

Protestant and Catholic Churches Show New Support For Palestinians

By Dr. Charles Kimball

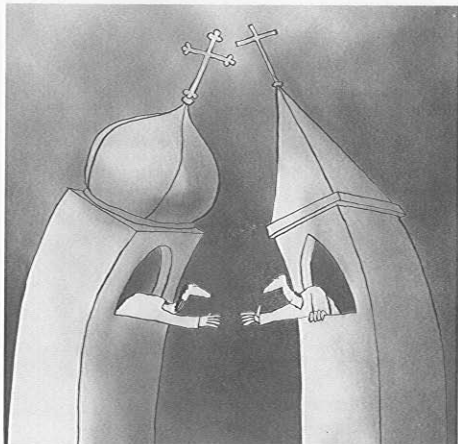
"The Middle East conflict is not your issue! Why do you Christians have to mess around in a situation that is not directly your concern?" These words, voiced by an American Jew recently, no doubt reflect a perception held by many others, namely: Christians in the U.S. have little or no business involving themselves in the tangled web of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I promptly challenged the presuppositions of my partner in dialogue. In my view, Christians, particularly in the U.S., are drawn to the events in the contemporary Middle East from at least four different angles.

First, like Jews and Muslims, Christians are connected historically to the Eastern end of the Mediterranean. This is the land where Jesus lived and taught, the place where the Church was born and developed through the early, formative centuries of church history. The continuing deep attachment to the Holy Land is reflected annually in the innumerable tours and pilgrimages of hundreds of thousands of Christians.

Second, Christians are linked directly with the indigenous Christian community that continues to live and worship in this unique and volatile region of the world. There are today between 10 and 12 million Christians living in the Middle East. Christians in the West relate directly to Middle

Eastern Christians (as they do to people in Latin America, Southern Africa, Eastern Europe and elsewhere) through ecumenical groupings, most notably councils of churches. As with the relationships in other parts of the world, the hopes, dreams, fears and concerns are



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Drawing by Len Munnik

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About This Issue

In May, Mayor Elias Freij of Bethlehem, at a press conference in New York City, predicted that the military occupation of his land will continue as long as the U.S. Congress continues to finance Israel's expansionist policies. And this support, he added, will continue until the churches in the United States begin to exercise their moral influence more vigorously. He was not buoyed by the prospect. "I am an optimist by nature," said the mayor, "but facts are facts."

We are sending Mayor Freij an advance copy of this issue, written by Dr. Charles Kimball, whose position as Middle East Director of the National Council of Churches has put him in close touch with Protestant and Catholic churches over the past seven years. May his survey of the growing Protestant and Catholic support for Palestinians be a source of some encouragement for the belea-

guered mayor.

Our book selection is *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* by Canon Naim Ateek of St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. It is reviewed on pages 13-14 by Dr. Andrej Kreutz. This and other current books and audio-visuals on the Middle East are offered at substantial discount prices on pages 15-16.

I would also like to bring to the attention of our readers a new booklet, *Organizing Teach-ins for Middle East Peace*, recently released by the International Jewish Peace Union, to serve as a resource for the peace movement. Booklets cost \$2.50 and may be obtained by writing to: IJPU, Box 20854, Tompkins Square Station, New York, NY 10009.

John F. Mahoney,
Executive Director

shared in mutuality. From a theological perspective, the Church is one. When one part of the body of the Church is in pain or turmoil, the whole community shares in that pain.

Related to this is a third compelling reason for Christians to engage the issues and work constructively for peace in the Middle East. Christians have traditionally affirmed their responsibility for a pastoral, prophetic and reconciling role in society. The Middle East certainly qualifies as an arena of deep concern. The pursuit of this pastoral vocation does not allow for silence or avoiding the differences. It does require judicious and prudent reflection drawn from the best moral insights in the religious tradition.

Finally, Christians in the U.S. bear a particular responsibility because of the role and influence of our government in world affairs. Responsible

citizenship requires that we seek to understand the issues, formulate positions and communicate them with governmental officials elected to represent us. What we say, do and think or what we fail to say, do and think may have a substantial impact on the debate within our society and the policy decisions implemented by our government officials. That the U.S. Government will play an active role in Middle East affairs is beyond dispute. The question is the degree to which American citizens, the vast majority of whom are ostensibly Christians, will make their voices heard in that process. Will we simply acquiesce silently or endeavor to take an active part in determining what is being done in our name?

In fact, organized and structured Christian communities in the U.S. have played various roles in the Middle East for more than 40 years.

The major activities have ranged from social service ministries and educational efforts to domestic political advocacy and interfaith initiatives. During the late 1980s, the number of

new program initiatives among church-related groups has increased substantially. A few examples illustrate the scope of these new activities.

underscores the potential importance of such initiatives.

During the past three years, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has pursued an extensive program to highlight Middle East issues in the educational programs of each Presbytery around the country. In addition to preparing written materials and using videos such as those mentioned above, they have sponsored visits and speaking tours by Lebanese, Egyptians, Palestinians and Israelis. More than any other U.S. denomination, the Presbyterians have been singled out for criticism—often through vague, inclusive labels such as “anti-Israel” or “pro-Arab”—in some quarters of the Jewish press during 1989 and 1990.

Presbyterians have maintained, even strengthened, their collective resolve despite harsh attacks. In early June, for instance, their General Assembly adopted a substantial resolution reiterating the denominational position and raising new questions about the wisdom of continuing massive U.S. aid to Israel so long as that government pursues settlements in the Occupied Territories and violates the human rights of Palestinians with alarming regularity.

Unfortunately, many people in the U.S.—even within the churches—remain largely unaware of these new and other ongoing programs. This article endeavors to help remedy the situation by addressing the following questions: What is the nature and scope of the diverse, church-related involvements? To what extent have the various programmatic initiatives been useful or effective, unhelpful or even counterproductive? What constitutes the primary agenda for the churches as they move into the final decade of the 20th century?

Before assessing U.S. church programs and priorities related to the Middle East, it is important to identify more clearly the churches and ecumenical structures within which Middle Eastern Christians operate. The realities among Middle Eastern Christians provide the framework for many of the specific efforts being pursued through U.S. churches today.

Recent Church-Related Initiatives

In the summer of 1988, U.S. churches played a major role during the controversial Israeli Government deportation of Mubarak Awad. Awad, a well-known peace activist, drew international media attention since he was expelled from his homeland after openly advocating nonviolence, mutual recognition and a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. The National Council of Churches (NCC) and many individual U.S. churches were highly visible in their support of Awad. His initial press conference (attended by over 100 journalists) was held at the NCC headquarters. Since his return, Awad has travelled widely and spoken in several hundred churches and church-related conferences.

During May of 1990, Churches for Middle East Peace, an ecumenical grouping of churches in Washington, D.C., organized a three-day national gathering designed to stimulate more effective advocacy on Middle East issues. A promotional flier announcing “Advocacy Days” reflected the broad base of support among U.S. churches. Among those participating in the “Advocacy Days” were many bishops, denominational and ecumenical executives and activist lay leaders who had not been engaged in Middle East advocacy issues previously. The growing strength and importance of this type of effort was manifest in the sharp critique published in several Jewish publications. While the churches’ positions were far from radical (calling, for instance, for a negotiated settlement that insured security and self-determination for both Israelis and Palestinians), several articles labeled “Advocacy

Days” as anti-Israel and full of PLO propaganda.

In 1988, an Episcopal diocese in California commissioned two documentary film projects dealing with the Middle East. *The Forgotten Faithful* focuses on the contemporary Christian community in the Holy Land; *Truth, Justice and Peace* is an insightful probe into the issues which must be understood and addressed if there is to be a durable peace in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Both documentaries have been and are being used widely in churches all over the U.S.

During the fall of 1989, the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher, an active group of lay Catholics with a deep concern for the Christians in the Holy Land, ventured into the contemporary dynamics of the Middle East. They invited the new Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michael Sabbagh, to the U.S. and Canada. For several weeks they sponsored his speaking tour and facilitated meetings with many prominent Catholic leaders throughout North America.

In the latter portion of 1989 and early 1990, a diverse group of Christian peace activists joined together to form “Middle East Witness.” This program, based on the successful experience of the church-related “Witness for Peace” in Central America is working closely with Palestinians and Israelis who believe that the physical presence of U.S. citizens in selected settings can provide protection and minimize human rights abuses currently prevalent in the Occupied Territories. The increasing violence against Palestinian civilians, the subject of the U.N. Security Council’s emergency meeting in late May,

Middle East Churches

The churches in the Middle East can be grouped into five "families": (1) Oriental Orthodox, (2) Eastern Orthodox, (3) Catholic, (4) The Assyrian Church of the East, and (5) Protestant. The two largest groupings of Christians are the Orthodox churches. Approximately 80 percent of the indigenous Christians belong to either Oriental or Eastern Orthodox churches. The Oriental Orthodox include the Coptic, Armenian, and Syrian Orthodox churches. The Eastern (Greek) churches are organized in four Patriarchates (Jerusalem, Antioch [now resident in Damascus], Alexandria and Constantinople) and they include the Church of Cyprus and the Church of Mt. Sinai. While the various Orthodox churches are linked in several ways, they are all self-govern-

ing. The Catholic churches account for some 15 percent of the Middle Eastern Christians. They all accept the ecclesiastical authority of the Pope in Rome, but few are actually Latin-rite churches. Rather, most Middle Eastern Catholics are gathered in the "uniate" churches, that is, churches united with Rome but still following liturgy and canon law in the tradition

of the various Orthodox communions. The largest of these churches include the Greek Catholics (Melkite), the Maronite church in Lebanon, the Syrian, Armenian and Coptic Catholic churches and the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

Unique among the Middle East churches is the Assyrian Church of the East. Separated from the Orthodox by doctrinal disputes in the fourth century, this ancient community remains active today mostly in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran.

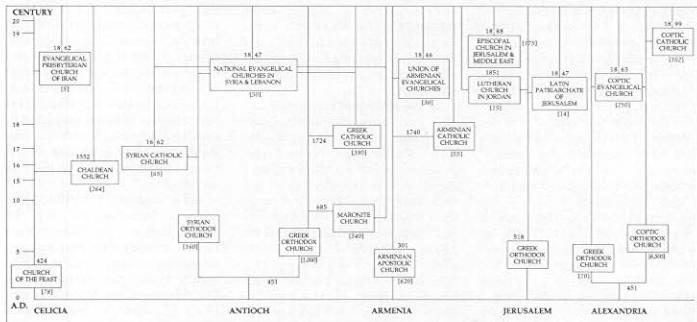
Protestants represent the newest family of churches in this historic homeland of Christendom. Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, Quakers, Congregationalists, Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist churches have been present since the 19th century. Today, the Protestants, who are called "Evangelicals" in the region, constitute 3-4 percent of the Arabic-speaking Christian community.

Collectively, the Middle East Christians represent a 10 percent minority in the predominantly Muslim region. The relative proportion of Christians and Muslims varies from country to country. Although no accurate figures exist, Lebanon is home

for approximately 1.5 million Christians or about 40 percent of the total population. By far, the numerically largest community is found in Egypt's 7-8 million Copts. Syria's Christian community exceeds one million. And, roughly 10 percent of the five million Palestinians dispersed in the region (and the world) are Christians. The chart below provides a general guide to the denominational and geographical distribution of Middle Eastern Christians.¹

Relationships among the numerous Middle Eastern churches have varied over the centuries. For the most part, the doctrinal divisions that led to fragmentation no longer represent serious obstacles to cooperative work and worship. In 1974, the Orthodox and Protestant churches formalized their movement toward ecumenical awareness and commitment when they established the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). In its first 15 years, the MECC has been acknowledged to be the forum and instrumentality for numerous ecumenical ministries and interfaith initiatives.

One of the primary ways Middle Eastern churches work together is through social service ministries. In Lebanon, the MECC implements a large program for emergency relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation.



This chart indicates the date of origin of the different Middle East churches and their approximate membership [appearing in brackets], in the thousands, today.

This program, based in both East and West Beirut, is unique in the country for its outreach to and inclusion of all communities. Unlike many other such efforts, the churches provide material assistance to people throughout that war-torn land. The MECC programs assume that Christian service and assistance to people in need—ranging from emergency medicine, clothing and housing to land reclamation and vocational training—should be provided to people without discrimination.

For more than 40 years, Middle Eastern churches have endeavored to respond to the various needs of the hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinian refugees. Ongoing programs in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan and in the Galilee region of Israel include education, health care, vocational training and social service centers. While the work is carried out through the MECC's Department on Service to Palestinian Refugees, it is designed to benefit all Palestinians in need without reference to their religious tradition. This longstanding involvement by the churches has been a particularly important component of the fragile infrastructure during the Palestinian uprising or *intifadah*.

The MECC and its member churches initiate and facilitate a wide diversity of programs related to education, women's issues, the youth and interfaith concerns. The importance of these efforts and growth in ecumenism was demonstrated vividly during the MECC's Fifth General Assembly held in January of 1990. At that historic meeting, the Catholic churches formally joined the MECC, thus making the council the representative body for virtually all Middle Eastern Christians.

The churches additionally collaborate in response to specific issues arising from contemporary events. Twice during April of this year, for example, church leaders in Jerusalem were the focus of international media attention as they spoke out collectively on issues of paramount importance to their community. The first episode centered around a "Prayer from Jerusalem." Written by church

leaders in Jerusalem and distributed by the Middle East Council of Churches and various Christian ecumenical organizations and denominations, it was intended for use in churches on Palm Sunday, the day when Christians traditionally recall Jesus' entry in Jerusalem.

Recognizing the urgent need for healing and wholeness, the Middle Eastern Christians invited others to join with them in prayer and fasting from Palm Sunday to Pentecost. While the prayer reflects deep, heartfelt concerns growing out of their daily experience, it also expresses the hope that God's spirit would "lead all of us to reach out to the other in a recognition of the common dignity possessed by all human beings."

The debate engendered by the prayer was fueled largely by press releases in which several American Jewish organizations presented sharply negative interpretations as factual. The American Jewish Committee, whose press release was quoted far more often than the prayer by both the secular media and other organizations, charged that the "anti-Israel" Middle East Council of Churches' prayer was nothing more than "a thinly veiled attack on the State of Israel in liturgical form." In addition to declaring that the prayer is "filled with mischievous innuendoes," the AJC stated the following:

The "Prayer from Jerusalem" makes the reckless and unjustified claim that Palestinian Arabs are being deprived of their "very right to life" by Israel. Such language implies that the physical destruction of the Palestinian community is the goal of policy of Israel. This is a malicious slander.²

The fact that "such language" is neither in the text of the prayer nor the intentions of those who wrote it did not seem to deflect the criticism. Clearly, the prayer struck a nerve. Whether it intended to or not, it provoked a response that revealed deep anxieties, concerns and political machinations that continue to complicate the difficult search for peace and justice in the Holy Land.

The encounter created by the

prayer, though painful and difficult, may yet produce positive growth in interfaith relations. Jewish leaders and organizational representatives have been invited, for instance, to meet with the Middle Eastern Christians who prepared the prayer so that each can hear the concerns and perspectives of the other directly. There has also been some discussion of new ways for representatives of the three religious communities—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—to consider together how they might better join in prayer and common efforts to facilitate the prospects for peace.

The second incident in April erupted when a group of some 150 Jewish settlers took physical possession of property owned by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in the Old City of Jerusalem. The move was particularly provocative since the property sits adjacent to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Christian leaders in Jerusalem were further angered by the timing of the occupation: the settlers moved in amid singing and dancing (and with the protection of Israeli police forces) on the Thursday evening before Good Friday.

In subsequent days, media investigation revealed the settlers had subleased the property (through the facade of a Panamanian front company) from a man who was leasing it from the Greek Orthodox church in order to run a hospice. Church officials insisted that the man had absolutely no right to sub-lease the property (for over \$4 million). Then came a major new wrinkle: the Government of Israel helped finance the entire project to the tune of \$1.9 million. Negative reaction intensified with Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kolek and several U.S. Jewish organizations publicly denouncing the behavior of both the settlers and the Government of Israel, calling it "shameful."

Church leaders in Jerusalem were swift to speak with one voice. Having raised their voices periodically over the difficulties and pressures routinely experienced, they announced on April 23rd that they would close all their shrines for one day on April 26. This unprecedented move reflected not only the frustration of Middle

East Christians, it also exemplified new levels of cooperation among churches whose history has been anything but harmonious. Increasingly, such events in the region have served to politicize the collective behavior of the churches.³

Although far from comprehensive, the foregoing provides a

glimpse of the breadth and focus of concerns within the Middle Eastern churches and the MECC. It is important to begin with this orientation since many, but by no means all, of the U.S. churches with active Middle East involvements work in close cooperation with the indigenous Christians of that region. This brief overview helps

to clarify the nature of various programs; and, it helps provide the backdrop against which we can view the behavior of U.S. Christians, some of whom approach the Middle East with little awareness of or concern for the Christians living there. We turn now to a consideration of the U.S. churches.

U.S. Christians and Middle East Issues

Christians in the U.S. can be divided roughly into three groupings, each with constituencies numbering between 45 and 55 million. The first group includes the traditional "mainline" churches (Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, etc.), which come together with the Orthodox communions (Orthodox Church in America, Greek, Armenian and Antiochian Orthodox, etc.) and several predominantly Afro-American churches as

constituent bodies in the 32-member National Council of Churches (NCC). The second is the Roman Catholic Church. The third grouping includes a variety of evangelical and fundamentalist churches (e.g., the Southern Baptist Convention, independent Baptists, Pentecostals, etc.) that traditionally have eschewed ecumenism as too threatening to their independence and doctrinal integrity.

While the categories are useful, they should not be seen as definitive.

Within each, one can readily discover individual churches and people reflecting the whole theological and ideological spectrum. The observations which follow should be understood, therefore, as indicative of major trends within these groups, all of whom exhibit dynamism and diversity within the grouping and in relation to the larger U.S. Christian community.

The National Council of Churches

The programmatic initiatives carried out through the NCC are pursued within the framework of the council's Policy Statement on the Middle East. The policy statement grew out of this charge of the churches to the NCC:

...to study and to speak and act on conditions and issues in the nation and the world which involve moral, ethical and spiritual principles inherent in the Christian gospel.

The policy statement was adopted by the NCC's Governing Board on November 6, 1980, following an extensive two-and-one-half-year study process by a distinguished panel of

church leaders. Considered progressive a decade ago, it now appears to be a thoughtful, moderate and constructive document. Indeed, it includes the talking points featured in the current debates about the region.⁴

The policy statement clearly spells out commitment to partnership with churches in the Middle East as a basic prerequisite. In practical terms, this means that we in the U.S. must endeavor to understand and take seriously the concerns, needs, hopes and fears of our ecumenical partners. Our programs are then shaped not by what we think is needed, but by what we commonly affirm as priorities.

To be sure, this commitment to partnership is not always manifest in the actual behavior of the churches. Still, it remains the mode of relationship most desired in the ecumenical community.

Social service ministries occupy the major form of direct involvement for NCC member churches. The above-mentioned programs in Lebanon and Palestine, an extensive diocesan-based program throughout Egypt and various projects in other countries comprise a network of services. U.S. churches provide personnel, equipment, technical expertise and financial support. Schools, clin-

ics, small-scale business and farming projects, vocational training, legal aid and educational loans are typical of the ongoing programs. Further, the churches have an invaluable communication and distribution network capable of responding with emergency assistance in time of war or natural disasters.

Financial support for these outreach ministries comes primarily from contributions by the various NCC member churches and through the nationwide educational and fund raising network of Church World Service (CWS). Each year, hundreds of thousands of people participate in CWS CROP Walks in hundreds of communities, large and small. The funds raised through pledges for walking so many miles are normally divided between ecumenical social service and emergency assistance programs worldwide (75 percent) and local projects (25 percent) such as shelters and food pantries. This CWS network provides an ongoing, meaningful way for U.S. citizens to assist people and communities in need.

The conscious shift toward mission as service in society represents a decidedly different orientation than was the case three decades earlier. It affirms the presence and witness of indigenous churches, placing an emphasis on facilitating their efforts to make a substantial contribution within their societies.

Another major area of focus and concern is defined by interfaith relations. Christians and Muslims, the two largest religious communities, account for nearly one-half of the world's population. The importance of new, more constructive Christian-Muslim relationships—as well as Jewish-Christian and Jewish-Muslim relations—cannot be overstated.⁵ Many U.S. churches within the NCC have endeavored to heighten awareness and improve relations across religious lines. Educational programs, study conferences, organized dialogues and cooperation in social services are primary vehicles for such efforts.

In 1985, the NCC Middle East Office and the Office on Christian-Muslim Relations jointly produced a reso-

lution on "Anti-Arab, Anti-Muslim and Anti-Islamic Prejudice in the U.S.A." This resolution, adopted by the NCC Governing Board, exemplifies the concern and the need for broad-based education within both the churches and the larger society. At a subsequent Governing Board meeting (where over 250 church leaders come together twice a year), the head of the World Muslim League and the Vice President of the World Jewish Congress were invited to address the plenary session. Over time, these types of program opportunities and frequent visits between church leaders and Muslim and Jewish leaders (in the U.S. and in the Middle East) can contribute toward better understanding, the overcoming of stereotypes and more healthy relations among adherents of the great monotheistic traditions.

In addition to their own programs, many churches have played an active, facilitating role with different regional and national interfaith initiatives. The U.S. Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East illustrates the point. This national group was organized in 1987 by prominent representative Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders. In its first year, more than 1,000 U.S. religious leaders endorsed the group and its platform calling for a negotiated settlement based on the rights of self-determination, independence and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. The Committee has convened major consultations in Washington, D.C., New York, Boston and Chicago. In each case more than 400 participants joined in the two- or three-day programs which featured key actors from the Middle East as well as the U.S. The Committee has also spawned a number of regional committees in cities like Portland, OR, St. Louis and Syracuse.⁶

This type of interfaith initiative demonstrates that Jews, Christians and Muslims can agree and work together on the most divisive of issues: the path toward Middle East peace. It also represents a formidable challenge to prevailing stereotypes about the concerns of U.S. religious groups. When Jews, Christians and

Muslims share a common agenda and sit together with Congressional representatives in Washington, the elected officials readily discern that something new is afoot. Many political leaders, ever mindful of which way the wind is blowing, will respond to such a representation—provided there is constituency support behind the religious leaders.

At a practical level, such common efforts serve to build positive, new relationships. Having been active personally in the U.S. Interreligious Committee, I have seen several hopeful developments unfold. In 1990, for instance, the Board of Directors or the Executive Committee routinely meets at the headquarters of the U.S. Council of Mosques or in a major synagogue or church in New York. The ease with which these religious leaders now interact personally (and increasingly at the institutional level) would not have been apparent only five years earlier. The experience of cooperation tends to "humanize" the other and nurtures interfaith relations in ways that will extend far beyond the scope of Middle East issues.

Central to all Middle East work among churches is education. The NCC and its member communions continually seek to provide educational materials and programs through their churches, denominational structures, universities and seminaries. Whatever the focus—indigenous Christians in the Middle East, the human service needs and projects, interfaith relations or particular issues in conflict situations—priority is given to education with the churches' constituency and, by extension, the larger society.

Many churches provide educational opportunities through traditional adult study programs. A growing number now sponsor serious study tours in cooperation with the MECC's Ecumenical Travel Office. Each year, several thousand people experience the rich diversity of the contemporary Middle East through these in-depth, first-hand visits in the region.

It is also true that tens of thousands of Christians from the NCC member

churches travel to the Middle East each year on Holy Land tours. For most, the opportunity to learn firsthand about the Christian community living today in the birthplace of the faith simply never arises.

Supplementing study programs and travel seminars, various church leaders and denominational executives routinely speak at annual meetings or in regional conferences; many also write articles and opinion pieces in denominational publications.

It is difficult to measure the extent to which the various educational programs have permeated the consciousness of the churches. As I have travelled widely to speak in churches over the past decade, I have been encouraged frequently by the level of awareness and engagement with the issues. All too often, however, I find church members who are interested enough to come out for a Middle East program but who have no clue about the policies, statements or study materials produced by their own denominational officials—not to mention those in the NCC.

Happily, the educational component will be featured in 1992 when the Middle East is the ecumenical study theme for NCC member churches. Education is not, of course, an end in itself. Education should lead toward greater participation in the programmatic components already noted above.

Without question, the single most consistent and urgent message from the Middle East to U.S. Christians relates to public policy advocacy. People in the Middle East feel directly the impact of U.S. Government actions. And, they rightly insist that U.S. citizens, Christians or others, bear the responsibility for what their government does in their name.

The NCC's Policy Statement on the Middle East devotes a major section to the "Witness of the Churches in Society." The document sets forth principles upon which public policy positions can be developed in relation to four major areas: self-determination; the rights of minorities; the arms race, security and justice; and, Israel and the Palestinians. Without attempting to detail solutions, the

document provides a frame of reference and particular steps that, in the considered judgment of the NCC leadership, address problem areas. Excerpts from the recommendations in the "Israel and the Palestinians" section convey the tone and substance:

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 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...

d. ...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 of 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.

On the tenth anniversary of its adoption, the policy statement continues to provide relevant guidance for the churches in their quest to help shape responsible policy positions. On the volatile issue of the status of Jerusalem, for instance, the simple position articulated above has been cited and employed repeatedly by the NCC and its member churches at critical moments.

In 1984, I provided Congressional testimony for the Senate Foreign Relations and House Foreign Affairs Committees in opposition to the legislation designed to require the U.S. to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The issue assumed highly disproportionate attention in Congress since it was portrayed as a barometer indicating support for Israel. And, it was put forward during the peak period of the Presidential and Congressional primary election season. In the case of the House testimony, I had the memorable experience of sitting next to the Rev. Jerry Falwell (then head of the Moral Majority and an "expert" on everything from South Africa to the Middle East) and Mr. Thomas Dine (Executive Director for AIPAC), both of whom strongly supported moving the embassy. We debated the issue for more than three hours on national cable television (C-SPAN). Fortunately, reason prevailed in the end. Several weeks later, the Congress decided to table the legislation rather than force the issue against the will of the Reagan Administration.

In 1990, the issue of Jerusalem resurfaced in American politics. President Bush drew sharp criticism in March for reiterating longstanding U.S. policy opposing Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem. Many in the Congress, sensing an opportunity to make domestic political hay, joined together in April to pass without debate a resolution declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel. As soon as the issue surfaced, several NCC member churches publicly expressed support for the Administration's clear, principled position and sought to discourage precipitous action by members of Congress.

Although the effort to dissuade Congress from adopting the resolution did not succeed, it did demonstrate the increasing visible presence of the churches in Washington. Such was not always the case on Middle East issues. Despite the solid policy base, many "mainline" Protestant and Orthodox churches were fairly quiet in Washington until the mid-1980s. Though there were several reasons for this, a primary one related

to the interfaith (Jewish and Christian) structures and coalitions within which many churches work. The inability to reach a consensus effectively excluded the Middle East from the common agenda.

In 1984, the churches organized a new effort to enhance their public policy advocacy work on Middle East issues. Churches for Middle East Peace (C-MEP) now includes representatives from some 14 major Christian communions which have offices in Washington, D.C. C-MEP concentrates on issues related to peace processes, human rights, arms sales and transfers, the issue of terrorism and the question of Jerusalem. Many of the participating churches have developed networks for mailing educa-

tional packets and responding to selected issues on an action-alert basis.⁷

It is difficult to measure with any certainty the success of the various church-related efforts identified above. Periodically, representatives from the NCC-related churches come together in an ecumenical setting to reflect on priorities and resources for human service ministries, interfaith programs, education and advocacy concerns. While less gratifying than the experience of a dramatic breakthrough, most church representatives continue to affirm the importance of perseverance in the work on several fronts. As one friend put it recently, "Christians are not called to be successful; we are called to be faithful to the responsibilities entrusted to us."

attention. Pope John Paul II has led the way with periodic statements on Israel/Palestine and on Lebanon. He has held highly publicized personal meetings during his tenure as pontiff with Yasir Arafat (in 1982, 1988 and 1990), Shimon Peres (in 1985) and various Lebanese leaders. Pope Paul VI had met earlier with Abba Eban (in 1969), Golda Meir (in 1973) and Moshe Dayan (in 1978). In these meetings and at critical points of conflict, the Vatican has reiterated its position affirming the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, Israelis and all the people in Lebanon. Church leaders have sought also to suggest helpful steps for moving toward nonviolent resolution of the conflicts.⁹

The Vatican has also taken an active role in the realm of interfaith relations. The major thrust began with Vatican II in the early 1960s. During those momentous years of renewal and reshaping, the Catholic Church developed new policy positions and established Vatican Secretariats for exploring interfaith relations. Through the global network connected to the Secretariat for Relations with the Jewish People and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, respectively, and through the extensive travel of Pope John Paul II, the interfaith agenda is being pursued with remarkable energy. The Middle East is, quite understandably, a major focal point for the convergence of interfaith issues today.

Within the U.S., New York's Cardinal John O'Connor has been a highly visible figure on Middle East issues. On three occasions he has travelled to the region in his capacity as President of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

In 1986, immediately after his elevation to the office of Cardinal in Rome, he went to Lebanon for detailed meetings with the leaders in Lebanon's numerous communities; he returned to Lebanon in 1989. In 1988, Cardinal O'Connor visited Jordan, Israel and the Occupied Territories under the scrutiny of an intense media spotlight. A major controversy erupted during the visit when the Cardinal cancelled a meeting sched-

The Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. relates to the Catholic Christian community in the Middle East in ways that parallel the patterns of the NCC and MECC member churches described above. The long history of mission and service ministries—ranging from education to emergency assistance and ongoing health care—are now linked closely with the priorities established by Middle Eastern Catholics. The church structures and lines of authority are decisively different among Catholics, but the thrust of the daily work in the churches is comparable.

In addition to the continuing presence of various mission-oriented religious orders, Catholic Christians in the West are active in the region through several social service organizations. The three major groups include Catholic Relief Services, the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and the Pontifical Mission for Palestine. Supported from abroad, these organizations operate programs in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Israel and the Occupied Territories.⁸ In practical day-to-day terms,

they interact with numerous other social service programs. The cooperation among church-related agencies will no doubt increase further in the wake of the 1990 MECC Assembly, during which the Middle Eastern Catholic churches became full members of the council.

In this region, the intentional effort to assist people in need inevitably includes the political arena. Providing emergency medical facilities or temporary shelter for internal refugees is necessary; it does not, however, address the root causes of conflicts that continue to create the human tragedies precipitating such emergency response. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church, like the ecumenical churches, perceives a major part of its tasks as education and public policy advocacy. Ultimately, the best way to help people and societies caught in conflict situations is by working to create a climate conducive to a negotiated settlement. This is, of course, no small task.

Catholic leaders who have ventured overtly into the political arena have received considerable media

uled with Prime Minister Shamir rather than comply with Shamir's wish to meet in his East Jerusalem Office. Catholic officials did not want to imply acceptance of the Israeli claim of sovereignty over Jerusalem. Since the Vatican does not have diplomatic relations with Israel, there was particular concern over the possible perception such a meeting might create.

In April and May of this year, Cardinal O'Connor came under intense criticism in the Jewish press when he spoke out publicly in protest of the Israeli-government supported effort of Jewish settlers to take control of St. John's Hospice in Jerusalem's Old City. Joining a chorus of protest among prominent U.S. Jewish leaders and organizations, O'Connor endeavored to speak frankly as a "friend of Israel." He agreed with the American Jewish Congress that the episode represented "a clandestine effort to settle Jews in the Christian quarter of Jerusalem." O'Connor called the move "insensitive" and "obscene." He also chided the Israeli Government for its failure to recognize and repudiate the "indecent act."

The response to his public statement was swift and strong. O'Connor was scolded for attacking Israel and charged with being anti-Semitic. The Cardinal stood his ground, reminding the press and public that his record as a friend of Israel was clear and warning that the frequent and casual use of the "anti-Semitic" charge was certain to be counter-productive.

The most extensive official public statement by U.S. Catholics appeared in November of 1989. Meeting in Baltimore, the U.S. Conference of Bishops adopted a lengthy pastoral letter entitled, "Toward Peace in the Middle East: Perspectives, Principles and Hopes."¹⁰ The impetus for the pastoral letter came from several sources. First, it had been twelve years since the U.S. Bishops had addressed issues in the Middle East. Second, these leaders were persuaded that 1989 and 1990 present a critical moment when genuine progress toward a durable peace is possible. They were determined to try to make a substantial contribution to the

process, fully aware of the "complex set of issues fraught with such power and emotion among peoples of different faiths and convictions."

The bishops identified their role and angle of vision from the outset:

We write this statement first and foremost as pastors and religious leaders deeply concerned about what continuing conflict and violence mean for the people who live there, for all the world and for people of faith everywhere. Our religious convictions, our traditional teaching and our ecclesial responsibilities call us to stand with the suffering, to advocate dialogue in place of violence and to work for genuine justice and peace.

...We have sought in these reflections to state our concerns clearly, with balance and restraint and with genuine respect and appreciation for the strong feelings and deep convictions of others...people of good will can sometimes disagree without undermining fundamental relationships of respect. We hope our reflections will be perceived in this context.¹¹

The focus of the document is on two specific arenas of conflict: Lebanon and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Recognizing other major issues, the pastoral letter zeroed in on these two because of their intrinsic urgency, their importance for Christians in the region and the challenges they pose for U.S. policy.

The text is divided into six sections. The first portion addresses "The Religious and Political Significance of the Middle East." The complexity of the major conflicts is presented in understandable terms with empathetic understanding of the legitimate bases from which different groups perceive and approach issues. The second section, "The NCCB and the Middle East," articulates the rationale for active involvement by the bishops and the larger Christian community in the U.S.

The third section concentrates on "Lebanon: The Tragedy and the Crime." Here the statement points to the major internal and external causes

of the present crisis. With candor and clarity the text helps to demystify what many people perceive as the most convoluted conflict in the world. Then, in response to the urgent need to halt the multi-sided civil war, the bishops identify a process of diplomatic initiatives and political negotiation which have two objectives. Archbishop Roger Mahony of Los Angeles, the Chair of the Committee which prepared the letter, summarized these objectives with these words:

The first is to free Lebanon of all foreign forces; the second is to initiate the rebuilding of Lebanese political and economic institutions. The goal is to preserve the unique heritage of democracy and religious pluralism which Lebanon has long represented in the Middle East, but to do so in the context that takes into account the tragic conflicts, outside interference and internal changes that have shaped the current crisis in Lebanon.

Next, the pastoral letter turns to "Israel, the Arab States and the Palestinians: Principles for Policy and Peace." Following an analysis of the conflict in terms of territory, sovereignty and security, the Catholic bishops identify a set of principles which they believe can be used to help adjudicate the conflicting claims at the heart of the dispute. These include mutual recognition of rights and direct negotiation—assisted by third parties—as the vehicle for conflict resolution.

The document makes several important affirmations. It declares that the unambiguous acceptance of Israel's right to exist with guarantees for secure borders—a foundation stone for a stable peace—requires strict limits to the exercise of Palestinian sovereignty. It insists that Palestinians possess the fundamental right to territorial and political sovereignty over their homeland and the right to participate as equals, through their chosen representatives, in all negotiations affecting their destiny. And, it affirms that responsibility for resolving the conflict rests not with Israel alone but with all the states in the

region and others in the international community.

The attention shifts to "U.S. Policy: Recommendations" in section five. The bishops urge the U.S. to weigh carefully the serious proposals being presented in 1989, to seize the new moment in U.S.-Soviet relations for movement forward in the Middle East, and to make clear, consistent and principled policy decisions. In Lebanon, for instance, this translates into three recommendations for U.S. initiatives: to facilitate the speedy withdrawal of all foreign forces; to support the process of constitutional reform and reconciliation; and, to help coordinate an effort for international economic assistance.

Recommendations on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict include basic endorsement of the present moral, strategic and political support for Israel, with hints that more responsible Israeli behavior is necessary if peace is to be achieved. They encourage continuing the direct political discussions with the Palestinians and suggest the U.S. express clearly its support for a Palestinian homeland and Palestinian political rights. In addition, the bishops commend the State Department for its *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1988* as these relate to the Palestinians living under military occupation. The pastoral letter calls this "a solid beginning" and deems it wise for the U.S. Government to take its own information into account when implementing U.S. policy.

The text ends with a "Conclusion" which speaks more directly to religious concerns and responsibilities.

We believe, however, that even beyond the political and moral intricacy of the Middle East there is a deeper reality which must be recognized and relied upon in pursuit of a just peace. The deeper reality is the pervasive religious nature of the Middle East: Its territory, history and people have been visited by God in a unique way. The religious foundations of the Middle East have political and moral relevance. The search for peace in the region requires the best resources

of reason, but it also should rely upon the faith, prayer and convictions of the religious traditions which call the Middle East their home.

True peace cannot effectively be built with new policies and guarantees alone. True peace also requires the building of trust between peoples, even when history divides them. Steps are needed now to encourage greater dialogue, to deepen trust and to build confidence between the diverse peoples of the Middle East.

It is often very difficult to measure tangibly the importance of church pronouncements, resolutions and policy statements. Depending on the breadth of its distribution and the seriousness of debate it engenders, the potential importance is considerable. Quite apart from any measurable level of "success," the effort by the bishops achieves several important goals.

First, it makes clear the Christian responsibility to engage faithfully in a

pastoral, prophetic and reconciling ministry. Second, it underscores the reality of our interconnected and interdependent world community in ways that evoke empathetic concern for people caught in tragic circumstances. One logical result of this heightened concern is participation in constructive change.

The document, unlike virtually all media coverage of Middle East events, demonstrates that it is possible to understand and identify basic issues as well as appropriate steps to address the issues. It provides clarity without being simplistic and hope without being unrealistic. Those who read and ponder the text will not easily retreat into the frequently observed position of non-involvement because "the issues are too complex."

The bishops understand well the limits of their contribution. But, they also have challenged Christians (and, by implication, others) in the U.S. to take seriously their responsibility as people of faith and as citizens in this country.

U.S. Evangelical, Fundamentalist Christians

The third major segment of American Christianity includes evangelical, fundamentalist and pentecostal churches. As regards the Middle East, most of these churches stand apart from the majority of "mainline" Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic churches discussed above. It is important to underscore the potential danger of lumping such diverse and fiercely independent churches into an inclusive category, since the whole theological spectrum can be found among these evangelical churches.

With this in mind, let us consider some major trends readily visible in a large majority of these churches—and especially among the TV evangelists (such as Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swag-

gart) who have become household names during the last decade. Perhaps the most striking point of common theological conviction centers on Israel. For most Evangelicals, modern-day Israel is understood as playing a central role in what they perceive as the unfolding drama of biblical prophecy. The theological frame of reference, rooted in 19th century pre-millennialism, interprets contemporary world events as vital components of the final stage of human history as we know it. The schemes vary, but most include a series of events—the appearance of the anti-Christ, the second coming of Christ, a massive conflagration at Armageddon—all centered in and around Israel.¹²

In political terms, this theological orientation translates into uncritical support for Israel. Interestingly, this "support" presupposes that Israel is some type of monolithic entity. Most Evangelicals who embrace this view seem to be unaware of the vigorous debates raging today within the Israeli body politic.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, a theologian at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, has criticized sharply this popular perspective as "bad theology" that produces "bad ethics" and a form of "anti-Jewishness."

Christian Zionism thrives both by spurious appeals to the Bible and by exploitation of Western Christian guilt for anti-Semitism. It claims that slavish support for the state of Israel, and refusal of all criticism of its policies, is the only legitimate expression of Christian repentance for anti-Semitism. But this is both false friendship and false repentance.

Christian Zionism philo-Semitism is a mask for anti-Jewishness in both the long and the short term. In the long term, the Jews are seen as people destined to be used by God in an apocalyptic design to destroy other nations and then disappear as a distinct religious community into Christianity.

In the short term, it is a false friendship because it does not accept Jews as complex human beings with faults and virtues, but instead turns them into a cipher for a Christian providential "plan." In the process it mystifies horrible injustice of Palestinians rather than engaging in a critical solidarity with Jews and Palestinians to create a just society in Palestine that would be an authentic expression of the best ethical traditions of all three monotheistic faiths.¹³

Ruether is not alone in challenging those who embrace uncritically this theological world view. In addition to the moral issues she raises, many others—including many Evangelical Christians—have observed and are concerned about the substantial societal influence of these fellow believ-

ers. Their impact is being felt in both the U.S. and in the Middle East.

During the 1980s, Evangelical Christians displayed a new vigor in political affairs. Well-organized, the "religious right" has now become a force to be reckoned with on many issues in American politics—including the Middle East.

Various U.S.-based evangelical and fundamentalist para-church groups are also having a major effect in the Middle East. There are today more than 35 different evangelical organizations actively working in the region. Many of these organizations are pursuing programs ostensibly designed to help people in need. While some good is undoubtedly accomplished, many are creating serious problems as well. Independent from denominational structures and accountabilities, many para-church groups operate without reference to the local Orthodox Catholic and Protestant churches. They do operate with substantial financial resources as well as considerable energy and dedication; they also bring with them a great deal of theological and political baggage. The Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) of Pat Robertson, for instance, runs a television ministry in southern Lebanon. Its uncritical support for Israeli military and political policies continues to create barriers between indigenous Christian and Muslim communities.

Although Christians have lived side by side with Muslims for centuries in the area of Lebanon, many are now being perceived as somehow related to these TV Christians in the West. One result: A growing number of Muslims are viewing their local Christian neighbors as somehow alien to the region and as a threat to their aspirations.

The lack of awareness of and concern for Middle Eastern Christians is most evident in Holy Land tourism. Each year, tens of thousands participate in these well-orchestrated trips. Sadly, most pilgrims return to the U.S. having visited holy sites, but without having encountered the living Christian community. One has only to talk a few minutes with most Holy Land tourists to discern the

narrow limits of their experience.

In recent years, several evangelical church organizations have sought to reverse this pattern. Mercy Corps International, a relief, education and human service organization based in Portland, OR, has led the way. Each year, Mercy Corps organizes several Middle East trips for key evangelical leaders (from church and business leaders to educators and journalists). Their approach features visits to traditional sites as well as opportunities to meet with a wide range of people (Israeli settlers, members of the Knesset, academics, lawyers, Palestinian activists, *et al.*) In their experience, and in my own, the results are heartening. Evangelical Christians, when presented with the diverse realities and complexities, begin to re-think their presuppositions. Whatever tentative conclusions are drawn, most acknowledge the need to take seriously the people in the region. When people are enabled to look beyond the barriers erected by one kind of propaganda or another, they will usually begin to wrestle with the issues— theological, ideological and political—in new ways. Moreover, well-intentioned people will naturally reflect seriously on the real-life consequences of their attitudes and behavior within the U.S.

The key is education. Since 1985, Mercy Corps and a number of other U.S. evangelical organizations have worked together in a loose-knit group called Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (EMEU). In addition to organized study tours in the region, EMEU has convened annual meetings during which 40 to 50 U.S. Evangelicals and Middle Eastern Christians engage issues of common concern. In 1987, EMEU organized a three-day gathering in London; the 1988 meeting was hosted by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in Richmond, VA; the EMEU meeting in 1989 was held at the Carter Center in Atlanta; and, in September of 1990, EMEU is being hosted by the MECC for a meeting in Cyprus. The upcoming meeting will include a week of visits to different Middle Eastern countries.¹⁴

The educational effort among U.S. Evangelicals is also taking place through publications with broad circulation in this community. *Sojourners* and, more recently, *Christianity Today* have featured articles that challenge the heretofore unchallenged assumptions of many Evangelical Christians.

The efforts of Mercy Corps, EMEU and selected journals are noteworthy. And, they have been greeted with great enthusiasm by MECC leaders. Even so, they represent only a beginning stage of a broader educational process that, hopefully, will discourage U.S. churches and church-related groups from working, often unwittingly, at cross purposes. While there will not be harmony at the theological level, it is possible to envision a day when human service ministries and the commitment to work for justice and peace will draw diverse segments of the American Christian community together in new and constructive ways.

The unprecedented reuniting of the Catholic churches with the majority Orthodox and most Protestants under the umbrella of the MECC is a symbol of hope. The fact that these ancient churches are finding ways to overcome longstanding differences ought to encourage U.S. churches to seek similar points of contact, both within this country and in our ecumenical relationships in the Middle East. Without diminishing the importance of the distinctive features among churches, most people do, in fact, recognize that those things which unite people of faith are far greater than those which divide.

Notes

1. Two current publications provide a detailed overview of the various churches comprising the contemporary mosaic in the Middle East. See, "Who are the Christians of the Middle East?" in *MECC Perspectives* (October 1986) and Norman A. Horner, *A Guide to Christian Churches in the Middle East* (Elkhart, IN: Mission Publications, 1989).
2. Press release from the American Jewish Committee, dated April 2, 1990.
3. Various articles in *The New York Times* and elsewhere appeared during the last ten days of April. See, for instance, "Israel Says It Helped Finance Settlers in Chris-

- tian Quarter," *NYT* (4/23/90); "Jerusalem Clerics Plan Shrine Protest," *NYT* (4/24/90); and "U.S. Jewish Group Critical of Israel on Aid to Settlers," *NYT* (4/25/90).
4. The NCC's *Policy Statement on the Middle East* is available from the NCC Middle East Office, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115. There is a \$1 charge to help cover printing and mailing costs.
 5. I have written at length on obstacles and opportunities for Christian-Muslim relations in a book scheduled to be released this fall. See, Charles A. Kimball, *Striving Together: A Way Forward in Christian-Muslim Relations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).
 6. For additional information about the U.S. Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East, contact Ronald J. Young, Green & Westview, 3rd Fl., Philadelphia, PA 19119.
 7. To obtain further information about the work of Churches for Middle East Peace and its constituent denominational networks, write to Corinne Whitlatch, 110 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, D.C. 20002.
 8. For information concerning the work of these social service ministries you may write Msgr. Robert L. Stern, Secretary General, Catholic Near East Welfare Association, 1011 First Avenue, New York, NY 10022.
 9. An extensive treatment on this topic is found in George E. Irani, *The Papacy and the Middle East: The Role of the Holy See in*

- the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1962-1984* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1986). Several excellent articles are also included in Kail C. Ellis (ed.), *The Vatican, Islam and The Middle East* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987).
10. For a copy of the complete text of this pastoral letter, write to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 3211 4th St., NE, Washington, D.C. 20017.
 11. Archbishop Mahony's remarks introducing the text at the Bishops' Conference are included alongside the document in *Origins* (November 23, 1989), pp. 403-4.
 12. For an extensive treatment of the theological and political convergence operative among many U.S. Evangelicals, see Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: The Secret Alliance Between Israel and the U.S. Christian Right* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1986).
 13. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Standing Up to State Theology: The Global Reach of Christian Zionism," *Sojourners* (January, 1990), p. 32. Prof. Ruether treats this theme in considerable detail in the book she co-authored with Herman J. Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).
 14. For additional information write: Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, 3030 S.W. First Ave., Portland, OR 97201.

Book Views

Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation

By Naim Stifan Ateek
Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books,
1989, 227 pp., \$9.95.

Reviewed by Andrej Kreutz

This book by the Rev. Naim S. Ateek, Canon of St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem, provides us with a much needed indigenous Christian perspective of the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation, as well as the much broader questions of the meaning of a Biblical message and human responsibility.

According to Canon Ateek, the foundation of modern Zionist Israel created for the Middle Eastern Christians "a seismic tremor of enormous

magnitude" that has shaken the very foundations of their beliefs. The inevitable questions such as: "What is God really like? Is God partial only to the Jews? Is this a God of justice and peace?" have arisen and need to be answered by the Christian Churches of the region. The reading of the Bible could not provide a clear answer and in view of its pro-Zionist interpretation, the Bible itself became part of the problem in the Arab-Israeli conflict. For the Palestinians, and up to a point, for all colonized peoples, the Biblical narrative of the conquest of Canaan and the Yahweh-ordered extermination of its indigenous inhabitants has caused major offense and a stumbling block to the acceptance of the Biblical message and Judeo-Christian traditions. A fresh start is needed to find a

bridge between the Bible and people, a theology that would contextualize and interpret while remaining faithful to the heart of one's religious beliefs.

Writing in the spirit of Liberation Theology, the author's effort to create such a bridge is prominently Christian and strictly based on the New Testament. For him, the basic criterion of the biblical interpretation for the Palestinian Christian is "nothing less than Jesus Christ Himself." It is the revelation of God in Christ which enables him to measure the validity and authenticity of the Biblical message for life. The passages of the Holy Book which reflect a human understanding of God that is totally different from the God in Christ—a God of love, justice and peace—can consequently neither be authoritative nor valid for the Christians. In addition, a theology of the God of Justice has by no means been an exclusive part of the Christian heritage. It had already been deeply rooted in the Jewish prophetic tradition which Christ seemed to follow. In fact the emergence of the Zionist movement in the 20th century marked, from that point of view, an obvious retrogression of the Jewish community from the profound thought of the Hebrew Prophets to a narrow and exclusive concept of a tribal God. The painful consequences of that for the indigenous Palestinian population and, also to a lesser extent, for the Israelis themselves, could and should be diverted, and in the future avoided, only if a more universal and inclusive image of God can be reinstated and a true conversion of hearts to the overall Biblical heritage takes place. As justice and power are united in God alone, it is a Christian duty not only to condemn the concrete cases of wrongdoing, but even more to expose the sanctioning lies upon which they are founded. The struggle against the political abuses of the Bible therefore seems a true Christian obligation and the service for love and peace is the highest commandment.

In accordance with these lofty principles, the author calls for recognition of Palestine as a country for both the Jews and the Palestinians. As an out-

come of that the Palestinians should eventually guarantee the survival of Israel by accepting it as a Jewish state, with the Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza established alongside the State of Israel. According to the author there is no other alternative offering real justice and peace in the area. The Palestinians should understand the unique role of the Holocaust in recent history. On the other hand, the Jews should also recognize that they caused wrongs and injustice to the Palestinians. The projected creation, in the future, of a Federated States of the Holy Land including Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon could create a mutual feeling of interdependency and lay down foundations for a really peaceful, secure and mutually beneficial, friendly coexistence. It could also help to find a solution to "the thorniest of all issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict," the problem of Jerusalem.

The Holy City could become the federal capital of the new federation. The prophetic and at present utopian character of the proposals should not, however, detract from their real moral value and their potential for the future. Finally, as the author points out, a change in attitudes towards one another of both Israeli Jews and Palestinians is a necessary precondition of any peace process.

Particularly interesting are the author's comments on the status and role of Palestinian Christians in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Although the Christian Church in Israel-Palestine is a rich mosaic of many historical denominations, the Christians in the country have for many centuries been just a minority. Through the centuries they have kept their faith against great odds and even now they live their lives in "a pre-Constantinian context," far from a spirit of militant triumphalism. For both social and political reasons there is no other community in the country which would be equally sensitive to the dangers of the present situation and more vitally interested in a peaceful resolution. Placed between Zionist Jews and the resurgent Muslim fundamentalism calling for "holy war," the indigenous Christian com-

munity might face total destruction with consequent irreparable damage to the continuity of the Christian tradition and the whole of Christendom. Fully aware of this threatening situation, Canon Ateek calls upon the churches of the land to act together in fulfillment of their imperatives of the prophetic and peacemaking ministry. Among the more practical methods he suggests is the creation by the churches of a Center for Peace-making in Israel-Palestine. The center would be multidimensional and comprehensive in its activities and could provide a forum for communication and reciprocity of different views and interests in order to mediate them in an atmosphere of concern for justice and peace.

At present, as the author points out, "the vicious circle of violence in the Israeli-Palestine conflict is on the increase [and] the hatred and antagonism are accelerating at a phenomenal pace." In spite of political manoeuvres and much bloodshed, a just and reasonable solution to the conflict does not seem to be imminent. More patient efforts by all people of goodwill are necessary in order to create a new climate of confidence and openness between the protagonists and in the region as a whole. To that end this book is very timely.

Dr. Andrej Kreutz, a former professor at the University of Calgary, is author of Vatican Policy on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: The Struggle for the Holy Land.

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