

EDITORIAL

The Reverend Aude Rantisi, 1936-2001

News from the Holy land seems to get progressively worse. More than a thousand people have now been killed in the constant war of attrition between Israelis and Palestinians. Of these eight hundred have been Palestinians, including a number of Christians, most of whom fell during the Israeli shelling and occupation of Bethlehem and surrounding areas. Sadly there is no light visible at the end of the tunnel. Hopes that the United States administration had the will and the capacity to pressure Israel into serious negotiations now seem pretty forlorn and the recent suicide bombings, with their predictable reprisals, seem to augur a rapid descent into a spiral of violence.

Amidst all these tragic circumstances members of Living Stones will be further saddened to hear of the death from heart failure of Aude Rantisi, one of the most inspirational of Palestinian Christians and a keen supporter of *Living Stones* from its beginning. When I first met Aude in 1982, he was running the Evangelical Boys' home in Ramallah. Aude was also the Deputy to Karim Kalef, the Mayor of Ramallah. Aude and Karim had both been elected in April 1976 when the Israeli administration had permitted local elections in all the major towns of the West Bank and a slate of candidates supportive of the political programme of the PLO had been swept to power with huge majorities. In 1980 Karim Khalef and the mayor of Nablus, Basam Shakah, had been maimed by Jewish terror bombers in an assassination attempt. Along with other elected mayors and officials in West Bank towns, Karim and Aude had then been deposed by the Israelis earlier in 1982. In Ramallah, Aude and Karim Khalef retained the loyalty and support of the people, and with Karim Khalef under house arrest in Jericho, there was a constant stream of visitors, Muslim and Christian alike, coming to Aude's house for advice and help.

Aude's early years had been marked by the trauma of 1948 when he and his family had been evicted along with thousands of others from their homes in Lydda, near to the site of the present Ben Gurion Tel Aviv Airport. This operation, directed by Ben Gurion personally, involved the expulsion of the inhabitants at gunpoint. Aude recalled that when the Hagannah soldiers ordered his family out of their home the populace had at first supposed that it was a search for arms. However the true purpose soon became clear. Aude recalled the systematic robbing of jewellery by soldiers and described one person being shot out of hand for hiding valuables. A procession of panic stricken men, women and children were forced through a narrow defile and, quite near to Aude, a child was crushed under the wheels of a cart and nobody was able to do anything to help due to the pressure of human bodies. Many others died on the weary trek to Ramallah where the survivors were housed in tents and makeshift shelters throughout a terrible winter.

As an adult Aude studied and trained for the Anglican ministry in Britain and it was here that he met his wife, Pat, whom he married in 1965, and who was to be his constant support and co-worker for the rest of his life. In 1969 he was ordained a priest of the Anglican diocese in Jerusalem.

Astonishingly, in view of his early experience, the adult Aude was free of any kind of hatred towards the Israelis. However, his was an insistent and eloquent voice for justice. Some two years after our first meeting, I was instrumental in bringing about a twinning between the deposed municipality of Ramallah and the Borough Council of Hounslow in West London. When Aude came to England and spoke in the Council Chamber in Hounslow the Councillors, in common with many pilgrim groups who had visited his house in Ramallah, came away moved both by the passion of his oratory and the justice of his cause.

Aude's life spanned the long years of the Palestinian *via crucis* from the *Nakba* to the *Second Intifada*. His analysis of the events through which he lived was widely valued among Palestinians of every background. I have heard Muslims as well as Christians speak of him in tones of hushed respect and I will never forget the tribute of a Latin Catholic priest with little English who gave up the difficult task of trying to explain a political point and said, 'You know my friend Aude Rantisi. He is good man. Ask him and he will tell you. I think like him.'

In his later years Aude did not enjoy good health. The boys' home was closed in 1993 and, in his retirement, relationships with some of his fellow Anglicans were soured. His theology and spirituality were always of a distinctively Evangelical kind and, during his later years, much of his Christian ministry was carried on with the Baptist community in Ramallah. He will be remembered variously as a devoted husband and father, as a warm and amusing friend, a tireless advocate of justice and peace, a Palestinian patriot and a fervent Christian. May he rest in peace!

In this issue of the newsletter we include a selection of Palestinian Christian voices responding to the events of 11 September and to the attacks in the Bethlehem area. Michael Prior contributes a thoughtful study of the relationship between religious atrocity and biblical scholarship. Stephen Sizer contributes the first of two articles on Christian Zionism and Jamil Bullata is the first émigré Palestinian Christian to be interviewed in a new series 'From the Diaspora'. In this interview Jamil Bullata points up the disastrous consequences of the present situation for the many Palestinian Christians working in the tourist industry. This economic circumstance can only exacerbate the sense of isolation experienced by Christian Palestinians. Anyone wishing to show solidarity with the Living Stones of the Holy Land during their time of trial may be interested in joining an Easter pilgrimage in 2002 to show solidarity and with the intention of praying for peace and justice for all the peoples and religions of the country. A full-page advertisement for this event is to be found on page on the back page of this issue. Those unable to join us at Easter who are interested in organizing a similar pilgrimage at another time are invited to contact the Editor at this address.

Deacon Duncan

VOICES FROM THE HOLY LAND

11 September

Messages from the Palestinian Churches

September 11

Message from the Latin Patriarch:

I would like to express to your Eminence and to the Church of America and the entire American people our solidarity and condolence for the terrible events which took place today in the USA. We are with you in prayer and feelings. The Church of the Holy Land prays with you and asks God to give you all His divine comfort and hope in these difficult moments. The Christian Communities in Jerusalem and the whole Palestinian people stand with you in these moments and share with you the sadness for the loss of innocent brothers and sisters in humanity and faith.

We condemn these horrifying crimes and we are shocked and deeply saddened when we watched the extent of the catastrophe inflicted upon the innocent people...

Please extend our deep and heartfelt solidarity with all the families and relatives of all the victims of these events. May the Lord give them strength and patience.

+ Michel Sabbah

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

Message from the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem:

The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East is distraught over the September 11 attacks on the United States of America. We fully and explicitly condemn those acts of terror on United States soil and on the citizens of America.

We forcefully denounce this inhuman and unjustified action, and we join our sufferings with the American people. On behalf of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, ordained and lay, we assure the President, the government and the people of the United States of our ceaseless prayers, calling upon Almighty God to comfort the hearts of the bereaved for the loss of their dear ones, and beseeching Him to heal all the injured in body, mind or-spirit.

May God have mercy on all the suffering, and may the souls of all who perished rest in His peace, and may the hearts of all the bereaved be comforted with His love.

+ RT. Rev. Riah Abu El-Asal,

Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem

Message on behalf of the Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem:

Salaam and grace to you from a troubled Jerusalem in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Bishop Younan who is currently travelling in the United States, expressed his deep personal shock and feeling of sympathy with the families of the victims. He affirmed his belief that we in the Church cannot give in to the forces of extremism, but have to give our support to the forces of moderation.

Bishop Younan, on behalf of all the members of our Church would like to express to you as the spiritual leader of our sister Church, to the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and

the entire American people our solidarity and condolence. Your pain is our pain. We were shocked to watch this unprecedented act of violence and terrorism. We therefore share your sadness and sorrow for the loss of so many innocent lives.

We pray for you, and express our solidarity with all the families and relatives of the victims. We take refuge in God's promise to unfailingly be with those are in need of His enduring presence.

On behalf of Bishop Munib Younan

Lutheran bishop in Jerusalem

Message from Palestinians international day of prayer and remembrance:

Palestinians and foreigners, led by Muslim and Christian clergy, prayed for the lives that were lost and asked God to ease the pain and suffering of those who lost loved ones. After prayers outside Damascus gate, the group marched through the streets of East Jerusalem ending at the entrance of the United State's Consulate in East Jerusalem, where the participants placed flowers and candles on the entrance of the Consulate.

We, in Palestine, continue to pray so that all terror for all peoples will end. As people who have suffered for so long, we cannot but feel the pain of a family that has lost a loved one or a child that will not again see his father or his mother. As we unite in grief, we pray for the day when all of us will unite in celebrating justice to all the peoples of the world.

A Christian Palestinian Perspective on the War in Afghanistan

We need to fight terrorism wherever it is, but we need to be precise about our goals and objectives before we hit. "I am for fighting against terrorism, but we have to define what terrorism is... I think the attack was too quick. I really feel sad for the Afghan people who barely even have anything to eat. I hope this does not harm them any more than they already are hurt... this war is already being described as a war of 'Christianity versus Islam ...' and one of 'infidels versus the faithful'. To a certain extent, this description was liable to affect the relations between Christians and Muslim extremists within the Palestinian community

Father Majdi al-Siryani, Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church, Beit Sahour

The October Attack on Bethlehem

From the message of the Latin Patriarch:

... Brothers and sisters: We are close to you. Together with you we experience the storm happen during these days. With God's help this crisis will pass. We are with you in these difficult times. We would like to encourage you: Love each other with patience and faith. With

the psalmist we say: 'Princes persecute me without a cause. But my heart stands in awe of Your word' (Ps 118, 161), and further: 'Consider my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget Your law. Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word' (118, 153-154).

Our destination is to be born under occupation and be exposed constantly to death. Every human person has the right and the duty to do all possible to him in order to obtain his own liberty. The international community finally has to come to understand that the Palestinian is a human being like all the others and has the right, as every human being, to reconquer his proper dignity and liberty in his own country.

Killing is evil. All violence is evil. All war disfigure the countenance of God, and is therefore evil. Only the murderer strives for murder. He opens the gates of death and makes the person enter. In our Holy Land the element that opens the gates to death is the military occupation. Therefore we say: the suffering of the Palestinian people until today is enough. It is time to end its tragedy.

To the Israeli people we say: you merit also security and peace. We wish you security and peace. In everybody and in every one of you we see the dignity which derives from that of God and which is

a gift to every human person being Palestinian or Hebrew. The key of death or peace is in your hands and in that of the government you have elected. It is the government that can open or close the gates of death. It is the government that can give you peace or take it away from you. Those who today fight each other and are thrown into the abyss of death have the right to live and enjoy security. Therefore, it depends on your government to put an end to all occupation that has been pressing upon the Palestinians during decades from this part, depriving them from their dignity and liberty. The United Nations have formulated regulations as a base of peace. It would be sufficient to implement them.

With our Brothers, the Patriarchs of the Holy City and all the Heads of the Churches of Jerusalem we declare: It is enough with the bloodshed; it is enough with the fight! Shut the gates of death, of hatred and terror. Stop the shedding of blood that calls for other bloodshed. The blood of all victims cries before God and before every human conscience. Restore the occupied land to the real owners, thus allowing hearts to regain serenity and for every human being to regain the proper humanity, and for Palestinians and Israelis to regain in equality the proper dignity given by God! ...

+ Michel Sabbah
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

FROM THE DIASPORA

Jamil Yousif Bullata

This is the first of a series of interviews with Palestinian Christians living in exile in Britain. In this issue the interview Jamil Bullata, a Greek Orthodox Christian from Jerusalem and an active supporter of charities and organisations linked with Palestine, answers questions about his life and reflects upon his experiences.

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

As a Christian Palestinian living in Jerusalem before 1967, I never felt different or out of place on account of my Christianity. Christians and Muslims lived in total harmony in what remained of Palestine after 1948. Although my elementary and secondary education was at the De la Salle College, which is a Catholic school, my friends at school and outside school consisted both of Muslims and of Christians from all denominations. It was more difficult for me being an Orthodox Christian in a Roman Catholic school. As a Christian, I was obliged to attend the Catholic Mass at the school every day and every Sunday for over ten years of my schooling. That daily routine was harder at Christmas and Easter times when I had to attend classes or possibly sit an examination on Orthodox Christmas Day (7 January) or during the Holy Week especially Good Friday. It was only by a very special permission that I was allowed to attend the

Sunday Liturgy and take Communion at my own local Orthodox Church. That is how it was at the De la Salle College in those days. I understand it is not as strict nowadays. I had, though, an excellent education in that school and really *je ne regrette rien!*

Moreover, being a Christian from the Holy Land made me always feel deeply rooted in Jerusalem. I am not referring here to my roots in the ancient Land of Canaan and especially in the Canaanite tribe of the Jebusites, who were the original Semitic inhabitants of Uru-Salem, also known as Jebus and now al-Quds. According to an opinion offered to my elder brother by Father Augustin Marmarji (1881-1963), a Dominican linguist of the Ecole Biblique et Archéologique, in Jerusalem and later independently confirmed by Dr Marvin M Pope, professor of Semitic languages and literature at Yale University, my family name has its origins in that civilisation. As you know, the Canaanites inhabited Palestine from about 3000 BC before the Hebrews are believed to have invaded around 1200 BC. Later the Canaanites formed the majority of the present-day Christian and Muslim Arabs of Palestine. I feel deeply rooted in Jerusalem because of my own life experiences, memories and family lore that has been part of my culture since childhood.

** What were the particular privileges and problems of the church to which you belonged in Palestine and were there any ways in which*

you think they may have been different from those of other Church traditions?

As I mentioned earlier, I belong to the Orthodox Church that is headed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. To answer your question, allow me first to give a little bit of a historic background. The Orthodox Church is not only the mother Church in the Holy Land but also the owner of almost all the Christian holy sites as well as extensive land holdings in the heart of Jerusalem and throughout Israel/Palestine—in Gaza, Ramle, Acre including even the flea market in Jaffa. It was at the beginning of the Ottoman rule in Palestine, about 500 years ago, that the Ottomans introduced in Palestine the new rule whereby the temporal authority must approve the candidates nominated to be patriarch of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem. After the end of the Ottoman rule in 1917 followed by the British Mandate over Palestine, the British authorities approved the candidates and in 1952 when the West Bank including East Jerusalem became part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Jordanian authorities approved the candidates. In 1981, when the previous Patriarch Deodoros was elected, it was the Jordanian government that had given its approval. This is because according to United Nations resolutions, East Jerusalem has the status of occupied territory. After the death of Deodoros in December 2000, there were 15 nominees for the position of Patriarch. Both Jordan and the Palestinian Authority approved the entire list, but Israel disqualified five candidates (including Irineos who was later elected in August 2001 as the new Greek Orthodox Patriarch) but following a petition to the Israeli Court of Justice, Israel then retracted and approved the entire list. From all this, you could see that the appointment of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, is, historically speaking, a political as well as a religious appointment. This does not apply to the other church traditions in the Holy Land.

To add to all these complications, there has not been an Arab Orthodox Patriarch in Jerusalem since 1534. The Arab Orthodox Christians who have been struggling against the Greek hierarchy for almost the last five centuries are discriminated against in the ministry they are able to exercise in the Orthodox Church in Palestine. Arab men intending to become clergy are obliged to get married before ordination so that they may not be able to become bishops and thus endanger Greek hegemony. Furthermore, the Greek hierarchy has not given these Arab Orthodox clergy any theological training, and such education as they have is informally acquired. The same kind of neglect by the Greek hierarchy is observed in the general education of the Arab Orthodox community who have not been given pastoral and spiritual care. In spite of the considerable wealth of the Orthodox Patriarchate, insufficient funds are made available for social services, for schools or for local Arab Orthodox church buildings. And the Arab Orthodox members of the community have also been prevented from participating in running the affairs of their local churches. This sad state of affairs does not apply to other Christian traditions in the Holy Land.

Irineos, the newly elected Greek Orthodox Patriarch, is thought to be sympathetic with the indigenous Arab Orthodox Christians. It is hoped that the new Patriarch will lead the Arab Orthodox community with a new and open

spirit so that all the members of the community will play their part as full partners in matters of community representation, school building, the refurbishing of the holy sites and the protection of church property, particularly land. You may understand now why my parents sent me to a Catholic school!

** What were the circumstances of you leaving Palestine and starting a new life abroad?*

When I left Jerusalem in May 1964, I did not have the intention of starting a new life abroad. My purpose for leaving my homeland was to go to Britain to study accountancy. To qualify as a chartered accountant I needed to complement my studies by training with a firm of chartered accountants in the United Kingdom. In June 1967, half way through my studies, what remained of historic Palestine after 1948 was occupied by Israel. The area was devastated. I was cut off from my family. After qualification, I had no alternative but to stay in Cardiff where I had studied and trained, lived after getting married and where my two children were born. I did not think that I was going to end up in a situation of forced exile and of never being allowed to go back to live and work in Jerusalem.

** How do you maintain your sense of Palestinian identity living in Britain?*

In order to hold on to an option, one has to be ready to let go of it. The option to let go was never an option for me. I owe a great deal for maintaining my sense of Palestinian identity to my immediate family. Although my wife is French and my two children were born in Britain, they never made me feel or want me ever to be other than a Palestinian and hence I never felt myself anything but a Palestinian at heart. In fact my family embraced the traditions, customs and culture that I carried with me from Palestine. I always share with them my memories and experiences in Palestine. Outside my family circle, we have many friends who are also Palestinian or connected to Palestine one way or another. We exchange the memories that we brought with us from Palestine and share these with our children. Again, my various voluntary and charity work in Britain not only keeps me *au courant* with what is taking place there but also maintains my connection as a sturdy bridge to my birth place.

** How do you see the situation for the Christian communities in the Holy Land?*

The plight of the Christian communities in the Holy Land is a very deep rooted and complicated issue dating back many years but it has intensified enormously since the Israeli occupation. I wish we could have one day more time to speak about this for being so close to my heart. Let it suffice to say that the situation of the Christian presence and the crisis of Christian disappearance in the Middle East is really becoming more acute than ever before. So much has been written most recently about this and so much concern also has been expressed but unfortunately not much has been done to ease the conditions that have created this sad state of affairs. The primary source of income for many Christians is from tourism and its subsidiary service businesses and the Israeli

occupation has taken away much of this livelihood. The mainline churches in the West are still hesitant in extending direct financial assistance or of drawing attention to the plight of Palestinian Christians for fear of appearing anti-semitic or to a lesser extent anti-Muslim. Help is needed urgently and I hope it will come before it is too late. In his book entitled *The Forgotten Faithful*, Said K Aburish, a Muslim himself, wrote: ‘... *Jerusalem without believers in Christ, is more serious than that of a Rome without a Pope or a Canterbury without an archbishop. It is tantamount to a criminal act which transcends a single church and strikes a blow at the foundations and the very idea of Christianity.*’

**What are the prospects for peace in the Middle East?*

Well, it all depends what is understood by peace. I think that one party understands peace to mean ‘*peace, quiet and tranquillity*’ or for that matter ‘*the security*’ it needs to sustain occupation and the subjugation of the occupied territories for repression, expropriation, destruction and dispossession, and to implement long term plans for the colonisation of the area. We are always told that it takes two parties to make peace. When that is what is understood by peace by the occupying and the stronger of the two parties (which, additionally, is supported internationally), you tell me what prospects for peace has the weaker party? It is an unequal contest between David and Goliath. It is bare chests and rocks versus F16s, gunships and bulldozers! When the weaker party fights back, its struggle and resistance of the occupier is looked upon as terrorism and if it accepts this unjust situation as a *fait accompli* it is doomed for extermination! Something positive, something very dramatic must happen for this state of affairs to change. Would this happen in my lifetime? Maybe not! Would it happen in my children’s lifetime? May be! How many must die until this happens? Only God Almighty can tell! Until the world community wakes up and opens its eyes to what is happening and something tangible is done about it, I think the prospects for peace in the Middle East are minimal or nonexistent and the so-called ‘peace process’ will remain for a long, long time a ‘process’ but without any peace in sight!

**Tell us something about any work you do for the Palestinian cause and for the cause of the Christian community there.*

Efforts exerted for the Palestinian cause from outside Palestine can never measure up to the efforts made by the Palestinians under occupation in Palestine, yet any endeavours, however small, contribute to the cause. Since my early retirement in 1992, after thirteen years as a partner in an international accounting firm in Saudi Arabia where I lived with my family I have given voluntarily most of my free time to various charitable/social organisations including charities and organisations for the assistance and relief of Palestinians.

Apart from my work for **Living Stones**, I am active in the recently established **Orthodox Christian Society of the Holy Sepulchre in Britain**. The Society’s main object is the support of Orthodox Christians in the Holy Land. Last year, our society made all the necessary arrangements to fund a student of Theology and Religious Studies and accordingly, secured a place for an Arab Orthodox Christian candidate

from Jerusalem to come to Britain to study Theology at The Institute For Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge, an affiliation with Cambridge University and the Cambridge Theological Federation. Unfortunately, because of the *Intifada* in September 2000, the candidate had to defer his coming to the UK until such time as he can feel his family is safe while he is away.

I am also a member of the Executive Committee of **Friends of Birzeit University** (FoBZU)—a UK charitable organisation which supports and responds to the needs of Birzeit University. In addition to helping students, FoBZU was instrumental in the award of a grant from the National Lottery Charities Board for the development of an adult literacy and family life programme to be carried out by the Adult Education Unit at Birzeit. Another grant was obtained from the Department for International Development (DFID) for the establishment of a Food Safety Unit at Birzeit. These are only a few of the projects presently in progress at Birzeit.

Again, I am the treasurer and Trustee of **Action Around Bethlehem Children With Disabilities** (ABCD), a UK charity dedicated to improving the quality of life for those children with physical, mental and psychological disabilities in the West Bank and Gaza. In addition to its direct work with its Palestinian partners at The Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation (BASR), ABCD has various outreach charitable programmes in the West Bank. ABCD has presently two on-going projects which were financed by grants it secured. One project that is being financed by the National Lottery Charities Board, is for the provision of a purpose built day centre for the disabled children of Obediah village for their daily educational, social and medical needs. The other project has been made possible by receiving a grant from the Welfare Association, the Charities Aid Foundation and The British Council to fund the expansion of a major training programme to highlight the needs of disabled children and to promote their total integration into the community. Only last week we, at ABCD, responded without delay to help a disabled young Palestinian who is presently in a Buckinghamshire hospital receiving occupational therapy to learn to live with his disability with some independence. A bullet despatched by an Israeli soldier exploded in his spine causing him to be permanently paralysed from the torso down. ABCD funded the special wheelchair manufactured specifically to the requirement of his disability.

I am involved with **Rediscovering Palestine**, a network of U.K. based charities and organisations working in a variety of ways towards peace with justice in Palestine/Israel with the main objectives of promoting knowledge and understanding of the Palestinian people in their religious and cultural diversity and of encouraging British tourists to ‘*rediscover Palestine*’.

Furthermore, in the last two months I took part in two different radio programmes for the BBC World Service on Palestinian matters. In **Reporting Religion**, I was interviewed concerning the election in August 2001 of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem and the controversy behind his appointment. In **Praise of God**, the second programme presented by the well-known Palestinian singer, Reem Kelani, was about Palestinian stories, legends and songs amassed over the centuries by Palestinian Christians and Muslims.

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM: JUSTIFYING APARTHEID IN THE NAME OF GOD

Stephen Sizer

The renewed Palestinian *Intifada*, has led to over 900 deaths, 760 of them Palestinian, including many children. It has also sparked a revival in Christian Zionist support for Israel.¹

Christian Zionism is born of the conviction that God has a continuing relationship with, and covenantal purpose for, the Jewish people. This is based on an ultra-literal reading of Scripture and the conviction that Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel are being fulfilled in the contemporary State of Israel. For Christian Zionists, God's promise to Abraham remains unconditional and eternal. 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates ... The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.' (Genesis 15:18; 17:8).

The Zionist dream, first articulated by Theodor Herzl in *Der Judenstaat* in 1896 and a year later at the First Zionist Congress, may actually be attributed to the writings and activities of Christians like Lewis Way, Joseph Wolff and Edward Irving who formed a broad coalition of Christian Zionists from the 1820s,² some sixty years before similar views were being espoused by Jewish leaders.³ When Herzl was wavering on the option of Palestine as a Jewish homeland in favour of Uganda or South America, he received a Bible from William Blackstone, the American Christian Zionist, with every reference to 'Israel' or 'Zion' underlined in red, together with a letter urging him to insist Zionists settle only in Palestine.⁴

In 1975, the United Nations condemned the ethnic exclusivism of Zionism as, 'a form of racism and racial discrimination.'⁵ At best, it seems, the Israeli State views Palestinians as an inferior species to be herded into Bantustan townships and refugee camps, and at worst treated like animals, expendable, to be sacrificed before the god of Zionism. Israel's continuing illegal settlement plans, land seizures, house demolitions, expulsions, deportations, military occupation, use of torture and 'extra-judicial' killings of Palestinians are seen by many as a form of racially motivated ethnic cleansing.⁶

Contemporary Christian Zionism is in part a reaction to criticism of Israel's apartheid regime. So, for example,

following the passing of U.N. Resolution 242 condemning Israel's occupation of the West Bank in 1967, when the entire international community closed their embassy's in Jerusalem in protest, the International Christian Embassy (ICEJ) was founded and moved to Jerusalem, expressly to show solidarity with Israel. Well over 200 other evangelical Christian Zionist organisations have been founded in Britain and the United States alone since 1980.

Essentially, Christian Zionists see themselves as defenders of, and apologists for the State of Israel. This support involves opposing those deemed to be critical of, or hostile toward Israel, but also inevitably leads to the justification of apartheid on so called 'biblical' grounds. As tensions increase in the Middle East, so the stakes are raised to gain the moral high ground, and the Bible is used as another weapon to silence Israel's critics. Increasingly, anti-Zionist convictions are equated with anti-Semitism and the Shoah exploited by what even some Zionists admit is 'holocaustology.'⁷ For example, Hal Lindsey is not alone in accusing those who oppose Zionism of anti-Semitism,

...the same error that founded the legacy of contempt for the Jews and ultimately led to the Holocaust of Nazi Germany.⁸

Similarly, Tony Higton, General Secretary of the Churches Ministry Among Jewish People (CMJ) laments the polarisation of positions.

It is so politically correct in many church circles to condemn Israel (as the recent ritual condemnation from Christian Aid illustrates) that to make balanced comments about her brings accusations of being a right wing, fundamentalist, Zionist ...⁹

This article will elaborate on what Christian Zionists believe about current events in the Middle East, why they support the State of Israel, lobby for an exclusively Jewish Jerusalem, advocate the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple, resist Palestinian aspirations for self determination, and are generally pessimistic about any peace deal between Jews and Arabs. Material has been drawn from the most influential evangelical Christian Zionist in Britain and the USA. These include the

¹ Open Letter to Evangelical Christians from Jews for Jesus, 'Now is the time to stand with Israel.' *New York Times*, 23 October 2000.

² Known as the 'Albury Circle' hosted by Henry Drummond and later included Lady Powerscourt and John Nelson Darby. See Andrew L Drummond, *Edward Irving and his Circle* (London, James Clarke).

³ Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism, Its Roots in Western History* (London, Zed, 1983), back cover.

⁴ Donald Wagner, *Dying in the Land of Promise* (London, Melisende, 2000), 16.

⁵ Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism, Its Roots in Western History* (London, Zed, 1983), 1 and 120.

⁶ Ewan MacAskill, 'Building Unbearable Lives' *The Guardian*, 12 January 2001, 17.

⁷ Ruth Rosen, 'Holocaustology, Past Oppression, Present Excuse?' *Issues*, Vol. 13. 5.

⁸ Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York, Bantam, 1989), back page.

⁹ Tony Higton, 'The Battle Continues' *Christian Herald*, October 2000.

Church's Ministry Among Jewish People, Jews for Jesus, Christian Friends of Israel, Bridges for Peace and the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem.¹⁰ The primary motivation driving Christian Zionism today is the conviction that 'the Bible tells them so.'¹¹

1. Ultra-Literalist Biblical Hermeneutic

The rise of biblical literalism and a futurist reading of scripture, which equates biblical references to Israel with the modern State of Israel and not the Church can be attributed to Christian Zionists like Lewis Way, Henry Drummond, Edward Irving and their associates at the Albury 'Unfulfilled Prophecy' Conferences of the 1820's.¹² In 1821, for example, Way published a pamphlet called 'The Latter Rain' in which he called Christians to pray for the Jews out of the conviction that Old Testament prophecies have a 'primary and literal reference to the Jews'.¹³ This movement was the catalyst not only for the founding of the London Jews Society (now CMJ) but also for John Nelson Darby, Edward Irving and Cyrus Scofield to develop an innovative premillennial dispensational theology which, historically, is the theological basis for Christian Zionism.

So, for example, they taught that the borders of the land promised to Abraham—from the Nile to the Euphrates—must become the future borders of the State of Israel since the Jews have never inherited all the land. Similarly, because the Jewish temple described by Ezekiel has never been built, it must one day replace the Moslem Dome of the Rock. Promises made during the Babylonian exile of a return are made to apply 2500 years later to the emigration of Soviet and Eastern European Jews because the language appears to suggest a 'final' return, one more extensive than has ever occurred before. Patrick Goodenough of the International Christian Embassy, for example, insists,

We simply believe the Bible. And that Bible, which we understand has not been revoked, makes it quite clear that God has given this land as an eternal inheritance to the Jewish people.¹⁴

Instead of recognising how Jesus and the Apostles interpreted the Old Testament, it is made to speak about present and future events almost as if the New Testament were never written. Under the Old Covenant, revelation from God came often in shadow, image, form and prophecy. In the New Covenant that revelation finds its consummation in

reality, substance and fulfilment in Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 1:1-4, 8:13, 10:1). The question is therefore not whether the promises of the covenant are to be understood literally or spiritually as Christian Zionists like to stress. It is instead a question of whether they should be understood in terms of Old Covenant shadow or in terms of New Covenant reality. This is the most basic hermeneutical error which Christian Zionists consistently repeat.

2. The Jews Remain God's 'Chosen People'

Because of their biblical literalism, and dispensational roots, many Christian Zionists believe that the Jews remain God's 'chosen people' enjoying a unique relationship, status and eternal purposes within their own land, separate from any promises made to the Church. So, the promises made to Abraham remain true today for the descendants of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Based on passages like Genesis 15, Christian Friends of Israel, for example, insist,

The Bible teaches that Israel (people, land, nation) has a divinely ordained and glorious future, and that God has neither rejected nor replaced His Jewish people.¹⁵

Similarly, Jews for Jesus perpetuate the dispensational distinction between God's purposes for Israel and that of the Church.

We believe that Israel exists as a covenant people through whom God continues to accomplish His purposes and that the Church is an elect people in accordance with the New Covenant, comprising both Jews and Gentiles who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and Redeemer.¹⁶

David Brickner, Executive Director of Jews for Jesus, affirms the position first propounded by Darby, that the Jews remain 'God's chosen people' while the church is merely 'a parenthesis'¹⁷ to God's future plans for the Jews. Christian Zionists fail to recognise that in the Bible, 'chosenness' becomes progressively universalised, the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ to all who trust in Him, irrespective of their racial origins.

3. Restorationism

Since the Jews remain forever God's chosen people, the promises concerning the land are similarly seen as unconditional and eternal. Therefore Christian Zionists are active in encouraging Jews to 'return' to Zion. At the *Third International Christian Zionist Congress* held in Jerusalem in 1996, under the auspices of ICEJ, some 1,500 delegates from over 40 countries unanimously affirmed the following,

¹⁰ A more detailed critique of Christian Zionism, dispensationalism and Christian Zionist agencies is available from the author's web site <http://www.sizers.org>.

¹¹ Kathleen C Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So, The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (London, SCM, 1990).

¹² D W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. (London, Unwin, 1989), 88.

¹³ Lewis Way, *The Latter Rain*, 2nd edn (London, 1821), in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*. 88.

¹⁴ Kathy Kern, 'Blessing Israel? Christian Embassy Responds' Christian Peacemakers Team, Internet: menno.org.cpt.news@MennoLink.org 2 November 1997.

¹⁵ Christian Friends of Israel, *Standing with Israel*, information leaflet, n.d.

¹⁶ Jews for Jesus, *Doctrinal*.

¹⁷ David Brickner, *Future Hope, A Jewish Christian Look at the End of the World*, 2nd edn. (San Francisco, Purple Pomegranate, 1999), 18.

The Lord in His zealous love for Israel and the Jewish People blesses and curses peoples and judges nations based upon their treatment of the Chosen People of Israel ... According to God's distribution of nations, the Land of Israel has been given to the Jewish People by God as an everlasting possession by an eternal covenant. The Jewish People have the absolute right to possess and dwell in the Land, including Judea, Samaria, Gaza and the Golan.¹⁸

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel, Walter Riggans reaffirmed CMJ's continuing commitment to restorationism.

CMJ has always been at the forefront of teaching about God's restoration of the Jewish people to and in Israel, and we are continually excited by, and watchful of all that is happening ... In other words, our prayerful interest in the State of Israel is as constant and committed as ever.¹⁹

This conviction has also been given voice through CMJ's *Shalom*, which has promoted agencies such as 'Operation Exodus' which encourage Jews to emigrate to Israel from Russia and Eastern Europe, allegedly in fulfilment of biblical prophecy.²⁰

David Brickner summarises how Christian Zionists view the contemporary State of Israel as evidence of God's continuing protection and favour toward the Jews.

I believe the modern day state of Israel is a miracle of God and a fulfilment of Bible prophecy. Jesus clearly said that 'Jerusalem would be trodden down of the Gentiles until the time of the nations is fulfilled' (Luke 21:24). It has been 50 years since the founding of that state, but only 30 years since Jerusalem came under the control of Jews for the first time since Jesus made that prediction. Could it be that 'this generation shall not pass until all these things are fulfilled?'²¹

These theological presuppositions clearly have serious political implications. Jewish 'restoration' to the lands associated with biblical Israel inevitably leads Christian Zionists to support the contemporary State of Israel.

4. Support for the State of Israel

A CMJ resource pack includes a section entitled, 'The State of

*Israel: Why should we support it?*²²

... in the biblical worldview one cannot actually separate theology and spirituality ... one cannot divorce the issue of the people of Israel's relationship with God from their relationship to their delegated sovereignty in the land of Israel ... God ... has made it possible for Jewish people everywhere to come and live in a restored Jewish homeland ... it seems to us that God is undoubtedly behind the re-creation of the Jewish State in the modern world. We are called to a support for the State of Israel ...²³

Similarly, 'Jews for Jesus' justify the military stance of Israel based on biblical precedence and divine command, claiming the choice for them is between survival and annihilation.

So far as force of arms is concerned, the choice for Israel has been to fight or to be annihilated. It must be remembered that every defensive position entails some violence. All bloodshed is regrettable; but Israel has no choice when faced with an intransigent and implacable foe that has threatened in the past to 'drive her into the sea.' ... We must also remember that war has not always been 'wrong.' In Moses' time the sons of Jacob did not traipse into the land of Canaan and find a welcoming committee eager to greet them and congratulate them upon their arrival. God commanded that they take Canaan by force. At that point it would have been wrong for them not to do it. There may be some who think that God has learned some new lessons since ancient times, but to our knowledge, God does not change. It is entirely possible that once again he might move Israel to resort to force.²⁴

Such support inevitably includes defending Israel's illegal military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights.

5. The Territorial Extent of Eretz Israel

At the heart of Christian Zionism is the conviction that the Land of Israel in its entirety was given unconditionally, exclusively and eternally by God to the Jews. The geographical extent of 'Eretz Israel', as Arnold Fruchtenbaum

¹⁸ International Christian Zionist Congress Proclamation, International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem. 25-29 February 1996.

¹⁹ Walter Riggans, *General Director's Annual Report 1996* (CMJ, St Albans, 1996).

²⁰ 'Operation Exodus', *Shalom*, March (1991); John & Mary Wartnaby, 'From the Ukraine to Israel', *Shalom*, 2, (1999), 8.

²¹ Brickner, *Don't*

²² CMJ, *Always be Prepared to Give an Answer Resource Pack* (CMJ, St Albans, 1996).

²³ CMJ, *The State of Israel: Why should we support it?* (CMJ, St Albans, 1996).

²⁴ 'zionism.htm' *Jews for Jesus FAQ*, www.jewsforjesus.org.

explains, is non-negotiable and covers everything from the Nile to the Euphrates.

...At no point in Jewish history have the Jews ever possessed all of the land from the Euphrates in the north to the River of Egypt in the south. Since God cannot lie, these things must yet come to pass. Somehow or other, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must possess all the land, and second, the descendants of Abraham must settle in all of the promised land.²⁵

Likewise, Louis Goldberg, of 'Jews for Jesus':

Ultimately Israel will have all that was promised in its entirety to Abraham.²⁶

The fourth resolution of the '*Declaration of the First International Christian Zionist Leadership Conference*' held under the auspices of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem in August 1985, was entitled, '*All Nations Should Recognize Judea and Samaria as Belonging to Israel.*'

The Congress declares that Judea and Samaria (inaccurately termed 'the West Bank') are, and by biblical right as well as international law and practice ought to be, a part of Israel.²⁷

Jan Willem van der Hoeven of the ICEJ offers a theological interpretation of the war in 1967:

God wanted to give His people that part of the land which they did not receive in 1948, and by hardening the hearts of the different Arab leaders—Presidents Nasser and Assad and King Hussein—He impelled Israel to react. The result of what became known as the Six Day War was that Judea and Samaria—heartland of biblical Israel—and the ancient city of Jerusalem—King David's capital—were returned to their original owner ... Thus, the Lord, by hardening the hearts of the Arab leaders, caused His people Israel to inherit the rest of the land, especially their ancient city, in a war of self defense! Until then, since 1949, Jordan had illegally held and occupied the 'West Bank' and Jerusalem. Thus, when Israel recaptured Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem, they did not even take over a territory that legally belonged at that time to any nation! How few in the West have even realized this. God has His own sovereign way to fulfil His Word and promise.²⁸

Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains how secular Jewish leaders made use of the Bible to reinforce the Zionist claim to the Land.

More often than not, the claim to Palestine as a Jewish homeland has been based upon historical and national rights. All this changed when Menachem Begin became Prime Minister of Israel. Historical and national claims were not discarded, but took secondary place to the Biblical claims which were now being set forth. Begin quoted heavily from God's promises to Abraham, Moses and the prophets. The West Bank was now called by its old Biblical names of Judea and Samaria ... this is the only area where Jewish claims become unique. ... the Jewish Biblical claims have no rival.²⁹

Dave Hunt gives this historical perspective on Israel's 'legal' claim to the Land.

Israel's claim to the land goes back 4,000 years to Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah in Hebron. There Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob and Leah are buried. In Hebron David was crowned king. This sacred Jewish site has no relationship to Arabs or Muslims. Yet Muslims claim Hebron as their own, built a mosque to keep Jews and Christians from visiting the cave, and are determined to drive out every Jewish resident.³⁰

Anne Dexter explains why present or future negotiations involving a land for peace deal will never appease Zionists.

The question of the ancient boundaries cannot be ignored. It underlies the policies of many Israeli statesmen. It explains why Sinai is always negotiable—it has twice been captured by Israel and returned to Egypt. It is the reason why Jewish settlements on the West Bank and Golan Heights are not just a matter of secure and defensible borders. It is the guiding principles in Israel's interpretation of West Bank autonomy, which insists that whatever the degree of self-determination allowed the people, the land itself belongs to Israel.³¹

In her view, Palestinian Christians must accept Zionism, and learn to live with it. '*Arab Christians are squarely faced with the biblical election of the Jews, and their role throughout history, particularly in the present.*'³²

²⁵ Arnold G Fruchtenbaum, 'This Land is Mine', *Issues*, 2. 4. www.jewsforjesus.org.

²⁶ Louis Goldberg, 'Whose Land Is It?' *Issues*, 4.2.

²⁷ *Declaration of the First International Christian Zionist Leadership Conference* (Jerusalem, International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem, 1985).

²⁸ Jan Willem van der Hoeven, *Babylon or Jerusalem?* (Shippensburg, Pasadena, Destiny Image Publishers, 1993), 151.

²⁹ Arnold G Fruchtenbaum, 'This Land is Mine', *Issues*, 2.4. www.jewsforjesus.org.

³⁰ Dave Hunt, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem' *TBC*, September 2000.

³¹ Dexter, *View*, 214-215.

³² Dexter, *View*, 32.

Tony Higton concedes that Palestinians are unhappy with the size of the 'areas', a euphemism for the Bantustans, which the Israeli's are offering in a 'land for peace' deal. However he justifies Israel's claim to the illegally held Occupied Territories on three grounds. The Palestinians have Jordan, the British allegedly went back on promises made in the Balfour Declaration and the amount of land agreed by the League of Nations in the 1948 Partition Plan was too small anyway.

I understand Mr Safieh's feeling that the Palestinian areas are too small. However, we must remember that Jordan is a Palestinian area too. It was part of the Mandated Palestine and, after we British reneged on the Balfour Declaration, the UN gave the Jewish people—Holocaust survivors and all—far too little land in 1948.³³

Higton's arguments contain several errors of fact. According to Uri Avnery, the Jewish historian, the Green Line agreed after the war of 1948 actually gave the State of Israel 78 percent of Palestine although the UN had only agreed to allow them 55 percent.

When the Palestinians agreed to a peace settlement based on the pre-1967 border (the Green Line), they were already giving up in advance 78 percent of the land between the sea and the Jordan River. They are ready to set up their state in the remaining 22 percent. Our government wants to 'compromise' over this area. Meaning: 'What's mine is mine, about what's yours, we shall compromise.'³⁴

The Peace Plan brokered by Clinton and Barak would have given the Israeli's a further 30 percent of the West Bank leaving the Palestinians isolated pockets of land surrounded by barbed wire, electric fences, mines and Jewish settlements. Christian Zionists cannot understand why Palestinians are not grateful. Richard Harvey, for example, points out that,

The Arab minority in Israel lives in better economic conditions than in many neighboring Arab states, and is certainly treated far more humanely than a Jew would be in an Arab land.³⁵

Christian Zionists therefore invariably oppose the dismantling of Jewish settlements in the Palestinian Territories. Theodore Beckett, Chairman of the Christian Friends of Israel Community Development Foundation has initiated an 'adopt-a-settlement' program among evangelical churches. Faith Bible Chapel in Denver, for example, has adopted the Jewish

town of Ariel. Seventy other Jewish settlements have also apparently been adopted in this way,

... with larger churches adopting larger settlements and smaller churches adopting smaller settlements and giving all a morale boost to show them they are not alone and are loved by many.³⁶

Jews for Jesus go as far as to compare Israel's continued occupation of the Palestinian Territories with the United States claim to Texas.

Many might wish that the Israeli government could feel secure enough to withdraw the settlements on the West Bank. But on the same basis, the United States should seriously consider giving Texas back to Mexico and, indeed, should never have settled it in the first place.³⁷

Christian Zionists also downplay or denigrate the role of the United Nations and human rights issues since they believe God has given the Land to Israel unconditionally and in perpetuity.

Jews for Jesus, for example, have been consistently critical of Christians who point out Israel's failure to uphold the human rights of Palestinians living under military occupation. Brickner even criticises agencies such as Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (EMEUE), founded by John Stott and directed by Don Wagner, who have challenged Israel's failure to respect human rights.

There are, however, others who describe themselves as evangelicals who want 'middle east understanding'—when in fact they are merely mouthpieces for anti-Israel propaganda. They allow their politically correct, over-wrought sense of moral outrage over the suffering of Palestinians to dictate their view of Scriptures. They point to injustice in the land and the fact that Israel is in unbelief, and conclude that God is through with the Jews and the land of Israel is illegitimate in His eyes.³⁸

This tension between those who seek the implementation of international law and Christian Zionists is nowhere more clearly polarised than on the status of Jerusalem.

(The second part of this article will review Christian Zionist attitudes to the status of Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the Temple, the rights of Arabs and the expectation of Armageddon.)

³³ Tony Higton, 'Beware of anti-Israel Propaganda', *The Church of England Newspaper*, 10 November 2000, 16.

³⁴ Uri Avnery, 12 Conventional Lies, *email newsletter*, 27 October 2000.

³⁵ Richard Harvey, 'Has Zionism Failed?' *Issues*, 5, 10.

³⁶ Sarah Honig, 'Adopt-a-Settlement Program', *The Jerusalem Post*, 2 October 1995.

³⁷ 'zionism.htm' *Jews for Jesus FAQ*, www.jewsforjesus.org.

³⁸ Brickner, *Don't*.

RELIGIOUS ATROCITIES AND BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Michael Prior, C.M.

The attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, and the multitude of commentary since add a certain urgency to the subject that I have pursued over many years: the co-existence of a potential for good and for evil in many of the religious traditions of the world. While virtually all religions can point to their ennobling qualities, few can boast of being untainted by imperialist and exploitative aspirations and achievements.

Studying the Bible in Jerusalem has made me particularly sensitive to the place of the reader, and has encouraged me to develop what might be called a Moral Reading of the Bible. Over the last twenty years I have confronted some of the morally problematic traditions of the Bible, in the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures in particular, and the deployment of these traditions in ideological support of projects which have caused devastation in several regions in the past. The spoliation continues in the Middle East, where we are left with an ongoing, unresolved problem between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs, the perdurance of which, in the estimation of many, is a contributory factor to the tragic circumstances which relate to 11 September and expressed themselves in a high-tech assault on Afghanistan.

My reading of the Bible in Jerusalem has led me to reflect upon not only the deployment of the Bible as an agent of oppression, but also on the public nature of the discipline of Biblical Studies, pointing to the necessity of its practitioners exercising a public responsibility and an ethical accountability. My exegetical interests might have taken a different direction had I not undertaken significant portions of my postgraduate biblical studies in the Land of the Bible. Studying in Jerusalem, then, has been one of the biggest catalysts for change in my own life.

The Context of Theological Reflection

The biblical discourse in the West is currently in the control of the university departments of Biblical Studies—as it was in Church/Synagogue circles previously—who decide upon which questions are important, and the appropriate training required of its practitioners. From the beginning, however, liberation theologians in Latin America drew attention to the primacy of the context of one's theological reflections (*lugar teológico*). Consequently, they insist, Western interpretation will always be distorted, since the Bible's central message, they say rather naively, is that God is on the side of the oppressed, while interpreters from North America and Europe do not know the experience of being subject to economic, personal, or institutional oppression, and can do no better than interpret the Bible from their positions of power.

Such is the lack of confidence in the methods and concerns of Western Biblical Studies that, in Brazil, for example, biblical scholars brought up in them are allowed enter the so-called Contextual Bible Study process only as servants, and participate when they are invited by the people, and only if they commit themselves to the social reality as

perceived, and to engage in socio-political transformation through Bible reading.

For Ignacio Ellacuría, President of the University of Central America in San Salvador, authentic Christian theology incorporates three elements: reflection, ethical option and action (*praxis*). It involves a reflection from Christian faith, the object of which is the Reign of God. Because it arises from being immersed in 'the historical reality' of the people of God—the concrete situation of people—such a theology introduces a fundamental ethical option, one which properly leads to *praxis*. The three elements, however, ought not to be considered as separate and in temporal sequence, but rather as completely integrated and almost simultaneously present in a dynamic tension in the richness of encountering the weight of reality.¹

Ellacuría insists that the context of theological reflection is vital to the discipline. His context was that of being among the poor people of Latin America,² whom he considered to be crucified on the cross of Latin America.³ Just as Ignatius of Loyola exhorted his disciples to go on their knees at the foot of the cross and ask, 'What have I done, what am I doing, what will I do for Christ crucified?' so Christians today, he urged, should reflect on the condition of the poor and ask, 'What have I done, what am I doing for the people on the cross, and what will I do to uncrucify them, and have them raised?'⁴ Being among the crucified people is the pre-eminent place of theology,⁵ and may exact a price.

Father Ellacuría, striving to bring the poor down from the cross, was put up there himself in a dramatic expression of his commitment to theological reflection and *praxis*. On 16 November 1989 government soldiers murdered him and five other Jesuits of the university, together with a seminary cook and her daughter. Jon Sobrino, another Jesuit of the university would have been murdered also on that night, had he not been out of the country at the time. For Sobrino also the task of theology is to bring the poor of Latin America off the cross.⁶ Both Fathers Ellacuría and Sobrino were

¹ On the richness of the historical context of reflection see Ignacio Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1990).

² 'Los pobres, "lugar teológico" en América Latina', in *Misión Abierta* 1981 (no. 4-5): 225-40.

³ 'El Pueblo crucificado. Ensayo de soterología histórico', in *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología* 18(1989): 305-33.

⁴ Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Las Iglesias latinoamericanas interpelan a la Iglesia de España', *Sal Terra* (1982, no. 826): 230.

⁵ See Kevin Burke's study of Ellacuría's theology, *The Ground Beneath the Cross: the Theology of Ignacio Ellacuría* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000).

⁶ Jon Sobrino, 'The Crucified Peoples: Yahweh's Suffering Servant Today', in Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (eds) *1492-1992 The Voice of the Victims. Concilium* 1990(6) (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990): 120-29. See also Sobrino's 'Human Rights and Oppressed Peoples: Historical-Theological Reflections', in Michael Hayes and David Tombs (eds), *Truth and Memory: The Church and Human Rights in El Salvador and Guatemala* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001), pp. 134-58.

theological advisors to the Archbishop Oscar Romero, also murdered on 24 March 1980, while he was celebrating Mass. Theologising, in some contexts then, can be a matter of life and death.

Conventional Biblical Scholarship

I was trained in postgraduate biblical academies in Dublin, Rome, London and Jerusalem. In all four I learned the skills of the discipline, which, in the main, transported the scholar into the imagined world of biblical antiquity in order to understand the different periods of the past that produced the various books of the Bible—the so-called historical-critical method of the discipline. But my time in Jerusalem changed things substantially for me.

Although the focus of my own engagement was ‘the biblical past’ I could not avoid the modern social context. My experiences in ‘the land of the Bible’, supplemented by substantial reading, have changed not only my perception of the modern politics of the region, but, although not realising it along the way, have altered radically my understanding of the task of a biblical scholar. My studying the Bible in the Land of the Bible, then, provoked perspectives that scarcely would have arisen elsewhere.

Even my first visit, in Spring 1972, was significant. Prior to it I shared views that were typical of young people of my generation. I remember that as a six-year child my profound admiration at the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Some twenty years later, in the middle of my four years of study of Theology the war of 5–11 June 1967 broke out. I recall rushing through the seminary supper each evening to see how diminutive, innocent Israel was faring against its rapacious Arab predators. All my sources of information projected it as a classic conflict between virtuous David and despicable Goliath. The startling, speedy, and comprehensive victory of diminutive Israel produced surges of delight in me.

Later that summer in London, I was intrigued by billboards in Golders Green, with quotations from the Hebrew prophets, assuring readers that those who trusted in biblical prophecy could not be surprised by Israel’s victory. I was to learn later that the 1967 war inaugurated a new phase in the Zionist conquest of Mandated Palestine, one which brought theological assertions and biblical interpretations to the very heart of the ideology which propelled the Israeli conquest and set the pattern for Jewish settlement. After two more years of theology, ordination, and three years of postgraduate biblical studies, I made my first visit to Israel-Palestine at Easter 1972, with a party of postgraduate students from the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome.

Albeit one inquiring virtually exclusively into the archaeological remains of ancient civilisations, the visit offered the first challenge to my favourable predispositions towards Israel. I was disturbed immediately by the ubiquitous signs of the oppression of the Arabs, whom later I learnt to call Palestinians. I was witnessing some kind of ‘institutionalised oppression’—I cannot recall whether ‘apartheid’ was part of my vocabulary at the time.

Although I was researching the Pauline Epistles during my sabbatical year in the *École Biblique* in 1983–84 day-to-

day life in Jerusalem sharpened my sensitivities. I was beginning to suspect that the Israeli occupation was not after all for security reasons, but was an expansion towards the achievement of ‘Greater Israel’, which, I was to learn later, was the goal of even mainstream Zionism—the ‘Revisionists’ of the Likud party had wanted the east bank of the Jordan also.

One incident in particular alerted me to the religious dimension of the conflict. On a spring morning in 1984, the Voice of Israel radio reported that during the night a Jewish terrorist group had been caught attempting to blow up the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Haram al-Sharif (The Noble Sanctuary, which Jews refer to as the Temple Mount), only a few hundred meters south of the *École*. Subsequently the newspapers published pictures of some of those convicted of the offence, wearing the typical dress of the religious Jewish settler movement *Gush Emunim*. The report recorded that one was reading from the Book of Psalms as the judge read out the verdict. That an attempted act of such international and inter-faith significance sprang from religious fervour shocked me.

I can date to that period also voicing my first displeasure at my perception that the land traditions of the Bible appeared to mandate the genocide of the indigenes of ‘Canaan’. However, I had more pressing academic demands when I returned to London after my sabbatical. In 1985 I led a study tour to Israel and the Occupied Territories, and made other visits in 1987, 1990, and in 1991 I participated in an International Peace Walk from Jerusalem to Amman. It took some time for my experiences to acquire an ideological framework. Gradually I read more of the modern history of the region, and had formal meetings with some prominent Palestinians. I made three visits in 1993. Although my academic concentration in that period was on the scene of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4.16–30), my growing unease about the link between biblical spirituality and oppression stimulated me to examine the land traditions of the Bible, and so I began to read the narrative systematically with that theme in mind.

Yahweh and Ethnic Cleansing

What struck me most about the biblical narrative was that the divine promise of land was integrally linked with the mandate to exterminate the indigenous peoples. Even the Exodus narrative was problematic. While it portrays Yahweh as having compassion on the misery of his people, and as willing to deliver them from the Egyptians, and bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3.7–8), that was only part of the picture. Although the reading of Exodus 3, both in the Christian liturgy and in the classical texts of liberation theologies, halts abruptly in the middle of v. 8 at the description of the land as one ‘flowing with milk and honey’,⁷ the biblical text itself continues, ‘to the country of

⁷ E.g., Sobrino, ‘Human Rights and Oppressed Peoples...’, p. 137; for examples from Gustavo Gutiérrez, Philip Berryman, *et al.* see Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism. A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 278–84.

the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites'. Manifestly, the promised land, flowing with milk and honey, had no lack of indigenous peoples, and, according to the narrative, would soon flow with blood (see, e.g., Exodus 23.23-24; Deuteronomy 2.33-34; 7.1-11; 20.16-18; see also 9.1-5; 11.8-9, 23, 31-32). So much for the preparation. The Book of Joshua records the implementation of the divine mandate to commit genocide. These legendary achievements of Yahweh through the agencies of Moses, Aaron, and Joshua are kept before the Israelites—and Christians also—even in their prayers: 'You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it' (Psalm 80.8; see also Psalms 78.54-55; 105.44).

By modern standards of international law and human rights, what these biblical narratives mandate, of course, are 'war-crimes' and 'crimes against humanity'. One must acknowledge that much of the *Torah*, and the Book of Deuteronomy in particular, contains menacing ideologies, and racist, xenophobic and militaristic tendencies. Clearly, the implications of the existence of such dubious moral dispositions, presented as mandated by the divinity, within a book which is canonised as Sacred Scripture invited the most serious investigation. Moreover, as I was to confirm, the biblical paradigm functioned as part of the legitimising ideology for various colonial enterprises.

When I got back to England I wrote an article, 'The Bible as Instrument of Oppression', giving the three case studies of Latin America, southern Africa and Palestine.⁸ The subject, I judged, deserved fuller investigation, but before embarking on a more substantial monograph it would be prudent to examine the situation in Old Testament scholarship. Somebody must have addressed the moral question before, I presumed. Back in Jerusalem for August 1995, I realised that this was not the case.

I soon learned that even the monumental studies of W D Davies were inadequate and were politically motivated.⁹ Davies acknowledged later that he had written his seminal *The Gospel and the Land* (1974) at the request of friends in Jerusalem, who just before the war in 1967 urged his support for the cause of Israel (1982: xiii). I was intrigued by the frankness with which Davies publicised his hermeneutical key: 'Here I have concentrated on what in my judgement must be the beginning for an understanding of this conflict: the sympathetic attempt to comprehend the Jewish tradition' (1982: xiii-xiv). While he considers 'the land' from virtually every other conceivable perspective, little attention is given to broadly moral and human rights' issues. In particular, he excludes from his concern, 'What happens when the understanding of the Promised Land in Judaism conflicts with the claims of the traditions and occupancy of its other peoples?' He excused himself by saying that to engage that issue would demand another volume (1991: xv), without indicating his intention of embarking upon such an enterprise.

⁸ *Scripture Bulletin* 25(1995): 2-14.

⁹ *The Gospel and the Land. Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); *The Territorial Dimensions of Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); *The Territorial Dimensions of Judaism. With a Symposium and Further Reflections* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

It was beginning to dawn on me that much biblical investigation—especially that concentration on the past which is typical of the historical-critical method—was quite indifferent to moral considerations. The benevolent interpretation of biblical traditions which advocate atrocities and war crimes had given solace to those bent on the exploitation of new lands at the expense of native peoples. By the Autumn of 1995 I was well into a book on the subject, but was assured that a book on 'The Bible and Zionism' would not be published. I would have to broaden the subject. I completed the work during my year as Visiting Professor of Theology in Bethlehem University and Scholar-in-Residence in Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theology (1996-97): *The Bible and Colonialism* was launched in London in December 1997.¹⁰ After some difficulties in getting a publisher its follow-up was published in 1999.¹¹

Towards A Moral Reading of the Bible

From being a biblical scholar reflecting the biblical academy's emphasis on the historical-critical methods of the discipline, since the early 1980s, in response to carrying out substantial parts of my studies in the Holy Land, I have begun to probe issues of the Reception History and the Moral Exegesis of the biblical text, with especial relevance to the realities of people's lives in that region. The urgency of the task is suggested by the enormity of the tragedy of the region, and its alleged moral and theological legitimisation.

Zionism, however one estimates its value to international Jewry, is responsible for the dispossession, dispersion and humiliation of the indigenous Arab population of Mandated Palestine over the last fifty years. While such devastation is not unique in the history of human civilisation, it does have distinctive features. Most alarmingly from a moral perspective, the injustice to the indigenous population is passed over in most Western discourse, including biblical and theological scholarship, and in some religious circles is even clothed in the garment of piety.

All too frequently the ideological underpinning for European colonialism availed of the biblical paradigms of 'ethnic cleansing' and 'belligerent settler colonialism', the legitimisation of which has the authority of Sacred Scripture. With even more authority, the Jewish claim to 'return' relies on the Bible, which is a *sine qua non* for alleged moral legitimacy. The Bible read at face value, then, provides a moral framework which metamorphoses Zionist colonialist settlement in our own day into a divinely sanctioned polity.¹² The taking possession of the Promised Land and the forcible expulsion of the indigenous population in 1948-49, then, derives its alleged legitimacy primarily from the biblical mandate, whether viewed as the repository of Israel's sacred history, or as one of the cornerstones of its national mythology. The biblical

¹⁰ Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism. A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

¹¹ Michael Prior, *Zionism and the State of Israel: A Moral Inquiry* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

¹² See Michael Prior, 'The Right to Expel: the Bible and Ethnic Cleansing', in Naseer Aruri (ed.), *Palestinian Refugees and their Right of Return* (London and Sterling VA: Pluto Press, 2001), pp. 9-35.

narrative functioned as the objective historical account of Jews' title to the land, a claim allegedly borne out by archaeological findings, even for secular nationalists uninterested in the Bible as the repository of a theological claim to Palestine.¹³

What is most distressing from a moral and religious perspective is that, since 1967 in particular, the major ideological support for Zionist imperialism and the principal obstacle to treating the indigenous people with respect come from religious circles for whom the biblical narratives of land, understood in a literalist fashion, are normative. From a religious perspective the 'transfer' of the indigenous population, which the Zionist enterprise required, was a small price to pay for 'scaling the wall', and shortening the delay before the coming of the Messiah. It is a matter of concern that most religious Jews have little regard for the indigenes who have paid the price for the establishment of Israel. But then, neither did Joshua in the biblical narrative.

My reading of the history of Zionism, using the published findings of researchers into the Zionist and other archives, has confirmed that the 'transfer' of the Arab population was promoted by virtually the whole pantheon of Zionist ideologues, albeit mostly in secret, a conclusion which comprehensively unmask the myth of the benevolent and peaceful intentions of Zionism. I have seen also that Israeli appeal to an exclusively 'defensive ethos' is merely a public relations device, as well as an exercise in conscious self-deception, assuaging both world opinion and the consciences of Zionists. This led to the conclusion that the consistency with which the State of Israel is excused from having to conform to International Law and decent behaviour is one of the great eccentricities of modern political ethics.

Given the 'international community's' general disdain for ethnic cleansing it is surprising that Christian reflection on the Holy Land has not gone much further than reflect predictable conformity with political realities as they develop. At best, one detects in the attitudes within the Churches an adherence to 'the fallacy of balance', the assumption that in this unique situation of conflict there is an equality of rights, an equality of pain, an equality of sacrifice, etc., as if 'the rights of the rapist and the victim' were finely balanced.

Conclusion

Researching the Bible in a city under military occupation and in a land from which the majority of its indigenous Arab population had been expelled—with the Bible allegedly supplying moral legitimisation of divine provenance—provided a unique context for developing a hermeneutic which involved an ethical and theological evaluation of my context, and pointed to a reassessment of the nature of the discipline of Biblical Studies itself. While struggling to make sense of my context and my task, of course, I had no sense of establishing a novel methodology, such as might later be classified as a political, or public paradigm for biblical interpretation. In 1984 I had no sense of embarking upon what subsequently would be called a 'post-colonial' study of the biblical narrative. Nor had I a sense of engaging in a discourse that might later be designated a Moral Exegesis of the Bible.

Because of the tragic social consequence of the politics obtaining in the region during my stays in the land of the Bible I had particular reason to be concerned about the public responsibility of biblical studies, that is, one that embraces the need to construct a publicly accessible, and not just an academic or theological-religious discourse which attends to moral questions. My concerns began with questions as to how to deal with the fact that the Bible was used in that region to protect a hegemonic political system of oppression, and how to respond to that situation as a scholar, aware of how such concerns appeared to be of no concern to the biblical academy, either that *in situ* in the Holy Land or anywhere else in the world.

Western support for the Zionist enterprise was particularly striking from a moral perspective. Whereas elsewhere the perpetrators of colonial plunder were objects of opprobrium, the Zionist conquest was widely judged to be a just and appropriate accomplishment, with even unique religious significance. Much of the rationale for that evaluation derived from literalist interpretations of particular traditions of the Bible: the Zionist prize was no more than what the Jewish people deserved in virtue of God's promises as outlined in the biblical narrative. But the impact of the deployment of the text was more widespread.

When I discovered in 1994 that appeal to the biblical narrative was a critical ideological element 'legitimising' *apartheid* in South Africa, as well as being a determining element in the theological underpinning for the colonisation of 'Latin America' I wrote my first comparative study on the role of the Bible in the oppression of people ('The Bible as Instrument of Oppression', 1995). This was an arresting assertion in a context in which the Bible was conventionally used as an instrument of liberation within Liberation Theology.

This development in my perceptions suggested the necessity of considering the perspective of the victims of various colonial enterprises, an endeavour analogous to reading the biblical text 'with the eyes of the Canaanites', that is, with a sensitivity to the moral question of the impact which colonising enterprises, and the Zionist conquest and settlement in Palestine in particular, have had on the indigenous populations. The academy, of course, does not read the biblical narrative 'with the eyes of the Canaanites'. Rather, it broadly accepts the perspectives of the biblical authors, who make it clear that the claim of the divine promise of land is integrally

¹³ While the Bible is not the only provider of alleged moral legitimacy for Zionism it is the most powerful moral one, without which the Zionist conquest would be no more legitimate than any other enterprise of colonial plunder. The Bible read at face value provides not only a moral framework which transposes Jewish claims into a divinely sanctioned legitimacy, but postulates the taking possession of the Promised Land and the forcible expulsion of the indigenous population as the fulfilment of a biblical mandate (See Michael Prior, 'Zionist Ethnic Cleansing: the Fulfilment of Biblical Prophecy?' *Epworth Review* 27(2, 2000): 49-60). However, the appeal to the Bible is mainly to those traditions which portray Yahweh as a promoter of an ethnicist and xenophobic 'nationalism', premised on attitudes of racial dominance and exclusion. While these attitudes accord with those of nineteenth-century European colonialism they do not advance the goal of other traditions within Judaism, such as that inviting the Jewish community to be 'a light to the nations'.

linked with the alleged divine mandate to exterminate its indigenous people. But even if the narrative of Genesis to Joshua did correspond to what actually happened—the view that its literary genre is history runs in the face of all serious scholarly comment—it should not escape an evaluation based on criteria of morality. It was clear to me that these land traditions posed fundamental moral questions, relating to one's understanding of God's nature and dealings with humankind, and of human behaviour, especially in the light of the use to which they had been put in fuelling imperialist genocidal enterprises in a wide variety of contexts for close on two thousand years. The communities which have preserved and promulgated these biblical narratives—including the biblical academy—should shoulder some of the responsibility for what has been done in conformity with their values.

The neglect of the moral dimension in biblical scholarship has many explanations. While practitioners of the historical-critical method strive assiduously to discover whatever can be ascertained about the social, religious, and political context of each of the biblical writings, they are less sensitive to their own social, religious, and political contexts, and the impact that these might have on their interpretation of the biblical texts. Few appear to see it as a necessary task of the discipline to evaluate the biblical texts in terms of modern ethical criteria, or display any inclination to involve their scholarship in any processes of social transformation. Their task is complete once they have illuminated their segment of the past. There is no question of seeing themselves as called to be critical transformative intellectuals with a responsibility for delineating models for the overthrow of systems of domination and oppression on the world scale. Other factors also add to the neglect in the area of the land of the Bible.

Much biblical studies has been propelled by the search for ancient Israel as the taproot of Western civilisation, and the antecedent of Christianity. Consequently the history of the entire region of the biblical narrative has been merely a backdrop to the history of Israel, Judah and Second Temple Judaism, with the Bible centre stage, and all other evidence in its service.¹⁴ The biblical narrative's presentation of the genocide preceding the establishment of biblical Israel required no apologia, since, in addition to being in conformity with the alleged divine mandate, the biblical culture reached its evolutionary zenith in the form of Western Christendom. Thus, even William Foxwell Albright, the doyen of biblical archaeologists, had no qualms about the plunder attendant upon Joshua's enterprise, which he understood in a largely historically reliable way.¹⁵ An analogous indulgence obtains in the modern period also in the benign Western assessment of the Zionist enterprise.

¹⁴ The wider history of the region has been written out—there is urgent need to construct a 'secular history' of the region or a 'history without the Bible'. See Keith W Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel. The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁵ 'From the impartial standpoint of a philosopher of history, it often seems necessary that a people of markedly inferior type should vanish before a people of superior potentialities, since there is a point beyond which racial mixture cannot go without disaster... Thus the Canaanites, with their orgiastic nature worship, their cult of fertility in the form of serpent symbols and sensuous nudity, and

The Reception History of the biblical text concerns itself with the history of the effects of texts, rather than simply inquiring into their literary origins. It is my contention that the academy responsible for the exegesis of the texts of the Bible has a responsibility also to comment on how these texts are deployed in each generation over the millennia since the period of their composition. While behind much of the imperialist expansion of the Western world's past lies the Bible and its reception in Christian ideology, and while it may be plain to modern readers of the Bible that its meganarratives have played a huge part in the imperialising impulse, it seldom seems to bother biblical scholars to the point of critical opposition.

I have investigated the deployment of the Bible in a way which attempts to respect the complexity of the social and political conditions in each region examined. The complexity of my research subject required discussion of the Bible and modern biblical hermeneutics, post-biblical Jewish and Christian cultures, the colonisation by Europeans of Latin America, South Africa, and the Middle East, the history and development of Zionism, the international law of war and of occupation, and human rights, etc. If the task of dealing competently with virtually every aspect of the problem is so formidable as to intimidate even the most versatile and gifted academic, the concerned individual nevertheless is left with the moral imperative of deciding on the matter. Responsibility for moral judgement and action rests with the individual and cannot be shifted even to others more gifted, learned, and morally upright than oneself.

It is gratifying to learn more recently that, after a long period of silence, the need for a Moral Exegesis of the biblical text is being recognised by some. Heikki Räisänen insists that 'a moral evaluation of biblical texts and of their interpretation is indispensable today', and applauds my application of a moral critique to the Zionist enterprise.¹⁶ Peter Miano criticises the biblical academy for virtually ignoring the moral dimensions of the biblical texts and real life contexts. He suggests that when the values and moral standards of biblical passages go unrecognised they are susceptible to being misappropriated and misapplied, sometimes with damaging consequences. Taking his cue from my Moral Critique, Miano proposes a 'Value Critique', 'the deliberate examination of the value systems presumed by and expressed in the stories of the Bible'.¹⁷

their gross mythology, were replaced by Israel, with its pastoral simplicity and purity of life, its lofty monotheism, and its severe code of ethics' (*From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 280-81. Prior to Keith Whitelam's critique (*The Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 88) no commentator had drawn attention to Albright's undisguised racist attitudes, which were typical of virtually every Western colonial enterprise which predicated that the 'superior' peoples of the West had the right to exploit, and in some cases exterminate the 'natives'. Reflecting such values, Albright also judged that through Zionism Jews would bring to the Near East all the benefits of European civilisation ('Why the Near East needs the Jews', *New Palestine* 32[1942]: 12-13).

¹⁶ Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology. A Story and a Programme* (London: SCM, 2000), p. 207.

¹⁷ Peter J Miano, *The Word of God and the World of the Bible. An Introduction to the Cultural Backgrounds of the New Testament* (London: Melisende, 2001), p. 12.

Still, the area of Israel-Palestine, as against those of Feminist, or Fundamentalist Exegesis, remains a safe haven against such probings, as in the case of Elisabeth Schlüssler Fiorenza's programme for an 'ethics of accountability' in Biblical Studies.¹⁸ The claim in our own age that the biblical narrative, however repulsive its deployment as part of the ideological support for colonialism in the past, legitimises the 'ethnic cleansing' of the Palestinian Arabs is not challenged within the biblical academy. Although sensitive to those biblical texts which have been adduced to legitimise war, nurture anti-Judaism and misogyny, justify slavery, and promote colonial dehumanisation, etc., Schlüssler Fiorenza does not rise to the challenge of facing into one of the most blatant uses of the Bible as a charter for oppression, and one for which the domestic politics in, and foreign policy of the USA has a particular responsibility. Perhaps it is her own 'social location' that prevents her from facing into what is one of the great scandals of the international biblical community, namely its silence in the face of Political Zionism's cynical embrace of the biblical narrative as an integral element of the ideological justification for its programme. This constitutes a dereliction of responsibility from which the next generation of biblical scholars surely will wish to extricate itself.

Biblical scholars, one would hope, should be obliged to protest against outrages being perpetrated in the name of fidelity to the biblical covenant. Yet I am virtually alone within the biblical academy in having violated the unique 'no-fly-zone' of Israel-Palestine. I have drawn attention to the 'orientalist' presuppositions of much of the biblical academy, and have demonstrated that the major biblical works on 'Land' were indifferent to the rights of the indigenous people, and in some instances at least, were politically compromised. The view that the Bible provides the title-deed for the establishment of the State of Israel and for its policies since 1948 is so pervasive even within mainstream Christian theology and university Biblical Studies, that the very attempt to raise the issue is sure to elicit opposition. The disfavour usually takes the form of personal abuse, and the intimidation of publishers.

I am happy to allow my research activity to be judged on whether I have pursued significant truth-questions, with a sensitivity to, and moral concern for the social consequences of the use of the biblical narrative as an instrument of oppression. I have engaged in biblical research

with the spirit of what Schlüssler Fiorenza calls an 'ethics of accountability', i.e., with a concern for exposing 'the ethical consequences of the biblical text and its meanings', especially when these have promoted various forms of oppression, not least through 'colonial dehumanisation', and for making their findings known to a wider public.¹⁹ Because of the moral seriousness of the debate I do not apologise for trespassing upon the domain of the emotionally detached, intellectually dispassionate and rationally value-neutral disposition considered by some to be the appropriate one for biblical scholars.

There is, perhaps, a therapeutic aspect to my Moral Exegesis. As I now understand the discipline, biblical exegesis, in addition to probing into the circumstances of the composition of the biblical narratives, should concern itself with the real conditions of people's lives, and not satisfy itself with comfortable survival in an academic or ecclesial ghetto. My academic work addresses aspects of biblical hermeneutics, and informs a wider public on issues which have implications for human well-being, as well as for allegiance to God. While such a venture might be regarded as an instructive academic contribution by any competent scholar, to assume responsibility for doing so is for me, who has witnessed the dispossession, dispersion and humiliation of one victimised people in particular, of the order of a moral imperative. It is high time that biblical scholars, Church people, and Western intellectuals read the biblical narratives of the promise of land 'with the eyes of the Canaanites', and dealt with the consequences of their Reception History.

Much of my work is an exploration into terrain virtually devoid of enquirers, and is an attempt to map out some of the contours of that terrain. It does not pretend to have all the answers, but it does reflect my dissatisfaction with the prevailing scholastic assessments of the matter, especially the most common ones, which prefer the security of silence to risking the opprobrium of speaking out. It is, I trust, consistent with the concerns of St Vincent de Paul, whose interpretation of the Scriptures was significantly influenced by his encounter with the marginalised and the exploited. My study of the Bible in the Land of the Bible in particular introduced me to a context of wide international and interfaith significance in which the biblical narrative is appealed to as an instrument of oppression. Thus, as a direct result of studying in Jerusalem, my historical-critical reading gave way to A Moral Reading of the Bible.

¹⁸ See Schlüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic. The Politics of Biblical Studies*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999.

¹⁹ *Rhetoric and Ethic...* pp. 28-29. John Riches points his readers to 'An excellent guide to the use of the Bible in the colonial period is provided by Michael Prior, etc.' (*The Bible. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 6).