

What are **first principles**? The ancient philosopher, Aristotle, described first principles as the most basic truths upon which knowledge is built. For instance, if you want to understand the exact composition of a **cake**, you must break it down to its constitutive elements: flour, eggs, butter, **milk**, etc. What is **milk**? **Milk** is **water**, proteins, minerals, etc. What is **water**? **Water** is a molecule composed of two hydrogen atoms and one **oxygen** atom. What is an **oxygen** atom, etc., etc.? That's the extent of my knowledge of chemistry. I'm sure you get the point.

Unlike chemistry, history is malleable in that it is "written by the victors." However, If we want to comprehend the events of today, we must know what **really** happened yesterday. That means we sometimes have to search beyond the headlines and school-board approved textbooks to find the **first principles** of history in order to have a clear understanding of the present.

For full disclosure, I am not a historian. I have a Bachelor of Arts in Theology & History, what amounts to an undergraduate minor in Philosophy, and a Master of Arts in Theology, in which my thesis was focused on Middle Eastern Christianity and its diaspora. I am not a historian. I am merely a student of history. What follows is not a research paper or a work that could be submitted for professional peer review and publication. At most, you might call it an academic essay. Perhaps, better put...a teaching essay.

### **The Holy Land, aka *Palestine***

For average Catholics in America, their knowledge of the historical realities of the Holy Land stops with the New Testament and does not resume until the post-WW2 founding of the modern nation-state of Israel in 1948. This is due in large part to the heresy of Zionism that was developed in the late 1800's and propagated widely (even to the current day) by Evangelical Protestants. For the purpose of this essay, I will start my review of historical **first principles** of the Holy Land with the Ottoman Empire, which was definitively established by the late 1400's, and of which, the Holy Land was a part of, including Jerusalem, until the defeat of the Empire in WWI in 1918.

The Ottoman Empire was founded by sunni Muslims who came to be the super-majority of its citizens. However, Christians and Jews also lived freely in the Empire, in the Holy Land. By *lived freely*, you should not mistake that the Christians and Jews enjoyed the same rights and benefits that their fellow Muslim citizens enjoyed. However, they were accorded the rights to practice their religion, own property, and participate in government and commerce. The Christian and Jewish minorities were also afforded official protection by the Empire against zealous Muslim aggression. With exceptions, the Christians and Jews lived moderately well as second class citizens within the Muslim dominated empire, and the relations among the adherents of the three monotheistic religions were **relatively** polite. The Holy Land (aka Palestine and/or Israel) was not vacant land just waiting for some group of people to come and colonize it.

### **Jewish Nationalist Movement & the Balfour Declaration**

With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the end of WWI, the Holy Land came under the jurisdiction of the British. The indigenous Muslims, Christians, and Jews of millennia past who had been living together under the relatively considerate rule of the Ottomans now fell under the governance of London.

Just prior to the fall of the Ottoman Empire, there began a political movement throughout Europe for the establishment of a Jewish nation. The leader of this Jewish nationalist movement was a man by the name of Theodore Herzl. Herzl had the support, both political and financial, of many of the European elite, including the French branch of the Rothschild family. In 1904, Herzl secured an audience with Pope St. Pius X in the hope of obtaining the support of the Holy See in bringing his plan to fruition in the Holy Land. St. Pius X diplomatically conveyed a clear NO. From an account of the meeting attributed to Herzl himself, the saintly pope also remarked that, while the Church was powerless to prevent the European Jews from colonizing the Holy Land, if they did, "*we shall have churches and priests ready to baptize all of you.*"

The year before the conclusion of WWI, the Jewish Nationalist movement took a great leap forward toward accomplishing its goal. Or, rather...it was the government of Great Britain that took the leap for it by the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

#### **From the Declaration:**

*His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.*

The Balfour Declaration was so called as it was the work of British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour and was addressed to the most prominent member of the British Jewish community, Lord Lionel Walter Rothschild of

the famous banking family of the same last name, for dissemination amongst the Zionist (Jewish Nationalist) Federation of Great Britain.

**Interbellum: WWI to WWII**

In the years between the conclusion of WWI and the beginning of WWII, the Jewish Nationalist movement gained ever greater political and financial backing. The aforementioned Balfour Declaration and the subsequent advent of British rule over the Holy Land after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in WWI made for fertile ground to realize the dream of a Jewish nation in Palestine. During the 1920’s and 1930’s, with increasing Jewish immigration from Europe to Palestine, the political power of the British Government and the financial support of Zionist Federation elites (the Rothschilds being chief among them) were brought to bear upon the long established Palestinian Muslim and Christian communities in the Holy Land.

As predicted by Theodore Herzl himself, tensions grew as non-Jewish Palestinians were forced or coerced off from their ancestral lands to make room for Jewish immigrants. This resulted in several uprisings that were harshly put down by the British Military, further weakening the position of Palestinian Muslims and Christians.

**Post WWII and the Nakbah**

In the aftermath of the horrific events of WWII, not least of which was the Holocaust, the Holy Land became one of the destinations of choice for European Jews seeking a new life elsewhere. The tensions between the indigenous population of Palestinians and the new European Jewish settlers became more than post-war Britain could handle at the time. So, the issue of the Holy Land was referred to the newly created United Nations in 1947. The plan that was proposed and passed by resolution of the UN saw the Holy Land partitioned into a Palestinian state and a Jewish state.

However, this plan was rejected by Palestinian leadership as well as their Arab neighbors as it completely disregarded the property ownership rights of the indigenous Palestinians whose ancestral lands fell within the proposed boundaries of the Jewish state and amounted to a forced exile with no possibility of return. By the Spring of 1948, Palestinians refusing to leave their rightful lands became the targets of Jewish para-military groups that drove them from their homes and properties. In May 1948 the Jewish state declared independence and named its new county Israel. In response to forceful encroachment and the dispossession of Palestinian lands by Jewish settlers that culminated in the establishment of the new nation state of Israel, the surrounding Arab nations declared war. A war that the Arabs would lose.

By the end of the 1948 war, known to Palestinians as the Nakbah (“catastrophe”), an estimated 700,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes and land. Hundreds of Palestinian villages were ethnically cleansed or completely destroyed while the new nation-state of Israel welcomed more and more Jewish immigrants from around the world to take possession of the immorally acquired Palestinian homes, farms, and fields. The Palestinians, meanwhile, were scattered into refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.. These refugee camps, particularly in Gaza and the West Bank, ceased to be refugee camps and took on every characteristic of a concentration camp. This forced exodus of the Palestinians by the Israelis was not only a humanitarian disaster, but the foundational crime against humanity that defines the conflict today.

**Historical First Principles and Conclusion**

As is clear from this brief historical essay, the political narrative advanced by Israel, and repeated by American politicians, media, and Evangelical leaders, conveniently ignores (or misrepresents) historical **first principles**. The atrocities committed by Palestinians against Israelis is absolutely unjustifiable. You would be gravely mistaken to conclude that I support the terrorist acts of Hamas. However, considering the fallen nature of man, one should not be surprised that a people who has been (and is) the ongoing victim of genocide and ethnic cleansing would resist with brutal tactics. It should also be of no surprise that the Palestinians would harbor great animus toward those who have enabled (and continue to enable) their destruction, such as the United States of America.

**The conversion to the Catholic Faith of every Jewish and Palestinian soul in the Holy Land is the only path to true and lasting peace.** Until then, all financial and military support from the United States to Israel must cease, an international humanitarian relief effort must be deployed to Gaza immediately, and an international peace keeping force must be sent to protect the Palestinians from any further Israeli war crimes.

**EVERY** human being is created in the image and likeness of God. Period. Every human being of goodwill is horrifically shocked that the people who suffered so unimaginably under the demonic evils of Naziism would imitate their tormentors. Gaza encompasses 141 square miles—about 25% the size of Lake County. It **had** an official population of 2.2 million people. Since October of 2023, there are more than 300,000 dead or missing Palestinians in Gaza. Where are the missing? Undoubtedly, they are decomposing under the rubble, never to be identified. Those who are not shocked (**and righteously angry**) are either uninformed, or devoid of goodwill.

Jesus Christ, King of All Nations and Peoples, have mercy on us.