

# CORNERSTONE

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## Sabeel 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference: BALFOUR AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM



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### Opening Sermon Challenging Religious Extremism

*by: The Rev. Naim Ateek*

With gratitude and thanksgiving to God, we have arrived safely in Bethlehem and there is room in the Inn for all of us. You are our modern magi who have come anxiously to search for peace and well-being of the children of God who live in this land. You have come to stand with us, your sisters and brothers, in Palestine. We are here to bear witness to the importance of peace that needs to be based on truth and justice. On behalf of the Sabeel Board, General Assembly, and





Visit to Aida Camp, Bethlehem

staff, I would like to welcome you all. Many of you have been with us many times. Many of you have been committed to a just peace for many years. It is wonderful to see you. I am thankful for your courage, perseverance, and sacrifice to be with us this week. As many of you know, Sabeel is a family. If you are here for the first time, we want you to know that you are automatically a member of our Sabeel family. When we welcome you, we say in Arabic, Ahlan wa Sahlan. Ahlan means you are family; Sahlan means, may your stay with us be pleasant and smooth. (But living under occupation, it is difficult to guarantee pleasantness and smoothness.) Be that as it may, we extend to all of you a hearty welcome; and we hope and pray that your stay with us will be blessed, safe, and fruitful.

In a special way, I would like to welcome those of you who are friends of Sabeel and I pray that we will not only reflect and learn together, but that this conference will energize us to continue the

struggle for the liberation of all our peoples, Palestinians and Israelis. I would like to pause here and express my heartfelt thanks to all the presenters, local and international, who have accepted our invitation and are with us to guide our thinking and to challenge us through their presentations. In a very special way, I would like to thank Father Rami Asakerieh for allowing us the use of St. Catherine's Nativity Church. This is Sabeel's 10th international conference. For this opening worship service, I have entitled my sermon: *Challenging Religious Extremism*. The Middle East – where Judaism, Christianity, and Islam originated – still stands out as the area of the world with the highest levels of social, religious, and political hostilities that involve religion. There is a proliferation of religious extremism, and it has been spreading beyond our area. As you all know from our program, we will be addressing this problem through our different speakers. At this time, I am only introducing this menacing

phenomenon.

Who is a religious extremist? A religious extremist is a person who holds extreme, fanatical religious views, especially one who resorts to, or advocates extreme action. Our three monotheistic religions, in various ways and degrees, are in a crisis regarding this phenomenon. Religion is supposed to lead us closer to the one God and closer to each other. Yet religion has become a problem. We are supposed to believe in the God of love and compassion, the God of justice and truth, the God of forgiveness and reconciliation. Yet we find ourselves very far from this God. Religion and our worship of God are supposed to make us more human and accepting of one another. Yet religious extremists, due to their beliefs and behaviors, are making a mockery of God. They have contaminated and polluted their religion. By so doing, they are dehumanizing us and dehumanizing themselves. A case in point is what has been happening in al-Arish in Sinai, Egypt lately where Coptic Christians were harassed and killed by Muslim religious extremists. The Egyptian government needs to do more to put an end to such criminal actions. The word religion has become repulsive. Let us briefly take a look at religious extremism:

- Muslim extremists: I believe that the case of militant and extremist Muslims has become widely exposed and well known. I know Muslims that are bewildered and even ashamed about the crimes of ISIS/Da'ish. These extremists use exclusive Quranic texts to kill their own brothers and sisters in the faith, as well as people of

other religions. Some Muslims are speaking out against Islamic extremists, and their lives have been threatened. Many Muslims have fled the Middle East for fear of ISIS. Some have given up on religion and turned secular. Religion has been debased and degraded for many good people.

- Israeli Jewish settlers: What is less known and exposed are the Israeli Jewish settler extremists. They have been cleverly hidden from many people in the west, especially in the United States. These religious extremists are no longer a fringe group in Israeli society. Some are ministers in Netanyahu's right-wing government. They dictate government policies that are extremely vicious against the Palestinians. The Palestinians have little recourse to the rule of law. By and large, the Israeli courts and the judges are in the service of the settlers and most of the verdicts are in their favor. The extremist settlers have a free hand and they seem to be unstoppable. They are motivated and inspired by their religious sacred books, not only the Torah but also the Talmud and the Halakha. These extremist settlers begin with a major premise that God gave all of the land of Palestine to Jews and that the Arabs/Palestinians living on the land are thieves. This is what they believe. Therefore, they must liberate the land. When they build settlements, they do not believe that they are confiscating Palestinian land. For them, it is not an act of stealing, as the Palestinians and the international community say it is;

they believe they are redeeming and sanctifying the land. They believe they are transferring the land from the satanic to the divine sphere, and that the use of force is permitted wherever and whenever necessary. They believe they are doing God's work. They believe that God is with them whenever, in his name, they kill Palestinians. There are many Israeli and American Jews (as well as Jews of other countries) who are disturbed about what is happening. Some are speaking out against these extremists but the majority of Israeli Jews are silent. Frankly speaking, I see many similarities between extremist Muslims like Da'ish/ISIS and Israeli Jewish religious settlers. They both have the same mindset and both share similar racist religious laws.

- Western Christian extremists: Christian extremism expresses itself, to a large extent, in Christian Zionist ideology that usually has been translated

into political decisions and actions. It continues to have dire consequences on the life and future of our Palestinian people -- the indigenous people of this land. In fact, western Christian Zionists must share the responsibility for the creation of Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel. One of the closest friends of Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, was an Anglican priest by the name of William Hechler. Rev. Hechler was instrumental in inspiring and educating Herzl on those passages of the Bible that, he believed, call for the return of Jews to Palestine in fulfillment of prophecy. There are western Christians who are sympathetic to the Palestinians but still believe that the land of Palestine was given by God to the Jewish people. Do they support us because they feel sorry for us? The biblical texts they use reflect a tribal and exclusive understanding of God that has



Wall at Aida Camp



Israeli road built on Palestinian land; Wall separating Beit Jala from its land

been annulled and transcended by later prophetic writing within the Old Testament itself, and most certainly by the New Testament. Such biblical texts have no historical value. They have become, exegetically and theologically, redundant. God is the God of truth and justice and wills justice for the oppressed. In my upcoming book, I try to help the reader understand some of these texts.

- Jesus defines religious extremism: before In my study of the gospels, I have always felt that the best definition of religious extremism and fundamentalism was given by Jesus Christ himself. According to the Gospel of John 16:1-3, Jesus said, “I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.” The words in John’s Gospel reflect the negative friction and struggle between the Jewish and the Christian

communities at the end of the first century. The recorded words of Jesus were a great encouragement to the believers during their persecution. In effect Jesus is saying: you will be persecuted and even killed by religious people who think that by killing you, they are doing God’s will. Sadly, this still reflects the situation of some Christian communities in the Middle East.

- Saul of Tarsus - a religious extremist: A case in point, in the book of Acts, is the story of Saul of Tarsus who later became Paul. In today’s language, Saul was a religious extremist. Out of his religious zeal, he was rounding up and persecuting the followers of Jesus (Acts 9). Saul approved of the stoning to death of Stephen, one of the young Christian converts (Acts 7:54, 58; 8:1). The story of Saul, the religious extremist, and his conversion is part of Christian history.

Certainly, our three religions can share stories about how their adherents were persecuted at the hands of extremists of another

religion. Oftentimes, some of the worst religious persecutions happened from within the same religion. The hostilities within the same religion can oftentimes exceed the enmities from outside. As examples, one can point to wars between Catholics and Protestants within Christianity; Sunnis and Shias within Islam; Haredim and mainline Jews within Judaism. From one perspective, religious extremists have different religious labels but they share the same basic mentality and mindset. We need to recognize that our religious histories are full of crimes committed against each other, and tragically, western Christians bear some responsibility for atrocities against other religions. The most striking examples are the Crusades and western Christian anti-Semitism. The basic truth is that none of us is innocent. All of us have sinned against God and neighbor. We need to stand before God in humility and repentance.

When I reflect on religious extremism, I wonder: Is the crisis brought about by religious extremism the result of faulty interpretations of religious sacred texts, or in the content and substance of those texts? In other words, does the problem lie in people’s belief in a violent god they find in their scriptures or is it in their blindness and unwillingness to see God as merciful and compassionate who requires us to do justice and to live in peace with one another?

Finally, what are the antidotes to the malaise of religious extremism? I would like to suggest a simple exercise. Every religion needs to identify what constitutes the heart of its religious faith as well as the core of its religious and spiritual



Opening Worship at Church of St. Catherine, Bethlehem

values. This exercise must be done not only by religious people but by individuals, men and women, whether practicing their religion or not. How do ordinary people understand and articulate the core of their religious faith? How do ordinary people understand God? How do they regard their neighbor? Can people produce a criterion that can help them test and measure their behavior in light of the core values of their religion? I would like to suggest the value of love as the criterion that can help us measure our religion, beliefs, faith, and behavior.

Let me end with two quotations that are antidotes to religious extremism. First: After his conversion, Saul of Tarsus became known as Paul. In his letter to the Church at Corinth he wrote:

“If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not

have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body (to be burned) so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Love is the antidote. Love trumps faith. Love trumps knowledge. Love trumps martyrdom. Paul got it from Christ. This was the revolution which Jesus Christ accomplished. Indeed, Jesus was brought up in a religious home and was taught to love God and to obey the religious laws. But later Jesus realized that under the façade of religiosity was a deep seated hypocrisy and racism that cannot belong to authentic religious faith. Authentic religious faith rejects any tribal, exclusive, and nationalist understanding of God. It rejects bigotry and racism. Authentic religious faith sees God as the God of all people. It sees God’s love and mercy embracing all people with no exceptions.

Secondly, Jesus Christ is the source.

He has given us the antidote of love for healing our religious extremism:

You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have. Do not the tax collectors do the same? ... (Matt 5: 43-46).

The antidote to the malaise of religious extremism is love. It is left to us to translate love into a strategy of action that can work in each of our various cultures. Brothers and sisters, this conference is a wakeup call. It presents us with a challenge. Take a good look at your religion and measure it against the demand of love of God and love of your neighbor. Amen.

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

# The Balfour Declaration: Historical Context

by: Dr. Peter A. Shambrook



Dr. Peter Shambrook speaking on the Balfour Declaration

In 1914, Great Britain was still the world's most powerful empire. Over a period of 500 years or so, through exploration, trade and settlement, treaties and the sword, missionaries, slavery, massacres, and ethnic cleansing, Britain colonised Ireland, part of the Americas, parts of Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and much more. During the 18th and 19th centuries, negotiating with allies concerning the control and division of unexplored territories, or the provinces of potential enemies was normal empire policy.

Empires impose, empires dispose, according to their interests. In 1914, the (mostly) Oxford and Cambridge male oligarchy who ran Britain and the Empire harboured no doubts about the superiority of British civilisation: maintenance of the British Empire and maintenance of civilisation were synonymous.

Britain was a key player in the Triple Entente, so as soon as the Ottoman Empire entered the war in November 1914, the Russian, French and British governments immediately began intense, secret discussions concerning the post-war division of the whole of the Ottoman Empire, including the Arab provinces. Standard empire policy.

In August 1914, the British government had little, if any, desire whatsoever, to promote either Arab nationalism or Jewish nationalism. So why did the British Government offer an independent Arab state including Palestine to Sherif Hussein in October 1915, then the same Palestine to the Jews in November 1917? One partial answer is World War I: only in the context of its progress can the promises be understood.

Around Christmas 1914, with a

stalemate on the Western Front, the British, French and Russians decided to force the Straits, take Istanbul, and knock Turkey out of the war. In secret discussions the three Allies agreed that post-war Russia would take Istanbul and the Straits, the French would have Syria, and the British ambiguously “reserved the right to claim [any] Ottoman territories in due course” (Constantinople Agreement, March / April 1915). However, as the Allied campaign to capture Istanbul failed (Autumn 1915), the British turned to the Arabs for help. Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Cairo offered British support for an independent Arab state to the Sherif of Mecca (October 1915), if the latter would launch a revolt against the Turks. In June 1916, the Sherif and his men duly started to attack Ottoman forces. The British regarded the letters between the two men as if written on a sheet of water. In November 1915, French civil servant Georges Picot had arrived in London, and negotiated, with Sir Mark Sykes, a mutually acceptable post-war partition of Arab lands: an outrageous example of double-dealing, imperial perfidy, according to George Antonius, but an essential exercise according to the British and French governments, now allies, but whose past rivalries over the region had nearly led them to war. Unable

to agree over Palestine, Sykes and Picot painted it brown on their map, and proposed it be governed by an ‘international administration’ (May 1916).

What then caused the British government in 1917 to turn to the Zionist movement? The tide of war had not yet turned in the Allies’ favour. Apart from the ever present ‘Suez Canal’, Empire security factor, the British government hoped that Russian Jews and the Jews of the USA would become the agents of pro-British propaganda, to aid the war effort. Secondly, diplomatic reports underlined that both the French and the Germans were interested in supporting the Zionist movement for their own colonial ambitions – this encouraged the British not to be outmanoeuvred. Finally, Balfour, Lord Milner, and Lloyd George – brought up on the Old Testament as well the New, although agnostic in reality – felt sympathetic towards the idea of the ‘return’ of the Jews to their homeland. Such sympathy grew out of the influence of Christian Zionist teaching which had strongly affected some of the British church and political establishment during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Throughout April, May, and June 1917, successive Zionist drafts were sent to the cabinet office. The only Jew in the cabinet, Edwin Montagu, was the most outspoken opponent of the Declaration, together with Lord Curzon – both of them, eventually, outmanoeuvred. Never was a declaration more carefully crafted. Its chief characteristic: deliberate ambiguity. The final draft explicitly recognised the legitimacy of Jewish *national* rights in Palestine, and implicitly denied Arab *national*

rights in Palestine, although the Arabs constituted some 92% of the indigenous population. Thus, Zionism was transformed overnight from a small, militarily powerless movement into an internationally recognised project: the dream became a possibility.

Chaim Weizmann played a key role in this saga. He met Churchill first in 1905, Balfour in 1906, and Lloyd George in 1914. In fact, he met with Prime Minister Lloyd George seven times during the war, and by his own account had 2,000 meetings with British officials at the highest level during this decisive period. Between 1905 and 1948, there was no Palestinian equivalent of Weizmann in the corridors of power of London, Washington or Paris. Moreover, it is vital to understand the mentality of these decision-makers, both of the Zionists (seeking safety, security, and a Jewish national home, following many centuries of Western Christian persecution, especially the late 19th century pogroms) and of the British, Empire-fixated elite. Most Government ministers regarded Arabs as politically and militarily insignificant, and economically, culturally, and theologically backward. Such orientalist attitudes were mirrored by Weizmann and his fellow European and American Zionist colleagues, and were undoubtedly a factor in the policies they pursued.

Although Balfour signed the letter, it was Churchill, as Colonial Secretary (1921-22), who successfully implemented and transformed the Declaration into the Mandate document of 24 July 1922. Henceforth, the cornerstone of British Mandatory policy in

Palestine was (unlike Egypt and Iraq) the unpublicised, deliberate withholding of democratic political institutions. Ironically, both Walid Khalidi and Sir Martin Gilbert agree on the centrality of this decisive denial policy, but disagree over its morality. Three significant key policies which emanated directly from the Declaration were the establishment of the Zionist Commission, the encouragement of Jewish immigration, and Jewish land purchase.

If there is one particular word which characterises a century of British policy towards the Arabs of Palestine, it is deception. Three brief examples: the Government publicised the Declaration as emanating exclusively from the War Cabinet. In fact, it was a two-party agreement. Secondly, during the 1920s British governments repeatedly denied any intention to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. In fact, the state archives reveal the exact opposite. Thirdly, for the past century no British government has ever acknowledged that in October 1915 Sir Henry McMahon promised Palestine to Sherif Hussein.

Thus it was that a 18<sup>th</sup> century-style colonial document, written by 19<sup>th</sup> century-minded Europeans during the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s ‘Great War for Civilisation’, and subsequently implemented by military force for three decades, sowed the seeds of the apparently endless, and certainly devastating, one hundred-year war for Palestine.

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Conference participants in front of the Dome of the Rock

# Islamic Fundamentalism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

by: Dr. Ghada Karmi

## Introduction

Over the last decade, the role of religion in conflicts of varying types has become a subject of increasingly prominent discourse, whether seen as a primary or a contributory cause of such conflicts. However true that may be in some situations, it needs careful examination as a factor in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is understandable that such a view has become prevalent since the rise of Hamas and other Islamist movements amongst the Palestinians and the prominence of religious groups and religious symbolism amongst Israelis. However, the conflict between the Zionist movement, culminating in the creation of the Israeli state, and the Palestinians is basically a

secular one over land. Right from the beginning of Zionism in Europe, the argument was about establishing a state for Jews. This led to a quest for territory on which to build such a state. It is well known that the Zionists considered various options, including Argentina, Uganda and Australia. They finally decided on Palestine because of its historical, religious and emotional associations for many Jews. As such, Palestine had an appeal for European Jews which the Zionists calculated could lure many of them to leave their countries of residence and undertake the major journey to a new and distant land. These decisions were not taken by religious Jews and not from a religious impetus. They were the product of deliberations by

secular people who nevertheless felt they had a Jewish identity of some sort. Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, in fact knew little of Palestine and had little interest in its religious significance.

Palestinians, threatened by the onslaught of these ideas against their country, never seriously believed the perpetrators to be motivated by religious zeal. A small Jewish minority, estimated to be 3000 people in 1880, had co-existed with the Arabs in Palestine for centuries. They were used to calling this minority 'Arab Jews', and were familiar with Jewish religious practices, since a majority of these Jews were devout. A tradition of Jewish pilgrimage to the Holy Land was well established,

and such people ended up in the places sacred to Jews: Safad, Hebron and Jerusalem. Zionism, however, was recognised from the start as something quite different. When the early immigrants came to Palestine at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were few in number and generally ignored. But, following the Balfour Declaration of 1917, and with increased European Jewish migration into the country after 1920, Palestinians began to understand that these new arrivals were after their land. This apprehension gathered pace with the attempts on the part of the immigrants to buy land.

Over the decades up to 1948 and the establishment of the state of Israel, the conflict increased between the Zionists and the indigenous Palestinians. Although other factors were now complicating the conflict, for example a tussle over unfair treatment by the British authorities who ruled the country, and the growing evidence of state building which they were helping the Zionists to achieve, the basic causes for the fight never changed. In 1947, the UN passed Resolution 181 to partition Palestine, giving the Zionist incomers 55% of the total. A year later, the Zionists, who had managed to buy only about 6% of the land, were able to acquire 78% of it through war.

In the war of 1967, Israel enlarged its acquisition of Palestine by seizing the rest of it, a situation which has held to this day. The pattern of Israeli control was always the same: to acquire Palestinian land, to settle it with Jews and to consolidate the Jewish presence in a variety of ways. This current situation is one

of ongoing Israeli colonisation in the territories occupied since 1967, but also in the parts of the country previously taken in 1948. One of the most important ways to do this was to keep the cleared Palestinians out of their land. In the wake of the 1948 war, Palestinian farmers who tried to get back to their farmlands were shot dead, and brutal reprisals against the Arab countries which hosted them were mounted to deter any more 'infiltration'. The people evicted from their land in 1948 and who went on to become refugees and exiles have been steadfastly denied the right to return ever since then. In these ways, Israel succeeded in taking over the whole of Palestine, although it was not able to expel its entire people. This whole history attests to the immutable fact that the struggle was over the ownership of land from the beginning and until today.

The Palestinian response was likewise related to this question. Resistance had been mounted against the

Zionist invasion throughout the period from 1920 until 1948. Yet it was quite unable to halt the Zionist advance, or to prevent the mass eviction of Palestinians that took place before and after 1948. When, in 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation was set up, it was a movement devoted to regaining the lost homeland. The leadership of the PLO and many of its fighters were secular and saw their struggle as such. This does not mean that they had no religious feeling. On the contrary, most PLO members and Palestinians, as a whole, were Muslims, some devout and many practised the rituals of Islam. But the PLO's ideology was not religious, and it can only be described as an essentially secular response to Zionism.

## Religious Zionism

After the 1967 war, religiously motivated Jewish settlers began to colonise the newly acquired Palestinian territories. Although



Tomb of the Patriarchs, Hebron



Panel on Islamic Extremism, Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah, Dr. Ghada Karmi, Hans Morten Haugen (Moderator) and Dr. Mustafa AbuSway

the Israeli government remained as secular as before, it used the fervour of these settlers to expand its colonialist enterprise. Soon, Gush Emunim, (Block of the Faithful) was one of the best organised of these religious groups. Founded in 1974, it believes that Erez Israel (the whole of Palestine) belongs exclusively to the Jews, and no part of it can be given up. Over time, Gush Emunim and several other orthodox groups have come to dominate Israeli policy over the occupied territories. These groups represent a Jewish fundamentalism akin to that of some American Protestants. They all believe in the coming of the Messiah, although the role assigned to the Jews in this process is different. Amongst their number, the extremist rabbi, Meir Kahane, became a prominent figure who espoused the expulsion of all Arabs from the Land of Israel. These movements were strengthened by the election of a Likud government in 1977 and the appointment of Ariel Sharon as infrastructure minister. The settlement project developed

massively under this government, and the religious fundamentalists flourished. Although the Jewish presence in the West Bank looked religious, and no doubt many of the settlers were fundamentalists, the project was still concerned primarily with the acquisition of land. Nevertheless, Jewish religious fundamentalism has increased in the last two decades, and shows no sign of abating. With time, these religious settlers have increased in numbers and strength, and their role in affecting Israeli state policy is growing.

Was this something new for Israel, whose leadership and state ethos had traditionally been secular? In fact, such a phenomenon was always inherent in the Zionist project. A Jewish state in concept could only have assigned a religious definition to its Jewish citizens. What else was there to define a Jew? It was for this reason that the rabbinate in Israel holds such power, and why Jewish religious festivals are so rigorously

practised and why religious law still applies to personal status in matters of marriage and divorce. Without the reference to religion, the edifice on which the Jewish state was built would have crumbled. Furthermore, the case for establishing the Jewish state in Palestine relied heavily on invoking and strengthening Judaism's links to it. It is hardly surprising that, in such a context, religious fundamentalism should have appeared.

#### ***Palestinian Islamism – Development and Timeline***

##### ***Political Islam 1917 – 48.***

*Islamic ideas around because of Muslim Brotherhood. Attempt to reconcile Islam with modernity. But in Palestine, nationalist response over physical control of land. Part of secular Arab nationalism.*

*1945 – 25 branches, in Jerusalem, Nablus, Haifa, Gaza. Up to 20,000 members. Message: teach Quran, fight against poverty and illiteracy. No real power and did not share in*

*the fight against Zionism, except in Gaza in 1948. Struggle thereafter was nationalist and Islamist.*

***Izz al-Din al-Qassam – d.1935.*** *Struggle against colonial occupation through reassertion of Muslim identity and jihad. Appeal to poor peasants and dispossessed. Hero and model for Hamas. Qassamite movement set up after him. But his death affected the British who treated Palestinians better and set up institutional Islam.*

***Hajj Amin al-Husseini.*** *British appointed him as Mufti in 1921. First General Islamic Congress in Jerusalem 1935. Internecine conflict with Nashashibis. People thought him a British stooge. Said idea of a Jewish national home is a religious idea, and Palestinians could not accept that in a Muslim country. 1936 – British ditched Hajj Amin after 1936.*

***1948 – 67. Period of nationalism.*** *Muslim Brotherhood had set up branches in Gaza refugee camps, attracting lots of members. Only political organisation that was allowed. Provided study and military training. Produced Abu Iyyad and Abu Jihad. Brotherhood allowed to operate in West Bank, centre in Amman. Activities devotional, not political resistance. 1952: Liberation Party, Palestinian Islamist movement. Aim to establish an Islamic state.*

*Brotherhood fell victim to fight with the Egyptian Government – Brotherhood dissolved in 1954, arrests and crackdown including Gaza.*

*1964 – PLO established. Secular, nationalist. Gazans turned against Brotherhood. Fedayeen movement not religious, also in Gaza. 1971 Israel attacked Gaza, 15,000 deported to*

*Sinai. Leadership crushed.*

##### ***Political Islam 1977 – 86***

*Aim of all movements: to establish Islamic state under Shari'a law. But different ways of getting there. Ideology relies on external sources, e.g. Egypt, Iran. Anti-colonialist, anti-secularist, anti-Zionist, anti-Jewish.*

##### ***1. Gaza***

*Reaction to Israeli assault. Supported by Israel to destroy nationalist activity. Ahmad Yassin – Muslim Brother, Shatti camp. Created Islamist movement in Gaza. 1973. Formed al-Mujamma' – social services, welfare, Islamic education, clinics, etc. Aim to defeat PLO.*

*Israeli-funded. Israel gave Mujamma' charitable status 1978. Internal fighting with PRC. Took over Islamic university in 1978. Education important to spread Islam. Israel helped Mujamma' to expel nationalists from university board, and stood aside during episodes of strife. Israel supplied*

*weapons. Regular meetings with Ahmad Yassin etc. 1984 – Ahmad Yassin arrested.*

##### ***Islamic Jihad***

*Founded 1986. Gaza. Small. To end Israeli rule. Split off from Muslim Brotherhood and Mujamma' because not anti-occupation enough. Inspired by and supports Iranian revolution—this showed that mighty rulers could be toppled. And so, Israel could be too. Mujamma' stopped supporting Iran because of Saudi Arabia. Debate over Iran.*

##### ***2. West Bank***

*Muslim Brotherhood strong here. But nationalist strong here too. Secularism strong. Islamists viewed as reactionary. Except rural areas and Hebron. PLO decline after 1982 meant Islamists gained more of a foothold. Even joined PFLP against Fateh. Najah University, an Islamist stronghold. 1986 Islamist bloc formed here. Used violence to get their ends, Israel interfered on their*

Continued on page 22 ➤➤



Interior of Al Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem

# Jewish Extremism

by: Sabar Vardi



*Jewish settlers on the Haram al Sharif*

I've been asked to talk about Jewish extremism, but I think first we must think about what we mean by "Jewish" and what we mean by "extremism." If we start with "Jewish," obviously there are a lot of definitions that go along with that term. It's important to understand, at least in the context that I come from in Israeli Jewish society, "Jewish" is not just a religion. If you look at Israeli ID cards, under

the Nationality clause, it would say "Jewish." And even though they've changed that now, and the ID doesn't say that anymore, the registry of the Ministry of the Interior classifies your nationality as Jewish, not just your religion. And when I talk about or think about Jewish extremism in this context, I think it's important to put it in the scope of nationalism and not just looking at a religion.

So, that's how I'm going to treat the question of "Jewish." And the issue of "extremism" is obviously a very relative term. When we think about extremists, we think about the fringe of society. If you think about Jewish extremism, you might picture what we call the "hilltop youth," the settler movement youth who go up to the hilltops in the West Bank, who start outposts and who are very

violent towards Palestinians on a very physical level. We have that image of extremism. But what I would like to talk about is what happens when the mainstream opinion is extreme. Extremism doesn't necessarily have to be the fringe, although that's what the word implies, but today, if you look at Israeli politics, the entire spectrum of it should be considered as extreme. I think we make a mistake if we differentiate the extremists from the mainstream establishment. If we just take examples from the last week (and there's always examples from "last week," no matter when you are speaking), we had this Bill, the amendment to the Entry to Israel Law, the 27<sup>th</sup> amendment, some of you might have heard of it, it forces the Ministry of the Interior to not give permits or visas to people who support a boycott or are part of a boycott. So, even if you just committed to participate in one, and the definition of boycott is a boycott of Israel or any of its institutions or any territory that it holds (I wonder what they mean by that definition?). It's a very general law that will affect a lot of the people here, but for me, what is interesting is seeing who pushed that forward. Does anyone know who the main person or party was who put that forward? Any guesses? It came out from Kulanu which is seen in Israel as a "center" party. It came out of Likud but also has some Labor people in it. It's seen as a center party and these are the people who brought up this bill. And the language around it says that you can have national pride and still believe in human rights. That's part of the explanation of that bill. And I have no idea what the connection is

between that sentence and that bill, but it's important to understand that that extremism is mainstream. Let me try to explain how that is constructed, especially for my generation. I was ten years old when Camp David ended, so very little that happened before that really affected my life or my politics, and obviously people younger than me, even more so. That's not part of our experience. I'm training to be a teacher and teach in a school in south Jerusalem. Part of the time we teach and part of the time we observe, so we see other teachers. I was observing a class of ninth graders, fourteen or fifteen year old kids, and the teacher was trying to explain the difference between right and left in Israel. So, what she did was go around the class of 19 students and ask them if they were right wing or left wing and why. And out of 19 students, 19 said they were right wing (that was not really a question). Seventeen out of 19 said that the reason they were right wing was because they hated Arabs. This is just a random class in a school in Jerusalem. This is not the extreme of anything. That is, right now, the way that these people are brought up, and it's important to remember that we're talking about fourteen, fifteen year old kids. I don't know about you, but I can't blame them for that. That's not their responsibility, but those are the responses coming out of them. That said, in three years, they will be with an M16 assault rifle standing at checkpoints. We can talk about the education system and whose responsibility but these things have very clear consequences. So, if I'm trying to explain how I see some of this extremism I have

something to say about this last generation, this post Camp David generation. There are two main things to say about us. The first is that we actually have no hope. Nobody has ever presented an alternative to us in our lifetime that you can seriously look at as a possibility for something different. Nobody has had a serious negotiation since Camp David; there's nothing on the table; nobody's offering anything. So, the idea for us, the only reality that we are presented with is maintaining the status quo. And this is true for Palestinians and Israelis. We have not had a serious alternative presented. The other thing that is worth noticing is that the segregation between the two societies has increased in those years; the checkpoint system started in the mid-90s, the wall in the beginning of the 2000s. So, the segregation has very much increased and it's had its affect. We like being nostalgic about the period before that, and I think not being there makes it easy to be nostalgic, but there's also a danger in that because if I really try to think about the core values that create the class that I walked into the other day, and create the hatred around this, they started long before the Camp David accords failed. My father grew up in that same mindset and that is a mindset that is based on the idea that the whole state, the whole society around us is created on the basic idea that Jews need a place to be in order to protect ourselves. It's based on a very fundamental place of fear. That's where our society comes from. And the solution offered to that fear is a "state." We say that to protect the Jews we have to create an Israeli state, but what we mean



Refugee displays keys from 1948, Al Aroub Camp near Hebron

by that is that we have to create an Israeli military. We don't say that but what we're actually saying is that the Jews need a military to protect themselves and that the state is a mechanism in which you create a military. And those two things: the fundamental fear that we come from and our response to that, which is the military, are fundamental for the state, for Israeli Jewish society and, I think, create the extremism that we live in now. Because if the idea is that we really believe, and if this is how we are raised, that everyone is trying to kill us as Jews. That's what people try to do.

Probably my favorite example of how this is constructed is in the

holiday season, between April and May, more or less. It's a month that starts with Passover and you know what the story of Passover is -- the exodus from Egypt. And the main commandment from Passover? Remember. Remembrance. In religions you can often have different perspectives on what it is that you remember, and there are amazing things that can be remembered out of that holiday. At the same time, there are also other narratives that can be remembered, and the memories that I bring out of that, the songs at the family Passover dinner translate to, "in every generation someone tries to exterminate us and then God saves us from them." This is also a story

that you can remember and take out of Passover. This is part of the Israeli narrative. And exactly a week after Passover ends is the Holocaust Memorial Day and exactly a week after that is the Soldiers' Memorial Day and, literally, the next morning is Independence Day.

And in many ways, I think that's a really good snapshot of Israeli mentality, this idea that everyone has always been trying to kill us, and this has been the case for three thousand years and you should tell this from generation to generation and remember that. And then, the worst example of what that could look like is the Holocaust, and then there's a solution to all that.

Soldiers still dying, still within that status quo, but creating a State, creating a solution to that. In many ways, that's the place that we're stuck in, and when you are in that space of defending yourself all the time, of feeling that you're always being persecuted then it means that when things actually do happen in Jerusalem... I grew up in Jerusalem during the second intifada; buses were blowing up in the streets; that was a reality. And I was told in this education system that everyone is always trying to kill us, and I go outside and people are trying to kill you. And it fits into that narrative, and I think that one of the most dangerous things that that creates, is that when it fits into the narrative of what's been happening for three thousand years, then you don't have to ask the question "why?"

If you go back to October 2015, two girls aged 14 and 16 from Hebron, Palestinian girls, who came into the market in Jerusalem, and possibly tried to stab people with scissors and were shot dead. As a society, I would like us to ask, "What would make a young teenage girl do that?" That should be the first question asked, but if you have an answer that that has been the reality for three thousand years and that's just how things are, then you don't ask that question. And that means that we don't see any alternatives to living by our sword, and if these kids in that school, about three or four hours after that class, hear that a Palestinian in a truck ran over a group of soldiers at a junction in the neighborhood of that school, we could ask that question, "Why would he do that?" knowing

that he would be killed, that his family home would be demolished. These are important questions to ask in trying to understand the reality of Jabal al Mukaber, Sur Baher, the neighborhood that he came from, adjacent to this Jewish settlement where these kids live. We can talk about that, not to legitimize it, but try to understand what his realities are and what fundamental changes need to happen for that to change, but for these kids that's not the case. They don't ask that question. They just said that they're right wing because they hate Arabs, and then Arabs tried to kill people next to them, so they're right wing because they hate Arabs. And it feeds into that same narrative.

So, I think when we talk about extremism, we need to talk about the fear that it comes from and how we also have a responsibility to break that fear and understand it, and try to give people a sense of security, and at the same time, not allow that fear and that extremism to be legitimate. Because the fact that we understand where it comes from, the fact that we can do that analysis and say, well, they're teenage kids, does not mean that in four years when they stand with a gun at a checkpoint, they don't have responsibility for what they're doing. They do have responsibility. But we also have the

responsibility of trying to change that narrative to allow them to step out of extremism, because it's very easy to talk about religious extremism or national extremism from our nice comfortable position of saying that that's not us, but the reality is that it is our responsibility. It's definitely my responsibility as an Israeli who lives here and next year will be teaching in these schools and will teach these kids, but I think it's also the responsibility of the international community to understand how you change your narratives in your own communities as well, because if we really want to challenge that extremism, we need to give it an alternative. And that's an alternative that, at the moment, doesn't exist.

So, that would be my request to you, to challenge these extremisms in your own community, whatever they look like. And we'll keep going back to Trump because this is a big issue at the moment, and for the Americans in the room, this is something that you need to deal with. Again, extremism is not about some white supremacist, anti-semitic, islamophobic, homophobic. It's your President! This is mainstream, so how do we take responsibility for changing that mainstream extremism and shifting it back to the extreme? Thank you.

*Ms. Sahar Vardi has been active with Israeli anti-militarist groups such as New Profile and works as the Israel Program Coordinator for the American Friends Service Committee based in Jerusalem.*





*Gathering at the Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulcher), Jerusalem*

## Comprehending Christian Zionism: Understanding the Movement and its Effect on Palestinian Life

*by: Dr. Robert Smith*

It's a pleasure to be here to participate in this panel on Christian extremism. In my home country, the United States, the only extremism openly discussed is associated with Muslims and Islam. Everyone else, including armed white men shooting Indian engineers in Kansas bars or occupying American facilities, are either mentally ill or defending American ideals. Muslims, however, need to be banned from or potentially removed from the country.

Extremism is a subjective category with no clear definition. The Oxford English dictionary helpfully defines an extremist as a person who holds extreme religious or political views,

especially one who advocates illegal, violent or other extreme action. Merriam Webster dictionary is no better, defining extremism as the quality or state of being extreme. In its special definition for English language learners, Merriam Webster says that extremism is belief in and support for ideas that are very far from what most people consider correct or reasonable. We learn from these definitions in their totality that an extremist is one who is extreme. More specifically, we learn that extremism is associated with radicalism and violence. In other words, designating something as extremist is a pejorative way to ensure that some ideas are beyond

the pale, outside what most people consider correct or reasonable. Any idea outside the norm is potentially extremist.

The designation, then, is a way to police the boundaries of thinkable thought, while stigmatizing any form of resistance to the presumably legitimate violence of the dominant collective. I wonder, then, how we can talk about extremism if we can't say objectively what the word even means, much less build a conference theme around it.

In the absence of clarity, I offer this working definition: Extremism is political action devoted solely to the implementation of its ideology rather than to the well-being of

human communities. Religious extremism, it follows, is when such political action is informed, validated and sanctioned by religious commitments. Since it is singularly committed to ideological purity, even if the content of ideology can vary, extremism resists interaction with contrary ideals. The introduction of religious commitments further limits the possibility of reasoned critique. Religious claims resist critique because they draw upon proprietary sources of knowledge and truth. Therefore, the most effective critique of a religiously sanctioned ideology, extremist or not, is from within that religious tradition itself. Any discussion of Christian extremism, therefore, immediately invokes a notion of intra-Christian responsibility. It is much easier to externalize and ridicule than it is to take responsibility. And the first step toward taking responsibility is to seek understanding.

My approach to Christian extremism is intimately bound up with the sweep of my academic project over all. For close to 20 years I've dwelt on the question of why American Christians act the way we act in relation to Israel and Palestine. This is a self-critical project because I am one of those American Christians. The ideas informing American relation to this geography, Christian Zionism chief among them, are part of my own formative culture. As a result, I seek to understand rather than ridicule or simply dismiss. In this, I hope to challenge the Christian extremism permeating my home country, inflicting violence and pain

on much the rest of the world.

So, in what follows, I'll share some of my research on Christian Zionism and discuss what we can do to challenge its continued primacy in western churches.

Christian Zionism, first and foremost, has very little to do with the so-called rapture theology of premillennial dispensationalism developed in the late 1800s. It is, instead, the outgrowth of English Protestant biblical interpretation in the 1500s and 1600s when Protestants faced the dual threats of Roman Catholic and Ottoman imperial power. The resultant anti Catholic and anti Islamic theology imagined Jews to be allies in an apocalyptic drama. These ideas bolstered an English Puritan sense of special mission and superiority. When these ideas were transferred to English colonies in the New World, they soon informed the deepest undercurrents of in American identity and mission. When this tradition of Judeo-centric prophecy interpretation informed political action, the result was Christian Zionism.

The first documented example of Christian Zionism is in 1649, when two English subjects living in Amsterdam suggest to English authorities, including Oliver Cromwell, that the English civil wars would end if this nation of England, with the inhabitants of the Netherlands, shall be the first and readiest to transport Israel's sons and daughters, in their ships, to the land promised to their forefathers. Several characteristics of Christian Zionism emerge through historical comparison.

First, Christian Zionism constructs Muslims and Jews for its own theological and political purposes. Moreover, its anti Catholic and anti Islamic foundations conspire against any relationship between western and eastern Christians, especially those who claim it is possible to live with Muslim neighbors.

Second, Christian Zionism is an imperial theology. In 1649, English and Dutch ships were not being built for pleasure cruises. These were ships of war and commerce, the tools of empire. In the theology of John Hagee today, the founder of Christians United for Israel, imperial strength is necessary for preserving the fact of Israel, which, of course, is a satrap, an imperial governor, for American and European imperial interests in the Middle East. Contemporary Christian Zionists can be understood as court theologians, serving the interests of corporate and military masters by providing religious sanction for state violence. Given the pervasive cultural consensus of Christian Zionism and its underlying theologies, Anglo American Christians tend to encounter this land as a projection of their own imaginations. The people associated with this land, both Jews and Palestinians, are commonly filtered through a literarily constructed imaginary of Anglo American biblical interpretation. The end result of this process is the creation of theo-political systems seeking to implement ideologies grounded first and foremost in ethno-religious triumphalism, namely the global hegemony of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Jews, through an

Anglo American tradition of Judeo-centric prophecy interpretation, are conscripted to play a part in a Christian drama of global redemption. As a result, Christian Zionism works hand in hand with white, possessive settler colonialism.

If Christian extremism is political action informed, sanctioned and validated by Christian commitments, devoted solely to the pure implementation of its ideology rather than the well-being of human communities, Christian Zionism certainly fits that definition. There are, however, problems with addressing Christian Zionism through the discourses of extremism.

While there's no doubt that Christian Zionism, in the Oxford Dictionary definition of the term, advocates illegal violent or other extreme action by the state of Israel and its settlers, one cannot say, at least regarding the United States, that Christian Zionism is very far from what most people consider correct or reasonable. Christian Zionism, rather, rests at the root of American identity and culture. The resulting cultural consensus helps reinforce western disregard for the well-being of Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities in what many want to call "The Holy Land." Moreover, the notion of extremism most often denotes disorderly, barbarian violence. Christian Zionists, on the other hand, promote theologies as civilized and sophisticated, as the structural violence drones and cruise missiles of the imperial interests that

they serve.

When progressive or liberationist Christians describe Christian Zionism as extremist, they risk thinking of the movement as marginal or as somehow illegitimate. This assessment minimizes the ongoing dangers of the movement as well as the sense of Christian responsibility that it demands. The first step for treating an illness is to seek a proper diagnosis, determining the ideology of the disease. What has caused this disease to come into being? If something is wrong, we must first stop merely recoiling from it and condemning it. Simply saying that cancer is a horrible, bad thing doesn't get us anywhere toward treating it.

The first step is seeking to understand. In physical illnesses, as well as theo-political maladies, this means diving deep into history and seeking comparative cases. In the midst of a pandemic, medical scientists have two primary tasks. First, to develop an antidote to cure the disease, or an inoculation to help prevent infection. In response to the many forms of religious extremism, including Christian Zionism afflicting our world today, religious communities, including churches, including Sabeel, have a responsibility to explore both tracks of action.

So, if discussing Christian extremism invokes a notion of intra Christian responsibility, what shall we do? How can Christian Zionism be effectively challenged as a form of Christian extremism?

The panels of the past few days have made it clear that the antidote to extremism is not more extremism, state sponsored or otherwise. Within each religious community, extremism must, instead, be counteracted by robust moderation, a concept I helped develop with Bishop Munib Younan in his role as President of the Lutheran World Federation. Robust moderation is neither soft nor weak. It isn't based in simplistic wishes that paper over the real challenges and differences facing many communities.

It, instead, promotes a vision for living together peaceably, recognizing the legitimacy of difference and seeking the good in the neighbor and for the neighbor. For those of us from countries far away from Nazareth and Zebabdeh, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, where Christian extremism seeks its own purposes through the violence of empire, our responsibility is not merely to condemn and certainly not to ridicule, but to shape a different vision, seeking not the theo-political interests of western empire, but the well-being of all the peoples of God, in Israel and Palestine and around the world.

*Dr. Robert O. Smith was appointed Director of the Jerusalem Global Gateway in October of 2014. He holds concurrent faculty appointments in the Keough School of Global Affairs and in the Department of Theology at Notre Dame University.*



*Afternoon lectures at Notre Dame, Jerusalem*

## Post-Conference Reflections

*by: Adam Keller*

I have several times attended events at the Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center - and coming there always gives me mixed feelings. This compound, built by the French in the end of the 19th Century, was in 1948 the site of fierce fighting - in which my own father was involved. He never talks about it in any detail, but from the little he lets drop from time to time it must have been a harsh experience. "The Notre Dame - that was a real hell!" "Danny, my classmate, was a swell guy. He did not survive The Notre Dame."

I was reminded of all this once again when coming to attend this year's Sabeel conference. Looking at the peaceful and neat lawns, the friendly and inviting halls and cafeteria, and trying to imagine how a young man

who was going to become my father had been involved in a hideous life-and-death struggle with Palestinian militiamen and Jordanian soldiers - on this very same terrain. And I reflected also on the fact that while this specific location is nowadays quiet and serene, the terrible conflict tearing this country apart did not end - it simply shifted to other locations.

I have always liked the idea of Liberation Theology, ever since I first heard of its appearance in Latin America, many years ago. I think it is highly applicable to the situation of the Palestinians in general and of Palestinian Christians, in particular. I think Sabeel has a very important role in reminding the world that there are Christian Palestinians and

that they suffer from the Israeli occupation as much as do Muslim Palestinians. Which makes it more difficult to subsume Palestinian resistance to the occupation as just one more aspect of the "Worldwide Muslim Terrorist Threat". And Sabeel has a very important role in confronting the version of Christianity which is peddled by various Evangelical groups (mainly in the US, but also in various other countries). Such groups support the most extreme forms of Israeli Jewish nationalism and racism, in the belief that Israeli provocations would bring on Armageddon (a nuclear one) and the Second Coming. (Neglecting to mention to their ardent Israeli supporters the fact that in their scenario of Armageddon about 90%

of the Jews would perish in the cataclysm.)

I should make clear that I am myself not a religious believer, holding neither to the Jewish religion of my very pious paternal grandparents nor to any other system of belief in a supernatural agency. Inevitably, in any gathering of religious people I can only be an observer, not a full-fledged member - though I consider myself an informed and highly interested observer of the world's religions and their adherents. While one may argue endlessly on whether or not God exists, there can be no question that human beings' belief in God (or in gods) exists and that it is one of the most important forces shaping human society and history. As I stated when it was my turn to speak, in my view the effect of

religion is to make a person more strong and determined in what he or she wants to do anyway. A person who wants to seek justice, do charity, help fellow human beings, make the world a better place - can be stronger, more firm and determined when believing that this is what God wants and commands. But unfortunately, also a person who wants to do evil deeds - to kill, enslave, persecute, torture, dispossess - can become more determined, persistent, obdurate in all these nasty things, if becoming convinced that THIS is what God wants and commands. I think you can find people of both kinds in the history of all religions, and all of them finding support for their divergent opinions in the same Scriptures and Holy Texts (the question is what to quote and what interpretation to

give what you quote...) In short, I think that religion should be labeled "handle with care".

It was very clear to me that in the Sabeel conference I was among people whose interpretation of religion is humane and caring - a conference organized by progressive Christians and welcoming progressives of other religions (or of no religion). People like Rabbi Arik Ascherman, my long-time friend and fellow activist, whose brand of Judaism stands in sharp and refreshing contrast to the disgusting fare sadly offered by much of the Jewish religious establishment in Israel.

Unfortunately, the pressure of many political and personal obligations prevented me from attending the whole of the Sabeel conference. Still, the part in which I did participate

was enough to have a very satisfying contact with many warm-hearted and dedicated people, who asked intelligent questions and offered well-thought out comments. It was a chance to renew some old contacts, make many new ones and meet for the first time face to face some people (especially Palestinians) with whom I had had long contact by email or Facebook.

Perhaps my most important contribution was three days after the conference ended, when my mobile phone suddenly rang. On the other end was Yishai Friedman, a journalist whom I encountered several times before: very polite and soft-spoken, but also a very committed supporter of the Israeli extreme right. His intent was very clear from the first question:

"You consider yourself a peace activist - so how could you participate in the conference of these Sabeel Israel-bashers, whose incitement verges on Antisemitism?"

"Incitement? Antisemitism? I noticed nothing of the kind, not the slightest trace of Antisemitism. They are Palestinians who suffer very much from Israeli occupation, and they spoke about it. I heard nothing inciting. I heard justified grievances which Israel should address."

"But they call for boycott of Israel! That is not the position of your organization, Gush Shalom, is it?"

"No, Gush Shalom called for a selective boycott, specifically aimed at settlements. That does not mean that we must impose our own agenda on all our interlocutors. Calling for boycott of Israel is a non-violent method of struggle. I very much prefer a Palestinian who calls for a boycott of Israel to one who blows

himself up in a Tel Aviv bus."

"But these Sabeel people compare what they call the suffering of the Palestinians to the crucifixion of Jesus! Don't you see that this is just a new form of the old blood libel, accusing the Jews of the murder of Jesus!"

"Not at all. Of course, it is historically true that for many centuries Jews, living as vulnerable minority communities in Christian countries, were collectively accused of complicity in the killing of Jesus. It is horribly true that this was used as the pretext for countless acts of persecution. In recent decades, the Catholic Church is doing a very great effort, largely successful, to root out this ugly perversion. But there is nothing comparable between this and pointing out the accurate fact that a people - the Palestinian people, composed of Muslims and Christians - is suffering occupation and dispossession at the hands of a state with the strongest army in the Middle East. And it is a fact that the state doing that is calling itself The State of the Jews, not The State of the Buddhists."

"But still, don't you feel even a bit uncomfortable with the people who evoke the Crucifixion in this way? To go hobnobbing with these people and speak in their conference and so on?"

"Not at all, I felt completely comfortable among the Sabeel people. They are Christians, and the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus is one of the main themes of being a Christian. It is natural for suffering Christians to compare their own suffering with that of Jesus, to speak of 'carrying a cross' and the like. For example, Christians suffering

under a dictatorial regime in Latin America might make the same kind of comparison. Like it is habitual for Jews to make comparisons drawn from the Hebrew Bible. Just a few days ago, when PM Netanyahu made a speech about the Iranian Nuclear Program, he made an extensive reference to the persecution of Jews in the Persian Empire 2500 years ago, as depicted in the Book of Esther. The Islamic Republic of Iran, whatever else they may be accused of, certainly bears no responsibility for that."

There was much more of this, about a whole hour of political-theological debate. I several times pointed out that, though having been invited to speak at the Sabeel conference, I had in no way been authorized to speak on behalf of Sabeel - which I could hardly do, being neither a Christian nor a Palestinian. I suggested that he contact Sabeel directly and let its authorized representatives speak for themselves, and I gave him several phone numbers. Friedman said he intended to do so, specifically mentioning that he wanted to speak with Rev. Naim Ateek. As far as I know, however, he did not do it - leaving me in the position of having acted, willy-nilly, as the spokesperson of Sabeel. I hope I did an adequate job of it.

*Adam Keller is an Israeli journalist and peace activist who was among the founders of Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc), of which he is a spokesperson.*



Panel on Jewish Extremism, Adam Keller, Cathy Nichols (Moderator), Rabbi Arik Ascherman and Ms. Sahar Vardi

» Continued from page 11

behalf. Clashes with nationalists. Bir Zeit – Islamist bloc here, one third of student administration. Hebron University, Islamists dominated. Islamic Jihad cells in West Bank. But small. Military acts.

#### **Hamas**

Arose out of Mujamma' in 1988. Ahmad Yassin spiritual leader. Free to operate. Funding from Gulf States and Europe. Strong base in Gaza and West Bank. Israel recognised it as legitimate. Met with Israeli officials. Israel allowed money to come in. Power struggle with PLO.

1989 – Hamas kidnapped and killed 2 Israeli soldiers. Israel made Hamas a prohibited organisation.

1991 – Gulf war led to cut off of funding to PLO. So weakened it in occupied territories. Hamas still had money and maintained welfare work.

1992 – Hamas attacks on Israel and on Palestinian collaborators. Bad rift with Fateh.

**Ideology.** Derived from Muslim Brotherhood. Way of dealing with Western domination of ideas. Islamic reform is the basis. Israel, a Western puppet. Will go once Islam is reinstated. Populist, able to influence all of Palestinian society through Islamic practice and countering nationalism and secularity.

Promoted via leaflets, no radio or TV station.

1. Loss of faith. The reason for Palestinian losses. Israel viewed as a product of Jewish faith. Therefore, Islamicisation will end

Israel. So, put an end to secular lifestyle, impose hijab, segregation, no entertainment.

2. Attitude to Jews/Israel. Religious conflict. Drawn of Prophet's relationship with the Jews. Zionists and Jews are interchangeable. (cf PLO which saw Zionism as imperialist and nothing to do with Judaism. Charter identified Zionism as the enemy).

3. Jihad. Defense, a duty via different methods. Palestine is a waqf. Reward in Paradise. No dialogue or negotiations.

4. Islamic nationalism. Hamas married the two. So, nationalism is the Muslims ejecting the enemy from Muslim lands, and becomes an Islamic concept. Secularism is a western import, elitist. Hamas represents the mass of people.

5. Relations with the PLO. Hamas is the alternative. Opposes PLO Charter.

#### **Islamic Jihad**

Influenced by: 1. Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Izz al-Din al-Qassam.

2. Ayatollah Khomeini.

Represent Palestinian Islamic ideas. Not populist. A vanguard movement. See Israel as religious and enemy of Islam. Zionism is an imperialist extension. Must be fought to the end. No negotiation, because no partial solutions. Not interested in fighting secular Palestinians.

#### **Summary**

As we have seen, Islamism became a feature after the first Intifada with the rise of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Defense, a duty via these movements espouse a clearly religious ideology, based on Islam and opposed to secularism. Their influence has grown in the last decade and threatens to change the character of Palestinian resistance to Israel. The Palestinian election of 2006 brought in a Hamas dominated government. Since that time, the rift with the secular nationalism of Fateh has intensified, and today there is a separate regime ruling the two parts of the Palestinian areas.\*

The Western states have nurtured this rift by designating Hamas a terrorist organisation. In the wake of the bombings of September 11, 2001, Israel was quick to draw a comparison with the Palestinian Islamic movements, which laid the basis for this designation. With the addition of another Islamist movement, Hezbollah, the Islamic parties in Palestine are gaining ground. Thus, a conflict which was not religious in basis, has acquired a religious colouring. The Palestinian movements have developed partly in response to the religious dimension of Israel's character, and partly because of Palestinian inability to defeat Israel. It is doubtful that they would have developed at all without Israel's existence.

\*Editor's note: As of October 12, 2017, Hamas and Fateh have signed an agreement to unify the two sides. The agreement is scheduled to take effect December 1, 2017.

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Visit our newly revised website at [www.sabeel.org](http://www.sabeel.org)

## PURPOSE STATEMENT *of* SABELL

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

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

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

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