

The Link

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About This Issue

James M. Wall edited the influential *Christian Century* magazine from 1972 through 1999 and currently serves as its Senior Contributing Editor.

Jim is a politician, active in Democratic party politics, having served as Illinois state chairman in Jimmy Carter's 1976 and 1980 presidential campaigns and Illinois state manager of Paul Simon's 1984 primary campaign for the U.S. Senate. In 1988, he assembled the Illinois delegate slate for Al Gore's presidential bid, and, presently, he is an elected Gore delegate to the 2000 convention.

He is also an ordained United Methodist minister.

And — a line of work he draws upon for this article — he is a film critic.

In 1973, upon assuming the editorship of *Christian Century*, Jim received an invitation from the American Jewish Committee to take an all-expenses paid trip to Israel.

He began his journey a solid, pro-Israel supporter, a position his AJC host had hoped to reinforce. But, then—in a twist of fate not planned by his host—he met LeRoy Friesen, a Mennonite, who convinced him to spend a day with him in the Israeli-occupied, Palestinian West Bank.

Now, 23 years later, the editor-politician-minister looks back upon an event that happened that day as a turning point in his understanding of Palestinians and their history.

John F. Mahoney
Executive Director

ON THE JERICHO ROAD

BY JAMES M. WALL

I made my first trip to Jerusalem in December of 1973. I viewed the region with a strong pro-Israeli perspective. I was the new editor of the *Christian Century* in 1973, responsible for publishing an ecumenical magazine primarily for mainline Protestant Christians, although we did have some Catholic and Jewish readers. I was named editor of the magazine after ten years as editor of the United Methodist magazine, the *Christian Advocate*, a decade during which my readers—and I—were preoccupied with the civil rights and anti-war struggles of the 1960s.

As a liberal Protestant, I was very aware of, and deeply grateful for, the support American Jewish activists gave to the fight to wipe out segregation in my native South. I had been politically active in George

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McGovern's 1972 campaign, where many of my fellow McGovernites and anti-war activists were Jewish. I had run for Congress as a Democrat in a losing battle in a heavily Republican Illinois district. (How heavy? The district now is represented by Henry Hyde.) Some of my funds for that campaign came from Jewish contributors. Suffice it to say, I entered the 1970s as a white southern liberal who was part of a political coalition that had ended segregation and halted a war.

I was only a few months into my tenure as editor of the Christian Century when I received what I now realize was an inevitable invitation from the American Jewish Committee to take an all-expenses paid trip to Israel. At first I refused, since I had little knowledge or interest in the region, other than my biblical affection for the land and my admiration for the victors of the 1967 Six Day War. I finally yielded to the urging of an enthusiastic and energetic AJC staff member, Inga Gibel (now Inga Lederer). She insisted that I could protect my "editorial integrity" by paying my own expenses, but she would still arrange my travel, hotel accommodations, and itinerary.

It is important to remember that three decades ago, if there were any organizations in the U.S. which might have offered me a Palestinian-oriented trip, I didn't hear from them. Indeed, three decades later, supporters of the Palestinian community are only now beginning to see the merit of political lobbying. As scholars of the region know, the Arab-American community in the United States, while larger in number, does not even approach in passion the fervor of American supporters for Israel.

My trip, initially planned for October, 1973, was postponed until after the Yom Kippur war (which I learned later, was also called the Ramadan War—my first introduction to the power to shape opinion by the act of "naming" places and events). I finally flew to Tel Aviv in early December, armed with a bible, a travel guide, the novel "O, Jerusalem," and a collection of essays by Martin Buber given to me by a Christian friend who had his own love affair with Jerusalem.

I landed in Tel Aviv with absolutely no knowledge that the airport was built on

ground that was once Lydda, an Arab town which saw major fighting in 1947-48 and where most indigenous Palestinians were either killed or driven out to permanent homes in refugee camps. I didn't know because every nation that wins a war and controls public opinion writes its own version of its victory. Only recently have the "new historians" of Israel begun to publish revised views of that period.

And how far more realistic these views are from those novels and films that have shaped American public opinion of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Two novels written during Israel's early development, Leon Uris's "Exodus" (1958), and Ted Berkman's "Cast a Giant Shadow" (1962), were both made into films which featured major U.S. stars, Paul Newman in Exodus and Kirk Douglas in Shadow. The movies were clearly sympathetic to the formation of the state of Israel and embodied many of the myths that Israel's new historians have exposed in recent years; but the story lines became ingrained as the popular belief among most Americans.

Berkman's novel is a loose rendering of the real life career of an American West Point graduate, Colonel Mickey Marcus, who went to Palestine in January, 1948, on a mission to transform Israeli underground fighters into soldiers. (At the time of his death, shot by mistake by one of his own men, Marcus was commander of the Israeli army in the Jerusalem area.)

My first taxi ride from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem took me through the valley of the Ayalon, where Joshua made the sun stand still, a biblical story I read as I rode through the valley. I knew then that my Sunday School stories were going to come alive, a visceral awareness that added to my excitement. I found myself admiring the abandoned tanks I saw by the side of the highway as we left the valley and headed toward Jerusalem. Thirty years later many of them are still there, monuments left by the winners of the war that raged along that highway.

My guide book told me that we were passing by the village of Abu Gosh, where Mickey Marcus was killed in a battle along the highway to Jerusalem in the 1947-48 war. It was many years later before I learned from Palestinian Jerusalem representative Faisal Hussein that his father

also died in that battle. The Palestinian perspective on history has yet to reach American popular culture, especially when so much of that culture is shaped by popular films and novels.

When I finally arrived in Jerusalem I was light-headed, both from jet lag and with the excitement of visiting this new and brave nation which only six years earlier had swept to a quick victory in the 1967 war. Before my trip ended a week later, I had encountered a new reality, and the dark burden of ambiguity began to descend. I knew then, as I do now, that if the state of Israel were to survive, it had to have a strong army and secure borders. But I also knew that there were consequences resulting from the creation of a state on land seized in a war over the objections of an indigenous population.

American Colony: Fortunate Choice

Inga Gibel grew increasingly disappointed in me over the years as I attempted to write out of this feeling of ambiguity. She had reason to regret placing me in the American Colony Hotel, which is located in East Jerusalem and staffed by Palestinians, a move I suspect her AJC superiors assumed distorted my view of the political situation. But for me, it was an exciting introduction to a new culture. I was awakened early each morning by prayers from a nearby mosque, my first encounter with Islam. And, as I discovered over the next three decades, I was in a hotel where both Jews and Palestinians were willing to talk to a visiting journalist.

It was in the garden at the American Colony where I once shared a memorable lunch with Marianne Heiberg, then the wife of Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Johan Jorgen Holst. I had met the couple at an Aspen conference a few years earlier and I was surprised to see Marianne in Jerusalem. She said she was doing research for her husband but, though she never confirmed this, I suspect she was an early participant in the process that led to the Oslo agreement in her home in Norway. After her husband's death, she directed a U.N. agency in Jerusalem and we met again for dinner on several occasions.

But my meetings with Marianne Heiberg were more than a decade in the future when I first arrived at the American Colony in 1973, fresh from the civil rights struggle in the U.S. In retrospect I realize now that I could not view what I saw in Israel and Palestine other than against the background of that fight over integration. I had hoped that veterans of that struggle would transfer their moral outrage against segregation to the Palestinian cause. These historic struggles are not exact parallels, but they have this much in common: when we look the other way or justify oppression, there is damage not only to the oppressed but also to the oppressors, no matter how seemingly righteous their cause.

People in my native South, with a few courageous ex-

ceptions, believed they could combine their Christian faith with a defense of segregation, "our way of life," a pattern of living which grew out of defeat in the Civil War and the ravages of the war's aftermath. There was considerable ambiguity in my own church, which adamantly refused to accept official integration, but which still had some members, including my parents and the occasional liberal pastor, who knew that "our way of life" may have been good for us, but it was bad for others.

When I was a college freshman at Georgia Tech in 1946, I worked part-time as a copy boy for the Atlanta Constitution during the editorship of Ralph McGill, an eloquent writer, a fighter against the injustices of segregation, and a mentor for me and many of my generation. Late one night our city room received a phone call that reported a lynching near my hometown of Monroe, Georgia. Four Negroes, two men and two women, had been shot to death in an isolated rural area by a white mob over an incident which started with a fight between a white farmer and a Negro farm hand. The mob was believed to include as many as 20 local men, who removed the two men from jail and drove them to an isolated location. The deaths of the two women were not planned, so it was later reported; they were killed because one of them recognized a member of the mob.

Outraged over the killings, I wrote a scathing editorial condemning the murders, and mailed it to the editor of the local paper in Monroe. The editorial was written with all the zeal and intemperance of an irate teenager. I demanded the arrest and death penalty of everyone responsible for the murders. (I had not yet developed my opposition to capital punishment.) Such a diatribe would have been tossed in the waste basket of any other southern newspaper, but the editor in Monroe happened to be a Methodist minister who thought it great that a local boy had an opinion on such a major event. To the huge embarrassment of my father, who was the appointed local city clerk, and the unbridled anger of most local citizens, my column appeared on the front page of the *Walton News*, complete with byline.

Not a single arrest was ever made for the murders, which, fortunately, were almost the last lynchings in the South. Still, it was a long time before the community's anger subsided over outside criticism and my column in particular. I probably would have been most unwelcome back home for many years had I not become a sports writer for the Atlanta Constitution in a region where sports rivals Protestantism as the local religion.

This personal history was with me as I began my first visit to the Middle East. The local AJC staffer arranged a tight schedule to expose me to a country that only two months earlier had lived through the trauma of the 1973 war. Hotels and restaurants were virtually empty in a post-war fall off of tourism. Eating lunch one day in the Mishkenot restaurant overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem, I met the legendary mayor, Teddy Kollek. There were not many visiting journalists in Jerusalem that day and the



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., AND THE AUTHOR, 1967.

mayor didn't want to miss a chance to greet one of them. I ran into Mayor Kollek a few years later in the Old City during the Intifada, and he appeared to remember me, the mark of a skilled politician.

I could appreciate the trauma Israelis were feeling; only a few months earlier they thought their country was in danger of invasion by Arab armies. Many whom I interviewed pressed upon me the fearful image they had of Arab troops marching triumphantly down Ben Yehuda street. I knew those fears were real, and I appreciated the intense feeling of danger Israelis conveyed when they recalled the Holocaust and their fear of repetition, which only they could prevent by building a strong military force and guaranteeing secure borders. Still, as I neared the end of my visit, no one had spoken to me from the Palestinian perspective.

Perspective is critical to my understanding of any complex issue. My graduate work at the University of Chicago was with Seward Hiltner, a professor of pastoral care, and he had stressed the importance of facing ambiguity with the knowledge that no single perspective ever exhausts a given reality. I wrote about this recently in the *Christian Century*, citing this anecdote:

The story is told of the family members who gather in a Liverpool hotel ballroom to learn the fate of loved ones who were traveling on the Titanic. Everyone is frantically seeking news of survivors. As I recall the story from an old comedy recording, the grieving crowd is surprised to see an old polar bear

walk into the room. He looks sad and there is a tear in his eye when he asks: "Have you got any news of the iceberg? My family were on it, you see. Have you got any news of the iceberg? They mean the whole world to me." It hadn't occurred to the grieving relatives that a polar bear's family might have been cruising through the icy waters on the iceberg that collided with the Titanic. It is, you see, all in the perspective.

My AJC host, who had his own passionate perspective, had arranged a meeting for me at the Holy Land Institute, an institution of a more evangelical persuasion than that of the *Christian Century*, which is known in church circles as a "liberal magazine." I was the guest of honor for the evening, but I was really there to be on the hot seat. The *Century's* reputation was that of decades of hostility to Zionism prior to Israel's becoming a state in 1948, a position shared by most Protestant missionaries in the Middle East and by most Jewish leaders in the United States. I remember sitting in a circle, surrounded by evangelical Christians who shared an intense loyalty to Israel. Everyone there pounded away at me for the *Century's* failure to champion Israel's cause, a sin for which I had little responsibility since I had been editor for only 14 months.

I heard only one friendly voice that evening, and I am still not sure how he slipped through the invitation net. His name was LeRoy Friesen, an American Mennonite pastor serving a three-year tour in Jerusalem. He asked me quietly if he could come by my hotel later that night for a chat. I was about chatted out but his intense and concerned

manner persuaded me I should see him. The Mennonites were, after all, one of the traditional peace churches in the United States, who send young workers like Friesen—at 43, he was the same age as I was—to labor on behalf of the non-powerful in locations around the world.

LeRoy told me that I was hearing only one perspective. He proposed that we travel into the West Bank and up to the Golan Heights, an excursion the AJC had not suggested, of course. Since I was paying my own way (thankfully), my AJC host had no grounds to object to my breaking away from my next day's meetings to go off on my own.

Epiphany at a Farm On the Jericho Road

LeRoy drove us in his VW coupe along the road to Jericho, the location for Jesus's story about the Good Samaritan. Driving northward out of Jericho, we talked about the importance of the Jordan River valley in terms of both farming and security. We stopped along the highway to admire the fertile fields of Israeli crops that lay between us and the river. We then left the highway and drove on a dirt road up a hill and stopped to talk with a Palestinian farmer, who was sitting in front of his house. I remember him as rather elderly, and I was struck by the resigned sadness in his manner. He pointed up the hill to his well, which reminded me of a Georgia sharecropper's well, and we saw that it was connected to a pump that provided water to his modest-sized field.

Quite a distance farther up the hill was an Israeli well, surrounded by barbed wire and enclosed in a concrete casing. That well was much deeper, LeRoy explained, and pipes carried its water down the hill where we could see it spraying onto the Israeli fields in the Jordan Valley. I knew enough about aquifers to know that the deeper, more sophisticated Israeli well (its pipes buried beneath the soil) would soon render useless the farmer's shallower well, with its open, above ground pipes.

What I saw that morning has shaped all of my subsequent understanding of the region. This was the strong dominating the weak: control, not sharing. Something was seriously wrong with that picture. In that farmer's sad, resigned face was my epiphany. The existential reality of injustice witnessed first-hand, as LeRoy knew, is a far more powerful teaching tool than injustice heard or read about.

I have recently reread sections of Leon Uris's 1958 novel, "Exodus," one that was a strong influence on my view of Israel when I first read it, as I suspect it was on a large number of American readers. Ari Ben Canaan (played by Paul Newman in the 1960 film) and Kitty, his American girlfriend, are driving through the Jezreel Valley, "which the Jews had turned from swamp into the finest farmland in the Middle East. . . . On one side of the hill the lush lands of the Jezreel and on the other, the sun-baked, dried-out, barren fields of the Arabs."

Once propaganda is fixed as the truth in the public mind—novels and movies are especially influential in this regard—it is very difficult to replace it with a different perspective. Great sections of the farmland and orchards long cultivated by Palestinian farmers—which were anything but dried-out and barren when I first saw them—have over the decades been confiscated for Israeli settlements and

bypass highways, leaving Palestinians with the least attractive agricultural patches and scant water resources to nurture them.

But I knew nothing of this in December, 1973, as we traveled along the Jordan highway and into the Golan Heights, listening intently as LeRoy gave me a history lesson. He reminded me that security built by Israel on the backs of the Palestinians would always be insecure. The comparison to the U.S. civil rights struggle, where a dominant culture controlled a minority population, emerged in my mind as such an obvious parallel that I was certain my American readers would feel as I did about what was being done to the Palestinians.

When we reached Bir Zeit University, a few miles north of Jerusalem, I talked with students and met the university president, Hanna Nasir, a graduate of Purdue University in Indiana, and the grandson of the founder of Bir Zeit, his grandmother, Nabiha Nasir. A year later, Nasir would be deported, thrown out of his country and dumped in the middle of the night across the Lebanon border. He was deemed a "threat" to Israeli security, and Israel subjected the university to periodic closings, always in the name of security.

Nasir took me to the teachers' lounge to meet a 27-year-old Palestinian professor who was just completing her doctoral work in English literature at the University of Virginia. Her name was Hanan Mikhail (later, Ashrawi). Today she is the best-known woman in the Palestinian leadership. Dr. Ashrawi was on the Palestinian negotiating team in Madrid, whose work was suddenly and, for the



LEROY FRIESEN, 1973



HANNA NASIR AND HANAN MIKHAIL (LATER ASHRAWI), BIR ZEIT UNIVERSITY, 1973.

Palestinians, unfortunately undercut by the Oslo agreement that allowed Yasir Arafat to return to Palestine in the first phase of the Jericho-Gaza agreement. Most recently, she served as the Palestinian spokesperson for the Camp David II summit.

After Hanna Nasir's deportation, I wrote an angry editorial deploring the elimination of younger Palestinian leaders from the occupied areas. It drew an immediate rebuke from the Israeli consul general in Chicago, a pleasant gentleman who could always be counted on for a good lunch in a restaurant close to his office whenever I published anything he deemed unflattering to Israel. Over the years, I have met a succession of Chicago consuls general, at times engaging them in lively debates on a local PBS talk show.

After a final day of meetings in Jerusalem, I retired to my room in the American Colony to begin writing my first report on the trip. It began with these words: "Had it not been for the Holocaust, the spirit of Zionism might have died with the rising tide of anti-colonialism and the new state of Israel might never have come into existence. That

is an interesting theory that the people of Israel might like to discuss some day. But not now; 2,400 of their young men have just died in the Yom Kippur war, and many Israelis feel that the possibility of another holocaust awaits them at the hands of the Arab states."

Further into that first column I described an interview with Uriel Tal, professor of Jewish history at Tel Aviv University. "I asked Dr. Tal to help me understand the rival claims of Israel's moral right to exist as against its continued military occupation of Arab lands captured in 1967. His response was explosive: 'How can you compare the lack of Israel's chance to survive with being under Israeli occupation!' Fresh in Dr. Tal's mind were reports of tortured soldiers, the annihilation of a kibbutz, and the continued threat from Arab leaders that Israel must be destroyed."

What I had experienced was a tactic that became all too familiar in the decades to come: the question unanswered, and in its place a reminder of Israel's need for security. The "tortured soldiers" phrase (I have no idea where I got that piece of information) was included to show that I un-

derstood his pain.

Rereading that first piece from Jerusalem in 1973, I realize that for all my effort at balance, I did manage to go on record with my concern over the earliest settlement construction. (Less than 10,000 Israelis in the occupied territories then; more than 250,000 today.) I also tried to quote “dovish” Israelis to gain credibility with my American Jewish readers. “When Israel argues this month in Geneva [1974] that it needs territorial buffer zones in the West Bank to protect its borders, I will be thinking of the large apartment complexes I saw going up for Israelis north on the road to Ramallah and east towards Bethlehem. More dovish Israelis fear that desire for permanence, not security, is behind these settlements. . . . The Israeli willingness to give up the West Bank is couched with considerable exceptions (including the entire city of Jerusalem) and sounds to Arab ears as though Israel’s aim is permanent conquest rather than sovereign security.”

I closed that initial piece with this paragraph: “The Jewish State of Israel, with its ambiguous identity as a nation and religious entity, looks to American Christians for support. Somehow we must find a way to provide that support, but we must do so by retaining our equally powerful commitment to the Palestinian Arabs—Christian and Muslim—who seek freedom and self-determination.”

Reaction from my Jewish readers was swift and negative. In response to my call for Christians to “somehow find a way” to support the claims of both sides, one rabbi wrote that the “way” lies in recognizing the rights of Jews to be in Israel.

Reporting the Palestinian Side of the Story

I have since traveled 17 more times to the region. The strategy I have employed in reporting in stories and editorials written from Chicago has been to use the personal stories of Palestinians to tap into American concern for justice and human rights. I wrote about young boys I talked to in hospital wards in Hebron during the Intifada, their legs and arms deliberately broken by Israeli soldiers, a practice the military denied until it was later revealed as accepted policy.

I also reported on the dehumanizing experiences Palestinians faced constantly. Images still come to me after so many decades in the area. One day I rode in a shared taxi between Gaza and Jerusalem—I was the only non-Palestinian in the taxi—when a young Israeli soldier at a checkpoint disdainfully waved away my passport and reached instead for the papers of Palestinians riding with me. He wanted to make his point: Palestinians were the danger; I wasn’t. (Little did he know; the pen can be mightier than the sword.)

One hot summer day in Gaza City I walked among Palestinian men standing in line for hours to get new identification papers, for no apparent reason other than harass-

ment. By sundown the line still stretched the length of a soccer field when loudspeakers announced that everyone would have to return the next day.

Israel insists that its close scrutiny of Palestinians is a security measure. But there are too many instances in which security is clearly designed as a tactic to dehumanize and humiliate Palestinians. I know that American Jews and Christians would be appalled by these tactics if they knew about them, but they are so commonplace that they’re seldom reported. Since so few Americans ever spend time with Palestinians, how could they ever know? The difference between Palestinians and Israelis in medical care, sanitation, housing and schools was evident in every village I visited.

I became friends with a Palestinian dentist who built a day care center for retarded children after he discovered that some working parents were chaining their disabled children to their beds so the adults could leave for work. He built without a “permit,” almost impossible to get from Israeli authorities in any event, and dared Israeli authorities to tear down a home for retarded children. They never did.

A year ago I went back to the center and found that my friend was no longer in charge. His building and program had been taken over by the Palestinian Authority, which is exerting control in many areas once served by non-profit indigenous Palestinian groups. It is a discouraging development in view of the extensive corruption that prevails within large segments of the PA, dominated as it is by “returnees” who benefit, as few others do, from the Oslo agreements.

On one of my trips into the West Bank I went to a private home for a meeting with several young Palestinians who showed me fresh scars on their legs, which they described as the result of torture they experienced as political prisoners in Israeli jails. In my report, I carefully couched their comments with the customary qualification, “they claimed” they were tortured. Israeli authorities have since admitted they had an official policy permitting the use of torture to obtain information from prisoners.

My attempts at “balanced” coverage did not go over well with at least one Palestinian reader. In November 1998, I went to see Khalid Amayreh, a journalist living in Hebron, and a graduate of the University of Oklahoma and Southern Illinois University. At the time, Khalid preferred to remain anonymous because he was under country arrest, which meant he could not leave the environs of Hebron. At the time I did not write about our meeting, one of the handicaps of trying to report life under occupation when the occupiers try to stifle criticism by local inhabitants whose freedom they control.

Khalid’s master’s thesis was based on research he did on the Christian Century coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from 1973 through 1983. His conclusion: I was far too “balanced” in my writing, going out of my way to remind my readers of the Holocaust, Israel’s need for

security, and, of course, Palestinian acts of terror that I said did considerable harm to the Palestinian cause. I told him I thought more recent reports were more plain spoken and perhaps less balanced. Khalid is still confined to Hebron, but now he has authorized me to use his name and report on our conversations.

I have been active in Illinois politics since 1972, serving as Illinois state chairman in Jimmy Carter's 1976 and 1980 presidential campaigns. Delegate selection for the 1976 Illinois delegation began in the autumn of 1975, and I had already planned my second trip to Jerusalem. I was again staying at the American Colony hotel and LeRoy Friesen was still on duty for the Mennonites. Near the end of that trip, he said we had to quit talking Middle East politics and talk about the 1976 presidential election, which I did after one of our long days on the road into the West Bank.

I remember telling LeRoy that Jimmy Carter would be elected, a prediction he found amusing since it wasn't until after the March, 1976 Illinois primary that Carter emerged as a serious contender. Carter understood my passion for the Palestinian situation, but I did not press that perspective on him because I knew that he could not win the Democratic nomination as a champion of the Palestinians. I believed, however, that once in office, his moral courage and commitment to human rights would lead him to take steps to ease the tension in the region. He demonstrated my confidence by pushing both sides toward the Camp David accords.

Carter had just been elected when the unthinkable happened, stunning liberal American Jews as well as the White House: Likud candidate Menachem Begin, whose "Judea and Samaria" label for the West Bank was once considered quaintly irrelevant, became prime minister. After a few months in office, Begin came to a meeting in New York and I was invited to a press gathering at the Waldorf Hotel to meet him. Begin shook my hand, took note of my name tag and then said, "Oh yes, you are for us."

I was surprised. Who could have so misled him? I assumed the Israeli religious liaison officer appreciated my "balanced" coverage, and knew of my friendship with Carter. Rather than embarrass him, and because my position on the Middle East couldn't matter much to Begin, I answered, "Yes sir, I am." I have tried to convince myself that what I meant was that I was, indeed, "for him and for peace in the region"—a feeble rationalization if ever I heard one.

Carter was the last Democratic candidate for whom I worked who didn't take a stand that was diametrically opposed to my own on the Palestinian issue. In 1984, for example, I managed Paul Simon's primary campaign for the U.S. Senate in Illinois. He needed a campaign manager to handle field operations, scheduling and budgets. I had no policy role.

I would not want to violate my personal communications with Simon, who won that primary and went on to defeat

Senator Charles Percy in the general election, but I can quote from his own autobiography to indicate just how strongly we disagreed on the issue that meant so much to me. In "P.S.: An Autobiography," Simon writes: "Tipping the scale as I weighed what to do [in 1983], leaders in the Jewish community urged me to run. The Percy record on Israel was not strong . . . and I have never felt my strong support of Israel was an anti-Arab stance. But the Jewish community has been generous in campaigns, and their support of me would make a difference."

While trying to decide whether or not to enter the race, Simon reports that he received a call from a "nationally respected Jewish leader from Chicago, Bob Asher." At the time, Asher was just completing a term as president of American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the powerful Jewish lobby. Asher "said he would go all-out for me if I became a candidate. I took the call in the kitchen of our 9th Street home in D.C. When I put down the receiver, I thought I would become a candidate. Jeanne [his wife] and I talked it over and quickly made the decision."

I remained as campaign manager for Simon, who had been a friend for many years, through his primary victory and helped him put together the staff which carried him to victory over Percy. It was during the primary campaign, however, that I first encountered Asher, one of Israel's staunchest supporters in the U.S. I had heard that while he had promised support to Simon, he was also involved in raising money for Tom Cochran, Percy's conservative opponent in the Republican primary. I was in Asher's office for a meeting and took the opportunity to suggest that funds diverted to Cochran would not be helpful to Simon. Besides, I asked him, how could he support a conservative when he was already supporting a liberal like Simon? His answer was curt: Beating Percy is what matters.

Criticism of PM Begin Draws Unfriendly Fire

During the primary, someone circulated to the Chicago media a packet of my Century editorials. I never found out who was behind the mailings, although I have my suspicion. In my writing I had been strongly critical of the policies of Prime Minister Begin. A Chicago Sun Times headline said, in effect, that Simon, who was raising money from the Jewish community, had as his campaign manager a strong critic of Israel. There was a clamor for my dismissal. To his credit, Simon refused to turn me out, saying that I was not in charge of his foreign policy. It was also true that he didn't need another change in leadership at that moment, and he also had an exit strategy—we both had agreed from the outset that at the end of the primary campaign I would return to my position with the Christian Century.

AIPAC is a textbook example of an effective Washington-based lobby. Labor unions, both sides of the abortion issue, gay and lesbian leaders, the NRA, and citizens concerned about the environment do not even approach AI-

PAC's power and influence. In American politics the Holocaust remains a powerful and devastating reminder of what happens to Jews when anti-Semitism becomes institutionalized. It was an easy political call in 1947 when President Harry Truman ignored the counsel of his White House advisors and quickly recognized the state of Israel. A reelection campaign was approaching. Truman knew where to find the support he needed and it wasn't among Arab-Americans.

AIPAC has a fearsome reputation for punishing politicians who are indifferent or unfriendly to what Israel needs from the U.S. Government. Those needs include billions of dollars annually in military and economic aid. Congressional incumbents elected with no support from the AIPAC discover quickly that even though their districts or states may have little interest in Middle East issues, money could, and will be, made available for future opponents. Hence intimidation of incumbents is a vital part of the AIPAC strategy. *[See author's sidebar on page 13 on how this intimidation extends even to the aides of politicians.—Editor.]*

Because of the power of the term "anti-Semitism" to halt civil discourse, conscientious and influential Jewish thinkers and leaders should speak out against its indiscriminate and vindictive application. This is particular true of people like novelist and essayist Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor. A man with Wiesel's standing in the world community could have been an important voice for justice and fair play for Palestinians, and a force for lasting peace. But in his memoirs he gives no indication that Palestinians are a suffering people for whom the western world should feel a responsibility. In his first memoir, "All Rivers Run to the Sea," there is only one brief reference to the Palestinian people.

When Al Gore asked me to assemble his delegate slates in Illinois for his presidential run in 1988 I told him that I was an opinion journalist whose awareness of the Palestinian perspective was well known in media circles. Had I been a news reporter, I could never have moved back and forth between politics and journalism. But opinion journalism, which is what I was engaged in as an editor of a magazine dealing with religion and culture, provided me with sufficient leeway. The important thing for me and for the magazine was that no overt partisan endorsement could appear in the magazine. Knowing that IRS regulations permit free discussion, but forbid endorsements, I protected the magazine's non-profit status by keeping candidate endorsements out of its pages.

During the 1992 primary, I appeared on the local PBS talk show as a Clinton representative. The following night, the show's producers broke what they told me was one of their cardinal rules: never have the same guest two nights in a row. But the producer needed a panelist to offer a Palestinian perspective; the local Israeli consul was also on the panel. Instantly, the Clinton campaign headquarters in Chicago began receiving complaining phone calls, the rapid response system at work. I never knew how many

calls came in, but there were enough to worry our office director, who came in to ask me for an explanation. I told him not to worry, I was espousing a point of view that was favored by the Labor party in Israel (which at the time was true.)

Why have those of us concerned with the Palestinian perspective failed in our efforts to advance that perspective with church and political leaders, the two groups for which I have had, as an editor, specific responsibility? An aroused church community might have had some of the impact on this issue that it demonstrated in the civil rights movement when Vice President Hubert Humphrey described the churches' role in the fight for racial equality as a critical element in the passage of civil rights legislation. But what little impact we may have had cannot compete with the passionate firewall of the Israeli lobby in the United States.

Trips made (with official Israeli tour guides) and trips not made (if sponsored political leaders had said no to one-sided visits) could have made an impact on Democrats like Bill Clinton and Al Gore before they became so dependent for campaign contributions on sources that want Israel handled with kid gloves. Both of these men do listen to input from mainline Protestant leaders, in contrast to Ronald Reagan and George Bush who were more in tune with the evangelical Protestant community. But few Democrats have dared, or cared, to identify with the Palestinian cause, despite ample evidence of injustice and human rights violations, issues that are usually Democratic hot buttons.

Could religious journals have had a greater impact in the religious and political communities if we had not been so obsessed with "balance" in what we have come to see is a situation that is anything but balanced? Military occupiers and the occupied are never balanced. Future historians will have to answer this question, but it is clear that our mainline and liberal constituencies have looked the other way rather than confront the obvious violations of human rights of the Palestinian people.

Clear to me, but not so clear to some of my well-intentioned American friends is the question: "What exactly is wrong with a peace agreement that Arafat himself agrees to?" The answer is beyond the space of this essay. Suffice it to say that patches of Palestinians crowded into isolated urban bantustans, hemmed in by borders under complete Israeli control, will not be the breeding ground of a new democracy; instead, they will harbor a seething population that has experienced 50 years of betrayal.

Controlling the Tour, Hiding the Palestinian

Another brick in the passionate firewall that defends Israel from criticism is less well known but no less effective: the systematic development and control of the tourist trade among American Christian church pastors and laity. In

controlling its bible land tourism, Israel can insure that tour members hear only good things about Israel and can make it difficult for tourists to have any sort of meaningful discourse with Palestinians. Of course, countries always seek to market themselves to tourists in glowing ways, but when that marketing masks and denies underlying civil and human rights abuses, the issue becomes a moral one.

My native South in my childhood and up until the civil rights movement was under the tight control of a power structure that included its media and economic leadership. The slow process of change was not accelerated until the 1960s sit-ins at lunch counters began receiving favorable national media coverage. Israel has had its own courageous journalists and political leaders, but only recently have those voices reached American audiences, and even in Israel they remain a distinct minority. Meanwhile, tight control over licensed tourist guides has assured Israel of an army of front line propagandists who make sure the official word is the only word heard by visitors.

Packaged, pro-Israel tourism targets the obvious Christian supporters among the evangelical and fundamentalist Christians who see the restored state of Israel as a prerequisite for the Second Coming of Christ. But these tours also are directed toward, and have dramatically shaped, the views of many of my readers—clergy and lay members of the mainline churches, including United Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, United Churches of Christ, Presbyterians and Baptists. These are precisely the denominations that had been in the leadership of the civil rights and anti-war movements in the 1960s. Biblical tourism is a powerful weapon that Israel uses to win the hearts and minds of believing American Christians who return home not only inspired by their visits to biblical sites but persuaded as well of the need to keep Israel secure against all enemies.

The Israeli tourist industry formed an early strong alliance with an independent U.S. based organization, Educational Opportunities (EO). It was conceived by and is still run by a United Methodist pastor who is a most effective businessman, but EO has no connection to official church structure. The formula is simple: Invite pastors to a free Holy Land tour, a tempting offer for a trip that could cost, full-fare, as much as \$4,000. Participating pastors then will be offered return free trips so long as they recruit a certain number of church members who are paying customers. These biblical tours studiously avoid any discussion of, and certainly no exposure to, active worshipping Palestinian Christian congregations. “Lifeless stones,” not “living people,” remain the focus of these tours.

With enough parishioners signed up, the pastor, and even a spouse, returns free of charge. The pastors are nominal tour leaders under the Israeli-approved guides, who facilitate group worship at special places, such as the hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee, or hymn-singing in churches in the Old City.

But these experiences are almost always devoid of any interaction with Palestinian Christian congregations. Indeed, when I encouraged some friends who led these groups to break away from their tours and visit the West Bank and East Jerusalem for conversations with leaders and worship with Christians, their tour guides unfailingly would warn them of the “danger” of venturing into Palestinian communities. “We cannot be responsible for your safety,” they are told. One effective tactic for diverting touring Christians from joining Arab Christian congregations in Jerusalem was to schedule a Sunday morning trip to the Dead Sea for a dip in the salt water and a climb up Masada (definitely not a biblical site, but a powerful emotional location in Israel’s history).

I once traveled with an official guide who did this with my group and was angry with me for including a worship service at St. George’s Cathedral prior to the Dead Sea-Masada trek. He claimed there would not be time for the southward journey. I knew he was wrong; most visiting pastors do not.

This tourism strategy, so obviously biased against indigenous Christians in the Holy Land, eventually came to the attention of the United Methodist hierarchy, and a resolution was forced through the church’s General Conference mandating that a portion of any tour under the direction of a United Methodist pastor should devote at least 20 percent of the trip to visits with or exposure to indigenous Christians. Unfortunately, this mandate is often either ignored or covered with a cursory optional lecture at night by Palestinian personalities who soon discover they are talking with American Christians who know nothing of local politics and are weary from a full day of touring. (One breakthrough could help: a year ago EO hired a veteran Palestinian sociologist, Ibrahim Matar, to offer informational tours for some of their groups. I have traveled with Ibrahim on his tours around the settlements surrounding Jerusalem, ending with a look at the homes in West Jerusalem, including the home that once belonged to his family. I can only hope that EO continues to use him for such tours.)

On the two occasions that I set up tour groups on behalf of the Christian Century, I employed an Israeli guide for one week, and a Palestinian guide the second week. We stayed one week in a “neutral” site like Notre Dame, and a second week in an East Jerusalem hotel. One of my Israeli guides was furious over the plan. He was offended, he told me, by the implication that he could not be balanced or knowledgeable about biblical and Crusader history. I respected his scholarship, but balanced he most certainly was not. I still recall a shouting match we had under the shade of a tree outside Yad Vashem, ostensibly arguing over some forgotten detail, but it was really his continuing agitation at my refusal to accept his contention that no Palestinian guide could do his work as well as he could. What really set him off was my assertion that as a Jewish reformed rabbi, he knew the words of the New Testament, but not the music.

We scheduled those Christian Century trips during the early days of the Intifada, which was good for the travelers because it taught them something of the solidarity of the leaders of that uprising and their ability to close down shops in East Jerusalem on command. But tour leading was far too time consuming for a magazine editor and after trips 1987 and 1989 I regret to say we left the field to groups who work closely with the Israeli tourist agency. (To paraphrase President George Bush, what could just one little tour leader do against such a massive force!) More recently, the Palestinian Authority has begun training its own guides for tours under Palestinian leadership, a catch-up strategy slow to match the power of organizations like Educational Opportunities.

Another important public relations strategy for Israel is its sponsorship of free get-acquainted tours for prominent and influential U.S. economic and political leaders, usually offered at the beginning of their careers—exactly the sort of tour to which I was invited in 1973. One example from my experience: When Carol Moseley Braun was a local county official in Illinois, before her election to one term in

the U.S. Senate, she traveled to Israel with other African-American politicians, including a woman I knew who commuted to work each morning in the same Chicago bus that I used. After the trip my friend told me what a great time they had and she reported that they stayed at a beautiful Israeli hotel in East Jerusalem. After ascertaining that the group had virtually no exposure to Palestinians on the trip, I asked her if she knew that their hotel is built on confiscated Palestinian land. Of course she didn't know it, and lacking any background on Israel's land confiscation practices, the fact had little impact on her. (The last time I drove by that hotel, there was still a lone Palestinian house standing in its shadow, the home of a defiant Palestinian family. All other homes and farms surrounding the hotel were long since removed.)

There have been significant exceptions to this general inability to counter the pro-Israel propaganda. My own personal journey could not have taken place without the presence of U.S. church representatives who have worked with Palestinians and who continue to provide guidance and local contacts that I first received from LeRoy Friesen

WALL AND FATHER ELIAS
CHACOUR, IBILLIN, ISRAEL,
APRIL, 1987.



WALL WITH PRESIDENTIAL
CANDIDATE JIMMY CARTER,
CHICAGO, 1976.

in 1973. A number of church representatives have been invaluable liaisons for me—like Mark Brown of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Martin and Betty Bailey from the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Doug Dicks, and United Methodist Sandra Olewine.

Pro-Israel propaganda will also come under increasing pressure as a result of the Internet and E-mail. Instant communication that leaps across borders is a Godsend to a people whose story has, until recently, remained largely untold. My E-mail address book is filled with the names of Palestinian contacts and news sources, and my date book on all of my trips is now filled well in advance of my flight to Tel Aviv.

I wish these technological connections had arrived sooner. Perhaps they would have made me a better evan-

gelist in presenting the Palestinian perspective to my church and political friends, as effective as LeRoy Friesen was in presenting a new perspective to me on the road to Jericho in December, 1973.

As I continue my own personal journey, I will work to make the Palestinian cause at least as well known to the American public as the Israeli position. I don't expect that goal to be achieved in my lifetime, but I intend to pursue it. It is, after all, my government, whose elected officials I have served, who have had such a major role in maintaining the imbalance in perspectives between Israel and Palestine. The legacy of injustices between conquerors and conquered—catalogued at Camp David II as borders, refugees, settlements and Jerusalem—must sooner or later be morally and legally confronted, confessed and corrected.

PHOTOS FROM MY DAY IN 1973 WITH LEROY FRIESEN ON THE JERICHO ROAD



HOME OF THE PALESTINIAN FARMER WE VISITED



FARMER'S WELL WITH OPEN, ABOVE GROUND PIPES



ISRAELI WELL WITH PROTECTED, CONCRETE CASING

The Richard Marius Story

Nothing can be as potentially damaging to any politician than having to answer unjustified accusations of anti-Semitism, as Hillary Clinton had to do recently. Mrs. Clinton was quickly rescued by logic (the target of her alleged invective 26 years ago was, as she knew at the time, Christian not Jew) and by wagons quickly circled around her by prominent Jews from the House and Senate.

Richard Marius, Harvard professor and volunteer speechwriter for Vice President Al Gore, was falsely charged as well—but there the similarities end.

One of the most moving speeches written by volunteer Marius for Gore dealt with the Holocaust and was delivered by the vice president at Madison Square Garden on April 18, 1993, the 50th anniversary of the uprising of the embattled Jews in the Warsaw ghetto.

Marius reported later that the speech was inspired by his memory of the boy photographed with his hands raised over his head, walking at the head of a long line of doomed Jews marching out of the smoke and ruin of the ghetto. In the background of the picture a leering Nazi trooper held a rifle.

Martin Peretz, now editor and publisher of *The New Republic*, has had a strong influence on Gore ever since he was one of Gore's professors at Harvard. Peretz also had submitted a draft of a speech for that occasion, only a paragraph of which was worked into the longer Marius speech.

A Luther scholar and novelist, Marius was described by some of Gore's staffers as the poet on their speech-writing team. Gore once greeted Marius at a Harvard graduation with a booming, "You are our savior!" a reference to speeches Marius had written both for the vice president and for Tipper Gore, many on very short notice.

In 1995, Vice President Gore hired Marius as a fulltime speechwriter.

When Peretz learned that Gore had persuaded Marius to give up his teaching job at Harvard and move to Washington, he sent Gore a book review that Marius had written in 1992 for the Harvard alumni magazine. The book was "A Season of Stones: Living in a Palestinian Village," by Helen Winternitz, an American researcher who had lived a year in a village on the occupied West Bank and who is herself of Jewish ancestry.

In his review, Marius wrote: "Winternitz's account of the brutality of the Shin Bet, the Israeli secret police, is eerily similar to the stories of the Gestapo, the Geheimschutzpolizei in Nazi-occupied territories in World War II—arbitrary arrests in the middle of the night, imprisonment without trial, beatings, refined tortures, murder, punishment of the families of suspects."

Peretz later told the Washington Post: "Once the vice-president knew



SCHOLAR AND SPEECHWRITER
RICHARD MARIUS

[about the review] he had to figure out if he wanted someone who believed that on his staff." That, of course, referred to what the media quickly termed, anti-Semitism. Gore had a staff member call Marius and tell him he no longer had a job at the White House. Fortunately for Marius, he was able to return to his teaching at Harvard. He never wrote another speech for Gore.

Marius later revealed in a letter to friends that he learned from a Gore staff member that "Peretz exploded when he discovered that I had written the speech for Madison Square Garden. Peretz had told the VP that I

was an anti-Semite."

The false allegation of anti-Semitism against Marius was based (without justification or accuracy) on a single book review written during a career that included many scholarly books, novels and articles. When Marius died in November, 1999, of pancreatic cancer, obituaries in *The New York Times* and the Associated Press devoted more attention to the charge of anti-Semitism that cost him a White House job than it did to Marius's extensive writings in theology and literature. The stories made a brief reference to Marius's scholarly books on Martin Luther, but did not mention that in his work on Luther he castigated the Reformer for his anti-Semitic writings.

Also missing from the obituaries was any reference to Gore's Holocaust speech. Only the vice president was in a position to acknowledge Marius as the author of that speech. Had he chosen to do so at the time of Marius's death, Gore could have easily refuted the allegation of anti-Semitism.

Bob Zelnick, former senior ABC News correspondent, writes in his recently published biography, "Gore: A Political Life," that Marius "had no history of anti-Semitism and adds that most [of Gore's staff] felt Marius had been wronged and that the vice-president had acted to keep Peretz happy rather than to protect his office."

At Peretz's recent 60th birthday celebration Gore was busy keeping Peretz happy, adding the celebrity status of the vice presidency to a gathering honoring Peretz along with other prominent guests and journalists who have worked for Peretz.

In Brill's *Content* (August, 2000) writer Robert Schmidt reports that a few years ago Peretz told former *New Republic* editor Hendrik Hertzberg, only half-jokingly, that he had four goals in life: to get rid of the Soviet Union, end affirmative action, see a strong and secure Israel, and get Al Gore elected president. At the time, recalls Hertzberg, Peretz said, I've got three out of four. — JMW

The original *Link* issue used this page to list books being offered for sale at discount prices by Americans for Middle East Understanding. Please consult AMEU's book catalog elsewhere on this website.

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Video-Cassettes (VHS)

AFSC & AAANC, **Collecting Stories from Exile: Chicago Palestinians Remember 1948** (1998, 28 minutes). Introduction by Edward Said. List: \$20.00; **AMEU: \$18.50.**

DMZ, **People & the Land** (1997, 57 minutes). This is the controversial documentary by Tom Hayes that appeared on over 40 PBS stations. **AMEU: \$25.00.**

IRA, **Children of the Cradle** (1996, 30-minute report on embargo of Iraq). **AMEU: \$3.00.**

Kelley, R., **The Bedouin of Israel** (1998, 2 hours). Never-before-seen film of how Israel has treated its Bedouin citizens, including interview with the notorious Green Patrol. **AMEU: \$30.00.**

Masri, M., **Children of Shatila** (1999, 58 minutes). The children 17 years after the massacre. List: \$50.00; **AMEU: \$39.50.**

Masri, M., **Hanan Ashrawi: A Woman of Her Time** (1995, 51 minutes). One of Palestine's most articulate representatives shows that Israel's occupation is far from over – and far from benign. List: \$65.00; **AMEU: \$35.00.**

Middle East Council of Churches, **Disabled for Palestine** (1993, 21 minutes). A Palestinian doctor shows cases of Palestinian civilians who have been maimed for life by Israeli bullets, beatings and tear gas. List: \$25.00; **AMEU: \$10.00.**

Munayyer, F. & H., **Palestinian Costumes and Embroidery: A Precious Legacy** (1990, 38 minutes). A rare collection of Palestinian dresses with accessories modeled against the background of Palestinian music, with commentary tracing the designs back to Canaanite times. List: \$50.00; **AMEU: \$12.50.**

Studio 52 Production, **Checkpoint: The Palestinians After Oslo** (1997, 58 minutes). Documents the post-Oslo situation with off-beat humor and historical insights provided by Palestinian and Israeli activists like Naseer Arad and Hanan Ashrawi. **AMEU: \$27.00.**

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