

PREFACE

While ancient Palestine witnessed the rise and fall of Jewish nationalism, the modern State of Israel and Zionism represent the rise and progression of Jewish national life. Both ancient and contemporary historiography reveal the close linkage between politics and religion in Israel's national existence. Jewish nationalism, past and present, is rooted in biblical ideas. Whereas the Zionist movement is largely political, at present it is also viewed through a theological prism.

At the same time, one can observe the flourishing of local and pan-Arab nationalism. This process influenced a shaping of the collective identity and religion of contemporary Palestinian Christians. Their Arab nationalist identity presents Jewish sovereignty, of any kind, as a theological problem. Thus, Palestinian Christianity sharply opposes Christian Zionism, and along with Muslims views Jewish Zionism as a western Crusader Christendom. It seems that this "theological" nationalist movement of Palestinian Christians will remain on the public agenda for the time being.

In this study Dr. Gershon Nerel employs a new comparative approach. Historical comparisons he uses for this analysis provide a unique insight into the political and theological world of Palestinian Christians.

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of the Jewish State in 1948, and the parallel emergence of a Palestinian entity, continuously affects the theological outlook of the Church vis-à-vis Israel and Palestinian Christians. Arab Christians of various denominations reproduce the anti-Israel theology that originated in the historic churches. When leading Palestinian prelates shape their identity, they infuse their antagonistic interpretations into the Bible, comprising Old and New Testaments. Arab Christians frequently refer to Church History as it unfolded during the past two millennia in order to lay claims for their particularistic theologies and national positions.

Palestinian Christians closely link theology and the geopolitical reality. They claim historic rights with legal recognition, rooted in a "Palestinian gospel." In fact, they validate their views using the biblical narrative. Authoritative clergymen among Palestinian Christians denounce contemporary Christian Zionism while opposing Israel through a systematic de-Judaization of the Bible.

Among the monotheistic religions of the Middle East, one does not merely discover a bilateral encounter between Judaism and Christianity, but rather a trilateral encounter between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. All three groups strongly express their 'position on Israel' either as identifiers or as opponents. Thus, for example, Palestinian Christians and Palestinian Muslims find a common interest in attacking Zionism, Israel, and the "Jewish Bible."

The symbiosis between Palestinian Muslims and Palestinian Christians currently evolves around confronting Christian Zionism as a "dangerous heresy." Nowadays, anti-Zionism, anti-Israelism and antisemitism are the product of the dialectical nature of the relationship between Jewish History, Church History and Islamic History.

INTRODUCTION*

“At a time when religious movements are reasserting themselves in the Middle East and antisemitism is on the rise around the world, it is especially important to understand Israel’s profound *theological* significance for both its friends and its adversaries. In contrast to the perception of most Jews that their state is decidedly secular, for both the Christian and Islamic traditions, the very existence of a sovereign Jewish entity has great theological implications.”

Joseph Dan, “Jewish Sovereignty as a Theological Problem,” *Azure* 16 (2004): 124.

This booklet originated in a paper which I read at the international conference organized by the *Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism* (SICSA) during February (18-21) 2003, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. My research on *Anti-Zionism in the “Electronic Church” of Palestinian Christianity* was first presented in the session “Between Palestinians and Israelis: The Church and the Media,” at that Jerusalem conference on *Antisemitism and Prejudice in the Contemporary Media*.¹ It showed that the historic anti-Jewish theology, as well as anti-Israel attitudes within the Church, are still attractive and influential. This is especially true of Arab churches within the Palestinian Authority which still adopt, revive and revise the anti-Israel heritage of Christianity.

While Christian Zionists insist that theologically the Jews as a people still remain the *Elect Nation* in a divine plan, as well as legitimately possessing their biblical homeland, Palestinian Christians take an active

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¹ A Hebrew version of this paper appeared in *Mahanaim: A Review for Jewish Thought and Culture—Between Jews and Christians: Contemporary Issues*, ed. by Rabbi Menachem Hacohen, no. 15 (2003): 77-87; and Gershon Nerel, “Spiritual *Intifada* of Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews,” in *Israel: His People, His Land, His Story*, ed. by Fred Wright (Eastbourne 2005), 205-19.

part in a spiritual intifada against Israel. Leadership of Palestinian Christians, Catholic, Protestant and Greek Orthodox, now use the media to disseminate anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli propaganda, allegedly based on the Bible. Thus, for example, the current “Palestinization” of Jesus, of Mary and of the Apostles, systematically attempts to manipulate the biblical narrative. Furthermore, when Palestinian prelates present Arab Christians as the authentic “Mother Church of Jerusalem”, they blatantly reshape historiography to fit their own aspirations in the Land, both from national and theological perspectives.

The ideas about Jewish sovereignty, linked to the foundations of Christianity, belong to the theological self-understanding par excellence of the churches. The churches had after 1948 to face a new reality about Israel, the fact there is no contradiction between Jewry/Judaism and national sovereignty exercised by Jews in the Holy Land in the framework of a Jewish State.

The establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, was a severe shock to historical Christian theology, undermining the concept of supersession or replacement, which led the Church to define itself as “Verus Israel.”

PROPAGANDA IN THE ELECTRONIC CHURCH

The Internet is a revolutionary tool shaping the Christian Church today.² Palestinian clergymen of different denominations are no exception in using cyber-communications to shape their religious, social, and political agenda. The Online Church adapts biblical exegesis to political circumstances.³ Various denominations operate websites through which they propagate their particular teaching. In his book, *Propaganda*, Jacques Ellul has demonstrated that disinformation is most effective when it reaches an individual “alone in the mass,” cut off from group participation.⁴ Therefore, when the electronic church targets the individual person facing the “on-screen pulpit,” it becomes a powerful tool of inducement. Thus, the electronic church influences thousands of

² See, e.g., D. Aikman, “The Internet, God’s Tool,” *Charisma* 24, no. 8 (Mar. 1999): 102.

³ Cf. A. H. Fjeldstad, “Communicating Christ in Cyberspace,” *World Evangelization* 82 (Apr. 1998): 4-7.

⁴ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965).

isolated individuals who benefit from “freedom of the press,” but lack a sense of proportion that would come from being exposed to *other* points of view. Needless to say, secular websites do not enjoy the unique authority of a “legitimate” electronic church.

THE PALESTINIAN “INTERNET CHURCH” AND THE MEDIA REVOLUTION OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

A close comparison between modern Palestinian churches and ancient Christianity reveals significant similarities in the use of revolutionary communication tools in order to promote an ideological cause.⁵ The media tactics employed today by Palestinian Christians are strikingly similar to early Christian historiography, as portrayed in Doron Mendels’ book, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity*. Contemporary Palestinian Christians, like Eusebius Pamphilus of the fourth century A.D., the father of ancient Christian historiography, employ the techniques of a media revolution in order to communicate their views to the general public.⁶ Palestinian bishops and deacons today channel the medium of computer communications towards the promotion of their national Palestinian cause, raising support for Palestinian identity and statehood.

Analogies between modern and ancient phenomena can be misleading, yet when well documented they may stimulate fresh thinking. Thus, one cannot avoid the symmetry between the abovementioned distant situations, particularly while talking about “martyrdom as a media asset,” and correlating between ancient martyrdom and modern terrorist groups—acting in Israel or Sarajevo.⁷ Parallels also appear between ancient and modern “competing media channels.” This is manifest, for example, in the struggle over orthodoxy and heresy in antiquity, or the rhetoric and propaganda of Palestinian Christians against Israel and its Christian-Zionist supporters.⁸

⁵ See, e.g., S. D. O’Leary, “Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59, no. 4 (1996): 781-808.

⁶ Doron Mendels, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius’s Ecclesiastical History* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999); idem, “The Rise of the Eastern Church: Media Revolution” (in Hebrew), *Zemanim* 77 (Winter 2001-2002): 12-19.

⁷ Mendels, *Media Revolution*, 75-76.

⁸ Ibid., 111-14.

There is an analogy between Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* and the national historiography within the electronic church of Palestinian Christianity, molding together religious and political aspects.

Dignified prelates are the real narrators of this new "Palestinian Ecclesiastical History," and they do not hide their most harsh and blunt words against Israel. Both personally and by proxy the Palestinian hierarchy exploits the "Electronic Church" and the media in order to penetrate the public sphere.

Because Palestinian Christians fully identify with the nationalist aspirations of Arab/Muslim Palestinian society, anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism are major components in their propaganda. Total opposition to Israel's historic rights to Eretz-Israel is a central theme as they rewrite the Palestinian Christian history. It is particularly within the hierarchical Episcopalian churches—Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran—that the figure of the Palestinian *bishop* functions as *the* visible (or incognito) historiographer of "Palestinian Ecclesiastical History." In other words, it is the bishop, with a "nose for news," who stands behind the biblical and political contextualization.⁹ The axis of this trend is the clergy's interpretation of reality through a distorted biblical imagery.

BASIC NETWORK OF THE PALESTINIAN "ELECTRONIC CHURCH"

This study focuses mainly on the Latin Catholic and Protestant Palestinian churches. Since the second half of the 20th century, it is the local Arab clergy who represent Western Christendom within the Arab Palestinian churches. One can easily find links via a search engine, such as Google (www.google.com), to information, public statements, and news items by entering the names of prominent Palestinian Christian personalities or those of lay Palestinian Christians operating from overseas.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., 176.

¹⁰ Cf. Peggy Sidur, "Trapped in the Network" (in Hebrew), *Kol Hazman*, 26 Apr. 2002, 74-76; www.ccme.org/palestine.html

The Palestinian Latin Church

Headed by Msgr. Michel Sabbah, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem operates its own web site (www.lpj.org).¹¹ On the surface, this site engages in no direct anti-Israel propaganda, but among the links, the reader may reach the website “Al-Bushra,” sponsored by the Arab-American Roman Catholic Community (www.al-bushra.org). The Al-Bushra site is run by Fr. Labib Kobi, a priest of Palestinian origin at St. Anne of the Sunset in San Francisco, California. While claiming “to walk the streets of the world with every human rights peacemaker calling for BROTHERHOOD and love,” the site in fact disseminates toxic anti-Zionist and anti-Israel propaganda in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, German, and Arabic; there is even some material in Czech.

Al-Bushra’s pages include a section on Israel with links to numerous documents and websites venomously critical of Israel, many of which deny any Jewish historical roots in the country. Among other items, one finds a link to Gandhi’s famous letter of 1938 declaring that Palestine belongs to the Arabs (www.al-bushra.org/israel/ghandi.htm), and to excerpts from the late Israel Shahak’s book, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years*. Shahak, formerly a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a communist journalist, produced many books and articles denouncing Judaism, Israel, and Zionism. For a time, Al-Bushra also linked to the website of Neturei Karta, a marginal ultra-Orthodox Jewish sect that is anti-Zionist and has its own “foreign minister” who met several times with Yasser Arafat. Links to websites of Israeli and Jewish organizations are only to those in the “peace movement” or those who are hypercritical of Israeli policies.

Among the links eventually removed from “Al-Bushra,” one could find “Via Dolorosa,” a loaded term of itself, targeting Middle Eastern and American Christians (www.via-dolorosa.net).¹²

The Palestinian Anglican Church

The Anglican Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, headed by Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal has a website (www.jerusalem.anglican.org), with an

¹¹ Michel Sabbah was born in Nazareth in March 1933 and is the first Palestinian to hold the office of Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem (from 1988); see “Biography to [sic] Patriarch Sabbah,” www.lpj.org

¹² Material from this website are available in the private archive of Gershon Nerel.

extensive list of links.¹³ Noteworthy sites are the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF; www.hcef.org) and the World Council of Churches (WCC; wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/jerusalem.html). Six separate links are made to Al-Bushra site, and all these sites have “Updates on the intifada” and anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli documents.

A key figure in the Anglican community remains Rev. Canon Naim Ateek, founder and director of Sabeel (“The way” in Arabic; www.sabeel.org), “an ecumenical center for Palestinian Liberation Theology, which seeks to make the Gospel contextually relevant.” This site is one of the most aggressive in its anti-Zionist and anti-Israel campaign. It gives the reader the impression of a serious religious site, aimed toward intellectuals who espouse liberation theology. Links are to groups like the pacifist Catholic Pax Christi organization, the Middle East Council of Churches, and journals such as *Sojourners* and *The Christian Century*. It is linked to anti-Zionist sites like Al-Jazeera, Indymedia, and Arab.net, as well as to Israeli peace movements like Peace Now and Bat Shalom, and to Al-Bushra. Canon Ateek’s anti-Israel vitriol has significantly influenced the Anglican Church in recent years.

The Palestinian Lutheran Church

The Lutheran website (www.holyland-lutherans.org) names Bishop Munib A. Younan as head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan (ELCJ), which takes its name from the fact that its congregations were founded when the Old City of Jerusalem and the sites of other congregations were considered part of Jordan.¹⁴ While Younan proudly refers to his title of “Bishop in Jerusalem,” he constantly gives the impression that the Holy City belongs “only” to the Holy Land, not to Israel. The website page lists the congregations of the diocese, located in Jerusalem, Beit Jala, Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Ramallah, and Amman, Jordan, and pointedly draws the reader’s attention to the fact that

in 2002 these four urban areas (like other Palestinian cities) were again invaded by Israeli military troops. Curfews are often imposed on the

¹³ Riah Abu El-Assal is the third Palestinian bishop of the Anglican diocese, enthroned in Jerusalem on Aug. 15, 1998. The first Palestinian Anglican bishop in Jerusalem was Faik Hadad (1976). See at jerusalem.anglican.org/history.htm

¹⁴ Younan was consecrated bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan on Jan. 5, 1998; www.holyland-lutherans.org/under.htm

urban areas, closing businesses, schools and universities, keeping people in their homes. Jerusalem continues to be disputed territory.

Significantly, the address of the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem’s Old City is given as “Muristan Road,” with a postal code “via Israel.”

Through the links of this Palestinian website, the reader can also observe a reference to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF; www.lutheranworld.org), which reveals that this organization does not recognize Israel, as if no Lutheran churches exist in Israel. Additional links point to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA; www.elca.org) and the World Council of Churches (WCC; www.wcc-coe.org). These websites are openly anti-Zionist and anti-Israel in their theology

Other Palestinian churches

Dr. Bishara and Alex Awad, the Evangelical/Baptist and Methodist brothers at the Bethlehem Bible College (BBC; www.bethlehembiblecollege.edu) lead a sharp anti-Israel campaign within their churches. Further Palestinian anti-Zionism is disseminated by Worldwide Faith News (www.wfn.org), the Florida United Methodist Review Online (www.flumc.org/comline/revarchive) and Come and See—“The Christian Website from Nazareth” (www.comeandsee.co.il). Yohanna Katanacho, of the Evangelical Alliance Church in the Holy Land, East Jerusalem, (C&MA; www.each-cma.org) promulgates his own theological anti-Israel materials. Meanwhile, his texts were removed recently from this website. In fact, some of the Palestinian resources on the websites appear only for a short time, and then are removed.

The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI; www.memri.org), an independent academic institution, currently provides systematic data on the anti-Israelism within Palestinian Greek-Orthodox circles.

THE BIBLE IN MEDIA PROPAGANDA

Palestinian Christians exploit biblical imagery in order to throw figurative stones against Zionism and Israel in the mass media. Biblical verses like “To such as these does the Kingdom of God belong!” (Mt. 19: 14) are attached to a photo promoting a Child Sponsorship charity that shows a young boy behind a grid—a clear hint of the “Israeli occupation” to

potential Western donors, although the grid itself is simply the common type found on the windows of many Arab houses.¹⁵

Bible teachers, members of both lower and higher clergy, function as mass media journalists and editors. Within the “digital church” the Bible teacher or interpreter becomes the final authority for the individual surfer when presenting the written word or symbol on the screen. Text and image assumes the authority of the Bible itself, and such “Bible teachers” use the electronic church as a power center. They standardize their biblical message by the mass production of distorted biblical exegesis.¹⁶

The Palestinian message in the internet church in fact creates a new “replacement language” substituting a new Arab Christian imagery.¹⁷ It reproduces the political, cultural, and social images of the secular media, comparing Zionism with Apartheid in South Africa, and turning the issue into a religious argument about a God who requires only justice and love.¹⁸

It is particularly through the interpretation of the Bible on global networks that Palestinians search for worldwide Christian solidarity and support. They do not just write a defense of their ideology, but like the early Christians, they go on the offensive in the battlefield for the minds of all who “inhabit” the Internet, both religious and secular.¹⁹

MARTYRDOM AS A MEDIA ASSET

Yasser Arafat declared more than once that he wished to become a martyr (*shabeed*) for the cause of the Palestinian people. This was widely broadcast in the mass media and within the global electronic church. Christians also heard and read Arafat’s declaration: “May God give me

¹⁵ “Photo tours”; see the left frame with information on the Child Sponsorship Program; www.hcef.org/hcef

¹⁶ See, e.g., “The Bible and the Media,” *Catholic Biblical Federation Bulletin Dei Verbum* 39 (1996): 3-6.

¹⁷ For further comparisons, see J. Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, at www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/rresearchd.dll/showbook?item_id=499

¹⁸ W. F. Fore, “Mass Media’s Mythic World,” 12.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Mendels, *Media Revolution*, 176; F. Ford Plude, “Interactive Technologies: The Potential for Solidarity in Local and Global Networks,” *Communication Ethics and Global Change: National and International Perspectives* (Cambridge, U.K.: Longmans, 1989), available at www.religion-online.org/cfi-bin/research.dll/showarticle?item_id=97

the honor of martyrdom in my steadfastness for Jerusalem.”²⁰ Echoing media reports about “Palestinian martyrdom,” Arab clergy have invented a new associative world around the term (which originally meant “witness” to the Christian faith, even unto death) by applying the term to the intifada in which contemporary Israel is portrayed as oppressing the Palestinian “martyrs.” It should be noted that the use of the Islamic term *shabeed* is historically rather different from the Christian terminology.²¹ Today, however, Palestinian Christians make political capital out of the *martyrium* that publicized early Christianity, while applying the concept to the current Al-Aqsa Intifada. Contemporary Israelis are presented as the “pagan” oppressors of the “Palestinian martyrs.”

Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan frequently introduces the term *martyria* into his sermons and his use of biblical imagery. In “A Message” of March 15, 2002, he wrote:

We are a church living in *martyria*. The physical attacks and destruction are very bad, but the fears and uncertainty of the people continue long after the tanks have rumbled away and the invading soldiers have disappeared, leaving utter chaos and debris behind.²²

Contrasting the “good martyr church” of the Palestinian victims to the evil and brutal perpetrators—Zionist Israelis—the bishop ignores the actual reason for the Israeli army’s entrance into Arab Christian areas—namely the terrorism that targets Israeli civilians. In the same paragraph, he adds that Palestinian Christians encourage one another “in the name of Christ who also suffered on this earth.” Past and present merge in a contemporary “Via Dolorosa,” complete with the hint that those who persecute Palestinians today are equivalent to the Roman legionaries who persecuted Christ.²³

Paradoxically, while Palestinian nationalist rhetoric continually attempts to prove that Jews have no historic connection to the land, they nevertheless draw on the Passion narrative to show that the “same wicked Jew” of antiquity is alive today. Bishop Younan’s “Easter Message from Jerusalem 2002” makes this connection transparent:

²⁰ J. Parshall, “A Terrorist by any Other Name,” *Israel My Glory* (Sept.-Oct. 2002): 17.

²¹ Cf. Mendels, *Media Revolution*, 51.

²² Munib Younan, “Global Mission Stories,”

www.elca.org/dgm/story/jerusalem32.html (removed; copy in Nerel Archive).

²³ See also Mendels, *Media Revolution*, 51-53.

Grace and salaam to you from Jerusalem and from the Christians who are carrying in their bodies the death of Jesus, making visible the life of Jesus.... When I read the passion history, and see the relationships and actions of Pilate, Caiaphas and Herod, and read the story of Pilate, the Roman governor, and his relationship to Jesus and to Barabbas—it seems that I am seeing in our present world the same stories relived. The pull of world power and material interests are more important than the lives of human beings.²⁴

Israelis, as implied in this imagery, are not only materialistic and selfish, but also portrayed as inhuman and bloodthirsty. In his “Easter Message” Younan goes on to say that he understands more and more every day what it means to live the death and resurrection of Jesus in his body:

It is carrying the cross, living in *martyria*. As a church in *martyria* we are called to be a servant to our people, not a master. In this we follow the example of our savior Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for all people.

Here, again, modern Zionists take the place of the pagan Romans who persecuted the early Christians. In linking the situation today to ancient Roman imperialism, Younan creates the impression that the worldwide Zionist organization stands behind the persecution of Palestinian Christians.²⁵

In the previous year’s “Easter Message from the Holy Land 2001,” Bishop Younan explained that the Passion narrative of Christ enables him to combat “distorted public opinion” and that “the truth may oblige us to carry the cross and be crucified on Golgotha.”²⁶ He continued:

It is true that the Palestinian Church is now a church that carries the cross. Or better, we are the church of real *martyria*. For this reason, our witness is a witness for love, for the just peace, for the non-violent struggle for the truth, and for equitable just co-existence between Palestinians and Israelis. The Church of the *martyria* is the Church that

²⁴ Munib Younan, “Global Mission Stories,” www.elca.org/dgm/story/jerusalem34.html

²⁵ For an elaboration of his “Theology of Martyria” see Munib Younan, *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and the World*, ed. by Fred Strickert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 41-54.

²⁶ Munib Younan, “Global Mission Stories,” www.elca.org/dgm/story/jerusalem14.html

seriously carries the cross whatever the price might be, because it is the follower of its crucified lord and master.²⁷

In other words, Golgotha is synonymous with the intifada in the eyes of the Palestinian Lutheran Church: the deaths of Palestinians parallel the sacrificial death of Christ on the Cross. In fact, it was Rev. Dr. Mary E. Jensen, the American media assistant to Bishop Younan, who initially took up the theme of “Palestinian Christian martyrdom” in November 2000, when Dr. Harry Fischer, a German Lutheran physician married to a Palestinian woman, died during IDF shelling of Beit Jala from Gilo, a suburb of Jerusalem which had been under constant terrorist attacks. Jensen published an article entitled “The Lutheran Church Offers a Martyr,” in which Bishop Younan is quoted as saying, “Harry, you join today the cloud of martyrs who gave their lives for the freedom of humanity.”²⁸

At no point in the article is there the slightest hint of the background to the Israeli shelling—that it was in response to violent assaults on Gilo by Palestinian terrorists who were shooting from positions in Beit Jala and Bethlehem. Dr. Fischer’s funeral service, which began at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation, is described in detail:

The pastors were singing hymns as they walked to the cemetery. Their voices singing “Alleluia!” filled the town that had experienced bombs and bullets and bloodshed only hours earlier.... Back at the church the family was receiving condolences. An enormous amount of dark and bitter coffee would be offered and consumed.²⁹

Rev. Jensen pointed out that Dr. Fischer is believed to be the first Christian and Lutheran killed in the “second intifada.” She noted that the Arabic word *intifada* means “a shaking off of an unwanted Israeli military occupation,” and immediately pointed out that the word is found in the Bible in Matt. 10:14—“And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, *shake off* the dust from your feet.” The context of Jesus’ words are instructions for the disciples he is sending to preach throughout the country, but in her article are invoked to justify the intifada. She concludes by referring to mourners

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mary E. Jensen, “Global Mission Stories” www.elca.org/dgm/story/jerusalem7.html (removed; copy in Nerel archive).

²⁹ Ibid.

listening to “the sound of the Israeli helicopters returning to shoot and destroy.”

It should be emphasized that Palestinians and their media assistants never report that terrorists intentionally initiate their attacks from residential neighborhoods, including from schools and kindergartens. Clergy make no attempts whatever to follow any objective norms or to balance their “religious journalism” with relevant and accurate data.³⁰ For Younan and his friends it would be a real “waste” if the “martyrdom” of Dr. Harry Fischer remained a private or a balanced story, rather than being presented as a media spectacle like the martyrdom spectacles of antiquity, achieving publicity by a shock effect.

SUICIDE BOMBERS—A PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Rev. Naim Ateek in writing about suicide bombers in Sabeel’s quarterly journal, *Cornerstone*, employs classic Palestinian double-talk. He states that as a Christian, he knows that the way of Christ “is the way of nonviolence and, therefore, I condemn all forms of violence and terrorism whether coming from the government of Israel or from militant Palestinian groups.”³¹ He goes on to falsely insinuate that the Palestinians did not initiate the terror, implying that Israel’s actions are equivalent to those of the suicide bombers. He then justifies the bombings as “resistance” to enslavement by Israel:

Humiliation is perhaps one of the worst methods used by Israel to dehumanize the Palestinians.... Many of these have been arrested and tortured in Israeli prisons and “concentration” camps,... their only possibility for existence is to exist as slaves under an Israeli apartheid system of domination. They feel they have no options and very little to lose. Consequently, they are willing to give themselves up for the cause of God and the homeland (*watan*) believing that with God there is so much to gain....³²

Ateek uses the rhetorical maneuver of turning the question marks that he himself poses into exclamation marks, particularly when he quotes others

³⁰ Cf. Mendels, *Media Revolution*, 15-23.

³¹ Naim Ateek, “Suicide Bombers: What is Theologically and Morally Wrong with Suicide Bombing? A Palestinian Perspective,” *Cornerstone* 25 (Summer 2002); www.sabeel.org/old/news/cstone25/suicidebombers.htm

³² Ibid.

who do justify the Palestinian suicide bombers. Thus, for example, when he refers to Islam that does accept the suicide bombers as *shuhada* (martyrs) and their act as martyrdom, he writes:

The militants go on to argue that what they are doing is precisely like a soldier in battle who carries out a heroic act by storming a club within a military camp and blowing himself up killing soldiers as well as women and children who happen to be enjoying a party.... In Islam, due to the close ties between God and country, they [the militants] are given a religious character and the people involved are considered martyrs; their act is martyrdom and its prize is paradise rather than a human [posthumous] military medal [as in the West]. When one considers it from this angle, then being engaged in war and the defense of one’s homeland, these militants would argue, the suicide bombing could be a legitimate way of resistance.³³

This rhetoric gives the impression that in spite of condemning the phenomenon of suicide bombers, still within certain circumstances it can be justified and therefore should have some legitimacy. Thus, Ateek also raises a rhetorical question that in fact strengthens his pro-suicide argumentation: “In this same vein, how does one view the US atomic bombing of two major cities in Japan during WW2 and the killing of over 170,000, most of them civilians?”³⁴

Suicidal martyrdom is no small media asset for Palestinian Christians. During both the first and second intifadas, clergymen like Ateek labored hard to turn the bad publicity about terrorism into sympathy, hoping that it would result in support for their cause. Naturally Ateek blames Israel, saying that “if Israel labels them as terrorists, they are, after all the product of its own making.”³⁵ Ateek is not a lone voice among Palestinian Christians. Bishara Awad, president of the Bethlehem Bible College, asserts that “the Israeli government is using the suicide attacks as an excuse to maintain control over the occupied Palestinian territories,” going on to say that the real issue is the occupation: “Israel is waging this war to put an end to any attempt of creating a Palestinian State.”³⁶ Awad avoids discussing whether “*all* of Israel is an occupied

³³ Ibid, 5.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, 3.

³⁶ Bishara Awad was born in Jerusalem in 1939, and attended the prestigious St. George’s High School. He founded Bethlehem Bible College in 1982.

territory,” and ignores the fact that Israel is responding to kamikaze terrorist attacks. Moreover, he defended Arafat’s claim that he is not behind the suicide bombers, without mentioning Arafat’s own repeatedly expressed wish to become a *shabeed* (martyr) for the Palestinian cause.

Awad’s brother, Alex Elias Awad, also blames Israel for the suicide bombers.³⁷ “They [the Palestinians] decide life is not worth living, and they waste their life in a suicide bombing. But it is not wasting a life because life is not worth living.”³⁸ In order to “balance” his own explanation for the suicide bombers, Alex Awad adds that “a vast majority of the more than 3 million Palestinians condemn the bombings and killing of innocent people.”³⁹ However, his statement ignores the data from polls conducted by Palestinians and others that indicate a high level of support for suicide bombing and continuing the intifada, not to mention statements by relatives of the bombers praising their actions and expressing their pride in these deeds.⁴⁰ In addition, Awad uses the media in an attempt to convince American Christians that Israel wants to rule exclusively over Jerusalem like the medieval Crusaders.

Well aware of the symbolic significance of Jerusalem and Bethlehem to the worldwide Christian community, in April and May 2002, about 120 armed Palestinians invaded the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem for thirty-eight days, holding both ecclesiastic and lay hostages, and desecrating the shrine. Bishara Awad refused to publicly condemn this violation of a sacred site, and even declared that the Church of the Nativity had the “right” to host the besieged terrorists. In a “Letter to Friends and Prayer Partners” overseas, he wrote:

I am reminded of the refuge cities mentioned in the Old Testament. In the book of Numbers 35:6 we read, “Six of the towns you give the

See www.hcef.org/foundation/people/ccholy/bawad.html (removed; copy in Nerel archive); “Bible College President Says Suicide Bombers are Excuse,” www.wfn.org/2002/04/msg00062.html

³⁷ Alex Elias Awad is pastor of an international church in East Jerusalem, and teaches at the Bethlehem Bible College, where he also serves on the board. See his comments at www.flumc.org/comline/revarchive/2002/041202s2.htm

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., “Glorification of Suicide Bombers,” *Israel Today*, no. 31 (July 2001): 9; A. Schneider, “‘Tanzim’ Boast About Attacks on Gilo,” Ibid., 11; “Kinder Wollen Märtyrer werden,” *Israel Heute*, no. 291 (Nov. 2002): 10.

Levites will be cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone may flee.” See also Numbers 35 and Joshua 20.⁴¹

Paradoxically, while Palestinian clergy claim that the Old Testament is obsolete with regard to territorial promises to Israel, they misuse the scriptural text referring to cities of refuge in order to legitimize the activities related to the terrorists.

The Latin Patriarch, Michel Sabbah, also expressed full support for the Palestinian terrorists who took shelter in the church, and fired at Israeli soldiers from within.⁴² The group of militants included known criminals from Bethlehem gangs. Following negotiations for their exit, they were sent to various European countries, and in December 2003, one of them, identified by the Belgian newspaper *De Standaard* only as “Khalid Al-N.,” was arrested on several criminal charges, including robbery of postal banks.⁴³

SAMSON—“THE JEWISH SUICIDE FREEDOM-FIGHTER”

Rev. Naim Ateek, in his *Cornerstone* article on suicide bombers, drew a connection to the biblical story of Samson:

Was not Samson a suicide bomber? Was he acting on behalf of the God of justice who wills the liberation of the oppressed? Was God pleased with the death of thousands of men and women of the Philistines? Are we confronted with many similar stories today in the experience of suicide bombers? Is it legitimate to tell the story today by substituting the name Ahmad for Samson?... Is the story of Samson legitimate because it is written in the Bible while the story of Ahmad is rejected because it is not and therefore he is condemned as a terrorist?⁴⁴

⁴¹ Bishara Awad, “Letter to Friends and Prayer Partners,” www.wfn.org/2002/04/msg00062.html Biblical references to cities of refuge indicate that they are intended for those guilty of involuntary manslaughter rather than premeditated murder, and existed at a time when blood vengeance was an accepted social practice. It should be noted that those who took refuge in the Church of the Nativity included a number of known criminals as well as terrorists.

⁴² Yitzhak Sergio Minerbi, “The International Crisis around the Nativity Church,” *Kivunim Hadasim* (New directions), ed. by Eli Eyal 7 (2002): 74-83. For background on the Bethlehem siege, see Joshua Hammer, *A Season in Bethlehem: Unholy War in a Sacred Place* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

⁴³ Gila Fine, “Palestinian deported to Belgium arrested for local crime,” *Jerusalem Post*, 18 Dec. 2003.

⁴⁴ Ateek, “Suicide Bombers.”

The story of Samson is used as an accusation against the “injustice of the God of Israel in the Old Testament,” for Ateek claims that the “old dispensation” of the “Jewish/Zionist God” is obsolete and irrelevant in the new dispensation of the New Testament. “Do we hold a theology of a biased God who only stands with Israel whether right or wrong?⁴⁵ Ateek unabashedly exploits “Jewish” biblical stories, including the case of King Saul (1 Samuel 31: 4-5), in support of Palestinian suicide bombers.⁴⁶

CHRIST’S CRUCIFIXION AND SELF-SACRIFICE

One picture can be more powerful than a thousand words. This familiar cliché applies quite well to an image found in 2003 on the website “Come and See—The Christian Web Site from Nazareth” (www.comeandsee.co.il), sponsored by an anonymous group of “Arab Christians from Israel.” Depicted there was the crucifixion, with the figure of Christ and another person nailing the left hand to the cross. Behind the crucifix one could see a flash, reminiscent of an explosion. Above the image is written “In His steps—A reflection” and below it appears “Is God happy with Suicide Bombing?” Such representation drew a link between the act of suicide bombing and the notion of martyrdom in the image of Christ on the cross.

Such linkage is present in Naim Ateek’s article on suicide bombers as well:

Christ did not try to escape from danger but set his face to go to Jerusalem where he was killed, this means that to give oneself on behalf of others is the greatest sacrifice of all. Christians believe that this is precisely what Christ has done. He died for us. Although one offers oneself to die, he does not pull the trigger and kill himself. He is open to sacrificing himself for the cause but he is not the one who does it.⁴⁷

Ateek reconstructs the leitmotif of martyrdom using the ultimate model of Christ himself to create a feeling of understanding and even sympathy for the terrorist “Palestinian Martyrs.” At the end of his article, Ateek

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.; a newly released best-selling novel for teens, *Rever la Palestine* (Dream of Palestine) sympathetically portrays a young Palestinian who becomes a suicide bomber www.wiesenthal.com/mailings_swk/swc_dec06.html

⁴⁷ Ibid.

does in fact distance himself from “any use of violence and terror whether perpetrated by the State or militant groups.” He holds up an “inspired vision” of peace but clearly holds Israel responsible for the extremism and suicide bombings. Indeed, while Ateek claims that the “Israeli form of apartheid is much worse than what was practiced in South Africa,” he introduces a new definition of a martyr which “should be expanded to include those who have been killed as a result of taking a prophetic stand against injustice and oppression.”⁴⁸ Like other Palestinian Christians, he sees the link between Christ crucified, ancient Christian martyrdom, and Palestinian homicidal terrorism as a unique asset to mobilize the media against Zionism and Israel.

COMPETING MEDIA CHANNELS:
PRO AND CON *CHRISTIAN ZIONISM*

In a similar way to the theological battles of the early church against the heretics, today the Palestinian Church confronts the modern “heterodox Christian Zionists.”⁴⁹ Arab Christians are fierce opponents of evangelical Christian Zionists.⁵⁰ Thus, they tirelessly attack the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ, www.icej.org) because of its enthusiastic support of Israel in the media.⁵¹ Much of the rage of Palestinian Christians against Christian Zionists appears on the internet, where they present their opponents as a heretical sect.

A leading spokesman, Father (“Abouna”) Labib Kobti, who operates the Al-Bushra website described earlier, wrote in 2001:

Christian Zionists are telling us that the settlers are the victims. Enough with lies.... This God of theirs is an enemy god that I cannot believe in.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁹ Mendels, *Media Revolution*, 111-17.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Yohanna Katanacho, “Why Does Jerry Falwell Support Israel?” www.comeandsee.co.il/article.php?sid=504&mode=thread&order=0 (removed; copy in Nerel archive). Cf. Pat Robertson, “Why Do Evangelical Christians Support Israel?” 4th Herzliya Conference on the Balance of Israel’s National Security, 17 Dec. 2003 www.crosswalk.com/news1236726.html?view=print

⁵¹ See, e.g., Jan Willem van der Hoeven, “Christian Zionism in Action,” in *Christians and Israel: Essays on Biblical Zionism and on Islamic Fundamentalism*, ed. by M. Johnson and N. Goodenough (Jerusalem: ICEJ, 1996), 51–53.

He is the god of one people exclusively and he is not God.... It is only a Zionist interpretation of a pagan god.⁵²

Aggressive opposition to the “heretic” Christian Zionists is constantly gaining ground.⁵³ On January 6, 2003, for example, Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan ended his greetings for the New Year as follows:

I hereby declare that Christian Zionism is not only a sick theology but it is a heresy, right along with Arianism and Nestorianism. I believe it is time we named this misinterpretation of Christ and the gospel for what it is.... Christian Zionism is anti-justice, anti-peace, anti-reconciliation.... and the enemy of peace in the Middle East.⁵⁴

In the bishop’s view, all Christian Zionists who support Israel should be condemned as deserving anathema and excommunication because they revive the heresies of Arianism and Nestorianism of antiquity.⁵⁵ Another vitriolic critic in the U.K. is Rev. Dr. Stephen Sizer, who denounces the “Armageddon theology” that leads Christians to support the Zionist cause.⁵⁶ Bishara Awad of Bethlehem is even more explicit:

The Palestinians are not only facing the very strong Zionist State of Israel, but they also have a hidden enemy in the Christian Zionists.... [T]his sect of Christianity known as Christian Zionism needs to repent to God for their misinterpretation of the scriptures, for being the instrument of division and hate, for siding with an evil power, and for hindering the witness of Christ to the people of the land.⁵⁷

For many Palestinian Christians, Zionism is racist and a form of apartheid. Thus, within the internet competition between Palestinian Christianity and Christian Zionism, a key media asset becomes the right

⁵² Labib Kobti, “Again with the Christian-Zionists,” 12 Feb. 2001 at www.al-bushra.org/promisedland/again.html

⁵³ See at www.al-bushra.org/ecu-inter/zionist.htm

⁵⁴ See www.al-bushra.org/hedchrch/munib4.html Bishop Younan’s news-letter can also be found at www.holyland-lutherans.org

⁵⁵ See Ann E. Hafften, “Challenge the Implications of ‘Christian Zionism,’” www.elca.org/jle/articles/contemporary_issues/article.hafften_ann_e.html (removed; copy in Nerel Archive).

⁵⁶ S. Sizer, “Christian Zionism,” 1; www.al-bushra.org/Promisedland/zionism.htm Cf. J. J. Prasch, “Stephen Sizer and the Sons of Menelaus,” in *Moriel*, no. 24 (Summer/Autumn 2003): 1-5.

⁵⁷ Bishara Awad, “Christian Zionism,” www.hcef.org/events/3conference/AwadSpeech.htm (removed; copy in Nerel Archive).

interpretation of Scripture and biblical values.⁵⁸ The “right” values for the Palestinians are “love” and “justice,” which they contrast with the radical end-time expectations of fundamentalist Zionist Christians who are, according to Bishop Younan, “obsessed” with the Antichrist. Younan writes that “some [apocalyptic and dispensational groups] are saying that the Antichrist is a Jew, adult, 33 years old, living in Israel” and these groups with their Zionist theology are harming the local Palestinian church.⁵⁹ The Antichrist imagined by the Protestant Christian fundamentalists represents evil, apostasy, and the destruction of the world.⁶⁰

By pointing to the Christian Zionists as a “heretical” sect, Palestinian Christians actually wish to prove their own “orthodoxy” and authenticity, as they can learn from well-known patterns of early church history.⁶¹

SENSATIONALISM

By inserting their own ideas into the quotations of others, Palestinian ecclesiastics frequently indulge in sensational expressions of hostility towards Zionism and Israel. Indeed, the use of exaggeration and extremes as well as libelous stories has become a norm. For example, on the first Thursday of Advent 2000, Anglican Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal published “A Christmas Message from Bethlehem.” The document, in English and Spanish, is on the bishop’s letterhead with his Episcopalian insignia, underlining its spiritual authority. The bishop crudely exploited the imagery of the Nativity story in order to attack Zionism and Israel:

Missing from this display today are the images of the innocent children who were murdered in Bethlehem by King Herod (Mat. 2:16).... Two millennia pass and the biblical drama continues. The plot remains but the actors change. We shall not forget the children of Bethlehem and its surrounding towns and villages, who are being harassed and oppressed.

⁵⁸ Cf. Mendels, *Media Revolution*, 113-14.

⁵⁹ Munib Younan, “The History of the Arab Christians and the Challenges in the Holy Land and the Middle East,” www.hcef.org/events/conference/younan.html

⁶⁰ See, for example, David S. Katz, “Nuclear Doomsday: The Fundamentalist Utopia,” *Babylon 18* (1998): 26-50.

⁶¹ D. Mendels, *Media Revolution*, 115.

Nor will we be able to forget the murdered children, and their companions, over 270 Palestinians....⁶²

The bishop manipulated the biblical text to give a one-sided and distorted picture of evil done to Palestinians “by the Israeli military onslaught against them at this Christmastide.” Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was presented as the modern murderous incarnation of Herod, killing the weak and “innocent” of Bethlehem. However, the website includes not only the bishop’s message, but the text of two letters he had written to Canon Henry White, an American priest in the United States, describing the situation of Bethlehem Christians. What is truly shocking, however, is the response to Bishop Abu El-Assal’s letters. Written on behalf of Canon White by his colleague, Father Monty, it invokes the image of Israel as a new Nazi-style “Reich”:

I call the present Israeli offensive against the peoples of Palestine— *Battalion Fascism*. But it seems the world is mute against Israel’s Battalion Fascism, much like the world was some sixty Christmases ago in its mute response to stopping Germany’s Reich Fascism against the Jews.... Your grace, you’re an Anglican Arab and I embrace you with great esteem.... You’re living and seeing inside today’s Israeli Reich [*sic*].... Not only have they frightened the Christians away, they’re also trying to take the crib away at the birthplace of Christianity. Frighten away or kill the Christians and Muslims, then Jerusalem is for Israel scot-free!! Thus the aim could well be to solely pursue policies of unrelenting violence in the occupied lands, and at the hands, of the Israeli Reich. And by their deeds of *Battalion Fascism* the faithful flee of Christendom and Islam.... no matter how many Israeli battalions commit their modern-day fascism against the Palestinian Innocent... Let us pray, dear bishop, for the glow worm to give light out of the darkness of Israel over Palestine.⁶³

Such defamatory words which equate Zionism with Nazism seem to be the opinions of Bishop Riah himself, as they appear within a message presented under his own name with his episcopal title.⁶⁴ Bishop Abu El-Assal has no problems at all with supporting terror in the service of the

⁶² Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, 19 Dec. 2000 at www.archbishops.org/peace.htm (removed; copy in Nerel Archive).

⁶³ Ibid., Father Monty, Anglican Church House, Arkansas, USA to Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, Jerusalem, 23 Dec. 2000.

⁶⁴ For “Zionist-Nazi collaboration” in the Arab world cf. Goetz Nordbruch, *The Socio-Historical Background of Holocaust Denial in Arab Countries*, ACTA series no. 17 (Jerusalem: SICSA, 2001, 6-9).

Palestinian cause. In February 2003, for example, the bishop declared that Palestinian martyrs receive eternal life, and quoted the Qur’an: “Do not consider those that were killed for the sake of God as dead, but alive with their Lord.”⁶⁵ He expressed his appreciation for “all martyrs that were killed on the land of Palestine,” and asserted that “all martyrs live in the Kingdom of Heaven.”⁶⁶ Mixing the New Testament concept of the Kingdom of Heaven with the Qur’an, the Palestinian bishop could create a revised “Anglican martyrology.”

Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Lutheran from Bethlehem, has used equally violent language against Israel. Thus, Raheb writes that “Ariel Sharon has a Nero complex” and “the little town of Bethlehem is ruined by Sharon, the Nero of the 21st century, who lives by seeing towns in flames.”⁶⁷ He misuses biblical imagery to describe the previous Israeli prime minister as the Egyptian Pharaoh, accusing the Western Church which has mostly “sided with Israel and become Pharaoh.”⁶⁸ Raheb also raises the theme of “Israel, an evil power of revenge and hatred”—with soldiers who “hate to see any positive sign of life in Bethlehem,” and who prevent Christian pilgrims from coming to worship in the city.⁶⁹

Raheb even writes that Israel is a “destroyer of culture,” accusing it of entering Bethlehem in spring 2002 to destroy as much as possible, including churches, a statue of the Virgin Mary, and mosaics in St. Catherine’s church, as well as national Palestinian collections in two archaeological museums.⁷⁰ In none of the reports on the Bethlehem

⁶⁵ www.comeandsee.co.il/categories.php?op=newindex&catid=3 (removed; available at Nerel archive).

⁶⁶ www.comeandsee.co.il/article.php?sid=415&mode=thread&order=0

⁶⁷ Mitri Raheb, “Updates from Bethlehem,” 4 Apr. 2002 at www.globalministries.org/mee/me042102.htm (removed; available at Nerel archive); see also www.wacc.org.uk/publications/action/243/bethlehem.html

⁶⁸ Jeffrey Loudon, “Living Stones of the Holy Land; Review of Mitri Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian*,” *Sojourners Magazine* (July-Aug. 1996) at www.sojo.net/magazine/index.cfm/action/sojourners/issue/soj9607/article/960732e.htm (removed; copy in Nerel archive); Raheb Mitri, *I am a Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 86-91.

⁶⁹ www.jerusalemmites.org/crimes/crimes_against_christianity/37.htm

⁷⁰ Ibid. Within Ghassan Joha’s article, “Bethlehem Stands as Monument to Israeli Destruction” www.Jerusalemmites.org (of the “Jerusalem Forum,” an Amman-based NGO); the selective quotations from Mitri Raheb refer to him as a “Christian authority” against “Israel’s military operations attacking religious shrines.”

siege and damage done to the structures, do the writers even mention the fact that criminals and terrorists entered and desecrated a Christian holy site, turning it essentially into a military base.

DE-JUDAIZATION OF THE BIBLE:
MARKETING THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE

Scriptural exegesis among Palestinian Christians has shaped a new Arab theology which denies any continuum between biblical Israel, the Land of Israel and the Jewish people of today. The clergy question the full authority of the Hebraic Old Testament. Moreover, Arab Christians repeatedly create the false impression that contemporary Palestinians are identical with first-century “Palestinians.” For example:

Jesus Christ’s resurrection took place in Jerusalem. Therefore, the first witnesses to the resurrection were Palestinians. The Church was born in Palestine as the early disciples and followers of Jesus were Palestinians.⁷¹

Christian Arabs and their supporters rewrite history to erase the Jewishness of various biblical passages, replacing “Land of Israel” with “Land of Palestine,” and distancing themselves from the Jewish geography of the Bible. In referring to the Holy Land, they emphasize that they are not immigrants, thereby implying that the Zionist Jews are alien newcomers without roots in the land of Israel. Moreover, Palestinian Christians argue that they “are not converts from Judaism or Islam. We are the descendents of those who first believed in Jesus Christ.”⁷² These “Christian slogans of authenticity” are seen as instrumental for promoting their cause.

Such phraseology among Palestinian Christian has become influential, particularly within the modern liberation theology of the Third World, embraced by Christians in Latin America, India, Africa, and the Middle East. More and more churches in the Third World divorce their theology from the “Old Testament” and rely on the message of Christ in the New.⁷³ De-Judaization of the Bible is seen, for example, in the liberation theology of Naim Ateek who writes:

⁷¹ N. S. Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (New York, 1996) 113. See also Lance D. Laird, “Meeting Jesus Again in the First Place: Palestinian Christians and the Bible,” *Interpretation* 55, no. 4 (2001): 400-12.

⁷² www.hcef.org/foundation/about/index.html (removed; copy in Nerel archives).

⁷³ See, e.g., Jean-Marie Lustiger, *La promesse* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2002), 128-29.

As a Christian, I cannot begin my study of the Bible from Genesis.... What God did for the world in Christ far exceeded the best that the prophets predicted and anticipated.⁷⁴

The Lutheran, Mitri Raheb, is no less explicit:

Israel failed because it laid claim to election as law, according to Paul. But Christ has put an end to all law (Rom. 10:4). In him the law has achieved its real purpose and election its original meaning.⁷⁵

For Raheb and Ateek, then, Israel’s election and God’s covenant with Israel in the Old Testament, which includes divine promises related to the land, are null and void after the coming of Christ and Israel’s rejection of Christ.

In Palestinian Christian terminology, key elements are descriptions of “Jesus the Palestinian,” as well as Mary and the apostles as Palestinians.⁷⁶ Even the Palestinian Muslim leadership of Fatah propagates the mythical figure of “Jesus the *first* Palestinian.”⁷⁷ Yasser Arafat, too, spoke of the “Palestinian Apostle Peter,” thereby negating the Jewish identity of Peter.⁷⁸ Obviously this serves as a political argument to sustain Palestinian ties to the land, and to strengthen their claims to Jerusalem.⁷⁹ Ignoring historical facts, the creation of a “Palestinian” Jesus, of a “Palestinian” Mary and “Palestinian” Apostles is pure nationalism serving a political cause. This approach feeds into the popular “Islamization” of Jesus and the entire New Testament, as if it were part and parcel of the Arab and Islamic legacy.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ N. Ateek, “Putting Christ at the Centre: The Land from a Palestinian Christian Perspective,” in *The Bible and the Land*, ed. by L. Loden, P. Walker and M. Wood (Jerusalem: Musalaha, 2000), 57; idem “Christian Zionism: The Dark Side of the Bible,” www.sabeel.org/old/news/cstone30/Naim_Ateek_Cstone30.htm

⁷⁵ M. Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 68.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., Danielle Haas, “Palestinian Christians Lay Claim to Jesus,” at www.metimes.com/issue99-52/reg/palestinian_christians_lay.htm (removed; copy in Nerel Archives).

⁷⁷ “Fatah Prayer for Christian Palestinian Conquest of Jerusalem,” www.unitedjerusalem.com/the_wye_river_memorandum_oct_1/Palestinian_Media_Watch/palestinian_media_watch.asp

⁷⁸ Gerald A. Honigman, “Arafat’s Jesus,” www.jewishxpress.com/issue28/ArafatJep.html

⁷⁹ See, e.g., M. S. Arnold, “Palestinians for Jesus?,” *Jerusalem Post*, 3 Mar. 2000, B3-B4.

⁸⁰ Cf. Sandro Magister, “Is Europe a Province of Islam? The Danger is Called Dhimmitude,” www.orthodoxytoday.org/articlesprint2/MagisterEuropeP.htm

PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANITY AGAINST JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

De-Judaization of the Bible by Palestinian Christians also has another dimension. Palestine, it is claimed, is the “Fifth Gospel,” where “an Arab Christian community has existed in this land since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 11).”⁸¹ The Palestinian clergy usurp the word “Arabs” (or “Arabians”) which appears in the account of Pentecost, and anachronistically apply the term to themselves. Where the text mentions Jewish pilgrims from Arabia who came to the Jerusalem Temple for the feast of Shavuot (Pentecost), contemporary Palestinian Christians simply falsify the context.⁸² Elias Chacour, an Arab Greek Catholic (Melkite) priest from the Galilee reflects this usurpation:

They, my ancestors, were the first to hear the Sermon on the Mount and to accompany the Lord from one peak to another during his life.... The Christianity of the Holy Land is Palestinian.⁸³

Through the media marketing campaign of the Palestinian cause, Arab Christians present themselves as the modern sons and daughters of the first Jerusalem Church. Thus only Arab Christians are declared to have a physical continuum in the land, and only the Palestinian Church is the authentic Church.⁸⁴ Thus, Palestinian Christians attempt to refute the claims of modern Jewish believers in Jesus (Messianic Jews) to be heirs of the early Jewish Christians.⁸⁵ In this way, Palestinian/Arab Christianity replaces both Scriptural and contemporary Jewish

⁸¹ On the “Fifth Gospel,” see, e.g., Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 114. B. Awad, “West Bank Squeezed by Warring Majorities,” *Christianity Today*, 16 Nov. 1998, 68.

⁸² See, e.g., Riah Abu El-Assal, “The Identity of the Palestinian Christian in Israel,” *Faith and Intifada: Palestinian Christian Voices*, ed. by N. S. Ateek, M. H. Ellis, and R. R. Ruether (New York, 1992), 77-79.

⁸³ Elias Chacour, “A Palestinian Christian Challenge to the West,” in *Faith and Intifada*, 87.

⁸⁴ See, e.g., Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 113-14; cf. Gershon Nerel, “Rome in Jerusalem: The Pope, the Jews and the Gospel in Israel,” *Mishkan* 32 (2000): 74-77.

⁸⁵ See, e.g., Gershon Nerel, “Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews” in *Le judéo-christianisme dans tous ses états*, edited by S. C. Mimouni & F. S. Jones (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 399-425; idem, “Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* and the Modern Yeshua-Movement: Some Comparisons,” *Mishkan* 39 (2003): 65-86; idem, *Messianic Jews’ in Eretz-Israel (1917-1967): Trends and Changes in Shaping Self Identity* (in Hebrew) (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996).

Christianity, evaporating the Jewishness of the New Testament.⁸⁶ Palestinian Christianity therefore asserts that it is the “Mother Church of the Holy Land.”⁸⁷

When Arab clergy replace Jewish with Palestinian Christianity, they also discover their national roots among the pagan Canaanites in the land. Labib Kobti, a Catholic, writes:

If some scholars are not sure to identify all the Palestinians with the Canaanites that possessed Palestine, it is also difficult, if not impossible, to identify the Jews of today with the Jews of yesterday, those who were exiled in Babylonia or lived in the different Diasporas all over the world and still live today in different countries.⁸⁸

Thus, the Palestinian de-Judaization of the Bible relates even to the pagan world, and Catholic Christians, for example, are requested to follow what their bishops say and teach.⁸⁹

NEO-MARCIONISM

Palestinian “Liberation Theology” is a kind of revived Marcionism.⁹⁰ In the 2nd century C.E., Marcion had argued that the Christian gospel was the absolute antithesis of the Torah, which reflected an evil Jewish God.⁹¹ Palestinian clergy follow Marcion in separating the Old Testament from the New, erasing where possible words like “Israel” and “Zion.” Neo-Marcionism also affects churches in India and Africa, where Christians replace the Old Testament with local Indian and

⁸⁶ Cf. Menahem Benhayim, “Palestinian Liberation Theology,” *The Hebrew Christian* 63 (1990): 87; R. Gibson, “The ‘Palestinianization’ of Jesus,” *Chai* (Life), no. 216 (2002): 2; Uri Marcus, “Choosing the Chosen and Winnowing the Wheat,”

www.ldolphin.org/winnow.html

⁸⁷ See, e.g., “Steps to Support the Mother Church,”

www.hcef.org/hcef/index.cfm/ID/118.cfm (removed; copy in Nerel archives).

⁸⁸ Fr. L. Kobti, “Israel-Palestine Right to Return and the Bible,” at www.al-bushra.org/latpatra/right.htm

⁸⁹ See also R. Schafer Horton, “The Middle East Peace Process: Patriarch Michel Sabbah’s View,” www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Feb2002/Feature2.asp

⁹⁰ Cf. R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

⁹¹ S.v. “Marcion,” *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 870.

African narratives.⁹² It is particularly strong within Palestinian Christianity—Catholic, Protestant and Greek Orthodox—in a sophisticated distortion of canonical scripture, and anchored in the public’s general ignorance of the text. Palestinian Christianity revives and promotes Marcion’s teaching that the New Testament is the gospel of love and justice—whereas the Old Covenant is the “Book of Wrath and Law.”⁹³ Within “liberation theology,” neo-Marcionism has been particularly influential with the help of highly manipulative propaganda. It has become part of the “internet arena” of the 21st century.⁹⁴

ARAB NETWORKING : CONNECTING ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

Arab Christian replacement theology has a symbiotic relationship to the Islamic theology concerning Judaism.⁹⁵ Palestinian Christians repeatedly declare that they are “an inseparable part of the Arab Islamic world, as well as being Christians by faith.”⁹⁶ While recognizing some common roots with Jews, as Arab Christians they feel bound to point to a common heritage with Islam. This is how Lutheran Mitri Raheb puts it:

I think we have to go further and recognize that Islam, too, is included in this Jewish-Christian context, theologically and historically. We have things in common with Muslims too. Just as Judaism is part of the Christian history, so Islam is part of the history of the effects of Christianity.⁹⁷

In reality, the Palestinian Christians were long ago mobilized on behalf of the nationalist cause, and coopted by Islamic forces against the Jews.

Recently, the Greek Orthodox Archimandrite Atallah Hanna, spokesman for the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, called once

⁹² See, e.g., Jean-Marie Lustiger, *La promesse*, 128-29; M. R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1991), 107-10.

⁹³ See, e.g., N. Ateek, “An Arab-Israeli’s Theological Reflections on the State of Israel After 40 Years,” *Immanuel* 22-23 (1989): 102-19.

⁹⁴ See also, e.g., J. Dan, “Jewish Sovereignty as a Theological Problem,” *Azure* 16 (2004): 123-39, and in Hebrew in *Tebelet* 15 (2003): 71-88, www.azure.org.il/16-dan.htm

⁹⁵ See, e.g., L. Holtzman and E. Schlossberg, “The Modern Religious Polemic between Muslims and Jews Reflected in the Book Haqaiq Quraniyya Hawla al-Qadiyya al-Filistiniyya” (in Hebrew), *Historia* 10 (2002): 133-34, 138-39, 154-58.

⁹⁶ M. Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 10.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

more for joint Muslim-Christian action to thwart the planned war against Iraq, inviting “Christian Arabs and Palestinians to join the opposition against Israeli occupation, in every necessary form.”⁹⁸ He has also applauded suicide bombers as “Arab heroes,” while denouncing peace efforts:

Israel is the Great Satan, and therefore one is not allowed to negotiate with Israel or even consider a cease-fire. Any kind of peace with Israel means making concessions, and that defeats the Arab strategy to resist and oppose the Jewish state.⁹⁹

Arafat eagerly encouraged such Church leaders to join the struggle for “liberating” Jerusalem from the Jews. While Arafat posed as the guardian of the Christian holy places, nobody mentioned that Islamic militants often smashed the windows of Christian-owned shops.¹⁰⁰

The myth of Arab national solidarity and “Pan-Arabism” remain the most significant factor within the Palestinian Christian-Muslim relationship. This Arabism led to the identification of Arab Christians with Muslim society, while attacking pro-Israel, Western Churches and pro-Israel evangelicals who support Zionism or those who belong to the Messianic Jewish movement. Arab Christian clergy like Father Manuel Musalam, head of the Latin Church in Gaza fiercely denounce Western Christians, Jews, and Israel. For Musalam, Western Christianity is a “Christianity of the jungle.” Joint statements on the subject are made at meetings of heads of Palestinian church leaders and Muslim clerics.¹⁰¹

The common enemy of Palestinian Arabs (both Christian and Muslim) remains Zionism, Israel, and the Jews who came to live in the land. For example, a free translation of a Palestinian song says: “We, Christians and Muslims, were living happily and peacefully in this land, until foreigners arrived from overseas and took it away from us.”¹⁰² In

⁹⁸ “Greek Orthodox Matters,” *Caspari Center Media Review* (Jerusalem), no. 2 (Jan. 2003): 2.

⁹⁹ Aviel Schneider, “Greek Orthodox Priest: ‘Israel is the Great Satan,’” *Israel Today*, no. 50 (Mar. 2003): 9.

¹⁰⁰ See, e.g., “Unholy Alliance,” *Israel Today*, no. 48 (Jan. 2003): 23.

¹⁰¹ See, e.g., MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis Series, no. 93, 1 May 2002,

www.memri.org/bin/opener.cgi?Page=archives&ID=IA9302

¹⁰² Francesco Rossi de Gasperis, SJ, “But Jesus Christ Has Not Abolished Israel: The Palestinian Churches and Judaism,” *The Inter-Religious Dialogue in Jerusalem*, www.ctrfi.org/Articles/Article2.htm (removed; copy in Nerel archives). Fr. Rossi de Gasperis teaches at the *Pontifical Biblical Institute* in Jerusalem.

other words, “Arabness is the space of the Palestinian Christian faith and this faith needs Arabness for its human depth.”¹⁰³ This leads the Palestinian churches to develop an Arabist rather than a biblical theology. Such an approach cannot avoid anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism. Moreover, as the Jesuit historian Francesco Rossi de Gasperis observes, Christian Arab supersession of the Old Testament is very useful to the contemporary Islamic theology of negating Judaism in practice.¹⁰⁴

The rapprochement with Islam takes many forms. For example, Alex Awad, a Palestinian Methodist pastor of the East Jerusalem Baptist Church, regards himself as the “Defender of Islam.” He often challenges Western Christian “stereotypes” of Muslims, and criticizes the phenomenon of American televangelists’ verbal attacks on Islam and Mohammed. He asks Western Christians to remember that it was the Crusaders of the Middle Ages who “sanctioned the killing of Muslims and other so-called infidels and heretics.”¹⁰⁵ At the same time, Awad attacks the Israeli government for allegedly propagating disinformation against the Palestinian Authority “as if persecuting Christians.”¹⁰⁶ Zionist Jews and the Western “Crusaders” appear as the joint enemy of Arab society, sparking a fusion of Christian and Islamic Judeophobia.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ibid., quoted in *Bulletin of the Associated Christian Press* (Christian Information Center, Jerusalem), no. 414 (Nov.-Dec. 2000): 18-19.

¹⁰⁴ Francesco Rossi de Gasperis, SJ., “Interreligious Dialogue in Jerusalem,” trans. from the Italian by J. and G. Ben Daniel, *Mondo e missione* (P.I.M.E., Milan) 131 (Feb. 2002): 11-13; and (Mar. 2002): 11-14.

¹⁰⁵ Alex Awad, “Muslims are our Neighbors,” mennonitechurch.ca/news/jerusalemletter (removed; copy in Nerel archive).

¹⁰⁶ Alex Awad, *Through the Eyes of the Victims: The Story of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Bethlehem Bible College, Oct. 2001, 70-71 (including CD-ROM).

¹⁰⁷ See, e.g., Robert S. Wistrich, “Muslim Antisemitism: A Clear and Present Danger,” at www.ajc.org/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=ijlTI2PHKoG&b=846637&ct=1102311 ; F. Rossi de Gasperis, SJ, “Interreligious Dialogue in Jerusalem,” *Ecumenical Theological Fraternity in Israel* (2003): 4, www.etrfi.org/Articles/Article2.htm ; Sandro Magister, “Is Europe a Province of Islam? The Danger is Called Dhimmitude,” www.orthodoxytoday.org/articlesprint2/MagisterEuropeP.htm

CYCLES OF PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN/MUSLIM ANTISEMITISM

Muslim-Christian collaboration among the Palestinian Arabs is not a novelty. It can be traced back to the participation of Christians in the Arab riots in Jaffa in 1921, which terrorized the Jewish population of the city. An English missionary described the situation in one of his reports to the London headquarters of the Church Missions to the Jews (CMJ):

A large number of the Jews are terror-stricken.... Unfortunately for the work, Arabs, who call themselves Christians, united with the Moslems in their endeavours to shed Jewish blood, so we have the unpleasant task of explaining and apologising for the falseness of this un-Christlike Christianity.... Hebrew Christian colporteurs had a narrow escape during these riots. They were surrounded by the mob, searched, and most likely would have been killed had not an Arab recognized [them].... as belonging to the English Church.¹⁰⁸

From this and similar reports, it is evident that only the presence of British soldiers in the streets of Jaffa saved the Jews from bloody pogroms. A similar anti-Zionist union of Muslims and Christians revived during the “First Intifada” of 1987-1993.¹⁰⁹ Ever since then Zionism is linked to Western Christian “Crusaders,” racism, fascism, and Nazism in Christian and Muslim Rhetoric.¹¹⁰

ISRAELI ARAB CHRISTIANS

Like Palestinian Christians who live as a minority under the Palestinian Authority, Arab Christians who hold Israeli citizenship are a small minority. However, most Israeli Arab Christians from an evangelical/fundamentalist background avoid the supersessionist theology. Pan-Arabism and the negation of Christian Zionism are not automatic within their circles. As a matter of fact, individuals and assemblies of Israeli Arab Christians, coming from different denominations, frequently acknowledge the continuum between biblical and modern Israel.

¹⁰⁸ Rev. A. C. Martin, “Useful Work at Jaffa,” *Jewish Missionary Intelligence* 11, no. 11 (Nov. 1921): 164-65.

¹⁰⁹ See, e.g., Naim Ateek, “Spiritual Intifada of the Early Church,” *Al-Fajr*, 29 May 1989, 4.

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., Amikam Nachmany, “The Intifada: 1987-1993. On Symbol, Ritual and Myth in National Struggle” (in Hebrew), *Alpayim* 24 (2002): 75-117.

Pastor Philip Saad of the Baptist church in Haifa, is a well known representative of such a group. He interprets the Bible with full acceptance of God's covenant and the election of Israel. In contrast to Palestinian Christians' "liberation theology," Pastor Saad accepts the literal message of both the Old and the New Testaments, including the prophecies concerning the land as promised to the nation of Israel. Rev. Saad openly says:

I am sad about the past, when more than 50 years ago, Arab Christians did not help the Jews who were returning home. Together with the Moslems, they were fighting the Zionists. The root of the Arab-Israeli conflict is definitely religion.... I even dare to say that there are Christian denominations in the country that have made an alliance with groups who oppose God's plan.¹¹¹

Moreover, when the state of Israel celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence in 1998, Pastor Saad and ten other Israeli Arab Christians went to Jerusalem and asked the government for forgiveness in the name of their forefathers, who had been against the return of the Jews to the country.¹¹² Also Pastor Samuel Aweida, of the Beth Eliyahu Congregation in Haifa and related to Lutheran Scandinavians, fully identifies with Israel's national restoration to her biblical homeland.¹¹³ Other Arab Christian leaders in Haifa, for example John Christopher Khoury of the Beth Hesda congregation and director of Ebenezer Home for the Elderly, and Rev. Samuel Sabbah, of the "Brethren" background, openly share the same beliefs. Such Israeli Arab evangelicals categorically reject the theological prejudice against Zionism and Israel which dominates the Palestinian churches.

OFFICIAL SILENCE

The leaders of Western Christendom have been silent in the face of Palestinian Muslim antisemitism and also ignore the anti-Zionist and anti-Israel propaganda of Palestinian Christians. There is not a single

¹¹¹ Aviel Schneider, "Interview with Arab Christian Pastor Philip Saad," *Israel Today*, no. 23 (Nov. 2000): 19.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Interviews by Gershon Nerel, summer 2003; see, e.g., Samuel Aweida, "The Jewish Messiah—the Savior of the World," in *Proceedings of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism* (LCJE), Seventh International Conference, Helsinki, 8 Aug. 2003, ed. by Kai Kjaer-Hansen (Åarhus, Denmark, 2003), 124-26.

Church document—Roman Catholic or mainline Protestant—that denounces or even criticizes Palestinian Christianity’s anti-Zionism. The overall impression is that Protestants tend to identify more strongly with Palestinian Christian anti-Israelism than Catholics.¹¹⁴ In strictly private talks, some officials in the Vatican do state their personal regret at Palestinian anti-Zionism and neo-Marcionism. But almost nothing is said publicly. On the Protestant side, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and other British Bishops do not hide their support of the Palestinian cause or their own anti-Zionist views.¹¹⁵ The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, never denounced the anti-Israel theological propaganda among Palestinian churches. In fact it supports it with Munib Younan as the vice president of LWF. Also other official Christian organizations, like the World Council of Churches in practice support the anti-Zionist liberation theology of Palestinian Christianity.

Melanie Phillips, a well-known British columnist, published a cover story in the *Spectator* on “Christians who Hate Jews” pointing to the increasing influence of Palestinian Christian theology upon the British public agenda, extending to top Church leaders as well as the general public. Her article demonstrates how Palestinian Christian revisionism has revived the ancient replacement theology—“the attempt by Arab Christians to reinterpret Scripture in order to delegitimise the Jews’ claim to the land of Israel.”¹¹⁶ In other words, Palestinian Christianity has been playing a significant role within the media in reinforcing British public opinion in its present anti-Israel position.

The same phenomenon is also observed nowadays in Scandinavian countries, particularly in Finland where Bishop Munib Younan, who studied theology in Helsinki, disseminates his anti-Israel views among

¹¹⁴ See, e.g., Cardinal Georges Cottier, OP, “Résistance et moralité des moyens,” *Nova et Vetera* 77, no. 4 (2002): 5-14. Cottier was the former theologian of the Pontifical household. Cf. S. Avineri, “The Pope’s Silence,” *Bulletin of the Associated Christian Press* (Jerusalem), no. 418, (Jul.-Aug. 2001): 9-10.

¹¹⁵ Archbishop Williams was invited as the keynote speaker at the 5th International Sabeel Conference on “Challenging Christian Zionism: Politics, Theology and the Israel-Palestine Conflict,” April 14-18, 2004; see at www.sabeel.org

¹¹⁶ Melanie Phillips, “Christians Who Hate the Jews,” *Spectator*, 16 Feb. 2002, 3.

Finnish Lutheran clergy.¹¹⁷ Official silence is inspired by arguments raised among Evangelical Palestinian Lutherans, the “only Arabic-speaking Lutheran denomination in the world.” For Bishop Younan, the label “Evangelical,” which his church still uses, is frankly embarrassing:

It is very difficult to explain to Muslims the difference between Evangelical and evangelistic. Our name as Lutheran Palestinians is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and Palestine (ELCJ). We have much at stake in helping people in the Middle East to understand who we are and what we believe, especially because the evangelistic groups are coopting our name. At a recent meeting of the Heads of Evangelical Churches in the Middle East we even discussed the possibility of changing our name because of the confusion and distrust that exist and are growing. We do not want to be linked or equated with these right wing groups...which] carry scenarios that are alien to our modern world and to our faith. This scenario includes the return of the Jews to the land through the establishment of Israel in 1948....¹¹⁸

For all Palestinian Protestants, terms like “Evangelical” and “Evangelicals” evoke the sharp extremism of right wing groups, which “portray themselves now as being philo-Semitic but in the long run they are actually anti-Semitic.”¹¹⁹ Such views, especially among Lutheran Palestinians, go hand in hand with Martin Luther’s old-age teachings against the Jews.

MEASURING THE EFFECTS OF PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN PROPAGANDA

It is no secret that tourist maps and pilgrimage brochures for Christians omit the name *Israel*—preferring the “Holy-Land” and “Palestine.” Most Palestinian Christian pilgrimage and tourism pamphlets introduce the symbolic imagery of the “Living Stones,” referring only to the local Arab churches. Through the media, the term “Living Stones” has become a symbolic trade mark used for promoting encounters between overseas

¹¹⁷ See, e.g., Taneli Kylätasku, “Rukoilen kirkossa Jeesuksen äidinkielellä,” *Kotimaa* (Helsinki), 23 Aug. 2002, 26-27; I thank Silja Bar-David for her help with the translation of this Finnish article.

¹¹⁸ Munib A. Younan, “Message to ELCA College and University Leaders,” www.holyland-lutherans.org/newsletters/keynote.htm

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

pilgrims and Palestinian Christians.¹²⁰ According to tour operators, when pilgrims prepare their itineraries, there are increasing requests from abroad to arrange visits to Palestinian villages and refugee camps.¹²¹ It is a fact that Palestinian Christians achieve their highest visibility and support within global reconciliation projects and interfaith dialogue promoted by ecumenical circles.¹²²

THE PROTESTANT DIVESTMENT CAMPAIGN

Palestinian Christian anti-Zionist propaganda stands actively behind the current Protestant campaign of economic and academic divestment against Israel.¹²³ The buildup first began in July 2004, when the 216th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) voted to initiate a process of selective divestment from multinational companies that do business in Israel.¹²⁴ Such economic “excommunication” is directed against Israeli government policy toward the Palestinians and accuses Israel of the sins of racism and apartheid. The Lutheran Rev. Mitri Raheb from Bethlehem, a guest at the Assembly, pulled many strings to achieve this decision. He said: “Sisters and brothers, this is a moment of truth. We have to send strong messages to such companies,” referring specifically to Caterpillar, the American producer of armored tractors and bulldozers.¹²⁵

In addition, the Presbyterian General Assembly voted to disavow Christian Zionism as a legitimate theological stance, stating that:

¹²⁰ See, e.g., Stephen Sizer, “Pilgrimages and Politics: A Survey of British Holy Land Tour Operators,” *Living Stones Magazine* 14 (Spring 1997): 14-17; cf. “Department of Alternative Tourism,” *Newsletter of the International Center of Bethlehem*, no. 1 (Nov. 1995): 5.

¹²¹ Interviews by Gershon Nerel with tour operators at Yad-Hashmona, among them Mr. Shmuel Smadja, Director of *Sar-El*, a Jerusalem based Tourism Agency. For a Palestinian perspective on “Zionist Tourism,” see S. Sizer, “The Promised Land: Palestine and Israel,” in *They Came and They Saw*, ed. N. Ateek & M. Prior (London 1999); and Kafity Samir (former Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem), www.virginiawater.co.uk/christchurch/articles/theysawandbelieved.htm

¹²² Canon Andrew White, Coventry Cathedral, UK, interview by Gershon Nerel at Yad Hasmona, Israel, Summer 2002.

¹²³ Divestment: “The act which strips one’s investment from an entity,” www.legal-explanations.com

¹²⁴ “Alexa Smith, “Assembly Endorses Israel Divestment,” www.pcusa.org/ga216/news/ga04121.htm

¹²⁵ Alexa Smith, *ibid.*; and www.wfn.org/2004/07/msg00060.html

Christian Zionism is not consistent with the basic values of Reformed theology because it makes use of idiosyncratic interpretations of Scripture to undergird a certain reading of current events¹²⁶

Theological positions were therefore interconnected with an economic boycott of Israel, justifying the resolution that calls for the Presbyterian Church to divest itself from companies that receive \$1 million or more in profits per year from investments in Israel or have invested \$1 million or more in Israel.¹²⁷ Besides Caterpillar, the Presbyterians also targeted communications giant Motorola, military contractor United Technologies, and electronics manufacturer ITT Industries—all of which supply the Israeli Defense Forces. The threat is to use the Church's multimillion-dollar stock holdings in the businesses to pressure the firms to modify or halt their dealings with Israel.¹²⁸

The Presbyterian Church (USA) spearheaded the campaign to use *corporate* divestment against Israel. The Episcopal Church (ECUSA) made a similar decision in November 2004, and plans to publish its own list of corporations “involved in activities that aid the occupation.”¹²⁹ Anglican churches worldwide also called for companies in their investment portfolios to drop any business activity supporting the “Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.”¹³⁰ The Church of England initially followed the recommendation of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) to divest from companies “supporting Israel’s illegal occupation.”¹³¹ The resulting furor and damage to Christian-Jewish relations in Great Britain may well have long-term consequences.

The disinvestment campaign is being promoted largely by Sabeel, the Palestinian Christian Center led by Naim Ateek.¹³² It is being increasingly

¹²⁶ See “Statement from the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA)” www.pcusa.org/oga/newsstories/israel.htm

¹²⁷ Eric J. Greenberg, “Presbyterian Group OKs Divestment from Israel,” www.dailyalert.org/archive/2004-07/2004-07-15.html

¹²⁸ “U.S. Presbyterians Target Five Firms with Israel Links,” *Haaretz*, 7 Aug. 2005, www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticlesEn.jhtml?itemNo=609222

¹²⁹ Amiram Barkat, “The Divestment Snowball,” *Haaretz*, 14 Sept. 2005, www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=624571

¹³⁰ Sarah Price Brown, “Anglican Group Urges Israel Sanctions,” *Boston Globe*, 24 June 2005; www.corkpsc.org/db.php?tid=69

¹³¹ “Church of England Urged to Follow ACC,” *War on Want*, 8 July 2005, electronicintifada.net/v2/printer3999.shtml

¹³² “A Call for Morally Responsible Investment,” at www.sabeel.org

adopted by other denominations, such as the United Church of Christ,¹³³ the Disciples of Christ,¹³⁴ and the umbrella organization of the World Council of Churches.¹³⁵

A further development is the academization of the divestment campaign. A “new ritual” on the American academic scene is the annual conference of the Palestine Solidarity Movement (PSM), urging divestment from Israel.¹³⁶ Such a weekend conference took place, for example, at Duke University, where Zionism was equated with apartheid.¹³⁷ The Association of University of Wisconsin Professionals (TAUWP) has adopted a resolution that calls on the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents to divest from companies that provide the Israeli Army with weapons, equipment, and supporting systems.¹³⁸

In the case of Western Christian churches, they generally base their divestment policy on a one-sided and skewed narrative received from Palestinian Christians. The Protestant churches usually ignore Muslim terrorism against Israel as well as anti-Christian acts in the Middle East. As Dexter Van Zile puts it, the denominations offer “an anti-Israel narrative from Palestinian Christians without context and without scrutiny.”¹³⁹

EPILOGUE

This essay has analyzed the “spiritual intifada” of Palestinian Christianity against Israel using its “arsenal” of biblical and theological interpretation.¹⁴⁰ The digital church is instrumental in this warfare of

¹³³ General Synod of the United Church of Christ, www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/gsrev25-15.pdf

¹³⁴ www.disciples.org/dns/Releases2005/0548.htm

¹³⁵ World Council of Churches Central Committee, “Minute on Economic Measures for Peace in Israel/Palestine,” 23 Feb. 2005, Geneva, www.oikoumene.org/GEN_PUB_5_Second_report_o.779.0.html

¹³⁶ “Intifada Comes to Duke,” *Commentary* (Jan. 2005), student.cs.ucc.ie/cs1064/jabowen/IPSC/php/art.php?aid=12446

¹³⁷ student.cs.ucc.ie/cs1064/jabowen/IPSC/php/art.php?aid=9471

¹³⁸ Al-Awda Wisconsin, “Statewide Academic Union Calls for University of Wisconsin Israel Divestment,” *Electronic Intifada*, 27 Apr. 2005, student.cs.ucc.ie/cs1064/jabowen/IPSC/php/art.php?aid=17733

¹³⁹ Dexter Van Zile, “Blind Prophecy,” www.judeo-christianalliance.org/materials/BlindProphecy.doc

¹⁴⁰ See Naim Ateek, “Spiritual Intifada of Early Church” in *Al-Fajr*, 29 May 1989, 4.

words, images, and symbols. Within the media culture a small church or denomination can have a much greater impact than its actual size. One may wrongly assume that the church on the internet is merely a “virtual” community, and so only a “virtual church.” However, the internet church does exert a powerful and formative influence which daily shapes public opinion, manipulates the Bible, and proliferates anti-Zionist, anti-Israel, and anti-Jewish ideas in the Christian world.

At the beginning of the 21st century, prejudice against Israel is not yet dead within ecclesiastical circles, particularly when leading clergymen detach contemporary Jews from biblical Israel. Even today, the universal Church still feels challenged by the Jewish people and the land of Israel. With a long history of *Contra Judaeos* literature, the churches now face the theological significance of the *sovereign* State of Israel. At the same time, today there is a new genre of *Contra Israel* publications that has spread among Palestinian Christians. The public arenas of the media, education, historiography, and global interfaith dialogue reflect how closely religion and politics are interconnected.

Although Western and Palestinian Christians share the same biblical heritage, they do not regard Israel’s unique position in the same manner. There is a growing dichotomy between Palestinian and Western believers in the Old and New Testaments. Palestinian Christians fervently adopt the traditional Church antagonism towards Judaism, dressing it in a new oriental garb. This parting of the ways reflects an unfinished battle over theological influence and territorial inheritance.

Christian Zionists insist that Israel as a State and nation still remains “the apple of God’s eye” in the divine plan. Pan-Arab solidarity, on the other hand, encourages Palestinian Christians to increasingly identify with Muslims rather than with the Western churches. In a recently-published document on Christian Zionism (see Addendum for the full text), four Palestinian bishops re-emphasize their unity with Muslims. However, this “pan-Arab unity” is fueled by their common antagonism to Israeli sovereignty within a Jewish state. Although the bishops’ “export statement” presents a façade of themselves as peacemakers to please all sides, in fact it undermines Israel’s *raison d’être*, based on the foundation of the linkage between modern and biblical Jewry. Paradoxically, while this statement highlights the “biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation,” at the same time it invalidates the Bible for allegedly supporting Israel’s “imperialism, colonialism and militarism.”

The internet marketplace allows Palestinian Christians to freely “sell” their prejudices in a very sophisticated way. Palestinian “internet missionaries” infiltrate the global web with a “new gospel” of anti-Israelism that reaches millions.¹⁴¹ This is the “old gospel” of the “anti-Zionist” Middle East Churches revamped in a new electronic garb. Life on the internet—religiously, politically and morally—is in no way neutral.

¹⁴¹ Aviel Schneider, “How the Palestinians Manipulate the Media,” *Israel Today*, no. 47 (Dec. 2002): 4-5.

ADDENDUM:
RELIGIOUS LEADERS' STATEMENT ON CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Source: ZENIT—The World Seen From Rome
Code: ZE06083009
Date: 2006-08-30

"WE STAND FOR JUSTICE. WE CAN DO NO OTHER"

JERUSALEM, AUG. 30, 2006 (Zenit.org).— Here is "The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism" released Aug. 22. The statement was written by Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem and other local heads of Churches in Jerusalem.

* * *

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

Christian Zionism is a modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace within Palestine and Israel.

The Christian Zionist program provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today.

We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation.

We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organizations with elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently imposing their unilateral preemptive borders and domination over Palestine.

This inevitably leads to unending cycles of violence that undermine the security of all peoples of the Middle East and the rest of the world.

We reject the teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these policies as they advance racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ.

Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from the ideologies of militarism and occupation. Instead, let them pursue the healing of the nations!

We call upon Christians in Churches on every continent to pray for the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are suffering as victims of occupation and militarism. These discriminative actions are turning Palestine into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusive Israeli settlements.

The establishment of the illegal settlements and the construction of the Separation Wall on confiscated Palestinian land undermine the viability of a Palestinian state as well as peace and security in the entire region.

We call upon all Churches that remain silent, to break their silence and speak for reconciliation with justice in the Holy Land.

Therefore, we commit ourselves to the following principles as an alternative way:

We affirm that all people are created in the image of God. In turn they are called to honor the dignity of every human being and to respect their inalienable rights.

We affirm that Israelis and Palestinians are capable of living together within peace, justice and security.

We affirm that Palestinians are one people, both Muslim and Christian. We reject all attempts to subvert and fragment their unity.

We call upon all people to reject the narrow world view of Christian Zionism and other ideologies that privilege one people at the expense of others.

We are committed to non-violent resistance as the most effective means to end the illegal occupation in order to attain a just and lasting peace.

With urgency we warn that Christian Zionism and its alliances are justifying colonization, apartheid and empire-building.

God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently but without violence.

"What does the Lord require of you: To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

This is where we take our stand. We stand for justice. We can do no other. Justice alone guarantees a peace that will lead to reconciliation with a life of security and prosperity for all the peoples of our land. By standing on the side of justice, we open ourselves to the work of peace — and working for peace makes us children of God.

"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Patriarch Michel Sabbah
Latin Patriarchate, Jerusalem

Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad,
Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem

Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal,
Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East

Bishop Munib Younan,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

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