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Palestinian Christians

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In his article published in the current issue of This Week in Palestine, His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah asks: “Who are we Palestinians? Who are we Christian Palestinians? What is our future? Will there be future generations of Christians in this land?” You’ll find the answers in his and other articles that focus on Palestinian Christians, the theme of this month’s issue.

The articles within these pages touch on many topics, such as the alarming rate of emigration by Palestinian Christians. Read Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb’s take on that. Other topics include the breach of the Status Quo with the local churches – an article not to be missed by advocate Ass’ad Mazzawi; the 800-year-old presence of the Custody of the Holy Land, its mission and accomplishments; the Palestinian Christian national movement since the turn of the last century, another must-read article; and many other topics on equality, justice, and actions taken by patriotic Palestinian Christians that challenge the narrative of so-called Christian Zionism.

We also feature two articles authored by exceptional women – Jean Zaru and Cedar Duaybis – who have dedicated their lives to peace and justice. Not only is the issue rich in content, but it is also quite pertinent given that Palestinians continue to be marginalized and that international law is being taken lightly by some.

The TWiP team extends a special thank you to the Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine for sponsoring this issue, and to the Custody of the Holy Land for their support.

In this month’s limelight section, you will read about our Personality of the Month, His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah, and you will get a glimpse into our Book of the Month, Cross in Contexts: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine by Rev. Mitri Raheb and Suzanne Watts Henderson. We recommend that you visit the photo exhibition Bethlehem, Between Sight and Insight, by Elias Halabi at Bab idDeir Gallery, and enjoy Chef Fadi Kattan’s Pain Perdu with Poached Pears. Finally, we invite you to visit Jifna, a village that preserves the presence of ancient Christianity.

We hope you’ll enjoy this unique great issue of This Week in Palestine.

The TWiP Collective
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Palestinian Christians in Modern History

The Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs

The Future of Christian Palestinians

Equality, Justice, and Peace

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Eight Hundred Years as Custodians of the Holy Land

Blood Bonds

“Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness”
The Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs

In light of rising conflicts in the Middle East and their destabilizing regional effects as well as the decrease in Palestine’s Christian population due to the policies of the Israeli occupation, President Mahmoud Abbas formed the Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine (HCC) by a presidential decree issued on May 24, 2012. The committee, which is the first of its kind in the region, was mandated to preserve and protect the indigenous Christian presence in Palestine, the birthplace of Christ, as well as protect and promote the legal rights and properties of Christian institutions and places of worship, including schools and community centers.

The committee members are representatives of several ministries and municipalities working together to advance the principle of full equality for all citizens under the law. The committee performs its responsibilities in accordance with the directives of the Palestinian president and in cooperation with official institutions, and it undertakes these tasks at the local, regional, and international levels.

The committee’s main goal is to curb the worrisome phenomenon of Christian emigration from Palestine because of the Israeli occupation and its pervasive violations of the human rights of Palestinians, including the construction of the separation wall that severely restricts the movement of Palestinians and chokes economic and social life in various key cities such as Jerusalem and Bethlehem. To that end, the committee works to preserve the Christian heritage and presence in the Holy Land through protecting Christian property as well as cultural, community, and religious institutions from Israel’s relentless campaign of illegal expropriation. It also works at the national, regional, and international levels to raise awareness about the history of Christianity in Palestine and the Middle East and its role in the social fiber and cultural heritage of Palestinian national identity, specifically the region’s cultural heritage at large. Locally, the committee also cooperates with the Ministry of Education to review the Palestinian curriculum and ensure that it accurately and sufficiently reflects these historical and cultural facts.

In order to reduce and eventually halt emigration, the HCC is promoting educational, housing, and medical projects as well as creating job opportunities for Palestinian Christians. Several housing projects have recently been established in the Bethlehem governorate for the local Christian communities with the help and support of the HCC. The committee also funded more than 50 restoration projects for churches and social centers that has guaranteed protection of Muslim and Christian holy sites in Palestine for nearly two centuries. This historical arrangement also guarantees the exemption of churches and their institutions, including schools, social centers, hospitals, and health clinics, from paying taxes. By imposing taxes, Israel threatens to close down these institutions, thus endangering the continued presence of Palestine’s indigenous Christian population.

In Jerusalem and by extension its continued presence in the Holy Land, which led to the temporary closure of the Holy Sepulcher Church in Jerusalem, Christianity’s holiest site, to protest serious violations of church property rights.

Other damaging practices that strike at the heart of continued Palestinian Christian presence are legally dubious activities and outright theft of property at Jaffa Gate, the main entrance to the Christian Quarter in Jerusalem’s Old City. In response to these alarming actions, which enjoy the full backing of the Israeli government and judiciary, smartphones, and service the community, in addition to supporting Christian scout groups.

The committee also works to alleviate the devastating impact of Israel’s colonial occupation on the lives, livelihoods, and rights of Palestinian Christians. This includes the unprecedented isolation of Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, which has torn families apart, affected economic activity, and struck at the heart of Palestinians’ right to freedom of worship in a city that is central to their faiths.

Israeli practices are eroding the Status Quo, the historical arrangement that guarantees protection of Muslim and Christian holy sites in Palestine for nearly two centuries. This historical arrangement also guarantees the exemption of churches and their institutions, including schools, social centers, hospitals, and health clinics, from paying taxes. By imposing taxes, Israel threatens to close down these institutions, thus endangering the continued presence of Palestine’s indigenous Christian population.
the HCC is working with community leaders to protect Palestinian Christian properties in Jerusalem. It is also lobbying the international community, particularly countries that define themselves as historical protectors of holy places in Jerusalem, to take concrete measures that would confront these illegal measures.

In this context, the committee decided to form the Jerusalem Committee to follow up on all the cases related to the Christian community in Jerusalem. Most importantly, this committee follows up on the breaches of the historical Status Quo and the seizure of properties that belong to the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem’s Christian Quarter by Israeli settler groups.

The HCC is also very active locally, regionally, and internationally in increasing awareness about the escalating Israeli violations against the Palestinian people and the targeting of the Christian presence in Palestine, especially in Jerusalem. In this context, the committee confronts Israeli actions and narratives that misleadingly portray the conflict as being a religious conflict between Jews and Muslims. To this end, the committee organizes many meetings throughout the world, including the United States, Europe, and Latin America, to highlight these attempts to obscure the fact that this conflict is political in nature and that it is perpetuated by Israel’s refusal to end its colonial regime and its determination to deprive the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights to self-determination and freedom.

These efforts expand the solidarity base in favor of the Palestinian cause and aid in confronting Israel’s plan to alter and permanently change the demographic and cultural identity of Palestine, especially in Jerusalem. They also facilitate networking among churches and build bridges of understanding and cooperation between partners committed to universal human rights as well as to the Christian values in order to advance the cause of Palestinian freedom.

In addition to raising awareness, the committee works tirelessly to recover properties of the Church Endowment that the Israeli occupying power and settlers seek to confiscate and possess. In his most recent visit to Rome in November, Dr. Ramzi Khoury, head of the HCC, met with His Holiness Pope Francis and conveyed President Mahmoud Abbas’ grave concern for the lands confiscated in the Cremisan Valley and the properties of the Greek Orthodox Church seized by Israeli settlers. Dr. Khoury also discussed with His Holiness the committee’s efforts to recover these properties and assist Palestinian churches in protecting them. This message was warmly received by His Holiness, who affirmed the Holy See’s principled position in support of the preservation and protection of Palestinian Christians and ensuring their continued presence in Palestine, as well as its support of their rights in line with international law.

To advance its stated goals and fulfill its mandate, the HCC also assists the State of Palestine’s efforts at the multilateral level. This has included Palestine’s success at UNESCO to inscribe the Church of the Nativity and Pilgrimage Route on the World Heritage List. The site was recently removed from the List of World Heritage under Threat thanks to the Palestinian-led efforts of restoration and preservation. The HCC has also participated in lobbying partners and allies in countries such as Brazil to prevent governments from transferring their embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The HCC is a sincere and organic reflection of Palestine’s culture and national identity as well as its invaluable contribution to humanity as a beacon of religious tolerance and brotherhood. The committee’s work and mandate have served as an inspiration throughout the region and a sign of hope that Palestine’s noble message of peace, shared values, and freedom can and must guide the region to a brighter, more peaceful and hopeful future. This is a source of enormous pride for all the members and partners of the HCC team.
Palestinian Christians in Modern History
Between Migration and Displacement

By Rev. Mitri Raheb

Introduction
The high volume of Christian emigration from Palestine has grave repercussions on the Christian presence in the Holy Land. Several leaders have recognized the gravity of the situation and have warned of the danger of the Holy Land being transformed into a kind of Christian theme park, stripped of its authentic Christian inhabitants. In truth, there is no exaggeration in that warning. After all, the dwindling Christian population of historical Palestine makes up, at best, no more than 1.7 percent of the total population today, including the Christian population in Israel as well as in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

With the aim to understand how this phenomenon of Christian migration from Palestine developed, I resolved to study the various circumstances that led to the current decline through an entire century based mainly on the official censuses conducting by the Ottomans in 1905, by the British in 1922 and 1931, by the Jordanians in 1961, by the Israeli military occupation in 1967, by the Palestinians in 2007 and 2017, and by the Israelis in several years between 1949 and 2011.

Christian migration in the Ottoman period
Up until the year 1917, Palestine was an inseparable part of the expansive Ottoman Empire, and residents, whether Muslim or Christian, were free to move in and out of the empire. Between the years 1860 and 1914, Ottoman estimates indicate that Christians constituted around 11 percent of the population in Palestine.

During the last three decades of the Ottoman Empire, Christian migration from Palestine became a significant component of the larger regional migration as up to one million migrants from the region left for North and South America. Some historians supposed that the reasons for leaving included financial ambition and the desire to escape the poverty and illness that infected the region at the time. Other accounts demonstrated that while Christians during the Ottoman period were exempt from serving in the army in return for paying the jizya tax, the Young Turks, who assumed power in 1908, sought to integrate Christians into the army.

What distinguishes the migration of Christians from Palestine is that the notion of the “Holy Land” was coming to prominence during this era. This led to a sharp increase in the sale of “Holy Land” crafts by Palestinian immigrants to religious pilgrims at home and abroad. Emigration thus increased so much, in fact, that during the ten years prior to World War I, Bethlehem lost half its population, dropping from 12,000 inhabitants to a population of 6,000. There has been speculation that 13 percent of the Christians from Palestine migrated between 1907 and 1917.

Even though the main motive for emigration – to escape the compulsory conscription in the army – was no longer effective after the end of World War I and the start of the British Mandate in Palestine, policies restricted Palestinians who had emigrated from returning to their home country. At the end of World War I, the number of Christian Palestinians was recorded as 8 percent of the total population.

The Palestinian displacement of 1948 (Nakba)
Whereas the first wave of immigration may have been somewhat by choice, the second wave of Palestinian displacement from the land was coercive. As a result of the 1948 catastrophe and its destruction of more than 420 villages, more than 700,000 Palestinians were forcibly evicted from their homes, soon to become refugees in what remained of Palestine and the surrounding region. Today, the number of Palestinian refugees has reached more than 6 million; the largest number of refugees in the world.

The 1948 Nakba had an immense and specific impact on Palestinian Christians. In a matter of months, almost 50,000 Christians out of 135,000 were displaced. Their numbers, which had constituted 8 percent of the population (in the previous year) dwindled to a shocking 2.8 percent after the Nakba. This left a most devastating blow on Christians in Palestine from which they have not recovered. Much like the situation under the British Mandate, Israeli authorities prohibited the return of Palestinians to their homes. The study conducted by the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem may give us deeper insight into the profundity of the tragedy for Christian Palestinians. In a census conducted by Rev. Elias Shihadeh Khoury in 1950, we find that the number of Lutherans in Bethlehem during that year reached 528 members, two thirds of whom were expelled in 1948. The remaining third did not stay in Bethlehem either; more than 50 percent withdrew to Jordan after the Naksa in 1967.

The Christian Palestinians of the diaspora maintained strong bonds and religious ties with their families in the West Bank, yet the study of the Christmas Church demonstrates that after the occupation of...
1967 (Naksa), Christians from Palestine ultimately lost not only their right of return but also the right to visit their families in the West Bank.

Migration during the Jordanian period

The period of Jordanian rule in Palestine between the years 1949 and 1967 witnessed an escalation of internal migration from the West Bank to the East Bank. The new emerging Kingdom of Jordan was eager to build its capital Amman; and for that reason, it needed educated persons and skilled labor, which were found in the larger Jerusalem area between Ramallah and Bethlehem. On the other hand, the Gulf region and other oil-producing countries were growing fast and also needed educated people and skilled labor, and they turned to Palestine to find them. Studies indicate that between 1952 and 1961, almost 15–22 percent of West Bank inhabitants left their homes, and between 1961 and 1967, this number was reduced to nearly 11–16 percent.

More specifically, the number of Christians in the West Bank declined from 42,618 in 1961 to 29,446 – which means that one-third of Palestinian Christians left the West Bank, and their percentage dropped from 5.8 percent to 4.9 percent.

The impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian Christian migration

The pressures of the Israeli occupation obviously amplified obstacles and led to a fourth wave of Christian emigration. The enforcement of people and the ongoing constraints, discriminatory policies, arbitrary arrests, and confiscation of land added to the general sense of hopelessness amidst wars and destruction throughout the region. In this era, most Christian Palestinians set their sights on Europe, the United States, and Canada as potential places to find refuge.

In this section, I will discuss three studies that we conducted during the last twelve years. The first is a study we prepared in 2008 on Christian Palestinians in the West Bank. The second is a study on Christian Arabs inside the Green Line (Israel) that we prepared in 2012. And the third is a more recent study that includes an opinion poll implemented in 2017.

In 2017, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics census demonstrated that the total population of Christian Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip combined was around 47,000. In our first study, conducted in the year 2008, the causes of Christian emigration were indicated as follows:
- Almost a third (32.6 percent) opted to emigrate due to the loss of freedom and absence of safety amidst the occupation, making the Israeli occupation the first and foremost reason for departure.
- Almost a fourth (26.4 percent) left because of the deteriorating economic conditions.
- Around a fifth (19.7 percent) succumbed to the option of emigration due to political unrest, especially during and after the second Intifada.
- More than a tenth (12.6 percent) took off for the pursuit of education. This is not a small percentage of youth intellect and should not be underestimated.
- Only less than half of one percent (0.3 percent) were motivated to leave for religious purposes. This percentage is so small that it dismisses as irrelevant the premise of religion as a cause for emigration.

The 2012 study demonstrated that the causes of the emigration of Christian Palestinians within the Green Line were numerous. Israeli military laws that were in practice between the years 1948 and 1966 had preemptive measures that isolated Palestinians, restricted their freedom of movement, and prevented their access to the labor market. In addition, discriminatory Israeli policies obstructed Palestinians from pursuing certain academic degrees in such fields as medicine, science, technology, research, and security-related fields, prompting many Palestinians in Israel to pursue their education abroad. Israeli employment policies that discriminated against Arab Palestinians saddled them with economic challenges, and the unceasing Israeli-Arab conflict and absence of any feasible solution put Palestinians in a continuously strenuous situation.

The most recent study on the emigration of Christians was conducted in 2017 and included a sample of 530 Palestinian Christians and 500 Palestinian Muslims. This study is the first of its kind to include Palestinian Christians and Muslims alike.

It is disturbing to acknowledge the high percentage of Christian respondents who are considering emigration: 28 percent in general, and 47 percent in Gaza, which is especially high in relation to the West Bank which is 25 percent. The estimates among Muslims are slightly lower: 24 percent in general, 27 percent in Gaza, and 23 percent in the West Bank.

The two main reasons for considering emigration are political instability and the economic situation, which is the dominating factor at 64 percent among Christians and 72 percent among Muslims. In contrast, the number one reason for staying in the country and not considering moving abroad is the Palestinian sense of determination to resist. 41 percent of Christian respondents and 49 percent of Muslim respondents expressed that perseverance is their reason to stay.

Conclusion

The steady decline of Christians in the Middle East and specifically in Palestine is a troublesome matter, and it has hazardous repercussions not only on the Palestinian Christian community but on the entire society as well. Without the presence of the Christian Palestinian people, the Holy Land – the land of origin of the Christian faith – would become little more than a mere site that contains old ruins and empty churches and buildings.

The Christian departure from Palestine deprives the country of a spectacular 1,400-year interfaith heritage. To squander such an exceptional foundation would be to lose a glorious and expansive cultural heritage. If Christians disappear from Palestine, Palestinian society would lose a very important ingredient of its religious and cultural tapestry that has safeguarded the pluralistic nature of Palestine, making it a bridge between the Arab-Islamic and Western worlds.

This article is based on Palestinian Christians: Emigration, Displacement, and Diaspora, by Mitri Raheb, Diyar Publisher, 2017.

Dr. Mitri Raheb is the founder and president of Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture in Bethlehem. Having published 16 books, Rev. Raheb is the most widely published Palestinian theologian to date. A social entrepreneur, he also founded Dar Annadwa Cultural and Conference Center, in addition to several other civic initiatives on national, regional, and international levels. Rev. Raheb is the recipient of the 2015 Olof Palme Prize for his courageous and indefatigable fight against occupation and violence. He holds a doctorate in theology from Philipps University of Marburg, Germany. He is married to Najwa Khoury and has two daughters, Dana and Tala. For more information, visit www.mitriraheb.org.

Dr. Mitri Raheb, Diyar Publisher, 2017.
Eight Hundred Years as Custodians of the Holy Land

By Francesco Patton, OFM

During the past two years, we Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land have been celebrating the 800th anniversary of the arrival of the first brothers, which took place in 1217. This year is particularly significant for us and for the entire Christian community because it marks the 800th anniversary of the pilgrimage of peace that Saint Francis of Assisi made to the Holy Land in 1219.

Prior to visiting the holy places in Palestine, Saint Francis crossed the firing line of the combatting armies of the Franks and Arabs and then went on to meet with the Sultan of Egypt. The encounter between Saint Francis and Sultan Al-Malik al-Kamil in Damietta, Egypt is engrained in our minds because it was a meeting of peace and heralded the beginning of a dialogue between believers of different cultures and faiths. As a result of this meeting, Saint Francis was able to visit the Holy Land and make a unique pilgrimage to the various holy places that turned out to be a spiritual experience that touched his heart and soul.

This pilgrimage marked the beginning of our presence as custodians of the Holy Land given that Saint Francis is our founder. We find our way of life summarized in Chapter XVI of the First Rule of life, written for us by Saint Francis. He reminds us that in our day-to-day lives, we should not quarrel or enter into disputes but be witnesses to every human creature of the love of God and confess that we are Christian.

In 1342, we received the official mandate by Pope Clement VI to be custodians of the Christian holy places – in other words, to live and worship in the places that remind us of the life and Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The pope also asked us to be an international brotherhood able to take care of the local Christians as well as the pilgrims who come from many different countries. Our centuries-old mandate is quite diverse and spread out; our communities exist in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Rhodes, Egypt, Italy, and outside the Mediterranean region.

Our international brotherhood consists of about 300 brothers who come from 45 different countries. We try to live the Franciscan life, which is first and foremost an evangelical life of prayer and fraternity at the service of the church and the people.

The activities that characterize our mission are many. First, as custodians of Christianity’s holy places, we welcome pilgrims – both local and international – and provide opportunities for them to

nourish their faith and read the Gospel in places dedicated to such spiritual experiences. In addition, and in order to better serve the pilgrims, the custody provides affordable lodging at various Casa Nova guesthouses in important cities such as Bethlehem, Jerusalem,

and Nazareth. We also offer pastoral services in Roman Catholic parishes, and thus we take care of the “living stones,” the Christians of the Holy Land who live here and in adjacent countries and who often face great challenges.

Furthermore, we have a strong commitment to the field of education. Our 18 schools are recognized as a model of coexistence and interreligious harmony. We welcome 10,000 Christian and Muslim students to live and study together in friendship.
and peace. We should also mention the contributions of our cultural study centers, namely the Studium Theologicum Jerusolymitanum, which offers a BA degree in theology studies, the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum of the Flagellation, which offers master's and PhD degrees in Biblical studies, and the Muski Center in Cairo for Oriental Christian Studies.

We have launched the Terra Sancta Museum project in order to illustrate the Christian identity of Jerusalem, side by side with its Jewish and Islamic identities. The museum includes a multimedia section that is already functional, an archaeological section, partially opened in June, and a historical section, whose preparation is already under way.

We take pride in the Magnificat Institute, a music school that is open to young people of all faiths who appreciate music and demonstrate a special talent in this field.

Very important also is our effort in the field of social work, through which we try to sustain the Christian presence in the Holy Land by creating job opportunities and offering apartments for local Christians. During these last years, we have intensified our commitment in Syria, which is a land that is particularly important for the history of Christianity, since it was on the road to Damascus that Saint Paul was called by the risen Lord to be the Apostle to the Nations; and it was from Syria that the Gospel spread in an extraordinary movement of evangelization to all the world.

The occasion of the eighth centenary of the pilgrimage of peace and of our 800 years of peaceful presence have helped us to reap the benefits and appreciate the prophetic vision of engagement between people of different civilizations and faiths. The approach of Saint Francis invites us all to enter into dialogue with others in order to cultivate a sense of harmony. For us, to be custodians means to take care of places and people.

Francesco Patton is the Custos of the Holy Land.
Blood Bonds
Palestinian Christian-Muslim Common Heritage

By Ali Qleibo

“God Speaks Aramaic!” insisted Gilda.

“God Speaks Arabic,” my sister countered.

Gaby and I silently followed the morning chatter between his sister Gilda and my sister Suhad as we whiled away the time waiting for the school bus. I was barely seven years old.

“The Lord spoke our language, and we shall be the first to gain admittance to heaven,” Gilda persisted.

“No, Allah speaks Arabic,” my sister Suhad would contend.

“The Qur’an is in Arabic, and it is the language of God in heaven.”

“We will be the first ushered into heaven, for Arabic is the spoken language in paradise!”

The girls’ prattle would end when the voice of Diana, Gilda’s older sister, broke into loud sobs, marking the end of her daily morning row with her father. Every morning Diana, 12 years old, mounted the same scene. She wanted a horse.

“Dad refuses to buy her a horse,” Gilda sadly explained.

“Where would we put it?”

For the past century, Jerusalem has stood apart from the rest of Palestine with its distinctive cosmopolitan character. From all over Palestine, parents would send off their children to Jerusalem’s boarding schools. For the girls, there were many options: Schmidt School, the Sisters of Zion, the Rosary Sisters, the Jerusalem Girls’ College, etc. The boys would invariably be sent to the Frères School, Terra Santa, or St. George. Ours was not the first Muslim generation in missionary schools. In fact, I was registered there by my grandfather, Jacob Nusseibeh, himself a graduate of the Frères high school, a student of the famous biblical archaeologist William Foxwell Albright. In fact, he is one of the Muslim custodians of the key to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, an honor that the Nusseibehs have passed on from father to son, as they were the first noble patrician Arab family from Medina to settle in Jerusalem in the seventh century.

We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our Allah and your Allah is One, and unto Him we surrender. Al-Qur’an29/46

We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma’il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we bow to Allah (in Islam). Al-Qur’an 136/2

Jacob Nusseibeh, my grandfather, is a member of one of the two Muslim families that are custodians of the key to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, an honor that the Nusseibehs have passed on from father to son, as they were the first noble patrician Arab family from Medina to settle in Jerusalem in the seventh century.

Baudelaire, Keats, and Wordsworth; Moliere, Racine, and Shakespeare; Charles Dickens, the Brontës, and D.H. Lawrence infused our lives with compassion and the lust for life and meaning.

The overall education, occupational pursuits, economic conditions, and way of life of the Jerusalemites encapsulate the profile of the Palestinian-Arab
middle class: bourgeois, generally well-educated, with an occupational structure similar to that of the new classes that began to emerge in the West starting in the late-eighteenth century. Cultured, professional, relatively well-off individuals lived communally. They tended to share common interests, often having common values and beliefs, as well as shared property, possessions, resources, and, in some cases, work, income, or assets.

“My mother, God bless her soul, never stopped talking of Hussein Qleibo,” my friend Nora Qort reminisced nostalgically. “He was the best friend of my uncle Habib. They bought the same panned-collar-style shirts together, the same cufflinks, and even the same house crockery on which they put the family initials.” Nora continued, “All is preserved in the museum Wujud.”

Throughout my life, my father talked fondly of his good friend Habib Qort. They spent all their time together and shared their love of music. Dad played the piano and had a good voice, and Zahieh, Nora’s mother, was a proficient pianist endowed with a good voice. Love of music is binding, and the friendship deepened with time. Home visits were joyful moments of piano and songs. Communal Christian-Muslim social life before the loss of Palestine, prior to Al-Nakba, had a different timbre. People had more leisurely time, and human relations were highly valued and cherished. When Habib died prematurely, my father, as was customary, assumed a protective role towards Zahieh. He matched his friend Samaan Qort, who was the director of the modern printing press in Dar al-Ayatam (the Muslim orphanage) with Nora’s mother.

“My father, Samaan Qort, though from the same family, was a distant relative and a close friend of your father… it was a perfect match!”

Nijmeh Kharoufah was another close friend of my father. A major enterpriser during the British Mandate, she was the first to market Palestinian embroidery as folk art for tourists to buy. Her shop on Sweqet Allun (David Street), still run by her nephews, was across from my father’s shop where he traded wholesale with flour, rice, and sugar.

Next to Nijmeh Kharoufah was the famous shop of Havelio, celebrated for its halawa and luqom (Turkish delights). Mr. Havelio, an observant Palestinian Jew, used to buy his sugar from my father. His son Abraham, who passed away in his late nineties a few years ago, adopted us as family friends after Al-Naksa. He once showed me the receipts for the transactions of sugar purchases, filled out and signed by my cousin Aref Qleibo who did the family accounting.

“Muslims and Greek Orthodox Christians (al-Rum) were close to each other because both were Oriental,” Nora explained. As I listened to her, I remembered the words of Mr. Havelio. He had said that it was easier for the Jews to become friends with Muslims and visit them at home since Muslims do not have crosses on the wall… and because of the shared concept of halal and kosher food.

“Should we have to walk to the Christian Quarter from Suq Khan al-Zeit, we would avoid passing the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, though it is a shortcut, and would go around the long way from Al-Dabbagha.” Havelio’s words echoed as I listened to Nora.

Muslims, on the other hand, felt at ease with the cross and the church. Jesus, after all, is a recognized and deferred-to prophet – a precursor of Mohammad – and the Virgin is hallowed and selected above all women in the Qur’an.

The villa in which lived Nijmeh and her sister, a famous couturier of the period, stands in testimony to their great affluence. Though they hail from Beit Jala, the two independent ladies amassed great wealth and built a villa of palatial dimensions in Qatamon. Religious affiliation was not an issue that my father spoke of. I did not know Nijmeh was Christian until years later when Abraham Havelio told me.

“People become friends because they have common interests, shared values, and similar lifestyles,” my dear friend Monica Awad pointed out. The fact that one goes to a church or to a mosque is a minor detail. “Communal Christian-Muslim life was based on a common life, with common objectives and common interests in a small homogenous society.” She concluded, “You are not my friend because you are Muslim, you are my friend because of all the details we have in common!”

Under Israeli military occupation, Jerusalem has undergone a radical demographic transformation that parallels both the expansion of the municipal boundaries of East Jerusalem, an unprecedented rise in the economic standard of living of its Palestinian residents, and the corresponding deployment of heterogeneous ethnic lifestyles.
After the Six-Day War, the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem expanded southward and northward. Greater Jerusalem has been extended to include 28 villages, from Isawiyeh in the north to the villages of Silwan, Abu Tor, Jabal al-Mukaber, and Sur Baher in the south, to name a few. Correspondingly, the demography of Jerusalem changed drastically. In the Israeli economic context, extensive employment opportunities have leveled the socioeconomic and cultural barriers between the traditional Palestinian aristocracy and, some say, haughty bourgeois population on the one hand, and the impoverished Arab peasants and Bedouins in the adjacent villages, on the other.

The combination of a heterogeneous, multicultural ethnic identity, a socioeconomically mobile middle class composed of migrants from Mount Hebron, and the Bedouin and peasant communities from the 23 Palestinian villages that comprise greater Jerusalem, has emerged and dissolved the once closed, homogeneous Jerusalem Arab bourgeois society to become a modern ethnically heterogeneous city. Fifty years after al-Nakseh, or the 1967 Six-Day War, greater East Jerusalem has become a multicultural city. The indigenous educated professional and Western-oriented middle class sustained the greatest blow. “The brain drain” and the massive middle-class urban emigration consequent to the fall of West Jerusalem in 1948 is one of the main causes underlying the drastic transformation of the elite and bourgeois character of Jerusalem. In the nationalist opposition to the Israeli occupation, both religions have been politically instrumentalized to the extent that the Christian community and the Muslim community have developed distinct resistance discourses. Mediocre academicians and theologians found fertile ground in advancing the malaise of their respective ethnic religious by highlighting their own grievances under occupation thereby inadvertently fostering the rift between the Christian and Muslim, presenting each group as having its own separate threats!

Throughout history, religion among Palestinians was merely an element of individual identity but never a defining element. Before the Nakba, Jerusalem was a small city composed of a relatively homogeneous closely knit Christian-Muslim community. Since Jerusalem was economically prosperous, the Arab population lived in general conviviality. Christians and Muslims worked together, held common interests and common values, and lived together. Few cosmopolitan bourgeois Jerusalemites stayed steadfast in their hometown. Estranged, the few that have remained are dinosaurs, an endangered species. We have become a minority in our hometown.

“All is lost. Palestine is lost,” Nora lamented.

Saint George/al-Khader strikes deep roots in the Palestinian psyche, testifying to our common primordial Canaanite roots. The churches in the town of Al-Khader, south of Bethlehem where St. George lived, and in Lydda, where he was born, attract Muslim and Christian supplicants alike. In a country where often the sacred spaces belong to one religious community to the exclusion of the other, the Saint George churches remain an exception because of his exalted position to both groups. Neither the Christian nor the Muslim narratives succeeded in eradicating the native Palestinian psycho-religious attachment to and devotional rituals surrounding the Canaanite rider of the clouds, the god of thunder, rain, and fertility. The different forms of ancient Semitic blood sacrifices survived until modernity as acts of devotion to al-Khader/Saint George. Ironically, while al-Khader is revered by Muslims as a holy man (ويلي), the Christians see him as a saint. Whereas, in the Ottoman period, a separate mosque was annexed to his tomb in Lod, Muslim supplicants perceive the Greek Church in the town of Al-Khader as a maqam, a Muslim sanctuary.

This same church in Al-Khader, southwest of Bethlehem, was the favored site for baptisms and circumcisions by Christians and
Muslims alike. In 1848, following the restoration of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, a priest wrote about his concern that Palestinian Christians could not be distinguished from Muslims. A Christian was distinguished only by the fact that he or she belonged to a particular clan, he noted. If a certain tribe was Christian, then individuals belonging to that tribe would be Christian, but without knowing what distinguished their faith from that of Muslims. Indeed, the situation was confusing: Many Muslims even had their children baptized at Al-Khader because tradition maintained that a child baptized there would be strong.

Unfortunately, anthropologists often arrive too late to the scene. The priest’s main concern, namely, to save souls, precluded ethnographic research. Who, how, and with which words did Muslims baptize and Christians circumcise at Al-Khader are questions that remain veiled in mystery. The thick description of their worldview did not interest the priest but was viewed with a sense of alarm. A century and a half later, the information can be partially recovered through the recollections of the grandchildren through individually conducted interviews. Since then, both the church and Muslim orthodoxy have penetrated the countryside. Nowadays a Muslim sacrifice to Saint George is considered *shirk* (شرك), a form of idolatry. The various forms of pagan rituals of blood sacrifice, such as burning the blood sacrifice, are now abandoned. Only one kind of Christian *thabihah* has survived wherein the entire sacrificial lamb is donated to an orphanage or a home for the aged. The blood of the sacrifice is considered blessed, and both Christians and Muslims dab their palms in the blood to bless the entrance of a house with their handprint, using the talismanic number five to ward off evil.

On the way to Dura, I dropped by to see my old friend, Um Nassar, in Beit Ummar. Though already April, it was cold, and despite my numerous winter visits, I was led for the first time into the living room. On the wall there was a picture of the Virgin carrying baby Jesus!

“I thought you were Muslim!” Anthropologists can’t be shy. The 86-year-old lady smiled timidly. “We used to be Christian … and it feels good to have the Virgin Mary,” her daughter said matter-of-factly.

“Our ancestors on mother’s side came with the Second Crusade in the twelfth century. They were two brothers. One stayed in Nablus and remained Christian. His brother, our grandfather, came south and became Muslim,” her nephew Walid explained.

“It has been a long time. I was getting worried.” Um Nassar was happy to see me. “My son wants you to visit him in his house. Let’s have our coffee there.”

We drove through the back streets of the village. I saw a sanctuary…

“It is *Matta* (Arabic for Matthew).” Um Nassar recited the *Fatiha*, a verse from the Quran, as we passed.

**Anthropologist, author artist Dr. Ali Qleibo** has lectured at Al-Quds University, held a fellowship at Shalom Hartman Institute, and was a visiting professor at Tokyo University for Foreign Studies and Kyoto University in Japan. Dr. Qleibo has authored numerous books on Jerusalem and its history. A renowned oil painter, his works have been on display in a variety of exhibitions and art shows. He may be reached at aqleibo@yahoo.com.
The Future of Christian Palestinians

By Patriarch Michel Sabbah

Who are we Palestinians? We are those who have lived in Palestine generation after generation, through the change of conquerors, states, and regimes. Who we are today is who we were yesterday. The entire history of this land named Palestine, or Israel, or Canaan, or whatever, is our history. We are the Palestine of today, yesterday, and tomorrow.

Who are we Christian Palestinians? We are very simply Palestinians who are believers in Jesus Christ. Our faith goes back to the days when Jesus himself was here in this land. We were all born here in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Here is our faith and our history. Christian Palestine is also a part of the history of all Palestinians – Christians, Muslims, Jews, or Samaritans (the small community that is still present today in the Palestinian city of Nablus). The history of each is the history of all because all Palestinians belong to all of Palestine, to the land as well as to the history and its various religions. At the time of Jesus Christ, we spoke the same language as Jesus – Syriac or Aramaic – with all the people of Greater Syria. Then we spoke Greek, with the Byzantine Roman empire. Then we spoke Arabic after the Muslim Arab conquest. Palestinian Muslims today were largely the same Syriac (or Greek) Christians who converted to Islam. Christians and Muslims, we belonged and we still belong to the same people and share the same history.

What is our future? Will there be Christians here in future generations? Many Western writers, even church people, think that our churches will become museums in the near future. Yet, I firmly believe that this will not be our fate. We will remain a living community, always in number and that they should not be afraid: “Do not be afraid, little flock” (Lk 12:32). “Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid” (Jn 14:27). It is true that numbers are important for nations and armies, but for the power of God, and for the spirit, it is not the law of numbers that prevails but rather the law of the spirit that “blows wherever it wants” (Jn 3:8). When we need numbers, we find them in the nation, with all the citizens.

Our future is the same as the future of all Palestinians and depends on the continuing struggle with Israel and Western politics. Physically, our death or our life, or our emigration, as Palestinians and as Christian Palestinians, depends on this ongoing struggle. Where this struggle will lead us, we do not know. Not even the strong and powerful in this land know where they are heading. They say that they are in search of security, but instead, they are heading towards more insecurity. And this will mean more insecurity for us as well.
Many make a direct link between our near disappearance and the relations between Muslims and Christians. For 14 centuries we have lived together and experienced both good and bad days. We have reached a certain equilibrium, a mutual acceptance and cooperation. We have not yet reached perfect coexistence, but we are walking in the right direction. In the midst of this consistent stride towards accepting each other, religious extremism and fanaticism have surfaced among Muslims and Christians. ISIS and its impact on Muslim society is an expression of this. Here, we must ask the important question: Who is responsible for this timely apparition of religious extremism? We know that there are seeds of sectarianism in the depths of the soul of every believer, Muslim, Christian, and others. There is a violent instinct to defend religion even with bloody wars. We have seen it frequently in human history, and in Christian history as well. It is strange how the most benevolent power in the hands of humans, namely their relationship with God, allegedly a fountain of all goodness, could be transformed by believers into a power of destruction and death. We know that the seeds of this behavior are present in each of us, latent, ready to be awakened by anyone who wants to use or abuse them. And now we must ask: Who has awakened them, who has exploited them as a means of destruction in the Middle East? The same ones who pretend today to fight against extremism. They have awakened this destructive power in believers. The same Western politicians who want to reshuffle the Middle East, after having unsettled it, have exploited this hidden force in the region. ISIS is a terrible scourge. But those who created it are an even greater threat.

Today, we are facing perils, political instability, and forced emigration. One of the most dangerous factors is the politics of the West in conjunction with the politics of Israel. The people in the West today – Christians, believers, and nonbelievers – are good, friendly human beings. But there is also a “murderous” political West, bent on creating a new Middle East, whatever the cost may be. For these Western politicians, Christians do not exist; whether we live or die does not matter to them. Since the creation of the state of Israel, this political West believes that the Middle East must adapt to this new reality, which means that we and the region must adapt to death, civil wars, and confusion. In Palestine, we have to adapt to settlements, destruction of agriculture, confiscation of land, house demolitions, arrests, political prisoners, the siege of Gaza, etc. All this belongs to the domain of death. But death cannot produce anything other than death – even for those who inflict it. If the murderous West wants life, it must change its politics in the region into a politics of life. Our future, to exist or not, depends on the West’s politics of death or life. The “good” West should ask, resist, and educate its leaders in order to create a new West, a West that believes more in humanity and the capacity to be good, respecting the equality and human dignity of peoples all over the world, rather than awakening death among them. Sadly, our future seems to be overshadowed by the reality of death. However, we remind all people, the strong as well as the weak, that not so long ago, other deadly powers appeared, in the West to be precise, and then disappeared.

What is the future of Christian Palestinians? Despite all the difficulties mentioned above, it is up to us to rely on ourselves, to know who we are and what we want. Our belief in Jesus Christ will give us strength in this endeavor. For Jesus said: “In truth I tell you, if your faith is the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain: move from here to there, and it will move; nothing will
be impossible for you” (Mt 17:20; Mk 9:29; Lk 17:6). Jesus also said: “In all truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works” (Jn 14:12). Jesus said that we have the power to move mountains, which means that we have the power to change situations and conditions of life, regardless of the power of evil and destruction that threatens us. This means having a new vision of ourselves, entering a new period in our history, beginning a new life, while remaining strong within our present reality of struggle, oppression, and death. Moreover, we Christians are not alone in our society; we can find a spirit of cooperation among our fellow citizens and in the universal human community. The struggle is the same for all. Christian Palestinians, all Palestinians, and all people of good will should unite their efforts in order to create a more human community, here in this Holy Land, in the West, and all over the world.
Equality, Justice, and Peace
A Personal Journey

By Jean Zaru

My spirituality is based on equality, human dignity, and human rights. So, as a Palestinian woman struggling to transform structures of violence and domination, I find that all struggles for justice are interrelated.

I started this journey with others and for others in order to achieve some of these goals. It has been a long journey, but we have not been deterred by physical pain, anxiety, or hurt. We have wanted to affirm life by upholding the ideals of equality, human dignity, and human rights at the national, political, economic, social, cultural, religious, and environmental levels. Sometimes the pain of sexism is eclipsed by the lack of national liberation, but it is crucial to remember that we, as Palestinians, cannot become free if women are not free.

Some women think that they are adequately involved in society through the services they offer in their homes as well as through various jobs within their communities. But is it truly enough to serve without being part of the decision-making processes at work, in church, and in society as a whole? When it comes to their own rights, many women have not yet experienced an awakened conscience, which is why they continue to participate in and reinforce the structures of injustice.

The call for justice is heard everywhere. It is neither an empty slogan nor a liturgical anthem. Rather, it is a cry from the heart, a cry out of humiliation and oppression, and a cry for a new future — to begin immediately.

Will our religious structures or our churches hear the cry for liberation and suffer with those who suffer?

Many people had hoped that decades of solidarity with women encouraged by the United Nations and the churches would lead to radical transformation of our societies and a positive change in the situation of women who suffer from poverty, economic exploitation, sexism, racism, and violence. The sad truth, however, is that not much has changed. In fact, most women today face more difficult conditions than they did 15 or 20 years ago in many parts of the world because of poverty and war, such as that waged against Gaza and the wars in many other countries in the Middle East.

I have learned that the struggle for justice is one struggle, and that an action taken to defend or strengthen human rights in one place is an action on behalf of people everywhere. I now understand that our global responsibilities and relationships have a focal point, and no matter where we live, we can work for human rights.

A kinship is formed as we create a prototype of a new community that knows no national, racial, gender, or sexual boundaries.

We should also be aware that religion, in both its progressive and reactionary forms, has entered into and shaped almost every major crisis in our world, and it has influenced our daily lives as well. On the progressive side, there are activists and peace movements that work for a radical alliance with the poor and the oppressed. On the reactionary side, narrowness and chauvinism in every religious tradition easily allies itself with chauvinistic national movements. Religion is a problem in cases where its structures of dominance have oppressed Palestinians, in general, and women, in particular. But religion has also been a solution when its vision of liberation and equality has generated powerful movements for political, social, and economic change.
The women’s movement for liberation, both locally and globally, has touched me most deeply and has forced me to change since I believe that women’s roles and status lie at the heart of every society.

We have so much work to do in order to unlearn what we have learned. We need to look out from different windows, which is not always simple to do. Given the way that women educate and raise their families, women themselves often seem to reinforce structures of injustice. Instead of utilizing the resources of co-powering and cooperation, women often use their power to dominate and coerce, which leads to the oppression and marginalization of others. Power, however, can be used in a constructive way to control one’s life and to influence one’s community to act justly.

Sexism is not only a sin against women; it is a sin against God who created us as equals.

Unless we are sustained by a commitment and a spirituality that is deeper than the ethics of revolution alone, this journey of struggle to change for the better, to transform ourselves and our societies, can lead to fatigue and burnout. The act of helping or redeeming a human being created in the image of God is a redemptive act, especially for women. It is an act to reclaim one’s lost wholeness and sense of self-worth. Freedom is not a new theme in Christian theology. The gospel itself is a message of liberation in Jesus Christ. It is good news to all people in every situation and in every place of internal and external oppression. Situations may vary, but all of us want to be alive and free. We all struggle for the freedom to shape our own future and participate in the search for what it means to be children of God.

Palestinian women live and work in a very traditional society where the “do’s” and “don’ts” for women are made very clear. Often our ministry depends on how well we conform to the expectations of our own people. If we don’t meet these expectations, our ministry is not validated or even taken seriously. Unfortunately, most people cannot look beyond the superficial. So, if I have any truth to communicate, I have to be careful not to lose the respect of the community. I therefore live my life in my traditional society on one hand, and in the ongoing, ever-changing world, on the other.

The women of Palestine are often referred to as the “glue of our society.” We are the ones who hold together our families, while our husbands, brothers, and sons are in prison, deported, wounded, or killed, or perhaps have migrated for economic or political reasons. As partners, we continue to be critically involved in a mostly nonviolent struggle. We continue to work, support, and build for a new future that, through our liberation, will liberate the entire Middle East and all of humanity. It is this hope that inspires us and leads us. It is this hope that will turn the sufferings into a new dawn for all humanity. And it is this hope that allows us to see the image of God in everyone.

Jean Zaru serves as the Presiding Clerk of the Religious Society of Friends. A teacher of ethics and religion, Jean is one of the founding members of Sabeel and has been the vice president of its board for 25 years. She has served on the boards of many local and international institutions and has published many articles and a book, Occupied with Nonviolence: a Palestinian Woman Speaks.
A Breach of the Status Quo
Imposing Taxes on Church Properties

By Ass‘ad Mazzawi

his past summer has witnessed an uproar among the Christian community in Jerusalem as well as in the rest of the Holy Land caused by a sequence of aggressive motions by Israel that threaten the genuine and authentic Christian presence in the Holy Land. These motions were conducted by some influential Israeli political activists, members of the Knesset (parliament), and government ministers who all aimed to impose restrictions and financial burdens that would cripple Jerusalem churches and their flocks.

In an unprecedented move that was seen as a breach of the Status Quo of the Holy City, the Israeli municipality of Jerusalem attempted to impose on churches retroactive property taxes (Arnona) worth tens of millions of dollars that would bankrupt the Christian institutions of Jerusalem. This attempt was paralleled with proposed legislation in the Israeli Knesset to give the Israeli government the right to seize church properties that had been sold or leased to third parties. This aggressive and unprecedented conduct drove the heads of churches to shut down the Church of Holy Sepulcher indefinitely. Three days into the shutdown, the Israeli government, through its prime minister, announced that it was backing down. Despite the official announcement, some Israeli politicians resumed their attempts to attack Christians and church institutions as part of populist political rhetoric.

The straw that broke the camel’s back was the decision of the Israeli High Court of Justice to reject an appeal by the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem regarding a previous ruling by the District Court of Jerusalem on case file number 08/2035, concerning a lawsuit filed by a Jewish settler group in 2008.

In the lawsuit, Jewish settlers requested that the District Court of Jerusalem approve three leasing transactions that they claimed to have concluded with a person named Nicolas Papadimus, who used to be a finance department employee at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate during the time of the deposed Patriarch Irenaios I. These “lease agreements” were signed with neither the knowledge nor the verbal or written approval of the Holy Synod, and they did not have the signature of the deposed Patriarch Irenaios or of any other member of the synod, which is the sole entity that legally represents the patriarchate in such matters.

The real estate deal, widely known as the “Jaffa Gate real estate deal,” is comprised of the Imperial Hotel building and the Petra Hotel building at Jaffa Gate (excluding the stores on the ground floor) as well as a civilian home in the Muazmia area located at Bab Hutta. All three locations are
and conspiracy in the legal process of creating the so-called deal. It was proven beyond a reasonable doubt that an Israeli Notary Public named Yaakov Miron approved the signature of Patriarch Irenaios on a power of attorney to Papadimus which enabled the latter to sign contracts. Later on, it was discovered that the same Yaakov Miron endorsed the signatures of the lease contracts of the Jaffa Gate deals! In addition, it must be mentioned that Yaakov Miron shares an office with attorney-at-law Ethan Giva, who is the lawyer on behalf of the Jewish settler group in this deal and in many others. Another fact ignored by the Jerusalem District Court and overlooked by the High Court of Justice, among many others, is that the Jerusalem Patriarchate demonstrated, by conclusive and irrefutable evidence, that Jewish settler groups have communicated with Papadimus in order to sidestep the institutions of the patriarchate. They bribed him and promised to grant US$ 1 million to be paid to him personally in the event that Papadimus realized the hopes of settler groups in acquiring the Jaffa Gate real estate – the subject of the transaction.

This atmosphere left the Christian community devastated and feeling helpless at first. The situation began to change when an individual who has been very close to the organization Ateret Cohanim for many years, and who possesses important information and valuable evidence in support of the patriarchate’s position, expressed his willingness to cooperate and expose the corrupt and illegal side of the so-called Jaffa Gate real estate deal, because, according to him, the extremist Ateret Cohanim had betrayed him, and the judicial proceedings regarding the church properties, and the practical results of these proceedings, were unjust and contrary to the truth.

Among the evidence provided by this individual, documents dating back to 1996 showed that the settlement-supporting billionaire and financier Irving Moskowitz had signed an agreement with the tenants of the Petra Hotel to buy their long-term protected-lease rights for US$ 4.5 million, in addition to his willingness to pay for other expenses, including the adjacent Little Petra Hotel. This is clear proof of the corruption of the suspicious deal of 2004, since it is unreasonable to agree to buy tenants’ “lease rights” for US$ 4.5 million in 1995 and then agree to buy the property itself, as well as the Little Petra Hotel, for $500,000 9 years later!

The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem also discovered that Ateret Cohanim, through its general manager, Mati Dan, used to pay bribes to “manage their affairs” regarding the church properties. These efforts coincided with the attempts of Israeli official authorities, such as the municipality and the tax service, to impose arbitrary measures against tenants of church properties with the aim to weaken their position.

The new evidence that the patriarchate has obtained confirms that Ateret Cohanim and its companies forged documents and submitted court proceedings based on these forged documents, despite knowing that they were forged. The evidence shows that the suspicious deals in 2004 involved bribes that have been allegedly paid by Ateret Cohanim to the patriarchate official at the time, Nicholas Papadimus. The evidence is clear in documents and audio recordings.

In August 2019, the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem filed a new case in the Israeli District Court of Jerusalem based on the newly revealed evidence in an attempt to cancel the previous ruling of the same court that was approved by the High Court. It should be noted that this recent procedure is not an easy one and is currently awaiting the statement of defense from the settlers’ lawyers.

The patriarchate, in cooperation with the local churches based in Jerusalem, also continues its public diplomatic efforts with the heads of states, heads of churches from around the world, and those who strive for peace and justice in the Holy Land to protect the historical and legal doctrine of the Status Quo relating to the holy shrines, and to defend the holy sites from all underhanded and immoral dealings.

Adv. Ass’ad Mazzawi holds an LLB degree from Hebrew University of Jerusalem and has been practicing law since June 1995. He is founder, senior partner, and owner of the Zahalka and Mazzawi Law Firm. In addition to representing several significant organizations and institutions, Adv. Mazzawi is a senior legal adviser to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. He is married to Rula and the father of Nicole and Karine.
By Xavier Abu Eid

During the early years of the British Mandate of Palestine, an official report was sent to the foreign office in London referring to the demonstrations that were taking place against the Balfour Declaration and the Zionist project: "The petitions are identical. They protest against Palestine being 'appropriated' by the Jews. They are signed by both Moslems and Christians." This statement could have been a surprise to those who believed that the Zionist enterprise was a "Judeo-Christian" goal, but it was not to those who knew the reality of Palestine, and particularly of its Christian population.

Lord Balfour, the British foreign secretary who promised Palestine to the Zionist movement, was highly influenced by a combination of colonialist and Christian Zionist views and didn't believe that the Palestinians were worthy of achieving freedom in their homeland. He declared: "Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires or prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit this ancient land." This view was strongly opposed by Rt. Rev. Rennie MacInnes, the Anglican bishop of Jerusalem at the time, who understood the consequences of the British-Zionist collaboration on his own Arab-Palestinian congregation.

Large numbers of Palestinian Christians were part of the Palestinian national movement from its very beginning. This prominence in the struggle for national independence can be understood from several perspectives, including most notably the higher education rates of Christians at that time in comparison to the rest of the population. But another factor of deep importance was the centuries-old Arab case against the Greek domination of the Jerusalem Orthodox Patriarchate. The disregard shown by the Greek hierarchy of the patriarchate against its Arab congregation reached its peak in 1923, when against the calls of its own Arab faithful, the patriarchate transferred a piece of land to a Zionist group (the "Zionist Palestine Land Development Company"). It was the first of several land transactions rejected by the Palestinian people. For the Christians involved in the national movement, including the strong voices of Khalil Sakakini and Yacoub Farraj, the Arabization of the patriarchate was an integral part of the Palestinian struggle for national liberation.

At the core of the national movement were the "Muslim-Christian Associations," particularly prominent in the ports of Jaffa and Haifa. They were served by a combative media that was mainly owned by Palestinian Christians. This was the case of Falastin (Palestine) newspaper, published in Jaffa since 1911 by Issa al-Issa, whose editorial line not only included strong opposition to the Zionist project but also a whole section called "Orthodoxiat" on the struggle to end the discrimination against Arabs in the patriarchate. Najib Nassar published a prominent essay against Zionism in 1913 in his magazine Al Karmel, published in Haifa. A report of Zionist intelligence agents identified Palestinian Christians, such as Issa al-Issa, as their most active opponents. One of the most well-known actors during the British Mandate was the Melkite archbishop of Galilee, Gregorios Hajjar, who enjoyed great networks in the Arab world. His death in a car accident in 1940 was blamed by the Palestinian street on the British authorities, considering him a martyr for the Palestinian cause. His funeral in Haifa brought some 25,000 people to the streets.

Good Friday procession at Cremisan Monastery near Bethlehem. Photo courtesy of Xavier Abu Eid.
The unified national movement known as the Arab Higher Committee had a board of six people, including two Christians. Among them was Alfred Rock, from Ein Karem, perhaps the first member of the Latin (Roman Catholic) Church with prominence in the national movement. When the discussions over the partition of Palestine took place, Christians played a significant role in the lobby efforts against the partition. They joined the incipient diplomatic corps initiated by Jamal Hussein and Musa Alami, taking prominent posts in the Palestinian representations in Geneva, Paris, London, Washington, and New York. Among them was Henry Kattan, the renowned lawyer graduated from the universities of London and Paris, who became the voice of the Palestinian people in the deliberations that were taking place in the United Nations. Emile Ghouri, a political scientist from the University of Cincinnati, also played an important role.

The Nakba, catastrophe, of 1948, became an inevitable outcome for the work of British colonialism, Zionist strategic planning, and Arab disorganization. It also represented a blow to the Christian Palestinian communities. While there were cases of stoic heroism, such as Michel Issa leading the last attempts of resistance in Jaffa alongside a few dozen fighters; the Armenian Brigade Abussouan and Lorenzo families, and the Spanish Deputy Consul Manuel Allende-Salazar, were preparing to celebrate Orthodox Christmas: almost 30 people were killed.

After 1948, the Palestinian leadership was dismembered, though an attempt was made to create a Palestinian government under the title of “the Government of all Palestine,” with its headquarters in Gaza. A Palestinian Christian, Michael Abcarius, became its finance minister. By that moment, almost 60 percent of the Palestinian Christian population had already been displaced from their homes. Most of the Palestinian leadership of the pre-Nakba years was dispersed throughout the region. Some became diplomats serving other Arab countries, many were either integrated into the Jordanian system that had annexed the West Bank or became followers of pan-Arabist ideologies, particularly among those in Syria.

A few others, though, remained committed to the resurgence of an Arab-Palestinian national movement. Among them was Fr. Ibrahim Ayyad, whose biggest contribution to the national cause was securing the Latin Patriarchate’s purchase of plots of land to prevent them from being taken by the Zionist movement, including almost 30,000 dunums of land in the northern Jordan Valley area of Tayasir. But he was also active politically, securing funds and political support for the national cause. He was condemned to exile after he was accused of being involved in the assassination of King Abdallah of Jordan in 1951, a charge he denied. In Beirut he became the head of the Roman Catholic Ecclesiastical Court, and it has been said that Yasser Arafat sent a delegation of people to meet him, in the early sixties, to get his blessing for the creation of Al-Fatah. Fr. Ayyad died in Palestine after returning there with Yasser Arafat during the nineties. His body was buried in the compound of the Latin Church of his hometown Beit Sahour.

In 1967, an Israeli aggression ended with the full occupation of historic Palestine, including Gaza and the West Bank. The 13 churches of Jerusalem now had their headquarters in East Jerusalem under Israeli control. This dramatically affected the work of the Christian institutions that were used to having open contacts with the Arab world, including, notably, the Latin Patriarchate Seminary in Beit Jala. The Arab defeat led to the resurgence of the Palestinian national movement, mainly from the young generation that had been expelled during the Nakba. Among them was George Habash, a medical doctor educated in Beirut who served in the hospital of his hometown Lydda during the fall of the city and who was shocked by the images of the expulsion of dozens of thousands of people, including the cold-blooded assassination of his neighbor. Dr. Habash led a group of Arab nationalists highly inspired by the Algerian Revolution that, turning to the left, formed the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). This included not only intellectuals such as Ghassan Kanafani and Naji Ali, but military masterminds such as Wadie’ Haddad, a refugee from a Melkite family expelled from Safad in Upper Galilee.

Another member of the Melkite community, Nayef Hawatmeh, became the leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). The Palestinian Communist Party also had a prominent membership of Palestinian Christians from before
the Nakba, including Fouad Nassar and the renowned writer Emile Habibi. After 1967, following the split between Israeli/Palestinian/Jordanian communist parties, a well-known personality from Beit Jala, Fouad Rizk, became one of the most important leaders in the occupied West Bank. Closer to the Pan-Arabist ideas of the Ba’ath Party was Kamal Nasser. A native of Birzeit and educated at the American University of Beirut, Kamal Nasser rapidly escalated in the political hierarchy of the Palestinian national movement until he became a member of the PLO Executive Committee and spokesperson. He was assassinated in 1973 by an Israeli commando in Beirut, alongside his colleagues Kamal Adwan and Mohammad Yousef Najjar.

suffered a terror attack in 1980, losing his right foot. He was also removed by the Israeli occupation in 1982.

In August 1982, the PLO left Beirut after resisting a siege of 88 days by Israeli forces and Lebanese Falangists. It was the end of a military campaign where Palestinian fighters fiercely fought for the survival of the national cause. Several Christians were among those fighters, including what was remembered as the heroic resistance of Al-Dbayeh Refugee Camp, known for hosting mainly Palestinian Christian refugees from Upper Galilee. A decade earlier, Melkite Archbishop of Jerusalem Hilarion Capucci had been detained by Israeli Forces and accused of carrying weapons for the Palestinian

seminarian who ended up getting a PhD in international law from the prestigious Catholic University of Louvain, became one of the first martyrs of the Palestinian diplomatic circles after being assassinated in Brussels. Although he was a native of Zababdeh, Israel did not allow the funeral to take place in his hometown, and his body still rests in Amman. During the same period, a young diplomat, Afif Safieh, a Roman Catholic from Jerusalem, had become one of the close confidants of Yasser Arafat and managed to secure a strong channel with the Holy See. A nephew of Anton Safieh, the caretaker head of the municipal council who saved whatever was possible from the Jerusalem Municipality before it fell to Zionist hands in May 1948, Afif

ended up representing Palestine in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the Vatican, Washington, and Moscow, among other special missions. He is remembered as part of a golden generation of Palestinian diplomats, which included Laila Shahid in Paris and later on in Brussels. A descendant of one of the most traditional Muslim families from Jerusalem, Ambassador Shahid, a living encyclopedia of Palestinian history, gave special emphasis to the Christian presence in the Palestinian capital and the European role with the Status Quo Agreements of the Holy Sites. Those were also the days of Ambassador Zuhdi Tarazi, a Christian from Gaza as Anglican, Archbishop Elia Khoury, was sitting as a member of the PLO Executive Committee and had been nominated by President Yasser Arafat as a member of the delegation to one of the first official dialogues with the United States. Renowned intellectual Edward Said, also from an Anglican family, had been keen to open the first channels with the State Department, alongside his lifelong colleague Professor Ibrahim Abu Lughod.

An interesting episode took place during the municipal elections promoted by the Israeli authorities in the occupied territory in the seventies. Convinced that they could isolate the PLO by promoting local leadership, Israel did its best to improve its image through the elections. The results, though, were not what they had expected: Despite the fact that the participation of all PLO factions had been banned by the occupation, figures known to be linked to the PLO massively defeated the candidates preferred by the Israeli Civil Administration. They also paid heavily: The mayor of Beit Jala, Bishara Daoud, was removed from his position, while the mayor of Ramallah, Karim Khalaf, resistance. President Arafat mentioned Archbishop Capucci in his historic UN address of 1974: “A brave prince of the Church, Bishop Capucci. Lifting his fingers to form the same victory sign used by our freedom-fighters, he said, ‘What I have done, I have done that all men may live on this land of peace in peace’ (…). To him we send our salutations and greetings.” Bishop Capucci was freed through a Vatican intervention after spending years in jail, and he remained a strong supporter of Palestinian freedom until his death in Rome, where he had spent his exile.

In 1981, the first Palestinian representative to Belgium Na’im Khader, a former Roman Catholic
Darwish and translated by Edward Said), changing the name “PLO” to “Palestine” in the United Nations. Another powerful symbol came from an unexpected place: the Vatican. In a historic decision, Pope John Paul II appointed Fr. Michel Sabbah as the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, becoming the first Palestinian to head the Catholic Church in the Holy Land.

The election of Patriarch Sabbah generated new momentum for the churches in Jerusalem. One of his first steps was to create the Saint Yves Society as a legal branch of the Latin Patriarchate to protect human rights. He organized the heads of churches in Jerusalem to break the Israeli siege against the town of Beit Sahour. The town of the biblical shepherds’ field had become a symbol of the Intifada because their inhabitants refused to pay taxes to the Israeli occupation. They suffered in return from severe collective punishment in the form of a draconian siege, an issue mentioned even at the Security Council. The Latin parish priest of Beit Sahour at the time, Fr. Peter Madros, remembers how once he officiated at the wedding of a parishioner wanted by the occupation “with the back doors of the altar open and people watching from the bell tower in order to alert him to escape should the army come for him during the ceremony.”

The early nineties saw the beginning of the Middle East Peace Process, the return of the PLO to Palestine, and the development of institutions for an independent state. Among the main projects was Bethlehem 2000, in order to promote Palestine as a major touristic destination. President Yasser Arafat implemented a strict system of quotas in order to ensure that several municipalities, including Bethlehem and Ramallah, would have Christian mayors and generous representation in the Palestinian parliaments (with various seats reserved for Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Gaza) as well as the appointment of a Christian as minister of tourism. During the Camp David summit in July 2000, the US administration tried to repack the Israeli positions that were presented to the Palestinian side. This included the Israeli annexation of the Armenian Quarter. This was the moment when President Arafat came out with his famous quote: “Don’t you know that my name is Yasser Arafatian? I’m not selling the Armenians.” On another occasion, he reportedly turned to a Coptic Egyptian-American State Department official, Gamal Hilal, who was translating for President Clinton, and asked him: “Please explain to the president what my dear friend Pope Shenouda would say if I accept this offer for Jerusalem.” None of the options proposed met even the most basic Palestinian requests or were consistent with international law or UN resolutions. Patriarch Sabbah once again mobilized the heads of churches in Jerusalem to send a letter to the delegates of the summit: “We regard the Christian and Armenian quarters of the Old City as inseparable and contiguous entities that are firmly united by the same faith.”

Bethlehem, a symbol of prosperity during the Oslo Process, became the face of its failure by 2000. International condemnations alone failed to prevent Israel from building the illegal settlement of Har Homa (Jabal Abu Ghneime), separating the holy cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Massive projects of settlement-related infrastructure, including bypass road 60 west of Bethlehem, had been built after the Oslo Agreement was signed; with the second Intifada, the images of the bombardment of Beit Jala and the siege of the Nativity Church became symbols of the end of the Peace Process. During that invasion, several Bethlehemites were killed, including Christine Saadeh, a 12-year-old girl killed “by mistake” when Israeli forces rained over 30 bullets on her family car. Johnny Thalgieh, 17 years old, wanted to become an Orthodox priest. He was killed by an Israeli sniper on his way to the Nativity Church. President Arafat, in a press conference while Israeli tanks were besieging his compound in Ramallah, furiously shouted at the press corps, “Don’t focus on what’s happening here, go see what they did to the Nativity Church!” One of the most powerful symbols of those years was Israel preventing the Palestinian president from attending Christmas Eve mass in the Nativity Church, with the Latin Patriarch keeping the president’s seat empty and decorating it with his traditional hatta.

The Church of the Nativity under siege by the Israeli army, 2002. Photo courtesy of Fr. Ibrahim Faltas.
The Trump Administration

By Issa Jamil Kassissieh

The United States’ recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital (and the latest statement by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo legitimizing the Israeli settlements in the heart of the Palestinian territory under the pretext of responding to Christian Evangelical voices) was not only part of an orchestrated effort by Trump officials to undermine international law and the international system as a whole, it also showed how Christians in the Middle East, and particularly in Palestine, continue to be negatively affected by decisions taken by those who claim to care about “Christianity.” The fact that no Christian leader in Palestine or Egypt agreed to meet Vice President Pence on his last visit was a strong statement of rejection towards American policies.

The developments since then have been negative. Nobody could claim that any step taken by the Trump administration has brought us any closer to peace. It has become clear though that the rest of the international community has to take concrete steps to advance the cause of a just and lasting peace. The case of Palestinian Christians, in particular, dramatically affected since the massive expulsions during the Nakba in 1948, could serve as an entry point for many in the West to understand the magnitude of the catastrophe suffered by the Palestinian people and the urgent need to bring a just and lasting peace to the Holy Land through the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.
areas of focused colonization was occupied East Jerusalem and its surroundings. Israel’s policy of grabbing as much land as possible was combined with attempts to limit the Palestinian presence, whether by controlling the Palestinian population registry or by literally withdrawing the residency rights of Palestinians from Jerusalem. Thus the Palestinian Christians are those most affected by such policies, and this American administration has no limits in blindly supporting Israel’s policies.

It was no surprise to hear the words of the American ambassador to Israel, Mr. David Friedman, on the first anniversary of the American Embassy’s move to Jerusalem: “Israel has one secret weapon that no other country has. Israel is on the side of God.” In other words, the American ambassador is endorsing the exclusivity approach, stressing the sole rights of Israel, implying that others do not count.

Within this context, the Israeli confiscation of the Cremisan lands in Bethlehem Governorate that belong to 58 Palestinian Christian families would become legitimate in the eyes of the American officials. In addition, the complaint by the heads of churches to one of Trump’s envoys about the settlers’ illegal attempts to control the church properties at Jaffa Gate, the main entrance to all the churches as well to the Holy Sepulcher, fell on deaf ears. And closing down the Holy Sepulcher by the heads of churches in protest against the attempts by the Israeli side to impose taxes on them in violation of the historical “status quo” was also a message to the Israeli government: “Enough is enough!” It was also a message to the American administration that the indigenous Christians in the Holy Land are angry. The Trump administration should refer to the communiqué of the local church addressed to President Trump (December 6, 2017) to understand better where they stand, as well as to the one related to their position regarding the unilateral recognition by the administration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Accordingly, the steps taken by the Trump administration have only worsened the situation on the ground. By enabling Israel to move ahead with its policies that deny the Palestinian right to self-determination, the prospects of a political solution continue to diminish, and many wonder whether any future for a viable Christian presence in the Holy Land remains. Palestinian Christian religious leaders continue to remind their congregations of the importance of keeping hope alive. But what does hope mean for Palestinians in their present situation? The need for concrete measures to enable the exercise of their long overdue rights matters more than ever if the prospects of peace are to be maintained. Waiting for the Trump administration to present its plan aimed at legitimizing Israeli violations of international law is not the answer.

One of the most important examples is the fact that Christians from the rest of the region are prevented from praying in the Holy Land. Those with Israeli military permits to access Jerusalem may get closer to their holy sites, as those in Jerusalem will continue to wonder about their residency status while continuing to struggle for their freedom and dignity in light of unjust policies related to their very rights in their own rooted city. The decisions taken by the Trump administration that claim to care about the “rights of Christians” in the Middle East are hence paradoxical.

Issa Jamil Kassissieh is the Ambassador of Palestine to the Holy See.
Christmas Is Back in Town!

Celebrating Christmas in Bethlehem has a very special meaning for Christians in Palestine and all over the world. This year, in order to bring back the joy of this season to our children and their families, the Christmas Parade will spread the magic and happiness in a whole new festive style.

Palestinian children have been waiting for the past two years to enjoy this marvelous spectacle again, and this year, the Christmas Parade is back to celebrate with six different themed floats that will showcase all the characters involved in the 2,000-year-old story.

The parade will include the three wise men, the shepherds, the camel, the angel, Mary and Joseph, Santa Claus and his reindeer-pulled sleigh, the famous elves, and Mrs. Santa surrounded by Christmas gifts, ornaments, Christmas candy canes, gingerbread houses, and surprising extras.

This one-of-a-kind parade production will feature more than 60 costumed performers, beautiful Christmas songs and carols, and brilliant floats with shimmering lights.

This season, the parade will tour four governorates and will be in Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jericho, and the town of Zababdeh, near Jenin.

Fully sponsored by The Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine, with a generous contribution by President Mahmoud Abbas, the parade will bring joy to the hearts of those celebrating the glorious holidays and reinforce the message of peace, love, and prosperity brought through the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of Palestine.

Join us on this joyous occasion and bring your family and friends. Get ready for wonderful surprises!
Palestinian Liberation Theology

By Cedar Duaybis

The seeds of Palestinian Liberation Theology (PLT) go back to the days of the Nakba, 71 years ago. About 750,000 Palestinians were driven out or fled in fright from their homeland in the face of the brutal onslaught of the Zionist underground militias. These militias were carrying out a premeditated plan to rid the country of its Palestinian Arab citizens.

When I look back today, I can discern a three-fold Nakba. It was a human Nakba of enormous magnitude. It was an identity Nakba that made us strangers in our own land, and it was a theological Nakba that pulled the ground out from under our feet and added to our feeling of being utterly lost. Our lives were like a ship whose anchor had broken loose and was drifting aimlessly. For the next 18 years, we, the Palestinians living in the newly formed Israeli state, were placed under very strict military rule that controlled every aspect of our lives.

When eventually the curfews were eased and we were able once more to go to church, everything was the same – the liturgy, the Bible readings, the sermon, and the hymns; whereas outside, our lives had been turned upside down. In his book, *Justice and Only Justice, a Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, Rev. Naim Ateek, the father of PLT, who himself, together with his family, had become an internal refugee in Nazareth, describes what happened.

“The establishment of the State of Israel was a seismic tremor of enormous magnitude that has shaken the very foundations of their beliefs…The fundamental question of many Christians, whether uttered or not is: ‘How can the Old Testament be the Word of God in light of the Palestinian Christian’s experience with its use to support Zionism?’” (pp. 77–78)

It is said that theology is a bridge that leads humans to God. For Palestinian Christians, this bridge had collapsed, and we were caught in the crack, unable to go back to our former theological thinking while groping to find a meaningful way into the future. Whether it was Western feelings of guilt or the theology of Christian literalists, or the ideology of Jewish Zionism, the Bible was used to legitimize the tragic fate of the Palestinian people.

Israel was not established without the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages, the creation of some 750,000 refugees, and the destruction of the national and political life of the Palestinian people. Our faith seemed to clash with the reality of our lives.

At the beginning of Naim Ateek’s ministry in the Anglican Church, he was determined to find answers to the many theological questions that alienated people from their faith at a time when they most needed consolation, hope, encouragement, and direction in their lives. He took time off to read the Bible with Palestinian eyes and reflect theologically on the tragic experience of the Palestinian people through the eyes of faith. Our faith crises intensified after the 1967 Six-Day War when the rest of historical Palestine – the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip – fell under Israeli occupation. Religious Zionism flourished, and it was evident that they would hold onto the land “that God had given them.”

My generation grew up under the influence of Western-dominated theology, especially during the British Mandate period when many schools were run by British missionaries. Scripture was taught through their lenses and, whether consciously or unconsciously, it was done in a way that supported the policy of the British government towards facilitating the establishment of the “Jewish homeland” in Palestine.

Naim Ateek formed a committee of concerned Christians from the various local churches, who after a series of workshops organized an international conference in order to put this Palestinian reading of the Bible in the context of liberation theologies around the world.

After the conference, the founding members decided to start a ministry among Palestinian Christians to help...
them come to terms with their faith in the light of their experience, and to draw on their faith to work for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Bible study was the mainstay of this new ecumenical ministry. We tried to discern what God was saying to us here and now, and to “develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, nonviolence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities” (Purpose Statement of Sabeel).

Right from the beginning, PLT stressed that there could be no liberation for one side with the enslavement of the other, and that the well-being of one side would be bound to the well-being of the other side. A way had to be found for sharing the land in order to turn the present curse into a blessing for all.

**Some theological anchors of Palestinian Liberation Theology**

One of the most stimulating ideas that affected the Palestinian Christians was the discovery that Jesus himself was a Palestinian who lived and died under the Roman occupation. Such a discovery connected Palestinian Christians with their first-century ancestors. It made Jesus accessible to them in his humanity and his relationship to the land, the people, and the powers. Jesus was a tangible person, and his ideas and teachings began to unfold in greater clarity for Palestinian Christians. Such relevance produced two important outcomes.

First, Jesus began to be seen as a paradigm of faith. Christians could look to him and model their lives after him. Jesus experienced the harshness of life under an oppressive occupation similar to the way our people were and still are experiencing oppression.

Second, Jesus Christ became a criterion for measuring, judging, testing, and evaluating people’s actions today. Jesus Christ inspired us to action; and like him, many of our people were ready to use his nonviolent methods. Jesus became the hermeneutic for interpreting the Bible, especially problematic texts in the Old Testament.

A further anchor was the priority of justice and the recognition that a lasting peace can only be built on justice. Justice is the business of the church, and the church has to take a stance on truth and justice. The time is ripe for the government of Israel to admit the wrongs and injustices it has committed against the Palestinians and to accept sharing the land of Palestine with them. The Palestinians, with their diversity of religious backgrounds, are the true indigenous people of the land.

Looking back at the journey of the last 30 years, it is true to say that whenever we proclaim the Gospel, we are in essence proclaiming liberation. In a sense, we see liberation as the essence of our Christian faith. Liberation is a comprehensive word. In both the original Hebrew and Greek, the meaning includes salvation, deliverance, and rescue, as well as well-being and healing. In fact, the concept of a theology of liberation emerged from a context of oppression and injustice. Wherever oppression, domination, and injustice are found, it is natural for human beings to seek freedom and liberation. From this perspective, Jesus Christ is our liberator.

In the context of Palestine and Israel, liberation theology developed formally more than 40 years after the Nakba; yet its roots were probably unconsciously hidden in an earlier time as it was ripening and maturing in the Palestinian soul and mind. We are sure that some clergy as well as laity were practicing some form of liberation theology without naming it. Indeed, all along many people were engaged in the resistance struggle. Many chose armed struggle; others chose peaceful and nonviolent means. Many were imprisoned and deported, while some lost their lives. It is possible to say that the flame of truth and justice has never been extinguished. People were aware of the military might of Israel as well as the ability of its security forces to apprehend any suspect and neutralize those who were perceived as a threat. In spite of this, people resisted by various nonviolent methods.

At the same time, due to the conflict over Palestine, the faith of many people was shaken. For those who continued to cling to faith, their theology reflected a sense of despair and resignation. It was a passive waiting on God. PLT, therefore, was the spark that ignited the fire that started doing two things. First, it burned the chains of the oppressive theology that shackled many of us; and secondly, PLT was the light that guided us on our way to fathom a deeper understanding of God in Christ and to discover the wonderful message of the Bible about a loving God who loves all people equally and wills justice, peace, and liberation for all.

Finally, from the very beginning, PLT was committed to nonviolence and emphasized three essential gradational points: justice, peace, and reconciliation. Justice must be done first. It is justice that can produce peace, and peace is what can open the door for reconciliation.

Cedar Duaybis is a co-founder of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre and a former Sabeel board member. She currently volunteers at Sabeel.
Kairos Palestine
The Great March to Freedom

By Rifat Odeh Kassis

Christians in Palestine are part and parcel of the Arab Palestinian nation, and Christianity is deeply rooted in this region. Palestinian Christians have managed to preserve their existence and survive all the unrest and wars throughout their history. This optimistic prophecy comes from a deep understanding and analysis of how Palestinian Christians have maintained their presence over the past 2,000 years and how they have succeeded in preserving their important role in society. Palestinian Christians will remain present in the future despite the ongoing turmoil in this region simply because their strength comes from within and is based on their faith and hope. One of the signs of this faith and hope is the Kairos Palestine document.

On December 11, 2009, a group of Palestinian Christian leaders, both clergy and laypeople, announced the establishment of the Christian Palestinian Initiative and launched the Kairos Palestine document, “A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering.” This document communicates the voice of Palestinian Christians to the world about the reality of the Israeli occupation and calls for support in establishing a just peace and equality between the peoples in our region. Soon after its launch, the Kairos document became more than just a text. It became a living initiative, a movement whose aim is to strengthen the Christian presence in Palestine and to work to end the prolonged Israeli colonial occupation with its structured violence and oppression. While the Kairos document may appear to be a call of pain and desperation, it is fundamentally a call for hope, born of love, prayer, and faith in both God and humanity.

It declares that “the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God,” distorting “the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation.”

Fundamentally, the Kairos document is a message of steadfastness and resistance on both the political and theological levels directed toward the Palestinian people. It tackles an intensely important and often neglected topic: the Zionist hijacking of the Bible itself as well as religious messages that aim to exclude other peoples and cultures from the land and deprive them of their rights. Racism in Israel is not simply a question of laws, or even of measures taken on the ground. Beneath the restrictions of movement, the house demolitions, the evictions, the residency revocations, the arbitrary arrests and interrogations, the administrative detentions, the imprisonment of children, and the violent repression of nonviolent protests lie powerful undercurrents that must be identified and understood. There is, in another words, an official Israeli discourse that monopolizes the history of the land and its people.

In response to this situation, Kairos Palestine was created to add a new voice and to offer new intellectual and theological tools to use in the struggle against occupation. The Kairos narrative is an inclusive one: it seeks peace with justice for all people, both Palestinian and Israeli. Yet emphasizing the need for inclusivity and equality does not and must not preclude Palestinians’ rights to their country. This too is one of Kairos Palestine’s central calls.

Moreover, in calling for support in opposing this occupation, Kairos Palestine not only addresses Palestinian Christians, Palestinian
Muslims, and Israeli Jews, it also addresses the church worldwide. It criticizes those “who use the Bible to threaten our existence…” attaching “Biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights.” While Kairos calls for “repentance,” it also affirms “the prophetic mission of the Church…to speak the Word of God courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context” and to support the oppressed.

In doing so, the Kairos document urges Christians to “take a position of truth with regard to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land,” including “boycott, disinvestment and sanctions as tools of nonviolence for justice, peace and security for all.” The document’s authors celebrate a message of “love and living together,” condemn “all forms of racism,” and call for “a common vision, built on equality and sharing, not on superiority, negation of the other or aggression, using the pretext of fear and security” – a vision through which “justice and security will be attained for all.”

The Palestinian people have suffered dispossession, oppression, land theft, displacement, and expulsion at the hands of the Israeli state for 71 years, including 52 years of direct military colonial occupation on what remains of historic Palestine. Over decades, the official international community has focused on Israel’s right to exist, with very little attention given to the life and rights of Palestinians. Israel’s continuous settlement building/expansion and further confiscation of Palestinian land has severely damaged prospects for a just peace. Racist laws that the State of Israel has enacted support the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

The State of Israel, like other oppressive regimes throughout history, doesn’t simply fear the anger of the oppressed. More significantly, Israel fears the steadfast faith, hope, and love of the oppressed – their inner strength. Israel knows that its power and impunity will prevail only as long as people feel weak and hopeless.

The Kairos Palestine document and movement have managed to maintain and sustain hope, and they have achieved substantial results. True to its original promise to serve as a platform for action, Kairos Palestine has achieved much over the past ten years.

• Kairos Palestine has established the international movement “Kairos for Global Justice Coalition.” Today there are affiliates in more than 25 countries on all continents. The movement works to mobilize churches and Christian organizations to work for a just peace in the region and seeks to support and strengthen the BDS call; end the blind loyalty of some churches towards Israel; and end their silence in the face of oppression. More churches are reevaluating their investments to avoid supporting companies and organizations that are either profiting from or supporting the Israeli occupation. Others have definitively voted to divest from such companies and financial institutions. We see that many nations – in increasing numbers – are expressing their support for Palestine and the Palestinians through nonviolent protests, the media, and governmental entities that advocate that Israel be held accountable.

• Pilgrimage and tourism practices are evolving through Kairos Palestine’s “Come and See” campaign. Kairos Palestine believes in the fundamental importance of this call. Many people come to Palestine and Israel as visitors, but they don’t see the actual situation. Kairos emphasizes the power of “seeing” because we believe that people of goodwill – namely, many of the tourists who come here – will be transformed if they can see clearly the reality around them.

• Hundreds of conferences have been organized under the Kairos theme. Thousands have come to visit, speak, and work in solidarity with Kairos Palestine. Hundreds of articles, theses, and other documents have been written about Kairos Palestine in many languages.

• Kairos Palestine theologians have been engaged in a wide-ranging dialogue with theologians from all over the world. Palestinian clergy and lay theologians have written scores of books about (or that reference) Kairos Palestine.

• Relationships between Kairos Palestine and Palestinian civil society are growing in strength and number.

• The Palestinian Kairos youth movement is expanding through Kairos’ efforts.

Today, Kairos Palestine focuses on three main priorities.

1) Working to preserve the Christian presence in Palestine and connecting Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with Palestinians inside the Green Line and in the diaspora, as well as advancing popular resistance and the role of youth movements in the struggle. Kairos Palestine has become a national social movement and a major voice for Christians working in partnership with local communities, churches, Christian organizations, and other national groups, both faith-based and secular.

2) Challenging the theological and political justification of the oppression of Palestinians by promoting an international theological dialogue with theologians from around the world. These conversations and dialogues aim to discourage the blind loyalty to Israel which is demonstrated through silence in the face of oppression; and to lobby churches to stop investing – directly and indirectly – in the occupation.

3) Strengthening and expanding the international advocacy movement, “Kairos for Global Justice Coalition,” whose aim is to mobilize churches and Christian organizations around the world to work for a just peace both in the region and in their own contexts. This movement shares a unified advocacy and lobby strategy to support the international BDS movement, sharing Kairos Palestine’s annual Christmas and Easter alerts which raise awareness about the racist policies and ongoing
destruction facing Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Kairos Palestine and its partners will continue to develop the “Come and See” call, mobilizing pilgrims to become advocates for a just peace.

There are many challenges that plague Palestinian daily life, but we refuse to lose faith in a just resolution. Kairos Palestine will not surrender hope as sumud (steadfast perseverance) is our way of life. Despite the challenges and difficulties, we see many signs of hope and look ahead to a time when justice will prevail.

We know that hope does not mean passively waiting for something to happen. Hope stirs us to act bravely. Hope is courage laced with love. Hope is a vivid, living guide to the future. Our primary reserve of hope is grounded in God, in ourselves, and in humankind. We trust our own power, gifts, and creativity. We believe in the power of people all over the world. Throughout the centuries, the bravery, perseverance, steadfastness, cooperation, vision, and love of ordinary people have transformed the world again and again – sometimes suddenly and dramatically and at other times slowly and quietly.

As we observe the tenth anniversary of Kairos Palestine, we continue to raise a voice in the wilderness. Kairos Palestine will continue to provide both a vital symbol of hope and the tools to transform that hope into action – for Palestinians, for people across the entire region, and for people around the world. Kairos Palestine will continue to shape and empower Palestinians’ legitimate, creative, and ultimately transforming popular resistance – a resistance driven by love, not by hatred and revenge.

In the end, Kairos is winning because, despite the bloodshed, hardship, and injustice, there are people and communities who dream of “a new land and a new human being, capable of rising up in the spirit to love each of his or her brothers and sisters.” (Kairos 10)

Rifat Kassis has over 30 years of experience working in the Middle East, Northern Caucasus, Central Asia, and Europe. He founded Defense for Children International Palestine and was elected world president of the international movement for two terms. He is a co-author of the Kairos Palestine document and has been the general coordinator of the Kairos movement since its inception in 2009. He has published two books, Palestine: A Bleeding Wound in the World’s Conscience and Kairos for Palestine. In addition, he has contributed to 17 books in various languages.
Vunk: Past, Past, and Past

By Kegham Balian

"hek kider, vor Baderiarkin hantibelou hamar bedk eh 10 varyrgyan ganoukh nergayanal?" queried, rhetorically, the gatekeeper of His Beatitude Archbishop Nourhan Manougian’s patriarchal office.

Confused? Good.

In order to understand the Armenian community in Jerusalem, or more specifically, the one associated with the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem (a distinction I stress, for merely residing within the oldest enclave of the Armenian diaspora isn’t sufficient in order to belong), one must know and feel the Vunk, which means convent in – you guessed it – Armenian. Feel a convent? I’ve always had a hard time explaining to my “non-conventeer” (let alone non-Armenian) friends the concept of living in this convent, a literal gated community in our case, where, come midnight, an actual gate is closed, effectively preventing any entry or exit, barring an emergency or work-related responsibilities, in which case a smaller door within the larger one is used to provide passage.

“What do you mean the gate is closing? You have a curfew?!” they’d ask, amused, as I rushed with Cinderellaesque fashion – minus the dress, tiara, and glass slippers – from Bab-al-Khalil to our quarter, desperately hoping to be on time lest I face the ire of the guards.

“Kegham Jan, chi gareli!” exclaimed Armen, the night guard, for the millionth time; and for the millionth time, I’d retort “Traffic gar, ge neres Armen Jan!” If that didn’t pan out, we’d resort to scaling one of the pipes situated on a five-meter-high wall adjacent to Mardigs Mini-Market (a beloved generational staple within our society), carrying tales of shattered tailbones to heighten our senses, imbuing us with the virility of a Hollywood stuntman in an otherwise Dionysian predicament, to successfully reach the top of St. James Cathedral, a return back home, to confinement, till five in the morning, when the gate is once again opened. Ridiculously feudal in this day and age, but it would be too reductive on my part not to acknowledge that these very walls insulate within them traditions and values that are hastily dissipating in a world that increasingly seeks to equalize rather than celebrate cultural differences.

Vunk means waking up to the morning bells of St. James Cathedral, to your grandmother stuffing both your pockets with Kleenex (accept no substitute); Vunk means passing through your neighbor’s laundry laid on wires lifted sky-high with wooden poles, a whiff of detergent, inevitably invasive yet eerily soothing, as you reach the Bezdig Pag (small yard), before eventually coalescing with friends emerging from the myriad of alleyways leading to the Medz Pag (big or main courtyard) on your way to the Tebroti Pag (schoolyard) of Sts. Tarkmanchatz Armenian School. Vunk means waiting for lunch break to have Jawwad’s ka’ek, the ratio of salt to za’atar dehydrating your soul; Vunk means playing Kar Kar, Pernel Pernel, and Gouleh (marbles) opposite the Calouste Gulbenkian Library, one of the world’s most comprehensive Armenian literature centers with its 100,000-book collection. Vunk is folks converging at Mardigs Mini-Market after work, generating a rumor mill that, if converted to energy, would be capable of sustainably powering Jerusalem and a few neighboring cities.
O Vunk, my Vunk, my cradle, my home, my….Fine, fine I’ll shut up. You get the gist. But in truth, I jest lest I weep, for the time of nostalgic adulation is over given the existential crisis gripping our community.

There has been a clergy-people and people-people cleavage, a three-way disarray of communication, contributing to a widening schism within the convent. Allow me to very briefly, to the best of my ability, elucidate on the main factions involved.

The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the home of the Brotherhood of St. James, a monastic order of about 60 members worldwide, under the umbrella of the Armenian Apostolic Church. A bastion of Christianity in the Holy Land, safeguarding a plethora of Christian sites, notably the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, alongside the Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox; the zenith of our cooperation being highly, highly evident during Easter. It also serves as a mini-welfare state, providing residence, education, and spiritual guidance to the populace: The Theological Seminary of the Patriarchate tasked with the formation of future priests, historically orphans, brought in from the diaspora and Armenia, aspiring to ordination and a lifelong commitment to clerical duties; the Ashkharagans (from this earth), or civilian population, focusing on sports and scouting, stemming from the three main clubs located in or around the quarter – Homenetmen, with close ties to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Party; Hoyetchmen, with close ties to the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party; and J.A.B.U. (Jerusalem Armenian Benevolent Union), an apolitical organization.

Why the political clarification, you ask, for an audience that by and large refers to us as simply Il-Arman? Precisely for this reason! We are known as Il-Arman to Palestinians, and Saghimahay (Jerusalemite Armenian) abroad, an identity that is one and the same should you distill the linguistic variables. An identity that transcends political allegiances. An identity worth protecting when we are blessed with this haven in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem, this Vunk! Yet our intra-communal differences, rather than enriching us, have stifled us. I’m tempted to shed light on our weighing dissonance, on our tribalism, but I digress, for the urgency should lie in seeing one another, not dabbling in our dirty laundry. When, who, why, where, and how. Pointless. History shouldn’t burden us, and burden us it shan’t.

Enter Armadner (“roots” in Armenian), an organization founded on July 19, 2019, for the preservation and continuity of our community, under the patronage of His Beatitude Archbishop Nourhan Manougian. Our goal is to serve as a bridge, both intra- and inter-communal, to create dialogue and understanding whilst overseeing the infrastructural development of religious, cultural, social, and economic endeavors in order to pave the road for a sustainable and durable future. Barely afoot, we have in a relatively short time managed to set historic precedents: For the first time ever, on September 21, the independence day of Armenia, we organized a reception in the Tebrosi Pag that gathered all the members of our community. For the first time ever, we managed to erect a Christmas tree in the Medz Pag – a sobering and joyful achievement. For the first time ever, we are working hand-in-hand with the patriarchate, renovating the Edward and Helen Mardigian Museum of Armenian Art and Culture, scheduled to open next year, showcasing our unique and resilient heritage, complemented by a cornucopia of priceless, timeless artifacts and manuscripts, in a technologically integrative multimedia setting, as well as a courtyard café that offers everyone a glimpse of traditional Armenian cuisine. All wonderfully sewn together by world-renowned academics Claude Mutafian and Raymond Kevorkian, references in the field of Armenian history; and
last but certainly not least, Harout Bezdjian, a talented museographer with an eye for the futuristic, in charge of the artistic direction of this project, proving that tradition and modernity can coexist.

"Don’t you know that one has to be 10 minutes early when meeting with the Patriarch?" was the question we were asked by the gatekeeper. Evidently, we didn’t. We weren’t aware of how to act or what to expect at the precipice of our very first meeting. Were we confused? Yes. Were we afraid? Even more so. Were we motivated? Absolutely. You have to understand that such a union, between clergy and laypeople, had never been accomplished in the 1,600-year history of our community. We were early yet very late. Late to put aside differences for the common good as we entered the room, leaving preconception and past frivolities at the door, and to our collective relief, conversed with a man who shared the same vision for the benefit of our people. All it took was the willingness to talk.

To the huffers and puffers: for every mention of the word Armenian, take a shot of your most potent disillusion, and leave reality to us. To the rest: come, sit, let’s talk.

"Dear, this isn’t possible!"

"There was traffic, dear Armen, forgive me!"

Kegham Balian is the co-founder and vice chairman of Armadner. He is production and marketing manager at Balian - Armenian Ceramics of Jerusalem, a family-owned company since 1922. He may be reached at armadner@gmail.com.
Neighbors of Trees and Stone

“Neighbors of trees and stone,” is how the 98-year-old Hajja Fatima from the village of Aboud describes the life of love and companionship between Muslims and Christians in the village. This ancient Roman village, located northwest of the city of Ramallah, also known as the City of Flowers, enjoys beautiful mountains planted with olive trees. Aboud’s historical heritage is no less important than its rich and natural heritage.

In Aboud, there are several churches, monasteries, and mosques built on foundations dating from the Byzantine, Ottoman, and Crusader periods. The oldest church in the village is the Church of Our Lady, built on the foundations of a church dating back to the fifth century AD.

The village also embodies the Palestinian social fabric, which combines harmony and coexistence between its Muslim and Christian inhabitants. Events and stories passed on from one generation to another attest to this harmony and to the durability and solidity of this cross-religion relationship.

“We are a family,” said 60-year-old Fadia, Fatima’s neighbor, about their Muslim-Christian relationships. “We’re in fact an example of all the families in the village. The term ‘cousin’ is frequently heard in the village of Aboud, particularly when it refers to two people who have breastfed from the same woman, even if one is Muslim and the other Christian.” Fadia adds: “It is common in the village to breastfeed each other’s children, whether Christian or Muslim. When I gave birth to my child Mayada, I fell ill and was forced to stay in hospital for about a week. My Muslim neighbor breastfed Mayada and took care of my daughter throughout that period.”

During the holy month of Ramadan, all the villagers participate in organizing iftars. It is customary for Christian families to prepare a Ramadan breakfast for their Muslim neighbors. “Christians sometimes fast during this holy month as a kind of fulfillment of their vows,” says Fadia.

During the war, the villagers in Aboud prayed together and asked the Virgin Mary to protect them. Fadia recounted the story of the Ballas family, a Muslim family who gave olive oil to the church every year until the mother of the family passed away.

These vivid examples of daily life in Aboud illustrate how national unity is embodied in Palestinian society. Let the world know that the land on which Jesus was born is a land of peace and love.
Saint Moses the Abyssinian Greek Orthodox Church

Saint Moses the Abyssinian Church is one of the oldest churches in Nablus, built in the seventeenth century on the ruins of an ancient Byzantine church and named after Saint Moses (Musa al-Habashi) from the Nile Valley area (now Ethiopia), from where he is said to have visited our country and region.

Inside the church and its yard there are five graves of priests, all of whom are from Rafidia. The church was restored twice during the twentieth century and has been recently renovated and reopened with the help and financial support of the Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs.

It is said that Saint Moses (the Abyssinian) was a tall, black-skinned man, with a very bad reputation, who repented and became a priest after having led a sinful life that included robberies and even murder. Through the great mercy of God, however, he repented, left his band of robbers, and went to one of the desert monasteries, where he performed many wonders. Saint Moses became a model of penitence, and after some time gained admittance to the monastery. There, his austere life and the heavenly favors he received placed him in the first rank among the Fathers of the Desert. Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, raised him to the priesthood. He died at the close of the fourth century, when he was in his seventy-fifth year, surrounded by his many disciples.
Michel Sabbah
A Voice in the Wilderness

By David M. Neuhaus SJ

Michel Sabbah, Palestinian, Catholic, bishop, and intellectual, was born in Nazareth, the city of the Annunciation, in Palestine on March 19, 1933. At the age of 10, he was sent to the Roman Catholic seminary in the town of Beit Jala to study at the minor seminary. In 1948, he was separated from his family who remained in what became the state of Israel as he continued his studies in the West Bank, which had been annexed by Jordan. After years of preparation, he was ordained to the priesthood in Nazareth in 1955. As a young priest, he served in Madaba in Jordan and afterwards was appointed to teach in the seminary. After serving as director of the schools and as a priest in Djibouti, Sabbah completed a doctorate in Arabic linguistics, studying at both Saint Joseph’s University in Beirut and the Sorbonne in Paris. From 1980 until 1988, while based in Jordan, he was president of Bethlehem University.

It was at the beginning of the first Intifada against the Israeli occupation that Sabbah was appointed as the first Palestinian Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. In those eventful years, his leadership, both in the church and in civil society, was noteworthy, a prophetic voice for justice and peace. He promoted nonviolent resistance to the occupation and joined forces with all oppressed Palestinians, Christians and Muslims, in working for an end to the occupation. As patriarch, Sabbah published a series of pastoral letters that discussed the important issues that faced Christian Palestinians and the whole church, elaborating on faith within a situation of injustice. He was particularly active in fostering dialogue and collaboration among the Christian churches as well as with Muslims, also seeking ways to dialogue with progressive Jews who were working for justice and peace for all. In 1991, he established the Society of Saint Yves, a Catholic organization for human rights and legal aid.

In his long years as Latin Patriarch, Sabbah was universally recognized for his efforts to promote the cause of justice and peace for Palestinians and all peoples in the Middle East. After a long mandate as patriarch, he retired at the age of 75 in 2008. Rather than rest, however, Sabbah has remained a vibrant and engaged intellectual and activist. He was involved in the drafting of the Kairos Palestine document, has travelled widely to speak in international forums, and continues to head the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land, a think tank that addresses the issues that face the church in Israel/Palestine today.
The Cross in Contexts
Suffering and Redemption in Palestine

By Mitri Raheb and Suzanne Watts Henderson

In *The Cross in Contexts: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine*, Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian theologian, and Suzanne Watts Henderson, a New Testament scholar in the United States, explore the meaning of the cross in both first- and twenty-first-century Palestinian contexts. In the book’s introduction, Dr. Raheb discusses the surprise and wonder he felt at the discovery of how many Palestinian writers, poets, and artists, both Christian and Muslim, used the symbol of the cross as a paradigm for Palestinian suffering. A chapter on Mahmoud Darwish highlights how a re-exploration of his work led to the uncovering of the use of the cross as a symbol by Darwish throughout his life as well. Through these discoveries, Raheb began to question what message these artists were communicating to the Palestinian people through the use of the cross. In this way, the book was born from the exploration of the connection between the cross and the struggle of the Palestinian people. Watts Henderson uses her perspective as an American biblical scholar to consider the redemptive power of the cross in first-century Palestine, what it meant at that time, and what it adds to the narrative. Some of the topics covered in the book include the cross and political power, the cross, state, and religious terror, and the theme of Palestine itself on the cross.

In the conclusion of the book, Dr. Raheb writes:
“*The cross has a context, and this context leads to Palestine. So much of the story started there, in a tiny little corridor of human history, in a country the size of New Jersey, surrounded by mighty regional powers. So much of the story has continued, across the millennia, as the people of Palestine—Canaanites, Israelites, Jews, Christians, Muslims—have endured one occupation after another….*

“**Within this story, one event stands out as a decisive moment of revelation. Somehow, in the crucifixion of their Lord, our ancestors in Palestine were able to find in the midst of suffering a meaning for life…. This revelation gave them the power not only to endure pain, but also to creatively resist empires and oppression. The revelation of the cross … helped them reimagine life in a context marked with death, and to find hope in unexpected places.**

“This book stands out because it’s a conversation that crosses boundaries of time and space and culture to bring into clearer view many ways in which Jesus’ death continues to liberate us. It’s a dialogue between first-century Palestine and the Palestine of today. It’s a dialogue between an American and a Palestinian. It’s a dialogue between a theologian and a biblical scholar, a woman and a man, and a professor and a pastor. It’s a dialogue at a crossroad.”
**Bethlehem**

**Between Sight and Insight**

*An Exhibition by Elias Halabi*

Bethlehem, Between Sight and Insight is an exhibition that displays a collection of photography that reflects the rich cultural and social heritage of Bethlehem. The exhibition celebrates the city’s having been selected as the Capital of Arab Culture for 2020, and pays tribute to places and individuals who have become an invaluable part not only of the city itself but also of its identity and culture.

Palestinian photographer Elias Halabi used social documentation as a style and the camera as a tool to shed light on places, people, topics, scenes, and everyday life in the city. Thus, he documents and recounts the city’s heritage and identity, its beautiful nature, architecture, and the majestic stance of its churches, monasteries, and mosques. In addition, the exhibition highlights portraits of people as they go about their daily lives and work, something that is not necessarily familiar to everyone today.

Elias Halabi’s academic background in social sciences and psychology strongly encouraged him to use his lens along with his passion for photography to document the socio-cultural aspect of human nature in Palestine, in general, and in Bethlehem, in particular. As he observed the region’s photographic archive, Halabi realized that it only focused on life, architecture of the past century, or the political conflict. That motivated him to add to the existing social and cultural documentation of the region.

Bethlehem, Between Sight and Insight, curated by Ahmad Hifnawi, is not only a visual narration to interact with the details and people around us, it is also an invitation from the artist to notice and contemplate important details that we overlook due to our hectic daily lives. It also encourages us to restore sight and insight to our lives by returning to the rhythm and pace of a slower and more serene lifestyle.

Elias Halabi was born in Jerusalem in 1984 and presently lives in Bethlehem. The exhibition hosted by Bab idDeir Gallery in Bethlehem opened on November 14, 2019 and runs until January 10, 2020.
Jifna Preserves the Presence of Ancient Christianity

by Bassam Almohor

In the middle of the valley to the north of Ramallah is a small evergreen, quiet, and peaceful village called Jifna. Its history goes back to a millennium before Christ when it was first mentioned in the Old Testament as “Ophni” and “Gophna,” although the village was renamed Jifna, which means “the vines,” as it is known for its grapevines. Later on, Jifna appeared in the renown Madaba mosaic map as a town with two towers and a gate. Jifna is also mentioned in a tenth-century inscription on a stone above the gate of St. George’s Monastery in Wadi Qelt near Jericho.

Located 20 kilometers north of Jerusalem (31.962988, 35.215543) and 683 meters above sea level, the village of Jifna has been marked by the presence of Christians since the first centuries after Christ and holds countless stories. The village is home to 3,000 inhabitants, about 900 of whom are Catholic and Orthodox Christians, and the rest are Muslims. Both St. Joseph Catholic Church and St. George Orthodox Church were built in the mid-nineteenth century. In the middle of the town, there are the ruins of the ancient Byzantine St. George Church that was built in the sixth century.

One of the old stories the villagers retell even today is the story of the Holy Family and the village water spring in the middle of the town. The people of Jifna believe that the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus passed through the village on their way from Jerusalem, sitting down to rest near a spring under a fig tree. Branches still grow from that ancient tree, and a shrine in her name was built on the spot.

St. Joseph Catholic Parish was opened by the Latin Patriarchate in 1856 and houses a school where 113 students from kindergarten to sixth grade are enrolled. Like many Christian schools in Palestine, the patriarchate school welcomes both Christian and Muslim students.

The Crusaders built a large castle in the middle of the Christian urban center. It had a monumental gate with a portcullis and contained a large vaulted hall and thick walls of fine masonry. After their defeat by the Ayyubids under Saladin in 1187, the place fell into ruin. Nowadays, some renovations are being carried out on a small section to be used by the village youth club.

Jifna is famous for its lovely garden restaurants and swimming pools. People from all over visit the village to taste the delicious local meals and drinks. It is also known for its apricot harvest festival: each year, during the late spring period, hundreds travel to the village to harvest the fruit during its brief season.

For more information and guidance, contact the Latin parish priest Johny Bahbah at 059 824 0297.

Bassam Almohor can be reached at almohor@gmail.com, 059 753 4681, or through Facebook: @notebooktraveling.

"Now the cities of the tribe of the sons of Benjamin according to their families were Jericho and Beth-hoglah and Emek-keziz, and Beth-arabah and Zemaraim and Bethel, and Avvim and Parah and Ophrah, and Chephar-ammoni and Ophni and Geba; twelve cities with their villages." (Joshua 18:21–24)
Pain Perdu with Poached Pears

By Chef Fadi Kattan

Recently, the avoidance of food waste has become a global culinary issue, but Arab custom has long considered it haram to throw away bread and other kinds of food. Pain perdu or French toast, as it is also known, is a delicious way to use up leftover, slightly stale bread. This recipe turns your remaining loaf of Palestinian ka’ak into a simple dessert with seasonal poached pears with spices and crème anglaise, a light custard – a dash of rosewater adding to the local flavor. It is guaranteed to impress your family or guests.

Time: 45 minutes
Servings: four

Ingredients

Poached pears
- 4 firm, ripe pears
- 500 ml water
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon rosewater
- 6 black peppercorns
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 3 whole star anise

Pain perdu
- 1 loaf leftover ka’ak bread
- 250 ml whole milk
- 3 eggs
- 75 g sugar
- 40 g butter

Crème anglaise
(makes 250 ml)
- 125 ml whole milk
- 125 ml whipping cream
- 1 vanilla bean, split (or 1 teaspoon vanilla essence)
- 3 large egg yolks
- 3 tablespoons sugar

Method

1. To poach the sliced pears, heat the water in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Pour in the lemon juice and rosewater. Add the peppercorns, ginger, cinnamon, and star anise. Stir to combine.

2. Gently place the pears in the saucepan, covering them to keep them submerged. Simmer and poach for about 15 minutes, until tender.

3. For the crème anglaise, combine the milk and cream in a medium saucepan. Scrape in seeds from vanilla bean and add the bean (or add essence). Heat the milk mixture until it simmers. Remove from the heat.

4. Whisk together the egg yolks and sugar in a medium bowl. Gradually whisk the hot milk mixture into the egg mixture. Return the crème anglaise to the saucepan. Stir over low heat until it thickens (about 5 minutes), taking care that it doesn’t boil. (If you wish to serve the crème anglaise chilled, it can be made a day ahead, covered, and refrigerated.)

5. For the pain perdu, whisk the eggs with the sugar and the milk in a medium bowl.

6. Cut the ka’ak bread into quarters and then slice these in half.

7. Fully soak each piece of bread in the egg mixture.

8. Heat the butter in a large frying pan and then add the slices of bread, cooking them well on both sides until they are golden brown.

9. Serve the pain perdu on a plate over lashings of crème anglaise, topping it with slices of poached pears. If you wish, add a scoop of vanilla ice cream.
**JERUSALEM**

**CONCERTS**

Sunday 15

18:00–19:00 Christmas concert organized by the Magnificat Institute Jerusalem featuring the Magnificat’s choirs, ensembles and orchestra. Immaculate Hall in St. Saviour Church.

**SPECIAL EVENTS**

Wednesday 4

16:00–18:00 “Who Are the People Working for Justice in Israel?” is a lecture organized by Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center to hear and learn from members of the community in Jerusalem working for a just peace in Israel. For registration, please contact registration@sabeel.org. Tantur Ecumenical Institute.

Friday 6

17:00 Christmas Tree Lighting of Mar Elias Jerusalem Church. Mar Elias Jerusalem Church Square.

Thursday 12

18:00–21:00 Traditional Lucia Celebration, organized by the Swedish Theological Institute, featuring a parade and offering warm wine (Glögg) and traditional gingerbread (pepparkakor), followed by Lucia prayer in the Chapel of S. Bridget. Garden of the Tabor House.

**THEATER**

Wednesday 4

20:00 Enheduanna is a contemporary work that combines dance, circus, poetry, and music, organized by Ashtar Theatre and presented by the Palestinian artist, Ashtar Muallim, who chose nontraditional arts for communication and expression. Palestinian National Theatre.

**BETHLEHEM**

**CHILDREN’S EVENTS**

Sunday 15

12:00 Decorating and tasting the traditional dessert al-burbara, a children’s activity organized by Bethlehem Municipality in celebration of Saint Barbara’s Day. To register, please call 059 459 3110. Bethlehem Peace Center.

**CONCERTS**

Sunday 1

19:00–20:30 Les Chanteurs Montagnards de Lourdes Christmas concert, organized by Bethlehem Municipality in the framework of the twinning relationship with the city of Lourdes, France. Chapel of the Divine Child, Bethlehem University.

Tuesday 10

18:00 Young Musicians European Orchestra, conducted by Maestro Paolo Olmi, organized by Bethlehem Municipality and the Italian Consulate General. Saint Catherine Church.

19:30 Christmas carols and reading with Brass for Peace. Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, Bethlehem.

**FILM SCREENINGS**

Monday 9

17:00–19:00 Red Carpet screening, organized by Dar Al-Kalima Cinema Club as part of the Fifth Human Rights Film Festival – Karama Palestine 2019. Dar Al-Kalima College Theatre.

**LECTURES**

Monday 2

8:30–12:00 “Current Political Realities in Palestine and Inside Israel” is a lecture and moderated panel organized by Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, including Q&A discussion with representatives from the United Nations, the Palestinian Authority, an Israeli Member of Knesset, and Al-Haq on the current political realities and international law. For registration, please contact registration@sabeel.org. Bethlehem Hotel.

Thursday 5

8:30–13:30 “Palestine and Nonviolence” is a lecture organized by Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center about the KUMI Initiative by members of Sabeel and a showing of the film Broken. For registration, please contact registration@sabeel.org. Bethlehem Hotel.

14:00–20:00 “Christian Zionism” is a lecture organized by Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center and Bethlehem Bible College. For registration, please contact registration@sabeel.org. Bethlehem Bible College.

**RELIGIOUS EVENTS**

Tuesday 24

13:00 Reception of His Beatitude the Most Rev. Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Apostolic Administrator. Manger Square.

22:00 Christmas Eve International Service. Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, Bethlehem.

23:00 The Midnight Christmas Vigil, presided by the Most Rev. Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Apostolic Administrator, followed by a procession to the Grotto of the Nativity. Manger Square.

Wednesday 25

10:00 Christmas Mass presided by the Most Rev. Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Apostolic Administrator. Saint Catherine Church.

10:30 Christmas Day service in Arabic. Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, Bethlehem.

**SPECIAL EVENTS**

Monday 2

14:00–20:30 Souq al-Eid| Bab idDeir Christmas Market, presenting all kinds of authentic artwork and products by Palestinian designers, such as jewelry, clothing, handicrafts, food, etc. Bab idDeir Gallery and Kitchen rooftop terrace.

14:00–21:00 Meeting with the Palestinian community of Beit Sahour hosted by Kairos Palestine to hear and learn what life is like for them. For registration, please contact registration@sabeel.org. Bethlehem Hotel.

Tuesday 3

8:30–18:30 A look into Muslim and Christian interfaith relations and a discussion on religious extremism hosted by Al-Liqa Center, and conversations with Bethlehem University students. For registration, please contact registration@sabeel.org. Bethlehem Hotel.

Friday 6

13:45–20:00 An afternoon at Dar Al-Kalima: Tour guided by artist, filmmaker, writer, and editor Joel Spring, and Susan Schuppli, organized by the Goethe-Institut Ramallah. Exhibition is open from Sunday to Thursday between 12:00 and 18:00 until January 12, 2020. Goethe-Institut Ramallah.

Sunday 15

17:00–20:00 Beit Jala Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony organized by Beit Jala Municipality. Municipality Square (Al-Manshiyeh).

Friday 27 – Sunday 29

16:00–20:30 Christmas House is a three-day activity organized by Bethlehem Municipality that offers a variety of Christmas performances and activities for children and families. Manger Square.

**THEATER**

Sunday 8

18:00–19:00 Christmas Box opening night, organized and produced by Diyar Theatre. Dar Al-Nadwa.

**RAMALLAH**

**CHILDREN’S EVENTS**

Sunday 1

8:00–14:00 FunTech Day of entertaining, technological and scientific activities for children from 6–12 years old, organized by Kids Lab and Ramallah Youth Club. Ramallah Recreational Complex.

**EXHIBITIONS**

Sunday 1

18:00–19:30 Overtones: On How to Listen. Artist Tour guided by artist, filmmaker, writer, and editor Shuruq Harb, with Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Hiwa K, Maha Maamoun, Noor Abed, Shayma Nader, Joel Spring, and Susan Schuppli, organized by the Goethe-Institut Ramallah. Exhibition is open from Sunday to Thursday between 12:00 and 18:00 until January 12, 2020. Goethe-Institut Ramallah.

**FILM SCREENINGS**

Wednesday 4

18:00 Wanda, produced in 1971 and directed by Barbara Loden, is a 102-minute English film that tells the story of a lonely housewife who drifts through mining country until she meets a petty thief who takes her in. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

Wednesday 11

18:00 Araby, produced in 2017 and directed by Affonso Uchoa and João Dumans, is a 97–minute Brazilian film that tells the story of a young man who sets off on a ten–year journey in search of a better life. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

Wednesday 18

18:00 Beasts of the Southern Wild, produced in 2012 and directed by Benh Zeitlin, is a 93–minute American film that tells the story of a six-year-old girl who exists on the brink of orphanhood, believing that the natural world is in balance with the universe until a fierce storm changes her reality. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

**LECTURES**

Saturday 21

18:00 Performative lecture by Marc Buchy presenting the findings of his research about unlearned history proposed by the colonizers and engagement in epistemic indiscipline”. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

**SPECIAL EVENTS**

Sunday 1

18:00 Ramallah Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony. Organized by Ramallah Municipality. Yasser Arafat Square.
E V E N T S

Thursday 5 – Sunday 8
17:00–23:00 Christmas bazaar offers a variety of traditional Christmas products, sweets, and food, as well as special performances for children and the entire family. The Greek Catholic Church Ramallah.

Friday 6 – Saturday 7
12:00–17:00 Tasting of the fresh olive oil from Terra Fidea and the olives of the Ramallah Roman olive trees. Dar Zahran Building.

Monday 9
11:30–14:00 National Integrity Ceremony, organized by AMAN Transparency Palestine to honor the champions of integrity for 2019. Theater of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society.

Monday 16
12:00–17:00 Tasting al–Burbara, the traditional dessert made on the occasion of Saint Barbara’s Day. Dar Zahran Heritage Building.

Monday 23
18:00 Young Writer of the Year Award 2019, offering prizes worth $4,000 for young writers from 22 to 35 years old in the literary fields of novel, drama, or poetry and short story. Winning pieces will be published and receive jury recommendations. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

SYMPOSIAS

Saturday 7
11:00–16:00 “Palestine from Above” is a symposium that explores how the technology of mapping and image making has been used by several administrations, mostly through the military, to depict the Palestinian landscape from the sky for purposes of documentation of infrastructure, human settlement, natural resources, and more. Presented by Zeynep Çelik, Michael Talbot, Andrew Yip, Raja Shehadeh, Salim Tamari, and Carol Khoury. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

Tuesday 10

THEATER

Sunday 15
18:30 Love on the Shelf is a theatrical work performed in a template of black comedy, presenting the characters’ efforts to break free from the daily constraints of a strange and accelerated world, in which humans lose their sense of intimacy, privacy, and love. Ashtar Theatre.

GAZA

SPECIAL EVENTS

Thursday 5
9:00–16:00 Artistic Stations 5 is an open house event organized by Theatre Day Productions for the Palestinian Performing Arts Network (PPAN) to present its annual cultural event 2019, showcasing new performing arts initiatives in the Gaza Strip, under the slogan: “Performing Arts is a Right and an Entitlement,” in which drama, theater presentations, dabka dance, circus, and puppet theater will highlight the important role of performing arts in the community. Theatre Day Productions theatre hall.

Monday 9
11:30–14:00 National Integrity Ceremony, organized by AMAN Transparency Palestine to honor the champions of integrity for 2019. Theatre of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society Gaza.

Thursday 12
14:00–16:00 Global campaign against gender-based violence – Gaza, organized by Theatre Day Production on the occasion of the International Day of Human Rights, with special emphasis on women rights, presenting creative audiovisual work produced by women in TDP’s audiovisual training program, and a play from the World Repertoire, now in a Gaza adaptation: Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Theatre Day Productions theatre hall.

Monday 30 – Tuesday 31
14:00–16:00 Presentations of youth initiatives organized as part of Theatre Day Productions’ entrepreneurship youth hub activities. Theatre Day Productions theatre hall.
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art
Al Jumhuriya St., P.O. Box 14644, Jerusalem 91146
Tel: 02-6283457, Fax: 02-6272312
Email: info@almalfoundation.org, www.almalfoundation.org
Al Mamal Foundation for Contemporary Art
Palestinian Heritage Museum
Abu Obaida St., P.O. Box 19377, Jerusalem. Tel: +972 2 6272531, Fax: +972 2 6272341
Email: info@dta-museum.org, website: www.dta-museum.org
The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNCM)
Jerusalem 11 Azzahra St., Shihabi Building
Tel: +972 (0)2-626-3230, Fax: +972 (0)2-627-1711
PO Box 66676, Jerusalem, 91666
Email: info@ncm.birzeit.edu, http://ncm.birzeit.edu
Birzeit University
Old Girl’s Hostel, Birzeit, Tel 02-281-9155/6
Ramallah Tel: 02-2959070-1, Fax: 02-2959071
Beit Sahour Tel & Fax: 02-2748704
Tchaikovsky Musical School Tel & Fax: 022778606
Nablus Tel & Fax: 09-237773
Gaza Tel & Fax: 08-2628903
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Yabous Cultural Centre
10 Al Zahra St, P.O. Box 54874
Jerusalem, Palestine
Tel: 00972 6261045, Fax: 00972 6261372
Email: officemanager@yabous.org, Website: Yabous.org

Dar Al-Sabagh Centre for Diaspora Studies and Research
Mar Andrea, Antonya Street, Bethlehem
Tel: 979-22773553 info@palestinenature.org
www.palestinenature.org/visit

Palestine Museum of Natural History
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Tel: 979-22773553 info@palestinenature.org
www.palestinenature.org/visit

A.M. Qattan Foundation
27 An-Nahda Women Association Street, Al-Tira, Ramallah – Palestine, P.O. Box 2276, Postal Code 90606
Telephone: +972 2 296 0544/+972 2 296 3280, Fax: +972 2 296 0544
Email: info@qattanfoundation.org, www.qattanfoundation.org
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Tel: +970 2 240389, Fax: +970 2 2402851, Mob: +970 5594790
Email: info@popularartcentre.org, www.popularartcentre.org
Facebook.com/PopularArtCentre http://twitter.com/PAC_ArtCentre http://instagram.com/pac.artcentre

Sareyyet Ramallah- First Ramallah Group
Al-Tireh Street, P.O Box: 2017, Ramallah- West Bank, Palestine
Tel: + 970 2 295 27 06 / + 970 2 295 26 90
Jawwal: + 970 597 777 086, Fax: + 970 2 298 05 83
E-mail: sareyyet@sareyyet.ps / art@sareyyet.ps, www.sareyyet.ps

The Palestinian Circus School
Al Manzel Street, Birzeit
Telefax: +970-2-2812000, Mobile: +972-59 2812001
Email: Info@palcircus.ps, www.palcircus.ps

The Palestinian Museum
Museum Street, PO Box 48, Birzeit, Palestine
Tel: +970 2 294 1948, Fax: +970 2 294 1936, Email: info@palmuseum.org

The Palestinian Museum
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reservation@jerusalemambassador.com

**Ambassador Boutique**
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Email: boutique@ambassadorcollection.com

**Austrian Hospice of the Holy Family**
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Tel: +972 2 6265800, Fax: +972 2 6265816
Email: office@austrianhospice.com, Website: www.austrianhospice.com

**Casa Nova - Jerusalem Hospice Guesthouse**
Casanova Street, New Gate
P.O.Box 1321 Jerusalem 9101301 Israel
Tel: 02 627 1441, 02 626 2974, Fax: 02 626 4370
Email: casanovaj@custodia.org, https://casanovaj.custodia.org/

**Christmas Boutique Hotel**
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christmashotel@bezeqint.net

**Gloria Hotel**
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Tel: 628 2431, Fax: 628 2401
glonahl@netvision.net.

**Jerusalem Hotel**
15 Antara Ben Shadad St., Jerusalem
Tel: 628 3282, Fax: 6283282, raed@jrshotel.com, www.jrshotel.com

**Knights Palace Hotel**
Freres Street, New Gate, Jerusalem
Tel: 628 2537, Fax: 627 5390
kp@actcom.co.il

**Pontifical Institute**
Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center
3 Paratroopers Road, P.O. Box 20531, Jerusalem, 91204
Tel: 627 9111, Fax: 627 1995, www.notredamecenter.org

**Ritz Hotel Jerusalem**
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Email: reservations@jerusaleminritz.com, www.jerusaleminritz.com

**Seven Arches Hotel**
Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, 91190
Tel: 626 7777, Fax: 627 1319
svnarch@bezeqint.net, www.7arches.com

**St. George Hotel**
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P.O.BOX 19627, Jerusalem 91544
Tel: +972 2 627 7232, Fax: +972 2 627 7233
E-mail: info@stgeorgehoteljerusalem.com

**Tantur Hills Hotel**
Hebron Road 303 (before Rachel's Tomb)
P.O.Box 19250, Jerusalem 9119201
Tel: +972 5 656 8800 Fax: +972 2 5658801
reservations@tanturhills.com, www.tanturhills.com

**Caesar Hotel**
Al Masyoun, Ramallah
Tel: 022979400 Fax: 022979401
info@caesar-hotel.ps, www.caesar-hotel.ps

**Carmel Hotel**
Al-Masyoun, Ramallah, Palestine
Tel: 2972222 Fax: 2966966,
www.carmelhotel.ps

**Gemzo Suites**
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gemzo@palnet.com, www.gemzosuites.net

**Millennium Hotel Palestine Ramallah**
P.O.Box 1771, Palestine, Ramallah, Al Masyoun
Tel: +970 2 2497929,
gemzo@palnet.com, www.gemzosuites.net

**Taybeh Golden Hotel**
Main Street 100, Taybeh (Ramallah District)
Tel: 289 9440
info@taybehgoldenhotel.com, www.taybehgoldenhotel.com
ACCOMMODATIONS

Bethlehem

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Email: city@ambassadorcollection.com

Jacir Palace Hotel
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Tel: 0097227666777, Fax: 009722766770
reservation@jacirpalace.ps, www.jacirpalace.ps
Facebook: jacirpalacehotel, Twitter: JacirPalace

Nativity Bells Hotel
City Center - Manger Street
Tel: 00 972 2 2748800, 2748808, Fax: 00 972 2 2748870
Email: nativitybells@palnet.com, www.nativitybellshotel.ps
https://www.facebook.com/NativityBellsHotel/

Ibda’a Cultural Center Guesthouse
Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Bab al-Mohayem, Bethlehem
Tel: +970 02 277 6444, info@ibdaa48.org  www.ibdaa48.org

Al Yasmeen Hotel
Nablus
Tel: 09 233 3555 Fax: 09 233 3666
Info@alyasmeen.com, www.alyasmeen.com

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Tel: 232 1255, Fax: 232 2189
reservation@jerichoresorts.com, www.jerichoresorts.com

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Jerusalem Street, Tel: 022311200, Fax: 022311222
Email: info@oasis-jericho.ps, website: http://www.oasis-jericho.ps
www.facebook.com/OasisJericho, Snapchat: oasis.hotel

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Mobile: 059 420 4378
rent@rawabi.ps

Nablus

Rawabi

Jericho

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Fax +972 2 6275391
kg@octcom.ca.il
www.knightspalace.com

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Jaffa Gate
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Al Diwan Restaurant
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Sheikh Jarrah, Jerusalem, 91196, Tel: 541 2222, Fax: 562 8202
reservation@jerusalembassador.com, www.jerusalembassador.com

Borderline Restaurant Café
Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem 97200
Tel 532 8342, contact@alshawhan.org

Cheese & Wine Rooftop Restaurant
(Pontifical Institute Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center)
Tel: 627 9177, rooftop@notredamecenter.org, www.notredamecenter.org

Jerusalem Hotel Restaurant (Kan Zaman)
15 Antara Ben Shadad St., Jerusalem
Tel: 628 3282, Fax: 6283282, raed@jshotel.com, www.jshotel.com

La Collina Bistro and Restaurant
Tantur Hills Hotel, Hebron Road 303
Tel: +972 2 5658800 Fax: +972 2 5658801
Email: reservations@tanturhills.com, www.tanturhills.com

Meejana Lounge (at St. George Hotel)
6 Amr Ibn Al Kas Street – Jerusalem
P.O. Box 69272, Jerusalem 91544
Tel: +972 2 627 7232, Fax: +972 2 627 7233
Email: info@stgeorhehoteljerusalem.com

Pasha’s
Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem 97200
Tel 582 5162, 532 8342, contact@alshawhan.org

Al-Jisser Pub
Al Madares Street, Beit Sahour
Mobile: 0597492175

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Tel: 02 276 9222

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Martini Bar
AlMasyoun, Ramallah
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Pronto Lounge
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Dr. Issa Ziadeh Street, Ramallah, Palestine
Tel: 02-298-7312 or 0599-795-978, prontocafeeramallah@gmail.com

Ramallah
**RESTAURANTS**

**Zeit ou Zaater**
Rukab St., Ramallah
(02) 295 4455, Email: zeitouzaater@gmail.com
Facebook: zeitouzaater

**Zest**
Issa Zadeh Street, Ramallah, Palestine
Tel: 02 295 3555, E-mail: info@zest.ps
Facebook: ZESTRestaurantOfficial Instagram: zestrestaurantofficial

**Artoos**
The Art of Gelato
Q Center, Rawabi 666, Palestine
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https://www.facebook.com/QCenterRawabiOfficial/

**Lilac**
Pizza, Pasta, & Pastries
Q Center, Rawabi 666, Palestine
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Shawarma & Falafel
Q Center, Rawabi 666, Palestine
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https://www.facebook.com/QCenterRawabiOfficial/

**Siroter**
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Tel: 02 282 5599
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**عالسيرم**
Quick Sandwiches Shop
Q Center, Rawabi 666, Palestine
Tel: 02 282 5599
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**Nablus**
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Tel: 09 233 3555 Fax: 09 233 3686
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**ATTRACTIONS**

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https://www.facebook.com/taybehbeer/
Opening Hours: Monday- Saturday 8 AM-3:30 PM

**Taybeh Winery**
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Tel: 02-289-9440, info@taybehwinery.com, www.taybehwinery.com
https://www.facebook.com/Taybehwinery/
Opening Hours: Daily 9 AM-5 PM

**Zawyeh Gallery**
Current exhibition: Bashar Khalaf | Solo exhibition |
7A President Square, Al-Balo’ Albireh
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zanani@zawyeh.net, www.zawyeh.net

**Jericho**

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**ATTRACTIONS**

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Q Center, Rawabi 666, Palestine
Tel: 059 594 9026, https://www.facebook.com/funfactoryrawabi/

**Rawabi Extreme**
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Tel: 059 420 4377, https://www.facebook.com/RawabiExtreme

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Email Dahert@netvision.net.il

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Email: info@gg-tours.ps, Web: www.gg-tours.ps

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Grand Park Hotel, Second Floor, Manger Street – Holy Land
Phone: +970 2 2777967+970 2 2764686, Fax: +970 2 277796
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www.lailatours.com, Laila Tours & Travel
When It Rains, It Rains on All

In my opinion, the main challenge of Palestinian Christians has always been how to maintain the balance between assimilating to the local, predominantly Muslim, culture while preserving their own cultural and religious identity. Palestinian Christians have never considered themselves to be an ethnic minority but rather part and parcel of society, sharing a common fate of glory and pain.

When Palestine was lost in 1948, the Christian villages of Iqrit and Kafr Bir‘im were not spared from demolition, and the ruins of the church in Iqrit still stand as a testimony. The inhabitants of both villages have yet to be allowed to return. In fact, their battle to go back to their destroyed villages is still in the courts. The religious identity of the Christians of Jaffa, Jerusalem, and many other cities and towns in historical Palestine did not protect them from the catastrophe that afflicted all Palestinians. A classic example: the residents of the upscale neighborhoods of Qatamon, Baqa‘a, and King George in West Jerusalem, many of whom were Christian. Practically all the inhabitants of these neighborhoods were forced to leave their homes and never allowed to return. Forcibly evicting Christians from West Jerusalem or terrorizing them to the point of driving them out not only caused a massive wave of emigration but also triggered a tragedy that was never to be overcome.

Sharing a common fate surely creates a certain bond that is evident in Palestine, as the article “Neighbors of Trees and Stone” in this edition clearly demonstrates. This bond is bound to become even stronger as you wait in line to cross a checkpoint or when you risk losing your Jerusalem residency if you reside elsewhere for a certain amount of time. I would like to believe that the case of the city of Beit Sahour during the first Intifada, which started in 1987, exemplifies the spirit of Palestinian Christians. Along with other towns and refugee camps, Beit Sahour essentially competed for leadership in the national resistance against the occupation. The heroic resistance by the people of this Christian town became a source of national pride not only for Palestinian Christians but for all Palestinians.

I am not talking about perfect harmony (which I doubt exists between communities anywhere in the world), but when it rains, it rains on all.

Long live Palestine.

Sani Meo
Publisher