

CORNER STONE

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“ENOUGH”

By Jonathan Kuttab

In June, we will mark 40 years to the beginning of the Occupation

To Palestinian Christians, forty is a significant number. It reminds us of the days of Jesus' fasting in the Wilderness, before he was tempted on the Mount of Temptation in Jericho. This event resonates deeply with us at Sabeel as we try to make our faith relevant to the situation under which we live. Like Christians throughout the ages, we look to our scriptures for guidance, solace, and strength to cope with our present situation. Thank God, we do find it there.

For there is no doubt that the Palestinian people living under Occupation often feel lost in the wilderness with a sense of frustration, dryness, and despair at what seems to be an interminable and unending Occupation. An Occupation marked by dispossession, exile, oppression, human rights violations, restriction on travel and development,

discrimination, and the heavy hand of subjugation by others. A system where the most natural and normal aspects of everyday life are regulated and controlled by permits capriciously denied or sometimes cynically granted sometimes in return for collaboration and betrayal. We have wandered around and often doubted

wicked flourish and our oppressors only get bolder while our heartfelt cries for justice and deliverance fall on deaf ears.

We are not totally innocent either: We have not done enough to end the Occupation. We have often placed our faith in fickle and corrupt leaders, or trusted Arab friends who betrayed us, or an international community that simply did not care. We have been tempted to worship the Golden Calf of Armed Struggle and national chauvinism. We have made common cause with those who, like our tormentors, did not care whether they killed innocent non-combatants or legitimate targets in their struggle. Many have given up the struggle and opted for exile and negation of our identity and heritage.



whether our leaders had any idea where we were going or how to get there. Times of hope and sensing God's presence seem to be few and far between. We cry for deliverance, and it seems to be far away. Like the Psalmist we often feel that the

Yet this is also the season of Easter, the annual revitalization of spring, when seeds long dormant in the dry ground spring through the surface into blossoming flowers and fruitful plants. It is the season of hope and faith in a God who came

among us in the Incarnation, lived on this earth, experienced our suffering and anguish, and who has gloriously heralded by his resurrection the ultimate victory over death and the lesser forms of evil and oppression. As we contemplate the story of the Passion of Christ, we cannot help identifying his suffering with our own. More importantly, however, we identify with the promise of the Resurrection: that evil, oppression, and tyranny will not have the last word. Despite what may appear as a hopeless situation, God is still sovereign and the ultimate battle has been won. Christ's death on the cross, and his suffering, only opened the way to his Resurrection and ultimate victory. We know that the darkest hour of the night is the one that immediately precedes the daybreak.

And lest our friends think we are demonizing Jews or promoting anti-Semitism by making analogies between the suffering of Palestinians and the crucifixion of Jesus, let me reiterate that those responsible for the evils of the occupation are Zionist entities. The deliverance we seek from the evils of the Occupation is a victory for Palestinians, as well as Jewish Israelis. The promise of the Resurrection carries the message of reconciliation and a hopeful future for both peoples, after we pass through the arid difficulties of the wilderness, and the agonies of the Passion Week.

Jonathan Kuttub is a lawyer and member of the Sabeel board.

Memory Against Forg

By: Alian Weaver

Milan Kundera, in his novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, writes that "the struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." In contexts where the victors seek to erase the textual and material traces of the vanquished and to obscure the bloody means by which victory was obtained, acts of memory can become political acts, disturbing and challenging dominant narratives. Thus, when Palestinians make pilgrimage to the ruins of their ancestral homes in places such as Bir'am, Mujaydil, and Suhmata, walking around the remaining stones and narrating the life of the village and its destruction by the Israeli military, they re-create landscapes from which Palestinian presence has been removed, and name as a Nakba, or catastrophe, what prevailing Israeli narratives call redemption. Or when communities of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, or elsewhere in the diaspora compile "memory books" for their villages, collecting the history and folklore of places like Ein Hawd, Beit 'Itab, or Lifta, they put the more than 500 destroyed Palestinian towns and villages back on the map, thus sustaining the hope that exile will not be forever, that the day of return will not be postponed indefinitely. These acts of memory are embodiments of what the German Jewish thinker Walter Benjamin termed the historian's task of brushing against the grain of history, of disturbing the tapestry of official accounts and state narratives in pursuit of silenced lives and voices; the historian's vocation is thus a political vocation, to be an agent of memory against forgetting.

In describing Western Christian approaches to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the simple thing to do would be to contrast two phenomena. On

the one hand, one has Christian Zionism, with its luminaries, political action committees, and pop culture, all informed by a particular theology that reads the biblical story as pointing towards an apocalyptic end of history in which the founding of the State of Israel and the ingathering of the exiled Jewish people play decisive roles in precipitating the last battle of Armageddon in which Satan is decisively defeated. Not surprisingly, Palestinian aspirations and rights are at best irrelevant in such a theological vision; at worst, Palestinians are obstacles to apocalyptic triumph, obstacles to be removed.

To Christian Zionism one could contrast efforts by various Christian bodies to explore

"the struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

-Milan Kundera

efforts by various Christian bodies to explore "selective divestment" as a tool to pressure Israel to end its military occupation. These Western churches have ties to the Palestinian church and have been moved by their Palestinian co-religionists to work for justice. Or one could contrast Christian Zionism with the efforts of an ecumenical advocacy organization such as Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), which comprises a variety of Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox bodies, while Christian Zionists insist that all of Palestine is the exclusive patrimony of the Jewish people, CMEP advocates for an end to occupation and a just two-state resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (although CMEP, unlike some of its member churches, has assiduously avoided association with divestment initiatives, perhaps fearing that promotion of such initiatives would harm CMEP's effectiveness in its "inside-the-Beltway" context).

getting

This contrast, however, would fail to get at root questions that Western churches need to address. In comparison to the lurid and arguably heretical theology of Christian Zionism, the lobbying of Christian groups like CMEP for an end to occupation and in favor of a two-state solution, and the tentative engagement of Christian churches with divestment initiatives, are of course preferable. What is missing from CMEP advocacy work or from much of the tentative talk in church circles about divestment, however, is any sustained discussion of Palestinian refugees. For churches captivated by dispensationalist theologies for which Zionism and the founding of the State of Israel represent key events in the unfolding of apocalyptic scenarios, Palestinian refugees do not represent a particular moral problem; like all Palestinians, they are viewed as interlopers onto and usurpers of the territory rightly belonging to the Jewish people. For the so-called mainline churches, however, those churches that have been engaged in various forms of peace advocacy related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Palestinian refugees do represent a problem, for their very existence raises questions and issues that



Western churches would rather avoid. One finds precious little mention of Palestinian refugees, let alone refugee rights of return and restitution, in CMEP's writings or in the Middle East resolutions of mainline

Protestant churches. The reasons for this omission are various, but I would suggest that a fundamental reason is that facing the Palestinian refugee issue forces the church to determine what it thinks about Zionism and about Israel as a Jewish state.¹

Support for a two-state solution is

comfortable for many Western churches, because it allows them to say: "We affirm Israel's right to exist, we affirm Israel's legitimacy as a Jewish state, we're simply against the occupation." Calls to end the occupation fit easily into this framework; advocacy for refugee rights complicates the picture. Palestinian refugees thus fade from view (as do Palestinians inside Israel).

Two recent statements arising from Christian-Jewish dialogue initiatives exemplify the reticence of Western churches to undertake a thoroughgoing critique of Zionism. One comes from a Catholic-Jewish conference held in Buenos Aires in July 2004; the other is a May 2005 report emerging from a series of Jewish-Protestant conversations at the

University of Chicago.² Both statements follow the same line of reasoning: to question Israel's military occupation, with its attendant human rights abuses, might be legitimate, but what falls beyond the pale of acceptable criticism are questions concerning the justice of the State of Israel's founding or about the Zionist

¹ A point of nuance is in order here. CMEP and, for the most part, the mainline churches, are on record as officially endorsing the right of return of Palestinian refugees. The churches' uncritical embrace of the rhetoric of the two-state solution, however, time and again means that refugee rights are de-emphasized or qualified, Geneva Initiative-style, by a virtual affirmation of an abstract "right" of return coupled with a contention that any concrete realization of that right would be severely restricted. To the extent that the churches respond to the call of Palestinian civil society to engage in boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) initiatives, grappling with the refugee issue will become urgent, and unquestioned commitment to a two-state solution will come into question. After all, the Palestinian civil society call for BDS explicitly names refugee return as one of the major goals of the campaign.

² The "Joint Declaration" of the 18th International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee Meeting can be found at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20040708_declaration-buenos-aires_en.html. The Chicago document, "What We've Learned from Each Other: A Report on a Jewish-Protestant Conversation about the Israel-Palestinian Conflict," can be accessed at http://divinity.uchicago.edu/news/spring_2005/jewish-protestant_conversation.pdf.

project of establishing and maintaining a Jewish state. The Buenos Aires statement declares a “rejection of anti-Semitism in all its forms, including anti-Zionism as a more recent manifestation of anti-Semitism.” The report emerging from the conversations at the University of Chicago cautions that “those who criticize Israeli policies should take care to ensure that such criticism not threaten Judaism, the Jewish people, or the legitimacy of the State of Israel.” The Christian participants in the Chicago dialogue—whose liberal theological orientation is far removed from the fundamentalist orientation of Christian Zionism—proceed to affirm as an “act of justice the establishment of a Jewish state after two thousand years of Jewish exile, wandering, and homelessness.” The document thus draws on biblical imagery concerning the pain and anguish of exile, affirming the “Jewish state” as the antidote to homelessness. Such an approach both mirrors the standard Zionist “negation of the diaspora” (*shelilat ha-galut*) and appears to assume without question that the only political alternative to “exile” is exclusivist, nationalist sovereignty.

Both statements thus warn that critiques of Zionism and of the “legitimacy of the State of Israel” are akin to anti-Semitism. While “anti-Zionism” is left undefined, Zionism is implicitly defined by these statements as the movement to establish “a Jewish state,” so anti-Zionism must therefore be understood to be a theological or political position that at least questions if not opposes the justice of establishing and maintaining a “Jewish state.” Recognizing the State of Israel’s “legitimacy” is bound up, from this perspective, with recognizing it as a “Jewish state.” A reader of these documents is left with the understanding that Christians, while they might criticize particular Israeli policies or actions, should affirm Zionism and recognize the

justice of “the establishment of a Jewish state.”

What “Jewish state” means in these types of claims is often left undefined and ambiguous, the key issues at stake unarticulated. The key issue that often goes unstated in these claims is demography. In contemporary Israeli political discourse, the question of the Jewishness of the Israeli state is repeatedly tied to questions of demography. Proponents of the “disengagement” plan and of the wall argue that “separation” from Palestinians is required in order to project Israel’s Jewish majority from the demographic threat represented by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Israeli officials, meanwhile, when arguing against Palestinian refugee return, routinely describe calls to allow refugee return as attacks on Israel’s character as a “Jewish state.” Israel’s identity as a Jewish

“... acts of memory can become political acts, disturbing and challenging dominant narratives.”

state, on the terms of this political discourse, was and is thus tied to creating and maintaining a Jewish demographic majority within particular territorial boundaries.

This project, many Israeli demographers warn, is under threat. Haifa University demographer Arnon Soffer has been the most prominent of many Israeli voices warning of demographic disaster for Israeli Jews. The number of Palestinians between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea (that is, in both Israel and the Occupied Territories, or the boundaries of British Mandate Palestine), Soffer has warned, will

equal the number of Jews in that land by 2010. Israeli politicians from across the political spectrum view this demographic reality with alarm. Israeli public-opinion researchers Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann have found that “the strong desire for a separation, even a unilateral one, is connected to a fear among the overwhelming majority of the Jewish public regarding the emergence of a *de facto* binational state.” The fear of an emerging bi-national reality has been put most pointedly by Israeli Labor politician Avraham Burg. “I am not afraid of weapons and terrorism,” Burg notes. “I am afraid of the day that of all them [Palestinians] will put their weapons down and say: One man, one vote.”

Demographic fears, coupled with a commitment to Zionism understood in terms of a linkage of demographic hegemony and territorial control, explain why nearly all Israeli Jewish politicians concur in rejecting any significant return of Palestinian refugees to homes and properties inside Israel, arguing that this would threaten the Jewish character of Israel. That the PLO has continued to call (at least on paper) for Palestinian refugees to be allowed to return to their homes and properties if they so choose has been taken as a sign that the Palestinians reject Israel as a state. It is not sufficient, the argument goes, to recognize Israel (as the PLO did in the Oslo accords); one must recognize Israel as a Jewish state, its right to maintain a Jewish majority.

If “Jewish state” and Zionism are understood as projects to create and maintain demographic and political hegemony over a particular territory, then the following conclusions would flow from the Chicago and Buenos Aires critiques of anti-Zionism and affirmations of the “justice” of Israel as a “Jewish state.” First, the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians (Christians and Muslims) from their homes and villages in 1948 was, if tragic, also necessary. If Zionism meant creating a state with a Jewish majority in historical Palestine,

and if one affirms Zionism as a just vision, then one must view some form of “transfer” of Palestinians from their homes as imperative, even just. Second, it follows that any return of these Palestinian refugees that would undermine this Jewish majority must be prevented. The logic of the Chicago and Buenos Aires documents thus falls in line with the Israeli characterization of calls for refugee return as anti-Semitic threats to Israel's Jewish identity.

Western churches need to question this logic which links the Jewishness of Israel to exclusivist discourses of demographic and territorial control. Part of breaking this logic would mean for the churches to become much more vocal than they have been regarding support for the rights of Palestinian refugees. Such support will mean being prepared for the charge that one is anti-Semitic for supporting refugee return: by supporting refugee return, the argument will go, one opposes Israel as a Jewish state, and this is equivalent to anti-Semitism. Such charges are, of course, frustrating and painful in their unfairness, but this frustration and pain do not, to my mind, constitute reasons for avoiding a critique of Zionism or for being quiet about the rights of Palestinian refugees. However, even if the Western churches continue to ignore Palestinian refugees, realities on the ground will make a critical examination of Zionism more difficult to avoid. Championing the two-state solution has, one could argue, allowed mainline churches to avoid a serious evaluation of Zionism as an ideology and a practice. The two-state solution appeals to liberalism's sense of fairness: there are two peoples, so there should be two states. It also appeals to the Christian concern for

reconciliation: when the two peoples each have their own states, the logic goes, enmity will be transformed first into good neighborliness and then into friendship. The unilateral separation plan, however, writes the epitaph for a two-state solution based



on the 1949 Armistice Line and shows how the State of Israel has effectively hijacked the rhetoric of the “two-state solution” to create an apartheid reality in the Occupied Territories. With the demise of the two-state solution, Western churches serious about working for a future of landed security for Palestinians and Israelis alike will have to move beyond advocacy for two states towards advocacy for the dismantling of discriminatory laws and institutions throughout Palestine/Israel, including the dismantling of the legal and political structures that prevent refugees from returning home.

For Christians, rights are not ultimately ends in themselves. Rather, they make sense within a teleological framework, within, that is, a vision of the broader political good to be nurtured and developed through the securing and implementation of these rights.

The political telos towards which Christian action should be directed is a holistic vision of reconciliation in the context of landed security. This vision is captured well by two portions of Scripture: first, the prophet Micah's vision of a day in which God's people will live secure under vine and fig tree, with no one to make them afraid (Micah 4:4); and second, the proclamation by the writer of Ephesians that in Christ Jesus the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile has been broken down (Eph 2:15). Christian concern about refugee rights is not about retribution and not even solely about restitution—rather, Christian concern about Palestinian refugee rights is driven

by a concern for future Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation.

After the horrors of the Shoah, it is understandable that the idea of Israel as a safe haven with a Jewish majority would be so important to many Jews. But must such a safe haven be tied to a project of maintaining and protecting a Jewish majority by any and all means? Might not a bi-national future in one state be one in which Palestinians and Israelis alike both sit securely under vine and fig tree? Such questions, as difficult and sensitive as they may be, will prove unavoidable in future Jewish-Christian conversation.

Alain Epp Weaver worked for eleven years in the Occupied Territories and Jordan for Mennonite Central Committee, most recently as Representative for Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq.



After 40 Years of Occupation Is it too late for Law?

Acting with Compassion to Ensure Respect for International Humanitarian Law

By: *Charles Shamas*

The normative foundations of international law have two important elements: conflict prevention (how to do no evil / not become an enemy to others) and conflict management (how to do no evil when defending one's self against the harm being inflicted by an enemy). State authorities make such law and are charged with implementing it. Humanity benefits if they do. On the fortieth year of Israel's occupation it may be time to take a fresh look in light of Christian teaching at the world view and values the law embodies, what sort of obstacles are preventing their implementation in the present case, why

this may matter to Churches, organisations of conscience and people of good will, and to what directions they can turn to do something about it.

The key internationally accepted norms of conflict prevention are embodied in human rights law, in the doctrine of 'friendly relations and cooperation' among states, as well as in various areas of national law and in the rights and responsibilities set out in international and domestic law for reacting to perceived abuses of power. These norms aim, as a minimum, to prevent states, non-state actors and ordinary people from becoming 'enemies' to each other, i.e. to preserve stability and peace. By contrast,

such Christian values as love, compassion and justice delineate a vision and standard of care that goes considerably beyond respecting others' rights in law in order to preserve peace.

Both Christian teaching and the law recognise that not even the most exemplary standard of conduct on the part of states and persons can guarantee that violence will not be directed against them, or that the perpetrators of such violence will not be convinced of the justice of their cause. Christians who find themselves in such situations are admonished not only to 'love thy enemy', but, also to 'judge not that you not be judged'. Similarly, the law

avoids placing the authority to determine and exact appropriate redress for a perceived injury with the aggrieved party. On the other hand, both Christian teaching and the law leave room for recourse to forceful measures, but only those that are immediately necessary to self-defense, and only until an authority competent to judge and powerful enough to implement lawful measures of protection and justice has acted.

In the world of nearly two millennia ago, replete with arbitrary secular authority, no competent source of adjudicative authority was recognised in Christian teaching other than God. However, the quest to build just secular systems of authority under the rule of law has preoccupied Christians and non-Christians alike for centuries. The efforts of today's community of states to establish a competent institutional authority through the United Nations has yet to succeed. On the other hand, much progress has been made by certain individual states and groups of states towards implementing a conflict-preventing rule of law for their own citizens.

Outside these islands of relative human security, humanity remains stuck with war and internal conflict, almost always claiming some justification of 'self-defense'. Powerful state and non-state actors with correspondingly extensive ambitions and felt needs remain free to unilaterally interpret 'imperative national interest' and 'necessary acts of self-defense' with a great deal of latitude.

Attempts to regulate the use of force between sovereigns and their military organisations produced the oldest body of international law: the 'law of war', which was re-named 'international humanitarian law' (IHL) following World War II to reflect its development and shift in emphasis towards ensuring the protection and welfare of all persons not engaging in the conduct of warfare. IHL now sets out

an extensive set of rules governing the conduct of armed conflict and the treatment of 'enemy' persons who have fallen under the control of one of the parties to the conflict. It obligates all parties to any armed conflict to respect those rules.

One of its central objectives is to prevent the deliberate or careless infliction of harm on any person that must be presumed to be not engaged in combat (*hors de combat*): civilians, as well as wounded, sick, shipwrecked, and captured enemy combatants. Another is to ensure the protection of all persons that have come under the control of an 'enemy' state or its military forces. In occupied territory,

necessity and proportionality.

The international system and much of the world are still struggling to implement just and effective secular systems of conflict prevention norms. This leaves broad scope for the arbitrary and violent exercise of power by any actor imagining a grievance or simply driven by greed. In this state of affairs the application of appropriate conflict management norms remains critical to preserving human welfare and dignity, preserving the stability of still emerging state-based systems of authority, and preserving the possibility that they will evolve to become more just.

International humanitarian law (IHL),



the occupying power must ensure the welfare of the civilian population, and may not deliberately cause them harm. It must also preserve the institutions and public life, habitat, infrastructure and property on which the civilian population depends for their welfare, security and ability to sustain their communal life. Any forceful or administrative measure that causes or threatens civilians with harm can only be justified if it meets the tests of military

and internationally accepted law enforcement norms have become the legal conflict management frameworks that states have found it appropriate to apply in order to minimise the harm caused to affected persons when they resort to the use of force against a military or civilian adversary. Christian teachings are particularly strong on conflict management norms, and, unlike the law of states, promote their application by

individuals. Christian love takes care of ensuring compliance with the activist purposes for which human rights law has been created, but more effectively because love, unlike law, is not an instrument of secular power. Christian teachings relating to conflict management set close absolute limits on the use of power and resort to force that do the job of the most basic protective elements of human rights law. They also capture the humanitarian essence of international humanitarian law without its major concession to secular power: the acceptance of war-making for any reason.

Christians are called upon to defend themselves with compassion and mercy, turning the other cheek and striving to defeat an enemy's will to continue causing harm without harboring any wish to harm the enemy.¹ IHL and internationally accepted law enforcement norms both embody this same ideal. However, to succeed in regulating the conduct of warfare, IHL does not attempt to constrain opportunities for war-making. It must permit the use of force to weaken or destroy an enemy force's physical ability to fight in hopes of defeating its will to fight. Enemy combatants may be killed, and military objects destroyed, at will. On the other hand, enemy civilians and civilian objects may not be targeted and every effort must be made to avoid harming them.

Considering the Palestinian experience of Israeli occupation in light of the rules of IHL reveals important ways in which IHL, despite its shortcomings, provides important universally accepted legal benchmarks and normative bases for action to Christians who would wish to intervene effectively against the abuses of power they recognise in this case.

IHL prohibits the transfer of part of an occupying power's population into occupied territories. It prohibits the deportation or forced transfer of protected



persons from occupied territories. Israeli settlements are prohibited. They must be removed. Measures that force the displacement or disintegration of established communities and the activities through which they sustain themselves are prohibited. The unlawful harm such measures have caused must be repaired through restitution and compensation.

IHL prohibits the annexation of occupied territories or altering its legislative, institutional and demographic status quo except in the interest of the protected persons themselves. Israel's annexation of Jerusalem and the massive alterations and degenerative effects it has caused in the legislative, institutional and demographic spheres are illegal, and must be reversed.

IHL prohibits collective punishment, and measures that cause unnecessary, excessive or disproportionate harm to the protected civilian population. The existing and already semi-permanent closure regime that has fragmented Palestinian life, isolating communities and paralysing economic life, is unlawful and must be ended.

All these strict prohibitions exist because the practices in question are recognised as serious abuses of power that are intolerable to affected persons and their communities and destructive of them. They have no

place in 'legitimate warfare', or legitimate security and law enforcement operations carried out in occupied territories.

The compassionate use of power to help protect victims who cannot protect themselves has a clear place in Christian teaching.² Similarly, international law assigns states a variety of rights, and even duties, to intervene against abuses of power by other states, non-state actors and ordinary persons. IHL specifically assigns a right and a duty to all uninvolved third states to ensure that its rules are respected. It gives Churches and public spirited citizens considerable opportunity to activate that third state duty and set their own voluntary public example of compliance with it. In this respect, IHL can be an effective instrument of Christian love. To promote its peaceful enforcement through participation in public life is to make use of the most benign of 'swords'.

If only for these reasons, Christians need to examine more closely how to use and defend IHL in the Israeli-Palestinian case.

The Problem

In 1991, during the run-up to the Madrid Peace Conference, John Bolton, then US Deputy Undersecretary for International Organisations, notified the Netherlands Presidency of the Council of the European Community that henceforth the United

States 'expected' the European Community member states to refrain from making reference to the Fourth Geneva Convention in all international fora.

The reasoning: Getting Israel to negotiate a settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict based on the principle of 'land for peace' required a 'politically neutral' international environment in which Israel's 'right to differ' on the interpretation and application of international law was respected by the other players. Israel's cooperation with the US-brokered peace process was conditioned on the continued absence of external law-based constraints on its use of power to transform the occupied Palestinian territory's demography, infrastructure and economy, and such measures were essential to its ability to press territorial claims that it considered vital to its national interest. It should also not be expected to surrender its preferred means of control during negotiations, just because the rest of the world considers them illegal. Indeed, no Israeli government could expect to negotiate a settlement acceptable to its electorate if third states were pressing Israel to 'stop and reverse' these measures just because they are illegal. Getting them stopped and reversed should be left to the Palestinians to negotiate, since Israel has nothing much else to bargain with except whether or not to end its occupation, and how much access to give Palestinian exports and labor to its markets.

At the time, few observers considered the reasoning put forward by the US, and accepted by much of Europe, as seriously flawed. After all, why focus on the 'blind application of legal rules' when an opportunity existed to shepherd the parties towards making peace? Or, as US diplomats, and then Secretary of State James Baker often pointedly asked the Palestinians that were being prepared to attend the Madrid Peace Conference and negotiations in Washington: 'do you want to end the occupation or just clean it up?'

Through this lens, the law regulated too many of the issues in dispute between Israel and the Palestinian people. It did not leave enough for negotiation. The prospect of its exigent application by third states threatened to shift the burden of negotiation from Palestinian shoulders. It threatened to make the Palestinian leadership and public less willing to accept compromising some rights protected by law in order to realise other rights also protected by law. In short, maintaining Israel's political margin to violate IHL was essential to the negotiation of Israeli-Palestinian peace on terms acceptable to Israel. Denied that margin, Israel would prefer to abandon negotiation and rely on its unilateral exercise of power exclusively.

Practically, this has meant limiting third state reactions to Israeli policies and practices they 'considered' unlawful. It has also meant assuring Israel that its continued attachment to such policies and practices would not expose it to any unwanted consequences, so long as Israel continued to negotiate.³ By 2004, thirty-seven years after Israel established its

occupation and fourteen years into the peace process launched in Madrid, even the rendering of an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice applying international law to Israel's construction of a 'Wall' in occupied territory was seen as threatening to upset efforts to get a negotiated peace.

Political decisions by states to preserve a persistent violator's immunity from IHL's exigent application and to treat serious violations of IHL as legitimate sources of advantage in waging conflicts and in negotiating their resolution have unacceptable consequences for all affected persons on any side of any conflict. To start with, they invite the abandonment of respect for its principles and rules by the people denied its protection.

Maintaining this absence of legal constraint has an international dimension, an inter-state dimension, and a dimension that directly concerns Churches, and all people of conscience. At the international level, with respect to IHL, ensuring that no exigent action is mandated by the UN Security Council (under Charter 7) or



General Assembly (under “Uniting for Peace”) is sufficient⁴. At the inter-state level, individual states may undertake active measures of enforcement by political decision. They may do so individually, jointly or commonly. The chosen measures can be positive (conditional incentives or rewards) or negative (from the smallest measures of diplomatic retortion, like postponing a state visit, to punitive sanctions). However, ensuring that no effective active measures of enforcement take place is easy. States capable of acting with the greatest effect can simply choose not to.

On the other hand, third states and non-state actors, including Churches, other organisations and grass roots movements of conscience can contribute to the “passive enforcement” of IHL by simply being law-abiding themselves: insisting that their own dealings with third parties are organised and carried out in conformity with the law, including the rules that certain violators are politically refusing to apply or respect. Their simple insistence on maintaining their own propriety and ‘clean hands’ can confront violators with a choice between accepting burdens on transacting the cooperation it desires, and exposing itself to the risk of losing certain opportunities, or accepting to conduct its own transactions in an internationally lawful manner that runs contrary to its own policies. In either case, the law wins.

Remaining faithful to one’s own values is a non-coercive and non-violent ‘sword’, essential to Christian action - as responsible investors, donors, consumers, and partners in dialogue. Pressing our governments to refuse to permit their dealings with a violator to be carried out in violation of rules of international law that they have bound themselves to ensure are respected ‘in all circumstances’ is a basic civic responsibility. It has nothing to do with promoting the imposition of one state’s political will on another. In its Advisory Opinion on the legal consequences of the construction of a “Wall” in the occupied Palestinian territory, the ICJ pointedly evoked this



same principle when it reminded states of their legal obligations not to recognise as lawful the illegal situation created by the construction of the Wall, and not to aid or assist in maintaining it.

The protective application of dissuasive power through law enforcement is essential to enable the oppressed to remain stakeholders in the international order’s system of norms, and to meet the challenge of ‘loving their enemy’ and ‘turning the other cheek’ when confronting a true enemy’s evil. Churches and ordinary citizens alike already have a hand in shaping how the law functions, generally, and in the Israeli-Palestinian case. They should not neglect to ensure that they use their own hand as diligently and

responsibly as their convictions, and their love of peace, demand. When just law functions well, it limits abuses of power through peaceful collective deterrence, making victims of abuse less reliant on threatening defensive counter-violence. When it works less well, it can at least provide those who have been wrongfully harmed with a credible prospect of lawful redress, helping them to forgive and move towards making peace with the enemy that oppresses them today.

Charles Shamas is the senior partner of The Mattin Group, a Palestinian voluntary partnership based in Ramallah and specialized in problems of human rights and international humanitarian law enforcement in the occupied Palestinian Territories.

1 Love your enemies.... (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27).

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing.... (1 Peter 3:9)

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.... Do not take revenge.... “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” (Romans 12:17-20).

2 Christ said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:14).

3 hence the unpublished letter of comfort reportedly given by the US promising to protect Israel from ‘international isolation’.

4 The two international mechanisms that are politically independent exceptions are the International Court of Justice, which mainly applies international law to the adjudication of private international disputes, and the International Criminal Court. In both cases Israel has exempted itself from their jurisdiction on matters arising from its conduct in hostilities and as an occupying power.

SABEEL INTERNATIONAL YOUNG ADULT CONFERENCE

July 19- July 29, 2007

- Do you want to know more about Current Realities in Palestine, during this 40th year of the Occupation?
- Do you want to visit Biblical Sites and share Biblical reflection with Young Adults from around the world?
- Are you between the ages of 18 and 35 and want to be involved in advocacy for peace with justice in the Holy Land?

If you answered “yes” to these questions, then we invite you to participate in Sabeel’s 2nd International Young Adult Conference.

Our vision for this conference is to gather, network, and further educate young leaders from Palestine and around the world, during this 40th year of the Occupation; so that they may be trained, commissioned, and equipped with the tools to act in advocacy to end the Occupation.

The conference will include:

- Visits to Palestinian Towns and Villages
- Events Celebrating Palestinian Culture
- Worship and Biblical Reflections
- Volunteer Experience
- Advocacy Workshops
- Sharing Experiences and Ideas with Palestinian Young Adults

The registration and program fee for the conference is \$700. This includes all of your land costs-food, accommodations, ground transportation, speakers and activities-but it does not include airfare. When scheduling flights, please keep in mind that participants should arrive on July 18th .

SPECIAL OFFER- For those interested in traveling in the Galilee there will be an option for a two-night tour for an additional \$150 after the conference.

REGISTER BY JUNE 15th AT WWW.SABEEL.ORG
or e-mail youth@sabeel.org for more information

ABOUT 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, justice and love. 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 worldwide to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center www.sabeel.org
P.O.B. 49084 Jerusalem 91491 Tel: 972.2.532.7136 Fax: 972.2.532.7137

A Parish Called Gaza

By: Metin Mitchell

Gaza is a narrow piece of land along the Mediterranean coast between Israel and Egypt. Just 40km long and 10 km wide, it is home to more than 1.4 million Palestinians. Land side, the Israeli government has built a "wall" around Gaza. This "wall" is one of the most sophisticated ever built. It is a construction of concrete blocks, barbed wire, electronic fences, and pillboxes with remote controlled 50-caliber machine guns.

Gaza has three main population centers: Gaza City, Khan Younis and Rafah. These are some of the most densely populated agglomerations in the world. The majority of the populations are refugees who fled or who were expelled from their homes in what was Palestine but became, in 1948, the State of Israel.

There are two ways in and out of the Gaza strip: Rafah crossing which leads through Egypt; Erez crossing which leads through to Israel. Imports are not permitted through Rafah. Exports are only permitted through Erez, however this is often closed. Any form of viable economic activity based on trade with the outside world is impossible.

Official unemployment is currently at 40 percent. The unemployment, the economic embargo and the indiscriminate air strikes by Israel's air force have led to an untold story. These are the facts. If you stack up these facts of misery they are just another tally of human injustice, poverty, and misery in a far away place. And you could quite easily walk away from them.

Having been there I can tell you that in amongst all the misery that is Gaza there

is much that is beautiful. There is hope, courage, defiance, and surprisingly, forgiveness. I have witnessed the Gospel there on the front line of poverty and misery. I have witnessed solidarity between Muslims and Christians. I have seen with my own eyes, in the midst of anger and fear, what a better world can look like.



I could tell you about the bleakness of Gaza. I could tell you of that drive into Gaza city with its bombed out roads and buildings. I could tell you about the scores of young men hanging around with nothing to do. I could tell you about the young men with guns looking for something to do. I could tell you about the donkeys and carts, about the hammering in the small workshops where men are desperately trying to recycle poverty.

But let me tell you instead about a single hospital there, the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital.

Amongst the narrow scarred streets there is a small oasis of whitewash and green

grass. It too carries its scars. The chapel of the hospital has been bombed by an Israeli Apache helicopter but this is dismissed in a good humored way by the hospital director. The wards are spartan. The equipment is old and inadequate. The surgery is dilapidated. The corridor acts as the overflow when the bombing gets really too bad and the casualties too many.

The hospital is open to all, irrespective of their faith. It treats the poor without charge, it treats those hurt in the crossfire of war, and it treats fighters injured in battle, be they Israeli or Palestinian. The hospital is there to heal the sick and suffering-period.

But direct casualties of war are not the only victims in Gaza. War and its filth brings a hidden killer. And this is cancer. The increase in cancer has been dramatic. It is the women who are hardest hit by cancer, particularly breast cancer. The hospital is doing what it can but it desperately needs a mammogram machine so that it can do better detection sooner and thus have a better chance of saving lives.

I was introduced to one of the hospital's cancer outpatients. She lives near the hospital with her family. They live in a graveyard. Her children are full of life. They have the biggest smiles and the most mischievous grins I have ever seen. They jump from one gravestone to another. These make good hiding places since many of the tombs are open, having been bombed at some point in time or another. Their home is a hut in the middle of the graves. The hut has no drainage for sewage.

You don't need to be a doctor to see that

the children are malnourished and sickly. But you do need to have a heart of steel not to be moved by the sight of them fighting amongst themselves for a single piece of meat they have found on the floor. The woman's eldest daughters make flat bread in a home made clay oven. They shared with me some of their bread. And in doing so gave me a meal far more generous than the richest of my friends has ever given me.

This woman is just one of the hospital's patients. She is dying. But she is undefeated, she is loud and alive. And with her amongst this rubble and poverty, Palestine lives, bloody, torn, and divided, but it lives on like an eternal flame beyond the power of a foreign army to snuff it out. This is Gaza. This is the "parish" in which the hospital operates.

But if this hospital works it is because the staff, Muslims and Christians, work unstintingly to take care of those around them. The Chief Surgeon is a Muslim and the Director of the hospital is a Christian, but none of that matters. In that hospital I saw the message of our Christian faith, the compassion and love for people, not segregated, blind to difference. I saw the message of our faith, raw and without hindrance of theology or denomination. I saw the world that I would like for my children to see. A world blind to religions differences, where people stand in dignity shoulder to shoulder with their neighbors, accepting what makes the other special and unique. A world where people give of themselves without counting the cost.

They need help. Specifically, I would ask you to pray for them and if ever you are at a loss for words to say let me share with you their prayer: "Pray not for Arab or Jew, for Palestinian or Israeli; Pray rather for ourselves; that we might not divide them in our prayers; but keep them both together in our hearts."

Metin Mitchell is an Anglican who is from the UK, and leads a professional services firm in the Middle East.

Missing Justice & Truth Foils Peace-making in the Middle East

By Nicola Nasser

Justice, the key for peace-making in the Middle East, is missing; hence the peace process in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has not delivered and has developed into a wider Arab and Muslim conflict. Israel has so far failed peace-makers, and because justice could not be but inseparably integrated with truth, these two prerogatives for any successful peace-making have been premeditatedly buried into oblivion amid the snowballing violence and incessant military confrontation created by the politics of "might is right," which became the rule of the day and gave birth to the current *fait accompli* of injustice in the Holy Land.

"Those of us who work for justice out of a strong faith in God believe that peace based on justice is the only way that will guarantee a life of security and reconciliation for both Israelis and Palestinians," wrote veteran Israeli-Palestinian active advocate of peace, justice and non-violence, Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek, himself a victim of the 60-year old conflict.¹ Alan Hart, the author of "Zionism, The Real Enemy of the Jews," among many other Jews, agrees: "The equation is a very simple one: No justice for the Palestinians = no peace for any of us," he wrote.

"The truth is that the whole situation that has been created here is one of conflicts and contradictions and the absence of a solution," an editorial by the Israeli daily Ha'aretz had concluded.² On June 5, Palestinians will mark 40 years of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. This is less than

three months after Iraqis commemorated four years of the U.S.-led invasion, which was encouraged by Israel and less than a year of the latest Israeli war on Lebanon, amid official as well as media warnings, officially denied by Israel, of a possible Israeli strike against Iran.³

This regional war-prone environment is exacerbated by the ever bleaker prospect of defusing the Arab - Israeli conflict, which has been the major source of six regional wars during the past six decades, by translating the words of U.S President George W. Bush's "vision" of a two-state solution into deeds before his mandate expires in January 2009. Both Palestinian and Israeli advocates of peace are growing, by the day, more pessimistic and a growing number of them are already looking for alternative solutions, like a "bi-national" state, also a non-starter to Israel.

Israel remains a borderless army state; her borders are demarcated by where her regional super army stands and she remains a country without a constitution as well, after six decades of her creation, because a constitution would stipulate where her borders should stand.

The moment of truth for Israeli peaceniks is looming close and persisting when they will have to make a lot of soul - searching to decide whether they are after might or right, peace or retaining the spoils of their military territorial expansion, co-existence or colonial settlement, a democratic or an apartheid state, being an integral part of the region or remaining an alien thereto. In brief the moment of truth is closing in to test their wisdom if not their peace credentials and to make them choose between justice and injustice and decide between war and

peace. Both Arabs and Arab Palestinians have their peace balls already in the Israeli court.

Palestinians today constitute 45% of the total population in historic Palestine, between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, and the Jews 55%. It is only a question of time when the Palestinians attain a majority regardless of how many Jews continue to immigrate to Israel; their immigration will sooner or later dry up. What then would Israel do? Continue to maintain the world's only remaining apartheid system? Or forcibly "transfer" Israeli Arab citizens to where nobody knows?

Military Might Exhausted

However "transfer" is no longer a viable Israeli option, although it is still an indiscreet obsession for an important sector of the Israeli ruling strategists. Israeli incumbent Minister for "Strategic Affairs," Avigdor Lieberman, is only a tip of an iceberg. A repetition of the ethnic cleansing of 1948⁴, which created the Palestinian refugee problem, is designated today by international law as a crime against humanity, and those who perpetrate it are subject to adjudication.

The impotence of Israeli overwhelming might has proved true also in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, where the first Palestinian civilian uprising of 1987 defused Israel's military superiority to accept the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as an autonomous authority on what was perceived as an integral part of "Greater Israel" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Israeli insistence on "Palestinian autonomy forever" led to a deadlock in the Oslo peace process of 1993 and the second Palestinian uprising of 2000 that is still raging. Despite resorting to reoccupation of the Palestinian Authority autonomous areas in the West Bank in 2002 and to military redeployment to the periphery of the Gaza Strip in 2005, the Israeli "might" has yet to subdue the Palestinian



"right" into accepting its unilaterally-perceived borderless expanded autonomy as a provisional state, which is still the official policy of the Israeli government. In turn, this is a non-starter to Palestinians, and the deadlock persists to claim more innocent lives, mainly Palestinian.

Israel has also played out its military might externally. Recently this might failed the expectations of its U.S strategic ally in what many have described as the "proxy" war on

Lebanon last summer. In this same country the Israeli military was forced out exactly as it had invaded 18 years earlier: unconditionally. Thirty-four years earlier the Israeli Occupying Power was forced out of the whole Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and a narrow strip of the Syrian Golan Heights as a result of the 1973 war.

This pattern of Israel's politically expendable military might is eroding further by the erosion in the political delivery of her

strategic U.S. ally, whose superior military invaded Iraq but has yet to secure its occupation. Similar political U.S. setbacks are manifested in deadlocked U.S. foreign policy in the Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Sudanese and Somali crises. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former U.S. National Security Adviser, was on record as saying: "Eventually, if neo-con policies continue to be pursued, the United States will be expelled from the region and that will be the beginning of the end for Israel as well."

Arabs Changed, Israelis Have To As Well

However sad it may sound and contrary to human survival instincts, Palestinian victims have in the mainstream reconciled to the Israeli *fait accompli* dictated to them by the sword: 1.2 million Israeli Palestinians have been unsuccessfully trying to integrate in the Israeli society as law-abiding citizens, but nonetheless remain after sixty years in struggle for an equal status citizenship. More than 3.5 million Palestinians under a 40-year old Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are still committed to a "vision" of two states living in peace and security alongside each other. More than 5 million Palestinian refugees in exile have brought into existence the PLO, which recognized Israel, renounced violence and opted for negotiations as "the" strategic option to solve their conflict with her.

Arabs, Palestinians included, have essentially changed course and joined an historic reconciliation process satisfied with the least justice possible, but yet they have to be reciprocated by other than the Israeli unilateral plans: Three members of the 22-League of Arab States, namely Egypt, Jordan and Mauritania have already signed peace treaties with Israel; Qatar and at least five other states maintain regular contacts and low-level trade representation with her. On March 28-29, 2007 an Arab summit

meeting in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, renewed their commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative they adopted in Beirut in 2002, offering Israel a collective peace and "normal" relations for Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese land she occupied in 1967



and the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. The PLO meanwhile is still irreversibly committed to the Oslo accords it had signed with Israel in 1993.

Unfortunately the U.S. diplomacy, the major decisive factor in peace-making, is squandering whatever time is left for the

Bush Administration in office on more of the same historical pattern of crisis management, preoccupied with other regional priorities; Washington accordingly is confining her efforts to arranging public relations encounters between Palestinian and Israeli leaders while condoning Israel's rejection of the Arab collective offer and her refusal to discuss the final status issues of the conflict with Palestinians. This pattern has practically empowered the Israeli occupying power to consolidate its colonial settlements on the occupied territories, thus creating on the ground the same facts that will inevitably pre-empt a two-state solution, a prerogative for a wider Arab-Israeli peace. More importantly this pattern has created the right environment for Israeli leaders to avoid reciprocity and to push to the back burner any serious soul searching for a just and lasting peace settlement.

This pattern of PR crisis management marked the U.S. and Israeli non-committal responses to the Arab offer and the historic opportunity of having a Palestinian consensus on the two-state solution as represented by the platform of the national unity government led by the Hamas-PLO ruling coalition. Missing the historic opportunity, Israel is offering no initiatives of her own.

Nicola Nasser is a veteran Arab journalist in Kuwait, Jordan, UAE and Palestine. He is based in Birzeit, West Bank of the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories.

(1) See a version of article originally written for the Boston Globe at:

<http://www.sabeel.org/old/news/news19/ateek.htm>.

(2) Ha'aretz, August 28, 2003.

(3) The Israeli Foreign Ministry denied recently a report by the Sunday Times of London that Israel has drawn up secret plans to destroy Iran's uranium enrichment facilities with tactical nuclear weapons.

(4) Ilan Pappé, an Israeli historian and professor of political science at Haifa University, is an authority on Palestinian ethnic cleansing. Pappé's latest book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oneworld Publications, Oxford, England, forthcoming in October 2006).

Marking 40 years of Occupation

Ramifications of the Occupation on the Life of the Church

By: Father Rafiq Khoury

I was ordained as a priest twenty days after the 1967 war which means that I have lived throughout my ordained life under the brunt of occupation. The naïve impression prevailing then was that the occupation will not last long, and I asked one of my professors at the Seminary then “Will the occupation last more than two weeks?” He looked at me in a pitiful manner and smiled. I understood then that this matter will take a long time. And this is how the painful journey started.

Escalating harassments

The occupation, as any other occupation in history, adopted the “divide and rule” policy through dealing with each church separately intending to detach them from the national entity, and to separate them from each other. In doing so, the occupation aimed at dealing with every church separately in order to facilitate its mission of making each institution give in to its logic and interests. Sometimes the carrot was used and other times the stick, with the main target being church land and church property. The occupation wanted to extend its control over every inch of property through fraud, cheating, extortion, purchase, renting, and other methods.

At the same time, the occupation worked on creating a rift between Christians and Muslims, taking advantage of some of the existing international conditions (the civil war in Lebanon, the conflicts in the Balkans and others). It did not succeed. Probably the events in Nazareth over



Shihab Eddin Mosque can be considered as the first successful attempt at creating a rift between Christians and Muslims in Nazareth, with ramifications on Christian-Muslim relations in the occupied territories. Other isolated events happened here and there, which the occupation used for its own purposes, but by-and-large relations among Palestinian Christians and Muslims remained as strong as ever. One has to point out the international campaign promoted by Zionist circles (such as Christian Zionists and others) through their widespread network as they tried to spread the idea that Palestinian Christians are being oppressed by the Muslim majority. This they did to serve suspicious political goals and to distort the image and reputation of the Palestinian Authority. Palestinian Christians have confronted those

allegations and their evil purposes and proved them false.

With the start of the peace process

The irony of the situation is that the escalating oppression against the Palestinian people in all its aspects, including direct and indirect pressure on church institutions, came in parallel with the peace process. There is no doubt that the closure of the city of Jerusalem to the Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was one of the oppressive measures that hit the core of the Palestinian people. It is well known that the city of Jerusalem constitutes the backbone of Palestinian life at all levels: political, religious, economic, cultural and social. As far as the church is concerned, the city of Jerusalem is its

center for all big and small matters related to the life of its parishioners (ecclesial courts, administration, pastoral and financial departments, health, scientific, cultural and educational institutions and others) as the headquarters for all the churches is located in the Holy City. Thus, the closure came as a very heavy blow to the life of the churches, causing chaos and confusion to the church's ministry. Christians from all churches in the Holy Land have experienced unmatched injustice by being denied visiting their holy places in the city of Jerusalem, which they have enjoyed over the ages, organizing regular pilgrimages to the different sites. These visits constitute an inseparable part of their spiritual well-being, as the city of Jerusalem is their spiritual reservoir from which they draw, and which has sustained their faith over the ages. It is common these days, for example, to meet a Christian from Bethlehem - especially among the young people - who has never seen or visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and other holy sites in Jerusalem. Moreover parish life was disrupted: it was not possible anymore to organize church meetings at any level. After the closure of Jerusalem, the Palestinian territories were transformed into isolated cantons with no interaction between them. Meetings and gatherings of Christians from the various regions became a difficult task. The Christians in the north of the West Bank were completely isolated. Gaza has become a big prison for Gazans, including the three thousand Christians living there.

In recent years, it has become more difficult to acquire entry visas for workers in church institutions (monks, nuns,

members of the Synod and others), thus depriving church institutions from human resources needed to perform the work. What is ironic is the fact that these measures, and the harassment that goes along with them, have increased after the signing of the agreement between the Vatican and the state of Israel.

And yet

The occupation has been a major challenge for the entire Palestinian people including the Christian churches in the Holy Land. The Palestinian people confronted the cruelty and oppression of the occupation with tremendous resilience and creativity at all levels. The same resilience can be said of the churches. Large scale theological thought emerged among clergy and lay-people, as well as the establishment of theological centers and theology movements that engaged in developing contextual Palestinian theology and Christian thinking that dealt with the life and witness of Christians living under occupation. Some such centers are: Al-Liqa' center in Bethlehem, Sabeel Center in Jerusalem and Nazareth, Al'Nadwa International Center in Bethlehem, and others. As a result, a Palestinian Christian theology emerged and became a living witness of the vitality of the church in the face of the occupation.

Moreover, the occupation has brought the different churches closer together. In the past decades we have witnessed regular meetings of the hierarchies of the different churches. Church authorities have had to get together to confront challenges created by the occupation. These meetings have produced united efforts in matters concerning the church

and Christians living under occupation. Another outcome of these meetings has been the issuing of joint statements and documents dealing with current issues (such as the Jerusalem Document). Another joint event was the recent conference on Christian education in Christian schools. This conference included representatives from all church-run schools. Another example of such vitality has been the "Catholic Synod journey of faith" which culminated in the general assembly in the year 2000. This was a time of celebration for the whole church.

Such is the cruelty of the occupation, and such is the energy and vitality with which the church faced the big challenge. Now is the time to take stock of all these elements, to reflect and pose the question: here and now—how do we proceed?

Father Rafiq Khoury is a Roman Catholic priest responsible for Religious Education at the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

Sabeel Congratulates

The Right Rev. Suheil Dawani

The New Anglican Bishop
in Jerusalem

And The Episcopal Bishop
of Jerusalem and The Middle East

Our prayers and support are with you as you proclaim Christ's Word and begin your mission as servant leader for justice, peace and reconciliation

Life Begins at 40

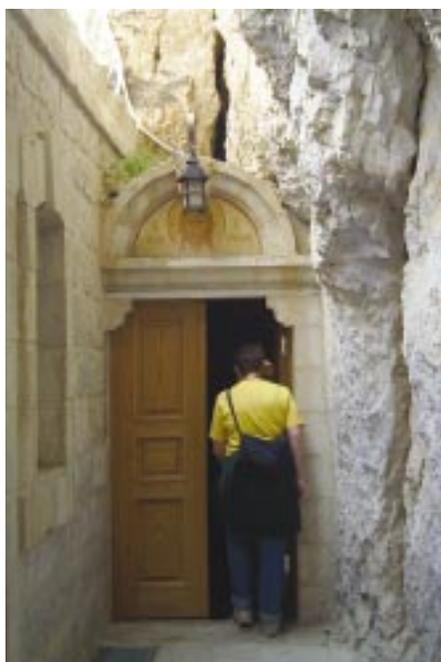
There is a saying: “Life begins at forty.” To a young person in his or her teens or twenties I’m sure this is difficult to grasp. Forty seems so old, surely past one’s prime, past the time of dreams of the future that were so filled with possibilities. But to those of us who have reached forty, or who are long past, we know the reality of this saying.

by *Tina Whitehead*

The first years of our lives are spent in laying the foundation for what lies ahead. Our bodies grow and mature. We go to school, decide on a course of studies and begin investing in our careers. Or we might get married and start families. How we approach these years and how we invest our time have a significant effect on the rest of our lives.

The first 40 years are a time of preparation, whether we are aware of it or not. They shape our values, give form to our dreams, and help us move to a deeper reality. As we get older we begin asking more questions about the meaning of life, about God. We examine where we’ve been and where we are going, and wonder if there is more to life than just the everyday routine of career and family. If we dig deep enough, we realize that God has been present all along, even though in our busy-ness of getting established in life, we have often failed to notice. We may even begin to see a future where God is leading, a future based on His promises, a future filled with possibilities and with hope.

Forty is the middle stage, the “through” stage, the “letting be” time. It is the most difficult time of life. Nothing seems to be happening. We “wander in the desert.” We look longingly back at the familiarity of the past rather than face the uncertainty of the future. It is a time over which we seem to have no control. How easy it is to get discouraged during this time. We want to “do” something to change the situation, but feel helpless to move ahead. It is a time of waiting. We



all know that it is difficult to wait, even when we know what we’re waiting for. But this is a time of waiting on, trusting that God will act in His own way and in His own time, without expectations, without knowing what lies ahead. It is not a passive time, but rather an active waiting, a preparing for God to act. It is the kind of waiting that Jesus experienced as he readied himself for ministry. It is the kind of waiting we must do even while we are obeying the voice of God which tells us to “do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

As we focus on 40 Years of Occupation, from 1967, through 40 years, to - where? We long for peace, for an end to the occupation and its oppression. We look for signs of hope, but instead find increasing despair among the people of the West

Bank and Gaza. The Wall continues to be built, settlements continue to grow and expand, villages are cut off from each other, people are unable to move freely within their own land. And the world is silent as injustice and the violation of human rights take their toll.

As I write this, we have just celebrated Holy Week in Jerusalem. We have come through Good Friday, Easter Saturday and ultimately Easter Sunday. In this celebration, the same pattern is at work: from - through - to, from the suffering and despair of Good Friday, through the seeming nothingness and waiting of Easter Saturday, to the glorious culmination of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday morning. What began as a time of despair and hopelessness ends in new life. In Isaiah, God speaks: “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19).

Isn’t this also God’s message for us now, in 2007? The people of this land have experienced 40 years of suffering under occupation, but in the midst of this suffering we continue to wait on God and trust Him to act. And God speaks to us again today with the promise of “a new thing,” a new reality. He proved it at Easter by bringing life out of death. Surely, He can again bring hope out of suffering. Surely, He can bring peace and justice out of oppression. Can this new life begin at 40? We must believe that God’s answer is “Yes!”

Tina Whitehead is a volunteer with Sabeel.

SABEEL FALL WITNESS VISIT

11-20 OCTOBER 2007

DATES: 11 - 20 October 2007 Inclusive (10 Nights)

COST: \$900 per person; \$180 single supplement

Included: all accommodations and meals for 10 nights plus all ground transportation and honoraria/fees for sites and group visits.

Not included: airfare, transfers to/from the airport, and additional nights in hotels.

ITINERARY:

4 NIGHTS IN JERUSALEM

and

4 NIGHTS IN BETHLEHEM

with day trips to Ramallah, Nablus and/or Jenin, and villages in the West Bank

2 NIGHTS IN THE GALILEE

to meet with Palestinian Israelis and visit the Holy sites

INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION:

Contact Sabeel at world@sabeel.org or telephone 972 2 532 7136.

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS:

Contact Johnny Khano

GUIDING STAR e-mail: Johnny@guidingstar2.com

PHONE: 972-2-627-3150 FAX: 972-2-627-3147

The year between June 2007 and May 2008 provides an effective framework for highlighting the ongoing Palestinian catastrophe:

- 90 years since the Balfour Declaration
- 60 years since the Nakba and the founding of the state of Israel
- 40 years of Occupation
- 25 years since Sabra/Shatila
- 20 years since the First Intifada
- 5 years of the Apartheid Wall

The Sabeel Fall Witness Visit offers a window into the daily lives of Palestinians living under the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as well as into the experiences of second-class citizenship of Palestinians who are citizens of Israel.

- Meet with Palestinian Christian and Muslim leaders of civic and religious organizations as well as with Israeli Jewish advocates for justice.
- Learn the stories of Palestinian Christians, share the worship that sustains their faith, and engage with Sabeel in promoting justice via liberation theology.

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.



Sabeel

Ecumenical Liberation
Theology Center
P.O.B. 49084
Jerusalem 91491
Tel: 972.2.532.7136
Fax: 972.2.532.7137

Visit our website at:

www.sabeel.org

E-Mail addresses:

General E-mail: sabeel@sabeel.org; Local Programs: local@sabeel.org; Clergy Program: clergy@sabeel.org;

Friends of Sabeel: world@sabeel.org; Youth Program: youth@sabeel.org; Media: media@sabeel.org; Public Relations: pr@sabeel.org

Friends of Sabeel

North America (FOS-NA)

(U.S. and Canada)
Canon Richard Toll
PO Box 9186
Portland, OR 97207
USA
Tel: (1)-503-653-6625
E-mail: friends@fosna.org
www.fosna.org

Canadian FOS (CFOS)

3 Sandstone Court
Nepean, Ontario
K2G 6N5
Canada
E-mail: cfos@ca.inter.net
Website: www.sabeel.ca

Friends of Sabeel

United Kingdom (FOS-UK)

8 Silver Street
Dursley
Gloucestershire
GL114ND
U.K.
Tel: (0) 1453-544-655
E-mail: fosuk@fish.co.uk

Friends of Sabeel

Ireland (FOS-IR)

9 Sycamore Road
Dublin 16
Ireland
E-mail: khthomp@eircom.net

Friends of Sabeel

Scandinavia

Rev. Mats Thurffjell
Den Gode Herdens Kyrka
Bläkullagatan 7
250 13 Helsingborg
Tel: +46 (0)70 372 60 85
E-mail: sverige@sabeelskandinavien.org
Website: www.sabeelskandinavien.org

Friends of Sabeel

Australia (FOS-AU)

The Revd Dr. Greg Jenks
PO Box 822
Kenmore, QLD 4069
Australia
Tel: +61 (0) 408 767 344
E-mail: sabeel@faithfutures.org
Website: www.fairhfaithfutures.org/sabeel

Sabeel-Nazareth

PO Box 8862
Nazareth 16300
Israel
Tel: 972(4)6020790
E-mail: nazareth@sabeel.org