

Damascus - ancient city of the Bible

Several cities claim the sobriquet "Oldest City in the World," one of them being Jericho, where excavations go on apace whenever the temperature permits. Another serious claimant, but where there is little in the way of excavation, is the large, teeming capital of Syria, Damascus.

As archaeologist Father Luis Alonso-Shoekel, S.J., puts it, we must seek the memory of Damascus' ancient inhabitants "in the atmosphere of the city and glimpse their shadows in the passing wind." This is often the case, as one visits the much-lived-in, often-destroyed ancient cities of the Bible.

Damascus is mentioned as far back as the book of Genesis, when it was an important thoroughway. In desert lands, water is the most precious of elements, and a lasting oasis like Damascus becomes a "natural" for a city. About the time of Moses (roughly the 13th century before Christ) Damascus was inevitably an important crossroads linking three centers of power: Babylon, Egypt, and the little-known Hittites spread all around Asia Minor.

IN THE BOOK OF KINGS we learn of the contacts between Jews and Syrians, and the first prophet to visit Damascus seems to have been Elisha. However, to Christians it remains forever in the imagination as the city of St. Paul, described in some detail in Acts, chapter 9.

There is the famous Street Called Straight, narrow and unimpressive it is to the unaided eye, but truly straight it is and thrilling to the Christian who reads the account of Paul's conversion. There is the gate where Paul must have passed on his way to and from Jerusalem. Several feet below the present city level is the chapel that tradition says marks the house of Ananias. As we have to recall so often in the Holy Lands, this may not be the precise spot, but it is once again the approximate spot, and thus satisfies the pilgrim.

The great wall over which St. Paul was lowered in a basket is still there, even if it has been repaired again and again over the centuries. The chapel that traditionally marks the spot is somewhat larger than that of Ananias' house, but again is a holy spot for pilgrims.

STILL LESS DO WE KNOW the exact location of St. Paul's dramatic conversion. Somewhere on the road leading down to Jerusalem it must have been.

Ever since 636 A.D., of course, Damascus has been a predominantly Muslim city. They believe that it is the site of the Garden of Eden, and compared to the surrounding desert it is indeed a paradisaical garden. For several centuries, their Mameluke emperors ruled much of the world from here.

One noteworthy trace of the Omayyad dynasty is the great mosque. As you enter (shoes, of course, or with sandals over your shoes) you see an extraordinary assembly of mosaics, among the finest in the world. Because of Islam's opposition to the portrayal of human figures, none are portrayed here; however, it is remarkable to observe the amount of imagination and taste displayed in the portrayal of trees and shapes derived from architecture, as well as the usual arabesques expected in Muslim art. These mosaics were created in 715 A.D.

THE MOSQUE WAS originally a Christian church, but re-orientated in such a way that the mihrab (or shrine-niche) is not where the altar would have been, but facing toward Mecca. The original church, built in the 4th century under Emperor Theodosius, was intended for the head of St. John the Baptist, and even today there is a shrine within the mosque which is said to contain this great relic. Since the Muslims recognize St. John as a prophet, they have no scruple about venerating him.

Another Christian shrine, though a strange one, is the tower called the "Jesus Minaret." The Muslims, who accept Jesus as a prophet though not as the Christ, believe that He will return to earth on top of this minaret.

Within the mosque, anyone will be impressed at the continuous round of prayer and sacred study. Men and boys read the Koran, handing on traditional interpretations and engaged in prayer. If you have just come from Egypt, you will be impressed by the apparently deeper devotion of Muslims here in Syria.

AS YOU DRIVE OUT of Damascus, either down toward Jerusalem or up and west toward Baalbek, you re-enter the desert and see shepherds leading their sheep toward whatever nourishment they can find. Toward the Mediterranean looms lofty Mount Hermon, rising 9232 feet above the Lebanese-Syrian border. Snow-capped as it is, it has often been selected as the mountain of Christ's transfiguration.

Whether Hermon, Thabor, or some other mountain is the true spot, you sense that you are within the area known by Christ, when He walked on earth. For just over Mount Hermon from Damascus lies Galilee, where He spent most of the hidden and public life.



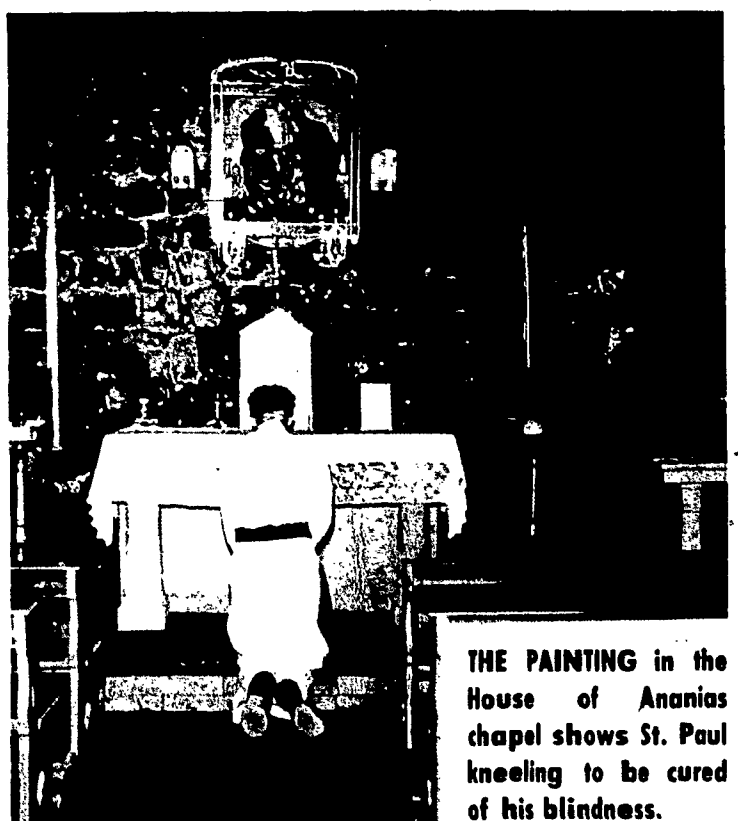
SQUATTING AGAINST an ancient building along the Street Called Straight, an elderly Muslim ceaselessly fingers her beads telling her prayers to Allah.

THIS IS THE THIRD of a series on the "Crescent of Christianity" written for the CLARION by the Rev. C. J. McNaspy, S.J. of AMERICA magazine, following a tour of ancient lands. Photos by the Rev. Elmo Romagosa of the CLARION Herald. Copyright, Nov. 1966, CLARION Herald.

THROUGH THIS GATE in the wall of Damascus, St. Paul, blinded after his encounter with the Lord, was led on the Street Called Straight to the house of Ananias.



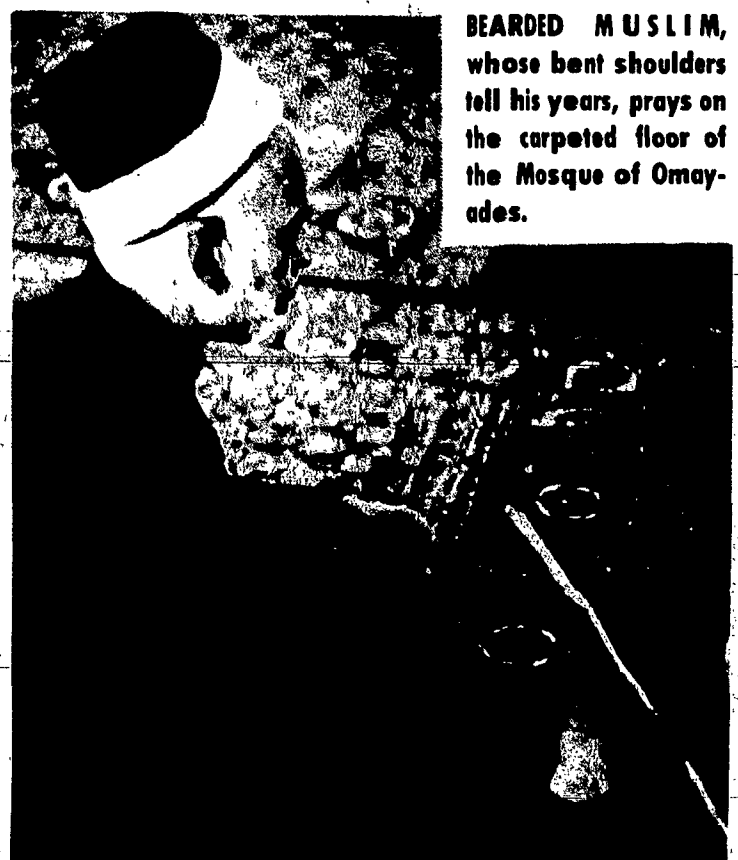
MERCHANTS hawk their wares along the Damascus sidewalks, as they have done for 3000 years.



THE PAINTING in the House of Ananias chapel shows St. Paul kneeling to be cured of his blindness.



BEDOUIN SHEPHERDS coax their herds through the arid, rock-filled land near the city.



BEARDED MUSLIM, whose bent shoulders tell his years, prays on the carpeted floor of the Mosque of Omayyades.

Thomas O'Brien Funeral Mass

Funeral Mass for Thomas P. O'Brien was offered by Father Benedict A. Ehmman in St. Michael's Church, Saturday, Oct. 29. In the Sanctuary were Rt. Rev. Msgr. Richard K. Burns and Rt. Rev. Msgr. John F. Duffy.

Mr. O'Brien, 64, of 129 McGuire Road, formerly of 32 Flower St., died Wednesday, Oct. 26. One of Mr. O'Brien's grandchildren is Father Thomas M. O'Brien, priest of the Rochester diocese and serving in Cochabamba, Bolivia.


Mr. O'Brien was a member of St. Michael's Holy Name Society and Commandery 43, Knights of St. John.

Surviving also is his wife, Tillie (Heberger) O'Brien; his son, Robert M.; two daughters, Mrs. Joseph (Madeleine) Kausch and Mrs. Raymond (Kathryn) Ruff; eight other grandchildren; nine great grandchildren and one sister, Mrs. Loretta Sylvester of Syracuse.

Father Paul M. Cloonan gave the blessing at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery. Arrangements by L. W. Maier's Sons, Clinton Ave. North.

Pontifical Rank
Vatican City —(RNS)— The Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities has raised the Institute of Philosophy and Theology in Paderborn, Germany, to the rank of a pontifical faculty of theology qualified to confer degrees.

FOR SOUND PROGRESSIVE GOVERNMENT ELECT



PETER J. VANDER TANG
14 years public service in state and county governments
REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE
County Legislature
3rd District
Towns of Gates & Ogden



GOD LOVE YOU

Most Reverend
Fulton J. Sheen

How often in cities, health departments ask citizens to submit to an examination for cancer so that the disease may be halted? But how few ever comply. Why? They are afraid that they will discover they have cancer. Hundreds of thousands of people prefer to live AS-IF they were healthy. They are afraid to know the truth, so they invent excuses: "I feel healthy," "Nothing wrong with me!" "Never felt better." What is dreaded is an encounter with Truth. Just as people avoid meeting those to whom they owe money and throw away envelopes which contain bills, so they take flight from any revelation of their true physical condition.

Apply this to the moral order. What is the reason for their unbelief? Why irreligion? Why push away a Bible in a hotel room? Because we do not want to know the Truth about ourselves. In the stillness of night we see ourselves in flashes as we really are, and then distract ourselves to escape the searchlight glare of our conscience. We live AS-IF we were good. About the only time some ever use the word conscience is when they say, "My conscience tells me I am right." What cancer is to the body, that our disordered life is to our spirit. We choose to live AS-IF everything were in order organically and morally.

Encounter with Christ in this state must be avoided. We do not feel uneasy when we speak of Confucius or the Vedic hymns. We are not upset by having a statue of Buddha placed in our room. But would we allow a crucifix to be hung before our eyes? Why the difference? It is because we are not involved with Buddha, but we do seem to be involved with Christ. Somehow we seem to be in the same relation to Christ as our bodies are to an X-ray machine. He may discover what is wrong on the inside. We walk on the other side of the street to avoid all contact and involvement with Him. We can no longer live AS-IF we were good and self-satisfied. So we say, "We do not believe." Unbelief is the fear of the truth about ourselves.

But there is another side of the picture. Just as submission to an X-ray may reveal the disease, it will also point the way to a cure. A toothache may indicate some hidden infection. If we face up to it, we submit to the dentist's drill and cure the cause of the ache. In like manner, the encounter with Christ is frightening, but once we meet Him head on and discover our true condition of heart, at once all our burdens are lifted. Before the encounter, He appears as a judge; after the encounter as an intercessor. Before the encounter He seems to be "purple robed and cypress-crowned"; after the encounter He is the all-loving Heart. But here the analogy with medicine begins to fail. The physician does not take on cancer to cure it; but Christ takes on sin to forgive it. His empathy is so great that our loneliness is His loneliness. Our seeming abandonment by God, He feels as His-own as He cries out on the Cross. Forgiveness cost Him something—His life. He became our hostage and our surety, "making Himself a sinner" to blot out our sins.

To all those whose life is grounded on the AS-IF, we propose this gradual approach. You are made up of having and being, of things outside yourself which adorn your life, and your personality. The way to strip ourselves of some of our having, our externals, is to gradually prepare for the encounter with Christ by getting rid of some of the sham of your life in the following ways:

1. Do not give your money to institutions or persons who are already rich. Christ is in the rich only if they are virtuous.
2. Give to the poor and you are giving to Christ. Christ is in the poor just because they are poor.
3. Be certain that the one to whom you give your externals will not invest any of it in stocks, bonds, property, marble buildings or swimming pools, but that every cent will be spent on the poor within the next 12 months.
4. The distribution of your alms should be done by someone who has the interests of the poor at heart, who knows of their condition everywhere and who is a father will help all the poor, not just one area or group. These conditions are not too difficult to fulfill for the Holy Father has established a mission to do this. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith which has the "first place" among all mission societies. Let me hear from you "as-ifers." God Love You!

Do you pride yourself on being "up on the news"? Then ask yourself this question: "How much do I know about what is happening on today's frontiers of the Church?" Find out in the words of missionaries living and working on the scene who write of their experiences in **WORLD MISSION**. This 112-page quarterly magazine, edited by the Most Rev. Fulton J. Sheen, will be sent to you for only \$5.00 a year. It is a gift for priests and school libraries. Write to **WORLD MISSION**, 366 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10001.

Can't see this column, please write to stand mail it to Most Rev. Fulton J. Sheen, National Director of The Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 366 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10001, or to your Diocesan Director, Rt. Rev. Msgr. John F. Duffy, 50 Chestnut Street, Rochester, New York 14604.

Jerusalem
New York—(RNS) usalem Bible, a co English translation sources made Catholic scholars in tain, has been published here and It is the first Ex lation from original the complete Bible Revised Standard V lished in 1952, and completed English make use of the Scrolls.
The new version name from a man French Bible done ten years ago Dominican scholars Bible who were tal in persuading ment to leave intact less Dead Sea Scrol found and to turn to "competent school
According to Fat der Jones, general the new English tra French Bible de Jes duced by L'Ecole 1956 was "the m translation from sources since the th when St. Jerome Latin Vulgate.
Instead of merely the French of the E usalem into English for The Jerusalem back to the origina Hebrew texts for the However, the expla ductions of various the Bible are for th translations from version, with here some post-Vatican dating.
Father Jones, ser in divinity at Chr in Liverpool, told ference here that h the production of t sion because he "fe

Aquinas In Phila


The annual Michigan, sponso a special interest the City of Rochee carried by the Aqu tute Marching Band select bands chose in the nationally tade.
For the first tin the parade will be color and will be viewing locally.
Friedrich-dilled, turned performing marching bands, from all over the a major attraction son's parade. All t scouted by parade look and listen to

Brazil Miss Expansion

(Continued from groups, do home social work and cor All of the Sisters "Convento de Sa Mateira.
Other reports on nounced by the Mo are:
Acceptance of a in the city of U modern and well-de of about 100,000 at 250 miles from Mat land a larger conv house about 15 planned in January
This will become nent House of the Central House ters of St. Joseph American missions.
The land where of Formation will section similar to t Road area in Rochee edge of a residen and close to lands trial plants. A pa and rectory will same parcel of lan the Irish Oblate I

Effective on Ju a regional super will be named an American assignm the Community. Alma, Superior of after returning to a short visit to the Petropolis before g tetra on the Feast Nov. 1.
In January, 1967, in the third missio Alta, will be rec upancy.

ELECT



FOR DE
Constitutional