

EDITORIAL

Michael Prior Fund and Memorial Volume

Much of this issue of the Living Stones Magazine is devoted to the memory of our chair, Father Michael Prior, who died as the result of a tragic accident on 21 July, when he fell from a ladder in the garden of the clergy house where he was living. Michael was a co-founder of Living Stones and continued as its leader and inspiration over two decades. It is hard to imagine Living Stones without Michael. However although we are publishing a number of tributes to his memory in this issue the greatest tribute that we can possibly offer to his memory is to continue the work he began—by building a stronger and more effective Living Stones. We have been greatly helped in attempting to do this by generous benefactions from the Prior family to initiate a memorial fund. The primary purpose of this fund will be to promote the study of theology and Holy Land Studies among Palestinians so as to promote the emergence of an indigenous, contextual Palestinian theology. We are inviting the members of Living Stones and the other friends and admirers of Michael to contribute directly to this fund and take out an advance subscription to a memorial volume at a suggested donation of at least £25. This volume will consist of a biographical introduction and a collection of essays and addresses by Michael that have not been published hitherto in book form, together with a full bibliography of Michael's published works. All profits from the book will go towards the memorial fund.

Death of President Arafat

We note that our own loss has been followed by the loss to the Palestinian people of President Arafat. Last April Michael visited President Arafat in his beleaguered fortress in Ramallah. Although Michael often criticised what he regarded as the sometimes morally and politically 'shambolic' failures of the Palestinian leadership he clearly felt great pleasure at being photographed with Arafat, expressing his personal solidarity with him in his suffering and isolation. As a charitable trust we are unable to make political judgements on behalf of our members but we are obliged to recognise the symbolic importance of President Arafat for a people deprived of land and identity. In the words of Afif Safieh, Palestinian General Delegate to the UK and the Holy See in his article in the Guardian of 12 November, 'Yasser Arafat was the Palestinian De Gaulle, the architect of the resurrection of our national movement in the mid-1960s, and its locomotive for almost 40 years.' We offer our sympathy to the Palestinian

people, Muslim and Christian alike, during this difficult time and pray that this time of sadness may also be a time of opportunity.

Mordecai Vanunu

During his last visit to Jerusalem Michael and the Living Stones pilgrim group visited the Anglican Cathedral of Saint George's and its Bishop Riah Abu El Assal, an old friend and patron of Living Stones. While we were there we had the privilege of a chance meeting with the peace activist and Christian prisoner of conscience Mordecai Vanunu who had taken refuge in the Cathedral close after eighteen years in prison, fourteen in solitary confinement for publicly confirming information already generally well known—that Israel had been developing weapons of mass destruction. Since then he has been rearrested for 'the crime' of speaking with western journalists and is being confined to the Cathedral area pending further process. British Christians and others concerned with peace and justice may wish to contact the Campaign to Free Vanunu and for a Nuclear Free Middle-East, 185 New Kent Road, London SE1 4AG Tel/Fax: 44 20 7378 9324 or e-mail: campaign@vanunu.freerve.co.uk.

In this issue

In this issue we are reproducing selections of the many tributes to Michael followed an appreciation of Michael preached at his funeral Mass, a tribute by Colin Morton, focal person of the Middle East Forum of Churches Together Great Britain and Ireland, given at the Living Stones Conference on October 23, an obituary published in the Independent newspaper and reproduced with permission. The final piece relating to Michael is by Michael himself, 'A Disaster for Dialogue,' a hard-hitting critique of Zionism, submitted to the Tablet just three days before his death and reproduced here by kind permission. This is followed by the conclusions of the two part articles on 'Christian Zionism: Alternative Perspectives' by Stephen Sizer and Tim Price. The antithetical character of the two viewpoints expressed in these articles should help to emphasise that the opinions of contributors to this magazine are not necessarily those of Living Stones, an organisation which has only one agenda—'to promote contacts between Christians in Britain and those in neighbouring countries' and we will continue provide a forum to those working towards that goal whatever their religious or political views. Our series 'From the Diaspora' will continue in the next issue.

Deacon Duncan Macpherson

TRIBUTES TO PROFESSOR MICHAEL PRIOR CM 1942 – 2004

Michael as a teacher and friend

My love of things academic started in Michael's classes. He was a truly inspirational and passionate teacher and also lovely, funny man. I can honestly say he played a foundational role in my life. I think of him often with respect and fondness. Cheers Michael! May he rest in peace.

Dr Laura Williamson, School of Law, Glasgow University

One of my first memories of the RS course is Michael starting a Monday morning scripture lecture, by singing "My father was a wandering Aramaean ... accompanying himself on the guitar.. I thought to myself at the time, this was a wonderfully novel way of teaching the Old Testament.

Mark Brennan

How fortunate are we who can say, 'Michael Prior was my friend.'

Alistair Duncan

Michael as a Writer and Scholar

I had the strongest admiration equally for his scholarship and for his passionate concern for justice, and I greatly enjoyed his company of the, regrettably, few occasions we met. We can pray and hope that he has received the crown reserved for those who hunger and thirst for what is right.

Fr Bernard Treacy, OP, Editor of Doctrine and Life, Dublin

'He is 'still speaking' through his books, lectures, and various publications. His voice will continue to be heard in many places throughout the world. His strong prophetic message will reverberate until justice for the Palestinians is done and peace and reconciliation are achieved'

Dr Naim Ateek, Director of Sabeel, Jerusalem

Michael as Champion of Palestinian Rights

'He was a very special dear person, with a good sense of humour, a lovely singing voice, a wonderful smiling face that brought light whenever he came into a room... had the zest for life, a wonderful writer, and a great supporter for the just cause of the Palestinians.'

Saida Nusseibeh

'We are grateful for every good thing, for every smile of hope that he generated on the faces of deprived people. I

am confident that he understood very well the statement of the Lord Jesus when he said: Everything you do to one of these little ones, you do it to me. This is where his commitment to the Palestinian cause came from.'

Fr Elias Chacour, Mar Elias College, Ibillin, Galilee

'The Palestinians, particularly, will miss him a great deal. He stood by their rights on three counts: as oppressed human beings, as Palestinians who have the right but not the might, and as natural natives of the Holy Land whom the Bible loves, not shuns. He will be remembered long in the minds and the hearts of all those who seek peace with justice.'

Dr Salman Abu Sitta, Palestine Land Society

'He was a spiritual and intellectual powerhouse who consistently used his talents to bring to light the roots and the justice of the Palestinian cause. His death is all the more shocking because of its suddenness. In my work as a journalist I frequently had the pleasure of hearing Michael's eloquent addresses. ... I will remember his warmth, humour and the twinkle in those eyes.'

Susannah Tarbush

'What most distinguishes Michael and makes him unique was his smile and realism. That is why he was intent on working so hard to uncover historical narratives that justify injustice in the name of religion or in any other name. Michael loved our people here but most important he loved justice. He was always hospitable and friendly, even with those who did not always agree with him on every point. I am sure that the city of Jerusalem and the Holy Land and those who knew Michael personally would miss his ... visits and his earnest commitment to the cause of justice.'

Bernard Sabella, Palestinian Academic

'Michael was a great friend and wonderful advocate for the Palestinian cause and we shall miss him very much. What a loss for all of us on so many levels. May he enjoy the eternal reward he so richly deserves.'

Brother Vincent Malham, President of Bethlehem University

Michael as Chair of Living Stones

'A wonderful friend, a very courageous scholar who spoke the truth.' *Jamil Bullata*

'He was an unstinting friend of Palestine and a tireless



Michael Prior with the editor

advocate of Palestinian rights. Many, many people will miss him.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory?

Reverend Daniel Burton

‘May God rest his dear soul and grant us all the strength to endure such a tragic loss to us his friends, to Living Stones, and the rest of this sad world which he tried to amend in the most honourable way.’ *Ramsay Bisharah*

‘Many people who have suffered continuing injustice have lost a stalwart champion and friend of high quality.’

Dr Colin Morton, Focal Person of the Middle East Forum, CTGBI

‘I knew Michael well and admired him. He was a very dedicated priest and a great Vincentian. As I got to know him better over 14 years I found him to be a committed scholar, now he is truly a living stone.’

Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor, Patron of the Living Stones Trust

APPRECIATION OF PROFESSOR MICHAEL PRIOR CM

Requiem Mass for Professor Michael Prior CM, Vincentian priest, biblical scholar and preacher, liberation theologian, peace activist and advocate of Palestinian rights, was celebrated at the chapel at Saint Mary’s College, Strawberry Hill on Friday 30 July. The congregation included a large contingent of concelebrating priests led by his Vincentian confreres, representatives of the Palestinian community and clergy and laity from many Christian churches. Deacon Duncan Macpherson, a former academic colleague, fellow activist and close friend of Michael, preached the following appreciation, which is published here.

‘We are here in a state of loss and great sadness at the loss of a friend. He was a different thing for each of the many people who will mourn him: brother; uncle; brother priest; academic colleague; teacher; fellow activist— champion of a cause. For all of them he was a friend. Michael had that great gift of friendship. So much so that even people who only met him once or twice counted themselves his friends

and are today experiencing a genuine sense of sorrow at their loss.

I have the burden placed on me by a friend of saying something about him in death and although remembering MP’s humour might help it will not take the pain away. He trusted me to do this but thought a video might have been better. It would doubtless have included his own often repeated, self-deprecating line, ‘Modesty is one of my chief virtues.’ But the video has not been found and so I wrestle with my task, And what should I say? How do we evaluate a friend? Rightly we shrink from a forensic analysis of this larger than life human being as that might diminish our sense of having known Michael as a friend.

So the question I would like briefly to explore is, ‘How we are to cope with our sorrow?’ We can be helped when we remember Michael’s typically Irish and Catholic attitude to death. When I first met him I would sometimes express concern about a man of his size and build taking vigorous exercise to which he would often reply, ‘Death is a teleological

necessity.' Or, on one occasion when I saw him about fifteen years ago when I saw him jogging, I expressed concern and he replied 'Well, if I die, at least I'll die healthy!' There was also his story—no doubt apocryphal—of the little man who came up the microphone after a requiem mass in a church in Dublin and announced that after the committal the mourners should meet again and, 'The corpse's brother will buy youse all a drink!'

We can also be helped when we remember Michael's unique combination of kindness and his belligerent sense of fun. Once when challenged to state his religion by an Israeli soldier outside the Tomb of Abraham in Hebron he answered humorously: 'Well I was a Zoroastrian, but I lapsed!' On another occasion he was arrested on a peace march in Jericho and when told that he was allowed one telephone call he said that he wanted to ring the Pope! His personality would have made him a superb shop steward or political backbencher. He could engage in an argument with relish and with the determination of a dog with a bone. And although he sometimes practised his considerable fighting skills on his friends he reserved the full treatment for those he regarded as purveyors of injustice or humbug. Michael was the quintessential Irish rebel and with just a few like Michael we are enabled to understand why it is that Britain no longer rules all of Ireland!

We can be helped when we remember Michael's commitment as a scholar—and not just his commitment to scholarship but also his commitment to committed scholarship; an approach reflected in his *Jesus the Liberator. Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4.16-30)* the Gospel we have heard today. During his two years study and teaching in the Holy Land he became an enthusiastic supporter of Palestinian rights. As you know he became cofounder and chair of Living Stones, an ecumenical organisation dedicated to promoting links

between Christians in the Holy Land and Christians in Britain. Convinced that much western biblical scholarship was either indifferent to or supportive of the expropriation and oppression of the Palestinians he also considered ways in which the story of the Exodus and the Conquest in the Bible had been used to justify colonialism in Latin America, South Africa and, of course, Palestine: a thesis explore in his *The Bible and Colonialism* 1997. In 1999 his major historical work *Zionism and the State of Israel: A Moral Inquiry* analysed the history of Zionism, to show that its roots were in secular nationalism and that support for Zionism by religious Jews was relatively recent ... He further sought to demonstrate that the expulsion of the Palestinians did not result either from the Nazi Holocaust or of the fortunes of war in 1948 but had been intended and planned by the founding fathers of Zionism from the outset. His final article published in *The Tablet* (30 July) challenged the allegation that opponents of Zionism were necessarily anti-Semitic. His last words to me were that what was needed was a new forum for Jewish-Christian dialogue that did not involve political pre-conditions but that allowed anti-Zionist Jews and anti-Zionist Christians to be party to the conversation. 'Go for it! We'll do it!' he said.

So how we are to cope with our sorrow at losing Michael? Above all we can do this by imitating his Christian faith and his commitment to justice and peace. I know that not everyone here shares Michael's faith. Not everyone here accepts Michael's politics. But Michael's faith and Michael's friendship were robustly inclusive. He was the kind of Catholic who was at ease with Christians of other traditions, with believers in Judaism and Islam, with agnostics and atheists. He would be happy for everyone to follow him as far down the road as they are able, preaching good news for the poor and liberation for captives: 'Go for it! We'll do it.'

MICHAEL PRIOR

Revd Dr Colin Morton

Today we honour a man who played a pioneering role in a work that is not over, but must still be advanced. What better way to honour Michael Prior than to move that work forward, to worship God and to find time for good talk? My tribute to him can only be partial, personal and inadequate, but it is from the heart.

A Cork man, a scholar in Semitic languages and the Bible, Irish young theologian of the year, a Vincentian priest, a teacher, a fine and fluent writer, an editor, a humorist, a polemicist, a moralist, a musician, the best of company and the best of friends. Michael was the sort of man who makes heaven more attractive, which is more than can be said for some of the saints.

One word that speaks to me is engagement. He engaged with his work, with the Bible, with his order, with his church, with people of all sorts, with an argument. You can't imagine him unengaged, uninvolved, not giving of himself. He engaged particularly with the Living Stones, the Palestinian Christians,

and the Palestinian people and their cause.

Michael was a person of great warmth and kindness, but there were things he did not take kindly to. One memory I have is of Michael giving a lecture at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. It was on the subject of his book that was later published as *The Bible and Colonialism*. It did not quite fit in with the then prevailing inter-faith etiquette at Tantur, and while his lecture gave a sense of liberation to many of us, from others it received a very hostile response. The chair offered him less than whole-hearted protection, but Michael was certainly not intimidated into placatory waffle. Accusations that his commitment to the Palestinians distorted his scholarship were rejected and turned back on his accusers with stronger evidence. There were in his life quite a few attempts to intimidate, quieten or disallow him. But he was not one to be cowed.

His was a good kind of ecumenism. Any thought that his openness and his commitments compromised his

Catholicism was totally misplaced. It was the commitment to his religion, his faith, his order that impelled his openness and his commitment to the oppressed. He was long an important member of the ecumenical Middle East Forum. I have enjoyed my time with the Forum because I believe that we have been comparatively open and we have been more on the Lord's business than on institutional business. If that is true, a great deal of credit is due to Michael, though I am sure that he considered us not honest or committed enough.

For to him the main-line churches were the problem more than the dispensationalists and the fundamentalists. Yes, if the main-line churches would challenge the dispensationalist Christian Zionists rather than treat them with silence or disdain, but even more if they would challenge the ethnic cleansing inherent in the philosophy and practise of main-line Zionism itself and any Biblical justification for it, then there could begin to be hope for justice for the Palestinians, an end to their continuing dispossession and a recovery of the richness of their national life. But he himself was met too often not with reasoned argument, but with silence or disdain.

As a thinker he believed in the power of ideas and the way they move events. Perhaps too much. Self-interest and emotions can be powerful too, with ideas following on as justification. Outside events can affect or give power to ideas. I have two conversations with Michael that were left unfinished, though I still feel Michael continuing them with me. One was about the holocaust. Michael believed that injustice was built into Zionism from the start and its course was in a way unaffected by the holocaust. I feel myself that without the fuel provided by the holocaust Zionism would not have succeeded, or it would never have achieved the

form it did. The other was about the unease I felt, as one bred in the Reformed tradition, at the way that he sometimes dealt with the Bible. How do we deal with holy texts, not only in conversing with Presbyterians like myself, but even more with Jews and Moslems relating to the Torah and the Koran. There can be other ways of dealing with awkward texts—if I may say so, ways not so very different from those in which awkward papal pronouncements from the past have been dealt with in the Catholic Church. These were conversations; but neither of them ever altered for me the thrust and value of Michael's work.

We honour him for his the lucidity of his thought and the thoroughness of his work, his moral clarity and courage, his critique of power and his overriding passion for the oppressed. For him the moral dimension could never be ignored. His life and work could be said to have been guided by Jesus' "Nazareth Manifesto" in Luke Chapter 4, the subject of his study, *Jesus the Liberator*. We thank God for Michael, a warrior for the light against darkness and humbug, for justice and human dignity against oppression.

During the last few years there has been here a growing appreciation of the Palestinian people and the justice due them. At the same time their situation has grown much worse. This year of the suffering they have lost two great champions, Edward Said and now Michael Prior. They need champions now, some of whom are here and many of whom were inspired by Michael. The time will come when the appalling gap between what is seen as needed and what is actually happening will be done away with. Then Michael's name and work will be honoured more than we can do today.

PROFESSOR MICHAEL PRIOR REMEMBERED*

*Controversial priest and theologian who was an outspoken supporter of Palestinian rights
Revd Duncan Macpherson*

Michael Prior, priest, scholar and activist: born Cork 15 March 1942; ordained priest 1969; Senior Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies, St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill 1977-97, Head of Department 1987-97, Principal Lecturer 1997-2002, Senior Research Fellow 2002-04, Professor of New Testament Studies 2004; died Osterley, Middlesex 21 July 2004.

Michael Prior was a Vincentian priest, a scripture scholar, a liberation theologian, peace activist and supporter of Palestinian rights. He was one of the more colourful and controversial figures in the Catholic Church in Britain, and a trenchant and outspoken critic of Israel and of Zionism.

Born in Cork in 1942, Prior joined the Congregation of the Mission on leaving school and took a degree in Physics at University College Dublin, completing his theological

studies in 1969. After ordination he studied Semitic Languages, gaining his Licentiate in Sacred Scripture in Rome in 1972.

After two years as a schoolmaster in Coventry, he became Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, later a college of Surrey University, in 1977. Prior gained his doctorate from London University in 1985 and became head of department in 1987. Apart from a sabbatical year in Jerusalem and a year as Visiting Professor of Theology in the University of Bethlehem, he spent the remaining years at St Mary's.

In his pursuit of biblical scholarship he contributed *Paul the Letter-writer and the Second Letter to Timothy* (1989) and served as chair of the Catholic Biblical Association of Great Britain. However, Prior became dedicated to the proposition that scholarship could also be politically committed, an approach reflected in his *Jesus the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4.16-30)* (1995).

This commitment found earlier expression in his campaigning for the rights of travelling people but time spent in the Holy Land led him to become an enthusiastic

* This obituary first appeared in *The Independent* newspaper on 23 August 2004 and is published with permission. © 2004 Independent Digital (UK) Ltd.

advocate of the Palestinian cause and in 1982 he became co-founder and chair of Living Stones, an ecumenical organisation promoting links between Christians in the Holy Land and in Britain.

He was convinced that much Western biblical scholarship encouraged active or passive collusion in the oppression of the Palestinian people, and his *The Bible and Colonialism: a moral critique* (1997) examined the way in which the biblical narrative of the Exodus from Egypt and the Conquest of Canaan had been deployed to justify colonialism in Latin America, South Africa and, of course, Palestine.

Prior's scholarly interest later shifted to the historical evaluation of Zionism. His *Zionism and the State of Israel: a moral inquiry* (1999) developed a moral critique of Zionism, underlining its secular roots and the relatively recent character of support for Zionism by religious Jewry. He also argued that the expulsion of the Palestinians, far from being a consequence of the Nazi Holocaust or of the fortunes of war in 1948, had been planned by the founding fathers of Zionism from the beginning. In a climate where many liberal commentators sought to combine concern for the Palestinians with support for Israel, Prior insisted on the 'original sin' of 1948 (as against the fashionable theory that depicted Israel as 'falling from grace' subsequent to the occupation of the territories in 1967).

His stance often brought opposition and in 2002, the

Jesuit Holy Cross College in Massachusetts withdrew a lecture invitation. Fortunately Prior thrived on opposition and, knowing them to be unfair, he shrugged off accusations of anti-Semitism. The day before his death he expressed the hope of establishing a forum for Jewish-Christian dialogue that would not exclude anti-Zionist Jews and Christians.

Prior will be remembered for his unique combination of kindness and his belligerent sense of fun. Once, when challenged to state his religion by an Israeli soldier, he answered humorously: 'Well I was Zoroastrian, but I lapsed.' On another occasion, when arrested on a peace march in Jericho, he was told that he was allowed one telephone call and replied that he wanted to ring the Pope.

He could engage in an argument with relish and the determination of a dog with a bone and, although he sometimes practised his polemical skills on his friends, he reserved the full treatment for those he regarded as purveyors of injustice or humbug. Prior was the quintessential Irish rebel and enabled many to understand better why Britain no longer rules all of Ireland.

His attitude to death, too, was typically Irish and Catholic. He was a man of substantial build and once responded to kindly expressions of concern over the advisability of jogging with the reply, 'Well, if I die, at least I'll die healthy!'

A DISASTER FOR DIALOGUE★

by the late Fr Michael Prior CM

After the eighteenth International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee met in Buenos Aires earlier this month, it released a joint statement repeating many of the constant emphases of the Jewish-Christian dialogue of recent years. There were wider global concerns too: economic disparity and its challenges, ecological devastation, the negative aspects of globalisation, and the urgent need for international peacemaking. One searches in vain, however, for an interfaith comment on the ever-deteriorating conditions in the Holy Land, and the challenge to justice and charity, or simply to justice and international legality, caused by the situation in Israel. There was not one mention of the Separation Wall dividing Jews and Palestinians.

Two elements above all others of the joint statement are particularly disturbing: the view that anti-Zionism is synonymous with anti-Semitism, and the declaration of commitment to the 'struggle against terrorism'. 'Terrorism' by implication, of course, excludes the multiple forms of state-sponsored outrages in the Middle East and elsewhere,

and, even more pointedly, includes any form of resistance to occupation or foreign domination.

Equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism marks 'a first' in Catholic thinking, and was quickly noticed by the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz* (10 July), under the headline, 'Catholic Church equates anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism'. *Haaretz* quoted the director of the World Jewish Congress as saying that the statement marks 'an historic moment: for the first time, the Catholic Church recognises in anti-Zionism an attack ... against the whole Jewish people'. The Anti-Defamation League was also quick to respond and put the joint statement on its website.

It had seemed to me only a matter of time before the equation 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' would work its way into the religious dialogue, as one of the many fruits of a vigorous campaign to close down any criticism of Israel. Against the background of the almost universal condemnation of the behaviour of the State in the Occupied Territories, the World Zionist Congress (WZC), meeting in Jerusalem in 2002, called upon its supporters everywhere to press the equation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism and racism. That was a clever tactic, since the last two are universally despised in humane circles. In accepting

★ This article appeared in *The Tablet* on 31 July 2004. © The Tablet Publishing Company Ltd. 2004.

the equation, Zionism—unlike any other political ideology, such as nationalism, socialism, Communism, apartheid, or globalisation—would be above reproach, and, by extension, so would the State of Israel. A rhetorical victory, however, would not be enough. The WZC encouraged university students to monitor the lectures of those suspected of criticising Israel, and report back to their masters. Thus, a whole culture reminiscent of McCarthyism has re-entered American campuses. In the Buenos Aires statement we see how the tactic has borne fruit in its inaugural entry into interfaith dialogue. Many Catholics, and not a few Jews, will be dismayed, particularly those with some knowledge of the nature of the ideology of Zionism and those who are distressed by the unfortunate effects of its implementation.

Virtually the entire religious leadership of Jews in nineteenth-century Eastern Europe considered Theodor Herzl, the creator of Zionism, and his creed, to be anathema. Britain's Chief Rabbi considered his programme to be an 'egregious blunder' and an 'absolutely mischievous project'. In Vienna, his own Chief Rabbi judged it to be incompatible with Judaism, a conclusion echoed by the Chief Rabbis of France and Belgium. The German Rabbinical Council condemned the efforts to create a Jewish national state as contrary to Holy Writ. They were not alone.

Agudat Yisrael, formed in Germany in 1912 to present a united Orthodox front against secularisation, assimilation and Herzlian nationalism, considered Zionism to be a pseudo-messianic, satanic conspiracy against God. Zionism would remove from Jewish communal life the religious values which united Jews. While pretending to protect Jewish life it abandoned the values which had sustained it. The abandonment of what was most characteristically Jewish in the pursuit of purely secular, nineteenth-century European notions of nationhood was, for them, the ultimate form of assimilation. The restoration of the Jewish people to its ancestral land was uniquely the task of the Messiah. Basing their stand on Jewish theology, rather than on concern for the indigenous population, such religious Jews saw the Zionist enterprise as a conscious repudiation of the most fundamental tenets of Judaism. A number of religious Jews—far outweighed by the numbers of secular ones who do so—add a humanitarian dimension to their critique.

Unlike those who pass over the moral question of the impact of Zionism on the indigenous Palestinians, the Jewish religious group Neturei Karla—founded in Jerusalem in 1938—continues to be distressed at the injustices to the Palestinians in the name of Jewishness. True Jews, they insist, are not allowed to dominate, kill, harm or demean another people. They regard Zionism as a tragic experiment and a 'dismal failure'. Already too much blood has been shed on the altar of a nineteenth-century colonial nationalism, misapplied to the Jewish people. From being that of a people of faith, Zionism, they charge, has changed being Jewish into a barren secular, ethnic identity. World Jewry, they insist, is implicated in Israel's violence against the Palestinians.

Such religious notables would be bemused to learn that their criticism of Zionism was a manifestation of anti-Semitism. Despite such religiously based criticism of the Zionist enterprise, however, the Jewish religious leadership today, both in Israel and abroad, has been among the most enthusiastic supporters of the Zionist enterprise. Given the consequences for the people of Palestine, I find their moral stance disturbing.

For there is a fundamental moral problem at the core of the Zionist project which no amount of special pleading, or pretence to innocence, can sidestep: it is the determination to establish a state for Jews at the expense of the indigenous Arabs. Herzl and the leadership of the Zionist enterprise were well aware of the ethnic-cleansing imperative of his project. As an entry in his diary of 12 June, 1895, shows, Herzl knew what was needed to establish a state for Jews in a land already inhabited. Having occupied the land and expropriated the private property, he wrote:

'We shall endeavour to expel the poor population across the border unnoticed, procuring employment for it in the transit countries, but denying it any employment in our own country ... The process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.'

There is also a large body of evidence in the Zionist archives, and in the public domain since the early Nineties, tracing the consistency of the this line of thinking within the Jewish leadership in Palestine. In fact, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was preceded and followed by the systematic expulsion of 80 per cent of the Arab population—aided by several massacres and rapes—the destruction of 418 of their villages to ensure they would not return, and the confiscation of virtually all their land. Israel's colonisation policy since 1967 has added to Palestinian disaffection to this day.

There are, then, two reasons for objection to criticism of Zionism being seen as 'an attack against the whole Jewish people'. The first has its roots in Jewish theological considerations, and the second includes consideration of the rights of an indigenous population not to be expelled from, or dominated in their land. If the former concerns preoccupied some religious Jews, then secular Jews, and some religious ones also, are among those most disturbed by the human cost of the implementation of Zionism. Such people should not be dismissed as 'self-hating Jews', nor should those who share their concerns, for either theological or humanitarian reasons, be accused of being 'Jew haters'.

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

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM: ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

The Political Agenda of Christian Zionism

Stephen Sizer

(This is the concluding part of the article that appeared in issue 25)

6.3 Justifying the Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

Frequently, defending Israeli security leads Christian Zionists to deny Palestinians the same basic human rights as Israelis. Some are even reluctant to acknowledge the existence of Palestinians as a distinct people. Dave Hunt is typical of those who equate Palestinians with the ancient Philistines, and use the term Palestinian in an entirely pejorative sense.

Central to the Middle East conflict today is the issue of the so-called Palestinian people ... Palestinians? There never was a Palestinian people, nation, language, culture, or religion. The claim of descent from a Palestinian people who lived for thousands of years in a land called Palestine is a hoax!¹

Based on Hunt's logic presumably the same arguments could be used against the right to self-determination of citizens of the United States or indeed of several dozen nations founded in the 20th century. The history of the persecution of the Jews illustrates how easily the denigration of an 'inferior' people or a denial of their existence as a distinct people can lead to the rationalizing of their eradication.

In May 2002, Dick Arme, the Republican Senate House Majority leader, made ground breaking news by justifying the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories. In an interview with Chris Matthews on CNBC on 1 May 1 2002, Arme stated that:

'Most of the people who now populate Israel were transported from all over the world to that land and they made it their home. The Palestinians can do the same and we are perfectly content to work with the Palestinians in doing that. We are not willing to sacrifice Israel for the notion of a Palestinian homeland ... I'm content to have Israel grab the entire West Bank ... There are many Arab nations that have many hundreds of thousands of acres of land, soil, and property and opportunity to create a Palestinian State.'²

Matthews gave Arme several opportunities to clarify that he was not advocating the ethnic cleansing of all Palestinians from the West Bank, but Arme was unrepentant. When asked, 'Have you ever told George Bush, the President from your home State of Texas, that you think the Palestinians should get up and go and leave Palestine and that's the solution?', Arme replied,

I'm probably telling him that right now ... I am content to have Israel occupy that land that it now occupies and to have those people who have been aggressors against Israel retired to some other arena.³

Arme's view that Palestinians should be 'retired' is only the latest in a series of calls in the mainstream US and UK media for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories.⁴

While such racist attitudes among Christian Zionists toward Arabs are common, as are the stereotypes that Palestinians are terrorists, it is more especially Muslims who are demonised.

6.4 Demonising Islam

Anti-Arab and Islamophobic sentiments have become even more widely tolerated since 11 September 2001. Such views have recently been described as a form of new 'McCarthyism'.⁵ In February 2002, for example, Pat Robertson caused considerable controversy when he too described Islam as a violent religion bent on world domination. He also claimed American Muslims were forming terrorist cells in order to destroy the country. Robertson made the allegations on his Christian Broadcasting Network '700 Club.' After clips showing Muslims in America, the announcer, Lee Webb asked Robertson, 'As for the Muslim immigrants Pat, it makes you wonder, if they have such contempt for our foreign policy why they'd even want to live here?' Robertson replied:

Well, as missionaries possibly to spread the doctrine of Islam ... I have taken issue with our esteemed President in regard to his stand in saying Islam is a peaceful religion. It's just not. And the Koran makes it very clear, if you see an infidel, you are to kill him ... the fact is

¹ Dave Hunt, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem.', *TBC*, September 2000.

² Dick Arme, 'Hardball with Chris Matthews', CNBC, 1 May 2002, cited in 'Republican Party Leader calls for Ethnic Cleansing of Palestinians on Prime Time Talk Show', *The Electronic Intifada*, <http://electronicintifada.net/actionitems/020502dickarmey.html>. See also 'Rep. Dick Arme calls for Ethnic Cleansing of Palestinians', *Counterpunch*, edited by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St Clair, <http://www.counterpunch.org/armey0502.html>. Dick Arme and his family are members of Lewisville Bible Church, Lewisville, Texas.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Charles Krauthammer, 'Mideast Violence: The Only Way Out', *Washington Post*, 15 May 2001; Emmanuel A. Winston writing in *USA Today* called for the 'resettling the Palestinians in Jordan', *USA Today*, 22 February (2002); John Derbyshire, 'Why don't I care about the Palestinians?', *National Review*, 9 May (2002); Clarence Wagner, 'Apples for Apples, Osama Bin Laden and Yasser Arafat', *Dispatch from Jerusalem*, May 2002, p. 1, 6, 17.

our immigration policies are now so skewed to the Middle East and away from Europe that we have introduced these people into our midst and undoubtedly there are terrorist cells all over them.⁶

At the 2002 Southern Baptist Convention⁷ held in Florida, the former national convention leader, the Rev. Jerry Vines, pastor of the 25,000 member First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, brought applause from several thousand participants of the pastors' conference when he described Muhammad as 'a demon-possessed paedophile'⁸

Such antipathy toward Arabs, denigration of Palestinians and hatred of Islam invariably leads Christian Zionists to also oppose any peaceful resolution of the Arab Israeli conflict which might require or coerce Israel to relinquish territory or compromise its security.

6.5 Opposing the Peace Process

While Christian Zionists endorse Israel's unilateral claim to the Occupied Territories, they oppose similar Palestinian aspirations to self determination since they believe the two are intrinsically incompatible.

Christian Zionists have been most vociferous in opposing the Road Map to Peace initiative of the US government, UN, European Community and Russia. Hal Lindsey, for example lamented 'I am heartbroken over the latest stage of the "road map to peace"', describing it instead as a 'Odyssey to Holocaust'.⁹ He went on to rebuke the US president. 'I was sickened to watch a well-meaning Christian American president talk incessantly about his vision for a Palestinian state and Jewish state living side by side in peace.'¹⁰

At the Interfaith Zionist Leadership Summit, held in Washington May 2003, Jewish and Christian Zionist leaders met to consider how to turn the 'road map' into a road-block. Gary Bauer, called the president's initiative 'a Satanic roadmap'.¹¹ Peace talks are not only a waste of time, they demonstrate a rebellious defiance toward God's plans. Such infallible certitudes lead some Christian Zionists to anathematise those who do not share their presuppositions.

6.6 Forcing God's Hand

Christian Zionists often attempt to silence critics with the threat of divine retribution. For example, Brickner warns

⁵ A term coined by William Safire, a former Nixon speechwriter and conservative Republican who thought George Bush Snr. was insufficiently pro-Israel. Cited in Lind, *op. cit.*

⁶ Alan Cooperman, 'Robertson Calls Islam a Religion of Violence, Mayhem', *Washington Post*, 22 February 2002, p. AO2.

⁷ The Southern Baptist Convention is a coalition of 42,000 churches with 16 million members. Since the 1980s it has become increasingly fundamentalist. See <http://www.sbcannualmeeting.org/sbc02/>

⁸ Richard Vara, 'Texas secession rumor, attacks on Islam mark Baptist meeting', *Houston Chronicle*, 10 June 2002; Alan Cooperman, 'Anti-Muslim Remarks Stir Tempest', *Washington Post*, 19 June 2002. According to Cooperman, the newly elected president of the Southern Baptists, the Revd Jack Graham defended Vine's speech as 'accurate'.

⁹ Hal Lindsey, 'If the blind lead the blind', WorldNetDaily.com 5 June 2003.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Duin, *op. cit.*

evangelicals who do not share a Zionist perspective that they are fighting against God.

Peril awaits those who presume to say that God is finished with His chosen people ... Just as God judged the nation of Egypt for her ill treatment of His people, so will He judge nations today. Evangelicals who would understand the Middle East must pay close attention to the teaching of Scripture, and take note of the cosmic forces that now do battle in the heavens but will soon do battle on earth. They must choose carefully which side to uphold.¹²

Hal Lindsey affirmed the same view when he said this week,

My great fear is that President Bush is ignorantly leading the United States into God's judgment. For God warns that He will judge all nations that have contributed to keeping Israel from living in the land He sovereignly gave them.¹³

Christians are left in no doubt which side to 'uphold.' On the 1st January 2002 edition of the CBN 700 Club, Pat Robertson warned that if the US

... wants to interfere with Bible prophecy and wants to move in and wrest East Jerusalem away from the Jews and give it to Yasser Arafat ... heaven help this nation of ours ... If the United States takes East Jerusalem back and makes it the capital of the Palestinian State, then we are asking for the wrath of God.¹⁴

Robertson even suggests that Rabin's assassination was an act of God, a judgement for his betrayal of his own people: 'This is God's land and God has strong words about someone who parts and divides His land. The rabbis put a curse on Yitzhak Rabin when he began cutting up the land.'¹⁵

Such pronouncements coming from highly influential Christian leaders appear little different from those of Muslim fundamentalists who call for a 'holy war' against the West. Dave MacPherson has noted that the danger of such Armageddon theology is not so much that it is fatalistic, but that it is so contagious.¹⁶ Karen Armstrong is not alone in tracing within Western Christian Zionism evidence of the legacy of the Crusades. Such fundamentalists have, she claims, 'returned to a classical and extreme religious crusading.'¹⁷

¹² Brickner, *op. cit.*

¹³ Lindsey, 'Blind'.

¹⁴ Howard Mortman, 'Don't ignore Pat Robertson', *The Frontline*, 7 January 2002. <http://www.hotlinescoop.com/web/content/columns/extrememortman/020107.htm>

¹⁵ Pat Robertson, 'Pat answers your questions on Israel', *700 Club*, Christian Broadcasting Network, <http://cbn.org/700club>

¹⁶ Dave MacPherson, cited in Halsell, *Forcing*, p. 10.

¹⁷ Karen Armstrong, *Holy War, The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World*, Macmillan, London, 1988, p. 377.

7. Conclusions: The Political Implications of Christian Zionism

We have seen how Christian Zionism as a movement has profound and lasting political consequences. Christian Zionists have shown varying degrees of enthusiasm for implementing six basic theological convictions that arise from their literal and futurist reading of the Bible:

1. The belief that the Jews remain God's chosen people leads Christian Zionists to a justification for Israel's military occupation of Palestine.
2. As God's chosen people, the final restoration of the Jews to Israel is therefore actively encouraged and facilitated through partnerships between Christian organisations and the Jewish Agency.
3. Eretz Israel, as delineated in scripture, belongs exclusively to the Jewish people, therefore the land must be annexed and the settlements adopted and strengthened.
4. Jerusalem is regarded as the eternal and exclusive capital of the Jews, and cannot be shared with the Palestinians. Therefore, strategically, Western governments are placed under pressure by Christian Zionists to relocate

their embassies to Jerusalem and thereby recognise the fact.

5. The Third Temple has yet to be built, the priesthood consecrated and sacrifices reinstated. As dispensational Christian Zionists, in particular, believe this is prophesied, they offer varying degrees of support to the Jewish Temple Mount organisations committed to achieving it.
6. Since Christian Zionists are convinced there will be an apocalyptic war between good and evil in the near future, there is no prospect for lasting peace between Jews and Arabs. Indeed, to advocate Israel compromise with Islam or coexist with Palestinians is to identify with those destined to oppose God and Israel in the imminent battle of Armageddon.

Clearly, not all Christian Zionists embrace each of these six tenets, or with the same degree of conviction or involvement. Nevertheless, as has been argued, the overall consequences of such uncritical support for the State of Israel, especially among American Evangelicals, is inherently and pathologically destructive, not least to the very Jewish people they claim to love.

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM: ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES The Restoration of Israel and Anti-Zionism

*Rev'd Tim Price,
National Field Co-ordinator, Church's Ministry among Jewish People*

(This is the concluding part of the article that appeared in issue 25)

Intolerance of different views

Within the Christian world this polarisation is reflected by an intolerance of any alternative way of seeing things. An Anglican bishop, on one occasion, bluntly asked me why we supported the restoration of Israel, as if this could not possibly be a viable theological or indeed historical/political position. That struck me as precisely the arrogance that the Church has traditionally adopted to any possible claim by the Jewish people to national restoration and a denial of the miracle of Jewish preservation through 2000 years exile from their land.

Entrenched positions have inevitably led to accusation and counter accusation with neither side attempting to understand or relate to the convictions held by the other.

Naim Ateek, for example, in the 2003 winter edition of *Cornerstone* says in his article 'The dark side of Religion' 'Without any shadow of doubt, Christian Zionism is one, if not the most dangerous, biblical distortion that is challenging us today'

By contrast Derek Prince, in probably his final message 'A call to Britain' gives a warning of judgement to the church if it persists in its belief that the Church has replaced Israel. He says 'The truth of the matter is, we determine our destiny on how we respond to what God is doing for Israel. He goes on to quote from Isaiah 60 'The nation and the kingdom that will not serve you, re-gathered Israel, will perish. Those nations will be utterly ruined.

Is there any way back from the abyss, the chasm, that divides the Church or are we destined to carry on the fight until one or other side delivers the knock out blow? One way forward perhaps lies in the teaching of St Paul from Romans.

Romans 9-11

Romans 9-11 have been described as the key to understanding of the ongoing relationship between Israel and the Church. Indeed it could be argued that the whole of Romans seeks to clarify that relationship.

In St Paul's teaching from Romans 9-11 Paul makes it crystal clear that the judgement against Israel for disobedience is a judicial hardening, so that the Gentiles can now be included as co-recipients of the Kingdom with Israel under the rule of the Messiah.

In grieving at his own nation's rejection of the Gospel, Paul says 'I have great anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off for the sake of my brothers those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons, theirs the divine glory, the covenants the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced all the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all forever to be praised.' Paul is not saying these are past riches, but Israel's present inheritance.

Later in chapter 10 St Paul says 'Brothers, my hearts desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.'

This inevitably led to his reflection on the future role of the Jewish people in which he recognises their rejection of Jesus as a stumbling, but concludes they are not beyond redemption as a nation.

'Did they the Jewish people stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all. Rather, because of their transgressions, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious'

Paul makes a startling observation that somehow even in the rejection of their own Messiah, Israel is being called to bring blessing to the Gentiles, and which in turn is designed to make Israel envious of that salvation which she herself has spurned.

Debt of Gratitude

Paul implies that for the Gentile branch of the Church we have a debt of gratitude to Israel for their disobedience and unbelief without which we could not be included as the people of God. The Church has done many things to Israel, but I'm not sure it has ever yet made her envious.

As Tom Torrance says 'The time has come for the whole Church of Christ to recognise far more profoundly and sincerely that it is a debtor to Israel, for it could not exist as Church except as it is grafted on to the stock of Israel. Israel remains the servant of the Lord with a vicarious function to fulfil *even for the Christian Church*, so that without heeding Israel or listening to its witness the Christian Church cannot properly understand its own existence or mission. But the Church today cannot relate sincerely to Israel without acknowledging to the full the piled-up guilt of its rejection and persecution of Israel throughout the Christian centuries.'

Later on in Romans 11 Paul gives a vivid picture of how we who are Gentiles have been grafted into Israel's olive tree.

Paul says that some, not all, of the natural branches, Israel, were cut off and a wild olive shoot, the Gentiles, has been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root. All the blessings to Israel are rightly ours, because we through Christ are spiritual descendants of Abraham, but that is not to exclusion of Israel,

the Jewish nation. Paul later makes clear God's judgement against Israel is not permanent.

Warning against arrogance

Hereafter Paul gives some health warnings to newly ingrafted Gentiles. He goes on to say 'Do not boast over those branches (that have been broken off). If you do, consider this. You do not support the root, but the root supports you.'

The implications of this are considerable, the Gentile Church, is sustained only as it remains grafted into Israel. It has no independent life of its own.

Psalms 80 says of the Lord 'You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land'

This metaphor is of Israel and in John's Gospel, Jesus takes this metaphor to himself when he says I am the vine, earlier the true vine; you are the branches ... if anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers, such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burnt.'

We are united to Israel only in so far as we are united with its representative as we remain branches deriving nourishment, life and fruitfulness from the true vine. Paul then rams home the point concerning the arrogance of the Church to Israel in Romans 11:19-20

You will say then, branches were broken off, so that I could be grafted in. Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith.

The New Covenant to which the Church so often lays unique claim, is the superior covenant. Those who break it come under greater judgement.

With a warning that has been singularly ignored by the Church, Paul goes on to say 'Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God, sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in that kindness. Otherwise, you will also be cut off'

What has the Church done to Israel for 2000 years? It has been arrogant to the Jewish nation. It has boasted that it is now the true Israel. It has forgotten the grace and kindness of God, in its lack of compassion to Israel down through the long centuries of Christian anti-Semitism and persecution.

As a people called out by grace, the Church has failed to act with mercy. It has failed to make Israel envious through its harsh treatment of the Jews culminating in their near genocide in the heart of Christian Europe.

In 1917 Britain, I believe, was given an entrustment by God, to bring the Jews home precisely because God in his foreknowledge knew the holocaust was imminent. Sadly Britain at a time when it could have done a considerable amount to pre-empt the holocaust was turning Jews away from the land it was internationally mandated to rule as the Jewish National Home.

The Church, and the Church especially in the West, has blood on its hands for its teaching concerning the Jewish people. When it comes to Israel, in our day, the Church's own history negates having a message that will be heard by Jewish people without repentance for that bitter legacy.

After the Second World War, Christian anti-Semitism,

largely went underground, yet today it has returned in a new more virulent form as anti-Zionism, or anti-Israelism, which at its root is a denial of the Jewish people to nationhood. That in turn has its roots in the very first schism between Jews and Christians when the Church began to define itself over and against the Synagogue.

The first schism

As Tom Torrance has written in the *Vocation and Destiny of Israel* 'The bitter separation between Church and Synagogue that set in after the Bar Kochba revolt in the second century after Christ was one of the greatest tragedies in the whole of our history not only for the people of God but for all western civilisation.'

The outcome of that separation was that the Jewish branch of the Church faded or was assimilated, as the Gentile branch came to dominate. The only identity for any Jewish believer was only in relation to its incorporation into the dominant Gentile Church. The Jewish expression of the Church was left to 'wither on the vine', and indeed after the Council of Nicaea, to which no Jewish bishop was invited, it was cut off altogether as the Gentile Church deliberately broke its Jewish connectedness through Israel's feasts and observances. In doing so it effectively sawed its own branch from the olive tree. It could be said that the Church has substantially been in error, and certainly imbalanced, ever since!

Torrance later asserts that the proliferation of schisms within the Church has its root in that radical split between the Gentile Christians and Jews. Only with the deep healing of that split in a deep-going reconciliation will all the other deep divisions with which we struggle in the ecumenical movement finally be overcome. The Gentile Church more than ever needs to rediscover its Jewish counterpart. Only then united as one will it discover its true calling as the People of God, Jew and Gentile.

Restoration

In the Old Testament, and indeed the New, is a wonderful picture of the restoration of Israel. The restoration of Israel is a major theme of both the major and Minor Prophets and one which the church has substantially opposed since the Council of Nicaea.

In Romans 11:23 Paul offers hope to Israel the natural branches 'And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all if you, the Gentile Church, were cut off from an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature, how much more readily will these the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree.

He goes on to say:

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may be conceited. Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.

In case we might be tempted to think that this means now the whole people of God, Paul makes it clear that it

applies to national Israel, the Jewish nation. All the major commentators have concluded that Israel here means the nation of Israel as is clear from the use of Jacob, as a metaphor for Israel:

'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away my sins'

The hardening of the nation of Israel is temporary and for our benefit. As Paul says:

'As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on *your* account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs. For God's gift and his call are irrevocable.'

God never has or ever will abandon the Jewish people. God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is permanent. The Land of Israel has been given to them as an everlasting possession. God has not revoked his covenant.

Just as the judgement of Israel led to blessing for the Gentiles, so the restoration of Israel will bring even greater blessing. The fullness of the Gentiles gives way to fullness to the Jews. As Paul says:

'If their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fulness bring. 'For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead.'

Just as Jesus as representative of Israel and its Suffering Servant endured the agony of Golgotha, so too its people for the last 2000 years have gone through a similar role as vicarious suffering servant among the nations. If the holocaust marked its denouement, its own Golgotha, then the regathering of the Jews to their land and the rebirth of Israel is but the first tokens of its national resurrection that will be the fruit of their restoration and will ultimately bring so much blessing to the nations.

True Zionism

The call of Abraham in Genesis 12 embodies the ultimate mission of God which is to bless the nations through Israel. 'The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people, your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you'

Later by an unconditional and royal covenant the Lord sets out the terms of the covenant.

'To your descendants I give the land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites,

Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Gergashites and Jebusites.’

This is ratified in a further covenant of circumcision in which the Lord promises to Abram ‘The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien. I will give it as an everlasting possession, to you, your descendants after you, and I will be their God.’

The covenant was again ratified with Isaac and Jacob and much later with Moses. If we are left in any doubt as to the permanence of that covenant Jeremiah leaves no escape clause.

This is what the Lord says ‘Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,’ declares the Lord.

Through the succession of covenants thereafter Mosaic, Davidic and New God sets out his plan to redeem the world and bring the nations under his kingship. The kingship of David, a type, for the Messianic kingdom that David’s greater Son will usher in at the eschaton when David’s fallen tent, a metaphor for Israel, will once more be rebuilt.

This is true Zionism, for it is God’s agenda to establish his earthly reign over the nations from Jerusalem. It is the nations that seek to thwart that goal. Indeed God makes it clear that he is holding the nations accountable through their support or opposition to His Son and to Israel

At the beginning of his life and at his end Jesus was given the title King of the Jews. At the Annunciation in Luke 1 the angel Gabriel says of Jesus ‘He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.’

There is one in heaven who is both Saviour of the World and King of Israel. In Acts 2 Peter is addressing Israel when in his speech he says ‘Therefore let Israel be assured of this God has made this Jesus both Lord and Messiah.’

Later he says again addressing Israel ‘He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophets’.

Peter is under no illusion that the great prophets of the Old Testament which speak of the restoration of Israel should be taken as anything other than literal. For him this is no allegory that can be spiritualised away. Anyone reading these great prophecies can only be struck by the great detail and specific nature of them. How any one can allegorise them is beyond me.

In that great Messianic Psalm 2 the Lord the Psalmist asks ‘Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?’ This theme is picked up in other Psalms such as Psalm 83

‘With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish. Come they say, ‘let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more’

How apposite are those words today!

However the real purpose of conspiracy is unfolded in Psalm 2:

‘The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One (The Messiah). Let us break their chains, they say and throw off their fetters’.

The Psalmist goes on to say:

The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath saying ‘I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.

Clearly here Zion cannot refer exclusively to heavenly Zion, but to Jerusalem, the seat of God’s earthly government. True Zionism is then about the outworking of God’s purposes for Israel and the nations with its focus on Jerusalem.

In case we may be under any illusion about its prophetic significance, the Psalmist goes on to warn:

‘Therefore you kings, be wise; be warned you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son (note Son is in capitals), let he be angry and you be destroyed in the way.’

The Day of the Lord in the apocalyptic writings was always seen as the decisive day of reckoning not only for Israel but for her enemies. True Zionism then must ultimately be seen in its right perspective of bringing about God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

No one in their right mind looking at the Church as it is presently constituted can see that the Kingdom is already here through the Church.

Kingdom people are here and the Lord indeed is gathering his people; the stone, in the words of Daniel has been thrown from heaven, is rolling down the mountainside, ready to destroy the kingdoms of the world as presently constituted. But the kingdoms remain at present.

It is only after the destruction of the kingdoms opposed to the rule of Christ, that the Lord establishes his Kingdom that will grow and fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters covers the seas.

At present, as in Jesus’ day, the kingdom is embryonic and rudimentary, evidence of the Coming kingdom will be seen through transformed lives, signs of its emergence will become evident, but the full expression of the Kingdom only comes after the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.

The conflict in the Middle East is not ultimately about Jew or Arab, Palestinian or Israeli, but about the nations’ intention to thwart the coming of Israel’s Messiah and King. The issue is about his right to reign over the nations.

The Church will be judged by where it stands in relation to the restoration of Israel and to whether it has colluded with the nations to oppose the purposes of God. Just as Israel was judged for its disobedience and apostasy so too the Church. In the Church’s case more harshly because the revelation given to her is greater than to Israel.

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, the Lord makes the care or lack of care of his 'brothers according to the flesh' as the plumb line. What you did to the least of these my brothers you did unto me.

At present, as I see it, many parts of the Church stand perilously close to judgement as it seeks to support those who would delegitimize Israel's right to exist as a nation and sow the seeds of anti-Semitism.

Just as the judgement of Israel led to blessing for the Gentiles, so the restoration of Israel will bring even greater blessing. The fullness of the Gentiles gives way to fullness to the Jews. As Paul says:

'If their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead.'

What of Israel today?

We may wonder given the way the government of Israel is today, how can the return of Jews to Palestine possibly be of God. Indeed as David Torrance states 'Many people seem to be hindered in their acceptance of the restoration of Israel to the land as a fulfilment of the Word of God, by the actual events taking place in the Middle East today.

Israel's restoration to the land has brought about great suffering to many Arabs and unrest to the rest of the world:

so many things the government of Israel is doing do not seem in accord with the Word of God and with his love for the people of all nations. So often Israel breaks its own ethical code toward the stranger in the land.

Whereas God loves the Jews, he loves the Arabs just as much, indeed has given great promise to them as a people group. How then can we affirm that God who is God of love, is behind these events and that Israel restoration to the Promised Land is a fulfilment of the Word of God.

In Ezekiel 37, the prophet in the picture of the valley of dry bones portrays a two stage restoration of Israel in which the nation is first physically restored then spiritually. Zechariah sees the nation acknowledging their rejection as they see the One who was pierced for them and in grief repenting before their own Messiah. A remarkable insight hundreds of years before the crucifixion

At present Israel is like any other nation, godless, and far away from her Messiah. She has been physically brought back to the land, yet she awaits the One from Zion who will deliver her. This is her destiny with the Church's as together they await the Lord's return to establish his glorious kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Let us finish this part with a collect from the Anglican liturgy: 'Almighty Father, whose will is to restore all things in thy beloved Son, the king of all: govern the hearts and minds of those in authority and bring the families of the nations divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin to be subject to his just and gentle rule; who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God, now and forever.'

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1. Please notify **LIVING STONES** of any change in your above details or in your tax circumstances if in future such circumstances change.
2. You can cancel this declaration at any time by notifying **LIVING STONES**.
3. If you pay tax at the higher rate, you can claim further tax relief in your Self Assessment tax return.

THE LIVING STONES OF THE HOLY LAND TRUST
Registered Charity No. 1081204

Standing Order Mandate

Your Bank Details

To Bank/Building Society
Address
Postcode

Your Full Name
Your Account Number
Your Bank Sort Code: - -

Instructions to your Bank

Please pay the sum of £
*monthly/quarterly/yearly to *Living Stones*
Account No. 8 913 7808
Girobank Sort Code: 72-00-05
commencing from (date)
and until further notice in writing.
*[delete as applicable]

Your Signature
Date

PLEASE RETURN THIS MANDATE TO:

The Honorary Treasurer, **LIVING STONES**
1 Gough Square, London EC4A 3DE
e-mail: treasurer@livingstonesonline.org.uk

