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The Dark Side of Religion

Christian Zionism: The Dark Side of the Bible

by Naim Ateek

Next year Sabeel will be holding its fifth international conference in Jerusalem between April 14-18. The theme of the conference will be Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict. As the theme clearly indicates, we will address the development of this Christian aberration and its impact on millions of people. We will also present a response to it.

In preparation for this important event, we are dedicating this issue of Cornerstone to introduce our friends to the dangers of Christian Zionism. It is my prayer that Friends of Sabeel everywhere would do their best, not only to make every effort to participate themselves, but also to encourage friends and acquaintances, especially those who have Christian Zionist leanings, to attend. I hope that the conference will provide the participants with the needed resources to address this heresy at home and in their own churches and organizations. Without any shadow of a doubt, Christian Zionism is one, if not the most dangerous, biblical distortion that is challenging us today.

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Although the general phenomenon of religious fundamentalism has been with us in one form or another for a very long time, its resurgence as a political force became conspicuous in the 1970's. Since then the Middle East region witnessed many atrocities perpetrated by human beings who belonged to different religions. Some of those might have been only nominally religious, others however, were acting in the name of God. During the Lebanese civil war in the 1970's, the phalangists were Christians who were responsible for the killing and murder of many Muslims. In Palestine-Israel, Muslim and Jewish fundamentalists interpreted their understanding of the will of God from their holy books and traditions and committed the most heinous acts against each other.

One classic example is when a religious Jewish settler from one of the settlements around Hebron went into the Abrahamic Mosque in Hebron and killed 29 Muslims who were at prayer. Similarly, many extremist Muslim suicide bombers have blown themselves up, killing Israelis in busses and cafes inside Israel, believing that they are pleasing God and earning a handsome reward in paradise.

Everyone of our religions is capable of expressing the most noble, sublime, and exquisite attributes of a merciful and loving God; and at the same time spout out the most narrow, terrible, and exclusive concepts and beliefs that can drive some extremists into acts of violence against others. **It is the dark side of every religion. It is our dark side that misinterprets and misunderstands God and makes God in our own image.**

As already mentioned, it is important to call attention to the dangers of Christian fundamentalism and Zionism; and for that matter, to any form of fundamentalism. Christian Zionism is one of the greatest challenges facing the Christian Church today. Its formative roots go back to the early 19th century in Britain and Ireland, although one can find even earlier expressions of it. Its most fertile soil was found within the Protestant and evangelical churches. Yet in its most natural and simplistic form, it seems to exist consciously and subconsciously among Christians within many mainline churches throughout the world. In addition to its presence in the western churches, Christian Zionism is found in Africa, South Korea, Latin America and other places. In the United States, their numbers range between fifty and a hundred million.

At the beginning of the 20th century, it was possible to distinguish between fundamentalist Christians who believed the Bible literally and were leading the fight against evolution; and Christians who were pre-millennialists and dispensationalists who were emphasizing the fulfillment of prophecy in the last days. Nowadays the two terms are often used inter-changeably. There are four important foundations to their beliefs: the Bible is the literal and inerrant word of God; prophecy is the key to interpreting and understanding the Scriptures and world history; the approaching end of the world and the impending and imminent Second Coming of Christ; and the centrality of Israel in God's plan of history and especially in the unfolding drama of the End Times.

It is possible to find some western Christians who are supportive of the state of Israel for political or other reasons that have nothing to do with religion. By far, however, the largest number of western Christians who are pro-Israel base their support on their understanding and interpretation of the Bible. For them, it is a divine mandate that they stand on the side of Israel and be supportive of the Jewish people. If they go against Israel, they are in essence going against God. To be faithful to Israel is to be faithful to God and vice versa. They often quote Genesis 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse." Christian Zionists interpret this verse to mean that God will bless those who bless Israel (although the text does not specifically say that) and will curse those who are against it. Since they are on the side of God, they must stand on the side of the State of Israel and bless it. Christian Zionists believe that God's clock is ticking, announcing

the approaching end of history. They anticipate the battle of Armageddon and the annihilation of millions of people. In such a scenario, those of us who work for peace are perceived by Christian Zionists as engaged in human futility because we are contradicting the plan of God. **Although, presumably, many of them abhor killing and do not engage in it directly, and they might be wonderful and sincere Christians in their own right, they have been mis-educated and misled.** Due to their faulty theology, however, they are unwittingly and unconsciously contributing to the oppression and killing of many innocent Palestinians by Israel.

Ultimately, the best definition for fundamentalism and religious extremism is that given by Jesus Christ himself. Jesus described it well when he told his disciples, "Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me" (John 16:2b-3).

There are two important points that need to be lifted up. First, the definition of a fundamentalist as a person who oppresses and even kills others in the name of God. Secondly, the best theological reason is given for such behavior. Those who do it do not know God or Christ. The words, "...they have not known the Father" are significant because they are meant to reflect the compassion and love that characterize God as Parent. The word "God" can be abstract but when God is described as "Father" it reflects the tenderness, love, and mercy of God. When the name of Jesus Christ is added to it, it elucidates it even further. For Jesus Christ expresses God's unconditional love. If Christian Zionists have an authentic knowledge of God in Christ, they would not commit or allow any person to commit any act of atrocity against another fellow human being even if he/she is their enemy. This would not be the way of Christ.

At Sabeel we believe that Christian Zionist theology defaces and disfigures God and the Christian Faith. It has also contributed to the perpetuation of injustice against the Palestinians. We have a responsibility to take a stand and speak prophetically against such a heresy. Christ has called us to do justice and be peacemakers. He said to his disciples "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). We must help our brothers and sisters to be aware of the dangers inherent in Christian Zionism and make available to them the needed resources to address it. At the same time, I pray that God will continue to empower us to work for justice, peace, and security for all the people of Palestine-Israel regardless of their ethnic or religious background.

This issue of Cornerstone is meant to draw the attention to the importance of next year's conference. We hope that you will join us. See you next year in Jerusalem.

The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek is the director of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center.

On one level it appears that certain Christian Zionist politicians and spokespersons have suddenly appeared on the scene during the post-September 11th Bush policies and have exercised unparalleled media and political influence. The anti-Islamic rhetoric of the Rev. Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Franklin Graham have alienated much of the Islamic world while the strongly pro-Zionist policies of such U.S. Congressmen as Dick Arme and Tom DeLay have provided unwavering support for the most militant aspects of Ariel Sharon's Likud coalition government and its policies. While the visibility of these leaders have converged with the new-found power of the Neo-conservatives in the Bush administration and the pro-Israel lobby, the ascendance of the Christian Zionists is not a new phenomenon. It may be surprising to many that their political presence in the United States dates back to the 1890s while in Great Britain, their history is much older. The following "Primer" will provide a brief introduction to the history, theology, and contemporary manifestations of what is now known as the Christian Zionist movement.

A Christian Zionist Primer

by Donald Wagner

(Part I) **Britain and Zion**

The British people have had a long-term fascination with the idea of Israel and its central role in biblical prophecy that dates back to their earliest recorded literature. The Epistle of Gildas (circa. 6th century A.D.) and the Venerable Bede's "Ecclesiastical History" (735 AD) both saw the British in terms of "the new Israel," God's chosen people, who were destined to play a strategic role despite repeated invasions by their Nordic neighbors. Israel's battles against the Philistines, Babylonians, and others served to guide the embryonic British self-understanding as "the new Israel."

A clear resurgence of the themes was evident in the sixteenth century, perhaps influenced by the Protestant Reformation and its emphasis on the Bible and varied interpretations of its texts now that Rome had lost its control over the new clergy and theologians. One of the early expressions of the themes was the monograph "Apocalypsis Apocalypseos," written by the Anglican clergyman, Rev. Thomas Brightman in 1585. Brightman urged the British people to support the return of the Jews to Palestine in order to hasten a series of prophetic events that would culminate in the return of Jesus. In 1621, a prominent member of the British Parliament, attorney Sir Henry Finch, advanced a similar

perspective when he wrote: "The Jews shall repair to their own country, shall inherit all of the land as before, shall live in safety, and shall continue in it forever." He argued that based on his interpretation of Genesis 12:3, that God would bless those nations that supported their return, but the idea did not find support from fellow Parliamentarians. While these writers cannot be classified as Christian Zionists they might be viewed as proto-Christian Zionists, as they prepared the way for those who would follow. Gradually their views receded but the turbulence following the American and French revolutions caused significant insecurity across Europe, and as the anxiety occurred in the run-up to a centennial year, prophetic speculation concerning Jesus' return and related events was in the air.

During the decade that followed the year 1800, several Christian writers and preachers began to speculate concerning the events leading to Jesus' imminent return, including the Anglican clergyman Rev. Louis Way. Rev. Way taught that it was necessary for the Jews to return to Palestine as the first stage prior to the Messianic Age and he offered speculation as to the timing of Jesus second coming. Within a short period of time Rev. Way gained a wide readership through his journal, *The Jewish Expositor*, and counted many clergy, academics and the poet Samuel Taylor

Coleridge as his subscribers.

A number of influential proto-Christian Zionists emerged during the generation that followed Rev. Way. The Rev. John Nelson Darby (1800-81), a renegade Irish Anglican priest, added several unique features to Rev. Way's teachings, including the doctrine of the "Rapture" whereby "born again Christians" would be literally removed from history and transferred to heaven prior to Jesus return. Darby also placed a restored Israel at the center of his theology, claiming that an actual Jewish state called Israel would become the central instrument for God to fulfill his plans during the last days of history. Only the true ("born again") Christians would be removed from history prior to the final battle of Armageddon in an event called "the Rapture," based on his literal interpretation of I Thessalonians 4:1-11. Darby's extensive writings and sixty year career as a missionary, consolidated this form of fundamentalism called "premillennialism" (Jesus would return prior to the Battle of Armageddon and Jesus millennial rule on earth), Darby made six missionary journeys to North America, where he became a popular teacher and preacher. The premillennial theology and its influence on Christian fundamentalists and the emerging evangelical movement in the United States can be directly traced to the influence of this renegade Irish preacher.

Christian Zionism is the direct product of this unusual and rather recent western form of Protestant theology. Found primarily in North America and England, it is now exported around the globe via satellite television, the internet, best-selling novels such as the 'Left Behind' series, films, and a new breed of missionaries. These unique doctrines were found among fringe movements in Christianity throughout the ages, but most Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant churches regard them as extreme and marginal doctrines, if not heresy.

All of us have just enough religion
to make us hate but not enough to
make us love one another

Jonathan Swift

One of the influential British social reformers to be influenced by premillennial theology was Lord Shaftesbury, a conservative evangelical Christian who was intimately linked to leading Members of the British Parliament. In 1839, Shaftesbury published an essay in the distinguished literary journal the Quarterly Review, titled "The State and Restoration of the Jews" where he argued: "the Jews must be encouraged to return (to Palestine) in yet greater numbers and become once more the husbandman of Judea and Galilee." Writing some 57 years before Max Nordau, Israel Zangwell, and Theodore Herzl popularized the phrase, Shaftesbury called the Jews "a people with no country for a country with no people," curiously similar to the theme of the early Zionists: "a land of no people for a people with no land." Gradually, Shaftesbury's views gained acceptance among British journalists, clergy, and politicians.

One of the most important figures in the development of Christian Zionism was the Anglican Chaplain in Vienna during the 1880s, the Rev. William Heckler, who became an acquaintance of Theodore Herzl. Heckler saw Herzl and the Zionist project as ordained by God in order to fulfill the prophetic scriptures. He then utilized his extensive political connections to assist the Zionist leader in his quest for an international sponsor of the Zionist project. Heckler arranged meetings with the Turkish Sultan and the German Kaiser, but it was his indirect contacts with the British elite that led to a meeting with the politician Arthur Balfour. That meeting in 1905 would eventually lead to the famous Declaration of November, 1917, that brought the Zionists their initial international legitimacy. The seeds of Balfour's keen interest in Zionism were prepared at least in part by his Sunday school faith, a case put forth by Balfour's biographer and niece, Blanch Dugdale.

Prime Minister David Lloyd-George was perhaps more predisposed to the Zionist ideology than Balfour. Journalist Christopher Sykes (son of the co-author of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916), in his volume *Two Studies in Virtue*, notes that Lloyd-George's political advisors were unable to train his mind on the map of Palestine during negotiations prior to the Treaty of Versailles due to his training by fundamentalist Christian parents and churches on the geography of ancient Israel. Lloyd-George admitted to Sykes that he was far more familiar with the cities and regions of Biblical Israel than the geography of his native Wales or England itself.

While British imperial designs undoubtedly were the primary political motivations in drawing these important British politicians to support the Zionist project, it is clear that they were predisposed to Zionism and undoubtedly enthusiastic to support the proposals of Theodore Herzl and Chaim Weitzmann due to their Christian Zionist background. Balfour's famous speech of 1919 makes the point:

For in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country. . . The four great powers are committed to Zionism, and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.

The phrases: "rooted in age-long traditions" and "future hopes" are perhaps grounded in his British imperial vision but they were also buttressed by his understanding of Bible prophecy, which under-girded his bias toward the Zionist project as well as his grand designs for England's colonialist policy.

Part one of five . To be continued in the next issue.

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The Holy Land and the Scandalous Performance of the Churches

by Michael Prior, C.M.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has increased the traditional concern of Christians for the 'Holy Land'. In addition to being one of the most explosive issues in international affairs, it constitutes for the Churches one of the great moral problems of our age. It raises not only issues of biblical interpretation, but of the authority of some biblical traditions. Relations between religion and 'nationalism', as well as between the relevant religions also surface. Sabeel, an indigenous organisation of Holy Land Christians, with strong international links, is in a favourable position to promote discussion of such issues. Its international conference on Christian Zionism is most apposite.

The Indigenous Christian Community

Western Christians must respect, and accord priority to

the position of the indigenous Christians. They not only theorise about the issues, but live in the midst of increasingly difficult circumstances. These are the virtually inevitable consequences of the determination of Political Zionism - a movement thoroughly at home in the racist, colonial spirit of nineteenth-century Europe - to establish a state for Jews (Judenstaat) in a land already inhabited. We now know from the Zionist archives themselves that, from the beginning, the Zionists realised that it would be necessary to expel the indigenous Arabs, that they appointed 'population transfer' committees - the first as early as 1937- and that they made all necessary arrangements to put their plans into action at the first opportunity, 1948.

Political Zionism has been a disaster for the Christians of the Holy Land. In 1948, 50,000 were among the 750,000 Palestinians expelled from (what became) the State of Israel. Since then, the remaining Christians have lived either as unequal citizens in Israel, or under Israeli occupation of varying degrees of oppression. They struggle on, hoping that even out of the dreadful circumstances of today there may, possibly, be a better future. Yet their plight has not yet been seriously addressed by the Church in a manner that respects basic justice, not to speak of the imperatives of Christian morality.

The World-wide Christian Community

Christians outside also interest themselves in the 'Holy Land'. They fall into a number of categories:

1. The most vociferous are those in the fundamentalist Evangelical Zionist wing. Although not nearly as numerous as mainstream Christians, they are much more ideologically committed, politically focused and influential, and in the US have the ear of President George W. Bush and his policy-makers. For them, what happened in 1948 and since is part of God's intention that the Children of Israel be gathered 'to Jerusalem'. Indeed, it will speed up the Second Coming of Christ. Rather than concentrate on Jesus' exhortations during his First Coming - e.g., to feed the hungry, heal the lame, give sight to the blind, clothe the naked, free the prisoners, etc. - such people are happier waiting for the Second Coming, with its Armageddon massacre. Meanwhile, they support the government of Israel that specialises in making the poor poorer, in making those with perfect sight blind, in making the walking lame, etc.

That Palestine was already occupied by Arabs, who would have to be driven out to fulfil the 'ethnic-cleansing' intentions of Political Zionism, is of little moral concern for many such people. Why? Because of how they interpret the prophetic and apocalyptic biblical texts. Their interpretation is not only naïve but is fundamentally immoral. A god such as theirs is the Great Ethnic-Cleanser, a militaristic and xenophobic genocidist, who is not sufficiently moral even to conform to the requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention, or of any of the Human Rights Protocols which

A god such as theirs is the Great Ethnic-Cleanser, a militaristic and xenophobic genocidist, who is not sufficiently moral even to conform to the requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention, or of any of the Human Rights Protocols which attempt to set limits to barbarism.

attempt to set limits to barbarism. The grotesque views of such people, embracing an essentially ethnic-cleansing enterprise as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy, and clothing Political Zionism in the garment of piety, would not warrant serious attention were it not for the influence they have on the domestic and foreign policies of the USA. They are also, of course, easy targets for the liberal establishment in the Church, the Universities and the media, whose own performance has been scarcely better.

2. The performance of the mainstream Churches has not been a model of ethical engagement. It is one of the anomalies of recent history that, while Christians have supported oppressed peoples virtually everywhere else, there has been relatively little protest against the historic injustice perpetrated on the indigenous population of Palestine. Many Christians, of course, are sympathetic to the ideal of a state for Jews as compensation for the litany of European persecutions of Jews. That it is others who have to pay the price is all the better. Moreover, even when faced with compelling evidence about the damage done to the Palestinians these people remain rather detached, preferring prudence to criticism. They cannot bring themselves to face the dark side of Political Zionism. In any case, taking a stand for Palestinian rights will not advance one's reputation, or help one's promotion prospects in the Church, the Universities and the media.

3. Many Christians, of course, approach the question from a Human Rights perspective. They acknowledge the

fundamental injustice done in 1948, and the atrocities since. Such people, typically, are not in positions of power. The most the leaders of the Churches, by and large, appear able to bring themselves to is to subscribe to the 'fallacy of balance'. Their consciences, it appears, are virtually paralysed by guilt, mostly about what was done to Jews in Europe in the past, for which they themselves are hardly responsible. They leave unchallenged a Zionist reading of Jewish history and of recent events in Palestine.

I am not aware of any Church leader - dean, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, patriarch, minister, presbyter, et al. - who has dared in a public forum to offer a moral critique of the ideology of Political Zionism commensurate with that of, e.g., apartheid, an ideology of far less deleterious consequences. **Though we know that the damage done to the Palestinians was at the heart of the Zionist enterprise from the beginning, the Church leadership reflects little appetite to pursue the relevant issues of justice and respect for historical truth.** The situation, of course, is even worse in the Universities. And as for the media ??? But even if the Universities and the media have consistently abandoned any pretence to moral propriety on the issue, the Church, surely, should do better.

Particularly in the face of the dismal performance of the other guardians of public discourse, the Churches should give a lead in moral debate. They should do better than fall into line with ongoing political manoeuvres, which, in

For a start, the leaderships of the Churches should insist that Israel 'come clean' on its seminal injustice against the Palestinian Arabs, that it apologise for it, undo the damage it has perpetrated as far as that is possible, honour its obligations with respect to the Palestinian right of return, make appropriate compensation for the damage done, and, on the basis of confession and restitution, move towards a less ethnocratic polity.

Living Christ,
 deep within my heart
 the fire of justice burns;
 so I ask this day for inner courage
 to walk in solidarity
 with all who are
 betrayed, exploited,
 driven from home,
 violated, imprisoned,
 detained without trial,
 held hostage, robbed,
 enslaved, silenced,
 abused.

From Iona Prayer Book

conforming to the demands of the powerful, reflect little contact with recognisable moral principles. For religious bodies to accord legitimacy to the expulsion of any indigenous population, and the expropriation of their lands, as happened, and continues to happen in Palestine, is highly problematic, indeed scandalous.

For a start, the leaderships of the Churches should insist that Israel 'come clean' on its seminal injustice against the Palestinian Arabs, that it apologise for it, undo the damage it has perpetrated as far as that is possible, honour its obligations with respect to the Palestinian right of return, make appropriate compensation for the damage done, and, on the basis of confession and restitution, move towards a less ethnocratic polity. Such exhortations would flow effortlessly from principles of Christian morality, and would be in conformity with elementary justice. And even more is required. Yet, all we get, instead, from the Church leadership is the embrace of whatever proposal the asymmetric parties to the dispute contrive - the 'Oslo Accords', the 'Road Map', however jaded, and however lacking in principles of justice. It is as if the Christian Church were content to act on the novel moral principle that the rights of the perpetrators of injustice and its victims were finely balanced.

Christian Zionists or Misguided Zealots

by Zoughbi Zoughbi

While visiting a church in Michigan this past year, my wife and children were shocked to hear the Minister intoning his solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict during the sermon. It's simple really, according to the Minister; the Palestinians need to be deported across the river into Jordan, and Israel needs to take the land of the West Bank and make it part of Israel. One wonders how complacent this Minister and his congregation would be if a foreign power came into the U.S., kicked them over the border with nothing more than they could carry, confiscated their land and homes, and then deemed this act acceptable as "the will of God".

Next came "Joe", a British evangelist who called me 'sinful' for daring to criticize the modern-day State of Israel. He went on to say that "if you criticize Israel, you criticize God."

I am worried about people who consider themselves representatives of God on earth, who decide the fate and the destiny of each and every human being. Zionist doctrine has taken a dangerous turn and is quickly manifesting itself on the ground here in the form of ethnic cleansing. Where is this theology heading and who are the 'misguided zealots' at the helm? As an Arab Palestinian Christian I have a responsibility towards

exposing the danger and negative impact of such a theology and I encourage all people to share in that responsibility. I believe in collective responsibility as an answer to such a perilous trend within the Christian family. This hasn't been a movement related to spirituality or religiosity and I would like to raise the awareness to such a danger since these groups have been able to garner political power.

During the cold war, right wing Christianity supported the foreign policy of NATO. Their bitter enemy was the communist regimes and the national liberation movements. After the cold war, Islam, Arabs, and others have become the "axis of evil"and terms of absoluteness (e.g. absolute justice) are used by the US administration when carrying out their wars. Therefore US foreign policy has been following the right wing / moral majority folks. This should be a wake-up call for people of conscience because it doesn't only endanger world peace per se, but also our spirituality as well as dehumanizing other faiths and religions. The theology that our Lord Jesus Christ taught us has never been in the service of Zionist politics. Jesus taught us that the Sabbath and (theology) is in the service of human beings, not the other way around.

As an Arab Palestinian Christian, I feel that those adhering to the Christian Zionist doctrine, if not disarmed, will have the following negative effects:

1. The “misguided” will weaken the witness of the Arab Christians who have been a constant presence in the Middle East irrespective of political havoc, insecurity and instability.
2. The “misguided” will put the Palestinian Christians in an awkward position, despite the fact we are bearing so much responsibility and facing numerous hardships and challenges. Christian Zionism creates a wedge between Arab Moslems and Christians. Few people in the Arab world can differentiate between the teachings of Jerry Falwell and his likes, and non-Zionist Christians including Arab Christians.
3. Zionist theology has already created religious turmoil in the Holy Land between all faiths and nations. Right wing Jewish groups call Jerry Falwell and his likes true Zionists....even though they plan for their eventual conversion to Christianity or their destruction. Thus the “misguided” are poisoning relations between Christians and Jews.
4. The “misguided” are trying to create an unhealthy relationship between the extended family of Christ, which cuts across nationality, sex, color, and church affiliation. They are dividing the family of Christ into different categories: pros and cons, right majority/ left minority: Bible belt versus social gospel and so on.....
5. The “misguided,” with their ruthless judgmental attitudes, are killing the way of ecumenism and pluralism that many churches have adopted.
6. The “misguided”, are trying to rob Christianity of spirituality. The core teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ is based on love. As Anna Sewall, author of “No Religion Without Love” puts it, “There is no religion without love, and people may talk as much as they like about their religion, but if it does not teach them to be good and kind to man and beast, it is all a sham.”

A humble piece of advice from the least of your brothers in Palestine to our prodigal daughters and sons within the Christian Zionist movement is as follows:

I. Christian leaders, anywhere, must not be cheerleaders for war; not in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, or anywhere. Don't wage wars in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. We have no problem with people who are trying to speed up and expedite the second coming of the Messiah, but not at the cost of destroying a nation by exploiting our plight and tragedy! Thus, by speeding up and rushing the second coming, the “misguided” would be dragging us into a religious war, where they will be either martyrs or heroes.

III. Christians should not be zealots in favor of starting religious wars in Palestine or elsewhere in order to build the Third Temple. I don't want anyone to be a hero or a victim. Every human life is valuable and holy, especially if we believe that we are all created in the Almighty's image.

IV. We must not create God in our image! Nor must we worship false idols. God's love is inclusive. God is not a real-estate agent or tribal God. God is compassion, mercy and kindness.

We believe in, and value dialogue. We encourage all believers and people of good-will to engage in a dynamic dialogue of action and interaction, awareness building, breaking stereotypes, ending overgeneralization and the dehumanization of others who are different from us, regardless of faith, religion, or political beliefs. We call for a dialogue of cultures, religions, and civilizations. We stand united against those who believe in clashes of civilizations and religions. And finally, my prayer for the ‘misguided’ is that the light of Jesus Christ will illuminate their consciences and lead them away from fundamentalism into the ocean of love, inclusivity, and humanity.

A Tribute to Edward Said

On behalf of Sabeel, the ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem and Friends of Sabeel throughout the world, I want to express our grief at the passing of Professor Edward Said.

In his own right and in his own way, Edward Said was a man of faith. He believed in the power of truth and justice. He believed in love and compassion. Although we grieve his untimely loss, we thank God for his life and celebrate his work and commitment to justice and peace in Palestine, his homeland.

The famous saying of Edmund Burke, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" does not apply and never applied to Edward. He was never silent. He confronted the injustice head on. We thank God for his courage and integrity in speaking and writing the truth in the face of the powers that be, and in spite of fierce opposition. He made many of us proud to be Palestinians. He gave voice and articulation to millions of people whose voice was negated and suppressed. When Edward spoke, we all felt strong. He always inspired and stimulated us. If we continue in his footsteps, dedication, and work, we must be assured that justice will ultimately triumph and the oppressive Israeli occupation will end and Palestinians and Israelis will live together in peace.

Someone has said, "The struggle against oppression is not fought on the battlefield of power or truth.... There are pitched battles waged on these ramparts, but the war is ultimately won or lost on a more forward front. In the end the battle against oppression stands or falls on the battlefield of hope" (Haugen, 1999 p. 67). This is what Edward did and this is what we will do. We will never lose hope. We will continue the struggle until a just peace is established.

We thank God for Edward's life and work. Although he has left us, his legacy will continue to teach and inspire us.

On behalf of Sabeel, and friends of Sabeel everywhere, we offer our heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones. May God grant them comfort and peace.

Naim Ateek

Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Jerusalem.



from **Speaking Truth to Power**

by Edward Said

Nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take. You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you need the approval of a boss or an authority figure; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within the responsible mainstream; someday you hope to get an honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship.

For an intellectual these habits of mind are corrupting par excellence. If anything can denature, neutralize, and finally kill a passionate intellectual life it is the internalization of such habits. Personally I have encountered them in one of the toughest of all contemporary issues, Palestine, where fear of speaking out about one of the greatest injustices in modern history has hobbled, blinkered, muzzled many who know the truth and are in a position to serve it. For despite the abuse and vilification that any outspoken supporter of Palestinian rights and self-determination earns for him or herself, the truth deserves to be spoken, represented by an unafraid and compassionate intellectual.

Representations of the Intellectual. The 1993 Reith Lectures. Edward W. Said.

Bible Study

Who is Israel?

Evangelical Theology at the Service of Politics

by Fr. Rick Van De Water

Hardly any Christian with a conscience would deny that the State of Israel is occupying lands belonging to others and on a daily basis flagrantly violates the human rights of Palestinians. For many evangelical Christians, however, the problem is not as much the recognition of that fact as the reconciliation of it with their theology. As Rev. Jerry Falwell once claimed: "Theologically, any Christian has to support Israel, simply because Jesus said to" (Time magazine, Feb. 17, 1986, p. 38). Not all evangelicals would accept that statement word for word, but many are of the opinion that "the nation which blesses Israel will be blessed, because Israel is God's chosen people." Are those assertions biblical? Evangelicals usually base their theological tenets on sound principles of biblical hermeneutics, the first and foremost of which is the unity of the two testaments: the New Testament cannot be interpreted without the background of the Old; nor can the teachings of the Old Testament be held in isolation from their fulfillment in the New (M.S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

1974, p. 18). When that hermeneutical principle is applied to the above-mentioned claims of God's blessing upon those who support Israel, their fallacy becomes apparent.

First of all, the statement that "the nation which blesses Israel will be blessed" cannot be found as such in the Bible. God did, however, repeatedly promise Abraham that through his "seed" ([rz]), all the nations of the world would be blessed (Gen 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). The question is: who is the seed of Abraham? In Gal 3:16, the apostle Paul points out that in God's repeated promise to Abraham, the Hebrew term "seed" is a singular word, not plural, because the "seed of Abraham" is a person: Christ. Consequently, God's promise of blessing is through Christ. Whoever blesses Christ, the seed of Abraham, will be blessed, for it is through Christ that God's blessing is extended to those out of every nation who accept him. To substitute the Israeli political state for Christ and claim that God's blessing is promised to those who bless it is to by-pass the New Testament interpretation of that Old Testament promise.

Jesus' disciples, who were Jews, saw themselves as that true remnant of Israel gathered in by the Messiah in

fulfillment of the prophecies of the “return of the last days,” and saved through their acceptance of him (Acts 2:5, 16-17, 39). They saw too that Jesus had come to universalize the chosen people of God, so that it would no longer be limited to any particular race, but would be open to any person who received the Messiah. That is Paul’s message to the Christians of gentile origin living in Ephesus when he says: “Remember that at that time you were separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:12-13). What Paul saw was that Christ had transcended race as the determining factor in the designation of God’s chosen people. To be chosen is to be in Christ, the Chosen One. Thus Paul could include gentile Christians in the true “Israel of God” (Eph 2:19; Gal 6:16), and conversely assert that “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel; nor because they are his descendents are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring come.’ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (Rom 9:6-8). If the first Christians saw themselves as the true “Israel of God,” must we not also understand that term in its true spiritual reality when we read the Bible, rather than simplistically equating it with a secular government that happens to have chosen the same name?

A related passage that is often misinterpreted is Paul’s comparison of God’s people to an olive tree in Rom 11:16-24. He states that while some of the “natural branches” have been cut from the tree through unbelief, other “branches,” namely gentile Christians, have been grafted in (11:17-20). Some make the mistake here of taking the “root” of the olive tree (11:18) to refer to Judaism. What this overlooks,

however, is that Paul considers those Jews who do not believe in Jesus to have been cut off from the tree. Consequently, the “root” of the tree must refer to Christians of Jewish origin, the first of whom were the apostles. The olive tree representing “Israel” is thus composed of Jewish Christians (the root) and gentile Christians (the grafted-in branches). This true Israel is not a “replacement” for the Jewish people, but rather the remnant of the Jewish people that embraced their Messiah when he came and proclaimed him to the nations. Paul’s olive tree thus has nothing to do with Christians being grafted into Judaism.

When Paul considered his non-Christian Jewish brothers, he recognized that “as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Rom 11:28-29). Certainly, then, the proper Christian attitude towards the Jewish people as a whole should be that of Paul: charity and

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compassion, in respect for common roots. Such charity, however, does not include condoning injustice on the part of the Israeli government. Does God our Father love us by simply going along with our every whim? Quite the contrary, “the Lord disciplines

those whom he loves” (Prov 3:12). True Christian love, then, cannot compromise on unjust actions which go squarely against the teachings of Christ, no matter who commits them. Followers of Christ are called to the rather difficult task of putting truth and human justice before their personal and national interests. Let them not imagine that in doing so, they are somehow opposing biblical prophecy.

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Snapshots of our Activities

Summer 2003 has been a hot one on both atmospheric and political levels. As negotiators struggle to keep the Road Map on the map, the blatant facts on the ground blur peace initiatives. The Apartheid wall still stands; incursions, killings and reprisals have increased; the cycle of violence continues; Palestinians are forced to make internal reforms that will satisfy the interests of all but the Palestinians. Individuals' patience is exhausted as world attention is diverted from the unending occupation. No wonder the level of tolerance is low, and despair is creeping in. Why then, do we still stand steadfast and keep striving for the end of occupation? We are confident that injustice cannot last. For those who seek a just peace, there is no recess.

Community-Building

Sabeel continues to participate in civil society building. For the past five weeks, as the queue of frustrated Jerusalem residents standing in front of the Ministry of Interior on Nablus Road grows, a group of non-violent protesters from various NGOs take position every Tuesday morning on the pavement across the ministry in a campaign to stop the inhumane treatment at this venue that controls all official registration of birth, death, family reunion, travel documents, in fact all the vital aspects of every single person's life. The humiliation and the degrading system of innumerable hours of wait, have lead into all kinds of illegal transactions and bribery in order to find one's way

into the ministry to obtain the much needed identity card or document. The Civil Society feels its responsibility to preserve the human being and his/her dignity, to combat discrimination and corruption. Even if the campaign does not achieve the fulfillment of all of our rights, we hope we can at least reduce the suffering and irritation of those fighting to be recognized either alive or dead.

Programs

All activities and events have been affected by the unstable situation, the summer heat and travel of organizers and beneficiaries.

Clergy Programs

The annual trip of the clergy took place on July 22. It was special in the choice with regard to the site “The Golan Heights” and the meeting with the Druze community and the remaining few Christian families there. Clergymen from Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Jericho led by Anton Farah, visited traditional religious places like Beit Saida, Caesarea Philippi (Banias) and rediscovered historical roots in the Golan. The priests were overwhelmingly touched by the warm welcome and generosity of their Druze hosts.

The September Clergy meeting was held on Friday 12, at the Greek Catholic Church in Bethlehem in order to encourage the West Bank priests from Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala, who cannot reach Jerusalem, to be present. Father, Yacoub Abu Sa’ada, the host, led the Bible Study. Dr. Maroun Lahham, the rector of the Latin Seminary in Beit Jala spoke about Christian Zionism from the perspective of both the Church in general and the Local Church in particular. Until the return of the Rev. Naim Ateek in December, and though his absence is largely felt, clergy meetings will be regularly facilitated by Sawsan Bittar, the Coordinator.



Women

Two prominent lecturers had heart to heart talks with the Palestinian and expatriate women of Sabeel.

On July 31, Dr. Sis Levin, a peace educator who won international renown as the woman who struggled for the freedom of her husband Jerry Levin in Lebanon in the 80s, guided her audience through “From violence to wholeness” as a redemptive method of therapy and style of life. Sis Levin has trained a multitude of teachers to infuse non-violent peace education in every subject, an approach to instill in the minds and hearts of children of the Abrahamic faiths, a concept, understanding and a living experience of forgiveness and love. The method is an ideally liberating process that is not easy to implement in such harsh areas of conflict. “But”, says Levin, “Women’s good will, determination and perseverance can achieve miracles”. She



Youth

The young summer camp leaders who had participated in a preparatory leadership training course in Ein Karem met on July 25, at the Maison d’ Abraham in Jerusalem to share their experiences of camps. They noted that the short training had helped them in many ways, and they requested longer and more specialized courses in future.

has had a pilot training course with students at the American University in Jenin, and Sis has also approached Bethlehem University, for possible cooperation.

On September 8, The Rev. Susan Burns, the Episcopal Pastor of the Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda, Maryland reflected on the “Martha and Mary” text in Luke 11:38-42. She led an interactive session in which the women probed answers about their role as women, their own positions, choices and priorities in different stages of one’s life. Susan, a lawyer by profession, a wife and a mother of three shared her own experience of combining all those ‘Martha and Mary’ duties at the right time.

On both occasions, Cedar Duaybis kindly helped with the Arabic translation.



Nora Carmi, Coordinator of Women’s Programs was invited by Christian Aid to lead a seminar on “ What makes for Peace: A Palestinian Christian Perspective “ on August 23, at the Greenbelt Festival held in Cheltenham Races, England. She also presented the keynote address “Striving for Peace” at the World Day of Prayer Quadrennial Meeting in Swanwick. While in the UK, Nora met with FOSUK members, and was interviewed both by Church Times Magazine and on BBC Derbyshire.



On August 8, Haya D’ides, the youth coordinator, Sami Khoury, former youth coordinator, and Nevine Nasrallah met with the group of Canadian volunteers led by the Rev. Robert Assaly, Chairperson of FOSNA, in Canada. The Canadian volunteers were interested to know how Palestinian youth view the actual political situation, so they can surmount the difficulties and the role of faith in their lives.

Haya D’ides, the youth coordinator, was hosted by

the Diocese of Lund, Sweden, August 21-27, where she gave three talks in schools. She was interviewed by the local newspaper “Trelleborgs Allehande”. She then proceeded to Dundee, Scotland for the Youth Assembly of the Church of Scotland where she led a seminar. She also gave a presentation in Edinburgh and explored the possibility of youth cooperation and exchange.

New Publications

Suicide-Bombers

A **Palestinian Christian Perspective** written by the Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek that appeared in *Cornerstone* -Summer 2002, is now available in booklet form and can be obtained at Sabeel center, or through the web.

The Arabic translation of **The Origins of the Palestine-Israel Conflict** will be available at the Center by mid-October 2003.

News from Nazareth

The Young Couples program is blooming. In July, the couples met at the Sisters of Nazareth to strategize on division of labor in the different fields of concern: Telling the Narrative - hence the need for a speakers' course, Palestinian Liberation Theology and Christian Education.

The Sabeel Committee and friends spent the week-end of July 5 and 6 on a study tour in Jerusalem. Led by Anton Farah, they explored tunnels and excavation sites, visited religious places and went on a settlement tour with ICAHD. With the Rev. Naim Ateek officiating, they celebrated the Eucharist at the Notre Dame Center, and spent a pleasant evening with their friends from Jerusalem, discussing the role and responsibility of Christians today.

The Sabeel Branch hosted the Rev. Peter Friis Nielsen, chairperson of FOSS, Denmark, on August 25-27. In his first trip to the Galilee, Peter was introduced to the work in Nazareth, visited the Nazareth Village project and met with the Nazareth Committee, as well as some of the Young Couples and the youth.



On September 28, The Sabeel Committee organized a pilgrimage to the upper Galilee. Fifty years after the destruction of Kufr Bir'am, many of its uprooted families commemorated their dispossession by revisiting the village, and regaining strength from their heritage. Is it a sign of resistance or defiance or better still a hope to return? The Nazareth group also visited al-Jish, where many of the refugees from Bir'am had taken refuge and where some of the homes have been transformed into heritage museums. The young people are eager to research the facts about the two villages and bring out the truth.

The group also visited Ma'alia. It was striking to note how much Upper Galilee had lost its original character and was becoming part of a modern Israel.

The Sabeel branch will celebrate the opening of its new extended offices in Nazareth on October 22, ten years after the Sabeel dream became a reality.



Let me not pray to be sheltered
from dangers but to be fearless in
facing them.

Let me not beg for the stilling of my
pain but for the heart to conquer it.
Let me not crave in anxious fear to be
saved but hope for the patience to win
my freedom.

Indian Poet Rabindranath Tagore

Visitors

Sabeel is amazed and thrilled at the courage of delegations and groups who persist in showing solidarity despite the deteriorating situation in the country.

On July 20, Sabeel hosted a reception for a delegation of Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. For several of the local invitees, it was an opportunity to express their gratitude and appreciation to Dale Bishop, the devoted familiar figure in the Middle East who had worked for peace and reconciliation among the peoples of the area. Dale is retiring from his post, but will undoubtedly keep striving for justice through his academic arena.



Sabeel also welcomed two Christian Peacemaker Teams delegations, new members of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program of the World Council of Churches, two monks from Massachusetts, a human rights delegation from Indiana, Board members of the Swedish Bilda, former Swedish Christian Study Center, and members of the Church of Sweden.

On three occasions, Sabeel took visitors on the Contemporary Way of the Cross, each time discovering newly demolished homes and fresh wounds and suffering. The last tour was conducted in Swedish!

Other

Responding to the invitation of PCUSA, The Rev. Naim Ateek will be spending four months in the USA lecturing, preaching, writing and advocating for justice.

Three new members have joined the International Department in preparation for next year's conference. Joyce Wilson from the USA and Josef Sahlberg from Sweden are volunteers, and Rhonda Amer from Jerusalem is a full-time staff member.

Sabeel is pleased that Hanna Lagerlof has come back from Sweden. It was also wonderful to have Hilary Rantisi and Paul Beran with us for a fortnight in August.

God Bless this growing family.



When large numbers of people live in abject poverty, a handful of people living in comfort and luxury amounts to a kind of violence.

Mahatma Gandhi

IFOS

S n a p s h o t s



International Friends of Sabeel supports the work of Sabeel through education, advocacy, conferences, solidarity visits, partner-to-partner projects, and financial contributions. Regional chapters have been established creating a network of friends throughout the world who work in partnership with Sabeel to help bring about a just and durable peace for Palestine and Israel.

IFOS held its annual coordinators' meeting in Boston, MA September 29- October 3. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to work more cohesively as an organization. Seventeen international coordinators and regional chapter heads participated in the week-long meeting.

and Bangor, North Wales, for his new book "Prayer is the Prophetic Theology in the 21st Century: Israel- Palestine". Three members of FOS- UK also participated in the IFOS annual meeting in Boston.



Canadian Friends of Sabeel (CFOS) has begun two new initiatives for communications with its members: a new website www.sabeel.ca and a quarterly membership newsletter to keep all Canadian members in touch with what local Canadian groups are doing and what is happening across the country. Our chair, Robert Assaly, recently returned from a solidarity visit with Sabeel. He led a group of Canadian youth who participated in a work camp in the Nablus region. In September we focused on preparations for the Boston IFOS meetings and plans for a new year of activity for CFOS.

Friends of Sabeel- US (FOS-US) held a national conference in Portland, Oregon, entitled "Laboring for Justice in Palestine and Israel". The conference was co-sponsored by 32 different organizations, which illustrates the tremendous interest and support of such initiatives. FOS-US is also planning a tour for religious leaders and human rights activists on November 16-21 entitled "Holy Land Solidarity Tour", which includes visiting the Christian sites, meeting with religious leaders, and Palestinian and Jewish human rights groups. The aim is to learn how people in the US can express support for a nonviolent cooperative approach to building a just and lasting peace.



Friends of Sabeel-UK celebrated its one year anniversary of the opening of their new office in Liverpool on September 19th. Rev. Garth Hewitt performed selections from his new CD "Toward the Dawn" and the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, the Rt. Rev. James Jones, was also on hand to enjoy an evening of Palestinian food, crafts and entertainment. FOS-UK is also hosting Jewish theologian, Marc Ellis, on a promotional tour to Liverpool, London, Manchester, Bradford



Friends of Sabeel- Ireland discussed and amended the new FOS-Ireland brochure at their last meeting. They also decided to set up a separate e-mail, continued to work on getting charitable status, and discussed a possible constitution. FOS- Ireland wants to have Palestinian embroidery and other local crafts to sell at Christmas sales.



Friends of Sabeel- Australia (FOS- OZ) has been given charitable status and is working diligently on increasing membership and identifying people who may be interested in setting up regional chapters. Please contact Ray Barraclough, (whose information can be found on the back cover of the Cornerstone) if you would like to help in these efforts. FOS-OZ are also arranging a public meeting on the evening of Friday, November 21, to express support for Palestinian Christians at St Andrew's Anglican Church in Lutwyche. The program includes a video, produced by the World Council of Churches, entitled "Ending the Occupation- Voices for a Just Peace". The focus is on "the road map for peace". For further information contact Ray Barraclough.

Friends of Sabeel- Scandinavia (FOS- S) is busy recruiting and educating people for the World Council of Churches' "Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel" (EAPPI). They also participated in the "Jerusalem Day", which was arranged for the 6th time, in Stockholm on October 4. Dr Göran Gunner from FOS- S gave a speech on Christian Zionism, and Bishop Munib Younan and the Rt. Rev. Michel Sabbah from Jerusalem were special guests at the conference. FOS- S is also working on a book about life in Palestine under occupation, a joint project with the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden.

If you are interested in becoming a member of International Friends of Sabeel, please contact:

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Space is limited so register early!

Purpose Statement of Sabeel

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. *Sabeel* strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on *Friends of Sabeel* groups in your area please contact our International representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.



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