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# Challenging Christian Zionism

## The Challenge Of Christian Zionism

The movement of Christian Zionism provides a challenge and an embarrassment to Palestinian Christians at a number of crucial levels, requiring us to address this issue theologically, politically, and existentially. It raises for us a number of issues that must be addressed.

First and foremost are the theological issues: What kind of God does Christianity teach and what kind of God do we believe in? Is God a tribal, territorially-based God, partial to the tribe of the Hebrews and interested in granting them a particular piece of land in Palestine to be their eternal birthright regardless of the rights of its indigenous inhabitants?? Is God the Lord of Hosts, glorying in the military exploits of his people, and wrathful and vengeful towards their enemies, assuring them of military victory (regardless of their own spiritual state of godliness or lack thereof)? Or is God the sacrificial God who loves the whole world, and who, as revealed to us in Christ, transcends racial and national boundaries, and opens his arms and offers his salvation to Jew and gentile alike, inviting into his universal kingdom all those who believe in him, granting them the power to be children of God, and inheritors of the promises??

It also presents hermeneutical problems of understanding prophecy and of eschatology: Is prophecy a form of fortune telling, and predictions about current na-

tional and international affairs? Is it a predictor of the end-times, and a method for identifying which political powers or movements today are evil, and constitute an antichrist to be opposed by God-fearing Christians? Or is prophecy carrying a message from God to be given courageously to a sinful society, and to those in power, calling them to repentance, and reminding them of who is truly sovereign in the affairs of men?

Christian Zionism also revives issues thought to be resolved during the first century of the Christian era concerning the nature of relationship between the Old and New Testament, and Jewish-Christian relationships. After two millennia of Jewish powerlessness, and gentile (including Christian) domination, and indeed even persecution of Jews, the picture has changed dramatically. Jews now constitute a powerful, dominant and controlling force, not only in their own affairs, but exercising power over others, including the small number of Palestinian Christians. Christian Zionism seems to celebrate this, and calls on Christians to promote this, and see in it the hand of God. While the anti-Semitic persecution of Jews was certainly sinful and un-Christian, is the current support of their arrogance the right response?? Are they to be exempt from the moral and ethical requirements of justice on account of their suffering and is the unqualified support offered by Christian Zionism the

Jonathan Kuttab



correct penitential response to Christian complicity in the persecution of the Jews?

Christian Zionism, on the political level, is crassly simplistic and unabashedly biased. It is supportive of the most extreme political positions of right wing Israelis, and deliberately ignores political realities, and the interest, or even existence, of other groups, including Palestinian Christians. In its total bias, it also ignores the requirements of international law, ethical principles, violations of human rights, and the requirements of simple justice. It is oblivious to the suffering of non-Jews, and the long-term impact of Israel's suicidal policies, which it gives a divine mantle of justification. Christian Zionists, particularly in Western countries and the United States, translate their theology into concrete political influence on behalf of Zionism and the state of Israel, and successfully influence the financial, political and military assistance given by the United States government to the State of Israel. They further claim that such political behavior is mandated by their faith and theology, and is normative for all Christians as well. Should all Christians support them in their political activism as well??

These issues rightly should be the concern of all Christians, but they are particularly the bane of Palestinian and Arab Christians. Christians in the Middle East have to contend not only with the theological implications of these positions, as they live in the midst of a Moslem world reeling from the impact of the demonization of Islam and the apparent onslaught of a 'crusading' Western world on them, but also with their political impact that they experience themselves in the form of daily deprivations, humiliations, loss of land, of rights, of loved ones, and of their patrimony. All this is justified in the name of their own God and their own scriptures.

It is to deal with these and similar questions that the Sabeel International Conference was organized in Jerusalem. It is our hope that the deliberations of that conference will lead us to answers that are theologically correct, and politically sensitive, and that it will translate into a plan of action for bringing these issues to the attention of the church at large, and ultimately bringing good news of peace, justice and reconciliation to the Holy Land as well.

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# A Holy We in an

Have you ever wondered why the day our Lord was killed is called "Good Friday"? What's "good" about the torture and murder of another human being? What could possibly be "good" about the torture and murder of the One many people on that very day believed to be the Messiah?

When I first moved to this land we call "holy", I was living in the Galilee in a small Arab village, about 50/50 Muslim and Christian. The Christian population was divided between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church. Since I worked for the local Greek Catholic priest I attended services at the village church that was built before the Crusader Era. Not only were the services conducted in Arabic, but the liturgy was the same as the Eastern Orthodox, very unfamiliar to me. Most of it was sung, sitting or standing.

At first I just stood when everyone else stood and sat when everyone else sat, not understanding what was being said or the symbolism behind any of the traditions involved; the swinging of the incense, the blessing with three fingers by the priest, the parading of the elements. It was all very strange and mystical to me. As I began to understand some Arabic and had a few lessons on the liturgy from my boss, I began to appreciate the ancient traditions as having their basis in the founding fathers of Christianity, traditions that go back almost 2000 years.



*The village of Ibillin*

Living in a village that still adheres to the old way of life, the sound of the church bells takes on the role of "town crier". One listens for the church bells to give you messages; a one hour "wake up" call before church, the 3 repeated rings that let you

# ek Unholy Land



know the priest has arrived and you should begin walking to church, the 3-3-7 series that lets you know that church has begun, the constant ring of the celebration of a wedding, or the 3 slow tolls that repeat several times to let the village know that someone has died and there will be a funeral the next day. The bells ring out the story of the life of the village.

All during Lent there are beautiful services every Friday evening leading up to Holy Week. But the endurance test really begins on Thursday, what we in the West call Maundy Thursday, or the day of the Last Supper. Even though in the West by suppertime it is still Thursday, in this part of the world a day is counted from sundown to sundown. Consequently by the evening of Thursday, it is already considered the day the Lord was crucified. In the evening a three-hour service begins during which all twelve gospels that describe the events are sung, special music is performed, and a large cross is carried three times around the church by one of the priests. (I learned the hard way to wear flat shoes to church during Holy Week since most of the three hour services are done while standing.)

The next day is called "Juma Hazini", Sad Friday, or "El Juma Al adtheema al Muqaddas", The Great Sacred Friday. None of the "Good Friday" euphemisms here. The death knell begins to ring at noon, the tra-



*Golgotha, Site of the Crucifixion*

ditional time when Christ was put on the cross, and lasts until 3:00 in the afternoon, the time when Jesus died and the sky grew dark and the earth shook. In the evening of that day there is another long service where the crucifix is taken down from the cross, placed in a large wooden manger filled with flowers, and carried around the church three

times by the eldest and most respected men of the congregation, while children follow behind throwing flower petals. (In a traditional burial service the casket is carried around the church instead.). Even though the men struggle under the weight of the burden, it is considered a great honor and blessing to be selected to carry the crucifix.



*Priest carrying the Holy Fire*

Saturday begins the celebrations. The service celebrating the victory of Christ over death begins at 10:00 am and lasts until 1:00. During the ceremony the congregation leaves the church by the western door, symbolizing the setting of the sun and the darkness of death. The door is then locked. The priest reads the liturgy while people hold candles and sing. The priest knocks on the door and says, "Open ye gates so that the King of Glory may enter!" He repeats this twice more until on the third time the doors are opened and all the righteous souls are released from the bonds of hell. Christ has conquered death.

Then the partying begins! It is the end of the daily fasting that took place during Lent, and the celebration of Christ's victory over death. There are barbeques, dancing in the streets, fireworks, and every other form of celebration imaginable. Confused that it was only Saturday and not yet Easter Sunday, I finally got up the nerve to ask why everyone was celebrating when it wasn't even Sunday yet. The answer came as no surprise: "We already know what's going to happen. Why wait? Christ has conquered death!" One of my favorite liturgical songs is sung. It has a beautiful tonality that is traditionally Eastern and creates an almost mystical feeling of awe when sung. The words in English are, "Christ has risen from the dead, and by his death he has

trampled upon death, and has given life to those who are in the tomb.” This calls for a celebration!

Sunday morning at 4:00, before the rise of the sun, begins the service of the Proclamation of the Resurrection. The church is crowded, overflowing with people. The children are relegated to the courtyard outside to make room for adults. Huge floral arrangements nestled onto every available flat surface fill the church with the scent of spring. For three hours voices are lifted in celebration and joy. When the worshippers emerge from the church, the sun is up and a new year of our Lord is begun.

Shortly thereafter the influence of Western commercialism begins to erupt into the religious celebrations. Children discover that the Easter Bunny has arrived. The long-held traditions are now overshadowed by Easter egg hunts and baskets brimming with jellybeans and chocolate bunnies. One tradition continues, however; the joy in Christ’s resurrection and his promise of eternal life. Indeed, life changes. There is great joy, great hope, in all that is done, in all that is shared, in all that must be endured. For 40 more days when people greet each other on the street, instead of saying “hello” they say, “Al Messieh Qam” (pron: mes-EE-ah kalm) Christ is Risen, the response to which is “Hakan Qam”, He is truly Risen. What a wonderful way to remember the most important event of our Christian lives.

Within this same “holy land”, however, there are those who are forced to celebrate in a much different manner. In the occupied West Bank and Gaza Palestinian Christians are not always able to get to their churches to worship during Holy Week. Severe travel restrictions or roadblocks and checkpoints prevent them from getting to their churches in a land where religious freedom is supposed to be the right of all people. The construction of the security wall, in some places a concrete wall 30 feet high, in other areas a swath of land 150 feet wide with electronic motion detectors, razor wire fencing, and patrolled security roads, prevents Christians from going from their homes to their churches. In some places the wall is being built down the middle of a main road. If a



*Looking through the Wall to Mount of Olives.*

Palestinian’s home happens to be on one side and his shop or church happens to be on the other, that person has no access to either. Instead that person is forced to live in a “concentration” area, cut off from both his source of income and his place of worship.

Under occupation Easter carries a different message. For some, it remains a constant “Sad Friday”, the day of the crucifixion. Palestinian Christians suffering under the heavy hand of oppression, without rights, without employment, without food or shelter, feel that they are still bearing the cross. They still suffer the beatings and the humiliation of the Via Dolorosa, the Way of the Cross. They continue to await death on the cross.

For others Easter brings renewed hope; hope that the occupation will be lifted and the violence will end, hope that their children will no longer feel constant fear, hope that peace will come to this land, hope that the message

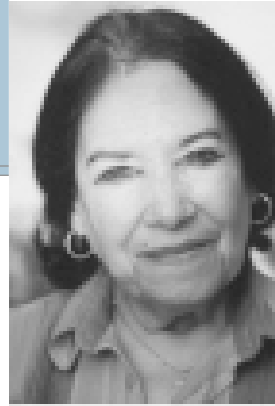


*The Separation Fence dividing homes from fields and towns.*

of Christ will be heard and there will be the release of the captives and freedom for the oppressed, hope that they will once again be able to go to their churches to celebrate the message of the One who was born here, who lived and worked and was a part of their daily lives here, who was condemned and suffered here, who carried our sins to the cross, here, who died here, and was risen from the dead, here, in this place where Christ’s presence is felt every day.

When Christians come from thousands of miles away during Holy Week to travel the Palm Sunday road or walk the Via Dolorosa they do not see those who have been faithful witnesses for 2000 years because the Christians of the West Bank are not permitted to do the same. They are locked inside their prisons called Bethlehem and Bethany and Beit Sahour, the Shepherd’s Fields. There are no Easter baskets or chocolate bunnies. There is no visit to the Church of the Resurrection. Instead they cling to the hope that Good Friday brings; that the Resurrection will come and all will be restored. For the Christians here know all too well that all things are possible through Christ. After all, he was one of them.

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# A Tribute to Fadwa Tuqan

Fadwa Tuqan was born in Nablus, Palestine in 1917. Tuqan was introduced to the art of poetry by her brother, the famous poet Ibrahim Tuqan. Initially a Romantic poet skilled in the traditional forms, she turned to free verse at the outset of the movement and wrote on a variety of personal and communal subjects. She soon became known as the Poet of Palestine. She passed away on Friday, December 12, 2003 at her home in Nablus.

## The heart said:

What have the troubles done to you, homes,  
And where are your inhabitants -  
Have you received news of them?  
Here where they used to be, and dream,  
And draw their plans for the morrow -  
Where's the dream and the future now?  
And where have they gone?  
The rubble stayed silent.  
Nothing spoke but the absence.

The Most Difficult Journey  
(Excerpt from Fadwa Tuqan's Diary written after the Six  
Day War of 1967)

My friendship and love for a number of Jews whom  
I got to know closely make me happy. I have felt the

warmth of their hearts and their true humanity. In their dealings with Arab people, they do not have any national condescension. While in their company I do not feel I am with people who belong to an enemy state that has stolen the land of my ancestors.

Let me make it clear that these feelings I have are not "naïve" or "simplistic." My feelings are purely human. I am fully aware of our Palestinian situation and of Israeli expansionist goals. This does not mean that I would put the blame on friends who are far from Zionist extremism. They are keen on making friends with Arabs and on building bridges of understanding and love between the two people. This, despite the desire of Zionist leaders who work on distancing the two people and destroying any bridges between them. My Israeli friends are excellent human beings who exert a lot of genuine effort in order to strengthen mutual understanding and human contact. They believe in co-existence with the Palestinians and do not deny our right to live in our homeland.

I have not met Yehudi Menuhin, one of the greatest violinists in the world. This great artist who has great international weight, is one of the staunchest defenders of Palestinian rights, not because of any enmity with Israel or disagreement with Jews, but because he is a Jewish man who speaks the truth.

# A Christian Zionist Primer

by Donald Wagner

## Part III REWINDING THE BIBLE PROPHECY CLOCK ISRAEL AND THE U.S. CHRISTIAN RIGHT (1948-1988)



The first lobbying effort on behalf of a Jewish state in Palestine was not organized nor was it initiated by Jews. It occurred in 1891, when the popular fundamentalist Christian writer and lay-preacher, William E. Blackstone organized a national campaign to appeal to the President of the United States, Benjamin Harrison. Blackstone gained notoriety through his national best-seller *Jesus is Coming (1882)*, which was his summary of the end-time premillennial doctrines. Blackstone saw the need for political support of the Jewish people when he heard the horrifying stories of the pogroms in Russia. He appealed to multi-millionaire friends such as John D. Rockefeller, the publisher Charles B. Scribner, and the industrialist J.P.Morgan to finance advertisements and a petition campaign that was carried in major newspapers from Boston to the Mississippi. Blackstone received support from most members of the U. S. Senate and House of Representatives, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and wealthy leaders such as the above-mentioned financial backers. Blackstone asked the President to support the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine but the appeal was rejected.

There is little record of significant political campaigns or public support for the Zionist cause after Blackstone's initiative, as fundamentalists began to withdraw from political activity following the Scopes' Trial and evolution battles. However, after a fifty year hiatus, gradual changes began after World War II. The birth of modern Israel in 1948 was viewed by conservative Christians as the fulfillment of certain prophetic Biblical texts. This previously small and marginalized school of Biblical interpretation called "premillennialism" suddenly began to assert itself within the larger evangelical Protestant community. Two political de-

velopments in the post-World War II era served to galvanize conservative Christians: the establishment of Israel and the Cold War. The two issues were usually linked by a plethora of preachers and authors who interpreted these political developments according to selected prophecy texts. According to their prophetic timetable, as the end of history approached, an evil global empire would emerge under the leadership of a mysterious world leader called the "Antichrist," and attack Israel, leading to the climactic Battle of Armageddon. Thus the new nation Israel was understood by conservative Christians to be at the center of these prophetic Biblical events, and thus Israel commanded unconditional financial and spiritual support.

When Israel captured Jerusalem and the West Bank (plus the Gaza Strip, Sinai, and the Golan Heights) in 1967, conservative Christians sensed confirmation that history had entered the latter days. L. Nelson Bell, father-in-law of evangelist Billy Graham and Editor of the influential journal *Christianity Today*, wrote in July, 1967: "That for the first time in more than 2000 years Jerusalem is now in the hands of the Jews gives the students of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible." The premillennialist approach gained popularity through a flurry of books, radio evangelists and television preachers. Hal Lindsay's *The Late, Great Planet Earth* has sold over 25 million copies, one of the best selling books in history. Lindsay's message popularized the dramatic premillennialist scenario for a generation of North Americans, essentially elevating Israel to the center of the historical scenario. Lindsay also developed a consulting business that included several members of the United States Congress, the CIA, Israeli Generals, the Pentagon, and the new Governor of Califor-

nia, Ronald Reagan.

### The Emerging Alliance

With the arrival of the American Bi-Centennial in 1976, several trends converged in the U.S. religious and political landscape, all pointing toward increased U.S. support for Israel and a higher political profile for the religious right. First, fundamentalist and evangelical churches became the fastest growing sector of American Christianity as the mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic branches were caught in a steady decline of members, budgets, and missions. Second, Jimmy Carter, an evangelical from the Bible Belt, was elected President of the United States, giving increased legitimacy to Evangelicals as *Time Magazine* confirmed when they named 1976 “the year of the Evangelical.”

Third, following the War of 1967, Israel gained an increased portion of the U.S. Foreign and Military budgets, becoming the “western pillar” of the U.S. strategic alliance against Soviet incursion into the Middle East, particularly after the Khomeini revolution pulled Iran from the U.S. orbit. During this period AIPAC and other pro-Israel lobby agencies began their ascent to power in shaping U.S. foreign policy. Fourth, the Roman Catholic Church and mainline Protestant denominations began to develop a more balanced approach to the Middle East, bringing them closer to the international consensus on the Palestine question. Pro-Israel organizations interpreted this shift as being anti-Israel and in turn began to court the conservative Christians. Marc Tannenbaum of the American Jewish Committee captured this sentiment when he told the *Washington Post*: “The evangelical community is the largest and fastest growing block of pro-Jewish sentiment in this country.”

The fifth development was the victory of Menachem Begin and the extremist Likud coalition in the Israeli election of

1977. Begin’s Revisionist Zionist ideology of establishing an “Iron Wall” of domination and his policies of annexation, militarization of the conflict, and accelerated construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, all found ready support within the U.S. Christian right. Likud’s tactic of utilizing Biblical names for the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and Biblical arguments to defend its policies (“God gave us this land”) found a resonance with the fundamentalist Christians.

A surprising development, perhaps the lynch-pin in forging the alliance, occurred in March, 1977, when President, Jimmy Carter inserted the clause “Palestinians deserve a right to their homeland” into a policy address. Immediately, the Israeli lobby and the Christian right responded with a series of full-page advertisements in major U.S. newspapers. The text stated in part: “The time has come for evangelical Christians to affirm their belief in biblical prophecy and Israel’s divine right to the land.” The text concluded with a line that took direct aim at Carter’s statement: “We affirm as Evangelicals our belief in the pro-Promised Land to the Jewish people. . . We would view with grave concern any effort to carve out of the Jewish homeland another nation or political entity.” The advertising campaign was one of the first significant signs of the Likud/Israeli lobby’s alliance with the Christian “right,” as it redirected conservative Christian support from Carter (a Democrat) to the Republican “right.” Jerry Strober, a former employee of the American Jewish Committee, coordinated the campaign and told *Newsweek Magazine*: “(The Evangelicals) are Carter’s constituency and he (had) better listen to them. . . The real source of strength the Jews have in this country is from the Evangelicals.”

### Reagan and Begin

By the time the 1980 elections were held, the political landscape had shifted in the Middle East and the United States.

“ There is little record of significant political campaigns or public support for the Zionist cause after Blackstone’s initiative, as fundamentalists began to withdraw from political activity following the Scopes’ Trial and evolution battles. ”

Carter's support of the Shah had a domestic political price as U.S. hostages were not released by their Iranian captors until U.S. voters cast their ballots, which resulted in the election of Ronald Reagan. Carter's inability to deliver the hostages was not the only factor in his defeat. An estimated 20 million fundamentalist and evangelical Christians voted for Reagan, most opposed to Carter's brand of evangelical Christianity that failed the test of unconditional support for Israel.

The power of the pro-Israel Republicans became a prominent part of the Reagan Administration with the President leading the way. On at least seven public occasions the former Hollywood actor expressed his belief in a final Battle of Armageddon. During one of his private conversations with Tom Dine (AIPAC director) Reagan said: "You know, I turn back to your ancient prophets in the Old Testament and the signs foretelling Armageddon, and I find myself wondering if we're the generation that is going to see that come about." The conversation was leaked to the Jerusalem Post and picked up across the United States on the AP wire. This stunning openness of a U.S. President with the chief lobbyist for a foreign government indicated the close cooperation that had developed between the Reagan Administration and the Israelis.

A little known feature of the Reagan White House was the series of seminars organized by the Administration and the Christian "right" with assistance from the Israeli lobby. One example occurred on March 19, 1984, briefing by Reagan's Middle East advisors in the State Department and AIPAC representatives. These sessions were designed to firm up the Republican Party's support from the Christian "right" while AIPAC and Christian Zionist organizations were encouraged to advance their respective agendas. The Christian participation, which averaged 150-200 in this series of gala dinner briefings in the White House, read like a "Who's Who" of the Christian right, including author Hal Lindsay, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Tim LeHaye (co-author of the Left Behind series), and Moral Majority strategist Ed McAteer. Several briefings were led by State Department official "Bud" McFarlane, one of the coordinators of the Iran-Contra scandal. Quietly working in the background was another Christian fundamentalist, Marine Colonel Oliver North.

Menachem Begin developed a close relationship with several leading fundamentalist clergy, such as Rev. Jerry Falwell, head of the Moral Majority, a favorite with Begin. Falwell received a Lear jet from the Israeli Government for his personal travel and in 1981 was honored with the Jabotinsky

Award in an elaborate ceremony in New York. When Israel bombed the Iraqi nuclear plant in 1981, Prime Minister Begin made his initial telephone call to Falwell, asking him to "explain to the Christian public the reasons for the bombing." He called President Reagan later. Falwell also takes credit for converting Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) from a critic of Israel to one of Israel's staunchest allies in the U.S. Senate, where he chaired the influential Foreign Relations Committee.

Late in the Reagan Era a number of sexual and financial improprieties within the fundamentalist Christian "right" began to erode its public support. Pat Robertson's ineffective run for the Presidency in 1988 led to a decline in the Christian right's political fortunes. Resilient as ever, the Israeli lobby was able to reassert itself in new forms with the election of another Bible-toting Southern Baptist President, Bill Clinton, despite his liberal social agenda. However, the peak period of the Christian Zionist/religious right influence declined after the Reagan Presidency, but it would return with renewed vigor after the September 11th, 2001 tragedy.

### Which word didn't you understand?

Someone once said they were not worried by the parts of the Bible they did not understand. What did bother them was the parts they did understand, and so it is with me. I am not worried by the parts of the Bible I have forgotten or never read, and I am not much bothered by the parts of the Bible and Christian teaching I cannot understand. What disturbs me are the parts that are so clear that it is not possible to understand them, such as the Beatitudes and some parts of the Sermon on the Mount, or the story of the sheep and the goats where Jesus says exactly what will happen to nations who allow the peoples of other nations to starve, for the only way to avoid the challenge of such passages is to pretend that Jesus meant something else or that, for some reason, what he says does not apply to us/

Roger Gray



“ We later interviewed a staff member of the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem that had previously interviewed Mor and investigated the problem. The U.S. Consulate had received a report on the persecution of Christian Palestinians that was a confidential internal document. ”

## Part IV Decline and Rise of Christian Zionist Influence

### CLINTON AND BUSH

During the Clinton era, the President increasingly inserted himself into the role of chief negotiator or personal convenor of the complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although his background had a hint of Southern Baptist evangelicalism, Clinton was more inclined toward the secular Labor Party in Israel and found a close affinity with Itzhak Rabin. Meanwhile, the Likud/Christian Zionist alliance opposed the Oslo Accords and found themselves on the political sidelines.

In 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu defeated Shimon Peres and once again Likud ideology and policies dominated Israeli policy. Netanyahu had long been a favorite of the Christian Zionists, a relationship that developed during his years as Israel's representative at the United Nations. Bibi was a frequent speaker at important Christian Zionist functions, whether the Feast of Tabernacles hosted by the International Christian Embassy-Jerusalem or the annual "National Prayer Breakfast for Israel" held in Washington, D.C. Within a few months of his election, Netanyahu convened the Israel Christian Advocacy Council, bringing seventeen American fundamentalist leaders to Israel for a political update on the situation in the Middle East. The tour concluded with a conference and statement that reflected Likud's political platform. The fundamentalist leaders signed a pledge stating "America will never, never desert Israel." Among the other pledges were a statement of support for Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights, and support of a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty. Each statement had Biblical citations and a veneer of evangelical Christian language.

The Christian Zionist leaders returned to the United States and launched a national campaign with full page advertisements in major newspapers under the banner "Christians

Call for a United Jerusalem." Of little concern to the Israeli leaders and the Christian Zionists was the fact that their political positions were in conflict with U.S. policy and could undermine the fragile negotiations on the Oslo process. Signed by Pat Robertson of the Christian Broadcasting Network, Ralph Reed, then director of the Christian Coalition (a conservative Christian lobby), Rev. Jerry Falwell, and Ed McAteer of the Religious Roundtable, the campaign was one of Likud's answers to the Clinton-Labor strategy. The campaign was also a direct challenge to the mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic campaign led by Churches for Middle East Peace that called for a "Shared Jerusalem."

Likud also turned to the Christian Zionists for help in offsetting the dramatic decline in contributions to Israel from the American Jewish establishment during the conflict between the Orthodox and Reform-Conservative Rabbis. When the latter cut back on their generous contributions to the Jewish National Fund (JNF) in the late 1990s, several Christian Zionist oriented churches were called upon to make-up the difference. The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, led by a former Anti-Defamation League employee and Orthodox Rabbi, Yechiel Eckstein, claimed to have raised more than \$5 million from mostly fundamentalist Christian sources. Rev. John Hagee, pastor of the Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, announced in February, 1997, that his church was donating more than \$1 million to Israel. Hagee claimed the funds would be used to help resettle Jews from the Soviet Union in the West Bank and Jerusalem. "We feel like the coming of Soviet Jews to Israel is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy," Hagee stated. When asked if he realized that support of Likud's policies and increasing the settlements was at cross-purposes with U.S. policy, Hagee answered: "I am a Bible scholar and a theologian and from my perspective the law of God transcends the laws of the United States govern-

ment and the U.S. State Department”.

The Netanyahu government utilized the American Christian Zionists in yet another strategy as they sought to undermine the already faltering Oslo negotiations. A broadcast on October 22, 1997, by Kol Israel (Israel Radio) claimed that the Palestinian Authority (PA) was persecuting Christians. Two days later, the Jerusalem Post published an article claiming that according to classified information made known to the Government of Israel, the few remaining Palestinian Christians faced relentless and brutal persecution from the “predominantly Muslim PA.” The report alleged that “Christian cemeteries have been destroyed, monasteries have had their telephone lines cut, and there have been break-ins in convents.” It went on to claim that the PA had “taken control of the churches and was pressuring Christian leaders to serve as mouthpieces for Yasser Arafat and opponents of Israel.” Within a month, U.S. Congressman J.C. Watts (R-OK) reiterated these charges in a Washington Times editorial piece, blaming Arafat for the Christian exodus from the Holy Land and calling for a review and possible freeze on the \$307 million in grants pledged to the PA from the United States. The campaign grew, thanks in part to publicity generated by the editorials of A.M. Rosenthal and William Safire in the New York Times and pressure exerted on Congress by Michael Horowitz, a pro-Israel lobbyist. .

Palestinian Christians were quick to denounce the charges. Mayor Hanna Nasser of Bethlehem, a Palestinian Christian, stated: “Our churches have complete freedom, and I’ve never heard that they’ve been under pressure.” In May, 1998, international Evangelical leader “Brother Andrew,” President of the Netherlands based Open Doors, and I (Don Wagner) led an investigation of the Israel charges on behalf of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding. We interviewed more than 60 Muslim and Christian leaders as well as people at the grass roots throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip as well as political leaders from the PA and government of Israel. We found no evidence of PA or Muslim persecution of Palestinian Christians, although there were three isolated cases of Christian-Muslim family disputes over intermarriage. The most telling interview came from Uri Mor, Director of the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs in the Department of Christian Communities, which oversees all Christian activities in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Mor noted that the charges were traceable to David Bar-Ilan, Netanyahu’s chief spokesman. Mor told our EMEU team that Bar-Ilan uses shreds of information as his “bread and butter” in the propaganda campaign against the Palestinians.

We later interviewed a staff member of the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem that had previously interviewed Mor and investigated the problem. The U.S. Consulate had received a report on the persecution of Christian Palestinians that was a confidential internal document. Upon investigation, the Consulate determined that the basis of the report came from four Palestinians who had converted to Islam. Two had criminal backgrounds and the others were suspected of collaborating with the Israeli secret police. They were converted to Christianity by a Messianic Jewish evangelist who resided in an Israeli settlement. The PA had imprisoned the converts based on their criminal activities, not their conversion to another religion. Apparently, Bar-Ilan’s office leaked the report to the International Christian Embassy-Jerusalem, the Christian Zionist organization with a close relationship with Likud. The Christian Embassy-Jerusalem then published the stories and launched a campaign against the Palestinian Authority that eventually reached the U.S. Congress. After its investigation, Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (EMEU) issued a statement that clarified the issues, citing “disturbing indications of political motivations were behind the publicity about Christian persecution” in the Holy Land. The Christian Zionist campaign against the PA came to a halt but undoubtedly the tactic will be pursued again.

### **An informed anger**

People who are angry at injustice are compassionate people: they are filled with passion and they do not make docile citizens: angry people (slaves and free people) forced the end of slavery in the British empire; angry people (men and women) won the vote for women; angry people (black and white) brought an end to apartheid in South Africa. Angry people can change the rules .... Compassion enlivens and empowers the heart and mind so that with an informed anger we ask questions.

“ In the spring of 2002 Israel responded to the Passover suicide bombing by reinvading the West Bank and conducted a devastating siege of Jenin, including the bulldozing of much of its refugee camp following a fierce resistance. ”

## Part V THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

In the spring of 2002 Israel responded to the Passover suicide bombing by reinvading the West Bank and conducted a devastating siege of Jenin, including the bulldozing of much of its refugee camp following a fierce resistance. The international community brought persistent pressure on US President George W. Bush demanding that he order Ariel Sharon to withdraw the Israeli military forces at once. A stern looking President stated at an April 2, 2002 press conference: “Withdraw! Withdraw your troops now!” At that point the Rev. Jerry Falwell and other Christian Zionist leaders working closely with the pro-Israel lobby organizations responded by mobilizing tens of thousands of telephone calls, emails, and letters to the President, according to a CBS-TV “Sixty Minutes” report of 6 October 2002, demanding that the President refrain from criticizing Israel and that he allow the Israeli army to finish its job in “fighting terrorism.” After this pressure, George Bush refused to ask Sharon to withdraw the Israeli troops and the Israeli Defense Forces intensified its bombardment of Jenin and other West Bank cities and refugee camps. In the same “Sixty Minutes” report, long-time Christian Zionist spokesman and Israeli advocate, the Rev. Jerry Falwell commented: “Evangelical Christians now know that they can count on George Bush to do the right thing for Israel every time.” Falwell added: “the Bible-belt is Israel’s safety net in the United States.”

Christian Zionist organizations and the pro-Israeli lobby are among the significant special interest groups that have converged since the election of George W. Bush to shape the new administration’s policy toward the Middle East, and for that matter, much of its foreign policy. Among the other powerful movements to converge are the neo-conservative ideologues, the multinational construction agencies (Halliburton, Bechtel, etc.), and the military industry. These are but some of the important movements whose interests have converged in the Bush administration. In some respects, most of these organizations and political tendencies were

already lined up and waiting for the proper moment to exercise to their new-found power and goals. The tragic events of September 11, 2001, provided the occasion for these movements and trends to unite in such a way that they have the primary forces that have shaped the policies of the new Bush administration.

Space permits only the most surface treatment of one of these movements, the fundamentalist Christian Zionists. Conservative Christians have been the fastest growing sector within the Christian churches of the United States since the late 1960s. Estimates of the number of evangelicals range from 100-130,000 million, out of which 20-25% would be classified as fundamentalist (20-26 million Americans). Of the fundamentalists, most but not all would be inclined to support the Christian Zionist position. A recent poll by Time/CNN noted that 59% of evangelicals polled believe the Battle of Armageddon, Rapture, and rise of the Antichrist are literal historical developments that will occur in the near future. The most important nation to play a role in the fulfillment of these prophetic events will be Israel, which many of the fundamentalist Christians understand to be God’s favored nation. These views are the fertile ground in which the Christian Zionist movement finds its popularity and political clout.

Today, the Christian Zionists are the largest potential base of support for the militant Likud government’s pro-Israeli interests in the United States. Working slowly but steadily since the late 1970s, the pro-Israel lobby has been able to mobilize both economic and political support for the state of Israel via the fundamentalist sector. For example, a relatively new organization, Stand for Israel, has emerged in the past two years to work closely with AIPAC to hold rallies and mobilize political support on behalf of Sharon’s policies. On April 2, 2003, Stand for Israel held a convention and lobbying day immediately after the annual AIPAC na-

“ The international community brought persistent pressure on US President George W. Bush demanding that he order Ariel Sharon to withdraw the Israeli military forces at once. ”

tional convention, utilizing many of the same speakers and policies that were central to the AIPAC meeting. Former US Presidential candidate Gary Bauer and a co-founder of Stand for Israel, addressed the Christian convention and urged attendees to oppose the “Roadmap” and any exchange of land for peace. Bauer stated: “Whoever sits in the confines of Washington, and suggests to the people of Israel that they have to give up more land in exchange for peace, that’s an obscenity.” Others present at the Stand for Israel dinner reflected the intimate relationship the Bush Administration shares with the Christian right and the pro-Israel lobby, including U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Daniel Ayalon, U.S. Senator Sam Brownback, Southern Baptist Convention leader Richard Land, and House of Representatives Minority Leader Tom DeLay. DeLay and Congressman Tom Lantos, perennial advocates of Israel’s interests in the House of Representatives, received the first annual “Friend of Israel Award” from Stand for Israel, for their success in leading Congress to pass House Resolution 392, restating the strong solidarity of the United States with Israel in their joint stance against international terrorism.

Thus by combining the forces of the most powerful political lobby in Washington, DC, (AIPAC and its various networks) with fundamentalist Christian pulpits, radio, and television, these united forces are capable of bringing significant political and economic pressure on every vote in the Senate and House, as well as on the Bush Presidency. Their support of Ariel Sharon’s militant Likud ideology is unquestioned and usually supported by selected Biblical footnotes. Such policies as increased Israeli settlements, preemptive assassination of Palestinian leaders, Israeli sovereignty over all of historic Palestine (especially Jerusalem), and more recently the expulsion of Yasser Arafat and the mass expulsion of large sectors of the Palestinian population, will find ready support within the Christian right. At the fall 2003 meeting of the powerful Christian Coalition, a fundamentalist Christian political organization, Israeli Cabinet member and Tourism Minister Benny Eylon re-

ceived strong support from the organizers and audience, despite the fact that he advocates the “transfer” of Palestinians to other Arab countries.

It seems that at this juncture of the Bush Presidency, the administration lacks both the political will and necessary counter pressure to hold Israel in check. The latest casualty appears to be the once lauded “Roadmap”, which now seems doomed in the trash heap of proposals and international resolutions to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this year of preparation for a Presidential election, Bush and his advisors will be reluctant to hold Israel accountable for its ever tightening “Iron Wall” strangulation of the Palestinians, let alone increased aggression against other Arab and Middle Eastern nations. Perhaps George W. Bush learned a lesson from his father’s administration, led then by Secretary of State James Baker. When Israel requested \$10 billion in loan guarantees to offset its economic woes incurred during the first Intifada, Bush Sr. and Baker withheld the loan request due to Israel’s rapid expansion of its illegal settlements. However, when the Bush campaign realized in September of 1992 that it was losing to Bill Clinton in the polls, it allowed the funds to be transferred to Israel. George W. Bush seems less likely to take similar risks, realizing that the political forces that have converged, including the critical Christian right and pro-Israel vote, are capable of making or breaking a President.

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Sabeel thanks the Daily Star and its editor Rami Khouri for permission to reprint the text which appeared as a 5 part series during September 9-13, 2003.

# Snapshots of our Activities

Not even the blossoming almond trees and early spring can uplift the spirits of a desperate people, who continue to endure the hard, cold winter of oppression and violence. If the first three months of 2004 are an indication of the coming year, where are the chances for peace? Who can give us hope? No wonder that the cries of “how long, oh Lord” are getting louder. Amidst all obstacles, Sabeel pursues its ministry, trusting that God’s Will will be done.

## PROGRAMS

The annual retreat/visioning that sets the tone for the year was held, once again, at the Sisters of St. Joseph’s sanctuary in Abu Gosh. Sixteen staff, board and volunteers, including two from Nazareth, participated in a bible study led by the Rev. Ross Jones of St. George’s College. Dan Simmons, World Vision International, facilitated and guided the group through the evaluation and strategizing process. Though Sabeel’s theme for the year will be “Challenging Christian Zionism”, the equally important needs of the local community will not be neglected. Sabeel will be considering a new structure and division of labor, retaining the ‘movement’ and ‘ministry’ aspects within necessary organizational lines. Filled with energy and determination, the Sabeelers returned to Jerusalem renewed and focused.

## CLERGY

The 24 hours annual retreat was extended to 48 hours and was held on January 20-22 at the Franciscan Sisters Pilgrim



House on the Mount of the Beatitudes. The Rev. Naim Ateek reflected on the Sermon on the Mount and Liberation Theology in the Old Testament personified in Jonah.

The first clergy meeting of the year was held on March 9. The eight priests present continued discussions, started last fall, on Christian Zionism. As in the past years, as well, several of the clergy participated in the Advent and Lent Programs and the Christmas dinner.

## WOMEN

On December 5, 28 women joined in the spiritual tour to St Stephen's Orthodox Church and the Russian Church of Mary Magdalene. At both places, the scriptures related to



the sites were read and reflections shared. The rest of the morning was spent visiting the Princess Basma Center for the disabled, a model of faith translated in community service. An exquisite lunch was served in a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. For many participants, including several newcomers, this was a novel experience.

On December 19, a very cold and snowy day, Zahira Kamal, Minister of Women's Affairs and Eileen Kuttab, Director of Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University discussed challenges of "The Geneva Initiative" with a group of Chris-

tian and Muslim women at Sabeel.

The first meeting of 2004 was on January 30 when over 40 women (again some new faces!) joined in the second spiritual tour. The first stop was at the Russian Convent on Mt of Olives, an inspiring refuge for a considerable number of Palestinian nuns then they went to pray and reflect at "Dominus Flevit" the tear-shaped chapel overlooking Jerusalem. Again, the sites were "new" for many... The imposing presence of the new "Nof Zahav" settlement bordering the fence of Maison d'Abraham in Ras-a-Amoud, where they were to spend the rest of the day, was a shocking reality. Once behind the gates of the retreat center, they enjoyed a simple meal and a lecture given by Naim Ateek who challenged the women to choose their own participatory role in serving and building our community. In the questionnaire identifying future programming needs, the women shared an overwhelming need for deeper understanding of the gospel made relevant in their daily lives.

As preparations for the 5th International Conference take most of the staff's time, no other 'special' women's programming was organized for the spring yet the majority of the attendees in the Lent course and pre-conference meetings were WOMEN!



## YOUTH

Sixty-eight young adults participated in a lively workshop held at the Catholic Action Hall in Bethlehem at the end of November. Dr. Jacqueline Sfeir and Father Jamal Khadder facilitated this first encounter which focused on the problems and challenges of adolescence and the growing phenomenon of marriage between different faiths and traditions.



On January 16, about 30 young leaders came to an organizing dinner at Sabeel during which Sabeel's proposed plans of activities for youth were discussed.

A joint Youth/Women program held on February 4 at the Maison d'Abraham brought together over 20 teenagers and 12 mothers for a full day of discovering each other's needs and grievances. Widad Saadeh, the social worker, assisted in bridging the generation gap through honest talk and genuine love.



On February 26, 28 young members of De La Salle, St. Francis and Young Christian Workers (YCW) participated in a workshop on "The Reality of Christian Youth in Jerusalem." Supported by Dr. Bernard Sabella, the young presenters, Rami Munayyer, and Randa Koa' identified social and economic needs of the youth and Suheil Asfour discussed their spiritual needs.

On March 22, British and Scottish youth from Christian Aid and Iona Community met with Palestinian youth members at Sabeel. Though they spoke about joint youth concerns such as education and family life, the events of the day, specifically the assassination of Hamas leader Ahmed Yassin, could not be ignored. Visitors were interested in understanding how youth deal with the occupation.



## COMMUNITY BUILDING

The Advent and Lent series are the axis of spiritual food offered to the ecumenical Palestine Christian communities. The Advent theme, "the true light which enlightens everyone was coming to the world" (John 1:9) was appropriately chosen to give hope during the very dark times. Father Maroun Lahham, Archmadrte Atallah and the Rev. Suhail Diwani respectively presented the Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican interpretations at three separate encounters. Hymns from the same traditions were also shared.



The end of season celebrations were completed in the Annual Christmas Dinner held at the Seven Arches Hotel on the Mt. of Olives.

Abeer Nusqyr, accompanied by Tony Yamini on the guitar, both from Nazareth, raised the spirits of the over 130 local and expatriate singers including a small group from Nazareth. The ecumenical family, represented by clergy and lay people, praised the Lord together and prayed for peace.

For Lent, Sabeel Jerusalem adapted the Lent course prepared by FOSUK "Challenging Illusion" to meet the needs of the local community. Under the heading, "Who do you say I am" Temptation, Justice, Peace and Hope were directly linked to Jesus Christ, our model for resistance, perseverance, salvation and silent victory.

Father Mina, a Coptic priest from Jericho, taught about "temptation" on Mt. Temptation. The over 90 Jerusalem and Jericho participants gathered together in the large cave.



Prior to the lesson, the text was read in the small chapel by the Orthodox priest, Father Atallah and Father Francois, the Franciscan priest of Jericho who had helped organize the crossing of the Jerusalem bus. The rest of the day was a socializing, fellowship and educational sharing with the Jericho participants over lunch, a visit to YWCA and a shopping spree to support the economy of the winter resort town suffering from the Israeli closure.

The second lesson, "Justice," started with a painful tour of the Jerusalem settlements, a stop at the arrogant and disgraceful Wall towering over Abu Dis, and an even more depressing view of the latest confiscation of land and new settlement expansion in Sawahre. The Amos text, taught by



Rev. Naim Ateek, struck close to the heart and minds of the participants (largely women).

Bishop Paul Sayyah of the Maronite Church concluded the series on March 16, teaching about Peace and Hope based on the texts. As participants chanted "make me a channel of your peace" it was evident that this Lent period accentuated by an increasing cycle of violence, temptations and suffering, would help us understand better the crucifixion for the sake of all humanity.

As the 'snaking' wall devoured more land and crept closer to Jerusalem, Sabeel invited Jamal Jum'a from PENGON (the umbrella of five environmental organizations) that started the 'Stop the Wall' campaign to brief an audience from Jerusalem about the latest developments on December 17, 2003. The presentation showed the dangers of this latest





threat of the Israeli occupation. Jonathan Kuttab analyzed the alarming situation from a theological perspective.

On March 4, a large crowd filled the Episcopal Hall in Ramallah to listen to Naim Ateek's introduction to Christian Zionism. A small group had even come from Jericho! Several women from Jerusalem had also crossed the dreaded check-points for this pre-conference event. Unfortunately for the Sabeel staff, the return to Jerusalem was over a two hour long wait at Qalandia. The pre-conference meetings in Bethlehem and Jerusalem will be held on March 31st and April 1st respectively.

## OTHER NEWS

Three staff members, Sawsan Bitar, Haya Di'des and Rhonda Amer, participated in the "Communication" series workshops held by MEATRC (Middle East Association for training and retreat centers) at the International Bethlehem Center. Sabeel warmly welcomes Louise Gleich from CMS, England who will be with Sabeel for a year.

Fadi Khoury has joined the international department to help with the conference, Sabeel is glad to have a male addition to the overwhelming female presence there!

We have had many wonderful visitors over the past months from the following groups: Churches for Middle East Peace, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel, Tantur, DanChurch Aid, TriFaith Minnesota Women, Christian Peace Team, KAIROS (see details in IFOS snapshots), Christian Aid, and the Iona Community. Particular appreciation is given to our friends from Wales led by Val Martin who spent a day volunteering to make the Sabeel office a more beautiful place.

## NEWS FROM NAZARETH

**Young Couples:** The Young Couple program continues to blossom. In their monthly meetings the focus was on: Christian Family as addressed by Father Elias Daw on January 23; Christian Education as addressed by Professor Nader Bshouti on February 21. The Young Couples also followed up on their first encounter with Ilan Pappé, the historian, who, on December 5, had given a lecture entitled, "We are slaves of history." Along with Jewish young couples, they organized a visit to his residence on February 9. They also met with Father Labib Copti, the Roman Catholic parish priest from San Francisco, during his recent visit to the country on March 10. On March 12, they started to study "Palestinian Liberation Theology" as in the Arabic version of Justice and Only Justice. Naim Ateek, author of the book, gave an introduction to his work.

**Pre-conference:** Over 130 eager participants attended the pre-conference lecture on Christian Zionism presented by Rev. Naim Ateek on March 13 at the YMCA.

**Trips:** The highlights of the Nazareth Sabeel Programs are the Sunday educational and spiritual trips with guide Anton Farah. On February 1, the sites visited were Megiddo, Caesarea and Mr. Carmel. Mass was celebrated in Issifya village. On March 7, the 'pilgrims' re-visited Saffourieh (Zipporis) and Beisan. Father Elias Kurzum conducted Mass in Tabgha.

**Other:** Members of the Sabeel Nazareth Committee met with clergymen Ibrahim Sam'aan and Suheil Bakkhish, chaplains of the Nazareth Hospital, to discuss programs. A donation of 1650 NIS collected by the committee of spiritual services was offered for the support of Sabeel's ministry in Nazareth.

**Visioning:** Sabeel-Nazareth presented and discussed its plans and budgets 2004 on March 13-14. The potentials and needs for service in the Galilee are innumerable, and Sabeel-Nazareth is willing to accept that challenge.



# S n a p s h o t s

International Friends of Sabeel supports the work of Sabeel through education, advocacy, conferences, solidarity visits, and financial contributions. Regional chapters have been established creating a network of friends throughout the world who work in partnership with Sabeel to help bring about a just and durable peace for Palestine and Israel.

## International Friends of Sabeel (IFOS)

have been very active these past few months with hosting conferences and extending their outreach and effectiveness through increasing memberships, establishing new regional chapters, and participating in our latest Solidarity Visit. We are happy to announce the establishment of our latest IFOS chapter in Ireland. If you are interested in their activities or becoming a member, please see their contact information on the back cover of Cornerstone.



### Friends of Sabeel-Ireland (FOS - IR)

Friends of Sabeel-Ireland reports, "We were very pleased with the positive response to the wood crafts from Bethlehem which were sold at various places round the country. We were able to contribute to Sabeel's funds from these sales. Our Friends of Sabeel brochures were available at most venues and our membership is increasing as a result. We are watching the International Court of Justice deliberations on The Wall and continue to keep you all in our prayers."

## Friends of Sabeel-North America (FOS-NA)

We have just completed two conferences: Seattle on February 13/14 and Salt Lake City on February 21. Sabeel regional conferences are an effective tool for broadening awareness among Christians in different communities. Drawing on a rich pool of expertise in the fields of theology, biblical scholarship, church social justice teaching,

regional history, international law, foreign policy and political currents, Sabeel conferences are able to attract wide participation from an ecumenical audience by offering knowledgeable and experienced presenters. Our speakers are individuals who represent the Palestinian Christian and Muslim communities as well as the Israeli Jewish community-religious leaders, scholars, authors and activists. American presenters come from all three religious traditions and from secular strands within the Christian justice and peace movement. We are planning conferences soon in Dallas, Atlanta, and Minneapolis. A typical regional conference occurs during a weekend (Friday and Saturday) and features from four to six major presentations over the two-day event with opportunities between presentations for small, intimate workshop sessions with individual presenters. In addition to the presentations and workshops, a conference includes film showings, books and videos sale, Palestinian olivewood and other handicrafts, a Middle Eastern banquet and cultural entertainment (such as dabke dancing, music, poetry). These events have been very effective in spreading the Sabeel "mustard seed conspiracy" for justice and peace.

## Canadian Friends of Sabeel (CFOS)



Canadian Friends of Sabeel continues to focus on the expansion of local groups and membership. While co-sponsoring various local speakers and events over the past year,



our members are now beginning to plan for a cross country visit of Rev. Naim Ateek in October 2004. In addition, one of our local groups is planning for a film festival focussed on the Occupation and another is preparing for the presentation of the play, "Cries From The Land" which is set during the first Palestinian uprising in 1987 and depicts a day in the life of a young Palestinian boy who has been arrested for stone throwing. The interaction between the young boy and his captors encapsulates the conflict and the play celebrates the tireless efforts of Israelis and Palestinians who work together for peace. For further information contact [sabeel@sympatico.ca](mailto:sabeel@sympatico.ca).

Lastly, a national delegation of high-level Canadian church leaders, laypeople, and staff visited the Middle East in March. KAIROS, Canada's largest ecumenical organization, is a partnership of eleven churches and church-related organizations committed to positive social change on a wide range of issues in Canada and in the global South. In the Middle East, KAIROS works in partnership with Palestinian and Israeli groups to promote a peace that is just for both peoples. This mission was a response to a request from the Middle East Coun-

Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.  
*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

cil of Churches for Canadian Christians to come to the region to witness and support people in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Lebanon who are working for peace. Members of the group met with Sabeel in Jerusalem. Our chair, Robert Assaly, assisted in the briefing meetings to prepare the delegation for their visit.

For more information visit [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org).

#### Friends of Sabeel-UK (FOS-UK)



reports that on Tuesday, March 16, Dr. Marc Ellis was scheduled to speak at Chester Cathedral. Marc is a Jewish Theologian and a professor at Baylor University in Texas. The lecture was entitled "Israel-Palestine - Where do we go from here?" The FOS-UK office will also hold a lunch-time vigil on Monday during Holy Week in commemoration of Deir Yassin, the anniversary of which falls on Good Friday this year. They have asked that churches remember Deir Yassin and plant an olive tree in remembrance.

Rev. Naim Ateek, director of Sabeel-Jerusalem will be in the UK from May 17-28. Contact the FOS-UK office for details.

If you are interested in becoming a member of International Friends of Sabeel, please contact:  
IFOS coordinator - Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, P.O, Box 49084 Jerusalem  
91491, Palestine via Israel

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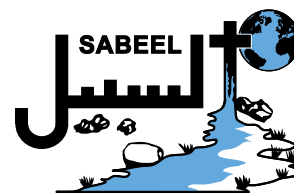
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## Purpose Statement of Sabeel

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

*Sabeel* also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on *Friends of Sabeel* groups in your area please contact our International representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.



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