

BETHLEHEM—Israeli bulldozers had begun their destruction. Now we gathered to protest the road they were building—Palestinians from the Bethlehem district, Israelis from peace organizations, expatriates from church agencies and non-governmental organizations.

We encircled "our" bulldozer and its Palestinian driver on a sweltering day in June, led by a phalanx of community leaders. Father Ibrahim Ayyad, an 85-year-old Catholic priest, was in the forefront, his frail frame supported at each elbow by younger men as he marched determinedly ahead.

Children, carrying crosses and crescents aloft, joined the rest of us with our banners and posters. As our bulldozer re-opened areas only recently closed by confiscation, we worked to rebuild stone walls that had centuries of history in them. A felled olive tree, about six feet in circumference, was pushed upright and replanted, adorned with a Palestinian flag. A cross and crescent were placed in front of the tree—significant because there

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# Slouching Toward Bethlehem 2000

By BETTY JANE BAILEY AND J. MARTIN BAILEY

had been attempts by Christian Zionist groups to drive a wedge between Christians and Muslims in the Bethlehem area. The twin symbols signaled our solidarity.

But the next day, the Israelis came back with extra soldiers to protect their bulldozers, and their terrible destruction of the land resumed.

The open assault on Bethlehem, an integral part of the West Bank, is evident in compelling statistics cited by Jennifer Morehead of the Land and Water Establishment, a Jerusalem-based hu-

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**About This Issue**

Martin Bailey was Director of Communications for the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.; his wife, Betty, was Associate Minister of Union Congregational Church in Upper Montclair, N.J. Upon retirement they volunteered to work for the Jerusalem office of the Middle East Council of Churches.

When AMEU was compiling its Alternative Travel Directory, Betty offered valuable recommendations. Her own flyer, "The Cost of a Free Trip" (see page 12), explained better than we ever could why such a directory was needed. For the sad truth is that most U.S. Christians never meet their co-religionists in Bethlehem, or anywhere else in the Holy Land. They're bused to Manger Square, see the traditional spot where Jesus was born, herded back on the bus, and whisked out of town. What they don't see is the story of this issue—a story told by two American Christians who, when they got off the bus, decided to live in Bethlehem.

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To obtain AMEU's Travel Directory, see page 7.

Our Holiday Book & Video Selections (pages 13-16) include the book "Peace for Palestine." Its author, a world renowned religious authority on the Palestine question, once confided to me back in 1978 that he had never been to Palestine, fearing that his visit might be construed as condoning Israel's military occupation. "Peace for Palestine," published in 1993 by the University Press of Florida, his last book, urges those involved in the Middle East negotiations to avoid the pitfalls of the 1948-49 armistice negotiations. In 1994, he wrote for *The Link* what I believe was his last major article on the Palestine question. We ran out of copies very quickly. On October 5, Rabbi Elmer Berger died. AMEU joins with his many friends throughout the world in mourning his loss, even as we celebrate his intellect, courage and integrity. Dr. Berger died at the age of 88, having never visited Palestine.

On behalf of all of us at AMEU, directors and staff, I extend to all of our readers our choicest best wishes for the holiday season.

**John F. Mahoney,  
Executive Director**

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John F. Mahoney, Executive Director  
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man rights organization. Writing in the July-August 1996 issue of *Challenge*, a widely respected bimonthly magazine that addresses issues of justice in Israel/Palestine, she reports that since 1967 over 61 percent of Bethlehem-area land (87,558 acres) has been either annexed, when Jerusalem illegally expanded its borders, or else confiscated for settlements, Jewish-only bypass roads, "green areas," or military zones.

The new military road will carve deeply into Bethlehem itself as it stretches from Gilo, a Jewish settlement west of Bethlehem, to the Field of Shepherds in Beit Sahour east of the town. It will effectively stymie Bethlehem's natural expansion into undeveloped agricultural land to the north, further crippling the town's plans for expansion of its tourist industry, the staple of its economy.

Israel's plans for dominion over Bethlehem's tourist assets are evident, too, at Rachel's Tomb, a site sacred to Muslims and Christians as well as Jews. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) currently controls access to the tomb. Bethlehem's main street was recently partitioned with a wall 300 feet long which creates a 30-foot-wide avenue for the entrance to the tomb on the "Jewish side," leaving less than 20 feet for two-way traffic on the other.

Israel has been known to order a full closure of the West Bank merely to accommodate Jewish worshippers at Rachel's Tomb, effectively sealing off Bethlehem for Christian pilgrims and Jerusalem's holy sites for Arab Christians and Muslims. Caught in

the fall-out when they are arbitrarily denied access to Jerusalem are Palestinian workers with jobs there, the ill in need of hospitalization, and students and teachers unable to reach their schools and universities.

The new road also advances Israel's plans for yet another settlement, Har Homa. As Jennifer Morehead writes in *Challenge*:

"The planned settlement for this area, appropriately named 'Har Homa' or 'Mount Wall,' will complete the ring of Jewish settlements

undermining Bethlehem's centuries-old arts and crafts industry.

"Israel is already scrambling to capitalize on 'Bethlehem 2000,' the Christian celebration of the 2000th anniversary of Jesus' birth. Some 2.6 million Christian tourists are expected for these celebrations. Christians are the mainstay of the tourist economy in Israel, comprising 63 percent of all tourists in 1995.

"Israel's development of the Har Homa complex will effectively co-opt Bethlehem's tourist economy, which is still reeling from the effects of the three-year closure of the West Bank and Gaza."

Elias Freij, Palestinian Tourism Minister and Mayor of Bethlehem, notes that "The wall at Rachel's Tomb, the three-year-old closure of the West Bank, and the construction of the new tourist village will help Israel to expand its annual \$3 billion tourist industry while destroying our much more modest annual income, worth only a few million dollars."



85-year-old Fr. Ibrahim Ayyad (center), a Roman Catholic priest, was a central figure in the protest last June of Israel's confiscation of land for a military road that will choke Bethlehem's economic development and support creation of the Jewish settlement Har Homa.—Photo by B.J. Bally

around the eastern (Arab) part of Jerusalem. Plans call for the additional confiscation of 1,750 acres of land near Abu Ghneim which belong to 2,400 families from Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour. This area, which will connect with Har Homa, is the future site of a vast new industrial/tourist complex, 'Bethlehem, Israel.'

"With it, Israeli planners hope to exploit what has traditionally been Bethlehem's main source of income: tourism. In addition to planned luxury hotels and souvenir shops, an industrial site will be built for factories producing olive wood souvenirs, thus

## Looking Toward A New Bethlehem

Walking through Bethlehem, a visitor would have no idea that the biggest anniversary of the city is only three years away.

The town was severely neglected during the 28 years of military occupation. Walls are crumbling. Streets are full of potholes. Litter is a problem and junk accumulates and rusts. Sidewalks and steps are dangerously

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broken. The shell of a large unfinished building stands near the entrance to Manger Square. Tourist buses must park in the square itself, filling the air with fumes and making walking a hazardous game of "dodge-em." No wonder tourists stick close to their guides.

Najwa, a friend who lives in the northern section of Bethlehem, turned on her tap last summer but no water came out. When she asked around the neighborhood, she found that everyone had the same problem.

"It has been going on in the summer as long as I can remember," she said. "We have to buy water from a tank truck at 70 shekels (about \$23) a load and we use it for drinking and cooking and showers and everything. We have to be careful." Najwa estimated her household of five adults bought about 20 tanks of water during the summer of 1996, spending more than \$460.

A study of students at Bethlehem

University reported by the Coordinating Committee of International NGOs in Jerusalem showed that many families frequently go five days a week without running water.

"I live in Beit Jala [the western hill town in Bethlehem District]," wrote one student. "We get water once every 15 days."

The study goes further to report that, "water quotas restrict usage by Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, while Israeli settlers have almost unlimited amounts."

A summer trip to a Jewish settlement on the edge of the Judean desert less than five miles from Bethlehem confirmed this water inequity for us. While Bethlehemites were buying water from tank trucks at highly inflated rates, the lawns were green in the settlement. Sprinklers were going at mid-day in the hot August sunshine. Sounds of children swimming in the outdoor pool added to the unreality of a place where water was plentiful

enough to waste during a six-month period without rain.

As if the water problem and the neglected streets and buildings weren't enough, the legacy of the Israeli occupation includes other infrastructure problems. Although the improvement of the sewer system is virtually complete, electrical service, garbage collection, and telephone lines need urgent attention. It is hard to believe that Bethlehem can be ready for 2000.

In addition to the deterioration of what can be seen, there is also a near absence of the various cultural and social institutions common to a city of Bethlehem's size and importance to Christian history. There is no public library, no large conference hall. Bethlehem University has the only theater, a cleverly built facility whose outdoor amphitheater can make use of indoor gymnasium seating. Two cinemas were torn down after the Israeli Army closed public meeting places during the *Intifada*.

The folklore museums are small and few of the archeological treasures in the area have been studied or developed to attract tourists. Culturally, Bethlehem is tragically underdeveloped.

But Bethlehem is home to some people of vision who—despite the fact that only three years remain before the Big Celebration—have hope even though they don't have money. They believe that Bethlehem belongs to the world, not just to them, to the municipal government, or to the Palestinian Authority. They hope that governments, non-governmental organizations, churches, businesses, and non-profit groups around the world will help with the rebirth of Bethlehem.

One of these visionaries is Prof. Qustandi Shomali, secretary of the Bethlehem 2000 Committee and a member of an old Bethlehem family. In an interview in his office at Bethlehem University, he described plans to upgrade the city's infrastructure.



During the Crusader occupation of the Holy Land, a door was constructed into The Church of the Nativity which kept mounted horsemen from entering. Today the door is seen as a symbol that all must enter in humility.—Photo by B. J. Bailey

Italy funded the Master Plan and UNESCO created a traveling photographic exhibition to arouse widespread interest. President Yasser Arafat has shown a personal interest and speaks of a new Bethlehem when he addresses religious groups and during travels abroad.

Renovations of the Old Market with help from SIDA (Swedish International Development Authority) are being discussed; new lights in Nativty Square and the Old City are being planned with the help of *Electricité de France*; and renovation of the Madbaseh (an old shopping street and square) will be undertaken by Cologne, Germany.

The Spanish Government has sponsored the publication of 20 tons of pamphlets and brochures, which



Dr. Shomali

are now stuck in an Israeli port until they can be cleared by customs and duty is paid.

But so far, Dr. Shomali says, the Americans have shown little interest in specific projects.

The Bethlehem University scholar is realistic about the extent of rehabilitation that can be completed by Christmas 1999, but he dreams of a cultural revival that will attract tourists and also improve the quality of people's lives.

"We need three or four big festivals or celebrations during the year, attracting 100,000 people, as well as a certain number of workshops and conferences. We need interfaith conferences that involve Muslims. And we want individual churches to have congresses in Bethlehem."

"Perhaps," he adds, "there can be a peace museum with the participation of major countries, a concert with well-known musicians, and a large camping area for young people."

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## When Family Land Is Confiscated

"This land was everything to my grandfather. He lived off this land by carefully tending the olive trees and selling the oil," comments George Ghattas, program manager for the Jerusalem office of World Vision, a large Christian international relief and development agency.

"I am glad he is not here to see this day. It would break him."

The day to which George referred was June 2, 1996, when the Israeli military bulldozed a wide swath through his three acres of land for a new "security patrol road."

On that day, while the Ghattas olive trees tumbled before the powerful Israeli bulldozers, George and his father stood by helplessly while ten soldiers savagely beat his older cousin, Khasous, for refusing to leave the Ghattas land.

The Ghattas family are part of the small Christian minority remaining in the Holy Land today. Some of them are Greek Orthodox and others are Latin [Roman] Catholic. Together they look at their land as a family inheritance. Their tract in Bethlehem has been handed down from generation to generation back to the

Ottoman period and, as George says, "As a Palestinian child you're fed the love of the land which becomes a part of you. It's an assurance to me that the land is there."

But now the land is not theirs. It is just a part of the 375 acres of Palestinian land taken for a security road which will separate Palestinian land owners from their own land and cut a wide swath out of Bethlehem. □

*Adapted from "Land Confiscation Family Profile: George Ghattas," by Virginia Woodward, communications director for World Vision Jerusalem.*



Israeli soldiers clash with Palestinian landowners and international activists on June 2 as a bulldozer claims additional Palestinian land in Bethlehem for a "security patrol road."—Photo by World Vision/V. Woodward.

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He added that Beit Sahour, the village of the Christmas shepherds in the eastern part of the Bethlehem District where he lives, is discussing a museum of popular folklore and a school to train people to make and market handicrafts.

Bethlehem needs an office for managing the work of the Bethlehem 2000 Committee and there is hope that an experienced and prominent person can be seconded to the municipality to coordinate international efforts and funding. But, as Professor Shomali and everyone else has pointed out, money is the big problem.

Both Bethlehem University and Bethlehem Bible College are looking ahead by holding training courses for Palestinian tour guides. When they finish the courses, the women and men will qualify for the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism exam and a possible license. But Brother Robert, who directs the Bethlehem University program, admitted that in the three years left they can only train about one-tenth of the guides needed and there is no guarantee that these guides will be able to function in areas where an Israeli license is required.

Mayor Freij expects that Bethlehem will be the site for the main religious ceremonies of the year 2000, citing Vatican assurances. A new Jerusalem Inter-Church Committee, appointed by the top church leaders in the Holy Land, has begun to function only recently. The relationship between this committee and Bethlehem planners has yet to be worked out, and the Bethlehem clergy ultimately are responsible to their

Jerusalem-based patriarchs and bishops.

Zoughbi Zoughbi, a layman whose family has long ties to Bethle-



Mayor Freij

Elias Mitri Freij has been Bethlehem's mayor since 1972. The 76-year-old Freij has seen his city of 45,000 inhabitants struggle through the harsh Israeli occupation and become part of the Palestinian autonomy under the Oslo Accords. Elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council, Freij was later named Minister of Tourism for the PNA. He is concerned that his city has a long way to go if it is to be the focus of special celebrations and events in the year 2000.—Photo by B. J. Bailey.

hem's Greek Catholic Church, has articulated an ecumenical, spiritual dream that others share. He says, "We need to find the room in ourselves—and widen that room—more than we need to build new hotels. I hope we invite people to stay in homes here and do things together as families. We need a renewal in the spirit of ecumenism and pluralism. The lay people need to have a role as well as the church leaders," he believes.

He also notes that, "The Muslims in Bethlehem have asked to join in the celebrations. I say that everyone is invited to the feast. *Ahlan wa-sahlan!* (Welcome!)"

Zoughbi expresses concern about the emigration of Christians from Bethlehem. "More than 40 old families—I mean the extended fami-

lies—now are completely absent, with no remaining members," he says. "In the last two months, 20 young people plus five families have left Bethlehem." Zoughbi's vision is that Bethlehem will rebuild on the human level as well as materially.

This new wave of emigration—especially among the Christians who tend to be better educated and have families or friends in Europe, the United States and Latin America—troubles everyone. It is reported that almost ten times as many Bethlehemites live in Santiago, Chile as live in Bethlehem.

Mayor Freij also worries about the declining Christian population. He would like to see those who have moved abroad show an interest in their city by helping in its renewal.

Father Ayyad has visited many Bethlehemites who have moved to Central and South America and he finds their ties to home are rather loose. He believes that a significant number will return for a visit during the Year 2000 and he hopes that if they find a more progressive city by then some will choose to move back.

It is a hope widely shared.

## Rooms for the Inn: Preparing for 2000

There will literally be "no room in the inn" for many pilgrims when the year 2000 dawns in Bethlehem. Ready the town for what some believe will be the biggest celebration ever is far behind any reasonable schedule.

One local pastor reflects that, "The year 2000 is coming ten years too soon. The people of Bethlehem and the members of our churches are just emerging from centuries of foreign domination and from an occupation that has left us with an inadequate physical and intellectual infrastructure. If we had another ten years we might be ready to welcome the world."

He may be too pessimistic. But it is true that the soldiers still control who can go from Bethlehem into Jerusalem and Israel to whatever menial jobs they can find there. As a result, unemployment is high and the Christians and Muslims who live in the West Bank are preoccupied with scratching out an existence. Many are just not aware of the implications of the Year 2000.

In similar situations where massive urban redevelopment is needed, you could expect the commercial sector—the Chamber of Commerce, for example—to take initiatives. But in Bethlehem the merchants have experienced too many disappointments and there is too little margin of profit. It seems the hope for a rebirth of Bethlehem must come from religious leaders who look not only for spiritual renewal but for physical redevelopment as well.

To be sure, there are men and women in Bethlehem who are creatively and courageously tackling some of the city's enormous problems. They are seeking to prioritize the vast number of individual tasks that need to be accomplished in the next three years.

"Our project book is this thick," says Lutheran pastor Mitri Raheb, holding thumb and forefinger three inches apart.

Raheb serves as treasurer for the municipality's Bethlehem 2000 Committee. "But we need to be realistic. Even with substantial outside help there isn't time to do it all."

In his view the principal allies are churches and non-governmental organizations that want to help on small projects.

Such realism, however, also acknowledges that there is no central place in town where a vision is projected, where projects are coordinated, or even where information about the announced plans of outside groups are collated.

There are rumors everywhere about an evangelical group that wants to build a sports center to house its mass meetings, about the reenactment of the journey of the Magi by camel caravan all the way from Persia (contemporary Iran), about media events and expos being planned for the Holy Land by outside groups, and about how the well-oiled Israeli tourism machine could "confiscate even the 2000th birthday of our Lord."

Such rumors raise the questions, "Whose celebration will it be, anyway? What role will the local churches play?"

The Christian Patriarchs of the Holy Land have at least answered the last question. His Beatitude, Michel Sabbah the Latin Patriarch, has said the major ecumenical event will be organized by, or be at the invitation of, the local churches.

The Patriarchs and other leaders

of the historic churches are themselves off to a slow start. They, too, have been preoccupied with the impact of Israeli policies, such as the decision to open the second door in the tunnel that parallels the ancient Western Wall and leads right into the Via Dolorosa. They seem determined, however, to make their plans ecumenically. That in itself is no small achievement for Christian institutions in the often competitive Holy Land.

They already have agreed that the opening ceremony for the celebration will be in December, 1999, and that the closing event (less ceremonial, they add) will take place before the end of January 2001. They intend to set specific dates that will make it possible to include all religious traditions. To avoid conflicts that could arise within the Basilica of the Nativity, they expect to hold the big celebrations in Manger Square.

Whatever else happens, there will be throngs of pilgrims coming to Bethlehem in 2000 A.D. Many will be devout. Some will be only curious. And there will be more than enough "crazies" who will want to be on hand for the return of the Messiah or the end of the world—whichever comes first. All will find a warm wel-

come—if not a conveniently located bed! And, if they stop long enough, they will experience at least a remnant of a faithful church that began at Pentecost.

These pilgrims will surely take home a rich mosaic of impressions. One hopes that they also will find ways to leave an encouraging word with the local Christians — the Living Stones of the Holy Land. □

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Autonomy Countered by Checkpoints**Bethlehem's Struggle Against the Long Odds of a Stacked Deck**

Last year at Christmas time, young Palestinians scrambled up a high fence and then ripped it down as a symbol of Bethlehem's liberation from Israeli military rule.

The fence had surrounded the Israeli police station on Manger Square across from the Church of the Nativity. It was an ugly reminder to tourists as well as residents that Bethlehem was under occupation, just as it had been when Jesus was born.

Now the symbol of that occupation had been trampled by exuberant youth. Their new symbol, a three-story-high painting of Yasser Arafat, hung above a souvenir shop, smiling down on the people who danced in Manger Square.

That was barely a year ago, in December, 1995. But now the reality of autonomy after long years of occupation has set in.

The Oslo 2 Accords (September 28, 1995) break the West Bank into areas A, B, and C. The main center of the Municipality of Bethlehem is area A, where the Palestinian police, along with the Palestinian Council, have responsibility for public order.

However, the northern part of Bethlehem, through which tourist buses arrive from Jerusalem, is area C—controlled by Israeli soldiers at one and sometimes more military checkpoints.

Israeli soldiers decide who comes to Bethlehem and who does not. Foreign travelers are okay—but Christians from Ramal-



Gate to Old City of Bethlehem on Star Street

lah are generally prevented from reaching the place where their Savior was born.

In mid-October, 1996, all tour buses were prohibited from entering the Bethlehem area. On one day, tourists of all ages had to walk the two miles from the Israeli military checkpoint to Manger Square. On several subsequent days, West Bank buses were allowed to pick up the tourists after they walked through the heavily fortified checkpoint. Sometimes these local buses were diverted through a hilly residential area with an additional checkpoint so Rachel's Tomb would be "safe." Twenty- to 30-minute delays each way are common at this

checkpoint. Recently one tour group was turned back when it tried to use the new by-pass road to avoid such delays. That group had a Palestinian driver. Israelis have prohibited the use of the road by any Palestinian.

There are other threats to the tourist industry that loom over Bethlehem's plans for the future. Israel controls the water resources and allocates grossly inadequate supplies to Bethlehem homes and hotels. Bezek, Israel's state-owned telephone company, is reluctant to furnish urgently needed lines for commercial and residential users in the West Bank.

It is easy to understand why many Bethlehemites lack confidence in the future—even a future as close as the year 2000.

The threat of competition from a new tourist village—"Bethlehem, Israel"—rising on confiscated land on Bethlehem's northern edge will be matched by other competitors for the tourist dollar: Nazareth in northern Israel and Jewish settlements in the Al-Maghtas region in the West Bank.

According to Nazareth Mayor Ramiz Jaraisy, Israel has earmarked \$83-million for infrastructure in Nazareth to be completed before tourists arrive for observances in the year 2000. As reported in the October 10, 1995, *Wall Street Journal*, two Nazareth resorts are being built by an Israeli real estate developer. These resorts will include "prayer halls, convention facilities and spectacular views of the holy sites." In addition, health clubs, pools, restaurants and a movie theater are being added to



tempt the prosperous "pilgrim" to pay homage to Jesus's childhood home—with all the conveniences of home. (At least one book is being written that claims, the Gospel accounts notwithstanding, that Nazareth was really the birthplace of Jesus. However, should tourists still insist on clinging to Bethlehem as the manger site, there is actually a town called Beit Lekhem ha-Glilit—Bethlehem in the Galilee—near Nazareth where gullible tourists can visit "Bethlehem" without ever stepping foot on the West Bank.)

Most recently, the Netanyahu government informed Jewish settlers in the Jordan Valley that a major tourist development is planned for the Al-Maghtas region, near St. John's Convent, a site sacred to Christians as the place where Jesus was baptized. In *The PALESTINEreport* of October 18, 1996, settler leaders David Hayyani and David Levy are quoted as saying the development is needed to bolster the economies of their settlements with tourist revenue.

Last December fax machines in hotels, travel agencies and churches spewed out a message from a group called the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ). "DO NOT VISIT BETHLEHEM," it began in large bold type. The flyer called on Christians to visit Efrat, an upper-middle class Jewish settlement built on occupied Palestinian land south of Bethlehem. The reason: Bethlehem had been transferred to Palestinian control.

To be sure of the flyer's effectiveness, the ICEJ and a group of Israeli settlers demonstrated at the Bethlehem military checkpoint on Christmas Eve trying to prevent Christian worshippers from attending services in Bethlehem.

Earlier in December an official sign had appeared on the Jerusalem side of the checkpoint warning tourists that it was illegal to enter the West Bank except with a tour group and a permit obtained three weeks in

advance. Pressure from the Bethlehem Mayor's office got the sign removed rapidly. But if there is such a regulation, it may still be on the books waiting to be enforced.

There is also a more subtle means regularly used to discourage travelers from visiting Bethlehem or limiting their time there to a short tour bus visit. It is found in travel books about the area and in warnings from tour

guides. Israeli officials declare the West Bank unsafe except for tour groups closely shepherded by a guide. Bethlehem is treated as if it were a dangerous area in the slums of a big city rather than a religious site and a home town of genuinely hospitable people. Currently there is no reason to believe Bethlehem will be treated any differently in the Year 2000. □

## Resources Recommended by the Authors

• I Am a Palestinian Christian, by Mitfi Raheb, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995.

• Challenge, a bimonthly English language magazine about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Written by Israelis, Palestinians and others and published in Jerusalem since 1990. Six issues per year, \$30 for individuals, \$50 for institutions. Checks payable to Challenge Magazine, POB 41199, Jaffa 61411, Israel, fax number 972-2-679-2270, e-mail <odaa@planet.edu>

• The PALESTINEreport [sic], a weekly newsletter contains news, analysis, summaries of the Palestinian press, editorials and background material. Published by the Jerusalem Media & Communication Centre. By mail, annual subscription rates are \$75 for individuals and \$150 for organizations; by e-mail, rates are \$40 for individuals and \$80 for organizations. Checks payable to JMCC, POB 25047, East Jerusalem via Israel. Fax 972-2-5829534, e-mail <JMCC@BARAKA.org>

• Biladi-The Jerusalem Times, published on Fridays in English, contains news, editorials, cartoons, poetry, and advertisements. Some pieces are translations from the Arab press. Annual subscription \$75. Checks payable to Biladi, Atlanta Office, 200 Rhine Drive, Alpharetta, GA 30202.

• Al-Liga Journal, a semi-annual Palestinian review dedicated to the study of Christianity, Islam, Christian-Muslim relations, and interfaith dialogue in the Palestinian context, and to cultural, historical, political and social issues. Annual subscription via air mail is \$30 for individuals and \$50 for institutions. Checks payable to The Center for Religious and Heritage

Studies in the Holy Land, POB 11328, Jerusalem. Fax 972-2-6741639.

• Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture is a quarterly of Middle East publications with each issue focusing on a particular subject. Subscriptions are \$40 for individuals, \$50 for institutions, and \$30 for students and seniors. Checks payable to Palestine-Israel Journal, POB 19839 Jerusalem.

• News from Within, a 36-page monthly magazine published by the Alternative Information Center, an Israeli group. The magazine reflects the approach of the center which combines political activism with research and analysis. The AIA provides information on currents in Israeli and Palestinian society, with special attention to the radical democratic and feminist struggles in both. Twelve issues annually for \$60. Checks payable to AIA, POB 31417, Jerusalem. Fax 972-2-6253151, e-mail <aicmail@trendline.co.il>

• The UNESCO photo exhibit "Bethlehem 2000," which opened last spring at Bethlehem University and is currently in circulation. Requests to display the exhibit in your community or to ask for a color catalog, information about Bethlehem, or exhibit tour schedules should be directed to UNESCO, 7 Place Fontenoy, 75007 Paris, France.

### Internet Home Pages

Bethlehem University:  
<<http://www.bethlehem.edu>>

Alternative Information Centre:  
<<http://www.aic.org>>

Palestinian Institute of Applied Research:  
<<http://www.arj.org>>

# The Tale of Two Holy Land Tours

At the end of this past summer, a pastor wrote to say that the group she accompanied was pleased with their trip to the Holy Land; they visited many historical and religious sites in a relatively short period of time. They appreciated the assistance their tour guide gave them in dealing with hotels, baggage, restaurants, security guards, etc.

But no time was made available to visit with Christians, to see anything in Bethlehem other than the Church of the Nativity, to patronize stores owned by Palestinians or to visit a single Christian institution.

Their desire to attend church on Sunday was met with hesitation by their guide. Although eventually they were able to worship at St. George's Church in Jerusalem, the group was not permitted time to stay for the discussion with local Christians that followed the service.

The guide kept stressing the problem of safety whenever they indicated an interest in visiting Palestinian areas. The guide even rescheduled appointments with Christian institutions on the edge of Bethlehem without telling the pastor/group leader; the visit to one church-related organization virtually was eliminated.

Another group, just a few weeks later, visited the same historical and religious sites, stayed in three- and four-star hotels and also were pleased with the help of their tour guide.

But, along with their stop at the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, they visited the Christmas Evangeli-

cal Lutheran Church, where they spoke with local Christians and explored the church's new international programs. They stayed after the service at the same church in Jerusalem where the earlier group had worshipped; the second group, however, participated in a lively discussion with Palestinian Christians. In addition, they visited a refugee camp just south of Bethlehem and shopped in a

the machinery of mass tourism which provides Christian tourists with an extended view of 20th-century Israel (including major national sites such as Masada, Yad Vashem, and the Knesset) and which passes very lightly over the 2000 years of Christian history with short stops at biblical sites that have been developed commercially.

Even the few Christian places on such a tour often are interpreted by guides who possess inadequate or distorted information. These tour packages are carefully designed to impress people with the modern and efficient Jewish State and to avoid contemporary Christian issues.

For almost 2000 years Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land were guided by Christians and enjoyed the hospitality of the local churches and monasteries. Beginning in the early 1900s, the heavy influx of tourists meant that the local churches no longer could provide enough hostels, hotels and guides.

Tourism has become a major industry in Israel. But, since 1967, Israel has declined to issue building permits for new hotels in Palestinian areas. Even more serious, Israeli policy limits the number of Palestinians, including Christian Palestinians, who can be trained and licensed as guides. Fewer than half a dozen have been licensed in the last 30 years. Only a few Christian tour guides remain in Israel and several of them are elderly and no longer able to work regularly.

A quote, widely attributed to former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe



St. George (El Khader in Arabic) is a symbol commonly used to indicate a Christian home or building in Bethlehem.

nonprofit store where the manager is developing income-producing embroidery and textile work for the wives of unemployed Palestinian workers.

They also toured an upper middle class Jewish settlement with a settler who retained his clear, American accent and American citizenship—and who affirmed his Israeli citizenship as well.

Both groups included older people with limited ability to walk long distances and both demonstrated a keen interest in the safety and welfare of the participants. The second group took seriously the need to understand and be in solidarity with local Christians. The first group was drawn into

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Dayan, illustrates Israel's fear of what tourists exposed to Palestinians might learn: "I'd rather have a Palestinian in the cockpit of an F-14 than at the microphone of a tour bus."

Although the quality of tourist guides differs, a study by the Swedish Christian Study Center shows that some of the information given to Christian groups at the Jerusalem Church of the Holy Sepulchre is appallingly inaccurate or insulting gibberish.

One quote cited in the study: "This is here the original tomb of the Jesus. This is Coptic back to the grace; inside you can see the original tomb of Jesus." Another example: "You can see Jesus was on the cross and here is Roman Catholic came and pierce the body of Jesus in his side here." Guides' comments in Bethlehem at the Church of the Nativity are probably no better.

As an alternative to this mass tourism and to the lack of significant contact with the historic Christian communities, several churches and agencies have programs to help visitors get to know the peoples and cultures of the Holy Land and to understand the reality of life faced by today's Christians.

One of these groups, based in Bethlehem, is the International Center (Dar an-Nadwa) at the Christmas Lutheran Church. Especially after its new Abu Gubran guest house was opened in 1992, the church has offered visitors an opportunity to experience the rich Palestinian culture and to meet local people. Discussions and cultural events are available in comfortable, contemporary surroundings.

The Rev. Mitri Raheb, one of the principal proponents of Palestinian Contextual Theology, has developed the center as a place where thoughtful visitors can reflect on their own faith in relation to the historic traditions out of which it was born. They can also review their own expressions of the Christian life in the context of a

people whose convictions are tested almost daily.

Working with interested travel agents in Europe and the United States, Dr. Raheb has developed a variety of travel "modules" that offer more than a cursory look at the historic sites by providing related biblical studies and experiences "off the beaten path." Dar an-Nadwa's programs also furnish visitors with meaningful contacts with the "Living Stones," as the contemporary Christians of Palestine and Israel frequently are called. Visitors see a church that enhances the role of women in the society, is concerned with its environment, offers a setting for dialogue with Muslim neighbors, and helps to train the next generation of Christian leaders in Palestine.

For a somewhat longer time, the Ecumenical Travel Service of the Middle East Council of Churches has furnished a carefully-balanced program for groups and individuals who come looking for an in-depth experience in the Holy Land. The ETS (formerly the Ecumenical Travel Office, or ETO) normally tailors such programs to the needs of particular groups, often introducing them to persons and places that are otherwise difficult to reach.

For example, ETS groups go to Gaza almost weekly. There they see the churches' work inside refugee camps, talk with human rights specialists, and observe vocational training centers and well-baby clinics. The Ecumenical Travel Service assists numerous fact-finding groups to contact political leaders of various perspectives in both Palestine and Israel. It also helps scholars and journalists engaged in research and writing.

On a typical "West Bank Day," the ETS will introduce a group to refugees living in the Occupied Territories near Jerusalem, including a visit to a refugee family's home. Not far away, the group will be welcomed by a Jewish settler whose modern community is an example of the high priority that Israel places on the creation of all-Jewish neighborhoods in

the midst of Arab villages that were established centuries ago. The settler will likely explain her or his conviction that the land on which the settlement was built was given by God to their ancient ancestors and that it is the duty of the modern State of Israel to build and protect such settlements "throughout Judea and Samaria," as they call the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The settler's claim—"We Jews have a right to live anywhere in Israel"—ignores international law with respect to the territorial integrity of lands occupied by military force.

Before returning to their hotel, participants will view the fortress-like settlements that encircle Jerusalem—settlements which effectively change the city's population ratios and create "facts on the ground." Israeli officials are candid in explaining that these enormous housing blocks are limited to Jews in order to provide a circle of security around the city and to influence the upcoming final status negotiations. The ETS's practice is to invite Israelis and Palestinians to make their own cases.

The ETS and several other non-governmental organizations have formed an informal network to encourage and promote this kind of alternative tourism. Participating agencies, which include Catholic and Protestant groups from Europe and the United States, stress the importance of balanced travel plans that include historic and religious sites and contact with the three living religions of the Holy Land. The network also encourages Christian travelers to divide their time between Israel and Palestine in order to contribute to the economies of both peoples and to seek an understanding of their competing claims to the land.

This Alternative Travel Network shares with other Christian groups the hope that as religious tourism increases as the Year 2000 approaches, pilgrims will not only have a positive experience in the Holy Land, but they will contribute positively to the yearnings of its peoples for peace and justice. □

## In and Around Bethlehem

# The Places and the People

• **Bethlehem Bible College:** Christian training center for Arabic speaking youth, on Hebron Road near Rachel's Tomb. With help of overseas friends, BBC in 1996 purchased the former Helen Keller building. Graduates become pastors, educators, counselors, youth directors, tour guides.

• **Bethlehem University:** Opened in 1973 in response to Pope Paul VI's request for institutions to improve quality of life in the area. Although frequently closed by Israelis, BU provides professional training for both Christians and Muslims, including a course for tour guides. Conversations with students can be arranged.

• **Christmas Evangelical Lutheran Church:** Up Paul VI Street (through the Suk) from Manger Square. Includes cave-like museum of Palestinian village life, Dar an-Nadwa International Center and Abu Gubran Guest House. The church's creative program includes women's studies, international relations and alternative tourism. A theological academy for west Asia will open at Christmastime, 1999, as part of Bethlehem 2000.

• **Church of the Nativity:** The church dates to Constantinian times (339 A.D.), was rebuilt in 614, restored by Crusaders in 1187; shared by Greek and Armenian Orthodox and Latin Catholics. Church built over ancient grottos believed to have housed the stable and, later, the rooms of St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin.

• **David's Wells:** (2 Sam. 23:15) Cisterns from which water was drawn for the shepherd warrior who became king.

• **Folklore Museum:** On Paul VI Street just off Manger Square. The Arab Women's Union seeks to protect Palestinian culture by collecting and displaying household artifacts in a traditional house. Features photo and clothing exhibits and a showroom where embroidered items are for sale.

• **Milk Grotto:** Church built on chalk-like ground in Bethlehem where, according to tradition, the Holy Family hid during the slaughter of the innocents or

perhaps paused on their flight to Egypt. A drop of milk fell to the ground and turned the local reddish stone to chalky white.

• **Rachel's Tomb:** (Genesis 35: 16-40). A site especially sacred to Jews and Muslims; located on disputed land that includes a Muslim cemetery; currently controlled by Israeli soldiers.

• **Shepherds' Fields:** (Luke 2:8) Three possible locations for biblical event in the village of Beit Sahour are managed by Franciscans, Greek Orthodox and East Jerusalem YMCA. Each has a cave or archaeological site.

• **Wfiam Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center:** Located on Manger Street, the Center has been asked to help mediate 120 conflicts in first seven months of 1996 (as of August 10, 95 of the problems had been resolved). Center also has offered workshops on such topics as the correct ways to treat children, early marriage and its challenges, male domination and female subordination.

### Near Bethlehem

• **Christian cities of Beit Sahour** (site of tax revolt against Israeli occupation) and Beit Jala. Among service institutions in these cities that enjoy the support of Western Christians are Hope School, House of Hope for the Blind and Mentally Handicapped, Talitha Kumi School, the YMCA Rehabilitation Center (where young men whose bones were broken as punishment during the *Intifada* are trained in vocations such as furniture-making), and the Rapprochement Center, where Christians, Muslims and Jews meet for dialogue.

• Several Catholic seminaries, including Cremsan Monastery, known for mountainside vineyards and fine wines. Picturesque Arab villages dot the countryside throughout the area.

• Refugee camps in and near Bethlehem, which are home to 14,000 persons; there also are 18 Jewish settlements in the Bethlehem district.

• Regional historic sites, which

include the ruins of King Herod's mountain fortress, the Herodian (which dominates the skyline); fields of Ruth and Boaz; prophet Amos's village of Tekoa; ancient water reservoirs known as Solomon's Pools; Monastery of St. Theodosius, where tradition says Wise Men were warned "to return by another way;" Mar Saba Monastery in the Judean Desert; and Mar Elias on the road to Jerusalem where, according to tradition, the prophet Elijah rested while fleeing from Jezebel (1 Kings 19).

• **Hebron, 20 miles south of Bethlehem.** Offers the Oaks of Mamre where, it is said, the three angels visited Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18), and the Ibrahim Mosque. Below the mosque is the Cave of the Patriarchs, which was purchased by Abraham as a burial place for Sarah (Genesis 23) and where he was later taken for burial (Genesis 25). Hebron also is known for its glass factories, which are open to visitors. □

## The Cost of a Free Ticket

It is not unusual for pastors and active lay persons to be offered free trips to the Holy Land in exchange for recruiting others to travel with them. The price of the ticket may be appealing ("free") but the cost actually is very high:

• The schedule is pre-planned and often unchangeable.

• The schedule keeps you "running where Jesus walked."

• Your guide may know little about Christianity, and you can seldom change a guide once one has been assigned.

• The choice of sights may neglect your particular interests in favor of more general tourist sites.

• There will be little or no time for you to visit with local Christians, people-to-people, and hear of their concerns and needs.

• All-day trips often are planned for Sundays, precluding your worshipping with local Christians in their churches.

• The guide may "hi-jack" the group to shop at a particular store instead of allowing you to spend time where you

(Continued on page 13)

## Merry Christmas

It was a hot, hot day and the calendar read August, but from the grotto beneath the altar in the Basilica of the Nativity came the strains, "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht."

A group of German pilgrims had reached one of the major destinations of their pilgrimage. They sang in awe and wonder, knelt to kiss the star on the floor under the altar, and then silently climbed up and out of the grotto.

Bethlehem is a city where there is always Christmas—not only on the lips of pilgrims but also in the stores. Locally-carved manger sets and olive wood Christmas tree ornaments, along with post cards, crosses, and mother of pearl boxes, dominate the shops in Manger Square and on the roads leading up to it. Christmas is 365 days a year.

But three times a year Christmas is celebrated officially in the "little town" of Bethlehem—December 25 by the churches following the Western calendar, January 6 by most of the Orthodox, and January 18 by the Armenians.

The most familiar celebration to Americans is the Midnight Mass at St. Catherine's Catholic Church on December 24, largely because it is televised and broadcast worldwide.

(Continued from page 12)  
choose.

- Your hotel may be isolated, so you will have little opportunity to see or do things on your own.

- You may have no opportunity for a "balanced" experience that makes it possible to see both Israel and Palestine and contribute to the economies of both.

- And, worst of all, you will be foregoing the hospitality of local Christians, who long for contact and friendship with other believers. □

## Eed Milad Majeed

But it is not the most familiar to Bethlehem Christians. They can't get tickets. Tickets are only available to outsiders (and to high officials) who apply to the Franciscan Pilgrims' Office in Jerusalem well ahead of time. Local Christians attend the services at their own churches and St. Catherine's parishioners go to Mass on Christmas morning.

Everyone is welcome, however, to join the celebrations in Manger Square on Christmas Eve and even the bagpipe bands of Muslim Scouts join with the Christian marching groups to accompany the processions.

The Square and the surrounding streets are lit with strings of lights and decorated with Palestinian flags and pictures of Yasser Arafat. Choirs from around the world perform on a hastily erected stage; and groups of men form impromptu circles to dance the debka. Then at night the Square is lit by fireworks.

Some groups of pilgrims go to Beit Sahour (the Fields of the Shepherds), a municipality to the east of the town of Bethlehem but still within the Bethlehem District. In ancient caves where shepherds have gathered for centuries and less than a mile from the new Israeli road on confiscated Palestinian land, Christians remember the night when the angels spoke of "peace to all on earth."

It is assumed that at Christmas 1999 and 2000 (the official celebration dates) many of the same

## Shnorhavor Dzenunt

services and ceremonies will take place. The use of the Basilica of the Nativity is regulated by the *Status Quo*, a ruling by the Turkish Court in 1852 to end disputes in the Basilica and Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It has been honored since then by the Christian churches and all of the ruling parties.

However, the other churches in Bethlehem, including the Ethiopian Orthodox, Lutheran, Greek Catholic, Maronite, Syrian Catholic and others, will be challenged to welcome the vast numbers of pilgrims as well.

Visitors who come to Bethlehem then can get information from the Christian Information Center, located just inside the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem. □



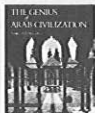
Jack Giacaman in his olive wood factory on Bethlehem's Milk Grotto Street.—Photo by J.M. Bailey.



Bethlehem Merchant Victor Tabash in his shop on Manger Square.—Photo by B.J. Bailey.

# Holiday Gift Suggestions

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- THE SPIRIT OF PALESTINE**, A. Duncan, ed. advisor, 1995, 10½x12½, illustrated, 244 pp., cloth. History of Palestine from 7000 BC to Intifada. List: \$100. AMEU: \$75.



- BEFORE THEIR DIASPORA**, Walid Khalidi, 1991, 351 pp., 9x11, paper. 474 family photos capture the history of Palestine from 1876 to 1948. List: \$29. AMEU: \$24.95.



- FOOD FROM BIBLICAL LANDS**, H. Corey, 1980, 154 pp., 8x10, paper, illus. Typical Arabic menus for each month of the year, adapted for American kitchens. List: \$16.95. AMEU: \$13.50.



- SITTI AND THE CATS**, S. Bahou, 1990, 32 pp., illus., 8x10 cloth. Enchanting fairy tale set in the culture and geography of old Palestine. List: \$13.95. AMEU: \$12.25



- THE DAY OF AHMED'S SECRET**, F. Heide, 1990, 34 pp., illus., 11x9, cloth. Ahmed rushes home through the streets of Cairo anxious to tell a burning secret. List: \$16. AMEU: \$14.50.



- SITTI'S SECRETS**, N. Nye, 1994, 32 pp., illus., 9x10, cloth. Young American girl visits her grandmother in a West Bank village. List: \$19.95. AMEU: \$14.50.



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- PEACE AND ITS DISCONTENTS**, E. Said, 1996, 188 pp., paper. A sometimes devastating critique of Oslo-Cairo accords. List: \$14.95. AMEU: \$13.95.



- IN THEIR SHOES**, G. Halsell, 1996, 200 pp., paper. Author of "Journey to Jerusalem" and several Link articles tells her courageous life story. List: \$14.95. AMEU: \$13.50.



- JERUSALEM: ONE CITY, THREE FAITHS**, K. Armstrong, 1996, 471 pp., cloth. Acclaimed history shows how each faith ruled the Holy City. List: \$29.50. AMEU: \$23.50.



- WARRIORS AT SUEZ**  
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Don Neff's trilogy on the Arab-Israeli wars of 1956, 1967 and 1973 retails for \$39.85. AMEU's price is \$8.25 each, or \$20 for the set of three, regular postage included.



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- **WHO ARE GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST?** G. Burge, 1993, 201 pp., paper. Evangelical Christian discovers new truths about Palestinians. List: \$10.95. AMEU: \$9.50.



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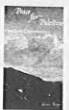
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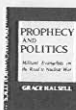
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- **FAITH AND THE INTIFADA**, N. Ateek, et al., 1992, 207 pp., paper. Essays on religious and political identity of Palestinian Christians. List: \$13.95. AMEU: \$10.50.



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