

National Council of Churches Adopts New Comprehensive Statement On the Middle East

By Allison Rock
and Jay Vogelaar

"What Christians in the U.S.A. say and do and think about the problems of the Middle East or what they fail to do may deeply affect their own future and the future of the world."

These words, part of the new policy statement¹ on the Middle East adopted unanimously last month by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., challenge Christians to examine Middle Eastern realities. The Middle East, cradle of Christianity, is still home to millions of Christians. Yet their religious counterparts in the United States too often see the area and its people through lens of ignorance and prejudice. Even informed people of goodwill hold contrasting perceptions which often sabotage Mideast discussions before they begin. This policy statement epitomizes three years of study, prayer, listening, and soul-searching in order to help correct these conditions.

In an effort to reflect the scope and content of the entire statement, direct quotations were extracted for the purpose of analysis. The background and preparatory work for the statement, as well as public reaction to it, appear as separate articles following the commentary.

The ordering of the statement's three subsections is especially significant. The Council felt it best to start with issues to which the churches are uniquely qualified to speak (Section One: "Relations Among the Churches"), then proceed to matters which take into account the views of people of other faiths (Section Two: "Relations with People of Other Faiths"), and finally to "The Witness of the Church in Society," that is, to consider those issues which involve the insights of political, economic, social and other secular entities, without discounting the church's unique "angle of vision" on such matters. The statement thus moves from introspective appraisal of relations within the Christian community to an

examination of its role in the wider society.

The section sequence also follows the directive implied in the statement's acknowledgement of Christ's observation that one must first remove the log from one's own eye before one will be able to see clearly the speck in the eye of another (Matthew 7: 1-5). Before being critical of others, it is important to look humbly into the less-than-favorable history of relations between the churches of the West and those of the Middle East.

¹ Policy statements outline the Council's convictions and positions with respect to Christian principles and their application. They are issued for: guidance of the Council; consideration by member churches; and influencing public opinion.

N.C.C. Governing Board discusses statement prior to vote on November 6.



About This Issue

When the 266-member governing board of a national organization, representing 32 Christian denominations with more than 40 million members, reaches unanimous agreement on a policy statement pertaining to the Middle East, that statement at once becomes newsworthy. When the document addresses issues such as overseas Christian mission and colonialist attitudes, Church ethics vis-a-vis government policies, rights of minorities in Middle Eastern cultures, the arms race, discussions with the P.L.O., statehood for the Palestinians, and the status of Jerusalem, then it exceeds its newsworthiness and represents a social achievement of the first rank.

In November, the National Council of the Churches of Christ, the nation's largest ecumenical body, issued its long-awaited policy statement on the Middle East. Our feature story on the background of the statement, its highlights, and some of the reaction

to it is written by Allison Rock and Jay Vogelaar. In August 1979, Allison returned from the West Bank after teaching two years at a Palestinian high school in Ramallah. Jay returned in 1978 from Egypt, where he studied sociology for four years at the American University of Cairo.

Acknowledgement is extended to the National Council of Churches of Christ for permission to reprint excerpts from its recently adopted Middle East policy statement. Photos are courtesy of Raymond Barrett and J.K. Isaac.

Two important books are examined in this issue. James Ennes's *Assault on the Liberty* has already prompted Senator Adlai Stevenson of Illinois to request classified government documents dealing with Israel's devastating 1967 attack on the U.S.S. Liberty in order to determine whether the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence should open a full-scale

inquiry into the raid that left 34 American servicemen dead and 171 wounded. A review of Ennes's book begins on page 13.

Edward Said, professor of English at Columbia University, is a member of the Palestine National Council, whose executive arm is the Palestine Liberation Organization. The review of his latest book, *A Question of Palestine*, begins on page 14. Details on ordering these and other significant books on the Middle-East at substantial discount prices are found on page 15.

The January/February 1981 issue of *The Link* will consider the developing relationship of Europe with the Arab countries and what affect this might have on United States foreign policy.

John F. Mahoney,
Executive Director

Policy Statement Introduction

"By the very nature of its vocation, the National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA [N.C.C.] and its member communions are called to study and address the situation of the peoples of the Middle East and its implications for humankind. The issues inherent in the situation are...issues of religious principle and profound moral consequence which demand a response from Christians—not least from the Christians of a nation that pursues its own interests in and has its own agenda for the region.

"This statement...recognizes that while the people of the Middle East must, of necessity, determine their own courses of action, issues of war and peace are of such crucial significance to

all the world's people, that they too may have a role to play. It affirms the responsibility of the N.C.C. and its member communions to witness to the government of the United States and to corporations and other agencies as their policies affect the people in the Middle East.

"...When the Church is truly Christ's church, through it the grace of God heals the brokenness of human relationships, breaks down separating walls, reconciles estranged persons with God and one another. The experience of this grace imposes a mission: Christians bear responsibility for a prophetic, pastoral and reconciling ministry in the world."

Commentary

Opening paragraphs of the policy statement explain the Council's involvement with peoples and issues of the Middle East. A cornerstone of the policy is the statement that Middle Easterners will determine their own future. A keystone is the overarching theological vision that, in responsive witness, Christians are called to be healers and reconcilers. For Christians in the U.S.A., this witness begins within their own country.

Historic bitterness and suspicion present in relations between Western and Eastern churches, between Christians, Jews, and Muslims—as well as the suffering and struggle present in the lives of many Israelis, Palestinians, Lebanese, Kurds, Iranians, Iraqis, Cypriots, Yemenis—indeed call for reconciliation and healing. The N.C.C. assumes a responsibility to address these problems and needs.

Section One: Relations Among Churches

"...the Middle East churches provide the essential witness to Christ in the Middle East. One role of the U.S.A. churches is to understand and be supportive of the significant witness of Middle East churches....The relationship presumes the equality of the partners in every respect and evokes a spirit of mutuality among these various members of the Body of Christ.

"...The geographical considerations that informed past mission comity agreements of the Western Protestant and Anglican churches, while a sign of Western Christian cooperation in their time, are no longer appropriate..."

"These new relationships must be

marked by a degree of mutuality seldom seen in the past. Just as U.S.A. churches may play a supportive role to Middle East churches in their own region, the N.C.C. along with the Middle East Council of Churches should encourage a supportive role of Middle East churches to U.S.A. churches within the United States of America....

"As these new relationships develop, the rich traditions of the Middle East churches may enlarge the experience of U.S.A. churches as they learn Middle East churches' life in prayer, in worship, in doctrine, in suffering and survival, in preservation of the sacraments and traditions, in witness to justice."

Commentary

Credible witness to other faiths and to the larger society requires unity and reconciliation among Christians. Therefore the policy statement specifically notes the history of disunity and bitterness present within the Christian community, specifically between Western Christians and churches in the Middle East.

Unconditional recognition of the vital witness of Middle East churches lies at the core of the N.C.C.'s concluding guidelines for interchurch relationships. Twenty years of dialogue and negotiations to overcome historical divisions produced, in 1974, the Middle East Council of Churches (M.E.C.C.), which includes Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, as well as most Protestant and Anglican, churches in the region. Partnership between the N.C.C. and the M.E.C.C. promotes joint consultation and planning; it assures sharing information and insights derived from strengthened relationships. This discourages churches in the U.S.A. from unilateral action or positions with respect to policies affecting the Middle East without previous consultation with churches in the Middle East. This will be an added dimension of the N.C.C.'s relationship with American Jewish and Arab-American groups.

Since Apostolic times there has been

a continuous Christian presence in the Middle East, a vital witness which has been provided by Eastern and Oriental Orthodox communities, by the Roman and Eastern-rite Catholic Churches (Uniates), and by the Church of the East (Assyrian), ignored or depreciated by Western Protestant and Anglican Christians.

Certainly Western Christians can learn much from the Eastern churches: from the enduring nature of the Middle Eastern church community; from the emphasis within church life on questions of being, as compared to a Western emphasis on doing; from Eastern perspectives on family and community life, in contrast to Western Protestant values of individual faith and salvation.

Western churches informally split the Middle East into separate mission fields through arrangements known as comity agreements. Presbyterians took responsibility for Egypt; the United Church of Christ went into Turkey; the Reformed Church in America sent missionaries to the Gulf, etc. Harmony sustained by these geographical comity agreements preserved the unity of Western churches (and avoided competition) as they established schools, hospitals, and churches. Ironically, a similar commitment to unity and cooperation did not exist in relations with the Middle East churches. Great

bitterness among Christians in the Middle East was aroused as members were drawn from the indigenous Orthodox and Catholic churches.

In the spirit of reconciliation and healing, the N.C.C. now rejects mission strategies which fragment rather than build unity among churches of the Middle East. Member communions are encouraged to evaluate their mission strategies accordingly and to enter an era of interchurch relations.

This new era will support continued struggles to understand theological differences which emerge from inter-regional dialogue. When the Council-initiated Middle East panel toured the area last February, for example, panelists encountered among Middle East Christians some theological positions which could be construed by Westerners as anti-semitism. Belief that Christians are now God's chosen people who will inherit the new Israel is one



Session members and observers (l to r): Abdullah Najjar, N.A.A.A.; Dr. Frank Maria, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese; Father M. Simon and Bishop Samuel, Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch.

aspect of Christian theological triumphalism. This belief, although not necessarily anti-semitic, clearly represents an area where dialogue in the global Christian community needs to occur.

Whether matters of substance or semantics, study and discussion of differences in Christian experience and doctrine can make a significant contribution towards a greater reconciliation and unity. Steps toward realizing a global vision of the Church can only strengthen witness to the peace and justice revealed in Jesus Christ.

Section Two: Relations With People Of Other Faiths

“The Middle East is the spiritual homeland of three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam....

“There are important similarities as well as differences among these three faiths. As for similarities, all three affirm God, who created the world and the people in it. Each acknowledges God is sovereign and sent prophets to warn humanity against idolatry and to call for repentance. All find God’s will revealed in holy scriptures and all see promise in history....

“Theological differences which produce tensions among Jews, Christians and Muslims today are concepts of land, concepts of mission, and concepts of the relation between religion and state.

“...As a result Christians, Muslims and Jews often hold distorted images of one another and treat one another with contempt or hatred to the point of violence and oppression. Further, the people of the West have for centuries viewed the people of the Middle East through the prisms of prejudice, misunderstanding, stereotypes, and insensitivity. In part, these biases... not only have served to provide rationalizations for the imperialistic and colonialist ventures of some countries, but also have fostered hatred of Islam as in the Crusades and anti-semitism as in the Holocaust.

“The relations of Christians with Jews and Muslims are also complicated by the variety of theological positions held by differing Christians about people of other faiths. These positions vary all the way from the claims of some Christians that all other faiths are false to those who claim that all are true. Depending upon the particular theological position, a variety of missionary efforts have been carried out with respect to Muslims and Jews, some of which have alienated both....

“Today, there is evidence of the necessity of responding to opportunities for new openness to each other by Jews, Christians and Muslims. It is urgent that the moment not be lost, but that people of different faiths seek new contacts, relationships, and ways of working together.

“...An important first step would be for persons of the different faiths to join in explorations involving scholarly exchanges, existential encounters and to abjure the use of religious claims for dehumanizing and ulterior purposes.

“...Finally, Christians in the U.S.A. need to expand their associations with Muslims and Jews who are their neighbors.... Muslims and Jews are among those in the U.S.A. who suffer from acts of discrimination, prejudice and violence and deprivation of civil rights. Christians must work to eliminate these injustices....”

committees. The policy statement advocates scholarly dialogue, cooperative efforts in ministry and social justice, and active civil rights work. Repentance and self-criticism, openness and active involvement are expected from Christians seeking new ways of working with Jews and Muslims.

Programmatic implications of the policy move the N.C.C. towards cooperative relationships between inter-faith committees and the regional and local ecumenical councils served by the Council’s Commission on Regional and Local Ecumenism. Cooperative relationships could also involve areas of the Council responsible for service projects, for economic justice and human rights issues, and for theological work. Although such efforts already exist within the N.C.C., the policy statement encourages the Council to give interreligious relationships a greater priority. It encourages the Council to expand and coordinate current efforts in that direction.

Some Christians have traditionally denied the integrity and truth of other faiths, sometimes judging them as totally false. Rev. Robert L. Turnipseed, member of the policy review task force and chairperson of both the N.C.C. Christian-Jewish Committee and Christian-Muslim Task Force, describes the policy statement’s contrasting tone: “We clearly moved away from an aggressive style of proselytism; we clearly moved away from a denunciation of other religions and saying that our way is the only way. I think we affirm that in and through Jesus Christ we do have something to share with people of other faiths, and that as we enter into dialogue with them we believe they have something to share with us.”

The policy statement encourages Christians to share their faith and to live their faith in encounters with people of other faiths—in a religious search for truth, in community life, in political advocacy work, and in social ministry. The value of such encounters depends in part on the attitudes of individuals involved: Will they fear encounter as threatening to their religion? Or will they take risks and welcome the opportunities involved?

Commentary

As the statement considers relations with Jews and Muslims in the Middle East, it provides a brief account of similarities and differences, which lend some insight into the historic mistrust and prejudice between Christians, Muslims and Jews. Although not exhaustive, this account does represent the Council’s struggle to survey the

nature of distinctive attitudes and patterns. For example, the exclusivity in some definitions of Christian mission theology has been a destructive force in relations between the three faiths.

Because the Council has no comprehensive approach to interfaith relationships, this new policy could directly affect future interfaith programs of the N.C.C. and enhance current work of Jewish-Christian, Muslim-Christian, and ecumenical

Section Three: The Witness Of The Church In Society

"Historically, religious bodies in U.S.A. society have accepted (even asserted) responsibility for initiating and sustaining moral discourse on public issues of justice and political responsibility. It would be arrogant to pretend they have always acted in unity, or that religious people and their institutions in interaction with the rest of society have shown themselves exempt from the various blindness that affect all people. Yet the religious community as such possesses an angle of vision which is different from that of the political party, the university or the research institute.

"Specifically, the Christian community understands itself to be a community of conscience. Belief in a just and loving God is expected to have consequences in human relations. The complexity of events, the sinful nature of persons and society, and human

fears make it difficult to bring an informed conscience to bear on issues of policy; the more difficult, the more necessary. Christians, like other peoples, can sow the seeds of justice or of injustice. Nevertheless, the Christian community, responding to the God of love and justice, is called to identify and lift up ethical issues and to go beyond technical and material considerations in an effort to focus the public debate on human concerns....

"Fundamental definitions of world order, human rights and national integrity are being tested by the particular dynamics of the contemporary Middle East....

"Examples of current Middle East conflicts reflecting the turbulent changes of the area include the Israel-Palestinian-Arab states conflict, the multi-faceted struggle in Lebanon, the struggle of the Kurds and other ethnic

groups for national existence, a divided Cyprus, sporadic warfare and reconciliation between the two Yemens, continuing ideological struggles between Syria and Iraq, open warfare between Iran and Iraq, the revolutionary movement in Iran and the creation there of an Islamic republic....

"The continuing U.S.A. involvement in the region has been intensified by the dependence of the United States of America and its allies on the abundant oil resources of the region.... The projected need of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for external energy resources within the next decade adds a further dimension to the great power conflict in the area....

"The challenge to the U.S.A. Christian churches to create a responsible public discourse related to the complexities of the Middle East carries a sense of urgency."

Commentary

Building on affirmations for interchurch and interfaith relations, the N.C.C. confronts political and economic issues in the Middle East. The policy statement considers three broad and multifaceted issues—self-determination, minority rights, and the arms race—and attempts to improve the quality of public debate about them. By extracting ethical considerations, justice issues, and human concerns, the policy statement brings hope that the general principles will later be applied to specific cases of injustice and conflict.

In sharing these positions based on its "angle of vision," the religious community can make a unique contribution. Description of several tensions building in the Middle East underscores the Council's sense of urgency about this contribution.

Lebanon, 1978: P.L.O. along road in Tyre; Israelis withdrawing from Abbasiya.



A \$5.00 voluntary annual subscription is requested to cover cost of postage and handling for *The Link* and Public Affairs Pamphlet series.

1. Self-Determination

"The Middle East is made up of states that came into being in a variety of ways: as portions of ancient empires, as tribal kingdoms, as the creation of Western colonial powers, and as part of a process of peoples asserting their independence....

"In the wake of the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire and the intrusion of Western colonialism, it was inevitable that these precariously constituted states would suffer crises of identity and conflicts over sovereignty.... Though the inherent legitimacy of such aspirations is recognized in international law... the international community lacks both adequate criteria to define this right in particular instances and adequate procedures to achieve peaceful and just implementation.... This is particularly the case when aspirations to self-determination involve conflicting claims to territory.... Establishing criteria for determining the justice of competing claims continues to be a responsibility of the international community. Further legal mechanisms are needed to adjudicate and implement agreements involving conflicting claims. A willingness to negotiate and compromise is essential to finding peaceful solutions that are recognized as just and provide a basis for reconciliation.

"Those claiming the right to self-determination usually perceive themselves as the oppressed. Giving voice to the voiceless and providing support for the powerless when their claims are believed to be just are practical ways the N.C.C. can express its commitment to justice... [by] providing forums wherein conflicting claims may be aired in an atmosphere of concern for justice and peace, monitoring developments, fact-finding, theological reflection, and advocacy for human rights.

"Above all, the N.C.C. seeks to be a minister of the reconciling love of Jesus Christ — not another combatant in conflicts in which the victims are the peoples of the Middle East."

Commentary

The N.C.C.'s analysis of national structures in the Middle East leads to the expectation of many competing

claims for territory as groups with a national identity organize and emerge in the future. The Council does not mention the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in this section in order to emphasize the universal nature of the right to self-determination.

Reestablishment of the universal nature of self-determination could help the international community meet future challenges from groups seeking self-determination. International law is not yet sufficient. The N.C.C. advocates development of an equitable system of mediation to be enforced by the international community. Until such a structure is in place, the N.C.C. has committed itself to "giving voice to the voiceless and providing support for the powerless when their claims are believed to be just."

2. The Rights of Minorities in Middle Eastern Cultures

"The international community has developed a consensus recognizing certain basic human rights and obligations that all governments owe to their citizens....

"Virtually all governments acknowledge the validity of these rights. But, in no country is there full compliance with all the rights recognized in international law....

"A particular human rights problem in the Middle East concerns the rights of minorities. Where the distinction between organized religion and the state is not affirmed, and where peoples define themselves and their political and social structures in specifically religious terms, issues pertaining to religious minorities become urgent.

"...The N.C.C. does not deny the right of a majority to define itself as it wishes, whether this be in terms of the separation of church and state guaranteed in the Constitution of the U.S.A., or in religious terms. Nevertheless, whatever form may be chosen by the majority, the N.C.C. believes that the burden is on that majority to provide full rights for citizens who may therefore be placed in a minority status....

"An appropriate task of the religious community alone or in cooperation with others committed to justice is to monitor alleged violations of rights of minority groups and to call to task those

governments and groups whose record demonstrates a disregard for minority rights.... The best proof of the integrity of concern of the U.S.A. Christian community will be given when it attends to violations of rights by its own governments (national, state and local) and its own institutions."

Commentary

The issue of minority rights in the Middle East is a sensitive one. It confronts: growing religious nationalism in the Middle East; the creation of religious states; and the right of self-determination for the majority of their peoples. Discussion of minority rights raises value questions about community versus individual rights and how those rights are defined.

The very survival of some religious groups in the Middle East is at stake. The Council recognizes that these same minority groups suffer injustices in the United States. Accordingly, the N.C.C. commits itself to advocating equal rights for minority groups in the Middle East and in the United States of America.

3. The Arms Race, Security and Justice

"The N.C.C. has consistently emphasized that lasting peace with security depends on just international relationships....

"Genuine security can only be founded on cooperative relationships of mutual trust. A United States of America's Middle East policy guided by those principles would seek not so much to preserve the status quo, as to support processes of change in the direction of justice. It would reflect a broad conception of the U.S.A. national interest with a genuine concern for the well-being of the peoples of the Middle East....

"The Middle East has become the most heavily armed region, apart from the major powers, far exceeding the rest of the world in almost every measure....

"The United States is not alone at fault. Other arms-producing states, both East and West, compete for influence in the region by supplying arms and military training....

"Ultimately, the people of the Middle

East suffer severely from the economic and social consequences of military buildups....

"Serious attention must be devoted to defusing the explosive mixture of oil, arms and power politics....Efforts to protect what the major powers understand as their vital interests, when carried on at the expense of the welfare —or even worse, the lives—of the people of the region, are unjust and immoral."

Commentary

Consistent with previous policy statements on arms, security and nuclear proliferation, this statement encourages support of peacekeeping efforts related to the Middle East which: subordinate perceived necessity for military preparedness to demands of justice; strengthen the role of the United Nations; seek to reduce and control arms; and encourage the development of a nuclear-weapons-free zone.

4. Israel and the Palestinians

"At the heart of any solution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict is a recognition that the struggle is between two peoples over the same territory. Conflicting promises made to both Jews and Arabs at the time of World War I by Great Britain and France set the stage for the struggle of these two peoples. Palestinians feel they have been deprived of their homeland and denied the right of self-determination. Israelis feel they have legitimately acquired their homeland for rebuilding a Jewish national life....

"At this time the Palestine Liberation Organization functions as the only organized voice of the Palestinian people and appears to be the only body able to negotiate a settlement on their behalf. Steps toward peace which would make possible direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians must include official action by the Palestine National Council, the deliberative body of the Palestine Liberation Organization, including either an amendment of the Palestine National Covenant of 1968 or an unambiguous statement recognizing Israel as a sovereign state and its right to continue as a Jewish state. At the same time, Israel must

officially declare its recognition of the right of Palestinians to self-determination, including the option of a sovereign state apart from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and of its acceptance of the Palestine Liberation Organization as a participant in the peace negotiations. Further, each party should refrain from all hostile acts against the other. As long as each party demands that the other takes the initiative, successful negotiation seems unlikely. These reciprocal initiatives will remove doubt about the acceptance by the two parties of each other's right to a national existence.

"...the N.C.C. considers the following affirmations essential, recognizing that their sequence and timing will be matters of negotiation:

- (a) Cessation of acts of violence in all its forms by all parties;
- (b) Recognition by the Arab states and by the Palestinian Arabs of the state of Israel with secure, defined and recognized borders; and recognition by Israel of the right of national self-determination for the Palestinian Arabs and of their right to select their own representatives and to establish a Palestinian entity, including a sovereign state. In the meantime, unilateral actions in respect to such issues as settlement policy and land and water use in the occupied areas can only inflame attitudes and reduce the prospect of achieving peace;
- (c) Agreement on and creation of a mode of enforcement of international guarantees for the sovereign and secure borders of Israel and of any Palestinian entity established as part of the peace process. This would mean the implementation of the principles enunciated in United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (1967);
- (d) Provision for solutions to problems of refugees and displaced persons, Palestinian Arab, Jewish and other, affected by the Israel-Palestinian and related conflicts dating from 1948, including questions of compensation and return;
- (e) Agreement on the future status of Jerusalem, a focus of the deepest religious inspiration and attachment of three faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Existing international treaties (Paris, 1856 and Berlin, 1878) and League of Nations actions regulating the rights and claims of the three monotheistic religions to Holy Places should remain unaltered. At the same time, the destiny of Jerusalem should be viewed in terms of people and not only in terms of shrines. Therefore, the

future status of Jerusalem should be included in the agenda of the official negotiations including Israel and the Palestinian people for a comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict. Unilateral actions by any one group in relation to Jerusalem will only perpetuate antagonisms that will threaten the peace of the city and possibly of the region.

"...In helping create a responsible public discourse in the U.S.A. on the conflict of Israel and the Palestinians and other Arabs, the N.C.C. should seek to uphold a perspective that is holistic rather than partial. It is essential that U.S.A. Christians recognize that peace and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians require peace and justice for each. This will depend upon bold initiatives by all parties seeking new options, risking courses of action which, while at one time appearing impossible, may provide a basis for a common vision of peace and justice."

Commentary

The Council's formula for peace with justice in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is based on the principle of reciprocal justice. Likely both parties will be dissatisfied with this third-party position, but the N.C.C. has offered a potential peace framework which does not require unilateral concessions by either group. It attempts to record the contrasting perceptions of Israeli and Palestinian claims to the land of Israel/Palestine; it reviews previous proposals for peace, the most recent being the Camp David Framework for Peace and the resultant Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty of 1979. The policy statement claims that the framework, while a significant achievement, has two limitations: (1) it has contributed to security and trust but has not led to peace agreements with other Arab states and (2) Palestinians have no place in the negotiations.

Before adopting the policy statement, the Governing Board inserted an important explanatory clause in its discussion of the "steps toward peace" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "which make possible direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians."

In the N.C.C.'s judgment negotiations are at an impasse as long as both sides declare that the other must take an initial unilateral act before each will be responsive.

The Council makes claims on both communities, reminding the Jewish community that it is unsatisfactory to say: "Of course the Palestinians have a right to a state. They have one. It's called Jordan."

To the Palestinians and other Arab communities in the region the Council says it is not helpful to say: "Of course Israel has a right to exist—as a secular democratic state."

The only possibility for negotiations, according to the Council, is to accept Israel as it perceives itself—sovereign and Jewish—and to accept the Palestinians as they see themselves—a people with the right to self-determination, including statehood, meaning a state apart from Jordan. According to Rev. John Lindner, principal author of the policy statement, "We tried to identify the core problems, the impediments for both sides in the peace process. Then, as a third party who is concerned about human life and justice, we say, 'This is the way we see the claims of both sides and the problems standing in the way.'"

As to the tragic cycle of violence in the conflict, the N.C.C. chooses not to

weigh the claims and counterclaims. It is aware that both groups may object to this decision. Palestinians may ask: Does the N.C.C. equate Israel's aggression via military occupation, settlement policies and massive retaliation air-raids against refugee camps with the violence employed in the Palestinian liberation struggle? Israelis may ask: Does the N.C.C. equate the P.L.O.'s terrorist tactics against innocent civilians with self-defense measures taken in the interest of Israel's security needs?

While noting that both sides cite evidence that the other seeks to destroy it, the policy statement appeals to the international community to guarantee the survival of both peoples.

Americans concerned about growing religious nationalism in the Middle East may ask: "Since citizens of the U.S.A. support a separation of church and state, why does the N.C.C. support Israel as a Jewish, as a religious, state?"

The policy statement addresses this issue in general terms, without direct reference to the Holocaust and the creation of Israel. Alice Wimer, N.C.C. staffperson on both the Middle East panel and the policy review task force,

explains: "For the concept of self-determination to have any meaning at all, it has to include the right for a state to define itself in religious terms, whether we like it or not."

Another N.C.C. policy spokesperson, Rev. George Telford, explained what was understood by a Jewish state: "It is a place where Jews can be themselves and have a homeland."

Israeli Jews, on reading early drafts of the policy statement, have asked: Are these Christians truly sensitive to our situation? Are they openly repenting Christian responsibility in the Holocaust? Arab Christians reading the document may also ask: Will these Christians seek forgiveness for their complicity as Americans in Middle East wars since 1948? Do they appreciate the problem of our shrinking numbers in the Middle East?

Answers to such questions cannot lie between the lines of the policy statement. Rather, positions, programs, dialogues and continuing efforts towards peace with justice must speak for the Council in the years to come.

How The Policy Statement Evolved

Eleven years ago a N.C.C. policy statement, "On the Crisis in the Middle East," concentrated only on the Israel-Arab conflict—and that in circumstances differing markedly from today's. By late 1977, fast-developing events necessitated a revised and expanded approach.

During routine review of N.C.C. policy, an interim task force studied issues of "human rights, peace negotiations, military strategy, inter-religious relations, refugee problems, the Division of Overseas Ministries Middle East program, Christian-Jewish relations, and any other appropriate areas for N.C.C. and its member communions."

The resultant Middle East Policy Review Task Force offered a wide spectrum of perspectives plus expertise in interfaith relations, theology and public affairs. They agreed that: (1) their primary purpose was to prepare educational tools to help church people build a better understanding of broader

Middle East issues; (2) they would deal with the entire Middle East, not just the Israel-Arab conflict; and (3) they would benefit from an interaction of differing opinions held within the Christian community.

Many units within the N.C.C. have interests in Middle East affairs. The task force asked all of them to suggest issues to which the churches in the United States are uniquely qualified to speak. At the same time, they commissioned study papers that addressed those issues from Jewish, Christian and Muslim perspectives. They sponsored public forums in which any interested persons—Jewish, Christian and Muslim—listened and discussed their concerns about problems in the Middle East.

By obtaining a wide range of religious, social and political input, the task force hoped to be sensitive to a variety of interpretations or viewpoints. Hence an awareness of many shades of

interpretation of real and perceived concerns—Jewish, Christian and Muslim alike—permeates the new policy statement. Code words such as "freedom fighter," "guerilla" and "terrorist" are avoided; other terms, often subject to partisan interpretation, such as "human rights" and "self-determination," are employed in accordance with internationally accepted understanding.

Aspirations of Palestinians are probably the best known in the Middle East and are, indeed, vital. But the task force decided that to contribute to current and future international debate on issues of self-determination, minority rights, and security, the Council must place these issues into a broad ethical framework which could be applied to many specific conflicts.

The N.C.C.'s Governing Board, in November 1979, provided further input into the task force's work by authorizing the creation of a panel of church leaders from member communions to

study the Israeli-Palestinian and other Middle Eastern conflicts. (See section on *N.C.C. Middle East Panel, page 10.*) The Governing Board also directed that panel findings be taken into consideration by the policy review task force.

In the spring of 1980 the proposed draft of the new policy statement was reviewed and finalized by appropriate units in the N.C.C. and mailed to the Governing Board members for discussion and emendations at their May

meeting. September 5 was the deadline for formal responses from the 32 member communions.

Those responses generated 20 hours of task force discussion on September 4-5, 1980. Its members struggled with whole passages, sentences, phrases, individual words, in an effort to express exactly and clearly the meanings sought, to maintain balance and sensitivity to the many points of view they encountered, and, as Rev. Lindner put

it, to "keep away from meaningless compromises so that everyone could function with integrity."

The task force finished its work in early September 1980 and forwarded its revised proposed policy statement to two N.C.C. divisions for final review. Two months later, the Governing Board members adopted the final statement at their plenary session.

The Middle East Panel

The creation of a high-level panel on the Middle East in September 1979 followed the resignation in August of Andrew Young as Ambassador to the United Nations. Young, the first black American to represent the United States in the world body, stepped down following the disclosure that he had spoken to Zehdi Labib Terzi, P.L.O. permanent representative to the United Nations. The resignation heightened already existing tensions between black and Jewish communities in the United States. N.C.C. president, Rev. William Howard, and other N.C.C. officers and available heads of communions met with Jewish and Palestinian American represen-

tatives to discuss the resignation and related developments. The Executive Committee of the N.C.C. hoped that formation of a special panel would strengthen these contacts and keep the N.C.C. informed on the complex issues of the Middle East.

Immediately following the naming of the 15-member panel, delegates from the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America submitted two controversial items for action at the November 1979 meeting of the Governing Board. One was a motion to "recognize the P.L.O. as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." The other, preceded by

national press coverage and a strong reaction from the Jewish community, was a resolution on "Violations of Human Rights and International Law by Israel."

At the panel's request, the Governing Board deferred action on these items pending the report of the panel's fact-finding trip in May 1980. The board authorized the panel to begin a study, travel and reflection process focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The board also asked the panel to study the draft of the policy statement on the Middle East as completed for reading in May 1980.

During the three phases of its study process the panel considered five inter-related issues: security in the region, the right of the Palestinian Arabs to self-determination, settlements on the West Bank, human rights and religious issues. In February, twenty representatives of organizations associated with Middle East concerns addressed these issues during two days of Congressional-style open hearings in New York City and Washington, D.C. (See page 11 for names of those who testified.)

A written elaboration of these issues sent to each group invited to testify triggered a boycott of the hearings by major Jewish organizations. Officials of 14 of the boycotting organizations signed a joint statement explaining their objections to the hearing format and to the wording of the issues selected for consideration. The elaboration of the issues was rewritten, while the N.C.C. defended its hearings as a forum in which all viewpoints could be expressed.

Leaders of other Jewish organizations and Jewish leaders of non-sectarian organizations did participate or submit

(L to r) Rev. George B. Telford, Jr., J. Richard Butler, Rev. Tracey K. Jones, Jr., and Rev. Joan B. Campbell hold a press conference between sessions of the General Board.



statements. By and large, they expressed a conciliatory spirit toward Arabs and a concern for the human rights of Palestinians.

In an effort to be sensitive to views of the Jewish community, panel members had extensive conversations with representatives of the Jewish organizations before and after the trip to the Middle East.

Testimony at the open hearings presented a breadth of viewpoints on the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Groups used the opportunity to explain their positions and to suggest means of achieving justice and peace in the Middle East.

The panel heard that the Camp David peace process both was a success and a failure. The P.L.O. was an organization of terrorists determined to dismantle Israel; the P.L.O. was an armed resistance movement seeking national rights. Israel built settlements for clearly justifiable security reasons; Israel was colonizing the occupied territories with no intention of withdrawal. The Christians' responsibility is to seek to maintain United States military support of Israel; Christians should insist on an end to all arms sales to the region.

According to panel member, Rev. George Telford: "The hearing process was necessary and helpful to the people going on the trip and probably also to the constituencies that wanted to be certain we clearly understood the issues from their perspectives before going. I believe it gave more credibility to our going."

Added Alice Wimer: "Every contact with representatives of Palestinian Arab and Jewish organizations helped to sensitize the panel members to the issues in the Middle East and to the degree of emotion with which people viewed one issue as opposed to another."

In late February 1980, during a two-week tour, 11 panel members and 5 N.C.C. staff members visited Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank; panelists divided in their coverage of Egypt and Syria. In meetings with religious, political and academic leaders, the panel discussed and gathered information about the five issues selected for study. The Middle East Council of Churches arranged most of the meetings; the American Jewish Committee assisted the panel in Israel. A detailed report of this trip appears in the *Middle East Panel Report: A Study Document*, available from the National Council of Churches. (See page 11 for list of those interviewed by the fact-

finding team.)

Dr. William P. Thompson, immediate N.C.C. past president, says in retrospect: "Perhaps one of the most impressive things to me was a conversation that we had with young persons engaged in the peace movement (Interns for Peace) in a village near Nazareth. I talked at some length with a young woman there who was from New York City but had gone over there because of her concern for peace in the Middle East. She was engaged in community organizing, helping people become acquainted across this gulf between Arabs and Israelis. She herself was a young Jew.

"In this village some of the Palestinian population was cooperating, rather actively. One young Palestinian was in the second echelon of the management of the peace movement in that town, working side by side with Israelis. It was frankly the most hopeful sign I saw. I generally came away with a feeling of depression, and frustration, feeling that there was such intransigence on both sides that the likelihood of any resolution of the difficulties was very remote. Developments that have occurred since have tended to confirm this."

Panel member George Telford summarizes, "The highlights of the trip for me were the late, off-the-agenda conversations. Talking late at night with people in Lebanon who were representing different points of view; sitting around a table in a church setting in Heliopolis in Egypt with people who had governmental responsibilities; walking through an Israeli kibbutz with a young woman and hearing how she perceived the issues; talking on a bus with an Israeli sabra and military expert; meeting with a member of the Palestine National Council, though he didn't identify himself as such; standing out in front of one of the settlements with the mayor of Hebron.

"I enjoy the larger context. I can get excited listening to Yasser Arafat and seeing him hold up [a picture of] an American Indian and saying, 'We will not be like this Indian!' Those are moments you don't forget. But the way I learned was probing one-on-one with people in a more open way in which they know they won't be quoted and you can ask riskier questions and not be misinterpreted. One can read all the formal positions of all the various parties and still not sense the nuances."

The panel did not formulate final recommendations until it had had

additional conversations with Palestinian Americans and representatives of Jewish groups upon returning to the United States. Staff associate Alice Wimer stressed the importance of these discussions: "During the trip they shared reactions to what they heard as they went along, but that's quite different from saying 'What is it we want to say after seeing these people?' To see people with heavy leadership roles in the life of the Church giving such intense, such careful, such thorough consideration to the issues was for me an inspiration."

When the panel read its findings to the Governing Board during May 1980 meeting, the Board voted to circulate the report as a study document. The Board asked the policy review task force to consider the panel's conclusions in its next draft of the policy statement on the Middle East. The Antiochian delegation agreed to withdraw the items it had submitted, with the understanding they could be resubmitted in accordance with Council procedures.

Task Force Panel

Bishop Maximos Aghiorgoussis, *N.C.C. Third Vice-President, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America*; Reverend James Andrews, *Stated Clerk, the Presbyterian Church in the United States*; Ms. Sonia J. Francis, *N.C.C. Vice-President for Communication, the Episcopal Church*; Reverend M. William Howard, Jr., *President, N.C.C., Executive Director of the Black Council, Reformed Church of America*; Reverend William R. Johnson, *Christian Methodist Episcopal Church*; Reverend Tracy Jones, Jr., *Chair, N.C.C. First Vice-President, General Secretary, Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church*; Bishop Chester A. Kirkendoll, *Recording Secretary, N.C.C., Christian Methodist Episcopal Church*; Dr. Dorothy J. Marple, *N.C.C. Second Vice-President, Assistant to the President of the Lutheran Church of America*; Reverend Archbishop Torkam Manoogian, *Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America*; Reverend Robert W. Neff, *General Secretary of the Church of the Brethren*; Reverend Avery D. Post, *President of the United Church of Christ*; Reverend Jeanne Audrey Powers, *N.C.C. Vice-President for Faith and*

Order, Assistant General Secretary, United Methodist Church; Reverend George B. Telford, Jr., N.C.C. Vice-President for Church and Society, Director of the Division of Corporate and Social Mission, Presbyterian Church in the United States; Dr. William P. Thompson, Immediate Past President, N.C.C. Stated Clerk, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

N.C.C. staff accompanying panel: Dr. Claire Randall, General Secretary; Kenyon Burke, Associate General Secretary; J. Richard Butler, Director of the Middle East Office; Reverend Joan B. Campbell, Assistant General Secretary; Alice Wimer, Staff Associate for International Affairs.

Group Representatives Testifying At Panel Hearings

Dr. Abdul Rauf, Islamic Center; Dr. Carl Herman Voss, National Council of Christians and Jews; Jean Abinader, National Association of Arab Americans; Dr. Walter Harrelson, Israel Study Group; Rick Seikaly, Palestine Congress of North America; Gail Pressberg, American Friends Service Committee; Elias El Hayek, American Lebanese Information Center; Dr. James Zogby, Palestine Human Rights Campaign; Mohammed Dosky, Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq; Larry Ekin, Middle East Research and Information Project; Anita Vittulo, Palestine Solidarity Committee; Father George Rados, Antiochian Archdiocese; General Mati Peled, Israeli-Palestinian Peace Council; Alan Solomonow, Middle East Peace Project; National Jewish Committee (written); E. Stephen MacArther, National Christian Leadership Council on Israel; Shawky Karas, American Coptic Association; George Karam, American Arabic Association; Paul Ischi, Eastern Orthodox Catholic Church; Alfred Lilienthal, Middle East Perspectives; Rephi Rabie, American Arab Relations Committee.

Middle East Leaders Interviewed

Camille Chamoun, former President of Lebanon and leader of the Lebanese Front; Gabriel Habib, General Secretary of the Middle East Council of

Churches; Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization; Nasir Kaddour, Syrian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; His Holiness Ignatius Jacob III, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch; His Beatitude Ignatius IV, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch; Dr. Ibrahim Salkini, Faculty of Islamic Law, University of Damascus; Butros Ghali, Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs; His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Coptic Orthodox Church; Kamel Al Sharif, Jordanian Minister of Religious Affairs; Shmuel Tamir, Israeli Minister of Justice; Teddy Kollek, Mayor of Jerusalem; David Glass, National Religious Party and Likud member of the Israeli Knesset; Dr. Amnon Selah, Peace Now Movement; Zeev Mankewitz, Lecturer at Hebrew University; West Bank mayors Karim Khalaf, Suleiman Tawil, Fahd Kawasmeh, and Elias Freij; Tony Bakerjian, Area Office of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Interviews with N.C.C. Officers and Observers

Rev. Tracey Jones, Chairperson of the Middle East Panel

Q: Does the N.C.C. recommend creation of a West Bank-Gaza State?

A: Not as the only option, no. The statement says, "At the same time, Israel must officially declare its recognition of the right of Palestinians to self-determination, including the option of a sovereign state apart from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan..." That's an option. They must exercise their own self-determination and whether they wish to exercise that option or an option for a confederation with Jordan or some other means by which it will be acceptable to them. We don't, ourselves, judge what that self-determination will be.

Rev. William Howard, N.C.C. President

Q: Has development of this policy damaged Christian-Jewish relations?

A: I believe there is a greater sense of appreciation for our integrity and

sincerity than there was when American Jewish organizations boycotted the panel's public sessions. When I went to Israel a few weeks ago, the American Jews who assisted arranging my itinerary could not have arranged a more thorough visit. Frankly, I do not believe they would have provided this quality of exposure were they not convinced that, however inadequate our position from their standpoint, we demonstrated a sincerity and intelligence they could respect.

Q: How might this policy statement contribute to interfaith relations?

A: As American Jews find cause to oppose certain aspects of the policy statement, I hope that there are things they can applaud. The same thing should ideally apply to the Palestinian community in the U.S.A.

If that's true, we came fairly close to our objective. If we have integrity with both communities, whether or not we agree, I would be humbled by the possibility of somehow cultivating constructive low-key dialogue among American Palestinians and American Jews. It would have obvious implications for possibilities for peace which do not exist at the moment.

Q: Will this statement be acceptable to your constituency of Protestant and Orthodox Christians?

A: I would hope it will be a contribution to ongoing debate within local churches. That is an end in itself. I hope they'll respect the integrity of the process and say, "Hey, I may not agree with these people, but I know that they went about it in a serious, even-handed way."

Q: How can the N.C.C. suggest Israel accept the P.L.O. in direct negotiations, given the record of violence between the two parties?

A: We talk about the right of the Palestinians to self-determination. To acknowledge that the P.L.O. exists is different from advocating its programs. We want the cessation of violent acts in order to obtain peace. If you want to negotiate with people who are not committing

these acts, proceed to do that. But our policy says, "You must go to the horse's mouth if you want to know how many teeth are there."

Rev. Tracey Jones

Q. Was there discussion with Arab groups?

- A. We have contacts with Palestinian groups beginning to emerge in the United States. They have been deeply concerned about many points of the document...But we are trying to find a way in which Mideast issues can be dealt with in terms of the American situation.

Rev. Joan Campbell, N.C.C. Associate General Secretary for Commission on Regional and Local Ecumenism

Q. Will this statement damage Christian-Jewish relations?

- A. As someone with responsibilities within the N.C.C. for working with Christian-Jewish relations, obviously I am aware that the Jewish community has very serious reservations about parts of the statement, especially references to the P.L.O. and Jerusalem. I wouldn't downplay or downgrade the seriousness of these concerns, but the statement does not close the door on the bridge role the N.C.C. sees for itself in this country. I do not believe there will be a break in Christian-Jewish relations: We have a difficult time ahead requiring extensive work and dialogue, and we're prepared to do that. There has already been extensive dialogue between local councils of churches, Christian leadership, and the Jewish community.

Rabbi James Rudin, Assistant National Interreligions Director, American Jewish Committee

Q. What are your objections to the role the N.C.C. might play based on this statement?

- A. For a group who wants open and mutual negotiations, the N.C.C. has in several ways precluded it by saying where the N.C.C. thinks it should be and who shall be the chief organized voice to carry that out. They have undermined the Camp David Agreements which we all agree is the only peace process in the Middle East.

Q: What are your impressions of the Governing Board's deliberations today?

Abdullah Najjar, Religious Affairs Commissioner, National Association of Arab Americans

A: I am surprised and pleased by the freedom of expression. My concern was that some people seemed to be voting, not for their conscience, but as spokesmen for one point of view, with very little information or knowledge about actual events in the Middle East.

I hope more Arab-Americans involved in communication between Muslims and Christians would be able to attend in the future and to establish additional rapport and coordination and understanding. We all need to think in terms of justice, the foundation for future peace in the Middle East.

Viqar Hamdani, U.N. Advisor, World Muslim Congress and Muslim World League

A: The statement is well-intentioned, well-informed. The statement will compel the governments concerned, especially the United States government which is taking a leading role in reconciling the opposite points of view in the Middle East. It could help the government come to a conclusion so as to persuade them to bring about a durable peace in that region.

Written Reaction To Statement

American Jewish Committee

November 6, 1980

"By advocating a P.L.O. state in the West Bank and Gaza 'apart from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,' and by demanding that Israel acquiesce in the creation of such an untenable state, the National Council has seriously compromised its potential role as a reconciling agent for peace and social justice for all the peoples of the Middle East.

"The American Jewish Committee welcomes the conscientious efforts of the N.C.C. to be responsive to the rights and needs of both Israel and Palestinians, however, the N.C.C.'s appeal for simultaneous and mutual acceptance by Israel and the P.L.O. of each other's legitimacy flies in the face of history. It assumes that by some

mechanical act the articulated purposes, functions, and murderous record of the P.L.O. will be cancelled out by a mere verbal declaration, with no provision made to test its implementation or demonstrate its sincerity."

Member Churches' Response To The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In its closing section, "Israel and the Palestinians," the N.C.C. policy statement calls the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a "major destabilizing element in the Middle East" which "poses sufficient threat to world peace to deserve special attention in any overall consideration of the Middle East."

Several member communions have issued statements which address this ongoing conflict.

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

(September 1979)

"...affirms the right of Israel to exist as a free state within secure borders, and...expresses support for the opportunity to establish a free and independent Palestinian state which recognizes the State of Israel..."

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES

(December 1979)

"We...affirm our conviction of the right of Israel to exist within secure and internationally recognized borders as a Jewish state, and...recognize that any comprehensive solution must find expression for the right of self-determination by Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank...and the Gaza Strip."

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

(October 1973)

"...peace and security can be attained only through a just and stable political settlement that takes into account the legitimate aspirations of all the peoples in the area and, particularly, the right to existence of the state of Israel and the rights of Palestinian Arabs."

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

(October 1979)

"Integral to the solution of the Middle East conflict is the recognition of the right to self-determination of both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Realization of this right demands our affirmation of the right of the state of Israel to exist and our support for the

fulfillment of the Palestinian national aspiration through a state of their own."

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN (June 1980)

"...we commend efforts of our government to achieve a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which include a termination of the violence and counterviolence, a mutual recognition of sovereign entities, and a just solution and compensation for those persons uprooted by the conflict since 1948."

UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, U.S.A.

A "meaningful criteria for peace and justice" includes "the right and power of Palestinian people to self-determination by political expression; the right and power of Jewish people to self-determination by political expression in Israel; mutually defined and accepted boundaries of all states, with extensions renounced."

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America "reiterates its call for justice under international law and human rights of

the Palestinian people and for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip..."

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA (June 1977)

The Reformed Church in America "affirms the rights of both Israelis and Palestinian Arabs for nationhood."

Other Statements

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

(November-December, 1975)

"We recognize that an international consensus has emerged as the basis for peaceful settlement on the following: (a) withdrawal by Israel from territories occupied in 1967; (b) the right of all states including Israel and the Arab states to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries; (c) the implementation of the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination."

L'Osservatore Romano, July 1, 1980

"In substance, the problem of Jerusalem cannot be reduced merely to a matter

of 'free access for all to the Holy Places'; there is, in addition and concretely, the need to: (1) guarantee by appropriate measures the global character of Jerusalem as a sacred heritage shared by all three monotheistic religions; (2) safeguard for them religious freedom, in all its aspects; (3) protect the complex of rights acquired by the various communities over the shrines and centers for spirituality, study and welfare; (4) ensure the continuance and development of their religious, educational and social respective activities; (5) actuate all of this with equality of treatment for the three religions; (6) achieve this through an 'appropriate juridical safeguard' that does not derive from the will of only one of the interested parties."

U.S. CATHOLIC CONFERENCE (November 1978)

"...we again call for a comprehensive political solution involving...the rights of Israel: to existence as a sovereign state within secure and recognized boundaries; the rights of the Palestinian Arabs: to participate in negotiations affecting their destiny, and to a homeland of their own."

Book Views

Assault on the Liberty

By James M. Ennes, Jr.
Random House, New York, 1979,
301 pp., \$12.95, cloth.

James Ennes, Jr., served as lieutenant among the officers of the U.S.S. Liberty on her fatal voyage; he was on watch at the bridge during the day of the attack, and was one of the first casualties. He is therefore able to provide a reliable account of the Israeli surveillance that preceded the assault, and, although his wounds prevented him from seeing anything further of the attackers, he has pieced the whole story together from the testimony of many shipmates.

It is this painstaking collection of testimony that lends this book its particular value. Readers who are not devotees of battle literature may find the detailed exposition somewhat

tedious, but they will be greatly enlightened, if they persist, by the author's criticisms of the Navy Court of Inquiry, which relied almost wholly on the faulty recollection of the heroic, battle-shocked commander, and which systematically ignored evidence that conflicted with or supplemented his account. Most of the ship's officers who were interviewed, Ennes says, "once they realized the shallowness of the questioning, dismissed the inquiry as 'whitewash.'" And "testimony that did conflict with McGonagle [the commander], or that tended to embarrass Israel was covered with a 'top secret' label, if it was accepted at all." The Court of Inquiry at least concluded that the Israeli armed forces had ample opportunity to identify the Liberty and that the attack was deliberate, but it minimized the evidence to the point that the Pentagon felt entitled to

declare "a case of mistaken identity"; and that "flat, calm conditions" prevented the ship's flag from flying sufficiently to be recognized.

The flag was flying, however, and the author reinforces his own distinct recollection of that fact by producing the ship's "Weather Observation Sheet" for June 8, 1967, the day in question. Ennes also states that there were no fewer than eight reconnoiterings by Israeli aircraft from 6 A.M. to 12:45 P.M. (Liberty time). At 2:00 P.M. three Israeli torpedo boats were sighted on radar, having left Ashdod about two hours earlier. In preparation for their arrival, Israeli Mirage jets raked the Liberty with rockets and machine-gun fire to disable the ship's radio antennae and clear its personnel from the decks. These were followed by Mystere jets, which delivered more rockets and canisters of

napalm. Some of the napalm, collected by a crew member, was among the evidence received by the Court of Inquiry only to be suppressed as "top secret." By the time the torpedo boats arrived, the Liberty was defenseless, but still able to escape the first torpedo despite heavy machine-gun fire. A second torpedo evidently missed as well, but the third opened a 40-foot hole in the starboard side. The torpedo boats circled for three-quarters of an hour, continuing to rake their victims with machine-gun fire. When the few surviving life rafts were inflated, these too were machine-gunned, except for one raft, which was taken aboard by the attackers.

Even from so summary an account it will be apparent to those who have read Anthony Pearson's book, *Conspiracy of Silence: The Attack on the U.S.S. Liberty*, that the attack was more carefully prepared than one could have learned from the report issued by the Court of Inquiry, and that the efforts to destroy the ship and crew were more deliberate.

One new puzzle is introduced, however. The attacking boats departed, and Israeli helicopters arrived for a

final reconnoitering, before American jets had been dispatched to help the Liberty, about a half hour later. By that time Israel had begun to issue apologies and our rescue planes were called back. Although the author offers no explanation, one can only conclude that the torpedo boats (or helicopters) had indicated to their command that the ship was not going to sink before help was likely to arrive. The attacking jets jammed the Liberty's radio transmission, but a message was successfully gotten out during one of the brief periods while rockets were being delivered; during these intervals the Israeli jamming equipment could not be used, and the jet pilots were well aware of that risk. They were probably also aware of the exchange messages.

A second puzzle, the mission of the Polaris submarine that accompanied the Liberty, is not given as much attention as Pearson gives it, although its presence is confirmed, as is the certainty that it recorded the attack. Both authors agree, however, that the submarine was not a factor in the Israeli motivation for the attack, and that the Israelis simply wanted to prevent the United States from following the prog-

ress of their multiple invasion of neighboring territory either too closely or too soon.

Once they were forced to concede failure to eliminate the Liberty and its crew, the Israelis immediately changed their strategy and attempted to pass off the attack as a regrettable error. In this they evidently had the complete support of the Pentagon. Something had to be done to redress the grievances of the 171 disabled survivors and the families of the 34 who died; the story of their frustration is more fully told by Pearson. But no such effort was made to recover damages, amounting to seven million dollars, sustained by the ship itself, which could not press its claim.

The real point of this story is plainly stated by neither Ennes nor Pearson, although it emerges plainly enough from the evidence they have presented: while the United States is a blindly loyal ally of Israel, Israel can hardly be said to be an ally of the United States.

Dr. Henry Fischer is Curator in Egyptology at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City, and a member of A.M.E.U.'s Board of Directors.

The Question of Palestine

By Edward W. Said

Times Books, 1979, 239 pp., \$12.50.

Edward Said's deeply engaging book, *The Question of Palestine*, is perhaps the single most important statement and explication to date of the Palestinian experience, historically and existentially.

Said lived as a child during the mid-forties in Palestine, has been in exile for more than 30 years, and is currently a Professor of English at Columbia University, as well as a member of the Palestinian National Council. His book combines the qualities of clarity and critical analysis, while reflecting intense personal care for the living community in which he shares.

Its fundamental thesis is absolutely clear: that on the land called Palestine there existed for hundreds of years a majority of pastoral, yet socially, culturally, politically and economically cohesive people, who identified themselves with the land they tilled, who lived in about 500 villages, clustered around the principal towns of Nablus, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Acre, Jaffa,

Jericho, Ramlah, Hebron and Haifa, and who, by virtue of an unbroken existence in Palestine for centuries, have an enormous historical and moral claim to make on the world community. Undeniably, a Palestinian people still exist, now between 3½ million and 4 million scattered throughout the world. And behind every Palestinian is the great general fact: that a whole generation, their parents, not so long ago lived in a land which is no longer their homeland. The fact that today Palestine does not exist, except as a memory—or more importantly, as an idea, a historical, political and human experience, and an act of sustained popular will—will not ever erase the fact that has characterized the question of Palestine from its beginning in modern historical life. That fact is: the refusal of Zionism and Israel to admit, and the consequent denial of, the existence of Palestinian Arabs who are there, not simply as an inconvenient nuisance, but as a population with an indissoluble bond with the land.

Mr. Said traces the beginning of Zionist colonialism from 1822, more than 100 years before the Holocaust, and describes the way in which, through the years, Zionist strategists

planned and acted so that the place called Palestine could be emptied of its native residents in order to make it a national homeland for the Jewish people. That strategy required, and still requires, the sheer blotting out of the knowledge and memory that almost a million Palestinian Arabs lived there in more than 500 villages, most of which were utterly destroyed.

But Mr. Said makes an effort to help us see how the question of Palestine developed not to resurrect the past, but in order to get beyond it. He describes the process of Palestinian self-determination in some detail, with particular attention to the way it has moved from the hope of a secular democratic state in all of Palestine to a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza. He outlines the dimensions of the Palestinian question after Camp David and, in an extended discussion, explains why Palestinians are unable to accept the present process, as well as detailing the "signals" the P.L.O. has given indicating its readiness for a political settlement. He argues urgently for a vision of the future for Palestine based "neither on a project for transforming people into non-people nor on a geopolitical fantasy about balance of

(Continued on page 16)

Books To Order

New Selections

Dewey Beegle, *Prophecy and Prediction*, Pryor Pettengill. 274 pp., \$5.95 (paperback). Refutes the biblical claim of Zionists to the Promised Land by discussing what the Bible teaches about prophecy, especially concerning the predictions of events which already have occurred and those which are to come. Our price, \$5.25.

Abdelwahab Elmessiri, *The Land of Promise*, North American. 255 pp., \$7.95 (paperback). A scholarly study of Zionist ideology and Israeli practices, showing Zionism as a political movement more Western than Jewish in nature; based mostly on Zionist and Israeli sources. Our price, \$5.20.

James Ennes, Jr., *Assault on the Liberty*, Random House. 301 pp. \$12.95. The author served as lieutenant among the officers of the U.S.S. Liberty on her fatal voyage. He was on watch at the bridge during the day of the Israeli attack. See review on p. 13. Our price, \$8.50.

Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*, Times Books. 239 pp. \$12.50. Author argues that the reason the problem of Palestine remains intractable is because the question of Palestine has not yet begun to be understood. See review on page 14. Our price, \$8.50.

Uri Avnery, *Israel Without Zionists: A Plea for Peace in the Middle East*, Macmillan Publishing. 278 pp. \$1.95 (paperback). A remarkable description of Israeli politics, as presented by a member of Israel's Knesset and the sole representative of a party that believes in the transformation of the Jewish state into a pluralistic and secular one that is able to achieve reconciliation with the Arabs. Our price, \$1.70.

Robert B. Betts, *Christians in the Arab East*, rev. 1978, John Knox. 318 pp. \$12.00. A comprehensive study of the Arabic-speaking Christians and the role they have played in the Middle East from the time of the Islamic conquest up to present-day developments. Valuable demographic statistics and a comprehensive bibliography included. Our price, \$7.75.

John H. Davis, *The Evasive Peace*, revised 1976, Dillon/Liederbach Inc. 136 pp. \$5.95. Factual background to present Arab-Israeli dilemma, with a prescription for peace in Middle East. Our price, \$3.60.

Jonathan Dimbleby, *The Palestinians*, Quartet Books, 256 pp. \$25.00. Explores the crisis of a people without a land, demonstrating that the "Palestinian problem" is not an abstract issue but an urgent human tragedy. Fully illustrated with moving, dramatic, often harrowing photographs by Donald McCullin. Our price, \$17.50.

Simha Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians*, Croom Helm (London). 361 pp. \$24.95. Spells out Zionist views on Palestinians prior to 1948 by outlining assumptions shared by most Zionists. In spite of differences within the Zionist movement, these assumptions continue in the present. Our price, \$15.50.

A.C. Forrest, *The Unholy Land*, Devin-Adair Co. 178 pp. \$3.95 (paperback). The author's personal, informed and uncompromising stand against what he considers to be imbalanced and distorted news coverage of the human tragedy brought about by the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. Our price, \$3.60.

Stephen D. Isaacs, *Jews and American Politics*, Doubleday & Co. 302 pp. An investigation into the role Jews play in American politics. It explodes many myths on this subject and shows how Jews have recognized and exerted the power they have. Our price, \$3.85.

Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, Monthly Review Press. 314 pp. \$12.50. Expanded version of Jiryis' original authoritative account of the deprivation of Arabs living in Israel. Our price, \$7.85.

Alfred Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection: What Price Peace?*, Dodd, Mead & Co. 800 pp. \$20.00. Covers the Arab-Israeli conflict from the time of Herzl to Camp David. It treats the subject from every angle. It is well-documented; the research involved is monumental. Contains much information of which Americans are mostly unaware. One authority has said that it should be read by every responsible citizen in the West. Our price, \$12.75.

William R. Polk, *The Elusive Peace: The Middle East in the Twentieth Century*, Croom Helm, 184 pp. \$15.95. Good introductory book on the history of the Middle East; corrects many of the prevailing Western myths. Our price, \$11.75.

Ephraim Sevela, *Farewell, Israel*, Gateway Editions. 295 pp. \$12.95. The author's disenchantment with Israel, which he had thought would be the fulfillment of his dreams, is emotionally expressed in his

treatment of what he calls Israel's "racism" and the disintegration of the world's Jewish communities. Our price, \$8.10.

Raymonda H. Tawil, *My Home, My Prison*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 265 pp. \$12.95. Autobiography of a Palestinian woman whose description of life under Israeli occupation mirrors the changing moods on the West Bank. Our price, \$8.50.

Evan M. Wilson, *Decision on Palestine*, Hoover Press, 244 pp. \$14.95. Well-documented analysis of the six years leading up to the creation of Israel. Based on author's personal experience and on information only recently made available by the United Nations and governments involved. Our price, \$10.00.

Contribution to A.M.E.U., tax deductible

Free Pamphlet Collection

A check or money order for \$ _____ is enclosed, payable to A.M.E.U.

Name _____

Address _____

Zip _____

13-5-80

Notices

A.M.E.U. is pleased to announce that it has been approved for association with the United Nation's Department of Information as a non-Governmental Organization. A.M.E.U.'s representatives will be Robert E. Marsh, member of A.M.E.U.'s board of directors, and John F. Mahoney, A.M.E.U.'s Executive Director.

A.M.E.U.'s new Book Catalogue has elicited an extraordinary response. To facilitate the processing of orders, we request that orders be sent in with prepayment. Also, we remind readers that they may select \$50.00 worth of books to be sent to a library of their choice and A.M.E.U. will match the donation.

A grant-sponsored study on the position and activities of Christian churches at the national and local levels regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is being conducted by Dr. Ruth Mouly. Dr. Mouly requests readers to share their information with her. Write: Dr. Ruth Mouly, 4G7 Forbes Quadrangle, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

power, but a vision accommodating both peoples with authentic claims to Palestine." For, he says, the actuality is that Palestinian and Israeli Jews are now fully implicated in each others' lives and political destinies.

The book is written in the conviction that present Jewish and American thinking and actions figure significantly in the question of Palestine. He recognizes that the Palestinian reality and history has been suppressed until recently. Moreover, he notes that the Palestinians have had the extraordinarily bad luck to have a good case of resisting colonial invasion of their homeland combined with "the most morally complex of all opponents, Jews, with a long history of victimization and terror behind them." It is for this acknowledged reason that I believe neither Mr. Said nor Palestinian leadership have taken seriously enough the problem posed not only for Jews, but for others who do support Palestinian self-determination, of what he rightly calls "the besetting P.L.O. vacillation between a revolutionary direction (liberation of all of Palestine) and one that seems to transform the aim to that of realizing a Palestinian state within part of Palestine (national independence).

Mr. Said yearns for a time "when Palestine will become the site of two societies existing together side by side in peace and harmony," and is committed to "the Palestinian idea" that the "only possible and acceptable destiny for the multicomunal Middle East, is a state based on secular human rights, not on religious or minority exclusivity." In general, I share that vision, and indeed hope for its political development within the process of self-determination by other peoples in the Middle East. Yet for many reasons, including some I support, Jewish self-determination has resulted in the creation of a Jewish state, a place where Jews can be unambiguously Jewish, and to which Jews worldwide can turn. I believe the long history of victimization and terror experienced by the Jews, and above all the Holocaust, gives the Jewish people an absolute moral right to exist as a Jewish state in peace with their neighbors.

The Palestinian Arab claims to justice are hindered by the failure of Palestinian representatives to make unambiguously clear that the Palestinian national struggle is no longer committed to the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state either in the

immediate future, or ultimately. Such a position would then obligate Israel and the United States to recognize the moral right of Palestinians to their own self-determination so effectively presented by Mr. Said, and to provide for: the immediate ending of the development of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories; a declaration of Israeli intent to negotiate what settlements should remain and under what conditions; open dialogue between the United States and the P.L.O.; and provision for the participation of the recognized representatives of the Palestinian people in any negotiations to provide for Palestinian self-determination.

Mr. Said has documented the terrible injustices done to the Palestinian people and argued persuasively the responsibilities of Israel and the United States in the region. One wishes he would have acknowledged that injustices and human rights violations are also present in Arab states in the region, and recognized that Israel's security needs rest in part on her perception that if the Arab armies had been successful in the 1967 war, not only would Israel have been destroyed as a Jewish state, but Jewish existence itself might well have been threatened by a second Holocaust.

The great historical tragedy of the Palestinian-Jewish conflict lies in at least two roots: a Western colonialism which viewed the Arab East, as it viewed most of the world, as territories for the redemptive mission of "civilizing" and "developing"; and a long history of anti-semitism in general, with an anti-Jewishness unparalleled in any other situation. The great contemporary tragedy is the failure of each to recognize and adequately deal with this history, and in Mr. Said's words "to reckon with the existential power and presence of another people with its land, its unfortunate history of suffering, its emotional and political investment in that land, and worse, to pretend that the other is a temporary nuisance that, given time and effort (and punitive violence from time to time), will finally go away."

Rev. George B. Telford, Jr. is the N.C.C. Vice President for Church and Society, and Director of the Division of Corporate and Social Mission for the Presbyterian Church in the United States. He was a member of the N.C.C.'s fact-finding panel which toured the Middle East in February 1980.

The Link aims at maintaining contacts among Americans who believe that friendship with the people of the Middle East is essential to world peace, who would contribute to this goal by spreading understanding of the history, values, religions, culture and economic conditions of the Middle East, and who would—in this context—press for greater fairness, consistency and integrity in United States policy toward that area.

It is published by A.M.E.U. (Americans for Middle East Understanding, Inc.) whose directors are: Hugh D. Auchincloss, *Atwater, Bradley & Partners, Inc.*; John V. Chapple, *former C.A.R.E. Director, Gaza Strip Project*; John H. Davis, *former Commissioner General of U.N.R.W.A., International Consultant*; John Dorman, *former Director of American Research Center, Cairo*; Henry G. Fischer, *Curator in Egyptology, Metropolitan Museum of Art (Vice President)*; Robert J. Hayes, *Ergon Corporation (Treasurer)*; Robert M. Henry, *Aramco, retired*; Dr. O. Kelly Ingram, *Professor, Duke University*; Robert E. Marsh, *Consultant, The Olayan Group of Companies*; John G. Nolan, *National Secretary, Catholic Near East Welfare Association (Secretary)*; Joseph L. Ryan, *S.J., Rector, Holy Cross College*; Jack B. Sunderland, *President of Coroil, Inc. (President)*; Elizabeth Thomas, *Egyptologist*; L. Humphrey Walz, *Associate Synod Executive, HR, United Presbyterian Synod of the Northeast*; Charles T. White, *former Financial Executive, Near East Foundation and A.I.D.*

John F. Mahoney, *Executive Director*;
Michael Villani, *Distribution*;
L. Cooley, *Editor*; F. Cooley, *Designer*

The views expressed in *The Link* are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinion of Americans for Middle East Understanding, Inc.

A.M.E.U. grants permission to reproduce material from *The Link*, in part or whole, with full credit given to A.M.E.U., which requests one copy of the work upon publication. All correspondence should be addressed to Room 771, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115. (212) 870-2336.



Americans for Middle East Understanding, Inc.
Room 771, 475 Riverside Drive
New York, N.Y. 10115