

A PALESTINIAN
THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

A PALESTINIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

*The Bible, Justice,
and the Palestine-Israel Conflict*

Naim Stifan Ateek

ORBIS  BOOKS
Maryknoll, New York 10545

Founded in 1970, Orbis Books endeavors to publish works that enlighten the mind, nourish the spirit, and challenge the conscience. The publishing arm of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Orbis seeks to explore the global dimensions of the Christian faith and mission, to invite dialogue with diverse cultures and religious traditions, and to serve the cause of reconciliation and peace. The books published reflect the views of their authors and do not represent the official position of the Maryknoll Society. To learn more about Maryknoll and Orbis Books, please visit our website at www.maryknollsociety.org.

Copyright © 2017 by Naim Stifan Ateek.

Published by Orbis Books, Box 302, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0302.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Queries regarding rights and permissions should be addressed to: Orbis Books, P.O. Box 302, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0302.

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. All rights reserved.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

Manuscript editing and typesetting by Joan Weber Laflamme.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ateek, Naim Stifan, 1937– author.

Title: A Palestinian theology of liberation : the Bible, justice, and the Palestine-Israel conflict / Ateek Stifan Naim.

Description: Maryknoll : Orbis Books, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017015519 (print) | LCCN 2017032181 (ebook) | ISBN 9781608337255 | ISBN 9781626982604 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Liberation theology—Palestine. | Arab-Israeli conflict. | Arab nationalism. | Jewish nationalism.

Classification: LCC BT83.57 (ebook) | LCC BT83.57 .A88 2017 (print) | DDC 261.7—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017015519>

*This book is dedicated to Jews, Muslims, Christians,
and all people of goodwill who believe in the power
of nonviolence and possess the courage to stand
and act for justice and peace for all the people of
the land, and especially for the liberation of the
Palestinian people.*

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Foreword by Walter Brueggemann</i>	<i>xv</i>
Introduction	1
1. Liberation Theology Worldwide	9
History and Development	9
How Does Liberation Theology Relate to Traditional Theology?	12
2. Who Are the Palestinian Christians?	15
The First Factor: The Theological Controversies	17
The Second Factor: The Coming of Islam	19
The Third Factor: The Coming of the Crusades	19
The Fourth Factor: The Coming of the Protestants	20
The Fifth Factor: The Coming of the Zionists and the State of Israel	21
3. The Threefold Nakba	25
The Human Nakba	26
The Identity Nakba	27
The Faith Nakba	28

4. Other Historical Events that Led to the Emergence of Palestinian Liberation Theology	31
The Holocaust	32
The War of 1967 and the Rise of Religious Zionism	34
The First Intifada	36
5. Reclaiming the Humanity of Jesus	41
Jesus in Nazareth (Luke 4:18–19)	42
The Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1–8)	43
Jesus Christ as Our Hermeneutic	44
6. Development of Religious Thought in the Old Testament	47
God of Some or God of All	47
Some Difficult Old Testament Texts	49
A Demand for Ethnic Cleansing	49
A Demand for Ethnic Annihilation	50
A Vengeful God	51
The Ultimate Enemy: Amalek	52
Some Examples	56
Bigotry and Racism	58
Land for Some or Land for All	60
A Theology that Transcends Leviticus	62
Ezekiel Critiques Other Theologies of His Day	67
How Does This Bear on the Palestinian Question?	68
Jerusalem for Some or Jerusalem for All	68
God of War or God of Peace	71
Psalm 24	73
Isaiah 42:13	73
Psalm 68:21, 30	74

Isaiah 2:2–5 (A Vision of Peace and Nonviolence)	74	
Micah 4:4–5 (A Vision of Peace and Interfaith)		75
The Theology of Jonah	76	
Conclusion: Exclusive and Inclusive Theologies, Then and Now	81	
7. Christ Is the Key		83
Expanding and Deepening the Understanding of God and Neighbor	83	
Jesus Reinterprets the Tradition	90	
The Gospel of Matthew	90	
The Gospel of Mark	91	
The Gospel of Luke	92	
Paul Reinterprets the Tradition	93	
Galatians 3:6–9	94	
Galatians 3:15–18, 22	94	
Galatians 3:23–24, 26, 28–29; 4:6–7	94	
Romans 4:13–17	95	
John Reinterprets the Tradition	99	
Creation Is Reinterpreted in the Light of Christ	99	
Election Is Reinterpreted in the Light of Christ	99	
The Land Is Reinterpreted and Re-Directed in the Light of Christ	101	
Ritual Purity Is Revamped in the Light of Christ	103	
The Temple Is Made Redundant and a Different Temple Is Built	103	
God’s Inclusive Love Is Extended to the Whole World through Christ	104	

8. Justice at the Center	105
New Threats and Dangers in Israel	106
New Israeli Myths	108
Threats in Palestine	110
Resolving the Conflict	111
Just Solutions?	111
Jerusalem	115
A Plea for a Strategy of Nonviolence	117
Seven Dimensions of Justice	119
The Peace Circle	121
9. The Emergence of Sabeel and Its Friends	123
Background	123
Archbishop Joseph Raya	124
Archbishop Elias Chacour	125
Indigenization of Church Leaderships	126
Palestinian Liberation Theology	126
Kairos Palestine	127
The Sabeel Center and Its Friends	129
Friends of Sabeel (IFOS and FOS)	131
Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA)	132
Friends of Sabeel UK	133
Canadian Friends of Sabeel (CFOS)	134
Friends of Sabeel in Scandinavia	134
Friends of Sabeel Norway (FoSN)	135
Friends of Sabeel Australia (FOS-AU)	135
Friends of Sabeel Ireland	136
Friends of Sabeel The Netherlands	136
Friends of Sabeel Germany	137
Friends of Sabeel France	137

10. The Heart of Faith and Action in the Twenty-first Century	139
What Is Palestinian Liberation Theology?	139
The Word of God	141
Three Essential Pillars for Resolving the Palestine/Israel Conflict	142
The Heart of Religious Faith	143
Who Is My Neighbor?	143
Who Is Our God?	143
The Hermeneutical Key	147
No Substitute for Justice	147
<i>Sumood</i> and <i>Thabaat</i>	149
We Are Servants of God's Kingdom	150
 Resources	 153
Purpose Statement of Sabeel	153
Sabeel Prayer	153
Sabeel International Conferences and Related Publications	154
Sabeel Publications	155
Cornerstone	156
Contemporary Way of the Cross	156
The Wave of Prayer	156
 <i>Bibliography</i>	 157
<i>Index</i>	163

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A NUMBER OF people have been involved, directly or indirectly, in the publication of this book.

Three persons deserve special mention. I am thankful to Cedar Duaybis, co-founder of Sabeel, for her indispensable help in editing the manuscript, in giving careful attention to details and to theological and political accuracy as well as for her encouragement and advice on various matters leading to the book's publication.

Tina Whitehead provided invaluable technical and computer skills. She too was involved in editing and in checking sources and in finalizing the manuscript that was sent to Orbis Books.

In spite of his parish responsibilities, Rev. Páraic Réamonn, minister of St. Andrews Church of Scotland in Jerusalem, applied his excellent editing skills to the manuscript and helped in reorganizing the material and in making it sharp and concise.

To each one of them I express my deep appreciation and gratitude.

At the beginning of the process, Omar Harami, Sabeel's administrator, and Marie-Claire Klassen initiated the research and some of the writing. Their work and enthusiasm provided strong stimulus for this project. To both of them I express my sincere gratitude.

The following friends financially supported this book project. To every one of them I owe a great debt of thanks. I apologize for the long delay in making this book a reality. I am thankful for their patience, trust, and confidence: Rev. Fahed Abu Akel, Susan Bell, Phillip and Cynthia Benson, Rev. Jim Bethel, Barbara Burns, Rev. Stanley and Jeanne Fowler, Jennifer and John Grosvenor, Barbara Huston, Elizabeth and John Mayfield, Rev. Darrel Meyers, Grace Said, Rev. Richard Toll, Peter A. Troop, James M. Wall.

Other friends gave me encouragement and support, including Samia Khoury, a co-founder of Sabeel; and Sawsan Bitar, senior Sabeel staff and Sabeel's program coordinator. My brother Saleem has always been faithful in his encouragement and support. I would also like to express my thanks to Archbishop Suheil Dawani for his hospitality and kindness whenever I stayed at St. George's Guest House, Jerusalem; and to St. George's College, and its former Dean Greg Jenks and Vice Dean Susan Lukens.

I am grateful to Orbis Books, its publisher Robert Ellsberg, and the staff for their friendship, support, and fine professional work.

My love and thanks to my wife, Maha, for her constant encouragement and sacrifice.

Ultimately, it is to God's grace and love that I owe my perpetual gratitude.

FOREWORD

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

THE ENDLESSLY VEXED circumstance of the “land of promise” cries out for our attention while at the same time that circumstance defies any hope for peaceable and just outcomes. The facts on the ground are sad enough. They are, however, made more intransigent by the grip of Israeli ideology that effectively defines that vexed circumstance for the Western imagination. Thus, almost all of the information (misinformation) that we receive in the West is filtered through Zionist ideological interest that holds in thrall much of the Christian community in the United States and consequently that holds in thrall US policy as well. In that articulation the current plight of Palestinians is kept invisible and the legitimate claims of Palestinians, grounded in historical and social reality, are left without articulation.

In the face of that ideologically driven vexed circumstance Naim Ateek has been for a very long time an honest and faithful witness. As a Palestinian Anglican priest, he knows a great deal about the actual sociopolitical transactions in the land of promise, and he knows how the Christian-biblical tradition bears upon that political reality. His present book is a continuation of

his critical reflection upon a liberation hermeneutic that has in purview not only the interest of Palestinians, but a possible just peace that is in the interest of all parties, Israeli as well as Palestinian. His testimony, however, requires a disruption of Zionist ideology that does not allow for the legitimacy of the “other” (Palestinians), who does not figure at all in the hegemony of Zionist claims.

At the center of Ateek’s exposition is the threefold *Nakba* (catastrophe) that the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 imposed upon the Palestinians. That catastrophe was a *human* disaster in which Palestinians lost their homes and property and were reduced to poverty and displacement. That catastrophe jeopardized the *identity* of Palestinians as the Zionists sought to erase Palestinian culture, history, and memory. And it was a *faith* catastrophe:

The establishment of the state of Israel was a seismic tremor of enormous magnitude that has shaken the very foundation of many people’s beliefs.

Clearly, the filtered narrative of the land of promise in the West has made it very difficult if not impossible to recognize and credit the profound catastrophe that has come upon the Palestinians.

As a run-up to the dramatic turn of 1948 Ateek offers a succinct and compelling story of the territory that is deeply rooted in Western intrusions into the territory by both religious initiatives and political interference. Ateek’s presentation of the history that culminated in the founding of the state of Israel is, of course, a very different story from the one told by the imperial West concerning the trajectory of the Balfour Declaration in which the West (Britain and the United States) stumbled into commitments propelled by deeply ambiguous motivations. Those ambiguous motivations, however, never had the historical

reality of the Palestinians in purview. Thus, the catastrophe has a traceable historical pedigree; that pedigree, however, amounts to an indictment rather than an illumination concerning the motivation and the outcome. Much of the effort on behalf of the new state was grounded in Western guilt toward the Jews because of the Holocaust.

The great bulk of Ateek's exposition, however, is a consideration of the scriptural and religious materials that have "authorized" Zionist claims and that may, so Ateek proposes, show us a way toward a just peace. Thus his book is an engagement both with texts that serve Zionist claims and with texts that tell otherwise. It is no surprise that Zionism, in an absolutist and uncritical way, can find biblical texts that serve hegemonic claims and that certify Jewish entitlement to the land of promise, and that justify whatever violence is necessary to have and to hold the land. That trajectory of scriptural testimony, with its claim of "chosenness," means that the promises of God are for "some" and not for "all," and the "some" of the promise is easily turned into ethnic or tribal claims. Ateek shows how such texts justify ethnic cleansing and annihilation, actions that have legitimacy in the eyes of some forms of Zionism. Obviously such texts, read ideologically and uncritically, justify and result exactly in abusive displacement of those not included in the claim of chosenness.

As counter to those texts that have justified Zionism so well, Ateek proposes that "Christ" is the key to an alternative, not because Christ endorses Palestinians, but because the claim of Christ includes a generous welcome for all, both Palestinians and Israelis. Ateek's reading of the Christian gospel is a move from "some" to "all," a rejection of privileged tribalism, and a prospect for a just peace in which all parties may participate. Ateek's exposition includes consideration of the Jesus narrative as part of the large reach of God beyond the Jewish community. He refers to the work of Jesus as nothing less than "the great revolution."

That revolution upends all partisan claims and concerns *God's love* for the whole world, and the truth that we cannot *love God* if we do not love our neighbor.

Ateek shows how the scripture of Israel is radically reinterpreted in the New Testament. He attends to the way in which Jesus offered fresh readings of old texts, the way in which Paul (Galatians and Romans) presents Abraham as the father in faith of many peoples, and the way in which John rereads creation in the light of Jesus. Each of these fresh readings is well beyond the old tribalism to which the old texts seem to give credence. Thus, with reference to scripture, we are engaged in contestation about which texts to read and how to read them. Zionist readers, of course, have no interest in the reinterpretation of the New Testament, but hopefully some Jewish readers will show interest in the radical reinterpretation of texts that takes place in the Hebrew Bible itself. Ateek hopes that Christians will pay more attention to our own scripture, because if we do, we will be led beyond the misinformed ideology that now occupies too much space among us. It is not the conversion of the Zionists but the conversion of Christians that Ateek addresses here.

Ateek finishes with specific attention to social reality. He sees that while the Israeli government pays lip service to the “two-state solution,” it gives no sign of any interest in curbing the expansion of settlements or in taking any action toward that solution. Indeed, the government of Israel pretends but in fact has no interest in a just peace:

Israel has never fully embraced a two-state solution and undermines it daily through more and more land confiscation and settlement building. In fact, Israel is intentionally trying to destroy this option.

In response to that undoubted reality, Ateek turns to the articulation of a Palestinian liberation theology and the future of

Sabeel as an ecumenical liberation theology center. Sabeel has become a worldwide movement of those who stand in solidarity with the Palestinians and who work and hope for a just peace.

This book is a venture in truth-telling advocacy. It speaks the truth in the face of the charade of Israeli ideology. It speaks in the midst of misinformation that largely governs Western attitudes and US policy. It is a summons to an ecumenical nonviolent version of the land of promise that pivots on the question of the neighbor. The book invites us to move out of the cocoon of ideology to action in the interest of an alternative future. It is certain that we will not have peace in the world—or peace in the “Near East”—until we have peace in Jerusalem. We have not yet recognized “the things that make for peace” (Luke 19:4). This important book will be a great learning among us to which Western Christians of every ilk should pay attention.

*Columbia Theological Seminary
April 12, 2017*

INTRODUCTION

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY was one of the most tragic in terms of violence and conflict. Besides the two great world wars, several horrendous tragedies took place: the Armenian genocide, the Jewish Holocaust, the Palestinian catastrophe (Nakba), the Rwandan genocide, to name a few. No one could imagine that the Palestinian Nakba would take such a long time to find a resolution. The year 2017 marks seventy years of this great tragedy. In fact, most of my life has been lived under the injustice and discrimination of the government of Israel and its oppression of our Palestinian people.

In 1948, I was a boy living in Beisan, a Palestinian town of six thousand people close to the Jordan River. Beisan was a mixed town of Muslims and Christians and had a vibrant Christian community that belonged to three churches—Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), and Anglican. I cherish fond memories of living in my hometown. My father had a good business as a goldsmith and silversmith. He had moved from Nablus to Beisan in the 1920s, bought land, and built three houses on it. God blessed him with ten children; I was number eight. We lived a very comfortable life in Beisan. It was a beautiful town blessed for its delicious fruits and vegetables. It had fresh water springs flowing from the adjacent mountains irrigating people's land and gardens. I still remember our garden and the variety of fruit trees my father planted and our family enjoyed.

Our life was turned upside down when the Zionist militias came into Beisan in May 1948 and occupied us. Many people were afraid and fled, while others remained in their homes. My father never wanted to leave. He begged the military commander to let us stay, but his military orders were clear. Everyone had to go. It was ethnic cleansing. We were forced out of our homes at gunpoint and were ordered to meet at the center of town. The soldiers divided us into two groups, Muslims and Christians. The Muslims were sent to the country of Jordan, a few miles east of Beisan. The Christians were put on buses and driven to the outskirts of Nazareth, where they were dumped outside the city limits, never to be allowed to return home.

When we arrived in Nazareth, we discovered that hundreds and thousands of Palestinians from the neighboring villages had suffered a similar fate. They too fled in fear or were evicted by force and came to Nazareth seeking refuge. All of a sudden the population of Nazareth swelled immensely. For our family, as for all others, it was hard to live as refugees after living comfortably in one's home and on one's land.

By the end of the 1948 war the dispossessed Palestinians numbered over 750,000. Most people in the West were not aware of this side of the tragedy. The Palestinian Arabs were largely invisible to the eyes of the West. They were overshadowed by the victims of the Holocaust, whose plight received greater significance and publicity. In fact, many Western Christians were glad to hear about the establishment of the state of Israel. They praised God for the return of Jews to Palestine. For them, the Jewish return was proof of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and a sign of the approaching end of the world and the imminent second coming of Christ.

For those who might have heard about what befell the Palestinian Arabs, it is possible that they felt sorry for us, but in the greater master plan of God and God's purposes for history, the Palestinians who were killed by the Zionists in the war and

the hundreds of thousands who were dispossessed and became refugees were probably considered collateral damage and a small price to pay compared with what God was accomplishing through the return of Jews to their ancestral homeland.

The memories I have from my childhood in Beisan and our eviction by the Jewish Zionist militias, as well as our life as refugees in Nazareth, are all imprinted deeply in my psyche and memory. Looking back at those dark years with hindsight, I am amazed at the level of faith and trust in God that my father enjoyed. He believed that, even in the darkest of hours, God never abandoned us. When we were evicted, God went out with us into our new life in Nazareth. Indeed, in spite of our tragedy, my father kept his faith and trust in God. He continued to believe in the goodness of God but was fully conscious of the injustice and inhumanity of humans against one another.

My father's strong faith was exemplary, and I am thankful to God for instilling the same faith in me. At the same time it is worth mentioning that the gospel that was preached by most of the Western missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was basically an evangelical and spiritual gospel whose object was to lead people into a personal faith in Jesus Christ. It addressed people's need for prayer and personal morality, but the Bible study was literal and dogmatic and did not address or relate to the political dangers that were looming ahead. I suspect that many of the missionaries were very sympathetic to Zionism and to the idea of the Jewish return to the land. Maybe they were too naive or too ignorant of the political implications for the local Palestinian Arab population. When the catastrophe struck, our Christian community was not ready for it. People's faith was not always resilient enough to withstand the tragic impact. Some of our people lost their faith; others joined and became prominent members of the Communist Party. They felt that the spirituality they were taught by the missionaries was one of resignation and acceptance of their fate as the will of God. Instead of outrage

at the injustice, on the part of Christians there was silence and submission; instead of the prophetic outcry, there was painful resignation. People expected Western Christians to champion their just cause and pressure Israel to respect international law and allow the return of the refugees; instead, they received only charity, but not justice. It took many years before the Palestinian Christian community was able to articulate a new theology of liberation that dared to speak justice and truth to people of power.

For most of our Palestinian people, including Christians, the predominant understanding of liberation involved armed struggle. The word *liberation* was pregnant with military and violent connotations. Yet, if liberation had to do with the armed struggle, how could it be reconciled with the nonviolent teachings, indeed the life example and the spirit of Jesus Christ? Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God." It is hard for those who commit violence, injustice, and oppression to claim a close relationship with the God of peace and reconciliation, the God of mercy and compassion.

How could we escape such a conundrum? Palestinian liberation theology brought a new understanding to the struggle. True liberation can be achieved more holistically and authentically through nonviolent struggle, provided that the whole community is committed to nonviolence and is willing to be actively engaged. For us, walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and using his nonviolent methods can make a difference in spite of the thorns and hurdles along the road. Resilience and perseverance are essential, especially when they are built on sound organization and discipline. Jesus Christ can inspire and guide us, and we can build our theology of peace on the basis of the New Testament and the biblical foundation of justice, truth, and nonviolence, as well as on the basis of international law.

Indeed, it is right to resist the evil of the illegal occupation of our country and to pursue peace and liberation for all the people of our land—Muslims, Jews and Christians. We must work for

the liberation of the oppressors as well as the liberation of the oppressed. The challenges are immense but one of the greatest benefits of nonviolence is its respect for the humanity of the antagonist. With the emergence of Palestinian liberation theology, the prophetic word of peace and justice was again heard in Jerusalem and throughout the land.



JESUS, FROM THE beginning, was no stranger to human suffering. Soon after his birth he fled the Massacre of the Innocents and was forced to become a refugee in Egypt. He was harassed by the powerful of his day and was ultimately unjustly sentenced to death and crucified. Jesus had a special place in his heart for the marginalized. His ministry took him to the blind, the lepers, the poor, women, and the ostracized. Jesus challenged the unjust socioeconomic and religious structures of his day, and his ministry touched all segments of society regardless of ethnic backgrounds.

Today the church continues to exist in the midst of a suffering and broken world. Every day there are men, women, and children who face war, famine, discrimination, violence, and poverty. The church has an ambiguous history in responding to these needs. At times the church has shown solidarity with the oppressed, while at other times it has been silent or complicit in their oppression.

For us Christians, the model of Jesus Christ as seen in the Gospels exhorts us to love and care for our brothers and sisters in humanity. What does this care look like? How can we best love those who are marginalized or oppressed? What does it mean to confront and challenge injustice and oppression in both word and deed?

In order to reflect on how we can respond to suffering, it is helpful to consider first the kind of life Jesus offers us:

Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Paul said, “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1).

The life Christ offers us is life in all its fullness. This fullness is not offered in some distant, far-off future, but in our present circumstances. We are able to enter into the fullness of life because Christ has already achieved our liberation through his death and resurrection. Indeed, Christ is our liberator, and God in Christ wills that we should be free. Therefore, we need to stand firm and must not submit to anything that dehumanizes or enslaves us.¹

The implication for us today is clear. No human being should be enslaved. Enslavement is not limited to the classical slavery that our world has known, although there are still people today who suffer from such abhorrent conditions. We are talking not only about the millions of people in our world today who are enslaved to sin and evil and in need of forgiveness and new life, but also about the millions who are enslaved by injustice and oppression by people in power and in need of political liberation. So long as people are living under conditions of domination, they are enslaved and are in desperate need of a new life of freedom.

This goes far beyond feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and providing care for the sick. Seeking justice requires us to confront the underlying inequities and the power structures of oppression. This means asking tough questions about why people are hungry in some parts of the world and not in others. It means critiquing the underlying factors that create refugees. It means questioning unequal access to life-saving medical treatment. Our response to suffering must extend beyond meeting basic needs to naming the injustices that perpetuate suffering, challenging oppressive political systems, and acting to ensure a more just and equitable world.

¹ Naim Ateek, “A Look Back, the Way Forward,” *Cornerstone* 66 (2013), 2.

Liberation theology, therefore, calls attention to the heart of the biblical message. It emphasizes and helps us focus on the liberating aspect of the word of God that has been in the Bible all along but, unfortunately, has been neglected. It brings the word of God to us in our daily lives, attuning our ears to what God is saying to us today and what God wants to do through us in this world that God loves and to which God has sent Jesus Christ. A theology of liberation is a way of speaking prophetically and contextually to a particular situation, especially where oppression, suffering, and injustice have long reigned.

The intention of this book is to provide an understanding of Palestinian liberation theology that will challenge readers to active participation in the work of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

WORLDWIDE

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

IN 1971, GUSTAVO Gutiérrez, a Peruvian priest and the father of liberation theology, published his seminal work, *A Theology of Liberation*. The theology he describes came from his experience of witnessing poverty and suffering in South America. The book emphasized the need to prioritize the poor, the exploited, and the oppressed, and to reject those who use power to maintain unjust systems at the expense of the most vulnerable. Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff writes: “Every true theology springs from . . . a true meeting with God in History. Liberation theology was born when faith confronted the injustice done to the poor.”¹

While liberation theology was first articulated in South America, its principles have been applied to unjust systems around the world. This introduction does not have the space to consider each in depth. Instead, it will briefly highlight three liberation theologies and the oppressive systems each criticized:

¹ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 3.

1. *African American liberation theology* named the evil of racism and racial privilege in white-dominated American society. It began with the 1960s civil rights movement and was inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X.² James Cone, an African American liberation theologian, writes that this movement called the church to reject oppressive institutions and launch “a vehement attack on the evils of racism in all its forms.”³ Womanist theology, inspired by the work of Alice Walker, looks at this issue from the perspective of marginalized African American women as well as other women of color.⁴
2. *Black liberation theology in South Africa* emerged within the context of the Black Consciousness Movement, and in conjunction with the University Christian Movement in 1970 and the Contextual Theology Institute in 1981.⁵ Theologians such as Simon Maimela, Manas Buthelezi, and Desmond Tutu played a key role in articulating a black theology in South Africa, which critiqued apartheid and the racist theology of the Dutch Reformed Churches.⁶
3. *Feminist liberation theology* emerged as a response to a global history of women’s suppression and marginalization as well as to oppressive patriarchal structures within

² James H. Cone, “Preface to the 1989 Edition,” in *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), vii–xiv.

³ Cone, “Introduction,” in *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 2.

⁴ Stephanie Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

⁵ Gerald West, “The Legacy of Liberation Theologies in South Africa, with an Emphasis on Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, vol. 36 (July 2010), 157–83.

⁶ R. S. Tshaka and M. K. Makofane, “The Continued Relevance of Black Liberation Theology for Democratic South Africa Today,” *Scriptura* (2012), 532–46.

the church. It includes theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary Daly, and Marianne Katoppo. Feminist theologian Natalie Watson says that a central goal of this theology is the “transformation of theological concepts, methods, language and imagery into a more holistic theology as a means and an expression of the struggle for liberation.”⁷

While each liberation theology focuses on different injustices, they share the common principle that the central Christian message is one of freedom and that this message has powerful implications for each specific context.

Within this global liberation movement, Palestinian liberation theology was born when faith confronted the injustice of the conquest of Palestinian land by the government of Israel and its oppression of the Palestinian people. From a Palestinian perspective, the creation of the state of Israel has been a settler colonial enterprise by Zionism⁸ that sought to dispossess the Palestinians—Muslims and Christians—of their land and replace them with Jews. One of the many features of this enterprise has been the use of the Bible as a tool to claim that the land of Palestine belongs solely to the Jewish people. Such a claim is historically false and theologically unfounded. Liberating the scriptures from Zionism means understanding that the person of Jesus Christ reveals a loving God who desires the liberation of all people.

While Palestinian liberation theology speaks to a specific context, it has become part of a global theological movement that reads scripture in light of the liberating message of Christ.

⁷ Natalie Watson, “Scripture and Tradition,” in *Feminist Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 2.

⁸ Zionism is a nationalist and political movement of Jews started by Theodor Herzl in Europe in 1897 for the establishment and development of a Jewish state in Palestine.

HOW DOES LIBERATION THEOLOGY RELATE TO TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY?

For many years liberation theology was on the fringe of theological discourse. However, since the inauguration of Pope Francis, it has begun to take a more prominent place. One of the first acts of the pope was to invite Gustavo Gutiérrez for a discussion at the Vatican. In August 2014, Pope Francis lifted the beatification ban on Salvadoran Archbishop Óscar Romero, indicating a new openness toward liberation theology in the Catholic Church. This radical shift signaled a new relationship between traditional and liberation theologies.

While traditional theology has been taught in a variety of ways, it is helpful to consider four main categories that are covered at most universities and seminaries and to examine how liberation theology fits into the traditional framework for teaching theology at such institutions:

- *Biblical theology*: Looking at biblical texts and analyzing and interpreting their meaning.
- *Historical theology*: Considering how Christian doctrine developed over time.
- *Systematic theology*: Considering theological principles such as the attributes of God and the Trinity.
- *Practical theology*: Looking at how theology affects people's lives. Often, this is in the form of pastoral or moral theology.

Liberation theology is a lived theology. It is a way of understanding suffering and injustice and responding to it. Moreover, when we take Jesus Christ as the center of our faith, he becomes both savior and liberator. Not only can he help us to analyze our situation in life, including the injustices our communities face, but he can also give us the strength and courage to confront them.

As our hermeneutic,⁹ our principle of interpretation, Christ can help us interpret and understand the scriptures, particularly the Old Testament. Christ as liberator can shape our historical account of the Christian faith and give us the tools to critique and reformulate antiquated dogma. The nature of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, can shape our systematic analysis of theological principles. Liberation theology challenges our practical and moral theology to go beyond the individual and consider the sins of unjust systems and power structures. While it may not directly fit into or relate to all the categories of traditional theology, it can still help us, even challenge us, to reconsider other theologies when it arises out of the context of life and especially the lives of the poor and oppressed.

From our perspective, therefore, liberation theology is the heart of all theology because it involves and concerns people's everyday life.

⁹ Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of text interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical text.

2

WHO ARE THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS?

ONE OF THE important marks of liberation theology is the way it takes seriously the context of liberation. This means that before one is able to articulate a theology of liberation, it is essential to do a serious and objective analysis of the problems that have caused the injustice that warrants liberation. When we consider the conflict over Palestine, it is important to ask who are the Palestinians in general, and more specifically, who are the Palestinian Christians?

The Palestinian people are the offspring of all the ancient tribes that inhabited Canaan (its ancient name) from time immemorial. It is important to remember that geographically Palestine was always a passageway for the ancient great empires. Many wars were fought on its soil or in its vicinity between the great empire of Egypt in the south and the different empires of the north. Palestine's geography facilitated the settlement of people who came as settlers or conquerors and stayed. The Bible mentions that Abraham came from ancient Mesopotamia (today's Iraq) and settled in it. So did the ancient Israelite tribes who lived among the existing population. Indeed, Palestine has always been a land of a great mixture of people from many

ethnic backgrounds. Palestine was conquered and governed by successive empires—Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Muslim Arabs and non-Arabs, Crusaders, to name just a few—but its multi-ethnic indigenous inhabitants remained on the land in good as well as bad times. Palestine was never a monolithic country. It was always a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural society.

DNA analysis of the Palestinian population, including Bedouins and Druze, has shown that they are the direct descendants of the ancient people of the land, including ancient Jews. “The closest genetic neighbors to most Jewish groups were the Palestinians, Israeli Bedouins, and Druze in addition to the Southern Europeans, including Cypriots.”¹

Although the country has been known by different names, the two by which it has been identified the longest have been Canaan and Palestine. Since the second century after Christ, the country was given the name Palestine by the Romans, and its inhabitants, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, became referred to as Palestinians. The new name, however, was not a new invention. It reflected ancient local practices going back to the twentieth Dynasty of Egypt (ca 1150 BC). In the fifth century BC, the Greek historian Herodotus, sometimes called the father of history, designated the country south of Phoenicia as *Philistine Syria*, hence the Greek term *Palaiastina* and the Latin, *Palestina*.²

The history of the Palestinian Christians who live in Palestine and Israel today goes back to the first century after Christ. Jesus Christ was born in Palestine, and his ministry encompassed Galilee, in the north, and Jerusalem, in the south. After his death and resurrection in Jerusalem, the church was born on the day of Pentecost. The Book of Acts describes the coming of the Holy Spirit on the followers of Christ: “They were all together in one

¹ Harry Ostrer and Karl Skorecki, “The Population Genetics of the Jewish People,” *Human Genetics* 132/2 (February 2013), 119–27.

² Bernard Anderson, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 185.

place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1–4).

Apparently, Luke, the author of Acts, intended to show how the good news of Christ started spreading from Jerusalem to the rest of the world, so he named the background of the people—“devout Jews from every nation under heaven”—who were present in Jerusalem at that time: “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs” (Acts 2:5, 9–11).

Through those people, as well as the work of Christian evangelists, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the seed of the gospel was planted in Palestine and the neighboring countries and beyond. Christian communities were sprouting. By the fourth century Palestine had become predominantly Christian.³

Over two thousand years, internal as well as external challenges have faced the church in general and Palestinian Christians in particular. It is possible to highlight five major factors that have affected the life and vitality of the Christian church in Palestine:⁴

THE FIRST FACTOR: THE THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSIES

As the church expanded and the number of Christians grew, the Christian communities started facing serious theological

³ Steven Runciman, “The Christian Arabs of Palestine,” Lecture, University of Essex, UK, November 26, 1968.

⁴ Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, and Maruine Tobin, eds., *The Forgotten Faithful: A Window on the Life and Witness of Palestinian Christians* (Jerusalem: Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2008).

challenges that caused the Emperor Constantine in AD 325 to call a general church council to resolve matters. The difficulties and misunderstandings that had emerged were largely theological, but they were worsened by political and cultural differences. Some Christians were living under the Roman Empire; others were under the Persian Empire. Some spoke Greek and used Hellenistic thought patterns; others spoke Aramaic and used Semitic patterns of thought. The one universal church was caught up in bitter theological controversies.

Between the fourth and fifth centuries a number of church councils were convened to consider important and thorny issues. Hundreds of bishops and theologians from various countries traveled to Asia Minor (today's Turkey) and met together to formulate important doctrines for the Christian Church. By the end of the fifth century, and as a result of the decisions of these councils, many of the Christians in today's Middle East separated themselves from the main body of the Christian Church—the Assyrian Church of Iraq, the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt, the Church of Ethiopia, the Syrian Orthodox Church, and the Armenian Orthodox Church.

This was the *first major schism* within the church that contributed to the fragmentation of Christianity in the separation of the Eastern Christians. Christians became alienated from one another. What remained in the East was the Byzantine (Eastern) Orthodox Church, which was referred to as Melkite because of its loyalty to the *Malek*, the emperor. During this period, however, the Byzantine Orthodox Churches of the East and the Roman Catholic Church in the West remained united.

By the middle of the fifth century Palestine already had some Copts, Syrians, Armenians, and Ethiopians living close to the holy places, and although they enjoyed good relations with the Orthodox Christians, the fracture had already taken place within the one church. This first great division within the church

resulted in alienation, resentment, hostility, broken fellowship, denunciation, and rejection of the sacraments of the “other.”

THE SECOND FACTOR: THE COMING OF ISLAM

The coming of Islam in the seventh century was welcomed by many Eastern Christians who resented the cruelty of the Byzantine Empire. In fact, some Eastern Christians fought alongside the Muslims against the Byzantines. Generally speaking, the Arab Muslim rulers were tolerant of Christians and Jews, many of whom enjoyed prominent government positions within the Muslim state.

However, with the passage of years, the non-Arab Muslim rulers became less tolerant. This resulted in greater hardships for and persecution of Christians, causing the movement of many Christians from the Arab peninsula to what we know today as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. Furthermore, to escape the payment of the special tax for non-Muslims (*al-jizya*) and also to avoid persecution, many Christians became Muslim. It was a conversion of convenience rather than conviction. Indeed, it is true that the coming of Islam lifted the yoke of the Byzantines off the shoulders of the indigenous Christians of the Middle East, but it weakened the Christian community through apostasy to Islam.

THE THIRD FACTOR: THE COMING OF THE CRUSADES

In 1054, forty-five years before the first Crusade (1099), the break between the Byzantine Orthodox Church in the East and the Roman Catholic Church in the West took place. This was the *second major schism* within the body of the Christian

Church. When the Crusaders came to Jerusalem, they perceived not only the Muslims as their enemies, but also the Jews and the indigenous Orthodox Christians of the land. To the chagrin of the Orthodox Church, the Crusaders replaced the Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem with a Roman Catholic patriarch. Moreover, during the Crusader period, a number of the Orthodox Churches in the East split, and a segment of the church asserted its loyalty to the Catholic Church in Rome while retaining its Eastern character and liturgy.

These divisions left the Christians of the East weaker and more fragmented, with much bitterness and hostility toward one another. The bitter legacy of the Crusades upset the lives of all the Christians of the East with regard to their Muslim neighbors and created suspicion and, at times, accusations of collaboration with the West. The division of the Eastern Orthodox Church into Orthodox and Catholic branches was the *third major schism* within Eastern Christianity.

THE FOURTH FACTOR: THE COMING OF THE PROTESTANTS

In the sixteenth century the Catholic Church in Western Europe was itself divided. In what became known as the Protestant Reformation, many Christians in Europe separated from Rome and formed their own national or local churches. Further splits took place within those churches. Eventually, many new Protestant and evangelical denominations came into being.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the great Protestant missionary movement started. In some countries this preceded colonialism, while in others it followed it. In Palestine the Western missionaries came while the Ottoman Turks were still in power, and colonialism followed after the end of World War I. The American Presbyterian missionaries went to Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, while the Anglicans and the Lutherans

came to Palestine. New Protestant and evangelical churches began to form, and most of their members were solicited from the Orthodox and Catholic churches of the land. This created the *fourth major schism* within Palestinian Christianity.

**THE FIFTH FACTOR:
THE COMING OF THE ZIONISTS
AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL**

In 1897, Theodor Herzl established the Zionist movement in Basel, Switzerland. Its main objective was the establishment of “a publicly recognized and legally secured Jewish home in Palestine.”⁵ The Zionists did not differentiate between Palestinian Christians and Muslims. They viewed them all as Arabs who needed to be eliminated for the success of the Zionist project. As far back as June 12, 1895, Herzl had written in his diary:

When we occupy the land . . . we must expropriate gently the private property on the estates assigned to us. We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our country. . . . Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.⁶

In 1947, the United Nations Partition Plan proposed to give Jews, the minority population in Palestine and largely recent immigrants, over 55 percent of Palestine for a state. To the Palestinian Muslims and Christians, the indigenous people of the land and the majority population, it gave approximately 45 percent. The plan was totally unjust and absurd. It was imposed on the

⁵ Alfred Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection: What Price Peace* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1978).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

Palestinians by the wishes of the victorious Western powers that refused to allow the Palestinians their right of self-determination. The Palestinians rejected the plan as unjust, while the Zionists accepted it because it gave them, for the first time, a legal foothold in the country. As soon as the UN endorsed the Partition Plan, the Zionists started to ethnically cleanse the Palestinians from their towns and villages.⁷ As a direct consequence of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, 750,000 Palestinians—Muslims and Christians—fled in fear or were driven out at gunpoint by the Zionist forces. The Zionist militias did not stop until they conquered over 78 percent (*not* 55 percent) of the land. The destruction of Palestine was a devastating blow to the Palestinians and the Arab countries. It was a setback that hindered Palestinian progress and development for many years to come.

When considering the above five factors, one notices that the internal divisions among the Christians left Palestine intact; but with the establishment of the state of Israel, the country was itself divided. Palestinian Christians were split between those who stayed in what became Israel and those displaced. Most Christians and their clergy became refugees and were forbidden by Israel to return to their homes, in contravention of UN resolutions that demanded their return. Approximately 60 percent of the Christians were ethnically cleansed. The loss of Christian numbers weakened the church further. Later, many Christians emigrated to the West, largely to escape the discrimination of Israel against its Arab Palestinian minority. Other refugees were scattered in different parts of the world, seeking refuge and a decent life for themselves and their families.

The same policies of discrimination were used by Israel after it occupied the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in 1967. Due to political instability, many Palestinian

⁷ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: Oneworld, 2006).

Christians have been steadily emigrating. Today, more Palestinian Christians live outside Palestine than inside. It is estimated that fewer than 200,000 Christians live inside historic Palestine, while over 200,000 are living in the diaspora.

The government of Israel has always used systems of control to keep the Palestinians under its domination. One of these is the segmentation of people. Palestinian Muslims and Christians live today in four separate geographical entities, namely, inside the state of Israel, on the West Bank, in East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip. Due to Israeli restrictions on their movement, most of them are not free to interact physically with those living in the other areas.

When one summarizes the last two thousand years of Palestinian Christianity, the five major factors above are certainly obvious. Each one of them negatively affected the Christian community in Palestine and left it weaker and more vulnerable than before. From a contemporary political perspective, it has been a tragic history of injustice and oppression, occupation, and discrimination. From an ecclesiastical perspective, it has been also a sad history of a fragmented body of Christ, with so many Christian divisions and splits.

Nevertheless, today the small Christian community in Palestine is a beautiful mosaic representing the universal church in its diversity and rich liturgical and ecclesiastical heritage—the Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and evangelical branches—all present in Jerusalem and the Holy Land for the praise and glory of God.

This short outline of Palestinian Christianity provides us with the agenda, indeed, with a mandate for the work of Palestinian liberation theology:

1. We have a responsibility toward our fellow Christians to affect healing and reconciliation among the Christian communities in the land. This is our *ecumenical* mandate.

2. We have a responsibility toward our Muslim brothers and sisters to heal past grievances and to build viable relations of mutual understanding, respect, and acceptance between our religions. This is our *interfaith* mandate.
3. We have a responsibility to strive diligently, through all nonviolent means, for the achievement of an equitable, peaceful resolution to the Palestine-Israel political conflict. It needs to be based on justice and truth, mercy and reconciliation, as outlined by the United Nations and the requirements of international law. This is our *justice and peace* mandate.
4. We have also an *international* mandate that calls us to work with our friends internationally to raise awareness about the plight and predicament of the Palestinians so that together we can strive for liberation and reconciliation among all the people of our land.

THE THREEFOLD NAKBA

THE SEEDS OF Palestinian liberation theology can be traced back to a defining moment in Palestinian history: the Nakba (catastrophe). In 1948, approximately 750,000 Palestinians fled in fear or were driven out by force from their country because of the brutal onslaught of the Zionist militias. These militias were carrying out a premeditated plan to evacuate the country of its Palestinian inhabitants.

A gradually rising number of Zionists had been entering Palestine from the end of the nineteenth century. The Zionists gained ground at the end of World War I, when the establishment of the British Mandate over Palestine set in motion the implementation of the Balfour Declaration. This declaration by the British Government in 1917 promised a homeland in Palestine to the Jews, a tiny minority at the time, while totally disregarding the political rights of the Palestinian majority. Over the next two decades there was a rapid increase of Jewish immigration to Palestine, both legally and illegally, as well as an increase in violence. Zionists began to press openly for a state, and as a result, the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan was set in motion, giving preference to the Zionist Jews, who had become 33 percent of the population.¹

¹ For more detailed coverage of this period, see Henry Cattán, *The Palestine Question* (London: Saqi Books, 2000).

THE HUMAN NAKBA

The Nakba was a threefold catastrophe for the Palestinian people.² First, it was a *human Nakba* of enormous magnitude. It affected Palestinians economically, ruptured Palestine's social fabric, and caused significant human trauma. The Nakba was the direct cause of poverty, because it resulted in the loss of Palestinian homes, lands, and possessions. This poverty was sustained by the life of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in refugee camps on the West Bank and Gaza and in neighboring Arab countries. The Nakba has also contributed to the deterioration of Palestine's traditional social fabric. By July 2014, there were approximately five million Palestinian refugees, over 700,000 of whom were registered by UNRWA and residing in Palestine.³ Many families were separated by the armistice lines; others by Israeli administrative detention of their members without charge or trial. The continued Israeli occupation has caused significant trauma. Violence, military oppression, and humiliation at checkpoints have contributed to distress within the Palestinian community. Clinical psychologists Abdel Hamid Afana and Samir Quota and psychiatrist and human rights activist Eyad El Sarraj state that many Palestinians are in need of mental-health interventions because of trauma. Adults who had been exposed to house demolitions displayed depression, anxiety, and paranoia that exceeded those of other groups.⁴ Unfortunately, there are currently very few resources available in Palestine to tackle this trauma.

² Cedar Duaybis, "The Threefold Nakba," *Cornerstone* 66 (2013).

³ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), "Where We Work," <http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank>.

⁴ Abdel Hamid Afana, Samir Quota, and Eyad El Sarraj, "Mental Health Needs in Palestine," *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine* 28 (November 2004).

THE IDENTITY NAKBA

The second aspect of the Nakba, for Palestinians who remained in Israel, was the *identity Nakba*. Overnight, Palestinians in Israel went from living in their own homes and lands to being strangers in their own country. For many Palestinians this physical uprooting resulted in a crisis of identity. Palestinian Christians and Muslims had to renegotiate what it meant to be Christian or Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab in the new Israeli state that did not want them.

The loss of identity was intensified by Israel's attempts to erase Palestinian culture, history, and memory. Israel did this in many ways. Three that are important to highlight are the great book robbery, the colonization of language and symbols, and the content of school curricula. Israeli historian Ilan Pappé argues that the great book robbery, a term that describes the seventy thousand Palestinian books that were "collected" by Israel, was a pillage that aimed to erase the Palestinian historical narrative.⁵ Gish Amit, a historian who wrote his doctoral thesis on this topic, describes this process as part of Israel's colonial enterprise, and "an act of exclusion of Palestinians from the national collective."⁶ Israel has further undermined Palestinian identity through exercising control over language and symbols. Perhaps the most striking example of this is that it was forbidden to speak about *Palestine* or *Palestinians* until the Oslo Accords (1993). On ID cards Palestinians were referred to as Arabs, and the Palestinians who remained inside the Israeli state were known as Israeli Arabs, not as Palestinians.⁷ Moreover, the Palestinian flag became

⁵ *The Great Book Robbery*, Xela Films (2012).

⁶ Gish Amit, "Salvage or Plunder? Israel's 'Collection' of Private Palestinian Libraries in West Jerusalem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40/4 (2010/11): 6–23.

⁷ More exactly, the first ID given by the state of Israel to the Palestinians who remained had the word *Palestinian* to indicate their nationality. Sometime later, the IDs were changed, and the specific word *Palestinian* was replaced by the more generic term *Arab*.

an illegal “terrorist” symbol. Such actions were colonial attempts to undermine the collective memory of the Palestinian people.

Education is yet another sphere in which Israel has sought to erase Palestinian identity. In Israeli schools textbooks that included a Palestinian historical narrative were banned. This has also extended to the Palestinian education system within Israel, where officials have insisted upon the use of Israeli textbooks in schools.⁸ In 2009, education minister Gideon Sa’ar removed the term *Nakba* from the Arab Israeli education curriculum.⁹

THE FAITH NAKBA

The third aspect of the Nakba was the *faith Nakba*. Cedar Duaybis, a Palestinian Christian and one of the founding members of Sabeel, has explained that it was “a theological Nakba that pulled the ground from under our feet and added to our feeling of being utterly lost. Our lives were like a ship whose anchor had broken loose and was drifting aimlessly.”¹⁰ At the heart of the faith Nakba was the harsh juxtaposition between the church and the day-to-day life of Palestinians. For the first eighteen years following the Nakba, Palestinians were placed under very strict military rule that controlled every aspect of their lives. Yet within the church nothing seemed to have changed—the liturgy, the Bible readings, the sermons, the hymns—in spite of the fact that people’s lives had been turned upside down. The establishment of the state of Israel was a seismic tremor of enormous magnitude that has shaken the very foundations of many people’s beliefs. The fundamental question for many Christians, whether uttered or not, was this: “How can the Old Testament be the word of

⁸ Or Kashti, “Education Ministry Bans Textbook That Offers Palestinian Narrative,” *Haaretz* (September 27, 2010).

⁹ Lidar Grave-Lazi, “Israeli, Arab Politicians in Heated Debate over Teaching Nakba Narrative to Israeli Students,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 29, 2015.

¹⁰ Duaybis, “The Threefold Nakba,” 10–12.

God in light of the Palestinian Christians' experience with its use to support Zionism?"¹¹

Some Palestinian Christians held on to their faith. For others, the Nakba caused the collapse of their belief system. They were unable to go back to their former theological and spiritual way of thinking while groping to find a meaningful way forward. Whether it was the theology of Christian fundamentalism and Zionism, or the ideology of Jewish Zionism, the Bible was used to grant approval to the tragic fate of the Palestinian people. Religious beliefs seemed to clash with the reality of everyday life.

In general, the first responses of Christians and churches to the Nakba were humanitarian. They provided food and shelter to the refugees and to the vulnerable members of the Palestinian community. However, these acts of charity were not accompanied by political action. There were many reasons for this. Most of the church hierarchy at the time was foreign and, consequently, not as invested in the political situation as the Palestinians themselves. Most Palestinians were in shock. They could not believe what was happening to them and to their country. Their first concern was to care for the immediate needs of their families and to the great influx of refugees.

The faith Nakba had made it clear that if the Palestinian Christian community wanted to reinvigorate its religious life, it was essential to reexamine the meaning of its faith and Christian responsibility in light of Israel's oppression of its people. Sadly, the Palestinian Nakba was still far from over, and it was important to discern the will of God for the Palestinian people as expressed in the message and life of Jesus Christ.

¹¹ Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 78.

OTHER HISTORICAL EVENTS
THAT LED TO THE EMERGENCE
OF PALESTINIAN LIBERATION
THEOLOGY

UNDOUBTEDLY, THE COMPREHENSIVE tragedy of the Nakba was the main event that turned Palestinian lives upside down. It seemed the Palestinians were destined to suffer not for any crime they had committed but just because they happened to live in their own homeland. Erich Fromm, the widely known scholar and author, wrote in 1959: “The claim of the Jews to the land of Israel cannot be a realistic political claim. If all nations would suddenly claim territories in which their forefathers lived two thousand years ago, this world would be a madhouse.”¹ It is totally nonsensical and irrational that Jews can claim the land of Palestine because their ancestors lived in it thousands of years ago, while the indigenous Palestinians who have never left it should be barred from it. But that is precisely what happened. The guilt, however, cannot be borne by the Zionist Jews alone. It was due also to the political responsibility of Britain and the

¹ *Jewish Newsletter* (New York), May 19, 1959, cited in Marion Woolfson, *Prophets in Babylon* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 13.

United States, as well as the biblical theology that many Western Christians espoused.

In addition to the Nakba, there were three other historical events that played a major role and contributed to the emergence of a Palestinian liberation theology.

THE HOLOCAUST

A few years before the Palestinian Nakba, and during World War II, the German Nazis annihilated six million European Jews in one of the worst holocausts of the twentieth century. Undoubtedly, the magnitude of the tragedy combined with Western guilt for the inability of the Allied forces to prevent the Holocaust constituted a strong incentive on the part of the victors of the war to speed up the implementation of the Balfour Declaration. In light of the enormity of the Holocaust, the rights and wishes of over a million Palestinian Arabs in Palestine seemed trivial and insignificant. One can even say that the Palestinians were the easy scapegoats. Indeed, millions of innocent Jews perished because of the sin of antisemitism, but the Palestinians were compelled to pay the price by their dispossession and loss of homeland. They were expecting self-determination as elaborated in the McMahon-Sherif Hussein correspondence,² but instead, their Palestine and its people were sacrificed on the altar of Western guilt.

Western responses to the Palestinian Nakba were, in general, limited to humanitarian aid rather than political outrage. What stood out in the West was the tragedy of the Holocaust. Most people were not at all aware of what happened to the Palestinian population. After all, the Palestinians were simply perceived as a bunch of Arabs. What happened to them was merely collateral

² Sami Hadawi, *Bitter Harvest; Palestine 1914–67* (New York: New World Press, 1967), 14.

damage that could be remedied with some humanitarian aid. In no way could it be compared with the much weightier tragedy that befell the Jews.

Soon, the establishment of the state of Israel began to be perceived as the antithesis to the Holocaust. Whereas the Holocaust was considered to be the lowest point in Jewish history and the culmination of thousands of years of tragedy and suffering, the creation of Israel and the return of millions of Jews to the land signified the dawning of redemption. If the Holocaust was the Jewish experience of death, the creation of the state of Israel signified their rising from the dead. Ezekiel 37 (the valley of dry bones) was invoked frequently by Western Christians and Jews. For Western Christian Zionists, the establishment of Israel was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy and the hastening of the second coming of Christ.

This period spawned a new dedication to interfaith dialogue, flinging open a door that had been shut for centuries. German, Dutch, British, Canadian, American, and other theologians discussed issues of history, theology, scripture, liturgy, attitudes, stereotypes, myths, and numerous other topics. Everything that marred Christian-Jewish relations in the past was tackled and addressed. These Holocaust theologians authored books and published articles. All the sins and crimes carried out against the Jewish people by Christians, Christianity, and the church were exposed and confessed. In the light of the Holocaust these dialogues were significant for many people.

However, this also led to the “Ecumenical Deal” where Western Christian participants not only expressed remorse for past crimes against the Jewish people, but also championed the Zionist cause and committed themselves to unflinching support of the state of Israel. Jews were perceived as innocent victims, while Western Christians were seen as guilty culprits. Most Western Christians were relieved to see Jews find a home after their unbelievable loss in the Holocaust and their many years of

persecution and suffering by Christians. It was fitting, therefore, that Western Christians walk penitently the way of solidarity and support for both the Jewish people and the state of Israel. In the words of Marc Ellis, what was required was “eternal repentance for Christian anti-Jewishness unencumbered by any substantive criticism of Israel.”³

It is important to remember that the tragedy of the Holocaust occurred over fifty years after the Zionist movement began. During these years the increasing legal and illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine contributed much to the escalation of violence between the indigenous Palestinian Arab population and the Zionist immigrants, whose goal was to devour Palestine and expel its indigenous people. Were it not for the Holocaust, it would be difficult to imagine the Zionist project coming to fruition so rapidly, if ever. Indeed, one cannot exaggerate the psychological influence that the Holocaust exerted in the creation of the state of Israel. If the Nakba necessitated the emergence of Palestinian liberation theology, the Holocaust was an essential part of its background.

THE WAR OF 1967 AND THE RISE OF RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

The war of 1967 was a watershed. The Israeli army occupied the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, as well as large areas of surrounding Arab countries. At the same time the war caused major internal shifts in the Israeli political parties, moving the whole country farther to the right. By the second half of the 1970s the Zionist movement started shifting from a secular to a religious form of Zionism and from an emphasis on the Holocaust to an emphasis on the Torah. This shift

³ Marc Ellis, “Beyond the Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Solidarity with the Palestinian People,” *The Link* (1992).

proved to be of great significance. It encouraged the confiscation of Palestinian land, the building of Jewish settlements, and the expansion of the settler movement. The use of the Bible proved to be a more potent tool for attracting support for Israel than even the Holocaust.

The use of the Hebrew Bible not only emboldened Jewish Zionists, it inspired and excited large numbers of Western evangelical Christians. Christian Zionism had a long history that dates back to the nineteenth century, with the writings of John Nelson Darby and Lord Shaftesbury, and even earlier.⁴ For Christian Zionists and other evangelicals the 1967 occupation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank served as the final proof of the approaching end of history. Now that Jerusalem was under Israeli-Jewish rule, the Christian Zionist theological agenda demanded, wrongly, the destruction of the Muslim holy sites on the Haram al Sharif and the building of a Jewish temple in anticipation of the second coming of Christ.

Since 2001, Jewish and Christian Zionists in the United States have worked closely together despite their theological differences. Christian Zionists espouse an apocalyptic end-time scenario: in the battle of Armageddon at the end of history, two-thirds of the Jewish people in Israel would be massacred and the last third would convert to the Christian faith. Such a fundamentalist belief contains antisemitic and genocidal implications with which one would expect the Jewish people to be extremely uncomfortable, and rightly so. However, because of the Christian Zionists' unflinching support of Israel on the one hand, and their anti-Muslim stance on the other, some Jewish Zionists have been willing to work together with Christian Zionists,

⁴ See Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (UK: IVP Academic, 2006); Don Wagner, *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014); and Naim Ateek, et al., *Challenging Christian Zionism* (UK: Melisende, 2005).

so long as they maintain their unshakable commitment to the well-being of Israel.

At the same time Jewish settlers have become more extreme and have started to take the law into their own hands. They have been harassing and assaulting Palestinian civilians openly under the protection of the Israeli army. In fact, the settlers increasingly occupy important positions of power. Some of them are members in the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) and ministers in the Israeli government. In addition, an increasing number enjoy higher ranks in the army and wield a growing military influence and power.

Tragically, the life of the Palestinians under the Israeli government continues to worsen. The Holocaust is no longer the great justifier; justification is now in the name of God and the Bible.

The continued role that such a Zionist reading of the Bible plays for both Jewish and Christian Zionists makes it essential for Palestinian liberation theology to criticize it squarely.

THE FIRST INTIFADA

The first intifada erupted in 1987 as a Palestinian popular response to continued injustice and oppression, as well as the failure of the international community to resolve the question of Palestine. The intifada not only unified the Palestinian people throughout the territories occupied in 1967, but it moved them to nonviolent direct action. It showed the world that the grassroots Palestinian community was able to organize and to resist peacefully.

Up until the first intifada, the Palestinians, convinced of the justness of their cause, were waiting on the United Nations and the international community to redress the grave injustices of 1948 and 1967 by implementing the UN resolutions regarding their homeland. However, the years passed by, and the United Nations was unable to implement its own resolutions due to the position of the Western powers, particularly the United

States, which was blindly committed to Israel's protection. Israel presumed that with the passage of time the Palestinians' claim would die. In fact, the Zionist adage was, "the old will die and the young will forget."

It is important to remember that when the intifada broke out, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had no official presence in Palestine. Yasser Arafat and the PLO leadership were in exile in Tunis. Furthermore, Israel and most Western countries considered the PLO a terrorist organization and had no dealings with it.

The intifada erupted spontaneously among the Palestinians in the 1967 territories as a reaction to the cruelty and heavy-handedness of the Israeli occupying forces. The intifada started in Gaza, but it soon engulfed the West Bank. The Gaza Strip at the time was not an isolated entity; people were able to travel freely between Gaza and the West Bank. Whenever the Israeli army was deployed to squash the intifada in a given town, the resistance erupted in another.

In spite of the brutal measures of the Israeli army, and the suffering it imposed, people felt a sense of exhilaration. The years of waiting for the United Nations and the international community to redress the injustice had been long and futile. It was time for the Palestinians themselves to rise up and through nonviolent resistance demand the end of the illegal occupation. That is why people were enthusiastic and excited, hoping that they could bring a drastic change to their situation. Most of them did not realize that they were up against a stubborn settler colonial ideology that is difficult to uproot.

The intifada of 1987 triggered the rise of Palestinian liberation theology, but it was not its original source. Its roots lay dormant in the Palestinian Nakba of 1948.

Palestinian liberation theology began at St. George's Cathedral, Jerusalem, home of the Palestinian Anglican (Episcopal) community, where I was the priest and pastor of the congregation. Every

Sunday the sermon revolved around the Gospel for the day and spoke to the situation and reality on the ground. After worship, the community gathered around coffee to reflect in light of the Gospel on their life under the illegal Israeli occupation. People shared their stories and experiences. They struggled with the meaning of their faith under occupation.

Their main inspiration came from Jesus Christ, who was always the model and paradigm of their faith. His life, teaching, and example became the criteria for their own lives and behavior. Escapism and flight were not an option. Jesus Christ was their liberator, and they must follow in his footsteps. His way of nonviolence was an important guiding principle. The armed struggle was not the way of Jesus; nonviolence was.

Providentially, the well-known New Testament scholar Dr. Kenneth Bailey was living in Jerusalem at the time and was a worshiper every Sunday. His presence provided a valuable biblical resource for the local community.

Every Sunday, the Palestinian Christian community of faith was doing theology on the ground in a contextual, pragmatic, and meaningful way. The main credit goes to the people themselves. The best political analysis as well as the best theological ideas came from the men and women of Jerusalem.

The Sunday gatherings became very popular and attracted other Christians from other communities in Jerusalem, as well as internationals. In the midst of the suffering of our people due to the brutality of the Israeli occupation forces, the members of our faith community found the discussion to be spiritually and psychologically therapeutic. It deepened their faith and gave them comfort, encouragement, and hope for the week to come.

The discussion became more stimulating when it dawned on the Palestinian Christians that the person they call Savior and Lord was himself a victim of an oppressive occupation. They did not have to go far to look for a liberator. Jesus Christ was a Palestinian, as we are. He lived in the same land we live in. He

breathed the same air we breathe. His language and thought patterns were Semitic, as ours are. The Palestine he lived in was a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-religious society, as it has been ever since. Moreover, the political situation of his day, with its many political and religious parties, showed great similarities to our situation today.⁵

Once that discovery was made, Jesus Christ was viewed as the paradigm of faith and our liberator. For Palestinian Christians, Jesus Christ seemed uniquely theirs. They perceived him as a fellow Palestinian who lived all his life under the Roman occupation and was eventually killed by the occupation forces in collaboration with the religious leaders of the day. Such a discovery had important theological implications for most people and became a great incentive for engagement.

It was thus, by the grace of God, at St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem that the foundations of Palestinian liberation theology were laid. If the Nakba of 1948 marked the destruction of the Palestinian community, and the intifada of 1987 marked the return to national consciousness, then, for the Palestinian Christian community, the emergence of a liberation theology marked the return to a more authentic faith and commitment in the service of God. It was an empowering *kairos* that gave people hope and courage and determination to become involved in the work of justice and peace that would lead to freedom and liberation.

⁵ See Naim Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 92–103.

RECLAIMING THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

PALESTINIAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY is the outcome of faith encountering context. It is when one's view or faith in God's justice confronts the dreadful injustice of human beings against their fellow humans. Palestinian liberation theology has three components: faith, context, and response; or faith, situation in life, and action. Liberation theology is realized when we are able to answer the question: what does God expect us to say and to do about the injustice and oppression that we see happening before us?

First, faith in the God of love and justice means that one is already sensitized by the love of God and is committed to do God's will in the world. Love and justice are two sides of the same coin. When people love God, they do justice to their fellow human beings. When people love their neighbors, they do justice to them. When love is absent, injustice is bound to ensue. To be committed to justice is to be committed to love of neighbor and vice versa. An important dimension of this faith is one's view of God's vision for the world. God wills that people live in justice and love, in mercy and forgiveness, in peace and reconciliation.

Second, the vision of God's love for all people needs to be followed by a truthful and honest analysis of the situation at

hand, in other words, by a careful assessment of the context of injustice and oppression.

Third, we need to ask and answer the theological question, what does God expect us to say and do? In the words of Micah, “What does the LORD require of you?” (6:8). When our answer leads us to become actively engaged in the achievement of justice and peace, then we are practicing a theology of liberation.

It must be remembered that the early theological Christian controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries ended with the affirmation of the divinity of Christ. Although the early creeds affirmed both Jesus Christ’s full humanity and full divinity,¹ the great emphasis was on his divinity. Our Eastern Christian liturgies are pregnant with the emphasis of Christ’s divinity, and many of our people take pride in stressing it.

Palestinian liberation theology, however, brought back the balance by reclaiming Jesus Christ’s full humanity. It was truly a discovery of the historical Jesus who lived under occupation like today’s Palestinians. When Palestinian Christians recognized and accepted his full humanity, it was a turning point that drove us directly back to the Gospels to study Jesus’s life and teachings. Such an exercise inspired and encouraged us to commit ourselves to the work for justice and peace.

JESUS IN NAZARETH (LUKE 4:18–19)

One of the key texts that inspired us was the passage from Isaiah 61 that Jesus used in the Nazareth synagogue.

¹ The Nicene Creed says clearly “eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father, through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”

“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 cap-
tives
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)

Jesus appropriated this text and in the ensuing discussion with his own town folks at the synagogue, he confronted their exclusive attitudes toward foreigners. He challenged their narrow view of God. God entrusted a Phoenician widow and her son to the prophet Elijah during a period of severe famine. As to the prophet Elisha, the only leper the prophet healed was a Syrian general. God’s love and care were not limited to the people of ancient Israel but extended even to their enemies.

The contemporary relevance of this gospel text cannot be overestimated. To begin with, it is a call for activism on behalf of the underdog and the oppressed people of the world.

It is also a critique of ethnocentric attitudes and policies. The Palestinians in occupied Palestine, including those who are citizens of the state of Israel, have been suffering from discrimination and racism for many years. Palestinian liberation theology challenges this and champions their cause for liberation.

THE UNJUST JUDGE (LUKE 18:1–8)

This text is a parable that Jesus used to emphasize the importance of persistence in prayer. It is likely that this story of a widow standing before the unjust judge and saying “grant me justice”

was more than a parable. It is likely that it reflected a real life story that Jesus was aware of.

This story is very relevant to Palestinian suffering. The judge represented empire and people of power, hence the injustice and oppression. The widow represented the vulnerable, the poor, and the oppressed.

Justice is at the heart of the struggle. Jesus's description is precise: "a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people" (v. 2). Once persons come to that state, they have lost their humanity.

In the struggle for justice the Palestinians are continuously facing unjust Israeli judges. Palestinians are dispossessed of their land; verbally and physically mistreated and abused; evicted from their homes; and at times have their homes demolished and are forced to move. Witnessing what is happening to Palestinian families under Israeli occupation makes Jesus's story pertinent and relevant to many people.

JESUS CHRIST AS OUR HERMENEUTIC

For Palestinian Christians, liberation theology is anchored in Jesus Christ as liberator. Indeed, Palestinian liberation theology is a Christ-centered theology that focuses directly on the Palestine-Israel conflict.

In Palestinian liberation theology Jesus Christ becomes the hermeneutic, the lens or principle of interpretation through which Christians can examine, test, evaluate, and determine the authentic word of God for them and differentiate it from what is unauthentic and meaningless to their life of faith.

What do we mean by Christ as hermeneutic? As we all know, the Bible is a big book that covers a long time span. Its content is diverse and varied. It includes prose and poetry, history and myths, prophecy and apocalyptic, tribal and universal ideas, and so on. It is not always easy to discern its message and meaning.

We need a criterion or a hermeneutic that can help interpret and evaluate the meaning and relevance of the text, as much as we can, to people's life today.

For Palestinian liberation theology the most useful hermeneutical key is Jesus Christ himself. With this hermeneutic it is possible to determine the meaning and relevance of the biblical text for our life today: Is what I am reading in line with the spirit of Christ and does it agree with the knowledge, nature, and character of God that has been revealed to us in and through Jesus Christ? Put differently, Is this biblical text in harmony with the love of God for all people? Such a simple formula can be of help to many Christians in determining the authenticity and usefulness of the text for their life today.

Later on in this book, I also use *love* as a hermeneutical tool, especially, love of God and love of neighbor. This is also quite valid. Many Christians might prefer the Christ hermeneutic, while others might find the love hermeneutic more appealing due to its encompassing nature. In essence, either hermeneutic can work and can help us test and measure the moral and spiritual value of the text to our daily life.

With both these hermeneutical keys in mind, let us consider a few examples. We intentionally use biblical texts that are relevant to the Palestine-Israel conflict and can further elucidate Palestinian liberation theology in practice.

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

GOD OF SOME OR GOD OF ALL

WHAT ARE PALESTINIAN Christians to make of the Old Testament? How are we to read this collection of texts in a way that liberates rather than enslaves?¹

One cannot deny that the Old Testament contains material that can deepen our faith and spirituality.² At the same time there are texts that can be very detrimental to our faith. Some texts contradict the principles of human rights and international law; other texts inspired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

The early church wrestled with the question of the Old Testament. Some Christians favored its elimination from the Bible,

¹ The Christian Old Testament is materially identical with what Jews call the Hebrew Scriptures or simply the Bible; the texts are differently organized and read through different lenses. On the difficulties in reading the Old Testament created for Palestinian Christians by the modern state of Israel, founded on forced displacement and dispossession, see Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), chap. 4.

² As examples, one can mention Psalms 23, 91, 51 (without verses 20–21), 139 (omitting 19–22), 85 (omitting 2–7), and 34 (omitting 17).

others, its selective and minimal use. The church retained it primarily for what it saw as its prophetic witness to the coming of Jesus Christ. The coming of Jesus Christ is believed to have fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

In order to cope with its difficult passages, Christians over the centuries used various methods of interpretation including typology, allegory, and spiritualizing of the text. Such methods are still used by some Christians today. Those who use these methods believe that they can remove the violent sting and make the text palatable. In Palestinian liberation theology we see those biblical texts that do not pass the test of the Christ hermeneutic or the love hermeneutic as morally and theologically offensive; they have no authority for us. Tragically, some of these texts have been used by Christians to justify, in God's name, slavery, war, degradation of women, the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and many other sins and evils. Some of these biblical texts still provide inspiration to extremists, as will be shown.

Some of these texts are usually referred to as "violence of God" or "texts of terror."³ They reflect tribal and exclusive understanding of God that has long been abandoned even within the Hebrew scriptures themselves (our Old Testament). We do not tear up those pages from our Bible but neither should we read them in public worship. They are not morally edifying; they do not contain a word from God to us. Rather, they reflect primitive human understanding as well as the prejudice, bigotry, and racism of tribal societies. Categorically, in no way do they reflect the love of God for all people as revealed to us in Jesus Christ. For many of us, no matter how much some people might allegorize, rationalize, or spiritualize those texts, they remain

³ See Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984); and Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible and the Quran* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

jarring and offensive to the spirit of Christ as well as to human dignity and morality, let alone the values of human rights and international law. In no way do they constitute a word of God for us. They must be rejected. They have no spiritual or moral value or authority for any person.

It is important to point out that Jesus never quoted from the Book of Numbers that sanctions the expulsion of the indigenous people of Canaan, nor did he quote from Joshua and Judges, which glorify ethnic cleansing of people. Jesus was very selective in his use of scripture. “Basically, Jesus doesn’t quote from his own Scriptures when they are punitive, imperialistic . . . classist, or exclusionary. In fact, he teaches the exact opposite in every case. This is hard to miss. And our job as Christians is to imitate Jesus!”⁴

SOME DIFFICULT OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS

A Demand for Ethnic Cleansing

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their figured stones, destroy all their cast images, and demolish all their high places. You shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess.” (Num 33:50–53)

It is worth noting that Jewish religious settlers regard the Hebrew scriptures as exclusively theirs. For the Christian community, the Old Testament is part of its Bible. For extremist religious Jews, both Zionist and non-Zionist, it has been utilized as an

⁴ Richard Rohr, “The Bible: A Text in Travail,” Center for Contemplation and Action, February 9, 2015.

ethno-nationalist book given to them by an ethno-nationalist god. Old Testament scholars tell us that Yahweh started as a male god of war, and now these Jewish religious extremists understand him as such. They believe that he is their nationalist god, who gave them the land, and they are now claiming it in his name. Since these texts are recorded in the Torah, and they believe were given to them directly from God by Moses, they accept them as being the authentic word of God.

Jewish religious Zionists and religious settlers have used biblical texts not only to justify their right to the land of Palestine (what they consider as the land of Israel), but also to justify their expulsion of the Palestinians.

When we use the Christ hermeneutic, we ask the question, Does this text reflect the love of God as shown and revealed to us in Jesus Christ? If our answer is a definite no, then such texts have no moral or theological value.

When we use the love hermeneutic, we ask, Does the God of love who loves all people equally order the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous people of the land?

Furthermore, what do the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international law say about ethnic cleansing? And what about everyday human morality and human decency?

The common response of Jewish religious extremists is, We are not interested in human rights; we are interested in divine rights. In other words, they want to be faithful to what they believe God demands rather than the demands of human rights.

A Demand for Ethnic Annihilation

[Moses said to the Israelites]: “When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy . . . and when the LORD your God gives them [seven nations] over to you and you defeat them, then you

must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy” (Deut 7:1–3)⁵

Texts such as this are used today to justify killing or expelling Palestinians—Christians and Muslims. Using our hermeneutical key, we ask, Is this the God that Christians have come to know in Jesus Christ? Do these texts reflect the spirit of Christ? Do they mirror and express the love of God that we have seen in Jesus Christ? Surely the answer is no. Therefore, we cannot accept them as a word of God for us. Such texts reflect a tribal and an exclusive way of thinking that, to a large extent, was later critiqued and repudiated within the Old Testament itself. Biblical scholars tell us during and after the Babylonian exile the tribal and exclusive understanding of God began to morph into a more inclusive and even universal understanding of God.

A Vengeful God

No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD, because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt. . . . You shall never promote their welfare or their prosperity as long as you live. (Deut 23:3–4, 6)

What God would require people to hand down grudges and resentments through future generations? It is clear that such a concept of God is tribal and exclusive. During and after the exile

⁵ See also, Exodus 23:23–24 and Deuteronomy 9:1–5; 20:16–18. Some scholars believe that such texts were added much later and that they have no historical basis. But they are used today by extremist settlers as history that inspires the oppression of Palestinians.

in Babylon, however, the idea that God cares for other people begins to develop. God's salvation is extended to all. Thus, Isaiah says:

Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.
(Isa 45:22)

One of the clearest texts is found in Isaiah 56, where the prophet rises above racial and ethnic considerations and extends God's embrace to all people excluded in the past—the eunuchs and the foreigners. When they live by God's covenant, God will give the eunuchs “a monument and a name better than sons and daughters” (v. 5) and will make the foreigners “joyful in my house of prayer . . . for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (v. 7). God will gather them together, the outcasts of Israel and the foreigners, because they are all God's people.

Such a wonderful revelation critiques earlier exclusive pronouncements. It is a new theology and a new understanding of God that is inclusively refreshing.

The Ultimate Enemy: Amalek

The Amalekites were a nomadic tribe that lived in the south of Palestine in the Negev (ancient Edom). Since the Amalekites were far from kind to the ancient Israelites in their journey to Canaan, God wanted to exterminate them (see Deut 25:17–19). Over the long history of the Jews, the Amalekites have come to symbolize evil and to represent the archetypal enemy of Jews.

Thus says the LORD of hosts, “I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and

utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” . . . Saul defeated the Amalekites. . . . Saul and the people spared [King] Agag, and the best of the sheep and of the cattle and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was valuable, and would not utterly destroy them. (1 Sam 15:2–3, 7, 9)

The text says that because Saul did not utterly destroy all the Amalekites as required, God was angry and rejected him. The prophet Samuel delivered the judgment of God:

“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obedience to the voice of the LORD?
Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is no less a sin than divination,
and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the
LORD,
he has also rejected you from being king. . . .”
And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the
LORD. (1 Sam 15:22–23, 33)

Texts such as this surely reflect a primitive understanding of God, tribal ethics in ancient societies that should not be taken literally. Unfortunately, in every one of our religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—it is possible to find people whose theology permits and even dictates such a literal and dogmatic interpretation of texts. Indeed, people are free to hold beliefs that are irrational and that contravene human rights as long as they do not act on them. From a religious perspective, is God pleased when women and children are massacred in cold blood?

Does God really ask people to hold grudges indefinitely against others because they did not offer them food and drink? When people believe that such texts constitute the word of God, and in God's name go out and act on it by oppressing and killing others, they are committing crimes against God and fellow human beings.

Theologically speaking, there are two serious problems in the story of Amalek: what it tells us about God, and what it tells us about Samuel the prophet of God. God is portrayed as a tribal god who has been carrying a deep grudge against the Amalekites that goes back hundreds of years, and he is now going to unleash his vengeance on all the descendants of Amalek. Here, it seems, God wants the total obliteration of the Amalekites, including all women and children, and even all their livestock and other animals. Again here, God seems to expect blind obedience from the king and army who are going to carry out the massacre and will punish anyone who dares to show mercy to the Amalekites.

This is a god who has been created in the image of those who are thirsty for revenge. The story cannot come from the God of mercy and compassion. It portrays a god whose nature is violence and vengeance. The prophet Samuel is a blind executioner who mirrors the god of revenge and does not see the Amalekites as humans: "Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Sam 15:22).

"To obey is better than sacrifice" has become a popular saying among today's religious extremists. According to Samuel, obedience trumps worship. By the time of the prophet Hosea, the knowledge of God has expanded. Hosea critiqued Samuel's theology. He made it clear that steadfast love trumps worship:

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
(Hos 6:6)

Jesus confirmed Hosea's theology and made it clearer. He told those religious fundamentalists who criticized him for having dinner with the tax collectors and sinners: "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Matt 9:13; 12:7).

In *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land*,⁶ David K. Shipler mentions that young Yeshiva students in Kiryat Arba were learning that today's Arabs are the Amalekites that God instructed the Jews "to fight eternally and destroy."

This came as a surprise to many people. Nowadays, with the growing number of religious settlers, it has become common knowledge. The Palestinian Arabs are considered the modern-day Amalekites, the enemies of the Jewish people. Allan C. Brownfeld, the executive director of the American Council of Judaism, writes:

Some rabbis, as Eliezer Waldenberg, winner of the 1976 Israel Prize, declared that Halakha, Jewish law, required a strict separation of Jews from Arabs, preferably an apartheid system, or better yet, the expulsion of the "goyim," all non-Jews, from Jerusalem. . . . Another rabbi writing in the student newspaper at Bar-Ilan University argued that the Torah prescribed genocide against modern Amalek.⁷

The government of Israel has always been careful not to be perceived by the West, and especially the United States, as being guilty of racist attitudes against the Palestinians. The reality, however, is that the present rightwing Israeli government (Netanyahu's third-term government), has been implementing and allowing the extremist settlers to implement racist measures

⁶ David K. Shipler, *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land* (New York: Times Books, 1986).

⁷ Allan C. Brownfeld, "It Is Time to Confront the Exclusionary Ethnocentrism in Jewish Sacred Literature," *Issues* (Winter 2000): 10.

against the Palestinians. We have already looked at a number of exclusive biblical texts that are being used to justify the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. There are, however, many other such texts found elsewhere in Jewish sacred literature that have come to the surface since these settlers gained power, both religious and political. As far back as the turn of the present century Brownfeld warned about the dangers of exclusionary ethnocentrism in Jewish sacred literature.⁸ Such material is being used as a source of inspiration for action by Jewish religious settler extremists against the Palestinians on whose land they are living. For most religious Jews what is prescribed by the Halakha and the Talmud is more strongly binding than some texts in the Hebrew Bible. It forms their beliefs and inspires their action with regard to the Palestinians.⁹

Brownfeld has summarized succinctly some of these beliefs. They reflect a violent and bigoted god that later Hebrew prophets had critiqued and rejected.

Some Examples

Every one of the following examples has relevance to the situation on the ground in Palestine-Israel and affects negatively the lives of the Palestinians. These militant settlers constitute a relatively small percentage of the Israeli population, but their political influence has become formidable. The fact that a growing number of government ministers and Knesset members are living in the settlements gives the settlers greater boldness to act against the Palestinians with impunity. If they have contempt for non-Jews, their hatred for Jews who oppose their views is even greater.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

- Orthodox religious law differentiates between a Jew and a non-Jew. “The body of a Jewish person is of a totally different quality from the body of all nations of the world.” Jews are superior to Gentiles. Jewish life has an infinite value; the term *human beings* refers only to Jews in the Halakha.
- Members of Gush Emunim believe that what appears to be confiscation of Arab-owned land for the building of Jewish settlements is not an act of stealing but one of sanctification. For them, the land is redeemed by being transferred from the satanic to the divine sphere. To further this process, the use of force is permitted wherever necessary.
- The fundamentalists believe that God gave all of the land of Israel including the land of Lebanon and beyond to the Jews, and Arabs living in Israel are viewed as thieves. One rabbi said, “We must live in this land even at the price of war. Moreover, even if there is peace, we must instigate wars of liberation in order to conquer the land.”
- Relying on Maimonides (twelfth century) Mordechai Nisan, a lecturer at the Hebrew University, expressed this view in an official publication of the World Zionist Organization, “A non-Jew who is permitted to reside in the land of Israel ‘must accept paying a tax and suffering the humiliation of servitude.’”
- Fundamentalist Jews refuse to admit that the killings of Muslims or any non-Jews is murder, because according to Halakha the killing by a Jew of a non-Jew under any circumstances is not regarded as murder. When militant Rabbi Moshe Levinger was asked whether he was sorry for the killings of twenty Muslims in the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron, he said, “I am sorry not only about dead Arabs but about dead flies.”
- Judah Halevi was a Jewish poet and philosopher of the twelfth century. He is an important thinker in Orthodox circles, where he is considered a major prophet. They study

each word, and they live by his ideas. He denigrates Christianity and Islam. “Any Gentile who joins us unconditionally shares our good fortune, without, however, being equal to us . . . because we are the pick of mankind.” His famous work is the *Kuzari*. It is full of racist material. “Abraham was the best of men but he contained in himself some bad elements, and these bad elements came out in the form of Ishmael.”

- The land of Israel is considered by the ultra-Orthodox as being the exclusive property of the Jews. Granting Palestinians authority over any part of the land causes harm to the Jewish settlers and deserves death. That is why Rabin was killed.
- Religious writings have helped stir the passions of hatred. Those who embark on such assaults in the name of God are often the most violent because they view themselves engaged in a process of purification.
- It was reported in *Haaretz* that the Israeli Minister of Justice was calling for murdering Palestinian mothers so that they do not bring out more “snakes.”¹⁰ Such statements were supported by the head of civil administration who supports ethnic cleansing and genocide of Palestinians.

When we reflect on such racism, we wonder whether it is at all possible to achieve a just peace in Palestine-Israel.

Bigotry and Racism

When Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem from the exile with great enthusiasm, they wanted to help organize the Jewish community of the land religiously and publicly. Nehemiah looked after the political and civic affairs of the Jewish com-

¹⁰ Ayelet Shaked, Israel Minister of Justice, Facebook post, July 7, 2014.

munity in Jerusalem while Ezra looked after people's religious affairs. Both were loyal appointees of the Persian Empire. Both had a great zeal for organizing the life of the Jewish community along strict religious lines. They emphasized an exclusive strand of theology. They expected people to return to a strict observance of the law as specified in the Torah.

Ezra and Nehemiah discovered that the Jewish inhabitants of the land had intermarried with the local people of the land, who were multi-ethnic and multi-racial, and had borne children. For both Ezra and Nehemiah, this was an abomination. It was a sin and an offense against God. The Mosaic Law said, "Do not intermarry with them [people of the land], giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons" (Deut 5:1–5; Exod 34:11–16).

Nehemiah recorded this matter in his book,

In those days also I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples. And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves." . . . Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign. . . . Remember me, O my God, for good. (Neh 13:23–26, 30, 31)

Ezra's full version is recorded in chapters 9 and 10 of his book. As a priest, Ezra was appalled when he found out that many of his fellow Jews had married non-Jewish wives: "Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way" (Ezra 9:2). Ezra directed the Jewish people: "Separate yourselves from the

peoples of the land and from the foreign wives” (Ezra 10:11). Ezra and Nehemiah forced those Jews who married wives from the land to drive out their wives and their children in order to be obedient to the law of God: “and they sent them away with their children” (10:44).

We ask, what god would require the breakup of families? What kind of god did Ezra and Nehemiah believe in? Surely this was a human decision that was attributed to God. It reflects human ignorance of the character and nature of God. This tragic story is repeated every day by religious people who say “God told me to do this.” The only assurance that it is from God is when it fulfills the hermeneutic of love. Otherwise, it merely reflects one’s own wishful thinking and selfish desires. The hermeneutic of love can help us determine if what we attribute to God is consistent with God’s will of love, justice, and peace for the other.

LAND FOR SOME OR LAND FOR ALL

So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you, they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe aliens reside, there you shall assign them their inheritance, says the Lord God. (Ezek 47:21–23)

The priest-prophet Ezekiel was writing during the period of the exile. He was himself exiled to Babylon several years before Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed by the Babylonians. During the period of the exile the demography of the land changed. New people from surrounding areas came by force or by choice and settled in the land, in both the north and south.

Ezekiel believed that the old tribal boundaries needed to change. A new and more equitable division of the land was essential. At the same time, the experience of exile had stretched and expanded Ezekiel's theology of God and land.

Ezekiel was writing to a new generation of inhabitants, both Jews and non-Jews. His new understanding of God's holiness and his developing theology could not entertain the idea that God would will the exclusion of what he still called "the aliens." His theology was opening up toward greater inclusivity, but his vocabulary was lagging behind. He believed that God would not advocate the expulsion of the aliens and strangers from the land. Rather, God was demanding their inclusion. Since the land belongs to God, and all the people of the land, regardless of background, are mere aliens and tenants, they all must share it under the merciful God and be good stewards of it. It was already established in the Torah that the "the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine [God's]; with me you are but aliens and tenants" (Lev 25:23).

The above texts in Numbers and Deuteronomy reflected a human tribal understanding of God. The tribal understanding is, by its nature, exclusive and narrow. However, once people's understanding of God opened up, as it did in Ezekiel's case, the exclusive theology became outdated and needed to be replaced by a more inclusive theology. It is important to emphasize that Ezekiel is speaking in the name of God and commanding that the division of the land must be equitable to all the inhabitants of the land regardless of their ethnic background. Such an interpretation fits the hermeneutic key of love—loving the neighbor as oneself.

- At the same time, it is important to emphasize that in the political struggle over the land of Palestine, the Palestinians are the indigenous people of the land and are not aliens to it. But even if they are considered aliens by Israel,

the prophetic injunction entitles them to share the land equitably.

- The ancient Israelites, as well as the modern religious settlers, consider the people of the land—the Palestinians—aliens. But the indigenous people of the land, the Palestinians, were and are aliens only with regard to the ancient Israelites and modern settlers; they were not aliens to the land. In fact, it was the Israelites and the modern religious settlers who were and are aliens to the land. Even Abraham referred to himself as an alien when he said to the Hittites: “I am a stranger and an alien residing among you” (Gen 23:4).
- Shlomo Sand, in *The Invention of the Jewish People*,¹¹ explodes the myth that there was a forced Jewish exile in the first century at the hands of the Romans. He argues that most modern Jews descend from converts whose native lands were scattered across the Middle East and Eastern Europe. This would mean that many or most of the indigenous people of the land are the offspring of the people who inhabited Palestine in ancient times, including the ancient tribes of Canaan and Israel.¹² He believes, therefore, that the Palestinians are the real people of the land, having never left it.

A THEOLOGY THAT TRANSCENDS LEVITICUS

It is noticeable that when Ezekiel mentions the word “aliens” (47:22), he is using the same words found in the Torah:

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien

¹¹ Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso, 2009).

¹² *Ibid.*, 184.

as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (Lev 19:33–34)

The words of Ezekiel show that he was aware of the Leviticus tradition which was probably being collected and finalized around the same time. According to this text aliens should not be oppressed but loved and protected. In our contemporary language it could mean that the human rights of aliens must be respected as that of other citizens. In fact, Ezekiel goes significantly further than the Leviticus text. Whereas resident aliens in Leviticus remain aliens in the land, the resident aliens in Ezekiel enjoy the right not only to share the land, but to inherit it and their children after them. In other words, they cease to be resident aliens. Leviticus does not go further than promoting the respect of human rights for resident aliens. In Ezekiel, God demands the full and total equality among all citizens.

Is it possible to imagine that Ezekiel (or his school of thought) was aware of the formation of the Torah during the period of the exile? Those who were collecting and editing the Book of Leviticus were a group of conservative, traditionalist, and religiously dogmatic writers. They represented the old school of exclusive theology that demanded a legal and strict keeping of the Law. In *Chosen?* Walter Brueggemann writes:

The reformulation of the tradition in the fifth century and the evocation of Judaism as heir to ancient Israel were accomplished under the leadership of Ezra the scribe. Ezra is remembered in Jewish tradition as second only to Moses as a religious leader. Ezra referred to the community as “the holy seed” (Ezra 9:2). That phrase intends a biological identity. . . . The exclusion was in order to guarantee the purity of the land and of Israelite society.¹³

¹³ Walter Brueggemann, *Chosen?* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 2015), 3, 5.

The Ezekiel school reflected a more open and inclusive theology that was ready to embrace all the people of the land, including the aliens.

In essence, there has always been a conflict between different schools of thought and theology. Leviticus wanted to preserve the past by idealizing it. The prophetic school after the exile was looking toward the future and developing an inclusive theology that included the other. The first was rigid and dogmatic, while the second was fluid and democratic.

One would think that the injunction in Ezekiel is clear and that aliens and strangers should not be oppressed but enjoy equal citizenship with Jews. In 1948, Israel promised to “uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed, or sex.”¹⁴ The drafting of a constitution was supposed to follow within months. This goal was abandoned because a constitution would establish basic constitutional rights such as equality and freedom of expression, and so on. Instead, Israel enshrined its inequality by affirming Israel as a Jewish state, giving a privileged status to its Jewish citizens. Jewish citizens of Israel are “nationals” of Israel, while Palestinians cannot be nationals of the state.¹⁵ There is no common Israeli nationality for all citizens. In essence, there is a built-in structural discrimination between the two. As it plays itself out in real life, it is racism and it is detrimental to full equality and peace.

Most Western people are not aware of this racism. In Western countries the words *citizenship* and *nationality* are congruent. A citizen is also a national. Not so in Israel. It seems that modern Israel has remained bound by the demands of Leviticus rather than Ezekiel. In fact, it did not live up to the human rights standard of Leviticus by its blatant violations of the human rights of

¹⁴ David Ben-Gurion, speech, Independence Hall (May 14, 1948).

¹⁵ Jonathan Cook, “‘Visible Equality’ as Confidence Trick,” in *Israel and South Africa: The Many Faces of Apartheid*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Zed Books, 2015).

Palestinians, whether inside Israel or in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Apparently, Ezekiel's theology of God, neighbor, and land after the exile rose to a new height. In the name of the sovereign God he is commanding that the people of the land share the land and inherit it together. After all, the land belongs to God. The Psalmist declares,

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it. (Ps 24:1)

Did not Leviticus itself say:

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine [God's]; with me you are but aliens and tenants (Lev 25:23)?

Since the land belongs to God and all the people are only aliens and tenants living on God's land, it cannot be that God would have commanded the expulsion and annihilation of the indigenous people of the land. It was Moses or human beings with a limited knowledge and understanding of God who were calling for such an ethnic cleansing. Such material was written down hundreds of years later. It was reflecting a tribal and exclusive understanding of God that was later transcended by a growing and developing knowledge that started to see God in a more inclusive way. It is not that God had evolved and changed from being vicious, violent, and exclusive to becoming merciful, kind, and inclusive. Rather, it is the human theology of God that has undergone the great transformation.

Some Christian scholars of more conservative leanings or views might feel more comfortable explaining it in a different way. They would say that through God's revelation and inspiration the knowledge of God developed. Others might add the importance

of human reason. The important point is to see the movement from an exclusive and tribal way of thinking to a growing knowledge and understanding of God that developed and changed. In other words, the ethnic cleansing and the annihilation of the indigenous people of the land were not mandated by God; they were mandated by human beings. They were part and parcel of a religious tribal culture that many primitive people possessed but that eventually became outdated. Tragically, however, we still have people who refuse to shed such ideas and continue to cling to an antiquated exclusive tribal theology that in its extreme form expresses itself in violent behavior and vicious crimes against others.

It is likely that some religious Jews might agree that Ezekiel's vision of the land, including all its inhabitants, both Palestinians and Israelis, need to live together in freedom and equality. But what about sovereignty over the land? To whom does it belong?

If, on the one hand, we are envisioning a one-state solution where all citizens enjoy total equality under the law with no special privileges given to any group that is based on wealth, ethnicity, military might, or religious claims, then the ballot box should be the determining factor. It is important to emphasize the fact that we are living in the twenty-first century and the movement of history is not to legitimate a solution that is imposed by military might or by enforcing a solution that is based on religious claims that go back thousands of years. The movement of history is for the respect and implementation of international law as the basis for conflict resolutions.

If, on the other hand, we are envisioning a two-state solution, then the Palestinians have the unquestionable legal right to their share of the land and sovereignty over it. Their right to the land is a given. They are the indigenous people of the land. It is their land *de jure*. It is not acceptable for religious Jews to claim the whole land on the basis of a tribal promise by a tribal god.¹⁶

¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the one and two-state solutions, see Chapter 8 of this work.

EZEKIEL CRITIQUES OTHER THEOLOGIES OF HIS DAY

In effect, Ezekiel was critiquing several theologies of his day. He critiqued a popular theology that the sin or a crime committed by a person can be paid for by other members of his family. It was an old tribal custom of collective punishment that sometimes went beyond an eye for an eye. The prophet was declaring in the name of God that

the person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child; the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own.
(Ezek 18:20)

Sadly, there are still communities that practice such crimes. It is the residue of thousands of years of tribal beliefs and behavior. Some terrorist groups as well as some governments that practice state terror are guilty of heinous crimes by punishing the innocent for the crimes of the few.

The government of Israel has not learned the lesson that Ezekiel was trying to teach his people. It practices collective punishment against Palestinians. It punishes the whole family and the whole town for the “crime” of one or two people. It demolishes their family homes and causes the homelessness of many people for a crime they did not commit. By doing so, Israel stands in violation of international law. Sadly, the international community has not been able to hold Israel accountable due to the protection of the United States.

Similarly, for Ezekiel the priest, the possession of the land must not be dependent on people’s obedience to the strict demands of the Law but on people’s holiness. Ezekiel was acting as both a priest and a prophet in demanding an understanding of the spirit of the Law rather than its outward strict observance.

It is important to note that although the movement toward a new understanding of the one inclusive God began to crystallize during the exile, some of the post-exilic prophets continued to vacillate between an exclusive and inclusive understanding of God. In spite of that, the movement toward inclusivity was marching on and gaining strength. We see it clearly in the theology of Jonah, discussed below.

HOW DOES THIS BEAR ON THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION?

It is clear that in the Torah there are only two solutions to the problem of the indigenous people of the land: expulsion or annihilation. Either alternative would be devastating because it would be an affront to their creator and an inhuman act to their fellow humans. On the one hand, Ezekiel critiques the theology of Numbers and Deuteronomy regarding the indigenous people of the land; on the other hand, he advocates a different theology based on his new understanding of God. All the people of the land regardless of their ethnic backgrounds must live together in justice and peace, sharing the land and enjoying the good earth that God has given to them. After all, the land and everything in it belong to a loving God who loves and cares for all his children equally.

Ezekiel's theology can pass the hermeneutic of love of God and love of neighbor. This is what Palestinian liberation theology promotes and advocates.

JERUSALEM FOR SOME OR JERUSALEM FOR ALL

It is clear that the experience of exile produced at least two major ideologies or two movements within the post-exilic Jewish community that stood at opposite ends of the theological

spectrum.¹⁷ The first wanted to retain the past in its traditional and legalistic understanding of God, while the second saw a progressive and dynamic God who prods the people into the future. Both ideologies affected people religiously and politically.

In encountering some opposition from local non-Jewish leaders on the question of Jerusalem, Nehemiah explained to them clearly and unequivocally that Jerusalem belonged exclusively to Jews. For Nehemiah, non-Jews had “no share or claim or historic right” in Jerusalem (Neh 2:20). Nehemiah’s words disregarded the fact that Jerusalem, according to the biblical account, was not a town of Judah but was conquered by David by force against the will of its indigenous Jebusite (Canaanite) inhabitants (2 Sam 5:6–9), who would have taken issue with Nehemiah’s exclusive words. What about the Jebusites’ claim and historic right in Jerusalem? Nehemiah’s words about Jerusalem did not make sense at the time. How much less palatable can they be when applied to Jerusalem of the twenty-first century?

Jerusalem as a city never stopped developing historically and religiously. It is unique among the cities of the world. It has a rich heritage and a rich legacy for three world religions and cannot be the monopoly of any one faith. History does not stop moving and evolving, and it is absurd to wipe out or negate the legitimate presence of any one of the three religions just because one religion/state possesses the military power to impose and exert its will.

It is important to emphasize that the first critical reaction against Nehemiah’s exclusive theology came from within the Jewish community after the exile:

On the holy mount stands the city he [God]
founded;

¹⁷ See Naim Ateek, *Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 142–45.

the LORD loves the gates of Zion
 more than all the dwellings of Jacob.
 Glorious things are spoken of you,
 O city of God.
 Among those who know me I mention Rahab
 [Egypt] and Babylon;
 Philistia too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia—
 “This one was born there,” they say. And of
 Zion it shall be said, “This one and that
 one were born in it”;
 for the Most High himself will establish it.
 The LORD records, as he registers the peoples,
 “This one was born there.”
 Singers and dancers alike say,
 “All my springs are in you.” *Selah*
 (Psalm 87)

The writer of Psalm 87 critiqued Nehemiah's narrow understanding of God and the city. The Psalmist pictured God standing at the gates of the city of Jerusalem registering the people coming in. God welcomed into it all people, including the worst and deadliest enemies of ancient Israel and Judah: the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Philistines. The Psalmist's theology of God is amazingly inclusive. God is a welcoming and all-embracing God. Metaphorically and spiritually, God considers them all, including the enemies, as having been born in Jerusalem. All of them belong to it, and Jerusalem belongs to them all.

The Psalmist expresses a vision that is worthy of Jerusalem. It must be an open city for all, not monopolized by any one country or any one religion. Even at the time of the Psalmist, an exclusive Jerusalem was unthinkable. Jerusalem must be inclusive for all its inhabitants because it is the city of God, and God is an inclusive and all-embracing, loving God.

Since the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem in the 1967 war, Israel has been enacting laws and regulations that aim at emptying Jerusalem of most of its non-Jewish—Muslim and Christian—population. The slogan often heard is, “Jerusalem is Jewish.” It is difficult to find any time in history when Jerusalem was exclusively Jewish. According to the biblical account (2 Sam 5:6–9), Jerusalem, as already mentioned, was a small Canaanite town that David conquered and made his capital. The government of Israel has adamantly rejected the sharing of the sovereignty of Jerusalem. It is important to remember that East Jerusalem is part of the Palestinian West Bank that was occupied by Israel in 1967, and its continued occupation is illegal under international law. Israel still lives by a theology of exclusion rather than inclusion. Tragically, most Jews in Israel today, and especially the religious settlers, reject any inclusive solution to the city. They are obstinately exclusive. The words of Nehemiah express their stubborn beliefs. Sharing Jerusalem by Israelis and Palestinians can be a major contributor to a life of peace and well-being for all the people of the land, as well as the key to finding the peaceful and nonviolent resolution to the whole seemingly intractable Palestine-Israel conflict.

GOD OF WAR OR GOD OF PEACE

Another important example that reflects the development of religious thought within the Old Testament has to do with the question of war. According to the Exodus story, when the ancient Israelites left Egypt they were pursued by Pharaoh and his army. God instructed Moses to

“Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians. . . .” So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned

to its normal depth. . . . The waters returned and covered the . . . entire army of Pharaoh. . . . Not one of them remained. . . . Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians. . . .

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

“I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

. . .

The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.”

(Exod 14:26–28, 30—15:1, 3)

Scholars tell us that in ancient times the Israelite tribes lived among other tribes in Canaan (Palestine). They were polytheists worshipping a number of gods. One of the chief gods in the Ancient Middle East was El. El was the father god among the Canaanites; he was the king of the gods. “It seems almost certain that the God of the Jews [Yahweh] evolved gradually from the Canaanite El.”¹⁸ Exodus 15:3 sees Yahweh as a war god. There are over 280 references in the Bible to Yahweh Sabaoth. *Sabaoth* means “armies” and the phrase is often translated “God of hosts.”

The word *Sabaoth* appears in the worship liturgy of many churches, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Sabaoth [or Lord God of hosts], heaven and earth are full of your glory.” Many of the mainline churches substituted the phrase *power and might* for *Sabaoth*. Such a rendering makes more sense to modern worshippers; the archaic word *Sabaoth* is incomprehensible to most people.

¹⁸ David Leeming, *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Psalm 24

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers. . . .

Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory?

The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory. *Selah*

(Psalm 24:1–2, 7–10)

The first few verses reflect a beautiful inclusive theology of God as maker and owner of the whole world. It also expresses an ethical obligation for those who enter into the presence of God. The mood changes with the last four verses. They picture God as a great warrior triumphantly entering his Temple in majesty and honor. He is the Lord of the armies.

Isaiah 42:13

The LORD goes forth like a soldier,
like a warrior he stirs up his fury;
he cries out, he shouts aloud,
he shows himself mighty against his foes.

Psalm 68:21, 30

But God will shatter the heads of his enemies,
the hairy crown of those who walk in their
guilty ways.

And yet later in the psalm we read:

Summon your might, O God;
scatter the peoples who delight in war.
(vv. 28, 30)

As already mentioned, the development of religious thought in the Bible regarding the concept of God has moved from Yahweh being one god among many gods to being the greatest god to being the only god; from being a god of war to a god of peace; and from an emphasis on war to a vision of peace and nonviolence. The clearest expressions of the new vision are found in Isaiah 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–5. These texts are usually read by both Christians and Jews as reflecting an inclusive and universal vision of peace for all people—a rejection of war and the instruments of war. They are also an interfaith vision of respect and acceptance of other people and their understanding of faith. Whereas Isaiah is satisfied with a political universal peace among nations, Micah adds the interfaith dimension where people respect one another's religions. Such a vision of peace continues to be a beacon of hope for a world in desperate need of hope.

Isaiah 2:2–5 (A Vision of Peace and Nonviolence)

In days to come
the mountain of the LORD's house

shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.
Many peoples shall come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the
LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.
O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!

Micah 4:4–5 (A Vision of Peace and Interfaith)

But they shall all sit under their own vines and
under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.
For all the peoples walk,
each in the name of its god,
but we will walk in the name of the LORD our
God
forever and ever.

By the time of the New Testament, the concept of God had been well established and God's character had become clear. For Jesus Christ, all those who work for peace are God's children, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God" (Matt 5:9). The New Testament letters refer to God invariably as the God of peace. In Romans 15:33, Paul ends his letter with the words, "The God of peace be with all of you." Paul started his letters with the words, "Grace and peace from God." The authentic God must be the God of peace.

THE THEOLOGY OF JONAH

The heart of Old Testament theology is encapsulated in the small Book of Jonah. The story was authored by a brilliant theologian who was reflecting on the situation of life in his community toward the end of the fourth century BC. The exile had long passed, and many of its lessons had been long forgotten. Some of the inclusive theology that emerged from the writings of prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah had faded, and many people had regressed to a tribal way of thinking. Instead of becoming more open to other nations, they were reverting to a more exclusive understanding of God and neighbor. They were returning to a theological "exceptionalism" that God is their exclusive God and that they are his exclusively chosen people. This theologically progressive gifted writer had assessed the situation in the country and felt that he must address this religious malaise, so he decided to choose the prophet Jonah as his protagonist. Jonah had lived several centuries before and was remembered in the community as a zealous nationalist prophet. He hated the Assyrians with a passion because they had conquered and destroyed his country, the kingdom of Israel. Jonah had been heartbroken and devastated by the annihilation of his people. He was hoping that "his" God would avenge the blood of his people by obliterating Assyria, especially its capital, Nineveh. For the writer-theologian, Jonah represented an ideal

character through whom he could address the central religious ailment the community was facing at the time.

The story begins with God asking Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria (modern Iraq), and call its people to turn to God and repent of their evil. Jonah could not believe that God would ask him to do that. How could God even entertain the thought of sending him to preach repentance to his enemies? Why would “his” God even care about the Assyrians, let alone seek their salvation? Should not “his” God destroy the people of Nineveh, including its king and princes? They were his staunchest enemies and “his” God should totally annihilate them. Jonah, to say the least, was disappointed and angry at God, and the politest thing to do was to flee from God. Jonah went to the port of Joppa (the modern city of Yafa near Tel Aviv) and boarded a boat sailing to Tarshish (in modern Spain). He was sure that God could not find him because God for Jonah was a territorial God and Tarshish was out of bounds.

As the journey progressed, a big storm in the sea threatened the lives of all the passengers. People were terrified and started to pray to their gods for rescue. The crew started to lighten the weight of the ship by throwing the cargo into the sea, but the winds and storm kept raging. The sailors decided to cast lots in order to determine who was guilty of angering his god and thus causing such a calamity. The lot fell on Jonah. Jonah confessed to them that he was fleeing from his God. The only solution was to throw him overboard. With much fear and trepidation, they threw him into the sea. The storm immediately ceased, and the sea became calm. God prepared a big fish to swallow Jonah, and out of the belly of the fish Jonah lifted up his prayers to God (chapter 2). After three days the fish spewed Jonah on the seashore.

Again God ordered Jonah to go to Nineveh and deliver the message of doom. Reluctantly, Jonah went.

[Jonah] cried out, “Forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). This was his message. To his surprise, the

people, including the king, put on sackcloth and ashes and repented of their evil ways. When God saw that all the people had repented, he changed his mind and decided not to destroy the city. This infuriated Jonah and he went out of the city to watch what would happen to it. When the city was not destroyed, Jonah was so upset he wished that God would take his life.

God made a gourd (castor bean plant) grow and shade Jonah from the hot Iraqi sun. Jonah was very pleased with the comfort it gave him. The next day God sent a worm that ate the roots of the gourd, and it immediately withered away and died. When the hot sun struck Jonah's head, he was more furious and wished he were dead.

Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?" (Jonah 4:10-11)

So, the beautiful story ends with the question, leaving the reader/listener to draw out the right conclusions.

There are three significant lessons that the writer-theologian intended to relay.

First, who is God? God is the only true, living, and sovereign God, the God of the whole world. Jonah discovered that God is gracious, merciful, and loving, even to Jonah's enemies, because that is the nature of God. God is an inclusive God. God's love and care embrace all people and nations, including the people of Assyria, his staunchest enemies. God is a God of justice who abhors evil and demands the just living of all people. God is a liberator and a redeemer God who seeks the liberation and redemption of all people. God wanted Jonah to go to the Assyrians

so that they might be liberated from their evil ways. To this God alone belongs worship, praise, and adoration.

Second, who are God's people? Jonah was brought up to believe that the Jewish people are the only people of God. They are the special and chosen people of God. It became clear to Jonah that God's people are not limited to one racial or ethnic group. God's people include all people. The people of Nineveh, Jonah's worst enemies, were among the people of God.

Third, which land is God's land? The story of Jonah emphasizes that there is no one particular land that belongs to God. God is the God of the whole world. Jonah's theology of land was restricted to his own country. He believed that God was a tribal god who has no business looking after or caring for other lands or nations that lay outside the boundaries of Canaan, the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah. God had to teach Jonah the lesson that God is concerned about all lands and the ethical and moral living of all people. The land of Assyria, as all other lands, is part of God's world.

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it.

(Psalm 24:1)

Through the story of Jonah, the Old Testament reaches its theological climax. Tragically, however, that did not mean the death of exclusive and racist theologies. The tension continues, and we observe it on a daily basis. The challenge of authentic faith is to overcome and defeat whatever is exclusionary regarding our theology of God, neighbor, and land, and to embrace whatever is inclusive.

The above detailed account of the meaning of the story of Jonah is intentional because it continues to speak to the malady of our times. The theology of Jonah must be emphasized in the face of exclusive modern theologies. As it is possible to use the

Bible in order to advocate for violence and war, it is also possible to use the Bible in order to promote justice and peace. Similarly, as it is possible to justify the oppression of the Palestinians, and even their ethnic cleansing in the name of an exclusive God, it is also possible to promote the sharing of the land and the peaceful and harmonious living between Palestinians and Israelis. It all depends on the readers' biblical lens and the hermeneutical key they use.

The story of Jonah contains a strong message that summarizes the ultimate in Old Testament theology of God, people of God, and theology of land. The message is clear. It discards and rejects any narrow and exclusive theology of the above three themes and lifts up high the message of God's inclusiveness out of which everything stems. With the story of Jonah the Old Testament practically comes to an end. The theology of Jonah is its theological climax. The Old Testament then moves into the ministry of Jesus Christ and into the theology of the New Testament. It is possible, therefore, to conclude that Jonah's theology can be a good hermeneutic by which one can determine and measure the authentic message of scripture within the Old Testament itself. In other words, the writer of Jonah was able to shatter the "exclusivism" in Old Testament theology. He then presented us with a theological statement about authentic religion and faith; that is, authentic faith rejects the exclusionary forms of religion and places its trust in the one inclusive God, creator of the world. Authentic understanding of the people of God rejects all the exclusionary forms of racial superiority and accepts that all people are God's people. Authentic understanding of land rejects the exclusionary monopoly of one people that brings about the negation, expulsion, and ethnic cleansing of the people of the land and accepts the inclusive view that calls people to share it with others (the Palestinians) on the basis of truth and justice. This is the authentic message of Jonah, and it has spiritual, moral, and theological as well as political relevance for us today.

**CONCLUSION: EXCLUSIVE AND INCLUSIVE
THEOLOGIES, THEN AND NOW**

1. Enough has been written to show that two distinct strands of religious thought run through the Old Testament. One is exclusive, offering us an ethnocentric (warrior) God and a legalistic and demanding strict adherence to the Law. The other is an inclusive, universal God who loves and embraces all people regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Both strands developed during and after the exile.
2. In the Torah, there are only two solutions to the “problem” of the indigenous people of the land: expulsion or annihilation. The prophet Ezekiel critiques that theology and advocates, in the name of God, a new resolution for the multi-ethnic and multi-racial inhabitants of the land, including Jews. They need, on an equal basis, to share, live, and inherit the land together in justice and peace and enjoy the good earth that God has given to them.
3. The same applies to Jerusalem: Nehemiah wanted to construct an exclusively Jewish community that refused to share Jerusalem. Today, we still have Jews and Western Christian Zionists who cling to an antiquated tribal theology that in its extreme forms shows itself in violent behavior and vicious crimes against the Palestinians.
4. Although the post-exilic prophets often vacillated between an exclusive and an inclusive understanding of God, the movement toward a new inclusive understanding of the one God that began to crystalize during the Babylonian exile was slowly gaining momentum.
5. It is possible to use the Bible to advocate for violence and war or to promote justice and peace. Similarly, it is possible to justify the oppression of the Palestinians, and

even their ethnic cleansing, in the name of an exclusive God or to promote the sharing of the land and peaceful and harmonious living between Palestinians and Israelis. It all depends on the hermeneutical key we use. The challenge of authentic faith is to overcome whatever is exclusionary in our theology of God, neighbor, and land and to embrace whatever is inclusive.

6. We see this challenge most clearly in the Book of Jonah. Authentic faith rejects exclusionary forms of religion and places its trust in the one God, creator and Lord of all. Authentic understanding of the people of God rejects exclusionary visions of ethnic superiority and accepts that all people are God's people. Authentic understanding of the land rejects an exclusionary monopoly of one people that involves expulsion and ethnic cleansing and agrees to share the land with the other people of the land on the basis of truth and justice. The message of Jonah has profound spiritual, moral, theological and political relevance for us today.
7. With the story of Jonah, the Old Testament reaches its theological climax. Jonah offers us a hermeneutic, internal to the Old Testament, through which Christians and Jews alike may read and sift its conflicting texts and tradition. For Palestinians and other Christians, the Old Testament then moves into the ministry of Jesus Christ and into the theology of the New Testament.

CHRIST IS THE KEY

THE NEW TESTAMENT accepts as given the best in Old Testament theology as expressed in the theology of Jonah and the great prophets as well as in some of the psalms regarding God and other people. It moves on theologically to deepen, expand, and reinterpret the tradition of the Old Testament in light of the coming of Jesus Christ. It also develops further people's understanding of God as understood in and through the coming of Christ as it was recorded in the New Testament. Due to human nature, however, these theological lessons can easily be forgotten. Therefore, they have to be retaught and relearned again and repeatedly by every succeeding generation.

EXPANDING AND DEEPENING THE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AND NEIGHBOR

By the time of Jesus the oneness of God was not in question within the Jewish religious community. The belief that God is one was already well established. What was always open to question was God's nature and character. The movement within the post-exilic prophets tended to vacillate between the inclusive and exclusive understandings of God. The question of exclusivity versus inclusivity remains open to this day, because it has to

do with human nature, human reason, human temperament, and the human psyche. Beginning with the Prophet Amos and later the exilic and post-exilic prophets, we see a growing emphasis on the inclusive nature of God and an intentional critique of the exclusive. With the coming of Jesus there is greater clarity regarding our understanding of God's nature.

By the time of Jesus religious Jews had already crystalized the foundation of Jewish faith as expressed in the Shema.¹ Originally, the Shema consisted only of the first verse: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone," which encapsulates Jewish monotheism. The version in the *mezuzah* that is placed on the doorpost of Jewish homes includes Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and 11:13–21. As recited in Jewish morning and evening prayer, Numbers 15:37–41 is added.

In Mark 12:28–34, one of the scribes asked Jesus:

"Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Interestingly, the question had to do with the commandment that was "the first of all. Jesus gave the right answer by quoting the Shema, but he did not stop there. He went further than the question intended. He added a second commandment.

What is clear is that the second commandment of loving the neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18) was never understood to be on a par with that of loving God. This is clear when we review the

¹ *Shema* in Hebrew means "hear" or "listen," the first word of the commandment.

biblical texts that are usually considered as extensions to the Shema (Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41). This second commandment is never mentioned in these texts. It is not even found in Deuteronomy. In Leviticus it is part of a long list of rituals, rules, and regulations that fall under the general rubric, “The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, . . .” These words are repeated at the beginning of every section and chapter of Leviticus, and they have to do with a mixed variety of topics ranging from keeping the Sabbath, to sacrifices, to personal and sexual behavior, to legal matters, to a number of other issues.

To put it within its immediate context, the text states:

You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (Lev 19:17–18)

In its immediate context this command does not stand out as special. It fits in with the general context around it.

The Hebrew word that is translated “your neighbor” does not literally mean that. The proper translation is, “You shall love your fellow as yourself.” Classical and Orthodox Judaism understand this as “your fellow Jew,” not fellow human being.²

The important question is, therefore, did the selection of this injunction originate with Jesus or was it already in use by Jews at the time of Jesus? This is quite puzzling, because what became the second commandment has come from a different tradition than that of the Shema in Deuteronomy.

There is another interesting episode in the Jewish tradition about a Gentile who asked two well-known sages to teach him

² Allan C. Brownfeld, “It Is Time to Confront the Exclusionary Ethnocentrism in Jewish Sacred Literature,” in *Issues* (Winter 2000), 10.

the Torah while standing on one foot. Rabbi Shammai drove him away saying that such a thing cannot be done. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, responded by saying, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary thereon; go and learn it” (Shab. 31a).³ What is amazing about this story is that Hillel did not use the words of the Shema as an answer. Neither did he use the verse as recorded in Leviticus about loving your neighbor as yourself. Rather, he composed a sentence that had to do with the neighbor using negative terminology. What is more glaring, Hillel deemed his reply as “the whole Torah.” What happened to the first commandment?

Is it possible that Jesus was the first to lift up the Leviticus text and give it importance? Is it possible that Jesus was the first to give it an inclusive meaning? Is it possible that the designation of the Leviticus text as the second great commandment goes back to Jesus when he said, “There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:31)? Is it possible that Jesus was the first to elevate the status of this minor injunction and give it the rank of the “greatest” by universalizing it? Is it possible that Jesus was the first who, by his inclusive interpretation of this commandment, was emphasizing the importance of doing justice to the neighbor? According to *The Interpreter’s Bible*, “It was probably Jesus who first combined the two ‘great commandments’ of Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18b into a summary of the law; there is no trace of any earlier teacher’s having done so.”⁴

It is worth noting that when quoting Leviticus 19:18, Jesus disregarded the wording of the original text, which said, “anyone of your kin” or “any of your people,” which would have given the command an exclusive interpretation. By removing these

³ Solomon Schechter and Wilhelm Bacher, “Hillel” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 6:398.

⁴ George Arthur Buttrick, *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 7, *New Testament Articles*, *Matthew, Mark* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), 847.

words, he opened up an inclusive application, which eventually included even love of one's enemies.

This is obviously clear in the behavior of Jesus toward fellow Jews, Romans, Samaritans and other Gentiles, including enemies. He healed people's sickness regardless of their ethnic or racial backgrounds. This Jesus theology has become immortalized in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), who compassionately rendered help to his Jewish enemy, the Jewish victim, who was brutalized by presumably Jewish robbers. By using stories Jesus forever shattered any narrow and exclusive meaning and interpretation of the love of neighbor.

For Jesus, therefore, the two great commandments are integrally linked together. The love of God cannot be separated from the love of our fellow human beings. In fact, the only real test for our love of God is our love of our neighbor. What are some other truths that stem from this theology?

1. It is not only that we have to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, but the good news, in Jesus Christ, is that God loves us and loves the whole world. *This is the first great revolution of Jesus Christ.*
2. In Christ, we realize that before we loved God, God loved us. To love God takes on a different dimension when we realize that God's love has preceded our love for God.
3. In Christ we realize that this loving God not only loves us but seeks those of us who are lost. Christ is the good shepherd who looks for the lost sheep and cares for all of his sheep.
4. Another truth is that we cannot say that we love God if we do not love our neighbor. "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The

commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 John 4:20–21). *This is the second great revolution of Jesus Christ.*

5. In Christ we know that God’s love embraces and includes all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, background, and orientation.
6. God’s nature has never changed. From eternity to eternity God was and is and will be forever the God of love. God did not evolve from a God of war and violence to a God of peace and compassion. What evolved is our limited knowledge of God. Similarly, God was always the one God, the only one true God. It is we who have created and worshiped many gods until we were guided to the truth about the reality of the one God.
7. For Christians, the best revelation of God’s love for human beings has come to us through the life of Jesus Christ, and it was expressed most genuinely through his death on the cross and his resurrection.
8. Jesus’s emphasis on the love of God and neighbor reflects the heart of authentic religious faith.

There is another important dimension that must be clarified. It is possible that Jesus detected a weakness in people’s understanding of the first commandment. On the one hand, it was right for the Jewish people to be proud for having made the great discovery that God is one and that they must love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. On the other hand, the human propensity is to make the love of God seem a duty of subjects to their king, of citizens to their ruler and governor. It is love that is required for God’s protection and care. But the great revolution of Christ is that he emphasized God’s love for us, a fact that is not implied in the first commandment. By introducing love of neighbor he guaranteed the interplay between

the two loves and the test that can determine them. In Romans, Paul talks about love as the only debt that we owe others:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. (Rom 13:8–10)

In addition, Jesus later taught his disciples not to be satisfied with the love of neighbor; they must go further and love their enemies. *This is the third great revolution that Jesus introduced.*

“You have heard that it was said, ‘you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” (Matt 5:43–45)

This is made clear in the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke:

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:30–37)

JESUS REINTERPRETS THE TRADITION

In order to elucidate the theological movement that Jesus created, we need to pay attention to the way Jesus related to Jews and Gentiles. Throughout his ministry Jesus rejected exclusivity and emphasized inclusivity. He exposed and confronted bigotry and racism. The four Gospels contain many examples. We use here a few samples from the first three Gospels.

The Gospel of Matthew

1. *Chapter 1:1–16*: The genealogy of Jesus the Messiah (Christ) contains a number of foreign women: Tamar, a

Canaanite; Ruth, a Moabite; Bathsheba, a Hittite (Uriah's wife); and Mary the mother of Jesus. Matthew intentionally mentions these women to show that God's salvation is intended for the whole world. Since some of these women were not reputable, it shows that God's salvation is not only for the righteous but also for the unrighteous, not only for the healthy, but also for the sick.

2. *Chapter 2:1–12*: The Magi were not Jewish but foreigners who were the first to visit Jesus and offer him their gifts and homage.
3. *Chapter 8:10–12*: The first recorded miracles are those of a Jewish leper and the servant of a Roman centurion. Jesus praises the centurion's faith, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown in the outer darkness."
4. *Chapter 15:21–28*: Jesus heals the daughter of a Canaanite woman. Healing was not limited to a privileged ancestry but to faith. Jesus told her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish" (v. 28).

The Gospel of Mark

1. *Chapter 1:14–15*: Whereas the issue of land dominates the Hebrew scriptures, its counterpart in the ministry of Jesus is the kingdom of God. It is a prominent theme in the Gospels. "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'" It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus's ministry centered on the kingdom of God, a kingdom where God is sovereign. When we talk about God's

kingdom, we are talking about a kingdom of justice and righteousness. Similarly, as the concept of the land was pivotal to ancient Israel, the kingdom of God is pivotal to Christ's believers.

2. *Chapter 5:1–20*: Jesus goes to a Gentile territory and heals a person with evil spirits.
3. *Chapter 11:15–18*: “Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, ‘Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a den of robbers.’”

The Gospel of Luke

1. *Chapter 4:14–29*: Jesus confronts the racism of the people in his hometown of Nazareth. When quoting Isaiah, he stops in midsentence and refuses to call on God's vengeance against non-Jews. He stated clearly that even in old times God cared about the survival of a Gentile, non-Jewish widow and her young son by sending the prophet Elijah to her during a famine. God allowed the healing of a Syrian general, a leper, by the prophet Elisha.
2. *Chapter 7:1–10*: Jesus heals the servant of a Roman officer.
3. *Chapter 9:51–56*: Jesus rebukes his disciples who wanted to call fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans who refused to welcome Jesus in their village. By so doing, he was calling into question the murderous behavior of the prophet Elijah, who called on fire to come down

from heaven and consume a military captain and his fifty soldiers (2 Kgs 1:9–16).

4. *Chapter 10:25–37*: Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, making the Samaritan the hero of the story and the one who saved the Jewish man victimized by robbers.
5. *Chapter 17:11–19*: Jesus heals ten lepers; nine were Jewish, and one was a Samaritan. The only one who returned to thank Jesus was the Samaritan. God does not differentiate between Jew and Gentile. All are God's children.

PAUL REINTERPRETS THE TRADITION

For the apostle Paul the whole tradition of ancient Israel had to be interpreted in light of the coming of Jesus Christ, including God's promise to Abraham regarding the land. The two key texts are in Galatians and Romans. Our purpose here is to focus on these passages, which relate and affect the theological and political situation in Palestine-Israel today.

Galatia was a province of the Roman Empire situated in the center of today's Turkey. There was a number of small Christian congregations living their life of faith in this province when a group of Jewish Christians (known as Judaizers) came, possibly from Jerusalem, and started to sow false teachings and wrong interpretations about the gospel of Christ among them. They were teaching that in order to be good Christians, Gentile Christians needed to observe the Jewish Law in addition to the teachings of Jesus Christ. When Paul found out, he was furious and wrote his letter to the Galatians. Paul insisted that salvation and liberation come through faith in Christ and have nothing to do with the observance of the Mosaic Law. Paul believed that the Law was passé. Faith in Christ is what counts.

Let us consider the gist of Paul's argument as found in the respective texts in his letters to the Galatians and to the Romans.

Galatians 3:6–9

Paul wrote:

Just as Abraham “believed in God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.” For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

Galatians 3:15–18, 22

Paul continues:

Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person’s will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. Now the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring; it does not say, “And to offsprings,” as of many; but it says, “And to your offspring,” that is, to one person, who is Christ. My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise . . . so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Galatians 3:23–24, 26, 28–29; 4:6–7

Paul goes on to say:

Before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came. . . . For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. . . . There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heir according to the promise. . . . And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir of God through Christ.

Romans 4:13–17

Paul writes:

For the promise that he [Abraham] would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason, it depends on faith in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations").

Let us summarize the gist of Paul's argument:

1. In the Book of Genesis (15:6) we read that Abraham believed in God, "and God reckoned it to him as

righteousness.” Abraham was justified not because of his good works but because of his faith and trust in God. It follows, for Paul, that all those who believe are Abraham’s descendants.

2. God promised Abraham that in him all the families or nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3, 18:18).⁵ For Paul, the promise refers to the coming of Christ. God foresees a time when the Gentiles will believe and will be blessed in Abraham the believer.
3. In cementing his argument, Paul reinterprets the promise. He says that God’s promise to Abraham and his offspring has to do with Christ and not the children of Israel. It was not for “offsprings” but “offspring.” In other words, God’s promise to Abraham was intended for and fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ.
4. This means that in the purposes of God, the promise to Abraham was given “so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to all those who believe” (Gal 3:22).
5. Theologically speaking, Paul is arguing that the promise was never about a physical piece of land. This is the way ancient Israel understood the promise and the way the ancient scribes expressed it. Rather, the promise concerns the whole world and the whole of humanity; it has nothing to do with the Law but with God’s grace for the liberation and salvation of the world.
6. That is why Paul wrote that Abraham was promised that his descendants would inherit the world (cosmos), not the land (Rom 4:13). He was interpreting the promise in light of the coming of Christ and in light of Christ’s saving grace.

⁵ Or “all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him.”

7. The promise of God was dependent on the faith of Abraham, which preceded the giving of the Law by more than four hundred years. If the inheritance of the land was based on the Law, it would be void, because there would be no legal basis for Abraham to inherit land. When Abraham's wife Sarah died, he came to the indigenous people of the land and asked for a place to bury her. He did not claim an inheritance due to the promise. He had no legal right to any part of the land. The Genesis account states that Abraham had to pay for a burial lot (Gen 23).
8. Paul says that God's promise rests on grace and is made to all of Abraham's descendants, for those who adhere to the Law and those who share the faith of Abraham (Rom 4:16).
9. In essence, Paul refuses to see the promise as the Genesis account describes it. He is looking at the general picture. The Genesis picture is both localized and limiting. Due to his faith in Christ, Paul can see the comprehensive picture that expresses the purposes of God, including liberation and salvation for the whole world.
10. Consequently, in Christ, any human inequalities are wiped out. "There is no Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).
11. "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heir according to the promise" (Gal 3:29). Surely Paul was aware of how Jews understood and appropriated the promise, but he chose to revamp its meaning.
12. Many religious Jews have placed themselves at the center of God's plan of history. Many fundamentalist Western Christians have placed the Jewish people at the center of

God's plan of history. Anyone who touches them touches the apple of God's eye (Zech 2:8). They see Jerusalem as the center of the world. The nations will come flocking to it, and out of Zion will come the word of the Lord (see Isa 2:2–4). This is certainly the way Paul believed before he met Christ.

13. Now, however, Paul is looking at things through the lens of Christ, and he has a diametrically opposite view of things. It is Christ that stands at the center. This means God's unconditional love for all people, justice and mercy for all, and peace and reconciliation for all.

It is important to remember that the priests and scribes who collected and edited the tradition that became the Book of Genesis after the exile had placed an undue emphasis on the promise of the land to the Jewish people, probably due to the fact that Jerusalem as well as the two Jewish kingdoms had been destroyed and due to the demographical changes that were taking place in the country. They wanted to confirm, substantiate, and ratify the claims of the promise for Jews alone so that no one else could have any counter claims. Brueggemann writes:

Most likely, the great tradition of land promise and land reception was given final biblical form during this critical period. That final form of the promise took a long look back in history, but it was given legitimacy and assurance in the moment of restoration. The land promise as we have it is in some large part the accomplishment of fifth-century traditionists, an accomplishment that became the bedrock conviction for the Judaism that followed.⁶

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Chosen?* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2015), 3.

JOHN REINTERPRETS THE TRADITION

The Gospel of John takes us to another level. The writer addresses a number of theological issues through which he reinterprets the Old Testament in light of faith in Jesus Christ. Here are a few examples:

Creation Is Reinterpreted in the Light of Christ

John includes Christ in God's work of creation:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. (John 1:1–3)

Election Is Reinterpreted in the Light of Christ

There is a redefining of *election*. Election is through faith and not connected with physical lineage. It is not based on race or ethnicity but on faith. The writer of John's Gospel is clear:

But to all who received him [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12–13)

John affirms the apostle Paul:

Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. (Rom 3:29–30)

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. . . . And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:26,29)

This theology is also attested to by the Gospel of Matthew:

When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness." (Matt 8:10–12)

The lesson is clear. Election has been redefined and reinterpreted. It was believed to be for the privileged few. It opened up some in the Old Testament, but in Christ, it became clear that it has nothing to do with ancestry or bloodline. It has to do with faith. "But to all who . . . believed . . . he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12–13).⁷

⁷ Two contemporary examples that explain what needs to be critiqued: the Eucharistic Prayer B in the American Book of Common Prayer (BCP, page 367), which reads, "We give thanks to you. O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your word spoken through the prophets and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son." What stands out is the phrase, "in the calling of Israel to be your people." This phrase is theologically anachronistic. It reflects a tribal theology of a polytheistic world when it was common for the gods to choose their people and vice versa. Such a theology was superseded within the Old Testament itself by later prophetic theology like that of Jonah. (See also Isaiah 19:25, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage"). Certainly, from a Christian perspective, it has become redundant and obsolete because election and chosenness have been redefined in light of Christ. The determinant is not an ethnic or racial genealogy but

***The Land Is Reinterpreted and
Re-Directed in the Light of Christ***

The land is central in the Old Testament. It is at the heart of the promise that God gave to Abraham and repeated to Isaac and Jacob and his twelve children. As Jacob was fleeing from his brother Esau, he spent the night on the way and saw in a dream a ladder coming down from heaven with its foot resting on the earth and God's angels going up and down. He heard God's voice reiterating the promise of the land of Canaan to Jacob and his offspring forever.

The writer of John reinterprets the promise. Jesus says to Nathaniel, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:51). The foot of Jacob's ladder is not standing on the earth but on Jesus Christ.

In other words, it is no longer the land that is significant, but Jesus Christ. The land is no longer the vehicle through which God expresses his faithfulness to people. . . . From a Christian perspective, the land no longer has any covenantal importance. The new covenant with God is based on the person of Jesus Christ.⁸

The whole concept of the land is reinterpreted and re-envisioned.

faith. It is hard to believe that many clergy repeat those words in the liturgy without being conscious of the theological anachronism. Another example comes from the baptismal liturgy (BCP, page 306): "We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise." What value does the last sentence have? Some scholars doubt that it ever happened, theologically it is absurd, spiritually it is not edifying. Why is it included?

⁸ Ateek, *Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 60.

1. Our theology of land begins with God the creator. God made the land and the land belongs to God; we are mere tenants and aliens (Lev 25:23). Our response to the Creator must always be expressed in adoration and praise.
2. The doctrine of the incarnation, the belief that God in Christ has taken on our humanity, gives a new theological importance to the earth and to our humanity. God in Christ has sanctified our humanity.
3. We must care for the earth. It is our home, given to us by the loving kindness of God. We must not allow its exploitation by human beings or its abuse. We are entrusted to be good stewards of God's world. Ways by which we make the world uninhabitable for future generations must be avoided and resisted.
4. We need to care for the well-being of all human beings. We have a responsibility to our bodies because they have been given to us by God and have been sanctified by Christ (1 Cor 6:19–20).
5. We have a great responsibility to the region of the world that God has given each of us. We need to work for justice and truth. On the basis of justice, as expressed by international law, we need to build peace and live in peace with our neighbors.
6. We must rise above nationalism and adopt internationalism. International law must become the foundational basis among countries and states.
7. As humans we cherish our birthplace, homeland, roots, and memories. As human beings homelands are dear, but we must transcend ethnocentric fanaticism and racism. Our common denominator is our common humanity. Our humanity can help us transcend our differences and help us accept one another and respect our differences.
8. This world has been given to us by God to be our earthly home. It is for all. All of us, whatever our faith,

are precious in the eyes of our loving Creator. This earth is a beautiful mosaic. Let us keep it that way.

It is worth reflecting here on what the Church of Scotland has expressed on the issue of the promised land in “The Inheritance of Abraham? A Report on the ‘Promised Land’”:

To Christians in the 21st century, promises about the land of Israel shouldn’t be intended to be taken literally, or as applying to a defined geographical territory; they are a way of speaking about how to live under God so that justice and peace reign, the weak and poor are protected, the stranger is included, and all have a share in the community and a contribution to make to it. The ‘promised land’ in the Bible is not a place, so much as a metaphor of how things ought to be among the people of God. This ‘promised land’ can be found—or built—anywhere.⁹

Ritual Purity Is Revamped in the Light of Christ

In the wedding in Cana of Galilee, the six stone jars of ritual cleansing are filled by the new wine of the spirit. The new wine of the spirit is inexhaustible (John 2).

The Temple Is Made Redundant and a Different Temple Is Built

After the cleansing of the Temple:

The Jews then said to him [Jesus], “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews

⁹ Church of Scotland, “The Inheritance of Abraham? A Report on the ‘Promised Land,’” rev. version (May 17, 2013), 9.

then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:18–22)

Three days after his death on the cross, God raised Jesus from the dead. Subsequently, the church came into being by the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is the body of Christ that is living and serving others in the world. The community of faith is the temple of God. This theology had already been elaborated on by the apostle Paul when he wrote: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? . . . For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple” (1 Cor 3:16–17). It is not the physical temple, the structure, that is important; it is the people of God, the true temple where the Holy Spirit dwells.

***God’s Inclusive Love Is Extended
to the Whole World through Christ***

God’s love is not anymore understood as limited to one race or one ethnic group but is for the whole world. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16).

8

JUSTICE AT THE CENTER

JUSTICE IS FOUNDATIONAL for the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. From the start of the Palestinian tragedy, the Nakba, the Palestinian demand has always been for justice. This cry has never ceased. It may have faded in the hearts of some, because of the ubiquitous reality of Israel's oppressive presence, the one-sided support Israel receives from the United States, and the failure of the international community to resolve the conflict. In spite of these, the demand for justice remains paramount.

One reason for the lack of resolution is our own Palestinian weakness, contrasted with the growing political, technological, and military strength of Israel and its influence around the world. We have failed to pressure the international community to find a solution. We lack the clout to produce results. Some Palestinian groups imagined that they could build clout through armed struggle. This led to unfortunate use of force and the suffering of many innocent people. Israel not only won those battles through superior force, but it managed to convince the world that the Palestinians are terrorists and have no rights. Israel won the propaganda war, and the just cause of the Palestinians faded from sight.

Many states, including the Arab states, are fully aware of the injustice done by Israel to the Palestinians. They would like to help the Palestinians. They would like to see the illegal military occupation end and the Palestinians have their own sovereign state. On the other hand, they trade with Israel and need the military and security technology that Israel can supply. They lack a strong incentive that can push them to take an unambiguous stand for justice for the Palestinians.

NEW THREATS AND DANGERS IN ISRAEL

One of the main strengths in the founding of the state of Israel was its secular Zionist leadership. For those visionaries, religion did not play a significant role. Consequently, they were able to build their new state on democratic principles. If it were not that Israel was established on grave injustice through the destruction of Palestine, denying the Palestinian people the right to self-determination, or even to their share of the land according to the United Nations Partition Plan of 1947, this democracy would have been worthy of praise. Yet for the Palestinian Arab-Israeli citizens, there has never been a real democracy. The state of Israel sees itself as a Jewish state, and it has never extended equality to its non-Jewish citizens. If those who look at Israeli democracy from the outside find it impressive, 20 percent of Israel's citizens see it as a sham.

Since the 1977 election of Likud, the rightwing Zionist party, there has been a gradual chipping away at Israeli democracy. Religion began to grow in influence on the political life of the state. The power of the religious settlers grew. They increased not only in number but also in influence and rank in the Israeli military. They became members of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament); some became ministers in Israeli governments, and the country moved steadily to the right.

Most religious settlers, and other religious Jews, are opposed to secular Zionism. Many religious settlers consider secular Zionism as a stage that God used to bring about the establishment of the state. That stage has passed. Their primary allegiance is to the Torah and not to Zionism. This means that they have to adhere to the religious Law, the Halakha. If there is a conflict between the demands of the Torah and Halakha, on the one hand, and international law, on the other hand, the Torah must take precedence. The Torah takes precedence over democracy.

Any measure of democracy Israel may claim to have is today being eradicated by its own leaders, who are undermining it by their unjust and undemocratic behavior. Many Jews and Jewish leaders in the world are becoming aware of this, and some are beginning to speak out against it.

The political situation in Israel is approaching a tipping point. The rightwing Israeli government is finding it difficult to rein in the religious settlers. Is it possible that a civil war within the Israeli society is brewing? That Israel's democracy is eroding at a faster rate than people imagine? That religious settlers today enjoy a greater influence than their numbers indicate? That international law does not stand a chance in the face of the racist laws that the rightwing Israeli government keeps enacting?

One wonders whether democracy is feasible when religion asserts control. If real and authentic democracy has not been able to thrive in the Middle East, it is partly due to the difficulty of separating religion and state. Once religion takes over, the movement toward vitality and reform slows down.

Israel claims to be a democracy, but it is actually more of an ethnocracy. The founders of the state of Israel declared it a state for the Jewish people. Being Jewish in a Jewish state gives a person rights, privileges, and benefits that are denied to non-Jews. One of these privileges is nationality. Only Jews can be nationals

of Israel; non-Jews may choose from a number of other nationalities, including Arab, Druze, Samaritan, Russian, and Aramaic.¹

Israel, as the nation-state of the Jewish people, is the state of all Jews around the world. Most of the world's Jews are not citizens of Israel. At the same time, Israel is not the state of 20 percent of its citizens. They do not really belong to the state in which they live, although they are the original people of the land.

To conceal its discrimination, Israel has invested several quasi-governmental bodies with great influence in decision making, such as the Jewish Agency, the Jewish National Fund, and the World Zionist Organization. These bodies represent the interests, not of all the citizens of Israel, but of all Jews worldwide. They privilege Jewish nationals in matters of land, water, education, the economy, and other vital issues. By refusing to agree on a constitution, Israel can avoid giving all citizens of Israel equal rights.

Although Israel has been *acting* as a Jewish state since its establishment, in recent years it has demanded to be *recognized* by the Palestinians as a Jewish state as a precondition for peace. This means that the Palestinians, of their own free will, would accept an inferior status. It would deprive the Palestinians of any claim to equality, especially with no constitution to protect them. Furthermore, it would allow Israel legally to deny any right of return for Palestinian refugees.

NEW ISRAELI MYTHS

At the same time, the government of Israel promotes new myths against the Palestinians.

¹ Jonathan Cook writes that there are 130 possible nationalities that people can choose from in Israel (“‘Visible Equality’ as Confidence Trick,” in *Israel and South Africa: The Many Faces of Apartheid*, ed. Ilan Pappé [London: Zed Books, 2015]).

- There is no occupation of the West Bank. How can a people or a nation occupy its own land? Jews have returned to Judea and Samaria. It is a return to their historic homeland and not an occupation of other people's land.
- While the number of Jewish-only settlements and settlers on the West Bank continues to grow, the Israeli government accuses the Palestinians of promoting the ethnic cleansing of Jews from the land of Israel whenever they talk about the removal of the settlements as required by international law.

Robert Cohen's comment is apt:

Israel gives today lip-service to the two-state solution but its logic is weird: "We support a two-state solution to the conflict. The Settlements are not in themselves an obstacle to peace. The future of the Settlements will be decided during peace negotiations. Everyone knows that mutually agreed land swaps will mean that the main Settlement blocs will be incorporated into Israel. In the meantime, we should encourage dialogue between the two sides and not favor one side over the other through boycotts. And since so many Palestinians are now employed in the Settlements, boycotts will directly harm the very people the boycotters claim to support."²

With the increasing power of religious settlers and rightwing Zionists, many politicians in Israel are reluctant to respect and implement democratic principles. "Everywhere else in the world, genuine democracy appears to strengthen national stability, but

² Robert A. H. Cohen, "Settlement Boycotts—Calling Time on the Hypocrisy of Our Jewish Leadership," *Writing from the Edge* blog (September 16, 2016).

in Israel it's presented as the worst possible thing that could happen."³

THREATS IN PALESTINE

Building a democracy is not easy in the Middle East. The Middle East is plagued with archaic traditions. The past is so rich and fertile that it is easy to get bogged down. Many people live more in the past than in the present. Orthodox believers in the three religious traditions—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—are persuaded that the past keeps believers connected with the source and origins of religion. They believe that this connection gives legitimacy to the faith, and it becomes the measure for faithful practice of that faith. This is why it is difficult to reconcile orthodox beliefs with international law and human rights. This is why it is difficult for some believers to move forward in their faith. And this is why many have turned their backs on orthodoxy.

Eastern Christianity faces the same challenges as other traditions, but it is easier for it because it does not aspire to political control. It does not enjoy political clout in Israel or Palestine. The case of Islam is different. It aspires to political control and the application of its own legal system (sharia law). It is very important, living in a twenty-first-century democracy, to have open and progressive education to inform conservative and fundamentalist religious thinking. The best democratic system assigns religion to private life. It needs to be respected and protected and free, but it must not enjoy political clout that will infringe on the rights of other people of a different religion. In a democracy all must be equal under the law.

This is what we aspire to and must continue to work for in the Middle East. Thank God that in each of our religions we

³ Ibid.

find people who believe that the basis of democracy should be full equality under the law.

This is also an integral part of Palestinian liberation theology. Its focus is the liberation of all people, whether part of a majority or part of a minority. It protects the rights of religious people to practice their religion. True democracy demands freedom of religion, not only freedom of worship. This allows those who choose not to have a religious faith to do so. This also is a right that needs to be respected and protected by law.

RESOLVING THE CONFLICT

Any just solution to the conflict must address this threefold denial of basic Palestinian rights.

1. Palestinian citizens of the state of Israel suffer from discrimination and are waiting to enjoy full equality.
2. Palestinians living under military occupation in the territories seized by Israel in 1967 are denied almost all rights.
3. Palestinian refugees have been living in exile, generation after generation, many of them in difficult circumstances. They are waiting for their right to return.⁴

JUST SOLUTIONS?

When one surveys the history of the conflict, it is clear that at every turn Israel expanded its territory in defiance of UN resolutions. The 1947 Partition Plan gave the Jewish people approximately 55 percent of Palestine and gave 45 percent for

⁴ These fundamental rights are addressed in Kairos Palestine, “A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering” (2009), often referred to as the Kairos Document. I was one of the fifteen Palestinian Christians who worked on this text.

an “Arab” state. The Palestinians—the indigenous people of the land—constituted two-thirds of the population, and so they rejected the unjust partition.

In the ensuing fighting, Israel occupied further territory until an armistice was agreed upon (1949) and the armistice line (Green Line) was drawn, which left Israel with 78 percent of historic Palestine.

The Palestinians called for one democratic secular state in all of Palestine, until in 1988, in the Arab summit at Algiers, they accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242, which called for a two-state solution. This implicitly meant that they recognized the state of Israel within the armistice Green Line. This constituted a great concession that the Palestinians made for the sake of peace. They accepted a Palestinian state on 22 percent of historic Palestine in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

Israel, through its illegal settlement policy, is eroding this solution, which has been accepted throughout the world.

A *two-state solution* envisions two sovereign states in Palestine. This was the UN option, recommended by the UN General Assembly in 1947. Over the decades, as we have seen, the original two-state solution has been greatly modified to the advantage of Israel by the vicissitudes of war. In broad outline, a two-state solution involves:

- A state of Israel within the area it occupied before June 1967. A democratic state for all its citizens without distinction or discrimination on ethnic or religious grounds.
- A state of Palestine that includes all the areas of Palestine that Israel occupied in 1967, that is, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. Again, it must be a democratic state for all its citizens without distinction due to ethnic or religious background.

- Israel will control West Jerusalem, and Palestine will control East Jerusalem; East Jerusalem will be the capital of Palestine, and West Jerusalem the capital of Israel; but Jerusalem will be an open city for all.
- Achievement of a just resolution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

Israel has never fully embraced a two-state solution and undermines it daily through more and more land confiscation and settlement building. In fact, Israel is intentionally trying to destroy this option.

Apparently, Israel would like to force the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah to accept the status quo of limited self-rule. This means that the Palestinians in the territories will never have the sovereignty of a state. They will always be subordinate to Israel.⁵

Palestinians long ago refused the concept of autonomy. Although severely restricted in what it can accomplish under Israeli occupation, the Palestinian Authority has been seeking to build state institutions and to function as a state. In 2012, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly approved the de facto recognition of a sovereign Palestinian state, and 138 states currently have bilateral relations with the state of Palestine.⁶

In recent years, as hopes for a genuine two-state solution have faded, many progressive thinkers—Palestinians, Jews, and internationals—began to propose a *one-state solution*. This is the solution that Palestinians have traditionally favored. In 1947, it

⁵ Benjamin Netanyahu recently proposed this in the form of a “State-minus,” but this has always been the default Israeli position. See Barak Ravid, “Netanyahu ahead of Trump Phone Call: I Am Willing to Give Palestinians a ‘State-minus,’” *Haaretz* (January 22, 2017).

⁶ Reuters, “Palestinians Win Implicit UN Recognition of Sovereign State” (November 29, 2012).

was rejected by the United Nations in favor of partition, in order to allow the creation of a Jewish state.

The *one state* would be a unitary democratic state for all the people of the land, Arab and Jew, Israeli and Palestinian, alike. All citizens would enjoy equal citizenship, rights, and responsibilities. Jerusalem would be the capital of the one state.

Israel is even more opposed to a one-state solution of this kind than to a two-state solution, but in fact it has been creating a parody of a single state—one in which it effectively controls the whole land of Palestine, “from the river to the sea,” while systematically discriminating against Palestinian Arab Israelis, denying basic human rights to Palestinians living under occupation, and refusing the right of return.

Underneath this, there is a theological concept. Israel believes that all the land belongs to it and that Palestinians are intruders with no right to any part of the land. This is an ethnocentric and even tribal concept, but Israel has been using it to lay claim to the whole land. It remains to be seen how long the world will allow Israel to continue down this cruel and destructive road.

Whether Israel likes it or not, two nations inhabit the land of Israel/Palestine: Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. They are comparable in size. The last estimates of the demography of the land, produced on the eve of the Jewish New Year in 2016, put the number of Jews in the state of Israel at approximately 6.4 million, while the combined Palestinian population, including the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Israel, and Jerusalem, is approximately 6.1 million.⁷ In essence, two nations live side by side, yet Israel is ruling over and dominating the Palestinian Arabs. This has led to renewed interest in another old proposal: a *bi-national solution*. The suggestion is that Israel/Palestine become a bi-national state. If both national communities were prepared to enter into such

⁷ Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics.

an agreement, the United Nations and representatives of both nations could work out the details. In this partnership the two national entities would retain their unique identities but would live together and share the whole land.

Israel does not recognize the Palestinian Arab minority inside Israel as a national minority. It would prefer to fragment it as a set of different religious minorities. In November 2016, a proposal was put forward by the opposition United List to the Knesset to have the Palestinian Arab minority recognized as a national minority.

JERUSALEM

The Oslo Declaration of Principles of 1993 left the four most difficult contested issues between Israel and the Palestinians to the final stage of negotiations. They include Jerusalem, refugees, borders, and settlements. Of these, the most contentious is the issue of Jerusalem. In 1980, Israel declared Jerusalem “complete and united” as the capital of Israel after having extended the boundaries of Jerusalem into the West Bank to include East Jerusalem in 1967.

The General Assembly’s Partition Plan of 1947 suggested that Jerusalem be internationalized. The UN vision of Jerusalem may have looked good on paper, but it underestimated the emotional attachment of the Palestinians—Christians and Muslims—on the one hand, and Jews on the other. Both sides wanted Jerusalem to be their capital and the center of their religious and political life.

In 1988, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) accepted Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967, which declares the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of land by force.” This implied the recognition of the state of Israel but also meant that East Jerusalem was occupied territory and must be given back in any peace agreement. It must be remembered that the problem

originated in the United Nations and that the United Nations is the only qualified body to resolve it.

There are, however, certain basic principles for a solution:

1. Jerusalem must remain open to all people and religions.
2. East Jerusalem must be the capital of Palestine, and West Jerusalem the capital of Israel.
3. The two states must undertake to respect and protect the integrity and sanctity of the holy places and their rightful religious ownership.

No state has recognized Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem or moved its embassy from Tel Aviv. During his presidential campaign Donald Trump announced his intention to move the US embassy to Jerusalem, which would be a grave violation of international law, but as of this writing, he has abstained from doing so.

Furthermore, the government of Israel has failed in its governance of East Jerusalem as a result of the special privileges it has given to Jewish settlers who have falsified and deceptively manipulated the laws to encroach on the rights of the Palestinian indigenous inhabitants, both Christian and Muslim. Here, as elsewhere, Israel cannot be trusted to be fair and just.

Israel has so far defied all UN resolutions, assisted by the US veto. It has created new facts on the ground, judaized Jerusalem, confiscated Palestinian homes, revoked East Jerusalem residency rights, and in general, subjected the Palestinians to harsh treatment. The world sits back and watches Israel commit all kinds of daily atrocities and does nothing about it. The United Nations needs courage, determination, and the will to act.

It is possible to dream of a time in the future when the two states of Palestine and Israel and a few other neighboring states like Jordan and Lebanon can form a federation of states of the Holy Land. It is possible to dream of a future in which Jerusalem can become the federal capital of a federation of states that can

contribute to a broader and more solid foundation for a secure and lasting peace for the whole region. May we continue to dream, hope, and work for such a future, one that will transform the miserable present to a brighter tomorrow for all the people of our land and the whole of the Middle East.

A PLEA FOR A STRATEGY OF NONVIOLENCE

Some years ago Palestinian youths from one or two villages on the West Bank started to engage the Israeli army each week after Friday prayers at the mosque. These young people are usually accompanied by Israeli and international peace activists. It is basically a nonviolent protest against the Israeli illegal occupation of their land and, more specifically, against the closure of the military gates to their agricultural fields, the blocking of the main road of their village, or other military punishments imposed on these villages. The resistance has spread to a few other villages but has not become a national movement. So far, Israel has been able to contain it.

Many of our people admire these young people for their patriotism, their love of the land, and their courage to face the oppressive Israeli army. Unfortunately, they lack a fully elaborated strategy that can allow nonviolent protest to expand and grow and have a greater impact.

Occasionally, especially in Jerusalem, a young Palestinian decides to attack a Jewish Israeli individual or group. We understand the oppression inflicted upon our people by the state of Israel, its army and border police, and its settlers. We understand the hopelessness, frustration, humiliation, and dehumanization our people are subjected to by the Israeli military. This drives some of our young people to act emotionally, irrationally, and indiscriminately, which in turn allows the army to shoot to kill and mostly get away with it. Israel calls these young people terrorists and again wins the sympathy of people in the West.

These acts by desperate young people will not contribute to the liberation of Palestine. Every time we pick up a knife, fire a shot, turn a car into a weapon, or fire a missile from Gaza into Israel, we act foolishly. The “armed struggle” and the “intifada of the lone wolves” cannot bring us freedom. In the arena of force, we are no match for the Israeli military. But I remember the late Faisal Husseini of Jerusalem, who used to say that if I cannot beat Tyson in the boxing ring, I can challenge him in a game of chess. Where we can match Israel is through nonviolent resistance. The Israeli military is not trained for nonviolence. The state of Israel doesn’t know how to respond to nonviolence. Train our people for nonviolence, and we can prevail.

For nonviolent struggle to be effective, it is important for the whole community to be involved. People need to be well trained in nonviolent resistance. People need to be willing to accept death rather than inflict death on their adversaries. People need to act as part of a carefully calculated and well-organized strategy.

For it to be effective, we need to march in our thousands and tens of thousands. All of us need to be ready to pay the price of freedom.

For it to be effective, political and religious leaders need to go down to the streets with the people—men and women, boys and girls—to demonstrate and march. They need to be ready to be killed but not to kill. They need to be persistent and not give up.

Gaza also needs a nonviolent strategy where tens of thousands of people, led by their religious and political leaders, march to the prison fence each week with banners and slogans that say, “We need justice.” Their cry has to reverberate until it is heard around the world. For liberation to come, this strategy must be carried out persistently, with no shots fired and without fleeing back.

We must stop waiting for freedom to come from outside. We need to take responsibility for our own liberation through nonviolent resistance. When ordinary people around the world hear our cry, then the world will begin to stand with us, and

world leaders, however little they may want to intervene on our behalf, will be obliged to do so. Freedom will come when we Palestinians ourselves, with our political and religious leaders, take the initiative to demand it and to earn it.

SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF JUSTICE

From the perspective of Palestinian faith, what do we mean by justice? A Palestinian liberation theology of justice has seven dimensions:

1. It is a *theology of justice and love*. Justice and love are two sides of the same coin. When there is love there is justice, and vice versa. Love entails relationships, respect for the other, and respect for the rights of the other. Love does not seek the destruction of the other but the good of the other. The Zionists who conquered Palestine did not come with good will toward the indigenous Palestinians. But as we seek justice, we need to connect it with love. To love our neighbor, including our enemy, is difficult but necessary.
2. It is a *theology of justice and mercy*. Justice on its own can be hard and harsh. It must be tempered by mercy. The Palestinians must gain their rights; justice must be done in accordance with international law, but we must not seek the destruction of the enemy. There should be no retaliation or revenge. We must ensure that all the people of the land—Palestinians and Israelis—can live together in peace and security. This means taking the moral high ground and implementing justice with compassion.
3. It is a *theology of justice and truth*. In the conflict over Palestine, truth was the first casualty. So many lies, myths, and fabrications against the Palestinians have circulated.

Through truth one can confront falsehood, deception, and myths. The way of Jesus is the way of truth and integrity. Jesus says, “You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). Very often Jesus confronted religious and political leaders of his day with the truth. Facing, speaking, revealing, and sharing truth is liberating.

4. It is a *theology of justice and security*. The state of Israel has been trying to achieve security without doing justice. But security imposed by the power of the gun will never be secure. It breeds only hatred and revenge. Such security is built on sand. Real security is achieved only when justice is done and Palestinians and Israelis agree to share the land.
5. It is a *theology of justice and nonviolence*. We resist everything that is evil, but we refuse to use evil methods. Violence—on both sides—must be rejected and shamed. Nonviolence takes courage, but it is a powerful and effective tool, especially when applied by the whole community. Nonviolence introduces a new moral context, believing that the arc of history bends toward justice. It focuses on the evil that has been committed and aims to end it, while it seeks the rehabilitation of the aggressors. It accepts suffering without retaliation for the sake of the cause it promotes. It respects the humanity of both the oppressed and the oppressor. In the conflict over Palestine, we promote boycott, divestment, and sanctions as nonviolent ways of resisting occupation and oppression.
6. It is a *theology of justice and peace*. Although justice is our first objective, it is only the first step toward the end of the conflict. Justice must lead to peace; inversely, it is the best and only foundation on which peace can be

built. Making peace is a mandate from Christ himself: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God” (Matt 5:9).

7. It is a theology of *justice, reconciliation, and forgiveness*. It is important for people of faith to work for healing, a process that has two important steps: reconciliation and forgiveness. Reconciliation begins with an open acknowledgment of the injustice and calls for a change of attitudes and just actions. Forgiveness completes the process of reconciliation and even goes beyond. When forgiveness is offered and received, full liberation takes place and both parties are set free. The forgiver is set free from the burden of revenge, and the forgiven is set free from guilt.

THE PEACE CIRCLE

Thomas à Kempis, a medieval priest and writer, said, “All men desire peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace.”⁸ What makes for peace?

- The peace circle begins with the doing of justice.
- Justice must be based on international law.
- International law is committed to resolving conflicts through nonviolent means.
- International law will take into account the element of truth.
- Justice is to be administered with mercy.
- Justice produces peace.
- Peace produces security.
- Peace and security open the way to reconciliation.

⁸ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, chap. 25.

- Reconciliation opens the way for forgiveness.
- Forgiveness leads to healing.

The peace circle begins with the doing of justice and ends by opening the possibility of reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, and love.

THE EMERGENCE OF SABEEL AND ITS FRIENDS

BACKGROUND

AFTER THE 1948 Nakba, the depressed Palestinian remnant that stayed within the part of Palestine that became the state of Israel lived under harsh military rule. Martial law created a system of control that consisted of three components: cooptation, segmentation, and dependence.¹

The prophetic voice of the church throughout this period was practically absent. There were no indigenous Palestinian church hierarchies at all. They were all foreign. The only voices that were heard against the injustice came from the Communist Party, whose members included Jews, Muslims, and Christians. The Communist Party was the only political party in the opposition that was recognized by Israel at that time. However, some of the remaining Palestinian church leaders were busily engaged in relief work for the thousands of Palestinian refugees who were displaced by the onslaught of the Zionists.

¹ Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).

When we review the Palestinian Christian involvement in the struggle for justice and peace, it is possible to identify five major factors: Archbishop Joseph Raya, Archbishop Elias Chacour, indigenization of church leaderships, Palestinian liberation theology, and Kairos Palestine.

Archbishop Joseph Raya

The first Arab voice to be heard from a church official was the voice of the Melkite Archbishop Joseph Raya (1916–2005). He was Lebanese by birth but Palestinian in education and sentiment. He came to Palestine in 1937, where he studied at St. Anne White Fathers' Seminary in Jerusalem. He was ordained both as deacon and priest in Jerusalem in the early 1940s. A few years later he went to the United States where he served in Melkite parishes. He spent seventeen years in Birmingham, Alabama, where he marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., during the civil rights movement.

Due to his activism in the civil rights movement, he was appointed archbishop of the Melkite community in Galilee—the largest Christian church in Israel. He arrived to his see in Haifa in 1968 (the same year Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated). Archbishop Raya was the first prominent Christian leader who raised a clear prophetic voice. He demanded that the Israeli government give justice to the Palestinians. He championed the cause of Iqrit and Kufr Baram—two Christian villages in the north whose inhabitants were evicted by the Zionists in 1948. The villagers had been assured that after two weeks they would be permitted to return to their homes; when they were not, they appealed their case to the Israeli Supreme Court, which ruled for their return. The military, however, still insisted on preventing this repatriation. In defiance of the law, the two villages were

demolished by the army, one of them bulldozed on Christmas Eve in 1951.² Archbishop Raya called for the implementation of the Supreme Court ruling, but the Israeli government refused. He then led nonviolent demonstrations and sit-ins to pressure the Israeli government to allow the return of the villagers. Thousands of people marched with him—Christians, Muslims, and Jews—but to no avail.

On one Sunday in August 1972, he ordered all the Melkite churches to close and to toll the church bells with the funeral toll announcing the death of justice in Israel. Still the government of Israel would not budge.

Raya used the nonviolent methods and techniques he had learned during the civil rights struggle in the United States, but he was not successful. He became controversial even within his own denomination, and pressures mounted against him from various sides. He resigned his see in 1974 and moved to Canada, where he lived until his death in 2005.

Archbishop Elias Chacour

One of Archbishop Raya's young priests at the time was Abuna Elias Chacour. Ten years after Raya's resignation, Chacour wrote his first book, *Blood Brothers*. This book was the first to be written by an Arab Christian clergyman relating his own story of displacement and the de-population of the people of his village, Kufr Baram, by the Zionists in 1948. The book was translated into a number of languages and became an excellent educational tool for thousands of people around the world who had not heard about the Palestinian tragedy.

² Elias Chacour and David Hazard, *Blood Brothers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2003), 73–83. First published in 1984.

Indigenization of Church Leaderships

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s a process of indigenization started within three church denominations in Palestine/Israel. In 1976, Rev. Fayek Haddad became the first Palestinian Anglican bishop in Jerusalem. In 1979, Rev. Dahoud Haddad became the first Palestinian Lutheran bishop in Jerusalem; and in early January 1988, less than one month after the first intifada, Pope John Paul II consecrated the first Palestinian Roman Catholic (Latin) patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah.

For the first time three church denominations had indigenous Arab Palestinian leaders. With the eruption of the first intifada in 1987, the voice of the indigenous bishops against Israeli injustice gradually began to be heard. In fact, the first joint statement against the occupation was signed by all the patriarchs and bishops in Jerusalem in January 1988. The statement said: "We take our stand with truth and justice against all forms of injustice and oppression. We stand with the suffering and the oppressed. We call upon the faithful to pray and to labor for justice and peace for all the people of our area." What was significant about the statement was that it broke the barrier of fear and silence and emboldened the hierarchies to raise their voice against the injustice.

Since then various statements have been issued and the voices of some of the hierarchies have been heard, even though intermittently and sometimes vaguely.

Palestinian Liberation Theology

The rise of Palestinian liberation theology began in 1989 with the publication of *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*. The book was received well by the Christian community of the land, including its various denominations—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. The book examined the

political, religious, and theological situation in the country from the position of Christian faith. It emphasized the importance of justice as well as God's inclusive love for all people. It condemned the Israeli occupation and the oppression of the Palestinians. It accentuated the significance of a nonviolent struggle against the illegal occupation. One of the important turning points was when Palestinian Christians began to identify with Jesus Christ as a Palestinian who lived under occupation. Jesus began to be viewed as a liberator as well as a paradigm for resistance and liberation.

Since the rise of Palestinian liberation theology, a number of important Christian organizations have emerged on the West Bank, especially in the Bethlehem area, and each has made a significant contribution to the work of justice and liberation.

Kairos Palestine

The fifth important factor along the way of justice and nonviolence was expressed in the Kairos Palestine document launched in December 2009.³ The document was produced ecumenically because all those who worked on it—bishops, clergy, lay men and women—belonged to the various churches of the land. It constituted a genuine Palestinian Christian voice that speaks truth to power and witnesses to the possibility of justice and peace for all the people of the land.

Much credit for the initial drafting of this document goes to Patriarch Michel Sabbah, the retired Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, who was a very active member of the group that worked on the document.

The Kairos Document candidly and boldly addresses the Palestinian, Israeli, and international groups:

³ Kairos Palestine, "A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering" (2009). Also referred to as the Kairos Document.

1. *To Palestinian Christians*: “Our word to all our Christian brothers and sisters is a word of hope, patience, steadfastness, and new action for a better future. . . . We place our hope in God. . . . At the same time, we continue to act in concord with God and God’s will, building, resisting evil, and bringing closer the day of justice and peace.” (no. 5.1)
2. *To Muslims*: “Our message to the Muslims is a message of love and of living together and a call to reject fanaticism and extremism. It is also a message to the world that Muslims are neither to be stereotyped as the enemy nor caricatured as terrorists but rather to be lived with in peace and engaged with in dialogue.” (no. 5.4.1.)
3. *To Jews*: “Even though we have fought one another in the recent past and still struggle today, we are able to love and live together. We can organize our political life, with all its complexity, according to the logic of this love and its power, after ending the occupation and establishing justice.” (no. 5.4.2)
4. *To the churches of the world*: “Our word . . . is firstly a word of gratitude for the solidarity you have shown toward us in word, deed and presence among us. It is a word of praise for the many Churches and Christians who support the right of the Palestinian people for self-determination. It is a message of solidarity with those Christians and churches who have suffered because of their advocacy for law and justice. . . . Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love?” (no. 6.1)
5. *To the international community*: “We call for a response to what the civil and religious institutions have proposed . . . the beginning of a system of economic sanctions

and boycott to be applied against Israel. We repeat once again that this is not revenge but rather a serious action in order to reach a just and definitive peace that will put an end to Israeli occupation of Palestine . . . and will guarantee security and peace for all.” (no. 7)

THE SABEEL CENTER AND ITS FRIENDS

Against this background, let us go back now and flesh out the emergence of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. Palestinian liberation theology came into being in the wake of the first intifada in 1987. The intifada could not be stopped; it kept raging for a number of years until the government of Israel recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. This was followed by the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993. Most Palestinians were hoping that the occupation would soon come to an end and the Palestinian state would emerge. When the euphoria passed, the Palestinians discovered that the occupation had dug its heels still deeper into our land.

The publication of *Justice and Only Justice* in 1989 gave more impetus to the nascent Palestinian liberation theology movement that had emerged. Under the auspices of Bishop Samir Kafity the book was launched in 1990 at St. George’s Cathedral with a number of speakers that reflected the Christian mosaic of Jerusalem. There was an atmosphere of excitement and hopeful expectation for this movement and for what it could contribute for the achievement of justice and peace.

At the same time, we were aware of our weakness and the huge task ahead of us. Indeed, there was a feeling of new synergy and energy among us as well as the determination to become involved more actively. We needed time to discern where the Holy Spirit was leading us. In the meantime we were conducting Bible

studies to open our people's eyes to the relevance of the Bible to what was going on, giving lectures, educating and organizing workshops, and waiting on God to guide our future steps. It is important to emphasize that from its inception the Palestinian liberation theology movement was genuinely ecumenical. We believed that Christ was breathing the Spirit on those Palestinian Christians who were eager to learn and to witness to the power of justice and nonviolence.

There was a deep feeling that we were on the right path. The response of our people was encouraging and God's blessing was experienced and felt. Yet we still needed greater clarity and assurance as to whether it was God's will that we should continue to develop this new ministry.

At the same time, plans were under way for an international conference wherein Palestinian liberation theology would be introduced not only to Palestinians and Israelis but to people across the world. In March 1990, a small conference was held at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute near Bethlehem. Ten international theologians were invited from across the world, including Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Dr. Marc Ellis from the United States. Participants from Ireland, South Africa, Philippines, Zimbabwe, and Sri Lanka were joined by around forty local Palestinian men and women.

During this discerning period, the nascent movement was simply referred to as Palestinian liberation theology. The small group of organizers felt that it was time to choose a name for the movement. A number of names were suggested, but none excited us until the name Sabeel came up.

Sabeel in Arabic has two meanings. It is, first, "the way," reminding those of us who are Christians that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It became more exciting when we realized that the oldest reference to the early followers of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem was "the people of the Way." When Saul of Tarsus (later the apostle Paul), who was a Jewish religious fanatic,

wanted to show his religious zeal, he started persecuting the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem and beyond. “Saul . . . went to the high priest and asked for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1–2; see also 18:25). This was the first mention of “the Way,” which translates as *Sabeel* in Arabic.

A second meaning is “a fountain or spring of living water.” This also reminds us of the words of Christ, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37–38).

For all of us, Sabeel is a movement of people who are on a journey. We are walking the way seeking justice and peace. We are joined by other people of other faiths—Christians, Muslims, and Jews—as well as secular people. We all share the same objective: to see the end of the illegal occupation of Israel of the Palestinian territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel, so that a just and secure peace can be achieved for all the people of Palestine and Israel. The name Sabeel was adopted in 1993. The first board was organized from a small group of clergy and lay people, men and women from various denominations.

Friends of Sabeel (IFOS and FOS)

International Friends of Sabeel (IFOS) was organized to support the work of Sabeel through education, advocacy, conferences, solidarity visits, partner-to-partner projects, and financial support. Regional groups (unofficially known as chapters) were set up to create a network of friends around the world who work in partnership with Sabeel to help bring about a just and durable peace for Palestine and Israel based on the demands of international law.

It all started after the second international Sabeel conference, which was held at the East Jerusalem YMCA, January 22–29, 1996. The theme of the conference was “The Significance of Jerusalem to Christians and of Christians to Jerusalem.” After the conference I approached Betsy Barlow from the United States and Jan Davies from the UK and asked them whether they were willing to take Sabeel a step further by organizing Friends of Sabeel (FOS) in their countries. They agreed. We discussed together the guidelines that were needed and agreed on four simple guidelines:

1. The Sabeel movement needs to start from within the mainline churches.
2. It must be ecumenical and interdenominational.
3. People who join must be committed to justice and peace for all the people of the land.
4. The movement must be committed to nonviolence.

From then on, a number of other groups were organized around the world. What follows is a short description of each of the groups/chapters. They are listed in the order of their founding. In most of the FOS groups the hard work is done by volunteers—men and women—wonderfully committed to justice and liberation for all.

Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA)

In 1996, after witnessing firsthand the injustice in the Holy Land and learning more about the US support of the illegal military occupation of Palestinian land, a group of American Christians were inspired to take up the Palestinian cause, educate their fellow Christians and church leaders, and build a movement with the ambitious goal of changing US policy in the Middle East.

This was the beginning of FOSNA, Friends of Sabeel North America. From 1996 to 2000, through grassroots education in churches, FOSNA made great strides in bringing awareness to the US role in Israel's military occupation.

Since that time FOSNA has organized numerous regional conferences that have educated thousands both in and outside of the church, and it has motivated people to action with its passion for justice. In 2015, FOSNA coordinated the national campaign, No Child Behind Bars/Drop G4S. G4S, the world's largest private security company, has profited from the detainment and abuse of Palestinian children and is complicit in violations of international law.⁴ FOSNA is leading the campaign to identify and expose G4S and has developed a "Municipal Divestment Organizing Guide" to help local groups identify the work of G4S in their communities. Confident in their foundation, their anchor, their rock, Christ the Liberator, FOSNA pledges to carry on the work of Sabeel.

Friends of Sabeel UK

Friends of Sabeel UK was started in 1996 and continues to work with the ecumenical network of churches and with other organizations in the UK. It is committed to supporting the Sabeel Theology Center in Jerusalem, supporting and encouraging the Christian community in the Holy Land in their life and witness, and raising awareness in the UK concerning Christians in the Holy Land and promoting links with them. Their efforts are presently concentrated on

⁴ As of November 2016, FOSNA announced that security company G4S had sold most of its Israeli business amid widespread condemnation for its complicity in Palestinian human rights abuses, including illegal detention and torture of Palestinian children.

1. targeting the next generation of young British Christians,
2. informing and educating the churches, and
3. pilgrimages and conferences, exposing people to the realities on the ground.

Canadian Friends of Sabeel (CFOS)

In November 1997, Sabeel board member Cedar Duaybis met in Jerusalem with a group from the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa that was finishing a visit to the Occupied Territories. After they had shared their experiences, Cedar asked, “So now you’re stuck with the truth; what are you going to do about it?” This was the beginning of Canadian Friends of Sabeel. A month later a member of the group, John Baycroft, Anglican Bishop of Ottawa, preached a sermon on Christmas Eve on his experience in Bethlehem. The main newspaper in Ottawa published the headline, “Bishop Slams Israel’s Evil,” which drew widespread criticism from the Israeli lobby and the lobby that included the Canadian Jewish Congress. Bishop Baycroft stood his ground and decided to call a conference in Ottawa on peace and justice in the Holy Land. Since that time CFOS has engaged in advocacy through various programs and projects. In 2008, it worked with Sabeel to develop the renewed sixtieth anniversary edition of the Nakba Photo Exhibit. Recently, it has developed the concept of Authentic Christian Pilgrimage and also an official certification for Authentic Christian Pilgrimage itineraries that would change the way churches do Holy Land pilgrimage.

Friends of Sabeel in Scandinavia

Friends of Sabeel in Scandinavia, gathering people from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, was founded in May 2001. The aim was and is to support Sabeel Jerusalem and its ecumenical work

for a just peace and an end to the occupation. Friends of Sabeel has worked independently in Norway and Sweden by taking action, holding seminars and workshops, arranging witness visits, participating in advocacy, and attending Sabeel's international conferences. During the first years there also was a Sabeel group in Denmark. In 2016 we formally started FOSS (Friends of Sabeel Sweden) and FoSN (Friends of Sabeel Norway). In reality, this is how we have worked for the last years. And, of course, people in Denmark are welcome to join us! An important aspect of their work is the "Come and See—Go and Tell!" emphasis that encourages people to attend the witness visits sponsored by Sabeel Jerusalem. Scholarships are made available to young people to make it possible for them to attend the youth conferences held in Jerusalem, and this has led to the establishing of Young Friends of Sabeel Sweden.

Friends of Sabeel Norway (FoSN)

Friends of Sabeel Norway was established in 2001 under the umbrella of Friends of Sabeel in Scandinavia, which was based in Sweden. As the struggle for a just peace continues in the Holy Land, Friends of Sabeel Norway aims to amplify the voice of their Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters by standing up for the oppressed, working for justice, and seeking peacebuilding opportunities. An important aspect of its work is linking theological issues to justice issues. This has been accomplished through seminars, workshops, op-eds, and dialogue between churches and church-related organizations on issues of justice.

Friends of Sabeel Australia (FOS-AU)

Friends of Sabeel Australia was established in August 2003 thanks to the initiative of Ray Barraclough, who had worked for the

Anglican Church in East Jerusalem in the early 1990s. It views itself as an ecumenical support group for the Sabeel Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem. Its aims are fivefold:

1. Increase the awareness of Australian Christians about the vision, aspirations, and activities of Sabeel and of Palestinian Christians;
2. Disseminate information about the life-situation of Palestinians;
3. Distribute copies of Sabeel's journal, *Cornerstone*, to its members and supporters;
4. Encourage attendance at Sabeel-sponsored international conferences; and
5. Seek to make pertinent contributions to Australian public discussion and policy as regard to the aspirations and experiences of the Palestinian people.

Friends of Sabeel Ireland

Friends of Sabeel Ireland was set up in 2003 in Dublin as a result of a meeting between Assis Naim and local clergy and laity who had wanted to hear of his experiences and determine in what way they might be able to support the aims of Sabeel.

Friends of Sabeel The Netherlands

Friends of Sabeel The Netherlands was founded in 2007 following preparations by a department within the Protestant Church to hold workshops that would alert people to the situation of the Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land. Its vision is to support the work of Sabeel by working for a just peace for the people of Palestine and Israel in a nonviolent way and by promoting reconciliation. Its vision is enacted through various activities,

including organizing national and regional conferences; joint projects with other peace and justice groups, such as Kairos Palestine; distributing *Cornerstone* and other publications; and organizing a yearly study trip called “Come and See.”

Friends of Sabeel Germany

Friends of Sabeel Germany was initially formed in 2007 as a result of a personal encounter with Assis Naim on the occasion of visiting Palestine/Jerusalem. With its activities Friends of Sabeel Germany is committed to justice and peace for Palestine and Israel. In cooperation with other organizations, it provides lectures and events, educating church audiences and the wider public about the root causes and current problems of the conflict and calling for a just peace for both parties. The members meet at least three times a year, exchanging information, planning activities, and getting involved in theological and political reflections.

Friends of Sabeel France

Friends of Sabeel France officially came into existence in 2010 under the leadership of Gilbert Charbonnier. Charbonnier had become aware of Sabeel in 2004 while serving with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel and attending a Sabeel international conference, Challenging Christian Zionism, in Jerusalem. He began to be interested in Palestinian liberation theology and believed that he needed to share his discoveries and experience with Christians in the various churches of France. One of the group’s major aims today is to increase the awareness of church members and leaders of the importance of the Israeli–Palestinian issue. This is accomplished on two levels: by discouraging a predetermined reading of Holy

Scripture so as to counter a conscious or unconscious Christian Zionist reading, and also to circulate information from Sabeel Jerusalem that conveys the realities and challenges faced by the Palestinian people today.

THE HEART
OF FAITH AND ACTION
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

WHAT IS PALESTINIAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY?

AS WE CONCLUDE this book, let us reiterate some of the essential guidelines of Palestinian liberation theology for our life of faith.

1. Palestinian liberation theology is a *contextual theology*. It takes the Palestinian context and situation in life seriously, and it addresses that specific context directly. It attempts to answer the question of what God expects us to do—and how must we respond to the injustice in Israel/Palestine.
2. It is a *liberation theology*. We seek the liberation of our people from oppression by the state of Israel and from the unjust and illegal occupation of Palestinian land, and the liberation of Israeli Jews from the sin of oppressing the Palestinians. The objective is to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor. The basic principles of this theology

- can be helpful beyond the Palestinian context to people of other contexts who suffer from injustice and oppression.
3. It is a *grassroots theology*. It developed out of Bible studies by the local community reflecting on its situation in Israel/Palestine through the eyes of faith.
 4. It is an *inclusive theology*. It rejects exclusive concepts of God that dehumanize and subjugate people. It demands that the laws of the state accord with international law.
 5. It is an *ecumenical theology*. The word *ecumenical* refers specifically to the Christian Church and includes all Christians of all denominations.
 6. It is an *interfaith theology*. This theology reaches out not only to Christians but to people of other faiths. It is founded on the premise that we live in God's world. God is the creator of all, and God's love and care embraces all. We are all members of the same human family whom God has created. We seek to relate to one another in love and respect for the dignity of every human being, to serve one another, and to work together for justice and peace for all people.
 7. It is a *humanitarian theology* that champions and respects the dignity of every human being, especially the poor and oppressed, the marginalized and disadvantaged.
 8. It is a *theology of nonviolence*. Jesus talked about a God who sends the rain and sunshine to the just and unjust. He said that if we want to be children of God, then we have to engage in peacemaking. He talked about peacemaking in a situation where people were living under a brutal and oppressive occupation. He taught the people to love their enemies and to pray for those who harm them.
 9. It is a *prophetic theology* that demands that faithful Christians courageously speak truth to power. The situation of the Palestinian people living under the illegal occupation of Israel requires the church, both clergy and

lay, to speak prophetically against the evil of injustice and oppression.

10. It is a *christological theology* for Christians, where Jesus Christ is both the model and paradigm of faith, and where Christ is the guide and the hermeneutic that can help us discern the authentic word of God.

THE WORD OF GOD

Most Christians are taught from childhood that the Bible is the word of God. It is important to emphasize that the conflict over Palestine has revolutionized our reading and understanding of the Bible. Frankly, the sacred position that the Bible has held for many people has been called into question due to texts that depict God as being violent. As we have pointed out before, most of those texts reflect a tribal and exclusive understanding of God that was critiqued and rejected by later prophetic writers. Such texts do not contain any word from God for us. They do not reflect the mind or spirit of Christ. When we apply the hermeneutic of love, they fail the test. As we have seen, they were critiqued and transformed within the Old Testament itself. They have no value for us. Therefore, we can no longer say simply that the Bible is the word of God. We can no longer make such a blanket statement. God can still speak to us through some biblical texts, but Jesus Christ must be the determining hermeneutic.

We have to be extremely careful when we say, “This is the word of the Lord” after the Bible reading in church when the reading reflects an exclusive theology that has become out of date with the coming of Christ and in some cases has already been critiqued by later prophetic writers in the Hebrew scriptures.¹ Unless the preacher is going to preach on such texts, it is

¹ In fact, the reader should sometimes say, “This is not the word of the Lord,” and the congregation should respond, “Thanks be to God.” This could also apply to some of the psalms (for example, Psalms 83, 94, 137).

not appropriate to read them in church. Before reading the text, pastors, priests, and ministers should ask themselves, Does this reading reflect the mind and love of God as shown to us in Jesus Christ? It is uncomfortable to hear the congregation say “Thanks be to God” after a reading that is, to say the least, unedifying. Clergy need to have the courage to omit those verses that are not in line with the spirit of Christ and the New Testament.

It is important to remember that theologically speaking the authentic word of God is Jesus Christ and not the Bible. It is the Word made flesh. It is Christ who comes to us in the breaking of the bread to nourish and renew us.

THREE ESSENTIAL PILLARS FOR RESOLVING THE PALESTINE/ISRAEL CONFLICT

From a Palestinian liberation theology perspective, there are three essentials that must be realized in order for a genuine peace to be achieved: justice, peace, and reconciliation. The sequence is important. Some might reverse the order of the first two. In fact, military people might suggest that peace needs to come before justice. In such a sequence peace is imposed through military might that leaves behind destruction and devastation. The result is not real peace. It is a shaky peace that leaves much bitterness and resentment. The best and most enduring peace is the one that is based on justice as understood and specified by international law.

Once justice is done, peace will emerge. The fruit of justice is peace. But peace is not the end. The objective must be reconciliation and forgiveness. It is important to undo the effects of injustice, discrimination, and oppression in order to achieve healing. Reconciliation and forgiveness are the ultimate in the achievement of a genuine peace. It is possible that not everyone can reach this goal, but the more people who can, the greater the sense of security and wellness in the country.

THE HEART OF RELIGIOUS FAITH

Who Is My Neighbor?

On the surface it is easy to say that the heart of religious faith is to love God and neighbor. In Jesus's day, people assumed that it was clear who God was. Radical monotheism was already well established among Jews. What was still ambiguous was, Who is my neighbor?

As we have seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37), Jesus opens up the concept of neighbor to mean not just our kin, that is, our fellow Jew, but to include all people, and in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:43–48) Jesus radically commands us to love even our enemies. From then on, at least for Christians, whenever the question of who is our neighbor comes up, we have a definite and reliable answer from the source—Jesus himself. Obviously, our clear answer does not guarantee the right attitude and right behavior toward others, but at least there is no ambiguity about who the neighbor is and how we should behave if we are followers of Jesus's way.

Who Is Our God?

In the twenty-first century, due to the alarming rise in religious fundamentalism and extremism in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world, we need to reexamine the fundamental question, Who is our God? This phenomenon exists within the three major religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The first great commandment tells us that God is one and that we must love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. But it does not tell us anything about the nature and character of God.

Throughout history we see religious men and women of the three monotheistic faiths committing heinous atrocities in the name of God. They negate, oppress, and kill others—including,

at times, people of their own religion—in the name of God and as a result of their narrow interpretation of certain parts of their sacred scriptures.

Is our God the god of violence and war? Is our God the god of vengeance and revenge? Is our God the god of discrimination and hate? The history of Christianity (for example, in the Inquisition, in the Crusades, in Ireland, in South Africa, and in the Ku Klux Klan in the United States) is filled with examples of crimes against humanity that were committed as a result of a distorted image of God. In Islam, ISIS is an extreme example of the distortion of the image of God that leads to the unspeakable crimes that are being committed, even against people of its own faith. In Israel/Palestine, the image of God that religious settlers hold stands in the way of a just and comprehensive solution. In light of all of this we are forced to ask, Who is God?

In essence, religious extremists are the same, regardless of the specific religion they belong to. They have the same mentality and mindset. They hate outsiders, they despise the other, and they believe in the superiority and exceptionalism of their religion.

Since every one of our three faiths believes in the one God, the adherents of each must ask themselves what is the greatest characteristic of the God they believe in? Is it possible for every one of our faiths to provide a hermeneutic through which people can determine what pleases and displeases God?

It is, of course, pretentious to think that we humans, with our limited faculties, can comprehend God. But at least we need to find out the nature and character of the God in whom we believe and trust.

When the lawyer asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus gave him the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Similarly, when we turn to Jesus and ask him, “Please tell us about God, about who God is,” Jesus turns to us and gives us the parable of the Prodigal Son:

Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’

Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'" (Luke 15:11–32)

Despite its traditional title, this is really a parable of the Good Father. Like the father in this story, God is a loving parent who loves all his children equally and unconditionally. Even when we stray, God's love brings us home, and God's mercy embraces us when we return. Love is the essence of God's nature.

God's love becomes the hermeneutic by which we can judge any attribute that we ascribe to God or any action that we undertake in God's name. "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16b). And this is intimately connected to the love of neighbor:

Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (1 John 4:20–21)

Surely behind religious laws, regulations, and commandments, there is a concept of God that emerges. For Christians, Jesus

Christ has shown God's true nature and character. Christ is the hermeneutic by which we can determine what pleases and displeases God. We see Jesus Christ as the paradigm of the love, faith, mercy, and compassion that we need to exhibit in our daily life.

The Hermeneutical Key

The ultimate hermeneutical key is thus love of God and love of neighbor. This is the key that measures any verse or passage of scripture. It can help the reader to determine whether it is a word of God for us or not. Our view of God informs our view of our neighbor. If our God is a God of love and mercy, then we must relate to our neighbor in such a way. If our view of God is that of violence and revenge, then it is going to color our relationship with our neighbor. The two are intricately linked.

The hermeneutical key of love of God and love of neighbor, together inseparably, can help us determine the mind of Christ for our daily life and help us measure what is the right and authentic relationship we can enjoy with God and with our fellow human brothers and sisters. This hermeneutical key is an essential tool that we must carry with us to be used at every juncture of life when we are up against challenging questions. We need to learn to use it. We must help the younger generations to use it. It is a recipe for a life lived to its fullest potential.

No Substitute for Justice

Justice is a common word in the Bible. It is mentioned more than two thousand times. Ken Wytsma writes:

Justice is rooted in the character of God, established in the creation of God, mandated by the commands of God,

present in the kingdom of God, motivated by the love of God, affirmed in the teaching of Jesus, reflected in the example of Jesus, and carried on today by all who are moved and led by the Spirit.²

When there is genuine love, justice is done. When justice is done, there is love.

We also find that truth and justice are related. The former has to do with the present reality on the ground, while the latter emphasizes how things ought to be. We as people of faith must have a deep commitment to both truth and justice. We need to present the factual documentation about the oppression of the Palestinian people and the injustice committed by the government of Israel through its military and police as well as through its settler population.

On the other hand, we must always point to the prophetic justice that is needed to change the ugly and unjust present to a just and fruitful future for all the people of our land. The presence of justice is the key to a life of security and peace.

So long as the government of Israel continues in the oppression of the Palestinian people and the occupation of Palestinian land, it is mandatory for all people of faith and all who believe in justice and peace to resist, using all the nonviolent methods and means that are available. Such resistance must continue until justice is done in accordance with international law, and the Palestinian people are free.

It is of paramount importance that we maintain the principles of human morality and decency in relating to our adversaries. We must continue to perceive them as neighbors with whom we want to live in peace when they turn from the injustice they have committed against us and against our people. These are

² Ken Wytsma, *Pursuing Justice* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013).

hard and difficult words. But we must boldly and courageously say them for the sake of preserving the humanity that God has bestowed on us. We must continue to be faithful to the best human values that God has given us.

Sumood and Thabaat

Sumood (Arabic for “steadfastness”) is practiced whenever Palestinians remain steadfast in spite of Israel’s brutal oppression and its attempt to drive the people from their land.

Thabaat (Arabic for “being grounded”) is used when people stand firm, withstanding the injustice, resolute in their determination, entrenched and rooted in the land. Although it is possible to use *Sumood* and *Thabaat* interchangeably, *Thabaat* implies a deeper sense of firmness and groundedness.³

For Palestinians, the olive tree symbolizes the notion of *Thabaat* and for this reason has become the symbol of Palestine. The olive tree has been celebrated throughout the centuries as the tree of life. Every part of it contributes to the well-being of people. No part goes to waste. Even the olive seeds are compressed for winter and burned to give warmth and heat.

Obviously, the most important gift that the olive tree gives to people is its olives and oil. With homemade bread it can be food and sustenance to people. During times of Israeli curfews, sieges, and raids, many Palestinians have survived by eating the fruit of this wonderful tree.

We thank God for this tree of life, which reminds us of God’s gracious love and care, especially for the poor and needy. It stands also for the resilience of the Palestinian community that continues to resist the injustice and struggles to stay rooted and grounded in its homeland. This is *Thabaat*.

³ Cf. John 15:1–12.

Jewish religious settlers and the Israeli army have uprooted and destroyed over one hundred thousand olive trees, symbolizing sharply the uprooting of the Palestinian people, yet through *Sumood* and *Thabaat* the Palestinians continue to stand firm. The Palestinian people are rooted not only in their homeland, but in faith, justice, truth, righteousness, and their desire for peace.

We Are Servants of God's Kingdom

In order to be servants of God's kingdom in the twenty-first century, we need to keep in mind the following:

1. Remember to stay connected with the source of your faith.
2. Remember to practice your faith through the love of God and the love of neighbor.
3. Remember to work for the liberation of all oppressed people, including the Palestinians.
4. Remember to commit yourself to the use of nonviolence. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "Means and ends must cohere because the end is pre-existent in the means, and ultimately destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends. . . . The means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek."⁴
5. Remember to imitate Christ in your life.
6. Remember to pray: Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
7. Remember that the kingdom of God is justice and peace.

Taizé is a French ecumenical monastic community whose worship is marked by song, simplicity and silent prayer. One of

⁴ Alex Ayres, ed., *The Wisdom of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Meridian, 1993), 150–51.

the many Taizé choruses that we sing is, “The kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” As in the final words of this chorus, let our active prayer be:

“Come, Lord, and open in us the gates of your kingdom.”



RESOURCES

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, nonviolence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word *Sabeel* is Arabic for “the way” and also a “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.

SABEEL PRAYER

Merciful and loving God, we give you thanks for the many blessings you have so graciously given us.

Thank you for your presence and guidance as we walk the way of peace.

Bless the work of Sabeel and its friends, local and international.

Guide its ecumenical, interfaith, and justice ministries. Grant us all the courage to confront oppression.

Strengthen our commitment to the work of justice, peace, and reconciliation among all people and especially between Palestinians and Israelis.

Help us all to see your image in one another. Empower us to stand up for truth and to respect the dignity of every human being. And to you alone be glory and honor now and forever. Amen.

SABEEL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES AND RELATED PUBLICATIONS

1st conference, March 10–17, 1990, Tantur. “Palestinian Liberation Theology”

The book: *Faith and the Intifada*

2nd conference, January 22–29, 1996, YMCA East Jerusalem. “The Significance of Jerusalem for Christians and of Christians for Jerusalem”

The book: *Jerusalem: What Makes for Peace!*

3rd conference, February 10–15, 1998, Bethlehem University. “The Challenge of Jubilee: What Does God Require?”

The book: *Holy Land Hollow Jubilee: God, Justice, and the Palestinians*

4th conference, February 21–24, 2001, Notre Dame, Jerusalem. “One New Humanity: Where Justice Is at Home”

No book was published

5th conference, April 14–18, 2004, Notre Dame, Jerusalem. “Challenging Christian Zionism”

The book: *Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics, and the Israel-Palestine Conflict*

6th conference, November 2–9, 2006, Notre Dame, Jerusalem.
“The Forgotten Faithful: A Window into the Life and Witness of Christians in the Holy Land”

Pre-conference publication: “Communities of the Forgotten Faithful”

The book title retained the conference theme
7th conference, October 12–19, 2008, Nazareth and Jerusalem.
“The Nakba: Memory, Reality, and Beyond”

Pre-conference publications: *I Come from There . . . and Remember* and *A Time to Remember; Palestinian Towns and Villages*
8th conference, February 23–28, 2011, Bethlehem Hotel, Palestine. “Challenging Empire: God, Faithfulness and Resistance”

The book title retained the conference theme
9th conference, November 19–24, 2013, Notre Dame, Jerusalem.
“The Bible and the Palestine-Israel Conflict”

The book title retained the conference theme
10th conference, March 7–13, 2017, Bethlehem and Nazareth.
“Jesus Christ Liberator Then and Now; Facing the Legacy of Injustice.”

SABEEL PUBLICATIONS

- *Our Story: The Palestinians* (2000)
- *Suicide Bombers* (2003)
- *Principles for a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel* (2004)
- *For He Is Our Peace . . . and Has Broken Down the Dividing Wall* (2004)
- *A Call for Morally Responsible Investment* (2005)
- *Reflections in the Galilee* (2008)
- *Contemporary Way of the Cross* (2017)

CORNERSTONE

Cornerstone is Sabeel's quarterly English-language publication. It highlights Sabeel's ministry activities, both locally and internationally, as well as providing theological reflections on contemporary social and political events. A French translation is also available. Issues of *Cornerstone* can be found at www.sabeel.org.

CONTEMPORARY WAY OF THE CROSS

The image of the suffering Christ is unique and key to the Christian faith. Jesus Christ, who experienced and overcame the physical and psychological pain of oppression, torture, and execution, is a source of great hope and strength to those who continue to suffer today. Sabeel seeks to bring alive the message of Christ in the historic context and daily suffering experienced by our Palestinian community. For us, the image of the cross with its affliction and pain and Jesus's response of gentleness, nonviolence, and ultimately resurrection, is one of comfort and inspiration. As Christ himself identified with suffering people and called on his followers to reach out to them in their need, we too invite our brothers and sisters in Christ across the world to join with us as we search for God in the midst of our affliction.

THE WAVE OF PRAYER

This prayer ministry enables local and international friends of Sabeel to pray over regional concerns on a weekly basis. Sent to Sabeel's network of supporters, the prayer is used in services around the world and during Sabeel's Thursday worship service in Jerusalem. As each community in its respective time zone lifts these concerns in prayer at noon every Thursday, this "wave of prayer" washes over the world. To become part of this prayer ministry, visit at www.sabeel.org, click on "pray," and enter the required information.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Afana, Abdel Hamid, Samir Qouta and Eyad El Sarraj. "Mental Health Needs in Palestine." *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine* 28 (November 2004).
- Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East. "They Call Them 'Light-Version' Settlements on the West Bank." August 15, 2012.
- Amit, Gish. "Salvage or Plunder? Israel's 'Collection' of Private Palestinian Libraries in West Jerusalem." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, no. 4 (2010/11): 6–23.
- Anderson, Bernard. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.
- Armstrong, Karen. *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*. New York: Ballantine, 1996.
- Ateek, Naim. "Historical Factors That Have Affected Palestinian Christians." In *The Forgotten Faithful: A Window into the Life and Witness of Christians in the Holy Land*, edited by Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, and Maurine Tobin. Jerusalem: Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2007.
- . *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.
- . *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008.

- . “Remembering and Looking Forward.” In *The Bible and the Palestine-Israel Conflict*. Jerusalem: Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2013.
- . “Suicide Bombers: A Palestinian Christian Perspective.” Jerusalem, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2003.
- Ayres, Alex, ed. *The Wisdom of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Meridian, 1993.
- Bartholomew, Patriarch. “Quotes on Environment and Peace—The Ecumenical Patriarchate.”
<https://www.patriarchate.org/bartholomew-quotes>.
- Boff, Leonardo, and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987.
- Brownfeld, Allan C. “It is Time to Confront the Exclusionary Ethnocentrism in Jewish Sacred Literature.” In *Issues* (Winter 2000).
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Chosen?* Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2015.
- Btselem. “Revocation of Residency in East Jerusalem.” January 1, 2011.
http://www.btselem.org/jerusalem/revocation_of_residency.
- . “Revocation of Social Rights and Health Insurance.” January 1, 2012.
http://www.btselem.org/jerusalem/social_security.
- . “Statistics on Settlements and Settler Population.” May 11, 2015.
<http://www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics>.
- Buttrick, George. *The Interpreter’s Bible*. Volume 7: *New Testament Articles, Matthew, Mark*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951.
- Cattan, Henry. *The Palestine Question*. London: Saqi Books, 2000.
- Chacour, Elias, and David Hazard. *Blood Brothers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2003.

- Church of Scotland, *The Inheritance of Abraham? A Report on the "Promised Land."* Revised edition. May 2013.
- Cone, James H. *Black Theology and Black Power*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Duaybis, Cedar. "The Threefold Nakba." *Cornerstone* 66 (2013).
- Ellis, Marc. "Beyond the Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Solidarity with the Palestinian People." *The Link* (1992).
- Grave-Lazi, Lidar. "Israeli, Arab Politicians in Heated Debate over Teaching Nakba Narrative to Israeli Students." *Jerusalem Post*. March 29, 2015.
- The Great Book Robbery*. Xela Films. 2012.
- Hadawi, Sami. *Bitter Harvest; Palestine 1914-67*. New York: New World Press, 1967.
- Howard-Brook, Wes, and Anthony Gwyther. *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
- Kashti, Or. "Education Ministry Bans Textbook That Offers Palestinian Narrative." *Haaretz*. September 27, 2010.
- Khoury, Geris. "Christian-Muslim Arab Dialog in the Holy Land." *Cornerstone* 64 (2012).
- Leeming, David. *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology*. London: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Lilienthal, Alfred. *The Zionist Connection: What Price Peace*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1978.
- Lustick, Ian. *Arabs in the Jewish State*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980.
- Mitchem, Stephanie. *Introducing Womanist Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Nelson-Pallmeyer, Jack. *Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible and the Quran*. New York: Continuum, 2005.
- Pappe, Ilan. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. London: Oneworld, 2006.
- Pappe, Ilan, ed. *Israel and South Africa: The Many Faces of Apartheid*. London: Zed Books, 2015.

- Pope Francis. "Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home." Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005.
- Rohr, Richard. "The Bible: A Text in Travail," Center for Contemplation and Action. February 9, 2015.
- Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*. London: Verso, 2009.
- Shahak, Israel, and Norton Mezvinsky. *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*. London: Pluto Press, 1999.
- Shipler, David K. *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land*. Revised and updated. New York: Penguin, 2015 [originally published in 1986].
- Sizer, Stephen. *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon?* UK: IVP, 2006.
- Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Trocme, André. *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution*. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2003.
- Tshaka, R. S., and M. K. Makofane. "The Continued Relevance of Black Liberation Theology for Democratic South Africa Today." *Scriptura* (2012).
- Tutu, Desmond. *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Random House Ebooks, 1999.
- UN General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, 217A(III).
- UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency–United Kingdom). *UNHCR: Facts and Figures on Refugees*. December 1, 2005.
- UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). "Where We Work." <http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work>.
- Wagner, Don. *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014.
- Watson, Natalie. "Scripture and Tradition." In *Feminist Theology*, 1–25. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003.

West, Gerald. "The Legacy of Liberation Theologies in South Africa, with an Emphasis on Biblical Hermeneutics." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36 (July 2010).

World Council of Churches. "The WCC and Eco-justice."
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/eco-justice>.

Wytsma, Ken. *Pursuing Justice*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013.

Zaru, Jean. *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

INDEX

- Afana, Abdel Hamid, 26
African American liberation
 theology, 10
aliens
 human rights for, 63
 inclusion of, 61–64
 Palestinians as, 61–62
Amalek, 52–56
Amit, Gish, 27
Arab and Jew (Shipler), 55
Arafat, Yasser, 37
Armenian Orthodox Church, 18
Assyrian Church of Iraq, 18
Authentic Christian Pilgrimage,
 134
- Bailey, Kenneth, 38
Balfour Declaration, xvi–xvii,
 25, 32
Barlow, Betsy, 132
Barraclough, Ray, 135–36
Baycroft, John, 134
Beisan (Palestine), 1–2
Bible
 missionaries and, 3–4
 as word of God, 141–42
 Zionist reading of, 11, 29,
 35–36
biblical theology, 12, 32
- bi-national solution, 114–15
Black Consciousness Movement,
 10
black liberation theology (South
 Africa), 10
Blood Brothers (Chacour and
 Hazard), 125
Boff, Leonardo, 9
British Mandate, 25
Brownfield, Allan C., 55, 56
Brueggemann, Walter, 63, 98
Buthelezi, Manas, 10
Byzantine Empire, 19
Byzantine (Eastern) Orthodox
 Church, 18, 19–20
- Canaan, 15, 16, 72. *See also*
 Palestine
Canadian Friends of Sabeel
 (CFOS), 134
Canadian Jewish Congress, 134
Chacour, Abuna Elias, 124, 125
Charbonnier, Gilbert, 137
Chosen? (Brueggemann), 63
chosenness, xvii
Christ. *See* Jesus Christ
Christian church
 birth of, 16–17
 as body of Christ, 104

- crimes against humanity and, 144
- schisms in, 18–20
- theological controversies in, 18–19
- Christian Zionism, 35–36
- Christological theology, 141
- Church of Ethiopia, 18
- Church of Scotland, 103
- civil rights movement (US), 10, 124
- Cohen, Robert, 109
- colonialism, 20, 27
- Communist Party, 3, 123
- Cone, James, 10
- Constantine, 18
- contextual theology, 139
- Contextual Theology Institute, 10
- Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt, 18
- Cornerstone* (Sabeel journal), 136, 156
- creation, Christ and, 99
- Crusades, 19–20
- curriculum, content of, in Israel, 27, 28
- Daly, Mary, 11
- Darby, John Nelson, 35
- Davies, Jan, 132
- democracy
 - in Israel, 106, 107, 109–10
 - in the Middle East, 110–11
 - two-state solution and, 112–13
- Duaybis, Cedar, 28, 134
- earth, care for, 102–3
- Eastern Christians, 18
 - challenges for, 110
 - Crusades' effect on, 20
 - Muslim persecution of, 19
- Eastern Orthodox Church,
 - division of, 20
- East Jerusalem, 112, 113, 115–16
 - occupation of, 22, 23, 34, 35, 71
- Ecumenical Deal, 33
- ecumenical theology, 140
- El, 72
- election, redefined, 99–100
- Ellis, Marc, 34, 130
- El Sarraj, Eyad, 26
- enemies, love of, 89–90, 143
- enslavement, 6
- ethnic annihilation, 50–51
- ethnic cleansing, 2, 22, 49–50, 66
- ethnocentrism, 56
- exceptionalism, theological, 76
- Ezekiel, 33, 60–68, 81
- Ezra, 58–60
- faith, 41
 - authentic, 80, 82
 - challenge of, 79, 82
 - elements of, 143–51
- feminist liberation theology, 10–11
- forgiveness, 121–22, 142
- Francis (pope), 12
- Friends of Sabeel (FOS), 132
- Friends of Sabeel Australia (FOS-AU), 135–36
- Friends of Sabeel France, 137–38
- Friends of Sabeel Germany, 137
- Friends of Sabeel Ireland, 136
- Friends of Sabeel The Netherlands, 136–37

- Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA), 132–33
 Friends of Sabeel Norway, 135
 Friends of Sabeel in Scandinavia, 134–35
 Friends of Sabeel Sweden (FOSS), 135
 Friends of Sabeel UK, 133–34
 Fromm, Erich, 31
 fundamentalism, 29, 35, 55, 57, 97–98, 143

 Gaza Strip, 112
 first intifada and, 37
 nonviolent protest in, 118
 occupation of, 22, 34
 G4S, 133
 God
 calling everyone together, 52
 character of, 143–47
 crimes against, 54
 exclusiveness of, 76, 83–84
 as god of peace and nonviolence, 74–76
 human theology of, 65–66
 identifying, 143–47
 inclusiveness of, 68, 73, 78, 80, 83–84, 104
 kingdom of, 91–92, 150–51
 knowledge of, 45, 54–55, 65–66, 88
 land of, 79, 80
 as liberator God, 78–79
 love for, 54
 love of, 41–42, 87–89, 104, 140, 143, 146, 147
 nature of, 83–84, 88, 143–47
 oneness of, 83
 people of, 79, 80, 82
 promise of, 97
 salvation of, 52, 77, 91
 tribal understanding of, 51, 65
 vengeance of, 51, 54
 violence of, 48, 141
 as war god, 72–74
 word of, 141–42
 grassroots theology, 140
 great book robbery, 27
 great revolution, xvii–xviii
 Green Line, 112
 Gush Emunim, 57
 Gutiérrez, Gustavo, 9, 12

 Haddad, Dahoud, 126
 Haddad, Fayek, 126
 Halakha, 55, 56, 57, 107
 Halevi, Judah, 57–58
 healing, 122
 hermeneutic
 Jesus Christ as, 44–45, 48, 50, 51, 141, 147
 love as, 45, 48, 50, 51, 60, 61, 68, 141, 146, 147
 Herodotus, 16
 Herzl, Theodor, 11n8, 21
 Hillel (rabbi), 86
 historical theology, 12
 history, movement of, 66
 Holocaust, xvii, 2
 contributing to the Nakba, 32
 Zionist movement and, 34
 humanitarian theology, 140
 humanity, as common denominator, 102
 Husseini, Faisal, 118

 IFOS. *See* International Friends of Sabeel

- incarnation, doctrine of, 102
- indigenization, church leadership
and, 124, 126
- injustice
context for, 42
faith confronting, 9
systemic, 6, 13
- interfaith dialogue, 33
- interfaith theology, 140
- interfaith vision, 74
- International Friends of Sabeel,
131
- internationalism, 102
- international law, 121
- Interpreter's Bible, The*, 86
- intifada, first, 36–39, 126, 129
- Invention of the Jewish People, The*
(Sand), 62
- Iqrit (Palestine), 124
- ISIS, 144
- Islam, 19
- Israel, state of. *See also* bi-national
solution; one-state solution;
two-state solution
biblical justification for, 11
constitution of, 64, 108
as democratic state, 106, 107,
109–10
demanding recognition as
Jewish state, 108
demography of, 114
discriminatory policies of,
22–23, 64–65, 114, 108
embassy of, 116
erasing Palestinian culture,
27–28
establishment of, and the
Holocaust, 32–33
as ethnocracy, 107
- founding of, xvi–xvii, 2, 11,
21–22, 106
- fulfilling biblical prophecy, 33
- Green Line in, 112
- ideology of, xv
- Jewish settlers in, 36
- martial law in, 123
- nationalities in, 27n7, 64,
107–8
- nonviolent protest against,
118. *See also* nonviolence
- one-state solution and, 114
- political parties in, 34
- promoting myths against
Palestinians, 108–10
- racism of, 55–56, 64–65
- religious settlers in, 106–7
- restricting Palestinians'
movement, 23
- settlers in, militancy of, 56–57
- oppression by, 1
- Supreme Court of, 124
- two-state solution and, 112,
113
- uninterested in just peace,
xviii
- violating international law, 67
- Western Christians' support
for, 33–34
- Jerusalem
claims to, 69–71
negotiations over, 115–17
sovereignty of, 71
tribal theology and, 81
- Jesus Christ
behavior of, toward others, 87
at center of God's plan of
history, 98

- confronting attitude toward
 - foreigners, 43
- confronting racism, 92
- divinity of, 42
- election and, 100
- first commandment of, 84, 88
- genealogy of, 90–93
- great revolutions of, 87–90
- healings by, 92, 93
- as hermeneutic, 44–45, 48, 50, 51, 141, 147
- humanity of, 42
- inclusivity of, 90–93
- as liberator, 12–13, 44, 127
- liberation and, 93
- ministry of, 5, 16–17
- miracles of, 91
- as model, 5–6, 38–39, 42–43, 127, 147
- offering new readings of old texts, xviii
- Old Testament prophecy and the second coming of, 2, 33, 48
- quoting Scripture selectively, 49
- salvation and, 93
- second commandment of, 84–88
- suffering and, 5, 156
- theology of, 55, 87–89
- as victim of oppressive occupation, 38–39
- and the way of truth, 120
- welcome of, xvii
- as word of God, 142
- Jewish Agency, 108
- Jewish National Fund, 108
- Jews. *See also* Judaism
 - Amalekites and, 52–56
 - at center of God's plan of history, 97–98
 - exile and, 60–61
 - intermarriage of, 59–60
 - religious extremism among, biblical claims of, 49–50
 - Romans' exile of, 62
 - John (Gospel author), reinterpreting Old Testament traditions, 99–104
 - John Paul II, 126
 - Jonah, theology of, 76–80, 82, 83
 - Judaism. *See also* Jews
 - distinguishing between Jews and non-Jews, 57
 - faith foundation of, 84
 - fundamentalists in, 57
 - Orthodox, 57–58
 - sacred literature
 - of, exclusionary ethnocentrism in, 56
 - justice, 102
 - achievement of, 42
 - biblical mentions of, 147–49
 - dimensions of, for Palestinian liberation theology, 119–21
 - forgiveness and, 121–22
 - God's will for, 41
 - love and, 41, 119, 122, 148
 - mercy and, 119, 121
 - nonviolence and, 120
 - Palestinian demand for, 105
 - peace and, 120–21, 142
 - reconciliation and, 121–22
 - security and, 120
 - seeking of, 6
 - truth and, 119–20, 148

- Justice and Only Justice* (Ateek),
126–27, 129
- just peace, xvi, xvii
- Kafity, Samir, 129
- Kairos Document, 111n4. *See*
also Kairos Palestine
- Kairos Palestine, 124, 127–29
- Katoppo, Marianne, 11
- King, Martin Luther, Jr., 10, 124,
150
- Kufr Baram (Palestine), 124, 125
- Kuzari* (Halevi), 58
- land
- centrality of, in the Old
Testament, 101
 - indigenous people and, 81
 - possession of, 65–67
 - promises about, 98, 103
 - reinterpretation of, in light of
Christ, 101–3
 - theology of, 79, 102, 114
- language, colonization of, 27
- Levenger, Moshe, 57
- liberation, 96
- achievement of, 4
 - context for, 15
 - Jesus Christ and, 93
 - theology of, 4. *See also*
liberation theology
- liberation theology
- biblical message of, 7
 - Francis and, 12
 - as heart of all theology, 13
 - practice of, 12, 42
 - realization of, 41
 - traditional theology and,
12–13
 - types of, 9–10
- Likud, 106
- love
- as debt owed to others, 89
 - as hermeneutic, 45, 48, 50, 51,
60, 61, 68, 141, 146, 147
 - justice and, 41, 119, 122, 148
- Maimela, Simon, 10
- Maimonides, 57
- Malcolm X, 10
- McMahon-Sherif Hussein
- correspondence, 32
- Melkite Church, 18, 124, 125
- mercy, justice and, 119, 121
- Middle East, democracy in,
110–11
- missionaries, 3, 20–21
- monotheism, 84, 143–44
- Muslim holy sites, destruction
of, 35
- Naim, Assis, 136, 137
- Nakba, the, 25, 105
- responses to, 29
 - as threefold catastrophe, xvi,
26–29
 - Western responses to, 32–33
- Nakba Photo Exhibit, 134
- nationalism, 102
- nationality, 27n7, 64, 107–8
- Nehemiah, 58–60, 69–70, 81
- neighbor
- identification of, 143–47
 - love of, 61, 68, 84–85, 87–89,
143, 146, 147
- Netanyahu government, 55–56
- New Testament. *See also* Bible
depicting God of peace, 76

- reinterpreting the scripture of
 - Israel, state of, xviii
- Nisan, Mordechai, 57
- No Child Behind Bars/Drop
 - G4S, 135
- nonviolence, 4, 5, 38, 117–19,
 - 125, 148
 - justice and, 120
 - theology of, 140
- Old Testament. *See also* Bible
 - claims to, 49–50
 - early church's approach to,
 - 47–48
 - ethnic annihilation in, 50–51
 - ethnic cleansing in, 49–50
 - exclusivism in, 80
 - interpretation of, 48
 - Palestinian Christians' reading
 - of, 47
 - texts of terror in, 48–49
 - theological climax of, 79, 80,
 - 82
 - theology of, 76
- olive tree, symbolism of, 149–50
- one-state solution, 66, 113–14
- Orthodox Church, splits in, 20
- Oslo Declaration of Principles
 - (Oslo Accords; 1993), 27,
 - 115, 129
- Palestine
 - geography of, 15
 - history of, 15–16
 - Jewish immigration to, 25
 - Jews' claim to, 31–32
 - liberation of, 4–5
 - occupation of, 2–3, 26
 - people of, 16
 - poverty in, 26
 - Protestant missionaries in,
 - 20–21
 - social fabric in, deterioration
 - of, 26
 - sovereign state of, 113
 - symbol of, 149–50
 - UN's division of, 21–22
- Palestine Liberation
 - Organization, 37, 115, 129
- Palestinian Arabs, considered as
 - Amalekites, 55
- Palestinian Authority, 113
- Palestinian Christians
 - emigration of, 22–23
 - faith crisis for, 29
 - history of, 16–24
- Palestinian liberation theology,
 - 4–5, 124
 - characteristics of, 139–41
 - components of, 41–42
 - as contextual theology, 139
 - as ecumenical movement, 130
 - focus of, 111
 - and Jesus's full humanity, 42
 - Jesus Christ as hermeneutic
 - for, 44–45
 - on justice, 119–21
 - mandates for, 23–24
 - origins of, 11, 25–39
 - rejecting certain biblical texts,
 - 48–51
 - rise of, 126–27, 129–30
 - Sabeel and, 130
- Palestinians
 - as aliens in their own land,
 - 61–62
 - catastrophes for, xvi–xvii, 3.
 - See also* Nakba

- dispossession of, 11
- faith crisis for, 28–29
- favoring one-state solution, 113–14
- identification of, 15
- identity crisis for, 27–28
- Israeli judges and, 44
- myths about, Israel promoting, 108–10
- as national minority, 115
- nonviolent direct action by, 36–39
- as refugees, 2–6, 22, 26, 29, 108, 111, 113, 115, 123
- rights of, 64–66, 111, 114
- self-determination for, 32, 113
- separation of, 26
- traumatized by occupation, 26
- weaknesses of, 105–6
- Papper, Ilan, 27
- parables
 - Good Samaritan, 87, 89–90, 93, 143, 144
 - Prodigal Son, 144–46
 - Unjust Judge, 43–44
- Partition Plan (UN), 21–22, 25, 111–12, 115
- Paul, reinterpreting tradition of ancient Israel, 93–98
- peace
 - achieving, 142
 - elements of, 121
 - justice and, 120–21
- PLO. *See* Palestine Liberation Organization
- practical theology, 12, 13
- promised land, 103. *See also* land
- prophetic theology, 140–41
- Protestant churches, 20–21
- Protestant Reformation, 20
- punishment, collective, 67
- Quota, Samir, 26
- Rabin, Yitzhak, 58
- racism, Jesus confronting, 92–93
- Raya, Joseph, 124–25
- reconciliation, 121–22, 142
- religious extremists, 48, 49–50, 54, 55–56, 81, 128, 144
- resident aliens, 63
- ritual purity, 103
- Roman Catholic Church, 18, 19–20
- Romero, Óscar, 12
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford, 11, 130
- Sa'ar, Gideon, 28
- Sabbah, Michel, 126, 127
- Sabeel, xviii–xix
 - beginnings of, 130–32
 - guidelines for, 132
 - international conferences of, 154–55
 - meaning of, 130–31
 - prayer, 153–54
 - prayer ministry of, 156
 - publications of, 155–56
 - purpose statement of, 153
- Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center (Jerusalem), 129, 133, 136
- Sabeel Jerusalem, 134–35, 138
- salvation, 52, 77, 91, 93, 96
- Sand, Shlomo, 62
- security, justice and, 120

- Shaftesbury, Lord (Anthony Ashley Cooper), 35
- Shammai (rabbi), 86
- Shema, the, 84–85
- Shipler, David K., 55
- South Africa, black liberation theology in, 10
- St. George's Cathedral (Jerusalem), 37–39, 129
- suffering, response to, 5–6
- Sumood*, 149–50
- symbols, colonization of, 27–28
- Syrian Orthodox Church, 18
- systematic theology, 12, 13
- Taizé, 150–51
- Talmud, 56
- temple, theology of, 104
- Thabaat*, 149–50
- theology
 - categories of, 12
 - exclusive, 69–70, 81, 141
 - inclusive, 61, 63–64, 70, 81, 140
- Theology of Liberation, A* (Gutiérrez), 9
- Thomas à Kempis, 121
- Torah, allegiance to, 107
- tribalism, xviii, 48, 51, 53, 61, 67, 81, 141
- Trump, Donald, 116
- truth, justice and, 119–20, 148
- Tutu, Desmond, 10
- two-state solution, xviii, 66, 109, 112
- United List, 115
- United Nations. *See also* Partition Plan
 - General Assembly Resolution 194, 113
 - resolutions of, 36
 - Security Council Resolution 242, 112, 115–16
- United States
 - committed to Israel's protection, 36–37, 67, 105
 - Middle East policy of, 132–33
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 47
- Waldenberg, Eliezer, 55
- Walker, Alice, 10
- war, in the Old Testament, 71–72
- war of 1967, 34–36
- Watson, Natalie, 11
- Way, the, 130–31
- West Bank, 112, 115
 - Christian organizations in, 127
 - first intifada and, 37
 - myths about, 109
 - nonviolent protest in, 117
 - occupation of, 22, 34, 35, 71
- Western Christians
 - placing Jews at center of God's plan of history, 97–98
 - response of, to Palestinian catastrophes, 2, 3–4
 - supporting state of Israel, 33–34
 - Zionism and, 35–36
- West Jerusalem, 113, 116
- womanist theology, 10
- World Zionist Organization, 57, 108
- Wytsma, Ken, 147–48

- Young Friends of Sabeel Sweden,
135
- Zionism, 11, 21
Holocaust and, xvii, 2, 33–35
ideology of, xv, xvi
- religious form of, 34–35
scripture and, xvii, 11, 35
secular, 106–7
Western Christians and,
35–36
Zionists, entering Palestine, 25