

EDITORIAL AND NEWS

'As you come to him, the Living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.'

1 Peter 2:4-5 (NIV)

Michael Prior Memorial Lecture

After last year's very successful Michael Prior Memorial Lecture given by the journalist and author, Robert Fisk, at Saint Mary's University College, Twickenham, this year's memorial lecture will be at Bethlehem University where the distinguished author and journalist Victoria Clark will speak on 'Christian Zionism, Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: the Power of Media Prejudice'. Victoria Clark's books on religious history include *Holy Fire: the Battle for Christ's Tomb* and now *Allies for Armageddon; the Rise of Christian Zionism*, an extract from which is included as the first article in this issue. The lecture will take place on October 16 in the Cardinal Carlo Furno Hall, Millennium Hall, within the context of the Second International Conference on Christian Muslim Relations. Living Stones is arranging transport facilities from the airport to a hotel in Jerusalem and thence to the University with accommodation in Bethlehem through an East Jerusalem travel agent for several of its members and for other participants from abroad. **Anyone interested in coming should make contact immediately.**

New co-ordinator

After an interval of several months without a co-coordinator the committee has now made a new and promising appointment of Felicity Dennistoun, a post-graduate student with a keen interest in the Middle East, who has agreed to work for us for several hours each week, maintaining the database, answering enquiries, liaising with other charities and organisations working with similar interest in the Holy Land, promoting the Michael Prior Memorial Fund,

organising conferences and generally helping with the running of the Trust on a week by week basis.

Aid for the Living Stones

We are now in the process of canvassing for candidates for a further scholarship and will be approaching a number of institutions and Church bodies in the Holy Land and elsewhere. Conscious of the housing needs of Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land the committee is now investigating housing projects organised by Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox Church bodies in the Holy Land in order to make donations and to raise funds in support of these projects.

In this Issue

Christian Zionism adversely affects relations between Western Christians and both the Christian and Muslim populations of the Arab world. For this reason much of this issue is given over to discussion of its influence. We publish two articles and a book review from Victoria which relate directly to this subject.

Our ABC of Christian communities in the Holy Land moves from an article on the Armenian Orthodox Church in the last issue to an account here of the history of the Anglican Church in Palestine by Bishop Kenneth Cragg. This is followed by another in our series 'From the Diaspora'—an interview with the Reverend Nasief Kawar by Jamil Bullata. The article 'Voices of the Living Stones' contains some messages and prayers from Christian leaders in the Middle East. 'A Christian Right of Return' catalogues just one example of unjust and unequal treatment of Christian Palestinians and we begin a new ABC, this time of charities and organisations that, directly or indirectly, help to support the living stones of the Holy Land

Deacon Duncan

Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust

ANNOUNCEMENT

VICTORIA CLARK
will give this year's
Michael Prior Memorial Lecture
on

*“The Influence of the Evangelical Zionist Lobby on
Perceptions of Islam in the Western Media”*

The lecture will take place at Bethlehem University at 2.30 on
16th October during the conference at Bethlehem University, in
the Cardinal Carlo Furno Hall, Millennium Hall, on
“The Influence of the Media and Education on
Christian Muslim Relations”

15-17th October 2008

Victoria Clark is a freelance journalist and writer. Her books on
religious history include *Holy Fire: the Battle for Christ's Tomb*
and now *Allies for Armageddon; the Rise of Christian Zionism*.

For more information on the conference and travel arrangements
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**CHRISTIAN ZIONISM
'BORN IN FEAR'**

Victoria Clark

This article is taken from Victoria Clark's Allies for Armageddon (p. 286 et seq.) and is published with the kind permission of the publisher, Yale University Press, and the author.

Zionism—Christian and Jewish—was born in fear. A proto-Christian Zionism first flourished in a climate of Calvinism-inspired fear mixed with millenarian hope. English Puritans like Sir Henry Finch and the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony lived in terror of a Catholic counter-reformation and of James I and his son bringing down a divine punishment on Englishmen in the form of an exile as long and painful as that of the Jews from Palestine. A terror that the French Revolution and Napoleonic republicanism were announcing the onset of the End Times seized evangelicals in nineteenth-century Britain, and their American counterparts sweetened the pill of pre-millennial dispensationalism's End Times nightmare with the dream of a rescuing Rapture. Eastern European pogroms and Theodor Herzl's well-founded fear of western Europe's intolerance of Jews spurred the development of Zionism amongst the Jewish communities.

It took Christian Zionists like Lewis Way, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury and George Eliot to infuse that fear with a humanitarian generosity that was, however, rooted in a damaging excess of imperial confidence. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 reflected both that humanitarian impulse and that imperial confidence. It also involved a failure to contemplate the likely consequences of the Declaration that has become a hallmark of the Christian Zionist outlook. Christian Zionists' simplistic approach to current events in the Middle East has long been undermining the wider international community's humanitarian and pragmatic efforts to broker peace in Israel-Palestine. At least as importantly, it is now harming not just the Palestinians but also the majority of Israelis and diaspora Jews who recognise the clear demographic imperative of ceding land to the Arabs in order to preserve both Israel's Jewish and its democratic character, as well as the justice of a Palestinian state. And Christian Zionism's knockon effects are no less damaging, they are hampering the West's ability to occupy the high moral ground in the wider struggle against Islamic fundamentalism

because it is all too easy to argue that America is fighting one fundamentalism with another.

Much as Christian Zionists talk of defending Judaeo-Christian values and bible mandates, it is hard to escape the conclusion that Europe's persecuted Jews were handed a poisoned chalice when Britain and America acknowledged their right to be 'restored' to Palestine. The chalice remains poisoned. Israel is still beleaguered and short of friends. This means that unconditional support from the richest and best-armed country in the world, even when it involves an irrational apocalypticism that envisages a double-strength Holocaust at Armageddon, is vital to the Zionists' cause, even while it alienates many of Israel's more thoughtful defenders. Still more importantly, the widespread Islamic perception of America and Israel as holier-than-thou, imperialistic, hubristic and deaf to the counsels of other countries in the region has stoked the fires of hatred across the Middle East.

As early as October 2002, six months before the attack on Iraq, the leader of the radical Islamic group Hezbollah in Lebanon, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, was warning that Christian Zionists and US oilmen were aiming to 'redraw the world's political map' and, he added, 'it is said that several US presidents are affiliated with the Christian Zionists'. Four years later a voice as authoritative and moderate as that of the best-selling British-Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif had taken up the cry. In a speech delivered at Warwick University and reprinted in full in Egypt's leading Al-Ahram newspaper, Soueif laid out the position:

'So here's the scene: in Israel, a stalled Zionist project, in the United States, a neo-con administration around a born-again president and a mobilised and growing Christian Zionist population—courted assiduously for years by Binyamin Netanyahu.

'It is clear to many people that the influence of the Zionist project on the ideology, the attitude and the modus operandi of the United States is doing major harm to the entire world. This can be seen in its most flagrant form in the actions and preaching of the Christian Zionists in the United States, this very active population of some 30 million who actually yearn for and work towards promoting Armageddon and the end of the world.'

Mounting Muslim loathing of Christian Zionism nourishes Jewish fear of Israel's Arab neighbours. It's a dangerously spiralling vicious circle; the more

inflamed the Muslim world becomes, the more terrified Israelis become, and the more comfort they seek in Christian Zionist support, and so on ...

At its root, the willingness of hard-headed Zionists to share a bed with millenarian Christian Zionists is the natural corollary of the urgent existential terror gripping much of the Jewish world—a terror firmly rooted in and nourished by the real experience of the Holocaust. The new fear generated by the attacks of 9/11 is what has dragged wider forces—Jewish and Christian neo-cons and President Bush himself - into the vortex of terror. All parties now appear unable to acknowledge their fear's capacity to generate more 'evil'. All are blind to the lesson of the mini-Armageddon in Waco, brought about by a fatal combination of the Branch Davidians' fear of the Satanic power of the American state, their wild imaginings about the End Times and their love of firearms.

Enduring fear of another Holocaust has long been motivating American Jews to ensure that, as Josh Reinstein boasted to me in Jerusalem in March 2006, Zionists have nothing to fear whichever political party is in power in America. Israel may never have had a better friend in the White House than George W Bush but, with most American Jews voting Democrat (80 per cent in the November 2006 mid-term elections) as well as providing a third of that party's funding, and with lobbying organisations like AIPAC and Malcolm Hoenlein's Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations hard at work on both sides of the house, the Jewish state is secure against the vagaries of changing administrations.

In the view of Jewish-American Georgetown University emeritus Professor Norman Birnbaum, there is precious little chance of a Democrat president altering the present line on Israel after 2008, simply because the Democrat Party 'cannot hope to develop an alternative American foreign policy while retaining its present financial and intellectual dependence on the Israel lobby.' Certainly, the performance of the Democrats in Congress after November 2006 did not encourage any belief that they would antagonise the Israel lobby by forcing Bush to refocus on brokering a peace in Israel-Palestine. And Christian Zionists and Israel appear to have little to fear from the Democrats' front-runner for president in 2008, New York Senator Hillary Clinton; she had backed the war in Iraq and already addressed an AIPAC conference.

In early 2007 it seemed that, at least as important as whether the president of the United States was a bible literalist advised by pro-Israel neo-cons, was whether the Israel lobby and its Jerusalem masters continued to fear a nuclear-arming Iran enough to court and organise 'the Armageddon crowd'. And, for as long as American millenarians continued

to believe that their country's fate depended on blessing Israel, and to find good reason to interpret everything going on in the Middle East as a sure sign of the End Times, their support for Likud and Israeli settlers and their appetite for war would not diminish.

The story of Christian Zionism reveals the roots of a politico-religious alliance, the thriving state of millenarianism in America, and one good reason for the gulf of sympathy separating the United States from her European allies today. But it also illustrates the unbridgeable psychological chasm dividing those with a fear-filled fundamentalist mind-set from those without it, especially in times of tumult and strain when popular anxiety tends towards the former. No more than any other kind of religious fundamentalists will Christian Zionists be wooed away from their bible literalism by theological argument, or shaken out of their beliefs by events turning out differently from how they expect. Again and again, the ideology has proved its chameleon-like ability to change with the times, to plug the gap left by ignorance of history and foreign cultures and assuage an unreasoning existential terror by answering a psychological need to be in the know' about the future, to feel in control.

If the influence of Christian Zionism on western policy continues to exert the hold it does today, there is a chance we may all become allies for Armageddon.



Suq al-Hanna'

Small craft articles made in Palestine and locally; please send for a list of currently available items. Proceeds support Palestinian refugees in the southern border town of Rafah in the Gaza Strip.

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**HERE'S A US PASTOR WE SHOULD
REALLY WORRY ABOUT**

Victoria Clark

The Independent, Thursday, 29 May 2008

By the time another banana skin of an evangelical pastor sent John McCain tumbling, fumbling for the right words to disown the association last week, many had abandoned all hope that another Republican presidency would mean change where it really counts for the rest of the world: Israel-Palestine.

Long before embarrassing footage was dug up of Pastor John Hagee preaching that Hitler did God's will by harrying Jews out of Europe to their promised land in Palestine, people of all religions and none were viewing his linking arms with Hagee as the surest sign that McCain would continue to favour Israel; to countenance the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza.

Pastor of a megachurch in San Antonio and CEO of Global Evangelism Television, Pastor Hagee happens to be the US's leading Christian Zionist, a powerful proponent, via his Christians United for Israel lobbying organisation, of an ideology that is much better understood by Arabs than by Westerners because of the immediate bearing it has on the Israel-Palestine issue.

Christian Zionists are a large subset—an estimated 30 million strong in the US—of evangelical Christians whose rigidly literal-minded reading of Bible prophecy has locked them into a passionate embrace with the most hawkish sections of Israeli society, namely, the far right of Likud and the settler movement.

For Christian Zionists there can be no Palestinian state, first, because the Bible doesn't mention any such thing, and second, because God promised all that land and, as Pastor Hagee has claimed, '10 times more' to Israel. For Christian Zionists the world is hurtling towards its end at Armageddon, a little to the north of Jerusalem. Two-thirds of the world's Jews, all those who have not accepted Jesus as their saviour, will perish in a war that will pit an 'Anti-Christ' and the Muslim world (especially Iran), and probably Russia too, against all true, born-again Christians and a returning Jesus Christ.

As this last imperative and Hagee's offensive take on the Holocaust amply prove, Christian Zionism should not be confused with philo-Semitism. Many Jews, especially Israelis, know this. The Israeli writer Gershom Gorenberg has put the

case very well in his book, *The End of Days: Christian Zionists* ‘don’t love real Jewish people. They love us as characters in their story, in their play, and that’s not who we are, and we never auditioned for that part, and the play is not one that ends up good for us.’

The Jewish component of what is collectively known as the US’s Israel Lobby knows it too, but AIPAC, for example, has been less inclined to dwell on the theology; more interested in accepting and building on a source of moneyed, committed and unconditional support for Israel; more than happy to capitalise on a favourite Christian Zionist Bible tag, Genesis 12:3 in which God says to Abraham: ‘I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse.’ The news that Pastor Hagee, who was a much-feted keynote speaker at their 2007 conference, believes that the Holocaust was God’s plan for his Chosen People, has embarrassed but not surprised them.

In October 2006 I attended a three-day festival to honour Israel at Hagee’s Cornerstone Church. It featured a choir singing in Hebrew, a dramatic re-enactment of Israel’s history, hawkish speeches by neo-cons and a donation of half-a-million dollars to an illegal Israeli settlement. Its keynote speaker was one of the most powerful members of the Jewish Israel Lobby, Malcolm Hoenlein, of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organisations.

Pastor Hagee rounded off the grand occasion with a blood-curdling address to Iran’s President Ahmadinejad, a reprise of his suggestion in his book of Bible prophecy interpretation, *Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World* (2006), that the US hurry to Israel’s defence by dropping a pre-emptive nuclear bomb on Iran.

‘Listen up, Mr President of Iran! Don’t threaten America! We’re not afraid of you! We Christian Zionists are going to be your worst nightmare. If you remember, Pharaoh threatened Israel, and he ended up fish-food in the Red Sea!’ His last words were for Jews: ‘Stop giving the land away! The land belongs to you! Keep it!’

Pastor Hagee is a far more influential figure than Barack Obama’s Pastor, Jeremiah Wright. Although McCain is now giving grounds for hope with a pledge to scrap the development of the bunker buster—a nuclear weapon capable of demolishing Iran’s underground nuclear facilities—his failure to firmly distance himself from a movement that resists any attempt by the US to act as a just broker in Israel–Palestine and talks up the case for war with Iran, remains a cause for concern.

The writer is the author of *Allies for Armageddon: the Rise of Christian Zionism* *(Yale University Press)*

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN JERUSALEM AND AROUND

Kenneth Cragg

Where should we begin? For Christians in England have always been drawn to what—dubiously—we call ‘the Holy Land’. (For unless all lands are ‘holy’, can any be?). The story in terms of ‘jurisdiction’ begins with the establishment of the Jerusalem Bishopric in 1841. It was a decision fraught with controversy. John Henry Newman saw it as a factor in his reversion to Rome, reading it as an unwarranted trespass into the territory of the Eastern Church. Perhaps it was part of the growing penetration of Western European interest in the Ottoman caliphate, when Canterbury requested a firman from Istanbul for the tenure of an English bishop in the Holy City. But the small Jewish population was also in mind as a field for Christian witness—a cause much canvassed by the likes of Lord Shaftesbury, a renowned evangelical layman. The first appointee, Michael Solomon Alexander was of Jewish birth. His path had been pioneered earlier by Joseph Wolff, sent by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, in 1821, a intrepid traveller who talent pursued his journey over the Oxus, via Bukhara to India.

There was an intriguing ecumenical duality in Bishop Alexander’s ministry, as jointly commissioned with the Lutheran Church in Prussia, with alternating appointees who would receive each other’s sacraments. This provision had remarkable fruition after Alexander’s brief tenure of four years (in which he laid the foundation stone of Christ Church, with the Old City hard by the Citadel of David and the Jaffa Gate) in the appointment of the Lutheran, Samuel Gobat, a French-speaking Swiss whose service lasted for thirty-three years. His episcopate symbolised the issues latent in the whole enterprise of an Anglican ‘presence’, alongside the ancient jurisdictions, Greek, Syrian, Latin and Armenian.

The original intention was to serve alongside these jurisdictions, respecting their communities, while intending Christian faith-commendation among Jews and Muslims. Gobat, however, made disciples vigorously among them. He founded schools in many villages and, when matters of doctrine arose through these contacts, argued he could no longer leave those who responded

inside their partially faulted norms. Thus he was effectively instrumental in creating a Palestinian Anglican Church with a gathering membership with buildings and pastorates in places like Nazareth, Nablus and Ramallah. His 'Bishop Gobat School' in Jerusalem proved a veritable nursery both of clergy and laymen to guide and maintain them. A strong lay element has always been vital in the affairs of local Anglicanism even though the episcopate remained within Canterbury until 1976.

Gobat was followed in 1879 by Joseph Barclay who served only until 1881 where the bishopric stayed in abeyance for six years. While what Gobat had accomplished was irreversible, there was an increasing desire within the Church of England to 'inter-belong' with the indigenous Churches. The hiatus was deliberately contrived and led to the tenure of G F Blyth (1887-1914) who brought in a much more diocesan structure, developing close relations with the Palestinian clergy who had suffered some strained relationships with the CMS personnel. Blyth saw the building of St George's Cathedral on the Damascus Road, while the Lutherans, now moving independently, built their notable church inside the Old City.

The end of his episcopate saw the onset of the First World War. His successor, Rennie MacInnes, beyond its harsh privations, entered on the exacting years of the British Mandate and the increased demands of what the historian Elizabeth Monroe called 'Britain's moment in the Middle East'. His successor in 1932, the sixth Bishop, G F Graham Brown brought to these new claims on ministry a strong initiative in Christian education. A decade later in 1942 he died tragically in a road accident at a level crossing with the newly made Haifa to Beirut railway, having laboured strenuously with the darkening scene of Zionist infiltration and its challenge to the hope of Palestinian nationhood.

That—as it proves still—intractable issue, sharpened further under his successor, W H Stewart (1943-1957) and the creation of an Anglican Archbishopric in Jerusalem, with the first Palestinian Bishop, Najib Qubain, sharing jurisdiction with first Campbell MacInnes and then George Appleton. During the time of the second, plans were set up for the creation of a 'Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East' to which the authority of Canterbury was relinquished. Since 1976 local bishops have been in trust with Iran (from 1961), Egypt and the Jerusalem diocese with Cyprus and the Gulf completing a four-part Province with mainly expatriate communities in the islands and the Gulf.

This necessary narrative of jurisdiction and its personnel does scant justice to the triple venture in concern (a) for local worshiping communities in their pastoral needs; (b) ecumenical relation with other communities for mutual help and theological converse, and (c) the commendation of 'God in Christ'

to God as understood and affirmed, whether as Yahweh or Allah, in the faiths Judaic and Islamic. This has long meant deep and positive encounter in and for the ‘overlaps’ notably divine creation and human custodian creaturehood (‘the vineyard, the husbandmen and the messengers’). We have no command to ‘Go into all the world to discuss the Gospel,’ but we do have the task to ‘commend it’ and ‘commending’ means engaging and translating.

This task has had many exemplars and generations of faithful women in villages and educationalists in centres like Jerusalem, Haifa and Amman. Eric F F Bishop of CMS was for more than three decades a beloved teacher of Arabic in the Newman School of Missions. His contemporary, W H Temple Gairdner of Cairo, brought an inspired ministry to the Egyptian Church in music, drama, theology and journalism. His biographer, Constance F Padwick, mediated Gairdner’s legacy of inspiration to a later generation. They made good the diligent travels of the Victorian Gobat who walked apostolically through Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, as an adjunct to his ‘care for Jerusalem’.

Some fulfilment of the vision of all these men has found fruition in the establishment, since the nineteen-sixties of St George’s College in Jerusalem and—more recently—of the School of Theology in Alexandria. These are heirs to the initiative taken from 1956 till the eighties by the Near East Christian Council in its Study Programme in Islamics, which operated by a series of Summer Schools, by a circulating periodical, and by the convening of local conferences.

Readers of *Living Stones* are alert enough to know already of the steady attrition or attenuation of the Christian presence both in Palestine and Lebanon. The factors are dire enough. The rights and hopes of Palestinians confront massive obstacles in the unilateral American affinity with Israel, in the thrust of ‘Christian Zionism’ and in the relentless encroachments of Israeli settlements.

‘Hope’ in Paul’s great Corinthian Hymn was firmly flanked by ‘faith’ and ‘love’. So it ever remains. Faith gives it birth: love holds it to courage.

FROM THE DIASPORA

Rev Nasief Kawar interviewed by Jamil Bullata

Can you tell us something about your experience of being a Christian living in the Holy Land?

I was born in Haifa in 1938. My father, who worked as a civil servant during the British Mandate over Palestine, was transferred to Acre where we were living at the time of the *Nakba* in 1948. My parents belonged to the Anglican Church. I used to go with them to church—first to a hall in the vicarage and later to the newly built church in the new part of the City of Acre. No difficulties were experienced in worship. We had a vicar and the congregation was quite large.

We worshipped at the Anglican Church once a month because, after the *Nakba* in 1948, there were not enough vicars in Acre. My brother and I went to the Terra Santa Catholic School which accepted pupils from all faiths and traditions as the sense of unity was very strong. My sisters joined us at a later stage. At this school we attended church three times a week. I assisted as an altar boy as well as in the church choir. We were also allowed to worship at the Greek Orthodox Church where we could take communion. I attended as well the Pentecostal and Brethren Churches. In a sense, everybody was ecumenical in outlook.

What memories do you have of the events leading up to the loss of a homeland in Palestine in 1948?

It was at the end of the British Mandate over Palestine in 1948 and after the horrendous events for the occupation of Palestine that a number of the Arab Palestinian population, both Christian and Moslem, had to be displaced to become refugees in Lebanon and other neighbouring countries. However, my family stayed put in Acre with a number of other families who tried to persuade refugees coming to Acre from Haifa and the surrounding villages to stay on rather than move further to Lebanon and the other nearby countries. But the shocking and horrifying news of the massacres in Deir Yasin and the neighbouring villages frightened everybody including the inhabitants of Acre who started fleeing to Lebanon. My family stayed on and witnessed the severe battles for taking over Acre that lasted 4 to 5 days. We were staying in the

basement of our house most of this time with hardly any sleep. Our house was near the Police Station which was the last place to be taken over. These events bring painful memories especially the distressing sensation of being under occupation. We received military orders to move away permanently from the new part of town to the old city. During this time, it was quite difficult to move from one place to the other as permits were required to do so. Additionally, there was a shortage of food during this time and arrests by the occupying authorities were very common. My mother and I were arrested one day for daring to go out of the old city in search of food but, fortunately, were later released.

What were the circumstances of your leaving the Holy Land/Palestine and starting a new life abroad?

In spite of the difficulties and the hardship we were experiencing as described earlier, I stayed under occupation in Israel until 1959 during which time I managed to make friends including some of our Jewish neighbours. In 1959, I travelled to the United Kingdom to live in Wimbledon at my aunt's who was married to an ex-British army officer who worked during the British Mandate over Palestine as a court official but who left Palestine in 1948. In London, I studied and trained as a radiographer. I then joined the Methodist Church Youth Fellowship in Wimbledon and later frequented the Methodist Church Stoke Newington in Green Lanes where I met my English wife.

I worked for some time in the National Health Service in London and South Yorkshire, but at the age of 50, I felt that I got the call to become a Methodist Minister. On application, I was accepted and so after training for two years in Bristol, I worked first in Barnsley, then Oldham in Lancashire, and later in Slough from where I retired to Redditch in Worcestershire.

How do you see the situation for the Christian communities in the Holy Land and what role can they play in bringing about a better future?

As you may have noticed, I am ecumenical in my outlook. I am pleased to hear that most of the Christians in the Holy Land are united in their fight against the injustices of the Israeli occupation. I pray and hope for a just peace for the Palestinians whose human rights have been abused whilst the world at large and the West in particular are doing nothing to help.

What are the prospects for peace in the Middle East?

Personally, I have not given up hope for the two-states solution based on the 1967 green line as borders between Israel and a future Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. I believe in open borders between Israel and the rest of the Arab World. It is hoped that all Christians around the world will not only put the necessary pressure on their governments for this to be achieved but will also be encouraged to go and visit Israel/Palestine to witness for themselves what is happening there and to listen to both sides of the argument.

I believe that the separation wall will have to come down one day as happened to the Berlin Wall. There will be no just peace ever if the problem of the refugees were not resolved justly and if the settlements in the West Bank were not dismantled.

For me there should be no difference between Christian, Moslem and Jew living in Israel/Palestine. Some will say that this is an unrealistic dream but I hope that this dream will come true one day even if this day may not be in my lifetime.

Tell us something about any work you do for the Palestinian cause and for the cause of the Christian Community there and elsewhere in the Holy Land and how do you maintain your sense of Palestinian identity living in Britain?

In addition to being a member of Living Stones, I am also a member of Friends of Sabeel UK, a branch of Sabeel in Jerusalem whose aims are peace on the Liberation Theology theme. Whenever I have the opportunity in church, I find it my duty and responsibility to preach about the injustices done to the Palestinians. I also make presentations, hold talks and show films for Christians and the world at large to witness reality and see what is happening to the Palestinians. All Christians need to put the words of Jesus into practice when He said that He came to fulfil the words of the prophet who said: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good news to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the lord's favour.*" (Luke 4: 18-19)

**VOICES FROM THE LIVING STONES
OF THE MIDDLE EAST**

Patriarch Fouad Twal: 'There is no reason to fear ...'

Beatitude Michel Sabbah has been succeeded by Archbishop Fouad Twal. The new Patriarch was born in Madaba, in Jordan, on October 23, 1940 and was educated at the Latin seminary of Beit-Jala, was ordained priest in 1966 and went on to study at the Lateran University and in the Pontifical Academy in Rome. After several posts in the Vatican diplomatic service he was ordained as Bishop of Tunis in 1992. In he was made Archbishop and became president of the Regional Episcopal Conference of North Africa (CERNA). In September 2005, Benedict XVI appointed him Coadjutor for the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. (Information from Asia News – 21 June 2008) The words that follow are taken from the new patriarch's homily in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Dear Brothers and Sisters, we passed by Golgotha and the stone of the Unction before arriving at the place of the Resurrection. Before our time, the Lord experienced the harshest of human dramas and underwent the bitterest of sufferings: deprivation, injustice, loneliness and agony. He walked through the narrow streets of Jerusalem carrying his cross, falling several times, always picking himself up, and this, until death. He allowed himself to be buried in the ground and trampled under foot, as the grain of wheat which is sown and which dies. We also, as a people, as a Church and as individuals, know which crosses, which challenges, and which difficulties await us. We know beforehand that we will fall at times and that we will receive some hard blows.

Your death, Lord, continues to take place in us and in every person who suffers, who is persecuted, who lives in fear, or who wanders from place to place. Our people in the Holy Land, like all of the peoples in the Middle East, are constantly groaning and suffering as they await the hour of their liberation, the hour of their resurrection, for the way of the cross continues on and on.

Nevertheless, just as there is a short distance separating Golgotha from the empty Tomb, so also we know that the distance separating death from Resurrection is also short.

For that reason, there is no reason to fear ...

We call upon the Leaders of the Nations in conflict, all of whom are dear to us: 'Fear the Lord and have pity on your peoples, on their young people, on their children

and on their elders. Have the courage to find just solutions so that we can all live in peace and security.’—We call upon the International Community so that, moved by a sense of responsibility, courage, and justice; it will help the populations of the region to take just decisions. We are certain that Peace is possible, that Justice is possible, and that mutual Trust is possible.—We call upon the faithful of the three monotheistic religions and of the various Christian denominations in this holy city to continue to deepen our dialogue, to strengthen our solidarity in charity, and to continue the meetings we have been having in this spirit.

‘He has been raised from the dead just as he said’ (Mt 28:5).

The final word of our history will not be left to hatred, to separations and violence. Today’s joy rekindles in us the great hope of Easter morning: Christ rose from the dead and triumphed! Love is stronger than all else! Risen with Christ, we begin our journey. With Christ, we will work toward a world based on justice, peace and security. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who accompanied her son on the road to suffering and death and who collaborated in his plan of salvation, accompany us in our mission. Amen.

Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah: ‘a wakeup call to those responsible for peace and war’

The extract which follows is taken from the Easter homily of the retiring Latin Patriarch, Michel Sabbah

‘By obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves for a genuine love of your brothers. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cloak for vice. In a word, live as servants of God’ (1 Pt 1, 22; 1 Pt 2, 16).

To live as free men without using freedom as a cloak: that is a wakeup call to those responsible for peace and war in our Land of the Resurrection and of freedom. Our conflict has been going on for more than a century. It has been a century of conflict and a century of human inability to end it. And this year marks forty years of occupation and forty years of inability to end it, together with forty years of insecurity and forty years of inability to end it. The spirit of Easter invites all those who, in this Holy Land, are responsible for making peace and waging war to have recourse to new criteria and to a new vision. Until now, oppression has bred violence, and violence has bred oppression. It is imperative that the initial oppression, the occupation, and the refusal to recognize each other cease so that we can set out resolutely on the road to peace. The Jews are celebrating Passover in memory of their liberation and as a symbol of freedom for all the peoples. Will Israel, some day, ever have the courage to celebrate Passover by giving freedom to the Palestinian people in order to recover its

own complete freedom? It would bring to an end a century of inability to make peace, and it would set in motion the work of the Resurrection and of a new life in this Land.

3. Brothers and Sisters, in our paschal joy and prayer, here before the tomb of the Lord, we pray for our entire diocese and for all the Churches in Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Cyprus. We pray for all the inhabitants of our countries, whether Muslims, Jews, Christians or Druze. To the Jews who are celebrating Passover, we wish them a Passover of holiness, freedom, and peace. To the entire Palestinian people, Christians and Muslims, who are under occupation, we wish them freedom, an end to our suffering, and freedom for thousands of political prisoners, along with the freedom of four Israeli prisoners. Our feast is a prayer for everyone and a renewal of our love for all. Christ is risen! He had to suffer in order to enter into his glory. He invites us to turn our suffering, at all levels, into a source of Redemption for us and for all those with whom we live. Christ is risen! Have a Happy and Holy feast of Easter. Amen.

Bishop Suhail Dawani, Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem: ‘Another Via Dolorosa’
Extract from the Bishop’s message reproduced from the Diocesan Website of the Anglican Diocese in Jerusalem

‘Our Holy Land is passing through another Via Dolorosa, and we are still searching for justice, peace, and hope. I doubt if there are any here today who have never suffered hurt or offence at some point in their lives—similarly, that anyone here has never given hurt or caused offence towards others. That is part of what it is to be human. Therefore, when things press hard upon us, we need to focus afresh upon the marks of our shared pain, upon those scars, which were caused by the mutual suffering of both Palestinians and Israelis. These scars remind us of the cost of the failure to love, to accept each other and to forgive.

It is in this situation we are now all called to serve. Jesus himself declared: ‘I have come to serve, not to be served.’ ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; behold, all things have become new.’ Jesus has given us the ministry of reconciliation. There is no doubt at this time, that all parties and faiths are called to a new ministry of reconciliation based on justice, peace and human dignity. Reconciliation is best served by dialogue, not debate. The Christian mission is best achieved by dialogue. St. James of Jerusalem, together with the Apostles, resolved the crisis of Jew and Gentile in the first Church of Jerusalem by dignified dialogue. The Old Testament calls for dialogue. Islam calls for dialogue. It states that there is no compulsion in religion.

The ministry to which I am called demolishes walls of hatred and separation, and builds bridges of peace. Thus, I am delighted to declare the establishment of

the Diocesan Department of Peace, Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue for the service of all peoples, and for coexistence among us all.’

Melkite Patriarch Gregorius III: ‘Let all be workers for peace’

From the Easter Message of Patriarch Gregorius

‘Our Eastern countries, which are the lands of the resurrection, are suffering in many of their members that are members of the Arab League and our brothers, being hungry, distressed and dying, or deprived of their rights, especially in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq. We are talking to them with sincere feeling and raising our fervent prayers, asking all our children to show solidarity with all who suffer and with their real causes. Let us all be workers for peace, pontifices, (bridge-builders) and peace-makers and let us beseech the Lord, that the local and regional leaders of our society and throughout the world may be real builders of peace. We pray above all that there may soon arise the dawn of the resurrection of worthy life, peace, security and prosperity and together, with a heart full of hope, faith and charity, we say, ‘Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.’ With my affection, esteem and apostolic blessing.’

Middle East Council of Churches: ‘A Just and Permanent Peace’

‘The Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches strongly denounces the activities perpetrated by the Israeli authorities in the Holy Land and Gaza Strip, and calls for stopping them immediately, for the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and from starting negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian National Authority with the aim of reaching of a just and permanent political solution that ensures the formation of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. The Executive Committee also expresses its denial of the atrocities that take place in the beloved Iraq, whether by the occupying forces or the terrorist groups, and that causes the death of many and destroys all aspects of life in Iraq.... And while asking God for the return of security and stability in Lebanon, the Executive Committee calls all the Lebanese parties to quickly reach the political agreement in order to pass from the state of worry and dispersion that Lebanon is living now to the state of peace and prosperity.’

This is taken from the statement of the Executive of the Middle East Council of Churches meeting in Cyprus last March. The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) is a fellowship of churches in the Middle East, which foster the ecumenical movement in the region. It brings together almost all the region’s Christians in a body that focuses on strengthening the relations between churches, between Christians and non-Christians in the region, and between members of the body of Christ within and outside the region.

**‘THE REUNION OF THE GREAT CATHOLICOS-
PATRIARCHATE OF THE EAST’:
ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE HOLY SEE,
THE CHALDEAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
AND THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST**

*Anthony O’Mahony
Heythrop College, University of London*

It is all too easy to be the bearer of bad news about Christianity in the Middle East. A profound series of crises has overtaken Middle Eastern Christianity in modern times.

Displacement by war, genocide, interreligious conflict, leading to loss, emigration and exile would seem to be the main experience of Christianity in the modern Middle East. However, modern crisis and contemporary ecumenism are beginning to bring down the barriers. In the course of the last decades, remarkable developments have taken place in the ecumenical relations between churches in the Middle East, both on the bilateral and multilateral levels—agreements that allow partial mutual participation in sacraments, formation of future priests, catechesis. Christian theologians have been calling for a new discernment to evaluate the theological and ecclesiological meaning of this new form of communion that is growing among churches of the Middle East. The Christian Churches have become part and parcel of each other in some mysterious way.

The Iraqi church¹ can be considered as a real mosaic of communities, however, ecumenism is very much alive in Iraq, where it is thought of a natural coming together of all who share the common faith of Christ.² It is from within this milieu that a great ecumenical stride was taken on 11 November 1994 when the Patriarch of the Church of the East published with John Paul II a joint declaration on the doctrine of Christ.³ The Church of the East is the sister Church of the Chaldean Catholics. This was followed by agreement, which allows for mutual admission to the Eucharist between the two churches. In October

1 Suha Rassam, *Christianity in Iraq*, Leominster, Gracewing 2004.

2 See the studies by Anthony O’Mahony, ‘Eastern Christianity in Modern Iraq’, in *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics* (ed A O’Mahony (London, Melisende 2004, pp.11-43; ‘Christianity in Modern Iraq’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 4, no 2. (2004), pp.121-142.

3 Gerald O’Collins SJ & Daniel Kendall, ‘Overcoming Christological Differences’, *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 37, 1996, pp. 382-390.

2001, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity published two texts: 1. *Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church in the East*; and 2. *Admission to the Eucharist in Situations of Pastoral Necessity*, the second being intended to clarify the meaning and application of the first. The mutualities associated with the admission to Eucharist are based on the official recognition, by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith on behalf of the Catholic Church, of the validity of an anaphora of Addai and Mari, traditionally used by the Church of the East, although it does not contain an explicit institution narrative.⁴ This recognition is expected to have far-reaching pastoral and theological implications. The statement from the Vatican added that publishing guidelines for eucharistic sharing between the members of the Church of the East and Chaldean Catholics was particularly important because so many faithful from both Churches had emigrated from Iraq and the surrounding area.⁵ Emigration continues to be a destructive reality that has affected all the Christian communities in the Middle East; however it also creates an important, vital and growing expression of Oriental Christianity in the west.

Despite *prima facie* negative responses from some Eastern churches to the recent document from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith on 'the doctrine of the Church' (2007) the relationship between the Catholic Church and Eastern Christianity is likely to become a central tenet of the papacy of Benedict XVI. This is especially true with regard to emerging European identity as the expansion of the EU has meant a growth eastward to include states such as Romania and Bulgaria who have an Orthodox Christian tradition. Some estimate that up to one million Eastern Christians are present living in Britain including close to 100,000 Eastern rite Catholics. Thus ecumenical relations between the Western and Eastern churches will become more rather than less important. For example the encounter between Catholics and Orthodox in the Ukraine has a European wide significance witnessed by the relationship being built between the Holy See and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. This relationship is also important in the encounter between Christianity and Islam. In his Regensburg address last year Benedict XVI widened the 'canon' of Catholic thought on relations with Islam to include Eastern Christian experience and theology.⁶ The success of the Catholic Church's relations with

4 Frans Bouwen, 'Assyriens et Chaldéens: admission mutuelle à l'euchariste', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* (Jerusalem), Vol. 51, 2001, pp. 333-347.

5 *The Tablet*, 3 November 2001, pp. 1580-1581.

6 See the following studies on Catholic theological response to Islam: Anthony O'Mahony, 'Catholic Theological Perspectives at the Second Vatican Council', *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 88, no.1016, 2007, pp. 385-398; A O'Mahony, 'Louis Massignon as Priest: Eastern Christianity and Islam', *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review*, Vol. 29, no.1, 2007, pp. 6-41; A Unsworth, 'John Paul II, Islam and the Christian-Muslim Encounter', *A Catholic-Shi'a Engagement* Edited by A O'Mahony, W Peterburs & M

Eastern Christianity will be an important sign and marker of this pontificate.

On the occasion of the recent meeting (June 2007) in Rome between Pope Benedict XVI and Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV of the 'Assyrian Church of the East', the Pope commented on the new reality that as a result of successive waves of emigration, many Christians from the Christian East are now living in the West which presents a variety of challenges to Christian identity and community life. Benedict XVI in his welcoming address to Mar Dinkha IV said 'At the same time, when Christians from the East and West live side by side, they have a precious opportunity to enrich one another and to understand more fully the catholicity of the Church, which, as a pilgrim in this world, lives, prays and bears witness to Christ in a variety of cultural, social and human contexts.' Mindful of his longstanding involvement as Cardinal Ratzinger, the Pope, ask the wider Catholic community to take note of the important ecumenical dialogue between the Holy See, the Assyrian Church and the Chaldean Church (the Catholic sister church in union with Rome and the dominant ecclesial tradition in Iraq).

The most recent summit of this ecumenical dialogue was the historic agreement on the Eucharist promulgated on 26 October 2001 between the two churches approved by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, and Pope John Paul II, which according to the foremost Jesuit scholar at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Robert Taft, should be considered 'the most remarkable Catholic magisterial document since Vatican II'. This document was of great significance for it recognized the validity of the 'Anaphora of Addai and Mari', despite its lack of an Institution Narrative. According one of the senior consultors the agreement tells Catholics who fulfill the stated conditions and receive Holy Communion at an Assyrian Eucharist using the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, that they are receiving the one true body and Blood of Christ, as at a Catholic Eucharist. The text entitled 'Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist Between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East' was promulgated on 26 October 2001, but bears the date of its approval 20 July 2001.

This venerable anaphora—the most ancient anaphora that is still in current use—had always in the past posed a problem for the Roman Catholic Church, which had as a result insisted on the insertion of the 'missing' element into the two Eastern Rite Catholic Churches which use this anaphora, namely the Chaldean and the Syro-Malabar Churches. Taft commented in *Worship* that 'this agreement tells Catholics who fulfill the stated conditions and receive

Shomali, London, Melisende 2006, pp. 253-302; Barbara Wood & A Unsworth: 'Pope Benedict XVI, Interreligious Dialogue and Islam', *One in Christ: a catholic ecumenical review*, Vol. XLI, no. 4, 2006, pp. 89-108.

Holy Communion at an Assyrian Eucharist using the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, that they are receiving the one true body and Blood of Christ, as at a Catholic Eucharist.’ What is so remarkable is that the Catholic Church recognized the ecclesial and theological authenticity of the Church of the East that had for sixteen centuries been considered as ‘the Nestorian Church’ whose principal theological position was perceived to be rejection of the foundational Christological doctrines of both Western and Eastern Christianity. Taft considered this ecumenical theological development ‘the most remarkable Catholic magisterial document since Vatican II.’⁷

How the two churches reached this point is a remarkable story. It is well known that the Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries produced a three-way theological split among the Christian Churches as follows—two natures in the incarnate Christ, but one hypostasis; One incarnate nature of God the Word, and one hypostasis (*qnumo* in Syriac); two natures in the incarnate Christ, with their two *qnome*. This division continues to this day but is only among the Syriac Churches of the Middle East and India that all three doctrinal positions are represented. The divisions originally caused by controversy over how best to describe the relationship between the divinity and the humanity in the incarnate Christ. For the Orthodox and Catholic (and Reformed) traditions the matter had been settled by the formulation produced at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Sebastian Brock of the Oxford University Oriental Institute, a leading authority on the late Cardinal König’s PRO ORIENTE commission which supported by its scholarship the dialogue, has stated, ‘while most of this formulation was (and remains) unproblematic, the use of two particular specific technical terms, “nature” (physis) and “hypostasis” proved to be a stumbling block’. These two terms had different meanings for different people, many in the Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, and beyond their borders in the Persian Empire, who understood the terms in way that was different from that intended by the Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon.⁸

Brock continued ‘As a result of this difference in meaning given to these two terms, verbal conflicts led to misunderstandings whenever they were employed’. This situation was effectively fossilized by the Arab invasions of the

7 Robert F Taft ‘Mass Without the Consecration? The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001’, *Worship*, Vol. 77, no.6, 2003, pp. 482-509. The importance of this text was first drawn to the readers of this journal by the Jesuit scholar, Robert Murray, ‘Tradition and Sacred Texts’ *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Vol. 6, no.1 2004, pp. 4-20.

8 S Brock, ‘The importance of the Syriac traditions in ecumenical dialogue on christology’, *Christian Orient*, Vol. 20, 1999, pp. 189-197; S Brock, ‘The Syriac Churches in Ecumenical Dialogue on Christology’, *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, pp. 44-65; Sebastian Brock, ‘The Syriac Churches and Dialogue with the Catholic Church’, *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. XLV (2004), pp. 466-476.

seventh century, at the time of the birth of Islam, when the Churches of the Middle East were politically cut off from those of the Byzantine Empire and the West. Since the latter were all entirely Chalcedonian, whereas the former, all under Arab rule, were largely non-Chalcedonian, the subsequent European tradition of writing ecclesiastical history has tended either to marginalize, or to forget entirely. Recent history has changed this situation: the Second Vatican Council, and the large-scale emigration from the Middle East to Europe, the Americas and Australia, of Christians from the non-Chalcedonian Churches, has brought these Churches into the direct conscious relationship of the Western Churches.

Until 1984 no significant ecumenical encounter had taken place between the Assyrian Church and the Catholic Church but in that year a unique meeting took place between the Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV and Pope John Paul II. This led to a series of 'unofficial' theological encounters between theologians of the two churches, considering the sixteen hundred years of separation, remarkable progress was made that in November 1994 the two leaders of the churches could sign a 'Common Declaration of Faith'. For the Church of the East, especially, this was an event of immense significance, the first time in its entire history that this Church had received official recognition by another Church. The Church of the East's application to join the Middle East Council of Churches quickly followed this event. The question which family of churches would it join—Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant—was a significant one. It was decided that it would form part of the Catholic family, which include the Chaldean Church. However sadly the Church remains outside of the MECC due to opposition from some Oriental Orthodox churches, whose theological dialogue with the Church of the East has stalled.

It has been pointed out painfully by many involved in the relations between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches that it has been the question of the status and role of the Eastern Catholic churches that has been, often wrongly, seen as an obstacle in ecumenical dialogue. Relations between the Church of the East and its counterpart, the Chaldean Catholic Church, had for obvious reasons always been difficult. But improvement followed naturally when in November 1996 the two Patriarchs, Dinkha IV and Raphael Bidawid, met in Southfield, Michigan and issued a Joint Patriarchal Statement. In the summer of the following year, 1997, a series of dramatic steps forward were made. In June the Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East unilaterally lifted the anathemas against persons revered by other Churches, in particular Cyril of Alexandria and Severus of Antioch—thus setting an admirable example for a similar lifting of anathemas by other Churches. At the same time the Synods of both the Assyrian Church of the East and of the Chaldean Catholic Church agreed to a 'The Joint Theological Commission' aiming ultimately at full ecclesial union. These were truly momentous events—the rapprochement between the Chaldean

Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East is of unique significance in ecumenical history although some ecclesiological problems remain.⁹

Despite these successes, and maybe because the speed and scale of change, the dialogue came to a sudden halt in 2005 due to division within the Church of the East about the implications of relations with the Catholic Church and the real possibility of 'full ecclesial unity'. Cardinal Kasper in an interview after the visit of Mar Dinkha IV to Rome said on these divisions in the Church of the East, 'cause difficulties, since they are improperly used by some Assyrian media to cast doubt on the Catholic Church and its true intentions toward the Assyrian Church'. What both churches have had to confront is that the two communities have been formed by a distinct identity and history, which to now bring together is just as traumatic as the original break. These difficulties have also to be set against the difficult modern history of Iraq and Christian displacement by war and conflict across the Middle East. The question of how Christianity should be configured in the post-Baathist settlement still struggles around Assyrian and Chaldean identity. Rome is aware of this acute dilemma and the recent meeting between the Pope and the Catholicos was initiated to give renewed heart to the communities involved as they seek reunion of the Church of the East.

The reunion of the great Catholicos-Patriarchate of the East from the Assyrian and Chaldean churches in union with the Papacy would be a profound and great moment in contemporary Christianity. Today with the significant growth in Christianity in Asia it should be recalled that it was the Church of the East which was in historical terms the great evangeliser. Until the fourteenth century, the Church of the East stretched over a very wide area, from the regions of the eastern bank of the Euphrates to South-East Asia. It is said to have had a total of some 250 dioceses and a thousand monasteries, distributed between Mesopotamia, Persia, Turkestan, the Gulf, India, Tibet, China and Mongolia. Only time will tell how this ecumenical dialogue will be received but its significance should not be hidden.¹⁰

9 Joseph Seferia, *The Chaldean Church of Iraq: A Story of Survival*, Oxford, Blackfriars Publications 2008; A O'Mahony, 'The Chaldean Catholic Church: The Politics of Church-State Relations in Modern Iraq', *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. XLV (2004), pp. 435-450; 'Life and Death of a Patriarch: Mar Roupheal I Bidwid, Patriarch of Babylon and the Chaldean Catholic Church in Iraq', *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review*, Vol. 27, no.1, 2005, pp. 26-46.

10 On the importance of the Syriac Christian Tradition for the future character of Christianity see S Brock, 'The Syriac Orient: a third "lung" for the Church', in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, Vol. 71, no.1, 2005, pp. 5-20.

**A CHRISTIAN ‘RIGHT OF RETURN’:
THE STORY OF MONA NASIR TUCKTUCK**

Dear Friends and Family,

I am writing to share a little about what is happening in my life lately. As most of you know, I have been in Jerusalem since March 18 with Ramzi who at the time had barely turned 5 months. We left Habib and made the sacrifice to be apart for the coming 4 months for the sake of preserving my Jerusalem ID, to keep my residency status. I know this might sound strange, but as a Palestinian who has lived her whole life in Jerusalem, and despite the fact that my family has lived in Jerusalem and Palestine for centuries, according to the Israeli law, Palestinians living in Jerusalem are only residents but not necessarily permanent residents, and therefore are at risk all the time of losing their residency rights.

For the past 3 years, I have been married to Habib, a Palestinian by blood but an American by citizenship, because Habib’s Jerusalem residency was revoked in 2004—although Habib was born in Jerusalem, and has lived there until his adult life. Anyways, now it was my turn to renew my entry visa to ‘Israel’ (yes, I needed a visa in my own country)—I met with a lawyer who asked for a substantial amount to help me renew my entry visa, which would preserve my residency until the next time I have to renew (a maximum of 3 years), but this time the Israelis refused to renew it and instead told me that since I made the decision to marry an ‘American’, who can’t reside in Jerusalem, I have made a decision to seek residency in a foreign country and am therefore ‘choosing’ to abandon my residency rights in Jerusalem. (Palestinians are not allowed to have dual residency or citizenship, a law that is not applicable to Israelis who are able to hold dual or multiple citizenships.) To make a long story short, I lost my residency rights in my own country!!!! I can only go back to visit as a tourist, and have to acquire a tourist visa from the Israeli embassy!! The ironic thing is that all my family still live there!! But I can never join them, I don’t have a choice in the matter. We, the people of the land are being thrown out!!!

On my way back from the lawyer’s office, I was stopped by Israeli soldiers who asked to see my papers—they spoke Russian. I thought to myself, these immigrants know nothing of this land they are serving and protecting- they don’t even know the language. They come from Russia, Europe, Africa, the US, and other places and choose to reside in my country- and they can!!!! Not only that but they can limit my movement in my country, and even kick me out of

it! When I complained to my lawyer about this injustice he simply answered, ‘Mona, this is occupation!!!’ Not at all the legal answer I was looking for at there is no human law that can protect me, or preserve my rights. Needless to say, I have lost my right to return, to my country ... to the only country I ever belonged to, the only place I ever called home.

As an adult who has been living under occupation for the past 33 years, I was upset but I can't say that I was surprised by what happened to me. However, what surprised me was what is happening with my 7 month old, Ramzi. Ramzi was born in the US and therefore got an American passport. Although he is the son of two full blooded Palestinians who call Jerusalem and Palestine home, he was denied residency rights in Jerusalem and was given a tourist visa. I asked the lady at the airport when we first arrived if she could give Ramzi (then 5 months old) a 4 month Visa, rather than the traditional 3 month visa, I showed her my residency card (at the time I still was considered a resident), and showed her our return plane tickets. She said no, and said that I should apply for an extension for Ramzi at the ministry of interior. To avoid conflict and to make my life easier I asked the lawyer to apply for an extension for Ramzi ... to my surprise Ramzi was denied. The Israeli government refused to grant a 7 month old baby an extension on his visa, not even with the help of our lawyer and all his connections!!! So, now I have to face the choice of leaving with Ramzi early and change our vacation plans, or stay with Ramzi here as planned until July 25th, and have my 7 month old be illegally overstaying his welcome in the land of his ancestors. The ironic thing is that this poor little baby can't even say mama or baba, yet he is pausing a security threat to Israel that they denied him a one month extension on his visa!!

So now, my little family of three are added to the millions of Palestinians who lost their right to reside in their country and have been kicked out of their homes. We now are residents of Las Vegas, but I will always refer to Palestine as my home. Since the 1948 diaspora of our people, the Palestinians in the world have been waiting for a just solution, that would give them the right to return to their homeland, and now 60 years later the list gets longer everyday with people just like the 3 of us who were driven out of our country. I will never give up the hope that one day I would have the choice to live in Palestine, and I will make sure that Ramzi also knows that he has a right to return!

SUPPORTING THE LIVING STONES

**This new series will introduce other organisations that support the
Living Stones of the Holy Land,
as far as possible in alphabetical order**

A is for Action around Bethlehem Children with Disability (ABCD)

In 1985, one of the present Trustees of ABCD who had spent some time working as a paediatric physiotherapist in the West Bank and The Gaza Strip recognized the dire needs of disabled children and young adults in the area. A year later, Action around Bethlehem Children with Disability (ABCD) was established as a UK registered charity No. 327327 by a Trust Deed dated 16th December 1986. On 27 February 2002, ABCD was incorporated under the Companies Acts 1985 to 1989 as a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital No. 4383155, with a registered office in the UK.

ABCD is closely affiliated to The Leonard Cheshire Foundation www.lcint.org. The late Lord Cheshire, patron of ABCD, donated a piece of land for the building of The Beit Jala Rehabilitation Centre run by The Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation (BASR). BASR is the core of the work of ABCD today.

ABCD is dedicated to improving the quality of life of those suffering from physical, mental and psychological disabilities in the Greater Bethlehem Area of the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. ABCD treats those in need regardless of race or creed, helping them to lead dignified and useful lives in their communities. ABCD works through Palestinian partners, The Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation (BASR) based in Beit Jala.

The objectives of the charity are ‘to promote the relief and rehabilitation of physically, mentally, or multi handicapped persons from the West Bank and Gaza Strip by establishing and providing residential facilities, vocational training programmes, vocational training centres, paramedical training, therapeutic educational programmes and other services relevant to the needs of such disabled persons and their families (including the manufacture and provision of aids and equipment).’

In 2002, US Agency for International Development figures showed that almost one quarter of Palestinian children under five were suffering from acute or

chronic malnutrition and the situation in the Gaza Strip is as bad as in African countries such as Nigeria and Chad. The survey states that this situation is due to the effects of the Israeli policy of sealing off the Palestinian territories for almost two years. The last figures from the World Health Organization estimated that approximately 2.5 percent of the population of this area are disabled persons in need of rehabilitative medical treatment— however due to the ever increasing violence and conflict it is certain that this figure has risen. (Since then the situation has deteriorated, particularly in Gaza where unemployment is now over 80 per cent and Gaza's 1.5 million people are among the poorest and most overcrowded in the world. Since the closure of the crossing point in June 2007, 85 per cent of Gazans have come to depend on food donations, water and electricity supplies are sporadic and unreliable),

ABCD is helping to meet these needs through community based programmes, bringing medical help, day-care and family support at grass roots level. Most of the information about ABCD is taken from their website at <http://www.abcdbethlehem.org.uk/>.

PILGRIM PREACHER

Palestine, pilgrimage and Preaching

Duncan Macpherson, foreword by Canon Naim Ateek

Pilgrim Preacher examines the impact of the Holy Land upon preaching. It explores the place of preaching in pilgrimage to the Holy Land but it also argues for the relevance to preaching of the Holy Land in all its aspects— geographical and cultural, historical and contemporary.

Drawing upon the latest insights of modern preaching studies, Deacon Duncan underlines the importance of the Holy Land for historical-critical interpretation of the texts of the Bible. He challenges the preacher to confront controversial issues requiring historical judgements that have relevance for contextual preaching that relate not only to the situation in the Holy Land but also to issues and conflicts worldwide.

This book will be invaluable both for Christian preachers and teachers and for a wider readership who are concerned to see peace and justice in the Holy Land and identify the role of religious understanding in bringing them about.

'This is the sort of book that Holy Land lovers might wish to have constantly to hand wherever they are, both for checking historical detail and for stimulation in preaching. It is well worth getting.' Stephen Need, *Theology*, October, 2005, 391-2.

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**ZION'S CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS?
THE BIBLE, ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH
BY STEPHEN SIZER
(INTER-VARSITY PRESS)**

*A REVIEW
by Victoria Clark*

No one in Christian circles this side of the Atlantic has done more than Stephen Sizer to raise alarm bells about 'a formidable and dangerous movement' called Christian Zionism whose geopolitical peril he locates in the core conviction that 'God blesses those nations that stand with Israel and curses those that don't.'

What this conviction has meant, especially ominously since 9/11 2001 when the ensuing War (or Crusade) on Terror added copious grist to the Christian Zionist mill, is that the entire Moslem world is 'cursed', while Israel and her western allies are blessed. For a Christian Zionist there can never be an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel and nor must Israel ever be forced to abandon her illegal settlements in the West Bank, let alone her claim to Jerusalem as her indivisible capital. Christian Zionists expect no peace in the Middle East until Jesus Second Coming, so all efforts to obtain a peace there are pre-doomed to failure. That some important aspects of this Christian Zionist worldview have neatly dovetailed with that of the Neo-conservatives in charge of US foreign policy in the Middle East since 2000 is well known, as is the fact that the evangelical Christian vote was vital to Bush's victory in 2004.

But why should the faith-based worldview of around a third of American evangelical Christians so closely resemble the guiding political ideology of the Jewish state? Anyone unversed in the biblical rationale for Christian Zionism will be tempted to explain it out of existence by listing other reasons for Americans' support for Israel: emotive Hollywood Holocaust movies have done their job; Israel advertises itself as the only democracy in the Middle East; Israel was a pioneering society like America. But there is a great deal more to Christian Zionism than that. In a nutshell, we are up against the word of God in the Jewish Old Testament as opposed to the word of his son Jesus, also God of course, in the Christian New Testament.

Dr Sizer's *Zion's Christian Soldiers: The Bible, Israel and the Church* does an excellent job of demonstrating the extent to which the age-old problem of discerning a clear and consistent message in both books of Bible has led to Christian Zionists over-weighting on the side of the Jewish Old Testament, at the expense of Jesus' universal and inclusive mission, at the expense, Sizer points out—though

without putting it quite as starkly—of Christianity itself: ‘Did the coming of Jesus, his death and resurrection and the founding of the church, fulfil or postpone the biblical prophecies concerning Israel? Is the church central to God’s purposes on earth, or a temporary sideshow?’ If you believe the latter to be the case then you are a Covenantalist, if the former, then you’re a Dispensationalist. If you are Dispensationalist then you are almost *de facto* a Christian Zionist.

Dr Sizer is a theologian, so his overriding concern is with painstakingly demonstrating—with the aid of useful diagrams and charts as well as detailed argument—that the Dispensationalist view of the God’s purposes is rooted in an inadequate, sometimes hilarious but also dangerously mistaken understanding of bible prophecy. He argues for a contextual rather than an ultra-literal reading of prophecy. The Dispensationalists’ ultra-literalism, he says, leads to a plethora of pitfalls, or rather, pratfalls: ‘Transient literalism (confidently identifying one of Israel’s prophesied enemies as Russia in the 1970s, but adjusting that to the ‘Russian-Syrian-Iranian Axis’ to match the reality of the 2000s, for example); Speculative Literalism (suggesting that one of the apostles forecast a nuclear war but had to explain it in terms intelligible to his age, as a volcano of fire and brimstone); Contradictory Literalism (no two ultra-literalist exegetes think alike on the meaning of any given prophecy); Enhanced literalism (adding words to the original here and there, to assist understanding); Arbitrary literalism (mention of an eagle in the Bible, for example, is taken as mention of the US because the bald-headed eagle is America’s national symbol).

Sizer’s book is not aimed at the lay reader. With its clear lay-out and helpful study hints at the end of each chapter, it is clearly intended for the Bible student or clergyperson seeking to understand the theological method of Christian Zionism and/or looking for some ammunition to effectively combat the ideology. To that extent is an ideally practical tool, an important weapon in any covenantalist’s arsenal. However, as a non-theologian writer on Christian Zionism, past and present, as someone who is as alarmed as Sizer by its political implications, I would say that he may be underestimating the degree to which its growing popularity depends on factors that will prove impervious to his cogent argument.

Anyone who has attended a bible ‘prophecy conference’ at which a leading Christian Zionist has declared, after reading Isaiah 17:1 to an audience of 4,000, ‘An oracle concerning Damascus. Behold Damascus will cease to be a city,’ that he wished ‘the US would obliterate Syria and not leave it to Israel’ will have some idea of the intellectual weight of popular Christian Zionism. With its focus on war and Armageddon Christian Zionism’s appeal can best be likened to that of a disaster movie; this is Christianity recast as a thriller. Anyone who has listened to an aeronautical engineer cum Bible prophecy expert like

Chuck Missler will note how natural it is for a scientifically-trained evangelical Christian to read the Bible ultra-literally, as one would a computer manual or a code to be ingeniously deciphered. An encounter with San Antonio's Pastor John Hagee, probably the most important Christian Zionist in America today, showed me that Christian Zionism is as reassuringly macho, gun-loving, super-confident and impatient for action as its counterpart, Islamic fundamentalism. Just as Moslem fundamentalism appeals to trained doctors and engineers, so Christian Zionism has a strong appeal for scientists and intelligence operatives, and to readers of thrillers and science fiction. Pastor Hagee writes Bible prophecy thrillers with titles like 'Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World'.

Like any religious fundamentalism, Christian Zionism has to do with Zeitgeist, with insecurity caused by change occurring at the pace it has since the end of the Cold War, with mass psychology. Travelling around Texas I discovered how rooted it is in emotion rather than reason. Time and again I encountered an appalling fear that America is falling out of favour with God in its adherents, a gut-level pessimism that has precious little to do with the Bible-reading. In October 2006 a salesgirl in tourist office in Waco burst into tears when I asked her the reason for her overwhelming 'heart for Israel': 'I'm just so scared that if we get the Democrats again they won't defend Israel so well, and that's going to bring suffering on America,' she sobbed, 'We *have* to go on blessing the Jews!'

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MICHAEL PRIOR CM

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