

Issue 5

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### In This Issue:

- [Peace Cannot be Built on Confiscated Land](#) by Naim Ateek
  - [The Story of a Returnee](#) by Grace Abu Mohor
  - [Israeli Elections & the Peace Process](#) by Samia Khoury
  - [Sabeel Nazareth](#) by Fuad Farrah
  - [Letter from Palestine](#) by Jean Zaru
  - ['The Hope of the People who Struggle'](#) by Lina Majaj
  - [Youth Work](#)
  - [New Sabeel Center](#)
  - [Friends of Sabeel](#)
- 

### [Contents](#)

#### *Peace Cannot be Built on Confiscated Land*

*Canon Ateek looks at the rise of religious Zionism and the effects of the Israeli elections.*

by Naim Ateek

The most dominant and adamant form of Zionism in Israel today is religious. This does not mean that secular Zionism has expired. It has, generally, mellowed and become more pragmatic. Apparently, secular Zionism has come to realize that the dream of the pioneering fathers of Zionism was based on some untenable premises. It is realistically impossible today, with the end of colonialism in which Zionism found its birth, to achieve the Zionist dream as envisaged. The Palestinians have not disappeared. In spite of their weakness, they have not totally capitulated to Zionist power. On the issue of the land, even the United States, Israel's closest ally, will not allow Israel to continue expanding its territory into other Arab States.

The Zionist dream has been successful to a good measure by carving a home for Jews in Palestine and wresting the country from its inhabitants. But the dream as conceived by the Zionist ideologues is unattainable today. Secular Zionists, in the previous Israeli government, were gradually becoming more pragmatic and ready to accept, though grudgingly, a political accommodation with the Palestinian inhabitants of the land. The grand Zionist dream must be sliced and tailored to the reality of a post-colonial Middle East. Paradoxically, however, since the peace process, it was the State of Israel that was perceived, in the eyes

of many people in the world, as generous in reaching for an accommodation. As if Palestine belongs totally to Israel, and that out of its sheer magnanimity and for the sake of peace, Israel is willing to give the Palestinians a small part of it. It might even allow them to establish a quasi state.

Tragically, this is the arrogance and susceptibility of power. The weak and the powerless have no say. Their rights can be trampled by the foot of the powerful and impunitively denied. The powerful have the ability to create the perceptions they choose. These perceptions in turn become the accepted stereotype of the poor and powerless.

This is the way many people saw the evolution of the largely secular Zionist labor government on May 28, 1996, the eve of the Israeli elections. In spite of all its hawkish campaign slogans, secular Zionism was on its way to find an accommodation with the Palestinians, as well as with other Arab neighbors, that would put an end to the conflict and internationally legitimize Israel's presence and gains. On Wednesday, May 29, 1996, however, Israelis went to the polls and elected Binyamin Netanyahu as prime minister, thus halting the movement of peace as the secular Zionists had begun to envisage it.

Netanyahu formed a government with the right-wing political and religious parties in Israel. The Zionism which the religious parties espouse is obviously religious in form and content. Their mandate is not based on a secular Zionist ideology, but on the Torah and its Rabbinical interpretation. Zionism has shifted from a secular to a more fundamentalist religious base. Its impact on the life of its own people as well as on the life of its neighbors will undoubtedly be felt. No sooner than the Likud victory was announced, settlers in the West Bank were taking the law into their own hands. They began harassing Palestinian villagers and their bulldozers started moving against Palestinian lands.

What can one expect from a right wing Likud-led government in the next four years?

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***The message ... to the government of Israel should be clear. Peace cannot be built on confiscated land.***

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Effects on Israelis

The impact of the Likud government will be felt on the Israelis themselves. With the ministries of Education, the Interior, Religion, Energy and Transport, and Labor and Welfare, headed by ministers from religious parties, the influence will be inevitable. Israeli democracy might also be adversely affected. Democracy can live with religion, but unfortunately many times, when one religion is in power, democracy suffers. Under the power of Jewish Orthodoxy, not only secular Jews will suffer, but religious Jews who belong to other religious denominations will have a hard time. There is a wide rift between religious and secular Jews in Israel. It is equally true to say that there is an obvious discrimination against Conservative, Reform, and other religious Jews who are not Orthodox. Even before the new government came to power, over twenty thousand secular Jews moved out of Jerusalem because they felt it overly Orthodox. A Reform woman rabbi told me that 51% of Jewish school children in Jerusalem today are of Orthodox religious background.

In June 1996, the Israeli army uprooted olive trees on confiscated Palestinian land to make way for a military road in Bethlehem near Jebel Abu Ghneim. Palestinians and supportive Israelis and internationals gathered together to demonstrate and to replant the trees.

Effects on Palestinians.

There are some Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza as well as Israeli Arab Palestinians who feel that the Likud government will not be as bad as people expect. The Likud will ease the closure and allow more Palestinians to work inside Israel. It will try to produce economic prosperity for Palestinians, hoping to silence them. With more money in their pockets they might forget or become less enthusiastic about their political aspirations. Israel will try to show them the contrast between living under a Palestinian autonomy that is burdened with insurmountable problems and living under the economic benefits which Israel can deliver. The Palestinians today are desperate

for work. The unemployment rate in some places is over 60%. Many of them have large families. Although they can get by on relatively little, they still need a modest income to meet their basic necessities. Israel would hope that many of these people will abandon their patriotism and nationalism and opt for a more pragmatic approach to life. One that resigns itself to accepting a better standard of living under Israeli tutelage instead of an independent Palestinian state with a struggling economy.

The Likud government will, undoubtedly, try to acquire a new image. Netanyahu is shrewd and might in the short run deceive many Palestinians with much needed immediate gains, that have actually become a litmus test for the viability of the peace process. These include the release of prisoners, the easing of the closure, the redeployment in Hebron, and the safe passage way between Gaza and the West Bank. These as well as others might form some of the concessions of Likud. The average person on the street might see them as real gains and feel quite happy. This does not, however, mean that the Likud government had compromised on any of its basic principles.

Moreover, it is conceivable that Likud might even contemplate a unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon. The Israeli leadership has always claimed that they have no interest in keeping southern Lebanon. They are there for purely security reasons. If they do this, Likud will be sending a strong message to the world that it is genuinely seeking peace while the Syrians and the Lebanese are the belligerent ones. The Israeli government can do all of these things and even more and still not change its basic ideology. It will not withdraw from the Golan Heights. It will not allow the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. It will not compromise on the settlements. It will not accept sharing Jerusalem with the Palestinians.

Moreover, it is expected that the Likud government will continue to expand the settlements and confiscate Palestinian land. There will be one major difference between it and its predecessor. The present government will not hesitate to confiscate houses and property inside the predominantly Palestinian inhabited areas. There are already plans to build Jewish housing at the eastern entrance to Jerusalem in Ras Al-Amoud. They will try to take as much land as they can from Silwan on the presumption that it is the ancient City of David. There is fear that during the next four years, the government will do its best to get a foothold on the Dome of the Rock area in the belief that it is their Temple Mount. I believe we will see an intensification in the activity of Jewish religious militant groups who operate inside the Old City of Jerusalem to grab more property from the Palestinians who live there.

We should not be fooled by the Likud Government's tactics. The message that needs to be sent to the government of Israel should be clear. Peace cannot be built on

confiscated land. Peace cannot be built on deception. All confiscation of Palestinian land should be reversible. Palestinians should continue to demand the lifting of the closure. At the same time they should continue to state clearly that these measures are not enough. The result of the peace process should be the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state on the whole of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

With a government that is heavily controlled by religious parties, the religious argument for keeping the whole of the land will become paramount. There are three important holy entities for religious Jews. The land of Israel, the people of Israel, and the Torah of Israel. These are inseparable and no compromise will be accepted on any of them. For many of these religious Jews, the land of Israel is not even limited to geographic Palestine. It should include, according to Genesis 15:18, most of Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. For them it is only a matter of time until God will help them extend their territory to those promised borders. It sounds incredible, and yet, unfortunately, it is true. For most of them, however, they have to take things one step at a time. The most essential task for them at hand today is to claim as much land from the Palestinians as possible. By doing this, they believe they will be fulfilling the commandments of God.

Effects on Christian Zionism.

There is yet another area of influence of which we need to be aware. With the rise of the religious right in Israel, a revival of Christian Zionism is expected. I am certain that in Christian Zionist circles, the victory of Likud was a cause of great rejoicing. For them the peace process was an aberration from the will of God and the teachings of the Bible. Many of them were against the peace process because it upset their calculations for the end times. Their biblical calendar for the Second Coming of Christ includes war and not peace. It speaks of an Armageddon and not a peace treaty.

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***Is God's faithfulness shown in keeping ... promises to Israel? ... Is it in a theology that helps one nation dominate another?***

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Israel, therefore, should fulfill its biblical mandate. It should reclaim the whole of the land. It should take over the area of the Dome of the Rock and re-build the third temple. One can immediately see that these things are tantamount to a declaration of war rather than a pursuit of peace. Any policies which the Israeli government will take that will enhance and exacerbate the tension, and ultimately lead to a global conflagration of military forces, fits well with the Christian fundamentalist calendar.

As the government of Israel pursues a policy of active confiscation of Palestinian land, which will increase the tension with the Palestinians, fundamentalist Christians will be watching every event as it fits in their jigsaw puzzle of the end times, especially as the millennium draws to a close.

Some of these Christians think that it is a question of the faithfulness of God. But is God's faithfulness shown in keeping these promises to Israel? Is it in a catastrophic war that will annihilate millions of people? Is it in a theology that helps one nation dominate and oppress another? Is this the God we believe to be the true and living God? Is such a God worthy to be called God? A barrage of theological questions can be asked.

We continue to insist on the nature of the God whom we love and worship: the God in whom we believe is the God we have seen in Christ; the God whose nature is love; the God who loves all and who wills justice and peace for all people; the God whose promises have been fulfilled in the coming of Christ. These promises do not have anything to do with the concept of one land for one people to the exclusion of others, but reflect a promise of life abundant for all people in all lands and throughout the world.

It is important to point out that Paul, in re-evaluating the land promises in the light of Christ, de-zionizes them. He understands them as being fulfilled in Christ in a more comprehensive and universal way. So in Romans 4:13 he says, 'For the promise that he (Abraham) would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.' There is nowhere in the Old Testament where Abraham was promised the world (cosmos) as an inheritance. Paul understands the promise in light of what God is doing in Christ for the whole world. The theological impact of such a verse is so radical and revolutionary that one would hope it would challenge all narrow Christian Zionist doctrines.

The coming four years present many challenges to all of us who have committed ourselves to work for a just peace in the Middle East. It demands total vigilance and alertness. We must continue to work together in concert and in dedication to establish justice, as much as we can, so that the possibility of peace will increase.

*Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek, Director of Sabeel, is Canon of St. George's Episcopal Cathedral in Jerusalem and pastor to its Palestinian congregation.*

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[Contents](#)

## ***The Story of a Returnee***

*by Grace Abu Mohor*

*Father Ayyad at the demonstration against land confiscation near Jebel Abu Ghneim.*

*Father Ibrahim Ayyad, a retired Roman Catholic priest, is a member of the Palestinian National Council and the Palestine Central Council. He was born in Beit Sahour in 1910, and was ordained in 1937 by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.*

*In 1951 Father Ayyad was accused of being involved in the assassination of King Abdullah. Although he was cleared of any involvement, he had to leave Palestine, for Beirut, where he remained for 35 years. During this time, he traveled frequently to South and North America and to Europe. He has written a number of articles and papers in Arabic and English on theological, historical and Palestinian national issues.*

*Father Ayyad returned to his home town in early 1996. Grace Abu Mohor spoke to him at the Latin Seminary in Beit Jala.*

### ***What were your feelings upon your return to Palestine?***

It was good to see the home of my birth and the church where I used to serve the mass as an altar boy. I was so happy to see my remaining friends and relatives. Two of my remaining relatives died after I saw them. I spoke about this after their funerals. Apart from a visit for four days before 1967, it was the first time I returned. I could not return before this due to my involvement with the Palestinian National Council and the Palestine Central Council.

### ***What are your plans for the immediate future?***

I want to help my people and do whatever I can, particularly in the spiritual and social fields. The door is open for me to help some of our people who are arrested by the Palestinian Authority.

***What was your reaction to celebrating Easter in Jerusalem again?***

I wrote about it in an article for the Jordan Times, 'The Holy Week and the Palestinian Calvary' (Sunday, April 7, 1996). As a result of the brutal Israeli blockade, we were prevented from participating in the celebrations of Holy Week at Calvary and in the Holy Sepulcher Church in Jerusalem, in order to renew our religious belief in our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. So the Latin Patriarch went ahead with the Easter Mass in the Holy Sepulcher, but asked, "Where are the people? Where are our people?"

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***'If this land is taken, what are we going to negotiate on? We need to knock on all the doors in the world.'***

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***In this article you wrote about the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the Palestinians. Do you see any similarities between the death and resurrection of Christ and the struggle of the Palestinians?***

I wanted to say that we Palestinians have previous experience in the resurrection of Christ. I accept that we suffer, and we go through the same way Christ went to Calvary, through the streets of Jerusalem, bearing the heavy cross. But after the Calvary comes the resurrection. It's only a question of time until the resurrection of the Palestinians comes.

***How can the church work towards the goals of peace and justice in this land?***

Personally, I take a verse from the Bible, 'Fight for justice and God will protect you.' But I deal with more practical ways to inform international public opinion about the life and sufferings of my people. I wonder how the world can be so silent about it. I spoke in churches in the United States and Mexico, in Catholic and Anglican churches. I spoke about the recklessness of the Israelis with my people, about how savage they are with the Palestinians.

The Latin Patriarch is doing his best to alleviate the sufferings of our people. For example, he is building housing units in Ramallah, in Beit Sahour and in other villages in Palestine.

***How has your Christian faith helped you in your work for peace and justice?***

God is just. So when you work for justice and use peaceful means, you are on the right Christian way. 'Fight for justice and God will fight for you against your enemies.'

I am very sad, I am very disappointed with the Christian stand in the world about the Palestinians. Every day we have land stolen, every day we have people put in jail, and this month we had 2 or 3 deaths, and nobody cares, not even the church. It's very sad for me. Netanyahu is increasing the settlements every day and now he wants to build 7000 houses and take more land. If this land is taken, what are we going to negotiate on? We need to knock on all the doors in the world, the Vatican, America, and the United Nations. I went myself to Jebel Abu Ghneim with the people. I am 86, but still I had to go to show that all the people are against this injustice.

***This interview will be read by Christians in many parts of the world, but particularly in North America and Europe. From your experience of living abroad, can you give a few examples of how friends outside can help?***

For example, the Americans should at least write to their senators or to their members of Congress, and ask them to raise this at the Senate or in the Congress. Friends can also send money to the churches and charitable institutions. Many Christians are leaving. Recently the Honduras Embassy told me that there are 34 petitions for emigration from Bethlehem. All of them are Christians. This is only for Honduras, maybe there are many more for the United States. The Christians in Bethlehem have become a minority.

***How can the church encourage them to stay?***

The church is encouraging them to stay. The parish priests in Bethlehem should preach from the pulpits and ask them to stay and support the city. Muslims are Palestinians like us. They are suffering, we have to suffer.

God will not let us down. God will intervene at the right time. I think that without God's help, we are already lost. Because the people see from a human point of view, they do nothing.

***Grace Napoleon Abu Mohor, from Beit Jala, teaches at the American Christian School in Jerusalem. She is involved in youth work in the West Bank, including Sabeel's youth programs.***

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[Contents](#)

## *Israeli Elections & the Peace Process*

*by Samia Khoury*

Dr. Azmi Bishara, professor of philosophy at Birzeit University and newly elected member of the Israeli Knesset, spoke alongside Canon Dr. Naim Ateek, director of *Sabeel*, at a panel discussion on the effect of the Israeli elections on the peace process. The panel was hosted by *Sabeel* in Ramallah on 20 June 1996, three weeks after the election of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and the Likud.

Dr. Bishara, who looked at the political implications of the elections, confirmed the fears of the Palestinian population regarding the election results. He explained the new election procedure, which for the first time had the election of the prime minister separate from the election of the Knesset members. The intention was to limit the power of the smaller parties, but the practical results were catastrophic. They brought about a very dangerous coalition of the religious and political right, with tremendous power going to the prime minister. Dr. Bishara envisaged many internal problems in Israel as a result.

Dr. Bishara explained how democracy in Israel is based on religious affiliation rather than citizenship. Hence the new system gave the electorate the opportunity to express their religious, ethnic and ideological affiliation, while voting separately for the prime minister.

The results of these elections on the peace process will, according to Dr. Bishara, be linked to the ability of the Arab world to challenge Israel regarding the new government's peace plan. A united Arab front with a clear vision of peace would be capable of exerting pressure on Israel, and would have to be reckoned with as a peace partner. As Dr. Bishara sees it, the Palestinians are not able to exert pressure on Israel in the present situation. This, he thinks, may eventually be possible, but would depend on the unity of the Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority, and on the implementation of democracy in the Palestinian territories.

Dr. Ateek analyzed the results of the elections from a religious perspective. He gave a brief background on the development of the relationship between the Zionist movement and religious Jews. In the beginning, the religious Jews considered the Zionist movement to be a heretical secular movement, but their view gradually changed. The important stages were following the Holocaust, after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and following the occupation of the remainder of Palestine in 1967. The religious parties have had some influence in government policy ever since the establishment of the State of Israel, but their power increased significantly when the Likud won the elections in 1977.

Like Dr. Bishara, Dr. Ateek anticipated numerous internal problems in Israel as a result of the elections, as not all Israeli Jews are religious. There is even a movement which calls for the separation of religion and the state.

Dr. Ateek's concern for the effect of these elections on the Palestinians is not as a result of Netanyahu's election, because most Palestinians do not see much difference between Peres and Netanyahu. The coalition with the religious parties is the main source of concern for Palestinians. These religious parties believe that the land is theirs as an eternal inheritance from God. They want to acquire as much of it as they can. Dr. Ateek believes that the allocation of some of the sensitive ministries to the religious parties can be detrimental to the peace process.

[See [Peace Cannot be Built on Confiscated Land by Naim Ateek](#)]

*Samia Khoury, a member of Sabeel's executive committee, is President of Rawdat El-Zuhur Women's Organization.*

---

## [Contents](#)

### **Sabeel Nazareth**

*by Fuad Farrah*

As part of its on-going program which aims to deepen the faith of the Christians of the Galilee, the *Sabeel* Committee in Nazareth organized a study trip in July to the holy sites around the Sea of Galilee.

The 70 participants from Nazareth were accompanied by Father Elias Korzom, an authority on church history and Christian heritage, who explained, with reference to the Bible, the significance of the holy sites we visited.

We participated in the holy mass at the Latin Church in the Galilean village of Rama, and met with the congregation for fellowship afterwards.

The group then headed towards Tabgha, on the north-eastern coast of the Sea of Galilee, passing areas where Jesus preached and performed many miracles. The Benedictine Fathers have built a church at Tabgha on the ruins of a Byzantine church which commemorates the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. The famous Byzantine mosaic floor which immortalizes this event can still be seen.

We visited the ruins of Capernaum, 'the town of Jesus', and went for a boat ride to Tiberias before returning to the Mount of Beatitudes. The church on the Mount, which is considered to be one of the most beautiful in the country, provides an excellent view of the whole area.

Finally, we went, via Wadi El-Hamam, to Majdal, the birthplace of Mary Magdalene, and then to the baptism site on the Jordan River.

The participants stressed the importance of connecting the Bible with the places mentioned within it, and the necessity of seeing these places up close. In September, we are going to Bethlehem and Jerusalem to visit the Biblical sites and meet with our Christian brothers and sisters there.

*Fuad Farrah, a member of Sabeel's Nazareth committee, is Secretary of the YMCA in Nazareth and an active member of the Orthodox community there.*

---

## [Contents](#)

### ***Letter from Palestine***

*by Jean Zaru*

*Dear Friends,*

One of the highlights of my life was attending the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975, which led to a great involvement in the ecumenical movement. I have traveled to lands near and far, where I have met Christians from many backgrounds and cultures, and encountered people of other faiths.

My first problem was always introducing myself. If I said I was Palestinian, they equated me with terrorism. If I said I was an Arab, they assumed I was a Muslim and wanted to know why I was there. If I said I came from Jerusalem, thinking this would make things clearer for my fellow Christians, someone would immediately say, 'Oh, you're Jewish. Shalom!' When I continued to point out that I am a Christian, the inevitable final query came, 'When were you converted?' I gave the only reply I could, 'Sorry I cannot give you the satisfaction of saving my soul. I am a Christian because my ancestors were disciples of Christ. They were members of the first Christian church, in Jerusalem, the mother of all churches.'

As I struggled on my journeys to affirm the presence of 12 million Arab Christians in the Middle East, and of the Palestinian people struggling for justice and freedom, new obstacles and pressures were revealed. For liberal Christians influenced by Holocaust

theology, European history and guilt, I am, as a Palestinian Christian, not part of their agenda. My very existence disturbs the balance. For fundamentalists, I am not among the chosen. Rather I am one of the cursed. As a Palestinian I stand in the way of the fulfillment of the prophecy of God, as they see it.

Yet I am joined by countless men and women in many parts of the world in the call for freedom and liberation. Whatever the language used, the call for liberation is more than just a slogan. It is a cry from the heart, a cry out of oppression, a cry for a new future to begin now. Together with others searching for freedom and with my friends in *Sabeel*, we want to tell the world that we are part of God's plan for human liberation, for building a household of life.

My journey toward freedom and my struggle for liberation can never be defined once and for all. I have been struggling, as a lay Palestinian woman, with the issues of human rights, justice and peace for the last three decades, but with every answer there seems to be a new question. It is important to reflect critically on one's situation. We need to find the energy, courage, hope, inspiration and zest for life, in order to carry on the important task of transforming ourselves, our churches and our societies. How can we share our life experience with younger people who are still in search of affirmation, perhaps uncertain of the choices and possibilities? They may not be aware of the exciting new roads to journey on, nor of the hard work and new responsibilities we have to shoulder.

In this struggle for life and for liberation, we need a spirituality that is not apart from, or over and above, life as we experience it, but a spirituality that is a force for survival, a power to inspire resistance, and a powerful tool for transformation. It includes the struggle to resist and overcome violence. Most religious traditions contain violent, as well as non-violent, dimensions. We draw from the springs of inspiration that lead us to active non-violence in our struggle for justice and peace. Let us develop non-violent theologies that will give us hope, hope that will turn suffering into a new dawn, and hope that allows us to see the image of God in everyone.

In peace and friendship,  
Sincerely,  
*Jean Zaru*

Jean Zaru, a member of *Sabeel's* executive committee, is Presiding Clerk of the Ramallah Society of Friends (Quakers). She is active in inter-faith dialogue and peace and justice issues.

---

[Contents](#)

## *'The Hope of the People who Struggle'*

*by Lina Majaj*

*Sabeel* concluded the last session of the Bible Study for the summer of 1996 on 10 July. The study was inspired by, although not limited to, the book *The Hope of the People Who Struggle* by Carlos Mesters, which looks at the final book of the Bible, Revelation.

During the weekly meetings lively discussions followed presentations based on the book and on readings from the Bible. Members of the group struggled with ideas such as God's 'judgment' and 'wrath'. Is it possible that our merciful Father could take revenge? This discussion about the nature of God came up again and again in our Bible study. We were reminded that the nature of God has been revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ.

One message was clearly voiced throughout the course of study: the oppressed, the forgotten and those who suffer have hope, as repeatedly indicated in John's message to the communities, as well as in other passages in the text. 'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more' (21:4).

The last session in the course focused on Revelation 21. One of the ideas highlighted was the following: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away' (21:1). This signifies that a new reality will be established where love and mercy will prevail in accordance with God's will. God will live with the people (21:3). God says to them, 'I will be your God and you will be my people' (21:3), and then God speaks to each one individually, 'I will be your God and you will be my child' (21:7). As Mesters points out, 'God makes a covenant with the entire people and with each one in particular. It is the perfect harmony among the people themselves and the people with God; of the individual with the community and the community with the individual. No one is lost in the anonymity of the crowd, nor in the individualism of a faith which only thinks about itself.'<sup>1</sup> Revelation 21 also confirms the Christian belief that Jesus replaces the temple, 'And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the almighty and the Lamb' (21:22).

The issue of Jerusalem continues to be central for Palestinians; Jerusalem is their home. To those who are Christian it is the place where salvation was witnessed and where the Church began. Unfortunately, interpretations of the Old Testament can be misused to create a new reality where control over the city is monopolized by the followers of one faith. Tom Wright in his article *Jerusalem and the New Testament* points out from Romans 4:13 that "'The promise to Abraham and his descendants ,

that they should inherit the world." [not Land] is as though ... the Land were a great advance metaphor' while God's purpose goes beyond the Land to the whole world.<sup>2</sup>

It is God's will that from Jerusalem, the message shall spread to the whole of creation. Let us work together to fulfill that promise.

*Sabeel* continues to explore issues that are vital to Palestinian Christians. The book of Revelation, the vision of John, is full of symbolism and is often difficult to interpret. Yet it has spoken to us as Palestinians and as Christians in a special way. It also addresses issues in communities in similar situations all over the world. We feel that we have the responsibility of sharing this message, because it has helped us to have a vision for the future. The mystery of the book of Revelation has begun to unfold to us as it had never done before. We look forward to resuming our discussions in the autumn when the Bible Study on Revelation will begin once more.

1. Mesters, Carlos, *The Hope of the People who Struggle*, Cluster, South Africa, p.68.
2. Walker, P.W.L. (ed.), *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, Paternoster, UK, 1992, p.67.

*Lina Majaj, a Sabeel speaker, is a member of St. George's Parish, Jerusalem. She has been taking part in the Bible Study course along with approximately 20 others from different churches in Jerusalem.*

---

[Contents](#)

### ***Youth Work***

*Sabeel* organized two youth conferences this summer for Christians from the Jerusalem and Bethlehem areas. The theme of both conferences was Peace for Jerusalem and from Jerusalem to the World. Ironically, most of the Bethlehem participants have not been able to visit Jerusalem for the past couple of years, due to the Israeli closure.

The historical and religious aspects of Jerusalem were discussed, and the young people were encouraged to give their own visions and solutions for the peace of Jerusalem. The participants also took part in workshops on the principle of conflict resolution in a pluralistic society. The Jerusalem participants visited Neve Shalom / Wahat Al Salaam community and Latrun monastery west of Jerusalem, while those from Bethlehem saw sites in the Nablus area.

The aim was to educate, explore and create a spiritual impetus among the Christian youth to live peacefully in a pluralistic society. The young people need to understand that not only are they the hope for the future, but that they also have a significant role to play today.

---

## [Contents](#)

### ***New Sabeel Center***

*Sabeel's* staff and volunteers have been operating out of a small office whose rental period ends in August. This office has proved to be inadequate for the needs of *Sabeel*.

This year, *Sabeel* stepped out in faith, taking the bold step of leasing an old house in the Sheikh Jarrah area of Jerusalem for five years to serve as our new center. Unfortunately the house was neglected and in need of repair, but now we have almost completed the renovations, and by the end of August we will be operating from there. This center will not only enable *Sabeel* to expand its programs, it will provide a permanent venue for the activities of *Sabeel*, thus helping to establish *Sabeel's* presence in the city. In the center, there are three offices, including one which will double as a conference room, and a hall large enough to hold 50 people. In the future, the Bible study, clergy meetings, speakers' bureau, youth programs and other activities can be held in the center.

*Sabeel* took this necessary step after much prayer and consultation. We need your prayers and financial support to continue with our vision.

---

## [Contents](#)

### *Friends of Sabeel*

Since the foundation of *Sabeel*, Liberation Theology Center, in 1990, one of our main objectives, in addition to strengthening the faith of Palestinian Christians, has been to share the life and witness of the Palestinian Christian community with friends abroad.

For several years now a network of valuable relationships has been nurtured through ongoing dialogue and cooperation with international church agencies, theologians and other interested individuals, as well as through the ministry of an ecumenical group of trained Palestinian Christian volunteers who have spoken to several thousand visitors to the Holy Land.

After our January 1996 international conference, The Significance of Jerusalem for Christians and of Christians for Jerusalem, it became clear that the time was ripe to create a structured network for our friends in different parts of the world.

The program agenda for Friends of *Sabeel* will naturally vary to some degree, according to the circumstances unique to each country, but in general it is envisioned that the following areas will be addressed: Education, Advocacy, Coordination and Fundraising.

A number of churches and organizations in Sweden got together in 1995 to form the Swedish *Sabeel* Committee. Friends of *Sabeel* groups are being formed in the US and the UK. For further information contact:

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