

# The Link

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## BEYOND ARMAGEDDON

by Don Wagner

*You know, I turn back to your ancient prophets in the Old Testament and signs foretelling Armageddon, and I find myself wondering if — if we're the generation that's going to see that come about. I don't know if you've noted any of those prophecies lately, but believe me, they certainly describe the times we're going through.<sup>1</sup>*

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*Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner is the Director of Middle East Programs for Mercy Corps International and Staff for Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding in Chicago. An ordained Presbyterian minister, he served from 1980-89 as National Director of the Palestine Human Rights Campaign.*



Palestinian Refugees, June 1967. They now number over 2,500,000.

United Nations Photo

One expects such a statement from the Rev. Pat Robertson on his "700 Club" television program or in one of the Rev. Jerry Falwell's frequent funding appeals. The speaker, however, was the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, in an intimate phone conversation with Tom Dine, Executive Director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Israel's powerful U.S. lobby.

Ronald Reagan was not the first high-ranking political official to adopt such a political position as a

result of his "understanding" of biblical prophecy. Evangelical Christian Zionists, as this study will refer to them, have been active politically in England since the sixteenth century, and include such influential pro-Zionists as Lord Balfour and Prime Minister Lloyd-George.

Recently, however, Christian Evangelicals have shown signs that they are rethinking their views on Zionism, and on the theological significance of the state of Israel, as well as on the morality of paying for the dehumanization of millions of Palestinians.

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## About This Issue

In 1983 I went on a Jerry Falwell sponsored "Prophecy Trip" to Jerusalem. For three evenings, in the city's Diplomat Hotel, 630 of us heard "Evangelical" exegetes expound the "eschatological" import of Jews now streaming into the "Promised Land." They were *the* sign, we were told, of the imminent Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when He would "rapture" true Christians into the upper air, while the rest of humankind was being slaughtered below. 144,000 Jews would bow down before Jesus and be saved, but the rest of Jewry would perish in this mother of all holocausts. It could even happen, we were told, while we were in Jerusalem; a ringside seat, as it were at Armageddon.

Between these theological expositions guest appearances were made by Israeli hawks Moshe Arens and Ariel Sharon.

Looking back over my notes I find two questions that came to mind: Don't Arens and Sharon see all this as a putdown of Judaism? Don't these Christians see that Palestinian Christians are being brutalized every day by an occupation enforced by Arens and Sharon?

The answer to the first question was easy: Arens and Sharon were worried more about U.S. Congressional support than about the Second Coming of Jesus; if Jerry helped them with Aid Now, they would help him with Apocalypse Now.

The second question was harder to fathom. After all, the 630 of us were indeed paying for the persecution of Palestinians with our tax dollars. The problem was, as I came to discover, we never saw any of these Palestinians. Flying out of Tel Aviv I asked the young minister next to me if he had spoken to any Palestinians. "No," he said, "But I think I saw one or two from the bus."

What has happened since the early 80s is that some Evangelicals have gotten off the bus and have ventured out into the West Bank and Gaza. What they have seen — and in some cases personally felt — is the dehumanization of an entire people. In the process they have recalled what Jesus told them they should do as they awaited His Second Coming: visit the imprisoned, comfort the afflicted, strive for peace, love one another.

No one I know has pursued those biblical injunctions more than the Rev. Don Wagner. If, as he suggests in this issue, more U.S. Evangelicals are looking beyond the Armageddon scenario to question the morality of subsidizing a brutal Occupation, it is because, in large measure, Don was there, showing them the refugee camps, the prisons, the closed schools and the cruel curfews.

Instead of promoting Armageddon, some of these Evangelicals are now stressing the Coming of Jesus to transform in a different way the City He once wept over.

To complement our feature article we are offering on pages 14 & 15 a number of books and videos that look at the Palestinian-Israeli question from a Gospel (Evangelical) perspective that emphasizes reconciliation through honor and forgiveness. One new publication is "Walking Beside Jesus in the Holy Land" by Isabelle Bacon. Reading it is like going to Jerusalem and bumping into a friend who shows you places and tells you fascinating bits of information that escape most tourists. And she does it with such gentle respect for the history and traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. If only I had 630 copies to pass around in 1983!

John F. Mahoney  
*Executive Director*

# Who Are The Evangelicals?

The term "Evangelical" is usually used erroneously by the secular press and even by much of the Christian media to identify the "Religious Right" and televangelists such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. In fact, the Evangelical movement has always been diverse, found primarily but not exclusively in Protestant Christianity. Derived from the Greek *Euangelion* (to proclaim the Good News), the word Evangelical was first applied to the churches of the 16th Century Protestant Reformation (Lutheran, Reformed/Presbyterian, Anglican, etc.). In much of Europe and the Middle East, "Evangelicals" are still understood as the mainline Protestant Churches.

However, in North America and parts of western Europe, Evangelicals are a modern (18-19th century) pietistic movement within Protestantism that has stressed the "born again" conversion experience, along with evangelizing (proselytizing) activities, often as a purifying reaction against more liberal or established branches of Christianity.

In an effort to be more precise in our consideration of U.S. Evangelicals, we will divide them into four categories based on their political-theological beliefs and practices. Here I follow Richard Quebedeaux's Evangelical "left, center, right" terminology, and add a fourth: the African-American and Evangelical within mainline Christianity. Current estimates for left, center and right Evangelicals in the U.S. range between 55-60 million; mainline (Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox) along with African-American Evangelicals number approximately 20 million.<sup>2</sup>

The fundamentalist branch, or "Evangelical Right," as they are often called, includes the fundamentalist Baptists and independent Bible churches, typified by Jerry Falwell

and Southern Baptist leader W.A. Criswell. 15-18 million strong and fiercely pro-Israel, they are also anti-Communist, anti-Muslim, pro-school prayer and against pro-choice. And they dominate television and radio with such personalities as Pat Robertson of the "700 Club," Paul Crouch of TBN Cable Network and James Robison, an associate of Marilyn and Vice President Dan Quayle.

The largest group of U.S. Evangelicals, approximately 40 million, is the "Evangelical Center," representing the 46 Protestant denominations within the National Association of Evangelicals. NAE was established in the early 1940s as an Evangelical alternative to the National Council of Churches, which Evangelicals saw as too liberal. Billy Graham is their most recognizable personality, and the respected journal *Christianity Today* reflects their viewpoints. Traditionally, the "Cen-

ter" has been pro-Israel, but it is precisely within this sector that recent changes have been occurring on the Israeli/Palestinian issue.

A third group, the Evangelical "Left," while less than 10% of U.S. Evangelicals, represents an influential minority. They are best known for their publications *Sojourners Magazine*, *The Other Side*, and the *Reformed Journal*, and their social justice advocacy network, *Evangelicals for Social Action*. They are considerably influential among intellectuals, college professors and pastors.

Two major groups not included in most surveys of U.S. Evangelicals constitute my fourth category. They are the 15-20 million African-Americans, who are Evangelical in their theology but liberal in their politics, and the growing number of mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox "Evangelicals," whose attitudes on the Middle East are yet to be clarified.

## Jerry Falwell's Friendship Tour To Israel

### INCLUDES...

1. An Israeli American Friendship Banquet in Jerusalem with Dr. Jerry Falwell and Prime Minister Menachem Begin.
2. Meetings with top Israeli Administration officials and Knesset Members.
3. Luncheon with Major Saad Haddad, Commander of Christian forces in Southern Lebanon.
4. Participating (particularly for pastors and other Christian laymen) in a transatlantic, live TV satellite program on Sunday, November 20. (Your church can be a part of the closed circuit video network!)
5. On-site tour of modern Israeli battlefields. (Hear military experts describe those battles and how they were decided.)
6. Official visit to an Israeli defense installation by a top military leader. (This tour is rarely offered.) You will see strategic military positions, plus experience first-hand the battle Israel faces as a nation.
7. Taping the "Jerry Falwell Old-Time Gospel Hour from Israel" TV Special. (Come be a part of this event of the year!)
8. A Bibleland tour that *avoids* ancient byzantine churches while emphasizing the places where Jesus Himself, Moses, Abraham...and other Bible Greats lived and walked.

*From Jerry Falwell's Travel Brochure, 1983.*

## Evangelical Christian Zionism

Why do so many Evangelical Christians view the State of Israel as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy? The answer lies in a system of biblical interpretation called either Dispensationalism or Premillennialism.

Modern Dispensationalists divide all of history into seven epochs called 'dispensations,' beginning with "Creation," and ending with the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus which is to follow the final Battle of Armageddon.

Premillennialism, a form of dispensationalism, holds that at the end of history Jesus Christ personally will return to earth, save Israel from defeat at the hands of the evil Anti-Christ, then establish a thousand year reign in Jerusalem.

Various forms of Premillennialism have arisen since the early days of the Christian Church. In the eighteenth century a new form called "Futurist Premillennialism" consolidated trends that began in the Protestant Reformation and became the basis for today's Evangelical Christian Zionist movement. Using selected Apocalyptic texts from the Bible such as Ezekiel 38-39, Daniel 7-12, and portions of the Book of Revelation, Futurists see the establishment of Israel in 1948 as the prophetic hinge on which other prophecies depend: the rebuilding of the Third Temple, Russia's invasion of Israel, the rise of the Anti-Christ, and the final Battle of Armageddon. Evangelical Christian Zionism has its roots in this Futurist Premillennialism, with its deemphasis on the role of the Christian Church in fulfilling God's plan for salvation and its elevation of the modern Jewish state in its place.<sup>3</sup>

[There is also a mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic form of Christian Zionism that marshals various biblical and theological arguments to make the case that modern political

Zionism is the liberation movement of the Jews and that Gentile guilt for the holocaust is linked to the survival of Israel. Representatives of this school are Dr. Franklin Littell, Dr. Roy Eckhart, Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr and Dr. Paul Van Buren.]

The rise of Evangelical Christian Zionism in the United States can be traced directly to John Nelson Darby (1800-82), by far the most important personality for the development of Evangelical Christian Zionism. His preaching of Future Premillennialism influenced prominent Evangelicals such as Dwight L. Moody, C. I. Scofield and William E. Blackstone. [Blackstone, in his bestselling book, "Jesus Is Coming," called Zionism the fulfillment of prophecy.<sup>4</sup> In 1891, he organized a national campaign to urge President Harrison to back a Jewish state in Palestine, and gathered extensive support from governors of leading states, major newspapers, and financiers such as John D. Rockefeller, Charles B. Scribner, and J. P. Morgan. It is likely that this campaign was the first organized lobbying effort in the U.S. on behalf

American Evangelicals and fundamentalists for the next sixty years.

Christian Zionism did not become a defined movement until the mid-1970s, with the occurrence of two events: the establishment in 1948 of the state of Israel and Israel's 1967 victory over the Arabs and its capture of Jerusalem. Billy Graham's father-in-law and editor of the influential Christianity Today, L. Nelson Bell, reflected the sentiments of most Evangelicals when he wrote: "That for the first time in more than 2,000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews gives a student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible."<sup>6</sup>

By the early 1970s there were numerous books, films and television programs, the most important of which was Hal Lindsay's "The Late Great Planet Earth," a popularized form of Christian Zionist literature that has sold over 25 million copies since its 1971 publication. Lindsay, in turn, has assumed major consulting roles with the Pentagon and the Government of Israel.

### ***Concentrating on the right-wing Evangelicals... the Zionists found natural allies who were pleased to take aggressive political positions on behalf of Israel.***

of Zionist causes. When Blackstone heard that Theodor Herzl was considering Uganda or Argentina for the Jewish state, he sent the Zionist leader a Bible marking every passage that referred to Israel and Palestine, with instructions that Palestine alone should be the Jewish state.<sup>5</sup>

The most important instrument at the popular level for advancing futurist premillennial theology was the 1909 publication of the "Scofield Reference Bible," which quickly became the primary edition used by most

By the 1976 Bicentennial year a political alliance was forming between U.S. Evangelicals, American Zionists and Israeli government officials. American Zionist leaders, perceiving changes in mainline Protestant denominations, turned more to the Evangelicals as major allies. Concentrating on the right-wing Evangelicals (the "Charismatics" and "fundamentalists"), the Zionists found natural allies who were pleased to take aggressive political positions on behalf of Israel.

Several Zionist organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the American Israel Political Affairs Committee (AIPAC) hired staff to monitor and nurture political ties among Evangelicals. In Chicago, ADL's Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein developed close ties with many televangelists, mainstream Evangelical centrists, and the fundamentalist wing of the Southern Baptist Convention.

During the 1976-79 period, four developments occurred that served to accelerate the political dimension of the new American Christian Zionist movement.

First, when Menachem Begin and the Likud Party came to power in 1977 they utilized religious language to advance their Revisionist Zionist political agenda. This strategy was effective among Evangelicals, particularly those predisposed to futurist premillennial theology.

Second, a triangular political relationship was cemented among the Israeli lobby in the United States, Israeli political leaders from Likud, and Evangelicals. A series of conferences, tours of Evangelicals to Israel, and selected political campaigns for Israeli interests solidified the bond.

Third, in the 1976 election, Evangelicals became a political force. They were courted by both political parties but more importantly, they developed methods and instruments of political activity that would become of major significance during the 1983 election. In the 1976 election, Evangelicals backed a "born again" Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher, Jimmy Carter, who was elected President.

Fourth, in March 1977 President Carter announced his support for the creation of a Palestinian "homeland." A Carter staff member told me that the phrase was not in the President's prepared text and reflected his own convictions. At this point, the Israeli lobby turned to activate its newly-found friends, the Christian Zionists, against Carter.

One successful strategy by the Jewish and Christian Zionists was placing full-page advertisements in major newspapers across the United States. The advertisements were titled "Evangelical Support for Israel!" The text stated in part: "The time has come for Evangelical Christians to affirm their belief in Biblical prophecy and Israel's divine right to the Holy Land."<sup>7</sup>

This basic Christian Zionist theme targeted President Carter's public support for a Palestinian homeland and was designed to force him to pay a political price. Among the signators were prominent Evangelicals from the "right" and "center" of U.S. Evangelicalism, including singer Pat Boone, Kenneth Kantzer of Christianity Today, and Dallas Seminary's premillennialist theologian John Walvoord.

This heavily-financed campaign bore significant fruit for the Christian-Jewish Zionist alliance. It may have initiated the eventual departure of millions of pro-Zionist Christian Evangelical voters from Jimmy Carter. As Jerry Strober, a former American Jewish Committee employee then under contract to organize the campaign, told Newsweek: "[The Evangelicals] are Carter's constituency and he had better listen to them....The real source of strength the Jews have in this country is from the Evangelicals."<sup>8</sup> Strober's remarks were significant and anticipated problems Carter would face in the 1980 presidential election.

The 1980 Presidential election campaign found the Evangelicals joining the conservative wing of the Republican party, where over 80% swung to Reagan. The election of Ronald Reagan ushered in not only the most pro-Israel administration in history but gave several Christian Zionists prominent political posts. In addition to the President, those who subscribed to the futurist premillennial theology and Christian Zionism included Attorney General Ed

Meese, Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, and Secretary of the Interior James Watt. Several second-level personnel held the Christian Zionist perspective and had considerable influence.

Once the Reagan Administration opened the door, leading Evangelical Christian Zionist televangelists and writers were given direct access to the President and cabinet members. Rev. Jerry Falwell, Christian Zionist televangelist Mike Evans, and author Hal Lindsay were among them. In addition, annual "Prayer Breakfasts for Israel" and frequent "White House Seminars" brought Evangelicals of the Christian Zionist persuasion face to face with the Reagan Administration and Congressional leadership.

Televangelist Mike Evans was typical of the those who gained considerable visibility and political influence during the early Reagan years. In a fundraising letter in 1982, Evans, claiming he had been called "to shake America and Israel for God," went on to say: "Little did I know that the President of the United States would invite me up to challenge 58 generals and admirals with the truth of God in the middle of a White House meeting. Little did I know that a speech written by me, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and filled with the Word of God, calling America to stand by Israel, would be put into the Congressional Record."<sup>9</sup>

Jerry Falwell was intimate with leading Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Menachem Begin. In 1979, Falwell received the Jabotinsky Award from Israel in appreciation of his pro-Israel political activity. Israel donated a Lear jet to him for use in his travels. After bombing Baghdad's nuclear reactor in 1981, Begin did not call President Reagan first, but instead phoned Falwell and asked him to tell Americans why Israel needed to protect herself. Columnists Evans and Novak revealed

in August 1981 that Falwell's ties to Begin were so close that the Evangelist routinely telephoned Begin to get approval before meeting any Arab Christians. Grace Halsell's insightful volume "Prophecy and Politics" offers firsthand experience with the Falwell version of Christian Zionism.<sup>10</sup>

Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon provided Evangelical Christian Zionists and the Reagan Administration another opportunity to express their political linkage. During the first week of the invasion, June 4-10, 1982, CBN's Pat Robertson charted the Israeli attacks each day on his "700 Club" television program and rendered his futurist premillennialist interpretation. Robertson speculated that the invasion might be a sign pointing toward the Battle of Armageddon and claimed that Israel's attack was "a modern Joshua event." Robertson used his television program to urge viewers to write President Reagan immediately and encourage Israel's war against the Palestinians.<sup>11</sup>

There were also several Evangelical Christian Zionist leaders, considerably to the right of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, who had direct access to the Reagan White House. Among them were Terry Risenhoover and Doug Krieger who in the early 1980s were the prime movers behind American support for the Jewish extremist organization, the Temple Mount Faithful (Jerusalem). These Evangelical Christian Zionists believed that the destruction of the Dome of the Rock and rebuilding the Third Jewish Temple were the final events necessary to insure the return of Jesus.

In May 1984, Risenhoover and Krieger organized a major "White House" briefing for Evangelicals on Middle East issues. Over 150 Christian Evangelicals and heads of major American Zionist organizations received invitations on U.S. State Department stationery. Among those present were Hal Lindsay, Jimmy

Swaggert and Conservative strategist Ed McAteer. Not a single mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, or African-American Evangelical leader was invited. The Middle East policy briefing, chaired by Reagan spokesman J. William Middendorf, was given by Bud McFarland, later of Iran-Contra fame.

While the Reagan Administration enabled Evangelical Christian Zionists to expand their political influence to remarkable heights, the Bush Administration has been more restrained. Yet, as evident at the 1992 Republican Convention in Houston, the religious right is very much alive and well. Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, whose 300 delegates dominated the platform committee, boasts 550 chapters in 50 states and a membership of 250,000, compared with 100,000 a year ago. Their political zealotry was not lost on the man running for reelection. Speaking before a gathering of the Religious Roundtable soon after the Convention, President Bush professed that he "was struck that the other party took words to put together a platform but left out three simple letters: G-O-D."<sup>12</sup>

***"We also express our deep concern for all who have been unjustly imprisoned..."***  
*- from the "Lausanne Covenant," adopted by Evangelicals from 150 nations.*

To mobilize the financial and political support of U.S. Evangelicals for Israel, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ), the most active and important Christian Zionist organization with an international agenda, recently opened a Washington, D.C. lobby office called the Christian-Israel Political Affairs Committee (CIPAC). Since 1990, ICEJ has raised over \$2 million to bring 35 panelloads of Soviet Jews to Israel. It has also

been active in lobbying the U.S. Congress to support Israel's \$10 billion loan guarantee request and to promote Jewish settlement throughout Israel and occupied Palestine.

## The Roots of Change

Dr. John Stott is perhaps the most influential Evangelical aside from Billy Graham of the present generation. His books number over thirty volumes and have helped shape Evangelical students and young adults since the early 1950s. It was John Stott who drafted much of the "Lausanne Covenant," adopted by Evangelicals from 150 nations at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974. The Lausanne Covenant continues to be the doctrinal position to which most Evangelicals adhere.

Built into the Lausanne Covenant is a strong position on human rights:

[We] call upon [the leaders of nations] to guarantee freedom of thought and conscience, and freedom to practice and propagate religion in accordance with the will of God and as set forth

in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We also express our deep concern for all who have been unjustly imprisoned, and especially for our brethren who are suffering for their testimony to the Lord Jesus. We promise to pay and work for their freedom.<sup>13</sup>

The potential for Evangelical concern for justice and human rights for any people, including Palestinians

and Israelis, lies with this statement. However, few Evangelicals would address the Palestine issue until the late 1980s.

In February 1987, I had an opportunity to meet Dr. Stott and asked "What is your perspective now on Zionism and Christian Zionism in particular?" He paused, then answered: "After considerable study, I have concluded that Zionism and especially Christian Zionism are biblically untenable."

Dr. Stott's response is significant for several reasons. First, it marks a clear position by one of the world's great Evangelical thinkers, a leader of impeccable credentials. Second, it reflects the logical conclusion of a Lausanne Evangelical who may not have had cause to ponder the Palestine question until the late 1980s, but clearly had changed his thinking by 1988. Third, it is a reminder that changes among Evangelicals on an issue such as Palestine must have a clear biblical foundation, or there will be no change at all. The Bible remains their primary source of authority so that any changes in Evangelical attitudes and policies will come only through their interpretation of the Bible.

## Rethinking the Bible and Justice in the Holy Land

It should be noted that the debate on the Palestine question began in the Middle Eastern churches in 1969, long before the Western churches viewed it as a legitimate theological issue. The first public meetings in the United States that attempted to challenge established Evangelical positions on the Israeli-Palestinian issue were held in LaGrange, Illinois, in May 1979 and May 1981. Co-sponsored by Sojourners Magazine, the Palestine Human Rights Campaign and the Presbytery of Chicago's Middle East Task Force,

the conference stimulated little debate within Evangelicalism but did cause significant discussion among mainstream Protestants. The two conferences heard political and biblical analyses from Palestinian and American analysts and each year issued a Declaration.

The 1979 LaGrange meeting was challenged by several Zionist organizations. Chicago's Anti-Defamation League representative, Rabbi Y. Eck-

***"We are anguished by the fact that countless Christians believe that the Bible gives the modern state of Israel a divine right to lands inhabited by the Palestinian people . . ."***  
- from the LaGrange Declaration, signed by over 5,000 U.S. Christians.

stein, tried unsuccessfully to force the Chicago Presbytery to withdraw its sponsorship.

The ADL and other Zionist agencies were able, however, to force Rabbi Arnold Kaiman of Chicago and Father John Pawlowski of Catholic Theological Union to withdraw their participation.

Eventually, the LaGrange Declarations I and II were signed by over 5,000 U.S. Christians. They were widely discussed and served as an initial venture into Evangelical territory. Both Declarations appealed to the Bible and both called for new thinking and sensitivity toward the suffering of Palestinians:

As believers committed to Christ and his Kingdom, we challenge the popular assumptions about biblical interpretation and the presuppositions of political loyalty held so widely by fellow Christians in their attitudes toward the conflict in the Middle East. We address this urgent call to the church of Jesus Christ to hear and heed those voices crying out as bruised reeds for justice in the land where our Lord walked, taught,

was crucified, and rose from the dead. We have closed our hearts to these voices and isolated ourselves even from the pleading of fellow Christians who continue to live in that land.<sup>14</sup>

That final phrase, "the pleading of fellow Christians," referred to the forgotten Palestinian Christian community. Later this theme became the dominant practical message that would challenge Evangelicals.

The Declaration went on to challenge the futurist premillennial Biblical perspective:

We are anguished by the fact that countless Christians believe that the Bible gives the modern state of Israel a divine right to lands inhabited by the Palestinian people and divine sanction to the state of Israel's policy of territorial acquisition.<sup>15</sup>

Then the Declaration turned to address the specific issues of injustice done to the Palestinian community since the establishment of the state of Israel:

Forthrightly, we declare our conviction that in the process of establishing the state of Israel, a deep injustice was done to the Palestinian people, confiscating their land and driving many into exile and even death. Moreover, for 13 years, large portions of the holy land and its people, including the West Bank of the Jordan River, Gaza and East Jerusalem, have suffered under foreign military occupation, even as in our Lord's time. Land is seized from its inhabitants. Water for farming is rationed and re-

stricted. Schools and universities are closed by the Israeli military authorities...We confess our silence, our indifference, our hardness, and our cowardice, all too often, in the face of these dehumanizing realities.<sup>16</sup>

Sojourners Magazine published the Declaration and received severe criticism, not only from Evangelicals but also from Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant leaders. Despite the fact that the Declaration affirmed Israel's existence and right to security for Jews while condemning Arab violence, several Christian scholars dismissed the Declaration as hopelessly anti-Semitic.

While undoubtedly ahead of its time, the Declaration was endorsed by a number of Evangelical leaders, including: John Alexander and Mark Olsen of *The Other Side*, Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners*, Dr. Nicholas Woltersdorff of Calvin College, Paul Rees of World Vision, African-American Christian leaders such as John Perkins, Rev. Joseph Lowery, author Catherine Meeke, Congressman Rev. Walter Fauntroy, Drs. Dewey Beegle and Bruce Birch of Wesley Seminary, Art Gish of New Covenant Fellowship, Walden Howard, President of Faith at Work, and Bill Starr of Young Life. Wes Michaelson, former aide to Senator Mark Hatfield, chaired the LaGrange drafting committee and contributed significantly to its final text.

## Evangelicals Meet Palestinians in the Holy Land

For over 150 years, the Evangelical branches of the Protestant denominations had carried on significant missionary activities in the Middle East. By the late 1960s, leadership of these programs had been turned over to indigenous peoples, with limited western support staff remaining. When Israel invaded

Lebanon in June, 1982, its brutal treatment of Palestinians and Lebanese shocked many of these Evangelical groups, who had become far more sensitive to the plight of the Palestinians. One such organization was World Vision International. With Beirut under siege and Lebanon's population in the south cut off from the rest of the country, World Vision along with other international agencies waited in Beirut to bring much-needed food and medicine to the war torn areas. For two weeks, Israel refused entry into the South. Neither the United Nations, the Middle East Council of Churches, nor World Vision were allowed to move. World Vision's president, the late Stan Mooneyham, flew to Beirut where he joined Len Rodgers. A series of protests were issued to Israel and U.S. political leadership at the highest levels of the Reagan Administration and Congress. Due in part to their strong Evangelical credentials, World Vision was granted the first permit to bring food and supplies to Southern Lebanon.

Len Rodgers and Stan Mooneyham led the convoy and brought food to the most desperate areas, especially the Palestinian refugee camps near Sidon and Tyre. They were appalled by the desperate conditions of the Palestinians, how Israel had leveled over 50% of the camps, and imprisoned most of the male population over age 14. Mooneyham protested the Israeli actions and issued statements to the U.S. Press, which promptly carried his statement. Israeli Prime Minister Begin was furious and countered with his own statement to the press and to World Vision. Several of Israel's Evangelical friends in the United States registered their opposition and informed World Vision that unless the words were retracted, the organization would pay dearly. Mooneyham did not retract his statement and World Vision lost several major donors.

The Lebanon War also brought another unexpected development among Evangelicals: alternative Holy Land tours. For many years, the second most popular overseas destination for U.S. travelers was Israel, with Evangelical Holy Land tourists among the leaders. All were dominated by the Christian Zionist orientation and had virtually no contact with Palestinian Christians. One of the smaller Evangelical relief organizations, Mercy Corps International, happened to have staff and Board Members in Beirut during the Israeli invasion and were within a few blocks of the initial bombing raids. Included in the delegation were the chair of the Board Dan O'Neill, an author and son-in-law of the entertainer Pat Boone; President Ellsworth Culver, and several members of its board of directors. O'Neill and Culver were deeply moved by the suffering of the Palestinians and Lebanese, and impressed by the work of the Middle East Council of Churches.

Both leaders became convinced that more Evangelicals needed to be exposed to the Arab people, to progressive Israelis, and to hear from Arab Christians. Mercy Corps proposed to the Middle East Council of Churches that a dual program begin as soon as conditions allowed: 1. a series of factfinding tours for U.S. Evangelical leaders; 2. assigning an Evangelical from the U.S. to work with MECC to foster closer relationships with Middle East Christians and improve interpretation back to the U.S. Both proposals were enthusiastically accepted by Gabriel Habib, by then head of MECC.

Beginning in the spring of 1983, Mercy Corps (in cooperation with MECC) organized and led an average of two delegations per year, until the program ended in 1991. Evangelical journalists, authors, presidents of colleges and seminaries, academics, and business leaders traveled to the Middle East and received firsthand experiences. Other



Evangelical organizations took delegations but on a less systematic basis than Mercy Corps. The results of these experiences cannot be overestimated and within a year the fruits began to surface as leading Evangelical journalists visited the Holy Land with Mercy Corps delegations.

The major Evangelical journal, the mainstream Christianity Today, sent its editor in chief Gil Beers and senior editor Tom Minnery on a Mercy Corps delegation in 1983. The Quaker, Dr. Landrum Bolling, past president of Earlham College and the Lilly Foundation, led the delegation. The tour formed the basis for Christianity Today's first major issue on the Arab-Israeli conflict, in a manner that challenged the traditional dispensational line of thought. The lead editorial by Harry Genet called for a just solution to the Palestine question and challenged the Reagan Administration's Middle East policy. Landrum Bolling's lead story focused on Lebanon's troubled history and issued the same appeal.<sup>17</sup> The Christianity Today issue signaled that the Middle East was no longer to be interpreted exclusively in dispensationalist Christian Zionist categories.

Another major source of change among western Evangelicals has been the steadfast effort by Palestinian (and other Arab) Christians. Here the efforts of the Middle East Council of Churches in cooperation with the Palestinian Christians, has carried the major burden. No one can calculate the effect of the small Palestinian Christian community in Israel and the West Bank in this regard. Among the many leaders of this initiative, I will mention several Palestinians who have had a special effect on Evangelicals.

In 1983, Father Elias Chacour of the tiny Galilean village Ibillin published his remarkable biography "Blood Brothers." Chacour selected an evangelical author, David Hazzard to assist him and Chosen Books,

then a division of the conservative Zondervan Publishing House, issued the book. Chacour and Hazzard carefully nuanced the language toward an Evangelical audience and made a compelling case for the Palestinian cause. More than any other book, "Blood Brothers" had a lasting impact on Evangelicals.

Jonathan Kuttab, a Jerusalem-born son of a Palestinian Christian Evangelist, is a highly skilled lawyer and committed Christian. Kuttab is a frequent speaker in U.S. Evangelical colleges and regularly challenges Evangelical leaders to be consistent in their application of justice. Kuttab is as well-versed in the Bible as he is in the human rights law. The steady parade of visitors to Jerusalem now make Kuttab's office a regular stop.

The Rev. Audeh Rantis, a Palestinian Evangelical in Ramallah, was educated at a Bible college in England and completed his university study at Aurora College in the United States. Audeh and his British wife, Pat, founded the Evangelical Home for Boys (later one for girls) in Ramallah in the late 1960s. Popular among Muslims and Christian Palestinians in the West Bank, Rantis was elected Deputy Mayor of Ramallah in 1976. The Rantis challenge Evangelicals to remember the Palestinians and their ministry has gained increased support from North Americans. Rev. Rantis's autobiography "Blessed are the Peacemakers" was published by Zondervan in 1991.<sup>18</sup>

The other Palestinian Evangelicals are Bishara Awad, who, with his brother Alex, founded the Bethlehem Bible College in 1983. The Awads are U.S.-educated Palestinians with extensive background in the Evangelical right. Christian Zionists from the International Christian Embassy-Jerusalem have attempted numerous schemes to draw the Awads into their orbit, but without success. The Awad brothers have stimulated a reassessment among

fundamentalist Southern Baptists and the Assemblies of God churches since 1985.

## Pointing to the Year 2000

One clear result of the Palestinian uprising, their Intifada, has been an awareness among western Christians of the ever shrinking Palestinian Church in the land where Christianity arose. In January 1988, the Christian leaders of Jerusalem issued an urgent appeal to Christians worldwide to join them in prayer and advocacy for their legitimate rights. Not only did the mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic leadership respond, but support as well came from numerous Evangelical journals, leaders and parachurch organizations.

Coinciding with this new awareness of Palestinian rights was a rash of bad publicity for several televangelists, beginning with the Jim Bakker-Jessica Hahn sex scandal, and fueled by the sexual exploits of Jimmy Swaggart, the death threatening funding appeals of Oral Roberts, and the humiliating defeat in 1988 of presidential candidate Pat Robertson. All this led to a dramatic loss in financial support for the televangelists and a corresponding loss of political support for the pro-Israel lobby among U.S. Christians. New efforts to rebuild the old rightist Evangelical Christian Zionist network commenced in the spring of 1991, following the Gulf War. Entertainer Pat Boone was hired by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, and through a series of costly advertisements in Evangelical journals and television, Israel sought to resurrect its declining Evangelical market. The results have been limited, due in part to the faltering U.S. economy and new questions about Israel.

In another effort, Pat Boone teamed with Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein

of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, in order to raise major donations for the settlement of Soviet Jews. A nationwide telethon titled "While the Door is Still Open" aired on February 24, 1992. Contri-

to the Palestinians themselves. A Gallup Poll of February 14, 1992 cited four of every ten (43%) considered Israel's tactics too harsh in responding to the Intifada. Two months later the Chicago Tribune revealed that

1986 primarily from the "Evangelical Center." Working independently but in close cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches and western Evangelical organizations in the Middle East, EMEU has become a leavening influence in educating, building partnerships and facilitating understanding between Arab Christians and western Evangelicals.

After a series of small seminars at Southern Baptist Mission headquarters (1987) and the Jimmy Carter Center in Atlanta (1988), EMEU, in conjunction with the Middle East Council of Churches, organized a major consultation in Cyprus in 1991 called "Signs of Hope." Over 90 North American Evangelical leaders attended the meeting and heard firsthand accounts from Arab Christians. An American Baptist Evangelical, Dr. Ray Bakke, Consultant to the Lausanne Committee and Director of International Urban Associates, chairs EMEU, whose Steering Committee includes: Dr. William O'Brien, Director of the Global Center at the Southern Baptist Convention's Sanford University, Karen Newell, Executive Director at the American Friends Service Committee, Dr. Sam Hines, a leading African-American preacher in the Church of God, Dr. Robert Douglas, Director of Zwemer Institute (affiliated with Fuller Theological Seminary) and Bill Taylor of Youth Life International.

The EMEU effort complements earlier desires by the Middle East Council of Churches to open discussions with Evangelicals. Since the early 1980s, MECC has been in dialogue with Evangelical agencies concerning their missionary activities in the Middle East and various peace and justice questions, including the Palestinians. On July 3, 1987, MECC's Gabriel Habib issued an "Open Letter" to over 150 Evangelical leaders in North America in which he urged Evangelicals to recognize the legitimate needs of Arab Christians whose historic presence

***In mid-November 1991, Pat Boone led over 500 pilgrims on a Holy Land tour, but few knew about a private meeting that was arranged for him by Mercy Corps International and local Palestinians.***

butions were directed to the United Jewish Appeal and the Settlement Campaign. Aside from the \$100,000 donated by Pat Robertson, returns have been minimal.<sup>19</sup>

[In mid-November 1991, Pat Boone led over 500 pilgrims on a Holy Land tour, but few knew about a private meeting that was arranged for him by Mercy Corps International and local Palestinians. Boone agreed to give one hour of his time to meet Palestinian Christians at his hotel, the Hyatt Regency in East Jerusalem. Despite numerous "Holy Land Pilgrimages," he had never met with Palestinians. Four leading Palestinian Christians spent the hour describing their conditions, their historic presence in the Holy Land, and their needs. Boone was visibly shaken. Lawyer Jonathan Kuttub opened the conversation by noting: "Mr. Boone, did you realize that right now you are sitting in a hotel that was built on land confiscated from a Palestinian Christian family?" When the four Palestinians left the hotel room, the Israeli Tourism officials assigned to Boone shook their heads; one cursed in frustration over what had transpired without their knowledge. Boone has now promised to do a benefit concert in Nazareth for the Christians of Galilee.]

73% of respondents had their opinion of Israel diminished in recent months. Pro-Israel sympathy held high among Americans, but it was no longer as uncritical as it had been. By 1990, the respected "Times-Mirror Political Typology" concluded even among American Jews, that there was more criticism of Israel's treatment of Palestinians than support for the Shamir government's hardline policies.<sup>20</sup>

The fourth major change occurred in approximately the same time but it had major theological and political ramifications. When the "Old Guard" Communist coup failed in the Soviet Union the week of August 21, 1991, "futurist premillennialism" received a challenge that threatened to overturn the entire system. Thus ended the theory of an impending Soviet invasion of Israel from the North according to prophecies in Ezekiel 38-39. The near "overnight" removal of Israel's greatest threat presented a challenge to dispensationalists, who hurriedly searched for a new enemy and Anti-Christ. Some proclaimed Saddam Hussein and Islam as the new Anti-Christ, others looked toward Europe and the European Economic Community as the culprit.

The fifth change among Evangelicals has been the quiet ascendancy of the loose network called Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, a coalition of Evangelical leadership and organizations formed in October

A third change since the Intifada began was the shift in U.S. public opinion on the Palestine question. The shift can be attributed directly

in the Middle East dates back to the Day of Pentecost.<sup>21</sup> The Habib letter received over 100 positive written responses and only two negative reactions.

The newest development among Evangelicals on the Palestine question has emerged primarily from the work of World Vision in the West Bank. World Vision's Director in Israel and Palestine since 1986, Bill Warnock, has gained the trust of the Palestinian community, both Christian and Muslim. Increasingly, Warnock has found the need to link justice concerns for Palestinians and Israeli Jews alike to his relief and development programs. His regular reports to World Vision's California headquarters and its Washington, DC Government Affairs office have told of specific cases of individual suffering and collective human rights violations.

Warnock's reports prompted World Vision's President Bob Seiple to write every member of the U.S. Congress to plea for U.S. pressure on Israel. Seiple told the lawmakers:

The mother of our staff photographer was shot and killed by a single sniper's bullet from a military helicopter while kneeling over her wounded son outside a mosque where they had been worshipping. A 14 year old World Vision-sponsored child was shot in the face and beaten for one hour by 16 soldiers near the Church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem. Several families of World Vision children have had their houses blown up, bulldozed, or attacked in the middle of the night. I want to urge you to do whatever is within your power to encourage our Israeli friends to move expeditiously to a peace settlement, to cease the building of settlements in the illegally occupied Territories, and to reach out to the suffering people of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Long-term stability in the

Middle East depends upon it. Further, I want to go on record in the strongest possible terms, given the increasing humanitarian demands upon our fragile foreign assistance budget, that you support the President and Secretary of State in their refusal to provide the \$10 billion loan guarantees while the Israelis continue to expand settlements.<sup>22</sup>

This moving appeal by the President of a leading Evangelical organization (now the sixth largest relief organization in the world) reflects

organization works. Additionally, this action was backed by the daily efforts of its Washington staff directed by Tom Getman, former legislative director for Senator Mark Hatfield. Getman's network of personal relationships in Congress, the State Department, and various policy organizations has increased World Vision's considerable credibility and influence.

In a separate activity, three members of the EMEU Steering Committee organized a prayer service on Monday, December 9, 1991, in Washington, DC, on the eve of the Middle



Father Elias Chacour with Virginia Woodward, former personal secretary for Mrs. Jim Baker, and Tom Getman, Director Government Relations, World Vision.

considerable awareness of the problems, plus a political savvy that comes with the clout of several million donors and clients. The letter was well received by many congressional offices and Secretary of State Baker conveyed to World Vision his personal gratitude. World Vision's letter was sent after considerable prayer, anguish, and the conclusion that it had to act for the sake of its vulnerable staff, the Palestinian community, and those with whom the

East Peace Talks. The entire Palestinian and Jordanian delegations were present for the hour of prayer and reflection in remembrance of the "Fourth Anniversary of the Intifada." Addresses were delivered by the Palestinian delegation's spokespersons, Dr. Hanan Ashrawi and Dr. Haidar Abdel-Shafi. Several leading clergy and religious organizational heads from the Washington, DC community were also present for this moving service, which was later

shown in its entirety on Jordanian Television, and seen throughout Israel and the occupied West Bank.

***The remarkable shift in World Vision can be duplicated by other major Evangelical organizations such as Young Life International, InterVarsity, and by several major denominations such as the Overseas Division of the usually conservative Southern Baptist Convention.***

These recent developments within Evangelicalism concerning the Middle East indicate that important changes are indeed underway. In its March 9, 1992 cover-story on "Christian Zionism", the journal *Christianity Today* cited a recent poll of its readers that showed just how far Evangelical views on Christian Zionism are changing. The poll indicated that 46% of Evangelicals surveyed had changed their attitude toward Israel during the last decade, and 39% said their stance was "more critical" (12% said they were "more accepting"). An overwhelming 88% now believe "Christians should hold the State of Israel to the same standards of justice and human rights in its international and internal affairs as any other state."<sup>23</sup> Five years ago these figures would have been reversed.

Only time will tell if this significant attitudinal shift will continue. Because changes are recent, it will be necessary to monitor whether they translate into institutional, policy, theological and other changes within the complex systems that constitute American Evangelicalism.

Meanwhile, the following trends merit observation as we approach the dawn of Christianity's third millennium:

**1. Theological Changes:** A new school of conservative Calvinist Evangelicals, the Christian Reconstructionists, is a good example of scholars advocating change. Christian Reconstructions reject futurist

premillennialism, the basis for Evangelical Christian Zionism, and have consistently rejected the works of

Hal Lindsay and others. Important Reconstructionists include Gary DeMars, Greg Bahnsen, Gary North of the newsletter *American Vision* and their mentor, the conservative Church historian, Dr. John Gerstner.

A Jewish convert to Christianity, Steve Schlissel, has also written a devastating critique of Lindsay's theology from the Messianic Jewish perspective, entitled "Hal Lindsay and the Restoration of the Jews."

Even premillennialist scholars are changing. Dr. Dwight Wilson from the traditionally Christian Zionist Assemblies of God domination, in a recent update of his 1977 volume "Armageddon Now," takes a sophisticated look at Zionism and concludes that Christian Zionism merits condemnation.<sup>24</sup>

If the efforts of these scholars gain acceptance within the major sectors of the Evangelical "Center," including publishing houses and journals long dominated by futurist premillennialists, they will have a significant impact on the mainstream and will complement the impact of *Christianity Today*. Their importance lies in their impeccable Evangelical theological credentials and their knowledge of these constituencies.

**2. Role of Arab Christians:** A second major trend is the role of Palestinian and other Arab Christians in the Evangelical debate on Middle East issues. Will Evangelicals invite Palestinians into the debate? Will they include Evangelicals in policy discussions, biblical interpretation and

strategy for mission? Will Evangelicals continue to relate to the Middle East Council of Churches, overcoming to a degree their anti-Ecumenical history?

**3. Role of Christian Missions:** Most Western Evangelical mission agencies have staff in the Middle East and a growing body of these informed leaders are effecting change. The remarkable shift in World Vision can be duplicated by other major Evangelical organizations such as Young Life International, InterVarsity, and by several major denominations such as the Overseas Mission Division of the usually conservative Southern Baptist Convention. Whether financial cutbacks combined with political pressure by Christian Zionists undermine the voices for change will determine to a large extent future policy of these organizations in the Middle East.

**4. Role of the Liturgical Churches:** A surprising number of U.S. Evangelical leaders have been turning to the liturgical churches for their personal worship and spiritual quest. Major Evangelical leaders are not members of traditional Evangelical churches but have chosen Episcopal/Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian traditions. Other Evangelical leaders, particularly academics and parachurch leaders, are looking to Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. In 1985, a network of conservative Evangelical house churches joined the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America, a large Arab Christian denomination. Through their experience with Eastern Christians many Evangelical leaders are exposed to the theology and politics of Arab Christians. These new relationships and partnerships in mission may have deep and long-lasting effects.

**5. Role of Mainstream Evangelicals:** These "Center" Evangelicals reflect the political views of the U.S.

political establishment on most issues. Their changing attitude on Middle East policy certainly coincided with shifts within the Bush Administration and U.S. public opinion. A return to the old politics of unconditional support for Israeli policies after the November Presidential elections would certainly see these new trends among Evangelicals challenged by the Christian Zionists.

These trends by no means indicate that Evangelicals have abandoned their long tradition of support for Israel. According to the Christianity Today poll of March 9, 1992 and the above trends in Evangelical agencies, a solid foundation of support for Israel as a state and security rights of Jews remains firm. Whether Evangelicals will be able to carve out a careful theological and policy position that affirms the rights of both Palestinians and Jews remains to be seen. Considerable pressure will be forthcoming to side with one party as opposed to the other.

A final, pragmatic aspect of the future is the economic cutbacks now affecting most major Evangelical institutions. The global economic recession has finally touched Evangelical agencies, most of whom were spared financial woes during their economic boom in the 1980s. Evangelical colleges, mission agencies, publishers, and various ministries are now having to face severe cutbacks. World Vision has recently seen its private donor support decrease by over 10% annually. Some insiders observe that one factor is their changed position on Middle East issues. World Vision has not been able to expand its Middle East agenda as planned. Others are in the same predicament. Whether the present economic woes are a long or short term phenomenon is unknown.

As the world approaches the year 2000, it is likely that there will be a series of predictions based on the futuristic premillennialist biblical scenario. Such was the case in the 1950s,

the 1970s, and the 1980s. However, the broad range of recent changes within Evangelicalism indicate that these ideas and political initiatives will have less influence than in previous millennial mileposts. Whereas many Evangelicals still believe the Middle East will be the locus of a nuclear World War III, a new movement has emerged to seek a peaceful era between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The next generation may witness which prevails: the Christian Zionist's prediction of a bloody Battle of Armageddon in the Middle East or the search for a lasting peace based upon justice for Jews and Palestinians.

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List: \$19.95; AMEU: \$18.50

- THE INTIFADA: A Jewish Eye Witness**  
50 Minute Video, Syracuse Alternative Media Network, 1991  
Written & narrated by Elana Levy, who visited Israel-Palestine twice in 1989. "What I saw," she reports, "forced me to speak out—as a Jew, as an American, as a woman, and as a human being." This is a very moving, personal witness to Israel's iron-fist occupation.  
List: \$55.00; AMEU: \$35.00

- JORDAN'S STORMY BANKS**  
1991 Videocassette: VHS, 30 Minutes  
First produced in 1982 by the Presbyterian Church, this revised edition takes account of the most recent events in the Middle East. Ideal both for church groups and high school students as an introduction to the Palestine/Israel conflict.  
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