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We are happy to present to you our second issue of CORNERSTONE. We are grateful that our first issue was well received by many of our friends and hope that you will find this edition as informative.

You will notice in this issue, a summary of the Statement on Jerusalem, which has been produced by the Heads of the Christian Churches in Jerusalem. If you would like to have the complete text, we would be happy to mail it to you. Please let us know.

In light of the Statement on Jerusalem, *Sabeel* is beginning to plan for an international conference on the significance of Jerusalem for Christians. Our tentative date for this event is the beginning of February 1996. We are working with an ecumenical committee to plan this conference and hope many of you will be able to attend. We commend this conference to your prayers and support.

Sabeel would like to extend to all of you our greetings for the New Year.

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Herod & The Star

The Christmas story according to Matthew, Chapter Two includes all the human ingredients for making a modern contemporary political event relevant to people's life in Israel/Palestine. The main actors are still with us and around us. These are the Herods, the chief priests, and the people of Jerusalem. Like the first Magi, there are even modern day Magi who come as seekers from distant lands searching for the

"king" who can usher in peace. Every time one of them comes in the person of a Clinton or Christopher, the city of Jerusalem becomes troubled again as in the days of old (Matt. 2:3). Its streets are blocked off in the name of security, traffic jams make movement impossible, and people's frustration runs high. These Magi come and go while Jerusalem, indeed, the whole of the land, still cries in genuine desperation for peace.

Those of us who live in Jerusalem are conscious of the presence of the Herods of today in the form of government leaders and military powers that seek the good of their own people, but not the good of all; a military power that wants to impose its will on people without satisfying the demands for justice.

At the same time we have different types of religious leaders - Jewish, Muslim, and Christian. Some of them have been contained within cleverly created government supported organizations. Many of these are western Christian leaders that whether by choice or enticement become bridled and controlled through such memberships. Any prophetic voice can easily be muted and stifled. There are, however, other religious leaders. Some are content to sit on the fence and watch while others, be they Jewish, Muslim, or Christian, genuinely work to maintain a prophetic message of peace through justice.

The recent statement produced by the heads of the Christian Communities of the Holy Land is an attempt to draw attention to the significance of Jerusalem to Christians in the face of flagrant violation of Jerusalem's status and well being. It is becoming obvious to many indigenous Christians that while the Jewish historical and religious claim to Jerusalem is magnified and maximized, the Muslim and the Christian claims are denied or at best minimized. Many of us particularly feel that there is an intentional marginalization of the Christians of this land. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to educate and inform people of the significance of Jerusalem, indeed, the whole of the land to its indigenous Christians as well as to a billion other Christians all over the world. Unfortunately, it is still the Herods of this world who possess the military and political power and seek to control people's minds and bodies, as well as events. They peripherise and negate whomever they choose. They live in the illusion that they can control history.

Biblical liberation history teaches us that the final word is ultimately to God and not to the Herods. The Herods may deceive, lie, conspire, destroy, and even massacre others, but real answers that produce peace do not lie within their political establishment or power. God's answer for peace in a troubled world lay in the birth of a new child and was based on a renewed formula that recognized that the ultimate sovereignty belongs to God alone, "Glory to God". Peace is God's gift to those who acknowledge God's sovereignty and rule, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth

peace." "Those who dwell and inherit the earth are not the haughty and proud, but the meek who place their trust in God. " (Ps.37:9, 11, 22,29,34; Matt.5:5). "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those whom he favors" (Luke 2: 14).

The Magi preferred to be guided by the star rather than by the impressive sophistication, diplomacy, and power of Herod. Their perception was right. They could not trust his devious and unjust ways. They followed the star and were led to Bethlehem. God's new initiative for peace lay there, if people would only respond. For the Magi, it resulted in a change of direction and a different route back to their country . (Matt. 2: 12)

It behooves today's Magi to visit Bethlehem. Their road usually ends in Jerusalem. They come with the illusion that the answers to peace lie with the Herods in Jerusalem. They do not realize that the genuine answers to peace lie in everything that the child of Bethlehem has stood for; humility, openness, love of others, forgiveness, even sacrifice of oneself for others.

We are part of the people of Jerusalem today. The child of Bethlehem has inspired us. We humbly seek to be his followers, guided and motivated by his Spirit.

We try to communicate his message and carry on a prophetic ministry as he had done. We cry over the well-being of the city of Jerusalem that does not know, "the things that make for peace," as he had done. (Luke 19:42) We are troubled whenever anyone is killed. The killing of any person diminishes us as humans. We recognize, however, that so long as there is injustice, then violence and bloodshed will endure and peace cannot be genuinely established, nor can it endure. We, therefore, lift our voices loudly and clearly. Justice is the true foundation for an enduring peace. We have seen the star. We have a vision for peace that is inspired by faith in God and love and concern for all. We can, therefore, definitely say that any peace that stands a chance of enduring, demands the release of Palestinian prisoners, the return of refugees, the total ending of the presence of Israeli occupation - settlers and army from the West Bank and Gaza and the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. Such an action constitutes an acceptable justice to most Palestinians and will ultimately bring security to the state of Israel. It would put real life in the peace process. It would address the root causes of the conflict and would open the way to reconciliation. Nothing less than that will give Israelis and Palestinians the security and justice they so desperately need.

In the absence of that perfect justice and peace which only God can give and which we humans resist because it cuts through our selfishness, greed and evil, this is the best peace we are capable of making. It demands our commitment, and by God's help it will be accomplished for the sake of all the inhabitants of our country.

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Palestine & South Africa

Reflections on a visit to South Africa by two members from Sabeel, Canon Naim Ateek and Mrs. Cedar Duaybis

Our visit to South Africa coincided with the conclusion of one hundred days of independence for that long suffering and war-torn country. The word "miracle" was still on everyone's lips. For us it was a miracle that we were standing in Cape Town, awestruck by the majesty of the view of Table Mountain in front of us.

The invitation came from the "Theology Exchange Programme South-South dialogue TEP, which has its headquarters in Cape Town, South Africa. TEP exists to encourage the exchange of theological insight among people who live in the southern hemisphere and believe that theological reflection arises in the context of political, economic, cultural, social and personal dimensions of society. 1994 was chosen as the year of, "Solidarity with Palestine" and after an exploratory trip by Mike Mailula to Palestine, *Sabeel* was chosen as TEP's partner for this exchange program.

The trip was overwhelming in every way and confirmed what our guide books said, that "South Africa is a world in one country."

The timing of the trip was excellent since it exposed us to the new spirit of the country; a spirit of hope that has taken over from despair. There are still many problems. It is an enormous responsibility that has been laid on the shoulders of the government and its great leader, Nelson Mandela.

The first two weeks were spent meeting people and listening to the South African story. We also had time to visit places, worship in different churches and tell our own story. It was fascinating and tragic to listen to stories from people who were very much involved in the struggle against apartheid and who are now leaders in important positions. We could not help comparing their struggle and suffering to what is happening in our county.

The third week of the three week stay for Mrs. Duaybis was devoted to visiting women's organizations. She heard about their bitter struggle against the cruel policy of apartheid, as well as their struggle for equality and human rights in a maledominated society. This is particularly relevant at this time of transition when women could become in effect, marginalized despite having been at the forefront of the struggle.

Women in Palestine would identify with this fear as we are going through similar labour pains.

Mrs. Duaybis shared a draft copy of the Palestinian Women's Charter which calls for equality for women in all spheres of public and private life including law, economy, education, development, politics, civil and family life, culture and religion, health, and the media. Fifty-six Palestinian women's organizations had formed a coalition in 1989 and came up with the charter to be presented for inclusion in the constitution. At the Women's National Coalition office in Johannesburg, Cedar was presented with their women's charter, which is the fruit of a research project requested by the coalition.

The two charters are very similar. Women in both countries are "breaking their silence" and claiming respect and recognition of their human rights and dignity. In both countries women are seizing this "historic moment" to effect change in their status and material conditions.

Churches in South Africa have already ordained women priests and on our first Sunday we had the pleasure of listening to a woman priest deliver a sermon at St. Georges' Church in Johannesburg. Despite this liberal attitude, physical abuse of women in South Africa is a very grave and widespread problem in a society that suffers the highest rate of violence in the world. It was a privilege to end the visit with an invitation from the National President of the YWCA of South Africa, Mrs. Joyce Seroke to visit the YWCA of Soweto. Cedar also received invitations to visit both the vice-president of the YWCA and Mrs. Seroke's home. Later she visited Mrs. Leah Tutu, wife of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in their home in Soweto. It was painful to listen to the stories of those very brave and strong women as they told of their long struggle for national freedom and demand for human rights as women. No law or legislation will elevate the status of women to full personhood until the change occurs in the minds, perceptions and attitudes of all men and women.

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Snapshots of Our Activities

Youth Programs

"I was impressed by the spirit of cooperation among the leaders and their friendly/warm attitude towards participants";

"Very interesting topics, but lectures tended to be too long, not leaving enough time

for group discussion ";

"We need more time for recreational activities, sports and arts";

"This was my first ecumenical Christian camp (I participate in summer camps every year) and it was a very different, but positive experience";

"Kassis (Rev.) Naim was a father to all, loving and caring".

These are a sample of some of the comments expressed by the sixty young participants at the end of a six-day Ecumenical Summer Youth Camp, held on August 1-6 at Talitha Kumi Lutheran School in Beit Jala, a West Bank town close to Bethlehem. This second youth camp organized by *Sabeel*, (the first one was held in Ramallah in 1993), was designed to foster a Christian community by providing a forum for youth aged 15-18 to voice their doubts, fears and aspirations. It also provided an opportunity for the young people to share opposing views and ideas in an open Christian atmosphere that teaches respect for all. Curious latecomers, encouraged by the participants, visited the camp almost everyday.

Leadership training promoted through teamwork was emphasized in all activities and duties performed by the groups. These skills were also evident in the leisure part of joint creative projects conducted in clay, acting of parables, competitive sports games and kitchen chores, and even the more serious daily worship service, discussions, reflections and journal report. The groups were given the names of Love, Joy, Hope, Faith, and Reconciliation.

"O Lord, You have blessed us. It is through your grace that Palestinian Christians live in the Holy Land. Grant us O Lord, to grow, strong in our faith so that we can be true advocates to the Christian Message."

>From a prayer by "Faith" group.

Clergy of different denominations were invited to conduct the morning worship service. This included a Greek Orthodox, a Roman Catholic, a Melkite, a Syrian Orthodox, and an Episcopalian. This was definitely a unique and pleasant experience.

Lectures and discussions were made more real through the memorable trip to Ein Karim, the hamlet where St. John the Baptist was born. As we walked down the narrow lanes of the once Arab village, situated at the foot of the Jerusalem hills we reflected upon our Christian roots. At the Sourik Caves which is an exquisite display of stalagmites and stalactites created by nature's patient perseverance throughout ages, one could only stop and give praise to God, the creator of such beauty and wisdom.

The camp ended too quickly for all, in celebration with songs and hymns, acting and sports competitions, an art exhibition, gift sharing and an icecream party. A young girl

recited an improvised poem of nine stanzas entitled, "The *Sabeel* Conference". The following is a translation of only two stanzas:

"Love one another," Christ told us
And a glowing candle be
For oh! Where would the world be
Without the gift of Christ's love to us?
Carry the message of love,
the important resolutions of the conference
Sow them in every place
for your life to be filled with happiness.

Indeed, as one leader, described it, the camp was "a reunion of ecumenical Christians responding to the teachings of Christ to 'love one another' in order to become one body."

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We Are The Living Stones

Nazareth Branch Report

The following is the report of the Nazareth Branch of *Sabeel* In May 1993, a six member committee was appointed in Nazareth whose main objective was to organize a course for speakers, similar to the Jerusalem Speakers' Bureau. The first job of the committee was to hold a symposium in June 1993, entitled "Christianity and the Old Testament." The symposium was led by Canon Ateek with participation by Father Elias Chacour, Father Yousef Issa and Dr. Nakhleh Bishara. From this symposium we concluded that the immediate local need would be to conduct a series of lectures on Christian issues. In response to this, we have begun to hold meetings every two weeks which we call, "Nazareth evenings with the Holy Scripture."

At one time we had 250 people, but about 50 - 70 people attend on a regular basis. Participants come from the local churches and all ages participate. The biggest problem has been to find a hall which is large, quiet, and easily accessible to everyone. The Sisters of Nazareth Hostel have offered the use of the church for the up-coming year. There are plans to start sessions at the Salesian Sisters (on the outskirts of town) to allow those who cannot reach the center of town to participate.

The topics of the sessions were determined with the help of Father Elias Chacour and members of the committee. Some of the topics discussed were: The Acts of the Apostles; Reading the Bible Today in the Land of the Bible; Resurrection in our Daily Life; Mary, Mother of the Lord, (as viewed in different denominations); The Holy Spirit; The Holy Cross in our Life, The Holy Cross in the Bible and the Church; The Church between Unity and Plurality; Faith and Consumer Society; Christian Family and Modern Challenges; Health, Sickness and Temptations in the Christian Family.

Our vision for the future is to continue the Bible Sessions, begin recruiting people for a course which prepares local speakers, and make more contacts between the Palestinians in Galilee and in Jerusalem. We hope to place special emphasis on helping the young people come together to discuss common issues.

***Sabeel* in Holland**

During the month of November 1994, a member of *Sabeel's*, Speakers' Bureau, Ms. Rula Kort was chosen to participate in an international program sponsored by Pax Christi of the Netherlands. Through arrangements made by the Pax Christi office, two guest speakers, one from Israel and one from Palestine, visited select secondary classrooms in Utrecht. Through these visits, Dutch students age 15-18 were offered an opportunity to learn more about the current situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories. They listened to the speakers and raised many questions. School information packets had been provided prior to these sessions which included information on the history of the Jewish and Palestinian people, various human rights issues, the situation of youth, and the Declaration of Principles. As preparation for the speakers' visits students spent time in classes discussing these information packets.

Rula and a young Israeli man visited seven schools over an eight day period, giving 4-6 presentations per day to about 25-30 students per class. In the evenings, the speakers had meetings with various community groups i.e., Reformed Church Groups, International Council of Churches, and the Jewish/Palestinian Dialogue Group. Attendance was usually around 10-15 people at each meeting which offered community members an opportunity to also learn first-hand about Palestinian/Israeli issues.

Overall, Ms. Kort felt the project was very beneficial. It gave students an opportunity to meet and talk personally with a Palestinian and an Israeli young person with whom they could identify. Limited or no social activities have been the norm in the Territories since the beginning of the Intifada in 1987. Students compared their lives as teenagers going to dances or the cinema to the lives of Palestinian young people who must deal with such issues as checking the news on the radio to see if schools are open due to an imposed curfew or closure in the Territories.

Rula felt it was an excellent opportunity to challenge prejudicial notions about Palestinians. She helped students to understand that it is not unusual for Christians and Muslims to be friends. Despite the image which the media often portrays, only a small number of Palestinians and Israelis are extremists.

It was rewarding for Rula to meet many people in Holland, get to know the country, and have the opportunity to inform more people about the current situation in the Territories.

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The Significance of Jerusalem for Christians

"On Monday, the 14th of November, 1994, the heads of Christian communities in Jerusalem met in solemn conclave to discuss the status of the holy city and the situation of Christians there." At the conclusion of the session, they issued a declaration entitled: "The Significance of Jerusalem for Christians". The following is a summary of the key points raised in that statement:

"Jerusalem is a city holy for the people of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Its unique nature of sanctity endows it with a special vocation calling for reconciliation and harmony among people. . . Unfortunately, the city has become a source of conflict and disharmony.... " Even in the peace process, ". . . Jerusalem has again been sidestepped, leaving the issues of its status, and sovereignty the most difficult questions to resolve in future negotiations. "

". . . The Israeli position is that Jerusalem should remain the unified and eternal capital of the state of Israel, under the absolute sovereignty of Israel alone. The Palestinians, on the other hand, insist that Jerusalem should become the capital of a future state of Palestine, although they do not lay claim to the entire modern city, but only the eastern, Arab part."

". . . History teaches us that in order for Jerusalem to be a city of peace, no longer lusted after from the outside and thus a bone of contention between warring sides, it cannot belong exclusively to one people or to only one religion. Jerusalem should be open to all, shared by all. Those who govern the city should make it the capital of humankind. This universal vision of Jerusalem would help those who exercise power there to open it to others who also are fondly attached to it."

". . . In the vision of their faith, Christians believe the Jerusalem of the Prophets to be the foreseen place of the salvation in and through Jesus Christ."

". . . The earthly Jerusalem, in the Christian tradition, prefigures the heavenly Jerusalem as the vision of peace." ". . . For almost two thousand years, through so many hardships and the succession of so many powers, the local Church with its faithful has always been actively present in Jerusalem. Across the centuries, the local Church has witnessed to the life and preaching, and the death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ upon the same Holy Places. Its faithful have been receiving other brothers and sisters in the faith, as pilgrims, resident or in transit, inviting them to be reimmersed into the refreshing, ever living ecclesiastical sources." That continuing presence of a living Christian community is inseparable from the historical sites. Through the living stones the holy archaeological sites take on life.

"The significance of Jerusalem for Christians thus has two inseparable fundamental dimensions:

1. it is a Holy City with holy places most precious to Christians because of their link with the history of salvation fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ;
2. it is a city with a community of Christians which has been living continually there since its origins.

Thus for the local Christians, as well as for local Jews and Moslems, Jerusalem is not only a Holy City, but also their native city." Jerusalem is their home and by virtue of this they are given the right to continue to live there freely, with all the rights of citizenship. ". . . Local Christians, not only in their capacity as Christians per se, but like all other citizens, religious or not, should enjoy the same fundamental rights for all: social, cultural, political, and national."

". . . In claiming these rights for themselves, Christians recognise and respect similar and parallel rights of Jewish and Moslem believers and their communities. Christians declare themselves disposed to search with Jews and Moslems for a mutually respectful application of these rights and for a harmonious coexistence, in the perspective of the universal spiritual vocation of Jerusalem." ". . . Jerusalem is a symbol and a promise of the presence of God, of fraternity and peace for humankind, in particular the children of Abraham: Jews, Christians and Moslems."

Theological Reflections

President Bill Clinton in his speech before the Knesset on Thursday night, October 27, 1994 said that thirteen years ago he visited the state of Israel with his pastor. At that time he added, "I formed a bond with my pastor..." The pastor said to him, "If you abandon Israel, God will never forgive you." (Jerusalem Post, October 28, 1994)

President Clinton's statement was an exhilarating message to Israelis who reacted with fervent applause. It must have also given great satisfaction and joy to many Fundamentalist and Zionist Christians. It, however, brought a cold chill to many Palestinians as well as others across the world.

Let us consider the theology behind such a statement. What does it say about God and the state of Israel? To begin with, it places Israel at the center and gives it primacy. It reflects a Christian Fundamentalist thinking that everything hinges on Israel and that it must be supported at all costs. It says that Israel is different and unique and must be given utmost allegiance. Many Dispensationalists, Fundamentalists, and Christian Zionists believe that Israel should never be abandoned no matter what. - - They believe that Israel is God's chosen people and whomever touches it touches the apple of God's eye (Zech 2:8). They often quote Genesis 12:3 ' I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse...' They take these and similar verses literally and feel bound to bless Israel so that they will not be cursed by God. They believe that they should be faithful supporters of the state of Israel on biblical grounds. President Clinton was enunciating such a fundamentalist belief when he quoted his pastor in his speech to the Israeli Knesset.

If we examine therefore, this statement from a Christian perspective, we encounter a number of problems. Our faith teaches us that all people stand equal before God. "... For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Rom. 3:22). God's love and concern as revealed in the New Testament is directed to all people equally, (John 3:16). A more correct biblical and theological statement which the President's pastor could have said would have been, "If you abandon God", or "If you abandon Justice", or "If you abandon truth". With such statements, one's commitment is clearly to God and his principles rather than to any nation or state. Political states, regardless of who they are, are prone to commit injustice and immorality and cannot be given a blanket allegiance. The state of Israel is like any other state that can be right or wrong at different times. To give it an unconditional loyalty is disloyalty to the God of justice and truth. Such statements reflect, therefore, a narrow and incomplete knowledge of who God is.

In the time of the prophet Jeremiah, some of the people of Jerusalem held a narrow and exclusive view of God. They believed that Jerusalem could not be destroyed

because God is ever present to protect it and the temple of the Lord stands in its midst. Jeremiah had to remind them with stern words that unless they repent and stop their injustice and oppression of others, Jerusalem will be destroyed (Jeremiah 7). In other words, God is not a tribal God. God is faithful to himself.

There is, however, the second part of President Clinton's statement, "God will never forgive you." This part of the sentence reflects also a Very poor theology of God. The God of the New Testament is a God who forgives. The nature of God is forgiveness and love. We know that in Christ, God extends and offers us his unlimited love and forgiveness. Is a sin against the state of Israel, a sin that cannot be forgiven? In the Old Testament, as we have seen in Jeremiah, when people sinned and committed injustice, the state was destroyed and many people went into Exile. When they repented and returned to God, forgiveness and renewal were extended . To say, " God will never forgive you," reflects an inaccurate understanding of the nature and character of the God of the Bible.

Unfortunately, in his speech to the Knesset, President Clinton missed a golden opportunity to be prophetic. He only talked about peace, he did not talk about justice. Talking about peace takes less courage than talking about justice. Unjust regimes always talk about peace and always wish to establish it. Their peace, however, is not based on justice, but on preserving and perpetuating the injustice which they have created. It is based on maintaining the status quo and consolidating the gains which they had acquired through their military power. It would have been wonderful, had President Clinton reminded the Israeli leadership of God's requirement for justice. "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream."(Amos 5:24). Or Micah's words, "...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (6:8)" Unfortunately, this note of justice was missing from the President's speech.

Clinton prefaced his statement by saying that he "formed a bond with his pastor." As Christians it is our challenge to form a bond with God and to commit ourselves to the establishment of a peace that is based on justice. Such a peace carries within it the seeds of endurance.