



# Palestinian Liberation Theology

A lecture given by **The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek**

In memory of **Michael Prior**

“Palestinian liberation theology” by the Revd. Dr. Naim Ateek is an important resource that sums up what liberation theology is about and its importance for people who suffer injustice and oppression based on inherited biblical interpretations and understandings.

It is a contextual theology within the setting of the Palestinian tragedy, as well as a liberation theology that has implications wider and broader than that one context.

All liberation theologies have three components: Faith, context and response. In the Palestinian context, it was the eruption of the first Intifada against the injustice and oppression of the Israeli occupation that inspired Canon Naim Ateek to try to answer the persistent faith questions that faced the tiny Palestinian community in its everyday struggle in the midst of suffering. The historical Jesus, who lived, suffered and died under the Roman occupation, became the model and hermeneutic that formed the basis on which to build their liberation theology.

Naim Ateek was able to help his people to keep their faith and resist injustice, non-violently, by developing a theology that is both biblically based and theologically sound.

The paper continues to point out the areas that Palestinian liberation theology must impact and how it turned into a movement that feels the pulse of the community, and tries to address those issues that impact people’s lives. This movement is now supported in prayer and action by “Friends of Sabeel” around the world.

The second part of the paper is a tribute to Father Michael Prior on the tenth anniversary of his passing, whom he describes as a friend, a liberation theologian and a prophet, and a person of moral integrity. A fitting tribute worthy of a great man.

*Ms. Cedar Duaybes*

*Co-founder of Sabeel Liberation Theology Center*

## “Religion, Politics and Intolerance”

In this careful article, Revd. Dr. Ateek traces the history of the role of religion and its contribution to intolerance in all three monotheistic religions in the Middle East. He carefully shows how their teachings about God, and the Other has usually directly led to intolerance when it was wedded to political power.

He concludes that it has proven very difficult for any of the three religions to be a positive force for tolerance wherever they were dominant politically. He questions, that being the case, whether any state can be Jewish, Muslim, or even Christian while being fully democratic and providing genuine equality to adherents of the other religions.

In the end, he acknowledges that for genuine pluralism, there needs to be mutual trust and acceptance, and that given the important role of religion for many people in the middle east, we need to examine our theologies and find new forms and understandings of God in each religion if religion is ever to become a force for tolerance rather than an engine for intolerance and repression of others.»

*Adv. Jonahtan Kuttab*

*Co-founder of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology center and the executive director of FOSNA*

## “The Significance of Jerusalem: A Vision for Peace”

by the Revd. Dr. Naim Ateek is a concise and informative resource for anyone interested in the history, theology, and political context of this holy city. Beginning with a discussion of the name of the city itself (it is not the “city of peace”, either etymologically or in reality), this booklet walks the reader through the significance of Jerusalem from the Canaanite period to today.

I appreciate how the author takes care to accurately represent the meaning of the city within each of the Abrahamic religions. It seems to me that these are incredibly important insights for anyone seeking to engage in interfaith dialogue or political advocacy in Palestine/Israel.

I highly recommend this collection of writings and will be adding it to my list of essential resources for church tours and pilgrims.

**The Rev. Carrie Ballenger**

*Pastor, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem*

## **“Cry Out, Do Not Hold Back!”**

I am so heartened to read Rev. Dr Naim Ateek’s “Cry Out, Do Not Hold Back!”.

The distilled wisdom of over 50 years ministry, this is an immensely significant and urgent call (as well as loving rebuke) for the Western church to find its prophetic voice and speak truth to power over Palestine. For far too long church leaders have been silent about injustice in Palestine and have compromised their prophetic witness.

In clear and simple terms Naim explains how Christians have “quenched the Spirit and choked the prophetic”, caring more about personal interests than fidelity to God’s truth.

Through simple biblical expositions, Naim shatters the illusion that somehow Jesus was apolitical. Instead, we are offered a clear, Christ-centred, biblical theology of justice and peace.

The inclusion of the testimonies of contemporary Palestinian Christian leaders who, as faithful “martyrs”, have shown courage in challenging Israeli apartheid, is also deeply inspiring.

This book is particularly valuable in outlining the practical steps we need to take to recover our prophetic voice and so fulfil our God-given mandate.

*Revd. Dr. Stephen Sizer*

*Founder & Director, Peacemaker Trust*

## **Sabeel Christmas Messages 2014 – 2020, by Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek**

Christ was born in Palestine, living all his life under Roman occupation, rejected by people of power.

When I lived in Jerusalem and became part of daily life of Palestinian Christians, I learnt to read the Gospel through Palestinian eyes. This is what Rev. Naim Ateek is doing in his Sabeel Christmas messages: he inspires people of faith to read the Gospel through the experience of Palestinian Christians. Christ did not come to start a new religion nor to support the rich and wealthy, but to suffer with the oppressed, stand in solidarity, and give hope and joy to those excluded.

I highly recommend reading, reflecting and practicing those Christmas Messages, during Advent, Christmas and the rest of the year, since they reflect on the spirit and resilience of Christmas, the hope of Palestinian Christians for liberation and freedom, and the joy that comes to all of us at Christmas.

*Meta Floor*

Staff member Sabeel Jerusalem 2007-2012, Friends of Sabeel the Netherlands

## **Liberation Theology as a Test of Authentic Religion” by Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek** **Part II of the monograph “Religion and Politics in Israel/Palestine**

Originally published in 2007 as a Festschrift volume honouring the 80th birthday of the “Father of Liberation Theology,” Dr. Gustavo Gutierrez, Rev. Ateek’s analysis is both urgent and brutally honest given the desperate crisis facing Palestinians in the 2020s. He reminds us that Palestinians by and large have been abandoned by the global church and the application of international law by the dangerous ideologies now dominated by militant Zionism.

Dr. Ateek begins with a critique of “Theologies of Domination and Oppression” that have left the Palestinians humiliated facing political and economic collapse, all justified by a false theology of domination and military power. The tragic reality is why our Parliaments, mainstream secular and religious media, and our religious institutions perpetuate these myths creating the impression God favours the rich and powerful. Dr. Ateek then pivots and claims the key to authentic religion begins with how we understand God. Are we worshipping and serving a “god” of war and military might who favours certain races and religions? In essence this is the god of Christian and Jewish Zionism and the so-called “prosperity gospel,” a false ideology. This is not the God of Abraham, the prophets and Jesus who commands us to love God and neighbour as ourselves. Everything hinges on who God is for us and for our community.

Today, Christian and Jewish Zionists offer a different theological narrative that endorses an extreme form of authoritarian nationalism that includes an Apartheid system of rule over all of historic Palestine. This false ideology disguised as religion offers a path of privilege and militarism, following a tribal god and perpetual warfare. No wonder many Muslims and religious and political leaders worldwide are left confused as to who this “god” is and what Christians truly believe. Palestinian and Middle Eastern Christians are left to carry the burden of calling us back to our authentic faith and Dr. Ateek is one of the powerful voices challenging us. Ateek adds that another burden for Palestinians is how to explain the “deafening silence” of the global church and Christian west that seems to have abandoned them, when their urgent cries for solidarity and hope are met with silence or disinterest.

The essay concludes with a challenge as Ateek reminds us that the search for justice in Palestine is an opportunity and a test case” for authentic religion. He states “We have failed to transcend the selfishness and greed as well as our narrow nationalist concerns.” Too often we abandon liberation and authentic faith for “a co-opted and empty religion lacking in its true power.” He reminds us again that the primary test is “who is the God we claim to follow and do we have the convictions to stand up and live our faith? Are we willing to abandon the case of Palestine and allow the militant “god” of the Zionists to triumph on our watch? If we and our denominations are incapable of proclaiming the prophetic word and paying the price of acting for justice, then we allow injustice and a bankrupt form of Christianity (and Judaism and Islam) to triumph.

This is the time for “costly solidarity,” And lest we forget, Dr. Ateek quotes his friend ,Dr. Gutierrez, who reminds us as Jesus did, that one of the most difficult challenges is to proclaim “tough love” to our Israeli neighbours. “We must liberate our oppressors from their misuse of power. Dr. Gutierrez says, “this is the new Gospel of loving our enemies.”

Naim Ateek is at his prophetic best in this powerful article. Now the ball is in our court and it is for us to spread this prophetic word by taking up the cross of liberating solidarity and love for our Palestinian and Israeli sisters and brothers. In the process we will experience the liberation of our hearts, minds, and theologies.

**Rev. Don Wagner**

*A retired pastor, professor, and past National Program Director of FOSNA and my memoir «Glory to God in the Lowest» will be published around Easter 2022.*