

CORNERSTONE

A PUBLICATION BY SABEEL ECUMENICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY CENTER



LIBERATED BY LOVE

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Closing Sermon Jesus Christ Liberator, Then & Now

by: The Rev. Naim Ateek

As we come to the end of our conference, I would like to reflect with you on our major theme, *Jesus Christ Liberator, Then and Now*. My focus is on that Kairos moment when Jesus Christ introduced a new theological breakthrough that no one before him had accomplished. I assume that many would suppose that I will be talking about Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Granted, we consider that as the ultimate act of love. But that is not my focus at this time. I would like to point to





Local sheikhs and clergy from the Sabeel fall clergy retreat sharing lunch at Majdal Shams, Golan Heights.

another Kairos moment that happened during Jesus' life. I would like to focus on an important defining moment in Jesus' ministry that resulted in a new and fresh understanding of God and human relationships. It was indeed a theological revolution.

During this conference we have been reflecting on the state of the Middle East in light of widespread religious extremism and its threats and challenges. I would like to pick up from where I ended my sermon at the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. I concluded my presentation by saying that the antidote to religious extremism is found in the love of neighbor. But what is the background of this, and what was unique about what Jesus Christ did? My objective is to recapture that moment when it happened THEN; and, by the grace of God, to allow it to rejuvenate and galvanize us NOW. I will relate it as a story.

Many of you know this, but please bear with me. The baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan by John the Baptist must have been a uniquely meaningful experience to Jesus Christ. He felt that he received God's special blessing and call for a special mission. It is quite probable that after his baptism, Jesus spent time with John the Baptist. He also spent several weeks in the desert around Jericho, to reflect on the meaning of the kingdom of God and God's mission that he was called to undertake,

as well as the challenges and difficulties along the way. Certainly, Jesus was seeking God's guidance in fulfilling God's will.

The Concept of God

It is important to note that by the time of Jesus, the basic theological understanding of God was already crystallized. It was during the Babylonian Exile that Jewish religious thinkers were able to formulate their basic religious beliefs about the oneness of God. Most of the time before the exile, the Israelites were vacillating in their worship of many gods. Yahweh was a favorite god for them but not the only god. Sometime during the exile, Yahweh was acknowledged as the only God. The belief in the one God became the cornerstone of Judaism. It was expressed in the words of the Shema, "Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5). Rightly, it made the Jewish people proud of this great discovery; but it also led to haughtiness and arrogance. Other nations were considered not on a par with the Jewish people and were even despised.

How Similar Is THEN to NOW

What do we hear from the right-wing Israeli government and the Israeli Jewish religious extremists? They say: The

state of Israel is our state. It is the state of the Jewish people, and the Jewish people alone. Jerusalem is our Jerusalem, and it is ours alone. The whole land is our land, and it is ours alone. When you hear such words continuously and incessantly, what chance does peace have? At the time of Jesus, God was boxed-in as an ethnic god for an ethnic community, and elaborate laws and regulations began to develop around God and the people of God as well as against the outsiders, the gentiles. As an example, Leviticus chapter 19 contains a number of injunctions: "You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; ... 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" (19:18). The phrase "any of your kin" or "any of your people" are repeated very often, making it clear that these are injunctions governing relationships within the community itself but not outside of it. Apparently, although Jesus himself was brought up in this kind of teaching, and in such a closed mindset, at some point in his life he felt that such beliefs contradicted his understanding of God. For Jesus, the situation reflected bigotry and racism.

Nazareth and Capernaum

After his baptism, Jesus decided to go back to Nazareth and to discuss his understanding of the nature and character of God. On the Sabbath, he went to the synagogue. He read a passage from Isaiah (61) about liberation and justice. But when the words of the prophet were turning racist against gentiles, he stopped in mid-sentence and refused to call on God's wrath and vengeance on the enemies of the Jewish people. He stopped with the mention of jubilee, the year of God's favor. It is the year in which the debts of the poor are cancelled, the slaves are liberated, and the land is returned to its original owners. In discussing his views, Jesus talked about a gentile Phoenician widow from Lebanon who looked after prophet Elijah for a few years during a severe famine, and a gentile Syrian general who was healed of leprosy by Prophet Elisha. Jesus' words were clear, namely, God is the God of all people and cares for all, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. The fundamentalist and nationalist community in Nazareth could not bear it. They threw him out. For them, Jesus' conception of God was wrong. They believed that God

was their God alone, and that only they were God's special people. For them, the Leviticus text of loving the neighbor as one's self was closed to outsiders. It only applied inside the ethnic family of the Jewish people. Jesus decided to open it up.

Jesus left Nazareth and moved to Capernaum where he started to practice what he believed about God: He taught all the people that came to him. He healed the sick regardless of their ethnic background. He even healed people on the Sabbath which earned him the ire and anger of the religious leadership. Moreover, Jesus was willing to enter into the homes of gentiles, something religious Jews avoided. He spent time with the Samaritans and he praised the faith of gentiles over the faith of Jews. His life was threatened, yet he continued courageously to do good to all, to teach and to heal. Jesus turned faith upside down. Jesus became very popular among the people. As always, it is the religious leaders who are more conservative who obstruct the movement of the spirit of God.

What Is the Greatest Commandment?

The real theological Kairos moment that sparked the revolution came when an expert in the law asked Jesus, "What is the great commandment?" Jesus started to give him the traditional religious answer. "Hear O Israel, The Lord our God is one Lord and you shall love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and strength." To everybody's surprise, Jesus did not stop there. Jesus continued by saying that there was another commandment that is just like it. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." What



Closing communion service for the 10th International Sabeel Conference, St. Peter's Primacy, Sea of Galilee



Young people passing through the checkpoint, Old City, Hebron

did Jesus do? He reached into the religious tradition of the people and pulled out an injunction from Leviticus (19). It was meant to apply only to a fellow Jew. Jesus stripped the exclusive implication and dropped out the phrase, “any of your kin; or any of your people” and opened it up. For Jesus, there is no exceptionalism. Everyone is included. You shall love your neighbor, regardless of his/her ethnic or racial background, as yourself.

Jesus removed the sting of racism. Later, when Jesus was asked “who is my neighbor?” he gave them the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan was considered an enemy, but he was the only one to stop and help the badly injured Jewish person. Furthermore, Jesus did not only release and liberate the love of neighbor from its closed ethnic prison, he lifted the injunction and placed it alongside the great commandment of the love of God. Jesus’ revolution consisted of two important points: 1. It was Jesus who first removed the exclusive boundaries that closed the love of neighbor and confined it within a very narrow ethnic community. After stripping the exclusionary material, he opened it up for all and gave it a universal application and implication making it an all-inclusive commandment that brings in even one’s enemies. 2. Jesus Christ lifted up the injunction to love the neighbor and placed it alongside the first great commandment of the love of God. It was Jesus Christ who was the first to join and connect the two commandments together. Then he concluded, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22).

This was the prophetic voice of Jesus Christ THEN, and this is the prophetic voice that is needed NOW – your voices, our voices. Jesus liberated the two texts. By liberating the two texts, he liberated love. By liberating love, Jesus liberated their understanding of both God and neighbor. Both God and neighbor had been boxed-in within a small community of faith. The rest of the people of the world were left outside God’s grace and love. But God cannot be boxed-in. God’s Spirit has always been active inside as well as outside the religions of the world. Before Christ accomplished this liberation, had someone asked, “How can I show God that I love him?” the answer would have been, “Keep God’s commandments.” After Jesus linked the two loves, i.e. the love of God and the love of neighbor, the test for checking the genuineness of our love of God is our love of neighbor. The early Christian community recognized this well. “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 [Christ] is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 John 4:20-21). Due to human propensity it is possible to claim loving God, and at the same time to commit all kinds of atrocities against one’s neighbor. One can be very religious and still be a racist. The antidote for all of that is to realize that true love of God demands the love of neighbor.

Friends, this is the revolution that Jesus Christ accomplished. We need to recapture it anew. It is the best antidote for racism and the best cure for many of the ailments of our world today. The Apostle Paul wrote, “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). We have an important role to play. Jesus Christ liberator THEN and NOW leaves us with a great challenge: You are the light of the world; you are the salt of the earth. Let your light shine and let your presence, like salt, make a difference in the world today. Amen.

The Rev. Naim Ateek is the co-founder of Sabeel, Jerusalem and currently serves as Chairperson of the Sabeel Board.



Separation Wall and Israeli-only road built on stolen Beit Jala land

Extremism in the Christian Palestinian Community

By: Mrs. Violette Khoury

There is no doubt that we are entering a new era where extremism and racism are expanding and becoming not only acceptable but a mainstream and normal way of thinking. Extremism is everywhere, in Israel, in the Middle East, whether we talk about ISIS or Islamophobia, but perhaps the

origin of all extremism is one, the one who profits from it and wants to find justification for its policies. A priori we would think that Christian Palestinian extremism is an objective fact in this country, but after considering a broader and deeper view, I believe that we can talk about virtual extremism which

has been induced into our minds and to which we have been receptive because of our lack of awareness. God forbid that it will spread to our hearts if we remain passive and indifferent to it. Extremism is nothing less than an intoxication of our minds that will kill our society. And don’t forget the role of the

mass media that enhances the global extremism and spreads the idea by focusing directly or indirectly on extremism and by so doing, the idea becomes a matter of fact. We repeat it, talk about it and respond to it, so the fiction becomes a virtual reality that we start to believe, accept and justify, and so we end by acting accordingly and it becomes a fact. This is, indeed, what is happening on the ground here among the Christian Palestinian community as well as the Muslim community.

1. Who Is the Christian Community?

First of all, they are Palestinians. Second, they are Palestinians. Third, they are Palestinians. They are an integral part of the Palestinian people. They have the same challenges, are subject to the same rules and face the same destiny as the non-Christian Palestinians. Whether they are in Israel or in the West Bank or in Jerusalem or in Gaza or in the refugee camps or in the diaspora, the Palestinian suffering is the same: denial and injustice, but it is lived in different aspects.

As a Palestinian Christian, I remember when, in 1960, I went to study in Rome. I am a Palestinian, Christian, Israeli citizen and this was my first approach to western society. There I discovered three feelings that I'd never had before. The first was "Peace." I discovered that peace exists; peace is a reality; peace is not a fiction; peace is not a dream. I'd never experienced that before, but I saw there people living in peace. The second was "Freedom." I came

from a background where we lived under military control. We were segregated; we needed permits; we were oppressed; we were controlled; we could not express ourselves, and we were afraid. Fear was the master of our behavior and we were not free to be ourselves. There, I saw what freedom means. You can go and speak and express yourself. Freedom is a beautiful gift from God that we didn't know while we were living under occupation. The third feeling was strange. I missed my Moslem part and, somehow, also my Jewish part. It was too homogeneous Christian for me. It was there that I realized that we Palestinians are forged and shaped to live in a pluralistic, harmonious community and to form a beautiful, rich mosaic. We cannot detach ourselves from each other. This harmony in the social structure has been the strength that helped the Palestinian internal refugees with Israeli citizenship to overcome the ethnic cleansing during and after the Nakba. They survived and reconstituted a society without any foreign help and with no internal help at all.

The unity helped the Palestinians, the so called "Arabs of Israel," to emerge as an entity, an entity that Israel has an interest to weaken and enfeeble in order to control and disperse by applying the rule of "divide to win." This is based on the structure of society that was made by the Ottoman Empire which had divided the Palestinian society into "Mellats." "Mellat" has the definition of sect rather than of religion. It is a structure

of belonging that controls and segregates. This same division was adopted by the British mandate and then by Israel. "Mellat" is the structure of belonging to a small group rather than to a nation. I remember my first identity card on which it was specified, "Mellat" – Christian. So, we were brought up to be Christians, Moslems or Druze. This structure made it easy for Israel to create a new nationality for the Druze community that, de facto, became a separate entity and, now Israel is about to create a new Christian Aramaic nationality that would not recognize us as Arabs or as Palestinians. For example, in the Golan Heights, the Druze are still identifying themselves as Syrians or as Arabs, but in Israel they simply identify themselves as Druze. This policy of fragmentation, separation and isolation creates the "other" and gives the feeling of a fragile and vulnerable existence and, therefore, the need to protect ourselves.

The Christians are made to feel crushed between two majorities: Jews as Israelis and Moslems as Arabs. The invisible separation walls imposed by the system create ignorance and prejudice. The ignorance creates fear, the fear creates suspicion and therefore the "other" becomes an enemy rather than a partner. For example, if I consider myself a Christian, then the Muslim becomes the "other," and so on. And, in a certain way, that "other" becomes responsible for our problems because it is easier to reach the one who is closest to me, who is near me, than to blame the high and unreachable authority and

the laws that I cannot change. And so, the field for friction is ready.

2. The Local Christian Structure

The less than 2% of the population, Christian local community, is divided into thirteen official denominations in the Holy Land. In Israel there are seven that are recognized. Our first belonging, according to the system that we are living in, is to the denomination and here is where extremism starts to emerge. Besides, there is constant talk about the "tiny presence of Christians in the Holy Land," about the danger of Christian disappearance. The local Palestinian church is becoming a minority. We are less than half of the total number of Palestinians in Israel. This argument is a very important argument by itself, but it is also an indirect insinuation to the Christians that they do not belong here, that they have no future and thus it is an inspiration for them to leave.

3. The Role of the Church

The church is an important part of our identity. By absence of nationality I am introduced as: Arab, Palestinian, Israeli, Christian, Catholic, Melkite. My denomination is part of my official identity; it is the closest authority to which I belong. For me, this is Melkite. Everyone needs this identity to be married or to be buried. Therefore, the church has a civil role as well as a spiritual role. There is a direct relation between the church and the people. The Christian community needs a church involved in their challenges in all aspects of life: spiritual as well

as social, cultural, and political. There is a need for reciprocity between the church and the people. It is a mutual responsibility. The church cannot ignore the political aspects that affect our daily life and existence as a community. Standing for justice and rights is not being politicized. This common current behavior tends to separate religion from politics which creates a deep gap between the church and its people. Jesus Christ, himself, was not involved in politics, but he stood for justice and challenged injustice.

We need a national church, a church that will help us face the challenges and stick to the teachings of Jesus Christ and prevent the rise of extremism.

1. We must create awareness, awareness to tell the truth and not to be afraid of the truth. Truth is life and liberation. It prevents the darkness of suspicion and prejudice.
2. We need a proper reading of plans made for us and a proper interpretation of the facts. This is the wisdom required to avoid falling in the traps to which we only react and therefore we accomplish the plan that was meant for us.
3. We need a leadership that will help us to stand up and take our responsibility in our hands. We cannot remain passive or indifferent or feel powerless. No one is insignificant. If we do what we can and give all that we can, like the one who gave two fish and five loaves to feed five thousand people, we can make a difference.

4. We have to communicate openly with each other, to learn about and to know the "other" as they are, and not as we see them in the stereotypes that we have for them. This will build trust rather than suspicion and love rather than hatred.
5. We need to develop a healthy existence, to work, invest, and develop a productive community rather than a consumer one. We have skills and potential that are not exploited. We need investments and entrepreneurs rather than charity. We need action and not just talk. We've become a story to talk about. It is high time to talk with us rather than to talk about us so that we will not be uprooted from the land to which we belong and from the nation to whom we belong.

Concerns of Palestinian Muslims

by: Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway

I would like to begin by thanking Sabeel for hosting this conference. Sabeel for us as Palestinian Muslims and Christians is a place where we can get together, where we struggle together, but also where we can celebrate being Palestinians, sharing and breaking fast together during Ramadan with our Christian brothers and sisters with whom we share this land.

When we talk about liberation, we need to be liberated from our own pigeon holes and reclaim the one human family. Any ideology, whether advanced by Muslims, Christians or Jews or whoever, that puts one group above another, is not loyal to this one human family. We need to be seen on equal footing, and you know very well that there is no eleventh commandment, “Thou shalt have a nation state.” God created us as different peoples and tribes so that we may know each other, and knowing each other is not simply saying, “My name is Mustafa.” We need to rub shoulders on the ground, fighting poverty, fighting disease, fighting illiteracy, making sure that the one billion people on earth who do not have fresh water and sanitation will have fresh water and sanitation, regardless of their background. All people deserve fresh water, and this is why, if we go back to the Partition Plan, I would say ‘no’ because it

excluded us Palestinians totally from the Tiberias Lake. If you go back to the map, we have been excluded unjustly. One person, one share of water for Jew, Christian, Druze, Muslim—one share of water for each person and it should not be otherwise.

There’s a special place in Islamic theology for the people of the book and what I would like to highlight for you today, is what we call the paradigm of “birr” which has no English equivalent. I will explain. Usually we use “birr” in relationship to our parents. The best possible relationship of “birr” is with our parents. The Quran uses the same word to relate to the people of the book. There are two conditions: first, that those people of the book should not fight us in terms of our religion, probably what we would call today “islamophobia,” and second, that we should not be driven out from our homes which basically has been and still is the case. What took place by force in 1948 is still taking place under the guise of law. People lose their IDs; they lose their residency, especially in Jerusalem. Between 1967 and 1994, a quarter of a million Palestinians from the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip lost their residency. After 1994, the highest number being in 2008, over four thousand Palestinians from

East Jerusalem were kicked out of their city. When we talk about “birr,” we open our arms, but we need to be in a relationship that is based on justice. The polity has to be conducted according to justice. The Quran speaks about the possibility of social and economic relationships with people of the book but it is also the polity itself that is a shared responsibility between us and we need to advance this position, especially amongst us Palestinians, whereby we are before the law on equal footing, but we need to have dialogue away from cameras, away from the light, and simply deal with the everyday issues that plague our society.

It’s easy for me to speak about the challenges in terms of the occupation, but I should also speak about the challenges that I have in my heart. I need to live up to the Quranic model when I deal with my Christian brothers and sisters because it’s very clear that on the ground there’s a big difference between the ideals and the reality. And Christians sometimes do suffer only for the reason that they are Christians.

At the end of the cold war, Samuel Huntington advanced the theory of the clash of civilizations, and for me, particularly, I addressed this theory, of course critiquing it. First and foremost, it drops all



Member of Fall Witness Trip with young boys from Hebron

economic issues from the equation, that we are bound to have conflict because of our cultural differences. Civilizations do not fight each other; civilizations do not have a will of their own. There is always someone who makes a decision to go to war, always someone who declares war. Civilizations depend on each other; they feed each other; they enrich each other. And, in fact, we might think of one human civilization with particular issues pertaining to specific regions. We need to go beyond the idea of clash. It would be very silly to think that the way we eat or the way we dress is the reason for us to be in conflict. When I think about the Palestinian issue, I tend to go back to Jericho. I go long before the first Zionist convention. Why do I go back

to Jericho? In the wildest claims of Zionism they talk about three thousand years of history, which is, of course, not true. Jericho is ten thousand years old. It’s the oldest known agricultural settlement in the world. There were no Jews, Christians or Muslims, but there were those people who lived in this land, who had history, who built their own place and had agriculture. You cannot deny the fact that many people came and went and the problem is in exclusive claims. We should not, as we struggle for freedom, have exclusive claims based on thinking that history began with any one of us. History did not begin with any one of us, because we don’t know particularly when history began. No one is originally from anywhere, let’s put

it this way, and if you’d like to talk about contemporary belongings, think about the whole Peruvian Catholic Church that was converted to Judaism and they performed the aliya. They came here as settlers, returning. What kind of returning if they were indigenous to South America? This puzzles me, but the idea is not having people living somewhere; it’s about coming and seeing that the people do have a place, and they have their own history rather than myth.

The Balfour Declaration reduced us Palestinians to non-Jews as if we don’t have an identity of our own. Sadly, practically all international resolutions reduce us during that period to non-Jews when we were basically a majority in the land. The approach to us was to marginalize

us, to push us out of the realm of history.

In Jerusalem, the challenges that we face as Muslims are practically the challenges that face the Christians. If we talk about the lack of freedom of movement, both of us, during our holidays, need permits if we come from the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. We need permits; we don't have freedom of movement and if we don't have freedom of movement, we don't have freedom of worship. People do not have access to their respective holy places, especially in Jerusalem. And not only on special occasions. For Muslims it's become systematic. People from outside Jerusalem are excluded unless they have permits, and there are conditions for this. For Muslims, on specific occasions, men have to be fifty years old. It used to be forty, then it became forty-five, then it became fifty, and sometimes even when you are fifty you are not allowed. I remember when I was with the head of the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce and we were at one of the gates leading to Aqsa Mosque. He was at the time 86 years old and he was not allowed to enter. In fact, on that day, nobody was for a while. At al Aqsa Mosque, the Waqf administration, which is part of the Jordanian ministry of Waqf, has a hard time running the affairs of the Mosque, which is a very large establishment, with hundreds of employees including physicians and residential engineers. And to give you a hint of how things are, one of the engineers went with a couple of plumbers to replace a rusty pipe in the eastern part of the Mosque.

Two policemen approached him and told him to stop working for a moment, and to ask for permission before he could resume work. So, in essence, they have no problem with the work. It's about who is the boss. It's part of occupied Jerusalem, and the end of the occupation will mean the end of the problems at Al Aqsa Mosque.

One problem in East Jerusalem, and this goes for all of us as Palestinians, not just Muslims, is the right to play. Our kids have the right to play at proper places and playgrounds. Ehud Olmert, former prime minister, when he was mayor of Jerusalem, was on record as saying that 96% of public parks are in West Jerusalem. This discrimination does not only apply to public parks. Whether it's maternity clinics, public libraries, public pools, name it, there's a gap between West Jerusalem and East Jerusalem. We need more than one thousand classrooms, according to Ir Amim, so that every child in East Jerusalem will be in school. Housing is extremely rare. If you'd like to apply for a building permit, most people would not be able to afford it. It's politically motivated. People can pay up to \$30,000 for the permit for an average apartment and that's beyond reach. This is why people ultimately decide to build without permits and then they might face demolition and be forced to pay for the bulldozers of the municipality. This brings us to the topic of Caterpillar and BDS, which is basically a healthy alternative to violence or to the use of force. Nonviolence should be the way forward as we struggle together

to achieve our freedom and end the occupation.

I have been asked to also address the challenges that Muslims face in the West. Let me say that Islamophobia comes from ignorant people who do not know the real story. They know neither the history nor the theology of Islam. Let me put it this way. The Prophet himself, peace be upon him, when the early Muslims in Mecca were persecuted, sent two waves of Muslims as refugees to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) because there was a just Christian king in Abyssinia where they could find refuge, where they could find a safe haven. So, when your Muslim brothers and sisters cross the deadly Mediterranean in these boats, and there are Christians too on these boats, let's look at the root of these problems that drive them to go northward or westward. There are real issues on the ground that we need to address.

I would like to say that violence is not the only reason. You can see the famine in Somalia. It's a shame, not only for the Arabs or the Muslims, but it's shameful that the world watches while over a hundred children in Somalia die in a 48-hour period because of a lack of food. Going back to the issue of violence and extremism. It is contextual. Violence is contextual; it is not textual. When reading the same texts through and through you know very well that the plan of God for humanity is peace.

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Celebrating an impromptu football match at Shuafat Refugee Camp. Palestine 4 – Witness Visit 0!

Concerns of Palestinian Christians

by: Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah

In this land, in Palestine and Israel, we are Christian Palestinians and we have the same concerns as everyone in the region. We live in a land disputed today between two peoples, Palestinians and Israelis. Christians are Palestinians.

Besides this local reality lived here in Palestine, the regional reality

is also part of our daily life. The regional reality is a reality of death, civil war, foreign interference and an extremist Muslim reality known as the Islamic State. But our first and main concern is reaching a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis. This struggle is the main frame of our daily life. Everything

is fed by it, leading to political instability and religious extremism. Here in Palestine, we have seen manifestations of religious Jewish extremism in many acts of desecration of Muslim and Christian holy places. These acts have been condemned by the Israeli authorities, but the authorities

have not taken any serious punitive action against the perpetrators. There is an anti-Christian extremism within Israeli society. We know that officially the Israeli authorities are against it, but extremism is there.

Christian Zionism is an essential concern for us as Christians and as Palestinians. The attitude of the Christian Zionists is a mortal threat to us; they use the Word of God to kill us, to tell us that our land is not ours, and our homes are not ours. To the Christian Zionist, I simply say two things: first, the Word of God is a word of life for all, for Israelis and Palestinians. If you use the Word of God, you know well that God is love; so, you, too, when you refer to the Word of God, should be filled with the same love of God for all, for Israelis and Palestinians.

As for Muslim extremism, the basic normal relation between Muslims and Christians is a relation of persons belonging to one people, having the same history and the same future. In our daily life, we have had, and still have, easy and difficult days. But besides this normal trend of life, there is also the fact of local mounting extremism in local religious currents or movements such as *tahrir* (liberation party), *salafis* (exclusive fundamentalists), or *Da'esh* (ISIS -the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria).

There is still a large popular base in the Palestinian society able to live a normal life, with mutual respect and collaboration. The mainline political leaders in the Palestinian government are following this line. Our concern is to build together a society in which every citizen feels entirely at home, as entire

human beings, equal to anyone. All Christians and Muslims would be anchored on this solid basic foundation: we are all human beings equally created by God. Everyone has his/her own religion, but in building the country, our common home, we are all the same; we are human beings.

After interreligious relations, our concern is to achieve what seems to be impossible to achieve: a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians. This conflict is part of our fears and a cause for emigration. It is also, for political considerations, a fertile place for all kinds of extremism and internal instabilities within the Palestinian society.

What about ISIS? It is true that ISIS is a local genuine Muslim reality. It is true that Muslims are killing Muslims and Christians. It is also true that ISIS was not born alone, and until now it is still supported or exploited by foreign western political realities both international (USA and Europe) and regional. The conclusion of that is the following: those who killed and forced Christians to emigrate are not only ISIS, but also and mainly those political decision-makers in the US and Europe. Our concern, our fear, is from the West, not the good peoples or the churches of the West, but the political decision-makers who are planning to create a new Middle East.

Dear international friends, if you are truly concerned about the future of Christians in this region, ask your governments about the truth of their politics here in Palestine and in the region. As peoples who live in and elect democracies, try to

elect people who are more human, who have more respect for human life, and for the stability of peoples in our region.

Religious extremism, in Palestine, Israel, and in the region, exists and is a concern for all. Our present and future will always be a joint effort with all people of good will to find the right way to live together, knowing that the essence of all religions is a relation with God, and a relation of respect and love with all men and women, in one's own religion and in all different religions. Our land is holy, a land for God and humanity, but it has been made a land of death, of people who hate and kill each other. Jerusalem is at the center of the struggle because it is holy. What holiness remains in it? The human being, the temple of God, is being destroyed. Holy places are there with past memories. But for many, God is not here.

This is our condition. Will we remain in it forever? Apparently, according to the vision of the "rulers," yes! This is the vision; what is today will remain forever. This is our concern as Christians, as Palestinians, and as human beings.

H.B. Patriarch Michel Sabbah served as the Archbishop and Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem from 1987 to 2008 and is co-author of the Kairos Palestine Document.

An Israeli Jewish Perspective

by: *Rabbi Arik Ascherman*

Today is the Fast of Esther. Those of you who remember the Book of Esther, this is the day that we fast in remembrance and solidarity with Esther who, before she went to King Ahasuerus, fasted for three days. And it's basically that same message as some have summarized most Jewish holidays, "They wanted to kill us. We won. Let's eat." There is this long historical consciousness that is ingrained in our psyche that the world hates us and that all we can do is ignore the world and look after ourselves. The basic narrative of Zionism is that after two thousand years of statelessness and homelessness, which was the direct cause of repression for Jews, that we need to have again control of our destiny, something which I, as a Zionist, identify with, although it's a little more complicated than that, of course.

If we want to talk specifically about religious extremism, and I would agree that we are a people and not just a religion, when the state of Israel was created, we'd been praying for two thousand years to return to our homeland, and we added to our prayers that Israel is the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption. And many people did see this as God's hand in history. And my wife remembers in 1967 huddling in a bomb shelter. Her dad had been off for who knows how long; she hadn't seen him; he'd been out fighting or preparing for the coming

war. Many, many Israeli Jews at that time thought simply that this was going to be the end, that finally the Arab world was going to succeed in throwing us into the sea and that Israel was going to be destroyed. We can now look at revisionist historians who can tell us that maybe things were actually a little bit different, that the balance of power wasn't quite that way, but that was what those people in the bomb shelters were feeling. And again, when we were not only not destroyed, but won this seemingly miraculous victory, you had a few lone voices in the wilderness at that time (I imagine that Uri Avnery was one of them) who said that this was a potential moral disaster. Our first prime minister was no longer in power. David ben Gurion also said that what we should do is try to immediately parlay this victory into peace, but most people felt differently. It also has to be said that at the time, there was a cartoon conference, the three no's —no peace, no recognition, no negotiation. At the time, there was a debate among Israelis about whether we would get security through territorial compromise, through territorial depth or through parlaying land for peace, but it didn't seem a reality that something could be done.

Today, you'd be hard pressed to find military experts who would say that this territorial depth is of

huge military benefit, and certainly not the settlements. But into that vacuum have come the forces that were unleashed by that miraculous victory of 1967, because people who were religious, and it is sadly true I must say as a Rabbi, that the vanguard of the extremist (and I would agree that it is much broader and wider than that), is coming from religious circles. These are people who, if 1948 was the beginning of our redemption (not that we had, more or less, all the biblical land of Israel in our hands), then this was surely God's doing and so, to reject that gift, to return land, that would be like slapping God in the face. It would be a sinful thing to do. Rather, our religious command was to redeem and to occupy and fill the land by any means possible. So, these powerful Messianic forces were unleashed in a new way in 1967.

The next point I'd like to make is the mutuality of the feeling of victimhood that we all feel in this land. Say to any Israeli or Palestinian that they are a victimizer, and they would be furious, outraged. "How dare you say that. I'm a victim." There was a late 19th, 20th century rabbi who, getting back to the Passover story, said the reason why the children of Israel had to stay in their homes when the angel of death passed over Egypt was because even when your cause is just, any contact with violence corrupts, and



Interfaith fellowship, Buq'ata, Golan Heights

that the difference between being a victim and a victimizer can be less than a hairbreadth, and sometimes we can be both at the same time. When we are all so ensconced in our holy victimhood, it is hard to get beyond. Once I saw an amazing little play that was like a game show, with Israelis and Palestinians each trying to score points by showing who had suffered the most, and unfortunately, that is very deep in the psychology of how we think, that the world will support us and understand us if we just can show our victimhood.

Even among the settlers, as incomprehensible as it is for us to understand, and it's not just

propaganda, many truly believe that they are the victims. Many see themselves as a misunderstood minority and that most Israelis don't understand or agree with them. The logic that they have such a powerful hold on the current government, a government that is doing everything it can in so many ways to continue to pave the way for the settlement enterprise, is something that just gets passed over. It is true that there is a majority of Israelis who would say at some level that settlements are a problem, that eventually there must be territorial compromise. But not now, because there's nobody to talk to. But they also, in a totally illogical way, see themselves as

victims. Everyone wants to portray themselves as the victims.

I would like to offer two or three things that point to some possibility of hope. First, from the Israeli side, our extremism is based on the fact, in the psychology of your average Israeli Jew, that there's nobody to talk to. We want peace but there's nobody to talk to. Then you convince yourself that you never really wanted what you can't have. A week before Sadat came to Jerusalem, an opinion poll showed a clear Israeli majority opposed to what a clear majority of Israelis supported a week later. The act of an Egyptian President coming to speak to the Knesset in Jerusalem

made it real. It could really happen, and opinions changed overnight. If tomorrow, and unfortunately I don't see any ice-breaking move made by any Israeli leader at the moment, but if the foreign ministers of the Arab League were to say tomorrow, "You've been ignoring our peace proposal for too long. We're coming to Jerusalem next week. We won't take 'no' for an answer. It's time to finish this," I do believe that again you would see Israeli Jewish public opinion change overnight.

Another piece of hope is that, unlike what we've seen recently in the constituencies of the United States of what percentage of people get their information from fake news versus something closer to the truth (and I won't say that traditional sources always tell the truth either), facts still count for something here, and so, for example, we've taken some public opinion polls. In 2013, 90% of Israeli Jews subscribed to the idea that the Bedouin are taking over the Negev. Let's unpack that. What does that mean? 70% thought that the Bedouin wanted 25% or more of the Negev; the media said they wanted 43.9%. If all the outstanding land claims of the Bedouin were to be recognized and honored, what percentage are we talking about? Anyone want to guess? It's 5.4%. And your average Israeli Jew said, "We're not sure we believe you because that's not what we heard in the media, but if that's true, then that sounds fair. We repeated that with an even more serious study in my former organization last April. We've done something right because we found out that now only 51% thought that the Bedouin

wanted to take over the Negev. But again, when you expose people to facts, people said, "that sounds fair." You had a clear majority of Israelis that said that we should be fair to the Bedouin, that we should not be moving Bedouin from their villages by force, and should be recognizing villages. In other words, as is often true in history, you can't ignore the fact that even though many of the people voted for the parties that are now running our country, that the populace is much less extreme, much more desirous of being fair, of being just, of being more decent than the government of Israel at this point.

Even when you hear this thing that I wish I could still believe, but I can't anymore, that we have the most moral army in the world, it's not just propaganda; people really believe it; they want to believe it because that's what they aspire to. And that's what says to me that it's not just rubbing the nose of the naughty puppy in the mess it's made, but holding up a mirror and saying that I know that you are good people who want to be just, but it's time for a reality check. It's not an easy task, but it's a little bit easier than if I felt I was dealing with an incorrigibly evil people. If I couldn't have faith in the basic goodness and decency of my own people I couldn't be doing what I've been doing for at least twenty-one years.

The last point of hope is that we can make a difference. You can make a difference. In many cases where we have been able to succeed to preserve Palestinian villages or whatever, it's because of the concern that you've expressed, that's translated into

some concern by some of your governments, and the fact is that when any of us go and stand in front of a bulldozer, or help rebuild a home, or defend Palestinian or Israeli Arab rights in different kinds of ways and I think everyone here has the same experience when people come to us and say, "Our children have to meet you because what they know of Israeli Jews is ... and our child who wants to be a terrorist when he grows up ... We want them to know that not all Israelis are like that." When we expose some of the Bedouin leaders to some of our studies, they say, "You have to translate that. Our people need to know this because they are so convinced that there is no hope for any kind of positive interaction or any kind of support or solidarity from our fellow Israeli Jews." And so, all of us have things that we can do that can break through the extremism which so often is based on making our victimhood sacred, not knowing the facts, and, therefore, having this fear of the other.

Rabbi Arik Ascherman is founder and former director of Rabbis for Human Rights, and is presently co-founder of the interfaith human rights organization, "Haqel – Jews and Arabs in Defense of Human Rights."



Remains of Maronite church, Baniyas, Galilee

Colonial Christianity and Indigenous Societies: Australia and Palestine

by: *Dr. Katalina Tabaafe-Williams*

Early in the 17th Century, a devout Portuguese by the name of Pedro de Queirós unsuccessfully tried to find what was known to Europeans at the time as the mythical southern continent, and although this Portuguese Roman Catholic was unsuccessful in his effort, he still felt that he could name this mythical southern continent Australia del Espiritu Santo, the Southern Land of the Holy Spirit. It was Captain Cook, however, an English Protestant, who made the decisive landfall in the world's smallest

continent in April of 1770, in a place called Botany Bay, which is not too far from the current Sydney airport. Then Captain Cook sailed up the east coast until he reached the northernmost point where he proceeded to take possession of the whole country, including the indigenous peoples, in the name of King George III of England, calling it New South Wales. Australia, as a name for this continent, was coined much later in the next century. Captain Cook did encounter Aborigines in his brief visit, but he

assumed that this land was free for the taking by the British Empire. It never occurred to him that he was infringing on the rights of a people who had lived there since time immemorial. In fact, he knew nothing about this people at all, and my assessment is that it was of no interest to him to get to know the indigenous people of the land before making such an outrageous claim on their country.

But this is a story that is replicated all over the globe, from the Pacific Oceania region to Africa, from the

Americas and the Caribbean to Asia by European British colonialists. In the situation of the aboriginal Australians, this is a people who are so ancient that they represent the oldest continuous habitation of any one people in any one place on the planet. Until the first fleet touched Sydney harbor, eighteen years later after Captain Cook arrived, the Aborigines had lived on the continent in isolation for over forty thousand years. They lived in a unique and deeply spiritual harmony with the environment, a harmony that grew out of their understanding that the land itself was sacred. This is an ancient people who did not presume to own this land; rather, they understood the land to own them.

Two hundred years ago, the Aborigines were nomadic hunter/gatherers who lived well most of the time, took care of their hunting grounds and of their game. Their seasonal patterns of migration ensured sufficient food despite the harsh and capricious nature of the Australian climate. They exercised a gentle mastery over an environment that white people would find alien and bewildering. They understood intimately where to find food and water in places that would seem to be barren to the rest of us. Early white settlers and explorers died of thirst or starvation in places where Aborigines lived in relative prosperity. But their stone age weapons would offer them no protection against the nation that ruled half of the world at that time. Aboriginal reality was the dream; it was the reality from which all life was derived, not merely an event in

the distant past. Time was circular not linear, as each generation relived the dreaming activities. Both ritual and daily life were integral to this present reality. For Aborigines there was no division between the sacred and the secular. The sacredness was embodied in the land itself and particularly in sacred sites and objects. Each separate group had its own special sacred sites, sacred totems, songs and ceremonies and the stories that they told of their ancestral spirits were passed on from one generation to another in songs and through a vast oral tradition. These stories, of course, were not just stories, but they had practical application as well, for they provided rules and had information about the environment and its care. Theirs was a highly complex and all-embracing spirituality. Under their gentle care, Australia was truly a land of the spirit.

The first white observers saw none of this, of course. Seeing no forms of worship that fit their expectations, they assumed there were none. But, in fact, aboriginal culture had a rich variety of religious manifestations. Everyone was involved in some way in the rituals, though some were restricted to men only, or to women only, or to the older members of the group. There was, however, no priestly caste which obviously confused Christians who were used to hierarchy, nor did they realize that religious knowledge was the most valuable possession in this culture which set little store by material possessions and goods. The white settlers were further confused by the rich diversity of groups, for at the time of white settlement, aboriginal

society was divided into many different tribal groups, speaking more than three hundred languages and many more dialects. Nor did the newcomers understand the delicate checks and balances which allowed these people to coexist in tribal relations. Intertribal relations, though often marked by some skirmishes of violent confrontation, were based on a well-developed etiquette of courtesy and mutual obligation. Within each grouping, kinship obligations, including the sharing of food and possessions, had a high priority.

So, when the first ships unloaded its dismal cargo of prisoners in 1788, the aboriginal observers were curious but in many ways apathetic. Their long isolation had left them quite innocent to the ways of the world. They never imagined that they would be invaded and taken over and dispossessed of their land. The prisoners, carrying with them assumptions of white British Christian supremacy, decided that the Aborigines were depraved savages, completely devoid of culture, religion and morals, and so the destruction of forty thousand years of dreaming in a few brief decades was the tragic outcome of this meeting of two very different cultures.

For Australia's Aborigines, the dreaming turned to nightmare in the wake of white settlement. The introduction of exotic diseases such as smallpox, measles and influenza, from which they had no immunity, decimated them. The loss of their traditional hunting grounds caused widespread hunger. The white settlers, if they cared at

all for the native population, simply assumed that in such a vast country the Aborigines would be able to move on to other areas to hunt and gather. They had no understanding of the complex territorial divisions which controlled tribal movements. Displaced Aborigines were faced with either starvation or tribal warfare. Aboriginal women were forcibly abducted, molested and raped. Many suffered horribly and the retaliation of their menfolk was interpreted as criminal violence and heavily punished. The spread of venereal disease affected vast numbers of the population. At the frontiers of settlement, as it moved inexorably across the continent, the level of bloodshed was certainly much higher than white records show today.

The cumulative effects on traditional aboriginal society were certainly traumatic. A culture that had survived all manner of natural and climactic disasters over thousands of years was readily undermined. Most surviving Aborigines had no alternative but to work for their new white masters, often under brutal and degrading conditions and the payment in white flour, sugar, tea, alcohol and tobacco destroyed what physical health they had left. So catastrophic was the cumulative effect of white invasion that many colonists assumed that Aborigines were a dying race, doomed to rapid extinction.

With a few honorable exceptions, the leaders of the Christian churches in the Australian colonies failed to champion the cause of the victimized aboriginal people. Only rarely did Christians speak out publically in their defense. Too often they colluded with the notion that Britain was destined to



Posing for pictures at al-Aroub Refugee Camp near Hebron

rule this new land. The destruction of the original way of life, even of the people themselves, was seen as the inevitable consequence of their destiny. Indeed, some saw it as praiseworthy, believing that the heathen ways of the defiant black people were to be eradicated at all cost. Judeo-Christian morality

was offended by practices such as polygamy and infanticide in some areas. They failed to understand the survival realities that made the latter a necessary evil or to recognize the profound spiritual reality that supported this alien culture. Even missionaries who had the best interests of Aborigines at heart, nevertheless assumed that the Gospel and European civilization were inseparable. The converted Aborigines were expected to abandon all vestiges of traditional life. And it is true that in our contemporary discourse on missionaries and the missionary enterprise, there are a lot of missiologists who want to advocate that without missionaries many of these indigenous cultures would have been totally extinct. And it is true because in many situations, not just in Australia but also in other indigenous situations around the globe, missionaries have stood between the state and invaders and the indigenous population and helped them to survive. But when you look at the reality that indigenous people around the globe continue to face at this very moment, to this very day, for what good was this? You almost feel at

times that we say, 'OK, we brought the trouble on you, but we're now helping you, so you must be grateful to us.' It seems strange to me that indigenous peoples in various parts of the world are being told that they need to be grateful for hospitals and schools that were built for them. Indigenous people in Australia

were doing quite well without the invaders, and for many, many centuries, and whether they needed the education brought by the settlers and colonizers, I'm happy to debate this as well. Education for progress, for survival in the world that we live in today, yes, there's a value there, but when is it that we can have a mutual exchange with indigenous people so that we can take from them what *they* have to offer by way of education? This could relate to how we live with nature, how we live on the land, or with medication and medicines that they have known for many generations, or their understanding of cosmology and navigation skills on the oceans. Some of this knowledge has been passed from generation to generation and is still valuable for us today, even with advanced technology and all the gadgets that are now available to us, apparently to make us more efficient.

The situation of indigenous people in Australia is currently as dismal as ever. We will have people tell us that there's advancement and benefit from so many things that have happened over the years, but my perception is that indigenous people are still at the very bottom of the social, political, economic, and cultural hierarchy in Australia and, as I am responsible for the indigenous program of the World Council of Churches, this is what I have perceived in the meetings and forums I've had with indigenous peoples from around the globe.

The other day we did a workshop on the spirituality of the land. I believe that it is so significant to continue to tell the stories of indigenous peoples

and how they got to where they are today because I don't believe that these stories are told well enough. And I don't believe that our younger generations, let alone our older generations, really know the stories in their details. There's such a mystique about indigenous peoples. There is a sense of lost hope and hopelessness that surrounds them. How are we to tell the stories in such a way that those of us who have power, who have a voice, are truly inspired to do something? We continue to advocate for human rights at the United Nations. We continue to produce papers. We continue to theologize. We continue to preach and proclaim the word in our churches. But still, indigenous peoples are at the frontline of the worst human rights violations around the globe. Their very existence and their very humanity, their connectedness to the land that gives them the soul to live ... they are constantly being deprived of these things. I don't know how my theologizing from this podium is going to make any difference. I just know that my soul is devastated each and every moment I'm having a conversation and a dialogue with an indigenous brother or sister. The sense that these are spiritual beings that are just drifting and not anchored to anything because what they have been anchored to for generations and for centuries in the land has been taken away from them.

What do we do from this conference? I'm supposed to do some comparative analyses between the indigenous people of Australia and the Palestinians, and the impact

of colonial Christianity on the lives of these peoples. The only thing I can say is that colonial Christianity has been truly complicit in the displacement, in the deprivation of both these peoples. The commonality between the two situations is this: The Palestinian people have suffered in the very same way as the indigenous peoples of Australia. When it comes to Palestine, however many times the current regime, the Israelis, say they have ruled over this land from ancient times to this day, it is still not their land. And I know that as Christians we hear all the time of the affinity of the Jews to their land. Yes, they have an affinity to the land which they claim was promised to them by God, but there is enough evidence in the biblical texts that we claim to be our sacred texts that says that there were people here before they came and those people have continuously lived on this land to this day. But power and might, backed by military weapons make it impossible for indigenous peoples to make any claims to the land. So, if this is not an example of Christian extremism and fundamentalism in the way that these lands have been taken over, then I don't know what is.

Dr. Katalina Tahaqfe-Williams works with the World Council of Churches in Geneva on its migration, indigenous, and multicultural ministry programs. Her experience includes working with indigenous peoples in New Zealand and Australia.

How Long, O Lord?

By: *The Rev. Canon Richard Toll*

For thirty-four years I have been coming to Palestine/Israel. Each time I come with hope, but I leave with despair. One hundred and sixty internationals from fifteen countries gathered in Bethlehem and Nazareth this past March at the tenth international conference of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem. The conference addressed:

- 100 years of Great Britain's Balfour Declaration in 1917 that opened the door for Zionists to begin taking land from the Palestinians to make a homeland for the Jewish people.
- 70 years ago, the United Nations partitioned Palestine and gave 53 percent of Palestine to Jewish people and the remaining 47 percent to Palestinians.
- 50 years ago, the Zionists took the remaining 22 percent of Palestine and occupied it with military force. Since that occupation, the state of Israel has transferred 600,000 settlers into the Palestinian Territories in opposition to international law.

Three million Palestinians are under military occupation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Two million Palestinians are under siege and occupation in Gaza.

Two million Palestinians in the state of Israel are second class citizens since they are not Jewish. Many laws

of discrimination have been passed in the Knesset against Palestinian citizens of Israel.

There are now six million Palestinian refugees worldwide, descendants of the refugees who were forced out of Palestine in 1948 and 1967. Over five hundred villages and towns were destroyed by the Zionists in 1948 and the population of those towns and villages became refugees, now living throughout the world, some still in refugee camps in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The Psalmist asks, 'How long, O Lord?'

There is an unsustainability to the military occupation. It violates human rights through its use of military laws that exclude Palestinians from travel, visiting Jerusalem and their holy sites, and from education opportunities and permits for building homes, as confiscation of land and house demolitions continue.

The state of Israel is losing its soul over what they have done and are doing to the Palestinians as they continue to claim land from the Palestinians and as settlers do so in the name of their God.

The state of Israel is a state that needs to be criticized as all other states. But the state of Israel refuses to abide by international law. They resent any criticism and call people anti-Semitic who dare to

criticize them for an illegal military occupation. So, the church remains silent as thousands upon thousands of human rights violations occur in the occupied territories.

And in Gaza thousands are killed, live under siege and occupation. Medical supplies are not available. Water is not drinkable. Israel does not adhere to the Oslo accords on fishing rights.

Collective punishment of Palestinians (illegal under international law) has been a continuing policy of the military occupation.

How long, O Lord?

It depends on people of good will who will challenge the system of a state that does not adhere to international law and violates standards of human rights that are acknowledged by every religious group in the world, including many Jewish people inside Israel and around the world.

How long, O Lord?

It seems that God is waiting for people like you and me to do something.

Rev. Canon Richard Toll, DD, DMIN, is presently President of the Board of Trustees, Friends of Sabeel, North America.

Book Launch

by: *The Rev. Páraic Réamonn / Mrs. Cedar Duaybis*

On Friday, November 3, 2017 130 people gathered at Notre Dame Center in Jerusalem, as Sabeel, together with Bilda (Swedish Christian Study Centre), The Educational Bookshop and the Tantur Ecumenical Institute hosted a book launch to introduce Rev. Naim Ateek's latest work, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation; The Bible, Justice and the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Orbis, 2017). Following are excerpts from endorsements given by Cedar Duaybis and Rev. Páraic Réamonn:

Rev. Páraic Réamonn:

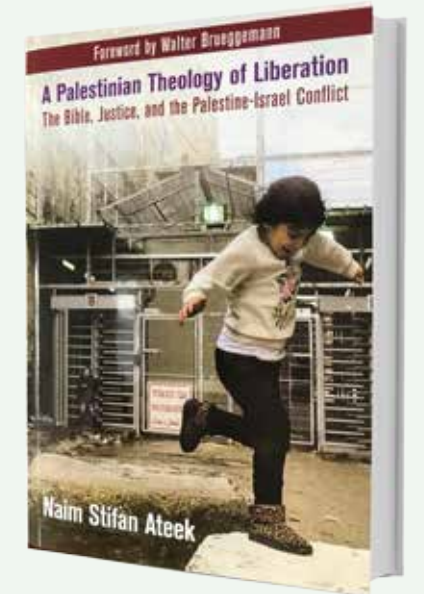
From Gutiérrez and Ateek, Gustavo and Naim, I and many others have learned that the calling of the

worldwide church - a calling the Western church finds particularly challenging - is to stand with the poor and the downtrodden. But that calling is also to invite those who tread them down to stop doing that - to invite the exploiter, the oppressor and the dominator instead into the new community of those who live as equals because we are all God's children.

My friend Robert Smith was blogging recently about the New Christian Zionism. He concluded that all of us are confronted with a threefold task: "Now is the time for a new conversation about Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations, a new conversation about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a new conversation about historical Christian responsibility."



Rev. Naim Ateek, Rev. Páraic Réamonn and Cedar Duaybis at Notre Dame Ecumenical Center for the book launch for "A Palestinian Theology of Liberation."



In that complex conversation, the Palestinian liberation theology that Naim began now almost thirty years ago, and that continues today in his own writings but now also in the writings of so many others, is an essential voice that must be heard. Let my last word therefore be Walter Brueggemann's word. "This important book will be a great learning among us to which Western Christians of every ilk should pay attention." May it be so.

Cedar Duaybis:

The context is Palestinian, the experience is Palestinian, the need is Palestinian and the theologian is Palestinian, but the Theology is liberating, and the Theology is liberated. "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."

Rev. Páraic Réamonn is currently serving as pastor of St. Andrew's Scots Memorial Church in Jerusalem. Cedar Duaybis is a co-founder of Sabeel.



Meeting at the Maronite Church with the only remaining Christian family in Ein Qiniyye, a Druze village in the Israeli occupied Golan Heights

2018 Spring Witness Visit

Join Rev. Naim Ateek, co-founder of Sabeel, as we focus on the Christian community in the Holy Land. More complete information can be found on the Sabeel website, www.sabeel.org or by contacting Sabeel (world@sabeel.org).

February 28–March 8
2018 Spring Witness Visit

The Forgotten Faithful -
A Window into the Life
and Witness of Christians in
The Land of The Holy One



Meeting of Maronite and Syrian Orthodox priests, Golan Heights



Maronite church in Ein Qiniyye, a Druze village in the Israeli occupied Golan Heights

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PURPOSE STATEMENT *of* SABELL

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

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns.

It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

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