

## Issue 7

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#### **An Easter Message**

*by Elias Chacour*

A few months ago we celebrated the birth of the Prince of Peace. We were reminded 'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people ... a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:10-11).

Today we share with you some more good news. Despite all the problems and obstacles, we proclaim from Jerusalem the historic reality and divine revelation: we have an empty tomb and a risen Lord. Joy? Yes, for sure. Trust? Certainly. Dismissal

of fear without any doubt ... resurgence of hope despite the oppression. We have been walking the way of the risen Lord for two thousand years.

We have proclaimed the 'Good News' so often that it has become emptied of its meaning, like a frame without a picture. What is the content of the good news? Is it good news for all, or is it 'bad news' for many? We proclaim, in the words of Paul, that since the resurrection, there are no more privileges for Jew over Gentile, man over woman, or lord over slave. This is good news for the gentile, for the woman and for the slave (Galatians 3:27-28). Was it then, or is it now, good news for 'Jew,' for 'man', or for 'lord', to see that their privileges in reality mean misery? They too need to be liberated from being singled out as a different creation. We invite everyone to remember that they were not born Jew, man, lord, gentile, woman or slave, but babies, in the image and likeness of God.

The good news is the invitation to all humanity to partake in the divine banquet of our common heavenly Father. It is a renewed appeal to all of us to remember that we are descendants of Abraham. An Iraqi gentile from Mesopotamia, he has become the parent of all believers, whose message was destined for, and delivered to all the nations.

The good news exists in proclaiming the new, exciting revelation: God our Father and our Sovereign is neither a regional nor a tribal god. The story of the widow of Zeriphath of Sidon and Namaan the Syrian has made the traditional interpretation of the promised land obsolete (Luke 4:26-27). Similarly, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, 'Woman, believe me the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem ... the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father seeks such as these to worship him' (John 4:21-27). We believe that the message of Christ, the man from Galilee, is an appeal to shatter the 'capsule' that imprisoned God with his people. This would open the door for God and his creation to join together and become a blessing for each other. The creation becomes a blessing to God, and God becomes a blessing for the creation -- an extraordinary symphony of compassion and of love.

*Sabeel* is one ring in the long chain of hope and of struggle. *Sabeel* continues the centuries long tradition of proclaiming the Good News adopted by the Lord himself, the Man from Galilee at the dawn of his public life:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19).*

*Sabeel* remains faithful to its message and would like to express special thanks and heartfelt gratitude for the support of all our friends. Your friendship is extremely important and deeply appreciated. We invite you to continue walking with us, because together 'we are stronger than the storm.'

We wish to greet you with the Byzantine oriental Christians: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

*Father Elias Chacour, Vice President of Sabeel, is a Greek Catholic priest and founder of Mar Elias College in Ibillin, Galilee.*

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### **Jahalin Expulsion**

Under the cover of the Hebron Agreement and the release of the Palestinian women political prisoners, some 400 Jahalin Bedouin were expelled from the land on which they have lived for the past 45 years to make way for the expansion of the illegal settlement of Ma'ale Adumim. The Jahalin were forcibly moved to a site near the Abu Dis garbage dump and now reside in 16 metal shipping containers on a exposed, rocky hillside. Other families live in thin canvas tents provided by relief organizations. A single water line with four spigots provides water for the 40 families that now live in this new site.

*A Jahalin home being demolished*

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### **Hebron - The Meaning of Redeployment**

*by Christian Peacemakers Team, Hebron*

The long-awaited redeployment of the Israeli military from the West Bank town of Hebron on January 17 was welcomed with international fanfare, even if it was nine

months behind schedule. On the streets of Hebron, however, the feeling has been mixed. Palestinians celebrated the arrival of Palestinian police to 80 percent of the city (Area H-1), but in the 20 percent still under Israeli control (Area H-2), many Palestinians express fear about the potential for violence due to the continued presence of some 400 militant Jewish settlers in the heart of the city.

One Palestinian shop owner compared the new agreement to a new-born baby. "One has to wait several weeks," Rashad told Christian Peacemaker Teams, "to see if it will be a happy or angry baby." While it may be premature to predict the reaction of both Palestinians and Jewish settlers in the coming weeks and months to the redeployment, it is clear that the agreement suffers from severe congenital defects.

The divisions in Hebron are more apparent than ever. Israel retains overall responsibility for "security" in 20 percent of the city (where the 400 Jewish settlers live in several small heavily guarded enclaves) that includes the central market and religious sites and is home to some 30,000 Palestinians. Checkpoints mark the internal borders of the city between H-1 and H-2. In the 80 percent the streets are full of life; in the 20 percent there is unease and uncertainty. Beyond the city limits, Hebron remains surrounded by Israeli troops who can at any time close the borders and restrict the movement of Palestinians in and out of the city.

The agreement transferred civil responsibilities, like building and renovations, to the Palestinian municipal authority. Less than two weeks after redeployment, however, the Israeli military has imposed an order to stop Palestinian building and renovations in 158 places in H-2 that are near the Jewish settlements. Meanwhile \$35 million are being pumped into the Jewish settlements by a private foreign Jewish investor for continued construction of housing for some 25 Jewish families.

There are small signs of hope. The freshly painted store fronts and the lifting of tension in 80 percent of Hebron point toward a better future. The solidarity expressed by Israeli peace groups with Palestinians living in the city, including a group of descendants of the pre-1929 Jewish community in Hebron, harbors the potential for new relations between Palestinians and Jews. For now however, redeployment has left Hebron a divided city whose future remains far from certain.

*Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) is an initiative among Mennonite and Brethren congregations, and Friends meetings who support Violence Reduction Teams around the world.*

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## **Something New Has Happened**

*by Naim Ateek*

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A few weeks ago, after months of painful negotiations an interim agreement was signed between the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel by which the Israeli army pulled out from approximately 80% of the city of Hebron. The jubilation of the Palestinians was marred by the fact that the 20% of Hebron which is still under Israeli occupation includes the Abrahamic Mosque and 20-30,000 Palestinians.

The withdrawal from Hebron should have been completed almost year ago. It would have marked the end of the first phase of the Oslo II agreement and brought the two sides to the beginning of the second phase. The first phase of the agreement therefore was meant to be a short, transitory period, leading to phase two, when further Israeli military withdrawal would set the stage for the final and permanent solution. Instead, the first phase of Oslo II dragged out so long that the daily life of the Palestinians became unbearable. Now in fact a worse form of Occupation exists than before. By stalling, Mr. Netanyahu hoped to create new irreversible facts on the ground that would influence the shape of the final settlement. In this sense the Hebron agreement was a landmark, provided its terms are implemented. It was linked to further withdrawal from the West Bank - with United States guarantees - thus shattering the Likud dream of a greater Israel.

Had it not been for the deeper involvement of the US, an agreement would not have been reached, something that the Palestinians always knew and worked for. The United States has to carry out its responsibility of full partner and honest broker in the coming negotiations. Another significance of the Hebron agreement is that Mr. Netanyahu finally realized that there is no substitute to the Oslo agreement which will inevitably lead to an independent Palestinian State. Hopefully, he and his government now realize that the age when one nation could rule over another is over.

Hebron in its religious significance to Jews is second only to Jerusalem. It has become a symbol of Jewish sacred rights and sovereignty. The withdrawal from Hebron now paves the way to withdrawal from occupied Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the hard reality is that the Palestinians have to live a few more years during this interim period without any guarantee that in the final agreement the rest of Hebron would be returned to them. Their taste of freedom has been bittersweet, yet the occupation has been challenged and its foundation shaken. Something new has happened.

One of the important themes of the Gospel of John is that Christ brings the new -- the water is changed into wine (chapter 2:1-11); the old temple is replaced by a new one (2:18-22); a new birth from above versus physical birth (3:1-8); a new kind of living water which if people drink of they will never thirst; (4:1-15); worshiping God in a new way, in spirit and truth, versus worshiping God on Mt. Gerizim or Mt. Zion(4:20-24). In every instance, the presence of Christ points to a new reality that has taken place.

One can elaborate more on the story of the wedding at Cana of Galilee (John 2). The six water jars which were used for outward purification and cleansing according to the old law are now, by the power of Christ, changed into the wine of the Gospel, the wine of the spirit for inner purification and cleansing. And the volume of the wine is incredibly plentiful. No less than 700 liters of wine which cannot be consumed by a small village wedding. In other words, in the mind of the Evangelist, the inexhaustible grace of Christ. God's love and grace have opened up in Christ to reach all. In Christ, freedom has been won. The occupation has ended.

It is also significant to point out that according to John the Evangelist, all this happened on the **third day**. This reminds Christians of the resurrection of Christ that took place on the third day. It means that the new life in Christ was accomplished through his death and resurrection. In the victory of Christ the occupation was over. The old regime was conquered and evil overcome. New possibilities for a new life emerge. This requires new responsibilities to address and meet the new challenges that have risen with the opening of the new life. The change is phenomenal. It is as drastic and revolutionary as the change of water into wine.

What is worth noting when looking at Hebron and our Christian life is that most of us live just like the city of Hebron with, at least, 20% of our life still under occupation. Indeed, Christ has won the victory and given us freedom but part of our life falls short of complete liberation.

In Hebron, one can say, with 80% of its area liberated, there was a wedding, the occupation was over. The new has come. People can now experience the taste of freedom. Yet their freedom requires responsibility to build a better society than the occupation provided. They need to transform life and society so that the new that has started will gain momentum that would lead to the liberation of the rest of their city. They have to prove it through responsible action, mature behavior, cooperation with each other, and healing of wounds.

As we celebrate the feast of Easter, the feast of Liberation, we too will celebrate it with a mixture of joy and sadness. Christ has won for us the victory but a good percentage of our life still lives under occupation. Freedom, however, requires of us a renewed commitment to work for the liberation of the rest of our life as well as the liberation of others. On the third day there was a wedding...." (John 2:1).

*Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek, President of the board of directors of Sabeel, is Canon of St. George's Episcopal Cathedral and pastor of its Palestinian congregation.*

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### **An Interview with Hanan Ashrawi**

*by Cedar Duaybis*

*Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, former spokesperson for the Palestinian negotiating team at the peace talks, later founder of the independent commission for civil rights in Palestine and elected representative of Jerusalem on the Palestinian Legislative Council, is now Minister of Higher Education. She is a Palestinian Christian from Ramallah, educator, writer, poet and a staunch advocate of women's rights. Dr. Ashrawi is the recipient of numerous international, Arab and Palestinian awards and honorary degrees.*

***Dr. Ashrawi, one year after the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, what do you find encouraging or discouraging in terms of your expectations and actual achievements?***

It has not been smooth sailing. The Council is operating within very difficult conditions. It is working in a transitional period which places severe constraints and restrictions on the work of the council. This is a pioneering effort, the first experience of its kind, and both the legislative and executive authorities are finding their way still. There's lot's of exploratory work; there's lots of trial and error. At the same time there were heightened expectations which led to a certain feeling of letdown among many people. There are, of course, criteria of standards, of any legislative body, and these were not very clear to most people. They expected immediate results; that any resolution taken by the council will automatically be implemented, without realizing

that the council's work is primarily legislative in terms of passing laws, and the only thing that is binding is a bill, that is taken as a law -- rather than resolutions which convey the sense of the council or a political position. There were also administrative structural problems. Setting up a whole new system is not that simple, other than the conceptual aspects and the legal aspects, are the structural administrative aspects. In terms of the executive, its ability to recognize the fact that it is accountable, that there is a system of accountability, that the work of the legislative Council should be respected and that the council has the power actually to hold this executive accountable. A certain degree of defensiveness, which is not unexpected and which exists all over the world.

So I would say that the achievements are summarized in the fact that we started with the rules of procedure, or rules of order, which are quite democratic and acceptable. We started with dealing with substantive issues within the committees. There is a sort of feedback within the community, the people in the constituencies, and their representatives. At the same time there are the shortcomings, the fact that we have not been able to achieve all the goals that we set out for ourselves including issues of rule of law, of human rights, of the budgetary state of accountability and delays in the process of enacting laws. And even if you ratify them - first reading - they still have to go to the executive and then come back [to the council]. The basic law has been delayed even though the first reading has passed and has been ratified. We really need to move quickly on these issues because the legal chaos that we have is part of the basic problems that we have.

***You chose for your campaign slogan "Li'an Al-Quds Siyadah wa Alwatan Iradah" which translated means because Jerusalem is a matter of sovereignty and the homeland is a matter of will." How does Hanan keep up this will power in the face of all the ups and downs of the situation?***

I think it is an essential ingredient. Will power is the ongoing theme of a Palestinian, not just survival, but power of staying despite of all attempts of national eradication. I believe without this collective will power of the people, we would not have gotten anywhere. Historically, we are a people slated for national eradication as an identity, as a history, as a culture, as an authentic people with national rights. It's this will power that made us survive. And not just survive, but persevere. And I believe it is the most basic ingredient in any kind of Palestinian vindication, so to speak. And we do need historical vindication. So to me the question is not to surrender to the injustice or to be captured by the inequities of the past, but rather have the will power to break through the very difficult legacy of the past, and very unjust and painful conditions of the present, to be a true act of will, a conscious exercise of will, in order to achieve national restructuring. This motif is what keeps us going, this is what maintains

Palestinian identity and this idea of sovereignty is inherent in the human being. The human being exercises sovereignty as an act of will.

***I would like to be a little more specific in terms of the political situation. Now that we are moving towards the final stage of the negotiations, how do you see the end results? Co-existence or complete separation?***

Anything which starts with "co" presupposes parity, presupposes a situation of compatibility, a situation of 'equal but separate,' with relationships of mutuality. Co-existence does not necessarily exclude separation. Separation means putting an end to what I described in my Madrid speech as this fatal embrace," or fatal proximity, because it was a relationship of domination, of control, of occupation, of total lack of parity and equality, and a total absence of justice. To deal with a question of co-existence you have to supply it with its pre-requisites: equality; parity, mutuality, reciprocity, and so on. These are prerequisites for any type of relationship which can exist on an even keel. There can be no coexistence between unequals, or when one side determines the fate of the other, or feels free to exercise the right of life and death over the other. And there is nothing on earth that says that I can co-exist with an oppressor, there is nothing that says that I can co-exist within a situation of injustice. I am quite willing to co-exist with people on the basis of the politics of inclusion, on the basis of mutual legitimization, but I will not accept my delegitimization in order to legitimize the other. This is what we meant by the end of the politics of exclusion and the beginning of the politics of inclusion. To do that we have to disengage, and I've described this as a disengagement from a very abnormal and painful and unnatural situation, and then we will be engaged as equals.

***Where does Jerusalem fit into this?***

Jerusalem is the heart of the matter, and this is not just a metaphorical statement. I have always said that Jerusalem is the lynch pin, it is the basis, it is the real test, and it is the *sine qua non* for any type of agreement which would have the minimum acceptable level of justice and of parity. And therefore we always say Jerusalem has to embody the principle of sharing and it has to be the concrete expression of peace. Therefore, Jerusalem cannot be exclusively the possession of one side because, as we had said in the Madrid speech, it defies exclusive possession". It cannot be the spoils of war. It cannot be under the exclusive control and possession of Israel.

Its history, its culture, its traditions... all its components, whether they are physical, historical, geographical, national, legal, spiritual, religious, or cultural, Jerusalem is much greater than the sum total of its parts, it is clear. And therefore, without taking into account comprehensive rights, and this is where comprehensiveness and inclusion come in, any attempt at distorting Jerusalem, at imposing or dictating one will for

Jerusalem, at removing legality from the issue of Jerusalem, will lead to a temporary truce but will not lead to peace. This is the basis of peace: Jerusalem has to be understood in its totality, but has to be dealt with on the basis of legality and political justice, as well as the vindication of its history and its future. And we feel Jerusalem has to be the capital of Palestine. If the Israelis want it to be the capital of Israel then we deal with the totality of the city of Jerusalem, East and West. Only when the whole equation is completed would there be a possibility for the sharing of Jerusalem on the basis of equal rights. But, not to discuss East Jerusalem separately as if East Jerusalem is the only issue in question.

Legally, Jerusalem is still *corpus separatum*. It is not subject to the sovereignty of anybody, but given historical, national, cultural realities, I think Jerusalem should be shared. All of Jerusalem, and East Jerusalem should be the capital of Palestine. The Israelis wish to have West Jerusalem as their capital. Only when we have this equation will this work. It is also of course part of the occupied Palestinian territories.

***Dr. Ashrawi, you yourself are an educator, now the minister for Higher Education. What in your opinion, constitutes the major challenge facing our education system?***

There are many, many challenges in terms of education, starting with the definition of education, levels of education -- whether it is a question of increasing awareness, whether it is a question of developing a sense of vision and translating that vision into behavioral aspects, or whether it is a question of creating institutions which would embody educational systems that would be able to translate principles into realities and into behavior and actual exercise. Education deals with the most important and sensitive component of our reality, both the means and the end, the human being and the human mind. So we are entrusted with this most delicate, and sensitive and important aspect of our reality. We are facing challenges at all levels: the challenges of overcoming a painful and difficult legacy of the past; of transforming mentalities and mind sets; of maintaining institutions that would be able to carry forth the exercise of education as an integrated process with the human being as a totality, where the human mind is not an abstraction, where the values and systems become a matter of daily behavior; where you understand the authenticity of your own culture and your own needs, and place them within a human awareness and a global vision.

***In this connection, how do we overcome fundamentalism and racism in our move towards democracy and pluralism?***

The question of fundamentalism is anti-educational because it is dogmatic. I call it more dogmatism than fundamentalism. Because many people interpret fundamentalism as going back to the fundamentals, to the basics, but it has become a buzz word. Dogmatism, of whatever religion, of whatever ideology, of whatever

nature, is anti-educational and counter productive. To overcome it you have to use the tools of expansiveness rather than the tools of convolusion. Any type of dogmatism or fundamentalism is convoluted and imprisons the human mind rather than liberating the human mind. Therefore you have to deal, first of all, with a sense of openness, exposure, ability to deal with different ideas and different truths, and recognize truths and their validity as they interact, rather than hold on to an absolute view of reality and force God to take sides. God does not take sides. The human being has the full right to explore, to discover, different responses, different answers and different truths, and to reach the truths which are applicable and relevant. To do that you have to provide alternatives. Generally, in our part of the world, dogmatism and absolutism emerge as a result of a sense of let down and disappointment, as an escapist response to reality.

Therefore you have to tackle reality rather than escape from it and you have to provide alternatives that people can hold on to as mechanisms for dealing with a painful and unjust reality. This is one. Two, you have to, in many ways, to practice what you preach, at a very cliché-ish level. If we uphold pluralism, democracy and human rights, and if we recognize the validity of the human being, of the other, then it means we have to legitimize ourselves and legitimize the other through our own actions, not through claiming to have the absolute monopoly over the truth, or over the domain of right. And to do that you have to have an eclectic and dialectic attitude and behavior, and tolerance is the major ingredient for allowing the other to claim his or her validity. You have to be tolerant, but at the same time one cannot be tolerant of situations that are inherently unjust or evil. So the question of tolerance is not accepting injustice or oppression. The question of tolerance is being able to interact on an equal basis while at the same time finding common terms of reference.

***Dr. Ashrawi, this interview will be read by a large number of people, mainly Christians world wide. What specifically in your opinion might they do to promote a just peace in the region?***

I am glad that you have said "just peace" because most people believe that peace is a process or a mechanism, they don't think of it as a state of being and as one that is based on a sense of justice. But we have to translate justice once again into workable habits. So I would say first of all that truth is on the side of a just peace. People have to always know the truth. They shouldn't be satisfied lightly. They shouldn't be satisfied with clichés, stereotypes or the racist generalizations that they were given, to have the courage to seek the truth and recognize it when it is there. But once you have the truth you have a responsibility to act on it. I understand a contemporary church to be not only a contemplative church -- it is an active church with a sense of social responsibility for social justice, internally and for humanity. And therefore it is this commitment to humanity -- I'm not saying "am I my brother's keeper?" but in a sense

I am saying that we do share a collective responsibility. If we want to translate a genuine peace into reality, we should be intolerant of injustice. And I believe that the courage to stand up and speak out, even when it is not very popular or very rewarding in terms of daily events or realities... ultimately there is a process of redemption involved. I believe that it can be done, the churches should be able to speak out, should reach out. After all, this is the heart of Christianity and if Christianity really believes in their redemptive process then this is where redemption has to take place.

***To leave the wider world, and come closer to home. Do you have a word to say to our local church leaders?***

I think it is very important that our church leaders understand the importance of community, and the responsibility of the church, by providing support systems for the community. I am seriously alarmed at the emigration. I am alarmed that many Christians feel that they have not evolved a support system or the sense of active community, and therefore are more vulnerable to any type of external oppression, particularly when it comes to the Israeli behavior, Israeli actions . But I also believe in an ongoing shared vision and dialogue. I do not believe that we as Palestinians define ourselves primarily as being Christian or Muslim. We define ourselves as being Palestinian, human beings, but at the same time with a unique legacy of religious pluralism and the authenticity of Christianity. After all this is the longest existing tradition of Christianity in the world. And this sense of continuity and authenticity is a source of strength. Therefore one should place it forward, present it as a source of authenticity and validation of identity, and move ahead, encompassing the full humanity of the Christian community here as part of a series of concentric circles, not as separate from, but as part of, the larger community. We have a shared language, a shared history, a shared vision, a shared future with Islam. We are in an Islamic culture, and I am not talking about an artificial dialogue; I'm talking about an organic reality and an unfolding on-going reality which should be maintained. This sense of oneness with the dominant culture of the Arab world has to be maintained, while at the same time feeling confident in one's identity.

***Hanan, you are well known as a staunch advocate of women's rights. How in your view can we bridge the gap between legislation and reality?***

Well, even in legislation sometimes we have a hard time placing women's rights at the forefront and eliminating any kind of discrimination or gender bias in the language of legislation. Legislation alone as you have said is not enough. It has to have a mechanism of follow-up and implementation. Therefore, I believe women should have gender support systems -- women's organizations, as well as other social justice groups, that would provide this context for women, so that the individual woman does not feel alone or vulnerable. She should work collectively in the sense that there is a

shared awareness of women's rights and a commitment to gender issues. This sometimes necessitates models, having women that are willing to take the risk, willing to stand up for what they believe, and for their rights, and to fight the gender battle daily. Because I believe it's a very difficult battle. And you can never sit back on your laurels and say I have done enough. Issues should be approached with a sense of collective vision that the individual woman's strength comes from her sisters and the sense of collective approach, and whatever she achieves has to be brought back to bear on the conditions of women as a whole.

I also believe that we should intrude at every level. We should challenge the given, at the economic level, at the social level, and at the political level. In every endeavor or activity we should have a positive intervention. I believe in affirmative action for women, particularly now, because people tend to create a sense of false symmetry: if you want to be equal, let's give you equal opportunity at a superficial level. But we have a long legacy of inequality so we need positive intervention to undo part of the injustice or to balance the equation as it stands.

I also think that we need to have awareness and part of it is the educational system and program, the curricula we choose and so on, and part of it is for women not to accept relegated goals, not to accept dictates by others, to challenge at every level and to do it, again not to do it alone, but within a collective gender vision. Without a gender agenda, we become pragmatic. Without a sense of understanding of women's rights and the components of the injustice done to us, in order to try to undo that, we won't be able to succeed. So we have to have the ability to challenge, to intervene, and to work collectively... as women, not to accept the given and not even to allow for the superficial complacency that comes from mini victories. And it's difficult. It's not easy.

***Dr. Ashrawi we have come to the end of our interview and I would like to address Hanan the writer. I enjoyed reading your book, 'This Side of Peace', very much and always wonder if more will flow from your pen?***

This type of book is new. I've written mainly academic works, and a lot of fiction, and poetry and criticism, and text books. But I certainly think this genre, which attempts to deal with reality from a personal perspective, without it being a biography or a memoir, is certainly very badly needed, to imbue the collective, historical, or political reality with a human identity and a human voice. I certainly intend to write another book of this nature, but I am also writing a novel. If I have time I will finish that! Writing to me is something essential, and I don't feel whole without writing. Not as a cathartic or psychotherapeutic exercise, but as an essential expression of creativity -- I love words and I love language -- and I think it's essential for a whole and healthy existence.

*Cedar Duaybis is a member of the Executive Committee of Sabeel.*

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**John the Baptist as an Image of the Church:**

**A Reflection on Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26**

*by Rafiq Khoury*

*Father Rafiq Khoury of the Latin (Roman Catholic) Church gave the following sermon, in Arabic, at St. George's Episcopal Cathedral in Jerusalem. In a pioneering ecumenical initiative during Advent 1996, Canon Naim Ateek and the Palestinian congregation at St. George's Episcopal Cathedral invited priests from the Latin, Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches to preach during their regular worship services.*

Dear sisters and brothers,

I thank God for being with you this day. I also thank Canon Naim Ateek for inviting me to preach in this beautiful cathedral as part of his ecumenical initiative this advent season. This is the first time I have preached in a church that is not my own. You can imagine the images I carry inside me as I stand in an Anglican Episcopal Church, as I can also imagine the images that you carry inside you; images from history, distant and not so distant, world history as well as that of our region.

Historical memories that are harbored by communities and individuals are burdens that weigh upon us, especially in this Holy Land where different and varied memories

come face to face, pushing each other and fighting as if to negate each other. This is what we are called to overcome in order to bring healing to those memories, making them harmonious, complementary and inclusive, instead of mutually repulsive, conflicting and exclusive. This applies to the different churches in the Holy Land but especially in Jerusalem. A spiritual purity and inner peace and tranquillity is called for to enable us to meet and appreciate the wealth inherent in every church. It enables us to absorb it and turn it into the collective wealth of all the churches.

This certainly does not do away with differences of creed, but rather places us in the best situation and spiritual condition to deal with matters of creed in a genuine and productive manner. This can only be done through the power of the Holy Spirit, which makes all things new (Revelation 21:5).

This is the advent season, which prepares us for the coming of Christ. The Church helps us by highlighting some passages that arouse our longing for the indwelling of Christ in us as individuals and communities of faith. Therefore we can reflect the image of Christ and transform the Church into an icon that portrays the features of the mystery of Christ.

Today the Church has not given us a set text for preaching, but rather a living person - John the Baptist. John's message is his guidance for us in the way that leads to Christ. He is the voice that prepared the way for the Word. John is the voice and Christ is the Word, as St. Augustine put it. In the person of John the Baptist I see an image of the Church. Let us together look at some of these features that help us to comprehend the mystery of the Church in its relationship with the mystery of Jesus Christ.

The first feature is prophetic courage. (Matthew 11:2) It tells us that John was in prison. We also know that he was in prison because of his prophetic courage in the face of the powerful of this world. It is an uncompromising courage, one that does not accept half solutions or appeasement, but rather speaks out strongly, sharply and truthfully. When the prophetic spirit dies down, the Church becomes a human institution, maybe strong and influential and active but without spirit. We must ask whether the spirit of prophecy abides in our churches?

The second feature is the characteristics of the coming Messiah (Matthew 11:2-15.) They are the signs that we find scattered in the book of the prophet Isaiah, which Jesus put together in one passage: "the blind recover their sight, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the poor hear the good news." The Christ that the people were awaiting had, in their minds and over the passage of time, taken the image of power and might. Jesus put matters in their right perspective by assuring them that the mark of the Messiah was his closeness to the poor, the blind, the lame, the lepers and the

deaf. Who is the Christ of our churches? Is he a temporal monarch or the Messiah of the poor? Is he the Messiah of power or the Messiah of service?

The third feature is found in the message of John the Baptist as reported by Matthew: 'Here is my herald whom I send on ahead of you, and he will prepare the way before you' (Matthew 11:10). When John was asked about his identity he answered: 'I am not the Messiah. After me comes one who is mightier than I. I am not fit to unfasten his shoes'. John's personality was strong, attractive and charming. The people loved him, but the wine of power did not turn his head. He understood his position. The Church must be the way to Christ. It is the Church in as much as Christ dwells in it, and in as much as it leads to Him. Is there a danger that it might take the place of Christ? Are our churches pathways to Christ, or do they hide the image of Christ? Do our churches point to themselves instead of pointing to Christ?

The fourth feature is inspired by John's lifestyle, which Christ describes in a prophetic, poetic and emotional manner: 'What was the spectacle that drew you to the wilderness? A reed-bed swept by the wind? No? Then what did you go to see? A man dressed in silks and satins? Surely you must look in palaces for that.' Matthew's Gospel describes him as follows: 'John's clothing was a rough coat of camel hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.' John was not a prophet by his words, but by his lifestyle. The same applied to the prophets of the Old Testament who preached to the people and inspired them to repentance through the example of their way of life. Their life itself was prophecy!

The world today is consumed with the spirit of consumerism. Is the Church itself innocent of this material spirit? Can the Church of today keep its identity and bear witness to other things that today's person and today's world needs? A Church clothed in silk and satin cannot speak to the poor, the blind, the leper and the deaf!

Dear sisters and brothers, I leave you with these questions at the threshold of Christmas which is an appropriate time for us to return to our true identity. John the Baptist is an image of this identity and a reminder of it. Is this not the message of the prophets? May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you evermore. Amen.

*Father Rafiq Khoury is the General Secretary of the Synod of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land. He is also in charge of religious education in the Latin Patriarchate.*

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## **The Threat to Palestinian Residency Rights in Jerusalem**

*by Jonathan Kuttab*

Israel's attempts to create total and exclusive hegemony in Jerusalem has recently taken a very ugly turn. The bases for this policy were laid back in 1987 when East Jerusalem was illegally annexed into Israel. The residents of East Jerusalem were at that time given a strange status of "residents" but not citizens of Israel. This was not understood at the time for its seriousness because the Palestinian community together with the entire world rejected the annexation and were not eager to demand rights for the Palestinians under Israeli law.

The next step in Israel's policy was to physically restrict building in East Jerusalem by confiscating large tracts of land and introducing large numbers of Jews into housing built by the Israeli government for Jews only. These settlers have now become almost a majority of the population in East Jerusalem. The Palestinian Jerusalemites who were squeezed by the lack of available space for building were slowly forced to move to the outskirts of Jerusalem and began to live there.

The recent crisis comes with the application of Israeli "Law of Entry into Israel" to those residents. In the famous case, Mubarak Awad vs. Ministry of Interior, the Israeli High Court had held that Palestinian East Jerusalemites have the status of permanent residents under the Law of Entry into Israel and that they could lose that status if they obtained another citizenship, left the country for seven years, or obtained another permanent residency.

The current campaign is aimed at this law by requiring East Jerusalemites to prove that they in fact have been residing in East Jerusalem continuously and that they have not obtained another residency. Living outside the annexed municipal boundaries of Jerusalem is now being viewed as "abandoning" their residency and status as Jerusalemites. As many as 30,000 to 50,000 East Jerusalemites now stand to lose their Identity Cards and will therefore be permanently barred from entering into Jerusalem without permit.

Ministry of Interior Officials are now requiring proof of payment of municipal taxes (*Arnona*) and other evidence of residence inside the municipal boundaries. Since Palestinians cannot obtain building permits to build in East Jerusalem, rents have become exorbitant and those who moved to the suburbs are now threatened with being treated as if they abandoned their rights in Jerusalem.

Almost every Palestinian family in East Jerusalem, whether Muslim or Christian, has faced, in one form or another, the threat of this new policy. Individuals who have

obtained foreign passports, or who have traveled abroad to study, or who have been forced to seek housing outside Jerusalem all now stand to lose their Identity Cards and be permanently barred from access to Jerusalem. One commentator has called this ethnic cleansing without genocide". Israeli officials are not reluctant to blatantly describe their policies and their aims. Jerusalem, they say, must be the permanent exclusive capital of the Jewish People. While lip service is paid to providing access to Jerusalem to members of other religions, the reality on the ground is that Palestinian Muslims and Christians are systematically barred from entry to Jerusalem unless they are residents or have a special permit. Now that these residencies are being withdrawn in large numbers, there is an urgent danger that Jerusalem will be deprived of its indigenous non-Jewish population.

Needless to say none of these provisions are applicable to Jews whose rights to enter Jerusalem are based on the Law of Return and not on the law of Entry into Israel". As such, Jews from Ethiopia, the former Soviet Union, the United States or anywhere else in the world can come and obtain immediate rights to residency and citizenship in Israel. Jews who move to the West Bank as settlers do not lose any of their rights, but the Palestinian Arabs who are forced out of the city because of lack of housing, lose, not only social rights and benefits, health and social security, but also their very rights to reside in Jerusalem

*Sabeel* is very concerned about this policy which is subtle as it is pernicious. Racism and exclusivity threatens the fiber of coexistence in Jerusalem and Israeli attempts to obtain domination in the Holy City at the expense of its indigenous population can only lead to more hatred, unrest and bloodshed.

*Jonathan Kuttab is a board member of Sabeel, a lawyer and co-founder of the human rights organizations Al-Haq and the Mandela Institute for Political Prisoners.*

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## **The Syrian Orthodox Church and Community in the Holy Land**

by Jack Khazmo

The Syrian Orthodox Church is an ancient oriental church. Although it is small in number, about five million members worldwide, including four million in India, it is rich in history, liturgy, rituals and language. Many Syrian Orthodox contributed to the Arab Renaissance during the Arab Abassid Caliphate.

### ***The Congregation***

The Syrian Orthodox Church in the Holy Land has a congregation of approximately 5000, concentrated in the Jerusalem and Bethlehem areas, with a few members in Ramallah and Jericho. Thousands have emigrated in the last few decades, mainly to North America where they have established over 10 churches.

The spiritual leader of the congregation is The Patriarchal Vicar in Jerusalem, His Eminence Archbishop Mar Swerios Malki Murad. He is assisted by five priests, one of them married serves the church community in Bethlehem. The seat of the Patriarchal Vicar is in St. Mark's Convent, the oldest convent in the Old City of Jerusalem. The church has a number of active institutions. These include St. Mark's Syriac Welfare Association in Jerusalem, which was established in 1927, the Syrian Orthodox Club in Jerusalem with its well-known Scouts' group, St. Ephreim Welfare Association in Bethlehem, and the Syrian Orthodox Club of Bethlehem. The Committee of St. Mark's Convent, which is appointed by His Holiness Mar Ignatius Zacka I, head of the Worldwide Syrian Church, assists His Eminence the Patriarchal Vicar to Jerusalem, the Holy Land and Jordan, in running the administrative affairs, especially the *Waqf* (Church Property).

### ***The Presence in the Holy Land***

The history of the church in the Holy Land goes back to the first days of Christianity. St. Mark's Convent is an irrevocable witness to this presence as it contains St. Mark's Church, which is believed by many historians and archaeologists to be the site of the Last Supper and Pentecost, and the house of St. Luke.

The present members of the church are mainly immigrants from south-eastern Turkey after 1915. The Syrian Orthodox Church and its members went through many periods of great difficulty throughout their history, forcing them to move from place to place looking for refuge and security. Many joined other churches which split from the Syrian Orthodox Church.

### ***Rights in the Holy Places***

The Syrian Orthodox Church has historic rights, along with four other churches, to worship in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher throughout the year. Though the church does not have as many rights as the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic or Armenian Orthodox churches, they are important and valuable. Many rights were lost in the past during difficult times; some were taken over by other churches, but the rights that the Syrian Churches still hold in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher include:

- the right to hold prayers and worship every Sunday throughout the year in the Syrian Orthodox Chapel of St. Nicodimus.
- the right to use 18 official entrances to the church.
- the right to pray during processions in most parts of the church including around and inside the tomb of Christ.

This situation also applies to rights in the Church of the Nativity, and the Church of the Ascension, but the Syrian Church also has rights in the holy places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

### ***Churches and Monasteries***

The Syrian Orthodox Church maintains a few churches and monasteries in the Holy Land, although a larger number were lost for various reasons in the past. As mentioned earlier, the history of St. Mark's Convent in Jerusalem, which includes St. Mark's Church, goes back to the first days of Christianity. The Church of the Virgin Mary, near Manger Square in Bethlehem, was built by members of the congregation during the 1920s. The Syrian Orthodox Church also maintains chapels in the Holy Sepulcher, the Church of the Ascension and in the Church of the Nativity. St. John's Monastery on the River Jordan has been closed by the Israelis since 1967, due to its location in the Israeli Military area. No-one is allowed to enter the monastery, which is surrounded by mines.

Those churches and monasteries in Jerusalem lost during the past include the Monastery of *Al-adas* (Lentils) in *Bab Hutta*, next to Herod's Gate in the Old City; Monastery of St. Thomas near Jaffa Gate which is now used by the Al-Deisi family; the Church of St. Peter, now the Al-Malawiyah Mosque; the Church of Mary Kar'a whose exact site is in the new Jewish Quarter; the Church of St. Thomas, located next to the Armenian Convent, is now in ruins; the Church of Albashoura next to Suk Al Husor in the Old City was converted into a cafe. Manuscripts in St. Mark's Convent also refer to Syrian Orthodox Churches in Gaza, Akka (Acre) and Jericho, but these were lost for various reasons.

### ***Distinguishing Characteristics***

The Syrian Orthodox Church is indigenous to this land. It began in Jerusalem. The congregation, however, is not affiliated to a special homeland or political dogma. While Syrian Orthodox

are true to spiritual dogma and beliefs, they do not claim any homeland. They are loyal to the land where they reside, mainly in the Middle East. The liturgy, rites and rituals are ancient, while the church continues to use Syriac (Aramaic), the language

of Jesus Christ. This oriental church believes in one nature of Jesus Christ, the nature of God, that contains both the divine and human. It is a monophysite church like its sister churches: Coptic, Armenian and Abyssinian (Ethiopian). The priest of the church does not wear the crown during religious ceremonies, for the Syrian Church believes that only God, the King of the World, wears the spiritual crown.

**References:**

1. The Syrian Orthodox Church in the Holy Land, Jacob Koriah, St. Mark's Convent, Jerusalem, 1976.
2. St. Mark's Convent, various ancient manuscripts.
3. St. Mark's Convent, current files and documents.

*Jack Khazmo, editor and publisher of the weekly magazine, Al-Bayader Al-Siyasi, is chair of St. Mark's Syriac Welfare association and a member of St. Mark's Committee.*

*His Eminence Archbishop Mar Swerios Malki Murad (Patriarchal Vicar to Jerusalem, The Holy Land and Jordan), in front of St. John's Church on the Jordan River. St John's Monastery has been closed since 1967 and nobody is allowed to enter.*

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**A Journey to Jerusalem**

by Marc H. Ellis

*Dr. Marc Ellis, the renowned Jewish American theologian visited Palestine and Israel in November 1996 at the invitation of various organizations including Sabeel. During his two week stay, Dr. Ellis met with many individuals and organizations, both Palestinian and Israeli, and spoke to many different audiences, beginning at Sabeel center. Dr. Ellis reflects upon his 'journey to Jerusalem'.*

Returning to Israel and Palestine in November for my first visit since 1992 was exciting and difficult. The excitement was rooted in a feeling of being at home in the

Holy Land; the difficulty stemmed from the deterioration of relations between Israel and Palestinians in the post-Oslo era. Of course, and contrary to public perceptions, this crisis of Israel and Palestine has taken a downward spiral since the signing of the Oslo accords, but any hope that remained of reversing that spiral ended with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. The election of Netanyahu sealed the fate of the peace process, at least for the time being. In my discussions with Jews and Palestinians outside of the Holy Land, I heard of this disappointment; experiencing it myself during my journey was heartbreaking. Could I feel at home as my Palestinian friends experienced the apartheid-like ghettos that the world insists on calling autonomy? It is almost a surreal situation as once again I was welcomed by a people who had been systematically stripped of their homeland by my own.

In 1988, at the height of the Intifada, I wrote of the interconnectedness of Jewish and Palestinian history and the need for solidarity with the Palestinian people. In the intervening years the Declaration of Principles was signed and there was hope that a Jewish recognition of complicity in the displacement of the Palestinian people would lead to a vision of reconciliation that included peace with justice. Yet it was clear in the reading in preparation for my journey and in discussions during my visit that expropriation of property, building of settlements, violation of human and national rights, even torture, had increased after Oslo. As I observed this situation I wondered what form Jewish solidarity would take today. In 1988, solidarity meant a recognition of Jewish culpability and the need for the establishment of a Palestinian state. By 1996, the settlements and invasion of Palestinian territory had gone so far as to raise the question of whether there was anything left upon which to establish a state. With the map of Oslo in hand and surveying the same territory with my own eyes, the question was hardly theoretical. I wondered whether in the celebration of the Oslo accords we had paradoxically come to the end of Palestine.

The end of Palestine has been commented upon by Palestinian intellectuals and church leaders, but as a Jew this possibility strikes me at the deepest level. What does it mean to Jewish history if the Jewish state completes the task of expropriation and expansion to the point where a reversal of the process becomes impossible? Can we ever again proclaim our tradition as messengers to humanity? What kind of message can we proclaim to our own children? That after our suffering in the European diaspora, we have survived, conquered and created a new diaspora of Palestinians? Reconciliation is possible when the people who have been displaced, the land that has been expropriated, and the culture that has been interrupted, can return and root itself once again. Was I witnessing the end of this opportunity as I traveled between Palestinian cities whose entry and freedom is controlled by Jewish soldiers and the politicians who dictate their actions?

The geography in Israel and Palestine has always been confusing to me. The same land contains two peoples with their own cultures and aspirations, obviously divided and just as obviously shared. Can two peoples who walk the same earth, watch the same sun rise and set, farm the same land, be only separate? Even the historic and recent violent confrontations represent the creation of a history that is intertwined in blood and responsibility. The dividing line between Jew and Palestinian is firm and diffuse, with separate histories and identities yet that are also shared. I wondered as I spoke with Palestinians whether this division could ever be seen within the context of connection and whether the connection between Jew and Palestinian would ever be recognized in its tragic dimensions while transformed into a new identity that promises a future beyond the present impasse. For it became clear in my journey that the state of Israel would not stop until Palestine ceased to exist except in name only, and that millions of Palestinians would not live forever within this framework. A new explosion is brewing between the unstoppable state and the aspirations of an entire people. Could we be missing the last opportunity to recognize the shared dimensions of Jewish and Palestinian identity and life?

During my journey the following became clear: the end of Palestine means the end of the Jewish tradition as we have known and inherited it. It means the end of Jewish history. This is what my journey to the Holy Land brought home to me. The situation reminded me of the triumph of Christianity, with its blessing of the state in the era of Constantine and its globalization in the wake of 1492. When Christianity blessed and benefitted from power, especially in the West, the salvation it proclaimed was trumpeted with a militarism that still mars its claims to the gospels. Or, perhaps more to the point, it began to live the new gospels of power and colonialism. As Gustavo Gutierrez, the father of Latin American liberation theology, writes, evangelization was then done under threat. In the Americas, the Spanish conducted an "evangelization at gunpoint." Some Christians protested this form of evangelization as a form of apostasy from the original message of Jesus, but it was too late. In its colonial form Christianity became unrecognizable to its original bearers even as the cathedrals were built and the church became wealthy beyond compare. Something happened to Christianity in this alliance with empire that diluted, even dramatically changed, its intent and message. In Europe, Jews were victims of this militant Christianity, but in Palestine Jews assumed many of the attributes that it had barely survived. As I heard the message of Jewish suffering and religiosity trumpeted so loudly and militantly, I returned to this transformation of Christianity as a lesson for Jews in the present. Had we embarked on a Constantinian Judaism which proclaimed the values of peace and justice even as they are transformed into acts of terror against the Palestinian people?

In Jerusalem I saw this transformation of Judaism most clearly. Since my first visit there in 1973, much has happened. The borders of this ancient city have expanded

tremendously through a ring of Jewish settlements around the city, and within the old city itself the Muslim and Christian population has decreased relative to the Jewish population. Again, I had read about these shifting demographics and experienced bits and pieces of them over the years. But a week's stay in Jerusalem this visit was alarming: the population and culture, the very rhythms of the city, were now almost completely Jewish, and the Palestinian presence had been reduced to religious sites and tourist shops. Each morning as I walked through the city I witnessed Jews on their way to pray at the Western Wall or bringing their children to religious schools. I asked myself whether these religious people reflected at all on the fact that the very practice of their faith was predicated on displacement and injustice. Could they say their prayers with a clear conscience when the place they called home was no longer home to Christians and Muslims who once lived in Jerusalem? The Judaization of Jerusalem is to some Jews the dawn of redemption. But can redemption for one people be found at the expense of another's pain and suffering? When the redemption of one people is at the price of another, then redemption itself is called into question. This is the lesson that Jews taught Christians of the West after the Holocaust when Christians discovered that the redemption they proclaimed helped produce the death factories of Europe. As I strolled around Jerusalem and admired its history and beauty, these thoughts remained with me: when would we as Jews apply the lessons we learned to ourselves? If Israel is the dawn of redemption for Jews, and if this redemption is a disaster for the Palestinians, then the redemption is false, a lie, a sin even.

And so it is. Regardless of the rhetoric and the religious garb, regardless of the bold pronouncements of Jerusalem as the undivided and eternal capital of Israel, the memory of Palestinian suffering will haunt this victory until one day a cry will well up within the Jewish psyche that speaks of the betrayal of our own dead and our vocation in the world. Already that speech can only be whispered and one day it will, like the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem and the land, be found only in exile. There in the exile a new Jewish consciousness will take root, no doubt among dispossessed Palestinians. Together these Jews and Palestinians will recall the promises of redemption and begin to build a just community worthy of living in the land called holy.

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## **Reflections on Easter and the Resurrection**

*In the following meditations, young women from Nazareth reflect upon the meaning of Easter and the resurrection. All of these women attended the Center for*

***Christian Encounter in Nazareth, which was run by Father Faraj Nakhleh, a Melkite priest, until his recent death.***

*Amal Mabjish, a Roman Catholic biology teacher, worked at the center until the death of Father Faraj. She writes:*

Resurrection is Jesus Christ - Jesus alive. Our faith in him is our life and our resurrection. 'Why look among the dead for someone who is alive.' This is the message of the resurrection: life in light of Christ who is risen from death, leaving the tomb empty. Our life on earth is based on the hope of our resurrection, like Jesus Christ. Resurrection changes the concept of death, it becomes a transition between this life and eternal happiness in the 'new heaven and new earth; where the Lord wipes away all tears and where there is no more death nor suffering. Resurrection is our faith which makes us proclaim that Jesus Christ is alive, alive first in ourselves.

Resurrection is the life of perpetual happiness with and in Christ the Lord. *Faten Khoury, student of history of art and theater is a member of the Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church. She writes:*

Resurrection reminds us that the narrow way leads at its end to light and happiness. Jesus Christ asked us to enter and go through this narrow way in order to get to the light; the way of the cross leads us to resurrection and eternal life. To follow this way we have to be united with the Holy Trinity. This unity comes from the reality that Jesus Christ is alive in us. The Father the Son and the Holy Spirit - One God. With Jesus Christ, I can face difficulties and sufferings; the Holy Spirit gives me help and consolation and the Father sent His Son for our salvation. With this unity is the real resurrection. After this resurrection, the victory; Christ has conquered death. Every person on earth is called to realize a resurrection in his life and maybe in the life of others. *Nevine Basha, Orthodox, writes: Resurrection is: new life, salvation, fulfillment of prophecies, faith and Christianity.*

*A Roman Catholic nurse writes:*

Resurrection is the foundation of our Christian life and our hope, which is sharing the Kingdom of God in the last day. By the Resurrection I proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He is the source of light in my life, and in that of every Christian. Since our baptism we became children of God, who made us the light for everyone on earth. The resurrection of Christ is our life and our victory. Since He conquered the world our life became the means towards eternal life, not an engagement on earth. Without Resurrection our life would have been miserable and without hope.

*Nibal Mazzawi, a Melkite student of architecture, writes:*

Resurrection is the renovation of life; the light after the darkness; it's the joy after the sorrow.

*Hanin Karram, a Roman Catholic social welfare student, writes:*

Jesus Christ came from heaven, shed His blood on earth and conquered death by the power of the Holy Cross, and, His glorious resurrection; the mystery of glory. The fruit of this mystery is faith.

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## **Resurrection**

by Hortense Nakhleh

### **Christ is Risen!**

This is the joyous greeting exchanged among Byzantine Christians on Easter Day. It is the fundamental expression of faith shared by all Christians, regardless of their denominational affiliation. This greeting was the first proclamation of the church on the day of its birth.. 'God has made this Jesus,... both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:32-36). The church started with a real event and a proclamation which has continued for 2000 years. Christ is risen, He has risen indeed.

Why do we search for death where there is life? Why do we complain and cry when Jesus calls us to a whole new future? Christ has preceded us to a new life and a new ministry. We shall all go to meet him and though this earthly world will come to an end, the proclaiming of the Word of Life will never end.

The Holy Book clearly states that all our yearning and hope for a life of harmony, designed and promised by God, can be fulfilled, in spite of our failure, sin and death, if we live in Him. Easter, the Resurrection, is the greatest of celebrations. Its root and symbol are found in the Old Testament in the Passover, meaning *The Passage*. Our Lord Jesus Christ celebrated the feast of Passover with his disciples at the last supper, and as He is the true lamb of God, new meaning was given birth.

The Resurrection is not only the commemoration of a historical event. It is a continuous journey upon which Christianity is based.

The Resurrection reaffirms and strengthens Christian faith, 'And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith' (I Cor. 15:14). The Resurrection is the ultimate challenge 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' (I Cor. 15:55) that gives a vision of a new city -- a new life -- where death no longer exists. Adam, the mortal man, frustrated the plan of the Creator by leading humanity to death; the new Adam, Jesus Christ, rose from the dead and has become the source of abundant life. Christ's victory over all evil makes His death the greatest symbol.

The Resurrection justifies the existence of the Church that helps perpetuate and complete the salvation process. It is in the church that the death and resurrection of those fallen occurs. This is possible only through faith and baptism, the sacrament of faith in the church. It is in baptism, the passage/entrance to salvation, that we die with Christ in order to live in his resurrection. The resurrection is the coming of the kingdom into our world. This participation in baptism, death and resurrection is the true guarantee / promise for real life. The resurrection mystery is achieved only through Christ and the church (a continuity of His presence is the basis upon which our faith revolves).

The resurrection gives true meaning to the daily life of Christians. 'For had not Christ lived, we would have remained in sin.'

Youth are the pivotal springboard; youth is not a stage in life, it is the ability to stand up and go forth. Age does not define youth: an 80 old man can be young and filled with life while a 20 old young man may be chained down by fear, suspicion and shame. Christ calls us to rise, break the bonds and chains and go forth without dwelling on our long period of imprisonment. Let us not be afraid. Let us remember: 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die.' (John 11:25-26)

Let us come out of our tombs of ignorance, let us rise from sleep and death. Why do we seek life among the dead? It is not here among the tombs where we bury our dead, our thoughts and our dreams. Christ has opened a path of light. At the end of our closed roads Christ is alive and has vanquished death. There is a future for the world and a meaning to history. Humanity is eternal for Christ is alive.

Our ministry, our message -- like that of all churches -- stems from Christ risen from the dead. The church is the way, a prophetic spirit, which brings out hope from the tomb, and keeps alive the light that vanquishes darkness.

*Sister Hortense Nakhleh, a Palestinian nun of the Order of the Rosary Sisters, is headteacher of the Rosary School in Jerusalem.*

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**Forthcoming Conferences**

*Sabeel*

Liberation Theology Center  
announces its  
Third International Conference

***The Challenge of Jubilee  
What Does God Require?***

11-15 February 1998  
Bethlehem

...good news to the poor...  
release to the captives...  
recovery of sight to the blind...  
let the oppressed go free..."  
Luke 4:18-19

*Conference Objectives:*

- To address the issues of justice and human dignity, as reflected in the concept of Biblical Jubilee
- To affirm the faithful witness of the Palestinian Christian community and strengthen global ties of solidarity
- To call for justice, liberty, human rights and reconciliation for all peoples in Palestine and Israel, as we move forward in hope towards the 21st century

and its  
Fourth International Conference

# *Two Thousand Years of Christian Heritage in the Middle East*

May 2000  
Jerusalem

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### **Snapshots of Our Activities**

#### **Clergy Gatherings**

Parish priests, representatives of seven different churches: Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Lutheran, Roman Catholic (including Franciscans), Syrian Orthodox, and Episcopal, met at the retreat center run by the St. Joseph Nuns in Abu Ghosh on December 8-9 for prayers and ecumenical

reflections. They discussed the most effective ways of educating and reaching out to their parishioners. Mgr. Paul Sayyah, the new Maronite Patriarchal Vicar paid them a short visit in the evening, encouraging these ecumenical endeavors at the grassroots level.

#### **Lenten Studies**

*Sabeel* invited five lay men and women, members of the Lutheran, Arab Orthodox, Presbyterian, Coptic Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches, to meditate on scripture readings for this season. This ecumenical five-week study will be conducted in Arabic in Jerusalem at *Sabeel* Center, with the assistance of local clergy to lead the discussions and prayers.

Upon the request of Friends of *Sabeel* in North America and the United Kingdom, the English version is available and can be obtained through the coordinators, Betsy Barlow and Janet Davies respectively. Each weekly meditation is followed by study questions, updates on the actual situation in Palestine and calls for action.

### **Speakers' Bureau**

Many volunteer speakers of the Speakers Bureau responded to *Sabeel's* invitation to the gathering held on January 31, 1997. This was a brainstorming session to find means of developing this ministry as the number of pilgrims increases and the request for speakers becomes a more demanding obligation. Both Adv. Jonathan Kuttab and Canon Naim Ateek responded to the questions pertaining to the latest political developments as they analyzed them from a Palestinian Christian perspective of justice, right, and evil. It was encouraging to note the commitment of the young people who feel that this is an important ministry, and understand the need to expand the circle of speakers.