

negotiating states, whether at a Geneva conference or elsewhere.

I say this because I do not believe there can be lasting peace in the area without a solution for Jerusalem that permits – in practice as well as theory – free access to the Holy Places by Moslems as well as Christians and Jews, and because I do not foresee any likelihood of a political agreement's being negotiated on this issue. In the political context, the problem is deadlocked. Can it be lifted from politics and placed in a totally fresh context that is at the same time the one with the deepest roots in history – the religious context?

Political headway

In political negotiations, with a major effort by all concerned, including the super-powers, I can see headway being made on the question of withdrawal from occupied territories (in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 242), except in the glaringly obvious case of Jerusalem. Even a homeland for the Palestinians may be worked out and guarantees given all round that nobody is going to be pushed into the sea or wiped off the face of the new maps. But will this much progress (so devoutly to be wished) be attainable if Jerusalem remains – as far as the Arabs and the Moslems of the world are concerned – an Israeli-occupied territory? Can we imagine the late King Faisal of Saudi Arabia ever fulfilling his life-time desire to pray under these conditions in the silver-domed Mosque of Al-Aqsa, beside the golden Dome of the Rock? Politically, this is a sticking-point for both sides.

If there is to be any solution other than a military solution of fact (which is what we have at present) or a military reversal of the present line of control (which is what the Arabs would sooner or later attempt), the only "third force" which could transcend the political-military state of perpetual confrontation and lead to a solution all concerned might be able to live with is the internationalization of Jerusalem as a Holy City under a religious regime composed of Jews, Moslems and Christians. Despite the enormous difficulties of the task, such a regime could (I believe) become a reality if the three religious communities around the world really want it enough. It will never happen if one or other of these communities is bored with the idea. As communities of the "Peoples of the Book" (to use the language of the Koran) we must all want it very much – with the sort of passion that the call of "Jerusalem" generated in the Middle Ages.

Historically, each community has every right to demand such a solution. We

must each be more aware of the strength of the claims of all three groups, because none of us have been taught about the basis for the claims of the others. So let us look briefly at the case each community can make for access to (and a share in the control of) the Holy Places that are inextricably inter-linked in the Old City of Jerusalem so that no clever "cutting of the cake" could separate jurisdictions in a manner satisfactory to the three communities. The City must be one and has to be shared.

Special importance

Take first the Jewish claims, since they come first in time. All three "Peoples of the Book" share the tradition of Abraham but certainly, for the Jews, special importance must be given to their links with the City of David and of Solomon, the City of the two Temples (Solomon's and Zorobabel's), where the Ark of the Covenant of Moses, the two tablets of the Law, were kept in the Tabernacle on the Rock. Traditionally this was the same Rock on the summit of Mount Moriah where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice Isaac, and where Jacob later rested his head to dream that a ladder was set up to heaven, with angels ascending and descending. In other words, the Rock serves as an *axis mundi*, the centre of the Jewish psyche, their link as a people between God and man, the door or threshold to a higher world, as interpreted by the Kabbalists. So it is easy to understand why, for thousands of years, Jews have faced Jerusalem to say their prayers. It is their spiritual centre.

For the Christians, no less than for the Jews, Jerusalem is the Holy City where Christ was crucified, was buried, rose from the Sepulchre, and ascended to heaven. As Mircea Eliade records the Christian tradition of Golgotha (the "place of the skull"), it "was situated at the centre of the world, since it was the summit of the cosmic mountain and at the same time the place where Adam had been created and buried. Thus the blood of the Saviour falls upon Adam's skull, buried precisely at the foot of the Cross, and redeems him."

Mr George recently resigned from the Department of External Affairs to work on a series of books and television productions. His last post was Ambassador to Iran and Kuwait. He had previously been High Commissioner to Ceylon and to India. Other positions took him to Athens, New York and Paris. The views expressed in this article are the personal views of the author.

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