

CORNER STONE

Issue 43 - Winter 2007

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STAND FIRM...

HOLD FAST

2nd Thessalonians 2:15



by Naim Ateek

community of the land will survive. But it needs the prayers and support of our friends everywhere. We have a great responsibility to do the following things:

1. To encourage local Christians to stay in the land.
2. To nourish, strengthen, and deepen the spiritual life and moral fabric of local Christians through ecumenical faith formation, earnest pastoral care, and active involvement in service and in the ministry of justice and peacemaking.
3. To find ways to strengthen their economic standard of life by finding (and creating) meaningful employment that can help them and their families to live in dignity and comfort.
4. To support local Christians in the education of their children so that their voice would be heard and their contribution would be felt in the community at home and abroad.
5. To stay connected with our brothers and sisters who emigrated and are living abroad and encourage them to stay connected with us.

As was mentioned in the Conference, it is the quality of the Christian presence rather than the quantity that ultimately can be effective and can make a difference. The

This issue of Cornerstone is dedicated to Sabeel's 6th International Conference which was held November 2-9, 2006 on the theme of THE FORGOTTEN FAITHFUL. The conference focused on the presence of the Christian community and the challenges they are facing. Sabeel will be publishing the conference proceedings in both Arabic and English during 2007.

In this issue we are presenting some highlights of the conference that would be interesting to those who attended and informative to those who did not. Having said that, I would like to take this opportunity and thank all those who were able to come. From the evaluation

we received, participants had a wonderful experience taking part in activities that did not feature in previous Sabeel conferences. Our friends were exposed to areas of the country not visited before; and met many people in a number of villages both in the West Bank and Galilee.

I would also like to thank the members of the Board of Sabeel, the staff, and volunteers who helped us. We had 28 volunteers from 7 countries supporting us and faithfully carrying out their assigned tasks.

Indeed, by the Grace of God, the Christian

local churches represented by the Patriarchs and Bishops of the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches together with lay leaders need to formulate a vision of Christian presence in the land. This vision has to be translated into a practical strategy that can be implemented with the help of the churches locally and internationally. This is an awesome responsibility but it is essential for the viable survival of the Christian community in the Holy Land. In order to succeed, however, the churches need to work in concert and coordination to find the right resources and organizational system that can address the urgent needs of local Christians.

It has to be a partnership between Christians of the Holy Land and churches and friends abroad.

By the time this issue of Cornerstone reaches our friends, the New Year would be already in progress. The year 2007 marks 40 years of occupation of the Palestinian Territories.

ENOUGH!
JUSTICE IS OVERDUE-
THE OCCUPATION OF
PALESTINE MUST END.

The words of Paul to the Church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 13:6) come to mind. "Love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth" (TEV) May we receive renewed energy to continue the journey as we express our love in the abhorrence of the evil of injustice and oppression and in our delight in truth and justice as we diligently work for the peace and liberation of Palestine!

We wish you all God's peace and blessing.

The Rev. Naim Ateek is Director of Sabeel

CONFERENCE REPORT

*by Y. Lynn Holmes
Conference Coordinator*

I consider myself most fortunate to have had the opportunity to participate in Sabeel's Sixth International Conference which took place November 2 to 9. Although I had never attended one of Sabeel's international conferences before, I was asked to be the coordinator for this conference and to make certain that everything ran smoothly. I had visions that this might be a very difficult task, but as I got to know the wonderful Sabeel full-time staff and the volunteers who worked on an almost full-time basis and those who worked only part-time I began to realize how easy my job was going to be. What a fantastic group of staff and volunteers Dr. Naim Ateek has put together at Sabeel. I have never seen a harder working

and more dedicated group. They were always willing to do whatever job was necessary and to stay as long as it took to get the job done. Whatever work they did, was done well. The same can be said for Dr. Ateek and the Sabeel Board. Because of the fine work of the Sabeel staff and volunteers, the Sabeel Board and Dr. Ateek and his wife Maha, and of course the great group of people who attended the conference, Sabeel's Sixth International Conference was one of its most successful.

It was also successful because of what the conference was trying to do. The title of the conference was "The Forgotten Faithful: A Window into the Life and Witness of Christians in the Holy Land." The world is basically ignorant about the



Palestinian Christians and this conference attempted to remove some of the ignorance that has existed. To do this, the conference had a great many Palestinian Christians as speakers and had many papers read about Palestinian Christians. A great effort was made to have interaction between the conference participants and Palestinian Christians in the villages of the West Bank and the Galilee area. As a result, all of the conference participants went to a church service in one of the West Bank villages and visited churches and met with church members in churches in the Galilee area. At each place meals were served and much interaction and conversation took place. The meetings were genuinely enjoyed by both the conference participants and the Palestinian Christians. A total of about thirty churches in about 15 villages were visited. All of the conference participants came away with a much better understanding of the Palestinian Christians, and the Palestinian Christians left their churches believing that they had been able to give people from the West a better understanding of their situation.

The conference was likewise a success because of the great speakers, the interesting topics that were covered, the Bible studies and the worship services, as well as the wonderful local entertainment that was enjoyed by all on several occasions. There were challenging papers, like the one that Bishop Munib Younan gave on "The Role of the Church in Peacemaking"; informative papers like the one of Ghassan Khatib on "Political Analysis: Vision for Peace"; and worshipful papers like the Bible studies given by Dr. Kenneth Bailey. The



cultural entertainment by Al-Funoun, the Edward Said National Conservatory, Mawwal and Oud-En-Nadd was also fantastic. One must not forget all of the exciting and interesting panel discussions like the ones on "Strategies to End the Israeli Occupation", "The Disappearing Landscape", and "Together for Centuries". Also of great importance were special presentations made by key church leaders like Patriarch Theophilos III, Patriarch Michel Sabbah, and Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo. Of course there were also two presentations by Dr. Naim Ateek that were most enlightening and challenging. What variety; what quality, what information and what entertainment this Sixth Sabeel International Conference offered to those who participated in it.

One of the more interesting parts of the conference was that it continually traveled. In contrast to most conferences where they stay in one hotel and one conference center, the Sixth Sabeel International Conference was almost

continually on the move. The participants stayed in hotels in Jerusalem, Jericho and Nazareth, had meetings in conference centers in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Nazareth, visited villages in the West Bank and in northern Galilee and had the final worship service on the shore of the Sea of Galilee at St. Peter's Primacy. In the midst of all of this moving, no one was left behind and no luggage was lost. Although the conference began with many potential logistical nightmares, it ended with tremendous logistical success and the participants got to see much of the Holy Land as well.

Probably one of the key reasons why the conference was so successful was that the participants were such a great group. They were flexible, cooperative and happy about everything. What a pleasure it was to work with all of those that came to the conference. I really appreciated all that the participants did to make the Sixth Sabeel International Conference so successful.

I think that you can see from what I have written that those who came to the conference had a great time and those who did not come missed a wonderful opportunity to interact with Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land and to enjoy the papers, speeches, panels, worship and travels of this exceptional conference. I am so glad that I was involved in this conference and I am ready to attend another one like it in the near future. I hope that you will be there too.

Dr. Y. Lynn Holmes served as professor and university administrator with degrees in Ancient History and has published articles in the areas of religion, ancient history and the modern Middle East

Opening Speech

by Patriarch Theophilos III
Greek Orthodox Church



It is an honor as the Patriarch of Jerusalem to be amongst you this evening and to address Sabeel's 6th International Conference on the subject, "The Forgotten Faithful: A Window into the Life and Witness of Christians in the Holy Land." This Conference provides a unique opportunity to encounter the realities of Christians in the Middle East, in general, and in Israel and Palestine, in particular. Jerusalem, as the host city of the three monotheistic religions, Judaism,

Christianity and Islam, undoubtedly constitutes a window into the life and witness of Christians who are part and parcel of the sacred history, that is, the history of salvation which is inextricably associated with the history of the Holy Land, the land that has been blessed with the sacrificial blood and the burial of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Christian witness throughout the 2,000 years of Christianity in the Holy Land has been manifested in and through the very establishment by our Lord, Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Church of Jerusalem and its elevation to the well known Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The Church, as the Body of Christ, and the Christian faithful as the members of the Body of Christ, serve with and participate in the birth, the crucifixion passion and the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ who is the Head of His Body, the Head of the Church, and the leader of our life in faith. The ultimate purpose of the Church is to help us attain transformation, that is, deification or unity with God, in and through the process of healing and sanctification. Attainment of our transformation implies deliverance from our sinful human predicament which is conditioned on the emptying of oneself as Christ emptied Himself. Christian community, as a whole, and Christian churches, in particular, have been assigned an apostolic mission which is both local and ecumenical. This local and ecumenical mission aims at maintaining Christian presence in the Holy Land as well as facing challenges and aspirations, encounters with real life-political, social, economical, religious conditions and relationships between fellow [human beings] of different religious affiliations. The presence, therefore, of this international Christian gathering in Jerusalem is giving hope that the voice of the "Forgotten Faithful" is no longer the voice of one crying in the wilderness, but the way of awareness of Christian fellowship. God bless you. Thank you.

Patriarch Theophilos III was elected 14th primate of the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem in 2005.

Forgotten Christi

*by Michel Sabbah,
Latin Patriarch and Archbishop of Jerusalem*

Who are we Christians of the Holy Land? We are thirteen traditional churches: five Orthodox (Greek, Armenian, Copt, Syrian and Ethiopian), six Catholic (Roman or Latin Catholic, Greek Catholic, Maronite, Armenian, Syrian, and Chaldean), and two Protestant (Anglican and Lutheran). As churches, we all have ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the same three countries: Israel, Palestine and Jordan. In these three countries, the total number of Christians is about 400,000, half of whom live in Jordan, the other half in Palestine-Israel. A larger number of Christians, who have been emigrating from the 19th century until today, live in the Diaspora. All of them are Arabs, Palestinians or Jordanians.

Besides this basic traditional Arab Christian presence in the Holy Land (Israel, Palestine, and Jordan), there is in Israel a Christian Hebrew-speaking community, both Catholic and Protestant. To that must be added a large Russian presence which increased with successive waves of Jewish immigration to Israel. According to various estimates given by Israeli sources, non-Jewish Russians in Israel number between four or five hundred thousand people. Non-Jewish means that they are either Christians or they have Christian roots. Varied, but limited, pastoral work is carried out among this population by monasteries in Israel or by a few priests exclusively dedicated to their pastoral care. At the same time, Jewish religious organizations are very active in "Judaizing" these non-Jewish Russians.

Additionally, there is a third Christian presence in the Holy Land, an international one made up of workers and business people. It is approximately as large as the indigenous Christian presence, particularly in Israel. This paper is limited to the Arab Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land.

The reality in which we Palestinian Christians are presently living has the following characteristics:

First, we are an integral part of the Arab world and hence of the Arab and the Muslim world. We are a part of it, and we are sent to it by God. As Arab Christians in the Holy Land, we are called to be witnesses to Jesus in His land and in our Arab Muslim society as well as in the Israeli Jewish

ans of the Holy Land?



society. In order to do that, we dialogue with both Muslims and Jews. In the last few years, a Council of Religious Leaders in the Holy Land, comprising Christians, Jews and Muslims, was created. It is functioning, though very hesitatingly. Nevertheless, it is an effort that will continue because all three religions are in need of it.

Second, as Christians in the Holy Land, we live in a situation of conflict, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; we live under a military occupation imposed by the Israelis on the Palestinians and within a Palestinian resistance to this occupation which pursues both violent and non-violent means.

Within this conflict, we are at the same time Palestinians and Christians. As Palestinians and Christians, we say three complementary things. First, occupation is an injustice that must stop. Therefore, resistance to occupation is a right and a duty. Second, resistance can be violent or non-

violent. We, as Christians, call for non-violent resistance. Third, our position is based on the following fundamentally Christian and human principles: all human beings are equal in dignity before God. They all have the same rights and the same duties. No one, for religious or political reasons, should be subjugated by the other. All people have the right to live in security and to choose their own type of independent government, Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Therefore, in this conflict, we call for an end to the occupation, declaring at the same time that we care for the well-being and for the security and peace of both peoples, Israelis and Palestinians.

Are we Christian Palestinians in the Holy Land forgotten? The answer is both yes and no.

We are not forgotten by ever so many Christians who belong to various Churches around the world. Indeed, we receive a lot of attention from many

Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches. The important presence of pilgrims, in response to our frequent invitations, is a sign that we are not forgotten. Moreover, we receive many messages of solidarity from Churches all around the world, and we are morally and materially supported by the great generosity of many people and by numerous donations that allow our institutions and many of our individual Christians to keep functioning. We cannot forget, either, the advocacy conducted by the Churches, by the WCC and its accompaniment program, and by the divestment initiative adopted by some Churches, although it is strongly opposed by others despite the fact that it is an effort to limit war and bring peace and reconciliation. There is also the voice and the presence of the Holy See in Rome and of so many other churches, with a special mention of the churches of the United States and Great Britain.

Taking all this into consideration, we can say that we are not forgotten. But the fate and future of Palestinian Christians do not depend only on messages of solidarity, on generous charity, and on limited advocacy. The present and future of Christians depend on the conflict itself: the longer it continues, the more endangered is their presence. The greatest contribution that can be made to Christians in the Holy Land is to help put an end to the conflict and to ask the churches to intervene by calling for an end to the conflict. We are speaking of a contribution to reconciliation, which is the proper action for all churches. As St. Paul says: "He reconciled us to himself through Christ and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18).

The churches are called to exercise this ministry of reconciliation in the midst of this conflict here in the Holy Land between Israelis and Palestinians because the conflict is taking place here, where the holy places are located, where the roots of Christianity itself are found, and where the conflict seriously endangers the Christian presence and its future.

Despite all the signs of solidarity mentioned above, it seems that not all the churches are sufficiently aware of this ministry and of this obligation, either because of negligence or because they fear involving themselves in a conflict that concerns Judaism and the Jewish people. Christians of the Holy Land, the Land of the Redemption itself, wait for more awareness, more courage, and more concerted and decisive action on the part of the churches in order to bring reconciliation to all in this Land of the Redemption.

We are forgotten when it comes to the political leaders and to the political agendas for the region. We can say that the political agendas are indifferent to the survival or disappearance of Christians. Some political leaders have occasionally visited church authorities in Jerusalem and paid attention to their existence and concerns. Some US Congressmen, these days, show interest in our survival and believe we are endangered by our Muslim society. Others think we can be a disincarnated and purely religious community, belonging to nothing, to no place. They offer to help us, to protect us, as a special community, independent of the conflict, while the overall occupation, oppression and injustices are taking place. We say: uprooting us from our Palestinian society is not the way to help us. It is the way to kill us. We keep saying: we are human beings; we are part of our society, of those who die, of those who go to prison, and of those whose houses are demolished. All these people are part of us, and we are part of every human being, of Muslims and Jews alike. We are part of this land. We are part of the conflict because it is not a conflict between Muslims and Jews; it is a conflict about the dignity of the human person, and about human rights and freedom. Christians cannot and must not be set apart as mere spectators entitled to enjoy an "inhuman, disembodied" life, while others are paying the price of freedom by their lives or their daily suffering.

Again we say to those political leaders interested in helping Christians: you must understand that the best support you can

offer us is to get involved in the process of reconciliation between the two peoples because this is the true and real condition for our survival, and this is our vocation and our mission in this land.

Concerning this relation between the churches and ourselves, I want to add this: since our survival is in our own hands, the support that comes to us from all the other churches can truly help us.

The question of emigration, the question of our survival and of our future, involves our own re-education. It is a question of a coordinated catechesis so that all of us become equally aware of our vocation and mission in this land. This means a catechesis that teaches our faithful that a truly authentic Christian life begins with worship in the presence of God. It begins with a presence before God, a presence that sends us out from the church to our society, to the heart of the conflict. It requires that we see ourselves as partners in all of the suffering that is taking place, in all of the heavy sacrifices that are being made. This also means a catechesis that teaches all those among us who are involved in direct political activity that their actions must be intimately linked to moments of worship and of presence before God, inside or outside the church. They must not leave the church with denominational, sectarian, negative, or fanatical attitudes and behaviors, but with a love and strength similar to God's own love for all his creatures of all religions and nationalities, as well as with a more decided contribution to and sharing in all aspects of the life of our society.

For that, we need more coordination. It is true: we meet often as heads of churches in Jerusalem. We talk about our situation, but we still need a clearer agenda that takes into consideration the roots of our life and the meaning of our witness to Jesus in His land. We need to know that, though we

are a small number, we are not lost between two majorities. We have our own vocation and mission, we have our full place in our society, and we share in the general obligation to establish peace and justice within it.

Perhaps we need an ecumenical Christian synod in the Holy Land to call for deep and serious reflection to put together the mode of Christian living in this Holy Land, a mode that clearly states how we relate to each other in terms of our basic Christian commandment of love, how we relate to all our brothers and sisters of different religions here in the land, and how we relate to our Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world, as we ask them to support us in our vocation and in our mission to our own society.

What is our future? Many books have been published about us Christians in the Holy Land or in the Middle East. Almost all these studies made by westerners are pessimistic about our future. They see us as disappearing in a few generations. For them, the Christian presence is in the final stage of its struggle for survival within the Muslim Arab world.

As for us, we say: a Christian vision of the future is essentially a vision of hope, a hope based on trust in the goodness of God as well as in the basic goodness of all human beings who are God's creatures and children, "since it is in him that we live, and move, and exist" (Acts 17:28). Therefore, it is also a hope based on the daily efforts and struggles of men and women, as well as on our own efforts to foster, among all Christians in this holy and difficult land, more unity, love and faithfulness to our vocation and mission here.

With this, we will live and develop as best as we can. Some of us will leave. But those who remain will live and grow in love for each other and for all of our society.

Patriarch Michel Sabbah became the first Palestinian to serve as Latin Patriarch and Archbishop of Jerusalem, having been appointed in 1987.

REFUSAL TO BE NEGLECTED

by Jean Zaru

These are very hard days in Palestine. The settlement expansion and the construction of the wall continue unabated. International law and UN resolutions sit collecting dust. While the political landscape has changed dramatically and global powers maneuver a response, humanitarian aid and military violence against civilians is used like a playing card without regard to ordinary families struggling to secure their daily bread.

During such times as these, it is necessary to name the atrocities, to name our individual and collective pain. For it often goes unheard. Voicing it always includes risk but is nonetheless crucial, for with the cry of pain begins the formation of a counter community around an alternative perception of reality. Thus, the act of crying out and groaning is at once an act of subversion and an act of hope.

My friends, we have been working for a long time to end oppression and occupation and have, thus far, not secured our rights. It is discouraging. Fear and loss surround us, and many forces are at work to make us feel marginalized and disempowered. At best the work ahead seems overwhelming.

Without a doubt, the way of transformation calls us to stand against the forces of death and evil, both within us, and around us. It challenges us to resist the temptation simply to re-arrange the furniture, whether that re-arrangement is in the structures of our psyche, or those of our planet.

What is that inner force that drives us, that provides regeneration and perseverance to speak the truth that so desperately needs to be spoken in this moment in history? I am older, my health poor, my body fragile and yet, as do so many others, I believe that I have no choice but to bear witness to what is happening in my land, to expose the structures of violence and domination, to

bring them out into the light, and thereby undercut their power. If I deserve credit for courage, it is only for continuing the struggle under occupation on so many fronts, for remaining samida (steadfast) and, all the while, open to love of neighbor, to the beauty of the earth, and to contributing to its healing when it is violated. My friends, struggle changes us in profound ways.

For the essence of struggle is neither endurance, nor is it denial. Rather, the essence of struggle is the decision to become NEW rather than simply to become older. That is, within the essence of struggle lies the opportunity to grow either smaller or larger, to become more than what we already are or to retreat into becoming less. Indeed, the process of life itself may be found within this opportunity. In the struggle, and in this particular struggle, we cannot give up.

Resistance challenges the system's values and categories. Resistance speaks its own truth to power, and shifts the ground of struggle to its own terrain. Resistance is often thought of as negative. However, resistance is the REFUSAL TO BE NEGLECTED.

Today, Palestinians find themselves embedded in structures that neglect their humanity and human rights and only acts of resistance can transform these structures. And I, along with many others, have opted for the path of active nonviolent resistance. To resist is to be human, and yet resistance is not easy. It requires constant, hard work. Indeed, it is not easy to sustain the path of nonviolent resistance for years and years, over many issues. None of us can resist all the time, in every area of life. We must choose our battles, meaning we must choose the priorities of struggle.

But the question remains: where do we find sustenance? How are we re-energized, how are we empowered to continue to go forward

on the path of resisting structures of domination and establishing the reign of God, indeed establishing a household of life?

I believe that we continue because something is so sacred to us, so sacred that it means more than our comfort and convenience. It might be God, or the Spirit, or the sacredness of life, or Mother Earth, or equality and freedom, or human rights and human dignity. Whatever it is and whatever we call it, it CAN nurture us. To be nurtured personally empowers and sustains us as individuals. But in the struggle we need community. We need each other and we need to build together a local and global movement for peace with justice, for the struggle is one.

I have found that times of grief and anguish can actually strengthen our bonds. And now, in such times in this movement in Palestine and Israel and beyond, we need each other as never before. We need to treat each other well, to cherish and care for and support each other to become the community we imagine. Our solidarity must go deeper than we have ever known before. At its best, solidarity means strengthening our openness and communication with each other, our willingness to bring everyone to the table, our practice of direct democracy, as well as our commitment to build broad based alliances and network with like minded people.

It is now more necessary than ever to move from statements to direct non-violent action, like divesting from structures that enable the occupation. Such action gives hope to the people in the forefront of the struggle. To vocally advocate for the implementation of international law and the protection of human rights gives hope, as well.

Clearly, involvement in any just action has a price. Thus the question then becomes, "Am I ready to pay the price and share the suffering of others?" Suffering for me is bearable, if it is for the cause of liberation. For we not only move closer to liberation but within the very process itself we may find a new, beloved community with others and with God.

The full text of this speech can be found at www.sabeel.org

Opening Meditation

by Arch. Paul Sayah

The experience of Pentecost which took place in this great city of Jerusalem 2000 years ago has been, is and will always be a determining event in the life and growth of the Church of Jesus Christ. So what is the Spirit telling us 2000 years on? As I read the account of this event again three features seem to stand out before me:

1. This is an event marked by two vivid signs coming together, violent wind and fire! What a combination! All but a wishy washy, lukewarm kind of an encounter. This is "the power from on high" Promised in Lk. 24:49. She, the Spirit, (in our Maronite Syriac Tradition the Spirit is feminine) gave the Apostles "the power to express themselves AS SHE directs them."
2. This is an event marked by an ontological unity, a unity at the level of being, among the various members of that small Community of Apostles: "the same tongues as of fire separated and came to rest on the head of each one of them." This is a deeply unifying event.
3. Lastly, it is an event distinguished by the greatest diversity of the people who witnessed it, as "there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven."

This whole scenario points out to me three challenges which our Churches both here and probably all over the world are called upon to face at this particular junction of history.

First: The Challenge to Accept God's Spirit and Surrender to Him

God, the Father, in the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit, comes to each one of us

personally to challenge us, to shake us up strongly and give us new power from on high (strong wind and fire). Do I really accept to engage with Him, to enter in real communion with Him and become a part of the Holy Trinity? Do I accept to be included in the realm of the Spirit, to allow the Spirit to cry in me "Abba" Father... Dad?



I have been called to be an integral part of His household, as Saint Paul says. Am I really aware of my true identity, more still, do I dare to accept truly and fully this acceptance of my creator and Savior for me? Of course says I! Who would be such a fool as to reject such a fantastic offer?! But this fantastic offer of adoption and integration carries with it an equally special and demanding call "to speak as the Spirit gives me the power to," to be really the echo of the voice of God, to

be prophetic all the way, to say a blind and lasting "yes" to God, to His people, to life and to His creation. When Mary said her "yes" she didn't have a clue that it would lead her all the way up to the cross. Neither did the Apostles know all that was really involved in their total surrender. Incidentally, when I catch myself saying, "Oh! We are only a small minority and can't really do much," then I remember that they were only twelve initially and all of them were no great heroes by human standards. But when they accepted the Spirit, they took things seriously and surrendered to God, then the sky became the limit. Do I dare accept my new identity as a Christian, as "the Temple of the Holy Spirit" and surrender to that spirit and live by it" This is the first challenge put to every Christian by the Holy Spirit: come alive again, get up, get renewed and work with God.

Second: The Challenge to Accept the Call to Unity

The challenge to allow the spirit to unite us as Christians, as adopted daughters and sons of the same God and Father! The very same tongues of fire separated, we are told (obviously after having been one) and came to rest on the head of each one of them, the fathers of each and every believer in Jesus Christ. Every Church claims to be born from the same Spirit, the same Word of God and yet we remain divided! We all claim to be nourished and constantly renewed by the same source of life, the Eucharist, the Scriptures and the Traditions of our early Fathers, and we still fail to grow into Him and become one with Him and with each other. We dare to remain divided while we know clearly that the express will of Jesus Christ in his prayer for us is to be one. "Father may they all be one just as you Father are in me and I in you, so that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe." Our divisions are first an obstacle to our

communion with God. There is no such thing as I am OK and you are not! I am well with God but it is all still ahead of you! As long as we remain divided, each one of us bears the weight of this great sin! Furthermore, our divisions are a scandal, they are a stumbling block to the world believing in Jesus Christ. What is really at stake in our divisions is the authenticity of our fidelity to our very identity, and of course, the credibility of our witness. This is the second challenge: let each one of us repent and let all come together and be united.

Third: The Challenge of Diversity

“There were devout men (not any men!) living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven and at this sound (the violent wind and fire) they all assembled and each one was bewildered to hear the men speaking in their own language and they were amazed and astonished.” Clearly the Holy Spirit came upon each and everyone of them without distinction as to race or religion (the Holy Spirit does not allow herself to be possessed or monopolized by anyone in particular!) as we often would like to think. So overwhelming was the impact on them. Listen once again to the four verbs used: “at the sound of the Spirit they were assembled, they were bewildered, amazed and astonished.” The Spirit made them move and come together. The Spirit unites, brings people closer into dialogue and even into communion. The fruits of the Spirit, according to Saint Paul, are, as you know, nothing but a deep expression of communion, a real encounter. They are “love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, truthfulness, gentleness and self control” (how handy to keep in mind when it comes to dialogue!). No wonder each and every one of those people was touched at the very core of his or her being, so much so that they were bewildered, amazed and astonished! All those devout men (and women, I am sure as well), coming from such diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds lived such a wonderful experience of unity within diversity (and once again their religion mattered to them; they were devout people, taking things seriously). They lived such an experience, thanks to the unifying action of the Spirit of God upon them, mediated by the Apostles

from whom we have inherited “this great Ministry of Reconciliation.” Is the Spirit sufficiently present in us and alive to carry on such unifying power as they did? I need not emphasize the great need for such ministry now-a-days, as there is no country, not even a small community where several religious or ethnic groups are living, that can claim to be immune to problems! Our challenge is to be able to repeat this miracle and touch the hearts and souls of different factions, perhaps not amaze and bewilder them, but at least assemble them, bring them into dialogue and allow the Spirit to do her work. This is the third challenge put to us as individuals and to our churches as

“The future of Christianity will depend on our ability to allow the Spirit to work in us and to be free of fear and full of love”

communities: openness to diversity and work towards a ministry of reconciliation. But, of course, nobody would believe us unless as individuals we project an image of real seriousness about our own commitment to our Christian identity, and as communities, we show forth a true spirit of unity.

My Brothers and Sisters,

You have come here from all over the world to reflect with us on the future of Christianity in this Holy Land. Let me tell you something you know very well. Christianity is the

religion of the Cross and Resurrection and like her Master, the Church here has to know how to embrace the Cross, how to be aggressive in accomplishing the work of the kingdom, in witnessing to God’s love and then she will truly live. She is the grain of wheat, and unless she knows how to die, just like her Master, how to sacrifice herself in the service of all the people of this land, she will never live and prosper and yield a rich harvest. In as much as the future of Christianity in this land depends on us, it will depend on our ability to allow the Spirit to work in us and to be free of fear and full of love. Full of love in this context meaning not only to endeavor to eliminate prejudice, eradicate discrimination and abolish all injustice. . . but also to learn to celebrate ethnic and religious differences as real and precious gifts that we all exchange and treasure.

My Sisters and Brothers,

Let me conclude my reflections with these simple and straightforward words of Saint Paul to the Galatians: “Since we are living by the Spirit let our behavior be guided by the Spirit (simply, let us put our action where our mouth is!) and let us not be conceited or provocative and envious of one another.” When you come to think of it, these are really the fruits of the Spirit put in a different form. That is what I hear the Spirit saying both to us here in the Mother Church of Jerusalem and perhaps also to some of your Churches as well. But the main thing that remains for us to do now is that all those who can hear should listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. Amen.



Calling A Spade A Spade

The 1948 Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

by Ilan Pappé

For many years, the term “Nakba” - which means a human catastrophe - seemed a satisfactory term for assessing both the events of 1948 in Palestine and their impact on our lives today. I think it is time to use a different term: “The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine.” The term Nakba does not imply directly any reference to who is behind the catastrophe - anything can cause the destruction of Palestine, even the Palestinians themselves. Not so when the term ethnic cleansing is used. It implies direct accusation and reference to culprits, not only in the past but also in the present. Far more importantly, it connected policies such as the ones that destroyed Palestine in 1948 to an ideology. And when this ideology is still the basis of Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians wherever they are: the Nakba continues or more forcefully and accurately, the ethnic cleansing rages on. In this 58th commemoration of the Nakba, it is time to use openly and without hesitation the term ethnic cleansing as the best possible term for describing the expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948.

Ethnic Cleansing is a crime and those who perpetrated it are criminals. In 1948, the leadership of the Zionist movement, which became the government of Israel, committed a crime against the Palestinian people. The crime was Ethnic Cleansing. This is not a casual term but an indictment with far reaching political, legal and moral implications. Any action by one ethnic group meant to drive out another ethnic group with the purpose of transforming a mixed ethnic region into a pure one is Ethnic Cleansing. An action becomes an ethnic cleansing policy regardless of the means employed to

obtain it. Every means, from persuasion and threats, up to expulsions and mass killings justifies the attribution of the term to such policies. The above definitions and references can be found in the American State Department and United Nations websites.

The Israeli objective in 1948 was clear and was articulated without any evasions.. The goal was to take over as much as possible from the territory of Mandatory Palestine and the removal of most of the Palestinian villages and urban neighborhoods from the coveted future Jewish State. The execution was even more systematic and comprehensive than the

“the Nakba continues, or more forcefully and accurately, the ethnic cleansing rages on.”

plan anticipated. In a matter of seven months, 531 villages were destroyed and 11 urban neighborhoods emptied. The mass expulsion was accompanied by massacres, rape and imprisonment of men (defined as males above the age of ten) in labor camps for periods over a year. All these characteristics in the year of 2006 can be only attributed to an ethnic cleansing policy; namely a policy that in the UN definition aims at transforming a mixed ethnic area into a pure ethnic space, when all the means, are justified. Such a policy is defined in the international law as a crime against humanity which the US State Department believes can only be rectified by the repatriation of all the people who left, or were expelled, as a result

of the ethnic cleansing operations.

The political implication of such a statement is that Israel is exclusively blamable for the making of the Palestinian refugee problem and bears legal as well as moral responsibility for the problem. The legal implication is that even if there is obsolesce, after such a long period, for those who committed a deed which is described as a crime against humanity, the deed itself is still a crime that nobody ever was brought to justice for its perpetration. The moral implication is that indeed the Jewish State was born out of sin - like many other states of course - but the sin, or the crime, was never admitted. Worse, among certain circles in Israel it is acknowledged, but with the same breath, it is fully justified in hindsight and as a future policy against the Palestinians wherever they are.

But all these implications were totally ignored by the Israeli political elite and instead a very different lesson was derived from the 1948 events: you can, as a state, expel half of Palestine’s population, destroy half of its villages and get away with it without a scratch or criticism. The consequences of such a lesson were inevitable, the continuation of the ethnic cleansing policy by other means. There were quite known landmarks in this process, the expulsion of tens of villages between 1948 and 1956 from Israel proper; the forced transfer of 300,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and a very measured, but constant, cleansing from the Greater Jerusalem area.

As long as the political lesson is not learned, there will be no solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The issue of the refugees will repeatedly fail any attempt, successful as it may be in any other parameters, to reconcile the two



conflicting parties. This is why it is so important to recognize the 1948 events as an ethnic cleansing operation, so as to ensure that a political solution will not evade the root of the conflict; namely the expulsion of the Palestinians. Such evasions in the past are the main reason for the collapse of all the previous peace accords.

As long as the legal lesson is not learned there will always remain retributive impulses and revengeful emotions on the Palestinian side. The legal recognition of the 1948 Nakba as an act of ethnic cleansing would enable a restitutive justice. This is the process that has taken place recently in South Africa. The acknowledgement of past evils is not done in order to bring criminals to justice, but rather in order to bring the crime itself to public attention and trial. The final ruling—there will not be retributive, there will be no punishment, but rather restitutive—the victims will be compensated. The most reasonable compensation for the particular

case of the Palestinian refugees was stated clearly already in December 1948 by the UN General Assembly in its resolution 194: the unconditional return of the refugees and their families to their homeland (and homes where possible).

As long as the moral lesson is not learned, the state of Israel will continue to exist as a hostile enclave at the heart of the Arab world. It would remain the last reminder of the colonialist past that complicates not only Israeli relationship with the Palestinians, but with the Arab world as a whole. And because the moral lesson is not taken in, there is today in Israel a hindsight justification for the ethnic cleansing and a real danger for yet another attempt to bring it about.

When and how can we hope for these lessons to be learned and absorbed into the effort to bring peace and reconciliation in Palestine? First, of course, not much can

be expected to happen as long as the present brutal phase of the occupation of the West Bank continues. And yet alongside the struggle against the occupation with the positive development of the BDS option (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) being adopted as the main strategy forward by the civil society in the occupied territories and by the International Solidarity Movement—the effort to relocate the 1948 ethnic cleansing at the center of the world's attention and consciousness has to continue.

On the 58th anniversary and in preparation for the 60th anniversary we, Palestinians, Israelis and whoever cares for this land, should demand that the 1948 crime against humanity would be included in everyone's history books so as to stop the present crimes from continuing before it is too late.

Dr. Ilan Pappé, an Israeli historian, is a senior lecturer in the department of Political Science at Haifa University and the Chair of the Emil Touma Institute for Palestinian Studies in Haifa.

The Melkite Church

Upon reflection we have concluded that we did not do justice to the Melkite Church in our last Cornerstone. The Melkite Church is the largest Christian community in Israel with a membership of 78,000 in Galilee alone. We offer the following in order to clarify the importance of the Melkite Christian community in the Holy Land.

Melkites are members of the Catholic Church. Antioch was one of the first cities to become a center of the Christian faith. It was in Antioch that St. Paul started his first apostolic journey, and before Peter was in Rome, he was the head of the Church of Antioch.. One of the most important Antiocheans of the earlier church was St. John Chrysostom.

In 325 A.D. at the Council of Nicaea the patriarchates of Alexandria and Antioch were established. Like the patriarchate of Jerusalem (Council of Chalcedon 451 A.D.) Antioch was both a territorial and juridical entity. The government of the church was held by the Sees of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The bishops of these sees were given the title of Patriarch. After the capitol of the Roman empire was moved to Constantinople, that city was also elevated to a Patriarchal see (381A.D.) and given the ranking of "second only to the See of Peter" (Rome).

With the seventh century onslaught of the Islamic conquest of the Middle East, the Melkites found themselves under non-Christian domination. During most of this first Islamic period the Melkites were well treated as a "protected people, but they were frequently denied all civic and social responsibilities. When the Byzantine Empire re-conquered the Middle East, the fashions of Constantinople were incorporated into the liturgical life of the Melkite Church. Between 960 and 1085 A.D. much of the imperial style of Constantinople became a part of the Melkite ritual. Despite the now close ties to Constantinople, the Melkite peoples never broke off relations with Rome and with the Pope.

The great strain between the Melkite Church and Rome happened because of the Crusades. When the Western Catholics came into the Holy Land they did not recognize the legitimacy of the Eastern methods of worship. In the worst cases marauding Crusaders ransacked orthodox churches, and at best cases they simply installed Latin patriarchs and bishops usurping the local control of the church. By the end of the Crusades there was an estrangement between the churches, but the Melkites never actually broke off relations with Rome.

The reign of the Mamelukes from 1250 to 1516 put an end to the Western occupation of the Middle East but it also brought harsh reprisals on the Christians of Antioch. Sustained destruction of religious sites, persecutions of clergy, and massacres of faithful led to a depopulation of entire Christian communities. For at least two centuries after the Ottoman conquest in 1516, the persecutions continued unabated. The Turkish sultan wanted his capital, Constantinople, to be the religious capital of the East, so he gave the Ecumenical Patriarch complete authority over all the Melkite hierarchy. Although the Antiochean church was under the direct control of the Orthodox Church, the Melkites managed to maintain some links to Rome. Because the Melkite patriarchs were chosen from the local clergy, the church remained in union with Rome while under the direction of Constantinople. Some of the Melkite hierarchs were more disposed to Constantinople, while others favored the authority of Rome - but as "the church in the middle," the Melkites retained their allegiance to the Holy See.

In the 1600's western missionaries to the Middle East found fertile ground among the Melkites who were eager to obtain an educated clergy. Soon the Jesuits, Cappuchins, Carmelites, and Franciscans were educating and preaching the Word to a Melkite faithful starved for religious resources. In 1709 Patriarch Cyril V formally recognized the authority of the Pope of Rome as the head of the Church. Some of the Antiochean faithful looked to the West for salvation of their church, while others only saw the missionaries as outsiders who did not understand their eastern customs, ancestral laws, and had not gone through the centuries of deprivations. As a result in 1724 the church split in two. One faction under the influence of Constantinople became known at the Antiochean Orthodox, while the other group, loyal to Rome, became known at the Melkite Catholics.

Since the formal declaration of Roman/Melkite union in 1724, the Melkite Catholics have worked steady to be a "voice for the East within the Western Church." Melkite Patriarch Gregory Joseph spent his thirty-three years working for union of the Churches while striving to maintain the Eastern traditions and rituals. His was a significant voice during the deliberations of the first Vatican Council and he was an important influence on Pope Leo XIII's Orientalium Dignit. During Vatican II, it was Melkite Patriarch Maximos IV who spoke on behalf of the "absent brother", the great Orthodox Church. And so, today, the Melkite Catholics are a small but vibrant voice within the Catholic Church; a voice calling upon the dignity of the orthodox faith and praying for the unity of the church of Christ.

Across the Political and Economic Divide

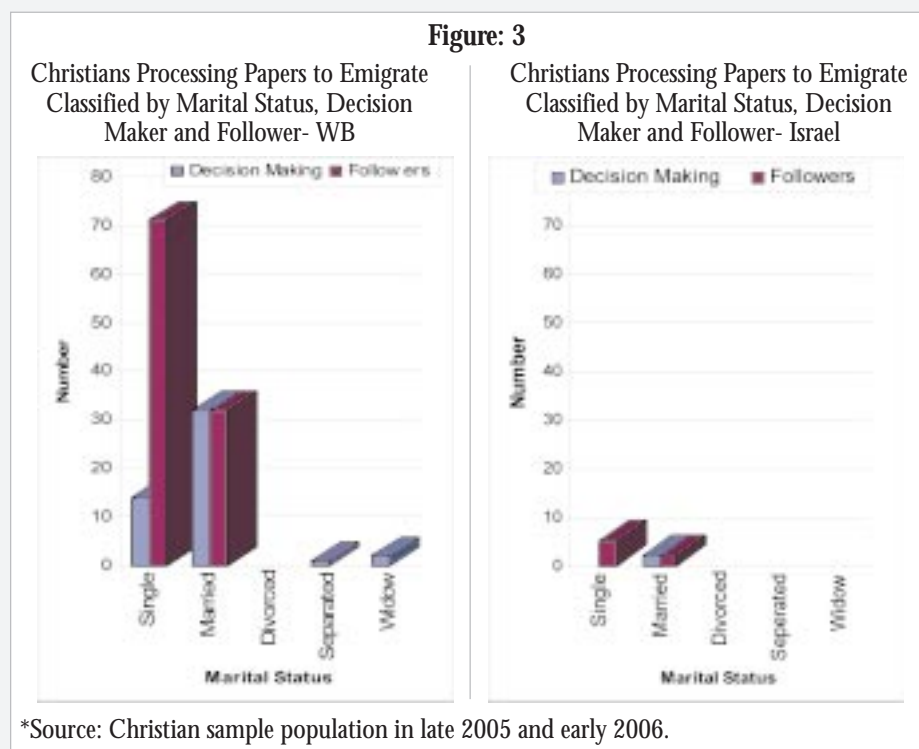
The following excerpt is from the survey conducted for Sabeel. For the full survey results, please visit our website at: www.sabeel.org.

by Romell Soudah

Little is known about the Palestinian Christian population in the Holy Land. The question of the Christian presence reflected by population size in the Holy Land has become more important than ever. The Christian population has been declining in absolute and relative terms over the years. In British mandated Palestine of 1946 Christians numbered 148,910. At present, the Christian population counts less than 160,000 in both Palestine and Israel. Several factors are responsible for this decline. The restless political situation and the accompanying depressed economic conditions are the major causes behind the declining size of the Christian population in the Holy Land.

This study is quantitative and comparative and is based on a very large sample from both the Christian population in Palestine and that in Israel. The sample of 1500 families was equally divided between the two territories and it covered Christians in urban and rural localities. It must be pointed out that the 750 families interviewed in Palestine were all from the West Bank including East Jerusalem. It was not possible, due to the political situation and other factors, to include a sample from the Gaza Strip where there is a Christian population of approximately 2,500 mostly Greek Orthodox.

The main purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to briefly show demographic,



economic, educational, and emigration data as generated by the Christian population itself; (2) to focus on emigration and its causes and the challenges confronting Palestinian Christians and their continued presence in the Holy Land.

Emigration

The most alarming factor affecting the Christian population and threatening its future existence is the steady stream of emigration. With the passage of time, more and more Christians are leaving their homeland every year. In recent years, this

stream of emigrants has increased and reached new dimensions as the causes of flight have multiplied.

The Christian community in the West Bank (WB) suffers from waves of emigration more than the Christian community in Israel. Figure 3 shows those Christians who are now processing emigration papers and waiting for host country approval.

It is clear that the size of the Christian emigration problem in the WB is far larger than that among Christians in Israel. This

Table: 15
**Persons are Processing Papers to Emigrate Classified by Marital Status,
 Decision Makers & Followers**

West Bank		Marital Status	Israel	
Followers	Decision Makers		Decision Makers	Followers
68.9%	28.6%	Single		71.4%
31.1%	65.3%	Married	100%	28.6%
	2%	Separated		
	4.1%	Widowed		
100%	100%	Total	100%	100%
67.8%	32.2%	100%	22.2%	77.8%

is due to the political and economic situation in the WB. The graph also shows that emigration among males is more than that among females. However, the graphs are marked with a sizable portion of singles as they represent the largest portion of emigrants from the WB and Israel. The most striking figures among emigrants are married persons. Married persons represent a large portion of emigrants because most of the single emigrants are their followers.

Table 15 shows percentages of the Christian sample population who are processing their papers by marital status, decision making, followers and region. The division between the principal decision maker and followers is of considerable importance in emigration analysis.

Although singles represent the largest portion and married persons represent a lower portion in the WB (as in figure 3), table 15 shows that the percentages are reversed with respect to who makes the decision and who has to follow. While singles represent only 28.6%; married (with separated and widowed) represent 71.4% of the decision makers. The followers are far more than the decision makers. Table 15 shows that while decision makers represent 32.2%, followers represent 67.8% of those who are intending to leave. Therefore,

Christian emigration from the WB is characterized by family type emigration marked with large number of followers. This is the most harmful type of emigration that has adverse effects on the whole community.

Emigration today poses a real problem to the Christian community in the WB. It is most important to point out that those who are processing papers to leave represent 4.5% of the total Christian sample population in the WB which is double the annual Christian population natural growth rate. It does not only cancel off population natural growth rate but causes a sharp decrease in population size. Christians in Israel suffer far less than Christians in the WB from emigration. Figure 3 shows a very small portion of Israeli Arab Christians who intend to leave as compared to those in the WB. This can be attributed to differences in general

living conditions between the two communities. In general, while Christians in the WB, like all other Palestinians, suffer from a wide range of Israeli oppressive measures that negatively affect every sphere of life, in Israel, Christians are conducting their lives under relatively normal conditions.

Causes of Emigration

Christians in the Holy Land have been influenced by their religious beliefs and their educational background. Palestinian Christians have become highly urbanized and more ambitious on a personal level. Their hopes and aims for a better life, better schooling, and better living conditions preoccupy their thinking.

Although the survey reveals a vast number of causes inviting and causing emigration, these causes are complex and interrelated. However, they can be classified under five reasons as shown by table 16.

For Christians in the WB, table 16 shows that a total of 44.7% of the respondents want to leave in order to find work, 42.6% want to leave because of the existing bad economic and political situation, 8.5% want to leave to join their families, and only 4.2% want to leave to work and study.

Overall, the most inviting reason to emigrate is an economic one. Those who are leaving in order to work and those who are leaving because of the bad economic and political situation represent 87.3% of the total respondents. This is not surprising. The WB economy, during the

Table: 16
Causes of Emigration

West Bank	Reason	Israel
44.7%	To Work	
42.6%	Bad Economic and Political Situation	
	Living Conditions	100%
8.5%	To Join Family	
4.2%	To Work and Study	

past three decades, has experienced poor performance, absence of economic confidence, and high uncertainty. Therefore, the lack of job security and opportunity, associated with the high cost of living, has pushed many Christians to emigrate in search of a better life and economic opportunities.

Christian emigration is highly influenced by political factors. Considering that the political situation in the area is marked with spiraling conflict and instability, this cannot but be a pressuring and pushing factor encouraging emigration. Israeli drastic measures against the Palestinians affect and touch every sphere of life in a most negative manner. Christians, as Palestinian Arabs, have suffered as a consequence. Many individuals and families voluntarily emigrate in search of freedom and security as well as to ensure income and a secure future for their children.

Although emigration is a normal process among all nations, Christian emigration from the Holy Land is a unique one. It has its own special causes and different consequences. Emigration for such a small Christian community represents one of the major constraints: retarding its population growth and threatening its future existence. In fact, it continues to increase the fear and worry of many remaining Christians about their future prospects and development.

Now is the time for the Christian churches to act in order to reduce emigration and eliminate its effects. Churches must act and do everything possible before holy places become mere monuments. There is still time to overcome this problem but not much time before the population reaches its irreversible size.

Economic and Welfare Inequities

The survey indicates that the similarities are far greater than the differences between the two Christian communities in the WB and Israel. Although their population structure, education and labor force indicators are the same, their



welfare and emigration patterns are different. Christian welfare in the West Bank is far less than that in Israel and the problem of Christian emigration is far greater in the WB than that in Israel. Several factors such as social, economic, educational, and political conditions are responsible for this but the most determining factor for welfare and emigration is the political one.

Like all Palestinians, Christians in the WB are living under occupation with serious human rights infractions by Israel. The confiscation of Palestinian land particularly took a sizable portion of Christian private property in the Bethlehem area where 50% of Christians in the WB live, thus making many of those who depend on the land to think seriously of emigration.

The Separation Wall has also cut off the Bethlehem area from its vital connection with Jerusalem, as well as with other Palestinian areas. As a consequence, people become separated from their families and loved ones, from work and from essential needed facilities such as health centers, schools and universities. It creates a new harsh environment of ghettoization for Christians living in the Bethlehem area in

particular and for other Palestinians as well.

To conclude, the continuous confiscation of land, military roadblocks and the separation wall coupled with restrictions on mobility and access give the impression that people are living in a cage, dehumanized, with little hope for freedom and normal living. This situation really affects the core of the Christian community in Palestine and is the primary factor for forcing Christian Palestinians to leave.

Conclusion

The study shows that the indicators of Christian values and preferences with respect to population structure, education, labor force, and life style are very much similar in both Christian communities in the WB and Israel. The differences between them resulted from being two distinct economies and two different political situations. Christians in the WB live in an abnormal economic and political situation marked with a ruined economy and an unstable political environment. In Israel, Christians live in a relatively normal economic and political situation marked with an advanced economy and stability in the political situation and judicial and governmental institutions.



CONFERENCE STATEMENT

November 2-9, 2006

Sabeel's 6th International Conference was held November 2-9, 2006 under the theme of "THE FORGOTTEN FAITHFUL-A Window into the Life and Witness of Christians in the Holy Land". Meetings were held in various venues starting in Jerusalem and including Bethlehem, Jericho, Ramallah, and Nazareth. It was a truly ecumenical experience. The cumulative number of international and local participants in the different settings was more than 500. Approximately 200 people from 29 countries came from abroad.

Most of the speakers were local Palestinian Christians. The Orthodox Patriarch gave the initial greetings at the opening celebration and the Latin Patriarch gave a presentation on the topic of "Palestinian Christianity: The Challenges and the Vision for the Future." In addition, Archbishops and Bishops from the Orthodox, Armenian, Coptic, Syrian, Latin, Maronite, Anglican, and Lutheran

churches addressed the conference. The conference also included prayers, songs, and chants from the various church traditions presented by clergy, church choirs, and soloists.

In addition to the 40 lectures given during the conference, there were special greetings given by the Governor of Jericho and the Mayors of Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nazareth. Furthermore, the participants worshiped in and visited 32 churches in 13 villages and came in contact with more than 50 clergy of the various church denominations in the different towns and villages. They experienced fellowship with their local sisters and brothers and had a taste of Palestinian hospitality in the meals they shared. In both Ramallah and Nazareth special cultural events were presented by young local musicians and performers who are keeping Palestinian arts alive and vibrant.

An important feature of the conference was

the presentation of a survey of the Christians of the Holy Land conducted specially for Sabeel. The survey covered the areas of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as Israel. Due to political instability in Gaza, it was impossible to complete the survey there. Various aspects of the survey were analyzed by a team of professors from the Bethlehem University.

Two highlights of the conference were the opening lecture by Christian Qur'anic scholar Dr. Kenneth Cragg and the series of Bible studies presented by Dr. Kenneth Bailey in which he examined three parables in light of their cultural context and their meaning today.

Special mention must be made of the opening celebration of the conference in which the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III welcomed and greeted the participants. A message from the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, was

read. Through power point, music, song, and dance, the opening celebration reminded the participants of the origins of the Christian Faith. It emphasized the death and resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Through the power of the Spirit, the Church came into being and the Gospel of freedom and love was spread from Jerusalem to the various parts of the world.

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

1. The Palestinian Christians are the descendants of the first community of believers who loved, believed in, and followed Jesus Christ. From the beginning they were a mixture of many ethnic and racial groups but all became members of the One Body of Christ, the Church.
2. In spite of the vicissitudes of history, they have maintained their faith in Christ during the last 2000 years amidst excruciating circumstances and in spite of the religious and political upheavals. Yet they have preserved the beautiful mosaic of their rich liturgical traditions and continue to bear witness. In order to strengthen the Christian presence and witness, it is mandatory, therefore, for Palestinian Christians to work together ecumenically. The hierarchies of the churches have a great responsibility to rise above denominationalism and commit themselves to nourishing closer bonds of love and acceptance among themselves.
3. Due to political and economic instability, many Palestinian Christians have been emigrating to the West. Internal as well as external factors have undermined their presence. Those who are in the Holy Land today make up less than 2% of the population.
4. Palestinian Christians are an integral part of the Palestinian people. They share the same aspirations and destiny as their Muslim sisters and brothers. All Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been living under an illegal Israeli occupation for almost 40 years. With many peace-loving people from around the world, whether faith-based or

secular, Muslims and Christians continue to work for the end of the Israeli occupation and the establishment of a viable, independent and sovereign state in Palestine.

5. The Israeli Arab community - Christian and Muslim - continues to struggle for total equality with its Jewish counterpart. The obstacle, however, is the nature of the state of Israel. It is a Jewish state and not a state for all its citizens. Therefore, the struggle will continue until total equality is achieved.
6. Participants also observed the daily suffering of Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and were acutely aware of the plight of Gazans,

“The Palestinian Christians are the descendants of the first community of believers who loved, believed in, and followed Jesus Christ.”

about 80 of whom (half of them civilians) were killed during the week of the conference. Conference participants were shocked by news of the Israeli army attack on an apartment building in Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip that resulted in the deaths of 19 civilians, primarily women and children. Moreover, during the conference day in Bethlehem, participants were unable to visit the Church of Nativity or to view the Wall in central Bethlehem because of funerals being held for two Palestinians who had been killed and had their family homes demolished by the Israeli army. Special prayers were raised for the victims and their families.

7. It was clear to participants that Palestinians and Israelis - Christians, Muslims, and Jews can live together in peace. The greatest obstacle to genuine reconciliation, however, stems from Israel's refusal to accept Palestinian rights

to a state of their own within the 1967 borders, i.e. all of the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. The conference called for strong response against the Israeli government policies of confiscation of Palestinian land in the West Bank, building and expanding of settlements, the presence of hundreds of checkpoints, and the building of the segregation Wall which separates Palestinians from Palestinians and takes their land and water. All these measures are eroding the possibility of the two state solution to the conflict.

8. Such obstacles to peace must be actively resisted both locally and internationally through nonviolent methods like boycotts and Morally Responsible Investment. Moreover, international sanctions that make life untenable for people in the occupied territories must be immediately lifted.
9. Palestinian Christians have a mandate from Christ to be salt of the earth and light of the world. They have a vocation to remain in the land and maintain a prophetic voice for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

The conference ended on the shores of the Sea of Galilee with a Communion Service and the commissioning of the participants to commit themselves to strive for peace with justice. Sabeel calls on all our friends:

1. To establish bonds of fellowship with Palestinian Christians and to stand in solidarity with all Palestinians in their struggle for liberation.
2. To commit themselves to active prayer, education, and advocacy on behalf of the Palestinian people
3. To campaign for truth and justice with the energy and consistency of an ever-flowing stream
4. To work without ceasing to bring healing and reconciliation to all people with God's joy and peace in their hearts, especially to the people of the land where the first message of peace was proclaimed.

Sabeel, Jerusalem
November 15, 2006

“My life will not be the same as a result of these encounters.”

Participant Evaluation

Worked amazingly well given all the things that could go wrong! Staff and volunteers seemed very much a well-coordinated team. Communication sometimes slipped, I noticed, but for a long and complicated conference you all were very together- thanks

The speakers were well chosen. They articulated the issues well. Topics chosen were most appropriate. Unfortunately few women were actual speakers. I understand that certain people had to be asked due to their roles.

Kenneth Bailey and Ilan Pappé were exceptional. Would have hoped for more input from Israeli perspective and how that analysis impacts on the Forgotten Faithful. Needed more sense of urgency.

I feel there are many more women who could have shared with us as speakers. The women moderators were all excellent, I thought, as were the few women presenters

The facilities were very good and the hospitality helpful. A hot shower in Nazareth would have been appreciated.

We were welcomed with hospitality beyond imagination. I would like more contact with people in villages and in homes.

To visit Palestinian Christians and worship with them in their villages and see their situation and try and understand their everyday difficulties was a privilege and very humbling.

Village Visits were very moving, informative; important Sabeel outreach, which I hope will be followed up locally.

The final worship was very meaningful-to have communion at the sea where Jesus lived and taught-thank you

Especially appreciated Deacon Ateek's music for worship

Yes, yes, yes! The first-hand testimony to daily realities is critical- their stories I can tell at home

The village visits were a good way to expose participants to Palestinian Christians beyond the Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah axis.

I wish more Palestinian Christian youth would have participated both as participants as well as speakers.

Well done. Probably could have used more down time to engage more fully.

Important to learn that in many villages Palestinian/Muslim/Christian/Druze can and do live in harmony.

As a local Galilean Christian Palestinian, it was great to spend time with Jerusalemites, West Bankers, during the conference. Thank you all Sabeel staff for being concerned and



allowing such programs to aid in making friends and learning from each other to encourage and lift our hopes in continuing to live in the Holy Land.

The lack of time for reflection became an issue- lots of questions buzzing with scarce opportunity to ask- not everyone is comfortable asking in whole group. Sharing thoughts/ideas among observers might have been possible in smaller focus groups.

For a first time visitor to the Holy Lands there was a strong pilgrimage element in my visit and our inability to get to the church of the

Nativity was both very disappointing and made the point of the nature of the occupation in these lands.

Excellent education regarding Christianity as integral part of Arab world. The “Muslim vs. Jew” common perception of the conflict; I’ve seen jaws drop when I tell people there are Christians among the Palestinians who were dispossessed along with everyone else.

Suggestion: When at Bethlehem University have a panel of students. We did this before when we were there and it was a highlight!

The Al Funoun dancing and the music in Ramallah were inspirational!

Sabeel has already made a difference, especially amongst the patriarchy of the Jerusalem churches- ecumenism is happening and the work of Sabeel is in the forefront of this exciting progress.

The issue of gender, we need to see more women in the speakers because I believe that women have different experiences from men. For example what happens to the wives when their husbands have been shot? How do they survive? How do they cross the checkpoints? Are they sometimes sexually harassed? What does it mean for the Palestinian women to live behind the wall?

Needed more time devoted to advocacy. Need to have opportunity for different levels- those new to the issue and those who want to refine, focus, carry advocacy to a deeper level. Given the critical and urgent nature of the situation there could have been more emphasis on the URGENCY of the current situation and ways to address that! Anti-apartheid issues!

My first conference and probably my last because of my age, but wouldn't have missed it for quids (Australian expression)

My life will not be the same as a result of these encounters.

2007

SABEEL INTERNATIONAL WITNESS FOR JUSTICE & PEACE VISIT February 28 - March 7, 2007

“Be not afraid,
speak out and
do not keep silent:
I am with you.”

Acts 18:9

Visit begins with lunch on Wednesday, February 28 and concludes with closing worship and dinner on Wednesday, March 7.

Witness Visit will include:

- Exposure trips to see the political “facts on the ground” in the West Bank in the 40th year of Occupation by Israel
- Lectures by Palestinian and Israeli experts
- Visit to holy sites in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and the Galilee
- Jerusalem’s Old City
- Advocacy workshops

For more information visit our website: www.sabeel.org • e-mail: world@sabeel.org

If you can't join us this time, join us for the Fall Visit, October 2007.

40 YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS: 40 YEARS OF OCCUPATION

Sabeel's Second International Young Adult Conference

July 19-29, 2007 | For ages 18-35

Conference will include:

- Visits to Palestinian Towns and Villages
- Events Celebrating Palestinian Culture • Worship and Biblical Reflections
- Volunteer experience • Advocacy Workshops
- Sharing Experiences and Ideas with local Palestinian Young Adults

For more information
visit

www.sabeel.org

e-mail Youth@sabeel.org

Focus on:

- Current Political Situation
- Biblical Reflections
- Advocacy to end the Occupation

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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