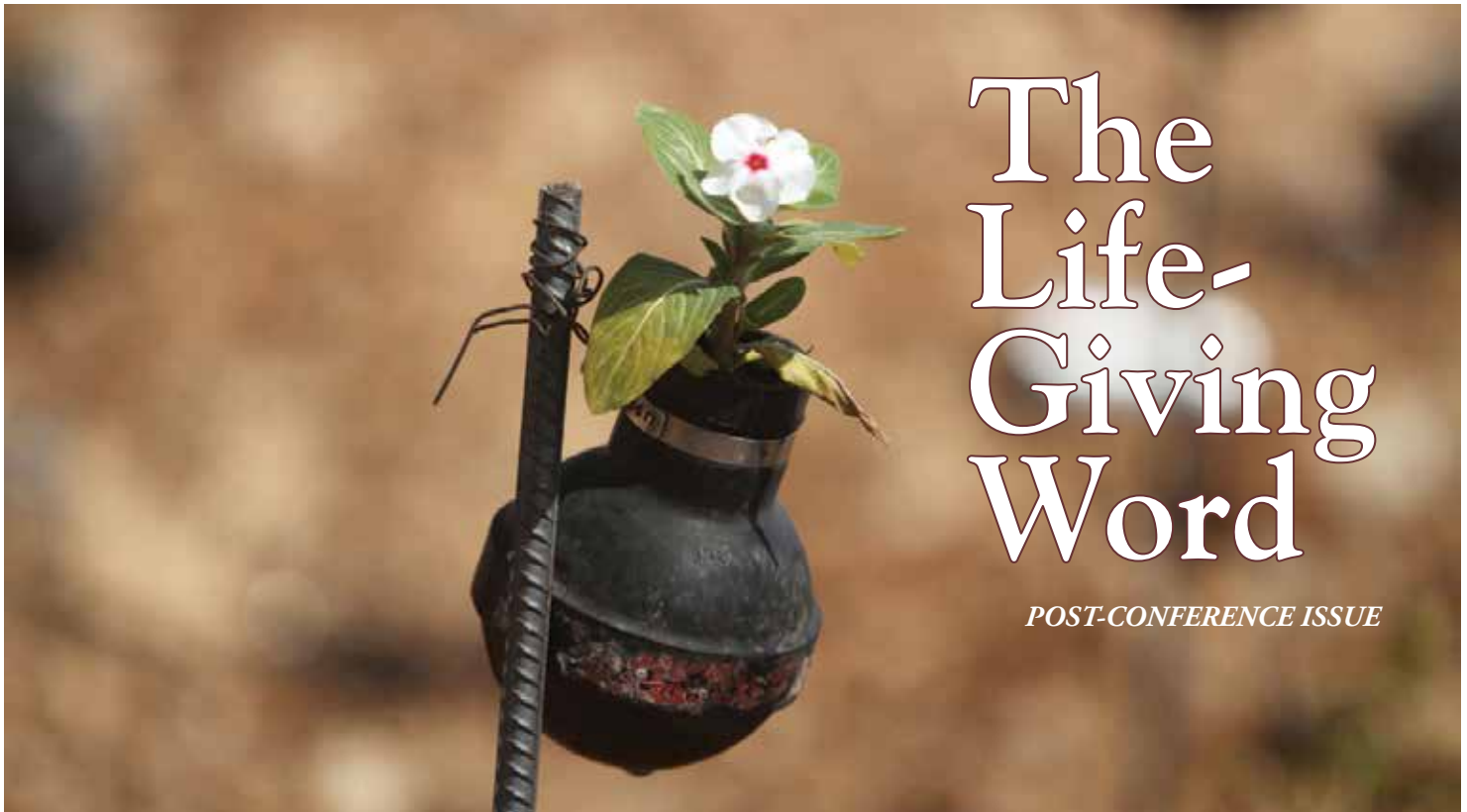


CORNERSTONE

A PUBLICATION BY SABELL ECUMENICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY CENTER



The Life-Giving Word

POST-CONFERENCE ISSUE

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A tear gas canister shot by the Israeli military is used to grow a flower in the West bank village of Bil'in.

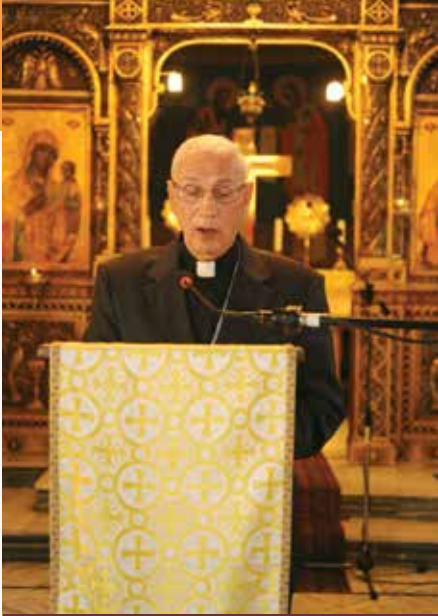
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Today the Scripture is Fulfilled

by Naim Ateek

Editor's note: The following sermon was given by Rev. Naim Ateek on November 19th, 2013 at the opening of Sabeel's 9th International Conference, "The Bible and the Palestine-Israel Conflict." The sermon introduced the theme of the conference and was a vivid illustration of how the Bible can address relevant every day issues of life; and the way modern-day biblical scholarship can critique the misuse of the Bible and emphasize the importance of working for justice and peace.



The Rev. Naim Ateek preaches at the Greek Catholic Church in Jerusalem during the 9th International Conference opening worship.

“The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Luke 4:14-21).

On behalf of the Sabeel Center, I would like to welcome you all to our 9th international conference. I thank God for your safe arrival and for your presence with us. I hope and pray that our time together will be blessed and fruitful. I pray that this conference will energize us and renew our commitment to continue the struggle for a just peace for all the people of our land.

Although, it is my hope that this conference will raise important questions about the Bible and the way it has been used and abused in our land, we will be giving special attention to the importance of international law and human rights for the resolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Due to biblical abuse from Jewish and Christian Zionists and inadvertently from many well-intentioned ordinary Christians, the Bible that can lead us to salvation has become itself in need of saving. In other words, many of our people are being killed and oppressed by the way the Bible is being used

and interpreted. Tragically this is not new in the history of our faith. The Bible has been used to justify slavery, war, apartheid, silencing of women and many other things and now the oppression and killing of the Palestinians. How did Jesus use the Bible? Can Jesus guide us? I believe he can. Let us look at Jesus’ encounter in his hometown Nazareth as recorded in Luke chapter 4.

We know from the Gospels that Jesus was brought up in a small town called Nazareth in Galilee. What do we know about this town? Not much. But New Testament scholar, Kenneth Bailey, a good friend of some of us, has written, as a result of his research, something very interesting.

It seems that the northern part of Palestine after the Exile (6th century B.C.), including the Galilee, was largely inhabited by non-Jews. The prophet Isaiah writing several hundred years before Christ refers to Galilee as the Galilee of the Gentiles, i.e. non-Jews.

Nazareth according to Dr. Bailey started as a settlement for Jews, probably built in the 2nd century B.C. by Aristobulus the Maccabean who conquered Galilee and wanted to Judaize it. Nazareth, therefore, was a settlement town and it was inhabited to begin with by settlers, many of whom were nationalists. We also know that there is no mention of Nazareth in the Old Testament.

One of the theories of why Joseph and Mary chose to come to Nazareth after their return from Egypt was due to employment availability in that area. About three miles northwest of Nazareth, King Herod Antipas was building and beautifying Sepphoris, (Saffouria in Arabic) as his first capital. Probably Joseph sought employment there so he chose to live close by. If this is the case, then Jesus grew up in

a settlement.

We know from the Gospels that when he was 30 years old, he went to the Jordan River and was baptized by John the Baptist. Sometime later he returned to Nazareth and on the Sabbath he went to the Synagogue to pray. The attendant, the khazan, handed him the scroll of Isaiah. From the text we deduce that it was Jesus who chose the passage that he wanted to read:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. Then the text reads: *“The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.”* Then he said, *“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”* There are several important points that we need to remember as we look at this event:

FIRST: The Isaiah text in our Bible from which Jesus read is chapter 61. This text has found fulfillment in the coming of Christ. In his reading of the Isaiah passage, Jesus said, *“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”* As Christians we recognize that Jesus Christ is the goal, center, and climax of our biblical faith. In him the scriptures have been fulfilled.

SECOND: The words which Jesus read in the Nazareth Synagogue expressed God’s concern for the poor and oppressed. It talked about God’s good news to the poor, good news of liberation for the prisoners and the oppressed, and healing for the sick and the diseased. The heart of the message, which the prophet Isaiah was conveying to the people in exile, was about justice and that God is their

liberator. They were words of comfort and hope for people who were broken by years of oppression; and it touched their hearts and emotions.

THIRD: What is significant is the fact that Jesus did not read the Isaiah text verbatim; he edited it. He omitted some words and added others from another section of Isaiah. By doing so, he made it more relevant to his hearers. His hearers were not living in exile; they were now living under the Roman occupation. He contextualized the message and made it relevant. Is this an important hint for those who use the text literally? Jesus did not hesitate to edit the text. For him, the liberative message was more important than the literal words.

FOURTH: Moreover, Jesus did something more radical with the Isaiah text. He stopped in mid-sentence and did not finish the reading of the passage. What did he leave out? The whole sentence reads, *“To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,*

And the day of vengeance of our God.” The year of the Lord’s favor is the year of jubilee when justice is restored to the poor and oppressed in the community. This, Jesus read; but he left out, “the day of vengeance of our God.”

In one of my first visits to Hebron, years ago, I saw that the Palestinian shops were closed and that the settlers had written on the doors, the word “vengeance,” “revenge” in Hebrew “Neqama,” the same word as in Arabic “Naqma.” What the Hebron settlers were calling for was vengeance against the Palestinians.

Jesus refused to read that sentence. He left it out. In other words he refused to call for God’s vengeance on their non-Jewish enemies. He refused to read what for him was theologically offensive and unacceptable. I realize that some biblical scholars have given various interpretations, but I believe that it was Jesus himself who, due to his theology of God as a loving parent, could not call on God’s judgment on

their enemies. In my understanding of the text, Jesus felt free to critique Isaiah’s words. Jesus refused to read words that reflected racism and bigotry. Jesus’ hermeneutic of God’s love for all caused him to stop in mid-sentence. Remember Jesus was speaking to a settler community who would love to hear that their God was standing with them and will pour out his wrath and vengeance on their enemies. Jesus refused to give them that pleasure. The lesson is clear for me: whatever does not agree with the hermeneutic of God’s love for all people has no authority for us and must not be read even if it is written in the Bible.

FIFTH: Jesus showed great courage by standing before a group of nationalists and confronting their bigotry. When we look at the rest of the chapter, we see words that can only be described as racist. What are some of the words that Jesus did not read?

“Strangers [that is non-Jews] shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till



Sabeel co-founders Naim Ateek, Jonathan Kuttab, and Jean Zaru at the 25- year celebration of PLT in Jericho

your land and dress your vines; but you shall be called priests of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory” (Isaiah 61: 5-6).

In October 2010, the late Israeli Sephardic leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, (He died a few weeks ago) the spiritual leader of the Shas Party and a former chief Sephardic rabbi of Israel, said, “Goyim [gentiles] were born only to serve us [Jews]. Without that, they have no place in the world; only to serve the People of Israel...Why are gentiles needed? They will work, they will plow, they will reap. We will sit like an effendi (aristocrat) and eat.”

I am certain he had the Isaiah text in mind. It is important to say that a number of Jews condemned his words. But he was using the Hebrew Bible. Zionism made out of the Palestinians hewers of wood and drawers of water. Isaiah was describing a community after the Exile when societal roles would be reversed. The exiled Jews would become masters and the gentiles would be their servants; and Jews will feast on the wealth of nations and be proud that it is theirs. I believe that Jesus could not subscribe to such a theology.

Such words are found in the Bible even on the lips of Isaiah, but it reflects bigotry and xenophobia. It is contrary to the spirit of a loving God who loves and cares for all. Again the lesson is clear: when using the Bible, we can critique those exclusive texts found in the Bible because they do not reflect the God of love. Some Christians try to rationalize and justify them. They are best disregarded as it is difficult to whitewash them.

SIXTH: In order to drive home his message, Jesus used two examples from

their Hebrew tradition.

1. In order to care for the prophet Elijah during a period of famine, God sent the prophet to a Phoenician widow from Lebanon, a gentile who looked after Elijah for three years. Jesus was driving home a strong and clear theology of God. The pagan widow had faith that the God of Elijah will provide for her and her family as well as the prophet. Jesus chose a foreign widow as a model of faith for the Nazareth settler community.

2. Elisha the prophet healed Naaman the Syrian general who was a gentile. Jesus struck at their racist nerve. God chose pagan people as models of faith. God’s love and care is not restricted to one small ethnic community.

SEVENTH: Jesus had a hermeneutic of God’s love for all people and Isaiah’s words did not comply with that criterion. The people of Nazareth did not like the preacher Jesus. They wanted to hear words that would satisfy their bigotry against foreigners. Jesus was not willing to play their game or give them that pleasure. He confronted them and gave them a lesson in theology. The God Jesus talked about is a liberator God. If God is biased, God shows bias toward the poor and the oppressed. Jesus shattered their exclusive concept of God and critiqued their understanding of the scriptures. Just because it is in the Bible does not mean it is correct or its theology is sound. By doing so, I believe that Jesus gives us an important lesson of how to relate to the Bible.

Brothers and sisters, imagine the scene. Jesus stands in the Nazareth synagogue and courageously confronts his nationalist hometown folks. Jesus was not seeking popularity and admiration; he sought to be faithful to God.

I believe Jesus gave us an example of

how to read scripture. In conclusion, what does it mean for us to say scripture is fulfilled?

- Like Jesus Christ, we can only say scripture is fulfilled when we are proclaiming justice and liberation for all the people of the land regardless of their ethnic, racial, or religious background.

- We can only say scripture is fulfilled when we witness to God’s love for all people; and for us Christians, God’s love as seen and exemplified in the love of Jesus Christ.

- To say scripture is fulfilled is to take a stand for justice and to struggle and confront injustice, racism, violence, discrimination and everything that corrupts and de-humanizes people.

- To say scripture is fulfilled is to critique any misuse of scripture that justifies the theft of people’s land, the demolition of people’s homes, the uprooting of people’s olive and fruit trees, and the oppression of the people of the land.

- To say scripture is fulfilled is to believe that God’s word for us is always a word of life, peace, love and joy. It is a word of hope and strength for all people.

- To say scripture is fulfilled implies a challenge for us. It challenges our narrow and exclusive theology. It challenges us to become more compassionate and Christ-like people.

May God give us the strength and the wisdom not only to challenge the powers that be, but to remain faithful in our work and witness for justice and peace! Amen

The Rev. Ateek is Director of Sabeel.

The Word of God Embedded in the Grassroots

by Ann Hafften

When Dr. Nancy Cardoso Pereira said, “Holy land is about tomatoes,” my heart laughed and I felt a happy surge of my old enthusiasm for liberation theology. At the ninth Sabeel International Conference, she said, “Holy land is about tomatoes and potatoes and beans and rice. There is a dialogue between us and light and water, and then food, and this is holy.”

My first contact with Palestinian liberation theology, around 1990, was through Rev. Naim Ateek and Sabeel. As a Christian who had witnessed massive changes in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem, I was inspired with the imperative for justice and peace. I was grateful for a theological foundation upon which to build an understanding of the occupation and its implications for the people. I needed a method for looking at the realities of this particular oppression.

At the ninth conference, almost 25 years later, we looked at the bible through the lens of occupation. We experienced the joy of Christian community and the task at hand – digesting some very challenging academic presentations.



Conference participants read scripture passages at the Jordan River during the 9th International Conference.

The bible has been used as a tool for archeology and as a partner for historical study. It has authority, but is that authority absolute or flexible? Was there really a synagogue at Nazareth? We must understand the bible in historical context, but what does it say to the people of today’s churches?

Nancy, the Brazilian, threw open a window. The crisp early-winter air was rich with images, even smells: earth and soil, vegetables and animals, the poor and the people crowded into checkpoints, living under oppression, the everyday blessings of life when people are free.

Nancy told us how the reading of bible in Latin America is so at home with Palestinian liberation theology. “The bible in Latin America is a lot of things at the same time. The bible is everywhere; it’s all around, important and unimportant, always present.”

How like the Holy Land, I thought, where it seems that everyone – including tourists and pilgrims – thinks their own reading of the bible is all in all and ultimately true.

When Nancy said that the challenge for us is to transform a text imposed by the colonial project into a received text, I thought how true of this place where the imposition has occurred probably ten times over. “It’s not that easy to transform,” Nancy said, and I nodded.

Nancy told us about the paradoxical “different ways to live without the bible but to live with the bible.” She shared some of what Latin America had learned and “...why we really understand about occupation.”

In the ‘60s liberation theology addressed a continent exhausted by poverty and oppression, Nancy said. “Liberation theology grew in a network of local communities and pastoral organizations and it soon became much more than a church issue.” That story, familiar to me, reminded me too of the birth of Sabeel 25 years ago and the hope it planted in me.

Nancy said, “It is about praxis, intellectual and spiritual expression of a vast social movement in a complex network of peasants, workers, indigenous people, marginalized



The panel "Occupation of the Bible" at the 9th International Conference

women, youth from the periphery, and a church program, and it is about the preferential option for the poor."

She said, "When I talk about grassroots reading of the bible, I'm talking about these people reading the bible," and a great deal more about imperialism and the destruction of dreams. "Through it all we feel so close to the situation of the Palestinian people. We know what occupation is about," she said.

This is the theme that we supporters of Sabeel, we workers for justice and prayers for peace, must never forget. The Word of God is embedded in the mud and water and air of creation, in the poorest children of God, the weak and the strong, the funny ones, the angry ones, the weeping ones, the striving ones. Jesus came into the world to be part of all this, and in the middle of all this is where we will find him. We each look for God out of our own

occupation, and we have to remember that we will find him with the poor and oppressed.

Nancy named the oppressors: biblical fundamentalism and Christian Zionism, "defenders of western political domination of the world." She said, "Biblical authority provides reinforcement of the capitalistic, imperialistic tactic and works against any searching for another possible world outside of capitalism."

In this sense, biblical authority, like capitalism, supports what is "not normal, not necessary, for example, war, global warming, degradation of the environments, etc.," she said.

"Israel, supported by us ... an ideal of white Europeans invading a country far from home, emptying it of its inhabitants, and saying 'It's all God's will,'" she said.

Nancy called us all to denounce the "powerful and painful combination of Western North Atlantic theology with Western North Atlantic socio-economic capitalism." The tasks of Christians, she said, are: "breaking spiritually from capitalism, denouncing all worship of capital, understanding ourselves as one religion among others, and trusting in God's liberating grace."

I was delighted and refreshed by Nancy's indignation, her creativity, and her gentle reminder to trust in God's grace. Nancy said, "Believe in a free Palestine. Deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day."

Ann Hafften is a free-lance writer from Texas who serves on the Board of Friends of Sabeel-North America. For most of her career she has worked as a communication specialist for agencies of the Lutheran Church in the USA.



Sabeel 9th International Conference participants at the Notre Dame Hotel and Conference Center in Jerusalem

The Conference Day to Day

by Hans Nebel

As many as 174 participants from 15 countries participated in the 6-day program. In addition, local visitors came daily, so we averaged 200 people a day. At the 25-year celebration of Palestinian Liberation Theology (PLT), which moved the group to a conference center in Jericho, we were about 400 participants – mostly a large flock from Nazareth. This location gave local Palestinians from the West Bank, who are excluded from coming to Jerusalem, an opportunity to attend. The conference was distinguished by its meetings with panel discussions and presentations by highly qualified speakers from almost anywhere in the world. Themes of the conference were high standard. The subject was deepened

and given a content that uplifted us and gave us the feeling that we were part of something bigger than we in our own context usually participate in.

There were scheduled panel discussions among theologians, followed by participation of the audience with questions. There were also further discussions between lawyers of universal human rights and violations of these, specifically in the case of the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, and the subsequent relocation of parts of the occupier's population into occupied territory, which is in violation of the Geneva Convention, Article 49: "The Occupying Power shall not deport or move parts of its own civilian population into the territories it occupies."

Day 1. The program began with the **opening worship** at the Greek Catholic Church in the Old City. Anyone who wants a sense of the nerve in the conference should read Luke 4: 14-21, and Naim Ateek's sermon, including the words of Isaiah: "*The Spirit of the*

Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's grace" (Luke 4: 18-19).

Later, at the Notre Dame Center, Dr. Mustafa Barghouti's presentation on the Palestinian people's daily suffering under the Israeli occupation gave an impression of reality as it still is for the Palestinian people after 45 years of occupation.

Day 2. **Biblical Authority:** The questions raised in this panel session were: Does the Bible have political authority for one people, and if so, does this one people have rights that the other people do not have? The Bible used as a title deed gives the Jewish people the right to Palestine at the expense of the indigenous Palestinian population. The question answers itself for most people. The treatment of the Bible and its scriptures and all the content and interpretation of them - and the key to the understanding of the

Holy Scriptures - were made common concerns of the conference and its participants. The first day continued with afternoon panel sessions.

Day 3. **Does the Bible Have a Future?** Rev. Peter Du Brul (Palestine), Rev. Gregory Jenks (Australia), and Dr. Gary Burge (USA) together gave during the first panel session of the day their weight and experienced work through expositions related to "Eretz Yisrael" in the Bible. Has "the country" limits? According to the Bible itself, the Psalms, and the prophets, is "the country" an exclusive size with physical limitations, or is it an inclusive place where God is near and where God's will is done – and includes all human beings? Who is the Lord God, other than the creator of the earth, life and man?

Day 4. **Focus Groups.** I participated in the following groups: Overview of Jewish Religious Views and the Political Situation in Israel by Rabbi Arik Ascherman and Christian Zionism by Dr. Gary Burge. In the afternoon was the presentation, Breaking a Generation: Children in the Israeli Military Detention, by Mr. Gerard Horton, lawyer, co-founder of Military Court Watch (MCW). It was horrifying to hear about the imprisonment of Palestinian children, methods of interrogation and torture, and detention of minors (and adults), sometimes without trial and without information given to parents about where their children are. The talk was followed by a prayer at the Ofer Prison, where there is a large number of Palestinian children detained, some for years.

Day 5. **Excursion.** For my part, we went into the Negev desert along with most of the conference participants. Here we visited a Bedouin village where the Bedouins were under threat of being displaced and their villages

erased, along with the villages of about 40,000 Bedouins in the Negev. The Bedouins had already organized themselves to fight against the plan. The plan had attracted international attention. Around the world there were objections to the plan. After sitting in the square with Bedouin representatives, there was nobody who did not wholeheartedly support the Bedouins in their struggle to preserve their villages, life and culture.

Day 6. First there was the **closing worship** in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ascension at the Augusta Victoria Centre. In the afternoon conference participants gathered in Jericho to celebrate Palestinian Liberation theology's 25th anniversary with a festive audience. The conference participants gathered in the evening at the Notre Dame Center in Jerusalem for a final celebration.

Every day we were inspired with music and song of dedicated musicians who uplifted us in song and prayer and silence, morning, noon and night, and during the celebration of PLT's 25th anniversary.

The conference had reached the road's end. The mood was that we had participated in one of our life-defining events. We had read the Bible together. We had listened and learned and were moved by the words and spirit. We thanked God, our Creator and Lord, Jesus Christ, our Savior, that he is the way, truth and life, justice and peace for all people on earth. We pray for peace and justice for the Palestinian people. Now we are waiting a lot of individual presentations.

Hans Nebel is a retired pastor of the Danish Lutheran Church in Copenhagen and currently works as a coordinator on projects supported by the Danish State to Palestine. This was his third Sabeel international conference.

Challenging Our Faith

by Marie Körner

I had the privilege to participate in the Sabeel 9th International Conference at the Notre Dame Hotel and Conference Center. The center is well suited to host conferences like this and of course it is a privilege for us international participants to have the Old City of Jerusalem at our doorstep; but at the same time it is hard to know that for many local Palestinians it is impossible to come to Jerusalem and participate. I understand that choosing Jerusalem as the venue is a statement in itself by Sabeel, but it is not an easy choice as there are these serious disadvantages.

We come to the Sabeel Conference not only to show our solidarity, to learn more about the different aspects of the conflict as well as what our Christian identity demands from us; but we also come to be inspired and deepen our faith. It seems like where faith is challenged and seriously tested, there it also will deepen; while in an affluent environment and in a comfortable life, there faith tends to be more shallow. I thank Sabeel deeply for the precious gift you gave us in the challenge we encountered at the Sabeel conference.

The conference started in a very powerful way with the opening service and the sermon by Dr. Naim Ateek. Many of us participants are probably regular churchgoers, but for myself at least I am not used to a message so contextual and right to the point as this sermon was. It was a message that will help us

in the onward work and struggle. The central point was that Jesus can teach us to use the biblical text in a liberating way, which sometimes means to omit parts. For example, those that speak about vengeance.

So to fundamentally read and use everything that is in the Bible actually means to misuse scripture. We need to be guided by God's love for all people. We can also learn something from reflecting on the outcome. Jesus did not seek popularity and admiration. When he sought to be faithful to the universal love of God, he made the people in Nazareth very angry and they even wanted to kill him right then and there. This is something to reflect on when we face opposition that feels uncomfortable and maybe even threatening.

One of the important challenges for us in the Kairos Palestine document is to work with theological questions and exegesis and to oppose Christian Zionism. This is something that really took place during this conference in several ways. One danger with being a Christian with a more liberal view of the Bible and theology is that you just distance yourself from those with a more fundamental and evangelical view. You actually seldom get into dialogue because you rarely meet. So for me it was very interesting to listen to Dr. Gary Burge who serves and works within an evangelical context and consequently, constantly has these dialogues and discussions.

His point was that we believe in a God that acts and speaks in history, and that the written revelation in the Bible is a central though not exclusive way for God to reach us humans in our time. But we need to also work with hermeneutics with humility, well aware that quite a lot in the context is foreign. At the same time, his final



Conference participants sing for Palestinian child prisoners outside Ofer Prison.

point was that theology that lives and works without the Bible has failed, so we cannot give it up as sometimes has been the tendency. I think voices like his - that know well the evangelical context and are able to present an argumentation in support for justice in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in this case - are really very valuable.

A very powerful moment was when we commemorated the memories of those who had passed away and who had given time and effort for the struggle of the work of Sabeel. We were singing together with Jim and Jean Strathdee, who started out: "For all the saints who've shown your love in how they live and where they move." I then got a vision of belonging to a global movement for justice and peace where already some have given their lives; while others are on the road still fighting. We do not know how long it will take until we reach the goal: justice for the Palestinian people and peace and security for all living in the region. But there is no turning back.

As the conference moved on to deal with international law, another powerful moment that I will always remember was the information about children in military prisons in Israel and the prayer

service we had outside the Ofer Prison. It is hard to comprehend that a country describing itself as a democracy is guilty of all these terrible crimes.

There are far too many important impressions from the conference to mention everything, but we ended with celebrating the 25 years of Palestinian Liberation Theology well in accordance with the Liberation Theology model: see, analyze, act and celebrate.

Rev. Marie Körner is the Secretary of International and Ecumenical Affairs at the Diocese of Lund, Church of Sweden, and the Deputy Chairperson of Friends of Sabeel Scandinavia. This was her third time attending a Sabeel conference.

"Come and See" Sabeel Witness Visit

November 12-20, 2014

Cost starting from \$1,450
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(An additional \$100 for registration
after September 1, 2014)

Please see www.sabeel.org for more
information and the registration form.



Unrecognized Bedouin village

Sumud

(Standing Fast)

With the day's theme of *Sumud*, Sabeel 9th International Conference participants traveled to three different areas to see for themselves the injustice on the ground suffered by Palestinians, including the Bedouins.

As many as four buses of participants traveled south on the dusty roads to visit the Bedouin community of the Negev to learn about unrecognized villages where the Bedouins— all citizens of Israel - live without secure housing structures, electricity and other essential services. Tens of thousands of people in these impoverished communities, hundreds of years old, are threatened by the Israeli government's Prawer Plan. This plan would evict them from their ancestral land and relocate them for the benefit of Israeli Jewish citizens. Participants visited eight unrecognized villages, ate lunch with families, and met with Bedouin representatives to hear their plight firsthand. Just days after this excursion, the Prawer Plan was defeated in the Israeli Knesset, and temporarily placed on hold.

Another busload of participants headed to the Bethlehem governorate for a tour following the separation Wall's snaking trail through Beit Jala, one of the three major towns of the district. Traversing the tops of hills outside Beit Jala, participants witnessed Palestinian towns threatened by encroaching settlements, and heard from a local guide about the consequences of occupation. A brief walk through Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem brought the participants to Al-Rowwad Cultural and Theatre Training Center, a place empowering youth to engage in creative, nonviolent resistance. After a short bus ride, attendees ate lunch at the Tent of Nations and listened to Daoud Nassar discuss how his family's farm has become a place where people from around the world can choose to "refuse to be enemies."

More participants traveled in another bus to one of the most difficult areas of the West Bank – Hebron – where residents in the Old City must pass through a "mini" checkpoint at its entrance, and where the market there sees few foreign visitors because of restricted access and settler violence. After sharing a traditional meal with Hebron families, participants then visited the Ibrahimi Mosque that is sandwiched between a Palestinian community and an illegal Jewish settlement; and Shuhada Street, blocked by two Israeli soldiers to prevent Palestinians from passing to a settler area of the city.



Unrecognized Bedouin village



Conference participants buy embroidery from the Women of Lakiya.



Conference participants share lunch with a Bedouin girl.

Thank you to the organizations and individuals that made these excursions possible including: Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies, Al-Rowwad Cultural and Theatre Training Center, MUSAWA, The Bedouin Committee for Unrecognized Villages, The Women of Lakiya; local guides and representatives, Atieh Al A'tham, Daoud Nassar, Mazin Qumsiyeh, Nidal Al-Farajin, Walid Abu Al Halaweh; and Janet Lewis of the Methodist Liaison Office.

Glimpses of Our Activities



Local program participants enjoy refreshments at a children's home in Bethlehem for Advent.



The Sabeel community celebrates at the Sabeel Christmas Dinner at the Seven Arches Hotel in Jerusalem.



Focus group with Rabbi Arik Ascherman at the 9th International Conference



Sabeel Jerusalem and Nazareth staff at the 9th International Conference



Hind Khoury, Vice President of the Sabeel Board, recognizes past and present I-FOS coordinators at the 9th International Conference.



Clergy from the Dominican Church in Jerusalem sing at the Sabeel Christmas Dinner.



Young adults celebrate Advent in Jericho.



Worship service at the French Hospital church in Nazareth



Jean and Jim Strathdee lead the conference choir at the Church of the Ascension, Augusta Victoria, in Jerusalem.



Lawyer Diana Buttu speaks during the panel “International Law and Religion” (panel moderator, the Rev. Richard Toll pictured left.)

God’s Promise to All

by Ernest Reichert

It was my first visit to Israel-Palestine and my first experience at a Sabeel conference, and I am thankful for having had the opportunity of experiencing both. Before this, I had often been in other countries of the Middle East and everywhere I had been struck by the load of concern that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was generating in the minds of people. Everywhere it was considered as an ongoing injustice and a risk of destabilization for the whole region. In contrast, I was struck by the open-mindedness of both the Palestinian

and the international participants I met at the Sabeel conference.

As in the Kairos Palestine document, there was a spirit of hope in a context of absolute hopelessness, and the strong desire to believe that in spite of it all, a peaceful future was still possible. This is under the condition, however, that Israel stops its occupation of the land and starts respecting the rights and dignity of its people, thus taking into account the basic requests of international law. This is obviously not the case yet and the land is full of examples. We could not miss them. Everywhere, Arab citizens are treated as second class and just disposable elements. What struck me in the attitudes of all those I met was the dignity they nevertheless manage to preserve, as well as their will to absolutely refuse violence as a way to change their conditions of living. I just hope that they will be able to continue in such a way, because they are exposed to the violence of the Israeli

government in all segments of their lives.

Sabeel is a Christian movement and its conference participants were mainly Christians. Some Christians, as well as many Jews, make use of the Bible and mainly the Old Testament to justify the Israeli occupation of more and more Palestinian land - thus giving less and less space and rights to its inhabitants. Therefore, an important space was given to panel sessions to discuss how to understand God’s word, his promise and will. What struck me was the readiness of the participating evangelicals to pay attention to the fate of all concerned parties. In my experience, the French Church bodies have so far been quite less open-minded!

My feeling, however, is that referring to biblical texts will not help us as long as we have not previously accepted some basic attitudes on how to receive them: not as untouchable and timeless truths, but as testimonies of encounters with

God in a series of particular contexts. God's word, promise and will are always for today. We can learn from past experiences; but in a new context they can never be reproduced exactly the same way. What remains reliable, however, is God's deep desire that all his creatures can live, act and be considered as people in his own image and likeness, sharing mutual respect and a deep concern for the welfare of all other beings. This is the way he has always been experienced by the men and women who have been his advocates in the Scriptures. As Christians, we believe that in Christ, he himself went this way until the bitter end on the cross, refusing until the very end to resort to any destructive violence in order to realize his purpose. This I believe in.

In this sense, the Hebrew Scriptures also are nothing but the testimony of

Jewish people that God has always been faithful to his promise and has always wanted the best for them in spite of quite numerous betrayals. They tell us how he gave the Jewish people a place to live in security and peace with the purpose for them to be themselves a blessing for all the other people they would encounter in the course of their history. This good message that has been told in many ways throughout the Scriptures has always been and has again and again to be actualized in new settings. The former prophets already enlarged this promise to more and more people because, as Psalm 24 proclaims, the whole world belongs to the Lord. It is consequently the duty of all those who take his promise and will seriously to engage in the same task today.

In a more secular way, this would mean applying international law. The

program of the Sabeel conference rightly provided a transition from discussing the Bible to presenting international law. The effects of taking the Bible into account and/or applying international law will be the same on the ground, though referring to God can bring those who engage with him a renewed hope and a deeper sense of human solidarity. Both are direly needed today, so that all can enjoy the "rest" (others translate this as "safety") that God promises to his people (Joshua 1:15). No one can enjoy such a rest if the others cannot share it. It should be offered to all, and whether this happens or not has to be our common concern.

Rev. Ernest Reichert is a retired pastor and the President of Friends of Sabeel France.

Ofer Prison

~ a military installation where children from occupied Palestine are incarcerated after being kidnaped from their homes in the middle of the night by Israeli soldiers.

They are isolated, coerced, and sometimes beaten into signing a confession that they threw stones at Israeli military vehicles.

This is state terrorism calculated to control Palestinian people.

**These cold grey walls, these towering, life-crushing, forever cold grey walls,
monuments to death and efficiency...
the torture of children**

**I cannot breathe, my heart has stuttered, afraid to take its next beat,
my blood is retreating, my bones turn to water.**

**I am sucked out the window of a speeding car and dashed against the cold grey buttress of
a freeway bridge unable to move, to think, to feel.**

O the cries in the night, O the cries in the night, O the cries in the night.

One day these cold grey walls will be melted by a million spoonfuls of justice and mothers' tears.

*A poem by Jim Strathdee (USA)
November 23, 2013*



The children's choir from the Ramallah Evangelical School performs at the Intercontinental Hotel in Jericho during Sabeel's 25-year celebration of PLT.

PLT 25 Years On

25-year celebration of Palestinian Liberation Theology Jerusalem, November 24, 2013

An excerpt from a talk by Mary Grey

...And now I want to thank Sabeel for the way you develop our Palestinian Liberation Theology (PLT) in our own countries - through the publications emerging from conferences and through the travels of Rev. Ateek in our countries. One outcome of this in the UK is our response to the Kairos Palestine document from the Palestinian Christians in December 2009. Some here among us - like Anne Clayton and the Rev. Warren Bardsley - led the UK team and were part of its dramatic launch at the Greenbelt Festival in August of this year. We end our UK document by affirming:

We can be silent no longer. It is time for prophetic faithfulness. It is time for action.

I cite this as an example that PLT is bearing fruit in other countries. Another initiative is the Balfour Project – mentioned already by Roger Spooner. It is a good example of action that is appropriate in certain contexts but not in others. In 1917 the Balfour Declaration was sent to Lord Rothschild, offering a home for the Jews in Palestine, ignoring the fact that the land was already promised to the Arabs. Following PLT's stress on reconciliation and forgiveness,

The Balfour Project (www.balfourproject.org) seeks to mark the centenary of the Balfour Declaration by:

- **acknowledgement** of Britain's actions at the time of the Balfour Declaration and throughout the Mandate, and particularly the deceit surrounding our nation's true intentions;
- **pardon** for our nation's wrongdoing - from Palestinians for having intentionally ignored their legitimate aspirations and from Jews for our part in the centuries of anti-Semitism;



The Ouf dance group performs at the Notre Dame Center in Jerusalem during Sabeel's 25-year celebration of PLT.

- **integrity** in our nation's future dealings with Jews, Palestinians, and all peoples.

Thus we are seeking to contribute to peace in Palestine-Israel by acknowledging Britain's part in the conflict through the Balfour Declaration and the years of the Mandate. I see this as a way to developing the vision of Palestinian Liberation Theology for the future. Liberation Theology has always made the distinction between victim and oppressor: Palestinian people are crying out for justice. We British citizens, who have historically been part of the oppression (which to many British people is a completely new idea!), have the moral obligation to act in reparation and in action for peace.

And I will end with the words written for us by Bishop John Baker, former Bishop of Salisbury - words you can find on our website:

There is no **peace** without repentance;
 There is no **repentance** without knowledge;
 There is no **knowledge** without education.

Sabeel's inspiration in developing Palestinian Liberation Theology for over 25 years has taught us that there is work that only we can do and that is the true meaning of solidarity. My hope is that if we all recognize and commit to the task that is uniquely ours, the Wall will come down, the Occupation will end, and the Holy Land will at last enjoy peace with justice.

Professor Mary Grey is a Roman Catholic liberation theologian and former professor at St. Mary's University College in London and the University of Wales. She is Trustee of Living Stones of the Holy Land, a core member of the Balfour project, a Patron of Friends of Sabeel UK, and a long-time Friend of Sabeel.



Conference participants watch the Ouf dance group in Jerusalem.

A peek inside conference participant evaluations...

“It was obvious from the beginning that a very great deal of prayer and preparation had been put into this conference.”

“Just very special - deeply moving, challenging, and to know how many Friends are invited across the world for justice and peace in this land.”

“I would like to see the next conference back in the West Bank.”

“Less sitting and listening, more moving.”

“Day 1 and Day 2 provided the faith and nourishment which I relish, personally, to proceed with inspiration and vision. Day 3 was outstanding and provided the basis for future advocacy.”

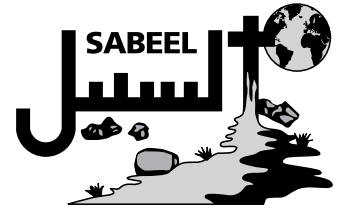
“We could not recruit locally because we did not have enough detailed information.”

“Sabeel needs strategic thinking and planning to engage the younger generation . . . not sure [how] but it sure seems urgent.”

“It was my first conference and I highly appreciated everything.”

“This conference deserves an A+!”

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PURPOSE STATEMENT *of* SABELL

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, nonviolence, 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.