

EDITORIAL

This edition of the Magazine is somewhat later than anticipated. We had scheduled an interview by Duncan Macpherson with Cormac Murphy-O'Connor but the Cardinal's heavy work schedule meant this was only possible somewhat later than had been hoped. However, we are pleased that it is now included in this issue.

It sees almost a *sine qua non* that the Magazine appears against a depressing background and series of events in Israel/Palestine and this is no exception. Even the safe release of Alan Johnston—in which a local Catholic priest seems to have played a part—hardly lifts the gloom of the recent action in Gaza.

Readers should rest assured that some of our regular features, such as 'Voices from the Diaspora', will be resumed with the next issue. We will also continue with our general surveys of the Christian communities of the region.

We are pleased to note that the first Michael Prior Memorial Lecture has just taken place. Robert Fisk, the renowned Middle East correspondent for *The Independent*, was the first lecturer in the series of Michael Prior Memorial Lectures. It was held under the auspices of Living Stones and sponsored jointly by Living Stones and the Centre for Religion and Philosophy of St Mary's University College, London. Held at St Mary's on 6 June 2007, the lecture was attended by over 250 people. Mr Fisk's presentation can be heard on www.livingstonesonline.org.uk. It was a lively, provocative and challenging occasion where the speaker ranged widely over current events, speaking on the theme, 'Facts, Lies and Videotape: Reporting Events in the Middle East.'

We also include three notices of planned pilgrimages. These seem apt in the light of Cormac Murphy-O'Connor comments in his interview.

Bishop Cragg's talk at the AGM in January 2007, was entitled 'The Measure of the Christian Task in the Palestinian Situation' and is reproduced here. This is followed by 'Preaching the Promised Land for the Canaanites' by our chairman, Duncan Macpherson. Matthew Taylor writes on 'Living Stones Online' and Martin O'Kane reviews Michael Prior's *A Living Stone*. We include the Easter

Message sent by the patriarchs and heads of local churches in Jerusalem and, finally, we are pleased to include the talk given at the AGM by Professor Manuel Hassassian, PLO Representative to the UK.

Members are encouraged to visit the website where a number of these important items are also available for download. Moreover, there is the opportunity to subscribe to the news service which Matthew Taylor writes about in these pages.

Just in case those living in the comparative safety of the UK think they are immune to the tragedies of Israel/Palestine, we take the liberty of reproducing a note circulated by executive committee member, Jo Simister. Its brutal facts need no comment:

‘On Thursday 16th May at about 5pm local time my sister-in-law Fadwa was travelling in a car with one of her slightly elder sisters and her husband and three young children (under school age) between two of the family homes in Rafah, Gaza Strip, when they were caught in crossfire between Israeli helicopter gunships and retaliatory firing from the ground. The other passengers and car were untouched, but Fadwa was fatally wounded. She was taken to the hospital, from where her father took her body immediately, prepared it for burial himself, and she was of course buried soon after, as is the custom (before sundown on the day of death).

This brave course of action was to prevent any examination of the body and identification of the bullets (Israeli or Palestinian, of either faction), leading to blame and retaliation—a very wise action.

‘Fadwa Ayish Younis was 23 years old. She was still living at home, studying, and unmarried.’

Leonard Harrow

FROM THE CHAIR

There is little to be happy about in the situation of Christians in the Holy Land and in the wider Middle East. In Iraq one of the oldest Christian communities in the world has been halved in numbers due to a haemorrhage of Christians who have become refugees in Syria and elsewhere as they flee the religious intolerance and general mayhem consequent upon the invasion of their country. Those who remain, risk—and frequently incur—beatings and assassinations. According to a report in *The Tablet* (14 July) 59 Iraqi children and their families have just risked their lives by going ahead with the public celebration of a children's 'first Holy Communion at the Syrian Catholic Church of Our Lady in Baghdad! Meanwhile in Israel-Palestine: the road map is going nowhere; the Palestinian leadership is divided; Gaza has suffered fratricidal violence and the perennial Palestinian experience of road blocks, arrests without trial, house demolitions, expropriation of property, wounding and shootings continues. It is small wonder that many of those Christians who have the opportunity to leave are doing so.

Raising Awareness

Clearly the solution needs to be both political and international. As our interview with Living Stones patron Cardinal Cormac Murphy O' Connor makes clear, although Church leaders do not have political answers, all Christians have the task of raising awareness of the plight of the Palestinians and showing that Palestinian Christians are not forgotten. Specifically, the Cardinal echoes the plea of the Christian leaders in the Holy Land that Christians in Britain should not hesitate to show solidarity by going on pilgrimage.

Pilgrimages

Living Stones is contributing in a small way in all these areas. Pilgrimages are only rarely organised by us but we are now able to advise those wishing to organise a pilgrimage in the spirit of Living Stones. Such a pilgrimage will always involve worshipping and meeting with the indigenous Christian communities as well as with those individuals and organisations concerned with justice and peace for all the inhabitants of the Holy Land. We are also able to recommend pilgrimages which we believe fulfil these criteria.

Further Action

Examples of our contribution to the raising of awareness of issues affecting the churches of the Middle East have included our January conference, at which Bishop Kenneth Cragg offered a profound reflection on the relationship between Christianity, Islam and Judaism (a paper included in this issue of the journal). Another notable example was the first Michael Prior Memorial Lecture, held at Saint Mary's University College, and co-hosted by the College's Holy Land Research Centre. This lecture was given by the eminent Independent correspondent Robert Fisk with the provocative title of 'Reporting the Middle East: Facts, Lies and Videotape.' This hard hitting and frequently controversial talk can be heard on our website on <http://www.livingstonesonline.org.uk/>

Research and Publications

The Living Stones Michael Prior Memorial Fund continues to fund a Palestinian PhD student in Jerusalem who is researching a thesis for the University of Wales on the impact of the occupation on the Christian Churches in the Holy Land (Lampeter). It is also providing help for several relevant projects at Bethlehem University

Congratulations are due to associate editor, Dr Stephen Sizer, on his new book on Christian Zionism; *Zion's Christian Soldiers: The Bible Israel and the Church*, published by Inter Varsity Press with a forward by John Stott. Recommendations for this book can be found on <http://www.sizers.org/articles/zcsreviews.htm>

We are now able to offer advice and contacts for Living Stones members interested in pursuing post graduate research in Holy Land Studies.

Duncan Macpherson

**AN INTERVIEW WITH
CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR**

Duncan Macpherson

1. *After your reference to the wall in your 2006 Christmas homily, one of your unkinde critics accused you of 'grandstanding' from a distance. How far did going to the Holy Land and meeting the people who live there either confirm or modify your previous conceptions of the situation?*

What most shocked me during my visit to the Holy Land was that fact that the streets of Bethlehem are so deserted. The pilgrims no longer come to this holy place, and the Palestinian Christians themselves are now leaving to find employment elsewhere. The people there struggle so much to find hope and joy in their daily lives, which are dominated by concerns about economic hardship and security. The reality of their struggle was made very clear to me.

2. *As you know, Living Stones is an ecumenical charity; what do you see as the significance of the fact that your pilgrimage was undertaken in company with the Archbishop of Canterbury, an Armenian bishop and a Free Church leader?*

Our presence in Bethlehem was as Church leaders, united in spite of our differences by our belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The fact that we were all in Bethlehem together in the Advent season, when we prepare to celebrate Christ coming into our world, was a symbol of the unity of all members of the Church across the world in Jesus; and a sign of hope for those Christians in the Holy Land.

3. *Did all four members of the group react in the same way to the shared experience of the visit or were there any differences in perception of what was happening there or of what should be done to advance peace and justice in the region?*

I think all four of us were equally and deeply moved by the pilgrimage. What we saw there was a people and a place that have been torn apart by violence, and what we took away, more than anything else was a desire for peace. I am sure each of us would describe our experience and our memories differently but nobody could fail to have been moved by the plight of the people of the Holy Land.

4. *Which Christian and other religious leaders did you meet, and what was their message to the Christians in Britain?*

We met the thirteen heads of Churches in Jerusalem, the most senior among whom was the Greek Patriarch, Theophilos III. They were incredibly welcoming towards us, and it was clear that our very presence in the Holy Land was an act of fraternal solidarity that was gratefully received. Their message to us was a plea for support from the Christians in Britain and an encouragement for more Christians to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

5. *What can be done to stop the exodus of Christians from the Holy Land or to encourage those who have left to return? What do you see as the responsibility of the wider church in this matter?*

First and foremost we should all pray for an end to this conflict and to the pain that has been caused to the all those whose lives have been affected by it. But I would also urge the Christians of this country to go if they can on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We must show the Christians of the Holy Land that they are not forgotten, that they and the land where they live are very much in our minds and our hearts. The Church should not turn its back on their suffering.

6. *Do you see the Palestinian issue as having any impact on wider Muslim/Christian and Jewish/Christian relations, especially in the UK?*

I think that the issue in Palestine is one which everyone concerned with and involved in inter-faith relations between these three faiths must engage seriously with, but the important thing is to turn it into constructive dialogue. To stand together as members of different faiths in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land and to show them that there is hope for a peaceful relationship is crucial.

7. *What do you feel we must do to support groups such as Palestinian Christians, and other groups, e.g. Chaldeans in Iraq and Iran?*

We must raise awareness of their plight and ensure that their troubles are always in our prayers. It is hard for many of us to imagine the difficulties that these people face on a daily basis, but our support is so important to them. I would again encourage those who are able to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land to go there—this will bring so much reassurance to the Palestinian Christians that they are not forgotten.

8. *How do you see the way forward for peace and justice in the Middle East?*

It is not for me to postulate solutions to this difficult and painful problem, but I do think that the key to peace in the Middle East is peace in the Holy Land. We must continue to pray that those on both sides of the conflict have a conversion of heart and are able to trust each other. This change in mentality is the first step on the path to a peaceful and just Middle East.

I think the example given by the new arrangements in Northern Ireland for peaceful government and reconciliation can be a sign of hope for all areas of conflict, not least the Holy Land.

THE MEASURE OF THE CHRISTIAN TASK IN THE PALESTINIAN SITUATION

Bishop Kenneth Cragg

(A talk given at Living Stones' AGM and Conference, 20 January 2007, at All Hallows on the Wall, London)

We have a lot of ground to cover and a very difficult topic—'the measure of the Christian task in the Palestinian situation'. One might say the first measure of the task is surviving at all, given the long story of mutual alienation and physical humiliation. There is a loss of hope and the onset of a deep and legitimate despair about the whole nature of the future. In that context, as we have heard, there has been a sad degree of emigration out of the land. So there is a real problem of Christian survival. In certain tragic sense what has been in the mind of Living Stones is that the interest of the West in Jerusalem becomes like the visiting of a museum to look at relics of the past. This museumisation of the Holy Land in that way is one of the great tragedies of Palestinian Christianity. But I would like to say that in a visit last November to the Sabeel conference I was deeply impressed with the resilience of the Palestinian population when you visit the not misnamed Ramallah Palace of Culture. It is indeed a palace, a marvellous building with a splendid auditorium, at the heart of Ramallah. I was also shown a housing complex of some 30 dwellings, of a size and location suitable for young families, built by the Anglican diocese there which is trying to discourage the emigration incidental to the loss of local hope. There is a real resilience of spirit in the Palestinian cause for which we should rejoice. It is evident in the vitality of the excellent amenities of the university of Bethlehem despite endless interference. As we have been hearing from Anthony O'Mahony there is the ecumenical problem, the task of identity. There are so many things

that are disparate about the Christian image in the Middle East.

This is not the main topic that I want to come to, but maybe it is time to appreciate those Chalcedonian definitions and what they were aiming to do and at the same time somehow to live beyond them. There is a very wise saying about Christology: 'Do not turn a mystery into an enigma,' using 'mystery' in the New Testament sense of the *mysterion*. We can be over-intellectual in trying to balance together the elements which we have in view in our faith when we say 'God was in Christ'.

Beyond these two measures of the Christian task there is obviously the relation to Zionism and its relation to Judaism and ours to Islam. Let us try and explore together the Christian task in respect of these two systems which are the immediate context of our survival. I want to say that Zionism, in its expression of Judaism, and Islam together share a single description, namely that they are in a sense religions identified by antipathy, I mean antipathy to what is not themselves. I do not imply that all religions are not somehow involved in this assertiveness of identity. We all are. Yet there is something in the Judaic and the Islamic which lives essentially in radical terms of contrast. It is there in the very opening chapter of the Qur'an, 'Those upon whom God's anger rests,' so characteristic of Islam. Consult David Marshall's doctoral study mainly based on Surah 11, 'God and the Idolators'. And we are all familiar with this deliberate contrast which tends to identify the very being of the Muslim. Because ultimately of the change in Islam which took place in the very context of the *Sirah* of Muhammad himself, and notably in the sequel to the Hijrah from Mecca to the Medina Islam was made inherently political. However, in the context of the prophets, Muhammad was only a preacher to whom it was said, 'Muhammad, your sole liability is the message you bring, the *balagh*.' This was radically altered, whether or not by divine decree (because there is no trace of the Hijrah having been commanded) Islam became a movement involved in the legitimated use of force and in conflict. So then Islam tends to be defined by a conscious and deeply indulged contrast with what is not Islam. Thus it is part of the Christian vocation to address this problem, namely, put in a positive form, Can Islam be comprehended now as a message only and not as a polity and a policy?

There is the same situation with Judaism, not islamically in terms of doctrine, which is necessarily assertive by a degree of important contrast, but in the Jewish case what is ultimately ethnic and covenantal—which is tragically symbolised by the rearing of a wall, the sense of being *not* a 'gentile'. Thus to be Jewish is to be identified by a basic contrast which in its own terms is equally assertive

as Islam's. For Jewry 'God knows his name as great in Israel' as in a rabbinic saying addressed to the Jewish people: 'If you are not my witnesses, then I am not God.' That could have a deep theological sense for any believer. The Lord is enthroned on the praises of the people. Take away the people and their praises—where is the throne?

So in a crucial sense they do not have 'an international God'. There is something uniquely distinctive in both directions about the Lord God of Israel and those who are called to his singular worship.

This is the situation we confront and undoubtedly, in differing measures, it lies behind the whole concept of the recovery of Zion. Therefore the Christian task, understood theologically, is to try to bring around a conversion whereby the particularity asserted in these terms is somehow incorporated into the universal. I want to try and argue that this should be done as far as possible not on our part from within the Christian understanding of God as an alternative, but as far as possible from Judaic and Islamic sources themselves.

For me this involves seeking to go back to the ultimate Biblical/Qur'anic doctrine of creation. Understanding creation, not as creationism in a dogmatic sense as in some parts of America, but as the intendedness of the world. 'Let there be', 'let us make', 'have thou dominion'—and this is a very precious understanding. As the Qur'an has it, Surah 21.16 and 44.38, the Lord saying: 'We did not create the world and all that is between the heavens and the earth, as if we were jesting.' This world, this history, are not a plaything in the hands of one playing a game. They mean, and mean well. In this created order there is a legitimate element of sheer human diversity. I am not wanting to argue that somehow these identities sanctioned, in the Qur'anic case by an asserted dogma, and in the other case by an understanding covenantally of a certain people which is in the last analysis ethnic; rather, to find that identity belonging to mankind. Therefore it has to be possessed, indulged, enjoyed, affirmed, as a contribution on the part of those who know 'they are involved in mankind.' These identities are part of God's creation; there are many references in the Qur'an to the Lord having intended diversity. Our identities are based on irreducible realities, the love of land, the love of memory and time, and a love of motherhood, land love, time love, or if you like the where, the when and the whence of all human society. All this is God-given, but the point is we do not have to exceptionalise our experience of it, but rather, in the indulging and enjoying of our own identity, to appreciate its incidence in the other. For there really is the other, in the same created terms as we ourselves.

The Christian task is to try and draw out of both those other religions this hidden secret and also try with proper humility to indicate how, from the beginning, it was at the heart of the New Testament community. There *is* an element in the New Testament of otherness, 'Come ye out from among them and be ye separate,' but it is fair to argue in that kind of situation the reference is essentially ethical. We have to remember the degradation of the Roman world, and also the instinctive concern of watching Jewry, when the Gentiles began to be welcomed, 'Are these people outside the law and not within the Covenant, are they capable of Torah-righteousness?' It was a deep ethical concern of the Epistles to demonstrate that not only were Gentiles convertible in the doctrine of inclusion, but also in the very quality of their daily living. You will find that constantly emphasised within the New Testament. Moreover, in the context of Christian dispersion, what you have is an exercise in human persuasion. In Paul's words, 'God commends,' where the whole idea is 'establishing together', the thought that you are trying to communicate what already has affinity in the hearing of those with whom you speak. The preaching of a distinctive gospel is in itself a search for community, 'that ye may also have fellowship with us, for our fellowship is with the Father.' You therefore get those marvellous repeated passages in the book of Revelation going out of its way to say: All peoples, nations, kindreds and tongues before the throne, bringing their glory and honour into this Kingdom.'

At the heart of the New Testament, and its not being political or military, but only commendatory, and seeking the world in terms of embrace, it is fair to say that you have a New Testament community which contrives both to be itself as ethnically multiple, and yet at the same time collectively inclusive. It seems to me that this is part of the theological measure of the Christian task. How would it affect the situation if we had, as it were, the ability to put across this concept of a common humanity, legitimately but not competitively, denominated by religion, so that religions would cease to be, on whatever ground, the instrument of human division? It is a plea for a theology of co-existence which you can find in the nature of the very particularity of faith with which initial Christianity offered itself to the world.

Furthermore, the *bête noire* of Islam from the beginning and tragically to this day, has been the law of retaliation. If you are attacked you are warranted in reversing it and attacking in turn. If only President Bush had understood that, because the events after September 11 2001 walked right into that equation. This is inseparable from the post-Hijrah nature of Medinan Islam. Its story ceased to be a *balagh* only and became an active, martial, vigorous and in some

terms, ruthless, hegemony which was required to be accepted by those who took the faith.

I suggested that we should, as far as possible, argue this case not as some sublime Christian alternative which we are loftily offering but as far as possible from their own sources. There are references in the Qur'an, e.g. Surah 13.22, that reconciliation is better. There was an article the other day commending the virtue of patience, and gentleness, and you will find these qualities. But there is always the question of whether these passages of reconciliation are about what goes on between Muslims, or in relation to the non-Muslim? Of course, if the non-Muslim acquiesces as in the historic *Dhimmi* system of inferiorisation, then there can be a mutual existence, but hardly in those circumstances a co-existence. For you have always got the majority/minority complex with all that human nature can do with that by way of pettiness and oppression.

So let us try to argue the need for Islam to return to its Meccan identity. What is wrong with that? Nobody can doubt the priority of Mecca—it is where the pilgrimage goes. It is where every mosque has its orientation meticulously. It is the original, the second *qiblah* of Islam, after the Hijrah. The question that needs to be put to the Muslim then is: Can we not transcend the *lex talionis*? Why, as we heard in the very first session, do Palestinians as fellow Muslims have to be at such odds with each other? 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath'—the marvellous saying in Ephesians, and where did the writer get it from, unless from the Beatitudes themselves. Can people somehow learn that the *lex talionis* is utterly futile? Let us be honest, the so-called benign form of 'an eye for an eye' (which is the alibi of Judaism) does not really work at all because another eye is gone, another limb is forfeit, another life is lost. Why not abrogate the principle altogether? And that is what you find within the confines of the New Testament. Putting it in another way, Muhammad was his own Constantine, *mutatis mutandi*, about the prevailing circumstances. There is no measure or echo of Constantine in the New Testament, which is the definitive Christian Canon. Moreover, we do not have 'In this sign conquer' as part of what may recur by repetition in the lectionary of the faith. The problem in a sense with Islam is that the Medinan dimension is rooted in the *tajwid*, in the recital, so that there is no escape from it. It has been necessary, in Christian circles, to insist that certain elements in the biblical tradition are genuinely superseded. The Qur'an already has the doctrine of abrogation whereby what it later abrogates what is earlier. Why not abrogation in reverse, so what was earlier, i.e. the Meccan, in this sense abrogates what was later, i.e. the Medinan? Whether at long range this is possible in the interior debate of the Muslims themselves, it is certainly within

that kind of witness that the Christian Church is seeking to bring.

It seems to me that the spiritual measure of the Christian task, not using the word 'spiritual' evasively, is to keep ever present in this context those two dimensions of our duty in relation to the insistent, shall I call it egotism, of Jewish identity.

From the beginning I remember Abba Eban, that great advocate at the United Nations, saying: We are not Levantine. The whole idea of Zionism is that we do not mean to assimilate; we were not seeking host nation status from the Arab world – we have had enough of that in the West; we are seeking to be our own nation. In this context, as we heard from Dr Hassasian, it is no use saying that Zionism is colonialism. In its own view it is recovering its mother country. But the urge to do that is born from this insistent sense that we must preserve an identity which is necessarily, by definition, distinctive from the larger humanity. What we are trying to say to both faiths is that you will not lose identity – you will re-inherit it within the meaning of the human collective. What this might mean in terms of a willingness within the Israeli mind as somehow to belong they have yet to discover.

It would take another hour to work out what it might mean in terms of two states. There are endless problems about the viability of that concept, just as there are about the idea of a unitary state given all the decades of enmity and violence. But there is at least a plea for an identity that prides this particularity, yet somehow allows it to be 'involved in mankind'. This too would overcome the Islamic insistence on a necessary retaliation against those in relation to whom it finds itself in necessary religious contrast.

Maybe there is time for one final point. You ask what does this mean about the power dimension in general? For my part I would fall back on that saying, 'Be not overcome of evil.' It was legitimate to see that Nazism needed to be resisted and overcome. But such necessary 'not being overcome' need not, must not persist in conflict-enmity but—after success—positively 'overcome with good'. May I remark that something of the very being of the State of Israel was paid for in the sands of Al Alamein and the beachheads of Normandy. The notion that we can live somehow totally self-sufficient with no debts to the rest of the world is a total fabrication if we understand how interlocked all history is. You do not have to be a Gentile to drop cluster bombs. There *is* this one-ness about humanity which, as it were, admits an open-ended, open-minded, genuinely hospitable, particularity but finally, only and forever on the basis of being one with mankind.

**PREACHING THE PROMISED LAND
FOR THE CANAANITES**

Duncan Macpherson

'But as for the towns of these peoples that Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as Yahweh your God has commanded.'

(Deuteronomy 20:16-17).

'The obvious characters for Native Americans to identify with are the Canaanites, the people who already lived in the Promised Land ... I read the Exodus stories with Canaanite eyes.'

(Robert Allen Warrior)

Introduction

Preachers who preached in the summer of 2006 with any sensitivity to 'the world in front of the text' could scarcely ignore the events that took place in Iraq, Israel, Gaza and Lebanon; an escalating theatre of violence that leapt out daily from the news bulletins on the TV screens and that seemed to suggest that the worst was yet to come. Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which the preacher can interpret such events. The first proceeds from one form or another of Christian Zionism; the conviction that the restoration of the State of Israel in 1948 and its subsequent fortunes are part of a divine plan. The second perspective is based upon general humanitarian principles of peace and justice, is sensitive to international law and attempts to interpret Scripture according to the hermeneutic of Liberation Theology.

This paper will pass briefly over preaching perspectives on Middle Eastern conflicts adopted by the enormously influential fundamentalist dispensationalist

* This paper was given as a workshop paper and is published among the 'Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics', <http://www.homiletics.org/members/Files/PDFs/Full%20Year/2006papers.pdf> pages 83-90. 'Preaching for Renewal, Transformation and Liberation,' This conference was hosted by Palm Beach University, West Palm Beach, Florida, November 29-December 2, 2006.

preachers and as well as the subtler kinds of Christian Zionism that inform the words spoken both in the pulpit and the theological academy.¹ It will then focus its main attention on the way in which preachers operating out of a peace and justice hermeneutic relate to contrary texts that appear to not only justify but to command bloodshed, ethnic cleansing and other crimes against humanity on the sole condition that they form part of a revealed plan. Finally I will suggest preaching strategies for preachers who are prepared to engage prophetically with the politics of the Middle East conflict. My discussion of these issues will draw freely from the writings of my late friend and colleague, Professor Michael Prior CM, Vincentian priest, biblical scholar, peace activist and liberation theologian, who took up the cause of the Palestinians and engaged with a moral critique of the land traditions of the Bible as contrary texts.

In an article entitled 'Reading the Bible with the Eyes of the Canaanites'², written in tribute to Edward Said and just before his own death, Michael Prior acknowledged the source of the title of his essay. Well into his study of the relationship between the biblical traditions on land with colonialism he encountered the phrase, reading the biblical narratives 'with the eyes of the Canaanites' by the native North American, Robert Allen Warrior in Said's collection, *Blaming the Victim*³ and reiterated by Warrior in 1991: 'The obvious characters for Native Americans to identify with are the Canaanites, the people who already lived in the Promised Land ... I read the Exodus stories with Canaanite eyes.'⁴

1 Approaches to preaching on the issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were discussed in some detail in my paper 'Preaching and Holy Land Studies: With Special Reference to Preaching in the Holy Land', Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, 'Prophetic Preaching', Hosted by Boston University School of Theology, Boston, Massachusetts, December 5-7, 2002, 5-14, and in 'Take Away the Stone: Prophetic Preaching and the Israeli Palestinian Conflict', Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, 'Preaching and the Resurrection', Hosted by Memphis Theological Seminary, Memphis, Tennessee, December 2-4, 2004, 87-95. I would also refer readers to my book, *The Pilgrim Preacher: Palestine and Pilgrimage* (London: Melisende, 2004).

2 Michael Prior, 'Reading the Bible with the Eyes of the Canaanites: Homage to Edward W Said', in *A Living Stone: Selected essays and Addresses: Michael Prior, CM*. Edited with an Introduction by D Macpherson (London: Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust, 1 Gough Square, London EC4A3DE, 2005), 277.

3 See Edward W Said, 'Michael Walzer's Exodus and Revolution: A Canaanite Reading', in Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens (eds), *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (London/New York: Verso, 1988), 161-78.

4 Robert Allen Warrior, *The Sweetgrass Meaning of Solidarity: 500 Years of Resistance*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (January 1991), 269.

Fundamentalist Christian Zionist Approaches

Unfortunately, it is difficult to find Christian preachers sympathetic to the sufferings of the modern equivalent of the Canaanites. Fired by the conviction that the scenario for the last times is being acted out before our eyes in the Middle East, dispensationalist Evangelical preachers in the United States have been foremost in supporting President Bush over the war in Iraq. They were also been enthusiastic in urging Israel on in its Summer 2006 invasion of Lebanon and have continually supported the most uncompromising Israeli advocates of 'Greater Israel' policies in the West Bank and Gaza. Writing in *The New York Times* (01/20/2006), evangelical Professor Charles Marsh, catalogues some of the many American evangelical preachers and writers who have condoned the Iraq invasion. These include TV evangelist Charles Stanley of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta ('We should offer to serve the war effort in any way possible ... God battles with people who oppose him, who fight against him and his followers'). In addition, Billy Graham's son, Franklin Graham, and Marvin Olasky, editor of *World* magazine and former advisor to Bush on faith-based policy, both suggested that the American invasion of Iraq would create exciting new prospects for proselytizing Muslims. Tim LaHaye, of *Left Behind* fame, saw Iraq as 'a focal point of end-time events', and Jerry Falwell declared that 'God is pro-war.' Marsh reports that 87 percent of all white evangelical Christians in the United States supported the president's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 and that 68 percent continue to do so.

For further evidence of Evangelical attitudes to the latest conflict we can instance the pro-Israel rally in Washington on 18-19 July when Christians from Florida and other states lobbied politicians to back Israel's military campaign in Lebanon. According to a Miami Herald report, John Hagee, pastor of a mega-church in San Antonio, founder of 'Christians United for Israel' and organiser of this lobby, 'has issued dire predictions about instability in the region leading to apocalypse'. In his 2006 book *Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World*, Hagee warns: 'The coming nuclear showdown with Iran is a certainty. The war of Ezekiel 38-39 could begin before this book gets published.'⁵ On July 22 2006 Jerry Falwell characterised recent events in the Middle East 'as a prelude or forerunner to the future Battle of Armageddon and the glorious return of Jesus Christ' and Pat Robertson warned that 'God himself' will fight for Israel. Darien Bennett, pastor of Upscale Scottsdale Bible Church, on the 10:00 PM news of July 15 2006 on the US Channel 5 sought to justify the Israeli destruction of the modern Lebanese cities of Tyre and Sidon

5 Alexandra Alter, 'Middle East Crisis', *Miami Herald*, 8 August 2006.

by displaying a Bible open at verses from Ezekiel chapters 26 to 28. According to Bennett their destruction, along with that of Gaza, are signs of God's march towards Armageddon. 'Israel's war is God's war and let no man stand in the way.'⁶

Main Stream Christian Zionist Approaches

It would be a mistake to simply laugh at the inanities of such simplistic hermeneutics. Such preachers make up in influence what they lack in intellectual sophistication. It would be similarly mistaken to ignore the subtler influence of main stream Christian Zionism. Among politically and theologically liberal Protestant Christians guilt for Christian oppression of Jews throughout history combines with residually fundamentalist interpretation of the land traditions of the Old Testament to exempt Israel from serious criticism. Instead of the unequivocal support for Israeli aggression of the Armageddon fantasists, we have a constant plea for 'balance'. Thus Canon Andrew White, Anglican Vicar of Baghdad and head of the Foundation for Reconciliation in the Middle East, was against support for an unconditional ceasefire in the Israeli-Lebanon conflict because, 'just condemning one side will not actually deal with the matter realistically. The fact is that in any conflict there are usually two sides involved.'⁷ So too with his approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; White opposed the Church of England synod's decision to consider disinvestment in Caterpillar tractors on the grounds that the Anglican Church had 'fallen into the trap of thinking that you must be either pro Israeli or pro Palestinian. The reality is that we should be pro both people (*sic*). Both have suffered and both need our support, love and understanding ... I despair at my own Church, but the reality is that it causes me to ask questions about the Church rather than Israel. We will press on with our work, fortunately it is no longer the work of the C of E and we will continue loving both peoples and seeking truth and justice for all and never falling into the evil trap of anti Zionism and anti-Semitism.'⁸

For White, as for many involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue anti-Zionism is the twin of anti-Semitism, part of the same 'evil trap'. Even the great civil rights leader Martin Luther King is reported as having being concerned that the

6 Charles E Carlson, 'The Christian Right: Not Right, Not Following Christ', July 24 2006: <http://www.whtt.org/index.php?news=2&id=901>.

7 <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20060803/23460.htm>.

8 <http://www.anglicansforisrael.com/docs/2006/02/09/important-statement-from-canon-andrew-white>.

natural sense of sympathy felt for the Palestinians by African Americans might lead to anti-Zionism: 'Antisemitism, the hatred of the Jewish people, has been and remains a blot on the soul of mankind. In this we are in full agreement. So know also this: anti-Zionism is inherently anti-Semitic, and ever will be so ... How easy it should be ... to understand and support the right of the Jewish People to live in their ancient Land of Israel. All men of good will exult in the fulfilment of God's promise that his People should return in joy to rebuild their plundered land. This is Zionism, nothing more, nothing less. The times have made it unpopular, in the West, to proclaim openly a hatred of the Jews. This being the case, the anti-Semite must constantly seek new forms and forums for his poison. How he must revel in the new masquerade! He does not hate the Jews; he is just 'anti-Zionist'!

'My friend, I do not accuse you of deliberate anti-Semitism. I know you feel, as I do, a deep love of truth and justice and revulsion for racism, prejudice, and discrimination. But I know you have been misled—as others have been—into thinking you can be 'anti-Zionist' and yet remain true to these heartfelt principles that you and I share. Let my words echo in the depths of your soul: When people criticize Zionism, they mean Jews—make no mistake about it.'⁹

Roman Catholics have been slower to accept this equation. In 1982, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews¹⁰ advised preachers and catechists that 'the existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law.' In 1989, the Pontifical Commission 'Justitia et Pax' suggested that Anti-Zionism, while logically distinct from anti-Semitism, 'serves at times as a screen for anti-Semitism, feeding on it and leading to it.'¹¹ However, in July 2004 the eighteenth International Catholic-

9 From M L King Jr., 'Letter to an Anti-Zionist Friend', *Saturday Review*, XLVII (Aug. 1967), 76. Reprinted in M L King Jr., *This I Believe: Selections from the Writings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* The sources of this letter has been challenged but it certainly has the ring of Luther King's style and may be based on unpublished or even on oral material. For details of the challenge to the authenticity of this letter, see Fadi Kiblawi and Will Youmans, 'The Use and Abuse of Martin Luther King Jr. by Israel's Apologists' on <http://www.blacksandjews.com/Israel.MLK.html>.

10 http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/reasons-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820306_jews-judaism_en.html.

11 *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis: VI. Judaism and Christianity in History* <http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/>

Jewish Liaison Committee meeting in Buenos Aires expressed the view that anti-Zionism was synonymous with anti-Semitism. This was a first time that any semi-official Roman Catholic document had made this identification and the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz* (10 July) recorded this under the headline, 'Catholic Church equates anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism'. The Anti-Defamation League then quickly put the joint statement on its website. In an article printed just after his death¹², Michael Prior identified two objections to criticism of Zionism 'being seen as, an attack against the whole Jewish people.'. The first of his objections was rooted in Jewish theological considerations, and the second on the rights of an indigenous population, expelled from, or dominated in their land. 'If the former concerns preoccupy some religious Jews, then secular Jews, and some religious ones also, are among those most disturbed by the human cost of the implementation of Zionism. Such people should not be dismissed as "self-hating Jews", nor should those who share their concerns, for either theological or humanitarian reasons, be accused of being "Jew haters."'

Prior concludes by suggesting that 'the failure of the Catholic and Jewish leaders to include a thoughtful religious perspective on one of the great moral crises of our time calls the integrity of the actual Catholic-Jewish dialogue into question. How does the evasion of hard truths in any way benefit the noble ideal of inter-religious relations? There are religious and moral considerations of even greater importance than cosy relations with another faith group. One might not unreasonably have hoped that the combined wisdom as reflected in the Buenos Aires joint statement would transcend the liberation rhetoric of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President George W Bush.'

Prior was one scholar, perhaps the only one, who focussed adequate attention on the difficulty of preaching peace and justice in the Middle East using inspired texts that appear to not only justify, but to command, bloodshed, ethnic cleansing and other crimes against humanity on the sole condition that they form part of a revealed plan.

It was from the Bible that Prior had learnt the hunger for justice that underwrote his political sympathies, and in particular from the two texts that he saw as most directly inspiring this hunger; the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7:29) and the preaching of Jesus at Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30).

[catholic/church_Racism.html](#).

12 'A Disaster for Dialogue,' *A Living Stone*, 297-300. Originally published in *The Tablet*, 31 July 2004.

Resisting the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount as an abstract ideal, Prior asserted that 'It should spur one on to a higher kind of living' and although the Sermon has 'special relevance to anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus', Prior conceded that it was not practicable for the world of politics. Nevertheless he held that it had considerable relevance for those seeking to influence social and political realities. The disposition to treat others as one would wish them to treat oneself (Matthew 7:12) 'offers the most serious resistance to the idolizing of the divisions of the human race on the basis of nationality, creed, race, or wealth.'¹³

The inspiration to resist the 'idolizing of such divisions of the human race' found further support in Luke's Gospel with its perceived emphasis on a preferential option for the poor. Prior penned several articles¹⁴ developing this thesis, in preparation for his *Jesus the Liberator, Nazareth Liberation Theology*.¹⁵

The Old Testament as an Instrument of Oppression

However, despite finding so much inspiration from the Bible for his political theology, Prior found that some of the themes in the Old Testament were less conducive to his liberationist theme. The problem is to be found in the fact that the Torah 'is fundamentally rooted in the escape from Egypt of the Hebrew slaves, who entered and occupied a land which was already occupied by others. The occupation of another people's land realistically demands systematic pillage and killing. What distinguishes the biblical account of this activity is that it is presented as having not only divine approval, but as happening at the command of the divinity. In the traditions in the Book of Joshua, in particular, the Israelites killed and butchered in conformity with the directives of God. This presentation of God as a monster gloating over the destruction of others must be rejected out of hand by anyone who presumes that the conduct of an ethical God, at the very least, will not fall lower than that of ordinary secular decency.'¹⁶

13 *Ibid.*, 65-6.

14 "'Evangelizare Pauperibus Misit Me": Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth', *Colloque* No. 22 (1990): 50-62. In 'The Poor in Luke's Gospel', *Colloque* No. 23 (1991): 349-69, and in 'Isaiah and the Liberation of the Poor (Luke 4.16-30)', *Scripture Bulletin* 24 (1994): 36-46.

15 Michael Prior, *Jesus the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)*, The Biblical Seminar 26 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

16 'Clinton's Bible, Goldstein's Hermeneutics and Rabin's Metal Detectors', *Middle East International* (16 December 1994), 20-21, and reprinted in *A Living Stone*, 158-9.

Prior points to the contradiction that liberation theologies look to a whole range of biblical themes that 'fit the concept of liberation very comfortably' (e.g., liberation from oppression in Egypt, Babylon, etc.), but they ignore texts of oppression. 'If the Bible is looked to as providing a theological basis for Liberation Theology elsewhere, the sad reality is that in its place of origin it has become an equally well-founded basis for a Theology of Oppression.'

In his 1997 Lattey Lecture,¹⁷ Prior makes a related point that, whereas liberation theologians 'have appropriated the Exodus story in their long and tortuous struggle against colonialism, imperialism and dictatorship ...,' the perspective on the Exodus story takes on a different complexion when read 'with the eyes of the Canaanites', that is, with the eyes of any of several different cultures, which have been victims of a colonialism fired by religious imperialism, whether of the Indians in North or Latin America, the Maoris in New Zealand, the Aborigines in Australia, the Khoikhoi and San in southern Africa, or, the Palestinians in Palestine.' Prior goes on to ask whether a consistent reading of the biblical text does not 'require the liberating God of the Exodus to become the oppressive God of the occupation of Canaan?'

Prior's major work, *The Bible and Colonialism*, published in 1997¹⁸ and subsequently in translation in Arabic, French and Spanish editions, argued that, by the standards of secular modern moral values, what the biblical narrative commands are war crimes and crimes against humanity. This work was penned by Prior in 1996-7 during a sabbatical year as Visiting Professor of Theology in Bethlehem University and Scholar-in-Residence in Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theology, Jerusalem. Written against the background sound of bullets and rioting, Prior gave the issues discussed added relevance and poignancy.

The book's examples of the oppressive use of the biblical narrative focus on Latin America, South Africa and Palestine¹⁹ are followed by an examination of the textual and historical evidence relating to the Pentateuch and, in particular, to the historicity of the Exodus and the Conquest and he argues that modern biblical scholarship 'has shifted from viewing much of the biblical narrative

17 'A Land flowing with Milk, Honey, and People,' *Scripture Bulletin* 28: 2-17 and reprinted in *A Living Stone*, 161-179.

18 *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique*. The Biblical Seminar 48 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

19 The original title was to have been '*Land of Israel, God and Morality*.' Originally Prior had intended to focus his discussion exclusively on the Zionist use of the land traditions of the Bible, but his publishers urged that he broaden the scope of the discussion to include the other two examples.

as simple history to concentrating on its authors as historiographers, whose reconstruction of the past reflected their own religious and political ideologies.²⁰ After a review of the research findings that support this view of the biblical narrative, Prior asks whether ‘texts which belong to the genre of folkloric epic and legend, rather than history ... confer legitimacy on the Israelite possession of the land and on subsequent forms of colonialism which looked to the biblical paradigm, understood as factual history, for legitimization later?’²¹ Prior then proceeds to examine scholarly discussion of the 1705 references to the word ‘Land’ in the Bible and found only two scholars to have analyzed the use of the word; W D Davies and Walter Brueggemann, both professors at Union Theological Seminary. Davis’ *The Gospel and the Land*, 1974, and *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*, 1982, were both written from a Zionist standpoint and the first of these in response to a specific request to lend support to Israel after the 1967 war. Brueggemann’s 1977 work, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, refused to engage with moral or political questions relating to Israel-Palestine. Prior considered that such discussion, that neglected moral considerations, inevitably reflected the Euro-centric perspectives of virtually all western historiography, and in the case of W F Albright, traces of its racism. The Bible, for some, ‘was the idea that redeems the conquest of the earth.’ Prior conceded that there were a ‘breadth of views within the Old Testament on land occupation and war’ but insisted that there remained ‘the major question of the portrayal of God as one who does not conform to even the minimum morality which nation states commit themselves to today.’²²

Preaching Strategies

Inevitably, readers of the Bible have different ideas not only on how to interpret the Bible but also on which bits they find problematic. What unites them is the reality that there are texts that seem to run contrary not only to the core moral values of the Gospel but to any kind of human moral sensitivity. In a paper given at the 2005 Academy of Homiletics Stephen Farris of the Vancouver School of Theology gave a paper on the ‘Preaching of Contrary Texts’²³ and

20 Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 247.

21 *Ibid.*, 252.

22 *Ibid.*, 268.

23 2005 Archive, 7-11. <http://www.homiletics.org/members/Files/PDFs/2005/2005%20Farris%20-%20Preaching%20Contrary%20Texts.pdf>.

asked three questions: what makes a text contrary, how such texts are to be viewed theologically as scripture for the church and what strategies to use for preaching these texts. Farris distinguishes between texts that are simply contrary in a culturally relative sense—that they are inimical to the culture that the interpreter comes from and those that are inimical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As a response to his third question he advocates Schleiermacher's use of the hermeneutical circle so that the totality of Scripture is explicated by the parts and the parts by the whole. In this understanding although the parts and the whole are both necessary for understanding 'the whole is hermeneutically privileged.' The Church is able to adapt the significance of each text, including contrary texts in the light of changing circumstances and insights.

Michael Prior considered several possible ways of rehabilitating the unacceptable parts of the Old Testament. In the section on 'Rehabilitating the Bible,' in *The Bible and Colonialism*, he examined potential solutions but found them all, to some degree, unsatisfactory. The first of these, going back to Augustine, is the understanding that the Old Testament is only Revelation in the light of the New (in Augustine's dictum, 'the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old becomes clear in the New'), (270). The second way, akin to that of Augustine, is to interpret the Old Testament christologically, an approach exemplified by two Palestinian Christians whom Prior particularly admired: Latin Patriarch Michel Sabah and Anglican theologian, Canon Naim Ateek²⁴. Both propose a christological hermeneutic: whereby the Old Testament is to be understood in the light of what we know of God through his self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Ateek, in particular, finds a progression in the moral development of the Old Testament from the nationalistic and exclusivist perspective of the Pentateuch and the early prophets through to the universalism of the later prophets which was to reach still greater openness in the person and teaching of Jesus. In this understanding, religious Zionism represents a regression to the earlier harsher vision. Michel Sabah in an important pastoral letter²⁵ 'allows those passages in the Bible which abhor violence to correct those which promote it,' and rejects any kind of violence which seeks justification in the biblical text. Without commenting decisively on the validity of these approaches, Prior pressed on with some humour to consider the way in which the Roman lectionary simply censors out scandalous or difficult portions from its list of appointed readings. Prior saw this as a similar approach taken by Liberation theologians who use

24 *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998).

25 *Reading the Bible Today in the Land of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Latin Patriarchate, 1993).

the Exodus as a paradigm for political and economic liberation but leave out of account that the land of the promise already belonged to others.

It has not perhaps been generally recognized that Christian attempts to cope with the colonialist and genocidal contrary texts of the Old Testament can feed into an approach to the anti-Judaic or supercessionist problem for interpreting the New. Likewise anti-supercessionist approaches to the New Testament, in reaffirming the enduring independent value of the Old Covenant, tend to reinforce the problems we may have with the contrary texts of the Old Testament. For Fundamentalist Christians there is of course no problem. God's notions of compassion and justice are far above ours and it is quite possible for God to command ethnic cleansing and genocide for the Canaanites—and by extension the Palestinians—and also to condemn the Jews for their refusal to accept Christ. Admittedly, the Dispensationalist Christian Zionists find a role for the Jews in the final struggle; to that extent the Old Covenant still stands. However those Jews who do not then convert will have no place in the future Kingdom. There is after all no contradiction in Zionist anti-Semitism. One feeds upon then other and it is interesting that some of then leading American Zionist evangelical preachers have been accused of anti-Semitic remarks.²⁶

For preachers who do not share the fundamentalist Christian Zionist perspective the solution to this problem may be discoverable in a liberationist version of the hermeneutical circle. The central motif of Scripture is seen as the promise of the Messiah who will preach good news to the poor combined with 'serious resistance to the idolizing of the divisions of the human race'. Once this is understood, contrary texts become part of the very human collateral narrative in which the divine message is discerned. Those preachers who use the Bible to justify colonialism or the oppression of those regarded as the modern

26 For examples of the slip showing see Debra Nussbaum Cohen, 'Falwell Antichrist remark sparks anti-Semitism charges,' *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, New York, January 22, 1999. (www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story_id/10405/format/html/displaystory.html) or James Warren 'Nixon And Billy Graham Anti-Semitism Caught On Tape,' *Chicago Tribune*, 1 March 2002 (<http://www.rense.com/general20/billy.htm>). Revd Dan C Fore, former head of the Moral Majority in New York, once professed, 'I love the Jewish people deeply. God has given them talents He has not given others. They are His chosen people. Jews have a God-given ability to make money. They control the media; they control this city.' The sentiment has been echoed by Falwell, who remarked during one sermon that 'a few of you don't like the Jews, and I know why. They can make more money accidentally than you can on purpose.' Others, such as Revd Donald Wildman, founder of the American Family Association, have adopted the view of evangelical leader R J Rushdoony's conviction that the mainstream television networks promote anti-Christian values because they are mostly controlled by Jews.

Canaanites—be they Palestinians, native Americans, Jews or anybody else—have failed to see the biblical narrative in the totality of its message of divine liberation which, in turn, explicates each and every one of its parts.

PILGRIMAGES TO THE HOLY LAND—2007

The following are pilgrimages planned for later this year.

1. ‘A Visit to the Land of the Holy One’

This is an opportunity to hear Jewish, Christian and Muslim voices in Israel/Palestine and to spend quality time at the Holy sites in Bethlehem, Nazareth, the Galilee and Jerusalem. This mix of history, revelation and the present brings to life the Christ of our times in this troubled land. Highly recommended for those seeking to understand the social and political situation today in which the Christian Church in Israel/Palestine seeks to thrive. It is also an opportunity for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land reflecting on the life of Christ and its significance today.

Departure UK October 31st 2007

Return UK November 14th 2007

All inclusive cost, apart from personal spending money: Single occupancy £1,200, double occupancy £1,000.

Please contact Revd Clarence Musgrave at clarencejoan@talktalk.net or on mobile: 07986 48 45 47

2. Sabeel Fall Witness Visit

Offers a window into the daily lives of Palestinians living under the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as well as into the experiences of second-class citizenship of Palestinians who are citizens of Israel. Meet with Palestinian and Muslim leaders of civic and religious organizations as well as with Israeli Jewish advocates for justice. Learn the stories of Palestinian Christians, share the worship that sustains their faith, and engage with Sabeel in promoting justice

via liberation theology. Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Galilee.

Dates: 11–20 October 2007 (10 nights)

Cost EXCLUSIVE OF AIR FARES AND TO/FROM AIRPORT OR EXTRA NIGHTS: £500 per person with £100 single supplement (costs quoted in \$900 and \$180 respectively—pound sterling approximate). Includes all accommodation, meals, ground transportation, honoraria/fees.

Information and registration at world@sabeel.org

3. Pilgrimage for peace and for solidarity with the Living Stones of the Holy Land

8th October–17 October

Chaplain: Father Martin Griffin, MSFS

Tour leader: Deacon Duncan Macpherson

Following the example of Cardinal Cormac who was a pilgrim in the Holy Land with other church leaders last December, this pilgrimage includes not only visits to the main shrines and pilgrimage sites but also pays attention to meeting and worshipping with the ‘living stones,’ the Christian people of the holy land, as well as people of the other faiths, especially those concerned with issues of justice and peace.

Cost of pilgrimage £795

The cost of the pilgrimage will include scheduled flights to Tel Aviv on Olympic Airways via Athens from Heathrow airport, half-board accommodation in good quality hotels and pilgrim hospices in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jericho, coach travel to and from hotels and to most of the main shrines associated with the life, death and resurrection of our Lord, together with a one night stopover and coach tour on the return journey in Athens, where Paul once preached.

LIVING STONES ONLINE

Matthew Taylor

Try typing “living stones” into Google’s ubiquitous search engine and you will be pleased to know that our website, livingstonesonline.org, will feature in the first half dozen search results¹. This was not the case a few years ago, but as this article explains, Living Stones online now boasts some content which sets it apart in the increasingly significant virtual landscape.

The website was first launched four years ago by the present webmaster and trustee, Matthew Taylor. At first the site had a basic and largely static format. It advertised the charity, listed conferences and gave membership details. Subsequently the site has expanded to include an archive of the magazine, articles by members, a long list of links to related sites, charity appeals, podcasts and dynamic news headlines. It is this news service in particular which, by dint of its frequently refreshed content and multiple links, has propelled our site to the summit of web searches.

The news service automatically generates headlines which can be viewed either on the site itself or else via email. I would encourage all members to try this service (to subscribe simply enter your email address on the page <http://www.livingstonesonline.org.uk/newsfeed.php>). The headlines are filtered using search terms from a large array of news sources including the BBC, UK broadsheets, Ekklesia, Christian Today, Fides, Haaretz and ICN (Independent Catholic News). News of Living Stones’ own events is also included.

Traffic to the site has been growing steadily, particularly since the addition of the news service. In the last year traffic has increased by over 60%. According to the latest statistics for the site, there are now over 1600 hits, or 900 sessions every week. Most of this traffic comprises either search engine spiders or automated fetching for our subscription news service. However this still leaves over 100 human visits every week. There may be 50 referrals from search engines (mostly Google), which emphasises the importance of our high visibility

The site is now entering a new and exciting phase of its development with the recruitment of Colin South, the charity’s administrator, as the content manager and editor. Expect a new look and feel to the site, and some diverse, stimulating content. Meanwhile do please pay a visit and let me have any feedback including suggestions for content. Equally if you have an article or photos you would like published send an email to webmaster@livingstonesonline.org.uk. Best of all, if you like what you see please mention the site to your colleagues. Word of mouth can be the best recommendation!

1. In fact, the website is the first ranked search result returned (as tested using Google on 15 April 2007)

A REVIEW

A Living Stone: Selected Essays and Address of Michael Prior CM.
Duncan Macpherson (ed.). London: Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust.
2006. Hbk. Pp. 309.

This is a most welcome and important book, celebrating the life, scholarship and contribution of the late Professor Michael Prior who was Chair for many years of the Catholic Biblical Association and Professor of Biblical Studies at St. Mary's University College, Strawberry Hill, London. The four divisions of the book reflect the valuable work of someone who was both Catholic priest and internationally renowned academic: Part 1 includes articles and essays written by Michael over many years on the Gospel of Luke, his initial area of research. Part 2 focuses on Michael's work as 'pilgrim', his work with Palestinian Christians and the London based Living Stones organisation. Part 3 includes some very challenging and thought-provoking articles on the biblical justification of the State of Israel – and the lessons to be learned for other societies too (see especially his excellent essay 'The Bible as an Instrument of Oppression'). Part 1V brings together Michael's moral critique of Zionism and his exploration of terminology such as 'antizionism' and 'antisemitism'.

For over 30 years, Michael Prior made a most significant and unique contribution to Catholic Higher Education in the UK, to international biblical scholarship and to the safe guarding of human rights and social justice. For those of us who knew him and his selfless commitment to the causes he espoused, the loss (caused by his sudden death in 2004) has been truly devastating. He was an inspirational figure in an age when biblical scholars, often centred on their own academic careers, frequently forget the social obligations that the teaching of the Bible commissions us to do. This book summons all biblical scholars back to examining how the Bible can be mis-read and mis-construed and how this can bring real misery to real people. It is a very challenging book and a very necessary book. Duncan Macpherson deserves enormous praise and credit for the way he has painstakingly edited this book, bringing together a lifetime of work by Michael Prior. It is indeed a lasting memory to Michael and should be a constant challenge to all biblical scholars and students. I recommend it very strongly as a textbook for both undergraduates and postgraduates and as a subject for research seminars for staff and research students of the Bible. It is indeed, a most fitting memorial to Michael.

Martin O'Kane
University of Wales, Lampeter

**TALK GIVEN TO LIVING STONES AT ALL HALLOWS
ON THE WALL, LONDON EC2, 20 JANUARY 2007**

Professor Manuel Hassassian, PLO Representative to the UK.

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are facing a precarious situation, with military incursions and constant attacks on civilians by Israel. Security is deteriorating and Israel is exploiting this situation, trying to escalate the violence against the Palestinians. Suffering from abject poverty and dire economic conditions, the Palestinians are becoming increasingly desperate about their future and the prospect of any resolution to the conflict.

Israel keeps reiterating that its air raids and assassinations will continue even if innocent Palestinians are the victims, because Israel has been given the green light from the US. The Israelis are randomly sending missiles, and innocent Palestinian children, women and old men are being hit every day. Sometimes Israel has pinpointed its 'targeted assassinations', but most victims have been civilians in Gaza.

Israel claims they are attacking Hamas and the other Palestinian factions in self-defence, as Qassam rockets are being fired on Israel. However, these rockets have not inflicted serious damage. Israel is using them as an excuse to create havoc, instability and insecurity to justify its policies in the Occupied Territories and to call on the international community to further isolate Hamas, saying Hamas is a terrorist organisation and could never be a partner for peace.

The Palestinians are currently engaged in a serious national dialogue. In order to resolve our internal political issues, there is continuous debate between the presidential institutions, the Hamas-led government and all the factions on how to narrow our differences in terms of strategies, future plans and negotiations with Israel.

Israel's unilateralism is a recipe for disaster. Olmert wants to define Israel's borders without bilateral negotiations with the Palestinians, abort the two-state solution, confiscate 50 percent of the West Bank, continue with the Apartheid Wall which cuts almost 15 km deep into the West Bank, and create bantustans that are not contiguous or viable. He will also try to strike a deal where Jordan will handle the security of the West Bank, and where security in Gaza will be dealt with by the Egyptians. This is the Olmert plan—no state, no sovereignty for the Palestinians, and no autonomy in our own internal affairs.

So it is in Israel's interest to keep the Occupied Territories highly volatile

politically in order to justify this 'convergence' plan. Israel continues to expand settlements, build the Apartheid Wall, and maintains its creeping annexation and the process of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Israel is seeking to buy time for this by trying to destabilise the situation, to put more pressure on the Palestinian leadership through these attacks, to prevent a Palestinian consensus, because they do not want a united Palestinian stance directed at ending the occupation.

Israel is putting pressure on the Palestinians through economic strangulation, preventing us from operating an open border-crossing in Gaza, not allowing Palestinians to work inside Israel, and to make economic conditions so dire to the point where desperation, they think, will eventually make the Palestinians kneel down and accept Israel's agenda.

Israel aims to destabilise the Palestinian situation, but claim to the world that Israel and its illegal occupation are not the cause of the internal conflict, that this internal conflict is jeopardising the existence of Israel, and Israel is simply trying to defend itself against Palestinians, who have no intentions of negotiations and settlement.

Today, Palestinian unemployment is over 50 percent, and, in certain areas, 70 to 75 percent live below the poverty level. These negative circumstances are not conducive for normalisation and the resumption of any kind of negotiation. Europe says it would like to inject economic aid, but it is trying to circumvent and delegitimise Hamas, to deal with the Palestinian issue simply on a humanitarian basis and is also trying to circumvent President Abbas. Europe plans for money to go directly to individual families who meet the criteria of poverty, health and educational organisations, but via individuals and NGOs, bypassing not only the Palestinian Government but also the presidential office. Europe says it wants to empower the President, and wants funding to go through him, but this is not happening. Europe expresses sympathy for the Palestinians and says it wants to help. Then it presents fictions on how it will funnel aid to the Occupied Territories, at a time when we are on the brink of starvation, our children are suffering from malnutrition, and 160,000 public sector workers have not been paid for months. Europe claims it will not let the Palestinians starve, but they are starving the Palestinian people indirectly by aiding Israel in destabilising the situation, being more supportive towards the Israelis, putting pressure on the Palestinians, and blackmailing our elected government.

It is very unfortunate that the international community is collectively punishing the Palestinians for pursuing the democratic process of electing their own

representatives, and ironic that sanctions are being imposed on the occupied rather than the occupiers. The 'liberal', 'democratic' world that has been preaching democracy is renegeing on us now, and justifying Olmert's unilateralist plan as part of the road map, when it is in total contradiction of the International Court of Justice ruling and international law.

Israel refuses to recognise that there is a Palestinian partner, and the international community, led by the US, does not challenge this. Israel has always done this to justify its policies. Even if Fatah had won the January 2006 parliamentary elections, Ariel Sharon or Ehud Olmert would not have changed policy because Israel is not interested in peace, but in controlling the land and removing the Palestinians.

For almost 20 years President Arafat pursued a long and arduous path of negotiations with Israel. What was the outcome? Israel took more land, put more settlers in the Occupied Territories and increased military checkpoints. Eventually Israel economically strangled the Palestinians, isolated our president, and ended his life by confining him to one room for three years. Israel did all this under what it called the peace process.

Binyamin Netanyahu recently said the Israeli army is capable of eradicating Gaza and all its population. Statements like this, made by senior officials in Israel, are a reflection of how far they are willing to go in trying to destroy the Palestinians through military pressure and incursions.

The British Government must act independently, and not be subservient to US policy, and the international community must stop the massacres perpetrated by Israel, lift the economic blockade, and put pressure on Israel to return to the negotiating table and stop the rhetoric that there is no Palestinian partner.

If the international community does not play a positive role to create an independent, viable Palestinian state, and create conducive conditions economically, politically, security-wise, for the Palestinians, nothing will move forward. More bloodshed and violent convulsions will take place, because Palestinians then would act out of desperation if they have nothing left except a struggle for existence against occupation.

If there is political will amongst the international community, Israel and the US, there is a chance to revive the road map, remove the Wall, and evacuate the settlements. The international community must press Israel to face the reality that there is no military solution.

**EASTER MESSAGE SENT BY THE PATRIARCHS AND
HEADS OF LOCAL CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM**

Sisters and brothers here and in all the world, we greet you in the name of our Risen Lord and ask God to fill you with the joy and the strength of the resurrection.

Having opposed early Christians and, indeed, sought to bring many of them to trial for their faith, St. Paul was suddenly challenged by our Blessed Lord as he journeyed to Damascus. Within a short time he became a powerful messenger for Jesus. Reading his various epistles we see he has much to say on many aspects of the Christian faith.

The statement he sets before the Philippians is regarded by many people as the most powerful: "All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings."

In this short sentence he links the cross and the Resurrection. The sufferings he had to face for his faith lead him to become conscious of the power of the Resurrection given to those who truly believe, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yet again, recent months have shown us much of the hardships and sufferings people have to endure, not least in this land. Much of this burden has arisen from man's inhumanity to men together with the deprivation of basic human dignity and rights, all caused by the siege imposed upon us.

Our Blessed Lord challenges all of us; if we are to be his disciples we must take up our cross and follow him. In the midst of sufferings, we reach for the power of the Resurrection and the power of the Spirit that enables us to take away the oppressions that are imposed upon us.

So, as we celebrate the joy of Easter we must examine carefully where we stand in relation to God. Many of us need to abandon the selfish instinct within us. If we truly seek the power of the Resurrection in our lives, then we must disregard any idea we might have of self-sufficiency or worldly hopes that hide from our eyes the things of heaven and of the Spirit.

If we believe in the Resurrection, we must affirm that our security is with God and in the power of the Resurrection. Again St. Paul reminds us when writing to the Corinthians: "But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Despite our weakness and despite the unjust circumstances imposed upon us, the power of God can free us if we come to understand the logic of the Spirit in us and if we behave accordingly.

On the first Good Friday, the disciples of Jesus doubtlessly felt shattered. However, gradually their faith was restored as they became conscious of their Risen Lord. Their own personal darkness of fear and uncertainty was suddenly illuminated by the light of Jesus' resurrection.

So, as we celebrate the Resurrection we must be more diligent in searching for the light and in using it to build a better tomorrow for all of us, Palestinians or Israelis,

Muslims, Jews, Christians and Druzes. We search for the light that comes from God, illuminates all creation, guides every true believer in his search to find God's freedom for all, together with his peace and justice.

As we greet our sisters and brothers across the world, we wish them the joy of Easter and the power of the Risen Lord in their daily lives. While conscious of the care and concern shown by many of you, we again ask for your particular prayers for this land, that God will guide all its governors and show them the path of justice and equality among all.

Pray for the newly formed Unity Government of the Palestinians together with the Israeli Government and the Arab Initiative, to work to remove fear and all oppression, the walls, the barriers and the prisons, so that hearts become full of trust and all can enjoy the same freedom and the same dignity.

Then we would ask that you make a particular effort to encourage your particular nation to stop the embargo imposed upon us and to restore its aid to the Palestinians. Many vital areas of community are in a desperate plight as a result of the withholding of this aid, not least [among them, areas of] justice, economy, medicine and education, etc.

As all Christians across the world celebrate Easter together we wish everyone, at home and abroad, that joy which our Blessed Lord's resurrection brings. We ask God to bestow upon all the joy and the power of the resurrection so that the words of Jesus become real as he said: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed!

May you experience a happy and holy Easter!

Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem

Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem

Patriarch Michel Sabbah, R. C. Latin

Patriarch Torkom I Manooghian, Armenian Orthodox

Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM, Custos of the Holy Land

Archbishop Anba Abraham, Coptic Orthodox

Archbishop Swerios Malki Murad, Syrian-Orthodox

Archbishop Abouna Mattias, Ethiopian Orthodox

Archbishop Paul Sayyah, Maronite

Bishop Suheil Dawani, Anglican

Bishop Munib Younan, Lutheran

Bishop Pierre Malki, Syrian-Catholic

Archbishop Georges Michel Bakar, Greek Catholic

Father Rafael Minassian, Armenian Catholic