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In This Issue:

- [Partnering with God](#) by Naim Ateek
- [Interview with the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem](#) by Samia Khoury
- [Analysis and Anticipation](#) by Azmi Bishara
- [Justice and Reconciliation](#) by Rosemary Radford Ruether
- [Religion in the Conflict](#) by Karl-Axel Elmquist
- [The Prophet Micah and Jerusalem](#) by Mitri Raheb
- [Behind the Headlines in Hebron](#) by Kathleen Kern
- [So Full of Life](#) by Caroline Abdelnour
- [Sabeel Nazareth meets Sabeel Jerusalem](#) by Blanche Mizzawi
- [FOS-NA Hosts Conference in Washington](#) by Betsy Barlow
- [Books](#) by Stephen Sizer
- [Snapshots of Our Activities](#)

[Contents](#)

Partnering with God

by Naim Ateek

The tight closure or siege which was inflicted on the Palestinian community after the atrocious suicidal bombings on July 30 and September 4, 1997 in West Jerusalem exposes clearly the "Palestans" policy of Israel. Generally in the past, when closures were imposed, it meant the sealing of the West Bank and Gaza from Israel. The Palestinians were free to move within their areas but were not allowed to cross over into the "green line," i.e. the pre 1967 boundaries of the state of Israel. With the "Palestans" policy, a new tragic reality became clear. An additional internal closure is now imposed — a bantustan type which many Palestinians are referring to as

"Palestans." This means that Palestinians cannot move inside their own areas. Villages are sealed from each other and people cannot move to the closest towns around them. We are talking, then, about two closures, internal within the West Bank and external with Israel. A good example of this is what happened at the end of August 1997. Israel radio reported that the closure was lifted. We soon discovered, however, that only the internal one was lifted which links the Palestinian towns with each other but the external closure was still in effect. Palestinians were allowed to move around between their villages and towns but were not allowed to go back to their work within Israel, or enter Jerusalem. So practically speaking, the closure was not lifted and the Palestinians were still imprisoned.

Apparently, every new closure imposed by Israel is markedly worse than its predecessor. The overarching reason given is usually that of security. From the Palestinian perspective, however, only a small fraction of it has to do with actual security. In reality, it has to do with the arrogance of power and the Israeli need to assert control and dominate the Palestinians. Indeed, one does not have to humiliate a person in order to make a security check. With every closure the punishments and humiliation of the Palestinians escalate considerably. It is a calculated increase in the degradation of a whole people. We know that such policies do not and will not contribute to peaceful living. The sooner Israel learns this the quicker it will be able to reap more goodwill from the Palestinians. Humiliation only deepens the resentment and increases the determination for revenge. Israeli leaders who advocate tougher policies against the Palestinians are committing a crime that will ultimately backfire against their own people.

On my way back from the United States at the end of July, I read an article on the SAS plane in the Scanorama magazine (July/August 1997, page 6) by AnnBritt Grunewald entitled "An eye for an eye does not cut the crime rate." AnnBritt, who for 28 years worked for the Swedish penal system, was warning against depriving prisoners of their freedom. Scientific research has not shown any correlation between more severe sentences and a decline in crime. She found the New Testament golden rule as the most effective therapeutic creed. "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Her fundamental principle has been the respect of human dignity. She quotes a statement from Gertrude Stein, "Freedom is the most important thing in the whole world, more important than food and clothing, more important than anything else on this mortal earth."

For most Palestinians the wounds created by humiliation usually leave deeper scars than physical wounds. To deprive any person, let alone a whole nation, of its freedom and dignity is one of the worst crimes one can do against another. Such a crime breeds violence and kills any possibility of peace. Every time people's freedom is restricted and their humanity negated, security risks increase rather than decrease. The better

Israel learns this lesson the stronger the foundation it would be laying for its own life of security.

Israel has not yet been able to determine the identity of the suicide bombers. Some news reports indicated that they might have come from abroad. In spite of the lack of evidence, Israel was reluctant to lift the closure and Palestinians continued to suffer. One of the punitive measures which Israel is carrying out weekly and as a matter of fact is the demolition of Palestinian homes. Under the pretext of building without a license (which Israel rarely gives to Palestinians), the destruction of homes has increased sharply. Since the bombings more than 45 houses have been destroyed. Everywhere one turns there is increasing injustice and humiliation. The peace process has not been revived so far. Most people are living at the edge of their nerves with frustration and despair.

There is a beautiful verse in 1 Peter 2:23. "When he (Christ) was insulted, he did not return insult for insult. When he suffered, he uttered no threats, but he committed himself to him who judges justly." When Peter's letter was written the Christian community was undergoing persecution. The writer wanted to offer them comfort and strength in the fact that Jesus himself underwent insult and suffering and that he emerged victorious. "He committed himself to him who judges justly." There comes a point in the struggle when after doing what is humanly possible, one has to commit the struggle to God who judges justly.

Powers of evil can easily align themselves together and frustrate and complicate the doing of what is good and just... one has to constantly commit the outcome to God "who judges justly."

One of the most discouraging things about injustice is its pervasiveness. The struggle against injustice demands clarity of vision and perseverance. Unfortunately, evil has many allies. Moreover, by its very nature, injustice is deceptive and manipulative. People of goodwill must be very cautious, otherwise they could be sucked into an alignment with unjust powers. Powers of evil can easily align themselves together and frustrate and complicate the doing of what is good and just. In spite of all problems, one has to constantly commit the outcome to God "who judges justly." This is where struggle and spirituality come together. As Christians, we must always see the interconnectedness between activism and prayer. On the one hand, we must be involved in the struggle for justice and do everything we can to create change based

on justice, and on the other hand, we must maintain our total reliance on God "who judges justly." This partnership between God and humans is essential. It keeps us humble. It is not what we can accomplish, but rather what God can accomplish through us. It also protects us from despair. Evil is so real and pervasive that 'good' people could easily be driven to despair and give up the struggle. Partnering with God keeps our hopes up. The living God in whom we hope and trust is the God of justice and peace. God will ultimately triumph. So we must not give in to despair.

Furthermore, for the writer of the letter of first Peter, Jesus is the model par excellence. "When insulted, he did not return insult for insult. When he suffered, he uttered no threats..." The picture here is not of a weak person who did not stand up for what is right but of a strong person who did not use the same weapons of evil to fight back evil. At the end it was better to accept death rather than submit himself to evil methods. Christ was unwilling to use insults or threats. His life itself exposed and challenged evil. For to live and stand for truth and justice is in itself a way of exposing and judging falsehood and wrong. We must, with God, press on in our struggle against everything that dehumanizes people.

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[Manger Square in Bethlehem - No Tourists](#)

[Contents](#)

Interview with the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem

by Samia Khoury

There have been a growing number of reports recently about the status and future prospects of Christians under the Palestinian Authority. So-called experts have been joined by members of the US Congress in expressing their concerns.

*We turned to **His Beatitude Michel Sabbah**, the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem, to comment on this matter:*

Irrespective of what is being said or written abroad or locally, the core of the issue is the relationship between Muslims and Christians. On the level of the Authorities, whether Palestinian or Jordanian, that relationship is excellent and we have no reason to worry. Also amongst the people excellent relationships exist between the vast majority of Muslims and Christians. But it is only natural that wherever there are people there are conflicts and clashes, and sometimes tribal and family clans are an added element to those clashes. So whatever problems exist on the grass roots level there is always a third party that takes advantage of the situation for its own interest and fans the fire of religious sensitivities. That is why we have to assert that this is an internal Palestinian issue, and we as Palestinians are responsible to find a way to deal with it. So it is very important for responsible people, both Muslims and Christians, to work together with the Palestinian authority in a concerted effort to create a mechanism in order to contain any of those clashes immediately so that justice will prevail irrespective of who the guilty party is. Such a mechanism would not be sufficient to solve the problem in the long run unless there is education towards a pluralistic and inclusive society.

How does your Beatitude see the role of education as the basis of a vision for a long term solution?

Education must begin at home and school, through church and mosque. When Christian parents raise their children and hammer into their heads that Muslims are their sisters and brothers and they have to love them and vice versa with the Muslim parents: When the priests in the churches and the Sheikhs in the mosques stress in their sermons that we are all brethren and have to love, respect and accept each other, most of the root causes for such clashes would eventually disappear. But above all the Palestinian Authority has a big responsibility to revise all its school curricula with a new positive vision in order to create a just, pluralistic and inclusive society that would guarantee a healthy relationship of natural acceptance and respect amongst all Palestinians. Religious education, Arabic language, social studies and civics all need to be looked at with this new vision. Distorted and negative stereotypes that the Christian is a stranger in the land, that the Muslim is the enemy, can only be corrected through new positive concepts within the educational system.

Christian emigration has been a cause of concern for the Church for several decades. How do you see the situation today, and what is the church doing to reverse this trend?

Emigration is not a new trend. We should not exaggerate the issue. Ever since the beginning of the last century there were economic and social reasons for emigration. The new factor now is the political situation. When the peace process started there was a slow down in emigration. But due to the lack of progress in the peace process and due to frustration as a result of the deterioration in both the political and economic situation, emigration started picking up. It is understandable that people need to feel secure and be able to give their families a decent living. Although the church realizes how difficult the situation is, it continuously encourages its people to stay and put up with the difficulties. The churches have helped in cutting down on emigration through housing projects which each church has tried to initiate. But housing is a big responsibility, financially speaking, therefore the churches alone cannot cope with. So we think that the Palestinian Authority should be encouraged to carry out more housing projects for the Palestinian people.

On the other hand, church institutions, schools, hospitals and other social service centers have provided a large number of jobs to help people stay in the country. In fact, one of the main aims of establishing Bethlehem University was to encourage the young people to stay and get their education here so that eventually they would work in the country. The University continues to provide jobs for a large number of people.

His Holiness the Pope has recently offered to mediate between Israel and the Palestinians to try and bring the peace process out of its present stalemate. Does your Beatitude believe that there is still hope for the peace process and if so, what is needed to bring it out of the present impasse?

The Palestinian and Arab conflict with Israel has been going on for a hundred years, and is bound to take a few more years to come to an end. Now for the first time we are talking about peace, and we have no choice but to be patient and hopeful. If we lose hope we might as well give up! Of course Israel is doing all it can to stall the negotiations, grab more land and obstruct the establishment of a Palestinian state, only adding to the frustration of the Palestinians. Nevertheless, we should not waste our energy on blaming Israel but rather on the assessment of our own performance. In order to rekindle the hope that was glowing at the beginning of the peace process, the Palestinian Authority should concentrate on state building, strengthening and supporting democracy and institutions of civil society which will inevitably lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state where people would feel comfortable living in security and dignity.

We need to start a new stage with a positive attitude that we can build. The churches have to be united, and the people should relinquish their self interest or the interest of their parties. Their efforts should concentrate on cooperation and working together positively for building our state. The whole region realizes that resorting to force would be futile and as a Church we believe in peaceful solutions. So why not spare the people of the region further suffering since there is no other alternative to negotiations for a peaceful solution?

Within less than three years the Christian world will celebrate 2000 years of Christianity. In your opinion how best can the universal Church meet the grandeur of the occasion and how are the Churches in the Holy Land celebrating the event?

The year 2000 is a spiritual and religious celebration. It is also a spiritual and religious revival that will of course lead to a national and civil revival: it is a resurgence for all. When the spirit is whole and revived then a person will act peacefully and honestly. This celebration commemorates the birth of Christ 2000 ago. Christ the God, Christ the man through incarnation offered humanity the moral values needed for building a good society. That is why we at the Catholic Church shall concentrate on this spiritual aspect and through the "Synodus" (walking together) there will be a concerted effort for building spiritual awareness: What does it really mean to be a Christian? To be a believer in Christ. The churches should all be one in Christ. Each Church can maintain its identity and traditions but at the same time be open to other Churches. I can maintain my identity as a Catholic and still consider the Protestant and the Greek Orthodox as my brethren, and vice versa. That is what 2000 is all about for us - a spiritual revival amongst the Church hierarchy and the people; to be able to express our faith is to be one at heart. It might be very difficult to unite institutions but there are no barriers in front of the unity of hearts.

Along side this spiritual revival there will be other activities taking place and there are committees and people in charge of planning and executing the various programs.

Looking toward the year 2000 and beyond: how can we strengthen the Christian presence in the Holy Land and maintain its viability among the two other major faiths?

We should not worry that we are small in number. The Church of Jerusalem specifically has always been small though it is the mother Church and hence the most important Church. Other churches in the world grew and became important, but not the Church of Jerusalem. In the first centuries after Pentecost, other churches: Antioch, Rome and Alexandria; became patriarchal and leading churches. Jerusalem depended in those days on Caesarea, which in turn depended on Antioch. Only in the fifth century did Jerusalem become a Patriarchate and one of the leading churches,

with Patriarch Juvenalis. Then all through the centuries, except during the Byzantine parenthesis from the 4th to the 7th century, Jerusalem remained a small Church.

In this I see a mystery, the mystery of Jesus himself, which we continue to live in our daily lives as Church and people. When Jesus lived in this country 2000 years ago, he remained a sign of controversy, refused by his country and his people, as he is today, except for the few Christians who accept him and his message. We should understand that and not worry about it. We will maintain our presence in this Land of the Lord despite all difficulties.

Our strength is our faith. *"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from hereto there', and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you"* (Matthew 17:20). That is why it is important to revive, and to bear witness through service to the community in general. I see a need for educating and training Christians for responsible tasks in various fields. This should be within a united strategy, irrespective of their denominations, so that they can build up the community and translate their faith into action.

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[Contents](#)

Analysis and Anticipation

by Azmi Bishara

The Current Situation - An Impasse

It is clear that there is an impasse. The area of Abu Ghneim is being confiscated, more land is being taken to expand Ma'ale Adumim, and there are bypass roads everywhere. Everywhere in the West Bank some bulldozers are doing something. The so-called redeployment is delayed, and Israel's one-sided decision on the scope of the next redeployment was not accepted by the Palestinians.

Since the Israeli government has nothing to suggest in this phase, an option is for the United States, Europe, and Russia to play a more active role. Netanyahu, the national religious parties and the right wing parties in Israel are the majority in parliament, and they have nothing to suggest politically to the Palestinians except to continue to expand settlements. The problem is that the United States, which is the most

important mediator in this region, behaves in this issue as a branch of the Likud government. It shies away from criticizing Israel and supports it unconditionally. It does not want to face the reality that the Israeli settlements are the biggest obstacle to the peace process.

Final Status

The Israeli government coalition wants an early final status agreement instead of Oslo. In general the details of Oslo have become the problem (i.e. the scope of the redeployment in Hebron, freeing women prisoners). Now the Israeli government has changed its conception; it is not only against the details, but also against the concept of Oslo. The concept of Oslo has two phases; one is a transitional phase and the second, the final status. Now Israel wants to reach the final status before fulfilling anything concerning the transitional phase. It wants to implement its transitional phase obligations in return for Palestinian concessions in the final status, including the question of the settlements.

What is adopted by the Israeli government for the final status is actually the old Alon Plan which was suggested by the Labor party and which was modified later in the 80's by Sharon, to the effect that the areas that were supposed to be returned to Jordan should be now given to the Palestinian authority, and the areas that were not to have been returned to Jordan will be annexed to Israel. That's why it is called Alon Plus, but actually it is Sharon's Plan. We can see a more intensive comeback of Sharon to politics after his long and total exclusion following the war in Lebanon in 1982. Of course the Palestinians helped him to come back by the Abu Mazen-Sharon meeting, which shouldn't have taken place. Even the Israeli opposition is angry that Palestinians helped Sharon through this meeting.

However, these are only details. The most important thing is that in the general picture of Alon Plus, most of the area would be annexed to Israel together with the settlements. The densely populated areas would be returned to the Palestinian Authority for an extended autonomy, which may be called a Palestinian state. On the question of Jerusalem there is nothing to add to the Israeli official position, no change on the status of Jerusalem as the unified capital of the State of Israel, no dismantling of settlements, no withdrawal to the borders of 1967.

In the framework of these norms the Palestinians should agree to this suggested final status now or in the near future before Israel fulfills its obligations of the Oslo Agreement. The final status is rather similar to the existing situation with extended authority for the Palestinian Authority. 'Concessions' will then be possible in issues like the airport, like the seaport in Gaza; maybe the secure passage between the West Bank and Gaza which is now being considered. These were obligations that Israel

agreed to; now they are issues for negotiation and are used as strategic collateral against the Palestinians. This is now the impasse as I describe it.

The Palestinian Authority

The Arafat leadership cannot sign such a final status agreement, that is why it seems that there is an Israeli attack on Arafat and that a peaceful solution in this situation is impossible. With all our critique of Arafat's practices - such as questions of administration and institutionalization of decision making, human and civil rights - he cannot, historically speaking, behave like an Antione Lahd (the leader of the south Lebanese army and an ally of Israel).

Nation Building

Christian-Muslim Relations

To say that Israel alone is responsible for the problems between Christians and Muslims is not true. It is an attempt to escape reality. What about Christian/Muslim problems in Egypt, is Israel also guilty there? Of course Israel is interested (as are certain other western countries) and I would not exclude active Israeli involvement in these issues, especially in Jerusalem. But our society should also be criticized. The traditional patriarchal social structures in the extended family and confessionalism still exist and are very active, and the process of nation building has hardly started in the Palestinian society. We can be proud of our national heritage and national history facing occupation and facing different powers, but internally, the nation building process is still just beginning and a lot of work needs to be done.

Nation building has two processes; One is breaking from and going beyond the limits of the tribe, the *hamouleh*, the traditional society, and into a bigger group which is the nation. The other is breaking through the limits of traditional structures in the direction of the individual, who is the entity of which the nation is composed. The nation is not composed of families, and confessions, sects and religious groups, it is composed of individuals. The two processes are still lacking within our society. Palestinians are individuals whether Christian or Muslim. Their rights should not derive from their affiliation to a certain family or religion.

The process of nation building is not the process of liberation from occupation. It is the process of individualization and turning individuals into citizens. When the national consciousness weakens, we suddenly discover that there are other strong forces such as religion and the family lurking under the surface, waiting to be activated. Group affiliation becomes important for the individual. These affiliations are still strong and an indicator of a weak national consciousness. Of course such things do not happen without friction between majority and minority. Fanaticism

springs out. This is not only apparent in Jerusalem and in the West Bank, but also in Galilee.

This simple formula - that Israel is to blame - is easy to claim, but is nonsense. Of course Israel has an interest in such conflicts between Christians and Muslims, but an interest is one thing and a conspiracy is something else. Israel can do a lot, but it cannot make us fanatics. Israel can send two or three young people to provoke Christians or Muslims, but Israel cannot mobilize the whole group, the whole city, to behave as Muslims and Christians against each other. We should not be easy prey to provocation.

On issues of principle there is no real dispute between the Israeli opposition and the government.

The Israeli Opposition

The Israeli opposition was totally inactive for a long time. They were maneuvered and manipulated by Netanyahu into toying with the idea of a national unity government, which would bring them back to the government in the form of a national unity government. Of course this did not happen, but they wasted a lot of time.

On issues of principle, there is no real dispute between the Israeli opposition and the government. For example, the Israeli opposition would not say that it is against building in Abu Ghneim, it would say that it would have built it without this noise and without making the Palestinians angry. On the final status issues, this governmental term began with an agreement between Labor and Likud. Knesset Member Michael Eitan of Likud and Knesset Member Yossi Beilin of Labor agreed to certain common lines, concerning the final status. This agreement limits the Labor party's criticism of the Israeli government.

The Arab World

I do not see any indications that the Arab world is going to turn into a major political player. The Arab world, if united, would be a major player in the international political arena, especially in pressuring the American administration. That is exactly what we need, but it is not happening. On the contrary, the United States recently pressured Egypt with regard to the negotiations, instead of the other way around. There is an improvement at the declaration level; the Arab world is now supporting

the Palestinians' position in the negotiations. There is a certain delay in the normalization process with Israel, but that is it. Even this delay in normalization with Israel is itself proving not to be a real pressure on Israel, because either way we have a government which is not interested in normalization. This government is not for a warm peace, it is for a cold peace with the Arab world. So the Arab world as it exists today is not doing what is supposed to be done.

I am sorry that I have no optimistic announcement to make. I do not see real changes in the Arab world. There are structural changes that can make us optimistic. For example there is more cultural unity in the Arab world, there is a higher level of education and rapid development of scientific research. There are some democratic reforms in some Arab States. We have yet to see where all this is leading us. A total capitulation to Israel has not happened and there is support of the Palestinian position. I was a little more optimistic at the beginning of this term of parliament about Egyptian diplomacy and the attempt to coordinate an Arab front against the Israeli-Turkish alliance. I saw some hope when the Arab States took a stand on this very major issue. The Iraqi-Syrian rapprochement, for example, did not exceed the limits of tactics to get some American and Israeli attention. It did not turn into strategic cooperation between Iraq and Syria. But for real practical steps, I think that the existing regimes are too weak and too dependent on America, politically and economically. It is a difficult situation.

The United States

The United States is the most important player. Without it, it will be very difficult to change things using only the dynamics of the Israeli public opinion. Of course this is important, and the Palestinian struggle is also very important, but as long as we disregard the American interior arena as a monopoly of Zionist activities, we will never gain much. Two things should be combined. First, official Arab pressure and a change in the structure of the Arab states' relationship with the United States. Second, and maybe even more important, to start working with our possible allies in the United States. I do not ignore the power of the Israeli lobby, which is very well organized, especially around this administration and the present congress. But we have allies in the United States that we do not contact: liberals who are very keen on achieving peace in the Middle East, the African American politicians, and those against the alignment between Christian fundamentalism and extreme right Zionism. The established churches are potential allies but we do not reach them sufficiently, even though we share the same concerns. The Christian fundamentalists and the most extreme elements in the Jewish community support each other and are driving this region towards catastrophe. These people should not be influencing the policies of the USA in the region. It is unbelievable; historically speaking, Christian fundamentalism and Jewish fundamentalism were enemies. But the case of Christian fundamentalism

in the United States is a very unique phenomenon. I think there is a meeting of minds between Christian and Jewish fundamentalists.

There is an overlap between extreme fundamentalist theology and Jewish messianic theology. I do not see it only as a shared interest, there is something deeper, in the language, in the codes and in the political agenda. The established churches and mainstream Christianity in the United States want normal relationships with the Arab world, with the Palestinians — Christian and Muslim. It is unbelievable that a policy of a superpower should be influenced by these kinds of alliances. These are the people that Netanyahu meets in the United States — the Christian fundamentalists. We can find a lot of allies among rational politicians and liberals. In terms of organization, we cannot even come close to the established Jewish communities and Zionist lobby in the United States, but we have a starting point. Palestinians must learn how to influence decision making in democratic countries like the United States. We need time, but I think sometimes we lack the conviction. We work in Europe, we work in the third world, but in United States, we feel we cannot get anywhere. It is perceived as the devil itself, the enemy of the Arabs and Muslims, and as the embodiment of imperialism.

One cannot penetrate imperialistic mentality without influencing public opinion. Nothing would have happened in Vietnam or in Central America without the US public opinion. I think the same thing applied when Israel was faced with the Palestinian *Intifada* (uprising). Palestinians tied Israel's hands by influencing Israeli and US public opinion. It was not able to use all its force, it could not send tanks to the cities at the time of the Intifada. That is why the Intifada continued for so long.

This is the rule of working with the public, with colonial countries that have democratic structures. This was the case in France, in Britain, in Israel and the United States. This is where we have fallen short. We did not reach public opinion. We should be humble enough to ask for help.

The two possibilities are either a two-state solution or a bi-national solution. The third possibility is the reality being structured now: an apartheid reality.

The Future

I do not know what will happen in the future. Certainly there is hope. A moralist does not depend on feelings of optimism or pessimism. I am a pessimist when it comes to

the behavior of human beings, because of what people do. But one has to work with certain value judgments about reality. When things are not good, one has to try to change them, not because one has a chance, but because they are unjust.

Now in the next fifty years, there are two possibilities and a third one that we reject. The two possibilities are either a two-state solution or a bi-national solution. The third possibility is the reality being structured now: an apartheid reality. It cannot be something that we accept, whether in the next fifty years or hundred years.

Israel seems to be building apartheid, and calls it autonomy. It calls it different names, but look at the structure of the relationship with Gaza, it is actually apartheid. Look at what is happening in the West Bank with the closures etc., it is apartheid. There are two legal systems - one for Jewish settlements and one for Palestinians. Jewish settlers have freedom of movement, while Palestinians have none. Two economic situations, totally different. You cannot be building apartheid and not undermine the national option, which both people want, the two-state solution. If you undermine the national option, the bi-national will emerge. This is the process I see in the next fifty years. Now which of these scenarios will emerge in the future, I do not know. But this is the process, this is what is happening. So a certain political enlightenment may take place and people might start to work toward a positive solution for statehood with a certain political status for the Palestinians in Jerusalem. Otherwise, the apartheid system will continue and the next generation will abandon the idea of a Palestinian state and start asking for civil rights, for citizenship, for a bi-national state. This is the process I see. I can't see great events happening out of this stagnation in the near future. A new dynamic could emerge. A certain explosion, or a certain revolutionary development could bring with it a new dynamic that I can't anticipate now. If suddenly a Jewish settler enters the mosque in Hebron and kills again, or if there are a series of suicide bombers, or if suddenly there are large scale confrontations between the Palestinian police and the Israelis, everything will change. But as long as you exclude these sudden revolutionary events, these are the scenarios for the final solution.

Dr. Azmi Bishara is a Palestinian professor of philosophy - an Israeli citizen - and currently a member of the Israeli Knesset (parliament).

[Contents](#)

Justice and Reconciliation

by Rosemary Radford Ruether

Between June 23-29, 1997 the Second European Ecumenical Assembly, bringing together 12,000 people from all Christian traditions across Western and Eastern Europe, met in Graz, Austria. The theme of the conference was Reconciliation. This talk was given as a contribution to this assembly.

Reconciliation is a problematic concept for oppressed people. Too often the demand for reconciliation is put forward without regard to genuine change in the oppressive situation of power. The victimized are called to forgive and be reconciled in a way that perpetuates, rather than rectifies, the causes of alienation and division. It is my contention that reconciliation is only possible when there is genuine conversion on the part of those who are divided from each other, and a transformation of relations that promotes justice. Both personal and social conversion is required for real reconciliation.

The powerful often expect that victimized people can be made to be reconciled to their bad situation, to passively accept that nothing better is possible. Since the collapse of the former communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the Western capitalist neo-liberal market economy has been demanding this kind of reconciliation from the whole world, including the majority who are disadvantaged by it. They are saying to the poor, the under and unemployed, those who are experiencing cutbacks in basic social services and the pollution of their environments: "this is it. This is the best, indeed the only possible, economic system. Accept it as the best of all possible worlds. Give up any dream of an alternative."

So far those who profit from the neo-liberal economy have gotten away with this silencing of hope, but hopefully not for long, for human beings cannot be made to be reconciled with hopelessness, with hollow promises that are contradicted by a worsening reality for the majority of humans on this planet. It is in the nature of humanness that one cannot live without a vision of a better future, of a redemptive transformation. This is why the demand for reconciliation as passive acquiescence to an unjust fate must finally fail. If not the defeated generation, then their children, will recreate resurgent protest against injustice, resurgent visions of alternative futures.

But what are the ways of creating genuine reconciliation, through conversion of hearts and conversion of unjust social relations? How is this possible given the endemic tendency of those who are advantaged to cling to their unjust advantages and to refuse to repent and change? This is what the Christian tradition has called 'sin'. I think that the feminist liberation theologies have some insights into this process of transformation that need to be learned by a dominant perspective that recreates the cycle of violence through endless efforts to win at the expense of others.

I want to illustrate the problem of authentic and inauthentic reconciliation by two contemporary examples of peacemaking: the first example is that of South Africa, with the victory over apartheid and the conduct of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; the second is the Israeli-Palestinian 'peace process.' I want to ask what has led to imperfect but real change and reconciliation in the case of South Africa, in contrast to the Israeli-Palestinian case, where injustice is actually being worsened through what is euphemistically called 'the peace process.'

I taught in South Africa for several months in 1989 shortly before the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, during the final stage of protest against apartheid called the 'defiance campaign.' At that time the apartheid legal, political and economic system, which had been built for over eighty years, seemed intractable. The fiction of the African homelands were still in place; martial law made public protest meetings illegal, and even to hope for a change in the political system that would give the African majority equal votes seemed utopian. Yet in less than five years this system unraveled. The banned African National Congress is now the ruling party; Nelson Mandela is President and a new Constitution giving all South Africans equal citizenship has been put in place. With the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by Bishop Desmond Tutu, a process is in place by which those who perpetrated the crimes of apartheid are asked to fully disclose the truth, with a promise of amnesty.

The work of this Commission is far from creating full reconciliation. On the white side, it has become apparent that, while lesser white police and military personnel might admit their misdeeds, those in top political office, specifically former President De Klerk, are not willing to admit that the permission for these misdeeds was general policy well known to the top leaders. On the other hand, the families of those who were tortured and killed are not happy when their persecutors receive amnesty only in exchange for full disclosure.

Moreover, although political equality is now established for all South Africans, the economic consequences of white monopolization of land and resource wealth is far from changed. The Black majority is still desperately poor and lacks basic amenities. In addition, gender relations, especially endemic violence against women, has hardly been touched. Yet because there was some genuine change; political equality, the election of a Black majority government accepted by whites, the basis for some real reconciliation is present.

Because the criminals were so many, one can hardly punish them all, the Commission reasons. Let there just be full disclosure of the truth; let the criminals publicly admit their crimes before the whole nation; and have to live with being thus known; let the record be set straight, and then let us go forward to create a new South Africa where

politically equality may blossom into more equally distributed social and economic means of life. In the South African case, reconciliation is built on real change toward greater justice, coupled with amnesty for those who make a public admission of guilt. This is repentance and forgiveness translated into legal, political terms.

In the Israeli-Palestinian case there were hopes of similar change that would lead to some real justice, allowing for reconciliation and peace, but these conditions are being undermined and betrayed as the peace process shows its actual face as a strategy by which the Israeli government consolidates its victory over the Palestinians in terms of demography and land. Like South African apartheid, with which it is being increasingly compared, the Israeli conquest of Palestinian land and people was shaped from the turn of the century, but especially since the 1948 war.

The shaping of a Jewish state in Palestine at the expense of Palestinian residence and land ownership over the last fifty years can be summarized as a three fold process: occupying as much of the land as possible, eliminating Palestinian landownership and residence as much as possible, and increasing Jewish population and their spread across as much of the land as possible. In short, creating what the Israelis call "facts on the ground;" that is, a process of continuing demographic shift from a Palestinian majority population and land ownership to a Jewish majority population and landownership.

In 1947 Palestinians were over 1.5 million, three times the Jewish population. Jews were 600,000 and had purchased about 10% of the land. Yet the United Nations partition plan of that year gave the Jews 55% of the best land, leaving 45% for a Palestinian state. In the 1948-9 War Israel expanded to another 20% of the territory, drove out a million Palestinians and took control of 90% of the land in this expanded territory for exclusive Jewish use. More than 400 Palestinian villages were destroyed, and the land given for a Palestinian state was divided between Israel and Jordan, with the Gaza Strip occupied by Egypt.

Then in 1967 Israel took control of the Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (also the Sinai, later negotiated back to Egypt). Since that time it has confiscated about 78% of the West Bank and 44% of the crowded Gaza Strip. (A current Knesset bill would transfer this land to Israeli law, effectively putting it under Israeli sovereignty.) From 1987-91 Palestinians rose in protest (the Intifada) against these intolerable conditions of continuing repression, displacement and land confiscation. Some 1500 mostly young people were killed and 135,000 injured, many permanently.

Outcry over this situation finally brought enough pressure both outside and within Israel that the Israeli political leaders, under the government of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres agreed to what appeared to be a reverse of this historic policy,

conceding the possibility of a Palestinian 'entity' in the West Bank and Gaza, in exchange for peace. Former enemies, PLO Chairman Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Rabin, shook hands on the White House lawn. The world was amazed and rejoiced.

However the design of the peace process as conceived by Rabin and Peres soon showed its limitations. Basically, the Labor government had no real intention of allowing a sovereign Palestinian state to emerge in the whole of the West Bank and Gaza, with its capital in East Jerusalem, the minimal demand of Palestinians. Rather their intention was to create conditions for the ratification of a new partition of this twenty five percent of Palestine, allotting about a third of it to Jewish settlers in regions to be annexed to Israel, another third to Palestinians and a third zone that would be negotiated.

At best Palestinians might receive about 12% of historic Palestine or less than half of the West Bank and Gaza, but these Palestinian zones would be divided from each other into enclaves surrounded by the Israeli military and settlers and with little access to adequate land for farming or other means of making a living and without access to roads linking them with each other and, most of all, with Jerusalem. These separated enclaves would be administered by a Palestinian authority charged with keeping the Palestinians under control, but under Israeli military supervision who could intervene at any time. In short, not an autonomous state, but a system of apartheid, similar to that constructed by white South Africans for Blacks, only with less land and more crowded conditions.

The powerful often expect that victimized people can be made to be reconciled to their bad situation, to passively accept that nothing better is possible.

Most of all, the Labor government shaped a plan, continued with even more gusto by the succeeding Likud government of Netanyahu, to eliminate as many Palestinian residents from East Jerusalem as possible, while increasing Jewish landholding and settlements in this occupied territory in an expanded Jerusalem area. The purpose of this judaization of greater Jerusalem is to turn the Palestinian majority population in this area to a minority, thereby undermining the demographic basis of a Palestinian claim to East Jerusalem as the capital of a unified Palestinian state.

These policies clearly do not represent conditions of minimally acceptable justice for Palestinians. They are in fact the continuation of occupation and its final consolidation

under the cover of what is misleadingly called a "peace process." The Israelis have counted on the sympathy of Western Europeans and North Americans for Israel, fueled by a combination of 1) their alliance with Israel's hegemonic presence in the Arab world, 2) their need to compensate for their guilt for the genocide of European Jewry, and 3) their inability to care enough about Arab Palestinians to understand the details of this process of ongoing injustice, to prevent an effective outcry against this deception.

Real repentance and a desire to create minimal justice for Israeli-Palestinian coexistence are lacking in this policy, one that is as much that of the Labor government as the Likud. Sadly, the good desire of Western Christians to repent of their crimes toward Jews has been turned into the destruction of Palestinians, by making Western Christians feel that they should pay for their guilt to Jews by turning a blind eye to their unjust treatment of Palestinians. Palestinians have been made to pay for Western Christian sins against Jews.

This is really the key issue that European and American Christians need to confront. We need to understand not only what is happening there to promote justice or injustice; we need to understand *our own role*, as European and American Christians in the promotion of ethnocide of the Palestinian people. In effect we have created the historical framework in which this process of ethnocide goes on. And we have done it and continue to do it in the name of reconciliation with the Jews. It is Americans particularly who provide the money and arms through our government that allows this to happen. But Western Christians generally have constructed the historical framework of legitimization of this process.

We legitimize it as something due to the Jews, both by Biblical land claims and also as compensation for the Holocaust. We also collaborate in creating a wall of silence around the resulting injustice to the Palestinians that prevents this from being seen and understood. And we imagine that, by doing it, we salve our bad consciences for our past genocide of European Jews.

Why are Western Christians so unable to recognize what they are doing? Why is injustice to Palestinians so invisible or unimportant to them? Why do they imagine they are rectifying an injustice to one people, the Jews, by destroying another people, the Palestinians? Perhaps a key problem is that Christians are still not able to accept Jews as ordinary human beings. They still need to construct them in archetypal scheme as paradigms of either exemplary virtue or exemplary vice.

Seeking to escape from the evil consequences of making Jews the paradigms of vice, we flip to the opposite pole of seeing Jews as incapable of wrong, paragons of folk wisdom and founders of a messianic state. To recognize that great evil is being done

by Israeli Jews to Palestinians in the construction of this state makes us feel anxious that we are falling back to the other pole of the dualism; i.e. Jews as evil. Jews are not allowed to be ordinary people, with a range of capacities, good and bad, in different contexts of power and powerlessness. This myopia is bad enough in personal relations, but fatal in world politics.

The critical question for any discussion of reconciliation is how does one nurture the growth of a breakthrough community of friends that crosses boundaries, deconstructs the dominant ideology that normalizes sin and injustice, and shapes an alternative praxis of mutuality that can touch and transform both personal consciousness and social structures? This is not easy. The pathway to conversion, transformation and justice that grounds reconciliation is filled with pitfalls. But the first step is taken when persons across broken relations glimpse one another as friends, and are no longer able to affirm themselves without affirming the other at the same time. In other words, the ground and fruits of conversion is love, for it is love that melts the heart of stone and gives us hearts of flesh by which we begin to experience what it means to love the neighbor as oneself.

Professor Rosemary Radford Ruether, a member of Friends of Sabeel - North America's steering committee, is Professor of Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and the author of numerous articles and books.

[Contents](#)

Religion in the Conflict - for Better or for Worse

by Karl-Axel Elmquist

The Swedish Sabeel group has at several occasions been discussing the lack of deeper knowledge and understanding in Sweden and the whole western world about the religious dimension in the Middle East conflict.

This lack of understanding, whether among the authorities, politicians, churches, or NGO's, could lead to drawing wrong and sometimes dangerous conclusions, making political analysis, aid work, information, and common support inadequate. So we thought that we have a responsibility to offer to the Swedish authorities, political parties, churches and ourselves a possibility to learn more by listening to and meeting with people in the area who are involved in the struggle for peace, democracy and justice. We were convinced that our partner *Sabeel* in Jerusalem, with its strong

integrity, high intellectual resource and wide network of contacts, had the best qualifications to arrange a seminar on the role of religion in the peace process.

We were not disappointed: After a long time of trial and error, we were able to bring together a highly qualified group of politicians, civil servants, and church leaders for a two day seminar in Jerusalem with several involved Palestinians and Swedes working in the area.

As I was the responsible person for arranging the seminar on the Swedish side, I prefer to quote from two of the reports written by participants:

Mrs. Birthe Hom from the Swedish Authority for International Cooperation, SIDA, writes in her report:

"The lectures were of constant high quality. The seminar gave a deeper understanding of the complicated reality behind the peace process. Both lecturers and participants gave painful impressions of the frustration the Palestinians experience every day, the humiliation and lack of freedom which limits the hope for the near future. The necessity for reconciliation was strongly emphasized. The Christian Palestinians told about their network of contact with sister churches in South Africa for exchange of experiences and knowledge concerning reconciliation. The necessity to create meeting opportunities between Palestinians and Israelis for dialogue and the importance of working with children and youth was strongly stressed.

I want to underline that the seminar and the short visit once again made me aware of the role that religion plays ... for better or for worse ... in the countries where Swedes are involved in humanitarian aid and in long term development assistance."

"A better introduction to a direct contact with the situation in this area is hard to think of," writes Sigfrid Demingar, the General secretary of the Swedish Missionary Council about the seminar and continues in his report to 'his' ecumenical council: "The lecturers who participated were highly qualified Palestinians (both Christian and Muslim) and Jews. They gave a comprehensive picture of the complicated situation. The seminar also gave examples of an honest and humble dialogue between people with sincere religious convictions on both sides."

In a questionnaire on the seminar all the Swedish participants stressed the high quality of the lectures and lecturers which deepened their understanding and interest and strengthened their desire for future engagement.

The question now for the Swedish Sabeel Group is how to continue to develop our partnership. We clearly see the need for more information in Sweden through

seminars where Swedes and Palestinians can meet. We also feel the necessity to develop and exchange activities making it possible for different groups - women, clergy, youth - to meet. Whether there are possibilities to find financial resources is still in the dark. But our first seminar in the new *Sabeel* quarters, gave us the necessary and strong inspiration to find practical ways to deepen our partnership for the sake of understanding, peace and Christian togetherness.

Karl-Axel Elmquist is chairman of the Swedish Sabeel group. A Presbyterian minister, he's involved with DIAKONIA, Amnesty International, and Life and Peace Institute.

[Contents](#)

The Prophet Micah and Jerusalem

A Meditation on Micah 3:1-4,3:9-4.4 by *Mitri Raheb*

3 And I said: Listen, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Should you not know justice? - 2 you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin off my people, and the flesh off their bones; 3 who eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin off them, break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a caldron. 4 Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have acted wickedly.

9 Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, 10 who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! 11 Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, "Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us." 12 Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

4 In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, 2 and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem 3 He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; 4 but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

The prophet Micah lived in the second half of the 8th. century B.C., around the time of the Assyrian invasion of the northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.. His hometown was Moreschet, the Palestinian village of Tel-Eljudeidah near Bet-Guvrin. Micah devotes numerous, long passages to Jerusalem. In these passages he says some good things and some less than complimentary things about this city. But in the end, it seems that he has had enough of 'the Holy City'. He eventually breaks off the discourse about Jerusalem and retires completely to Bethlehem. For him, the Messiah did not come from Jerusalem, but from Bethlehem, the least of all cities (Micah 5). Despite the fact that the text is very complex and requires a more comprehensive treatment, I wish to restrict myself in this meditation to three main points.

First, in reading the Micah text, one notices a strong tension within the passages. In chapter 3:1-4, 9-12, we find words of judgment on Jerusalem, which testify to the lack of justice. However, in chapter 4, there is a vision of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion, as well as a beautiful song of peace. This tension is striking. Exegetes tend to downplay the tension by identifying chapter 4 as secondary and thus not originally from Micah. Nevertheless, I think that we should not make it so easy for ourselves. It is precisely this tension, produced by the two chapters, that we experience today, as Christians, presumably along with Muslims and Jews. The issue is the tension between the reality which we experience and the promise whose fulfillment we await. It is noteworthy that the words of judgment in chapter 3 speak of actual reality. For that reason the grammatical present tense is mostly used. Chapter 4, in contrast, is dealing with promises, and here the future tense primarily is used. The present of Jerusalem is characterized by injustice, and yet there is a longing and hope for a completely different scenario. This tension is something we should not let go of, because it is precisely this tension that people here in Jerusalem experience. It is the tension between the unjust building of Israeli settlements and the simultaneous hope for a future of Jerusalem that is characterized by plurality and equal rights for all its peoples in all their diversity.

Second, Micah in chapter 3, addresses the "rulers of the house of Jacob and the chiefs of the house of Israel". Both the political and the religious leaders are subjected to a fundamental critique, as they promise the people religious and political security. They promise security at a time of insecurity and peace at a time when there is no peace. When reading this text I could not but think of the Israeli Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was elected because he was promising to bring the Israeli people peace with security. Arrogantly he was continuing to build new settlements in and around Jerusalem. In his coalition he was relying on right wing Jewish groups, who seem to be motivated by a strong religious ideology. Their motivation, however, was economical rather than religious. Now, we are at a point where there is no peace nor

security. Micah was stressing the fact that there could be neither peace nor security in Jerusalem without justice, and that a religious ideology is no guarantee for safety.

... who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! 11 Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, "Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us." 12 Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

This leads to my third point, which I would like to make through an examination of chapter 4. It deals with a pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem, which is a vision that occurs two times in this particular form in the Bible; the other is Isaiah 2.

Theologically, this means that the text probably did not originate with either Isaiah or Micah. The two hymns by Isaiah and Micah are almost identical, with the exception of the last verse (Micah 4:4), which appears only in Micah and not in Isaiah. To me this verse is very important, although we do not generally devote much attention to it when we study the hymn. Isaiah's text concludes with:

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isaiah 2:4).

Micah, in contrast, continues, and declares:

but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid (Micah 4:4).

This verse does not appear in Isaiah until chapter 65 (Isaiah 65:21-22), at the end of the book of tetra Isaiah. For Micah, however, it was important to include this verse at this point. We can recognize why it was important for him if we look at our contemporary situation.

There are people of the opinion that one can see the fulfillment of the promise given in this hymn, namely the pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem and the sealing of peace between the nations in the peace process which started in 1993. To a certain extent, there is a beating of swords into ploughshares actually taking place, primarily because the driving force behind the peace process is economic development. Or, to turn it around the other way, if we speak of economic development, then both politicians and non-politicians tend to entertain the 'grand ideas' of beating swords into ploughshares. This phrase, to me, fosters very positive associations. During the cold war, this verse played an important role in the efforts of the peace movement.

For me, it is too big of a picture and too powerful of a scenario if we speak through these images of transforming the Middle East into an 'Oasis of Peace'. For in doing so, we tend to forget who those people who are supposed to sit under their own vines and fig trees really are; the people to whom this very thing is being denied. It seems as though Micah wants to say: Please, if you intend to paint yourselves with such great scenes of development, then do not forget the most important thing, namely that "they shall all sit under their own vine and fig tree." Isaiah makes it plain that no peace can reign when one plants the trees but another sits under them. This is the situation that we find, for instance, in Canada Park just outside of Jerusalem: the trees were once planted by the Palestinians, but today, tourists, pilgrims and Israeli visitors sit under them and pick their fruits. The true symbol of peace is against this: "they shall all sit under their own vine and fig tree."

If we are to speak of this all-transforming experience, then it is important that it is experienced by each person. Otherwise, in my opinion, we cannot speak of peace. For this reason, I believe that our greatest challenge for the future is not a political but a socio-economic one, since now we are experiencing in the 'new' Middle East a polarization of society. There are the few, very wealthy people, while the great majority are those increasingly falling below the poverty line. Those in the middle (class) are slowly disappearing, and with them, the living memory of those people who are not sitting under their own vines and fig trees. This is the challenge for us as Christians, and it still lies ahead of us.

The Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb is pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem and General Director of the International Center of Bethlehem.

This meditation has been adapted by the author from his contribution to [*Jerusalem: What Makes for Peace!*](#)

[Contents](#)

Behind the Headlines in Hebron

by Kathleen Kern

Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!....."

2 Samuel 12:4-7

"It is only one room!" the young mother told me as she dabbed away tears with the corner of her head scarf. "Why do they want..." Either her English or her ability to speak failed her and she turned away.

I had no answer for her. I gave her children some toys and books and walked away from their house - two rooms, really, made from cement. One room contained the kitchen, living, and sleeping area for the couple and their three children. The adjacent room had no roof, because they had run out of money.

Then came the demolition order from the Israeli military authorities. If the family does not destroy their house by a given date, the Israeli military will bulldoze it and send the family a bill for its demolition.

As I walked away, I thought of the story that the prophet Nathan told King David after David, to cover up his adulterous liaison with Bathsheba, had sent Uriah, her husband, to his death. The poor man with the cherished little ewe lamb in Nathan's allegory seemed to speak directly to the anguish of the family losing a house the size of my garage in the United States.

It is a story lived out by more than 500 families right now in the Hebron district - many of them subsistence farmers. Some will lose all they have so that existing settlements may expand and new settlements may be built. Settlement bypass roads¹ and Israel's unilateral decision to move its border with the West Bank in by several kilometers will swallow up the homes and livelihoods of others.

We know from the biblical account that David acknowledged his sins and repented after Nathan confronted him. Had he shared the world view of certain Israeli politicians, he might have said, "Well, Nathan, it might seem obvious to you from the biased reports concerning my kingship that what I have done is wrong, but you have to understand there are thousands of Hittite women Uriah could have chosen. All I wanted was this one woman that I'm pretty sure God wanted me to have. Anyway, I never gave Uriah permission to marry her. Have some sympathy, for crying out loud! I've got the Philistines to contend with, not to mention the Moabites and the Ammonites and the Arameans. Okay, so some people may not think this whole

adultery thing and sending Uriah to the front was such a great idea, but have a heart! I'm besieged, here!"

Those of us who have worked with Christian Peacemaker Teams in Hebron over the last couple of months have received e-mail from our loved ones back in North America expressing concern regarding the clashes they have seen on the news. They worry about our safety as they see the rage of the young men throwing the stones and the molotov cocktails and the soldiers responding with gunfire.

What we want them to see, what we want everyone in our countries to see, are the catastrophic events that do not make the news - the houses going down and the rich red farmland bulldozed and covered with asphalt. We want them to see the limited water from Palestinian aquifers watering lawns and filling swimming pools in Israeli settlements while many Hebronites go without water for drinking and washing. We want them to see the checkpoints and the barbed wire restricting Palestinians from moving freely in their country and the contempt with which Israeli soldiers and settlers treat them.

The rage you see on the young men's faces in Hebron is not born of spite. It comes from watching one too many little ewe lambs sacrificed on the altar of Israeli expansionism.

1. *i.e. roads constructed to allow cars with Israeli license plates to avoid Palestinian areas. Current Israeli policy dictates that all Palestinian homes within 150 meters of these roads must be demolished.*

Kathleen Kern is a member of Christian Peacemaker Teams, living and working in Hebron.

[Contents](#)

So Full of Life

by Caroline Abdelnour

Despite the Israeli siege on the West Bank, *Sabeel* managed to organize a youth conference for the Ramallah area, albeit limited and delayed. Young people came from the city of Ramallah, the town of Birzeit, and the villages of Jifna and Taybeh.

Even though I have been a resident of Ramallah most of my life, I didn't know any of the seventeen youth who participated in the camp. However, they were very friendly, and before I knew it, the seeds of friendship began to grow between us. They really touched my heart, which is the last thing that I expected to happen considering that the conference lasted only two days. I could see their lively spirits peaking at me through their eyes. They are full of life, they want to play and learn. They are also full of potential and of great ideas. They showed interest in the subjects that were dealt with, and found them relevant to their day to day living. The issues discussed were:

- "Integrity of the Creation," presented by the Rev. Naim Ateek
- "Women and men in the Bible and in the Palestinian culture," by Caroline Abdelnour
- "Good Citizenship and Stewardship," by Samia Khoury

The youth have a lot of energy, yet they are frustrated due to the difficult political situation they live in. They want to travel and go places. Most of them want to visit places where Jesus has been. These places are in their own country, but they've never visited due to the occupation. I can feel their fear. Their fear of losing their youth and their future in the midst of all the fights and tragedies. I can identify with them, for I have the same fears.

My prayer is that through *Sabeel's* ministry, we would be able to restore some hope to the youth, the hope that only God can give through his unconditional love. I believe in my heart that God will never abandon the youth for he said "*Let the children come to me, and do not stop them for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs*" (Matthew 19:14).

The planned program for the Bethlehem area had to be canceled due to the prolonged Israeli siege of the area. We hope to carry out these activities during the autumn.

Caroline Abdelnour, Sabeel's Youth Coordinator, recently graduated from North Park University in Chicago, IL with a degree in Youth Ministry.

[Contents](#)

Sabeel Nazareth meets Sabeel Jerusalem

by Blanche Mizzawi

Following a series of Bible Study meetings for two years, the Nazareth *Sabeel* committee initiated another program, visits to the Holy places within the country. The Holy Land attracts many Christian pilgrims from all over the world filling them with a sense of pride and belonging. For local Christian pilgrims, the significance stems from their deep-rootedness in the country and their faith. These trips are an attempt to link up with those who share these roots and faith in order to better understand each other's problems, concerns and struggles.

On June 28, 1997, fifty seven people, young and old, men and women from various denominations - including visitors from the Palestinian diaspora - left Nazareth on a journey to Jerusalem with our spiritual leader and guide Father Elie Kurzum.

After several stops at Jericho, Bethphage, Bethany and also the church of Gethsemane and the Mt. of Olives, we arrived in Jerusalem and went straight to the Via Dolorosa and then to the Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulcher). As we walked in the footsteps of our Lord, in the land of the Gospel and prophecy, we read some passages from the Gospel. Our hearts swelled with love and longing for Jerusalem; we had a sense of belonging to these places, and a feeling of sadness as we left them. We reached Bethlehem at the end of the day and chose to spend the night in the autonomous Palestinian area.

On the next day, Sunday 29, the group divided into two. Those who would remain in Bethlehem resumed visits to the Nativity Church, Shepherds Field and attended Sunday services with Father Elie Kurzum. The second group once more found its way to Jerusalem experiencing the same difficulties that Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza face daily as they cross the checkpoints. We worshiped at St. George's Cathedral with Canon Naim Ateek and the congregation, shared a cup of coffee and participated in the discussion of the sermon.

The highlight of the visit came at noon when we all went to the *Sabeel* Center. Each one of us felt that we had come home to be with our family. Archimandrite Atallah Hanna of the Greek Orthodox church greeted us warmly, after which we shared a meal in the garden, meeting clergy and lay people. Canon Naim Ateek then repeated the warm welcome, and spoke about the aims, activities and aspirations of the *Sabeel* movement, leaving a deep impact on our hearts. He also thanked Mrs. Violette Khoury, Nazareth *Sabeel* Coordinator, for the beautiful gift they presented to *Sabeel*. The gift was two photographs, one of an old street in Nazareth, and the other of some Nazarene women balancing jars on their heads in front of Mary's well in 1927. They also gave *Sabeel* an album of hand-drawn illustrations of homes and buildings in old Nazareth by Cecile Kahly.

The visit to Jerusalem was of special significance. It was an intimate meeting between Christians from Galilee and Christians from Jerusalem. As the bus sped back to Nazareth we all carried in our hearts unforgettable feelings and memories.

Blanche Mizzawi, Greek Catholic, is an active member of the Nazareth Sabeel Committee.

[Contents](#)

FOS-NA Hosts Conference in Washington

by Betsy Barlow

The newly formed Friends of Sabeel - North America hosted a conference in Washington June 5-6 entitled "Jerusalem - The Things That Make For Peace: An Agenda for American Christians." The program was organized to appeal both to Americans who wanted to find out what was happening in the Holy Land, and those with some experience who were concerned about what American Christians could do to work for justice and peace.

On Thursday June 5, after many in the group had spent the morning lobbying Congress, the conference opened with the film "Jerusalem: An Occupation Set in Stone?" produced by the Palestine Housing Rights Organization and directed by Marty Rosenbluth. Marty attended the program, and answered questions after the film. The house demolition scenes caused the audience to gasp as family homes were destroyed.

On Friday three panels addressed issues of concern to Americans. The first topic, "American Policy and the Perpetuation of Injustice," was addressed by Jonathan Kuttab, Palestinian human rights attorney, Yvonne Haddad, professor of Modern Islamic history at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst, and Sara Roy, author of "The Gaza Strip: The Politics of De-development."

The second topic, "Western Christian Mythology and the Perpetuation of Injustice," was the focus of Prof. Rosemary Ruether, Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, Father Elias Chacour, Melkite priest and founder of Mar Elias College in Ibillin, and Mitri Raheb, pastor of the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, and Jean Zaru, presiding Clerk of the Ramallah Friends Meeting. (Father Chacour and Ms. Zaru are also co-vice presidents of *Sabeel*.)

The third panel, composed of Marc Ellis, Jewish theologian and author, Dale Bishop, Middle East Executive, Common Global Ministries Board, Gabriel Habib, former Executive Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, and Naim Ateek, Canon of St. George's Cathedral, Jerusalem, and President of *Sabeel*, addressed the topic "Working for Justice: An Agenda for Americans."

The program concluded with a worship service. The participants were extremely grateful to the speakers, some of whom who had to travel long distances, who gave us informative and inspiring messages.

Interspersed with the panels were two meetings, by denominations and by regions, aimed at promoting appropriate action in these spheres. The planning committee and the participants were extremely grateful for the warm hospitality shown by our hosts at the National Presbyterian Church.

Those who attended came away well informed and invigorated for continued work for justice. Many of us plan to attend the *Sabeel* conference in Jerusalem in February where we will glean more information, new ideas, and can meet old friends.

FOS-NA presently operates an email action list, which disseminates news from Palestine. We will soon offer the option of a short information summary once for busy people with small email capacity and also the more detailed reports for those who need the full stories. We also will be setting up fax and mail networks for those without email who nevertheless want to be informed of the latest news.

Betsy Barlow is coordinator of Friends of Sabeel - North America. She is also an Episcopal lay person active in Middle East affairs.

[Contents](#)

Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem

P.W.L. Walker

Reviewed by Stephen Sizer

"This is the first systematic treatment of Jerusalem right across the New Testament. If Christians, and for that matter anyone else, want to think

seriously about the place of Jerusalem in the Bible and for today, they will have to take this book very seriously indeed." (N.T. Wright)

Peter Walker raises and then answers four vitally important questions: What is the biblical significance of Jerusalem?; What was Jesus' attitude toward the City and its Temple?; Did the New Testament writers see Jerusalem as being affected by the coming of Jesus?; and, How should Christians view Jerusalem today? His thesis is that the New Testament writers, and in particular Jesus fundamentally and irrevocably re-evaluate the Old Testament significance of Jerusalem. For the first Christians, the coming of the Messiah cast Jerusalem in an entirely new light.

"... any passion they might have had for Jerusalem had been transformed by reflecting on a different kind of 'passion' -Jesus' death outside the city's wall." (xi)

Walker shows that it is quite vacuous for Christians to quote Old Testament texts concerning Jerusalem to imply that God's purposes remained unchanged with the coming of Jesus. He shows convincingly that the way New Testament writers view Jerusalem is indicative of the way they view the Land. Working systematically through the New Testament documents, Walker focuses on what each book has to teach about the Temple, the City and the Land.

With the controversy surrounding the arbitrary and politically motivated celebrations of Jerusalem 3000 in mind, Walker's treatment of the New Testament passages is particularly useful. He shows, for example, in Galatians how Paul compares the present Jerusalem not with Sarah but Hagar still in slavery and bondage. He points out how Paul refuses to allow Christians to link the earthly Jerusalem to the Jerusalem above since she is still spiritually in slavery. Theologically nothing has changed since that assessment. Jewish people need to hear of the Gospel of grace and freedom from the law found in Jesus, not affirmed by Christian Zionists, in their sub-Christian nationalistic legalism.

"Access to the 'Jerusalem above' had nothing to do with the Jerusalem below... Christian identity...was not bound up with the physical Jerusalem... The Christian gospel did not offer a new validation for Jerusalem; on the contrary, the Christian Church needed to be set free from the 'slavery' that was inherent in the 'present Jerusalem'. The Cross of Christ had had profound repercussions, leading to the death of many things (cf. 6:12-15); one of these, paradoxically, was Jerusalem itself." (p.131-132)

Walker's analysis of the Johannine material is equally excellent. Summarizing John's perspective, he concludes, Any Christian attempt to invest the places associated with

Jesus in Palestine with a new spiritual significance should be ruled out - Jesus himself was the only true 'Holy Place'. (p. 191)

Likewise the call of Hebrews is a radical one, "... a call to make a decisive break with the past at a time when there was much pressure to invest in the Temple and Jerusalem with a future ... Christian believers had a new calling - to identify with Jesus, not with Jerusalem" (p. 234).

Walker's book is a healthy antidote to the earth bound and materialistic theology of much Christian Zionism, preoccupied as it is with the rebuilding of an earthly Temple, supporting Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem and the conquest of most of the Middle East to fulfill the Abrahamic promise. Walker convincingly shows through this comprehensive analysis of the New Testament material that,

... Jerusalem has lost whatever theological status it previously possessed. The way the Old Testament ascribes to Jerusalem a special, central and sacred status within the on-going purposes of God is not reaffirmed by the New Testament writers. Instead they see God's purposes as having moved forward into a new era in which the previous emphasis on the city (as well as on the Land and the Temple) is no longer appropriate. The coming of Jesus has been its undoing ... Jesus expressed his true love for Jerusalem not by acceding to its agendas but by denying them. Those who follow in his steps and who truly love Jerusalem may similarly have to resist some of the enticements which this city offers (p. 319, 326).

The consummation of God's purposes lie in a City made without hands which we await from heaven, "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God." (Hebrews 12:22). Peter Walker's book helps us to get our perspective right. I wholeheartedly commend it.

*Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 1996. 370 pages.
ISBN 0-8028-4287-9*

Rev. Stephen Sizer, Vicar of Christ Church, Virginia Water, England, has recently completed a Doctorate of Philosophy on responsible pilgrimages to the Holy Land. He is acting chair of Living Stones.

[Contents](#)

Snapshots of Our Activities

Clergy Gatherings

Parish priests from Jerusalem, the Bethlehem area and Ramallah met with their brothers from Nazareth and the surrounding towns in May, 1997. Most of the churches were represented. The Jerusalem group headed towards Mount Tabor, a part of their pilgrimage, and visited both the Orthodox and Latin (Roman Catholic) churches. They prayed for unity, enriched by the traditions of the different churches.

Bishop Riah Abu Assal welcomed them all at St. Margaret's hostel. There were about fifty people ready to discuss issues of common concern and eager to find ways of bridging the gaps toward understanding and love. Education, housing, counseling, ecumenism were some of the subjects that were brought up and discussed. The clergy unanimously felt the need for more such encounters. "Today, I feel I'm not alone" said one young priest.

"We do not know enough about each other", said another.

Some clergy were accompanied by their wives. The Nazareth and *Sabeel* Committee members, who had helped organize the Galilee tour, were also present. The day ended too quickly with promises to meet again maybe for a retreat in the fall.

Before returning to Jerusalem, the pilgrims stopped at Mary's well where they were received by the Orthodox council. Unfortunately, they did not have enough time to visit the Latin Basilica of the Annunciation.

The group that had left Jerusalem in the morning was now closer to each other, exchanging anecdotes, jokes and praising God for his bountiful love.

"Palestine the Nightmare, Palestine the Dream"

Dr. Munir Fasheh, educator and member of the Board of Directors of *Sabeel* challenged a gathering of people with this theme. He aroused the curiosity and motivated young and old disillusioned people to pursue the dream that would help them live with dignity and a vision for the future. Dr. Fasheh's talk is defined in his words:

"It is funny how the mind works. When it is busy with small, narrow, racist, exclusive or selfish dreams, it can't think of big ones. When all doors to small dreams are locked, peoples' imaginations and spirits go wild; and it is exactly during such phases in history that humanity had its leaps in perception, in thought, and in expression."

Bible Study Tour

The ecumenical Bible Study group has for several weeks been exploring the mysteries of the book of Revelation. We concluded the course with a visit. Our destination was Megiddo, the Armageddon as Saint John called it (Rev. 16:16).

The group of 20 traveled through the lanes of history along the old Roman Road leading to the oasis of Jericho, Beisan in the Jordan Valley reaching Marj Bani Amer, Jezreel, the fertile plain known as the 'bread basket'. Unfortunately, it has also been the battlefield for raiding armies for many centuries. In fact, at least 20 civilizations have left their imprints on the Tel overlooking the area.

The story of violence and balance of power was retold once again as we visited Mount Carmel and Caesarea. The excavations of Megiddo were fascinating but the tranquility and the beauty of that place strengthened our faith in the work of justice and peace as the only road to the "Kingdom of God" on earth, rather than war and bloodshed as some imagine.

The next Bible study trip will be to Turkey to visit the sites and remains of the Seven Churches.

Nazareth Remembers Charles De Foucauld, Little Brother of Jesus

On June 18th, the people of Nazareth were invited by *Sabeel*, the *Bishara* (Annunciation) Family Club and the municipality of Nazareth to commemorate 100 years since the arrival of Charles De Foucauld at the convent of St. Claire at Nazareth.

Bishop Boulos Marcuzzo, representative of the Latin church recounted the life story of the young man who one hundred years ago, left the Trappist monastery in France to come to Nazareth to "live like Jesus lived, to be poor like him." He wrote "I long for Nazareth."

One hundred years later, Nazareth still remembers and feels blessed by the memory of the life of Charles De Foucauld, the beggar and the saint.

Nazareth gave brother Charles the secret of its hidden life. This 'universal brother' saw Jesus in every human being and served Christians, Muslims and Jews alike.

Many thanks and apologies to those who participated in these programs and wrote interesting, detailed reports that we could not include in this issue for lack of space.