



In the office of the mayor of Jerusalem. Mayor Teddy Kollek with President Howard W. Hunter on January 27, 1987. Richard A. Hunter looking on. Courtesy Dorene Beagles.



## **Reflections on Howard W. Hunter in Jerusalem: An Interview with Teddy Kollek**

*A few months before President Hunter's death, the former mayor of Jerusalem paid tribute to the President as a quiet friend to all and a man of judgment one couldn't "not trust."*

Mark Scott

### **Introduction**

On September 5, 1994, former Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek was interviewed as part of a television documentary on the life of President Howard W. Hunter. The interview was conducted at the Jerusalem Center by Mark Scott of the LDS Church's Audiovisual Department. The former mayor, who himself has an extraordinary reputation, cited the great respect and admiration he held for President Hunter and said he would do anything requested of him for the President.

The documentary, *Howard W. Hunter: Prophet of God*, was produced for the Public Affairs Department of the Church and aired over the Church's satellite system between sessions of the October 1994 general conference. Only a small portion of the interview was used in the documentary. This article includes the complete interview.

### **Teddy Kollek**

Teddy Kollek became mayor of Jerusalem in 1965 at age fifty-four and served in that position twenty-eight years. As mayor, Kollek worked to beautify the city, foster tolerance, and encourage "freedom of worship and free access to the Holy Places for all."<sup>1</sup>



He was mayor at the time the Church built the Orson Hyde Memorial Gardens (dedicated in 1979 by Spencer W. Kimball) and the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies (dedicated in 1989 by President Howard W. Hunter). Those projects would not have been possible without Teddy Kollek's cooperation.

Kollek was born in Vienna and immigrated to Palestine in the mid-1930s. In 1939 he successfully negotiated with Adolph Eichmann to allow the release and emigration of three thousand Jewish youth who were incarcerated in concentration camps. From 1952 to 1964, he was the director general of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's office. Although now in his eighties, Kollek remains active in raising funds for beautifying and restoring Jerusalem, as well as providing human services for his beloved city.

### **The Interview**

Mark Scott: How long have you known President Hunter?

Teddy Kollek: Well, it's difficult for me to remember. I think certainly since the idea of a Mormon center in Jerusalem started. He came here as, of course, Elder Hunter, not as President Hunter. You had been here for quite some years in rented premises at Ramat Rachel, where you sent groups several times a year. But then you made up your mind that you wanted to be fully represented in Jerusalem and started negotiating about a site. I remember that vividly, talking several times about this with President Hunter. The first idea was to build it right next door to the King David Hotel in an open garden along the road, and I was very much against this. I thought you would be cramped in style. If there would be an argument—there is nothing in Jerusalem that is not argued about—then it would be right in the center of town, and it wouldn't do any good for the quietness and the pleasant atmosphere that you were normally accustomed to creating. So, finally, in all of these negotiations, when I met with President Hunter on frequent occasions, the decision fell on this plot here. It is so much superior to anything else that was contemplated before, and it shows his good judgment and his good taste.





At the dedication of the Orson Hyde Memorial Garden, 1979. Howard W. Hunter receiving a token of appreciation from then Mayor Teddy Kollek of Jerusalem. Seated (*left to right*): President Spencer W. Kimball, Camilla E. Kimball, Dorothy Elaine Hunter Rasmussen, President Ezra Taft Benson, and Flora A. Benson. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

S: What was your dialogue with him like at the time?

K: Well, he explained to me the importance of having a center, a Mormon center, here in Jerusalem. Then, of course, I accepted [the idea] gladly and happily; but this was the content of our conversation. I never imagined or hoped you would build something so beautiful and so impressive as this building where we are sitting. I know there were many people involved in this. Elder Faust had a great hand in this, and others who came over here. But Elder Hunter was no doubt the moving spirit and the one who stuck with it even during periods when he didn't feel so well physically. He thought about this all the time and just gave it a real push. I don't know, but I imagine you must have overspent your budget several times here. Not a penny was saved on the beauty of this place, and the results are remarkable. But without Elder Hunter, I am sure this would not have come about.



Of course, you know enough about the arguments that happened here. We are an argumentative people, all of us, whether it's the Israelis, certainly, but even throughout the various Christian denominations. They were not all happy about the Mormons coming in and made all kinds of difficulties. The Moslems are argumentative too. Everybody regards themselves as the only chosen one and has good arguments. Of course, we have the best, there's no question. I say this jokingly, but we are the oldest. Next year [1995], it will be 3,000 years since David the King came and made the capital of the Jewish kingdom here. This, of course, is decisive for us and in a sense is decisive for all the others who came after that, based on this.

S: How did President Hunter deal with the problems as they arose? What was his style?

K: He was always full of equanimity, but I have a slight suspicion that he didn't quite appreciate the fierceness of the arguments that were fought here. In a simple sense, this fell to a very great extent to me. For months and months outside city hall, I had pickets of Hassidic Jews who believed that this was the worst thing that could happen to Jerusalem . . . there's always a worst thing that could happen to Jerusalem; that's part of the atmosphere. Altogether, it is a much quieter city than people know. I had the good fortune last month to be in Seattle, a nice and quiet and pleasant city, probably the type of city in which every American would like to live. It is the same size as we are, and it turns out they have exactly ten times as many cases of homicide during the year as we have (and we have an equal number of citizens). But in our case, every one becomes a headline in the papers. There, they are a pleasant, nice, hard-working community, and they get over it easily. Here, everything is being trumpeted on television and in the media and the papers. The fact that you lived through all this quietly is to a very great extent to the credit of Elder Hunter. I'm sure inside he knew the difficulties, but he dealt with them in a sensible, a nice way. He could just as easily have thrown up his hands and said, "You don't want





Jerusalem Center, 1994. Looking northwest toward the BYU Jerusalem Center of Near Eastern Studies. Describing the center as “so beautiful and so impressive,” Teddy Kollek attributes much of the success of this project to President Hunter, who “was no doubt the moving spirit and the one who stuck with it even during periods when he didn’t feel so well physically.” Courtesy Mark Philbrick.

this to go. Why should we bother?” But he had set his mind on having this institution here, and this is what he carried out. We are really deeply grateful to have concerts in this hall here, to see this view of the Temple Mount and the whole of Jerusalem, its churches and its mosques and its ancient monuments and the Rockefeller museum and whatever you want. It is no doubt the best thing that could happen to us.

S: Do you consider President Hunter a good friend?

K: No question . . . no question. But I think he is a good friend of mankind. He is particularly attached to Jerusalem and this building. I haven’t seen all your Mormon temples all over, but of the ones I’ve seen, there is none to touch this one, this architecture, and this, of course, we owe to him. He is attached to this building particularly, but he is a man who is a friend of mankind, and that’s what makes him so special.



S: What are some of the particular remembrances you have of your association with him?

K: Well, the more recent are the stronger ones. Recently, we were really worried about his health, but he came here in spite of his health, and he didn't miss a single necessary trip. He came sometimes under very difficult physical circumstances, but he didn't miss a single meeting or a single decision. So recent memories show his real strengths in a very quiet way—his tremendous strengths in caring for the church, for his community, for his assignment, and for this building here in the city of Jerusalem.

S: If he were here and you could talk to him again, are there some things you would like to say to him . . . that maybe you don't say sometimes?

K: Well, I don't think he likes praise. I don't think he likes people to use long, unusual phrases. Therefore, I would only again repeat my very simple "thank you" to him, but in my heart I know what it means, and I hope he does.

This is a particularly beautiful day today. And if I could utter a wish today on the eve of our new year, I wish I could take President Hunter on this beautiful terrace, and we could look together at Jerusalem in this very excellent light, with the newly decorated mosque that was newly gilded by King Hussein and looks now even nicer than it did before, and the various church steeples and other important buildings that we can see from here. I think it would give him great pleasure to do this, and it would be for me a great honor to accompany him on such a tour of this beautiful terrace looking at Jerusalem.

S: This is such a remarkable place. So many religions and so many, as you said, vocal religions, where does the Mormon Church fit into all of this?

K: Well, forgive me, but you are the latest . . . the youngest child. Very often the youngest child is the most beloved child. Now you certainly came here in great style, and you took even the opposition—and it was a strong opposition—quietly, knowing that eventually your very presence and the way you





View from the Jerusalem Center, 1994. Looking southwest toward Jerusalem through some of the center's many arches. Courtesy Mark Philbrick.

presented yourselves here would conquer all the opposition. That you surely have done in a magnificent way. I don't know whether there is still some opposition or some suspicion or so around, but the way you have stuck to your undertakings here in this city—not to do any proselytizing because you know how sensitive people are, in a generation in which we lost six million Jews during the Holocaust, not to lose Jews through proselytizing—your very action, the way you did it, I think, conquered everybody. Because I can't lose any more [elections] as mayor—after the last election, eight terms, 28 years, was apparently sufficient. So here I am in a personal way thanking you very much for what you did, for what you stand for, and for how you express it.

S: When in the discussions with President Hunter, that became an issue—not proselytizing and so on—how was that handled by President Hunter?



- K: I think he understood our misgivings. Jews have suffered over generations, for a long time at the hands of the churches, the militant churches. Maybe the thing that comes first to mind is our position in Spain and Portugal. The Crusades are directly connected with this country, during which many, many people suffered. So when a single word, *proselytizing*, is mentioned, it means something very abhorrent to us . . . particularly now, as I said, in the time and generation which lost six million people in the most cruel possible fashion. I thought that all these things didn't have to be explained to President Hunter. He understood this perfectly. But he was also, I am sure, so composed because he knew how well you would overcome this by the way you are carrying yourself and you are acting. And this is what happened in every way. He understood us. The church acted the way it is accustomed to act—not to shout, to keep its promises in a quiet way. And all this together was a combination which led, no doubt, to your becoming victorious.
- S: You obviously trusted him very early. Why is that?
- K: Well, if you meet him, you can't not trust him. It's as simple as all that, you know. I knew it was not an easy thing for the Mormon Church and for him to say, "We shall not proselytize," because that is one of your tenets. This is what you are doing in many parts of the world. It couldn't have been easy for him, but I had no doubt that if he undertook this he would stick to it.
- S: Let me ask you just one last question. Are there some particular qualities of President Hunter that you especially like.
- K: With all my high regard for the Mormon Church and its members and the way you all behave—and I saw you individually and I saw you when almost 2,000 came here for the opening of the Orson Hyde Garden around the corner here—he is even quieter, if possible, more simple, more direct than all of you. And that is very impressive.





Interviewing Teddy Kollek. Mark Scott is holding a microphone. Teddy Kollek is seated on the right. The others are a free-lance film crew from Jerusalem. BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, September 5, 1994. Courtesy Mark Scott.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Teddy Kollek to Friends, September 14, 1993, Jerusalem. Copy in the possession of Robert C. Taylor, Provo Office of the BYU Jerusalem Center for near Eastern Studies.