

CORNERSTONE

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Photo by Jan Willem Stamm/FOSNL

Rev. Mitri Raheb preaching in front of the Separation Wall at the Opening Worship Service for Sabeel's 8th International Conference in Bethlehem.

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Faithfulness and Resistance

By Naim Ateek

This issue of Cornerstone is dedicated to Sabeel's 8th international conference which was held in Bethlehem, Feb. 23-28, 2011 under the theme: Challenging Empire: God, Faithfulness, and Resistance.

The conference attracted over 300 people from 15 different countries. It was a comprehensive experience for our international and local participants, with worship, Bible study, lectures, testimonies, group discussion, workshops, field visits, and a variety of other first-hand experiences with the local Palestinian community.

The local context

For many years now, the Palestinians have been conscious of their life under a basically global American Empire of which Israel is an extension and essential strategic partner. The local expressions of this Empire are felt by its Palestinian victims on a daily basis – the belligerent occupation, the settler form of colonization, the excessive use of military force, the oppressive system of control, the manipulation of laws and regulations that humiliate and oppress people, the presence of an apartheid wall, the dehumanizing checkpoints, the subtle and not so subtle policies that aim at stripping the Palestinians from their land and pushing them out.

Indeed, one of the main characteristics of this Empire is Israel's disregard for human rights and International Law; and its adamant refusal to recognize Palestinians' national right to independence and sovereignty. As far as the Palestinians are concerned, the hegemonic influence and control of Empire over their lives has become extensive and unbearable and the international community has been impotent at stopping the grave injustice and oppression.

The international context

What has been truly significant is the awareness of some biblical scholars and theologians of the global dimension of American Empire. Consequently, they started alerting the world to the dangers and threats of Empire and challenging people everywhere to look at it in light of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ about the kingdom of God. For more than twenty years, a growing number of theologians (by and large Americans) have given special attention to the question of Empire. A mere sample of these books reflects

the concern of these theologians (not to mention more secular writers): *Binding the Strong Man* (1988); *Engaging the Powers* (1992); *Paul and Empire* (1997); *Unveiling Empire*, (1999); *Matthew and Empire* (2001); *Jesus and Empire* (2003); *The Roman Empire and the New Testament* (2006); *God and Empire* (2007); *America, Amerikkka: Elect Nation & Imperial Violence* (2007); *The arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (2008) as well as others. The relevance of this research has been incalculable when we consider the global impact of Empire on people's lives.

The regional context

As we were in the thick of our preparations for the conference, suddenly, a new context began to emerge and impose itself on us. The whole Middle East region erupted with revolutions against the ruling regimes. We could not believe how relevant and timely the theme of the conference had become. The first revolution started in Tunisia and was soon followed by Egypt and later Libya, Yemen, and Syria. These revolutions were initiated and led by young adults who were seeking change. The magic words heard all over the region

are: freedom, liberty, human rights, human dignity, and democracy. The cry is against corruption, dictatorship, abuse of power, nepotism, misuse of state funds, poverty, oppression of people, restrictions of civil liberties and many others.

Within these changing and fluid contexts, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center has been aware of the fact that due to its growing military power, Israel's arrogance has increased and so has its oppression of the Palestinians. Since it has been unable to bring the Palestinians to their knees and exact from them further concessions, no peace seems possible because Israel refuses to comply with the demands of international law. Consequently, Israel's link with American Empire has made it more stubborn and belligerent and its influence on the American Congress has hindered the American Administration from playing a constructive role in the achievement of a just peace.

The challenge

In light of this impasse, how can we be faithful to God and to our human values as we daily interface with Empire? Weak as we are how can we challenge and resist Empire? What does Christian radical discipleship mean for us today



Sabeel 8th International Conference staff and volunteers.



Photo by Alex Wakileh/Sabeel

Over 300 people from 15 different countries participated in the Conference.

and for our friends who also live in the shadow of this global Empire?

What we did in the conference was clear and simple. We started by mapping Empire and then through organized visits in the Jerusalem and Hebron areas we saw Empire in its various expressions. We juxtaposed that with the experience of Jesus with the Empire of his day and with the experiences of the early Christian community as expressed through the Gospel of Mark.

At the same time, we gained insight from the experience of our brothers and sisters of South Africa who provided us with a model of resistance and faithfulness to God. And in order to deepen the experience of our participants, we heard the testimonies of local speakers – Christians, Muslims, and Jews – that addressed the theology, politics, media, economics, culture,



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faithfulness and resistance...
To be faithful to God is to resist the vileness of Empire;
and to resist is to be faithful.

and education which Empire uses in order to maintain its hegemony on the Palestinians.

The conference clarified the close relationship between faithfulness and resistance. Both went hand in hand. To be faithful to God is to resist the vileness of Empire; and to resist is to

be faithful. For the followers of Jesus Christ, it is essential that resistance must not use the tools and tactics of Empire but those that are in line with peaceful and nonviolent methods.

After exploring and being equipped with the various ways of nonviolent resistance, the conference came to an end when all of us participants, locals and internationals, gathered in praise and song as representatives of a global community of faith around the table of Christ to receive the spiritual food and nourishment for the journey ahead. With renewed commitment of faith and love of God and neighbor and with strong determination to continue to challenge the snares of Empire, we pledged to work for peace based on truth and justice.

The Rev. Ateek is the Director of Sabeel



Photo by Alex Wakileh/Sabeel

Conference Group photo below the title of the conference painted on the Separation Wall.

Sabeel 8th International Conference Statement

To Our Friends and All People of Conscience:

As the margins of Empire began to crumble in the Arab world, Sabeel's Eighth International Conference convened in Bethlehem inside the prison walls of imperial rule. We, the participants, 300 people from 15 countries, met from 23rd to 28th February, 2011, to discuss "Challenging Empire: God, Faithfulness and Resistance," surrounded by the unavoidable and cruel effects of empire's rule on the Palestinian people and their land.

We heard how Jesus resisted the arrogance, violence and repression of Empire and became a model for us when he drove out the money changers and confirmed the people's independence from Caesar. Jesus helps us overcome fear and stand in solidarity against Empire. We must follow his example and pray for his courage to resist imperial power, aligning ourselves with the poorest and most oppressed. We met the victims of Empire in refugee camps, at checkpoints and in their homes, where they courageously persist in the face of unrelenting oppression. We saw them resist the theft of their homes, fields and water, challenging us to confront Empire in our own countries and in the Holy Land.

We support the Kairos Palestine document and encourage all Christians to read it and act on it. Confronting the root

causes of the conflict, this document urges all Christians and people of conscience to help end the military occupation that deprives Palestinians of their rights and condemns both peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, to a distortion of their humanity. We see boycott and divestment as non-violent tools for justice, peace and security for all. We say to the churches: come and see. You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Our word to the international community is to stop the double standards, and insist on the enforcement of international law and U.N. resolutions regarding the Palestine-Israel conflict.

As we depart this conference we hold the United States responsible for the obstacles it has placed in the path of peace, including its veto of a U.N. resolution that condemned Israeli settlement building in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, contrary to U.S. policy stating that settlements are illegal.

We will carry all that we have seen and learned here to our homes and families, our churches and governments, along with the challenges we have accepted for ourselves and our communities.

Bethlehem, Palestine, 28 February, 2011
www.kairospalestine.ps

Ten Starting Points for a Spirituality of Nonviolence and Resistance to Empire

Excerpts from lecture by John Dear

1) A spirituality of resistance is a spirituality of nonviolence.

Nonviolence is not a tactic or a strategy, and it is certainly not passive. It is a new way of life.

2) Our spirituality of resistance is based in the nonviolent resistance of Jesus and in discipleship to Jesus, the nonviolent resister of Empire.

The Garden of Gethsemane. Here come the Roman soldiers, and what did St. Peter do? ... He got out his sword to kill the soldiers, thinking that in all of salvation history, if violence was ever justified this was it. But then the commandment came as Jesus said: "Put down the sword." We are not allowed to kill. These are the last words of Jesus to the church, and it is the first time they truly understand him and his nonviolence.

3) It reclaims the nonviolence of God and claims our core identity as God's beloved sons and daughters.

When Jesus calls us out of Empire and into justice and peace, he speaks of a God who ... does not create or bless Empire but wants us as God's children to live in the fullness of life.

4) It means we are contemplatives of peace and nonviolence.

We live in relationship with the God of peace, and so we spend time every day with God in silent prayer, contemplation, and meditation... We are invited to let go of our inner imperial tendencies [and]... to welcome God's gift of peace within us so that we can radiate personally the peace we seek politically, so that our very presence is disarming.

5) It begins with a practice of personal, mindful nonviolence toward ourselves and others.

We must practice non-cooperation with the Empire's occupation of our lives and souls... looking deeply within at the causes of our violence and not beat ourselves up but try to cultivate interior nonviolence.

6) Our Palestinian sisters and brothers show us that a spirituality of resistance is a way of life.

For Palestinians... just living and breathing is an act of nonviolent resistance... We in the West have to relearn making nonviolent resistance our

daily practice for the rest of our lives.

7) A spirituality of resistance is prophetic. It breaks the silence, complicity and acceptance of Empire and war. It publicly denounces Empire and the false spirituality of violence and announces justice and peace.

8) It means being visionaries of a new world of nonviolence.

We are new Abolitionists: We are announcing a new world without walls, occupation, apartheid, rubber bullets, and tear gas. We are announcing the abolition of war, poverty, racism, sexism, nuclear weapons, and environmental destruction!

9) It is a spirituality of the cross, of taking up the cross as nonviolent resistance to Empire, of carrying the cross of nonviolent resistance to Empire.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said we have to learn how to use suffering creatively... Instead of inflicting violence on others, we accept suffering without even the desire to retaliate as we pursue justice with love for all people.

10) A spirituality of resistance is a spirituality of hope and resurrection.

Beware the push for immediate results, for success. That is the language of Empire, of the Pentagon... There is an inverse proportionality: the more we are in charge and try to do it all, the less happens. The more we let go and risk and walk forward in faith to resist Empire, the more happens. So take risks, trust God, and place your hope in God!

Eighty- five nonviolent revolutions have taken place in the last 25 years. Recently, Mubarak fled from Cairo! The occupation can end, nuclear weapons can be abolished, world hunger can end. The Empire will fall... I urge you to keep your eyes on the risen Jesus, to cultivate what gives hope, to do hopeful things, to lift up the vision of a new world of nonviolence, and to go forward in hope.

Fr. Dear, S.J. is a priest, peace activist, organizer, lecturer, and author/ editor of 25 books on peace and nonviolence.

The Call to Discipleship: Resist Colonizing Economics!

Excerpts from lecture by Ched Myers

The first noteworthy aspect of Mark's story [of the call of the first disciples (Mark 1:16-20)] is that Jesus' ministry begins with the matter of fact statement that Jesus emerges into his public vocation "after John is arrested by Herod." In his later flashback account of John's execution (6:14-30), Mark explains the circumstances surrounding these events, making it clear that it was John's public criticisms of Herod's personal and political policies that got him thrown into prison and eventually killed. ... Of all the mentors Jesus might have chosen to "initiate" him through baptism in the wild waters of the Jordan (Mk 1:9), why does he make his way to this politically notorious prophet? Perhaps the attraction was John's clear self-identification with the radical tradition of the wilderness prophets. Indeed his costume—camel hair skins—is symbolic, invoking the memory of the great prophet Elijah (2 Kg 1:1-17), who also challenged the royal house. Moreover, Elijah's story lacked "closure," since he disappeared into heaven—at the Jordan (2 Kg 2:6-14). His was a subversive memory indeed. ...

A second interesting thing to note about how Mark introduces Jesus is his hometown. Jesus is introduced as hailing "from Nazareth in Galilee" (1:9). Despite the fact that this village was obscure (being otherwise unattested in ancient literature), Mark emphasizes it throughout his story (1:24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6). What was, however, significant about Nazareth was that it lay a mere three miles southwest of Sepphoris... After Herod's death in 4 BCE, a major Judean insurrection broke out, and the historian Josephus tells us that one of the most important skirmishes was the sacking of the royal armory at Sepphoris. In retaliation, Varus, the Roman legate of Syria, razed the city and sold the Jewish rebels to slavery...and Herod Antipas ordered that it be reconstructed as a modern Roman city. When it was completed, he brought in a new population of loyal functionaries and workers—to replace the former inhabitants who had been killed by Varus's legions or sold off into slavery.

If we assume that Jesus labored as a carpenter/construction worker in Nazareth, an hour's walk from Sepphoris, then it is highly likely that he worked there rebuilding the city. The trauma of Sepphoris' destruction and reconstruction as an imperial city right at his doorstep would have had a profound impact on his consciousness, infusing in him a keen sense of the travails of Empire.



Photo by Nicolas Atallah/Sabeel

Sabeel Young Adults from the Galilee, Jerusalem, and the West Bank volunteered at an ancient church in the remains of the depopulated Palestinian village of Saffurya. Like Sepphoris before it, in 1948 Saffurya was destroyed and its residents expelled to neighboring Nazareth.

➤ The trauma of Sepphoris' destruction and reconstruction as an imperial city right at Jesus' doorstep would have had a profound impact on his consciousness, infusing in him a keen sense of the travails of Empire.

This brings us to a third notable aspect of Jesus' introduction in Mark. He comes proclaiming the "gospel" (Greek euangelion; see 1:1), a term that was polemical and political. ... Gerd Theissen, in *The Gospels in Context*, believes that Mark's use of euangelion "would have had a special ring to it" in Palestine toward the end of the Roman-Jewish war in 69 CE: It was here that Vespasian had been proclaimed emperor. Josephus calls the news of his proclamation as emperor "good news": "...Every city kept festival for the euangelia and offered sacrifices on his behalf."

But Mark's "good news" is challenging, not parroting, imperial propaganda. It implies that Caesar's hegemony is being eclipsed by a powerful prophet who has been anointed by the rebel John the Baptist in Jordan's holy waters, and who heralds the restoration of Yahweh's true sovereignty.

Mr. Myers worked for three decades with many peace and justice organizations and movements before founding Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, where he works with his wife, Elaine Enns.

Resistance at Home

Excerpts from lecture by Andreas van Agt

Before addressing the situation in my country, the Netherlands, I want to express my deepest respect and admiration for all those, here in Palestine and also in Israel, who struggle peacefully for a just solution to the conflict, for an end to Israel's military occupation. These courageous peace and human rights activists are my source of inspiration. They are the ones that have extended a moral duty to me to work for peace and justice as long and as much as I can. I salute these heroes of justice and peace for their seemingly endless energy, their endurance and their ability to keep hope alive...

How sad it is that Israel persists in stealing land, thus darkening the prospects for peace! And how frustrating, indeed infuriating it is that the international community stands by and lets it happen, or worse, in fact encourages Israel to build more settlements.

How else should we interpret the recent veto by the United States of the UN Security Council resolution condemning the settlements, the text of which was based on language the US had previously used itself when criticizing and even rejecting the settlements? How can the US veto a resolution that confirms that the settlements are illegal and a central obstacle to peace? It is stunning, not to say absurd...

[However,] there is reason for hope. A little over a year ago, on 8 December 2009, an important development took place in Europe. Under the courageous leadership of the government of Sweden, the European Union adopted promising and strong positions on the Middle East peace process. The EU declared that it "will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties." Moreover, it reiterated that

"settlements, the separation barrier where built on occupied land, demolition of homes and evictions are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-state solution impossible." The EU urged Israel "to immediately end all settlement activities, in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, including natural growth, and to dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001." With regard to Jerusalem, it recalled that it has never recognized "the annexation of East Jerusalem." And it concluded that the continued policy of closure of the Gaza Strip "is unacceptable and politically counterproductive."

For the Palestinians, all of this may not matter much in the short term. However, they have every reason to believe that they do not stand alone in their struggle for self-determination. Sooner or later, they will be freed from occupation and colonization, a prospect that is also in Israel's true interest. ...

Nations of the civilized world have a compelling moral duty to reach out to rescue the trampled Palestinians, as the State of Israel violates International Law, continuously and flagrantly. No explanation is needed here. There are on record conventions of human rights law, as well as treaties of humanitarian law regulating warfare and occupation. Yet, Israel has disregarded the rulings given by the highest court on the earth, the International Court of Justice located in the Netherlands, which has clearly spoken out against the separation wall and the illegality of settlement building.

Prof. van Agt, former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, launched The Rights Forum in 2009, a foundation which promotes a just Middle East policy of the Dutch government and the European Union.

View from the Bethlehem Hotel, where the conference was held, of Bethlehem in the valley overshadowed by the illegal Israeli settlement Har Homa on the far hill.



Challenging Empire: A Conference Reflection

By Richard K. Toll

The timing was right for the Sabeel conference held in Bethlehem on February 23 through 28. Challenging Empire: God, Faithfulness and Resistance was a fitting theme for the conference in view of events happening in the Middle East. Though it had been planned over a year ago, it was as if the conference was planned *after* Tunisia, *after* Egypt.

Our opening service was near the checkpoint in Bethlehem, an early morning worship facing the 27-foot high wall on which those words of the conference title had been writ large in colorful spray paint. On our right stood a guard tower with an armed Israeli guard overseeing everything we did. To our left in the distance was the huge Israeli settlement of Gilo, which continues to expand down the hills into Beit Jala, overtaking more and more Palestinian land. Many Palestinians worshipping with us could not go into Jerusalem, just four miles away, due to travel restrictions.

Conference participants coming to the region for the first time were overwhelmed by what they saw and eagerly got up at 5 o'clock in the morning to experience the checkpoints before breakfast. They observed as Palestinians, including children, were forced to wait in lines to go through the checkpoints. This was just the beginning of the conference.

Bethlehem was the perfect place to hold the conference. The local Palestinian Christians were pleased to host us and attended many presentations and workshops. They obviously felt uplifted by the speakers and supported by so many internationals coming to their town. Here we were, sitting in the midst of a military occupation that has lasted since 1967, with eighty-five percent of Bethlehem confiscated by Israel for the wall, settlements, by-pass roads and military installations. The people of the Bethlehem area represent



The Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba of Cape Town, South Africa, preaching at the Church of All Nations in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Photo by Alex Wakileh/Sabeel

a community that has been occupied, threatened and diminished over the years in the name of security—the new god of Israel.

I have a memory that is embedded in my soul. I was a deputy to the 1990 national convention of the Episcopal Church in Anaheim, California. I sponsored two resolutions that initially passed in both the House of Deputies (clergy and lay) and the House of Bishops. The first advocated a two-state solution based on international law. The second opposed settlement activity in the West Bank and again stressed international law. Both of these resolutions passed in our legislative convention in 1990 and remain the official policy of the Episcopal Church in the United States—21 years ago! Yet, the church still struggles to be faithful to its call to stand with the oppressed. I remember a visit from members of the Jewish Federation in New York who were invited to speak on the resolutions. One comment I will never forget: “No one can tell Israel what to do.” That comment remains the official policy of the state of Israel, ignoring international law and continuing a policy of military occupation. Some in the church go along with it. U.S. official policy opposes Israel’s settlement expansion, yet the U.S. again vetoed attempts to condemn Israel’s settlements in a recent vote in the United Nations.

The Sabeel conference in Bethlehem highlighted these contradictions of policy in church and state. Israel and the U.S. are the oppressive EMPIRE in the Middle East, but hopefully the “Arab Spring” is providing the challenge by which change will happen. Occupation will end and the two-state solution will prevail.

The Rev. Canon Toll is the chair of Friends of Sabeel North America.

Blessed are the Meek

Excerpts from the sermon by the Rev. Mitri Raheb

Matthew, chapter 5, verse 5: “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the Earth.” ...

As we think about this verse, it seems that Jesus is mistaken about the meek inheriting the Land. The military occupation is in control, not only of the land but also of the resources, the water, and the electromagnetic fields. Everything is controlled by the Empire. ...

However ... I learned after my long struggle with this text that we have to read it not just from the perspective of the last sixty years, but we have to take the last 3000 years all at once.

Now look! We have a long history with Empires. There is not one single regional Empire that did not occupy our country. ... Think about it -- which of these Empires lasted forever? None of them, for they came and stayed for 50, 100, 200, 400 years, and then they were all gone with the wind. ...

Empires come and go, but who remains in the Land? The poor remain. Even now the people of the Land who are successful immigrate and become part of Empire. Those who



“Empires come and go,
but who remains in the
Land? The poor remain...
the meek inherit the
Land.”

are well educated go to seek jobs created by Empire. Who remains in this country? The meek remain. Empires come and go; the meek inherit the Land. ...

The moment Jesus spoke those words, Empire lost its power over us. This is actually what we are experiencing today in the Arab world. Millions of young people have lost their fear of their Empire; they really understand that Empire is not here to stay. We can come close to the wall and we can start shattering it because it will be gone one day. God will not do it alone. He will do it only with us.

The Rev. Dr. Raheb is Pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, President of Diyar, one of the authors of the Kairos Palestine document and author of I Am a Palestinian Christian.

God, Faithfulness and Resistance

Excerpts from the sermon by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba

Perhaps the most important lesson is vulnerability, and here I want to affirm the model that Jesus gives us in his anguished wrestling in Gethsemane. As Anglicans, we found it hard to hold together through the apartheid years in South Africa. Tensions between church and prophetic theology were very real, very painful.

There was an even harder debate around the armed struggle, deeply complicated by the fact that Anglican chaplains served with the government's armed forces, which were brutalizing our own parishioners in South Africa and in the front-line states.

Only through daring to meet each other in the shadow of the cross, not only discussing with our intellects but laying bare our broken hearts and battered souls, were we able to hold together.

... Dealing constructively with painful and divisive issues can only happen if we are prepared to share with profound honesty and acknowledge our differences. This requires a degree of mutual vulnerability that is very challenging. That

would certainly be the case amongst those who live here, especially when we recall how much blood has been spilled around the question of Jerusalem.

Yet, paradoxically, the difficulty of the task should give us courage. For engaging in mutual vulnerability can help overcome our tendency to objectify others by putting us in touch with what we share as human beings. Only through embracing complete vulnerability was Jesus able to be wholly one of us and so win our redemption.

This is the key to genuine dialogue where all are granted the dignity to tell their stories on their own terms and to be heard respectfully; only then can people begin to trust one another. Only dialogue can build trust. And without trust, none of us can find reconciliation, and none of us can go forward on the journey to the lasting justice and peace for which every society cries out.

Archbishop Makgoba is the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town and Metropolitan of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

Glimpses of Our Activities

Photo by Sara Brubacher/Sabeel



In a joint Jerusalem-Nazareth program young adults from the Galilee, Jerusalem and the West Bank plant olive trees in Beit Jala to save the land from being taken by a nearby illegal Israeli settlement.

Photo by Enas Geraisy/Sabeel



A workshop for the Sabeel Young Adults in Nazareth about how to live in and face a pluralistic society.



Photo by Enas Geraisy/Sabeel

Families from Nazareth participating in a Way of the Cross in Jerusalem on an Easter Trip that also included a holiday performance in Bethlehem. Sabeel Jerusalem later led a Contemporary Way of the Cross, combining the Stations of the Cross with prayers for the suffering in Palestine today.



Photo by Dirma Said/Sabeel

150 women from Jerusalem and several villages in the Galilee and the West Bank visiting the Church of the 10 Lepers in Burqiin on a joint Jerusalem-Nazareth Sabeel Clergy and Women program that also went to Kufur-Qud and Zababdeh to build community, discuss challenges that face women and pray together.

Photo by Sawwan Bitan/Sabeel



One of the weekly Sabeel Jerusalem combined Clergy-Community Programs for Lent, visiting the Notre Dame Douleurs home for the elderly in Abu Dis, a suburb of East Jerusalem.



Photo by Nicolas Atallah/Sabeel

An Easter Egg Hunt and games co-organized by Sabeel Jerusalem and the Catholic Scouts for 140 children from disadvantaged families in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Glimpses of the Conference



Evangelical Lutheran School's Dabkeh Group performed Dabkeh, Palestinian folklore dance, in the Cultural Event at Terra Sancta Boy's School in Bethlehem.

Photo by Alex Wakileh/Sabeel



Photo by Ryan Rodrick Beiler/MCC

Nasser Ghawi addresses a group at the weekly demonstrations that protest house evictions and the occupation in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah during the Witness Empire at Work Jerusalem day.

Photo by Alex Wakileh/Sabeel



Ched Myers and Elaine Enns leading a workshop on Restorative Justice, Political Violence and Peacemaking as one of the twelve presentations/workshops from International, Israeli and Palestinian activists.



Photo by Alex Wakileh/Sabeel

Sabeel staff working in the Conference Resource Room, which offered free publications from organizations, housed the Nakba Photo Exhibit, and sold books, Sabeel products and local Palestinian crafts.

Resistance Through Culture

By Sara Brubacher

It is dark. A single floodlight shines just bright enough to enable a crane to lower the metal pieces of a stage down into the Tombs of the Kings, a historical site in East Jerusalem under French jurisdiction. We continue to watch the short video as the workers rapidly progress, turning an empty archaeological site into a beautiful stage-front with seating for 800 people. The Jerusalem Festival of Arabic Music is ready to begin!

Why, one might ask, is the stage set-up for a major music festival forced to begin in secret, in the middle of the night only 36 hours before the opening concert? This is just one of the many challenges of the Israeli occupation that Rania Elias faces as the Director of Yabous Productions.

During one of the presentation/workshops of the Sabeel Conference, Ms. Elias told us how a devastating effect of the Israeli occupation is the conscious suppression of Palestinian culture. This is especially the case in East Jerusalem, which not so long ago was the cultural, educational and economic center of Palestine, and is still where Palestinians hope to make their capital of a future state. However, since the closure of the West Bank and Gaza in 1993 and now even more with the separation wall, Palestinians have been cut off from Jerusalem. Today an eerie stillness settles over East Jerusalem in the evening: a stillness that used to be full of events and bustling people; a stillness that I have often experienced as I lived in East Jerusalem while volunteering at Sabeel this past year.

Yet since its start in 1995, Yabous Productions has organized festivals and events centered in East Jerusalem in an attempt to keep Palestinian culture alive and flourishing in this culturally and religiously diverse city. They have faced many obstacles, from performers not being able to come due to visas being denied, to moving locations for a Jerusalem Literature Festival after it began due to Israeli Police closing the venue, but still each year the festivals and events continue to grow. And while festivals come and go, this spring the Yabous Cultural Center is opening in East Jerusalem, after years of delays from the Israeli Jerusalem administration, as a more permanent professional performance facility.

Ms. Elias presented such a strong voice for the importance of culture as a form of nonviolent resistance. She truly

Since its start in 1995, Yabous Productions has organized festivals and events centered in East Jerusalem in an attempt to keep Palestinian culture alive and flourishing in this culturally and religiously diverse city.

embodies the strong, independent and beautiful—inside and out—Palestinian woman, and it is women like her that I have grown to love and look up to during my time here. A question at the end of her presentation drew out her personal story of struggle as a woman from Bethlehem who fell in love with and married a man from East Jerusalem, but whom Israel will not allow to live in Jerusalem with her family. She does so any way, “illegally” under Israel’s standards, and leaving Jerusalem to come speak to us in Bethlehem was actually a risk. But it is these acts of nonviolent resistance and sumoud, steadfast resilience, which have kept the Palestinian spirit alive. And as Palestinians keep up their popular resistance through culture and other means, we as internationals can walk in solidarity, tell the world about the Palestine that we know, and support a just peace through advocacy and boycott, divestment and sanctions.

Ms. Brubacher is an eleven month volunteer at Sabeel who is working on a degree in Peace and Conflict Studies and Religious Studies at the University of Waterloo in Canada.



Photo by Alex Wakilebi/Sabeel

Sabeel staff usher the Conference Cultural Event in traditional Palestinian dress called “thoub”.

“One Person, One Vote, All Equal.”

By Anne Clayton

Having only recently seen the film “Little town of Bethlehem” which features Yonatan Shapira as one of three men’s journey to nonviolence, I had the privilege of meeting him when he came to give a Seminar at Sabeel’s Conference in Bethlehem. Yonatan was an officer in the Israeli Air Force and flew hundreds of missions over the territories in a Blackhawk helicopter squadron during the course of his eleven year career. One of the actions that shocked Yonatan into his refusal to obey orders was the action of a fellow Israeli pilot who fired a 1-ton bomb from his F16 fighter jet, as ordered, at a house in Al-Derredg, where a suspected Palestinian terrorist was staying. Yonatan identifies Al Deredg as one of the most crowded districts of Gaza, and indeed of the world. Besides the targeted Palestinian, 13 local people were killed in that attack: 2 men, 2 women, and 9 children, one of whom was 2 years old. 160 other people were wounded in the explosion. He considered the means used in the attack, a 1-ton bomb, and its goal, the assassination of one man, to be wildly disproportionate to the attack’s predictable collateral effects, and a violation of the rules of engagement of which all Israeli soldiers are aware. Those rules, as Yonatan has understood them, include the obligation to refuse to obey orders that are clearly illegal and immoral. Not long after this incident he became a prominent Israeli “refusenik,” authoring the Pilot’s Letter – a 2003 statement signed by 27 Israeli pilots who publicly refused to fly missions over the Occupied Territories.

Yonatan then went on to co-found “Combatants for Peace” a prominent organization in the growing Israeli Refusenik movement. He is active now in supporting non-violent Palestinian actions in Sheikh Jarrah, Bil’in and throughout the Occupied Territories. (He was, in fact, arrested last January at a demonstration in Sheikh Jarrah.) He has said that as an IDF officer and even as a leader in the Israeli peace movement he came to realize that the most important way he can serve now is



He has said that as an IDF officer and even as a leader in the Israeli peace movement he came to realize that the most important way he can serve now is to “stand behind” Palestinians in their non-violent campaign for liberation.

to “stand behind” Palestinians in their non-violent campaign for liberation. In his seminar, after giving an outline of his journey, he went on to describe some of the situations that he had most recently been involved in supporting. One was in the Negev where the Bedouin are being moved from their homes to allow trees to be planted, all in the name of some Christians who funded a huge project to plant a million trees in the desert. He described the anguish of the people as they retreated into a smaller and smaller space, eventually ending



Photo by Jan Willem Stamm/FOSNL

Yonatan Shapira, former IDF pilot who is a prominent Israeli “refusenik” and author of the Pilot’s Letter, led one of the twelve presentations/workshops from International, Israeli and Palestinian activists.

up just beside the cemetery, only to find themselves surrounded by newly planted trees almost immediately.

He gave us a new acronym to remember, PEPSI, which stands for “Progressives except for Palestine”, talking of his Jewish community in the States, who are democratic and strong supporters of Human Rights on everything – except Israel. He learned this in the US, where he goes to work to earn money to fund his peace work back in Israel. He is not allowed to work at home.

One memorable moment in the question time was when he was asked by one of the Palestinians present what he hoped for as an outcome for peace. His answer was that the only way forward was one Democratic State. He was then asked what did that State look like and he said “one person, one vote, all equal.”

He was unassuming in conversation, and humble; he listens and speaks with respect and is open, intelligent and knowledgeable in his answers. The impression was of a man who was committed to real peace no matter what the cost. He also mentioned that his family is supportive of his work – his father “is not quite there yet” but respects his activism and his mother is “the most active of them all.”

Ms. Clayton is the Coordinator of Friends of Sabeel UK.

Excerpt from Statement by South African Participants

In solidarity with the Palestinians' longing for peace with justice, a group of six South African Christians attended the 8th International Sabeel Conference in Bethlehem.

The group, reflecting a complexion of race, gender, denominational and age spread, resolved to:

- Support the Sabeel conference's statement, especially with regards to the call for BDS as a call to non-violent resistance of boycott, divestment and sanctions towards the state of Israel.
- Support and welcome to South Africa a group of Palestinian Christians in April 2011. These courageous Palestinians and Christians were involved in the drafting and promotion of the Palestine Kairos Document.
- Urge all South Africans, especially people of faith, to continue to pray for a lasting and just peace in the Holy Land and for the people of this area at this time of their history. We cannot be free until all are free.

- Create "kairos moments" in our own contexts and communities concerning the Palestinian struggle against its occupation by Israel and the general situation regarding Israel and Palestine. This means: in each one's context we will challenge anything that seeks to kill and demean humans by using non-violent means to bring about just solutions.

Signed,

The Most Revd Dr Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Rev Madika Sibeko, Methodist Church of South Africa

Rev Sithembiso Zwane, Ujamaa Centre, Univ. KwaZulu Natal

Dr Stiaan van der Merwe, Kairos Southern Africa

Rev Solomuzi Mabusa, School of Religion and Theology, Univ. KwaZulu Natal

Rev Juan Minnie, Peace Support Outreach, EG Bible College

A Rhyme for the Sabeel 8th International Conference

February 17, 2011

By Samia Khoury

At Sabeel nowadays every one's as busy as a bee
 Yet Staff and volunteers manage to maintain the glee
 Sometimes not knowing whether they're going or coming
 Amidst all the hustle and bustle they end up humming
 The program seems finalized after the 25th draft
 And the worship service is done with lots of craft
 Speakers have confirmed and moderators chosen with care
 All share responsibilities and all know what to bear
 With no agent or coordinator this conference is unique
 But to the minutest detail our director has to critique
 No matter how busy, at one we stop for lunch
 As Maha walks in with treats for the whole bunch
 Bless you all for your commitment in those stressful times
 You've been my inspiration for writing these rhymes

Ms. Khoury is the Treasurer of the Sabeel Board.



Photo by Alex Wakileh/Sabeel

Yasmeen Children's Choir from the Magnificat Institute moved conference participants through song during the Cultural Event at Terra Sancta Boy's School in Bethlehem.

Selections from Conference Participant Evaluations

- Hearing and seeing the occupation first hand during the Witness Empire at Work days puts the matter in one's heart, not just one's head; it gave the lectures flesh and humanity. They were both the most difficult and hopeful parts of the conference.
- A more explicit connection could have been made between the larger empire and the Witness Empire at Work trips in Hebron and Jerusalem areas (such as money trails etc...).
- As a Palestinian Christian, I appreciated being integrated into the tours: crucial for local Palestinians to witness these things as well.
- My first experience to the appalling reality of Hebron strikes me as worse than what I know of South Africa.
- Worship at the Wall was a powerful way to get us started, spiritually and emotionally; Ched Myers was the glue of the conference. My thoughts by the end of the conference keep coming back to his 2 sessions and also to the worship at the Wall
- The Bible study was excellent and the worship good, but time needed for peaceful entering and reflection; a good space could have been created for the conference at the worship.
- Worship opportunities were good, though mostly in Christian traditions that reflect a rather orthodox theology in liturgical form. A little more diversity would be excellent!
- The Bible study and Worship services were very helpful for my understanding of the true message of Jesus and for deepening my spirituality. The interpretation of Jesus as standing up to empire and seeing that much of Christianity is domesticated is a deep contradiction.
- The Sunday evening Cultural Event was lovely - I wanted to dance myself!
- The Cultural Evening was delightful and hope-full: youth claiming and celebrating their culture.
- Don't use "empire's yardsticks" when inviting speakers (success, published, educated, male, cleric, famous, etc). There were many people among the participants who are intelligent, experienced, diverse, well-spoken individuals who would have made wonderful speakers, especially if their voice comes from somewhere other than "the center."
- As Ched Myers said "We can and we must do better to hear the voices of our sisters..."
- Absolutely first rate organization of the conference; first rate staff. Excellent, seamlessly moving a very large group around. Only suggestion: less food.
- Thank you for making us feel "at home."

“We refuse to be enemies”: Witnessing Empire at Work in Hebron Area

By *Margriet Westers*

When I applied for Sabeel’s 4th Young Adult Conference in the summer of 2009, I never would have thought how it would change the years ahead of me. I was studying Theology and had one more year to go for my bachelor’s degree. Going to the Holy Land at almost no cost (thanks to some organizations who helped fund the trip) sounded like a great plan to me, but I was not really prepared to see the many checkpoints, the ugly separation wall, and the Bantustans that Palestine was about to become. During one of the days we visited Bet Omar, a village just north of Hebron, where we had an unpleasant encounter with Israeli soldiers checking our ID’s and demanding that we leave that “dangerous” place.

But in February 2011, one and a half years later, I was back in Bet Omar. From September 2010 to March 2011, I



People learn to live with occupation, but I wonder how it affects those children from Bet Omar, whose fear of imprisonment is more than a simple nightmare.



Daher Nassar speaking to the Sabeel Fall 2010 Witness Visit group at Tent of Nations; his family has struggled for years to keep the land which they have owned since the Ottoman Empire.

volunteered at Sabeel especially for the 8th International Conference, “Challenging Empire: God, Faithfulness and Resistance”. Two of the Conference days were appointed to experience “Empire at Work” in the Hebron and Jerusalem areas. On the Hebron day, together with my Palestinian colleague Nicolas and a bus full of conference participants, I visited Bet Omar again – the “dangerous” place that we are not supposed to know or visit.

First, we headed down to the Tent of Nations to meet the Nassar family. To me, the Nassars are a great example of unconditional forgiveness and love. Surrounded by settlements of the Gush Etzion block south of Bethlehem, this family has struggled for years to keep their land, land which they have owned since the Ottoman Empire. Though the court case with Israel has cost the Nassars tens of thousands of dollars, still the words engraved on the stone at the gate of their land reads, “We refuse to be enemies”. We had the opportunity to visit them, to listen to Daoud Nassar, to see the effects of the occupation on their daily lives and to learn from their creativity in resisting empire. For example, when Israel forbade the family to build a barn for their gardening tools, they instead bought a caravan

to put their tools in: "A caravan is not a building," Daher (Daoud's brother) told us.

After this visit, we drove further south to Bet Omar. While drinking Arabic coffee, we listened to many stories about the effects of the occupation in Bet Omar. We heard stories about children being arrested and imprisoned with the accusation of stone throwing. We heard stories about farmers who were not allowed to go to their lands, because their mere presence on their own lands would be a "danger" for the illegal Israeli settlers living nearby. We were impressed by the stories we heard and the perseverance of the villagers to stay in Bet Omar.

Knowing (better than we Westerners do) that nothing makes people love you more than a good meal, we were invited for lunch with five different families in Bet Omar. Like always, we were welcomed into houses of people we did not know and the food –traditional Palestinian mujadara, or rice and lentils – was really delicious. After the meal, we had a little time left and so went to the farmers' fields to see their daily demonstration against the neighboring Israeli settlement that is against International law and that sometimes prevents them from reaching their lands. Though we only saw a small portion of the demonstration, the empty tear gas canisters and rubber bullets all around us made it clear that these demonstrations were tense. Many Israeli soldiers were standing on the hills, prepared with gas masks and guns, while the farmers carried nothing but their flags.

Our group returned to Bethlehem filled with impressions, stories and images. Nothing had changed since I visited Bet Omar one and a half year ago. The soldiers, the settlement, the nightly raids – it was all still there. But the perseverance of the people, their generosity and hospitality were also still the same. People learn to live with occupation, but I wonder how it affects those children from Bet Omar, whose fear of imprisonment is more than a simple nightmare. However, meeting the Nassar family and the people of Bet Omar motivated and inspired all of us to continue to work for justice and peace for all the people in this land.

Ms. Westers, who volunteered at Sabeel from September 2010 to March 2011, currently studies Arabic Language and Culture at Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

Sabeel Fall 2011 Witness Visit

- Worship with Palestinian Christians and experience the realities of life under Israeli Occupation
- Meet with Palestinian Christians and Muslims as well as Jewish Israeli and international partners in non-violent resistance
- Learn about the loss of civil and property rights of Arab Israeli citizens

September 14 – 23, 2011

Nights in Bethlehem, Jerusalem and the Galilee

Cost: \$1,500 per person in a double room;
\$1,850 per person in a single room

This cost includes a non-refundable registration fee of \$300, all accommodations and meals for 9 nights, all transportation and honoraria during the visit. It does NOT include airfare or transportation to and from the airport.

For more information please email:
Maurine Tobin at mmtobin38@gmail.com or
sabeel@sabeel.org or call: + 972 2 5327136

Registration Deadline: 25 August 2011

Sabeel's 6th International Young Adult Conference
**Christianity in the East, Islam in the West:
Prophetic Voices from Palestine and Israel**
July 20 – July 31, 2011

For more information: www.sabeel.org

**We need your help! Sponsor young adult
participants from Palestine and the
Global South. If you are interested
please email youth@sabeel.org.**



Photo by Joshua Enns

Witnessing Empire at Work in Jerusalem

By Rhadia Qubty

Nabi Samuel is a West Bank village near Jerusalem located up on a hill that is surrounded by a valley swarmed with new illegal settlements built since the 1967 occupation. Thank God, the Mosque and dirt road up to the small village are maintained, but seeing all of the wire fences and security towers as watch dogs is disheartening to the Palestinian residents who can't move freely in their own village. The one room school and outdoor toilet is standing since the 1967 War... Sadly the scene seems in a stand still since the occupation!!

Lifta, now the remnants of a beautiful village on a hillside entering Jerusalem, is desolate since it was conquered in 1948 and all of its residents were expelled and scattered to East Jerusalem, the West Bank or neighboring Arab countries. While our group was listening to the story of Lifta, a Palestinian man carrying a flowering plant, with his wife and children, stopped by our group as we looked down the valley towards the village. It turns out Lifta was their original home village and they had brought their relative from Jordan to visit the grave of her parents at Lifta, which she had been forced to leave when she was 24 years old.

This scenario touched me deeply because it brought alive the continuity of Palestinian history and heritage. Indeed, this Muslim family's eagerness to visit the grave in spite of it being deserted and the woman travelling from Jordan, who was so glad to be able to see her home town and share the experience with her relatives and grandchildren, was just as if

The Palestinian depopulated village of Lifta, whose residents were expelled in 1948. The beautiful architecture still stands, bringing enjoyment to visitors and hopes of return to residents, but today the village is threatened to be turned into an Israeli luxury complex.

she came regularly according to traditional practice in their religion to express respect and honor to her parents by the visit.

From Lifta we drove to East Jerusalem, to the Sheik Jarrah neighborhood, where the bus let us down near a mixed crowd that demonstrates every Friday afternoon in objection to illegal Jewish settler's filtering into Palestinian homes and houses claiming it belongs to them...even though Palestinians lived there before and after 1967. I was so glad to join these people from various backgrounds—Jews, Palestinians, and Internationals—holding signs and Palestinian flags to assure all who pass through the area that we support and respect the International Human Rights of the Palestinians in hopes that the settlers will leave the Sheik Jarrah neighborhood.

Finally, as a Christian Palestinian Israeli I am very proud and appreciative to join in the field trips that Sabeel organizes in the various International Conferences. These lively experiences have opened my eyes and helped me to become more aware of and rooted in my Palestinian heritage and identity. Therefore my responsibility is to convey the true Palestinian story, historically, culturally and spiritually, locally and globally, instead of the majority of people relying only on the media.

Ms. Qubty is a Christian Palestinian Israeli who is an active committee member of Sabeel Nazareth.

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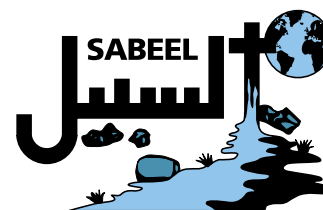
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PURPOSE STATEMENT *f* SABELL

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.

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