected in various ways in the church in Israel. It created diverse effects within the Latin patriarchal diocese, centered on Nazareth. After all, the town of the Virgin had enjoyed a particular significance since the 1947–49 war, because of the importance assumed by the battle for the town and by the numbers of refugees sheltering there, as well as a result of the Catholic fears that the Christian and Muslim populations of Nazareth were becoming centers for the spread of communist ideas to the rest of the diocese.

2.1 *The “Poison Weed” of Communism*

In the summer of 1948, at the peak of the struggle for control of Galilee, Nazareth received much international attention. The town was one of the most important areas in the war’s development; but more than anything else, it was the Virgin’s home city; according to a certain Catholic devotionalist mentality, prayers addressed to Mary to hasten the arrival of peace in Palestine should find particular receptiveness and speedy realization as she had been born in Nazareth. Since the outbreak of the war, the concerns of the Catholic hierarchy had focused on the Galilee town; it feared the open warfare between the Israeli army and Arab troops but also worried that the town could lose what was called its special “Christian character” in the face of a growing Muslim population due to the waves of refugees taking shelter there. This fear concealed an additional element that loomed large in the minds of the Catholic clergy: Nazareth was particularly highly regarded because in the emerging situation, the Latin Church feared the spread of communist ideas in Galilee and elsewhere.

6 For a historical definition of anticommunist Catholic issues, especially in relation to the case of Italy, and the connection between Catholic anticommunism and the celebration of the Holy Year of 1950, see Andrea Mariuzzo, *Divergenze parallele: Comunismo e anticomunismo alle origini del linguaggio politico dell’Italia repubblicana (1945–1953)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2010), 47–98 and 55–56.

7 Pio XII, encyclical letter *Ad caeli Reginam*, October 11, 1954, in AAS 46 (1954): 625–40.

The first to communicate this concern directly to the Holy See was the patriarchal vicar, Antonio Vergani, in a document that explicitly referred to the “poison weed” of communism enveloping Galilee.⁸ The cleric’s fears could be explained in various ways: first, the association of Judaism with Bolshevism that constituted one of the typical styles of the anti-Jewish prejudice widespread in the Catholic mentality in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had also spread vigorously among the Arab and Western clergy in the region. Leveraging the binary of Judaism and communism, Barlassina addressed a great number of reports to the Holy See, going back to the 1920s, that presented the Zionists as new Bolsheviks, lacking in morals and disrespectful of Christian values. The model of communal life in the kibbutzim reinforced the church’s conviction that the Zionist settlements constituted an example of “thoroughgoing communism”, in Barlassina’s words.⁹ In 1948, the fall of Nazareth to the Israeli army without much resistance accentuated the fears of some Catholics that the town that symbolized Christianity would be transformed into a Jewish colony.

Vergani’s letter did not only refer to the Jews; indeed, the church was aware that the Palestinian parties that had emerged in the preceding decades also contained a radical component. Many Christians had joined them and Christians featured among some of the principal leaders. Under the British Mandate, the mainly Jewish Palestine Communist Party (PCC) also contained a solid Christian component, as did the National Liberation League in Palestine, founded in Haifa in 1943–44 as a consequence of the Arab split from the PCC. It was led by three Christian Palestinians, Imil Habibi, Fu’ad Nassar and Imil Tuma.¹⁰ After 1948 the local Catholic Church was therefore alarmed by the possible growth of this Marxist tendency, especially in the context of the increasing poverty and instability in which the Palestinian population found itself after the war.

Vergani was not alone in making a connection between refugees and the spread of communism in the Middle East. In the United States, amid growing McCarthyism, Thomas McMahon, national secretary of the CNEWA, also declared himself convinced of the fact that the rising unemployment in

8 AANY, ACNEWA, appeal from Vergani titled “Nazareth la città della S. Famiglia minacciata dalla fame,” sent to Tisserant, Nazareth, June 24, 1948.

9 ASS, ACAES, Pio XI, *Turchia*, 152, “Risposte supplementari” appended to dispatch no. 1140/37, Barlassina to Pizzardo, Jerusalem, August 11, 1937, translation from Italian.

10 See Una McGahern, *Palestinian Christians in Israel: State Attitudes Towards Non-Muslims in a Jewish State* (London: Routledge, 2011), 73. On the history of the PCC, see Sondra Miller Rubenstein, *The Communist Movement in Palestine and Israel, 1919–1984* (London: Routledge, 2019); and Musa Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party, 1919–1948: Arab and Jew in the Struggle for Internationalism*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Haymarket, 2010).



FIGURE 7.2
Franciscan casa nova,
Nazareth, ca. 1940s–50s
ASCTS

Nazareth had increased the risk that the city would surrender to the communists. According to McMahon, the refugees taken in by the Franciscan casa nova wished “to hoist the Commie banner over it” (fig. 7.2).¹¹ He visited the group of Christian workers organized by Vergani, about a thousand people to whom the patriarchal vicar had promised work, fearing that, otherwise, the growing mass of unemployed people in Nazareth would turn to labor unions with ties to the Israeli Communist Party (*ha-Miflaga ha-Komunistit ha-Yisra’elit*, Maki, which replaced the Palestine Communist Party after 1948). Vergani’s conviction, which he also communicated to the US prelate, was that there was no work for anyone in Nazareth that was not tied to the communist party; therefore, it was the church’s role to try to combat and counterbalance this situation.

At the same time, the idea was widespread in the church that Nazareth was a unique case: it had been deeply affected by the conflict because of the arrival of thousands of refugees, but its surrender had been bloodless, and it had not experienced the types of clashes that had destroyed other settlements. However, the congregants and clergy did not take account of the fact

11 AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, December 10, 1948.

that this was the result of a precise political intention on the part of the Israeli leadership.¹² The clergy failed to appreciate the political intelligence of the Israeli leaders; instead, a different explanation was favored, one that was miraculous in character: Nazareth had been preserved in this special way during the conflict precisely because it was the town of the Virgin.

In any case, Nazareth was now the focus of Christian attention and the intersection of three themes: first, the humanitarian emergency in Galilee occasioned by the arrival of refugees and the impoverishment of the town's original population, faced with growing unemployment; second, the conviction expressed by various ecclesiastical representatives – Vergani and McMahon *in primis* – of the necessity for the church to intervene on behalf of the refugees and the impoverished, with the risk of Christians embracing communist organizations or other religious denominations; third, the connection between Nazareth and Mary. The Virgin had protected the town during the war, but it was necessary to continue to pray to her not to abandon its inhabitants even after the end of hostilities, especially now that they were under the control of the Israeli authorities – whose promises of religious freedom were judged by many Christians to be insincere and unreliable – and faced with a growing Muslim population, who were seen as ready to attack the Christian minority.

2.2 “A Pacific Army”: Catholic Trade Unions in Galilee

During a meeting with Ya'akov Herzog, director of the Christian department of the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, on his trip to the Middle East in December 1948, McMahon discussed the Russian Orthodox Church's policy of sending priests to the newly established Israel to spread Soviet propaganda.¹³ Meanwhile, from New York, the Palestinian shaykh Hanna Bisharat, who moved to the United States from Jerusalem before the war, recommended to McMahon that the Catholic Church should intervene in support of the refugee population, “exercising her great influence against the spread of communism”.¹⁴ That autumn, Vergani described Nazareth as a “menacing den of communist propaganda” in correspondence with the apostolic administrator, Jallad.¹⁵ According to the vicar, the church could combat communism in two ways. The first and fundamental way was by “feeding the workers”: provide jobs for

12 See Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 418–19.

13 See AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, December 10, 1948.

14 AANY, ACNEWA, Bisharat to McMahon, New York, October 19, 1948.

15 APLJ, LB-AG, *Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Jallad, Nazareth, November 2, 1948, translation from Italian.

the masses of unemployed that were concentrating in the “mother city of the divine worker”. Presenting Jesus as the first worker reflected a pervasive image in the Catholic culture of the period. The significance implicit in this characterization was that the church was well aware of the workers’ situation because Christ himself had worked as a craftsman, but, just as he had respected the authority of his father, displaying an ideal of agreement and social harmony, so too the masses of workers ought not rebel against their patrons by embracing Marxist doctrines and so risk the disruption of order that would come back to haunt their weakest classes.¹⁶

Second, Vergani thought that the church had another ideological reserve at its disposal that could be used as anticommunist material, namely Catholic social doctrine. This body of thought could be presented as a theoretical collocation that was just as egalitarian as communism and could serve to create cohesiveness among associations and groups; to this end, Vergani organized the League of Workers of Nazareth (al-Rabita) in October 1948, with the intention of creating a local Catholic labor union in which to gather the town’s workers and remove them from the influence of communism, constituting, in his words “a pacific army for the triumph of peace and the wellbeing of humanity”. In this way, the vicar intended “to stem the tide of communism”, especially among the Palestinians in Israel.¹⁷ The Melkite bishop Hakim also publicly expressed his fear of communism at a press conference in 1950.¹⁸

al-Rabita was thus born through the will of Vergani and Hakim, with the assent of the Holy See;¹⁹ the two Catholic prelates, despite their disagreements and the disputes in which they had participated, shared a fear of the growth of communism (and of the sort of socialism supported by the Mapai and Mapam parties) in Nazareth and all over Galilee. This common goal resulted in their contribution to the foundation of al-Rabita; they did not apply entry requirements in terms of the religion of the workers who wished to join, but in reality the league drew mostly Catholics, both Latin and Eastern, relying, as

16 For historical insight into political interpretations of the figure of Jesus, see Daniele Menozzi, *Lecture politiche di Gesù: Dall’Ancien Régime alla Rivoluzione* (Brescia: Paideia, 1979).

17 ISA, HZ/30/354, article in English by Vergani on workers in Israel sent to the US National Catholic Welfare Conference, February 17, 1952.

18 “Archbishop Warns Against Communism in Arab Countries,” Reuters, December 13, 1950, also in ISA, G/13/5808.

19 See ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 858/49, 2, doc. 143, Vergani to Coussa, Strambino (Turin), June 17, 1954.

Vergani wrote, on “the social principles of the immortal papal encyclicals”.²⁰ In 1953, the association had more than two thousand members, divided into seventeen sections.

Various issues complicated the first years of the association's existence, and the government appeared reluctant to recognize it. McMahon, however, stirred the political waters in search of an Israeli political consensus over al-Rabita. Eventually, the association obtained official recognition; McMahon met with Ben-Gurion himself to make sure that the organization would achieve greater political and public attention. Vergani and Hakim decided to further reinforce al-Rabita's anticommunist spirit, opening up an alliance with the Arab socialist forces represented by the Israel Labor League (originally the Palestine Labor League set up in 1927, which, in turn, was part of the Zionist labor movement, the Histadrut, although not completely integrated in it).²¹ This accord with the Arab socialist labor organizations was realized with the affiliation of al-Rabita to the Israel Labor League in 1951. This very decision also motivated the creation of a study center for workers in which educational and cultural activities could be organized. In this way, Vergani was able to present some seminars on the church's social doctrine. Al-Rabita's activities also played out in relation to the administrations of the cities closest to Nazareth. The Haifa labor union, for example, granted some al-Rabita members extraordinary permission to travel from Galilee to Haifa on a daily basis, where the possibilities of finding employment were much greater and where over 70 percent of Nazareth's workers were already employed.

If the poverty and wretched conditions of the refugees were seen as the principal cause for the growth of communism in the Nazareth area, the ultimate responsibility for this diffusion was attributed to various actors. First, to Israel and its politicians; the church blamed the refugee problem on the establishment of the Israeli state itself, and the refugees' conditions had dramatically heightened the appeal of communism. In this sense, the position of the Catholic Church in Israel was close to that of other Christian denominations.²² Furthermore, the Soviet Union's immediate recognition of the new state in 1948 increased Catholic suspicions of an alliance between Moscow and Tel Aviv.

20 ISA, HZ/30/354, article in English by Vergani on workers in Israel sent to the US National Catholic Welfare Conference, February 17, 1952.

21 Histadrut admitted Arab workers as full members in 1959.

22 TNA, FO 371/82631, ER 1785/2, copy of a confidential report titled “Notes on the Christian Position in Israel”, produced by Denis Baly, headmaster of the Anglican St. George's College in Jerusalem, enclosed in confidential dispatch no. 120/5/50 sent from the Consulate General of Jerusalem to the FO Eastern Department, September 21, 1950.

The critique of Israel unified the various Christian Churches in Jerusalem; however, they were nonetheless divided on many other points. For example, the Catholic world attributed significant blame on the Orthodox Church, which the Soviet government had attempted to extend throughout the Middle East. The Israeli leadership had responded to this Catholic argumentation saying that the project to internationalize Jerusalem had itself opened up the field for Soviet involvement through the activity of the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow, making the Holy City an “ideal center for Soviet activity”.²³ Furthermore, the Orthodox world of Jerusalem itself was split between the Greek component, which wished to maintain its traditional supremacy over the Arab part, and the Russian element, which supported the Arabs. In any case, the secular divisions between Catholics and Orthodox exacerbated sharply due to Catholic suspicion of the procommunist activities on the part of the Orthodox.

Finally, there were some Catholic observers who read these events according a metahistorical and apocalyptic register: the spread of communism in the Holy Land was a sign of the impending final battle between good and evil. For some priests, the struggle against communism could lead to a rapprochement between Jews and Christians in the name of their shared faith in the God of Abraham and their common conviction that “the evil of the present world is ... apostasy from God”, as the Franciscan Lino Arioli wrote to the secretary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yehuda Shpigel.²⁴ It is clear, then, how the Catholic world’s anticommunist rhetoric in Israel included ideas, motivations and reflections that were very diverse. Israel itself was sometimes considered a state that supported a form of materialist socialism or, on the contrary, was the unique anticommunist bulwark and barrier in the Middle East. In this quite dynamic framework, the declaration of the Marian Year endowed Nazareth with additional importance.

2.3 *Marian Year 1954*

In terms of devotion and religious practices, Pius XII’s proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary on November 1, 1950, during Holy Year, further rehabilitated and revived the Marian cult. Custos Giacinto Faccio stressed the primary importance of the role of the Franciscans in the Marian movement, which had requested Pius XII to proclaim the dogma.²⁵ This emphasis

23 TNA, FO 371/115709, EE 1082/16, Chadwick to Younger, confidential telegram, Tel Aviv, September 17, 1951.

24 ISA, G/13/5826, Arioli to Shpigel, Capernaum, November 18, 1953, translation from Italian.

25 Giacinto Faccio, *Lettera circolare in occasione della definizione dogmatica dell'Assunta (1 Novembre 1950)* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, January 14, 1951).

on the Franciscan contribution enabled the *custos* to nurture the polemic against non-Catholics concerning access to the Church of the Assumption of Mary, at the foot of the Mount of Olives, where tradition located the tomb and place where Mary ascended into heaven.

This climate was conducive to a general relaunch of Marian devotion in the Latin patriarchal territory. An example was the preaching of Raymond-Jean-Marie Payrière, a Versailles priest, who, in defiance of his own bishop, had gone to Trani and from there to the Holy Land. Payrière's program was based on the Fatima revelations of 1917. At the end of his journey, which lasted around two months (December 1950–February 1951), Payrière forwarded an account to the patriarch in which he described his accomplishments.²⁶ In two months, Payrière had participated in more than a hundred celebrations, sixty-four conferences and sermons, and dozens of meetings with priests and religious congregations. Every ceremony included prayers, invocations and the consecration to the Immaculate Heart. His concern, which differed from that of Vergani and the other clergy, was not so much the spread of communism in Nazareth or in the Holy Land in general; his travels to the places connected with Mary were chiefly intended to serve as an additional act of prayer to the Virgin for her intercession to defeat communism all over the world.

The experience of Payrière – who launched the periodical *La Paix par le Coeur Immaculé* (1952) after returning to France, which published a small volume titled *Fatima: Le signe du ciel. Mon cœur immaculé triomphera*, that went through at least a dozen editions²⁷ – demonstrates the exchanges and connections between Europe and the Holy Land through which the politicization of cults was spread in the period.

A further impulse may have come from Pius XI's announcement, contained in the encyclical *Fulgens corona*, of September 8, 1953,²⁸ of the proclamation of a special Marian Year for 1954. The Jerusalem ecclesiastical hierarchy immediately mobilized to plan for local initiatives. In October 1953, the patriarch formed a permanent committee for the Marian Year, with the auxiliary bishop, Jallad, named as its president. The committee analyzed the program of proposed activities, in step with the calendar for the opening and concluding celebrations published by Rome. All the parishes would be involved in engagements during the course of the year, with initiatives of devotional character

26 APLJ, AG, *Maria S.S. Année Mariale 1954*, "Rapport d'activité" typescript drafted by Payrière, Jerusalem, February 9, 1951.

27 Raymond J.M. Payrière, *Fatima: Le signe du ciel. Mon cœur immaculé triomphera* (Coulommiers: Brodar et Taupin, 1956).

28 AAS 45 (1953): 577–92.

(processions, pilgrimages, rosaries) as well as cultural activities and mass communication events (conferences, shows, concerts, film projections).

The year was marked by extensive participation in public liturgy. The Vatican central committee for the Marian Year invited the local churches to celebrate a day dedicated to the “Church of silence” in communist countries, which also met with a great degree of response in the Latin diocese of Jerusalem. On April 3, 1954, in front of the church on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Christians gathered to pray for the peoples “who suffer under the terrible beast of communism”, as a text published by the regional Marian Year committee declared.²⁹ The symbology laid out by Vergani (the intensely emotive images chosen to describe the “Church of silence”; the biblical references to the apocalypse by way of identifying communism with the “enemy” par excellence, Satan; the placing of a statue representing Our Lady of Lourdes) was intended to convey to those present the terror of the Soviet regime and, thus, to dissuade Israeli Palestinians from embracing communism. Hakim, who participated in the liturgy alongside Vergani, equated communism with “demonic persecution”.

However, the focus of the energies of the region’s churches in 1954 was on Nazareth. There was an additional factor: during that year, the city became the locus of a harsh debate that brought Jerusalem’s principal ecclesiastical institutions – the Franciscan Custody and the Latin Patriarchate – into conflict with the Holy See. At the root of the conflict were the plans to construct the Basilica of the Annunciation, with an architectural debate exposing differing interpretations of the Israeli situation and the role of the church in that context as well as diverse significations of Catholic anticommunism in relation to the Marian cult and its political application.

3 “Eliminating Communism from Nazareth”: the Construction of the Basilica of the Annunciation

3.1 *A Long-discussed Project*

The plans to dedicate a new church to Mary at Nazareth had a long history.³⁰ The location traditionally identified as where the Archangel Gabriel visited

29 APLJ, AG, *Maria S.S. Année Mariale, 1954*, unsigned typescript document, with the stamp of the Haifa Committee for the Marian Year, on the celebration of April 3, 1954.

30 Israeli geographer and historian Masha Halevi has surveyed the history of the Basilica of the Annunciation attentively. Her work has developed themes of historical geography connected to the Catholic world of the Holy Land in the contemporary era and to the construction of a “Catholic landscape” within the State of Israel, especially through the study of the plans of Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi. See Masha Halevi, “The Politics Behind

the Virgin to announce the birth of Jesus belonged to the Franciscan Custody since the seventeenth century. By the twentieth century, the little chapel they had built there was considered unsuitable to the importance of such a foundational event in the history of Christianity. A century later, the project of enlarging the existing church failed. During the 1920s, Custos Ferdinando Diotallevi (1918–24) had another idea: having obtained permission from Pius XI, he entrusted an architect, Antonio Barluzzi, with the task of designing a new church.³¹

After an initial rejection from Rome, in 1941, Barluzzi prepared new plans, which conceived the basilica on a particularly grand scale, reflecting a certain eclecticism with he invested the entire design. His intention was that the structure should symbolize the power of the Catholic Church, an institution charged with mediating between the human and the divine. The encounter between the mundane and the transcendental was indicated by the mystery of incarnation, which, according to the scriptures, had originated at the location of the Annunciation. For this, too, the symbology of the structure ought, in Barluzzi's mind, to emphasize the grandeur and universal centrality of Christianity and, even more so, of Catholicism. The path to the building of the church was nonetheless tortuous given the outbreak of Second World War and the 1948 conflict.

In the late 1940s, the custody once began to push for the construction of the church in Nazareth, albeit for different reasons. The principal motivation now was the importance that a building site for an edifice of this kind would represent amid a struggling economy, with unemployment rates already very high, as they were in Nazareth. What was at stake for the church was the possibility of providing employment to refugees and poor people and thus – according to a line of reasoning always popular within the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the region – to combat the rising levels of communism among Christians.

In any case, the start of construction was delayed again for several reasons: opposition from the Holy See, the necessity to obtain planning permission from the Israeli authorities and, not least, the difficulty of finding the huge funds to finance a work of this scale. To resolve the money issue, the custody organized a worldwide fundraising campaign. Donations to the construction

the Construction of the Modern Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth," *Catholic Historical Review* 96, no. 1 (2010). What is proposed here is a less-beaten track, rehearsing the connections between the architectural debate and the politicization of Catholic cults in Israel, which is most clear from some unpublished documents found in ecclesiastical archives in Jerusalem.

31 Known as the "architect of the Holy Land", Barluzzi (1884–1960) designed, built or restored twenty-four churches, hospitals and schools in the region between the 1910s and the 1950s that were under the control of the Franciscan Custody.

of the Nazareth church were further incentivized by the declaration of the 1954 Marian Year. Also in this search for consensus, the custos and the patriarch stressed the religious and political significances of the work: the church would contribute to spreading the worship of Mary, repelling the attack of the communist “beast” and, at the same time, providing work for the inhabitants of Nazareth, thus protecting them from possible communist temptations. In all these significances, the church viewed the city of Galilee as an anticommunist bastion in Israel and throughout the Middle East.

3.2 *Roman Divergences*

In early 1954, the Discretorium, the governing organ of the custody, decided to proceed with the construction of the church. The patriarch congratulated Custos Faccio on the move, which he considered nothing short of “an inspiration by the Holy Immaculate Virgin”.³² Gori added: “I have wondered so many times how it would be possible to eliminate the communism from Nazareth that has taken hold there since 1948.” The only solution was “to offer work through the construction of the church”.³³ In reply, Faccio said “the observation that the initiative will serve ‘to eliminate the communism from Nazareth’ pleases me greatly: the Vatican will certainly take it into account.”³⁴

In reality, the Holy See, and especially the Congregation for the Oriental Church under Tisserant, was not in full agreement on the utility of a venture of this type. First of all, they were unconvinced by the grandiosity of Barluzzi’s design: the Holy See was critical of the dizzying costs, the imposing dimensions and the strident contrast between the enormous church and the small Catholic community surrounding it, in a context where the Vatican and Jerusalem were already in open conflict as to the financial management of the Latin diocese and the custody. The Nazareth project exacerbated the existing conflict; all the more so because Tisserant feared that the Latin Church would use the structure as a power symbol, not only toward the Melkite contingent but also toward the Muslim and Jewish populations in the State of Israel. The cardinal would have much preferred a strong commitment on the part of church institutions to the management of parishes and the existing social realities. For his part, Barluzzi, and the Italian Franciscans in the Middle East in general, took a dim view of Tisserant’s criticisms, judging that the cardinal represented a French line of thinking aimed at unseating the Italian majority within the

32 APLJ, *Custodia di T.S.*, Gori to Faccio, copy, Jerusalem, February 16, 1954, translation from Italian.

33 Ibid.

34 APLJ, *ibid.*, Faccio to Gori, Jerusalem, February 17, 1954, translation from Italian.

custody in consequence of a long-standing *querelle* that saw the Italians, Spanish and French compete to enforce their respective national aspirations in the region.³⁵ Reinforcing this interpretation, the French press expressed its deep reservations about the Nazareth project; Maurice Lelong, in an article published in the July–August 1954 issue of the journal *L'art sacré*, compared Barluzzi's "monstrous" plans to a dragon.³⁶ Without mincing his words to the criticisms expressed by the authoritative journal, Faccio responded that the sanctuary of Lourdes and the Roman basilicas were certainly not diminutive constructions, but nonetheless they were deemed suitable for their contexts. In any case, given how highly inflamed the exchange of opinions on the Nazareth project was at the level of public debate, the custody and the patriarchate were aware that the responses that would be sent to Rome would have to be much more delicately argued.

Tensions mounted again after a decision by Tisserant in February 1954: while the apostolic delegate, Oddi, was expressing his doubts on the project,³⁷ the Oriental Congregation prohibited the foundation of new missions, churches, schools, hospitals and orphanages without authorization from Rome. The ban also affected the sanctuaries, with an implicit but very clear reference to the construction of the Nazareth church.³⁸ Faccio now attempted to reaffirm that his project was in line with the intentions of the Holy See for the Marian Year, maintaining that Pius XII's declaration of the year had "restored new faith" in the construction of the church.³⁹ Faced with resistance from the Oriental Congregation, the custody tried to secure the approval of the Secretariat of State. In March 1954, Faccio met with the pro-secretary of state, Montini, on the question of the church. Explaining the reasons in favor of its construction,

35 See Masha Halevi, "Le'uman Italki ve-Oman Dati: Antonio Barluzzi u-fe'ilutu le-kidum ha-interesim ha-Italkiyim be-Erets ha-Kodesh" [An Italian nationalist and religious artist: Antonio Barluzzi, the agent of Italian interests in the Holy Land], *Cathedra*, no. 144 (2012).

36 *Art sacré* was the expression of a tendency that proposed to reconcile Catholicism and modernity through art. See Françoise Caussé, *La revue "L'Art Sacré": Le débat en France sur l'art et la religion (1945–1954)* (Paris: Cerf, 2010), and Daniele Menozzi, *La Chiesa e le immagini: I testi fondamentali sulle arti figurative dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, 2nd ed. (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1995), 275–86.

37 "What will the Arabs say? That we want to favor Israel with the contribution of several million dollars? That the aim is to increase the influx of pilgrims to Galilee?" ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Custodia Terra Santa*, 122/75, doc. 2, Oddi to Tisserant, Jerusalem, February 17, 1954, translation from Italian.

38 AAV, *ADAGP*, 19, 77, 4, fol. 20, Tisserant (and Coussa's signature) to Oddi, Rome, February 20, 1954.

39 ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Custodia Terra Santa*, 122/75, doc. 4, Faccio to Tisserant, Jerusalem, March 4, 1954, translation from Italian.

the custos reiterated the danger of communism.⁴⁰ Faccio further argued that Jordan would not protest at such a project taking place in Israel, because the church would provide Arabs with work. For the custos, overall, denying the Franciscans the opportunity to build new sanctuaries would be to administer “the last rites” to the custody.⁴¹

However, despite Faccio’s efforts, the Secretariat of State agreed with Tisserant on the unwisdom of such a project.⁴² While the discord between the ecclesiastical institutions in Jerusalem and some representatives of the Vatican curia continued, a political event would stir up the situation in Nazareth.

3.3 *Political Developments*

On April 12, 1954, municipal elections took place in Galilee city, with Maki receiving most of the votes. In reality, this represented a half-victory for the party as its number of votes had fallen compared to the elections of 1949 and 1951 and, above all, because a pro-Mapai coalition took control of the municipality. However, the church in Israel interpreted the 1954 results as a further defeat in its anticommunist struggle: in advance of these elections, Vergani and Hakim had joined forces to create a list of candidates of various Christian denominations. Therefore, for these leaders, the electoral result was seen as proof of communist expansion throughout the Middle East, including Israel.

In this political situation, the importance of building the Nazareth church gained even more importance and was the subject of more propaganda within the church. The custody printed leaflets proclaiming “Combat communism in Nazareth! The construction of the Basilica of the Annunciation will give work to the poor and needy.” Both the patriarch and Paschal Kinsel, custodial commissioner of the United States, became increasingly convinced that providing

40 ACGOFM, *Segreteria Generale, Custodia di Terra Santa*, 764, Faccio to Montini, copy, Rome, March 17, 1954.

41 ACGOFM, *ibid.*, Faccio to Tisserant, no. 1954, copy, Jerusalem, April 3, 1954, translation from Italian.

42 According to Montini, the construction raised “delicate questions both as regards the collection of the huge funds needed, in these difficult moments, and for the local spiritual and political reflexes that demand great circumspection and prudence.” ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Custodia Terra Santa*, 122/75, doc. 6, Montini to Faccio, copy, Vatican, April 8, 1954, translation from Italian. Faccio wrote to the former apostolic delegate Testa that the pro-secretary of state, Domenico Tardini, supported the construction. “If your Excellency would help me to pacify the Vatican, I would be much obliged. Msgr. Tardini ... referring to the Nazareth enterprise, said: ‘hold on and push forward!’” BAM, AGT, 7, C, *Santo Sepolcro e santuari palestinesi*, 016, Faccio to Testa, Jerusalem, September 9, 1955, translation from Italian.

work for the population through construction of the church was crucial to check the spread of communism in Nazareth. Vergani estimated that a third of the city's workers was unemployed, which meant at least twenty-one thousand people were without an income. The church would partially resolve this situation and so fulfil a humanitarian and not just a religious goal.⁴³ Anticommunism was thus ever less connected to an invocation of the Virgin and ever more to an economic undertaking with social implications.

An additional factor emerges from these events. During these months, as it turned out, the position of the Israeli government toward the Catholic Church of Nazareth underwent a transformation. In the preceding years, as has been seen, there was overt opposition between the local church and the State of Israel, especially around the questions of the return of refugees, the seizure of goods of expelled or fugitive Christians, and the conditions of the Palestinian population under the restrictive measures of military rule. The building of the church, in contrast, led to a convergence in the interests of the two sides, which brought about an, albeit cautious, rapprochement. This development was demonstrated by the fact that the Israeli authorities eventually granted permission for the building of the church, although it was in a region under emergency law. These three motivations may have been behind this mediation attempt with the church on the question of Nazareth: first, during an internal political crisis – Ben-Gurion had resigned as prime minister in December 1953 – the majority Mapai party, now at the helm of the Israeli government, harbored deep fears that Maki could gain ground in Israel. Further, the Israeli government's need to openly expose the accusation that freedom of worship existed only on paper, a critique that was recurrent in the media and in the declarations of Catholic representatives all over the world since 1948. Finally, these events occurred in a context of harsh conflict that pitted the Catholic hierarchy and congregations in Israel against some measures under discussion in the Knesset: in this political climate, the Israeli government had some interest in granting permission to build a church in Nazareth as a symbol of their willingness to extend a hand to the Catholics, sending a signal of its openness directly to the Holy See, and so attempt to break the silence between the Israeli government and the Roman curia that followed the private audience between Pius XII and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharet in March 1952.⁴⁴

43 APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, report by Vergani titled “Le elezioni municipali di Nazareth: 12 aprile 1954” [Nazareth], April 20, 1954.

44 Bialer, *Cross on the Star of David*, 52.

The convergence of interests between the local church and Israel was also evident in the participation of Israeli government representatives in the concluding celebrations of the Marian Year of Jerusalem's Latin diocese, during which the foundation stone for the Nazareth church was laid.

3.4 *The Beginning of Work on the Basilica*

In November 1954, Custos Faccio published a new circular announcing the commencement of building work in Nazareth. Despite not having received authorization from Rome, once again the custos claimed that his actions were legitimate because of their connection to the Marian Year.⁴⁵ Thus, in the region, the most media-covered moment of the Marian Year took place on December 8, 1954, in the course of a ceremony marking the conclusion of the year and the laying of the foundation stone of the new basilica (fig. 7.3). In the name of the government, Paolo Colbi, head of the Christian affairs department of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, reasserted the guarantees promised by the State of Israel to Christians and hinted at a softening of the state of emergency so as to permit the construction of the church.⁴⁶ The press reported that during the ceremony, Patriarch Gori placed a special message from Pius XII and some Israeli coins in the foundations.

After this celebration, which indicated that the heads of the Latin Church and the State of Israel had come to an agreement regarding the building of the Nazareth church, the Jerusalem Church and the Holy See engaged in a very tense game of diplomacy. The absence from the ceremony of Apostolic Delegate Oddi revealed the remaining tensions over the project. The custody, supported by the patriarchate, had commented building work on the new church without the actual support of the Oriental Congregation or the authorization of the Vatican secretary of state. The failure to inform and to invite Oddi triggered a very harsh reaction from the apostolic delegate and Tisserant.⁴⁷ Faccio responded to the criticisms by declaring that this decision had been made to avoid the church's construction being considered an appeasement between the Vatican and Israel.⁴⁸ In the fall of 1955, the Secretariat of State

45 Giacinto Faccio, *Lettera circolare sulla regalità di Maria* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, November 27, 1954).

46 ISA, G/5/5812, "Allocution de M. le Dr. Colbi à l'occasion de la pose de la première pierre de la nouvelle Basilique de l'Annonciation à Nazareth."

47 See ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Custodia Terra Santa*, 122/75, doc. 19, Oddi to Tisserant, Jerusalem, January 4, 1955, and ACGOFM, *Segreteria Generale, Custodia di Terra Santa*, 765, Tisserant and Coussa to Sepinski, Rome, January 15, 1955.

48 ASCTS, ACC, *S. Congregazione pro Ecclesia Orientali*, Faccio to Tisserant, copy, Jerusalem, February 9, 1955.



FIGURE 7.3
Laying of the foundation
stone of the Basilica of the
Annunciation, Nazareth,
1954
APLJ/AEBAF

ordered the *custos* to suspend the works.⁴⁹ The Secretariat of State then proceeded to nominate a new architect to design plans to replace those prepared by *Barluzzi*. In 1958, *Giovanni Muzio* was entrusted with responsibility for the Nazareth church project. The new architect's plans would be accepted a year later, with the construction concluding in 1968. The church was consecrated in the following year.

The intensity of the politicization of references to the Virgin after 1956 would not be as significant as in the first half of the 1950s, a phase in which local factors (the focus of the Christians on Nazareth, the specter of communism, the refugee question) combined with international ones (the Holy See's declaration, first, of the Holy Year and, then, of the Marian Year: tensions connected to the conflict and the uncertainty regarding the future of the Middle East within this context) were superimposed on a devotional and pietist frame of reference that was sensitive to the political implications of relaunching certain cults.

In Galilee, in the context of the reinstatement of the Marian devotion by the Holy See, and especially in the two key moments of the Holy Year and the

49 See ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Custodia Terra Santa*, 122/75, doc. 58, Dell'Acqua to Coussa, Vatican, October 14, 1955.

Marian Year, the local church's reception of the initiatives proposed by the Vatican actually resulted in profound tensions between the Jerusalem Latin Church and the Holy See. At issue was the self-image that the Catholic world intended to present in the region. Thus, there was an opposition between the presentation of a potent and imposing community – symbolized by the architecture of the church as an anticommunist bastion placed among Jews and Muslims – which was the wish of the custody and the patriarchate, and the line taken by Tisserant, who preferred that the local church focus on the pastoral care of the faithful, after the deep changes caused by the 1948 war. The fact that these issues brought Jerusalem and the Vatican into conflict is demonstrated by the measure in which the relations between two poles – a center that disseminated messages and impulses through cults and liturgy among other means, and Jerusalem and European actors that relaunched and repurposed these messages in the light of their local realities – could be translated into opposition. It was as if the cults, once transmitted to an increasingly global Catholic arena, escaped the control of the actors who had initially promoted them, opening up a spectrum of receptions and reinterpretations that went beyond the oversight of the central authority. When Rome tried to restore its own ambitions and the original forms of its messages, the result was a dialectic that was not always easily reconciled between the various poles.

1956: a Hinge Year

1 Changes and Advances

After 1948, the year 1956 was the second major watershed in the long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict. Unlike the first, and unlike the third – June 1967 – it did not result in significant and permanent changes to Israel's contested borders with its neighboring Arab countries. However, the events of this year consolidated in such a way as to prepare the ground for the reversals of the 1960s: the Suez crisis revealed the fragility of the agreements concluded between Israel and Egypt in 1949, and the short-lived capture of Gaza by the Israeli army returned attention to the dramatic situation of the Palestinian refugees. The battle over the Suez Canal marked one of the highest moments of tension in the Middle East during the Cold War. At the same time, however, it sparked new developments within the Arab world, particularly in Syria and Iraq.¹

From the point of view of the Latin diocese, too, 1956 was a year of events and incipient change that would manifest themselves fully in the following years and would result in important new directions. Fresh rumors about the possible abolition of the Latin Patriarchate in favor of a single Eastern Catholic diocese led to further disagreements with the Melkite contingent. At the same time, the beginning of a new phase of conflict with the Muslim population in Jordan was marked by a series of incidents in the spring of 1956. The influence of Nasser's nationalism accentuated the demand for greater engagement in the management of the Latin diocese on the part of the Arab clergy, to the point of calls for a Palestinian patriarch, which would only be realized three decades later, with the nomination of Michel Sabbah, originally from Nazareth, in 1987.

Meanwhile, in Israel the press continued to allege that Catholics were proselytizing Jews. However, within the Latin Patriarchate, the mediation efforts between the members of the Association of Saint James (ASJ) and some Israeli politicians were accompanied by the slow change and improvement in relations between Israel and the country's Latin vicariate for Galilee, especially

1 On the historiography on the Cold War in the Middle East, see Nathan J. Citino, "The Middle East and the Cold War," *Cold War History* 19, no. 3 (2019); the seminal volumes Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon, 2009); Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); and Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955–1967* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994).

through Vergani's actions. These developments would be accompanied by a gradual reconsideration of Israel on the part of the Holy See in the final years of Pius XII's papacy, which were also a consequence of the transformations launched by John XXIII (1958–63) with respect to relations with the Jewish world. For the Latin Church, 1956 heralded phenomena that the Second Vatican Council, the 1967 war and subsequent events would reveal in full.

1.1 *Insistent Rumors of Abolishing the Latin Patriarchate*

In the mid-1950s, the focus moved to a discussion of some questions concerning the patriarchate's very existence. There were two main points at issue: first, rumors of a unification of the Latin Patriarchate and the Melkite Eparchy resurfaced. Second, the internal conflict within the Latin clergy between the European element and the indigenous component was growing, with the Arabs demanding greater recognition and power.

These two problems were already at the center of protracted and exhausting negotiations. Regarding the first point, in particular, during the patriarchal vacancy of 1947–49, the Vatican curia had sought to achieve a real union between Latins and Melkites. The nomination of Gori as head of the Latin diocese showed that ultimately the Holy See preferred to maintain the patriarchal order according to its constitution of 1847. At the same time, however, the attempts to unify the school system in Transjordan and the project for the shared management of the parishes were moves toward the progressive convergence of Latin and Melkite institutions. The failure of both these experiments clearly attests to the obstacles to the union of the two Catholic components; however, it did not put an end to the requests from Rome to continue down that path.

During the summer of 1956, Pius XII and Gori probably talked in Rome about a possible abolition of the Latin Patriarchate. On June 18, the patriarch met Angelo Dell'Acqua, substitute for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State; three days later, Gori, responding to a request advanced during the audience, sent the prelate a memorandum "concerning the motives that ... require the presence of the Latin rite in Palestine and the safeguarding of the prestige of the Custody".² In the document, Gori described the state of the Latin Patriarchate: it numbered about fifty thousand faithful, of whom eight thousand were refugees in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, and as many had emigrated to the United States and Latin America, or elsewhere.

² APLJ, LB, *Secrétairerie d'État, 1949–1987*, Gori to Dell'Acqua, copy, Rome, June 21, 1956, translation from Italian.

The patriarch then denounced the Melkites' overt hostility toward the patriarchate and the custody and endorsed some hypotheses suggesting that the Eastern Catholic press was averse to the Latin component. After describing some episodes of conflict between Latins and Melkites over the division of PMP aid, Gori responded to the accusation that the Latin diocese was in the hands of European clergy by highlighting that the majority of its clergy was composed of Arab priests, who were first among those not against unification with the Melkite clergy. Gori concluded the document by requesting that the Latin Patriarchate be "reassured with an authoritative voice" concerning the wish to keep the Latin diocese in existence.³ In a message to the diocesan clergy summarizing the Rome meeting, the patriarch guaranteed that the patriarchate would not be unified with the Melkite Eparchy, stating that the pope was aware of the Latin diocese's concerns.⁴

Meanwhile, the Melkites also registered their complaints in Rome. In July 1956, the Melkite bishop Georges Hakim sent a long memorandum in which he laid out how the Latin Patriarchate had violated the directives of the Holy See, acting contrary to the provisions of Leo XIII's *Orientalium dignitas*, according to which the Latins were present to assist the Eastern Catholics ("auxilium orientalium"). Furthermore, the patriarchate's clergy had concentrated all power in their own hands and relied more on Western embassies than on Arab governments.⁵

Beyond the quarrel between Latins and Eastern Catholics, there were also disagreements between the Arab and foreign clergy within the Latin patriarchal diocese, at a time when anti-Western sentiment was on the rise in the Arab countries. Not only was the patriarchate at issue – with the calls by some priests for an Arab patriarch – but so too was the custody (which reviewed its statutes in 1955),⁶ as was shown by the decision in summer 1956 to nominate an Armenian Arabic-speaking friar, Basilio Talatinian, to the Discretorium, the governing organ of the custody.⁷ In the bigger picture,

3 APLJ, *ibid.*, memorandum attached to a letter from Gori to Dell'Acqua, translation from Italian.

4 Alberto Gori, "Visite au Saint Père," *Jérusalem: Le Moniteur diocésain* 22, nos. 9–10 (September–October 1956).

5 CADC, *Levant, Israël (1953–1959)*, 49, *Relations avec les églises chrétiennes (18 décembre 1953–28 décembre 1959)*, Hakim to Tisserant, copy, Haifa, July 30, 1956.

6 See *Acta Custodiæ Terræ Sanctæ* 1, no. 1 (January–March 1956): 5–7.

7 See *Acta Custodiæ Terræ Sanctæ* 1, no. 3 (July–September 1956): 101–2. Talatinian (1910–2015), an Armenian Catholic, was born in Cilicia. His family escaped the genocide, moving to Syria and then to Palestine. He joined the Franciscan Custody and became a friar in 1931. He taught canon law and was a member of the Discretorium from 1956 to 1959. He was appointed an expert (*peritus*) at the Second Vatican Council.

the relations between the European and Arab components within the various Christian denominations represented a very touchy issue, not just for the Latins and Melkites, but also, if not even more so, for the Greek Orthodox, which had experienced internal problems with these issues for some time. The death of Greek Orthodox Patriarch Timotheos, on December 31, 1955, and the subsequent delay in nominating a successor, increased the Arab calls for a greater degree of local engagement at the expense of the traditional dominance of the Greek element. Amid this environment, the Russian Orthodox Church appeared more attractive.

In an international political scenario that featured the beginnings of a decolonization process, the Arab drive for a progressive uncoupling from foreign ties got attention, taking hold not only in Orthodox but also in Latin contexts. Fr. Ibrahim 'Ayyad, despite the patriarchal order to abstain from political activities after his suspected involvement in the assassination of King 'Abdullah – organized a meeting on these issues with about fifty priests in April 1956. They formulated two requests to the patriarchate: the nomination of an Arab patriarch and recognition of the participation of notable Arab Latins in the financial management of the patriarchal diocese.⁸ The apostolic delegate strongly rebuked 'Ayyad, demanding the suspension of any kind of meeting aimed at making political demands on the patriarchal hierarchy.

The events at Suez showed the international importance of the positioning of the Arab world within the difficult equilibrium between East and West. From the local religious perspective too, it conferred importance on the requests of the Arab clergy within the Latin Patriarchate and, in parallel, on the role of the Oriental Catholics with respect to the Latins. Both the claims from the Arabs and the tensions between Latins and Easterns would continue far beyond 1956, manifesting themselves in the preparation work for the Second Vatican Council.⁹ In any case, the difficulties the patriarchate underwent in this phase were not only connected to internal dynamics. The relations of the Jerusalem diocese with the Israeli government and the Jordanian monarchy were also marked by a series of contentious episodes during 1956.

8 CADC, *Levant, Palestine (1953–1959)*, 650, *Questions religieuses*, Laforge to Pinay, Jerusalem, April 25, 1956.

9 See Giuseppe Ruggieri, "Beyond an Ecclesiology of Polemics: The Debate on the Church," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, *Formation of the Council's Identity, October 1962–September 1963*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).

1.2 *New Charges of Proselytism*

Before taking the parliamentary route toward legislation on the matter of conversion, the Latin Church decided to hold talks to defend itself from its critics and offer its own version of the events discussed in the Israeli press. Vergani met with the ASJ priests, who were engaged in the apostolate in the Jewish world, to discuss these issues. The form chosen to defend the Latin Church's actions in Israel was that of a press conference. In the course of various meetings of the association, there was a notable absence of contacts and relationships with the press and with Israeli public opinion in general on the part of the Jerusalem Church. It was now decided that a representative of the local hierarchy should meet with the association of Israeli journalists to discuss relations between the church and state.¹⁰

The meeting with the media took place on March 10, 1956. Vergani presented a document drafted by the three principal representatives of the ASJ: Joseph Stiassny, Jean-Roger Héné and Bruno Hussar. This was a long, dense text, carefully prepared in the preceding weeks and revised several times.¹¹ Vergani and the clergy who had joined him in discussion attributed particular importance to the occasion: it was the first press conference held in Israel by a Latin dignitary, the representative of an entity – the Catholic Church – whose central government in the Vatican had not recognized the new state. Thus, this meeting was a delicate occasion, both on account of the topics under discussion and, above all, because of the conversions from Judaism to Christianity in Israel.

At the beginning of the press conference, Vergani immediately clarified that the intention was not to offer a historical treatment of the relations between Jews and Christians, but rather to face questions connected to the contemporary situation in Israel. From a political perspective, the document suggested that the relations between the government and the church hierarchy were excellent, in what was a generous description of a far more complex reality. He then added that the conditions of Christians within Israel were not altogether easy: there had been episodes of intolerance, especially at the expense of priests, who had even been pelted with stones in some cities. The key point of his argument was that the clergy was not in Israel to “promote Christianity among the Jews” but to care for the resident Catholic population and to guard the Holy Places. It was further specified that “there is no priest or nun whose sole purpose is to proselytize”.

10 See APNDS, *P. Stiassny*, minutes of the meeting of February 10, 1956, Jerusalem.

11 APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, unsigned typescript document, Jerusalem, March 10, 1956.

The document was particularly harsh in its treatment of the Israeli press, which was accused of painting the so-called “mission” as a “mysterious organization, with its seat in the Vatican and branches called Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, and so on”, and so making it into “a mythical entity, something like the ‘international Judaism’ in the spirit of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*”. This passage was particularly strong, especially when one considers that – even if one restricts one’s perspective to the last century – the Catholic press and journalists, an ecclesiastical assemblage if ever there was one, were among the principal wielders and disseminators of the rhetoric of a “Jewish danger” and a “Jewish conspiracy” that aimed at subverting Europe and the entire world. The stereotype was overturned here without, however, any admission that the church had been among its primary exploiters for a long time.

The authors of the document offered two examples to reinforce the thesis that the Catholics in Israel were not engaged in proselytization: that of Jews who approached the church for material aid and that of Jewish children in Catholic schools. In both cases, Vergani rejected the accusation that Catholics had used social action as an instrument for conversion. In the case of the children, in particular, he stressed that the thousand or so Jewish pupils in Catholic schools did not participate in religious activities and did not follow the catechism taught to their classmates.

The response to Vergani’s speech was probably better among the Israelis present than within the church itself. From Amman, the vicar of Transjordan, Sim’an, described his surprise and disappointment on hearing reports of the meeting on Israeli radio that sounded like “praise and incense” for Israel.¹² Apostolic Delegate Oddi also lamented Vergani’s initiative, judging it imprudent in having broken the silence that the Jerusalem Church – and even more so the Holy See – had chosen to maintain.¹³ Despite the criticisms, the patriarchal vicar did not intend to remain silent. ASJ members had also been inquiring into how to publicize their events. With the singular goal of enabling a more comprehensive communication of the association’s activities, Héné was charged with establishing contacts with the Israeli press.¹⁴

In August 1956, Israeli media widely reported on the conversion to Catholicism of seventeen Jewish families in the Beersheba area; in return for their decision to change religion, the church guaranteed them the opportunity

12 APLJ, LB-AG, *Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946–1953*, Sim’an to Beltritti, Amman, March 12, 1956.

13 See CADC, *Levant, Israël (1953–1959)*, 35, *Représentation du Saint-Siège en Israël 6 septembre 1955–19 juillet 1957*, Laforge to Pineau, Jerusalem, March 13, 1956.

14 AOSJ, 1945–1959, minutes of the meeting of December 11, 1955, Jerusalem, December 11, 1955.

to leave Israel and move to Brazil. The Israeli Jewish press ran articles claiming that a Catholic priest working in the area, probably referring to Héné himself, was seeking conversions in the Negev region. Vergani categorically denied these rumors and issued a statement which retorted that the Catholic Church not only did not offer assistance to converts if they intended to leave the country but in fact it sought to help them remain in Israel.¹⁵

Faced with reports of this nature, the discretion and prudence that had characterized the beginnings of the ASJ now made way for a cautious openness to the public. The association's official recognition by the patriarchate paved the way for the gradual identification of its members. Members of the group also established contacts with Israeli politicians, a clear sign of a will for legitimation within Israel.

1.3 *The Association of Saint James: Loyalty to Zionism and the "Drama" of the Division with the Arab Faithful*

At the press conference, Vergani expressed his hope that Jewish Catholic associations would come into being in Israel on the model of the French *Amitiés judéo-chrétiennes*. But there was no explicit acknowledgement of the ASJ's existence. This does not mean that the group was unknown to influential figures in Israeli politics. The Israeli government was aware of the meetings of a group of priests who ministered with converts from Judaism to Catholicism.

In January 1955, Paolo Colbi, head of the Christian affairs department of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, received a list of participants of the association's meetings and the statutes that the members had adopted. The meeting between Tournay and Israeli President Yitshak Ben-Zvi in 1956 was followed two years later by a one between Hussar and Ben-Gurion; the former left this discussion profoundly fascinated by the figure and personality of the most important of the State of Israel's founders.¹⁶ The visit was one of the indicators of the progressive convergence between the French Dominican and the Israeli government. Hussar's adherence to Zionism along with his willingness to release ASJ members from their social isolation drove him to express evermore explicit support for the Israeli government, identifying loyalty to Israel with support for its authorities. In that period, the association's members developed an outlook that included a love of biblical Israel, an identification with the State of Israel and an adherence to Zionism. This process had two significant effects: it allowed some members of the association to advance

15 See AOSJ, *ibid.*, press communiqué from Vergani, Jerusalem, August 30, 1956.

16 See AAAJ, R 80, *Jean-Roger Héné, Œuvre St Jacques* 2, minutes of the monthly meeting of the central committee, Jerusalem, June 20, 1958.

into the Israeli political environment (Hussar subsequently participated in the Israeli delegation to the UN in 1967) and, at the same time, distanced the association from the positions of the rest of the Latin Church, which was generally pro-Arab and accused the ASJ of supporting Israeli policies that restricted the liberties and rights of the Arab population. The consequences of these developments would become clearer in the 1960s, with the Second Vatican Council and the June 1967 war. In reality, the relations between the ASJ and the Israeli government were not devoid of conflict. In 1955, the problems surrounding the visa renewal of a Jewish convert, Elias Friedman, created tensions between representatives of the association and some politicians. On the other hand, from 1956 a portion of the association's members shifted to expressing more vocal support of Israeli policies.

At the same time, the coexistence of Arab faithful and Jewish converts to Catholicism became a central concern of Hussar and other members of the association. In Jaffa, the separation of the two groups was particularly apparent due to the existence of the parish of St. Peter, managed by the Franciscans and attended by Latin Arabs, while the Catholics of Jewish origin had their point of contact with the ASJ. Those in charge of the latter community considered the division within the church in Israel as a wound to be healed, a real and true "*drama*".¹⁷ At the same time, they believed that, at least for the time being, the need for a separate community was undeniable in view of the current conflict. For this reason, Hussar, addressing Gori in 1956, distinguished the society's "immediate" from its "ultimate goal". The first goal had to be the religious instruction and training of Christians of Jewish origin, while the second aimed "one day" to unite all the Catholics within the diocese into a single church, "loving and praying with one heart and one voice". For Hussar, it was clear that "the circumstances make this [unity] impossible at the present time". It would take "a long, patient and intelligent period of training of the faithful by all the priests who have charge of their souls" for that day to arrive.¹⁸ Despite the political situation, the Dominican hoped to organize meetings between the Arab and Jewish parts of the Latin Church in Israel. To this end, in the spring of 1956, Hussar organized moments of prayer for peace.

The church in Israel, but also Latin Catholics in Jordan, became increasingly apprehensive amid the tensions that culminated in the war over the Suez Canal. Since the beginning of the 1950s, the Latins in the Hashemite Kingdom

17 AOSJ, 1945-1959, minutes of the meeting of July 21, 1955, 'Ayn Karim, translation from French, emphasis underlined in original.

18 APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo, 1954-1959*, Hussar to Gori, Nazareth, August 22, 1956, translation from French.

had found themselves at the center of political interest, primarily because a Catholic priest was suspected of involvement in the conspiracy to kill King ‘Abdullah but also because of the participation of Christians in nationalist and communist movements and the growth of tensions with the Muslim population. The 1956 crisis further accentuated these issues, diverse and partially contradictory as they were.

2 Nationalism and Communism in Jordan

2.1 *“We Live and Breathe Islamic Air”: the Latin Catholic Perception of Muslims*

For the Middle East, the 1950s was a decade of nationalism, revolutionary impulses and third-worldism. The region experienced a new phase of development. The “modernization theories” propagated by the Western bloc recommended, as a remedy for the fragility of these states now designated as the “third world”, a mode of development featuring economic growth even before the strengthening of democratic institutions and social equality. In contrast, the third-world reflections elaborated by the leaders who attended the Bandung Conference in 1955 opened the way in the early 1960s for the formation of the “third bloc” of so-called “nonaligned countries”, not part of the Western or Soviet world.

In the Middle East, these transformations mostly took on a revolutionary cast. The example of Egypt, where in 1952 the monarchy was overthrown in a coup d’état that was followed by Nasser’s ascent to power, had profound repercussions for the entire region. In Jordan, the king’s murder in 1951 had raised fears of the growth of an antimonarchist movement. The government searched for political means to accelerate economic development, pursuing a path of progressive national independence.

In May 1953, the coronation ceremony of King Hussein was accompanied by clashes between the Muslim and Christian populations.¹⁹ In an atmosphere of growing anti-Christian sentiment within the kingdom, the heads of the various Catholic denominations attempted to reassert their ties with the Jordanian monarchy.²⁰ The priests forwarded their concerns to the patriarch: Mario Furla, the Italian curate of the new parish of ‘Aydun, inaugurated in 1951, wrote to Gori that “here we live and breathe Islamic air; and they tell me that there are

19 See APLJ, *LB-AG, Vicariat Transjordanie, 1946–1953*, Sim’an to Gori, Amman, May 6, 1953.

20 APLJ, *ibid.*, telegram sent by Christian religious leaders in Amman to Hussein, copy of the Italian translation, Amman, May 3, 1953.

even those among the Christians who have circumcised their children!”²¹ In any case, opinions on the actual state of relations between the two communities diverged within the clergy. The same Furla, for example, reassessed the true extent of anti-Christian sentiment in the Muslim population, noting that there had been an improvement in relations compared to previous decades. Consular representatives also differed in their interpretations: in the course of 1952, the Italian minister in Jordan, Pierluigi La Terza, faced with the first actions of the Talal regime and the nationalist direction of the Abu al-Huda government, insisted that “it is not appropriate either to dramatize or to cry out about persecution of the Christians”, because “they enjoy the fullest freedom of religion in Jordan”.²² While he considered Prime Minister Abu al-Huda a “fanatic”, La Terza believed that the situation was worthy of attention, but not alarm. He shared these convictions with the Latin vicar in Amman, Sim’an, who was already deeply concerned.

If the Abu al-Huda government combined anti-British, democratic and secular-nationalist tendencies – rather contradictory positions – the influence exerted by the Muslim Brotherhood in neighboring Egypt also increased in Hashemite-controlled Palestine. Despite their differences on the religious front, they shared some features with the nationalist movement, especially in terms of their popular basis and opposition to Western influences and interference.²³

At the same time, the various currents of secular nationalism that had dominated the political landscape of the Middle East since the end of the First World War now had share space with the growing activism of political Islamic

21 APLJ, *Paroisses, Irbid/Eidun*, Furla to Gori, ‘Aydun, March 1, 1952, translation from Italian.

22 ASDMAE, *Ambasciata d'Italia presso la Santa Sede (1946–1954)*, 212, *Jordan*, La Terza to the Italian Foreign Ministry, confidential, Amman, January 3, 1952, translation from Italian.

23 The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 in the Egyptian city of Ismailia by Hassan al-Banna. An elementary schoolteacher, he initially pursued a program of modernization in the teaching of Islam in religious schools and thus was able to re-Islamize the entire society, starting with education. As the historiography has shown, the truly new element in the Muslim Brotherhood was its pursuit of the politicization of Islam. Its objective of founding a new Islamic state implied a strong focus on the popular masses; to attract support for the movement, the Muslim Brotherhood was active on the social front, especially in the arenas of health and education. It thus represented the first case of a mass Islamic political movement. If the movement's adherents were originally concentrated in the Suez area, this expanded rapidly to the rest of Egypt and beyond; in 1946, the Muslim Brotherhood also arrived in Palestine and Jordan. See Barry Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Xavier Ternisien, *Les Frères musulmans* (Paris: Fayard, 2005); Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*.

groups, which were in a minority. These transformations manifested themselves in Jordan, too. Tensions between Christians and Muslims came to a head in 1956 with the clashes that took place in Madaba and then spread to other parts of Jordan.²⁴ In the town on the foothills of Mount Nebo, whose population of about 7,000 was majority Muslim but contained a significant Christian minority (1,700 people), a series of incidents between Christians and Muslims took place in April, which necessitated the deployment of the army. These clashes drew a huge response from the Latin Church because they coincided with the arrival of Gori in the city to celebrate the anniversary of the opening of the local mission. During the celebration, the patriarch's sermon was interrupted after some shots were fired. Five people were killed, and about fifty were wounded. According to the Catholic account, a dozen Christian homes were damaged. Other incidents occurred at al-Salt, where stones were thrown at the Melkite church, and Amman, where the Christian cemetery was damaged. Gori now turned to King Hussein, requesting that the government to intervene to reestablish order and condemn the episodes of violence. A six-member government commission was tasked with investigating the incidents at Madaba but it accomplished little.

There were various factors at play behind these clashes: rivalry between Christian tribes, alliances between some Christians and Muslim tribes, lineage claims, political and commercial competition, and ancient anti-Christian sentiments now revived by new elements. The Latin Catholics interpreted the events as a new episode in the longstanding hatred on the part of the area's Muslims that had been evident since the reestablishment of the Latin community in 1880. The Christian vocabulary of "persecution" by Muslims – used amply by the Latin Church during the period – thus joined past with present in a single chain of violence. The epic and heroic tone with which the Catholic press described the events further accentuated this characterization. On June 1, 1956, an article in the Assumptionist daily *La Croix* attributed responsibility for the violence between Christians and Muslims in Jordan to the Islamization the country, especially because of the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁵

24 An anonymous undated typescript report – traceable to Médebielle and datable to 1956 – on the events in Madaba is contained in APLJ, *Paroisses, Madaba, 1928–1962*. On these events, see Chatelard, *Briser la mosaïque*, 253–56. On the history of the Latin parish of Madaba, see Maggiolini, *Arabi Cristiani*, 188–218.

25 A copy of an article titled "Violents incidents antichrétiens en Jordanie" is available in APLJ, *Madaba, 1928–1962*.

2.2 *Radicalization and Repression*

The Latin Church's perception of the spread of Soviet materialism in Jordan remained as strong as ever. It considered neither the Hashemite monarchy nor, even less, the new Egypt of Nasser as possible allies in the plan to counter the spread of the atheist ideology.

The 1950s were particularly important for the Jordanian Communist Party (JCP, al-Hizb al-Shuyu'i). While a communist movement had existed for several decades, the events of 1948 constituted a decisive moment in the political evolution of the party, which was established illegally in the same year.²⁶ The annexation of the West Bank by the Hashemite Kingdom following the first Arab-Israeli war marked a phase of development for the communist movement, also among the Palestinian refugees. The communist movement was antiimperialist, hostile to the Hashemite monarchy, which it judged pro-British and representative of foreign interests in Jordan, and, naturally, anti-Zionist. The dramatic situation of the Palestinian refugees and their strong sense of betrayal by the Jordanian monarchy brought them closer to the leaders of the nascent JCP. This was thus the result of the fusion in 1951 of Jordanian supporters of the Marxist thesis and the Arab branch of the Palestine Communist Party, also called the Palestinian League of National Liberation. In the 1940s and 1950s, the major centers of communist activity were Amman, al-Salt, Madaba, al-Karak and – in the West Bank – Nablus, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah. These last three cities also represented the area of the greatest concentration of the Christian population in the West Bank. Some JCP leaders, like Ya'qub Zayadin and 'Isa Madanat, were Christians.

The Hashemite monarchy reacted by repressing the JCP: to his death, King 'Abdullah strenuously opposed it, and before his assassination, he promoted a law that would prosecute promoters and adherents of Marxist ideas. Some party leaders were arrested and imprisoned for many years. However, this did not mark the end of the movement; it grew during the 1950s, organizing numerous demonstrations, strikes and actions, which attracted new members but also increased the opposition of the Jordanian government. In 1953, the government approved new measures against the most radical left-wing propaganda within the country. As the party was still illegal, its members ran under the National Front (al-Jabha al-Wataniyya) banner, which had obtained

26 On the Jordanian Communist Party and, in a broader sense, on political parties within the Hashemite Kingdom, see Uriel Dann, *King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism: Jordan, 1955–1967* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), and Amnon Cohen, *Political Parties in the West Bank under the Jordanian Regime, 1949–1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 27–93.

government authorization. Two years later, in the October 1956 elections, the party won three seats in parliament.

In this phase of consolidation for the National Front, the charge of communism became an instrument with which to eliminate political opponents. However, this rhetoric also had a certain hold within Catholic contexts. In the Vatican, the first half of the 1950s saw a change in thinking about a Muslim and Christian anticommunist joint front; initially considered a desirable option, although unattainable, it later came to be seen as a project that was harmful to the Catholic cause. The Holy See was ever more fearful that Arab nationalism, and the growing anti-Western sentiments among the Arabs, could only tend to favor further communist penetration of the Middle East.

In the Jordanian-controlled sector of Jerusalem, the Latin Church reverted to other strategies in its battle against the spread of communism. From his vantage point in Israel, Vergani declared himself more concerned by the growing spread of Marxist ideology in Jordan than in Israel. Once more, for the vicar, the solution was instruction in Catholic social doctrine and aid for the Palestinian refugees. This was a conviction shared by the local Latin hierarchy, but also by the most active foreign Catholic representatives in the region, especially the US one, and Spellman and McMahon above all.

In 1956, these – still fairly generic – fears on the part of the Catholics experienced a new growth: the Suez crisis represented a moment when the international tensions between the Western world and the communist bloc were played out in the Middle East, in an acute and dramatic way.

3 The Suez Crisis

3.1 *Harbingers of the Cold War*

The war that lasted a short period in the autumn of 1956 was the result of events dating back at least three years. These events had to do with Arab-Israeli relations and the Cold War system: on the one hand was the regional conflict between Israel and the Arab countries that had remained unresolved after the armistice accords of 1949; on the other was the opposition on a global scale between two blocs – Western and Soviet – and the question of the positioning of the Middle Eastern countries within them.²⁷

²⁷ See Stephen Blackwell, *British Military Intervention and the Struggle for Jordan: King Hussein, Nasser and the Middle East Crisis, 1955–1958* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Simon C. Smith, ed., *Reassessing Suez 1956: New Perspectives on the Crisis and Its Aftermath* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Motti Golani, *Israel in Search of a War: The Sinai Campaign*,

Nasser's ascent and his emergence as leader of Arab nationalism were of great concern to Israel. In the summer of 1954, London concluded an agreement with Cairo, under which the British government agreed to plan the withdrawal of its military from the Suez Canal, along which there were British bases under the terms of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936.²⁸ The Israeli military representative viewed with concern the content of the new agreement, fearing it would signal greater vulnerability to possible attack from Nasser, while the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Moshe Sharet, on the contrary, thought that the Egyptian president, having received what he asked for in terms of the emancipation of the country from the foreign military presence, should have begun a phase of openness toward Israel. The hawkish argument prevailed, as was seen in a series of attacks carried out by Israeli military intelligence on Egyptian, British and US civilian structures in the summer of 1954.²⁹ The sabotage strategy, which was aimed at creating a state of tension between Egypt and Israel – as is evident in the case of the dispatch of the ship *Bat Galim* to the Suez Canal with the goal of having it seized and creating some sort of diplomatic incident – became ever more intense at the end of 1954. Sharet tried to maintain a mediating strategy, opening talks with Nasser, who showed a certain level of willingness to reach an agreement with Israel. However, these talks produced little apart from further internal divisions in the Israeli government.

The political crisis favored Ben-Gurion's return to politics and the isolation of the positions expressed by Sharet, who resigned as prime minister in November 1955 and, a few months later, as foreign minister. The return of Ben-Gurion marked the definitive turn toward a military offensive against Nasser's Egypt. Britain and the United States tried to induce Israel to seek a diplomatic solution and to abandon the military option. Furthermore, Britain

1955–1956 (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998); and William Roger Louis and Roger Owen, eds., *Suez 1956: The Crisis and Its Consequences* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989). For innovative perspectives on the history of the Suez Canal, see Angelos Dalachanis, *The Greek Exodus from Egypt: Diaspora Politics and Emigration, 1937–1962* (New York: Berghahn, 2017).

28 See Layla Morsy, "The Military Clauses of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, 1936," *IJMES* 16, no. 1 (1984).

29 Operation Susannah, as it was called, had lasting consequences in Israel: the resignation of Pinhas Lavon from his post as defense minister in February 1955, accused of being responsible for the military orders and, some years later, with the reopening of the political and judicial debate on the Lavon affair, the resignation of Ben-Gurion as prime minister in 1961 and 1963. For more information on the Lavon affair, see Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, new ed. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 111–13.

declared itself in favor of Israel's ceding of the Negev to Egypt in such a way that the latter would have a connection with Jordanian territory without having to cross enemy territory.

Resentment of the British position grew, along with the desire to put an end to diplomatic delays and to proceed with the attack, a plan especially supported by the influential military chief of staff Moshe Dayan, who, aside from the goal of defense, had hopes of territorial conquest; above all, the Gaza Strip and that of Sharm El Sheikh, which would provide access to Aqaba.

In early 1956, US President Dwight Eisenhower made a final attempt at mediation by planning a meeting between Ben-Gurion and Nasser. The face-to-face encounter did not happen; for both leaders, meeting the other would have led to too many internal problems. The historical weight of the example of the secret meetings between Golda Meir and King 'Abdullah in the previous decade weighed on both protagonists in the relations between Egypt and Israel. War was already very close.

3.2 *Drums of War and Prayers for Peace*

The growing apprehension within Israeli society about the approach of a new conflict also pervaded the minds of Latin Catholics. In early 1956 in the territory under Jordanian control, Christians experienced months of tension and clashes with the Palestinian population and the Jordanian army. Jerusalem, divided in two since the conflict of 1948, reflected the atmosphere of uncertainty on both sides of Mandelbaum Gate. There were frequent upheavals in the Old City from December 1955 to February 1956. From St. Anne's, the superior of the White Fathers in Jerusalem, Maurice Blondeel, likened the atmosphere caused by the clashes and the expectation of new incidents to being "on a volcano".³⁰ In this context, in mid-January, the Tel Aviv members of the ASJ discussed the idea of organizing a "novena of prayer and penitence to achieve peace between Israel and the Arab states".³¹ Hussar considered the possibility of inviting other religious congregations to participate in the

30 "The general impression is that we are on a volcano, both with respect to home affairs with the Palestinian opposition to Jordan and to the English – and with respect to external affairs: it seems sure that this year the Arab-Jewish question will prevail, either peacefully or militarily." AMGMA, *GEN 375, Maison Mère et Annexes Jérusalem, (5) Correspondence received Jerusalem (1955–1957)*, 375449, Blondeel to Gelot, Jerusalem, February 1, 1956, translation from French.

31 AAAJ, R 80, *Jean-Roger Héné, Œuvre St Jacques 2*, text signed by Hussar and titled "Communication de Jaffa au président et aux membres du Comité central", minutes, Jaffa, January 17, 1956, translation from French. Hussar wrote in the text: "Such a manifestation, beyond its value as a prayer, would respond to the desire of many members of Saint James, and to the intentions of a certain number of Jews who are extremely sensitive to

novena, scheduled for March 2–10, specifying that the request be forwarded to communities known for their sympathy toward Israel but not to those clergy who had displayed anti-Jewish views. The proposal was discussed by the association's central committee; Vergani agreed to propose to the patriarch that the novena be extended to the entire diocese. However, the patriarch refused to grant his permission for the novena to go ahead.³²

The worsening of the situation on the political front in early spring 1956 prompted Hussar to make a new proposal, this time for an octave of prayer from May 3 to 10. He also sent the patriarchate the text he had produced in the name of the Tel Aviv ASJ *foyer*. This was an entirely different document from the invitations to “crusades of prayer” for the Holy Land that had been issued one after the other during the events of 1948. The appeal opened by expressing horror at the idea of a new war, which would be catastrophic for all the countries involved and would endanger the very existence of Israel. The text continued by asking God's forgiveness for not having achieved an agreement between Jews and Arabs and requesting divine intervention to restore peace in the land of Jesus. The most important passage in the text had to do with the rift between Israel and the Arab world; it applied the Pauline metaphor of the “wall of separation” between Jews and gentiles to the contemporary political situation.³³ This served to actualize the call to religion as an instrument of peace and to supplicate the intervention of Christ. Furthermore, not only did Hussar appeal to an Israeli audience – the letter was signed by “a group of Christians of Israel” – and make references to Jews (“our fathers”), he also referred overtly to Muslims (the “sons of Ishmael”). The ASJ members were thus trying to create a bridge not only between Arab and Jewish Christians but also to the Muslim faithful who lived in the country and in the Latin diocese. In any case, Patriarch Gori declined to instruct the Jerusalem diocese to celebrate this prayer. Hussar took the initiative to send the octave to various communities

any sign of sympathy in these days of danger and national isolation. It would be absolutely within the lines laid out by the statutes of the association.”

32 See APNDS, *P. Stiasny*, minutes of the meeting of the association's central committee, Jerusalem, March 9, 1956.

33 “Between Israel and our Arab brothers, the genuine obstacles have formed a wall of separation. May God inspire the leaders responsible for the decisions to resolve, in justice and peace, the problems that divide our peoples. JESUS is ‘OUR PEACE’, He who made of the two peoples (the Jews and the other Nations) one, destroying the wall of hatred that separated them (Eph. 2:14): beseech Him to unite the children of Isaac and of Ishmael in the same love of the Father of all, the all-powerful and all-loving God.” APLJ, *Opera S. Giacomo, 1954–1959*, Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Easter [April 1] 1956, translation from French, capitals in the original. Hussar sent the text of the prayer also to the apostolic delegate. See AAV, *ADAGP*, 20, 81, 5, fols. 292–93, Hussar to Oddi, ‘Ayn Karim, April 17, 1956.

and personalities in Israel and abroad, and a number of ASJ groups observed it. Other clergy also made their concerns known during this period, addressing them directly to members of the Israeli government. The Father of Sion Pierre de Condé addressed Colbi with the wish “*that God save Israel!*”³⁴

From the political point of view, the resignation of Sharet, who was replaced by Golda Meir, gave rise to concern within the Latin Church that matters were coming to a head. A few days after what he defined as Sharet’s “spectacular resignation”, Vergani anxiously asked Vicar General Jallad, “are we going to war?”³⁵ Inspired by this fear and the vivid recollection of the 1947–49 war, the Latin vicar for Galilee visited the various religious houses and parishes, inviting all of them to stay and not to abandon churches and convents, so as to avoid the occupations and destruction that had marked the conflict. In the event of bombardments and firefights, the priest encouraged them to hoist the Vatican flag on the roofs of the parishes and religious houses to avoid being struck. Vergani’s greatest fear was that a new conflict could strike fresh panic among the priests and cause a new wave of refugees. To prevent this, he asked the patriarchal chapter and Jallad to instruct the priests never to abandon their parishes and so to avoid a dispersal of the Catholics. Further, imagining that Ben-Gurion now had “a free hand” to administer “blows to the head”, Vergani wrote to the minister for religious affairs requesting that, in the event of conflict, liaison officers would be designated to protect the religious houses in the various areas of the country.³⁶ For the vicar, a war would lead to the annexation of the West Bank by Israel, in view of the Israeli army’s military superiority.

The Catholic anxieties about the possibility of a new war in the Middle East were not confined to Jerusalem: the foreign nunciatures were also following the progression of events attentively and, especially in Rome, the central administration of the church was in a state of alarm. In April 1956, Pius XII met with Dag Hammarskjöld. The UN secretary-general attempted direct mediation with Nasser and Ben-Gurion, making three visits to the Middle East. On his return from the second of these journeys, he made a stop in Rome. The pope expressed his support for the project to create a demilitarized zone on the Egyptian-Israeli border, a plan that Hammarskjöld had presented to the leaders of the two countries with little result.

34 ISA, G/6/5811, Condé to Colbi, Marseille, March 18, 1956, translation from French, emphasis (underlined) in the original.

35 APLJ, LB-AG, *Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Jallad, top secret, Haifa, June 21, 1956.

36 APLJ, *ibid.*, Vergani to Gori, urgent confidential, Haifa, June 22, 1956, translation from Italian.

For the Holy See, responsibility for the current crisis lay with the international powers (especially Britain), which, on the eve of the 1947–49 war, had refused to establish an international regime for Palestine, a political solution that would have avoided the persistent Arab-Israeli tensions that led to the threat of imminent war. According to the French ambassador to the Holy See, Wladimir D'Ormesson (1948–56), Pro-Secretary of State Tardini declared himself convinced that Israel would have attacked Egypt immediately and thought – wrongly, as it would turn out – that an Arab victory over Israel, in the near or distant future, was a certainty.³⁷

3.3 *The Military Clash*

A series of events in summer 1956 accelerated the outbreak of conflict. At the end of June, Israel and France concluded a secret accord at Vermars for military intervention against Egypt. The Israeli army would receive a huge quantity of weapons from the French, and their intelligence services would collaborate with the goal of weakening Nasser. Some weeks later, on July 26, the Egyptian president announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, whose revenues Nasser intended to use for the construction of the Aswan Dam, after the Americans' abrupt announcement of withdrawal of their support for a \$70 million loan from the World Bank that had already been approved in late 1955.

The reaction of France and Britain, the company's main shareholders, was immediate. They set up a plan to concentrate their fleets in the canal and demand that Nasser rescind the nationalization. Israel was made aware of the Anglo-French project, although Britain would have preferred that Tel Aviv not be involved in the ensuing operations. During this phase, Britain sought to transmit an image of itself as a state pursuing peace with Egypt. Britain also promoted its apparently peaceful intentions in its relations with the Catholic world, which explains the fact that in August 1956, the British consul sent a memorandum to Patriarch Gori in which he described Nasser's actions as endangering the equilibrium of the Middle East and the British response as an effort to pacify the situation.³⁸

In reality, the British, French and Israeli plans were headed in quite another direction. After a series of negotiations, the three parties reached an accord under which the Israelis should attack Egypt in the area of the Suez Canal.

37 See CADC, *Levant, Palestine (1953–1959)*, 651, *ONU*, D'Ormesson to Pineau, Rome, April 14, 1956.

38 APLJ, *GV-GB, Consulats non catholiques (1852–1987)*, memorandum titled "The Suez Canal", sent by the British consul to Jerusalem to Gori, Jerusalem, August 10, 1956.

This would give France and Britain a card to play at the international level, according to which they would take on the role of mediators between the parties in conflict. The alliance was confirmed in a meeting on October 22–24, which resulted in the Protocol of Sèvres, which comprised seven articles laying out the attack Israel would make on Egypt on October 29 and the role that Britain and France would subsequently play. The two powers would issue a series of appeals for a ceasefire and would ask Egypt for permission for the Anglo-French forces to occupy the Suez Canal. If Egypt refused, they would intervene against Nasser's army.

Although the Sèvres plan was secret, at the end of October it was clear that a military escalation was imminent. This rekindled the Holy See's uncertainty as to the future of Jerusalem in the event of a change in the political order of the region and its anxiety about the safety of the Holy Places, the religious orders and Christians. An article in *L'Osservatore Romano* reiterated the Vatican plan for the creation of a *corpus separatum* for the city of Jerusalem, under an international regime.

On October 29, as set out in the Sèvres protocol, the Israeli attack on Egypt put an end to the Vatican's conjectures as to a possible rapid escalation of the situation. On the next day, Britain and France issued an ultimatum, as had also been agreed in advance; Egypt rejected it while Israel accepted. This was followed by the Anglo-French bombardment of Egyptian positions. In the meantime, Israel had invaded Sinai; by early November, Israeli troops occupied the peninsula and the Gaza Strip. The threat of Soviet intervention on the Egyptian side, in the same weeks of the Hungarian crisis, and UN pressure compelled France and Britain to withdraw quickly.

Although the military aspect of the conflict was over in just a few days, the Suez crisis exposed to the world the real danger of a new global conflict. Terror at the prospect of an approaching catastrophe took hold among the Christians in Israel, Jordan and Gaza. In those dramatic days, the Holy See was deeply concerned at the events underway. From what can be gleaned from the Italian ambassador to the Holy See, Francesco Giorgio Mameli (1952–57), in his discussions with Tardini, the pope approved the interventionist strategy of France and Britain in the hope that it might protect the Catholic institutions in Egypt and the region from possible conquest by Nasser, whose advocacy of pan-Arabism with socialist overtones made him unpopular in Rome.³⁹ The fear of Israeli involvement and, at the same time, of the Soviets entering

39 ASDMAE, *Affari politici (1951–1957)*, Israel, 1663, Mameli to the Italian Foreign Ministry, urgent top confidential, Rome, October 31, 1956.

the war, impelled the Holy See to avoid taking sides for fear of new and unpredictable upheaval.

The events in the Middle East induced Pius XII to produce an encyclical letter devoted to the region on November 1, titled *Laetamur admodum*.⁴⁰ This followed a pontifical document regarding events in Hungary published just a few days earlier.⁴¹ These texts marked a closing of the secret diplomatic mediation channels that the Holy See had begun with the Soviets, in an attempt to reach a form of coexistence that would guarantee the respect for the rights and fundamental liberties of the church in the Eastern bloc.⁴² The Hungarian repression and the fear of communist expansion in the Middle East marked the end of the pope's diplomatic attempts at dialogue with the Soviet government.

Concerns about the possibility of a new, worldwide conflict and the nuclear specter raised by the Suez crisis are clearly expressed in the papal encyclical, which reiterated the necessity for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. As he had done previously during other wars, the pope also called on Catholics to "encourage and promote this crusade of prayer."⁴³ Even before the pope issued this call, Patriarch Gori had already taken action in this direction. In May 1948, as *custos* he had consecrated the custody to the Immaculate Heart of Mary; now, as patriarch, he reiterated the placement of the Latin diocese under the protection of the Virgin to avoid a new conflict. At the end of October 1956, Gori composed a prayer and formulated a proposal to commission and place a mosaic dedicated to Mary the Helper in exchange for her protection from possible attack. The mosaic, produced in November, was placed in the vestibule of the patriarchate (fig. 8.1). The reaction of the ASJ was completely different; it responded positively to the government's appeal for mobilization by sending clothing to the troops in Sinai.⁴⁴

The Suez crisis had consequences at various levels. On the military and strategic level, Israel emerged victorious over the Egyptian army, but from the point of view of territorial expansion, it quickly lost both the Gaza Strip – a territory that was quite difficult to govern because of the enormous number of Palestinian refugees living there – and the Sinai Peninsula, withdrawing at the beginning of 1957 from both areas it had conquered in the preceding months. The events of autumn 1956 also reinforced Nasser's prestige in the

40 AAS 48 (1956): 745–48.

41 This was the encyclical letter *Luctuosissimi eventus*, October 28, 1956, in AAS 48 (1956): 741–44.

42 See Philippe Chenaux, *Pie XII: Diplomate et pasteur* (Paris: Cerf, 2003), 364–73.

43 AAS 48 (1956): 747.

44 APDF, BS, *Hussar*, "Réunion extraordinaire du 11.11.1956."



FIGURE 8.1

Ex-voto painting of the Virgin made after the Suez crisis at the entrance to the Latin Patriarchate

APLJ/AEBAF

eyes of unaffiliated countries, as they marked him out as a leader who opposed Western powers and, thus, a respected spokesman for third-world entities.

For the Latin Church too, the Suez crisis brought transformations in its wake. The failure to revise the Israeli-Jordan borders (“the ... precipice that exists between us and you,” as Vergani called it, writing from Nazareth to the patriarchal procurator, Léandre Girard, who was in the Old City of Jerusalem under Jordanian control) was accompanied by a change in the situation of Catholics in Gaza, who passed from Egyptian to Israeli control, only to return to Egyptian hands.⁴⁵ Since the arrival of Israeli troops in neighboring Rafah on November 2, Vergani sought to obtain permission to visit the parish of Gaza and to observe the conditions of the Latin population at close quarters.⁴⁶ He succeeded in entering Gaza on November 18, where he met with the curate, al-Nimri, who had opened the gates of the Latin church to anyone seeking refuge from the bombardment. The Latin vicar’s trip elicited a strong reaction

45 APLJ, AG, *Vicariat Nazareth, 1948–1961*, Mons. S.E. Kaldany, Vergani to Girard, [Nazareth], November 9, 1956, translation from Italian.

46 APLJ, LB-AG, *Vicariat Galilée, 1946–1956*, Vergani to Gori, November 2, 1956.

in Israel and elsewhere.⁴⁷ He also wrote to the minister for religious affairs to express his thanks for the permission to enter Gaza and to communicate that he had not observed any damage to Catholic structures from the recent conflict. Vergani's tone seems very different from that he had assumed eight years previously, during the 1947–49 war, when he had lamented and repeatedly denounced the occupations and desecrations on the part of the Israelis. The vicar's words became particularly important for the political use that was made of them. The Israeli and Arab press spread them, identifying Vergani as a "papal delegate" and making speculations that this gesture would open official relations between Israel and the Holy See. Moreover, some weeks later, they were quoted by Israeli Minister for Foreign Affairs Golda Meir before the UN General Assembly.

This episode caused the reaction of the patriarchal clergy, who proposed the removal of Vergani from his charge.⁴⁸ It is true that the priest was showing signs of a gradual change of attitude: the harsh judgments of Israeli society and government that had characterized his discourse and correspondence since 1948 was progressively giving way to a more conciliatory stance toward the Israeli authorities and a different perspective on the transformations underway in the country. It is possible that two events had a major influence on this gradual change: on the one hand, there was a convergence between Vergani and Colbi, which made the latter the principal and most attentive interlocutor in the Israeli government with the patriarchal vicar and with the Jerusalem Latin Church as a whole. Second was the priest's participation in the ASJ as its president, demonstrating a change from his initial suspicion of the association's members and their activities toward a growing interest in the ideas, experiences and choices made by the clergy involved in Jewish-Christian

47 According to some articles, Vergani released declarations regarding the Israeli military occupation according to which he appreciated the Israelis' military conduct. See "Visit to Gaza," *Catholic Herald*, December 14, 1956.

48 "Vergani had the ingenuity of entrusting to the authorities of Israel, at their request, a letter of thanks for what he had done well in this sector [of Gaza]. The thing itself of little significance, was exploited in the hands of the Jews, who are always good ... usurers, a pretext of repeated radio broadcasts in the Arabic language of propaganda ... with the name of the Latin Prelate, on that occasion called 'Papal Envoy'. Imagine your Eminence what happened within the patriarchal clergy and Arab public opinion. The Chapter immediately assembled – as His Beatitude confided to me – voted unanimously ... for his removal from the vicar's office. The Patriarch, whose temperament is submissive, spent days in despondency ... he is devising how to get him away from Israel without attracting attention." ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 855/49, 3, doc. 219, Angelo Sacchi, secretary of the Apostolic Delegation, to Tisserant, Jerusalem, January 11, 1957, translation from Italian.

dialogue in Israel. However, although Vergani was revising his attitude toward Israel, he still harbored anti-Israeli stereotypes and judgments.

In the aftermath of the Suez crisis, Vergani's actual concern was that it would lead more Arab Catholics to embrace communism. The events of November 1956 reinforced Nasser's prestige within the Arab world and the attraction for his brand of anticolonial and socialist politics. At the end of the year, in a report to Tisserant, Vergani claimed they were on the brink adopting communism en masse. The priest's alarmism was countered by Patriarch Gori, who found a growing awareness both among his congregants and within the Arab clergy of the Soviets' expansionistic aims in the Middle East and the importance of disseminating Catholic social doctrine as a weapon against the spread of communism.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, on the Melkite front, in a document issued at Christmas 1956 by the Greek Catholic Patriarchate in Damascus – on which the eparchies in the Holy Land were also dependent – Patriarch Maximos IV warned Catholics of the dangers of Marxist atheist ideology.⁵⁰

The year ended amid anticommunist fears and concerns about a new Arab-Israeli crisis. Various Catholics expressed more or less publicly the conviction that the Suez crisis was only the prelude to a military conflict that would resume sooner or later; the political situation in the region was far from peaceful, and within the church, discussion turned again to the internationalization of Jerusalem and the protection of the Holy Places. While the Holy See attentively followed the situation in Jerusalem,⁵¹ Apostolic Delegate Oddi, in discussions with European representatives in Jerusalem, reiterated the Vatican proposal that a *corpus separatum* should be created for the Holy City. However, the new conflict had made clear to many within the church that the Vatican's ideas were a nonstarter. The year ended amid anticommunist fears and concerns about a new Arab-Israeli crisis.

49 ASCTS, ACC, S. *Congregazione pro Ecclesia Orientali*, Gori to Tisserant, copy, Jerusalem, December 11, 1956.

50 "Chronique, Syrie, Au patriarcat melkite catholique: mandement patriarcal: "Soyons sur nos gardes", sur le patriotisme et la propagande communiste," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 6, no. 4 (1956): 376–77.

51 See AAV, *ADAGP*, 19, 79, 4, fol. 300, Tardini to Sacchi, Vatican, December 7, 1956.

Opening a New Phase: Toward the Second Vatican Council and the 1967 War

The Suez crisis triggered a series of consequences for the rest of the Middle Eastern Arab world after 1956. The growing consensus in favor of Nasser's pan-Arab proposal was significant and affected various countries. The Ba'ath Party in Syria and in Iraq was strongly attracted to Nasser's orbit, leading to a union between Egypt and Syria in 1958 in the United Arab Republic (UAR); the rapid failure of this political entity inspired by nationalist pan-Arabism was due to Nasser's centralism, which made Syria into a mere periphery of the power wielded in Cairo. This experience opened the way to political fragmentation in Damascus and severe instability in Baghdad, where, in 1958, a coup by a cell of Free Officers inspired by Nasser deposed the monarchy of King Faysal II, thus putting an end to Hashemite rule in the country. The events in Syria, Egypt and Iraq also had a number of consequences for Lebanon, where the Sunni and Druze components were close to Nasser's pan-Arab ideals; this sparked a season of protest that led the president, the Maronite Christian Kamil Sham'un, to request US military intervention in 1958.

One of the most significant effects of the war over Sinai was the decisive blow it constituted to the neocolonial pretensions of Britain and France in favor of an increasingly central role for the United States and the Soviet Union. These transformations brought about a series of consequences in the lives of the Middle Eastern Catholics as well; for example, after 1956, the robust Anglo-French intervention against Jordanian laws on religious institutions was interrupted. Further, with the announcement, on January 5, 1957, of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the US policy governing its dealings with the Middle East, the US president affirmed the will to pursue the strategy of the containment of Soviet expansion in the Middle East; Eisenhower also touched on the region's religious capital, confirming that it would be intolerable for the Holy Places to end up under the control of an atheist government.¹ Although the principal US interest was certainly not the Holy Places, the reference to a communist threat to the Christians of the Holy Land very much caught the

1 On the Eisenhower doctrine in the region, see Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

attention of the local Catholic Church, but also the Vatican and the Western episcopates, especially in the United States.

In Jordan, King Hussein was initially hesitant with respect to the positioning of the United States and the Soviet Union in the Middle East. He accepted and espoused the content of the Eisenhower Doctrine, but was met with its flat rejection by parliament and by the prime minister, which forced him not to take a pro-US position.² The British and US reaction was swift, and the external pressure pushed Hussein to take a position closer to Washington, specifically anticommunist, anti-Nasserian and anti-Ba'athist. He received huge consignments of troops from Britain and took a more strongly anticommunist position, choices that served to increase the already solid impression of the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan as an outpost of Western interests within the Arab world.

Israel also suffered the consequences of the exacerbation of the conflict. Two events that took place in Eastern bloc had repercussions for Israel, in particular: first, the dramatic crisis in Hungary, brought about by the violent repression of an anti-Soviet insurrection in October–November 1956, precipitated the emigration of a quarter of a million Hungarians, about seven thousand of whom went to Israel. Second, the events of the Polish October, which led to the rise to power of Władysław Gomułka, sparked a wave of migration, some of which was toward Israel. Gomułka's attempt at reform led to the opening of the country's borders; among those who left Poland, about thirty-one thousand came to Israel. The result was a new emergency due to the need to absorb the refugees from Eastern Europe.

This second wave of migratory pressure on Israel at the end of 1956 and in the months and years that followed (with a strong increase in Jewish immigration from Romania, too) also had consequences for the Latin Church in the country. As had already happened after 1948, the refugees from Eastern Europe included a few thousand Christians of Jewish origin. The problem of Jewish converts to Christianity from communist countries rapidly made its way onto the agenda of the Association of Saint James (ASJ). In order to meet the difficult material, economic and social conditions experienced by these Catholics in Israel, within a few months, the members of the association mobilized to create an aid network. In this way, a special committee was created to aid those who had left the Eastern bloc; Joseph Stiassny was in charge of coordinating the work.³

² See Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 126.

³ APNDS, P. Stiassny, unsigned report titled "Needs of the Church in Israel," undated (likely 1958).

It was not only the situation of the Jewish refugees that preoccupied a section of the Latin Church in Israel. The end of 1956 also saw new questions about the future of Catholic aid to Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. At the same time, on December 6, Thomas McMahon died suddenly, at the age of 47. Already the previous year, he had given up the position of CNEWA secretary and PMP president in favor of a Boston priest, Peter Tuohy. The loss of McMahon symbolically marked the end of the first phase of the PMP's history. The new conflict of 1956 spelled a further breach of the – already weak – hopes of an imminent resolution to the refugee question; the Israeli occupation of Gaza from November 2, 1956, until its withdrawal six months later, reiterated the problem of the refugees (in the Strip alone, there were 300,000 refugees out of a total population of 330,000) and of Palestinian incursions into Israel, with the violent Israeli reactions to them.

At the end of the 1950s, the scheduled end of the UNRWA's mandate – an organization created to deal with a phase of emergency that had already become focused on long-term development policies – reactivated the international divisions and those within the Arab world around the future of the Palestinian refugees. The renewed confirmation of the UNRWA's scope of activities was a sign that no agreement had been reached. The PMP also decided to continue its work in the refugee schools, and in providing medical assistance, while not losing sight of the transformations of the population still resident in the Palestinian refugee camps. Indeed, the end of the 1950s coincided with a progressive politicization and militarization of the refugees in the camps; they continued to live in dramatically greater poverty than the Palestinian bourgeoisie in the diaspora, who were already engaging in businesses activity abroad.

In the same period, a new season began in the relations between Israel and the Holy See that would improve in the years that followed. The proximity of some Arab countries to the Soviet Union certainly played a role in this cautious opening toward Israel. However, the Vatican's reservations toward Israel had not disappeared; Pro-Secretary of State Domenico Tardini made no secret of his opposition to the Israeli policies, declaring that its foundation had been “a mistake”. However, change was afoot.

A sign of the gradual thaw in relations came with a visit to Rome by Maurice Fisher, former Israeli ambassador to Paris and now vice-director general of the Foreign Ministry, in January 1957.⁴ The Israeli envoy held talks with Cardinal Tisserant, but his request to meet with Tardini was refused. Despite this denial, Fisher left the secretary of state a memorandum explaining the Israeli point of

4 See Bialer, *Cross on the Star of David*, 56–57.

view on the recent Suez crisis; and, most importantly, he met with numerous church representatives during his stay.

In this context, the papal election, on October 28, 1958, of a prelate like Angelo Roncalli – who, as has been seen, had a long history of relations and proximity with the Jewish world – after the death of Pius XII on October 9, undoubtedly imposed a new course in the relations between the Holy See and Israel. Some effects were immediately evident. The meeting between John XXIII and Fisher in February 1959 and the Vatican invitation to the Israeli ambassador in Italy, Eliahu Sasson, to the papal coronation mass in April, along with the cancellation of anti-Jewish references (the “perfidious Jews” and “Jewish perfidy”) from the Good Friday liturgy that March, were important signals of openness toward Israel and international Judaism. The attention on Israel was also shown by the decision to nominate the Franciscan Pier Giorgio Chiappero (1959–63) as patriarchal vicar of Galilee with episcopal character; he was the first to hold this role. He took over from Antonio Vergani, who had resigned in 1958. The exit of Vergani – who would die two years later – concluded the first decade of complex relations between the Latin Church and Israel.

There would be no shortage of new conflicts. In a renewal of the political disagreement on the issue of Christians of Jewish origin, Patriarch Gori addressed a memorandum to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion in which he demanded clarification of the significance of the adjective “Jewish” that, “according to some, comprises only the desire to identify with the Jewish People, in its past, its present, and its future; and for others, adherence to the Jewish religion as expressed by religious law.”⁵ Once again, the church was asking of Israel: who is a Jew?

At the end of the 1950s, the Catholic world of Jerusalem entered a decade that would witness fundamental change, both in the ecclesiastical and political contexts, triggering important transformations for the Latin Church of the region – the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and the June 1967 war between Israel and Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

The ASJ contributed to the preparation and realization of the troubled drafting of the *Nostra Aetate* declaration: some members of the *kehilah* participated in the council – particularly Bruno Hussar and Leo Rudloff – encouraging dialogue between Christianity and the Jewish world, advanced in Jerusalem through the foundation of St. Isaiah House – and promoting continuous relations outside Israel that contributed to the creation of a transnational networks of relations. Some ASJ leaders established solid contacts with Catholic

5 CADC, *Levant, Israël (1953–1959)*, 49, *Relations avec les églises chrétiennes, 18 décembre 1953–28 décembre 1959*, “Mémoire,” presented by Gori to Ben-Gurion, Jerusalem, July 31, 1958, translation from French.

and Jewish representatives in the United States, in particular through the intervention of John M. Oesterreicher.⁶

This rapprochement caused the progressive alignment of the ASJ with Israeli government positions and the American Jewish Committee during the 1960s.⁷ The *kehilah* celebrated the Israeli victory of the June 5–10, 1967 war and welcomed the Tsahal takeover of East Jerusalem as the “reunification” of the city under Israeli control, without making reference to the Palestinian *naksa*, the new exodus of around 300,000 Palestinian refugees toward Jordan.⁸ The ASJ’s position stood in stark contrast to the patriarchal hierarchy’s stance on the new territorial reality resulting from the war: the Israeli occupation of the Old City of Jerusalem, West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights. A new era of conflict and renegotiations, within the diocese and between the Latin Church, Israel and Jordan, was opening.

6 Born in Moravia to a Jewish family, John M. Oesterreicher (1904–93) converted to Roman Catholicism and was ordained to the priesthood in 1927. After the Anschluss, he publicly denounced the Nazi regime. He escaped from the antisemitic persecution, moving to Paris and then to the United States. In 1953 he founded the Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University, New Jersey, to promote a positive understanding and new encounters between Jews and Christians. During the Second Vatican Council he was one of the main authors of the *Nostra Aetate* declaration. Around the same time, he established contacts with the ASJ, namely Leo Rudloff, Bruno Hussar and Jean-Roger Héné. See John Maria Oesterreicher Papers, SHU–ASCC, 4.1, 70, 16, 22 and 32.

7 In January 1969 Hussar participated in the press conference, held at the American Jewish Committee’s national headquarters in New York, on the invitation of Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, after the attack by two members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine on an El Al plane at Athens airport on December 26, 1968. Hussar condemned as “immoral” the “double standard being used by many nations and some Christian institutions” with regard to the Palestinian attack. He also criticized the “one-sided and distorted presentation of the refugee problem, for which Arab leaders bear a heavy responsibility”. AJA, MS-603, F, 95, 3, AJA communiqué, January 8, 1969.

8 See William Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year That Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Metropolitan, 2007).

CONCLUSION

From the Archives to Jerusalem

As we look back at the cultural archive,
we begin to reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally*.

EDWARD W. SAID



The liminal year of 1948 began with the UN resolution of November 29, 1947, or even in 1946 with the King David Hotel bombing, and ended with the armistice treaties of 1949. In reality, it did not end at that moment either, as demonstrated by the creeping conflict between Israel and Palestinian infiltrators and the resumption of armed conflict in 1956, and remains open even now, decades and wars later.

The years from 1946 to 1956 as seen through the lens of the Latin Jerusalem diocese produces various reflections. The 1947–49 war was a prism of events, meanings and symbols. Correspondence between members of the Latin Church – whether they held important positions, whether they were clergy or laity – tends to linger over descriptions of the actions of the Israeli army, blaming them much more than the Arab troops for the war and the atrocities that took place. Despite few exceptions, Latin diocesan sources project an image of the Israeli army as a profanatory force, disrespectful of the symbolic structures of Christianity, atheist and lustful,¹ in contrast to the Arabs, who are depicted as respectful and attentive toward the Christian population, their property and their structures. If this indulgence in the judgment of the Arab actions can be more easily understood when one takes into consideration that the majority of the patriarchate's faithful were themselves Palestinians and Jordanians, a further cultural substrate emerges, stirred up by the events of

1 This last feature emerges particularly in the nuns' correspondence. See, for example, the letter by Sr. Marie Suzanne du Cœur de Jésus, from the Carmelite monastery of the Pater Noster on the Mount of Olives, to Apostolic Delegate Testa: "the war started again now and I'm very scared! Our village was disarmed and the Jews are a stone's throw from us ... I'm not afraid of dying, no, it's to be in the hands and the mercy of this Communists that won't have any respect for any this virtue which is so important to me." AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 55, 8, fol. 231r, Carmel of the Pater, July 15, 1948, translation from French.

war: in the documents of priests and nuns originally from Europe, the Israeli army is described as a sacrilegious force, without morals (the emphasis on the presence of females among the soldiers accentuates this consideration) and, above all, anti-Christian.

Old stereotypes from the Catholic anti-Jewish and antisemitic stylistic crucible were repurposed and applied to the new Palestinian-Israeli context; the image of the Jew as a de-Christianizing force, which dated back at least to the French Revolution, was renewed and translated to the situation in Israel. In addition, there was the memory of the Second World War and the Shoah; in the Catholic perspective, Israel appeared as an ungrateful state with respect to the aid the church had given the Jews during the Nazi-Fascist extermination.² This view clearly implied that no discussion of the responsibility, connivance or omissions in the Catholic attitude during the antisemitic persecution should be considered necessary. The recourse to these arguments also had a specific objective: to elicit international intervention on the part of the Holy See to put an end to the war, to request that Rome send a new patriarch, and to ask for money and aid for the Palestinian refugees.

During and after the 1947–49 war, the religious edifices became a *lieu de mémoire* of a past that no longer existed. The ruins came to be seen as admonitions of the necessity not to place any faith in the promises of religious freedom formulated by the Israeli government, which had concealed its intention of further marginalizing the Christian minority through political discrimination. A word that would appear in bulletins and articles in the Catholic press after 1948 was *persecution*. In the 1950s, it was precisely the term “persecution” that became the most suitable linguistic expression to describe the postwar situation as well; the political discussion around Christian schools in Israel, converts and marriage was interpreted as a further manifestation of “persecution” on the part of the Israelis against the survival of the Christian presence in the country.

Despite the profound diversity that characterized the State of Israel and the Kingdom of Jordan, in this period both went through a delicate period of definition and readjustment. The newborn Israeli state had to adjust the structures of the Yishuv to create a genuine Jewish state entity, within which, however, a strong Palestinian Arab component remained. The Kingdom of

2 In a report to Tisserant on the war damage to the Apostolic Delegation seat, Testa wrote: “It came to mind what the Holy Father did to protect and defend the interests and life of the Jews and how carefully the Apostolic Delegation had tried to get news of the persecuted and refugee Jews, during the last war. On the ground they placed forms used for this purpose by the Delegation which, without a doubt, deserved more and better, especially from the Jews.” AAV, *ADAGP*, 13, 55, 10, fols. 437–40: 439, copy, July 3, 1948, translation from Italian.

Jordan experienced decisive territorial expansion with the annexation of the West Bank, occupied during the conflict and intended as the location of the Palestinian state that never materialized. The reality of the Palestinian population – viewed with suspicion both by the Israeli and the Jordanian governments – also placed demands on the Catholic Church. Furthermore, both states enacted a series of laws that affected the Christian minority and the organizations headed by Catholic entities: the laws concerning education, aid and charity work, both in Israel and in Jordan, tended to circumscribe and limit the role of Catholic institutions in favor of state structures that would defend the Jewish and Islamic character, respectively, of the two states.

Palestinian Christians depicted themselves as the victims of Israel and, at the same time, as the victims of the politics of the great powers and of the Arab states that had sacrificed their destiny on the altar of international relations and expansionist desires. The myopia of France, Britain and Italy in their continuing desire to present themselves as guarantors and protectors of Christian, and particularly of Catholic, interests, was clearly evident in the debate on the Jordanian laws regarding aid institutions managed by churches and religious congregations. The anticolonial echoes of pan-Arab nationalism made inroads among the Christians too, but the European powers feigned not to take account of them and claimed for themselves the now anachronistic role of protector of the Christian minority. The Israeli government took advantage of this ambiguity, continuing two primary principles of the British Mandate period: the role of religious distinctions in Palestinian society and within the Palestinian Christian confessions and the primacy of sectarianism over Palestinian national claims.³

For its part, the Catholic hierarchy ambiguously encouraged European interference to the extent to which it could derive a benefit, but it rejected the equivalence “Latin Catholic” and “foreigner” and tried to demonstrate its own loyalty to the Arab cause. The short-circuiting of these positions was inevitable; the Latin Catholic Church wished to present itself as *Arab*, but, at the same time, it was engaged in curbing and circumscribing the requests for greater involvement of the Arab clergy in the exercise of power within the patriarchate, seeking to retain its governance in solidly European (and especially Italian) hands. That the result of this defense was precarious and not durable is shown by the fact that a Latin Catholic priest was accused of participating in the conspiracy to assassinate King ‘Abdullah (revealing the opposition existing among the Palestinians and Jordanians, including among the faithful and clergy of the diocese) and, above all, by the conflict between Latin and Eastern Catholics,

3 See Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, 162.

evidenced by the failure to come to agreement regarding the union of parishes and schools and the reopening of the rumors about the transformation of the Latin Patriarchate in favor of a single Catholic diocese in 1956.

These same elements make it clear that the unity of the Arab world was itself a powerful construction, strengthened by the potent and alluring appeal of Nasserian pan-Arabism. The resumption, in the mid-1950s, of overt conflict between Christians and Muslims in Jordan, and the growing consolidation of a Palestinian identity in the refugee camps with an anti-Jordan and anti-Western tone, comprise the pieces of a multifaceted structure of ideas that was the Arab identity in the region within the Latin Patriarchate.

1 Jerusalem's Diocese: a Plurality of Belonging

A minority history, but no less relevant for its small numbers (especially in light of the fact that it took place within the history of the patriarchate itself and would have important consequences for the future), was that of the Association of St. James. It shows, above all, how the Latin Catholic and the Jewish identities in Israel were by no means monolithic constructions. The formation of a Hebrew Christian community and the emergence of a liturgy in Hebrew reveal that Jerusalem's Latin Church could not be solely assimilated into the Arab component and, at the same time, that the very Jewishness of the State of Israel was a category that contained and reflected numerous diverse experiences, including those of Christians with Jewish origins. In addition to these aspects, further complexity arose from the fact that a good proportion of ASJ members had lived through the experience of antisemitic persecution and, upon arrival in Israel, declared themselves Zionists. They revealed the full dramatic actuality of the questions around the "Jewishness" of the new state but also dismantled the axiom that presented the Roman Catholic Church of Jerusalem as a purely Arab community.

The 1947–49 war and the postwar phase represent a crucial turning point, a seismic event for the Latin Church of Jerusalem. They constituted a decisive moment to test the solidity of its institutions after the reestablishment of the patriarchate in 1847. Notwithstanding the impact of the conflict and the reversals that it brought about, the Latin diocese survived and mobilized new resources and organizations in response to the refugee emergency that continued unresolved even in the decades that followed.⁴ The 1950s established the

⁴ According to patriarchal statistics (that do not include Jews who converted to Christianity) in 1959, the Latin faithful within the patriarchate numbered 46,644. There were 55 parishes,

crucial relevance of the patriarchate that replaced the traditional centrality of the Franciscan Custody, which had already been called into question in the decades of the Mandate by the strong personality and authority of Patriarch Barlassina.

The postwar period compelled the Church to daily, close interaction with two states in a period of consolidation where both countries were seeking to limit the public role of the church. Faced with such policies, the patriarchal hierarchy opted for direct confrontation. In the case of Jordan, Gori chose to propose a union of nationalism and Catholicism. Meanwhile, in Israel, the church made a greater effort to pursue a coherent policy given the social and political reality; this did not stop some of the most important figures in the Jerusalem Church from moving on a path of progressive openness toward Israel, albeit in the context of a church that was Arab by a great majority and strongly hostile to the new state.

In any case, in both states a repertoire of prejudices weighed on the protagonists and on their interpretations of reality. In the course of the 1950s, however, some sectors of the Catholic Church of Jerusalem became increasingly aware of the challenges posed by the new sociopolitical conditions. They, therefore, tried to formulate – publicly or in a concealed fashion – appropriate responses, particularly in the case of the laws concerning Christian institutions in Jordan and in the context of the apostolate toward the Jewish population in Israel. Despite the influence of the centuries-long history of Catholic anti-Judaism and antisemitism, the anti-Zionist stance of the Latin Church, and the opposition of the Holy See toward the establishment of the State of Israel, within the patriarchate a community of Jewish converts to Catholicism was created and grew.

Through these threads in the complex tapestry of the life of Jerusalem's Latin diocese in and after 1948, emerges the image of a church with porous borders, an institution that was slowly and laboriously beginning to integrate, absorb and appropriate origins, models, political convictions, pastoral and

40 of which were run by the patriarchal clergy, 14 by the Franciscan friars, and one by the Carmelite fathers. The large majority of faithful was located in the territory under Jordanian control. The biggest parish was that of Amman, with 7,640 congregants. In Israel the most numerous parish was Nazareth, with 3,300 faithful. In the territory of the Latin Jerusalem diocese, the other Catholic communities numbered 29,152 Melkites, 5,127 Maronites, 1,220 Armenians, 922 Syrians, 37 Copts and 180 faithful of other Catholic rites 180. Concerning the non-Catholics, there were 436,199 Greek Orthodox, 10,086 Armenians, 2,541 Syriacs, 450 Copts and 10,774 Protestants. See ACO, *Latini, Palestina e Transgiordania: Patriarcato di Gerusalemme*, 858/49, 3, doc. 224, "Relatio de statu dioecesis Patriarcatus latini hierosolymitani 1949–1959," Jerusalem, June 1, 1959.

even liturgical experiences that were extremely diverse, and to bring together these oppositions in a process of integration that expressed itself in multiple and sometimes contradictory forms.

2 For a New History of the “Long 1948”

The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is itself a history in conflict. The binary narratives and the opposing ideologies permeate the historiography of Arab-Israeli relations. Studies on the region’s Christians have also been presented within this context; one only has to think of Benny Morris’s thesis concerning Christians’ supposed preference for an Israeli Jewish government rather than an Arab Muslim authority, based mostly on Israeli military sources.⁵ On the other hand, an opposing narrative angle has depicted the Palestinian Christians, whether in Israel or refugees in Jordanian territory, as being aligned on identical political positions, thus disguising a far more complex reality.

Likewise, as regards inter-Christian relations, a certain sectarian historiography has presented the diverse communities within Jerusalem solely along the lines of their disagreements, losing sight of their interactions and completely neglecting certain protagonists, like women, children, people with disability and other silenced actors.⁶ To the contrary, Jerusalem represents a privileged laboratory in which to explore the connected and relational history of the daily dynamics and of the mechanisms of mimesis and differentiation among Christians, with and between Islamic and Jewish milieus, European powers, organizations and individuals.

With the historiographical turn determined by new studies on late Ottoman and Mandate Palestine published since the early 2000s, the history of Christian communities in Palestine has attracted new interest. Innovative research projects concerning cultural and political relations between the Middle East and Europe viewed through the lens of the history of Christian communities have been recently launched, focusing on unlocking, analyzing, preserving,

5 “It is likely that the majority of Christians would have preferred the continuation of the British Mandate to independence under Husseini rule; some may even have preferred Jewish rule. All were aware of the popular Muslim mob chant: ‘After Saturday, Sunday’ (meaning, after we take care of the Jews, it will be the Christians’ turn),” Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 25.

6 Reja-e Busailah’s memoir *In the Land of My Birth: A Palestinian Boyhood* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2017) is an extraordinary contribution to disability history in Mandate Palestine.

digitizing and publishing archives.⁷ In these fertile fields, it is now time to extend the studies to the exchanges within and between these communities during and after the 1947–49 war. New archival collections and records – as in the case of the Pius XII archives – reveal hidden aspects of the ordinary lives of individual, families, faith communities and religious institutions during and after “shadow years” like 1948 and 1967,⁸ connecting narratives that have been marginalized by a dominant historiography more oriented to military campaigns or confessional conflicts, and mobilizing sources and archives that had been previously selected and used according to ideological goals.

Given the lack of social history on religious communities in Israel, Palestine and Jordan after 1948, archives are more and more “active and interactive tools” that reflect not only the intention to narrate the past, especially where memories are contested, but also to prepare for the future.⁹ Archives are not only the product of state or community machines and administrations; they are also “epistemological experiments”. Between memory and desire, between the past and its narration, the archive stands as a subject, as a transit space.¹⁰

In the Palestinian diasporic, surveilled and colonized context, the archival space also represents a territory of elaboration of a counternarrative to raise dissensus.¹¹ Palestinian institutions have engaged in a considerable effort since early 1990s to collect and preserve written and mainly oral sources concerning Palestinian history, and notably the records of the refugees of the 1947–49 war.¹² This project also aimed to respond to the extensive use by historians

7 See especially MISSMO (Missions chrétiennes et sociétés au Moyen-Orient: organisations, identités, patrimonialisation, XIX^e–XXI^e siècles), promoted by French, Italian and Dutch research institutions, and CrossRoads: European Cultural Diplomacy and Arab Christians in Palestine. A Connected History (1920–1950), led by Karène Sanchez Summerer at Leiden University.

8 “Editorial: The Everyday and the Shadow Years,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 79 (2019), and Beshara Doumani and Alex Winder, “1948 and Its Shadows,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 1 (2018).

9 Arjun Appadurai, “Archive and Aspiration,” in *Information is Alive*, ed. Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder (Rotterdam: V2; NAI, 2003), 25. See also Appadurai, “The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition,” in *Culture and Public Action*, ed. Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

10 On the passage from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject, see Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (2002).

11 Ann Laura Stoler, “On Archiving as Dissensus,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 38, no. 1 (2018).

12 On the Palestinian side, the Palestinian Archive at the Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies at the Birzeit University, the Palestinian Heritage Center in Bethlehem, the Al-Quds University’s Center for Jerusalem Studies, the Badil Resource Center in Bethlehem, the Palestinian Heritage Museum in Jenin, the al-Nakba’s Oral

of almost exclusively Zionist and Israeli military archives, which has limited studies to a single documentary typology that is also one-sided. In this sense, the Palestinian renaissance in archival interest intended to respond to the studies – mainly by Israeli authors – that sought to attribute the responsibility for the creation of the 1948 Palestinian refugees to the Arab leaders and to delegitimize the existence and action of the UNRWA.¹³

Despite the reappraisal made possible by fresh new sources, the historiography on Palestinian refugees still has to fully dismantle the essentialist paradigm that reduces refugees to dehistoricized objects of (mainly Western and Christian) aid. On the contrary, documents produced by refugees, such as petitions, correspondence and family papers, as well as forms of collective political, economic, religious organization, unfold their forms of agency, horizons and systems of meanings as well as reveal the interconnection between state, Christian and Muslim humanitarian actors. The analysis of these sources could open a new phase of historiography “from below” on the Palestinian refugees, as pursued in numerous other case studies by historians of migration and humanitarianism, inserting and connecting these histories in the global history of displacement and migration.

The possibility to access new archives and unpublished sources brings this objective closer to realization and, at the same time, requires that historians are ready to cross reference different methodologies and competences in collaborative research projects. The commitment to accuracy in source analysis and intellectual honesty have accompanied a new transnational and nonsectarian

History Project by <https://www.palestineremembered.com/> are among the research and cultural centers, as well as NGOs, initiated numerous projects. The Israeli NGO Zochrot is particularly attentive to the archives on the nakba, especially through the genealogical historical research project “Looted Houses”. On oral history in Palestine, see Mahmoud Issa, “Oral History’s Credibility, Role and Functionality: From the Arab Islamic Tradition to Modern Historiography,” in *A New Critical Approach to the History of Palestine: Palestine History and Heritage Project 1*, ed. Ingrid Hjelm, Hamdan Taha, Ilan Pappé, and Thomas L. Thompson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019). For thoughtful reflections on the “mal d’archives” in the Palestinian and Israeli context, see Kamel, *Imperial Perceptions*, 165–75.

- 13 This argument is presented by Nur Masalha and Walidi Khalidi. See Nur Masalha, “A Critique on Benny Morris,” in *The Israel/Palestine Question*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 1999). Examples of anti-UNRWA stances are the works of Arlene Kushner, *UNRWA. Supplemental Report: A Rigorous Review of Agency Practices* (Jerusalem: Center for Near East Policy Research, 2004), accessed April 10, 2020, <http://www.israelvisit.co.il/BehindTheNews/pdf/SecondReport.pdf>; Avi Beker, *UNRWA, Terror and the Refugee Conundrum: Perpetuating the Misery* (Jerusalem: Institute of the World Jewish Congress, 2003); and Abraham Ashkenasi, “The International Institutionalization of a Refugee Problem: The Palestinians and UNRWA,” *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 1 (1990).

historiography and social research on the Christians in Israel, Palestine – especially in Gaza, where historical studies are severely lacking – and Jordan. History is also much needed in the narration of the global Palestinian diaspora (from the Middle East to Europe, from the United States to Canada and Australia, and especially in Latin America, in the large communities in Chile, Honduras, Guatemala and Brazil),¹⁴ after 1948, 1967, the two intifada, and during contemporary dramatic phenomena like the forced migration of Palestinian refugees as a result of the Syrian crisis.¹⁵

In the face of these events, “the time for oblivion has passed, the time for history has come”.¹⁶ History can reintroduce complexity to a deeply and painfully polarized debate, can expose false narratives and situate changes and ruptures in a long-term perspective. This task does not mean that the historian and the archivist exist in an ivory tower; on the contrary, their civil role is even more urgent and necessary, in a political and social context characterized by the apparent inability to elaborate alternatives to a present that appears devoid of hope for change. It is to thicken the present, which is the future’s past.

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- 14 Only few historical studies have approached the migration history of Palestinian Christians in Latin America. Jacob Norris’s, Lauren Banko’s and Nadim Bawalsa’s works represent a promising and fundamental field of research. See Jacob Norris, “Return Migration and the Rise of the Palestinian Nouveaux Riches, 1870–1925,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 2 (2017); Lauren Banko, “Claiming Identities in Palestine: Migration and Nationality under the Mandate,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 2 (2017); Nadim Bawalsa, “Palestinian Migrants and the Birth of a Diaspora in Latin America, 1860–1940” (PhD diss., New York University, 2017). For some statistical data, see Barnard Sabella, “The Emigration of the Arab Christians: Dimensions and Causes of the Exodus,” in Pacini, *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*.
- 15 For an ethnographic appraisal of the Palestinian Christians in the West Bank (and mainly in the Bethlehem area) in the post-Oslo phase, see Bård Helge Kårtveit, *Dilemmas of Attachment: Identity and Belonging Among Palestinian Christians* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).
- 16 Vincent Lemire, *Au pied du Mur: Histoire du quartier maghrébin de Jérusalem (1187–1967)* (Paris: Seuil, 2021). This book, based on a meticulous analysis of eight hundred years of sources, represents an unprecedented benchmark work in archival research all around the world (and the history of these archives), a nuanced and brilliantly innovative approach on Jerusalem’s history and a methodology lesson for every historian on the possibilities and meanings of history.

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