

Holy Land, Whose Land: Modern Dilemma, Ancient Roots?

Dorothy Drummond

Seattle: Educare Press, 2002. 326 pages.

Dorothy Drummond's book was born at the dawn of the third millennium, when the author was in Jerusalem. She had taken notes throughout her travels in the Holy Land, which she defines not only as the land of historic Palestine, but also the lands of present-day Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt (i.e., where the Patriarchs, Prophets, and the Holy Family roamed). Rather than write a travelogue, she decided to write a book about the Arab-Israeli conflict while interspersing her personal comments (in italics) about her journeys. Her intent is not to "answer the question posed in the title of this book. Rather, by shedding light on dark corners, it attempts to bring understanding," as she explains in the prologue.

The book is divided into three parts: a discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the present, a discussion of the roots of the conflict traveling 4,000 years into the past, and a brief discussion of how negotiation is the only way to resolve the conflict. There are maps and photographs throughout the book, as well as a 40-page glossary of the Holy Land's people and places. Drummond has written the work in the present tense, because of the immediacy of all that has happened in the Middle East, but the discussion ultimately centers on the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

Her book promises to be a good, balanced account written in a wonderfully accessible style. However, early on it runs into problems. For example, when she talks about the 1956 Israeli attack on Egypt, she fails

to mention that Britain and France were heavily involved in that war, a remarkable omission. Rabin was assassinated by “a crazed right-wing Israeli” who was, in fact, not crazed at all, but part of a movement of religious fanatics both in Israel and the United States who were calling for Rabin’s murder when he made peace with the Palestinians after the 1993 Oslo Peace Agreement. In Hebron, “a small but militant Jewish population” and “extremely conservative Jewish settlers” have forced themselves on the predominantly Arab city. But Drummond does not mention that they are heavily armed, taunt the Arab residents, and are predominantly from the United States. Furthermore, that whenever a settler commits an act of violence, a curfew is imposed not on the 400 settlers, but on the thousands of other city residents, while the settlers roam around brandishing their weapons.

Astonishingly, she claims that the al-Aqsa Intifada began when Ariel Sharon “appeared” at al-Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount), brushing aside the fact that he appeared with 1,000 men by his side, surely a thing far more provocative than the appearance of a single man. With regards to the Israeli-American relationship, she says that because the Israelis receive large amounts of aid from the latter, “often they must bend to the wishes of their benefactor, but refusing to on occasion as well.” It is certainly my perception that it is the United States that has bent and continues to bend to Israel’s desires more often than not.

Further in Part Two, we are told that Prophet Muhammad lost his father at the age of 2 and his mother at the age of 10, while, in fact, his father died before his birth and his mother died when he was 3 years old. King Abdullah ibn al-Husayn of Jordan, the great grandfather of the present King Abdullah, is referred to as a “Bedouin sheikh,” whereas he was a prince (emir), the son of al-Husayn, whose official titles were “Emir of Makkah, King of the Hijaz, and King of the Arabs.” The year for the civil war in Jordan is given as 1980 rather than 1970. King Faisal I of Iraq is referred to as King Abdullah’s cousin, whereas they are, in fact, brothers. Drummond claims that Syria and Iraq support one another, whereas they have been enemies for decades: Syria took Iran’s side in the Iran-Iraq war and even sent an armed contingent to fight in the 1991 Gulf War to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. She says that civil war took place in Lebanon from “the 1950s to the late 1980s,” giving the impression that it was a continuous 30-year war, which it was not.

I found the book’s strength to be in two areas: that of explaining why the Holy Land is so important to Jews, Christians, and Muslims without

prejudice, and in her genuine attempt to be unbiased in that she blames all sides for the mistakes made. The errors, some of which I have referred to above, definitely detract from the book. This is a shame, because her otherwise stylistically very readable book does have a positive – and hopeful – message to convey.

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