



officially resident population). They are Arab-language Jordanians and Palestinians, as well as numerous Iraqi and Syrian Christian refugees and western citizens falling outside the statistics.

Finally, Palestinian Christians still remaining in the West Bank and Gaza are less than 50,000, about 1 percent of the inhabitants. A traditionally Christian Palestinian area is found in Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour. The Christian population in the Palestinian Territories

has suffered the major decline. Half a century ago, Christians were over 5 percent.

The constant emigration of Christian Palestinians and Jordanians makes tallying very difficult.

Christian Religious Traditions

Overall, the main Christian community in the Holy Land is composed of Greek Orthodox, followed by the Melkites who are Greek Catholics. Thus, the Byzantine tradition is prevalent among the Orthodox and Catholic faithful. In Jordan, about half of the Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox Church, followed numerically by the Latin-rite Catholics and the Melkites. In Israel, instead, the most numerous are the Melkites, about 80,000, mostly settled in Galilee. They number 30,000 in Jordan.

Roman Catholics, followers of the Latin-Rite liturgical tradition, are about 20,000 in East Jerusalem, Nazareth (the Israeli area with the most Catholics), Gaza, and the West Bank.

The Catholics of other Eastern Churches are present in small numbers: a few thousand Maronites and Syro-Catholics, a few hundred Armenian Catholics, and very few Chaldean and Coptic Catholics.

The Catholics in Israel and the Palestinian Territories have 43 Latin parishes, 43 Melkite parishes,



14 Maronite parishes, two Syriac parishes, and one Armenian parish.

In Jordan, there are 33 Latin parishes, 28 Melkite, three Syriac, and two Armenian parishes.

A few hundred faithful represent the other Eastern Orthodox traditions: Armenian Apostolic, Coptic, and Ethiopian Orthodox. Overall, there are about 10,000 Protestants in the Holy Land: according to some estimates 7,000 Anglicans, 3,000 Lutherans, and then few members of other denominations.

Remaining in Jerusalem are about 10,000 Christian residents. There were about 30,000 at the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948.

An investigation by the U.S. Pew Research Center compares weekly religious attendance of the faithful of the three monastic religions in Israel. It is 38 percent for Christians, an average statistic of 49 percent for Muslims, and 27 percent for Jews. ✝

HOLY LAND GPS

Christians in the Holy Land

By Francesco Pistocchini

Who are the Christians in the Holy Land, and how many are there? Two clarifications first: 1) While the "Holy Land" served by the Franciscans may also encompass Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, and parts of Egypt, the destination of most pilgrims includes Israel, the Palestinian Territories (the West Bank and Gaza), and Jordan. At the center is Jerusalem, the Holy City, where all the Christian churches have an institutional representation and, in some cases, their faithful. 2) The few statistics available in these countries are relative to the local population, thus excluding

temporary residents (religious, foreign workers, refugees, etc.).

Country-by-Country

The populations of Israel, Palestine, and Jordan add up to 20.4 million people (8.8 million in Israel, 4.8 million in the West Bank and Gaza, and 6.8 million in Jordan; but also present in the Hashemite Kingdom are about 3 million other persons, refugees, and immigrants). Taken together in these territories, Christians number a little less than 500,000.

The most detailed data comes from the Israeli Statistics Office,

but it is limited to that country. At the end of 2018, Israel had 175,000 Christians, i.e. 2 percent of the population. If one adds to this number Asian foreign workers, African asylum seekers and other foreign sojourners, the number of Christians doubles. Even without including these people in the tally, Israel remains the only nation in the Middle East where the number of Christians is growing. About three-quarters of the Christian citizens are Arab-speaking; the rest are of Russian origin.

In Jordan, the Christians are about 250,000 (3.7 percent of the

