



Issue 35 - Winter 2004

PEACE

OUR GREATEST QUEST AS WE LOOK AHEAD

by *Naim Ateek*

As we stand at the beginning of 2005, we look ahead with hope and anticipation. It is good to dream of peace and to have visions of political stability in our area. The human soul longs for such things. Generally speaking, Palestinians, both Christian and Muslim, have a strong faith in God's power and providence. Our people wait on God. With every grim and depressing political analysis, many people add, "but God is able to change the situation". In other words, regardless of the way the powers connive to manipulate historical events, they cannot chart history's course. Ultimately, they do not have the upper hand. From the position of faith, it is God and not the powers who is in control, although many times it seems to be the contrary.

This means that God is actively involved in history. This is one of the foundational tenets of our faith. God has not abandoned the world. We continue to trust God's power to upset the connivance and complicity of those leaders who obstruct the way of peace. It is true that people of power have the ability to manipulate and control historical events and commit all kinds of evil, yet history has a way of foiling and upsetting their schemes sooner or later. If we believe in God as creator, then we believe that the whole creation was built on justice, goodness, and love. Moreover, there are people everywhere, religious and secular, who commit

themselves to the work of justice and peace. God is active through them and through many and varied ways to effect change for good, to redress wrongs, and to bring about peaceful solutions. As we begin the new year, it is appropriate to look ahead in faith and hope and to dream of a better future, not only for the people of Israel-Palestine and Iraq, but equally for all the people of the world who live in poverty and oppression.

In fact, faith as defined in the New Testament by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews is "to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see" (1:1). We begin 2005

with such a faith that lifts up a vision of peace for Israel-Palestine. Indeed, faith and hope originate in a view of God. If God is great, then people's faith and hope in God should also be great. In spite of the rumors of war against Syria and Iran these days, we must, therefore, continue to present a vision of a warless world and work hard for its fruition in the new year. This must be a major part of our agenda. Unfortunately, many people are not willing to be involved. They have spiritualized the Christian faith to an extent that they have shunned the work of justice. They consider such work as political and therefore taboo for the Christian. We need to reclaim this important responsibility to live and work in faith and hope.

In this regard, one can find great inspiration from the writings of the prophet Isaiah (chapters 1-39). I find some similarities between his times and ours. In the midst of great difficulties, he too was looking forward to a time of peace. One can even say that he was obsessed with the concept of peace. He could conceive and imagine it. Several hundred years before the birth of Christ,

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Isaiah (as well as Micah) articulated a vision of peace. They were able to see the futility of war and the possibility of resolving conflicts through nonviolent methods.

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; 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. (Isaiah 2:4)

What a wonderful, refreshing, and pertinent vision for our times.

Behind this vision is Isaiah's amazing view of God. God, for Isaiah is the great God of history. God wills peace and prosperity for all. It is human beings who due to greed and selfishness, arrogance and deceit, use violence and war in their lust for power and domination. Nothing much has changed in our world today. We still see world leaders who believe that through military force they can attain peace and prosperity and bring about order and security. They are poor students of history. It is impossible to control people through coercion. It might be successful for a time, but it is doomed to fail. If they are serious about peace, they must turn their swords into plowshares. They must take risks for peace.

It is important to note that Isaiah was expressing this vision at a time of political anxiety and perplexity. The Assyrian Empire was dominant in the eighth century B.C. and was threatening the whole region including Jerusalem where Isaiah was living. Isaiah was also aware of a greater danger that stemmed from the internal conditions of his own people. Religious and political corruption was pervasive in the society.

Isaiah describes poignantly some of the evils in the Jerusalemite community of his day:

How the faithful city has become a whore! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her - but now murderers! Your silver has become dross, your wine is mixed with water. Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a

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dispassionate about the possibility
of peace in our lifetime

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bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them. (1:21-23)

Isaiah was cognizant of these two threats that were capable of destroying Jerusalem; the external aggression of the Assyrians, and the internal implosion due to injustice and corruption. Both were formidable threats that could demolish the fabric of society. In the midst of such realism, low morale, anxiety, despair, and hopelessness, Isaiah articulated a vision of a great and holy God who calls people to repentance and justice, "Wash yourselves clean. Stop all this evil that I see you doing. Yes, stop doing evil and learn to do right. See that justice is done - help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights and defend widows" (1:16-17).

Moreover, he could see through the eyes of faith a community of nations capable of putting an end to war and turning its weapons of destruction into weapons of construction. Indeed, this is the nature of true faith. Faith and hope in God can be cognizant of the immediate context of life even when it is catastrophic; but its sure foundation lies in a God who is

ultimately in control of history and the author and giver of peace. It enabled Isaiah to write, "You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you" (Isaiah 26:3). At another time he can express a profound thought about the possibility of peaceful living when people do what is right. "Everywhere in the land righteousness and justice will be done. Because everyone will do what is right, there will be peace and security forever" (Isaiah 32:16-17).

In other words, Isaiah was looking forward in hope not only for the possibility of world peace, but also for peace for his own country and people. In chapter nine, he articulates a vision of the birth of a child who will bring about permanent peace.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

In chapter 11:1-9, Isaiah utters another vision of peace. The king will be filled with God's spirit, wisdom, knowledge, and the skill to govern:

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; ... The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. (Isaiah 9:3-4a, 6)

These visions constitute some of the most beautiful and profound expressions of peace in the Bible. It is important to point out that whenever peace is envisioned, justice, truth, and righteousness are essential ingredients. Yet due to the fact that the world had never experienced such an ideal, fantastic, and permanent peace, these beautiful poems of Isaiah became eschatological visions for global peace. With the passing of years, these wonderful visions were deferred to the coming of the Messiah. It was believed that they could be realized only in the messianic age.

After the death and resurrection of Christ, the Christian community believed that the messianic age had been inaugurated in the coming of Jesus the Christ (Messiah). Isaiah's visions had been fulfilled. Christ was the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." He was the royal heir of David. He was to rule with truth and justice and his kingdom would always be at peace. Since these visions of peace had never been physically and materially attained by so-called Christian nations, many Christians began to spiritualize and internalize them. They began to emphasize the inner peace that Christ gives. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (John 14:27). "I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world" (John 16:33). This has led many Christians to detach themselves from the world and think that world peace can only be eschatological. It has even caused many Christians to become complacent and apathetic about active political involvement. They have compartmentalized faith and separated their Christian faith from public policy. Yet others have

insisted that faith in Jesus Christ and living his gospel of peace, love, mercy, nonviolence, and forgiveness can produce, to a large extent, a harmonious and peaceful society.

It is important to emphasize that biblically speaking, in both the Old and the New Testament, peace has a social connotation. It is a social concept. It has to do with human relationships. I do not want to minimize the concept of internal peace. But if the Christian concept of peace stops at that, then, according to the Bible, it has lost its most important ingredient. It has not reached its intended capacity. We must reclaim the biblical understanding of peace in the political and social spheres.

When we look at the western countries today with their technological advancement and economic and political achievements, one observes a great number of available resources to achieve peace within and among the nations of the world. Surely, we have the resources to address the problem of poverty and hunger. If a fraction of the money that is being wasted on the war in Iraq could be spent on the poor of the world, it could do miracles. Moreover, we can find negotiated solutions to most political conflicts in our world today. We can bring about a good measure of peace and prosperity to billions of people around the globe. We only need to curb our ravenous appetite for power and domination. We need to live more modestly so that we can raise the standard of living of other people. We need to expand our understanding of the biblical words, "Love your neighbor as yourself." It must mean more than the good of our next door neighbors or our own country

and its citizens. It must mean more than having enough food for our people while we watch millions go to bed hungry. It must mean more than enjoying freedom and liberty while millions live under occupation, oppression, and injustice. We need the moral and spiritual will. We need also the political will. Our challenge to people of power everywhere is to commit themselves to adhere to international law and to enforce justice and fairness for all.

As we begin 2005, we cannot be indifferent or dispassionate about the possibility of peace in our lifetime. It is possible not only to imagine a warless world but to achieve it. It is possible to find an equitable and just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It must be possible for Israel to implement United Nations' resolutions and withdraw from all the occupied territories. It must be possible for Israel and the Palestinians to share their city, Jerusalem. By doing so, Israel will enhance its security rather than threaten it. Israelis and Palestinians can

“ “ we must, therefore,
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live in peace as neighbors. It only takes political will on the part of our leaders to enforce international law. But before the political will, our leaders must have the vision of peace. Isaiah offers it to all of us. Isaiah's world did not have the resources that we have today. We can achieve much. Dare we rise to the challenge?

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Resilient in Bethlehem

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" — which means, "God with us."

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

MT 1:20-25 (NIV)

The Christian community in Bethlehem has, against all odds, celebrated the birth of Christ this year with a determined sense of hope and enthusiasm. The streets around the Church of the Nativity that witnessed great damage and pain in the last few years were repaired renovated and moderately (due to the death of President Yaser Arafat) decorated with ornaments shining against the darkness of the harsh political realities. As contemporary Bethlehemites celebrated, you would see on their streets live Santas - not as fat as the ones you see elsewhere in the world - ringing bells and giving out holiday treats. Christmas was a time of celebration in Bethlehem regardless of the newly built eight meter high wall that encircles the city and its surrounding suburbs, cutting it off from her sister Jerusalem (6 miles away) and the rest of the world. The choirs of Bethlehem and visiting choirs sang as usual the carols of angels, shepherds, wise men

By Alex Awad

and of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus despite the choking economic conditions that drained the financial strength of the city in the last four years. They proclaimed 'Peace on Earth and goodwill towards humankind' in the face of current conflict, unrest and national imprisonment. Bells on top of the Church of the Nativity rang the Christmas anthems calling the faithful to come and adore Emanuel. The high wall did not hinder these Christmas chimes but with the speed of light, via satellite, their echo reached the homes of the faithful throughout the world.

The resiliency of the Christian community in and around Bethlehem reflects the devotion of men and women whom God called to participate in the first advent. Take, for example, the true life story of a professor at Bethlehem Bible College. He leaves his home near Ramallah at 6 AM daily to make his way to Bethlehem. His journey of 1-2 hours takes him through numerous checkpoints, roadblocks and dangerous conditions. He travels on foot and by public transportation when available; he is frequently stopped and he and the passengers on the bus interrogated. On one occasion a rubber bullet (rubber-coated steel) from a soldier's gun pierced the window of the taxi in which he was traveling and entered his knee. Nevertheless he is determined to make it to Bethlehem to carry out the ministry God called him to do. He shows up faithfully with a big smile and encourages his students, most of whom are prevented from leaving the city of Bethlehem. Nothing deters this professor and three others who come from Ramallah from

fulfilling their mission in Bethlehem. Such were the faithful saints of first advent as they waited on the promise of God. They did not allow the Herods and the Caesars of their political world to dampen their spirits or to hinder their search for the newborn King. Resilient Joseph traveled the harsh terrain from Nazareth to Bethlehem refusing to turn his back on Mary while enduring the possibility of being accused of a scandal. The three wise men, after failing to find the promised child, could have turned home frustrated and disheartened but they resolved to keep searching until they found the star that led them to the manger where the Savior of humanity was born.

In their steadfastness and resiliency the Christians in Bethlehem have declared to the world that although they are physically under perpetual siege yet no power on earth can incarcerate their spirit. That spirit of hope, faith and love continues to sustain them as they face cruel injustices. As we start our journey into the uncertainties of the New Year, we can take heart when we reflect on the attitudes of the saints of the first advent and contemporary citizens of Bethlehem. Empowered by the Spirit of God, we too can resolutely take a stand with those seeking peace on earth and goodwill to all of God's people.

The Rev. Alex Awad is United Methodist Mission personnel and serves as pastor of East Jerusalem Baptist Church and Dean of Students at Bethelhem Bible College.

SABEEL'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2004

THE DEFIANT SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

On behalf of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center-Board and Staff - I would like to send to all of our friends, local and international, our sincere Christmas greetings. I would also like to express our heartfelt gratitude for all the support that our friends give us.

May the Joy, Peace, and Love of Christmas Remain with You Throughout the New Year.

Some of our people ask how can we celebrate Christmas with all the closures and checkpoints, with all the injustice and oppression, with all the violations of human rights, with the presence of a wall that separates families and friends, and a multitude of hardships that the occupation imposes to make people's lives miserable, how can we speak of love, peace and joy when most of our people and millions of others around the world do not experience liberty and peace?

The questions are legitimate. Yet Christmas and New Year must be a time of renewal, of hope and anticipation, of determination and zeal to work for a better world where people can experience these essential qualities of life. Therefore, wherever empire exists and the powers that be are in control through domination, there is a greater responsibility for all of us to take a stand against all that dehumanizes people and to work for their liberation.

The Christmas story is a story of a liberating God who comes to join an oppressed people in the work of liberation. God's message through the angels is a

message of defiance. In spite of the presence of empire, human arrogance, and oppression, God is announcing peace and goodwill. This is God's agenda. Glory belongs to God and not to the emperor nor to the powers. Once that is genuinely acknowledged, peace is not far away.

It is in the midst of the Roman occupation that the Incarnation took place; it is in spite of the occupation that Mary and Joseph found joy and love in the birth of Jesus; it is in spite of the occupation and in the midst of economic hardships that the shepherds came to visit a family of modest means and discovered great joy and peace; it is in spite of the occupation that the Magi came to offer their gifts to the child.

We celebrate in the midst of the occupation and in spite of it. Through our celebration we defy the occupation; we defy the injustice; we defy the oppressors; we defy the powers.

They do not possess the last word, they can build high walls, but they cannot take away our hope, they can put us in jail, but they cannot take away our joy, they can prevent us from visiting family, but they cannot take away our love, they can stop us at checkpoints and impose all kinds of restrictions, but they cannot take away our pursuit of freedom and liberation, they can prevent us from going to Bethlehem, but they cannot prevent the spirit of Bethlehem from reaching us, they can treat us as nonhumans, but they cannot crush our spirit nor can they take away our God-given human worth and dignity, they can

act with hate and disgust but, by the grace of God, we can always refuse to stoop to the level of hate and maintain our love of God and neighbor that includes them.

Therefore Christmas makes us defiant. We defy the evildoers because we believe in the goodness which they are capable of doing, we defy hate because we believe in the power of love and forgiveness, we defy despair because we believe in life and hope, we defy violence and terror - both state and individual - because we believe in the power of peace and nonviolence, we defy war and the occupation of other people's lands because we believe in the power of peaceful methods based on international law and legitimacy, we defy and challenge those who humiliate and degrade others because we believe in the dignity of every human being.

The Incarnation took place when God took on our humanity, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This happened in Palestine under Roman occupation. Then as now and in spite of all the hardships, we celebrate Christ's birth, Emmanuel, God with us, giving us hope, joy, peace, and love.

We are defiant. We are full of hope. We will continue to work for peace through justice.

Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth Peace.

Naim Ateek
Sabeel, Jerusalem
December 14, 2004
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PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS

AND A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF PALESTINIAN SOCIETY

by *Bernard Sabella*

The major challenge today to Palestinian Christians and in fact to all Palestinians is one that revolves around "What Kind of Society Do We All Want?" Some would argue that it is not possible to engage in developing a clear vision while Israeli occupation continues. I differ on this; we need to develop this vision in particular because there is Israeli occupation. Working towards ending occupation and developing a Palestinian vision can and should work together.

There are some who expect us Palestinian Christians to be different than our Moslem compatriots on the subject of the Israeli occupation. We must understand that Palestinian Christians are an integral part of their society and hence they have many of the same opinions as their compatriots. Accordingly, ending the occupation is a principle to which Palestinian Christians subscribe. The negative effects of Israeli occupation have touched all of us and have made us into a traumatized, distressed and hurt people.

Palestinian Christians do speak out and do express their differences on matters such as suicide bombings or "martyrs" but we always do it with respect to the sensitivities of our compatriots. Likewise, Moslems show sensitivity to our concerns. My Moslem students at Bethlehem University always describe Islam as being tolerant and accepting of others. Certainly Christians, primarily secularists in political and social matters, would like to see that secular nationalism be the order of the day and the core of the Palestinian vision for the future. This is one of the reasons why Christian youth tend to be found in Palestinian political organizations of the center, Fateh, and the left of center, such as People's Party, Popular Front and Democratic Front. We as Palestinian Christians do convey the message that politicizing Islam leaves us with an uneasy feeling because we feel that we are left out

when the stress is on Islam as an organizing political and social religion. Our bonds with our Moslem compatriots were always bonds of nationalism and when they stress bonds of religion, this poses a problem to us on identity, future and also on vision of the society. Not that we do not want them to practice their religion and live out its principles and guidelines but we also want them to be aware of our presence and of our feeling as an integral part of the society that should not be left out because of religion.

The Church also has an important role to play in the Holy Land. This land is not simply the place of roots, it is also the place where indigenous Christians live as citizens whether in Palestine, Jordan or Israel. This was beautifully pointed out in the Statement issued by Heads of Churches on Jerusalem as the Place of Roots issued in November 1994. Accordingly, and in spite of their small numbers, Christians of the Holy Land have as much right as any other group to make an input into the process of peace-making and eventual reconciliation. In fact, the Christian dimension in the present conflict is important as a reminder to those who reduce the conflict to religion, on the Jewish and Moslem sides, that the conflict and its solution is not strictly a religious question but a political and nationalist question. The Church, therefore, is called upon to emphasize the Christian dimension and to remind all that our

presence here is not simply a question of numbers but rather a rich heritage of history and belonging to the land where Christianity first started. The international Church represented by the illustrious bishops and spiritual leaders present here is called upon to back the local Church in its effort at affirming the Christian role in the Holy Land. The support is both concrete and spiritual. In concrete terms, the preoccupation is to help Christian Palestinians help themselves and in this way to give an added incentive to stay put in this place of roots. On spiritual support, it is always uplifting to us when we see bishops and clergy of the Universal Church in contact and partnership with our Local Church and its leaders. This gives us hope that the Universal Church cares and that it wants all of us to live peaceful lives in our society and with our neighbors. The Church is also called upon to encourage all kinds of contacts and exchanges among the different nationalities and faiths that make up this blessed part of our world. This is not simply to say that dialogue is important but the more Israelis, Palestinians, Moslems, Jews and Christians come together the more the likelihood of developing a common vision for the future of all in this land becomes a possibility. The Universal and Local Church cannot turn its back on this, and we as faithful have to be committed to this as well.

Peacemaking needs courage on all sides. The Church is also called to be courageous in trying to impress on both sides and other concerned parties the need for making peace based on justice and on finding a fair and honorable solution for all. This is a difficult task but as military personnel continue to insist that their military machines, toys, planes and strategies are best in protecting and defending their countries, the Church and other peacemakers, irrespective of religious or other background, should keep insisting that the best protection is not military might but making an honorable and just peace with your neighbors. With peace all will come out winners; with war the gains and joys of the victor will only fuel the hurt and vicious cycles of violence of the loser.

FALSE OPTIMISM

By Jonathan Kuttab

The media is full of reports of the warming of the peace between Egypt and Israel, and of new initiatives to establish normal relations between the Arab countries and Israel. An Israeli spy, Azzam Azzam, incarcerated in Egypt for seven years, was suddenly released, and high-level delegations are visiting the Palestinian leadership again talking of a possible peace conference in London. The upcoming elections for President are likely to go smoothly and to provide Abu Mazen, the projected winner, with sufficient legitimacy to resume negotiations with Israel. Even Hamas is talking about a long term truce, or ceasefire, provided the other side ceases its targeted assassinations, and incursions into population centers. Everyone seems to be trying to project a positive optimistic outlook.

Far be it from me to stifle this much needed optimism. And surely, the ingredients of a reasonably fair settlement are well known to all parties, and within reach. Such a peaceful settlement, along the lines of a two-state solution are not only reasonable and fair, but ultimately in the best interests of all parties concerned, including the long-term interest of Israel itself. One can also cogently argue that there is an inevitability to such a solution that will impose itself despite the shrill objections of short-sighted politicians and radical ideologues from all sides. Therefore, it would seem, there is a basic justification for being optimistic.

Yet I cannot share the current optimism:

One reason is that much of this optimism is based on the false premise that the late Yasser Arafat was the obstacle to a negotiated peace, and that his disappearance from the scene removes the basic obstacle. The late Arafat had many faults, yet he courageously pursued a strategic turn towards peace, and invested much effort in that direction, when such a course was not very popular. He enjoyed popularity in the media and the West as long as he was perceived as going along with their interests, but when he refused to accept their terms, he was again vilified. His demonization, and the attempts to circumvent him and to ignore him were always transparent alibis by those who wished to avoid the Cause which he represented, and who did not want to address the real

The air is filled these days with a general optimism. Following the death of Yasser Arafat, and the smooth transition of power to Abu Mazen, and the prospects of near elections, there is a general expectation that things will get better, that the Israelis will institute a relaxation of the restrictions on travel, that peace negotiations may start again soon, and who knows, we may be at the end of the tunnel.

obstacles to peace, namely the occupation and the settlements.

The second reason is that all the talk of peace is negated by the realities on the ground. The Apartheid Wall continues to be erected, the settlements continue to exit, and to expand, Israeli control over Palestinian lives continues to be heavy-handed and oppressive, Israeli incursions into population centers, and targeted assassinations of activists unabated, and the "easing" of restrictions talked about does not address the fundamental issue of

Israeli domination and control over the Palestinian population.

The third reason is that nothing in the statements or behavior of the state of Israel or the United States, indicates that they are setting up any different framework, or abiding by the framework of international law. All of the talk of a Palestinian state appears to come in the context of creating a subordinated truncated entity that would spare Israel the responsibility for 3 million Palestinians while continuing to dominate their water, lands and lives. The structure for the "entity" is meant to maintain the settlement blocks in an apartheid system of separation (*hafrada*) consigning and confining the non-Jewish population to enclaves of misery and ghettoization.

And finally, the parties most interested in projecting the new optimism have traditionally not been too concerned with true justice or long-lasting corrections of injustice, but have utilized genuine desire for peace to confirm and legitimize existing structures and injustices.

Therefore when we hear of a major new push to normalize relationships between the Gulf states and Israel, under the leadership of Egypt, or when we hear of renewed peace talks, or of "relaxations" in travel restrictions, or "gestures of good will by one side or another, we have the right, and even duty to be skeptical. Like all Palestinians we have learnt to look for reality, and facts on the ground, rather than to declarations and media hype.

Having said all that, however, we must not lose Hope. Hope is a spiritual quality, built on faith in the ultimate victory of good over evil, and in belief in the sovereignty of God in the affairs of men. It is this hope, and not the superficial optimism that allows us to persist in the struggle for justice, and the hope for peace.

THE WALL

By Robyn Reynolds, *olsh*

So swift it rose before our eyes
With a world nodding, condoning lies,
A culture of distance, as evil unfolds,
All grim and grey - despair untold.
A wall curtailing liberty,
A wall to foster enmity
A wall - division's guarantee
The Wall - a new catastrophe.

Insurmountable, immovable,
impenetrable, unstopplable,
A concrete, massive, ugly wall,
A poison snake crawling on,
A cancer spreading and death prolonged.
Who envisioned this monstrous force?
Who marked its way and planned its
course?
Of what construction this ghostly wall?
Who its slaves in the deadly war?

And Wall replies: O fear conceived me
And pride, greed, suspicion too,
Cruelty fed me and hate as well.
My makers had no choice to make,
Called 'traitors', 'suckers' with lives at stake
(Poor men trapped in poverty,
Work - a dreadful irony).

Why here, why there, oh fateful wall?
To terminate life, all hope forestall?
To silence, deaden, taunt and tease
All those who yearn and long for peace.

No! No! I will face you!
I'll reject you, I will name you.
Each Israeli's hand I shake,
Every tear for Moslem's sake,
Every smile and every prayer
For ex-pats, leaders, every care,
Every step through check-point's shame,
In every road-block's awful game
I won't be silent, separate, cursed
But be instead His Heart on earth.

The glaring truth we have to see
The walls we build can't set us free.
The Wall is ours, our sin, our strife,
Its crumbling death will bring new life.

Walled God here before our eyes,
Dead and buried, crucified...
Yet! God of Bethlehem! So small,
Born in a cave, in an opened wall!

*Robyn Reynolds is an Australian religious sister and was a student
at Tantur Ecumenical Institute during Fall 2004.*

SOME STATISTICS FOR 2004*

Casualties

	Injured	Killed
Palestinians	3997	810
Israelis	567	96
Internationals	20	3

Demolitions

1,611 structures were completely demolished and many more were partially demolished or damaged. Most of these structures were homes, including multi-storey apartment buildings but also included shops, water cisterns and agricultural buildings.

Land confiscation and leveling

17, 540 dunums (1 dunum = 1, 000 sq meters = 1/4 acre) of land, mostly agricultural, were either confiscated or leveled, including the uprooting of hundreds of olive and citrus trees.

*These statistics are approximate figures based on the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs(OCHA)'s monthly and weekly briefings, and cover the period 1 Jan-14 Dec 2004

"CAN'T JUST ABOUT THE SAME

"Remember those who as though you were in

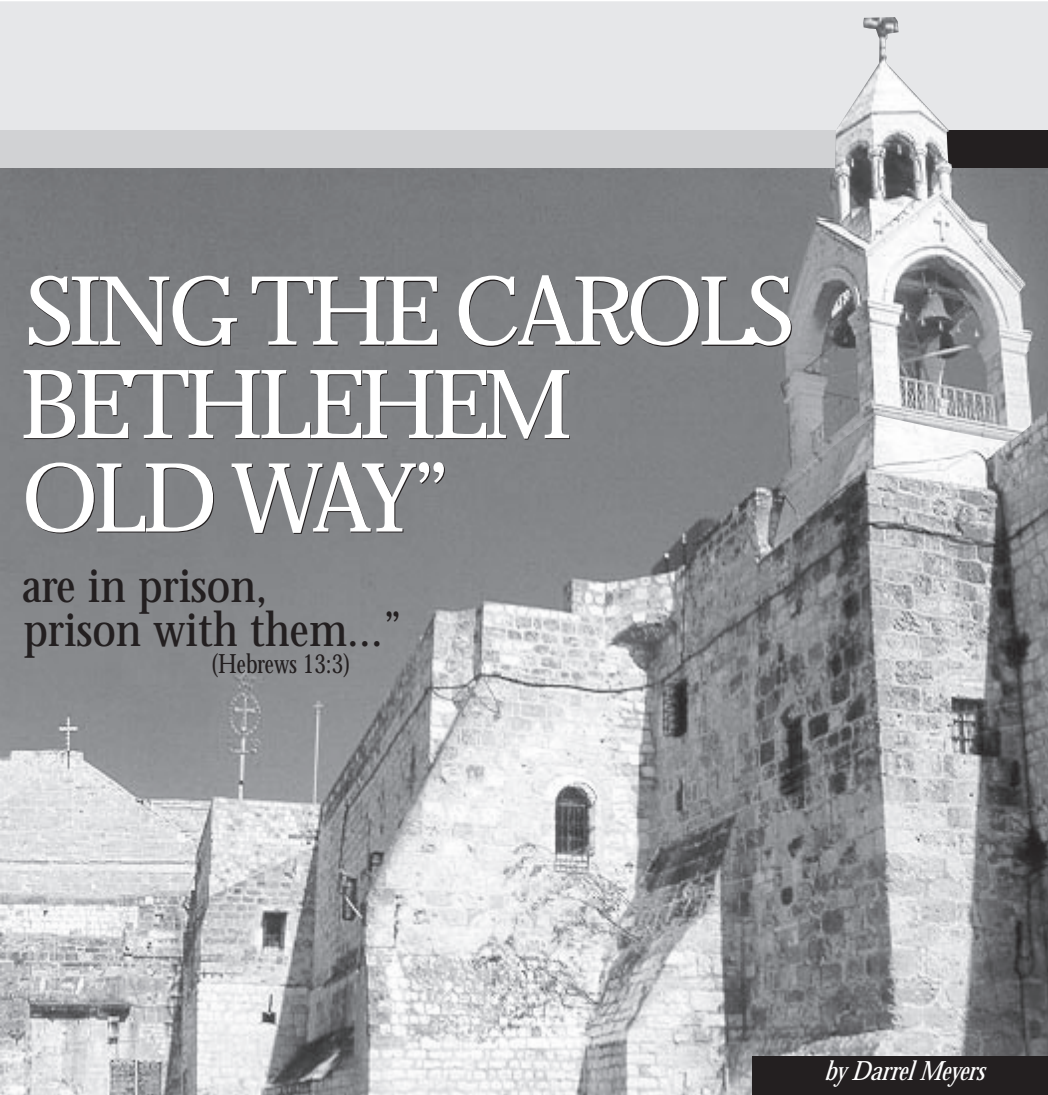


Coming back from the Sabeel-led "Witness for Peace and Justice" conference/tour a few weeks ago, I feel that we must do a verbal variation on a beloved Christmas carol this year. Since our faith is an Incarnational one I feel we must take seriously current realities on the ground that inflict massive injustice and crippling misery on a whole population. I refer today to those fellow humans who are Palestinian Christians and Muslims of Bethlehem. This season of Advent-Christmas-Epiphany I think we should be singing, and with lament: "O Walled-In Town of Bethlehem."

As our bus drove in this past November, it was disturbing enough to see the burgeoning Israeli settler colonies of Har Homa and Gilo atop the hills on the left and the right. It was disturbing enough to see hotels some of us had previously stayed in now shut down, along with shops now closed if not eradicated. But

SING THE CAROLS BETHLEHEM OLD WAY”

are in prison,
prison with them...”
(Hebrews 13:3)



by Darrel Meyers

to see this Separation Wall which is, like the colonies, being built on confiscated Palestinian land and which will totally surround the Birthplace-city of our Lord, is to witness nothing short of a crime against humanity.

We visited Dr. Mitri Raheb, pastor of the Christmas Lutheran Church. He confirmed what we were already becoming aware of: The West Bank, with the imposition of the 450 mile Wall/fence in progress, is becoming like Swiss cheese. The Israelis have the cheese, the Palestinians have the holes. Bethlehem's area of four by five miles, with its 70% unemployment rate and its like number being made destitute, is one of these 'holes.' Being encased by the Wall means that most of Bethlehem's water resources and agricultural land will be co-opted by Israel. Most archeological and tourist sites upon which so many Bethlehemites have depended for their livelihood will fall into

the occupiers' hands.

Since I've returned home I find it hard to sing, speak, or hear about Bethlehem without injecting something like, "Are you aware about what's happening to Bethlehem today? Can we simply celebrate in the same old way? People there, as throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories of West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem are appealing desperately to the world, 'Do something. We are living in a prison!'" Can the Church, can the followers of Jesus, hear this cry?

Occupation (a word U.S. media seems conspired to avoid) has become worse than ever for Christian and Muslim Palestinians. Yet, maybe there are some glimmers of hope. For instance, now the Wall has given the Occupation a face, an ugly face for the world to see. Witness, for example, the July 9th ruling of the International Court of

Justice which almost unanimously condemns the Wall and opposes the Occupation.

Another glimmer is the amazing resilience of the Palestinian people, and of the faithful, courageous witness of Palestinian Christians and churches who struggle to "promote hope in the time of pessimism," as Rev. Raheb puts it. Also to be noted is the growing number of human rights groups and NGOs around the world, including Jewish individuals and groups, who champion justice and peace for all in the Holy Land.

And then there may also be historical precedent for hope. I won't hold my breath for the current leadership to say, "Mr. Prime Minister, Tear down this Wall!" as Mr. Gorbachev was admonished years ago referring to the Berlin Wall which divided a city and a nation for nearly 30 years. But the day will come when this new Wall will fall! And when it does, and when this 37-year old Occupation ends, it will bring not only liberation to Palestinians but also, I believe, a new day of peace and future for Israelis as well.

Until then I think I'll continue, with a growing number of Christians, to speak out. I will try to identify with the New Testament call to "remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them." I will seek to be focused on Jesus "who is our peace, and in whose body the dividing wall of hostility has been broken down."

And I will continue to say, especially in this holy season: "Keep our eye on Bethlehem today! Lift up your voice for the people there! Pray for all those under occupation -and for the occupiers. Get involved to help change things!" For God came in Christ and got involved with the pains and failings, with the injustices and hopes affecting real people, bringing "release to the captives" (Luke 4:18). Including those of "O Walled-in Town of Bethlehem."

The Rev. Darrel Meyers was a participant in the November Witness for Justice and Peace Visit

BREAKING DOWN THE WALLS

Sabeel Witness for Justice and Peace Visit

November 5-12 2004

It is only when oppressed and abused people tell their stories that truth begins to be faced and seen and people can move forward from the past to the future. Unfortunately oppressors or abusers are people who exercise power over their victims; they have an interest in stopping the stories being told and tend to go to enormous lengths to do so and thus prevent people moving forward.

By Bridget Rees

One of the most striking features of this November's Witness visit for me was the interweaving stories we heard, both from people we visited, and from those who were members of the group itself. In just a week these stories from 1948 and 1967 among other things, as well as what we saw and experienced revealed the truth of much of what is going on in occupied Palestine, in occupied Syria, and in Israel, and the extent to which the truth and so many stories are suppressed.

People are increasingly discouraged from going to most of the places we visited - governments advise against travel to Israel and the occupied territories, insurers are reluctant to insure, and in Israel stories are told about how dangerous it is to go to some areas - always Palestinian ones. In this way attempts are made to prevent Palestinian stories being told. But those who do visit, as we did, find it is much easier and much less dangerous than one is led to believe. They come back inspired by the stories and the people telling them, standing up against oppression and refusing to be victims, but also depressed and angry by what they have seen and experienced, and their own feelings of powerlessness.

Visiting Hebron and walking through

those bits of the old city we were allowed in, was an amazing experience - coming up against barrier after barrier as we wove our way through the old streets, some solid and manned, others made of layers of impenetrable wire and fencing. It was unbelievable but we were there and witnessed it. We saw too both the closed shops and the desperate plight of those who, though open, had few, if any, customers. We could only get to see the site of Abraham's tomb after clambering precariously up to a roof top to look down on it - there was a Jewish feast over the time we were there so no Muslims were allowed into their mosque even though it was Ramadan. South of Hebron we visited the village of Tuwani with members of the Christian Peacemaker Team and heard stories of how settlers harassed Palestinian children on their way to school and sometimes their companions also.

The road into Ramallah was astonishing - now divided by a wall since several of us were there earlier this year. The Qalandia checkpoint, through which we walked, is much more sophisticated than before - more walls, towers, and turnstiles all making life more difficult and humiliating for Palestinians going through as if it hadn't already been difficult and humiliating enough.

Meeting Christians throughout the trip was a rich experience. On the Sunday, in Jerusalem, we split into small groups and worshipped together with Syrians, Melkites, Armenians and Latins and then had lunch with families from the churches afterwards - lots more stories. In Aboud in the West Bank, in Bi'ram in Israel and in Majdal Shams in occupied Syria, we again met Christians and heard of their experiences.

For me highlights were the visits to Bi'ram and Majdal Shams filling out the stories already heard about the events of 1948 and 1967. In Majdal Shams we met with a Christian family and lots of Muslim friends - keen to feed us even though it was Ramadan and they were fasting; and then as we visited the Shouting Hill, where Syrians come to shout to their friends and families across the valley because they are unable to visit them, we were sung and played to by a Druze in a haunting manner which brought tears to my eyes. In Bi'ram none of us will forget the story of Ibrahim Nasrallah and the Maronite Church and school as well as the ruined houses around them witnessing to what happened in just one Palestinian village in 1948.

Unfortunately we were unable to meet with the Christians in Zebabdeh who were expecting us; we were turned back at the checkpoint after sitting there for an hour and a half trying to get in - another very smart and sophisticated checkpoint geared to exclude unwanted visitors and Palestinians while Israelis can sweep through.

In addition there was Tabgha and Nazareth, Jayous and Bethlehem and evenings of discussion and talks - story after story to tell on our return. How will people know what is going on if no one tells them, and how will anyone know if they are not allowed to visit? If you haven't been recently, do go and come back with some stories and spread the word.

Bridget Rees was a participant in the November Witness for Justice and Peace Visit



REFLECTIONS ON THE U.S. ELECTION

by Richard K. Toll

Bear with me. So many people have reflected on the 2004 election for president of the United States. I'm just another voice crying in the wilderness. Bear with me and help me to reflect.

I can remember a practice drill we did in class when I was a student at Pecos Junior High in Texas in 1953 to train us how to survive a nuclear attack. In the "Duck and cover" exercise we all got under our desks. I remember looking at the top of my desk and wondering what possible protection that would give me from a nuclear blast. Fear of nuclear attack caused people to build huge bunkers stocked with enough water, food, and other supplies to allow them to survive a long time and not risk exposure to radiation outside. As time went by it became obvious that there wasn't much to be done in case of a nuclear attack, so the focus changed from surviving an attack to preventing one. Fear became a more positive thing in the 70s and 80s as more and more people began to address disarmament, to address the madness of even considering a nuclear war. I think we are still living with that madness.

One of the lessons I learned in my early years was the power that fear has. Fear can be irrational. Fear can be immobilizing. Fear can prevent action. Fear can be used and abused. It can also be a positive force if used rationally.

I relived some of my early experiences of fear during the past presidential election. The 9/11 attack set the stage for an election that centered around fear and never left the stage. It became the central part of the stage setting for both parties, so the election seems to have been decided on who was able to scare the most people into voting for them. My reflections of the 2004 election is

summarized in one word. Fear.

Again to reflect on early learnings. When I was in high school we had school presentations about the John Birch Society, which at that time was fighting communism. I discovered that I was actually more afraid of what the John Birch Society was promoting to save me from communism than I was of communism itself. The solutions they offered were learned in the McCarthy era that branded people as "communist" and destroyed their lives. I came to fear more the solutions of people with simplistic ideas and heavy hands.

As I look back on our election I am amazed how our democracy has ignored the realities, such as Iraq and the Middle East. Once again I am sensing that the shift to the right will lead us down a path we don't want to go. We have a president who admits to making no mistakes and a constituency that agrees with him, just like people who accept the inerrancy of the Bible, as if finding one saying in scripture that was not literally true would cause one's faith to crumble. That same mindset is translated into "My country right or wrong," a false principle already tested in Vietnam and found wanting.

In 1982 I made my first visit to Palestine/Israel. An echo remains for me in the voice of the Palestinian teenager from Bethlehem. He told us about his 12-year-old brother's arrest for throwing rocks at an Israeli jeep and how glad he was to meet Americans because, as he believed, "America wants to help Palestinians and will help us to get a state of our own." I've often wondered what happened to him and his family as Israel continued its policy of land confiscations, settlements, bypass

roads—all with U.S. support.

The conflict in Palestine/Israel is the most important issue in the world and it cries out for resolution. Yet in the presidential election campaign it was not even talked about. It was left out of discussion altogether by both major parties. Any discussion of the conflict always turned on blaming the Palestinians with no reference to Israeli violence whatsoever or Israel's denial of the rights of Palestinians.

It's one of the tragedies of our country at this point in history that we've allowed the deterioration of both Israel and Palestine to continue. Israel is losing its humanity and its legitimacy and Palestine is losing its land and culture.

I think that the lessons of this election are yet to be learned. The negative aspects of the campaign were extreme as was the use of fear to manipulate the American voter. Time will help us to reflect on how to proceed but it is my hope that there will be less emphasis on empire-building and more emphasis on working with other countries, especially in the Middle East. We in the U.S. fail consistently to look at history and learn from it. We seem to be repeating the same mistakes that the British empire made in the Middle East. Let's hope we stick around long enough to learn from our mistakes. One remembers hopefully the words of President Franklin Roosevelt as the depression surrounded and enfolded the country, "As Americans we have nothing to fear but fear itself." Wise words. We can learn from our past if we only stop and think about it.

The Rev. Canon Richard K. Toll is Chairman of Friends of Sabeel-North America

Snapshots of our Activities

The year 2004 is now over. The past twelve months have had their large share of suffering and difficulties, some measures of joy... and the promise of a new morrow.

For all those blessings bestowed upon Sabeel on both local and international levels, we are ever thankful to God.

PROGRAMS

COMMUNITY-BUILDING OPEN FORUM

Sabeel now holds a monthly "open forum" which, as the name suggests, deals with whatever is on the minds of the people. The forums will be targeting

the Christian community and will be held in Arabic.

IFTAR

Every year during the month of Ramadan, Sabeel holds an Iftar meal for Clergy and lay Muslims and Christians. November 4 brought together some 30

men who felt that Sabeel was rekindling the spirit of the good old days of Jerusalem.

ADVENT

"For he is our peace ...and has broken down the dividing wall." (Ephesians 2:14) A very appropriate theme for the Palestinians this year! The first of three Advent meetings was held on November 30 at the Old Age Home in Abu Dis under the stifling shadow of the 'separation wall'. However, inside the home, so well managed by the Sisters of Notre Dame des Douleurs, was cheerful and welcoming. For two hours, the seventy-five visitors socialized with some fifty elderly men and women. Later Archimandrite Atallah Hanna presented some reflections on the theme of "Hope."

The second and third meetings were held at the Sabeel center. On December 7, Dr. Sophie Ghanem from Jifna reflected on 'love' in the Advent season. Naim Ateek brought to a close the Advent season on December 14 by focusing on





'peace and joy' that can prevail only when all kinds of walls have been shattered.

CHRISTMAS DINNER

The Annual Ecumenical Christmas Dinner was held on December 16 at the Seven Arches hotel on the Mt. of Olives. It brought together 148 participants from the various churches. We were all happy to have Mordechai Vanunu join the Sabeel Christmas dinner this year.

WOMEN

"Together... We Build", Sabeel's First Ecumenical Women's Conference was held at Stella Maris- Haifa on October 15-16, 2004.

The theme was taken from 1 Corinthians 12:6 "There are different works but the same God who accomplishes all of them in everyone." 130 women from Jerusalem and Galilee spent Friday afternoon and Saturday reflecting on status of women from a religious and social viewpoint.

The sessions were led by Cedar Duaybis- secretary of the Sabeel board,

Helen Shehadeh- head of the National Society for the Visually Disabled, Ra'ida D'eem- a psychologist from Galilee and Hind Salman-consultant in Business Development and Community Building. Hind is a new member of the Sabeel Board. Ms. Ibtisaa Mualem-lawyer and pharmacist from Nazareth spoke about the position of Palestinian women inside the State of Israel, pointing out the opportunities and obstacles facing them.

There was, also, singing and small group discussions, but little time to visit Haifa, except for a brief stop over at the beautiful Baha'i Temple gardens where a group photograph was taken. The participants also enjoyed a special performance by an a capella choir "Musica Eterna" directed by Ilya Plotkin, while Victor Khristosov's photos of historical sights, Russian artistic treasures and icons were shown on screen.

Until the political situation changes and restrictions on movement are removed, Sabeel will have to be satisfied with mobile mini-conferences in different locations.

CLERGY

The clergy program has had a busy few months recently but there were two highlights. In June a group of Jerusalem clergy went to visit their colleagues in the West Bank villages of Jifna, Bir Zeit and Aboud near Ramallah. The clergy were able to share stories of life in the villages and learn more about the history of each community. They were also





pleased to be able to visit the family of clergy program member Fr. Manuel Musalam, who serves the church in Gaza and was prevented from attending his father's funeral. The group of clergy intends to continue reflecting on the Christian significance of Aboud village by studying Ibrahim Nairouz's book on the subject.

The other major event of the last few months was the annual ecumenical clergy retreat, which took place in November at the Franciscan hostel on Mt. Tabor. Father Jamal Khadder from the Latin Seminary in Beit Jala led the sessions that dealt with relations between the different churches.

YOUTH

The August trip of the thirty-five young people to Nazareth Village and Mt. Tabor was reviving and meaningful. Filled with laughter and myrth as well as deep theological thought, the youth were impressed by Sari Ateek's reflections of the transfiguration story.

The Olive Branch youth program planned for November 13 was slightly altered by the death of President Arafat. Before reflecting on the spiritual, social and political significance of the olive in Palestinian life, the youth shared their remarks about this monumental phase that could bring some change. Father Boulos Armali from the Melkite Church

and Naim Ateek guided the discussion. Another youth meeting was held in Bethlehem at the Terra Sancta School on December 3, 2004. Ghassan Andoni from Birzeit University and Father Rafiq Khoury from the Latin Patriarchate helped the 23 young participants explore their possibilities and responsibilities in shaping a future state. Both speakers, political and spiritual, stated the bleak reality of pessimistic facts on the ground but emphasized the importance of preserving the dignity of human beings who would serve God and community in hope.

NAZARETH

MARRIED COUPLES GROUP

The Married Couples Sabeel group in Nazareth was established about 2 years ago and includes couples between the ages of 35 and 45 who have school age children. We have about 20 couples, who meet to discuss issues that relate to us as Arab-Palestinian-Christians living



in Israel. We are currently meeting every three weeks to study and discuss Rev. Naim Ateek's book "Justice and only Justice".

A GIFT FROM CHILD TO CHILD
Saturday (11 December) afternoon, 80 children ages 1 through 12 years, came together to begin the Christmas celebration. The children enjoyed a puppet show, story telling and Christmas songs. This was followed by an activity of card making and gift wrapping. Each child was given the name of a child living in the occupied Palestinian territories who is unable to celebrate Christmas due to the political situation and the instability in the region. Each child decorated a card very creatively and wrote a message, and then wrapped a gift of a scarf with a hat to help keep their new friend warm. This activity brought the children into the Christmas spirit of giving, and opened their eyes to the situation of other children who are less fortunate.

WOMEN TO WOMEN FOR PEACE DELEGATION TO THE UK
Violet Khoury, Coordinator of Sabeel Nazareth, was part of a delegation of Israeli and Palestinian Women peacemakers to the UK in October. The women were invited by the British peace organization Women 2 Women 4 Peace (W2W4P), which was aimed at bringing together a diverse group of women and to help them build peace and understanding on a more personal level. At times this was hard but as Violet said at the end of the trip "we are not the same people that came on this visit. We have been changed."



VISIT TO SWEDEN

NOVEMBER 2004
RHONDA AMER
AND JANAN SIMAAN

Our visit to Sweden was eventful, and we had the chance to visit three towns: Stockholm, Göteborg and Linköping. We gave several presentations in which our main objective was to explain how it feels being Palestinian Christian youth living in Jerusalem, West Bank and Nazareth. The purpose was to show the different circumstances that we face everyday, and to show the challenges and struggles that we face living under occupation.

We pointed out the difference in the struggle of identity in Jerusalem, versus the struggle of equality in Nazareth.

We were interviewed by a local magazine, newspaper and radio station in Göteborg, and we also had the opportunity to meet with a Syrian Congregation in Stockholm, where we made a short presentation.

Although we faced many difficulties in

our journey, from security at the Israeli airport, to the extremely cold weather in Sweden, this trip was a truly great experience. We felt that we were able to help our audiences understand the difficulties we face as Christian Palestinians. Meeting two Palestinian women who have lived through the injustice helped our audience identify more with the Palestinians and also answered many of their questions regarding the situation. Our personal experiences and the pictures which we showed were more effective than the stories and news reports which they receive through the media. We thank Rev. Emanuel Furbacken for all his help and support on our trip.

October and November brought back memories of the blooming tourist season as a flow of visitors, some old friends—others larger groups of new peace builders, sailed through Sabeel in a quest for truth, expressing solidarity and support. They came from all over the world. Ecumenical Accompaniers, Christian Peace Maker delegations, students at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, participants of the Anglican Peace and Justice Network, Dutch theologians from Kerkinactie, French, Belgian and German 'pilgrims' from Pax Christi and Temoignage Chretien, fervent activists from the UK (led by the Rev. Andrew Ashdown, the Rev. Nicola Jones and the Rev. Philip North,) as well as from CMS and Palestine revisited (Linda Ramsden). Sweden and Norway were also represented and of course the USA. Fellowship for Reconciliation. It is always a pleasure to receive visitors and also partners from the Church of Scotland, Christian Aid and Danchurch Aid on their annual routine visit. The visit of the KAIROS

team members was touching since we bade farewell to Dale Hildebrand who introduced Hanadi Loubani his successor. Not to forget the Witness Visit participants in November. Sabeel is encouraged and strengthened by your commitment, witness and advocacy.

OTHER

Louise Gleich, the active and resourceful volunteer from Church Mission Society (CMS) will be leaving Sabeel in January. In the one-year that quickly flew by, Louise quietly but surely contributed her helpful expertise during the international conference, witness visits, and was instrumental in compiling valuable material for the Contemporary Way of the Cross and the Advent booklet. She will be greatly missed by our Sabeel family.



Sabeel Prayer

Merciful and loving God, we give you thanks for the many blessings you have so graciously given us. Thank you for your presence and guidance as we walk the way of peace. Bless the work of Sabeel and its friends, local and international. Guide its ecumenical, interfaith, and justice ministries. Grant us all the courage to confront oppression. Strengthen our commitment to the work of justice, peace, and reconciliation among all people and especially between Palestinians and Israelis. Help us all to see your image in each other. Empower us to stand up for truth and to respect the dignity of every human being. And to you alone be glory and honor now and forever. Amen.



A WORD OF THANKS

Many times in our busy schedule we neglect to stop and thank all of our friends for their dedication and commitment to the ministry of peace. I would like, therefore, to take this opportunity at the beginning of the New Year, to express a hearty word of thanks to all of our friends everywhere. In particular, the Jerusalem Sabeel Board - old and new members, Sabeel committee in Nazareth, the staff, and all the coordinators of Friends of Sabeel in the various areas of the world. May God grant us all health, strength, and wisdom to continue in our work of justice and peace.

Naim Ateek

2005

SABEEL INTERNATIONAL WITNESS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE VISIT

4-11 March 2005

“Be not afraid, speak out and do not keep
silence: I am with you.” Acts 18:9

PROGRAM (subject to change)

FRIDAY, MARCH 4 - AHLAN WA SAHLAN

Welcome, registration, Old City tour, opening worship

SATURDAY, MARCH 5 - BEARING WITNESS IN HEBRON AND ISRAEL

Visit to the Hebron and Beit Umar region. Meetings with Israeli peace groups.

SUNDAY, MARCH 6 - CELEBRATING OUR UNITY IN BETHLEHEM

Worship in local churches, afternoon reception with community

MONDAY, MARCH 7 - BEARING WITNESS IN RAMALLAH

Visit to the Ramallah area and Taybeh, evening lecture

TUESDAY, MARCH 8 - BEARING WITNESS IN JENIN

Visit to Jenin and Zebabdeh, overnight in Tiberias

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9 - REFLECTION IN THE GOLAN

Visit to the Golan, dinner with Sabeel Nazareth, overnight in Nazareth

THURSDAY, MARCH 10 - BEARING WITNESS IN TULKAREM

Visit to Tulkarem and Falumi

FRIDAY, MARCH 11 - SENDING FORTH

Advocacy workshops, evaluation and closing worship

*Post-visit : Optional trip to Gaza (conditions permitting).

*Additional travel and accommodation fees will apply

FEES

Full local travel package:
US\$ 800

(price includes 8 nights hotel
accommodation, all meals, registration &
transport based on double occupancy,
single supplement available)

To register contact Sabeel:

Call: (972) 2 532 7136;

Fax: (972) 2 532 7137

Email: world@sabeel.org

For prices on air travel
please contact
our local travel agent:

GUIDING STAR

Tel: (972)-2-627-3150

Fax: (972)-2-627-3147

Email:

johnny@guidingstar2.com

For more information

visit our website: www.sabeel.org

ifos Snapshots

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.



**FRIENDS OF
SABEEL
NORTH
AMERICA**

Conferences

Friends of Sabeel-North America continues to focus on regional conferences to nurture church and individual participation in our work. These events continue to evolve and each uniquely expresses the character of the local organizing group. We have a core group of outstanding presenters-which includes Naim Ateek, Don Wagner, Rosemary Ruether, Jeff Halper, Phyllis Bennis and others. We also have a growing list of Bible scholars, policy analysts, theologians, historians, authors and activists adding to the quality of these educational events. In addition, organizational co-sponsors for each conference number between 15 and 50-churches, peace and justice groups, as well as Jewish and Muslim groups-sign on to support these events through donations, volunteerism, publicity in

their respective communities, and participation as learners at the conferences. Anywhere between 200-350 people attend one event and typically each will continue to support Friends of Sabeel through donations, activism, and church work long after the conference. In this way we are cultivating this little mustardseed, Sabeel. We have found our niche in offering these excellent conferences around the U.S. to provide an opportunity to learn from our best and brightest movement leaders. Two conferences are scheduled in February 2005: Atlanta, Georgia (February 4 and 5 at Columbia Presbyterian Seminary) and Austin, Texas (February 11 and 12 at Austin Presbyterian Seminary). Details about program and registration are available at our website: www.fosna.org

Chapter Development

FOSNA has a college intern, Michelle Diamond, who is working on a chapter development handbook, using materials provided by Sabeel for International

Sabeel groups. Michelle is contacting our regional coordinators to research their needs and get their ideas for content. Michelle is a graduate student at Portland State University (Oregon) working on her Masters in Conflict Resolution. She is writing her dissertation on Christian Zionism.

New FOSNA Newsletter

Our new publication is quite different from Cornerstone. It provides our members with little tidbits of information about our activities, including conferences, actions and statements of the national churches, and leads them to important resources-books, videos, and websites. It also highlights chapter work and individual profiles. The first issue of the FOSNA newsletter in September 2004 was dedicated to the memory of Father Michael Prior.

Email Service

FOSNA has hired an email service to handle our mass email news alerts. The system is working well, saves staff time, and allows members the choice to unsubscribe if they do not wish to receive messages. The system is connected to our website so people can sign up online to receive our emails and join.

2005 Palestine Calendar

Sabeel supporter Robin Wagar of Campbell, California, has produced a beautiful 2005 Palestine: The Holy Land Calendar with great photographs and a Gift Bazaar that features Palestinian arts, crafts, books and videos. We are actively working to sell the calendars, which support Palestinian charitable groups and Friends of Sabeel. Ordering information is on our website.

Christmas Appeal 2004

Our annual Christmas appeal was mailed to 3,000 members around the country and included a Christmas greeting from Naim Ateek and a FOSNA lapel pin as

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

IFOS coordinator - Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, P.O.,
Box 49084 Jerusalem 91491, Palestine via Israel
Tel: 972.2.532.7136 Fax: 972.2.532.7137
E-mail: world@sabeel.org Website: www.sabeel.org

a Christmas gift. The appeal asks each member to give Sabeel a Gift of Friends by providing the name of someone "new" who would be interested in joining Sabeel and supporting our work with a contribution. A special mailing will go to these new friends.

Happy New Year

From Friends of Sabeel-North America to our Friends around the world: May God bless you in the New Year, give you encouragement in your work, and help you to grow the fruit of justice and peace for the Holy Land, and for the world.



FRIENDS OF SABEEL IRELAND

We in FoS Ireland send our congratulations to Sabeel on their 10th anniversary and pray God's blessing on the year ahead. We will pray for your people especially at this time, following the death of Yasser Arafat and for a peaceful procedure to elect a new leader.

We had a successful AGM in Dublin with a good attendance and a very challenging and worthwhile input from

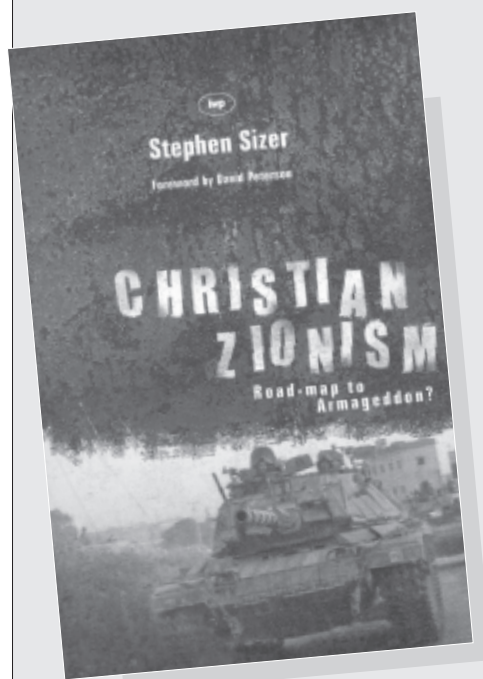
Rev Garth Hewitt of the Amos Trust who was able to give us a lot of information from his many visits to Palestine/Israel, interspersed with some of his songs. He gave a concert the following evening at a different venue in Dublin which was also greatly appreciated.

During this Advent period several of our members are active in selling crafts from Bethlehem in aid of Sabeel. This is happening around the country and we use it as an opportunity to advertise FoS Ireland.

Book Review

Christian Zionism

Road Map to Armageddon? By Stephen Sizer



Whether you were able to come to our April conference or not, this book by conference speaker and longstanding friend of Sabeel, Stephen Sizer, gives a valuable, and very readable insight into this crucial topic. Just look what people are saying about it:

"Stephen Sizer's work on Christian Zionism is the most important and comprehensive on the subject to date, and should be read by all students of the Middle East and by Christians concerned about a just resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Christian Zionism raises vital theological and political challenges that must be addressed head-on by Christians in the West, particularly evangelicals. The impact of this terribly misguided movement is increasingly putting Christians in the Middle East at risk, and it seems a far cry from the witness and message of Jesus Christ." Professor Don Wagner Professor of Religion and Middle Eastern Studies & Executive Director: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, North Park University, Chicago.

"It is very timely and ... a serious work on what is such a very troubling and troublesome issue for the Christians of the Holy Land as well as world wide." Abuna Elias Chacour (author of Blood Brothers

& We Belong to the Land).

"Stephen Sizer's doctoral thesis is a detailed and learned study of this important and influential movement." Professor Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok Centre for the Study of World Religions, University of Wales, Lampeter.

"Drawing on history, politics and theology, Stephen Sizer raises the level of strategic conversation regarding the Middle East crisis. His book will help leaders in both America and Europe generate "gamechanging" scenarios for faith to diffuse the doomsday plan created by a century of Zionism." Jay Gary at

www.christianfutures.com
(author of The Star of 2000)

Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon? is published by InterVarsity Press-UK and is available from www.ivpbooks.com, or directly from Stephen at www.sizers.org

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.



Sabeel

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