

“To Jerusalem is given the promise that all nations will go up there to pray to God, the one true Lord of the world. In the course of history many peoples have gone up to Jerusalem in different waves and settled there. But Jerusalem is still far from being a city of peace. During his second stay in Dormition Abbey’s Beit Joseph, James Paharik examines in the course of many conversations the causes, prejudices, sociological and ethnic fault-lines, and human intransigencies of the situation. Along with many who live in the land itself and with idealists who come from outside, he goes in search of peace among the mixture of cultures and religions. In this he is supported not only by desire, but by a hope which is grounded in the fact that God himself works in us through his Spirit. For Paharik, the monks on Mount Zion become witnesses of this hope, a hope which will find concrete expression in the projected Beit Benedict, an academy for the promotion of peace among the adherents of the three abrahamic religions. If, like Mary, whose death is commemorated on this mountain, we open ourselves fully to God, then we shall no longer judge one another but discover one another in God.”

—Dr. Notker Wolf, OSB
Abate Primate
Badia Primaziale S. Anselmo
Rome

“I heartily recommend *The Long Journey* because it explores in a balanced way the historical and contemporary multilayered tapestry of the Holy Land. Woven into this tapestry is the possibility of diminishing and even ending the present division of Jews and Arabs. Though today one has reason to be pessimistic about the outcome of this journey, in these pages we glimpse a future beyond the present impasse.”

—Marc H. Ellis
Center for Jewish Studies
Baylor University

“Prof. James Paharik combines an account of his journey of personal discovery of the present situation in Jerusalem and the Holy Land generally with the reflective analysis of a trained and observant sociologist and with his own spiritual meditation. His journey, as he notes, was also an interior one. Through numerous interviews with people from all walks of life and social levels he is able to portray realistically the painful divisions, wounds, and injustices present in all sectors of this society.

“As Paharik observes, the scientific method is inherently comparative, and his comparisons with the wounds and injustices suffered in other societies in the recent past, particularly in the USA, are illuminating and offer some hope for possible solutions.

“This book is to be recommended to all who wish to understand better the problems of this area of the world, problems which continue to have extensive repercussions throughout the world.”

—Mark Sheridan, OSB
Rettore Magnifico
Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo
Rome

The Long Journey

In Search of Justice and Peace
in Jerusalem

James G. Paharik

Foreword by R. Scott Appleby



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Dedication

To Helene, my true companion on the journey of life

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FOREWORD

Scholars and practitioners of peace building are fond of reciting two well-known epigrams: “Be the change you wish to see in the world” (Gandhi) and “If you want peace, work for justice” (Pope Paul VI). In the elegant and insightful journal of a peace pilgrim to Jerusalem that you are about to read, James Paharik explores the wisdom of each imperative and demonstrates how the pope’s command to seek peace through justice presumes and builds upon the Mahatma’s call to personal transformation. In a phrase: one cannot begin to comprehend the meaning of justice, or fathom its demands, unless and until one’s heart becomes open to compassion for every suffering human being. *Mercy is justice!* in a world whose moral contours are shaped by sin and ambiguity, by grace and freedom.

Nowhere is this peace-defining paradox more vividly apparent, or more difficult to embrace, than in the city that moved the Messiah to tears at its unfulfilled promise, its willful rejection of divine mercy. And so it was to Jerusalem that our author journeyed in order to discover the dynamics of peace building in a setting shaped by religious zeal and ethno-nationalist violence—yet surprisingly capable of hope and renewal. There he encountered the painful ironies on daily display at the spiritual epicenter of the three great ancient faiths that proclaim the One God of History, the Lord of Justice and Mercy, even as some of their misguided adherents render Jerusalem a place of heartbreak and betrayal.

One such painful irony reflected upon in these pages, the tragic consequences of which are still being felt by the dwindling

Christian population, is the legacy of the Crusades, an abominable offense against Muslims and indeed against all humanity—and thus against the One whom Christians confess to be God-become-Man. Nor was that multigenerational event the last time Christianity was compromised by entanglements with imperial ambition and power, as students of modern European and American “statecraft” are well aware.

Fortunately, the Christian presence in the Holy Land is not merely a tale of terrors perpetrated by medieval or modern crusaders—or of embarrassing contemporary intra-Christian squabbles (and occasional fisticuffs) marring otherwise solemn rituals at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher! Indeed, one of the many virtues of *The Long Journey* is the light it sheds on Catholic peace building in Jerusalem. Animating the dialogue, hospitality, and interreligious collaboration practiced at Beit Benedict, Paharik’s home away from home, is a theological anthropology that discerns and celebrates the presence of the divine in every act of human freedom, and most powerfully in the act of seeking reconciliation.

Another poignant irony explored here is the moral plight of Israel, the nation-state, as it strives to provide security for its citizens while also upholding the ideals of Israel, the blessed community. Like many before him, Paharik recoils at the spectacle of systemic abuses committed by the state, and at the inhumane treatment of Palestinians by some of Israel’s “extra-legal” settlers and Jewish extremists. How can a people whose history is suffused in suffering at the hands of oppressors tolerate any but the most compassionate policies toward the vulnerable “other” in its midst?

Yet because he practices compassion, our guide on the path to peace is poised to help us understand how people whose own vulnerability and minority status has so often been exploited can come to place their own safety and well-being above everything else, even their sense of justice.

Professor Paharik does not come to condemn, however, but to understand—and to “be the change” we wish to see in the world. Thus he sets his sights not on the surfaces but the depths, where he discovers and shares with us stories of compassionate women and men of Israel—not least, courageous fathers, from Zacharias to Yitzhak Frankenthal—who sacrificed personal security to make forgiveness and reconciliation a palpable reality in a land too often marred by retaliation. We meet justice-seeking Christians and Muslims, too, who have rejected the extremism of their respective coreligionists and have founded or joined one or more of the numerous nongovernmental organizations working in the Holy Land for peace, human rights, development, and reconciliation.

Indeed, *The Long Journey* provides a vivid “map of hope,” a representative profile of a larger and equally impressive range of individuals and movements working daily to make peace in Israel/Palestine a real possibility by sowing the seeds of justice. As one who has journeyed often to Jerusalem, and who shares the author’s admiration of relentless peace builders such as Zoughbi Zoughbi, head of the Wi’am Institute, and the Benedictine monks of Dormition Abbey, I know firsthand that what pilgrim Paharik says is true: genuine peace emerges “from the ground up,” through the quiet but persistent and profound efforts of people whose own hearts have been transformed and who have the courage to believe in and evoke the inner goodness of others.

The greater contribution of this disciplined meditation, however, lies in the spirit and ethos of peace building it slyly conveys. Appreciate not only what the author hears but also how carefully he listens; not only what he shows the reader but also how and what he has trained his eyes to see. The change we seek comes about through such practices, and from the heart that nurtures them.

Scott Appleby
University of Notre Dame
August 24, 2008

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INTRODUCTION

According to archaeologists, Jerusalem has been inhabited for at least five thousand years, making it one of the world's oldest cities. Throughout its long history, the city has frequently been the site of turmoil and strife. This was certainly true in the time of Jesus. Today on the Mount of Olives stands the Church of Dominus Flevit (Latin for "the Lord wept"), which offers a magnificent panorama of the Old City. The church is an architectural monument to the scriptural account of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem: "As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes'" (Luke 19:41-42). His weeping foreshadows the terrible sequence of events that would come: his own crucifixion, the decimation of the temple, and, finally, the destruction of much of the first-century city.

A millennium later Crusader forces are also said to have wept as they paused on another mountain, this one to the north rather than the east of the city. Their tears were born of relief and delight over their first sight of the Holy City; thus, they named that mountaintop, traditionally regarded as the site of the temple where Samuel declared Saul king of Israel (1 Sam 10:17-19), *Mons Gaudii*, or Mount Joy. Despite their tears, the Crusaders descended from this hallowed place with a murderous wrath on

the residents of Jerusalem, ushering in an era of violence that lasted for nearly two centuries.

These are only two of the stories that compose the turbulent history of the city, a history that intrudes into the present day. Yet Jerusalem, since at least the days of King Melchizedek of Salem (in Arabic *salam* or *salaam*, in Hebrew *shalom*), has, because of its association with the divine, also stood as an enduring testimony to the dream of peace. Biblical references to Jerusalem often celebrate this dimension of the city, as in Psalm 76:

In Judah God is known,
his name is great in Israel.
His abode has been established in Salem,
his dwelling place in Zion.
There he broke the flashing arrows,
the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war.
Selah

Indeed, over the course of many centuries, to diverse people and in myriad circumstances, God's wish for peace has been dramatically made manifest in Jerusalem. It was in Jerusalem where, according to the Gospel of John (20:19), the resurrected Jesus appeared at the hiding place of his disciples; his first words to them were "Peace be with you." The Acts of the Apostles (2:43-47) describes the coming of the Holy Spirit to Mount Zion and the revolution that followed:

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Though both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are replete with such tales of wonder, modern readers are often perplexed by them. C. S. Lewis defined miracles as “an interference with Nature by a supernatural power.”¹ Alternatively, miracles might be understood as an expression of an overwhelming awareness of God’s astounding generosity, as expressed in this song of David (Psalm 23):

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

I am one of many who came to Jerusalem in search of signs that it might fulfill its destiny as the embodiment of the kingdom of God. Admittedly, those signs are not at the moment readily apparent. Jerusalem is characterized by deep dichotomies, by the abrupt collision between the ancient and the modern, the sacred and profane, the ideal and real. Jerusalem is neither simple nor uniform but multilayered and multifaceted. In many respects it is several different cities, each with a distinct culture that places it at odds with the others. Only faith allows us to imagine how these many disparate realities might be reconciled. Indeed, the mosaic that is Jerusalem constitutes a microcosm of the entire region, where peoples with opposing identities and traditions uneasily strive to inhabit one small, coveted piece of land.

The chapters that follow are based on the journal that I wrote during the months of April, May, and June of 2007, from Easter through Pentecost. Though each chapter can be viewed as a

self-contained entity, the reader will soon discover that there is a common thread that runs through these nine essays. As a whole, the book examines the ways in which geographical, historical, theological, and sociological factors intersect to create the dilemmas, and also the opportunities, that confront the people of this region. The book repeatedly returns to reflections on the question of how Jews and Palestinians might transcend their divisions and antagonisms to create a society that fulfills its biblical promise as a kingdom of justice and peace.

I arrived in Jerusalem as an oblate novice of Dormition Abbey. In addition to my participation in the prayer life of the monastic community, I intended to make an oblation, or offering, by guiding them in the development of their programs to foster reverence and reconciliation through their institute, Beit Benedict Peace Academy. In order to do so, it was important to begin by studying other peace and human rights organizations throughout the city and to assess their effectiveness in accomplishing the task of peace building.

My research plan was based on the advice that Robert Park gave to his graduate students in the 1920s at the University of Chicago: "Go and sit in the lounges of luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedown; sit in the Orchestra Hall and in the Star and Garter Burlesque. In short, go and get the seat of your pants dirty in real research."² Jerusalem became my sociological laboratory; I ventured into its streets to experience its remarkable, and sometimes bewildering, complexity. In addition to the many people I encountered through participant observation, I conducted more than two dozen in-depth interviews with leaders of peace and human rights organizations; these organizations constituted a purposive sample that represented the wide range of strategies employed to build a more equitable and compassionate society.

In my research, I discovered that the residents of Jerusalem are keenly aware of how they are perceived in other nations, particularly the United States. Many of those whom I met wanted me to know that the images by which they are typically portrayed in the media do not tell their stories. Palestinians are especially concerned that they have been labeled as fanatics or terrorists; in fact, the great majority share the same goals—working productively, caring for their families, contributing to their churches and communities—that motivate the people of other nations.

Those who work for peace here also resemble their colleagues in other parts of the world. However, their efforts are perhaps driven by a greater sense of urgency as the prospects for a just end to the conflict steadily wane even as the yearning for a resolution intensifies. At the same time they are uniquely inspired by the distinctive legacy of this city, with its ancient calling to be a fulfillment of prophetic visions.

May this book honor the sacrifices and the unfaltering faith of those in this city who continue the quest for the day, described in Isaiah 62, when Jerusalem's "vindication shines out like the dawn, / and her salvation like a burning torch."



THE JOURNEY BEGINS

As I sat in the Atlanta airport waiting for my plane to board for Tel Aviv, I felt more than the usual sense of excitement that one has when beginning international travel. The sabbatical I had been granted from my teaching position at Seton Hill University would enable me to spend an extended period of time—two and a half months—in Jerusalem. I was embarking on a journey of study and spiritual reflection that would bring to fruition many months of planning and would afford me new insights into how tolerance and reconciliation might be cultivated in that troubled land.

I had been eager to return to the Holy Land since my briefer visit two years earlier. My desire to be there was, to be sure, not unusual; it had been felt by many people over thousands of years, and for understandable reasons. There is the spectacular terrain that ranges from the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea, the Negev Desert to the green highlands of the Galilee and the forested headwaters of the Jordan River. The landscape has an aesthetic quality that is truly inspirational, with vistas that evoke a sense of the divine. More tangibly, in a part of the world that is mostly arid, the land has the capacity to abundantly sustain life. This narrow piece

of earth forms a section of the famous Fertile Crescent that stretches from the Nile River in Egypt to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Iraq. It is in this region that plants were first domesticated at Jericho eleven thousand years ago, a revolution that made possible the flowering of the earliest civilizations.

Ironically, it is the very capacity to nourish life that has made the Fertile Crescent an arena for extinguishing life through invasion, warfare, and exploitation. Four thousand years ago, present-day Israel and Palestine were inhabited by Canaanites, a Semitic people who lived under the domination of Egyptian rulers. It is still possible to find remnants of Canaanite civilization in places such as Beth Shean, Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo. At Megiddo thirty-five hundred years ago, Pharaoh Thutmose III defeated an uprising by Canaanite rebels; that ferocious battle, as well as a long history of subsequent conflicts, made Megiddo, or Armageddon, a symbol of horrific warfare. In later centuries Philistine, Hebrew, Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, Roman, Persian, Arabian, and Christian invaders unleashed death and destruction on the Land of Canaan and also built new civilizations, thereby leaving their marks on the landscape as well as its peoples and its cultures—imprints that continue to be visible today.

Every part of the world has a geographical past; most have a human history as well, though that history is often sketchily documented. Thanks to unusually complete records and to extensive archaeological studies, there are few regions on earth whose past is as well known as this one's is. The awareness that nearly every valley and hillside was the site of a significant event gives one the sense of being inside a full-scale ancient history museum.

I had experienced that feeling many times during my previous trip, when I spent several weeks with my wife and our four teenagers on pilgrimage. From our base at Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem, we had explored the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane, walked the *Via Dolorosa* (Way of Sorrows), and

visited Ein Kerem and Bethlehem. Later we spent a remarkable week at Tabgha, the priory of Dormition Abbey on the lush shores of the Sea of Galilee. Tabgha (from the Greek *heptapegon* for the seven nearby springs that flow into the lake) commemorates the place of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. The association of Tabgha with the feeding of the multitudes is an ancient one; a fourth-century mosaic depicting bread and fish is beautifully preserved beneath the altar of the present church.

Like so many places in the Holy Land, Tabgha resounds with the echoes of biblical passages. From the shore at Dalmanutha one can descend over the rocks and wade in the Galilee or hire a boat, as we did, and sail across the water. Located in a basin surrounded by mountains, the lake is still subject to sudden storms like the one described in chapter four of the Gospel of Mark. At Tabgha we clearly understood the meaning of what the late Bargil Pixner, OSB, a former prior of Tabgha, meant when he wrote that the land is the “fifth gospel”; by “reading” it, one gains deeper insight into the written texts.

Tabgha is one of several places on the northern coast of the Galilee that plays a crucial role in Christian Scriptures. Nearby are Capernaum, site of Jesus’ teaching and miraculous works; Bethsaida, birthplace of several of the disciples; and Magdala, home of Mary Magdalene. It was along this shore that Jesus encountered those who would so faithfully commit themselves to his ministry and those to whom he offered such astounding demonstrations of his gift of healing:

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately

he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. (Mark 1:16-20)

The next passage in the Gospel of Mark (1:21-28) continues the account:

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Thus Jesus' authority was established in this region, and it became the center of his following. On the hill above Tabgha, Jesus is believed to have preached the Sermon on the Mount, which so succinctly and poetically encapsulates his message. The octagonal Church of the Beatitudes, which affords a majestic view of the lake below, now stands on the site.

On that earlier visit, we drove west from Tabgha into the hills to visit Nazareth and Cana, then east to the Golan Heights, and finally north, almost to the Lebanon border, to Banias (Caesarea Philippi), whose spring is an important source of the Jordan River. It is on route to Banias, after the feeding of the multitudes, that one of the most dramatic events in the New Testament is set. The event is the acknowledgment by Peter that Jesus is more than a teacher (rabbi), and greater even than a prophet: "Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that

I am?’ And they answered him, ‘John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’ He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah’” (Mark 8:27-29). That recognition of Jesus as the Son of God represented a decisive, and fateful, break between the faith of the followers of Jesus and the Judaism in which they had been formed.

From the heights of Baniyas, it is possible to glimpse the snow-tinged peaks of Mount Hermon, mentioned in Psalm 133 which honors the blessings of unity:

How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the LORD ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.

Near Baniyas, at Kibbutz Hagoshrim, we had rented a raft and paddled down the Jordan, which in that section is not the docile stream that flows into the Galilee but a swift-running, whitewater river. That excursion was one of the highlights of our trip for my children if not for me!

After I had seen my family safely onto their airplane for the journey home, I stayed on for another few weeks to study at Yad Vashem, the renowned institute for Holocaust commemoration and research. The institute is aptly named; it derives from Isaiah 56:5 where the Lord says, “I will give, in my house and within my walls, / a monument and a name [*yad vashem*] / better than sons and daughters; / I will give them an everlasting name.” The

seminar at Yad Vashem provided me with much material to use in teaching the *Shoah* (the Hebrew term for the destruction of European Jewry) and inspired me to develop, with the assistance of the staff at the National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education, a new online program in Holocaust and genocide studies at Seton Hill University.

Now, years later, as my plane landed at Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean Sea, I was again cognizant of the long history of the land. It was in this part of the coast that Egyptians, Canaanites, and later Philistines controlled the port cities of Joppa, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza. In ancient times the coastal plain formed a key section of the *Via Maris*—the Way of the Sea—that connected Egypt with Syria and Mesopotamia. To the southeast lay the Philistine city-state of Ekron, and across the Elah Valley was Gath, home, the Bible tells us, of the warrior-giant Goliath. These strongholds of Philistia figure prominently in the biblical texts that recount the conquest of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites. The second book of Samuel invokes them in one of the most moving laments in the Hebrew Scriptures. When both King Saul and his son Jonathan are killed by Philistines in a battle at Mount Gilboa, David cries:

Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places!
How the mighty have fallen!
Tell it not in Gath,
proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon
or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice. (2 Sam 1:19-20)

Having navigated customs with my luggage safely in tow, I emerged from the airport onto a boulevard lined with palm trees. There I found a taxi-van, or *sherut*, to take me and a group of fellow travelers on the sixty-three kilometer trip to Jerusalem. We drove out of the airport and made our way onto Highway 1.

Before long we passed the city of Lod (Lydda in Greek), reported in 1 Chronicles to have been founded by the tribe of Benjamin and where, according to the Acts of the Apostles, Peter healed the paralyzed Aeneas. Just to the south was Ramla (Ramle), a city that became an important center for the Arab Muslims who invaded and conquered Palestine in the seventh century. As we continued on, I noticed the exit toward Modi'in, where a sprawling new city is being built. It was there in 168 BCE that Judas Maccabeus began a revolt against the Greek rulers of Palestine that led to the establishment of the Hasmonean Kingdom.

As the sherut headed east the terrain became more undulating, and I realized that we had entered the Judean hills. We passed the town of Abu Gosh, location of the biblical Kiryat Ye'arim, where the Ark of the Covenant, having been rescued from the Philistines, resided for twenty years before being carried in triumph to Jerusalem by King David. Abu Gosh is also the site of the Church of the Resurrection, built by Crusaders in the twelfth century to venerate the place where Jesus appeared on the road to Emmaus. As we began the steep ascent toward Jerusalem, I saw a sign that pointed the way to the tomb of the prophet Samuel. In every direction, it seemed, holy places lay waiting to be visited or discovered.

In the Holy Land, however, the sacred must be viewed in conjunction with the stark reality of the profane. It is said that we must know history in order to avoid repeating its mistakes; yet while the tales of those who inhabited this land in the distant past are the focus of both scholarly inquiry and prayerful reverence, the foibles they describe are nonetheless very much alive in the present. The violence and destruction that figure so prominently in the biblical narrative of this region are also painfully evident in its recent past. Both ancient and modern history cast a disturbing shadow over the present, a present rife with religious and cultural divisions, military occupation, and oppression.

The Judean foothills through which I had just travelled—the Shephelah—were the locus of fierce battles in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Lod and Ramle were initially held by Arab forces, but they came under heavy attack by the Israeli army and were soon taken. In the aftermath of the battle, the Arab residents of the towns were forcibly evacuated. The displaced persons numbered fifty to sixty thousand, making this evacuation the largest of the war. After the war most refugees were prevented from returning to this region, and their land and property were confiscated. This is an example of the sort of cataclysmic event that continues to sear the minds of both Arabs and Israelis, and that underlies the strife that dominates this land.

As the sherut drove through the Judean hills, signs of the present conflict increased. We passed through a series of checkpoints patrolled by Israeli soldiers with weapons. Scattered on knolls on either side of the road were several small Arab villages, looking impoverished and isolated. These villages are remnants of the numerous Palestinian settlements that existed before the war, many of which were entirely demolished and are legally prohibited from being rebuilt. At the same time, further east near Highway 1 in the occupied West Bank is the large and expanding settlement of Ma'ale Adumim, only one of many new communities there for the exclusive use of Israeli Jews. Residents of Ma'ale Adumim inhabit a world of privilege that is inaccessible to those who live in the pitiable Arab villages of el Azariyeh (named for Lazarus, the traditional site of Bethany) and Abu Dis that are so geographically near yet so culturally removed.

We drove on, ascending still further, and reached the edges of Jerusalem. There we found a rapidly emerging city made of freshly poured concrete and partially finished buildings. Then we made our way through the older, more established areas, driving through the American colony founded in the nineteenth century. We continued along Nablus Road, past St. George

Cathedral, home of Jerusalem's Anglican Church. Finally, we arrived at a crossroad where we could glimpse the ancient walls of the Old City, the walls that encompass the sites so precious to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the Western Wall of the Temple, the Dome of the Rock, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher—all these places of reverence and awe lie inside those walls, among the labyrinthine corridors they contain.

In the brief trip from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem I had glimpsed the contradiction that is modern Israel, a society that transforms from open-air history museum to modern apartheid state in the blink of an eye, that shifts from the sacred places where God's love for humanity and the message of peace on earth were most dramatically proclaimed to places where people are treated with cruelty and contempt and innocent lives are systematically damaged and destroyed. Yet these severe contrasts also, strangely, contribute to the appeal of this place. It holds the allure of a puzzle, challenging one to envision a means by which the hellish reality of the present can be brought into alignment with the glorious visions of justice, equality, and peace articulated so long ago.

The sherut driver wound his way through the narrow streets and up the steep ascent to Mount Zion. Mount Zion, perhaps the holiest place in the Holy City, has been an object of veneration for thousands of years. Psalm 48 sings its glory:

Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised
in the city of our God.
His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation,
is the joy of all the earth.

From Mount Zion's commanding height one can gaze across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives and envision the path that Jesus would have taken from the Garden of Gethsemane to Zion, a gathering place for early Christians and site of the Last Supper. On this mountain, it is said, the Holy Spirit, after the

death of Jesus, entered the world; it is here too, according to tradition, that Mary, mother of Jesus, died.

By the time I reached my destination it was 9:00 p.m., and I was the last passenger on the sherut. I said good-bye to the driver and struggled to pull my luggage up the worn stone steps, steps that I had ascended so often during my last visit. Usually this spot just outside the Zion gate to the Old City was bustling with people. But this night it was cold, and the streets were silent and empty. It was still too early for tourist season, and the weather was not conducive to an evening stroll. As I walked through a narrow passage between high stone walls, every step that I took echoed loudly. Then, straight ahead, I saw the outlines of the Crusader-era structure built atop the ruins of the presumed place of the Last Supper. My family and I prayed in its Upper Room nearly every day during our last visit. Then I turned the corner, and there loomed the enormous, fortress-like Dormition Basilica and Abbey, built in 1910 to commemorate the place where Mary fell into eternal sleep. This was my destination.

The basilica was dark. I tried to open the iron gate that resembles a castle portcullis, but it was locked. It was past the time when the monks return to their rooms after evening prayer. I feared that they had gone to sleep for the night. I thought of Walter de la Mare's poem, "The Listeners":

"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller,
 Knocking on the moonlit door . . .
 And a bird flew up out of the turret,
 Above the Traveller's head:
 And he smote upon the door again a second time;
 "Is there anybody there?" he said . . .
 But only a host of phantom listeners
 That dwelt in the lone house then
 Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
 To that voice from the world of men . . .

[H]e suddenly smote on the door, even
Louder, and lifted his head:—
“Tell them I came, and no one answer’d,
That I kept my word,” he said.³

Suddenly a tall figure wearing a hood and a long, black cloak opened one of the monastery doors. It was not an apparition but ever-reliable Pater Elias, the *gastbruder* (guest brother), and a welcome sight! He greeted me warmly and helped me to cart my heavy bags to Beit Josef (House of Joseph), where I would be staying for the next two months. Beit Josef is the guesthouse at the abbey, and during our last stay we spent many happy hours in its dining room and in “The Oasis” recreation room, talking and playing card games with Father Paulus and the other guests.

As Father Elias led me to my room, I felt as though I was returning home. My relationship with these Benedictines, though initiated quite accidentally, had grown progressively deeper over the previous two years. My wife and I had first found our way to them through a member of the monastic community, Father Johannes Oravec, whom we met while he was studying in the Seminary at Saint Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Father Johannes introduced us to the history of the Dormition community and recounted its valiant struggle during an often-chaotic one hundred years on Mount Zion to remain, even in the midst of warfare and strife, a place of sanctity, prayer, and respect for people of all faiths.

From Father Johannes we learned of the long tradition of the abbey in fostering interreligious understanding, including the efforts of Abbot Leo Rudloff in the aftermath of the 1948 war to engage in a process of rapprochement with Israeli government officials and with Jewish religious leaders. By the late 1950s Abbot Leo had learned Hebrew and had established a close relationship with the influential theologian Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

These experiences led Abbot Leo to contribute to the writing of *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Time), the landmark 1965 Vatican document by which the Catholic Church called for more constructive relations with those of other faiths.⁴ Abbot Leo's successor, Father Laurentius Klein, extended these activities, inaugurating programs to facilitate a dialogue between his Benedictine community and other Christian organizations and a dialogue among the Christians, Jews, and Muslims of Jerusalem.

Father Johannes had also described the community's current efforts to promote peace. Guided by Abbot Benedikt Lindemann's vision, the community practices the Benedictine ideals of hospitality, compassion, and reverence in order to create a sacred space where reconciliation is possible. Yet despite the primer that Father Johannes had given us before our departure, we were not prepared for what we were to encounter in Jerusalem or at Tabgha.

During our stay in Jerusalem, my family learned how sharply segregated the city is, how absolute is the division between the Arab neighborhoods of the east and the Jewish communities of the west. Dormition Abbey, located on the border between the two halves of the city, provides a haven of serenity to residents on both sides of the divide and a rare place to safely and respectfully encounter the other and the divine. Given its location, we were not surprised to hear that as a result of a gathering of Arab and Jewish youths at Dormition Abbey in 2003, a request was made to the community to expand its programming for peace; participants, who were grateful for having found a neutral and safe place at Dormition, expressed a desire to continue to explore the path toward reconciliation that they had begun. Meanwhile, at the Tabgha priory we observed the healing effect of a program that brings Jewish and Arab children who have disabilities, along with their families, together for retreats. This program, which has been operating there for many years, makes peace, as the monks say, one family at a time.

During that visit Abbot Benedikt invited my wife and me to meet the leaders of the team who were raising funds in Germany for the institution of Beit Benedict Peace Academy, which the monks were developing to respond to the need for their initiatives for peace in Jerusalem. This meeting was the catalyst for our decision to do our part to raise support for Beit Benedict in the United States.

Based on what I had learned during my previous visit, I was convinced that the serene and faithful Benedictines of Dormition Abbey have a precious gift to offer to the task of healing this embittered, conflict-riven society. I was determined to devote my sabbatical to living and praying with the community, to deepening my understanding of their distinctive approach to reconciliation, and to meeting others in the city who are also committed to working for justice and peace. As I settled into my spartan room in Beit Josef, I was comforted to know that, during the weeks ahead, I would have a unique opportunity to devote myself full time to the service of peace.