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# Quo Vadis?



*By Charles Villa-Vicencio*

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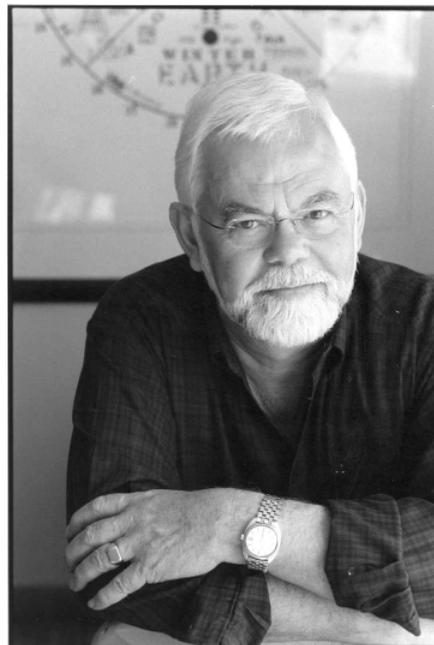
# About This Issue

This May, the leader of the world's largest Christian denomination will visit a people who have spent more time under military domination than any other in recent memory. Who will he see? What will he say? What might this unpredictable Pope Francis do?

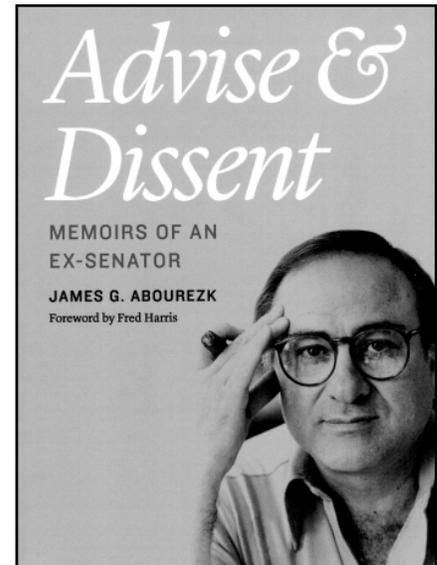
Our feature article looks to the past for some guidance on what this visit might portend.

Our author is Charles Villa-Vicencio, Emeritus Professor of Religion and Society at the University of Cape Town, Visiting Professor in the Conflict Resolution Program at Georgetown University, and Senior Research Fellow and founder of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town. From 1996-1998 Dr. Villa-Vicencio played a central role in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We are pleased to introduce him to readers of *The Link*.

Our book review selection is the



Author Charles Villa-Vicencio



recently updated edition of former Senator James Abourezk's "Advise & Dissent." It is reviewed on page 11 by AMEU president Bob Norberg. In 1974, then-Senator Abourezk wrote a feature article for *The Link* entitled "History of the Middle East Conflict." It was a courageous piece then as it is today—as, indeed, is the man himself.

In connection with the pope's visit, we are highlighting a new (2013) documentary film that traces the Palestinian catastrophe through the eyes of its Palestinian Christians. This Special Edition of "The Stones Cry Out" is reviewed on page 12 by AMEU director Edward Dillon. A Catholic biblical scholar, Fr. Dillon has led several AMEU trips to the Holy Land and is the author of three *Link* articles. [Note: his articles, and all *Link* articles going back to 1968 are available on our website, www.ameu.org.]

Other books and videos relevant to our feature article are listed on pages 13 to 15.

**John F. Mahoney**  
Executive Director

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## The Dangerous Memory of the Gospel

The church has long had a divided identity, consisting of traditional believers who cling to institutionalized ritual and what they regard as doctrinal purity and activists whose faith prioritizes social action. Numerically the former is the larger group for the simple reason that most people are conformists who accept the religious and socio-political status quo of the day. The latter invariably comprises a smaller group of people who affirm that what they believe is a part of the Christian tradition that is suppressed, if not forgotten, by the dominant structures within the institutional church.

This smaller group is customarily side-lined by the church hierarchy and frequently persecuted by political authorities. With some exceptions, however, the two sides of the church tend, with mutual irritation, to coexist. This leads to a situation where activists disturb the conscience of traditional believers, reminding them of what the Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz called the “dangerous memory of the Gospel.”

Jesus was a native of the dusty, rural town of Nazareth, known for its political resistance to Roman occupation. Historians tell us that, apart from what is written in the Gospels, there are only two indisputable facts that we know about the historical Jesus: the first is that he was a Jew who led a popular movement in Palestine at the beginning of the first century CE. The second is that Rome conspired with the Sanhedrin to crucify him, based on claims that he was the “King of the Jews” — a treasonous crime punishable by death.

The lines between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith preached by the church are blurred, with the non-biblical references to Jesus being few, while the New Testament references to his teaching are often contradictory. These include teachings that suggest racial exclusion — “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24); benevolent universalism — “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19); peace and nonviolence — “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9); and the promotion of violence — “Let him who has no sword, go sell your cloak and buy one” (Luke 22:36).

The earliest New Testament writings are those attributed to St. Paul, dating back to approximately 48 CE when he wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul’s primary interest was not, however, the historical Jesus but the proclamation of a Christian message to gentiles in the broader Roman Empire. Mark’s account of Jesus was written after 70 CE, Matthew and Luke wrote between 90 and 100 CE and John somewhere between 100 and 120 CE, with various non-canonical gospels interspersed between these dates. A lot of history and interpretation happened between the time of the ministry of Jesus and the earliest records available that record that ministry. This requires any thoughtful person to put aside preconceived theological casuistry in keeping an open mind on what Jesus may or may not have taught.

After the death of Jesus, James, “the brother of Jesus,” apparently emerged as leader of the embryonic church. In continuity with the teaching of Jesus, he insisted that a follower of Jesus needed to show partiality in favor of the poor. His fierce support for the poor and sharp criticism of the rich, may well explain why Ananus, the self-indulgent high priest at the time, persuaded the Sanhedrin to preside over James’ execution around 62 AD. Chaos reigned in Palestine at the time and the Roman occupiers were driven out of Palestine in 66 CE in a rebellion led by Jewish nationalists and the Sicarii (dagger men or assassins). The Romans reclaimed Jerusalem in 70 CE when they unleashed an orgy of violence against all forms of Jewish nationalism. They desecrated and burned the temple and slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews.

Barnabas and Paul had in the meantime (around 50 CE) met with “pillars of the church,” James, Peter, and John, to confirm the legitimacy of their mission to the gentiles and the freedom of gentile converts to reject the Mosaic Law. In so doing they extended the reach of the early church into the wider Roman Empire. The tension between James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, is seen in the *Epistle of James* (probably compiled by an editor drawing on the teachings of James). Rejecting Paul’s emphasis on faith alone as a means of salvation, the writer insisted on both faith and works as a vehicle of salvation. As Christian history shows, Paul would win this debate — and fifteen hundred

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years later Martin Luther would reject the Book of James as an "Epistle of Straw"!

Peter and others, meanwhile, would flee Jerusalem to escape the persecution of Herod Agrippa, only to see Peter later crucified in Rome under the rule of Emperor Nero Augustus Caesar, probably in 66 CE. Early Christians were at the same time eager to survive the onslaught on Jewish nationalists and distanced themselves from the Jews. They gradually transformed themselves from a Jewish sect into a separate religion centered in Rome, where Paul steadily moved the church towards a gospel more acceptable to the Hellenized culture of the Greco-Roman world. Despite this development, Paul would run afoul of the establishment, with tradition telling us that he too was executed after a lengthy period of imprisonment, possibly in the same year as Peter.

Bluntly put, the pendulum of the early church shifted away from its Jewish origins (and from the historic Jesus) to the Christ of faith as articulated by Paul. Paul's emphasis was primarily on Christology rather than the historical Jesus, insisting that his authority came through "a [direct] revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12), which seems to allude to his Damascus Road experience (Acts 9:5). In claiming this authority, Paul's references to Jesus, rather than taking his total ministry into consideration, are reduced to a spiritual reflection on the last supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), the crucifixion (I Corinthians 2:2) and the resurrection, without which he states "our preaching is empty and your faith is in vain" (I Corinthians 15:14).

Given the demands of a gentile and Hellenized world to which Paul believed he was called, his ministry placed less emphasis than the gospel writers on the historical context within which Jesus lived. While Paul's emphasis lessened the direct political impact of the message of Jesus in early Palestine, it was in continuity with the life of Jesus. In proclaiming that "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28), Paul's message transcended race, gender and class. This message is a crucial aspect of a gospel that rejects any sense of superiority by any group, based on race, culture, creed or gender, making it pertinent to apartheid South Africa and segregated Palestine. As such, Paul's mes-

sage needs to be embraced as a crucial part of what has been described as the "dangerous memory of the gospel" that undermines the complacency of the rich and powerful in any society.

Differently stated, there is an inter-related double heritage in the church, traceable to the person of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. One layer of this heritage is traceable to the teachings of Jesus contained in the gospels that capture the partiality of Jesus in support of the poor and oppressed, which led to his crucifixion and the martyrdom of his followers. The other layer concerns the universality of the gospel, emphasized in the teaching of Paul, which amplifies the teaching of Jesus as reflected in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, his encounter with the Syrophenician women, and elsewhere.

Both heritages are pertinent to a church within a society subjected to ideological distinctions based on race, class and gender.

## **The Dominant Tradition of Christianity**

The dominant message of any movement is invariably the message of those who wield most power at a given time. The dominant history of Christianity is the history told by those who exercised political power from the time of the Roman Empire to the global dominance of the United States of America today, where the story of Jesus is essentially the story told by that country's "popular" evangelists. Importantly, however, this power has never been left unchallenged. We see this happening in countries across the world where the poor and the marginalized in each successive age rise in resistance, and sometimes in revolution, against those who oppress and exploit them.

This is what happened in South Africa where a measure of sanity eventually prevailed in the apartheid state with the democratic elections that saw the emergence of a black majority government under the remarkable leadership of Nelson Mandela. There is no indication that the unfinished Palestinian intifada will in the immediate future realize what the South African struggle achieved in 1994. It is clear, however, that Palestinian resistance will not subside before the Palestinian people are afforded the opportunity to create a democratic future. This is a tried and tested reality of all history. The question is what will

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be the role of the Palestinian and global church as this process unfolds.

I identify in what follows a theological conflict that reaches to the heart of Christian identity, suggesting that unless the global church is prepared to observe the Palestinian conflict from the sidelines, it will be obliged to take sides with marginalized Palestinians against Israeli power.

The dominant tradition in church-state relations as we know it today emerged with the rulers of the Roman Empire imposing its imprint on the church through the 313 CE Edict of Milan, instituted under the authoritarian rule of Constantine the Great. It was an imprint imposed with a level of subtlety and Machiavellian *virtu* that none of Constantine's predecessors had been able to achieve through naked force. In the process the church became what was effectively a new imperial cult—transformed from a persecuted and impoverished social minority into a church led by a hierarchy of wealthy and powerful bishops, princes and emperors that assigned the poor to the margins of the church. By the high Middle Ages the dominant church had become the single most despotic political force in Europe.

Since this dramatic imperial feat, Christianity, with some notable exceptions, has grown accustomed to bolstering the powerful and neglecting the poor and vulnerable. Among the exceptions can be counted the confessing church in Nazi Germany, the church of the poor in Latin America that gave birth to liberation theology, the black theology genre that emerged from the civil rights movement in the U.S., the feminist and womanist theology movements in different parts of the world, and the signers of the three Kairos documents in South Africa (1985), Palestine (2009), and the United States (2011).

A further sense of hope in this regard has emerged in the apostolic exhortation, entitled, *The Joy of the Gospel* in which Pope Francis upholds the Christian calling to challenge the alliance between political and business leaders in the promotion of "a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power." He reaffirms a message in continuity with the Twenty-First Ecumenical Council and Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* that was opposed by several influential social conservatives in the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis has declared his opposition to what he calls the "deified market" of free-market capitalism. He is however no radical, ready to renounce the social teachings of the Catholic Church. He affirms the Catholic Church's opposition to abortion, insisting that "unborn children" are "the most defenseless and innocent among us," while contending "it is also true that we have done little to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations." He fits neither into any preconceived "liberal" nor "conservative" conclusions on moral theology, while calling the church to be in solidarity with the "weak and defenseless who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation."

Given the influence of conservatives in the Catholic Church, the struggle for the soul of the Catholic Church is likely to be an intense one. It is at the same time clear that the election of Pope Francis as the first pope from the Southern Hemisphere will be drawn on by progressive Catholics to challenge conservative interests in the church.

The Pope's visit in the Holy Land this May will also mark the 50th anniversary of an historic trip to the region by Pope Paul VI, when he met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, which resulted in the easing of a 900-year-long Great Schism between the churches of the East and West. This will be only the fourth papal visit to the Holy Land since biblical times. The fact that the Holy Land is the entrenched symbol of the brutal conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and that Jerusalem is a Holy City to three of the world's great religions will add to the expectations of what the Pope can achieve. The depth of these conflicts suggests, however, that these expectations will need to be constrained.

Given the divide that exists between the dominant church, which is invariably careful not to offend the political powers, and activist Christians who effectively constitute a "church within the church," Pope Francis' visit will be carefully watched. Pertinent questions will arise concerning the level of unity among Christians regarding the Palestinian situation and the Pope's response to the plight of the poor and marginalized people of the Holy Land. The struggle to define the message of the gospel and the response of the church to the needs of the poor can take on a new dimension as the eyes of the world's

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media track the Pope's visit.

The call needs to be for an activist faith often forgotten, but never completely lost, by the Christian church. In each age, from the Middle Ages, through the Reformation and into the modern period Christians have paid the price of obedience, even at the cost of persecution and death. These range from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany to Oscar Romero in El Salvador, Martin Luther King Jr., the Trappist monks killed in the Algerian civil war and the Nag Hammadi massacre of Coptic Christians. There are, in turn, countless unknown martyrs throughout the Middle East and elsewhere whose lives reflected the tradition of resistance and martyrdom.

The killings, including those of children, in Palestinian occupied territory, in turn, happen on a regular basis. Media reports on the Israeli military operations in Gaza in 2008/09 were widespread and additional reports on the killing of children over the years are extensive. These include the killing by Israel Defense Forces soldiers of Jamil Jibji and several other children and teenagers from the Askar refugee camp, who were allegedly throwing stones at military vehicles. Bushra Bargis was killed by a sniper's bullet with her school grammar book in her hand, and earlier a Jewish settler was sentenced to a mere six months community service and a \$17,000 fine for the beating to death of an 11-year-old Palestinian boy. There are at the same time an estimated 5,000-plus Palestinians being held in Israeli prisons, including Marwan Barghouti who was convicted and given a life sentence for murder by an Israeli court. Barghouti has become the "face" of Palestinian political prisoners, as Nelson Mandela became the "face" of the campaign to release all political prisoners in South Africa in the "free Mandela" campaign. There are also, we should note, Jewish young men and women in the army of the State of Israel who are refusing to surrender their lives in defense of an unjust state.

## **Kairos: The Favorable Time**

### **Kairos South Africa 1985**

The church is a global church, which requires Christians to be in solidarity with those who suffer in a particular place at a particular time. Churches are

largely aware of this, as is manifest in their global ministry programs that increasingly include Palestine in their ministry. Palestinians, in turn, look to other places around the world where struggles for justice are being waged, to learn from the success and failures of these quests.

South Africa is one of those places where Christians have fought the good fight for justice— and have to a significant sense succeeded, although there are obvious limitations inherent to the South African transition that Palestinians and others would do well to ponder. The overview of the South African struggle that follows is offered in the belief that comparative thinking and critique is required for Christians to "stand on the shoulders of others"—not in order to mimic them, but with a view to building on and improving their experiences and witness.

In this spirit of inquiry it is worth asking why it is that the South African struggle caught the imagination of the world. It was and is a struggle that is anything but romantic or painless. It cost those involved in the process dearly and there are lessons to be learned from its complicated history.

Early resistance to apartheid was essentially limited to peaceful protests. It was only after the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were banned in 1960 in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre and all channels for political opposition were eliminated that these groups resorted to armed resistance as a declared strategy to complement other non-violent strategies. There were at the same time, and continue to be, ideological differences and policy variations within the liberation movements, which militated against unified opposition to apartheid, much in the same way that Palestinian movements are marred by both inter- and intra-group conflict. Ideological and political differences in South Africa led to the establishment of the Black Consciousness Movement under the leadership of Steve Biko in the late 1960s as well as other divisions and factions. The broader objective of resistance to white rule nevertheless grew and the global community was mobilized in support of this development.

The work of the ANC as well as the PAC, once they established themselves in exile with offices in London, Lusaka and countries around the world,

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was a crucial factor in the South African struggle. These organizations worked through the United Nations (UN), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and anti-apartheid organizations across the world, which resulted in a level of global opposition that led to the declaration of apartheid as a crime against humanity by the General Assembly of the UN. This came into force in 1976 and led to a process that included an international arms boycott, trade sanctions, cultural boycotts and student protests against the apartheid regime.

Co-operation between ideologically estranged groups at home grew as a result of student movements, trade union affiliations and the establishment of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) in 1988. This mobilized black South Africans in a campaign to render the country ungovernable.

It was a costly process: 40,000 people were detained in the 1980s. There were dramatic increases of deaths in detention and in the flight of people into exile to join the armed struggle. Significantly though, as violent clashes between the government and the liberation movements escalated, clandestine meetings were being held between government leaders and the ANC. Structured meetings followed, top government officials met with Nelson Mandela and in December 1988 Mandela was moved from Pollsmoor Prison to Victor Verster Prison, with open telephone lines to consult with ANC colleagues in exile and in South Africa. In March 1989 Mandela wrote to President PW Botha, proposing that they meet to discuss the possibility of a negotiated settlement. Faced with global and internal pressure, the government released Mandela and others from prison. Political movements were unbanned and democratic elections were held in 1994.

The struggle against apartheid was always political, reaching to every sphere of existence. As such it included the participation of faith communities. The World Council of Churches (WCC) and Program to Combat Racism within the WCC played a major international role in exposing the iniquities of apartheid. They mobilized churches across the world against apartheid and exposed the atrocities committed by the South African military in the frontline states of (then) South West Africa (Namibia), Rhode-

sia (Zimbabwe) and Mozambique, and deeper into Africa.

In South Africa religious communities were similarly mobilized to resist apartheid. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) played a significant role in this regard, even though these organizations failed to secure the unqualified support of their member churches in so doing. Indeed, the divisions within member churches resulted in religious rivalry and the formation of splinter groups breaking away from the established churches, with the apartheid government taking advantage of this by pumping huge amounts of money into pro-apartheid groups in the churches.

Interfaith cooperation, both in opposing apartheid and in preparing the nation for democracy, was also a significant feature of the South African transition. In 1991, a year after the release of Mandela from prison, South African Muslims convened a National Muslim Conference in Cape Town. This was a gathering of 750 Muslims representing every shade of Muslim opinion who came together to debate Muslim Personal Law and related matters of concern to Muslims in anticipation of a new South African dispensation. The conference committed itself to support a multi-faith culture under a secular constitution. A subsequent National Interfaith Conference involving Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus and people of other religious beliefs, in turn, committed itself to support a political settlement, democratic elections and a secular constitution.

What is important to remember is that the religious resistance to apartheid and interfaith cooperation only came about in the wake of a long and hard-fought battle within which religious identities were used to bolster political conflicts. There were, however, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, members of other faiths, atheists, agnostics and secularists who found a deep common cause in their opposition to apartheid. They were frequently beaten by the police, imprisoned, driven into exile and in some cases killed, which deepened the solidarity among South Africans opposed to apartheid.

Facing an apartheid state that claimed to rule in obedience to God, it was Christians opposed to apartheid who felt a special responsibility to resist

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the state. The history of Christianity in South Africa tells of both confrontation and cooperation between church and state from the time of the arrival of the first white settlers in the country. It is from the time of colonial expansionism and the discovery of minerals in the nineteenth century that the institutional church was essentially supportive of white interests and privilege.

The turning point in Christian opposition to apartheid only came in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. The WCC convened a meeting in Cottesloe, Johannesburg, shortly after the massacre, to consult with South African churches concerning their stance on apartheid. The conference decisively voted against apartheid. Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of statutory apartheid and prime minister at the time, rebuked the delegates to the conference from the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), the largest of the white Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Churches, by accusing them of forgetting their responsibility regarding the "high purpose of apartheid." Many recanted, while Beyers Naudé, the moderator of the Southern Transvaal synod of the NGK, rejected Verwoerd's reprimand and was later expelled from his church. As the divisions within the church deepened, a space opened up within which leaders from various churches, such as Beyers Naudé, Desmond Tutu and others, became household names in the fight against apartheid.

The theological breakthrough in the church struggle took a significant step forward with the publication of two important books. One was Allan Boesak's doctoral thesis, *Farewell to Innocence*, in 1975. This was effectively the first black theology publication to capture public attention in South Africa. The other breakthrough came with the publication of Albert Nolan's *Jesus before Christianity* in 1976.

Two earlier developments prepared the way for this breakthrough in different ways. The so-called English-speaking churches (the majority of whose members were black as result of nineteenth-century mission work) were instrumental in the writing of the *Message to the People of South Africa* in 1968, which rejected apartheid as a "pseudo-gospel." The NGK, in turn, adopted a declaration in 1974 with the pretentious title of *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, providing a biblical jus-

tification for apartheid. This led, largely at the instigation of Allan Boesak, to the decision of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), to adopt a resolution declaring the theological justification of apartheid to be a heresy. Boesak was also elected president of the WARC at their 1982 General Council, which afforded him a global platform to further mobilize the world-wide church against apartheid.

Among the most significant and prophetic events in the history of the theological struggle against apartheid in the turbulent 1980s by the church in resistance to apartheid were the controversial *Call for the End to Unjust Rule*, which emerged at a deeply divided South African Council of Churches conference in 1984 and the South Africa *Kairos Document* (published in 1985). Both identified the rupture between the established institutional church and Christians in rebellion against apartheid. The *Call for the End to Unjust Rule* asked Christians to pray "that God will replace the present structures of oppression with ones that are just, and remove from power those who persist in defying his laws, installing in their place leaders who will govern with justice and mercy."

The *Kairos Document* rejected "state theology" in which the apartheid state drew on a distorted interpretation of chapter 13 in Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* and other passages of scripture to claim its authority is derived from God. It also rejected "church theology," describing it as having drawn on "a few stock ideas derived from the Christian tradition," without taking sides with oppressed people in their fight against apartheid. In so doing it affirmed a "prophetic theology" which rejected the state as having "no moral legitimacy" and being "an enemy of the common good."

#### **Kairos Palestine: 2009**

The similarities between apartheid South Africa and Israeli discrimination against Palestinians is widely debated and need not be dealt with here. Suffice it to say, the connections are difficult to ignore. John Dugard, in 2001, as Special Rapporteur to the UN Human Rights Commission, provided what is probably the most comprehensive study on the situation concerning the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Later, in his report to the Russell Tribunal on Palestine in 2011, he charged that there are hu-

man rights abuses in Palestine threatening international peace which many in the West would like to see swept under the carpet.

Palestinians have fought hard for their freedom, with two burdens that are more difficult to carry than those faced by South Africans. These concern the limitations of global solidarity with Palestinians and the hesitation of the global church to support the Palestinian cause to the same extent that it supported the South Africa struggle. This suggests the urgent need for levels of Palestinian unity, the global coordination of its work, domestic solidarity across ideological differences, the redefining of viable strategies for change and the need for the level of leadership that South Africans have produced not only in Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Steve Biko and Desmond Tutu, but also leaders at other levels of society.

Despite the remarkable theological work undertaken by Palestinian scholars and activists, such as Elias Chacour, Archbishop of the Melkite Church, and the Rev. Naim Ateek, founder of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem, the WCC and WARC have not embraced the Palestinian cause with the same enthusiasm with which they embraced the anti-apartheid cause. Geopolitical factors supportive of Israel bear as heavily on the church as they do on other dimensions of the Palestinian situation.

The building of global solidarity and international church cohesion in support of Palestine are realities that the ecumenical church is required to interrogate with a new sense of urgency to ensure that the violations against the Palestinian people are exposed on the world stage and addressed by global leaders.

In 2009, an impressive number of Palestinian Christian institutions and leaders, including the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah, signed the Kairos Palestine document. [For the complete list, see [www.kairopalestine.ps](http://www.kairopalestine.ps).] According to its authors, Israel's military occupation is "a sin against God and humanity," and all peoples, political leaders, and decision-makers must "put pressure on Israel and take legal measures in order to oblige its government to put an end to its oppression and disregard for international law." And explicitly, the

document affirms that nonviolent reaction to this injustice "is a right and duty for all Palestinians, including Christians."

### **Kairos USA: 2011**

On June 18, 2011, Christian leaders from around the United States issued an official response to the Kairos Palestine document.

Called Kairos USA, it begins with a confession of sin for the failure to say "Enough" to Israel's confiscation of Palestinian lands, as well as the equal failure to say "Enough" both to the billions of dollars the U.S. government gives Israel each year to subsidize its expanding settlements and to the veto-wielding votes it casts in the U.N. to shield Israel from international censure.

The document ends by inviting Christians across the U.S. to join the nonviolent effort to support those in Israel, the occupied territories, and throughout the world who work to end the illegal occupation and redress other legitimate Palestinian grievances through peaceful means. The Palestinian call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) is directed at Israeli policy, not the state of Israel itself or its citizens, and certainly not against the Jewish people. [For the list of signatories and other specific actions that can be taken, go to Kairos USA's impressive website: [www.kairosusa.org](http://www.kairosusa.org).]

The honesty embedded in this document is a sobering challenge to Christians in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world:

As individuals and as church members, we have supported a system of control, inequality and oppression through misreading our Holy Scriptures, flawed theology and distortions of history. We have allowed to go unchallenged theological and political ideas that have made us complicit in the oppression of the Palestinian people. Instead of speaking and acting boldly, we have chosen to offer careful statements designed to avoid controversy and leave cherished relationships undisturbed. We have forgotten the differences between a theology that supports the policies and institutional structures of oppression and a theology that, in response to

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history and human affairs, stands boldly with the widow, the orphan and the dispossessed.

Indeed, the cautious response of the West to human rights abuses of Palestinians evokes the need for a prophetic theology which addresses the political challenges associated with the geopolitical forces of the West as currently being played out in the Middle East. This essentially involves the question whether the church is prepared to confront the sense of Constantinian captivity to the state that is challenged by the memory of Jesus of Nazareth, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith— and, from the perspective of African spirituality, the primary ancestor of the Christian community.

Pertinent to the Palestinian situation is, in turn, the clarion call of Paul rejecting all forms of racism, gender distinction and class distinction. The dominant church in the West needs to be held accountable to this gospel, which an increasing number of Christians are beginning to realize. Consider, for example, Bishop Richard Pates who, as chairman of the Committee of International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, sent a letter, dated January 28, 2014, to Secretary of State John Kerry stating that the United States should urge the government of Israel to cease and desist in efforts to unnecessarily confiscate Palestinian lands.

This is Kairos, the favorable time, when God issues a challenge to decisive action. We are called on to ask whether, by default, if not by design, the church is sustaining an alliance between the church and a state that perpetuates the suffering of the poor and oppressed, or whether it is providing a voice for those who seek redemption from economic, political and ultimately spiritual destitution (Luke 4:18). It cannot serve both ends.

## Quo Vadis?

Apocryphal tradition has it that the Apostle Peter, while fleeing from likely crucifixion in Rome at the hands of the government, meets the risen Christ who is headed into the city. “Quo vadis?” Peter asks him—“Where are you going?” To which Christ responds, “I am going to Rome to be crucified again.” For the “prince of the apostles” it was a kairos moment. With renewed courage, he turns and goes

back to the city, where he is eventually crucified.

It is too much to expect that Pope Francis’ visit to the Holy City will result in historic reconciliation between Muslims and Christians or bridge the vicious gap between Israelis and Palestinians. Still, this is the man who has washed the feet of Muslims, visited prisoners in their cells, and shared his bread with the hungry and homeless.

His visit will create the opportunity to highlight the plight of Palestinians as well as the plight of oppressed Christians in some Arab states. For this reason, it is the obligation of Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Holy Land as well as in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and other parts of the Middle East, to ensure that the pope is exposed to the suffering of the victims of abuse in their respective areas. Handled with integrity and sensitivity by all religious groups (Christians, Muslims and Jews in all their different sectarian forms) as well as Israeli and Palestinian political groups (in their different ideological guises), the papal visit can contribute to a new phase in the struggle to resolve the entrenched problem facing Israelis and Palestinians.

His visit to the Holy Land can become a unique moment in time in which the institutional church asks of itself that crucial question: Quo vadis?

### Attention, Please . . .

- Additional copies of *Quo Vadis* can be purchased by calling our office (212-870-2053) or by contacting us by email at [ameu@ameu.org](mailto:ameu@ameu.org). Discounts are available for quantity purchases.
- For space considerations, the review of James Abourezk’s book, “Advise & Dissent,” was shortened from its original length. However, the website ([www.ameu.org](http://www.ameu.org)) carries the review in full.

## Book Review

### **“Advise & Consent”**

By James G. Abourezk

Reviewed by Bob Norberg

If you missed Jim Abourezk's autobiography the first time around (1989), opportunity knocks with the reissue of "Advise & Dissent." This is not the usual Preening Party we are accustomed to from men who have held positions of power and cherry pick only triumphal moments for their memoirs. At the outset, we find him as a headstrong youth who joins his peers in flinging slurs at the Indians in their community, and as an impetuous 16-year-old high school senior whose parents throw him out of the house when he is expelled for tying a teacher to a radiator.

What follows is a tumultuous ride from tiny Wood, South Dakota, to the House and Senate, and to "face time" with international figures that most politicians would hide from, let alone seek out, such as Fidel Castro and Yasir Arafat.

Abourezk would become a fierce populist, a staunch defender of Indian rights, an acerbic critic of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, and a proponent of diplomacy and cultural awareness over beligerency and force of arms.

Abourezk's enduring legacy is the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), which he founded in 1980. Fresh in Abourezk's mind was the entrapment scheme initiated in 1978 by the FBI, which code-named the operation "Abscam" because the central figure was a fake Arab sheikh who had \$400,000 in taxpayers' money to pay off public officials promising to do him favors.

"After the scandal broke in the press," writes Abourezk, "FBI Director William Webster was asked why the agent had been dressed as an Arab. He responded that it was necessary to choose some ethnic group that the public would believe was capable of bribing congressmen. And yet, no Arab or Arab-American had ever been even accused of bribing an American politician. There had been, of course, lots of publicity about Koreans, Wasps, Jews and members of other ethnic groups convicted of bribery, but not about Arabs."

Before ADC, "Israel Firsters" were largely unchecked as they played a zero sum game with propaganda that pumped up Israel while portraying Arabs in the worst possible light. ADC's potential was obviously seen as a threat. As Abourezk notes:

"In 1985, what the FBI described as a 'Jewish extremist group' attached a bomb to the door of ADC's office in Santa Ana, California, which killed Alex Odeh, ADC's West Coast organizer. Before that, the same extremist group attempted to bomb ADC's Boston office ... seriously injuring two Boston policemen who were attempting to dismantle it. ... I was notified in 1987 by the FBI that, during the course of investigating Odeh's assassination, they had uncovered a plot on my life ... "

In Chapter Nine, "Somebody Out There Hates Me," Abourezk demonstrates the power of the pro-Israel lobby by describing how President Gerald Ford was thrown under the bus by Congress in 1975 after threatening a "reassessment" of America's policy toward Israel if it refused to enter peace negotiations. "Reassessment," writes Abourezk, meant "that our arms shipments to Israel would be stopped until it came around to our way of thinking."

The Lobby orchestrated a letter that 76 senators signed, forcing Ford to back down. (Little has changed in how Israel can humiliate a sitting President. In 2011, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu gave a public Middle East history lesson to President Obama, wagging his finger in the President's face, then received 29 standing ovations from both sides of the aisle as he addressed a joint session of Congress—ovations, noted columnist Tom Friedman, that were bought and paid for by the Israel lobby.)

"Advise & Dissent" was endorsed enthusiastically by Gore Vidal, who called it "an object lesson for politicians of both today and tomorrow, who believe—wrongly—that they must sell their principles in order to be elected." Ralph Nader describes the book as "earthy, poignant, witty and forthright."

*Advise & Dissent: Memoirs of an Ex-Senator*, by James G. Abourezk, 275 pp., softcover. First published in 1989, republished in 2013 by University of Nebraska Press with epilogue and a new foreword by Fred Harris.

## Film Review

# “The Stones Cry Out”

Reviewed by Edward Dillon

Viewing “The Stones Cry Out” gave me a sense of déjà vu. I have heard this story before.

Some of the protagonists have grown old along with me. There is Father Elias Chacour. When I first heard of him he was a humble Melkite priest in the Galilee. Now in the documentary he is the Melkite patriarch of the Holy Land. His fate seems to be to preside over a community that is disappearing. Indeed, the Palestinian Christian community is fast disappearing in the land of Palestine.

That is the urgent message of this documentary.

There are two narratives concerning Palestine: the Zionist narrative and the Palestinian narrative.

I used to know only the Zionist narrative and was more shaped by it than I realized.

To check out the other narrative has been a wrenching experience, and I find it hard to express my present view. But it has to be expressed, and expressed simply: The Zionist narrative is a work of heroic pretense. In other words it is a lie. The Palestinian narrative is simply the tragic truth.

This well edited, 56-minute documentary concentrates on a part of that tragic history: the fate of the Christian communities in historic Palestine. Yasmine Perri, the Italian journalist, photographer and TV producer who made it, scoured official Palestinian, Israeli and U.N. film archives, and traveled all over historic Palestine to document the facts.

Some striking details stay with me:

- The U.N. vote dividing Palestine took three minutes in Nov. 1947. While Palestinians were sleeping, their land was given away. In the section of the roll-call that the film records, the United Kingdom abstains; the United States says Yes.

- In another scene, a voice-over says “Why do you seek the Living One among the dead? He is not here.” And the voice goes on: “If you just visit the holy sites with the stone churches you are missing the living stones—the Christian communities that have been here from the first days of the Christian movement.”

Some Israeli voices have been raised to show the lies behind the Zionist narrative. I think of Matti Peled’s son, Miko, or Ilan Pappé’s masterful work on the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

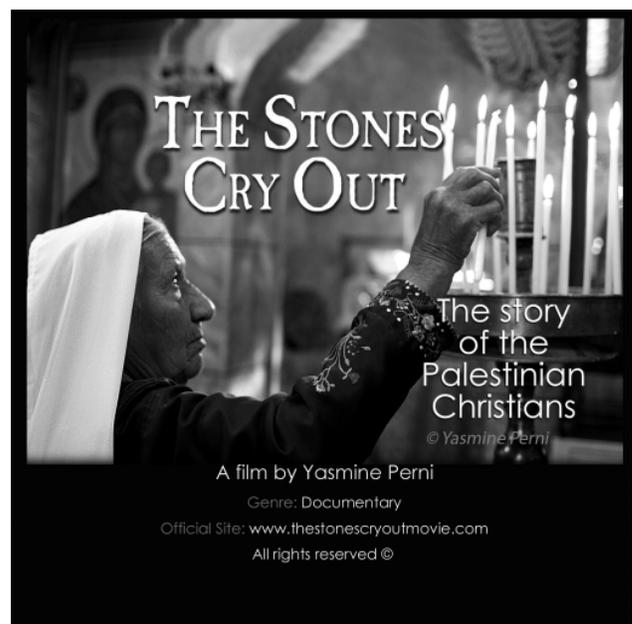
But I come close to despair when I keep hearing the voice of a priest interviewed in the documentary. He, too, speaks simply. When it comes to Israel, he says, no one knows how to speak the truth to power.

We Americans have been egregious accomplices to the ongoing Israeli crimes against a defenseless people; we have much to be ashamed of.

I for one felt like a guilty bystander as I watched this excellent film.

May we find our voice and thunder it for all to hear. ■

*Edward Dillon is a member of AMEU's Board of Directors.*



## Recommended Books

All AMEU Prices include Postage & Handling

- Advise & Dissent: Memoirs of an Ex-Senator** by James Abourezk, 2013 edition, paper, 275 pp., AMEU: \$16.50. (See review on page 11.)
- Fast Times in Palestine** by Pamela Olson, author of our Nov.-Dec. 2013 *Link*, "Farewell, Fig Leaf." 2013, paper, 322 pp. Highly readable and informative. AMEU: \$15.00.
- Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?** by Betty Jane & J. Martin Bailey, second edition, 2010, 439 pp. A "solid reference book." – *Christianity Today*. AMEU: \$15.95.
- Lest We Forget.** A listing of the times Israel has acted against U.S. interests, including its theft of U.S. nuclear material. An AMEU publication, 24 pages, fourth edition, 2011. AMEU: \$2.00 per copy. Bulk rates available.
- Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths** by Karen Armstrong. Paper, 1999, 474 pp. This book remains a critically acclaimed history of the Holy City. AMEU: \$15.50.
- A Palestinian-Christian Cry for Reconciliation** by Naim Ateek, founder of Sabeel's program of nonviolence. Paper, 2008, 224 pp..AMEU: \$17.50.
- Peace Not Apartheid** by Jimmy Carter. cloth, 2006,265 pp.. A critical analysis of Israel's occupation by a former U.S. president. AMEU: \$12.50.
- Blood Brothers** by Elias Chacour. Paper, 2003, 240 pp. This is an updated edition of his classic work, with an introduction by James Baker III. AMEU: \$12.50.
- Blood and Religion** by former Guardian journalist Jonathan Cook, who addresses the question of whether Israel can be both a Jewish and a democratic state. Paper, 2006, 222 pp. AMEU: \$16.50.
- An Israeli in Palestine** by Jeff Halper, co-founder of the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions. Paper, 2008, 317 pp. The occupation as seen by a Jewish-American-Israeli. AMEU: \$19.50.

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## Recommended Books, Continued

**All AMEU Prices Include Postage & Handling**

- Married to Another Man** by Ghadi Karmi, a Palestinian medical doctor and author, who argues for a single Israeli state. paper, 2007, 350 pp, **AMEU: \$22.50.**
- The Iron Cage** by Columbia University professor Rashid Khalidi. An in-depth look at why Palestinians do not have their own state. cloth, 2006, 281 pp, **AMEU: \$19.95.**
- Overcoming Zionism** by Jewish-American psychiatrist and human rights activist Joel Kovel on how Israel can heal its “state-sponsored racism.” paper, 2007, 299 pp., **AMEU: \$18.95.**
- Traditional Palestinian Costumes** by Hanan Munayyer, cloth, 2011, 554 pp. This is a “coffee-table” book with more than 500 brilliantly colored pictures of Palestinian dresses and jewelry, along with a scholarly history of Palestinian embroidery dating back to Canaanite times. **AMEU: \$180.00.**
- Warriors Against Israel** by former Time Magazine’s Jerusalem desk editor Donald Neff. cloth, 1988, 372 pp. The inside story of how Israel became America’s ally in 1973.
- Sixty Years Later** by Thomas Suarez. paper, 2010, 112 pp, illustrated. A look at Gaza through the lens of an American classical musician. **AMEU: \$15.00.**

**Zionism: The Real Enemy of the Jews** by former BBC correspondent Alan Hart. This is a 3-volume work that can be bought separately for **\$20.00 per book** or **\$45.00 per set.**

- Vol. 1: The False Messiah**, paper, 2009, 338 pp. **Spells out the dangers involved in the West’s unconditional support for Zionism.**
- Vol. 2: David Becomes Goliath**, paper 2009, 303 pp. posits that Israel’s claim to be living in constant danger of annihilation is propaganda nonsense.
- Vol. 3: Conflict Without End?** paper, 2010, 391 pp. Traces the history from the 1967 war and the creation of a Greater Israel to the present and asks is a final round of Zionist ethnic cleansing inevitable.

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## Recommended Films

All AMEU Prices Include Postage & Handling

- The Stones Cry Out**, 2013, 56-minute DVD. The Palestinian Catastrophe as seen through the eyes of Palestinian Christians. **AMEU: \$20.00.** (See review on page 12.)
- 5 Broken Cameras**. Oscar-nominated documentary on peaceful resistance on the West Bank. 90-minute DVD, 2012. **AMEU: \$25.00.** Shot mostly by a Palestinian farmer.
- Occupation 101**. Winner of nine Film Festival awards. One of the best DVDs on the colonization of Palestine. 90-minute documentary, plus 90 minutes of archival scenes, 2008, **AMEU: \$10.00.**
- Life in Occupied Palestine**. DVD documentary by Jewish-American activist Anna Baltzer, who authored our June-July 2007 *Link* "Witness for the Defenseless." 61 minutes, 2006, **AMEU: \$20.00.**
- Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land**. How the media slants its coverage of Israel's colonization of Palestine. DVD, 146 minutes, 2004. **AMEU: \$20.00**
- Children of the Nakba**. A Mennonite production. 2005, 26-minute documentary. Includes: "Walking the Path Jesus Walked" "Dividing Wall," and "Family Stories: Palestine." **AMEU: \$15.00.**
- Palestine for Beginners**. By the Palestine Information Project. 2004, 72-minute documentary. Includes sections on Zionism, the wars of 1948 & 1967, the Occupation, One State vs. Two States, and Nonviolence & Resistance. **AMEU: \$15.00.**

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