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**COME, HOLY SPIRIT: POSTMODERNITY, SPIRITUALITY, AND THE SPIRIT**
An Important Announcement about
Quarterly Review

January 2005

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—In its effort to explore new avenues and formats for communicating its mission in a rapidly changing world, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) will relinquish its involvement with the publication of Quarterly Review with the winter 2005 issue of the journal.

Jerome King Del Pino, general secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, shared this information with Neil Alexander, president of The United Methodist Publishing House, in a letter on September 27, 2004. Quarterly Review has been a joint production of the two agencies since its inception in 1980. Del Pino expressed deep appreciation for this 25-year collaboration and noted that the decision to discontinue support of the journal "was taken neither easily nor hastily."

While the restricted impact of the journal due to a decade-long decline in subscriptions was a factor in the board’s decision, Del Pino said, the primary consideration has to do with the agency’s need to reevaluate its entire communication strategy—which includes its publishing effort—in light of GBHEM’s newly adopted Strategic Plan. "The growing complexity and diversity of the church and the world in the new century call for a multifaceted, multidimensional publishing strategy that is simultaneously fully aligned with the board's strategic and missional aims and able to communicate effectively at a variety of levels to multiple constituencies through a diversity of products. While we deeply value Quarterly Review's contribution to the work of the agency over the years, it lacks the elasticity for adjusting to these new parameters," Del Pino added.

Editor of Quarterly Review Hendrik Pieterse will continue at GBHEM as a member of the Office of Interpretation. He will be deeply involved in the development and execution of the board’s new publishing endeavor. "The board’s decision regarding Quarterly Review does not mean that it is relinquishing its Disciplinary mandate to 'serve as advocate for the intellectual life of the church,'” Pieterse said. "On the contrary,” he added, "the board remains unequivocal in its commitment to nurturing deep-running theological discourse about the daunting theological issues facing the denomination in regard to its understanding and practice of higher education and appointed ministry. We are simply redirecting that theological task in new and creative ways for new and different times."

The United Methodist Publishing House is currently exploring a variety of options for the future of Quarterly Review. "However," says Harriett Jane Olson, Sr. Vice President for Publishing at The United Methodist Publishing House, "publication of Quarterly Review in its current format cannot be sustained without the partnership of GBHEM, which we have enjoyed since 1980." Publication in the current format will cease with the winter 2005 issue and subscribers who have already paid for additional issues will receive an adjustment to their accounts.
Quarterly Review (ISSN 0270-9287) provides continuing education resources for scholars, Christian educators, and lay and professional ministers in The United Methodist Church and other churches. QR intends to be a forum in which theological issues of significance to Christian ministry can be raised and debated.

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Spring 2005

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Evangelical and Methodist: A Popular History, by Riley B. Case
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One of the twentieth century's greatest atrocities was the Holocaust—the result of hideous European anti-Semitism. One of that century's greatest injustices was the Palestinians being deprived of their land—the result of manipulative European colonial power. Michael Lerner likens it to Jews jumping from the burning buildings of Europe and landing on the backs of Palestinians, with unintended results. This combination of events has led to a spiral of retaliatory violence in the Middle East, raising the urgent question: What will end this senseless spiral of mutual violence and death?

The essays in this volume address this question from a variety of viewpoints in hopes of provoking a wide-ranging and ongoing theological discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian situation among United Methodists and other Christians. While the authors have struggled hard to present the salient issues with clarity, fairness, and balance, their convictions and views on the matter are unmistakable. Thus, given the highly politicized nature of the current discussion in the culture and the church, the mutual suspicion, the vested interests, and the emotional investment on both sides, the essays are sure to anger some and disappoint others. With this in mind, it is important to point out that two fundamental assumptions resonate through all five essays. (1) Israel has a right to exist and the Palestinians deserve the protection of their human rights. (2) To discuss Palestinian human rights is not to engage in anti-Semitic rhetoric. Indeed, what is needed is a new level of discourse that moves the discussion beyond its current either-or stalemate.

In his essay, Naim Ateek claims that Israelis want security and Palestinians want justice. Neither will happen without the other; and the death and violence will not end without both. In an effort to explore the dynamics of that claim and to allow a Palestinian Christian voice to be
heard by Christians from other parts of the world, Sabeel Ecumenical
Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem convened its fifth international
conference on April 14-18, 2004. The conference sought to place the
Middle East conflict in its historical, political, and theological context and
to expose how Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism have hampered
the peace process. The organizers appealed to attendees to explore ways to
educate Christians in North America and Europe about the plight of the
Palestinians. Several essays in this volume seek to honor this appeal.

The articles by Ateek, Bryant, and McCarty address the conflict explicitly
from the vantage point of Christian theology. For them, the conversa-
tion needs to take place around the sacredness of human worth, not just
around the sacredness of land. However, to arrive at this point, argue Ateek
and Bryant, Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism must be recognized
for the obstacles to peace that they are and addressed and dismantled.

Elaine Hagopian opens her provocative analysis of the history of the
Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the claim that the problem is essentially polit-
cal and requires a political solution. Ateek and Bryant agree, but demon-
strate that the political problem has also been aided and sustained by the
formidable lobbying efforts of Christian Zionists in the United States.

Drawing on the United Methodist Book of Resolutions and the Book of
Discipline, Rhonda McCarty helpfully traces United Methodist responses to
the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and suggests concrete ways in which laity
and clergy can be better informed about the issues and be better prepared
to engage in meaningful efforts toward peace and justice.

Michael Lerner’s munificent, thoughtful essay represents an interpreta-
tion of the meaning and nature of the State of Israel that is growing in
influence and salience. The similarities between Lerner’s call for a “progres-
sive middle path to peace” and Ateek’s Palestinian Christian theology of
liberation are striking and hopeful. Do we have here the stirrings of a
mindset that will make for lasting peace and justice in the region?

May these articles spark constructive, informed, and—above all—enduring
theological reflection among United Methodists and others concerned about
a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

Barry E. Bryant is Associate Professor of United Methodist Studies at Memphis
Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tennessee.
The Palestine-Israel conflict is a political conflict. Although the conflict has taken on a veneer of religious fanaticism by some Israeli and non-Israeli Jews, as well as by Palestinian Islamists, in reality it is not about religion. This will become evident as the history unfolds.

In the nineteenth century, a number of Jewish leaders in Europe concluded that anti-Semitism at the hands of European Christians was permanent and incurable. Although there were two strands of Zionism that emerged in Europe, i.e., cultural and political Zionism, it was political Zionism that became dominant. Cultural Zionism sought to create a cultural and spiritual renewal center in Palestine that would allow Jews to secure their traditions. Political Zionism, after exploring sites such as Libya, Cyprus, and Uganda, among others, fixed on and sought to transform Palestine into a Jewish state. Chief political Zionist, Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) conceptualized the Jewish state in his book *Judenstaat*, published in 1896. It was followed by the formation of the World Zionist Organization and the convening of the First Zionist Congress in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland, thus launching the Zionist project.

The problem was that over 90 percent of the indigenous population of Palestine was Palestinian Arabs. Clearly, transforming Palestine into a Jewish state meant that Palestinians would have to be "transferred" out of Palestine and Jews would have to be brought in. In fact, the concept of "transfer" was and still is a constant theme in Zionist political literature and tracts.1 Quoted below is one of many examples of the Zionist intent of
moving out the indigenous Palestinians:

We cannot allow the Arabs to block so valuable a piece of historic reconstruction. . . . And therefore we must gently persuade them to "trek." After all, they have all Arabia with its million square miles. . . . There is no particular reason for the Arabs to cling to these few kilometers. "To fold their tents" and "silently steal away" is their proverbial habit: let them exemplify it now. (Israel Zangwill)

In fact, Palestinians were predominantly farmers, merchants, intellectuals, professional people, and small-business owners.

Zionism, Jewish Identity, and British Imperial Interests

Israeli psychologist Benjamin Beit Hallahmi brilliantly exposes the way political Zionism remade Jewish identity from that derived in the state of "Diaspora" in Europe—i.e., a "weak-kneed, passive Jew of the ghetto, the human dust that made up the Jewish people"—to one of a strong, assertive, self-sufficient, and modernized secular identity. In order to do this, Zionism had to somehow "claim continuity with the Jewish past . . . but it also attempt[ed] to create discontinuity, through a new space of a national homeland and a new time of secular nationalism."

Beit Hallahmi explains how Zionism resolved the contradiction of the two identities. He notes that Zionism, i.e., its ideological leaders, created a new Jewish history that claimed that Jewish identity was fostered in Palestine, not in the Diaspora, and that they were exiled against their will but yearned to return to the homeland. Further, Zionists arrested a particular time in the mythological version of Jewish history in Palestine and built its narrative on the claim that only that alleged period was the basis for identifying the "legitimate" owners of the land of Palestine. No people or period before or after that assumed period could have claim to the land.\(^5\) *Ipsi facto*, based on the Zionist narrative, the indigenous Palestinian Arabs have no authentic claim to their land. However, archaeological debates about the alleged ancient Israel "have become increasingly acrimonious because the aura of objectivity which has been projected to cover the collusion of biblical studies in the dispossession of Palestine has gradually been exposed.\(^6\)

The second hurdle that the Zionists had to overcome was to convince the British, who had strategic interests in the region, that the Zionists would
maintain and promote those interests in return for the British facilitating
the establishment of a Jewish homeland (read "state"). Indeed, the British
embraced the Zionists, first by the issuance of the Balfour Declaration on
November 2, 1917, which stated that "His Majesty's Government view with
favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish
people," and, second, by allowing the foundations of the state to be estab­
lished during most of the Mandate period and earlier, especially 1920–1948.

The Broken Trust: The Betrayal of Palestine

As World War I spread to the Middle East, the British sought, and were
offered, the help of Arabs in confronting the combined forces of the
Germans and the Ottoman Turks in the region. They turned to Sharif Husain
of Mecca in the Hejaz (western Arabia, now part of Saudi Arabia), allegedly a
descendant of the Prophet Mohammed and leader of Arab Muslims at the
time. In a 1915–1916 exchange of letters between Sharif Husain and Sir
Henry McMahon, British high commissioner for Egypt and the Sudan, an
agreement was reached between the parties. In return for Sharif Husain’s
ordering an Arab revolt against the Ottomans and Germans, the British
would facilitate an independent Arab State, basically in Greater Syria (Syria,
Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine), Iraq, and the Arabian peninsula, excepting
Aden. In further negotiations the British excluded specific areas that were of
interest to the French, as well as areas related to specific British agreements
with tribal chiefs. Nonetheless, Palestine was never excluded from the agree­
ment, though the British attempted later to argue that it was.

In any case, the British and French, the main negotiators of the 1916
Sykes-Picot agreement (Russia was also involved related to some of the
Turkish areas) secretly agreed on how they would split up Greater Syria
and Iraq after the war. Palestine would basically be in the British zone,
especially the port cities of Haifa and Acre.\(^8\) The Sykes-Picot agreement
was followed by the 1917 Ballour Declaration, noted above. Both the Sykes-
Picot agreement and the Ballour Declaration were in direct conflict with
the 1915-1916 Hussein-McMahon agreement. It was indeed a broken trust, a
betrayal of Palestine. The British had come to the conclusion that a Jewish
homeland in Palestine would serve British interests better than allowing
Palestine to be part of an independent Arab state or to facilitate separate
statehood for Palestine in accordance with Article 22, paragraph 4, of the
League of Nations' Covenant regarding the mandate system.\(^9\) Indeed, the
British kept secret the Declaration's text from Palestinians for several years so as not to alert them to the betrayal.

**Wilson and the King-Crane Commission of 1919**

Known as the "champion" of self-determination in his speeches from 1916-1919, President Wilson admitted to partiality in the way self-determination was to be applied. He took care not to advocate its application if it would step on British and French colonial interests in the Middle East.

Moreover, Wilson was greatly influenced by American Zionist Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, who worked closely with the British. He convinced the President to champion Zionism in his own foreign policy. Six months before the Balfour Declaration, Brandeis presented a document of Zionist thinking from London to the U.S. State Department. The document espoused the denial of the right of the indigenous people of Palestine to self-determination in just about every one of its provisions. "Palestinian Self-Determination could not be, to use the words of Wilson's Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, 'harmonized with Zionism, to which the President is practically committed.'"

Clearly, Wilson had made up his mind on supporting Zionism well before the 1919 Paris Peace Conference debates on Palestine. Reports received by Wilson at the conference from the U.S. Consul in Jerusalem warned him that the "implementation of Zionist goals would lead to bloodshed in the area." Wilson was pressured into sending a commission, known later as the King-Crane Commission, to investigate the situation in the fallen Ottoman Empire. However, Wilson emphasized to the Commission "that the questions of Palestine and Mesopotamia [Iraq] were virtually closed by the powers. The area was under occupation by the victorious British and French, who had their own colonial designs on the strategic area.

The Commission found that the Jewish minority (one-tenth of the population of Palestine in 1919) favored a Jewish national home in Palestine, while the majority Arabs opposed what they called "the usurpation" of their homeland. The latter preferred to be reunited with Greater Syria or to have an independent Palestinian state. The Commission recommended reuniting Palestine with Greater Syria and granting it independence, a demand that emanated from the July 1919 meeting of the democratically elected Syrian National Congress, composed of representatives from Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. The Commission emphasized "that
increasing colonial immigration of Jews from Europe into Palestine would deprive the indigenous people of their right to self-determination and would destabilize the situation in the country and thus endanger Palestinian lives." In any case, the Commission’s report, as with the 1917 Balfour Declaration, was kept secret for several years. The Commission’s recommendations conflicted with French and British intentions and interests in the area as originally embodied in the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement and with the British embrace of the Zionist designs on Palestine.

The World Zionist Organization presented what it considered to be the minimal map of the territorial dimensions of a viable Jewish State to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Water resources were a main concern in drawing the dimensions of this map. It included all of Palestine; South Lebanon up to the city of Sidon (including the Litani River); the headwaters of the Jordan River in Syria and Lebanon, i.e., the Syrian Golan Heights; the Hauran Plain of Syria, including the southern town of Deraa; control over the Hijaz Railway from Deraa to Amman to Ma'an in Jordan; and control over the Gulf of Aqaba, i.e., a large area on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. Various Zionists had other maps, which included the area from the Nile in the West to the Euphrates in the East or, for example, one that included Palestine, Lebanon, and western Syria, including part of Southern Turkey.

The British Mandate: the Interwar Years in Palestine

The San Remo Conference: April 1920

The World War I allies met in San Remo, Italy, to determine the fate of the fallen Ottoman Empire. The British and French were deeply concerned that their plans for the area were falling apart. Sharif Husain’s son, Feisal, was elected by the Syrian National Congress as King of Syria (Greater Syria) in March 1920; and his brother, Abdullah, was nominated to be King of Iraq. Rioting was occurring in Palestine. The region in general was in disarray, especially on the eve of Atatürk’s rebellion to salvage the Ottoman core area of Anatolia, today’s state of Turkey. The conference resulted in the establishment of the Mandate System under the League of Nations (formed in 1920). “At the conclusion of the San Remo conference on April 24, the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire learned that the Great Powers planned to retain dominion over their region through a new device called a mandate.”

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Britain and France justified this arrangement on the basis that the Arabs were not sufficiently prepared to govern themselves without experiencing a period of European guidance. Although it took until 1922 for the mandatory system to develop in Syria and Palestine (formally implemented in Palestine in September 1923) and until 1924 in Iraq, the French and British asserted their authority in the area immediately after San Remo.

The French managed to pressure Feisal out of Syria. He went to Palestine. Ultimately, the British established Feisal as King of Iraq, but under strict British control and authority. They created Trans-Jordan (now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) and placed Abdullah on the throne there. Abdullah was also beholden to the British. Neither monarch was popular, but Abdullah became the most hated for his collusion with the Zionists after the 1948 war, his annexation of the West Bank, and for his attempt to make Palestine geographically and linguistically disappear. He was assassinated by a Palestinian in 1951 in Jerusalem. His son, Talal, succeeded him for a year, but was deposed by Abdullah's old advisors, allegedly because of a mental disorder but more likely for being too much of an Arab nationalist. His son, Hussein, became king at the age of eighteen and continued his and Jordan's dependence on the British (now the United States). Attempts were made to assassinate Jordan's King Hussein for the secret meetings he had with Israeli leaders and his dependence on the United States. He survived, and now his son, King Abdullah II, reigns in Jordan.

The British Mandate Period in Palestine

Although the Mandate was formally issued in September 1923, in effect the British Mandate began in 1920, with the appointment of the first High Commissioner for Palestine, Herbert Samuel, himself Jewish. Palestine was placed under the British Colonial Office, foretelling its further colonization by Jews. During and after World War I, Chaim Weizmann, later to be the first president of Israel, established strong relationships with the British, assuring them always that a Jewish State would be in Britain's best interests in the region. Weizmann was concerned about Samuel's appointment because he did not know if he was one of the liberal British Jews who opposed Zionism. Later he found out that Samuel had written a 1913 memorandum on the subject of a Jewish State in Palestine. Hence, Samuel's appointment (1920–1925) was an important victory for Zionists to initiate the transformation of Palestine.\textsuperscript{18}

Contrary to traditional accounts portraying Samuel as a consummate
British official, he actually used his position to lay the foundations for a Jewish State in Palestine. He was not impartial. Among his many actions and policies are the following:

- He assured a liberal Jewish immigration policy aimed at demographic density.
- He facilitated Jewish land acquisition, including altering the Ottoman "land use" definition of ownership of state lands (lands held by the state in ownership trust for the land users), which were acquired by the British as the Mandate Authority of Palestine. He separated "land use" from "land ownership" so that when Jews acquired some of that land, they could evict the Palestinian "land use" owners and amass territorial and economic footing in Palestine.
- He facilitated contiguous Jewish settlements for political and economic development of the Jewish community.
- He adopted a policy of large public investments and deficit financing to employ the economically unabsorbed Jewish immigrants.
- He developed a favorable customs policy to allow Jews to import needed materials cheaply to develop a Jewish economy.
- He consulted regularly with Chaim Weizmann.
- He worked closely in Palestine with the Zionist Commission, the National Council for Jews, and the Jewish Constituent Assembly (Va’ad Leumi), precursor of the Israeli Knesset. Simultaneously, he blocked every effort by the majority Palestinians to gain authoritative representation, while granting the Zionist minority considerable power. In fact, he gave new Jewish immigrants immediate provisional citizenship so that they would have electoral impact. He tried to create collaborationist Palestinian parties (as other colonial powers have done in their colonies) to divide the Palestinians and provide a façade of Palestinian political participation.29

In the end, the Zionists acquired less than 6 percent of the land of Palestine, with an added 1 percent leased to the Zionists by the British, for a total of less than 7 percent.

Riots, Violence, and Strike in Palestine: The 1936 Peel Commission and the 1937 Partition Plan

Palestinians became increasingly aware of the fact that the Zionists were forging a takeover of Palestine. The Zionists had established proto-state
in institutional structures in Palestine, with paramilitary organizations at the ready. By this time, David Ben-Gurion, leader of the Labor Socialist Party, had become the dominant Zionist figure in Palestine. Ben Gurion was a brilliant strategist and tactician.

Ben-Gurion, and the rest of the left-wing leadership, always looked moderate and reasonable, denying either a conflict with the Arabs or the wish for a Jewish state. This was a brilliant ruse, a great tactical posture, but behind it he knew that the only way to defeat the Palestinians was through military force [a position that has defined Israel's Arab policy of force and more force to bring the Arabs to heel], which he created. While right-wing leaders made fiery speeches about a great Jewish army, Ben-Gurion quietly created it. . . . He [Ben-Gurion] knew very little about socialist theories and did not need to study socialism [the idealized Zionist construction of return to the land, Jewish self-sufficiency, etc., which appealed to European Jews immigrating to Palestine] to achieve his goal, which was the goal of the movement: Jewish sovereignty in Palestine.20

Palestinians kept pressing the British to live up to the 1915–1916 agreement and to the League of Nations' Covenant, Article 22, paragraph 4, which stated:

Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.21

In November 1934, Palestinians approached the British high commissioner about "the formation of a Legislative Council as a first step toward Palestinian self-government envisioned in the mandate."22 In November 1936, the Palestinians submitted a list of demands to the high commissioner that included:

1. The establishment of democratic government in accordance with the Covenant of the League of Nations and Article 2 of the Palestine Mandate.
2. Prohibition of the transfer of Arab lands to Jews.
3. The immediate cessation of Jewish immigration and the formation of a competent committee to determine the absorptive capacity of the country and lay down principles for immigration.23

The Palestinians understood that unrestrained Jewish immigration, combined with Zionist political and military institutional development, was leading to the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish state at their expense. By this time, Palestinians were conscious of the 1917 Balfour Declaration and other secret documents aimed at dispossessing them. Rebelling in 1936, the Palestinians called for a strike, and violent disturbances broke out. The British sent the Peel Commission to investigate the causes of the violence. In its report in July 1937, the Commission concluded that the desire for an independent Palestinian state could not be reconciled with Jewish nationalism and recommended partition of Palestine and the termination of the British Mandate. Ben-Gurion accepted the partition plan as a tactical step toward acquiring all of Palestine. His Zionist detractors criticized him for accepting the idea of a Jewish state in part of Palestine. "Lecturing to Mapai activists on 29 October 1937, Ben-Gurion explained that the realization of the Jewish state would come in two stages: the first, 'the period of building and laying foundations,' would last ten to fifteen years and would be but the prelude to the second stage, 'the period of expansion.'"24 In any case, the plan was never implemented, especially as war loomed on the horizon.

In 1939, George Antonius was part of the Palestinian delegation that went to King James Court to argue for Britain's implementation of the legal commitment made to Sharif Husain in 1915–1916. His 1938 book, The Arab Awakening, provided all of the irrefutable legal evidence, including detailed analysis and maps, of Britain's promises to the Arabs. However, "No matter how Antonius caught the British by the legal and moral tail, Great Britain continued to favor the Zionists, whose legal case was basically nil."25 The Jewish Agency was also invited to the same 1939 conference to search for a solution in lieu of the 1937 Partition Plan, unacceptable to Arabs; and the Zionists were unenthusiastic about it. As a result, the British, growing ever more concerned about war, issued a White Paper aimed at placating both parties. It stipulated that
(1) Britain would continue to rule Palestine for a ten-year period. If the Arabs and Jews were able to work together satisfactorily during this period, they would be given an increasing role in the Palestine government, and Palestine would be established as an independent state within ten years. Otherwise, independence would be postponed. (2) Seventy-five thousand Jewish immigrants would be allowed to enter Palestine over a five-year period. Any immigration after that would be subject to the acquiescence of the Arabs. (3) Stringent restrictions would be placed on land sales to Jews in certain areas and complete prohibition in other areas.

The outbreak of World War II postponed further thinking on Palestine.

Post-World War II Developments

Violence and the Anglo-American Committee Report

At the close of the war, violence resurfaced in Palestine. The Zionists pushed for allowing unrestricted Jewish immigration. The Arabs feared becoming a minority in their own country, even losing their country entirely. Exhausted by war, Britain found it increasingly difficult to control the situation in Palestine.

In October 1945, Britain persuaded U.S. President Harry Truman to undertake a joint study of the Palestine problem. They formed the Anglo-American Committee and submitted their report on May 1, 1946. Their basic recommendations were to issue, for 1946, 100,000 permit entries to Jews to immigrate to Palestine; to call for a binational state in Palestine, with equal representation for Jews and Palestinians; to make Palestine a UN Trust Territory, which would prepare the two communities for independence in a binational state; and to base future immigration to Palestine on mutual agreement. Truman accepted only those parts of the recommendations favorable to Zionists. Britain favored the whole but said that it could not admit 100,000 refugees into Palestine until the Zionist paramilitary groups were disbanded and disarmed. Ben-Gurion rejected the whole report, focusing instead on Jewish statehood. He was not interested in sharing the state with Palestinians, although Jewish intellectuals like Buber and Magnes were.

The Zionist paramilitary organizations, including the Zionist Irgun (headed by Menachem Begin) and Stern Gang terrorist groups, continued their campaign against the British. As Khalidi notes:
The Jewish campaign against the British did not mean that Ben-Gurion considered his relationship with the British to be a "military" one or that he sought an all-out confrontation with them. Quite the contrary, as we are assured by Teveth [Ben-Gurion's biographer], he saw the relationship as an exclusively "political" one. In other words, all Ben-Gurion wanted from Britain at this stage was to clear out the way so that he could pursue his "military" relationship with the Palestinians and the Arab countries. And pursue it he did . . . in a massive program of arms acquisition and military buildup.28

The UNGA Partition Resolution of November 1947

Before the UNGA Resolution 181 calling for the Partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state with Jerusalem as a corpus separatum administered by the UN was acted upon, the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was sent to Palestine. The committee recommended to the General Assembly that the Jewish refugee problem be considered an international responsibility. However, neither the UN as a whole nor the United States responded to this. In fact, the Zionists made every effort to restrict refugee migration to countries other than Palestine, with the intent of increasing demographic density in Palestine.29 While war was still raging, President Roosevelt favored an immigration plan that would open the doors of various countries to European refugees, especially Jews, each country designating a specific number it would be able to absorb. He lined up several. Roosevelt's representative, Morris Ernst, was sent to Great Britain during the war to determine how many the British could take. The British said they would take 150,000 if the United States would take the same. Roosevelt knew the U.S. would be a hard sell given the labor unions' fear of foreign workers; but the plan fell through, in any case. Ernst explained the defeat of the plan as follows:

[T]o me it seemed that the failure of the leading Jewish groups to support with zeal this immigration program may have caused the President not to push forward with it at that time . . . I was amazed and even felt insulted when active Jewish leaders decried, sneered and then attacked me as if I were a traitor . . . I was openly accused of furthering this plan for freer immigration in order to undermine political Zionism . . . I think I know the reason for much of the opposition. There is a deep, genuine, often fanatical emotional vested
interest in putting over the Palestinian movement [i.e., the Zionist project in Palestine].

After all the Zionist efforts to increase population density, Jews formed only one-third of the population in Palestine when the UNGA partition plan was passed on November 29, 1947.

The U.S. had pressured countries that had misgivings about the partition plan to vote for it. The USSR voted for it also, because it saw it as a quick way to get Britain out of the Middle East. The Soviets also hoped that the Communist and Socialist Jews in Palestine would join with Palestinians on the basis of class, overthrow nationalist Zionists, and establish a pro-Soviet country in Palestine. That, of course, did not happen.

The Arab states challenged the legality of the UNGA partition plan and its provisions. Among the requests made by the Arabs were that

the International Court of Justice be asked for its opinion on . . . a) whether or not Palestine was included in the Arab territories that had been promised independence by Britain at the end of World War I; . . . c) whether partition was consistent with the principles of the UN Charter; d) whether its adoption and forcible execution were within the competence or jurisdiction of the UN; and e) whether it lay within the power of any UN member or group of members to implement partition without the consent of the majority of the people living within the country.

The Arab challenge went down to a U.S.-pressured 21-20 vote on a counter challenge that insisted that the UN did have authority to partition. In any case, the Zionists accepted the 1947 partition plan as a tactical move that would lead to establishing a "legal" foothold in Palestine from which to expand into all of Palestine and beyond. Ben-Gurion was on record in the 1942 Biltmore Hotel meeting of the World Zionist Organization as committed to the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish commonwealth, as contrasted to the notion of partition calling for a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. However, by 1946, he reverted to his tactical acceptance of partition. He explained his acceptance to his fellow Zionists as simply a first step toward fulfilling the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish Commonwealth.

"Teveth [Ben-Gurion's biographer] paraphrases Ben-Gurion's thoughts as follows: 'Only those with deep Zionism would appreciate his doctrine of
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gradual implementation of the ideology. The Arabs rejected the partition plan. A few figures will demonstrate just how unfair the partition plan was. Under the plan:

• Jews received 55 percent of the best land in Palestine, while owning less than 7 percent in all of Palestine and less than 11 percent in the allotted area, while Palestinians were allotted 45 percent of their land.

• The proposed Palestinian state would have 818,000 Palestinians, including the 71,000 Palestinians in the seacoast city of Jaffa, surrounded by what would be the Jewish state, and fewer than 10,000 Jews. The Jerusalem corpus separatum would have 105,000 Palestinians and 100,000 Jews. The Jewish state would have about 499,000 Jews and about 438,000 Palestinians.

• Eighty percent of the land in the Jewish state was owned by Palestinians, whereas only 1 percent of the Palestinian land was owned by Jews.

• The best lands were incorporated into the Jewish state where Palestinians had citrus and cereal production areas, their main exports. Moreover, 40 percent of Palestinian industry and the major sources of the country’s electrical supply fell within the envisaged Jewish state.

• The plan also left Palestinians without air access or harbors and port facilities, except for isolated Jaffa.

Mainstream Zionists demanded what they felt was realistic in the 1940s: a Jewish state in the greater part of Palestine, which the partition plan offered. Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi notes that the Zionist acceptance of the partition plan was in essence acceptance of the Zionists’ own demand. He states further, “It is difficult to see why a moral kudos appertains to the party that accepts its own program, and eternal opprobrium attaches to the party that rejects a transaction it perceives to threaten its national existence.” Since that time, Israelis have said continually that had the Palestinians accepted the partition plan, they would have a Palestinian state today. However, given the fact that the 1947 proposed Jewish state had almost an equal number of Palestinians in the area allotted to the Zionists, it would not have been the Jewish state called for in Zionist congresses and literature but a binational state, a concept earlier rejected by Ben-Gurion. Moreover, given our contemporary knowledge of the planned expulsions, massacres, expansion strategy, and efforts today to deny Palestinian statehood on the 1967 Israeli-occupied territories, such pronouncements ring hollow.
The 1948 War

The UNGA 181 (II) was never implemented. In March 1948, the Zionist Plan Dalet (aka Plan D) was finalized. Building on previous plans, Plan Dalet was designed to secure the areas designated as the Jewish state in the partition plan as well as to secure areas beyond those borders. Well before the 1948 war, Palestinians were resisting what they considered to be Zionist colonialism, while Zionists preferred to call it a civil war. On May 14, 1948, the Jewish People’s Council, representing Jews in Palestine and the Zionist Movement, declared the establishment of the state of Israel. They rooted the declaration in that part of UNGA 181 (II) that called for a Jewish state while ignoring the parts that called for an Arab state and the internationalization of Jerusalem. Ben-Gurion resisted initiatives that could have prevented the war that followed the declaration, because he feared they would lead to a Palestinian state as well. “It was only Ben-Gurion’s profound opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state that undermined the Palestinians’ resistance to the Mufti’s call [to launch a war against the Zionist forces].”

War between the Arab armies and the forces of the newly declared Israel ensued. By the time the war ended, Israel had conquered 78 percent of Mandatory Palestine and had expelled or made to flee from the area some 750,000 Palestinians (Israel says fewer; Palestinians say more) of the 900,000 who had originally resided there. Some 150,000 managed to stay within what became Israel. The Palestinian refugees ended up primarily in camps in the remainder of Palestine, i.e., Gaza and the West Bank, and in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Some 400 to 500 villages (depending on whether subsections of larger villages were counted as villages) were demolished and Hebrew names given to the areas. Within what became Israel, a number of those who managed to stay became internal refugees, dispossessed of their lands. The total number of Palestinian refugees today is approximately 5 million, including those displaced in the 1967 war, 3.6 million of whom are registered for aid with the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA). They constitute 62.5 percent of the estimated 8 million Palestinian Arabs.

On December 11, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 194 (III), which has come to be known as the Right of Return resolution, although it also sought to reverse Israeli occupation and transformation of West Jerusalem and to place the whole of Jerusalem under a
UN trusteeship. The resolution established a special legal regime to deal with the refugee problem. First, it called specifically and solely for the return of the refugees to their original homes and properties in what became Israel. Second, compensation should be paid to those not wanting to return but also to those returning "for loss of, or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible." Third, a special UN agency was created, the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), to "facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation." In recognition that the refugees required assistance until such time as 194 (III) could be implemented, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 302 (IV) on December 8, 1949, establishing the UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). This agency was meant to be temporary until the repatriation of refugees was effected.

The UNCCP was unable to get the Israelis to recognize and implement UNGA 194(III) or to reverse its occupation and transformation of West Jerusalem. Israel was admitted to the United Nations in 1949, after agreeing to do both things. It did neither and within months declared West Jerusalem the capital of Israel.

The 1967 War and Its Aftermath: Stage-Two Expansion and the Demographic Dilemma for Israel

On June 5, 1967, Israel initiated a preventive war against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It handily defeated all three within a matter of days, occupying the Egyptian Sinai (returned to Egypt after the 1978 Peace Treaty with Israel), the Syrian Golan Heights (annexed to Israel in 1981), and the remainder of Mandatory Palestine, i.e., Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem (22 percent of Palestine). Israel began to place settlements in—i.e., colonize—the Golan Heights and the Palestinian territories. Unlike 1948, the majority of the Palestinians managed to remain on the land in the newly conquered territories, although there were 300,000 "displaced" persons.

Given the fact that Israel ultimately intended to keep the Occupied Territories, the existence of a large Palestinian population there recreated Israel's original demographic problem. A Whole Land of Israel Movement issued a Manifesto in 1967 affirming that "no government in Israel is entitled to give up [the
conquered territories which Zionists define as part of the whole of Israel, i.e., *Erez Israel* this entirety, which represents the inherent and inalienable right to our people from the beginning of its history.* [Quoted in Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 28-29.] Today, there are 5.2 million Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and over 1 million [the descendants of those 150,000 who managed to stay in Israel in 1948-49] within Israel proper. The Jewish population numbers some 5 million. Hence the ratio is approximately 4 Palestinians to every 5 Israeli Jews in Israel and the Occupied Territories.42

Given the Israeli dilemma of wanting to keep the land but not the Palestinian people residing on it, a debate took place in Israel regarding a solution to this dilemma. The "solutions" ranged from dependent autonomy for the Palestinians in areas of the Territories while Israel retained control over the land and would annex border areas to engineered emigration (read "ethnic cleansing") and *de facto* annexation of the Territories. The former was most often associated with Labor Party leader Yigal Allon and the latter was favored by Ariel Sharon and Yitzhak Shamir. In fact, no real action was taken to formalize a "solution."43 Camp David I produced a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1978, but failed on the Palestinian issue since Prime Minister Begin insisted on the concept of autonomy only for the residents of the Occupied Territories without territorial sovereignty. Refugee Palestinians were not considered at all. Israel continued building settlements in the territories and in Israeli-expanded East Jerusalem (which Israel annexed after the 1967 war), united it with West Jerusalem, and declared the whole the "eternal capital of Israel." Israel integrated the water resources and electric grid of the territories, placing them under Israeli control. More important, Israel embarked on a process of what scholar Sara Roy coined as "de-development," with the intention of precluding the growth of a viable economy in the territories that could undergird a possible Palestinian state.44

During the period from 1967 to the end of the first Gulf War in 1991, Palestinians resisted occupation, while the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), operating outside of Israel and the Occupied Territories, conducted operations against Israel and continued to advocate for Palestinian rights. The PLO ultimately publically agreed to a two-state solution in 1974. It was made explicit when the Palestine National Council (Palestinian policy body)
of the PLO declared a Palestinian state in 1988, rooting its legitimacy in the 1947 partition plan resolution UNGA 181 (II), but to be located in the 1967-Occupied Territories, i.e., 22 percent of Palestine instead of the 45 percent in the partition resolution. As part of that declaration, the PNC/PLO accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242, thereby recognizing Israel in the 78 percent of Palestine it conquered in 1948. There is nothing in UNSC 242 that calls for a Palestinian state, hence the reason for rooting the declaration in UNGA 181 (II). PLO moderation was not embraced by the Israeli government, given that Israel wanted to keep the 1967 Occupied Territories. Nonetheless, the first President Bush insisted that the time was opportune, in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, to "resolve" once and for all the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The "peace process" was initiated in Madrid on October 31, 1991, with UN Security Council Resolution 242 as the sole legal framework. Secretary of State James Baker sent letters of assurance to the peace delegations. It was obvious from reading the letter to the Israelis that the U.S. accepted Israel's claim that UNSC 242 did not call for Israel's full withdrawal from the territories. Moreover, territories were defined by Israel as administered, not occupied, territories. The international community did not accept this definition, but U.S. backing allowed Israel to maintain it. Palestinians were denied representation by the PLO, which represented all Palestinians in the diaspora and under occupation.

The Palestinian delegation was made up of Palestinians in the 1967 Israeli-occupied territories only (where the demographic problem existed) and was made part of the Jordanian delegation. The Madrid process failed because the Palestinian delegation insisted that the negotiations be about removing the Israeli military occupation, as well as the illegal settlements. The Palestinians refused to accept dependent autonomy in the territories with no end result of a viable state. That is when the backdoor channel was opened to PLO head, Yasir Arafat, in Oslo. Arafat, by accepting the Declaration of Principles (which did not guarantee a Palestinian state) and by accepting the Gaza/Jericho first proposal, de facto conceded to Israel the "right" to determine from which, if any, land it would withdraw. Moreover, the terms set for allowing a Palestinian Authority in the territories were clearly defined to give Israel ultimate control and veto power over the Authority and its institutions. The Israeli intent was to rid themselves of responsibility for the occupied Palestinians (the demographic problem) but to keep control over the land and resources. Once the Palestinian Authority
was established in the territories, the PLO, representing all Palestinians, declined in its ability to advocate for the rights of all Palestinians, including the diaspora refugees. Arafat remained as head of the PLO, but in effect the PLO was "collapsed" into the Authority.

The Oslo process led to worsened conditions for the Palestinians. Israelis worked diligently to assure that a "solution" would not lead to a viable Palestinian state or to any loss of control of the territories by Israel. The symbols of sovereignty—for example, passport issuance, stamps, etc.—were allowed, but only within the context of dependent autonomy. It is not necessary here to review the stages of the disintegration of Oslo; Sara Roy's excellent "Oslo Autopsy" covers this well.

Under the present [July 2004] Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Israel is pursuing the preferred Sharon "solution" of progressive engineered emigration by imprisoning Palestinians behind an apartheid wall aimed at producing conditions that will induce Palestinians to leave over time, Jordan being the obvious destination. The Likud always maintained that "Jordan is Palestine," in any case. Sharon has destroyed Palestinian infrastructure and institutions in the Territories and has crippled Palestinian security forces. In his effort, he has managed to apply the label of terrorism to the Palestinians, in place of legitimate Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and colonialism and to do it under the American umbrella of the "war on terrorism." The recent endorsement of Sharon's plans by President Bush and the U.S. House of Representatives gives full public clarity to what has been the implicit American position. Hence the "road map" for peace and the unofficial "Geneva Initiative" (which were but slight variations of Oslo) join Oslo on the junk heap of failed proposals. They do so because they did not call for the removal of the occupation and the recognition of the inalienable rights of the refugees and also because their terms implicitly sought to reward Israeli colonialism by allowing for more annexation of prime land in the West Bank in exchange for land unequal in quality.

All peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians have foundered on two issues: the establishment of a viable Palestinian state (a collective right) and on Palestinian refugees' right of return to their homes and properties in what became Israel after 1948 (Palestinian individual right).

Statehood represents the collective right of Palestinians to self-determination as embodied in a number of United Nations General Assembly Resolutions: 181 (II) (1947); 2787 (1971); 2955 (XXVIII) (1972); and 3236
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(XXIX) (1974), as well as the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Statehood in no way vitiates the individual right of refugees to return to their homes and properties in post-1948 Israel.

In all the "peace" negotiations and initiatives, Israel sought to limit the Palestinian collective right to a non-contiguous area in the West Bank and Gaza controlled by Israel politically and economically. Israel further sought to fold Palestinian refugees' individual rights into the collective right allegedly "offered" by Israel during the Oslo process. That is, Israel attempted to get Palestinian leadership to sign on to a Bantustan "statelet," to close the file on refugee claims by accepting to absorb refugees into the "statelet," and to agree to minimal repatriation (basically non-child-bearing refugees) to be granted as an Israeli humanitarian gesture. Given Sharon's policies and the apartheid wall, a two-state solution is no longer possible. The United States has failed to be an honest broker in this conflict. Neither has it supported the establishment of a viable Palestinian state nor has it encouraged Israel to accept legal responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugees and all that the latter entails under the relevant UN resolutions, international refugee conventions, and international humanitarian laws. Having expelled the majority of the refugees in 1948 to transform the demographics and having conquered all of the land by June 1967, Israel has aggressively fought refugee return and sharing the land of Palestine with Palestinians. In fact, Professor Benny Morris, whose scholarship revealed in detail the extent of Zionist use of terror to expel Palestinians, bemoans the fact that Ben-Gurion did not complete the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the 1948 war. 69

In the end, however, Israel cannot go on forever using force to deny Palestinians their rights and to destroy their lives in order to maintain a Jewish state. Such an effort has already taken a high moral toll on Israeli society and on Palestinian lives and society. Sharing the land within a political formula that guarantees the collective national and cultural rights of both peoples is the ultimate answer for a durable peace.

Conclusion

Clearly, the political Zionists drew on the rich mythical symbolism of the alleged ancient Israel, which they combined with a new forceful Jewish identity, in order to promote their goals in Palestine and have them appear as legitimate and inevitable. The majority of the Israelis, however, are
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secular. In order not to expose the contradiction, the Zionists never produced a constitution in which an identity would usually be proclaimed. Nonetheless, a number of settler movements, such as Gush Emunim, preach a biblical fundamentalism that claims Palestine as ancient Israel. They are vocal, but a minority, nonetheless. Palestinians have basically been secular in their social and political life. However, with the continuous Israeli effort to destroy Palestinian secular resistance, both armed and nonviolent, the Islamist resistance movement, which can reach people through religious institutions, has grown. This movement has unfortunately been welcomed by Sharon's government because it provides the opportunity to lump Hamas and Islamic jihad with the fringe "Islamic" terror networks operating across borders. The misguided and immoral use of suicide bombers in the name of a distorted Islam has been particularly repulsive, even though such martyrs are considered by some as one of the remaining means to resist Israeli aggression and occupation. The use of terror tactics against civilians, as contrasted with state or cross-border terrorism, has unfortunately been part and parcel of earlier anticolonial movements of resistance. Think, for example, of the Algerian resistance to the French or the Mau Mau resistance to the British in Kenya. One must ask what level of desperation is experienced to produce this form of resistance.

Thus, on the one hand, there is a small group claiming ownership of Palestine through mythological biblical prophecy and a growing minority that invokes jihad through martyrdom to resist the occupation of Palestine. Hamas has proposed long-term ceasefire agreements to Israel, only to be rebuffed by Sharon's government and to have its spiritual and political leadership assassinated.

In spite of the religious veneer, however, the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is a political conflict over land. The Zionists succeeded up to a point in transforming Palestine demographically and territorially into a Jewish state in control of all of Palestine. The Palestinians have resisted their dispossession and dispersal and seek to exercise their national collective and individual rights in their indigenous homeland in Palestine. The majority of the Palestinians still on the land and in the diaspora are willing to share Palestine with Israeli Jews on an equal basis but not to be excluded from their homeland to accommodate an exclusive Jewish state. Law and morality argue for a just solution.
Endnotes

2. Ibid., 14.
4. Ibid., 47.
6. Ibid., 72. See also Ze’ev Herzog, “The Holy Land, Archaeology, and the Bible: Deconstructing the Walls of Jericho,” Haaretz (Friday, 29 October 1999).
11. Ibid., 35.
12. Ibid., 36.
13. Ibid., 41.
15. All of the proposed maps were assembled from Zionist sources and put out in collected form by The Arab Women’s Information Committee in their publication, “From the Nile to the Euphrates,” in The Facts about the Palestine Problem
23. Ibid., 238.
27. For a good discussion of this period, see ibid., 16-42.
30. Ibid., 492-93.
32. Ibid., 17.
34. Ibid., 16.
40. Ibid., 18-20.
45. Tomeh, ed., United Nations Resolutions, 143. UNSC 242 was unusual in the sense that it did not refer back to extant resolutions on the conflict.
46. See the Special Document File on "The Madrid Peace Conference," in Journal of Palestine Studies 21/2 (Winter 1992): 117-49. The letter to Israel appears on p. 120. Two key commitments made by Baker were these: "The U.S. will not support the creation of an independent Palestinian state" [and] "Israel holds its own interpretation of Security Council Resolution 242, alongside other interpretations."
48. Sara Roy, "Why Peace Failed—An Oslo Autopsy," in Current History 100/651 (8 January 2002); reprinted in Tobin, ed., How Long, O Lord?, 11-28. Countering Barak's claims of a "generous offer" and that "there is no Palestinian partner for peace" are the following important articles: Robert Malley and Hussein Agha, "Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors," in The New York Review of Books 48/13 (9 August 2001) and Uri Avnery, "Irreversible Mental Damage," in Palestine Chronicle (22 June 2004), available online at www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=5760&sectionID=22. In it Avnery notes, "This is the culmination of a process that began with the return of the then Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, from the 2000 Camp David summit. After the failure of that meeting, he coined the mantra that has since become the cornerstone of the policy of successive Israeli governments: 'I have turned every stone on the way to peace/ I have offered the Palestinians more generous proposals than any of my predecessors/ The Palestinians have rejected all my offers/ Arafat wants to throw us into the sea/ We have no partner for peace.' This mantra is based on a series of lies that have been exploded long ago. American eye-witnesses like Robert Malley, President Clinton's advisor at Camp David, as well as some of the Israeli participants and international researchers have published detailed reports that prove that Barak himself was responsible for the failure at least as much as Arafat—in fact, far more."

Reflections of a Recovered Christian Zionist

BARRY E. BRYANT

It is probably not a good thing to begin an article like this with an autobiographical confession. But here it is anyway. I used to be a Dispensationalist. I realize now that being one also made me a Christian Zionist. Neither is the case any longer. The journey from there to here has led me from reading Hal Lindsey to meeting Yasar Arafat with a group from the Sabeel Center as a witness to nonviolence. The outcome of this journey is that I can no longer accept Christian Zionism as a theological option, any more than I can accept acts of terrorism as one. For whatever it may be worth, this is the story that hopefully gives some of the reasons why Wesleyans and Methodists should reject Christian Zionism. In the course of telling the story, I offer a critique of Christian Zionism and why it is such an obstacle to Middle East peace.

Left Behind

For anyone growing up in the Holiness tradition in the South in the 1970s, it was hard to avoid Dispensationalism. The theological orientation began innocently enough. It started with listening to preachers telling Revelation horror stories about the “False Prophet,” the “Antichrist,” and the “mark of the Beast.” We were held spellbound and told about the seven-year Tribulation, the four riders of the Apocalypse and their horses, along with the Seven Seals. Worse yet, we were told about how all this would contribute to the torture and death of those who would be left behind after God “raptured” the church. We never batted an eye when we were told Christians would be snatched shirtless right on into heaven. This was “Dispensationalism 101.” It was the Bible. He was a preacher. It had to be true.

Of course, proclaiming the “last days” has been a part of preaching the gospel since the Apostle Peter’s sermon at Pentecost. Evangelists have been using the parousia as a scythe for harvesting souls since the days of Paul. But since D.L. Moody, preachers have used Christ’s return to make
people feel like sinners in the hands of an angry, apocalyptic God. It was a type of evangelism intended to scare hell out of and Jesus into a person. The “good news” was, all we had to do in order to escape both hell and all the horrors of being left behind was to give our hearts to Jesus. And I did.

It happened during a youth camp in the middle of a humid, mosquito-infested North Carolina summer, after a series of sermons on the “end times” preached by someone brought in like a gospel gunslinger with the sole aim of seeing us saved. With sweat beading and veins bulging, he asked us all what would happen if the church got raptured there and then. Would we be ready? Would Jesus be able to snatch us to heaven? What would we do if we woke up one morning to find our families and friends gone, taken by Jesus into heaven as the church got raptured and we got left behind?

At the end of the sermon, a quartet of my friends sang a Larry Norman song, “I Wish We’d All Been Ready.” It described what it would be like to be left behind. There would be sword, famine, pestilence, disease, war, and bread worth its weight in gold. To the altar I went, with dozens of others who were probably just as determined as I was not to be left behind. When I made that decision, I did not intend on becoming a Christian Zionist. That was the next step.

Scofield, Darby, and Dispensationalism

That autumn I went to a Bible study on the “end times” and was told I needed a Scofield Reference Bible to learn how to read the Bible properly. I bought one, because I wanted to be able to peer into the biblical “crystal ball” of prophecy and see the future with my own eyes. Scofield’s Bible is largely how Dispensationalism crept like kudzu across the theological landscape of the twentieth century. Its contribution to spreading Dispensationalism throughout America cannot be overestimated. First published in 1909, his Bible established Scofield as the exegete par excellence of Dispensationalism. But if Scofield was Dispensationalism’s exegete, then J.N. Darby was its theologian. Scofield’s work was an attempt to popularize to an American audience the work of J.N. Darby, who has been credited as being the founder of Dispensationalism.

Darby was ordained in 1825 in the Church of Ireland and eventually became the leader of the “exclusive” Plymouth Brethren movement. Noted for his early indefatigable work trying to “evangelize” the Catholics, Darby was convinced of at least three things. First, Catholics are not truly
Christians and needed to be converted to the "true" faith. Second, when his best efforts to reform the church failed, a frustrated Darby concluded that it was too corrupt for God to be able to work through it. Third, Darby was convinced that God had personally revealed to him the divine plans for the future—an apocalyptic way of seeing things that he would share with the world as Dispensationalism. Generally, Dispensationalism is an elaborate, detailed, and convoluted theology, put together piecemeal by some rather creative theological minds. At the risk of oversimplification, it can be reduced to five key points.

First, the Bible is to be taken literally, especially where prophecy is concerned. Without this point, the entire system threatens to collapse. For this reason, Dispensationalism shares with Fundamentalism the belief in biblical literalism. But the two movements are not to be confused. Not all Fundamentalists are Dispensationalists, but all Dispensationalists are pretty much Fundamentalists. Both groups share an aversion to any of the disciplines of biblical criticism. There is no need to try to get to the original meaning of a passage. Because of the literalism, anyone with the help of a good concordance is able to "rightly divide the word of truth," as Scofield put it.

Divide is the operative word there. For the most part, Dispensationalists use a "cut-and-paste" method of proof-texting rather than careful sociolinguistic contextual analysis and exegesis of a passage. It amounts to biblical vivisection, which results in more disastrous consequences than most of the higher critical methods used by scholars. The goal of most biblical criticism is exegesis. The general outcome of Dispensationalists' "rightly dividing the word of truth" is eisegesis.

Furthermore, there was also a strong emphasis on one's private interpretation of Scripture. Nineteenth-century technology meant that for the first time in history the Bible could realistically become the private, personal property of everyone in the United States. The Bible could easily be placed into any open hand that wanted to hold one. The American ideal of democracy meant that when the Bible did fall into hands as personal property, one person's individual reading and opinion was just as authoritative as any other's. This inadvertently led to the privatization of Scripture and undermining the need for scholarship.

The result was a blatant disregard for the history of the interpretation of the Bible. For Dispensationalists, the past would not be much help in
understanding Scripture since a great deal of prophecy was left obscure and misunderstood until now, in order to prepare us for the end times. Bible readers from the past did not have the key to unlock the end-time prophetic mysteries. Darby did; and now we do.

Second, there are two eternal covenants established by God, one for Israel and one for the church. The old covenant is not replaced by the new—Israel always has been and always will be God’s “chosen people.” God’s covenant with Abraham to bless him and grant him land is unconditional and irrevocable. Consequently, both covenants exist side by side in the eternal scheme of things. It is God’s desire that the Jewish people return to the land and occupy Jerusalem as the undivided capital. One of the objectives is to rebuild the Temple so that ritual sacrifice may resume. This distinction made between the church and Israel on the basis of covenant is Darby’s biggest contribution to Christian Zionism.

Third, according to Scofield, these covenants are worked out through seven dispensations of history: Innocence (Gen. 1:28); Conscience (Gen. 3:7); Human Government (Gen. 8:15); Promise (Gen. 12:1); Law (Exod. 19:3); Church (Acts 2:1); and Kingdom (Rev. 20:4). Each dispensation represents something of a theological progress that results in Israel replacing the church before the triumphant return of Christ. A bit more will be said about this below.

Fourth, there will be a secret rapture of the church. Based on a reading of 1 Thess. 4:16-17, the Rapture may occur before, during, or after the seven-year Tribulation, depending on how one “literally” interprets prophecy. In the Rapture, Christ will come quickly and quietly for the church, “like a thief in the night.” Then Christ will come again later in glory with a trumpet blast, accompanied by the church. The only question typically left for discussion is whether this return comes before or after the millennial reign of Christ on earth. Nearly all Dispensationalists hold to a premillennial view of the second coming of Christ.

Finally, after the church has been raptured, it will be replaced by Israel to face the Tribulation. It was this “replacement” theology that stirred the most controversy, even in Darby’s day. The concept did a good job in dividing the Plymouth Brethren. To Darby, because the church was corrupt and beyond salvaging, it was part of just another dispensation to be overturned later. In fact, his was a rather pessimistic theology that taught that the only thing Christians could expect would be to watch evil grow continually.
It is for this reason that Dispensationalists for a long time showed little concern for social or political issues. What was the point? It was a kind of fatalism in which God was seen as having preordained things to get only worse. This fatalism changed only when Israel eventually was established as a nation-state. Then Dispensationalists got involved with social and political issues that would directly aid Israel. In the end, this mindset subverts any sense of justice. Injustice becomes an accepted norm in a deteriorating universe and in a world where Israel must be supported at all, even unjust, costs.

Darby and Scofield created a Dispensationalist way of reading the Bible—a hermeneutic, if you will. While this hermeneutic had been a Dispensationalist tool in evangelism, it would become a weapon in Christian Zionism. All that remained was to read Hal Lindsey in order to learn a method of how to read the newspaper prophetically, with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

Christian Zionism

It was not long before someone put a copy of Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* in my hand. I read it with great amusement, enthusiasm, and vigor. At each Bible study, I joined in the endless and obsessive speculation about Gog and Magog of Ezek. 38.2, when Russia would invade Israel, or who the Antichrist might be. The only hint as to who that might be could be found in the mathematical conundrum known as the “mark of the Beast.” With the right alphabet (English was preferred, of course; but Hebrew and Greek could also be used) and the right amount of algebra, 666 could be tweaked enough so that the Beast could be almost anyone. The theories covered everyone from John F. Kennedy to the Pope and often reflected a pronounced anti-Catholic sentiment. (Perhaps this accounts for the disregard of Christian communities on the West Bank now. They are nearly all Roman Catholic or Orthodox.)

The speculation increased over time. There was speculation as to what the Beast’s “mark” might look like. Suggestions ranged from tattoos to bar codes, even Social Security number cards. We speculated when the Rapture might occur and tried to imagine the chaos created by sidewalks full of empty clothes, careening cars, and crashing planes. Living in the middle of the Cold War, with its constant threat of nuclear holocaust, we speculated about Armageddon a lot and about how God would use “weapons of mass
reflection of a recovered christian zionist

destruction" to bring sinners to their knees before the Prince of Peace. More recently, Lindsey has speculated that, according to Rev. 16:13-14, blood will flow horse-bridle deep for two-hundred miles, from the Sea of Galilee to Eilat. Another Dispensationalist, Timothy Dailey, disagrees slightly with Lindsey. Dailey speculates that the passage actually describes Tel Aviv being destroyed by Syrian-fired nuclear warheads. To a generation who had been taught to hide under desks in the event of nuclear attack, the Rapture sounded like a good deal and an easy escape. Thank God we would not have to suffer all that. We would not be left behind.

Two events served as watershed moments for Dispensationalism. The first was the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. From that point on, "biblical Israel" was synonymous with "political Israel." This event has been seen as the final fulfillment of God's unconditional covenant with Abraham in Gen. 12:3 to give him the land. According to Dispensationalist theology, the Jews had to return to the Promised Land and the nation of Israel had to come into existence before Christ could return. Based on Christ's apocalyptic discourse in Matt. 24:1-15, Luke 21:5-36, and Mark 13:1-37, this event started the countdown to Christ's return. It remains a popular belief that the generation that witnessed the founding of the State of Israel would not pass before Christ returns. I was taught that if we wanted Jesus to return, all Bible-believing Christians had to assist the Jews in getting, keeping, and defending the Promised Land. This led to the conviction that Zionism was essential to the Christian faith. Zionism and the State of Israel were inexorably bound to the Second Coming of Christ. Furthermore, if we really wanted Jesus to return, then Israel had to occupy all the territories of the Holy Land. To desire otherwise would be anti-Semitic, even unchristian.

The second watershed moment is the Six Day War in 1967. The preemptive invasion by Israel of Palestinian territories clearly demonstrated to the Dispensationalist observer that the Holy Land had to be defended against Satan and the "evil empires" of Communism (and now, since the fall of Communism, Islam) at all costs, even war. For many this was the reason for America's "manifest destiny." It is the job of Americans to protect Israel. Many have argued that God's words to Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you," is why America has been blessed so much. We have blessed Israel and God has blessed us.

The ironic thing is that most mainline denominations agreed with the international objections to the occupation of the Gaza strip and the West
An example of how this came about for United Methodists can be seen in Rhonda McCarty's article in this issue. Yet, in spite of resolution after resolution by the United Nations, Dispensationalists saw it as their divine calling and purpose to offer enthusiastic and unqualified support for Israel. They still support the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories.

All of these things are what make Dispensationalists more Zionist and more militant than many Jews. It should be obvious that not all Zionists are Jews. Histories of the Zionist movement have even suggested that Christians were Zionists before Jews were. Before Moses Hess, Leo Pinsker, and Asher Ginsberg—even before Theodor Herzl—and their vision of a Zionist state, there were Darby and Scofield, among others. But what might not be as easy to see at this point is that not all Jews are Zionists. There always has been a significant (and now growing) number of Jews who do not agree with the principles of Zionism. There have been many Jews who have opposed Zionism on political and religious grounds. This indicates quite clearly that it is possible to be anti-Zionist without being anti-Semitic.

Because of all this, I was taught that Palestinians were the enemies of Israel and, consequently, the enemies of God. I was never told how the Palestinians were dispossessed of their land, or that Israel would have never come into existence without the aid of Western colonialism. I was never told that there is an ancient and significant Christian community on the West Bank, which does not understand American Christianity's support of the government that oppresses it. Gaza and the West Bank were seen as obstacles to Israel's occupying all the land promised to them, and the communities there—even the Christian communities—have been seen as expendable. The Six Day War and Israel's invasion of those territories were entirely justified. It would be Bible-believing Dispensationalist Christians and Israel against the evil of the world (that is, until the church got raptured and the Jews were left behind to face the wrath of the Antichrist alone. When they did they would either be converted to Christianity or killed by the Antichrist).

By now it is perhaps easy to see the attraction of this theology. No matter how bad things get, there is the assurance that God is in control. All the end-time suffering is necessary and painful preparation for the return of Christ. On the other hand, there was a comfort that the born-again Christian would not be left behind to suffer the worst of the suffering anyway. Furthermore, there was the sense of having the power of "inside
knowledge, of being able to see and understand the future and even current events in a way that the world could not. All of this adds up to a sense of empowerment that enticed a major group of Christians to get off the sidelines of history and into the game. It enabled them to use their hands to help shape history, instead of wringing them over its direction. Dispensationalists could now assist Jesus in his triumphant return.

An Exodus from Christian Zionism

There is no lack of theological reasons for rejecting Christian Zionism. But it was because I was introduced to Wesleyan theology that my exodus from Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism began. I gradually learned what it means to be a Methodist in theology. During the process of my Dispensationalist rehab, this "Wesleyanization" demonstrated quite simply that it is not possible to be a Wesleyan and a Dispensationalist at the same time. It was either Darby, Scofield, and Lindsey or Wesley and the theologians who follow in the Wesleyan and Methodist tradition.

There are lots of reasons for making such a choice. Ironically, none of them could be based on Wesley's own eschatology. To be honest, that is one of the most confusing and muddled doctrines in Wesley's writings. It is difficult even to know where Wesley stands on the millennium. Eschatology was one of those things about which Wesley felt he had to say something because it is referred to in the Bible. But his attention was more focused on here and now—on the issues of evangelism and reaching out to the poor. Consequently, he did not give much attention or thought to the "last things." He had little to say about such matters, and what he did say he largely borrowed from Johann Albrecht Bengel, the German Lutheran theologian and Bible scholar. It is more what Wesley had to say about the use of Scripture, grace, covenant, and the image of God that dismantled the five pillars of Dispensationalism for me.

At the same time, one does not have to be a Wesleyan to critique and reject Christian Zionism. There have been several theologians who have offered strong and valid reasons for rejecting Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism. But I do think that there cannot be two theologies more incompatible than Dispensationalism and Wesleyan theology. I cite just a few reasons.

The first is the understanding and role of Scripture. Dispensational rehab begins with a change in attitude toward Scripture. Dispensationalists
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insist on biblical literalism, except for the parts that are critical of wealth and the parts about the rich going through the eye of camel. Neither are the prophetic calls to justice and mercy taken very literally. When it comes to these topics, there seems to be a sudden fondness for the symbolic and metaphorical or a preference for ignoring them all together. All this suggests something of a canon within the canon for Dispensationalists. There seems to be a preference of Ezekiel over Amos and Revelation over the Sermon on the Mount. It is the eschatological over the ethical.

Regardless of what one makes of the so-called Wesleyan “quadrilateral,” the theological method set forth in the United Methodist Book of Discipline suggests a use of tradition (along with reason and experience) when Scripture is read.11 The typical Dispensationalist reading of Scripture totally disregards the traditions relating to a passage or the history of its interpretation and exegesis. The voices of suffering from the past are muted as they try to speak to the church of today. For example, when read in its historical context, the Book of Revelation is about the integrity of Christian worship in the face of an oppressive empire. The cries of the saints around the throne of God become cries for justice in the face of wickedness and oppression. Theirs are cries in the face of the evils of empire. One thing that tradition does is to keep us listening to voices in the past.

Beyond the use of tradition one could also turn to Wesley’s understanding of “searching the Scriptures.” This consisted of reading, meditating on, and hearing God’s word. It recognizes the value of reading and meditating on the Bible and its devotional use in a Christian’s life. But “hearing” the Bible is a way of bringing our reading and meditation back within the community. Hearing means that one person is reading and another is listening. Hearing and reading are acts of community. Thus, Bible study is not complete until this communal event occurs. It is a reminder that personal pronouns regarding the Bible must be used carefully. We should not speak of “my” Bible as much as we speak of “our” Bible. It is as much the Palestinian’s Bible as it is the American’s. We simply cannot afford to read it without them. In fact, we need to hear the Palestinians read to us from the Bible more often. One thing that searching the Scriptures does is that it keeps us listening to voices in the present.

When Scripture is heard in this way, a different way of looking at the prophets emerges. Dispensationalist thought sees prophecy as gazing into a fixed future sealed by the covenants of God. The meaning of most
prophecy has been kept obscured until the end time. Now we have been given the key to unlock the true meaning of prophecy. Finally, thanks to Darby's insights, we can foretell the future by "rightly dividing the word of truth." There is a significant Gnostic element here that should make a student of church history more than a bit nervous. The reliance upon "secret knowledge" renders the voice and experience of the early persecuted church useless. Dispensationalism ultimately turns the prophets into a version of "Gnostic gospel." The end result is virtually the same as it was for Gnosticism in the early church: a cosmic dualism of good and evil and of us versus them.

This use of prophecy does more to silence the genuine prophetic voice than anything else. It has often been pointed out that prophecy is not "foretelling" the future as much as it is "forth-telling" the Word of God. Prophecy is "truth-telling." The ironic thing about a Christian Zionist hermeneutic where prophecy is concerned is that it ends up oppressing the very ones whom the word of prophecy is intended to liberate.

There is one more element to this "Wesleyanization" that makes holding any Dispensationalist thought impossible, namely, the doctrine of grace. After reading the literature of Dispensationalism, one gets the sense that grace and goodness are for the elect only. There is simply no sense of God's universal, all-encompassing love and prevenient grace. The whole Dispensationalist idea of election and covenant suggests that only the elect have grace. Everyone else is left out in the apocalyptic cold and become dispensable creatures in order to bring about God's ultimate eschatological purposes. To use an argument that Wesley used against the Calvinists of his day, this makes God the author of evil. Moreover, history is nothing more than a prearranged puppet show. Consequently, Dispensationalist thought paints creation in dualistic ways of good and ever-increasing evil.

Because of this understanding of grace there is a lack of acknowledgment of the image of God in all persons. Every person has been created in the image of God. The sacred worth and divine character of each person is ignored when others are seen as the evil enemy. Dispensations adumbrate grace and covenant overshadows the image of God. Rather than viewed as a universal human right rooted in the theological concept of the image of God, justice is something for the elect, gained at the expense of others.

Dispensationalism is not a use of the Bible but an abuse of it. It is not a doctrine of working out God's eschatological purposes through grace and
justice but the perversion of these purposes. Once the pillars of Dispensationalism are destroyed, the house tumbles. And once the Dispensationalist house has collapsed, what possible reasons could there be for supporting Christian Zionism? They surely cannot be biblical, so they must be political. Once Christian Zionism becomes a political issue, it must be weighed in the scales of prophetic justice and the ethic of the kingdom of God that Jesus sought to establish. When weighed on those scales, it will be found lacking, for it has become a tool in oppressing the poor.

I abandoned the Dispensationalist point of view and joined the ranks of the theologically "enlightened" and thus the rehabilitation of my eschatology began. Admittedly, I have laughed and scoffed at their notions. I saw it as cartoon theology, caricatures of covenant theology filtered through creative and apocalyptic minds, misguided and misinformed as they were. It was just bad eschatology. But since then, Hal Lindsey has written nineteen more books and (depending on who is doing the counting) has sold somewhere between 15 and 20 million copies of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the sacred text of Dispensationalists. Since then, Jenkins and LaHaye have sold in excess of 50 million copies of books in the *Left Behind* series, Pat Robertson, Jack Van Impe, John Hagee, and the like have started broadcasting their messages globally; Christian Zionists have been extremely active in lobbying Congress for support of Israel and a great deal of American foreign policy has been developed with Zionism in mind. Since then, we have seen American foreign policy influenced by conservative Christian Zionists and Palestinians denied their basic human rights. Dispensationalism is clearly no longer a marginal, obscure theology. It has become a significant part of American culture, a huge influence on American foreign policy, and an alarming opponent to peace in the Middle East.

There was a time when Dispensationalist thought seemed to be nothing more than a theological gadget in an evangelist's bag of tools. But it has become much more than that. At the heart of Dispensationalism, and constituting its theological lynchpin, is Christian Zionism.

I rather suspect that there are lots of people sitting in Methodist pews who have a story similar to mine. They bought into Dispensationalism because of the eschatological intrigue. During their migration to Methodism they may have brought Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism with them. There are perhaps others who have been lured into the mindset as a result of the "*Left Behind*" phenomenon. But many have taken their seats in a
Methodist pew without going through Dispensationalist rehab. It needs to be said that not all Christian Zionists are Dispensationalists. Many of the laity may discover Methodist clergy who are Christian Zionists without the Dispensationalist eschatology. They are often Christian Zionists for what they perceive as political reasons. It is difficult to voice support for the Palestinians without being accused of anti-Semitism. Consequently, Christian Zionism needs to be approached from two perspectives. First, one must dismantle the Dispensationalist theology and replace it with a biblically sound eschatology. Second, one must approach Christian Zionism as an issue not of eschatology but of peace and justice. To recast Christian Zionism as a peace-and-justice issue is not to be anti-Semitic. It is not to deny Israel its right to exist. It is to say that Palestinians have been created in the image of God and should be treated as such.

What I have come slowly to realize over the years is that there is a perversity to the logic of Dispensationalism. Mind you, it is one thing to use end-time scenarios to scare kids into coming to Jesus during summer youth camp. It is quite another thing to use the same theology to deny an entire group of people their basic human rights. It is one thing to long for the return of Christ and another to argue that in order for the Prince of Peace to return we must experience Armageddon, the mother of all wars. It is one thing to say Israel has the right to exist. It is quite another thing to say that in order for Israel to exist Palestinians must be denied their right to exist. It is one thing to speculate about the parousia and another thing entirely to say that, as a consequence, millions of Dispensationalist Christians should feel no motive or incentive for peace in the Middle East. After all, according to the logic of Dispensationalism, peace postpones the return of Jesus. Moreover, the one group that seems to be the strongest ally to Israel holds a theology that maintains all Jews will either convert to Christianity or be killed by the Antichrist. Thus, while appearing to be pro-Israel on this side of the Rapture, Christian Zionism amounts to apocalyptic anti-Semitism.

Whether we believe that the Dispensationalist interpretation of prophecy will be fulfilled is no longer the point. Rather, the point is that Dispensationalism now has the power to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is no longer a laughing matter—mere cartoon theology—but a frightening apocalyptic vision taken seriously by millions of Christians around the world.

But there is a just and biblical alternative to all this. It is called the kingdom of God.
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Endnotes

1. For more about the Sabeel Center, see http://www.sabeel.org. For a statement from the conference, see http://www.sabeel.org/documents/5thConfStatementfinal.htm.
8. For a good online list of Jews in support of Palestine, see http://www.muhabjab.com/palestine.php?page=8#jews.
10. Timothy P. Weber, On the Road to Armageddon (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 15. Weber makes this point in what is a good but largely uncritical historical summary of how the movement empowered itself.
United Methodists and the Israeli-Palestinian Situation

RHONDA McCARTY

As I was preparing to write this article in late spring of 2004, I was part of an interesting email exchange between a United Methodist layperson and a Peace with Justice coordinator in Texas. The Peace with Justice coordinator had forwarded an email from United Methodist missionaries in Bethlehem to her email list. The response, which was copied to all of the original recipients, was an overtly hostile objection to the missionaries' letter. Specifically, the person objecting insisted that emails of this nature should not be distributed "in the name of The United Methodist Church." After rereading the original piece, I could find nothing that ran counter to the official position of the church. It recognized the rights of both Israelis and Palestinians to exist. It blamed both terrorism and militarism. It offered specific details about the human rights violations in Israel and Palestine. It offered specific suggestions about how to help that were consistent with the calls to action found in United Methodist resolutions.¹

I decided to respond to this man. I found that he had been raised in The United Methodist Church, was quite active, and, in fact, had his own copy of the 2000 Book of Resolutions. We agreed that only the General Conference has the authority to speak officially for The United Methodist Church. Yet he was completely unaware that the Conference had indeed spoken for quite some time on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. After taking the time to read the pertinent resolutions, he apologized to all involved, agreeing that the United Methodist Peace with Justice coordinator and the United Methodist missionaries had all acted appropriately and consistently in terms of the General Conference resolutions. He expressed sincere gratitude for the information.

I couldn't help but feel that United Methodists, particularly those of us who are committed to educating about this issue, had failed this man, and who knows how many others like him. It is one thing when a United Methodist has heard an argument for the church's position on an issue and...
disagrees. It is quite another when there is no awareness of it at all and therefore no opportunity even to consider how he or she may wish to respond.

My purpose in this article is twofold. First, I provide a critical analysis and interpretation of the resolutions and the parts of the Social Principles that apply to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Middle East peace. Second, I examine how the official position of the church in respect to this conflict might help United Methodists deal with issues of peace and justice. The above anecdote and countless similar episodes expose a huge gap between the existence of denominational resolutions and the understanding, attitudes, and actions of United Methodist clergy and laity. If we are truly to determine how United Methodists deal with these issues, we must look beyond the General Conference, the boards and agencies, and the episcopacy and into our annual conferences and the pulpits and pews of our local churches. Is it really enough simply to have Social Principles and resolutions? If they are of sound rationale, consistent with Christian theology and United Methodist doctrine, worthy of being supported by our General Conference delegates, bishops, and missionaries, then, at the very least, every United Methodist should have the opportunity to hear these positions and evaluate them for themselves. If this is not happening, then we need to find out why and determine how to overcome whatever barriers exist.

The Social Principles

The Social Principles are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.

As United Methodists, we do not dictate social principles to our membership. Rather, the "prayerful and thoughtful effort" of those who wrote them are submitted to us to consider, refine, and apply through "prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice." The inherent genius of this process—to be instructive and persuasive in the prophetic spirit—can happen only if some effort is applied toward instruction and persuasion.

In dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian issue, as with others, we rely some-
what on the teaching role of the episcopacy. While bishops are not allowed to vote at General Conference, they are responsible for transmitting doctrine to the broader church. While not authoritative in themselves, episcopal statements, when measured against General Conference decisions, may be determined to be consistent with the authoritative teachings of the church.\textsuperscript{3}

Several pertinent statements have been made both by individual bishops and by the Council of Bishops. Outgoing Council President William Oden led the Council to a bold statement in 2001 after participating in a delegation of U.S. church leaders to Palestine in December 2000. The document reiterated the resolutions of the 2000 General Conference and cited ¶164 of the Social Principles as its base.\textsuperscript{4} It applied those teachings to what the delegation had witnessed in the Occupied Territories. It then called upon the United States and the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to take action consistent with that teaching. Perhaps even more important was a call to all United Methodists to become educated and to work toward deeper understanding of the issues.\textsuperscript{5}

The Resolutions

In regard to the issue of Middle East peace, the Social Principles offer a sound framework for the more specific resolutions. Those who petition the General Conference for resolutions on peace and justice issues are doing so with the presumption that the church's attitudes and actions are to be based on the Social Principles.

Resolutions on peace and the Middle East first appeared in the 1968 Book of Resolutions. In the same year that the church addressed U.S. policy in Vietnam, racial equality, the cause of Christian unity, the urban crisis, anti-Semitism, and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolence, it also took on peace and the Middle East. The petition on The United Methodist Church and Peace focused on the unique role of the church "as an instrument of peace." The petition recognized that "no nation is ultimately sovereign," that indiscriminate use of weapons could not be morally justified, that self-determination was a reasonable expectation of all peoples, and that the United Nations was an institution worthy of the church's support. It also condemned war as a means of solving international disputes.\textsuperscript{6} Given the historical context, each one of these statements could be applied directly to our response to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip following the 1967 war, but Israel and Palestine
were not named specifically. The resolution was approved. Thus the foundation was laid for specific resolutions to follow.

The petition for a resolution on "the Middle East" was not approved that year but was included in the *Book of Resolutions* as a study document. It begins by objecting to what remains the crux of this conflict to today.

We cannot condone either threatened aggression or territorial expansion by armed force. We believe that boundaries of the states of the Middle East should now be determined by negotiations with a concern for justice, security, and the future peace of the area and the integrity of these boundaries should be assured by international protection.7

It recognized the reality of the State of Israel but called for a just solution for the Palestinian refugees caused by the creation of the state. It suggested several possible means, one of which was to return the refugees to their homes inside Israel. The Board of Missions was encouraged to seek out ways in which United Methodists could give and serve. Dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims was proposed in a belief that the mutual concerns of the faithful would lead to reconciliation.8

By 1972, the suggestion for dialogue had gained enough support to be approved as a separate resolution, but with one glaring omission: Muslims were not mentioned. The resolution, entitled "Dialogue between Jews and Christians," expressed our gratitude for our Jewish heritage, referring ambiguously to "the heritage and hope of an Israel in the context of which Jesus labored." Christians were reminded of our "implicit and explicit responsibility for the ... organized extermination of Jews ...."9

That same year, 1972, a petition was also submitted entitled "Israeli-Palestinian Struggle." It began with a reassertion that Jewish/Christian/Muslim dialogue was necessary for moving toward peace in the Middle East. The petition affirmed that some measure of justice for Palestinian refugees was essential. However, the petition was heavy with guilt-laden sentiment that, due to the Holocaust, we cannot begin to fathom the need that Israelis feel for security. The only action requested, therefore, was for all United Methodists to try to understand the conflict and work toward a solution utilizing nonmilitary means, which would allow Muslims, Christians, and Jews to coexist in the Holy Land.10 The resolution was not adopted but included as a study document.
The shift in the petitions during this four-year period is disturbing. United Methodists began by talking about dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims and about specific problems with Israel’s continuing occupation of Palestinian territory. Within four years, we managed to exclude Muslims from the dialogue and dilute the treatment of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle to an expression of sympathy for refugees and Holocaust survivors. Compassion is without a doubt a necessary component of the church’s response to situations of injustice. But sympathy, and more importantly, guilt are counterproductive. Professor and Rabbi Marc Ellis, director of the Center for American and Jewish Studies at Baylor University, believes that Jews and Christians have made a horrible mistake in letting guilt over the Holocaust adversely affect dialogue on a real and meaningful level. Holocaust guilt, which allows Christians to be silent about the injustice currently being done to the Palestinians, he says, is denigrating and patronizing to Jews.

Four years and another war later, a substantial resolution on the Middle East was finally adopted. The 1976 resolution was poignant in that it linked security to justice and peace to meeting the needs of both the Israelis and the Palestinians. It was sensitive to the insecurity of Israeli Jews as well as to the dispossession of the Palestinian people. It was balanced in that it called for self-determination and human rights for both Israelis and Palestinians. It was specific in that it named violations of international law, such as Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territory. The actions for which the resolution called remain critical for United Methodists even today:

1. Promote educational programs at all levels aimed at helping Christians understand the intricacies of the problem . . . increased contact with and among Christians, Muslims, and Jews from the Middle East . . . and participation in ecumenical networks.

2. Organize action programs at the national, conference, and local levels to oppose the continuing flow of arms from all sources to the Middle East.

3. Encourage governmental officials to seek an overall solution rather than accept a partial settlement which is likely to magnify the tensions, increase the isolation of the dispossessed, and set states against one another.

4. In line with the precedent established by the United Nations Security Council . . . urge governments to seek participation of both the Palestine Liberation Organization . . . and the State of Israel in all future negotiations.
With this firm foundation laid, the resolutions pertaining to peace and justice in the Middle East have shown increasing insight, foresight, strength, and detail in each subsequent quadrennium. Those who drafted the 1980 petition were obviously knowledgeable about the complexities of the Middle East peace process in its broad context and were already showing concern for how the conflicts and treaties with the surrounding Arab countries would affect the dispossessed of Palestine. The 1984 resolution includes the call to “resist simplistic theologies” vis-à-vis the Jewish people. This particular area still needs development, for at the same time as we are told to resist simplistic theology, we are also told implicitly that peace-and-justice issues involving this specific ethnic/religious group require a unique theological framework, compared to similar issues involving the rest of the world.

The 1988 resolution, entitled “The Current Arab-Israeli Crisis,” offered the strongest direct challenge by The United Methodist Church to Israeli military policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians. For the first time, the church actually calls upon the Israeli government to “stop beatings, to end the killings, to cease destroying Palestinian homes, to stop deporting Palestinians, to enter into negotiations with Palestinian civilians and the Palestine Liberation Organization over their legitimate demands, including the fair and just distribution of disputed lands.” However, it also called upon Palestinians and the PLO to “recognize the State of Israel with secure and recognized borders, and to enter into negotiations leading toward self-determination of all persons in the territories under military occupation, and to cease the support and initiation of all terrorist activities.” The resolution specifically asks the U.S. government to oppose the establishment of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories and to withhold financial support to Israel contingent upon its cessation of oppressive policies against the Palestinians.

The most important addition to the relevant resolutions in 1992 was an expanded petition on an issue formerly mentioned only briefly, namely, Holy Land Tours. United Methodists participating in trips to the Holy Land were spending virtually no time with the indigenous Christians of the area. Instead, they were herded to and from holy sites by Israeli tour guides, who would often tell them not to speak to Palestinians and to be especially careful for their safety and property in, for example, Bethlehem, whose population was mostly Christian. Understandably, people on those
tours were missing an exceptional opportunity to learn firsthand the issues of peace and justice from a unique Christian perspective. Many of them left not knowing that Palestinian Christians even existed.

This resolution specifically urged United Methodists to work through our liaison in Jerusalem to arrange to spend a portion of their time in direct encounter with their brothers and sisters there. United Methodists like Bonnie Jones Gehweiler and Bob and Peggy Hannum, the United Methodist liaisons in Jerusalem at the time, were already involved in such encounter tours. With the support of United Methodists under Bonnie’s guidance, one of the earliest tour operations in the West Bank, Alternative Tourism Group (ATG), was established. ATG offered Palestinian Christians in Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem, the opportunity to introduce American and European Christians not only to the land but also to their Palestinian Christian heritage. For most people who had this opportunity, the level of understanding and the conviction to work toward peace and justice increased dramatically. Alternative tours are not only invaluable in the education of American Christians but are also a form of direct aid to the oppressed Palestinian population by providing revenue from tourism, fostering relationships with American Christians, and gaining hope and encouragement from those relationships.

The 1996 General Conference offered three new resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, one regarding the settlements, one for economic assistance to the beleaguered Palestinians, and one for diplomatic intervention for Rev. Alex Awad, who had been commissioned by the General Board of Global Ministries to work in Jerusalem but who was denied a visa by the Israeli government. Perhaps more significant was the introduction in that year of a resolution on “the Middle East and North Africa.” While space here does not allow detailed analysis of the resolution, it shows that our lens was becoming wider geographically and our concern was growing for such global issues as sustainable development, human rights, and peace and justice, all of which were included in this resolution.

The resolutions in 2000 offered nothing new in terms of the Middle East per se. The issue of interreligious dialogue was reexamined via three different resolutions: “Building New Bridges in Hope,” which affirmed our special relationship with the Jews; “Called to Be Neighbors and Witnesses,” which dealt with interreligious relations and dialogue in general terms; and the very brief “Prejudice against Muslims and Arabs in the U.S.A.”
In 2004, four of the existing resolutions pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were due to expire. The issues were combined into one comprehensive resolution. The resulting petitions were extremely precise in naming the specific conditions of injustice and calls to action. Two very similar petitions actually went to committee with the recognition that both would not be approved. One, entitled "Just and Lasting Peace in Palestine/Israel," was submitted by the General Board of Global Ministries. The other, "A Just Peace in the Middle East," came from the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) and its Middle East Network. General Conference ultimately adopted the latter resolution. The MFSA petition, actually an edited version of the Global Ministries petition, was probably felt to be stronger in that it holds both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority accountable for the ongoing violence. The Palestinian Authority is urged to condemn all acts of terrorism against Israeli civilians and to engage in nonviolent means of resistance. MFSA was determined that the resolution not appear to support one party to the detriment of the other but rather to call for human rights for all involved.

The MFSA petition also reiterated former calls for United Methodist congregations to become more informed about the situation and to establish relationships with other faith communities, working together for peace and justice in the Holy Land. This is a critical component, as without communication and education, the resolutions would be nothing more than reference material. Both petitions agreed that an end to the occupation (a return to the 1967 borders) and the implementation of all United Nations resolutions vis-à-vis Israel were absolutely essential to any resolution of the situation.

Delegates were invited to attend a session prior to voting in which they had the opportunity to hear Rev. Sandra Olewine, United Methodist missionary in Bethlehem; Jeff Halper, director of the Israeli Committee against House Demolition; and Salim Shawamreh, a Palestinian Peace Activist. This team was ideally suited for demonstrating to United Methodists what the key issues are and for moving the church toward an appropriate response. They were able to speak not only to what the official position should be but also to the practical ways in which it might be implemented. With the generous financial and political support of the Minnesota Annual Conference, the Israeli Committee against House Demolition had, in the previous year, been able to rebuild Salim Shawamreh's home for the fifth...
time after its being demolished by the Israeli government. This time it was opened as a peace center. Not only did the Minnesotan United Methodists give financially but they also launched a massive lobbying campaign when the home was being threatened again. Calls to Congress and eventually to Secretary of State Colin Powell stopped the destruction of the Shawamreh home for the time being. Known as "the Palestine Israel Justice Project," it is an ongoing excellent model of how the church's position translates into practical ways of dealing with issues of peace and justice.50

This is by no means the only example of appropriate response. In keeping with the resolutions, the General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries continue to work with ecumenical coalitions in a variety of ways. Soon after the 2004 General Conference, General Board of Church and Society General Secretary Jim Winkler participated in a National Council of Churches' delegation that met with UN Secretary General Kofi Anan and also had an interfaith leadership meeting with Secretary of State Colin Powell. The latter group, members of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Middle East Peace, made up of Muslims, Christians, and Jews, is lobbying for the United States to resume heavy involvement in brokering Israeli-Palestinian peace. While the State Department's position at this meeting implicated Palestinian violence as the reason for breakdown of the peace process, Winkler, consistent with the position of the General Conference, stressed the importance of simultaneous actions of both Palestinians and Israelis.21

The General Board of Church and Society also coordinates a network of grassroots peace-and-justice activists throughout The United Methodist Church. Annual conferences are not consistent in their appointment and utilization of Peace with Justice coordinators, educators, and advocates. However, in annual conferences where the position has the support of the bishop and other leadership, local churches benefit from the efforts of Peace with Justice coordinators in working not only on global peace-and-justice issues but also on local projects such as Shalom Zones and in education related to the Social Principles and the resolutions as well.

A handful of annual conferences with active Peace with Justice coordinators did take advantage of the 2004 General Conference resolutions as an opportunity for education. Steve Hodges, Peace with Justice coordinator for the Holston Conference, conducted a workshop at their annual conference linked to the Social Principles and resolutions. Rev. Bruce Case in
Alaska held a discussion forum on the issue. The primary tools used were the Book of Resolutions and the Social Principles, along with an article by the General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society. The Northern Illinois Conference has formed a task force that is extremely active in bringing guest speakers from Israel and Palestine, distributing copies of the resolutions and bishops' statements, as well as continually looking for creative ways to increase understanding about the issue. Texas Peace with Justice coordinators Brenda Hardt and Nelda Reid are tireless in their efforts to educate through a variety of means, such as sharing pertinent news and information via email and newsletters, participating in community peace organizations, hosting Palestinian and Israeli guest speakers, and arranging interfaith groups of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women. These simple steps could be taken in any local church by any concerned member, clergy or lay.

Unfortunately, these examples are limited. Many United Methodists are still surprised to hear that the church has a stance on this issue. When asked what is being done in their annual conferences or local congregations to facilitate general discussion of the Social Principles and the resolutions, disseminate information about the sociopolitical situation in Israel and Palestine, or the church's response to the issue, many people are unaware of anything's being done.

Toward a Practical Understanding

There is undoubtedly a gap between the church’s official positions on social issues and the understanding that prevails "on the ground." The former is primarily the domain of the General Conference, the organizations that influence and implement the decisions of the General Conference, and the episcopacy. The domain of the latter, however, includes educational institutions, pastors, and laity.

As clearly and soundly based as the United Methodist Social Principles and resolutions are, at times their dissemination slows to a trickle. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this sometimes seems to be deliberate. In almost every congregation, there are those who will try to silence any position that runs counter to unequivocal and unquestioning support for Israel. On the other hand, there are those in leadership positions who are unable or unwilling to share this message with their congregations. It is not unusual for United Methodist pastors to admit that they are unfamiliar
with the theological, doctrinal, and/or historical-political material necessary to address this issue with confidence. Therefore, it is either discussed reluctantly and faintly or simply avoided.

It is also not uncommon to hear United Methodist clergy share theological, doctrinal, and/or historical-political material that is inconsistent with the United Methodist understanding of the issue as reflected in the denomination’s Social Principles and resolutions. Lacking knowledge of theological, doctrinal, and/or historical-political material can be damaging to churchwide practical understanding, interfaith relationships, and peace-making. A pastor who tries to cover the issue with sound theological and doctrinal positions but lacks complete and accurate information about the issue cannot possibly defend the position of the resolutions. To be sure, the Israeli-Palestinian situation is complex and controversial. Yet United Methodist pastors are called upon to deal with many other complex and controversial issues. So, when a pastor is asked about the United Methodist understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he or she should be able to answer that question fully, regardless of his or her own opinion about it.

Theological Education

One way to bridge the gap between the church’s official positions and practical understanding in the churches is through theological education and continuing education. It is not at all clear whether the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is being addressed in any consistent way in seminary and divinity school curricula. Courses can be found on world religions, various aspects of Islam, holy war, and interfaith dialogue; but there is little to suggest that the current geopolitical conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in its historical context, much less the appropriate response of the church, is a regular part of theological curricula. It would seem that the issue and the United Methodist understanding of it are being discussed incidentally more often than intentionally. Our seminaries could greatly impact consistent handling of the issue by giving clergy the confidence they need to address the issue from a sound theological base and good working knowledge of the church’s response to the current situation.

Our goal as United Methodists should be to make the entire denomination fully conversant with the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Our seminaries and divinity schools represent a long-term strategy. In the interim, we can employ two ways to bridge the gap between official pronouncements and
church practice. The "top-down" approach relies on changing the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of the clergy in such a way that the resolutions have "pulpit support." Laity involved in global ministry and peace with justice issues often complain that without pulpit support, they are constantly working against the current. Church members do take note of the issues their pastors consider worthy of support and those they choose to ignore. When discussion of a social issue is relegated to the last page of the newsletter and goes unacknowledged by the pastoral staff, the message is clearly different than when their support is front and center.

Until United Methodist clergy are willing and well-equipped, committed laity can build a bridge from the "bottom up." Those who are involved in issues not overtly supported by their pastor can sometimes muster a grassroots movement within a congregation, which in time may influence pastoral leadership or at least survive the lack of pastoral support. It has been my experience that pastors are thankful to have a canary to send into the mine. Many are surprised at the level of support for the church's official position among their members. Others are just relieved that someone else is willing to take on the issue. As the senior pastor of a large United Methodist church in Texas once said to me, "All pastors are thankful for the prophets in their churches, even if they don't want to be seen with them in public." In spite of their best attempts to avoid the controversy surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian issue, at some point pastors will have to face it. Ultimately, the clergy must be educated.

The opening paragraphs of this article were not intended as an indictment of those who simply have never heard the United Methodist position. To some degree it is an indictment, but of church leaders who do not know the official positions of the church. At the end of the day, the greatest responsibility rests with those of us who do know, believe, and act consistently with the church's position to work to increase the level of understanding of those who do not. The existence of resolutions, agency heads meeting with government officials, and bishops' statements are all steps in the right direction and helpful tools. But in and of themselves they do not create understanding among the clergy and laity that is substantial enough to help the church as a whole deal with issues of peace and justice in today's world.

The goal is to impact knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. The sincere hope is that with the right knowledge, changes in attitude and behavior
The change we seek in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at a minimum “prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.” The knowledge that will provide the foundation for such change includes complete and accurate information about the current crisis; complete and accurate discussion of the historical context; a sound theological framework for discussing peace and justice, both in general terms and more specifically vis-à-vis the nation-state of Israel; and an understanding of the Social Principles and resolutions in terms of content and rationale.

Beyond the lack of knowledge about the historical context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the current factual information about the ongoing geopolitical conflict, the rationale for the United Methodist position, and the theological confusion about the meaning of God’s covenantal relationship with Israel, there are several pragmatic factors that cause United Methodist leadership to resist educating appropriately about this issue. When attitudinal and behavioral change does not follow knowledge, we have to assume that barriers other than ignorance are in the way. What might those be?

Ideological dissent on the part of the pastor is one obstacle. Even after being exposed to the appropriate information, he or she may disagree on theological or political grounds. Fear of fiscal or political repercussions from one of several sources, such as theologically or politically ultra-conservative church members or interfaith contacts in the community is another possible reason for withholding this teaching. Many pastors hesitate to get involved in “political issues,” thus choosing to avoid any issue that might polarize the congregation. One pastor was accused of violating the separation of church and state for mentioning the Israeli-Palestinian issue in an election year.

Complacency is often a factor. It is simply easier not to address the issue. It takes a tremendous amount of background knowledge, theological confidence, and diplomacy to be able to present the issue well. Genuine sensitivity to the feelings of others is an important factor. However, when leaders are inadequately prepared to deal with this issue, their well-intended sensitivity to the feelings of others, such as Jewish colleagues or families of those serving in the military, may take precedence over the pursuit of peace and justice.

Perhaps the most common reason why United Methodists avoid any discussion of the issue is the fear of being considered anti-Semitic. After
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years of trying to repair the breach between the Christian and Jewish communities, we are now faced with an issue that is sure to challenge the level of trust that has been built. Any indication that our Jewish colleagues are sensitive to this issue instantly quells dialogue for fear that we will lose the ability to communicate altogether. Any public display of support for Palestinian rights often leads to an accusation of being anti-Semitic. The very people who are most likely to be sensitive to universal human rights will go to great lengths to avoid being perceived as anti-Semitic. Thus, as a silencing strategy, it is very effective.

Beyond the accusation of anti-Semitism, there is frequently the accusation of partiality, of taking sides. The irony of this is obvious to those who have seen firsthand the tremendous asymmetry of power between Israel and Palestine. A review of United Methodist resolutions indicates that they are actually quite deliberate in trying to provide as much balance as possible. However, justice requires restoring balance, not applying balance. As Stephen Charles Mott puts it, “The task of justice to which the Bible calls us, as exemplified by the prophets, is to restore the marginal . . . Biblical justice accordingly has a bias toward the weak.”

David Wildman, executive secretary of Human Rights and Racial Justice for the General Board of Global Ministries, helped draft the petition for the 2004 resolution. Wildman was concerned that the MFSA petition’s stipulation that we study the conflict “from all perspectives” might actually weaken efforts for justice and peace for all in Palestine and Israel. He explains, “We should never forget where we as a church stand when it comes to doing justice. This resolution clearly states that as The United Methodist Church we stand against military occupation. So while we might include a pro-occupation perspective (Israeli government, settlers, AIPAC) we would still be clear that we oppose occupation and will work actively with all seeking to end the occupation through nonviolent resistance.”

 Whereas the Social Principles and the resolutions of The United Methodist Church are of sound rationale, are consistent with Christian theology and United Methodist doctrine, and are worthy of the support of our delegates to General Conference, our bishops and our missionaries, I pray that in our efforts at disciple-making and peacemaking, we’ll find a way to scatter that seed broadly.
Rhonda McCarty frequently travels to Israel-Palestine, seeking a practical understanding of the conflict. A former Peace with Justice coordinator for the Northwest Texas Conference, she lives in Germantown, Tennessee.

Endnotes
4. Paragraph 164 covers "basic freedoms and human rights." Other pertinent sections are Section V, "The Political Community," and Section VI, "The World Community."
7. Ibid., 81-82.
8. Ibid., 82-83.
10. Ibid., 105-06.
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23. American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, the third-largest political lobby in the U.S.
The Conflict over Palestine:
A Palestinian Christian Response

NAIM ATEEK

At its inception, the religious implication of the conflict over Palestine was not directly conspicuous. In fact, for many years, no religious dimension was clearly discernible by the major players—Jews and Palestinians. It took over seventy years before the religious factors became politically dominant. In order to understand the background, one needs to be aware of three different and separate stories. Chronologically, the first is the story of Western Christian Zionists, followed by the Western Jewish Zionists and, finally, the story of the Palestinians.

Christian Zionists
The Protestant Reformation gave a new spiritual zeal to Europe in the sixteenth century. This was enhanced by the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. The monopoly of the church's hierarchy to interpret the Bible was broken. The Bible became available to the common people and Christian charismatic leaders began to offer various interpretations of the text. With exciting and wonderful teachings also came some diverse and, at times, deviant ideas. The deeper biblical insights enriched the church and contributed to the spiritual maturity of many Christians. At the same time, literalist and exclusive readings of the text led to theological and behavioral aberrations.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, it became clear that one of the topics occupying the minds of Protestant and evangelical Christians in both Britain and the United States was the Second Coming of Christ. Some Christians began to calculate the end of the world and predict specific dates for the Second Coming. By relating and associating verses together from the Old and New Testaments, these Christians deduced elaborate systems regarding the end of the world. In these schemes, the Jewish people were perceived as playing an essential role in the divine scenarios of the end. Before Christ can come back, Jews must return to Palestine.
"their" promised land, and establish their own state. John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) produced an elaborate biblical scheme that outlined seven dispensations, beginning with creation and ending with the final consummation of history. ¹ Similarly, Lord Shaftesbury (1801–1885) concluded from his study of the Bible that Jews must return to Palestine, and in the 1840s he was lobbying the British government for their return. ² In 1891, William Blackstone lobbied President Harrison in the United States to send Jews back to Palestine. ³ These Christians were interpreting the Bible with a definite theological mindset that led to different brands of millenarianism. ⁴ They were interested not in the welfare of the Jewish people but in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy as they interpreted it. The point that needs to be emphasized is that long before the Zionist Movement was established, some Western Christians were embarking on their independent study of the Scriptures and formulating their own theology of the end of history in which Jews had a central role to play.

Jewish Zionists

Totally unaware of what some Protestant and free-church Christians were scheming, the Jewish community in Europe was facing some serious challenges toward the latter part of the nineteenth century. Pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe caused many Jews to emigrate from those countries to the western part of Europe and even to the United States. The malaise of anti-Semitism was deep and pervasive among many Europeans. At the same time, Europe was expanding through its colonial ventures. Colonialism still enjoyed a positive aspect. It was perceived as exporting European culture and civilization to the "backward" people of the world.

Due to growing anti-Semitism, some European Jewish leaders concluded that it is difficult for Jews to live a fully European life among Christians who harbored anti-Jewish feelings. As a result of this analysis the Zionist Movement came into being in 1897, calling for the establishment of a Jewish state where Jews can live free of Christian bias. The early Jewish Zionists were secular and atheist and their project did not involve religion. In fact, the major religious Jewish denominations at the time condemned the Zionist Movement and considered it heretical. For them, it was only the Messiah that could gather in Jews from the Diaspora to Palestine. And as long as the Messiah has not come, any human attempt to accomplish that must be rejected.
For over seventy years, the Zionist Movement was dominated and controlled by its more secular and socialist leaders. Religion was exploited to achieve Zionist ends, but it never constituted its core. It was through the power, genius, intrigues, and manipulation of secular Zionism that the State of Israel was established in 1948 on the ashes of Palestine. The tragedy of the Holocaust and its aftermath of guilt feelings contributed much, especially among Western Christians, by ensuring a good measure of sympathy and support for the Israeli state.

It was only after the 1967 war that the Jewish religious element in the conflict began to crystallize. Most Jews perceived Israel's victory over the neighboring Arab states as miraculous. The successful outcome of the war was the last evidence needed to convince many religious Jews that God had been active through Zionism to bring about Israel's redemption. The settler movement got under way with great religious vigor in the early 1970s. In the 1977 national election, the right-wing Likud party, with strong religious leanings, won. Religious Zionism was on its way to becoming the strongest and most dominant expression of Zionism. It is important to note that Likud's ascent to power marked the beginning of closer ties between right-wing Jews and the American Christian Right. Since 9/11, they have entered into even closer alliances and, together with the neo-conservatives in Washington, have been influencing American foreign policy in the Middle East.

The Palestinians

The story of the Palestinians also has its own unique dimensions. As Europe was going through the period of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the Middle East was passing through its dormant period. Palestine, as well as all the Arab countries, came under Ottoman Turkish rule in 1517, which ended 400 years later at the close of World War I. At the end of the nineteenth century and approximately at the same time as the Zionist Movement came into being in Europe and started agitating for a Jewish state in Palestine, the Arabs in the Middle East, including Palestine, were agitating for independence from Turkish rule.

During World War I, the British government needed the Arabs to revolt against the Turkish Empire and in exchange pledged them their independence. Similarly, the Jewish Zionists were successful in 1917 in extracting a pledge from the British through the Balfour Declaration that promised
them a Jewish home in Palestine. At the end of the war, Palestine had a population of over 600,000, where Jews numbered fewer than 60,000.

The State of Israel came into being in 1948 on 78 percent of Palestinian land instead of the 54 percent allotted by the United Nations. In 1967, Israel occupied the rest of Palestine—the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. The first Palestinian intifada erupted at the end of 1987 with the hope of ending the illegal Israeli occupation and of establishing a Palestinian state on the basis of a two-state solution. Most Palestinians were willing to settle for a small state on the Gaza Strip and West Bank including East Jerusalem as its capital.

At the height of the intifada, Hamas came into being with ostensible backing of the Israeli authorities. Its slogans were clearly religious. The religious Jewish and Christian Zionist clichés were met with clearly Islamic clichés. Against the slogan that Jerusalem is Jewish, Hamas and other Islamic organizations lifted the slogan "Jerusalem is Islamic." The religious-political language became the lingua franca in the streets. From then on, the whole conflict was cast in a religious frame. Many Palestinian Christians felt marginalized due to the religious emphasis. The unity between Muslims and Christians had been exemplary ever since the inception of the conflict. The struggle over Palestine was primarily political, calling for the independence of Palestine for all its citizens. Regrettably, the religious sentiment had taken over in a narrow and discriminatory way.

At the same time, some people felt that it was in the interest of the Israeli government to present the conflict as a religious one between Jews and Muslims. When perceived as a struggle between Jews and Muslims, Israel was sure that most Western Christians would stand on its side.

This brief background shows that, except for Christian Zionists, who started from a religious basis, generally the major interlocutors in the conflict started from a more political ideology in which religious factors were not primary.

Resources for Helping Christians Cope with the Conflict

Long before the religious component of the conflict became politically dominant, Palestinian Christians had resources of faith to help them analyze and interpret the conflict and provide them with comfort and strength. Obviously, like other communities, the Palestinian community includes believers as well as secular people and religious skeptics.
It is important to clarify that it is natural for believers to respond to different challenges through the resources of their faith, whether the challenge was religiously motivated or not. By and large, Palestinian Christians perceived the conflict in its origin as mainly political and not religious. Although they drew on the resources of their faith for comfort and strength, they were looking for political solutions. They wanted the implementation of international law and United Nations resolutions so that they could regain their rights on the basis of the execution of justice. Even when the religious factor in the conflict became predominant, Palestinian Christians maintained their emphasis on international legitimacy as a basis for solving the conflict. Furthermore, although many religious Jews and Muslims started emphasizing the legitimacy of their cause by basing it on religious grounds, Palestinian Christians continued to insist on international legitimacy. At the same time, Christians, through a Palestinian theology of liberation, articulated a religious and theological answer against all those who dragged religion into the conflict. In this section, I am restricting my comments to those Palestinians who responded to the conflict from a position of faith. Five main resources have been tapped.

The first and most natural resource for people of faith is prayer. In the aftermath of the 1948 war and the forced displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and the destruction of over 500 villages and towns, the tragedy was deep and painful. It was natural for believers to turn to God in prayer. This is usually expressed in cries and sighs similar to those found in the psalms. On the one hand, Palestinian Christians were affirming their faith in a God of justice and truth. On the other hand, they were lamenting the intensity and extensiveness of evil and were crying for the end of the occupation and injustice. This is the most popular level of response by the poor and oppressed. It is expressed through intimate prayer to God. In Palestine, it could be addressed to God or Christ or the Virgin Mary or to one of the saints. It is one of the deepest and most sincere ways of supplication when the anguished human spirit turns to the divine and lifts up a prayer seeking help and comfort. Prayer might not help the believers to analyze what is happening. However, it can help them to continue their trust and hope in the love and protection of God. Even if they feel miserable and, at times, abandoned, prayer gives them strength and preserves the flicker of hope.

A second resource that has always been present among Palestinian
Christians is a simple perception of God as a God of justice and truth. The Christian community in Palestine is largely Orthodox and Catholic and the Bible has not always been widely available. Generally speaking, however, there has always been a simple and intuitive perception of God, based on childhood exposure to the faith, whether through occasional church attendance, assimilating popular religious tradition, or through the mundane exchange of ideas and discussions among ordinary folk. Christians know that Christianity is a religion based on love and that at the center of their faith is a crucified Christ. Jesus did not wage battles as Muhammad or Moses. He lived and taught the way of peace and nonviolence. Many Christians have memorized verses of Scripture that reflect the irenic spirit of the Christian faith, such as "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God" (Matt. 5:9). They know that Jesus presented a loving and caring picture of God, who treats everyone justly and fairly. Even if Christians do not always act on these beliefs, they know that these are intrinsic to their faith. In times of challenge, Christians usually fall back on these beliefs and express them in their discussion with one another in spite of the skepticism and ridicule of some. For believers, this kind of faith is an important bulwark. They must continue to cling to their faith in God, who will ultimately vindicate their cause.

A third resource is the local community of faith. This has been a very important resource because it can provide analysis of the situation, an opportunity for discussion and feedback, care and fellowship, as well as worship and prayer. This can involve the local priests and their interpretation of events. Faith communities can provide strength and comfort by offering places where people can share their pain with others who also are clinging to faith in the midst of tragic experiences. It is the community of faith at worship where the Mass or the Eucharist is an important source of consolation and strength. The sharing of stories has been very significant throughout. Stories have been very important in comforting and strengthening fellow believers and encouraging them to put their trust and hope in God. It is in communities of faith that denominational boundaries are transcended as Christians share their mutual joys and sorrows and their faith and hope in God and stand together in the midst of common political adversities.

A fourth resource is the wider international community of faith. Over the years, especially since the first intifada in the late 1980s, friends from abroad have been coming to visit, expressing their solidarity with the
Palestinian community in general and the Christian community in particu­lar. Some people come on fact-finding missions; others come to stand with their friends in their pain and oppression. These friends believe in the justice of the Palestinian cause, and they use their voice and pen to keep educating and advocating for a just peace. Such encounters create important opportunities for analyzing and interpreting the situation and for articulating ideas for response.

A very important extension of this is the number of Jews both inside and outside the country who have become increasingly engaged in advocacy against the Israeli occupation. They have discovered the fallacy of the Zionist project and its oppressive policies against the Palestinians. Through their writings and activism, they champion for justice, truth, and peace.

A fifth resource is the Bible. Yet it has been a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it is an important tool to be used to advocate for peacemaking. On the other hand, many Jews and Western Christians have used Scripture to support Israel's side. It is important, therefore, to focus on biblical interpretation and help Christians discover the deeper message of the Scriptures and encourage them to become active in their work for justice and peace.

Before doing that, it might be beneficial to consider how religion was taught to Palestinians in Christian schools before the creation of the State of Israel. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see today that so much of the teaching was based on false and unacceptable interpretation of the Bible. In their religious teaching, expatriate Christian missionaries, clergy and lay, Catholic and Protestant, who were working in church institutions in Palestine had a considerable influence on Palestinian Christianity. Whether intended or not, they were inculcating Christian Zionist interpretations of the Bible to young Palestinian minds. Basically, they were teaching that, according to the Bible, God has given the country of Palestine to Jews and they must return to it and reestablish their kingdom. Since such teachings were undoubtedly disturbing and offensive to Palestinians, the missionaries instilled in them the importance of accepting God's will and enduring the pain and tragedy, because "God knows what is best for us." As the Bible was presented and taught in a literal fashion, the spiritual and psychological impact was significant. Moreover, the virtue of being resigned to God's mysterious providence was hammered into them. Undoubtedly, this was troubling and unsettling to many Palestinians, young and old, especially in the twentieth century, when they were witnessing the arrival into Palestine
of tens of thousands of Jews, legally and illegally, to boost the Jewish population. Furthermore, the violent clashes between the indigenous Palestinian population and the incoming Zionists were escalating. The Palestinians became increasingly aware of the Zionist project for the acquisition of Palestine and were fighting to prevent it.

In light of this background, it is plausible to conclude that many Palestinian Christians found little meaning in the religious teaching they were receiving. It is no wonder that some turned away from God and religion because they perceived God as unfair and unjust. Others lived in a spiritual docility that refused to question the unfathomable wisdom of God. At the core of their being, the accumulated body of beliefs that they were given through their religious studies did not provide them with hope in the political struggle over Palestine. Basically, they were taught that God was not on the side of the Palestinians.

It was left to the advent of Palestinian Liberation Theology (PLT) to shatter this atrociously false theology, expose its falacious biblical interpretation and exegesis, and call attention to the spiritual, theological, and political injuries it had caused to many Arab Christians, including Palestinians. It was only then that deeper meanings of faith based on a God of justice and peace were presented to the Christians, driving out the myths of a biased god. God always stands on the side of justice because God is faithful to himself as the God of justice and truth. God’s bias is shown only with the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalized. This theology restored meaning and hope to Palestinians.

With the rise of PLT, this deeper biblical resource became available to Christians. The Bible had been a strong weapon in the hands of Christian and Jewish Zionists. Through a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, Christian Zionists were influencing millions of Americans in a misguided support of Israel. This abuse of the Bible made a religious and theological response necessary.

Palestinian theology of liberation focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. He becomes a model for the Palestinian Christian. Jesus is perceived as a Palestinian living under occupation. In fact, from birth to death, Jesus knew life only under a brutal Roman occupation. This means that all of his teachings and relationships were carried out in the milieu of the occupation. Reading the Gospels from this perspective opens up new avenues of insight that are not usually clear. For example, Jesus’ teaching
regarding nonviolence takes on a new emphasis (Matt. 5:38-42). Similarly,
the love for the enemy reveals the revolutionary nature of Jesus' radical
ethic in first-century Palestine (Matt. 5:43-48). At the same time, the fact
that Jesus chose to read a passage from Isaiah that emphasizes the work of
justice reflects a greater involvement on his part with issues of social,
-economic, religious, and even political justice (Luke 4:18-19). The repeated
emphasis throughout the Gospels against the narrow religious and political
nationalism of his day seems very striking and offers the modern-day
followers of Jesus in Palestine immeasurable strength to resist the injustice
of the occupation.

All the above and so much more that comes out from the life and
ministry of Jesus are a wonderful refreshing breeze that helps the Christian
not only to compare Jesus' response to life under occupation with today's
Palestinian response but also to give Christians strength to continue in the
struggle against injustice. Some of the most important challenges facing a
Palestinian liberation response come from adopting a nonviolent approach
in the resistance against Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territo­
ries. Indeed, it is important to resist evil without using the evil methods of
violence and terror (Matt. 5:39; Rom. 12:17). Equally, it is important to resist
and struggle against the racism and discrimination practiced by the Israeli
government against the Palestinians in almost every walk of life. However, it
must be done through the many nonviolent methods that are available.

One of the most unfortunate deteriorations in the Palestinian struggle
against the Israeli occupation of their country has been suicide bombings.
The Palestinians did not use this method in the beginning. In fact, there
were no suicide bombings before 1993, although the occupation of the
Palestinian territories began in 1967. It was due to the escalation in the
oppressive policies of the Israeli government and the increasing killing of
Palestinians that Palestinians resorted to the use of their own bodies as
instruments of attack. In spite of all the arguments for and against, from a
Christian perspective suicide bombings must be condemned. Palestinian
liberation theology cannot condone such actions and continue to promote
a nonviolent approach to resistance. The example of Christ presents the
Christian with a revolutionary model in which one accepts suffering on
oneself rather than inflict it on others. Christ's suffering critiques the
phenomenon of suicide bombings and points to a different paradigm for
the Christian.
Moreover, what is striking is the way Jesus focused on the injustices within his own community. The Gospels emphasize the way he addressed the economic inequalities within society (Luke 12:13-21; 16:19-31). He was sharply critical of the corruptions of the religious leadership of his day (Matthew 23). Undoubtedly, his blunt and pointed language contributed to the opposition and resentment against him. Similarly, Palestinian followers of Jesus Christ must address in a comprehensive way the various problems that oppress and dehumanize people. They need to follow in Jesus’ steps and face them with great candor and integrity.

Another dimension that has been of immense importance is that of the biblical theology of land and how it can help Palestinian Christians in challenging Jewish and Christian Zionist interpretations. Due to the abuse of the Bible by Jewish and Christian Zionists, the Bible has been used to support the exclusive right of Israel to the land and the negation of Palestinian rights. In a theology of land that deals with the whole topic in a comprehensive way, one discovers that the exclusive strand, though quite dominant in the Old Testament, does not constitute the authentic and holistic message of the Bible. Throughout the Bible, the movement is toward a more inclusive theology. Indeed, a plethora of material reflects a narrow and exclusive concept of the land that precludes non-Jews. Yet it is clear that the inclusive strand became increasingly prominent in some of the post-Exilic prophetic material. The New Testament clearly reflects an inclusive theology of land. When this inclusive theology is translated into the political arena, Palestinian Christians are able to promote a political solution to the land on the basis of the inclusion of others rather than their exclusion. Such a theology, based on sound exegesis of both the Old and the New Testaments, has been a tremendous resource of faith that has helped many Palestinian Christians in the promotion of a just peace.

Concretely, this means that peace requires the sharing of the land of Palestine between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. In other words, the illegal occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, must come to an end and an independent, sovereign, and viable Palestinian state must be established alongside the State of Israel. Both states must enter into peace treaties that are guaranteed by the international community and some form of economic interdependence that will ensure their economic growth and prosperity.

Religion is being used in the conflict today to alienate and oppress and
to make exclusive claims. However, the Palestinian Christian contribution is to advocate for a different perspective. Religion can be used as a reconciling factor in promoting the sharing of the country and the creation of a just peace, where Palestinians and Israelis can live together and find healing and well-being.


As one looks for a peaceable solution to the conflict over Palestine, the parable of the rich fool provides helpful insight. The parable was given in response to a question put to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). This question remains the essential one that Palestinians continue to ask since they have been denied their inheritance. In the parable, one son usurps the legitimate rights of both brothers to their father's patrimony. The parable also implies that one of the brothers is stronger than the other and was able to shun him and deny his rights. It also assumes the need for outside arbitration.

Interestingly, Jesus refuses to arbitrate. "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus could see that the basic problem is greed. He realized that greed is a destructive force that can drive away even brotherly love and create enmity within the same family. He felt that the problem was not going to be solved by someone who would pontificate and pronounce a judgment on the share percentages between the two. The problem lies in a much deeper issue, namely, the underlying sin of greed, selfishness, injustice, and the absence of love between the brothers. Although Jesus refused to act as an arbiter, he nevertheless gave the solution through a parable that struck at the heart of the problem. In the conflict over Palestine, the following lessons need to be learned so that a solution can be found.

1. Beware of greed. Human life does not consist in the accumulation of riches. It is possible to be rich and powerful and still be miserable. It is possible to have everything one needs and still be insecure and fearful. Possessing all of Palestine does not guarantee a life of security for the Israelis. On the contrary, it will only lead to instability and fear, because the inheritance was not shared with the Palestinian brother and sister. The reverse is also true. Any exclusive claim to the inheritance is wrong.

2. The rich man in the parable was getting richer but, instead of becoming more compassionate towards the needs of others, he could think
only about enlarging his own estate. Instead of seeing the need of the poor around him and thinking of ways to be of help, he considered only his own interests. The expansion of Israel by confiscating more and more Palestinian land can only be achieved through the power of the gun; but it can never achieve peace. Recognizing the rights of others and sharing the land with them can bring prosperity for all. Compassion contributes to peacemaking, while the consequences of greed are bitterness and strife.

3. The Lord called the rich man a fool. He will not be able to enjoy any of his riches because he only thought of his own selfish needs and not of the needs of others. The exploitation of others leads to grave injustice and does not yield peace. Some people accumulate riches and prestige by stepping on the rights of others. This may earn them respect, wealth, and power in the eyes of the world; but in the eyes of God, they are fools who do not know how to make peace and how to create an equitable society where people's dignity can be respected.

Doing justice ensures a life of peace and security between the two brothers. Justice must be done in sharing the land of Palestine between Israelis and Palestinians. No solution will be viable if the inheritance is not shared between the two and the Palestinians receive their rightful share. On such a just basis, peace and reconciliation can be built. True prosperity comes in a life of peace and security with the neighbor and the brother.

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Endnotes

1. For a more detailed discussion on Dispensationalism, see the work of Stephen Sizer in his forthcoming book Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon? (InterVarsity, 2004); or online: http://www.christianzionism.org. See also Donald Wagner, Anxious for Armageddon (Herald Press, 1995), 85-95, and the article by Barry Bryant in this issue.

2. For more background on Lord Shaftesbury, see Barbara W. Tuchman, Bible and Sword (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 175-207.


4. On the various types of Millenarianism, see R.J. McKelvey, The Millennium


7. See Naim Ateek, Justice, and Only Justice (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 74-150.


10. As examples of the more exclusive strand, one can point to the promise of the land to Abraham as recorded in Genesis chs. 12, 15, and 17 and repeated many times since then. Deuteronomy (eg., chs. 7, 9, 13, 20) contains many extreme instances of an exclusive theology of the land. As examples of the inclusive strand, note the prophetic emphasis on God’s unbiased exercise of justice for all in, for example, Amos 9:7-10, Micah 6:8, and Ezekiel 47:21-23, as well as the Book of Jonah. The inclusive strand continues in the New Testament. Jesus’ emphasis on the kingdom of God is in itself an inclusive concept. The emphasis on God’s love and care for all people in John 3:16 and Matt. 8:5-13 are examples of this theology. Paul’s inclusive reinterpretation of the promise of land to Abraham in light of the coming of Jesus Christ is very striking (see Rom. 4:13).
A Jewish Renewal Understanding of the State of Israel

MICHAEL LERNER

Jews did not return to Palestine in order to be oppressors or representatives of Western colonialism or cultural imperialism. It is true that some early Zionist leaders sought to portray their movement as a way to serve the interests of various Western states. And many Jews who came brought with them a Western arrogance that made it possible for them to see Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land," and hence to virtually ignore the Palestinian people and their own cultural and historical rights. However, the vast majority of those who came were seeking refuge from the murderous ravages of Western anti-Semitism or from the oppressive discrimination that they experienced in Arab countries.

I try to tell this story in a nuanced and balanced way in my book Healing Israel/Palestine. I show how each move made by the Jewish settlers was interpreted in the worst possible way by Arabs as proof of their worst fantasies of what Jews "really wanted" (which, according to the feudal landowners who feared the Jews, was simply to displace the native population) and how each move made by the Arab leadership was interpreted in the worst possible way by Jews as proof of their worst fantasies of what Arabs "really wanted" (ending any Jewish presence in the Holy Land except on the traditional dhimmi terms, in which non-Muslims lived peacefully in apartheid-like conditions, as they had in most Islamic countries for the past thousand years). What I show there is that each side's interpretation "made sense" from the standpoint of their own history and cultural assumptions. So the struggle that emerged was in some way an outgrowth of the historical experience of each side—Arabs with the Crusaders and with contemporary European colonialism; Jews with the persecution in Europe and with the history of oppression in Islamic lands.

The Ashkenazi Jews who shaped Israel in its early years were jumping from the burning buildings of Europe—and when they landed on the backs of Palestinians, unintentionally causing a great deal of pain to the people
who already lived there, they were so transfixed with their own (much greater and more acute) pain that they couldn’t be bothered to notice that they were displacing and hurting others in the process of creating their own state. Yet the task of paying attention to the pain they were causing was made more difficult by the startling fact—to often ignored in contemporary discourse—that the Arab leadership in Palestine, working with the surrounding feudal leadership of other Arab countries, succeeded in using Arab power to convince the British mandate holders of Palestine that they should not allow Jews seeking refuge from Hitler to enter into Palestine at precisely the moment when these Jews were being killed by the millions in Europe. Even after the war, when the dimensions of the genocide were fully revealed, the Palestinian leadership insisted that the British not allow hundreds of thousands of Jews in displaced-persons camps to come to Palestine, where they might rejoin families and start a new life. It was only the creation of the State of Israel that provided those refugees with a home to go to despite the opposition of the Palestinian population.

Jews’ anger and upset at the way they had been treated when it was they who were the refugees and victims of genocide formed the backdrop to their willingness to go along with a war to create the State of Israel that also involved forced displacements of the Arab population. Jews’ insensitivity to the pain that they caused and their subsequent denial of the fact that in creating Israel they had simultaneously helped create a Palestinian people most of whom were forced to live as refugees (their many descendants today still live as exiles and dream of “return” just as we Jews did for over 1800 years) was aided by the arrogance, stupidity, and anti-Semitism of Palestinian leaders and their Arab allies in neighboring states. These leaders dreamed of ridding the area of its Jews and, much like the Herut “revisionists” who eventually came to run Israel in the past twenty years, consistently resorted to violence and intimidation to pursue their maximalist fantasies, rejecting the United Nations 1947 offer that would have given Palestinians a state far larger than the one they are now talking about.

By the time Palestinians had come to their senses and acknowledged the reality of Israel and the necessity of accommodating to that reality if they were ever to find a way to establish even the most minimal self-determination in the land that had once belonged to their parents and grandparents, it was too late to undermine the powerful misconception of reality held by most Jews and Israelis that their state was likely to be wiped out at any
moment if they did not exercise the most powerful vigilance. Drenched in the memories of the Holocaust and in the internalized vision of themselves as inevitably powerless, Jews were unable to recognize that they had become the most powerful state in the region and among the top 20 percent of powerful countries in the world. And for over thirty years they have used this sense of imminent potential doom to justify the continuation of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

The occupation could only be maintained by what has become an international scandal—the violation of basic human rights of the occupied; the documented and widespread use of torture; the systematic destruction of Palestinian homes; the grabbing of Palestinian lands to allow expansion of West Bank settlements that had been created for the sole purpose of ensuring that no future accommodation with Palestinians could ever allow for a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank (since, as many settlers argued, the land had been given to the Jewish people by God, thus precluding any rights to Palestinians); and the transformation of Israeli politics from a robust democracy into a system replete with verbal violence that sometimes spilled over into real violence (most notably, the assassination of prime minister Rabin because of his pursuit of peace and reconciliation with the Palestinian people).

The distortions in Israeli society required to enable the occupation to continue have been yet another dimension of the problem. First, take the pervasive racism towards Arabs, manifested in the willingness not only to blame all Palestinians for the terrorist actions of a small minority but also to treat all Israeli citizens of Palestinian descent as second-class citizens. For example, East Jerusalem or Israeli-Palestinian towns receive lesser amounts of financial assistance than Jewish towns. Second, observe the refusal to allocate adequate funds to rectify the social inequalities between Ashkenazi and Sephardic/Mizrachi Jews. Third, note the willingness of both Labor and Likud to make electoral deals with ultra-orthodox parties intent on using state power to enforce religious control over Israelis’ personal lives and to grab disproportionate state revenues in order that they could count on these religious parties to back whatever their engagement or disengagement plans are in the West Bank.

Perhaps one of the greatest victims of all these distortions in Israel’s political life has been Judaism itself. Judaism has always had within it two competing strands, one that affirmed the possibility of healing the world
and transcending its violence and cruelty and the other that saw "the Other" (be that the original inhabitants of the land, who were to be subject to genocidal extermination, or later Greeks, Romans, Christians, or now Arabs) as inherently evil, beyond redemption, and hence deserving of cruelty and violence. I call this latter strand "Settler Judaism," because it reflects the ideology of settling the land that reaches its fulfillment as much in the Book of Joshua (and in some quotes in Torah) as in the reckless acts of Ariel Sharon and the current manifestations of the National Religious Party in Israel. This strand was actually a very necessary part of keeping psychologically healthy in the long period of Jewish history when we were the oppressed and we were being psychologically brutalized by imperial occupiers or by our most immoral "hosts" in European societies. It was an important bulwark to a sense of potential power among the most powerless peoples of Europe that we Jews could fantasize about a past in which we had been strong enough to conquer the land (though historians have doubted that such a conquest ever occurred) and emotionally powerful enough to proclaim ourselves "chosen." This happened at a time when, in fact, the rest of the world was treating us as their primary demeaned "other" and their mass culture portrayed us as devils with horns and tails, people who loved money and sexual conquest more than we loved life itself and who were destined for eternal damnation. In such a context, the fantasies of having power over others was an empowerment badly needed.

But today, when Jews are the rulers over an occupied people or living in Western societies and sharing the upper crust of income and political power with our non-Jewish neighbors, the supremacist ideas of Settler Judaism create a religious ideology that can appeal only to those stuck in the sense that we are eternally vulnerable. For a new generation of Jews, bred in circumstances of power and success, a Judaism based on fear and demeaning of others and used as a justification for every nuance of Israeli power and occupation becomes a Judaism that has very little spiritual appeal. Ironically, the need to be a handmaiden to Israel distorts Judaism and causes a "crisis of continuity" as younger Jews seek spiritual insight outside their inherited tradition.

Yet Judaism has another strand, what I and others call "Renewal Judaism." This strand started with the Prophets and has reasserted itself in every major age of Jewish life. It insists that the God of Torah is really the Force of Healing and Transformation and that our task is not to sanctify
existing power relations but to challenge them in the name of a vision of a world of peace and justice. Perhaps the greatest danger that Israel poses to the Jewish people is the extent to which it has helped Jews become cynical about their central task, namely, to proclaim to the world the possibility of possibility, to affirm the God of the universe as the Force that makes possible the breaking of the tendency of people to do to others the violence and cruelty that was done to them—the Force that makes possible the transcendence of "reality" as it is so that a new world can be shaped. If Israel is ever to be healed, it will only be when it is able to reject this slavish subordination to political realism and once again embrace the transformative spiritual message of renewal.

To believe in the God of the universe as the Force of Healing and Transformation is actually core to what Judaism was traditionally. The Hebrew name for God, YudHeyVavHey, woefully turned into a pronounceable but distorted "Jehovah" by the King James mistranslation of the Hebrew Bible, is formed from the root letters HVH, which is the Hebrew of the present tense of the word "to be." The Yud in front of that indicates future tense—that is, God as the movement from that which is to that which can be, the transformation of the is into the ought.

Yet most people are stuck in what the Bible calls idolatry—which in today's world is best translated as "cynical realism." To be a cynical realist is to allow "that which is" to determine your vision of "that which can be." Once you understand this, you can see why I believe that most people who claim to be religious, in the Jewish world and in almost every other religious tradition, actually don't believe in God but instead are cynical realists. They do not believe that the world can be healed and transformed and that it can be based on love, kindness, generosity, and openheartedness, because they do not believe that the God of the universe really has any capacity to enliven in humans that part of us that aspires to a world of this sort.

This is the key to understanding what needs to be done to heal Israel/Palestine. I am a strong supporter of the Geneva Accord. But I also believe that no political agreement will ever be sufficient for healing this struggle unless it is accompanied by a powerful spiritual movement that focuses on developing in both peoples a spirit of repentance and atonement based on a deep recognition that each side has been cruel and hateful toward the other. Each needs to do serious inner work to change the ways that they have portrayed themselves as the "righteous victims"
and the other as the embodiment of evil. On this foundation, a process of "truth and reconciliation" will be possible, and eventually a new attitude of openheartedness.

Because Israel has the greater power, I insist to my own people that it is we who should take the first steps by unilaterally ending the occupation and by giving the West Bank settlements to the Palestinian people as a step in the process of providing compensation for the decades of homelessness and refugee status. But this will be difficult in our post-9/11 world. It is tough enough to convince Americans, when fears of terrorism remain politically salient, that the best way to fight terror in the world is to follow The Tikkun Community's plan for a Global Marshall Plan in which the U.S. leads all the advanced industrial societies in dedicating 5 percent of their annual GNP to end global poverty and provide adequate educational and healthcare facilities and programs. It is equally hard to convince Israelis facing daily threats of terror to approach the Palestinians with the spirit of generosity that is needed. Conversely, I believe that the dynamics in Israel would totally reverse were the Palestinian people to embrace the philosophy of Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr., and proclaim a principled, not just a tactical, commitment to nonviolence. Yet, given the reality of daily oppression from the occupation, it is hard to convince Palestinians to change their approach and do what nonviolence can accomplish, namely, to convince the oppressor that they are seen not as evil forces to be destroyed but as human beings to be respected. This perception, once communicated effectively as King did to whites in the U.S., lessens the fear of the dominators that in letting go of their domination they risk their own extermination at the hands of the righteous indignation of those whom they had formerly oppressed.

The central problem underlying the frozenness of both sides—their inability to act in a spirit of generosity and openheartedness that could elicit the same from the other side—is the depressive conviction that the other side will never change and that the message of cynical realism is the ultimate truth, namely, that nothing much can change and that people are motivated more by fear and self-interest than by love and a desire to care for one another. That is why I believe that the most healing way out of this impasse is for each side to open itself up to the spiritual reality of the universe, because to the extent that it could do so it could let go of cynical realism and realize that the God of the universe makes possible a real
transformation toward love and kindness and generosity. Armed with that belief, they could make the changes in the way they treated the other side that would allow for a genuine and lasting peace.

In the meantime, I believe that our task in the United States is to change our own government’s slavish subordination to the pro-Sharon, pro-Occupation forces so that it can play a more positive role. The United States should remain committed to Israel’s survival and flourishing economically, politically, and militarily. The best way to achieve that end is for the U.S. to lead an international intervention to separate the two sides and impose a peace agreement along the lines of the Geneva Accord if the two parties are unwilling to come to that on their own in the next year. The U.S. should tell Israel that it will impose the same kind of economic boycott on Israel that it has imposed on Cuba until it implements fully the Geneva Accord. If necessary, it should be ready to mobilize an international force to separate and protect each people from the other until both sides understand that the world will not accept this killing any longer and will not allow Israel to occupy the West Bank or Gaza.

I believe that the mere threat of that kind of intervention will be sufficient, but only if it is accompanied by two other elements: (1) an offer of a mutual-defense pact with the U.S., should Israel comply in a spirit of generosity and openheartedness to the Palestinian people; (2) a declaration of support for Israel to remain a Jewish state with a majority of Jews and a commitment to Jewish culture until at least a hundred years after the time when anti-Semitism has disappeared from the face of the earth, at which point the affirmative-action nature of Israel will no longer be necessary and Israel should then become a normal society in which Jews have no special status. Without these two elements, any attempt to pressure Israel will have no impact except to give more power to the most fearful elements in Jewish consciousness. For that reason, it is a terrible error and a deal-breaker for the Palestinian people to ask Israel to accept a “right of return” that would, if implemented, eliminate the Jewish character of the state and put Jews back into the position they have been for the past two-thousand years, namely, at the mercy of non-Jews. This situation has worked out so disastrously for Jews that many would prefer to bring the rest of the world down into nuclear war than to go through that other experience again.

And here we come to the crux of the psychology of the issue: Jews are fearful and have reason to be. The legacy of anti-Semitism has not been
eliminated and still plays a role in the way that Israel is critiqued in the UN and in progressive circles. I have been unequivocal in my condemnation of Israeli human-rights violations, but I am also unequivocal in my condemnation of acts of terror against Israeli civilians. I do not believe that anything but a "progressive middle path" that is both pro-Israel and pro-Palestine can work. That middle path must show both peoples that the rest of the world truly understands their history and their fears and speaks to them with genuine compassion.

This has not been the case. Israel's sins deserve condemnation, but not apart from condemnation of far worse human-rights abusers. I propose using economic power to push Israel into a settlement; but I favor those same policies in reference to our treatment of the even worse human-rights violators, including China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, and the U.S. itself. When the progressive movement singles out Israel's sins for special attention while the world watches passively as far more people are killed in Rwanda and then in Darfur than were ever killed in the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, this selective prosecution reminds Jews of the long history of Jew-hating, whose legacy remains strong.

This is a truth that many have not fully understood: Even correct criticisms can sometimes be racist. Suppose in attending a meeting of a neighborhood association my son is singled out by a neighbor for criticism for making too much noise. Other neighbors point out that there is a whole gang of teenagers making excessive noise and my son is just one, and not even the worst one. This means that the neighbor who focused on my child might have just gotten the scene wrong. But if at future meetings that neighbor keeps on raising the criticism about my son and fails to mention the others, then the problem is not just my son but the irrational hatred of this neighbor, even though his criticisms are also correct. Singling out Israel in this way is anti-Semitism; and as long as that happens, Jews will not be in a space to listen to the content of the criticisms.

The solution is to change American policy toward both Israel and the rest of the world, so that it is consistently a supporter of human rights and willing to back that up with its full economic and political power. Moreover, it should work in concert with all the other nations of the world to impose a more just reality, not only in Israel but also in Darfur, Chechnya, Tibet, Kashmir, and a host of other situations. In that context, using American power to change Israeli policy makes a great deal of sense.
Yet most Americans are reluctant to think in these kinds of global transformative terms. There is good reason to want to restrain America when it acts by itself—the Iraq war serves as a current example. But America working in concert with the rest of the world and acting in a spirit of generosity that would be manifest when it first began to implement the Global Marshall Plan I mentioned earlier would be a very different force for peace and social justice than it is today.

How do we get there? By taking our belief in God seriously enough that we become active advocates for a new "bottom line" in our dealings with the world and with our own internal life in the U.S. Let this country become the world's leading force for redistributing wealth so that we can eliminate global poverty, homelessness, hunger, and inadequate healthcare and education. Let the U.S. become the leading force for rectifying 150 years of global insensitivity to the environment, rather than as it is now—the leading force for blocking global ecological sanity. And let the U.S. implement a new bottom line of love and caring, so that institutions will be judged efficient, rational, and productive to the extent that they maximize not only money and power but also love and caring and ethical and ecological sensitivity and enhance our capacities to respond to the universe with awe and wonder.

This is an impossible task only in a world where we have accepted cynical realism as our guide. But a world in which we let God be our guide would provide for a fundamental transformation in America so that it could have the moral legitimacy to lead a coalition of forces that would lovingly and powerfully intervene in all places where people are currently oppressed.

It is for this reason that I have joined with Susannah Heschel (chair of Jewish studies at Dartmouth College and daughter of the famous Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel) and with Cornel West (professor of theology at Princeton University) to create a new international interfaith organization of the spirit called The Tikkun Community (from the Hebrew word tikkun, meaning "healing and transformation"). We are calling for these kinds of changes in the U.S. and in its policies toward Israel just as we are calling for Israel and Palestine to implement the Geneva Accord and develop a new approach of generosity and repentance.

If there is one thing I have learned from history it is this: The path of the realists leads to more violence and hatred, not to peace and generosity. It is time now for a new voice of spiritual activism to be formed in this
A JEWISH RENEWAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

country that is a voice of love and kindness. I ask you to help me in this
effort by recruiting United Methodists and other Christian friends to join
with us when we go to Congress each year to urge the government to
support strategies like the Geneva Accord and other plans that reflect a
progressive middle path to peace. A joint Jewish-Christian-Islamic effort is
needed, and that is what we are building in The Tikkun Community. So
please join our interfaith organization, The Tikkun Community. Size
matters. If you and your friends join, you will be making a serious contribu-
tion to getting this middle-path perspective taken more seriously in
American life today. Together we can bring more of God’s energy into
shaping the destiny of our world.

Rabbi Michael Lerner is editor of Tikkun and author of nine books, including
Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation (HarperCollins,
1995). The rabbi of Beyt Tikkun synagogue in San Francisco, he encourages
people who agree with his perspective to join The Tikkun Community at
http://www.Tikkun.org; email: RabbiLerner@tikkun.org.

Endnotes

1. Michael Lerner, Healing Israel/Palestine: A Path to Peace and Reconciliation
2. See my response to critics of the Accord in my book The Geneva Accord and
Other Strategies for Middle East Peace (North Atlantic Books, 2004).
Is The United Methodist Church a Global Church Yet?

DAVID J. LAWSON

The proposed title for this article may be seen as a question or as an invitation. Cynics will suggest that the question implies that current conversation in The United Methodist Church about being a global church claims too much and is inaccurate. Others will hear in the title the assumption that something is in process—that a long-term change is taking place and that we are moving toward incarnating in our church’s life the genuine nature of The United Methodist Church as a global denomination.

It is common for ideological perspective, political bias, or desire for political advantage to frame United Methodists’ response to the issue. As with most important questions in our church, persons view the actuality of our church’s life through a lens that allows them to see answers favorable to their needs.

A way out of the constant struggles around this question requires a different approach. It is for that reason that I recommend continued on page 84

PATRICK STREIFF

Has The United Methodist Church ever been a global church? Will it ever be one? In the summer 2004 issue of Quarterly Review, I summarized some of my research about the past.1 Surprisingly, The United Methodist Church (or its predecessors, particularly the Methodist Episcopal Church) was more global in its missionary outreach a hundred years ago than for most of the twentieth century. Only in very recent years have central conferences outside the United States again risen in importance equal to or exceeding the level they enjoyed in the 1920s. The question about the global nature of the denomination has also received new attention in Bruce W. Robbins’s recent book A World Parish.2

Why call The United Methodist Church a “global” church? And what is meant by global? Globalization has become a watchword for liberal economists and an invective for social-justice advocates. The term global is used in many ways but is continued on page 86
a different approach. To start with, let us undertake an exhaustive inventory of the actual location of United Methodist congregations and annual conferences. The question of "location" will force the conversation to be based in reality. The United Methodist penchant for record-keeping should make such an inventory relatively easy to assemble. By including the location of congregations that are in full connection with The United Methodist Church and firmly a part of an annual conference, we are able accurately to list the variety of nations where United Methodist people worship and witness.

Our inventory will take on special meaning when we remember that not long ago our Constitution was amended so that each annual conference is equal in status, standing, and value, regardless of its geographical location, cultural environment, or economic strength. Because of the nature of our polity, the congregations in all of these annual conferences share in this constitutional equality. All are of equal value in fulfilling God's mission to the world through the church.

This factual inventory will demonstrate that, following the reception of The Methodist Church of Cote d'Ivoire into membership at the 2004 General Conference, there are 120 annual conferences located in 39 nations. According to more recent information, these annual conferences have a total of 43,048 local congregations. This last figure is quite fluid because of the constant establishment of new congregations in many parts of the world. As an example, East and Southern Africa are growing in membership at approximately 30 percent per year. The Philippines is experiencing similar growth. In the United States, while membership gain is not impressive, there is an emphasis on new-church starts that will cause our count to fluctuate.

Do these numbers not make it obvious that The United Methodist Church is global in character? But there is a problem with the word global. The current debate over the positive and negative delimitation and impact of globalization can distract us from our quest for an appropriate descriptive term. The term international is not any better, for it introduces into the definition of our church the idea of the "nation state" (a social invention barely more than 200 years old).

When we examine the nature of our church membership, we are again compelled to admit to the planetary nature of our church. The language about church membership has changed through several General Conferences but the meaning has remained constant. When a person
unites in membership with one of our congregations, he or she immedi­ately becomes a member of every other congregation in the connection. When a United Methodist relocates, he or she does not join the new congregation. Rather, the record of his or her membership is transferred as a symbol of his or her new setting for ministry.

In this article, focus is on the "essence" of The United Methodist Church. There are structural and financial issues to be resolved. However, if these issues are allowed to intrude themselves into the basic discussion, then in typical United Methodist fashion we will have made it impossible to answer the basic question. We discipline ourselves to identify our factual existence. Institutional questions, as complex as they are, will be resolved through the wisdom and organizational skill among our members.

Two remaining observations: (1) We must confess the sins of our past and present colonial mentality. Many denominations continue to define themselves based on their national origin. That is one way to define the church. It is not the United Methodist way. We must constantly remind ourselves that the United Methodist Constitution stands at the center of our life and will not allow us to think of ourselves as the "United Methodist Church of the United States" or of any other nation. (2) United Methodists in the United States need to free themselves from the belief that being the largest (that is, having the most money) gives them the right to control the church. I have heard statements like these in General Conference committees by delegates from the United States. It is not a position that can be defended in Scripture. We need to name it for what it is—the sin of arrogance. It ought to be an embarrassment of the highest order.

Conducting a careful inventory, such as I have recommended above, and examining our Constitution will produce an understanding of the essential nature of our church and our mission in the world. This will help United Methodists to remember that "mission" is central to our life. All other questions, as important as they may be, will find their answers in due time.

Are we a global church? Yes, of course! Are we growing into all that this implies? We are and we will.

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open to misunderstanding. For my part, I prefer the specifically Methodist term worldwide connection.

If our church takes seriously the mission statement in its Discipline, it is called to be a worldwide connection. The mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ ends at no national border and brings believers together beyond any differences of nationality, race, gender, or other distinctions. Forming a worldwide connection is just another implication of inclusivity. It is the footprint of inclusivity in the larger ecclesial structures.

Ever again, people engaged in the mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ have presented the aim of building up autonomous churches in other lands. The aim is laudable. Much too often in the past, missionary efforts have resulted in dependencies. The cry for autonomy in many parts of the world has been a reaction to the suffering from remaining under the authority of foreign powers. But neither dependency nor autonomy (or “self-headedness,” to use Robbins’s phrase) is a biblically rooted concept for the body of Christ. The Scriptures talk of members in one body, linked to one another, where all suffer if one suffers and all rejoice if one rejoices. Members in one body live in an interrelatedness and interdependence that require constant connection.

The tension between dependency and autonomy has not yet been overcome in favor of a partnership in a worldwide Methodist networking structure. Economic disparities create dependencies ever again. For example, donors, with best intentions, think they know what is good for recipients and want to determine the project on which they spend their dollars. Even if the recipients have more urgent needs elsewhere, they have to settle for the support for the donor’s chosen project. (I know of numerous such examples in post-communist Europe.) The United Methodist Church still has to learn patterns of stewardship that reduce dependencies and strengthen the responsibilities of decision making among recipients. Such new patterns create partnerships instead of relationships of donors and receivers.

What is true of economic disparity is true also of disparities in administrative leadership. People in highly developed countries have educational privileges and practical means that give them advantages to fill leadership positions as missionaries, or “experts.” This is another factor that creates and often maintains dependencies and causes a cry for autonomy. Our
church has to learn leadership patterns that strengthen indigenous leaders in the mission of the church.

While the church's worldwide connectedness still perpetuates dependencies in places, we have made progress towards worldwide inclusiveness. In the past two decades, delegates from annual conferences outside the United States have become involved in general councils, boards, and commissions in new ways. Central conference representation at the 2004 General Conference rose to 10 percent. But let me add an observation from a European point of view.

Europe was the center of colonial powers for centuries. Decolonization after World War II has radically changed power structures. Within the Christian churches in Europe, mission boards have been among the first entities to promote new models of partnership with the former mission fields overseas. The mission boards and agencies for development in the European churches, among them the mission boards of The United Methodist Church in Europe, have acquired expertise in empowering churches in developing countries today. By comparison, the United States had no colonies and experienced no decolonization after the war. However, it has become the lone super-power, and, like all superpowers, it tends to dominate and pretends to know what is best for others. American Christians can easily fall prey to this tendency, unless they experience a spiritual renewal that sets them free to respect, honor, and promote indigenous forms of Christian witness. United Methodists have made progress in valuing the gifts and graces of Methodists in other countries and building up a network of personal relationships and structural connectivity; but the task is not yet fulfilled.

Our church's current structure still reflects a time when The United Methodist Church was essentially a U.S.-based church. General Conference and general agencies play an essential role for the U.S. church but an auxiliary role for United Methodists outside its borders. Finances reflect that reality. Since The United Methodist Church outside the U.S. has grown in membership to almost 20 percent and will continue to grow, incongruities have given rise to searching questions. For example, is it appropriate for delegates outside the U.S. to make decisions at General Conference or in the Judicial Council that are binding for U.S. churches but able to be adapted by central conferences (for certain parts of the Book of Discipline)? Can the U.S. church continue to finance the growing non-U.S. part of the church's budget? Should all worldwide aspects of the church's work be

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centralized in the general agencies? Are there more time- and cost-effective ways to be as global as need be but also as local/regional as possible? Is it appropriate to fund central conference representation on general agency boards but not the programs they need in their churches?

The pressure for structural changes will increase. As before, some people are looking for the easy way out under the banner of "autonomy." Cut the connectional link between the United Methodist church in the United States and that of the rest of the world, they say. This way the U.S. part could keep its current general church structure intact. However, this proposal comes at a high price: division and retreat to national entities. Indeed, it would result in a form of congregationalism lived on an national scale! For my part, I opt for a Methodist way that maintains our connectional bonds and develops a structure that reflects a truly worldwide connectional church. In the 1996–2000 quadrennium, the "Connectional Process Team" did a good analysis of the problems even if the solution it proposed was inadequate. The United Methodist Church has to continue its search for solutions that take us forward and help us model a truly worldwide connectional church. The 2004 General Conference charged the Commission on the General Conference "to bring to the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas, recommendations regarding the format and structure of future General Conferences." I pray that the Commission’s work will help us find ways to live truly as a worldwide connectional church.

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**Endnotes**


May 22, 2005—First Sunday after Pentecost
Gen. 1:1–2:4a; Ps. 8; 2 Cor. 13:11–13; Matt 28:16–20

The author of Psalm 8 provides us one of the earliest commentaries we have on the opening chapter of the book of Genesis. Rightly, the psalmist focuses attention on the impact and the results of believing in this creator God.

"You have established your glory over against the skies (heavens)" (Ps. 8:1b).

Genesis 1 begins with the majestic phrase, "In the beginning God created the sky (heavens) and the earth." The psalmist makes plain that God's "name" and God's "glory," two consistent designations of the very being of this God in the Hebrew Bible, are established "over against" (a better reading of the Hebrew than the familiar "above") the heavens and "in all" the earth. The psalmist reminds us that God's created sky and earth are not to be confused for their maker. This God is both in and over against all that God has made. To forget that claim is to move toward idolatry, exchanging the glory of God for images, as Paul was much later to warn (Rom. 1:23).

Still, an upward glance at that sky, at the moon and the stars (vs. 3), leads the psalmist not to airy contemplation of the vastness of space but to a deep reflection on the seeming triviality of humanity (vs. 4)! In the context of countless stars (Gen. 1:15), observed for centuries as wheeling points of light far above our heads, and the silvery moon (Gen. 1:16), silent and cold and huge, yet monthly growing and dying in mystery, what possible value could weak and frail human beings have over against those eternal lights dotting the vast vault of the sky? Yet, wondrously, God has made them (us) "little less than elohim (gods, God), crowning them with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5). Here the psalmist points to Gen. 1:26–28 and the creation of humanity as only one of the significant events of the sixth day of God's work.
But note that the psalmist gives us a powerful warning here, reminding us of something we often forget when we read the Genesis account of human creation. Too often, Gen. 1:26-28 has been used as a club that humans have wielded over their fellow creatures from God's hands, emphasizing our "dominion over" and our "subduing of." Too often, we forget we are "trivial" in the context of our creation. Too often, we need to be reminded, as was the angry Job, that we do not sit in the center of God's creation. Like Job, we need further contemplation of mountain goats and ravens and lions and ostriches in order to remember that they, like us, are beloved of and cared for by God. Their value is not confined to what they can do for us; they are intrinsically valuable to a God who made them all. In fact, as God makes so clear to Job, God is forever caring for them; while Job seems to believe that all God really cares about is his claim for strict human justice, meted out mechanically by an all-too-predictable deity, Job's worldview has become far too small, as, too often, has ours (see Job 38-39).

The psalmist concludes the reading of Genesis 1 with the familiar claim that "you have caused them to rule over the works of your hands; all things are under their feet" (vs. 6). Here again, traditional readings of this psalm and of Gen. 1:28 have led to no end of human theological and ecological mischief. If we humans have "dominion" and are rulers over whatever God has made, then our kingly/queenly power seems to have no limits. The world is our oyster, and we are free to exploit as we will. This can hardly stand as a way to see our ongoing relationship with the earth as created and loved by God.

Again, the psalmist, in that crucial fifth verse of the psalm, tells us to continue to ask the central question of human existence: "What are human beings that you remember them, mortals that you visit (care for) them?" Whenever our overweening pride and arrogance threaten to swallow our true selves, the poet of Psalm 8 rises up with that question: just who exactly do you think you are in God's enormous creation? Hold to the paradox of triviality and godliness, for both define what it means to be human.

There is another, rather less-noted, place in the Genesis account that affirms this paradoxical view of human nature. The plural pronouns of 1:26 have brought on an ocean of ink. As God speaks in the plural imperative three times, commentators have speculated about ancient polytheistic contexts for the speech, or a kind of divine majestic plural (rather like the kings and queens of later times), or even the first biblical reference to the
Holy Trinity of later Christianity. Let me suggest a rather odder interpretation.

At the beginning of the sixth day's work of creation, God set about making all of the earth's wild and domesticated animals; for surely that is the simple division of the animal kingdom envisioned by the ancients: some are domesticated (cattle, horses, camels, donkeys) and some are wild (lions, tigers, and bears). Since these animals are the creatures just made by God, when God decides to make the human beings in "our image, after our likeness," God may be said to be speaking to and of the animals. Hence, in the story before us, God determines to make the human creatures as much like the animals as like God. In all of us humans, then, there is a little bit of God and a little bit of beast!

So, like the warning of Psalm 8 about natural human insignificance, so here in Genesis we are warned that we are as much beast as God. I find such warnings highly salutary in a time of potential ecological disaster. When, in 1967, the historian of science, Lynn White, Jr., laid the degradation of our environment at the feet of biblical Christianity, he created a heated discussion that is still hot nearly forty years later. As easy as it may be to shoot holes in his argument (as been done many times since 1967), the fact remains that we need a new way to envision ourselves in God's world than a traditional reading of Genesis has afforded us.

I suggest that, when read in the ways I have demonstrated, Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 offer an appropriate paradoxical understanding of the nature of humanity that can lead to an understanding of the human-God-earth relationship that is life-giving, earth-sustaining, and God-centered. We humans need a new way to envision all this; and that new vision, I suggest, is found in the ancient texts, after all. In this new vision, God is at the center of all God has made, and we humans are decentered. To be sure, we are a valued part of that creation, but only a part—and a beastly and godly part at that.

May 29, 2005—Second Sunday after Pentecost
Gen. 6:11-22; 7:24; 8:14-19; Ps. 46; Rom. 1:16-17, 3:22b-28; Matt. 7:21-29

The Lectionary selections in the story of Noah are very unfortunate. It has long been recognized that two accounts of this important story have been interwoven in Genesis 6-9, one usually assigned to the Priestly author of Genesis 1 and the other to the storytelling author (the so-called Yahwist) of Genesis 2-3. However much that may be true, the more important ques-
tion is this: what is a preacher to do with the story that we now have in Genesis 6–9? The Lectionary seems to have given us a kind of Priestly account in its selection of verses but, in so doing, has excluded the very heart of the story. No one should preach from the story of Noah and the flood without taking account of 6:5-8 and 8:20-22. For this reason, in what follows, I direct attention to those verses, too.

Genesis 6:5-8 provides the rationale for the destruction that is to come. Without these verses, God’s announcement that “the earth was corrupt in God’s sight” does not bear its full weight. Verse 5 is key: “God saw that the evil of humanity was great in the earth; indeed, every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil all day long.” The inclusiveness of that sentence is breathtaking. Not only is human evil great, but every inclination of the human heart’s thoughts (in the Hebrew understanding of anthropology, the heart is the seat of will and intelligence) is only evil all day long. In the face of such unprecedented evil, God resolves to act. But we are quickly told (vs. 6) that anger was not God’s primary emotion in the face of this evil. On the contrary, God was “sorry” and “grieved to the heart.” In human hearts was only evil, while in God’s heart there was only grief at the horror that humanity had become.

Unfortunately, human horror leads not to just human destruction but to the complete destruction of every living thing. God resolves to “wipe out” (as in blotting tears or wiping a dish clean) from the earth the human creatures and the animals and birds. Note that the destiny of the animal world is tied inexorably with the behavior of the human world. The eighth-century prophet Hosea recognized this inexorable connection as well (4:2-3). As we saw in our exegesis of Genesis 1, humans and animals are very closely intertwined, both in creation and in nature; and human dominion can too easily lead to animal disaster.

“But Noah found favor (grace) in the eyes of YHWH” (vs. 8). This stark sentence says very little, if anything, about Noah; he is one of those humans referred to in v. 5 as only evil. Yet, God treats him with favor in spite of that fact. Here we are told that God is able to find value and worth even in one of these wretches who precipitate the flood. No reader should search for any reason why Noah found such favor in God’s eyes; such a search begins and ends in God.

In this light, the Lectionary selection finds fuller meaning. As Gen. 6:11 makes clear, two words characterize God’s decision for destruction: corrupt.
and violence. "The earth was corrupt in the eyes of God; the earth was filled with violence." The two words are connected as follows: because there is violence the earth is corrupt. The word violence occurs most often in contexts of injustice (eg., Amos 3:10; Jer. 22:3). Human injustice "corrupts" the earth. The word corrupt is used in contexts of spoilage, fouled springs, ruined palaces, and rotted clothing. As a result of human evil, here described as human injustice, the earth itself is spoiled.

The story closely connects human evil with earth's degradation. Once again, the ancients confront us with the reality of ecological disaster as a result of human misbehavior. The favored Noah's large and peculiar boat and all of its inhabitants will be all that remains of the world populated by God in Genesis 1. Whether we hear the famous "two-by-two" demand of 6:19 or the "seven-pair" demand of "clean" creatures of 7:2, this ark carries within it the future of us all, human and animal alike.

After the flood, described in two different ways in chs. 7 and 8, Noah is called by God to leave the ark, along with his human and animal cargo (8:14-19). But 8:20-22 are crucial for the ending of the story. Noah immediately builds an altar to YHWH and sacrifices an appropriate clean offering on it to the God who has rescued him, his family, and the earth's animal creatures. And in a delightful touch, "YHWH smells the pleasing odor" and speaks, not aloud but in the divine heart, the following amazing lines: "I will never again curse the soil on account of humanity, because (even though?) the inclination of the human heart is evil from their youth. I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have just done." In other words, human beings have not been changed as a result of the flood. Indeed, the apparent reason that the flood came at all (6:5) is because of human evil. But now we are told by God that human beings remain evil. Thus, it is not human beings who have changed. It is God who has changed, or at least God's perception of human beings. Despite human evil, God will never again destroy. The God of strict justice before the flood now has become the God of amazing grace. The perpetual promise of the seasons (vs. 22) seals the reality of this new, ever-forgiving God. The same God of grace we Christians celebrate in Jesus Christ appears already here in Genesis 8.

God is forgiving, loving us well beyond our deserving. But that wonderful reality does not dissipate the other reality announced by the ancient tale of the flood: human evil inexorably leads to environmental degradation. Human violence, person against person, the powerful against
the weak leads to ecocide. The earth, God’s good creation of Genesis 1, is our home, a place for humans and animals and plants to inhabit in harmony. But human greed (the biblical “violence”), leading to imbalance of goods and services and inequalities of resources among the world’s peoples, appears to be leading all of God’s creation to chaos and death. The story of the flood, coupled with the story of creation in Genesis 1, offers an alternative to such inequities and death. In the eyes of the God of grace, all of the creation can find a new vision for equitable living. As Paul has it: “The whole creation is groaning (in labor pains) ... while we wait for adoption”—that is, while we wait for our full understanding of ourselves as sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:22-23). Once again, in the ancient tale, we see a new possibility for living together in God’s good world. The old story of the flood is a cautionary tale to those of us who think our dominion of earth is free, our subjugation of it God willed. Let us never forget our brothers and sisters whose violence brought the earth’s near end, and let us never forget the grace-filled God whose love for us would have us live in the peace God desired from the very beginning of all things.

June 5, 2005—Third Sunday after Pentecost
Gen. 12:1-9; Ps. 33:1-12; Rom. 4:13-25; Matt 9:9-13, 18-26

This passage from Genesis is the lynchpin of the entire biblical story, not just of the Hebrew Bible. God’s choice of the “foreigner” Abram and subsequent charge to leave all he knows and to journey to a place he has never seen establishes the fact that the God of all creation is a God who will stop at nothing in the attempt to return creation to the harmony of Genesis 1. To see that wondrous truth clearly, we must be reminded quickly of the movement of Genesis 1–11.

As we saw earlier, God’s creation of heaven and earth revealed a God of order, balance, and design, intent on making a place of harmony and shalom for all of God’s creations. Genesis 3, the fateful and funny story of the garden of Eden, began a downward spiral of disaster, as the first human couple disobeys the simplest of divine commands against fruit-eating and, upon discovering their nakedness, sewed loincloths from fig leaves to cover themselves up. The joke is this: Fig leaves feel like number-two-grade sandpaper! The story tells the truth about us: we forever try to cover our lies and deceptions with fig-leaf foolishness. Fig leaves are the very definition of human striving without God. And so, the first couple is banished from
the garden, not, however, before the bemused God offers them animal skins in place of the scratchy leaves. God’s grace is ever present.

The slippery slope of human willfulness reappears in chapter 4, when the elder of the first two brothers in history engages in fratricide. Cain kills Abel over some mystery of sacrificial acceptance and rejection and is banished from the ground from which he came. Abel’s innocent blood ever cries out from the ground (4:10), and God is always attentive to such cries. And even though Noah is born with the specific charge to “bring us relief (or, better, "rest," the word from which the name Noah is derived) from the work of our hands” (5:29), at first this attempt to counteract the curse of the ground fails. The flood comes anyway, given the horror that humanity has become (6:5).

Following the flood, as we saw in last Sunday’s reading, God was revealed clearly as a God of grace, anxious always to restore the harmony of creation. Initially, the rainbow sign of chapter 9 is intended not for us but for God. In two places, 9:15 and 9:16, God states that when God sees the bow (the word used as in “bow and arrow”) in the cloud, God will remember the covenant made between God and “every living creature of all flesh.” You and I can rejoice in the bow in the cloud, but it is not first set there for us: it is first the colorful string tied round God’s finger, so God will never again forget the universal covenant that God has now made with all of God’s creation.

But the hoped-for harmony is once again thwarted at the tower of Babel (ch. 11). It is very unfortunate that the story of the tower of Babel is not included in the Lectionary, especially in connection with the day of Pentecost. After all, among other things, the story of Pentecost in the Book of Acts is a reversal of the story of the tower of Babel. At Babel, God confused the languages of the human tower builders in order to prevent them from foolishly building a tower (out of mud brick and pitch, and not for heaven’s sake!) with its very top in the sky itself—the sky made by God in Genesis 1. Of course, God cannot even see the silly thing where God lives and so God must “come down” to have a peek (11:5)! Thus are human pretensions to greatness satirically undercut. The result of this would-be titanism is the inability to understand one another, which leads to the separation and scattering of the human family “over the face of all the earth.” Thus, at Pentecost (Acts 2), the great miracle is that the Christ-event, and the resulting gift of the Holy Spirit, enables worldwide communication.
once again and the intended harmony of God begins to be realized.

Back in Genesis, God again faces the challenge of a recalcitrant, uncommunicative rabble bent on self-fulfillment and self-destruction. God is sent back to the divine drawing board, and this time the great architect designs a different path by which the \textit{shalom} of creation might find its renewal. God turns to an unknown Mesopotamian patriarch to attempt to move the world once again toward harmony. Listen to the extraordinary words, so fateful for the rest of the Bible's story.

Take yourself from your country, from your kindred, from the very house of your father, to the country that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, making your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you. And through you all the families of the soil will be blessed (or "will bless themselves") (Gen. 12:1-3).

The mysterious Abram (his name means "great father") is asked to leave what he knows in an ascending order of difficulty—country, relatives, intimate family—and go to a place he has never seen. Once there, he is promised greatness. We might imagine the simple word \textit{great} here to mean "large/magnificent/enviable in size." But that meaning is quickly undercut. Greatness here means blessing. If Abram is to be great, he must bless, and not simply his own family but also "all the families of the soil." I use the word \textit{soil} here rather than \textit{earth}, because that is the exact meaning of the word. Of course, we use the word \textit{earth} as \textit{soil} when we work in our gardens and that is clearly the meaning here. It is important to make that distinction. The ground, the soil, has been cursed by fruit-eating, fratricide, unjust violence, overweening arrogance, and hubris. Abram's job is nothing less than the redemption of all that. Hence, he must bless "all the families of the soil."

And after that enormous divine charge, Abram, without remonstrance or complaint, takes up the task he has been assigned. Verses 4-9 give an itinerary of his journey in the land that will become Israel. Traveling with his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot, Abram moves from north to south, from Shechem to Bethel/Ai to the Negeb.

Still, amid this great call of God and Abram's wonderful response is a nearly unobtrusive fly in the ointment of hope for the future. That tiny speck flew into the story almost unannounced, and many of us did not hear it. Back in 11:30, in the course of a long genealogy, the simple truth is
uttered: "Now Sarai was barren; she had no child." But this is not a speck! The sentence sounds like a thunderclap into our story. How will the great God found a great nation designed to bless all the nations out of a couple who has no children? That glorious promise of descendants in 12:7 rings hollow in the face of Sarai's barrenness. Even this wonder-working God, this God of shalom, will be tested to make this work. We read on in the story with hope in God, but we fear for the human beings, whose history thus far has been less than stellar. Can blessing for all come from this?

June 12, 2005—Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Gen. 18:1-15; Ps. 116:1-2, 12-19; Rom. 5:1-8; Matt. 9:35-10:8

We come this Sunday to one of the most delightful stories in Genesis. But since we are in the middle of a longer story, we need always to remember where we are. After Abram's response to God's call to leave his home and journey to a place he has never seen, many odd things have happened. In response to famine in his new land. Abram decides to take his wife to Egypt, the breadbasket of the ancient world, in order to stay alive. Before entering the land of the pyramids, Abram counsels Sarai to lie about their relationship, urging her to say she is his sister, "in order that it may be good for me, and so that my life may be spared on your account" (12:13). In other words, Abram is immediately prepared to throw the promise of God away so that he might live! The great act of his leaving his home at God's command is quickly undercut by this act of arrogance, fear, and apparent indifference to his wife. God fortunately steps in to save Sarai from the Pharaoh's harem; and the couple leave Egypt greatly enriched, with Pharaoh's taunts sounding in Abram's ears.

In short order, Abram disputes with his nephew, Lot, about a division of the land (ch. 13); Abram saves Lot from a kidnapping by a coalition of Eastern kings (ch. 14); God covenants with Abram again in ch. 15, promising him a "great reward." Abram now begins to question this whole enterprise, pointing out his childlessness and urging God to accept his servant as heir (15:2). God will have none of it and reiterates the promise, sealing it with a mysterious nighttime vision of smoky fire pots and flaming torches (15:17-21). Then Sarai decided to use her maid, Hagar, as a surrogate mother for a child; but when the plan works all too well, she is jealous of the pregnant slave and demands that Abram throw her out to die in the desert (ch. 16). Once again God intervenes, this time to save the
helpless woman. In the long ch. 17, God makes covenant again, sealed this time by circumcision. However, the important lines for the ongoing story are 17:17-18. In response to God’s claim—again—that the aged Sarai will surely have a child, Abram falls on his face, laughing, and muttering the obvious problem with God’s plans: “Can a son be born to a hundred-year-old man? Can a ninety-year-old woman give birth?” He mutters these absurd questions to himself but shouts out loud, “Let Ishmael (Hagar’s boy) live before you!” Abram implies that this is the only son he is ever going to have; prune-faced geriatrics do not bear children!

God will have none of it. “My covenant I will establish with Isaac whom Sarah will bear for you about this time next year” (17:21). And that brings us to our story for today.

There is mystery and fun aplenty in this tale. It starts in the heat of the day, with Abraham (his name now changed in the preceding chapter) sitting at the flap of his tent. The desert heat rises into the air like the glow of an anvil. Looking up with half-closed eyes, peering into the glare of the afternoon sun, he sees three men standing near him, as if they had magically appeared out of the thin desert air. With the greatest of haste, the old man runs toward them and bows, nose to the ground in appropriate reverence for strangers seeking hospitality. Abraham speaks as one fully aware of the demands of Middle-Eastern hospitality. “My lord (the generic name for one’s better); if I find favor in your eyes, do not pass by your servant.” In other words, I am ready to play the part of host; do not snub my efforts, else all of us will lose face and you will forfeit a fine meal.

Again, typically, Abraham promises only a little of this and a drop of that and a moment of rest, when what he plans is a great feast and the finest of pleasures for these strangers. They agree. Sarah, listening at the tent flap, prepares an enormous repast, which Abraham politely serves and watches under a tree while the strangers eat.

Now the fun really begins. All three say in unison, “Where is Sarah, your wife?” These are odd strangers indeed! Abraham splutters out in response to this surprising question, “There, in the tent” (18:9). Now only one stranger speaks: “I will certainly return to you at the season of life, and without doubt Sarah, your wife, will have a son!” (18:9) Now Sarah was listening at the tent flap behind him (18:10) and “laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I am old and my husband (lord) is old, will there be pleasure for me?’” (18:12) Her concern is not directly about the impossibility of giving birth but about the
more general human concern of whether or not she and her aged husband are any longer capable of sexual joy. All of this is uttered to herself.

Then YHWH intervenes in vs. 13, "Why in the world did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Can I really bear a child when I am old?’" According to God, bearing a son and not sexual pleasure is the heart of the matter. There are at least two ways to hear the next famous line. The usual reading is, ‘Is anything too wonderful for YHWH?’ However, the grammar will also bear the translation, ‘Is anything more wonderful (or "marvelous" or "astounding") than YHWH?’ I rather like the joy and excitement of the second reading. YHWH is having a very good time in this story and likes nothing better than to show off the divine fun and power. ‘At the season I will return to you, precisely the time of life, and Sarah will have a son!’ I hear God’s joy spilling over like the joy of a child upon receiving a wonderfully unexpected gift. Or I picture Ebenezer Scrooge, now transformed by his ghostly visitors, feeding the family of his clerk, Bob Cratchit, and laughingly saving poor Tiny Tim from his crippling illness.

Sarah denied that she had laughed, for she was afraid. This is hardly surprising, seeing that her private thoughts have been heard as if they had been spoken aloud. ‘Oh, yes, you did,’ shouts God in high good humor. Perhaps it is often the case that the good humor of God is met by the serious fear and denial of God’s people. When I think of the God I love, this is the God I imagine—the laughing, jesting creator of us all who is not above a great joke. But it is always a joke on our behalf, not at our expense. And, of course, the joke here is on Abraham and Sarah, for the jesting God is right. At the right season, at just the right time—the very next year—old Sarah gives birth to a son and old Abraham names the boy Isaac, which, in Hebrew means "laughter." What else would you call a child if you had one when you were one-hundred years old?

These glorious stories, perhaps three millennia old, announce enormous truths about us, about the whole of creation, and, most of all, about God. In some Sunday school rooms, on certain Sundays, lessons are still being offered that may be summarized in the moral phrases, “Let’s be like Abraham, a man of faith,” or “Let’s be like Sarah, a woman of faith.” Well, these phrases are not quite right, however much they have been and will be said. To be more accurate, we need to say, “We are like Abraham; we are like Sarah.” Too often we attempt to force God’s hand to run the world as we would like it to be run. Too often we lie and deceive to get our own way.
Too often we frown at a God whose will for our lives is fun and shalom, not serious piety or grim-faced religion. Genesis can teach us so much about ourselves. But more than that, Genesis can teach us about God, the creator of the ends of the earth and a fun-loving and joking Friend who makes a covenant with us that will never end. It is that God whom Jesus announces and that God who promises to be with us “to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). And it is that God who uses even us to perform the divine will. Paul had this just right when he said, “We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us” (2 Cor. 4:7). I can think of no better summary of the stories of Genesis. We are the “cracked pots” that God is always in the habit of filling up with God’s good gifts; but because we are cracked, those gifts are too often spilled or spoiled. Yet God continues to use us, because like Abram we, too, with God’s unfailling help and love, can be a blessing to all the people of the soil.

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Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture translations in this article are my own.
The modern missionary movement was closely associated with the colonial expansionism of the West. Unfortunately, post-colonial guilt has resulted in what Max Warren termed "a terrible failure of nerve about the missionary enterprise." As the West is rapidly secularized and steadily dechristianized, and the Third World church grows autonomous and mature, the Western church has found itself unwilling and incompetent to engage in mission.

However, the church is a missionary community by its nature; mission is integral to its very identity and calling. Participating in mission, the church is drawn near to the loving and redemptive will of God for the world. What is thus urged on the church is not an abandonment but a holistic recovery of its intrinsic vocation. It needs to reexamine critically its own missionary motives and practices as well as to discern perceptively the new crises and challenges of the world today. As Wilbert Shenk well put it, the church is "continually to press on toward the frontier [of mission] but to do so in full awareness of the path the church has taken thus far."

This essay looks at crucial issues in world mission in terms of missional paradigm shifts, the rise of non-Western Christianity, and globalization.

Transforming Mission

In Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Orbis, 1991), the late South African missiologist David Bosch carefully investigates the transformations of the Christian mission during the past twenty centuries and explores a new paradigm of mission for the present crisis the church faces.

Bosch's thesis is that there have been major paradigm shifts in mission in response to profound crises and that our time and context legitimate another critical shift. The Enlightenment paradigm has heavily shaped the understanding and practice of the Christian mission since the eighteenth century. Now the new "postmodern" paradigm is emerging as the entire foundation of the Enlightenment is being challenged and is collapsing—
including its premises of the supremacy of reason, optimism based on progress thinking, and the autonomy of the individual.

Bosch portrays thirteen interrelated elements of the emerging paradigm. His painstaking description of each element both enriches the understanding of the Christian mission and broadens its theological foundation. For Bosch, the most fundamental element of all is to recognize mission as God’s mission, that is, mission derived from the very nature of God. The mission of the church is thus participation in and service to the mission of God that is already operative, embracing and affecting all people. For the church to be faithful to its missionary vocation, the local church needs to be rediscovered as the primary agent of mission, with the understanding that every Christian community finds itself in a missionary situation.

Bosch strongly emphasizes evangelism as an essential dimension of the church’s mission. He constructs probably the most integral and comprehensive theology of evangelism. Bosch also stresses the intrinsically ecumenical nature of mission, since authentic mission presupposes authentic unity. “The mutual coordination of mission and unity is non-negotiable,” he says, because God’s people are one and they have one mission, the missio Dei (464).

Bosch’s contribution as a missiologist is found in his encompassing systematic study of mission. With Martin Kahler, he believes that mission is the “mother of theology,” since it was in the missionary context that the early church was forced to engage in theological reflection. He thus argues, “Just as the church ceases to be church if it is not missionary, theology ceases to be theology if it loses its missionary character” (494). What the church today needs is not simply “a theology of mission” but “a missionary theology,” in which mission becomes an undergirding agenda for theology.

Among the criticisms of Transforming Mission are that Bosch’s emerging paradigm has not taken into account some significant elements, such as the role of women in mission, the growth of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, and the ecological crisis; that he has failed to provide criteria for evaluating the new paradigm; and that by engaging in dialogue primarily with scholars of the First World he has not recognized enough the contribution of Third World churches to the shaping of the emerging paradigm.²

Norman Thomas edited a companion volume to Transforming Mission, titled Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity (Orbis, 1995), which contains primary source documents.
The Rise of Non-Western Christianity

A former Scottish Methodist missionary to Sierra Leone and Professor Emeritus of the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World at the University of Edinburgh, Andrew Walls, is credited with calling attention to the demographic shift of the center of gravity of Christianity toward the Southern continents and thus to the future direction of the Christian churches. His two seminal books, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Orbis, 1996) and *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Orbis, 2002), have contributed a great deal to reexamining issues in Christian mission on terms set by non-Western Christianity.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Christianity was distinctly a Western religion; more than 80 percent of Christians lived in Europe or North America. In 2004, Christians in the Southern Hemisphere—Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific—comprise over 60 percent of the world Christian population. Christianity has become a non-Western religion. Such a shift is neither strange nor surprising, since “there is some inherent fragility, some built-in vulnerability, in Christianity” (2002: 29). Walls illustrates this fragility by pointing to the past major centers of Christianity that are no longer: Jerusalem, Egypt and Syria, and, most recently, Western Europe.

Walls insightfully contrasts expansions of Christianity and Islam. Whereas Islamic expansion is “progressive” in nature, moving out steadily from its geographical center, Christianity is a “serial movement” that contains recessions as well as advances. Thus, the center of Christianity shifts from place to place, and its progress is never final.

Based on these critical observations, Walls brings home some significant points concerning world mission. First, Christianity must continually enter into and interact with new cultures, crossing cultural frontiers: if it does not, it will lose its vitality and thus fade. A cross-cultural movement or diffusion is at the heart of Christianity. In the process of the transmission of faith, both the translation of the gospel into and the conversion of a specific culture take place. When this translation process stops, Christianity inevitably withers.

Second, the rise of non-Western Christianity should encourage Western churches to listen to voices from churches of the Southern continents. More and more, Christianity will be associated with and marked by non-Western Christians. Therefore, states Walls, “the study of Christian
history and theology will increasingly need to operate from the position where most Christians are,” paying heed to “Christianity as expressed in the experience of the Southern churches” (2002:47; 1996:146).

Third, what is needed between the churches of the West and the South is hospitality, reflected in equality and mutual respect and not dominant leadership by the former. The two should come together to make their witness credible and integral. What acutely concerns twenty-first-century Christianity are issues of ecumenism—not confessional and denominational but multicultural and intercontinental issues. Thus, according to Walls, “The great ecumenical issues will be about how African and Indian and Chinese and Korean and Hispanic and North American and European Christians can together make real the life of the body of Christ” (2002:69).

Walls’s writings reflect great wisdom based on his missionary experience, a lifetime of reflection on and teaching of the missionary movement, and continued intercultural engagement. His essay “The Ephesian Moment: At a Crossroads in Christian History” is perhaps the most solid and convincing argument for the church to become multicultural. He asserts that “the very height of Christ’s full stature [Eph. 4:13] is reached only by the coming together of the different cultural entities into the body of Christ” (2002:77). The original Ephesian moment was rather brief. Yet, Walls perceptively and hopefully points to the United States, with its growing Christian communities of the diasporas, as the most probable context in which a new Ephesian moment of multiculturalism could be realized.

Globalization and Contextualization

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, globalization has become the dominant force shaping and affecting the life and environment of the human community. Globalization is so significant and pervasive that it calls for new ways of understanding and doing theology and mission. Leading Roman Catholic missiologist Robert Schreiter critically examines implications and challenges of globalization to Christian mission and constructively addresses the relationship between contextualization and globalization in The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local (Orbis, 1997).

There have been three crucial changes providing impetus to the globalization phenomenon: politically, the move from a bipolar to a multipolar world; economically, the worldwide expansion of neoliberal capitalism following the collapse of socialism as an alternative economic ideology; and,
technologically, the revolutionary communications advancement. The world is increasingly becoming interconnected through a globalization process that extends the influence of modernity while compressing time and space.

According to Schreiter, "ambivalence" best describes the effect of globalization. It has generated greater material wealth, but the economic disparity between rich and poor is intensifying. It has promised progress but without a clear goal and often with dehumanizing consequences. The interconnected character of globalization has resulted in the unavoidable encounter between the global and local. Consequently, the local situation hardly remains unchanged. However, it does not necessarily surrender its own distinctness and often resists the globalizing forces with a heightened interest in the local.

Schreiter shows how the meaning of "context" has altered in consequence of globalization and highlights three critical, discernible changes (26-27). First, the concept of context has become deterritorialized: Boundaries concern difference rather than territorial space. Second, people simultaneously belong to or participate in multiple contexts, often occupying the same territory. Third, due to intense interaction among cultures, no context remains pristine and inevitably becomes hybrid.

Schreiter calls special attention to the fact that as the world is increasingly shaped by globalization, theology stands between the global and the local. Thus, the challenge for the church is to interact with and engage both the global and the local realities in its theological reflection and praxis. In response to the impact of globalization, Schreiter proposes to develop a new theological framework through "a renewed and expanded concept of catholicity," which is characterized by "a wholeness of inclusion and fullness of faith in a pattern of intercultural exchange and communication" (127,132).

Whether Schreiter's vision of a new catholicity offers a responsible and viable way of thinking and of doing theology between the global and the local remains to be proven. In fact, he is much clearer in portraying and analyzing the phenomena and challenges of globalization than in propounding the theological framework that will help the church understand its mission. However, Schreiter is certainly right in drawing the church's attention to globalization as the context within which a crucial theological reflection is to be undertaken. Local congregations cannot but engage in such theological discourse in order to serve as a faithful witness and a transforming agent both locally and globally.
Other Issues and Resources

Over the past century, Pentecostalism has grown from fewer than a million adherents to over 500 million; it indeed has become a worldwide phenomenon and the largest category in Protestantism. It is neither possible nor desirable to understand global Christianity or mission while ignoring the remarkable explosion of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. For instance, we cannot adequately comprehend African Christianity without grasping the significance of Pentecostal renewal. Pentecostalism has its own shortcomings and weaknesses, just as do other traditions; but it deserves an open and sympathetic hearing.

Two major studies examine the Pentecostal movement from within as well as engage views from outside and raise important theological and missiological questions not only for Pentecostalism but also for the broader Christian church. The essays collected in Called and Empowered (Hendrickson, 1991) locate the corporate identity of Pentecostalism in global mission, and attempt to construct an integral mission theology informed and shaped by the Pentecostal tradition. Douglas Petersen’s Not by Might Nor by Power: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America (Regnum, 1996) is an incisive study of the social concern and impact of the Pentecostal movement in Latin America and purports to dispel the common assumption that the Pentecostal church lacks both theology and awareness of social justice.

Jonathan J. Bonk’s Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem (Orbis, 1991) presents intriguing research on effects of the relative affluence of Western missionaries on mission—a serious issue that the Western church has often ignored and failed to address. Bonk critically explores the negative consequences of the economic and social disparity between missionaries and those among whom they serve in terms of relational, communicatory, and theological challenges. A son of missionaries, and wrestling with this predicament caused by Western missionary affluence, he turns to three central motifs of the New Testament—incarnation, cross, and weakness—as an empowering basis for an alternative way of life and service.

Although E. Stanley Jones’s The Christ of the Indian Road (Abingdon, 1925; reprint, 2001) was first published over three quarters of a century ago, it is amazingly current and offers a very holistic and comprehensive Christian missionary vision. Jones’s uncompromisingly christocentric and yet powerfully inclusive understanding and practice of mission and evan-
lism are particularly relevant in post-Christian, multicultural, and pluralistic North American culture.


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Endnotes

4. As Pentecostals trace their earliest roots to the Wesleyan and Holiness movements, Methodism in particular needs to engage Pentecostalism both sympathetically and critically. See, for example, David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church, by Lovett H. Weems, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003)

Abingdon Press has partnered with the G. Douglass Lewis Center for Church Leadership (at Wesley Theological Seminary) to launch with this evocative volume a new series on transformational leadership in the Wesleyan spirit, Discoveries: Insights for Church Leadership.

Weems is Director of the Lewis Center and widely respected as a writer, consultant, pastor, administrator, and advocate for leadership studies in theological education. Here he writes a practical manual, replete with helpful diagrams and pithy quotes, aimed at clergy and lay leaders who seek to guide congregations toward lasting change (change that values the unique stories of congregations).

Weems articulates gracefully and astutely his own integration of literature on preparing and moving through change. Summarizing much of current "best thought and best practices" in the field, he provides a road map for congregations to move through transformative processes of vision casting and renewal. While drawing expertly on the research and wisdom of numerous others, he reveals through case studies and anecdotes his own experience and passion for congregational ministry development in the Wesleyan spirit. (The endnotes are an excellent bibliography for the reader who wants to engage in further research.)

Given the number and variety of resources and consultants in the field of congregational leadership, one might wonder at yet another book on transformational leadership. Weems's contribution to the leadership literature on change and vision casting may be his focus on celebrating and preserving the best of the past while moving through transition, especially in congregations that are in earlier stages of perceived decline. His message to pastoral leaders includes a call to rehearse and affirm the congregation's story by drawing upon the richness of its unique communal narrative. Leaders thus serve as "bridge-builders" between congregational history and new or reframed ministries. The next step in faithfully fulfilling mission is a vision that is cast, shared, planned for, and enacted. The next chapter in a congregation's story is dealing with change positively. That is the change
that lasts. Weems also reminds us that vision is not created but discovered in God's own vision and our own stories—an encouraging word in the face of the often daunting challenge of moving forward.

Several components are less apparent (or even missing) in Weems's road map: discussion of the frequent systemic dysfunction that must be attended to prior to renewal and casting of new vision; the role of core values in the visioning process (central to much transformational literature); the centrality of sacramental and liturgical life as a context for communal transformation. Nevertheless, Weems's use of unique congregational stories is extremely helpful in reinforcing the key ideas he presents. These stories bring prescribed practices to life, inspire hope in the reader, and reinforce Weems's theme of narrative at the heart of leading through change. Perhaps future volumes of the Discoveries series will attend to some of the less-developed aspects mentioned above and to even broader denominational contexts. In the meantime, Weems's wisdom and integrity shine through in this first volume and will certainly encourage and orient those who are ready to "take the next step" in leading congregations toward unique participation in the coming reign of God.

Reviewed by Elise Eslinger, Elizabeth Wourms, and Richard Eslinger. They are associated with the Institute for Applied Theology at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.


Case reflects on a constituency integral to recent United Methodist tradition: "populist evangelicalism." The thesis of the book argues that the customary notion about the Good News movement as primarily a conservative reaction to the social and political unrest of the 1960s and 1970s fails to do justice to the movement. Rather, says case, "Good News is better understood as a movement authentically Methodist, authentically Wesleyan, in direct lineage with the doctrines and ethos of the Church's past, but with an eye to renewal in the Church's future" (12). Reflection upon historical events and characters in any time and place can be an enriching practice. Perhaps in this time and place following the 2004 General Conference careful critical reflection is especially needed.

Evangelical and Methodist assists me, a recipient of a John Wesley
Fellowship offered by A Foundation for Theological Education (176-77, 188, 221, 261) and a professor of evangelism at a United Methodist-affiliated theological seminary, to understand the unfolding of a history in which I find myself. Although not written chronologically, Case provides a narrative for the emergence of some of the structures that enable my ministry, yet the impetus of which began prior to my recollection.

Therefore, Case's history is not without implications for me, which naturally lead to questions, mainly of clarification. Clarification of terms such as populist and the at-times interchangeable use of fundamentalist and evangelical would provide helpful detail and alleviate confusion. Another important area of clarification, addressed by reference to a wider number of primary and secondary sources, is Case's understanding of "traditional Wesleyanism" (185). The late Albert Outler, leading Wesley scholar and "Mister United Methodist of the 1970s" (174), features in the history. However, little, if any, attention is given to the Neo-Wesleyan movement within theological education and the broader church. Similarly, the Foundation for Evangelism and its work in establishing faculty positions in United Methodist theological schools to encourage the theological study and teaching of evangelism also coincides with this narrative but is not featured.

The remarkable volatility of the present time within United Methodism demands careful critical reflection and attention to primary and secondary sources, interpreted with Christian charity. I hope that Evangelical and Methodist will not obstruct conversation between constituencies but will prompt readers to follow the model provided by the exchange between Robb and Outler, described by the latter:

It was . . . downright disconcerting to have Dr. Robb and some of his friends show up in my study one day with an openhearted challenge to help them do something more constructive than cry havoc . . . Here, obviously, was a heaven-sent opportunity not only for a reconciliation but also for a productive alliance in place of what had been an unproductive joust. Moreover, as we explored our problems, some unexpected items of agreement began to emerge (176).

Reviewed by Laceye E. Warner. Warner is Assistant Professor of the Practice of Evangelism and the Royce and Jane Reynolds Teaching Fellow at Duke University Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina.
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NEXT ISSUE:

**COME, HOLY SPIRIT: POSTMODERNITY, SPIRITUALITY, AND THE SPIRIT**
An Important Announcement about Quarterly Review

January 2005

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—In its effort to explore new avenues and formats for communicating its mission in a rapidly changing world, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) will relinquish its involvement with the publication of Quarterly Review with the winter 2005 issue of the journal.

Jerome King Del Pino, general secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, shared this information with Neil Alexander, president of The United Methodist Publishing House, in a letter on September 27, 2004. Quarterly Review has been a joint production of the two agencies since its inception in 1980. Del Pino expressed deep appreciation for this 25-year collaboration and noted that the decision to discontinue support of the journal "was taken neither easily nor hastily."

While the restricted impact of the journal due to a decade-long decline in subscriptions was a factor in the board's decision, Del Pino said, the primary consideration has to do with the agency's need to reevaluate its entire communication strategy—which includes its publishing effort—in light of GBHEM's newly adopted Strategic Plan. "The growing complexity and diversity of the church and the world in the new century call for a multifaceted, multidimensional publishing strategy that is simultaneously fully aligned with the board's strategic and missional aims and able to communicate effectively at a variety of levels to multiple constituencies through a diversity of products. While we deeply value Quarterly Review's contribution to the work of the agency over the years, it lacks the elasticity for adjusting to these new parameters," Del Pino added.

Editor of Quarterly Review Hendrik Pieterse will continue at GBHEM as a member of the Office of Interpretation. He will be deeply involved in the development and execution of the board's new publishing endeavor. "The board's decision regarding Quarterly Review does not mean that it is relinquishing its Disciplinary mandate to 'serve as advocate for the intellectual life of the church,'" Pieterse said. "On the contrary," he added, "the board remains unequivocal in its commitment to nurturing deep-running theological discourse about the daunting theological issues facing the denomination in regard to its understanding and practice of higher education and appointed ministry. We are simply redirecting that theological task in new and creative ways for new and different times."

The United Methodist Publishing House is currently exploring a variety of options for the future of Quarterly Review. "However," says Harriett Jane Olson, Sr. Vice President for Publishing at The United Methodist Publishing House, "publication of Quarterly Review in its current format cannot be sustained without the partnership of GBHEM, which we have enjoyed since 1980." Publication in the current format will cease with the winter 2005 issue and subscribers who have already paid for additional issues will receive an adjustment to their accounts.
Quarterly Review (ISSN 0270-9287) provides continuing education resources for scholars, Christian educators, and lay and professional ministers in The United Methodist Church and other churches. QR intends to be a forum in which theological issues of significance to Christian ministry can be raised and debated.

Editorial Offices: 1001 19th Avenue, South, P.O. Box 340007, Nashville, TN 37203-0007. Manuscripts should be in English and typed double-spaced, including notes.

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"Blessed Are the Peacemakers"

BARRY E. BRYANT

Guest Editor

One of the twentieth century’s greatest atrocities was the Holocaust—the result of hideous European anti-Semitism. One of that century’s greatest injustices was the Palestinians being deprived of their land—the result of manipulative European colonial power. Michael Lerner likens it to Jews jumping from the burning buildings of Europe and landing on the backs of Palestinians, with unintended results. This combination of events has led to a spiral of retaliatory violence in the Middle East, raising the urgent question: What will end this senseless spiral of mutual violence and death?

The essays in this volume address this question from a variety of viewpoints in hopes of provoking a wide-ranging and ongoing theological discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian situation among United Methodists and other Christians. While the authors have struggled hard to present the salient issues with clarity, fairness, and balance, their convictions and views on the matter are unmistakable. Thus, given the highly politicized nature of the current discussion in the culture and the church, the mutual suspicion, the vested interests, and the emotional investment on both sides, the essays are sure to anger some and disappoint others. With this in mind, it is important to point out that two fundamental assumptions resonate through all five essays. (1) Israel has a right to exist and the Palestinians deserve the protection of their human rights. (2) To discuss Palestinian human rights is not to engage in anti-Semitic rhetoric. Indeed, what is needed is a new level of discourse that moves the discussion beyond its current either-or stalemate.

In his essay, Naim Ateek claims that Israelis want security and Palestinians want justice. Neither will happen without the other; and the death and violence will not end without both. In an effort to explore the dynamics of that claim and to allow a Palestinian Christian voice to be
"BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS"

heard by Christians from other parts of the world, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem convened its fifth international conference on April 14-18, 2004. The conference sought to place the Middle East conflict in its historical, political, and theological context and to expose how Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism have hampered the peace process. The organizers appealed to attendees to explore ways to educate Christians in North America and Europe about the plight of the Palestinians. Several essays in this volume seek to honor this appeal.

The articles by Ateek, Bryant, and McCarty address the conflict explicitly from the vantage point of Christian theology. For them, the conversation needs to take place around the sacredness of human worth, not just around the sacredness of land. However, to arrive at this point, argue Ateek and Bryant, Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism must be recognized for the obstacles to peace that they are and addressed and dismantled.

Elaine Hagopian opens her provocative analysis of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the claim that the problem is essentially political and requires a political solution. Ateek and Bryant agree, but demonstrate that the political problem has also been aided and sustained by the formidable lobbying efforts of Christian Zionists in the United States.

Drawing on the United Methodist Book of Resolutions and the Book of Discipline, Rhonda McCarty helpfully traces United Methodist responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and suggests concrete ways in which laity and clergy can be better informed about the issues and be better prepared to engage in meaningful efforts toward peace and justice.

Michael Lerner's munificent, thoughtful essay represents an interpretation of the meaning and nature of the State of Israel that is growing in influence and salience. The similarities between Lerner's call for a "progressive middle path to peace" and Ateek's Palestinian Christian theology of liberation are striking and hopeful. Do we have here the stirrings of a mindset that will make for lasting peace and justice in the region?

May these articles spark constructive, informed, and—above all—enduring theological reflection among United Methodists and others concerned about a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

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The Palestine-Israel conflict is a political conflict. Although the conflict has taken on a veneer of religious fanaticism by some Israeli and non-Israeli Jews, as well as by Palestinian Islamists, in reality it is not about religion. This will become evident as the history unfolds.

In the nineteenth century, a number of Jewish leaders in Europe concluded that anti-Semitism at the hands of European Christians was permanent and incurable. Although there were two strands of Zionism that emerged in Europe, i.e., cultural and political Zionism, it was political Zionism that became dominant. Cultural Zionism sought to create a cultural and spiritual renewal center in Palestine that would allow Jews to secure their traditions. Political Zionism, after exploring sites such as Libya, Cyprus, and Uganda, among others, fixed on and sought to transform Palestine into a Jewish state. Chief political Zionist, Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) conceptualized the Jewish state in his book *Judenstat*, published in 1896. It was followed by the formation of the World Zionist Organization and the convening of the First Zionist Congress in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland, thus launching the Zionist project.

The problem was that over 90 percent of the indigenous population of Palestine was Palestinian Arabs. Clearly, transforming Palestine into a Jewish state meant that Palestinians would have to be "transferred" out of Palestine and Jews would have to be brought in. In fact, the concept of "transfer" was and still is a constant theme in Zionist political literature and tracts.1 Quoted below is one of many examples of the Zionist intent of...
moving out the indigenous Palestinians:

We cannot allow the Arabs to block so valuable a piece of historic reconstruction. . . And therefore we must gently persuade them to "trek." After all, they have all Arabia with its million square miles. . . There is no particular reason for the Arabs to cling to these few kilometers. "To fold their tents" and "silently steal away" is their proverbial habit: let them exemplify it now. (Israel Zangwill)

In fact, Palestinians were predominantly farmers, merchants, intellectuals, professional people, and small-business owners.

Zionism, Jewish Identity, and British Imperial Interests

Israeli psychologist Benjamin Beit Hallahmi brilliantly exposes the way political Zionism remade Jewish identity from that derived in the state of "Diaspora" in Europe—i.e., a "weak-kneed, passive Jew of the ghetto, the human dust that made up the Jewish people"—to one of a strong, assertive, self-sufficient, and modernized secular identity. In order to do this, Zionism had to somehow "claim continuity with the Jewish past . . . but it also attempted to create discontinuity, through a new space of a national homeland and a new time of secular nationalism." Beit Hallahmi explains how Zionism resolved the contradiction of the two identities. He notes that Zionism, i.e., its ideological leaders, created a new Jewish history that claimed that Jewish identity was fostered in Palestine, not in the Diaspora, and that they were exiled against their will but yearned to return to the homeland. Further, Zionists arrested a particular time in the mythological version of Jewish history in Palestine and built its narrative on the claim that only that alleged period was the basis for identifying the "legitimate" owners of the land of Palestine. No people or period before or after that assumed period could have claim to the land. Ipso facto, based on the Zionist narrative, the indigenous Palestinian Arabs have no authentic claim to their land. However, archeological debates about the alleged ancient Israel have become increasingly acrimonious because the aura of objectivity which has been projected to cover the collusion of biblical studies in the dispossession of Palestine has gradually been exposed.

The second hurdle that the Zionists had to overcome was to convince the British, who had strategic interests in the region, that the Zionists would
maintain and promote those interests in return for the British facilitating the establishment of a Jewish homeland (read "state"). Indeed, the British embraced the Zionists, first by the issuance of the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917, which stated that "His Majesty’s Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." 7 and, second, by allowing the foundations of the state to be established during most of the Mandate period and earlier, especially 1920–1948.

The Broken Trust: The Betrayal of Palestine

As World War I spread to the Middle East, the British sought, and were offered, the help of Arabs in confronting the combined forces of the Germans and the Ottoman Turks in the region. They turned to Sharif Husain of Mecca in the Hejaz (western Arabia, now part of Saudi Arabia), allegedly a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed and leader of Arab Muslims at the time. In a 1915–1916 exchange of letters between Sharif Husain and Sir Henry McMahon, British high commissioner for Egypt and the Sudan, an agreement was reached between the parties. In return for Sharif Husain’s ordering an Arab revolt against the Ottomans and Germans, the British would facilitate an independent Arab State, basically in Greater Syria (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine), Iraq, and the Arabian peninsula, excepting Aden. In further negotiations the British excluded specific areas that were of interest to the French, as well as areas related to specific British agreements with tribal chiefs. Nonetheless, Palestine was never excluded from the agreement, though the British attempted later to argue that it was.

In any case, the British and French, the main negotiators of the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement (Russia was also involved related to some of the Turkish areas) secretly agreed on how they would split up Greater Syria and Iraq after the war. Palestine would basically be in the British zone, especially the port cities of Haifa and Acre. 8 The Sykes-Picot agreement was followed by the 1917 Balfour Declaration, noted above. Both the Sykes-Picot agreement and the Balfour Declaration were in direct conflict with the 1915–1916 Husain-McMahon agreement. It was indeed a broken trust, a betrayal of Palestine. The British had come to the conclusion that a Jewish homeland in Palestine would serve British interests better than allowing Palestine to be part of an independent Arab state or to facilitate separate statehood for Palestine in accordance with Article 22, paragraph 4, of the League of Nations’ Covenant regarding the mandate system. 9 Indeed, the
British kept secret the Declaration's text from Palestinians for several years so as not to alert them to the betrayal.

**Wilson and the King-Crane Commission of 1919**

Known as the "champion" of self-determination in his speeches from 1916–1919, President Wilson admitted to partiality in the way self-determination was to be applied. He took care not to advocate its application if it would step on British and French colonial interests in the Middle East.

Moreover, Wilson was greatly influenced by American Zionist Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, who worked closely with the British. He convinced the President to champion Zionism in his own foreign policy. Six months before the Balfour Declaration, Brandeis presented a document of Zionist thinking from London to the U.S. State Department. The document espoused the denial of the right of the indigenous people of Palestine to self-determination in just about every one of its provisions. "Palestinian Self-Determination could not be, to use the words of Wilson's Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, 'harmonized with Zionism, to which the President is practically committed.'"

Clearly, Wilson had made up his mind on supporting Zionism well before the 1919 Paris Peace Conference debates on Palestine. Reports received by Wilson at the conference from the U.S. Consul in Jerusalem warned him that the "implementation of Zionist goals would lead to bloodshed in the area." Wilson was pressured into sending a commission, known later as the King-Crane Commission, to investigate the situation in the fallen Ottoman Empire. However, Wilson emphasized to the Commission "that the questions of Palestine and Mesopotamia [Iraq] were virtually closed by the powers. The area was under occupation by the victorious British and French, who had their own colonial designs on the strategic area.

The Commission found that the Jewish minority (one-tenth of the population of Palestine in 1919) favored a Jewish national home in Palestine, while the majority Arabs opposed what they called "the usurpation" of their homeland. The latter preferred to be reunited with Greater Syria or to have an independent Palestinian state. The Commission recommended reuniting Palestine with Greater Syria and granting it independence, a demand that emanated from the July 1919 meeting of the democratically elected Syrian National Congress, composed of representatives from Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. The Commission emphasized "that
increasing colonial immigration of Jews from Europe into Palestine would deprive the indigenous people of their right to self-determination and would destabilize the situation in the country and thus endanger Palestinian lives." In any case, the Commission's report, as with the 1917 Balfour Declaration, was kept secret for several years. The Commission's recommendations conflicted with French and British intentions and interests in the area as originally embodied in the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement and with the British embrace of the Zionist designs on Palestine.

The World Zionist Organization presented what it considered to be the minimal map of the territorial dimensions of a viable Jewish State to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Water resources were a main concern in drawing the dimensions of this map. It included all of Palestine; South Lebanon up to the city of Sidon (including the Litani River); the headwaters of the Jordan River in Syria and Lebanon, i.e., the Syrian Golan Heights; the Hauran Plain of Syria, including the southern town of Deraa; control over the Hijaz Railway from Deraa to Amman to Maan in Jordan; and control over the Gulf of Aqaba, i.e., a large area on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. Various Zionists had other maps, which included the area from the Nile in the West to the Euphrates in the East or, for example, one that included Palestine, Lebanon, and western Syria, including part of Southern Turkey.

The British Mandate: the Interwar Years in Palestine

The San Remo Conference: April 1920

The World War I allies met in San Remo, Italy, to determine the fate of the fallen Ottoman Empire. The British and French were deeply concerned that their plans for the area were falling apart. Sharif Husain's son, Feisal, was elected by the Syrian National Congress as King of Syria (Greater Syria) in March 1920; and his brother, Abdullah, was nominated to be King of Iraq. Rioting was occurring in Palestine. The region in general was in disarray, especially on the eve of Ataturk's rebellion to salvage the Ottoman core area of Anatolia, today's state of Turkey. The conference resulted in the establishment of the Mandate System under the League of Nations (formed in 1920). "At the conclusion of the San Remo conference on April 24, the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire learned that the Great Powers planned to retain dominion over their region through a new device called a mandate."
Britain and France justified this arrangement on the basis that the Arabs were not sufficiently prepared to govern themselves without experiencing a period of European guidance. Although it took until 1922 for the mandatory system to develop in Syria and Palestine (formally implemented in Palestine in September 1923) and until 1924 in Iraq, the French and British asserted their authority in the area immediately after San Remo.

The French managed to pressure Feisal out of Syria. He went to Palestine. Ultimately, the British established Feisal as King of Iraq, but under strict British control and authority. They created Trans-Jordan (now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) and placed Abdullah on the throne there. Abdullah was also beholden to the British. Neither monarch was popular, but Abdullah became the most hated for his collusion with the Zionists after the 1948 war, his annexation of the West Bank, and for his attempt to make Palestine geographically and linguistically disappear. He was assassinated by a Palestinian in 1951 in Jerusalem. His son, Talal, succeeded him for a year, but was deposed by Abdullah's old advisors, allegedly because of a mental disorder but more likely for being too much of an Arab nationalist. His son, Hussein, became king at the age of eighteen and continued his and Jordan's dependence on the British (now the United States). Attempts were made to assassinate Jordan's King Hussein for the secret meetings he had with Israeli leaders and his dependence on the United States. He survived, and now his son, King Abdullah II, reigns in Jordan.

The British Mandate Period in Palestine

Although the Mandate was formally issued in September 1923, in effect the British Mandate began in 1920, with the appointment of the first High Commissioner for Palestine, Herbert Samuel, himself Jewish. Palestine was placed under the British Colonial Office, foretelling its further colonization by Jews. During and after World War I, Chaim Weizman, later to be the first president of Israel, established strong relationships with the British, assuring them always that a Jewish State would be in Britain's best interests in the region. Weizman was concerned about Samuel's appointment because he did not know if he was one of the liberal British Jews who opposed Zionism. Later he found out that Samuel had written a 1915 memorandum on the subject of a Jewish State in Palestine. Hence, Samuel's appointment (1920–1925) was an important victory for Zionists to initiate the transformation of Palestine.

Contrary to traditional accounts portraying Samuel as a consummate...
British official; he actually used his position to lay the foundations for a Jewish State in Palestine. He was not impartial. Among his many actions and policies are the following:

• He assured a liberal Jewish immigration policy aimed at demographic density.

• He facilitated Jewish land acquisition, including altering the Ottoman "land use" definition of ownership of state lands (lands held by the state in ownership trust for the land users), which were acquired by the British as the Mandate Authority of Palestine. He separated "land use" from "land ownership" so that when Jews acquired some of that land, they could evict the Palestinian "land use" owners and amass territorial and economic footing in Palestine.

• He facilitated contiguous Jewish settlements for political and economic development of the Jewish community.

• He adopted a policy of large public investments and deficit financing to employ the economically unabsorbed Jewish immigrants.

• He developed a favorable customs policy to allow Jews to import needed materials cheaply to develop a Jewish economy.

• He consulted regularly with Chaim Weizmann.

• He worked closely in Palestine with the Zionist Commission, the National Council for Jews, and the Jewish Constituent Assembly (Va’ad Leumi), precursor of the Israeli Knesset. Simultaneously, he blocked every effort by the majority Palestinians to gain authoritative representation, while granting the Zionist minority considerable power. In fact, he gave new Jewish immigrants immediate provisional citizenship so that they would have electoral impact. He tried to create collaborationist Palestinian parties (as other colonial powers have done in their colonies) to divide the Palestinians and provide a façade of Palestinian political participation.29

In the end, the Zionists acquired less than 6 percent of the land of Palestine, with an added 1 percent leased to the Zionists by the British, for a total of less than 7 percent.

Riots, Violence, and Strike in Palestine: The 1936 Peel Commission and the 1937 Partition Plan

Palestinians became increasingly aware of the fact that the Zionists were forging a takeover of Palestine. The Zionists had established proto-state
institutional structures in Palestine, with paramilitary organizations at the ready. By this time, David Ben-Gurion, leader of the Labor Socialist Party, had become the dominant Zionist figure in Palestine. Ben Gurion was a brilliant strategist and tactician.

Ben-Gurion, and the rest of the left-wing leadership, always looked moderate and reasonable, denying either a conflict with the Arabs or the wish for a Jewish state. This was a brilliant ruse, a great tactical posture, but behind it he knew that the only way to defeat the Palestinians was through military force [a position that has defined Israel's Arab policy of force and more force to bring the Arabs to heel], which he created. While right-wing leaders made fiery speeches about a great Jewish army, Ben-Gurion quietly created it. . . . He [Ben-Gurion] knew very little about socialist theories and did not need to study socialism [the idealized Zionist construction of return to the land, Jewish self-sufficiency, etc., which appealed to European Jews immigrating to Palestine] to achieve his goal, which was the goal of the movement: Jewish sovereignty in Palestine.20

Palestinians kept pressing the British to live up to the 1915–1916 agreement and to the League of Nations' Covenant, Article 22, paragraph 4, which stated:

Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.21

In November 1934, Palestinians approached the British high commissioner about "the formation of a Legislative Council as a first step toward Palestinian self-government envisioned in the mandate."22 In November 1936, the Palestinians submitted a list of demands to the high commissioner that included:

1. The establishment of democratic government in accordance with the Covenant of the League of Nations and Article 2 of the Palestine Mandate.
2. Prohibition of the transfer of Arab lands to Jews.
3. The immediate cessation of Jewish immigration and the formation of a competent committee to determine the absorptive capacity of the country and lay down principles for immigration.\textsuperscript{23}

The Palestinians understood that unrestrained Jewish immigration, combined with Zionist political and military institutional development, was leading to the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish state at their expense. By this time, Palestinians were conscious of the 1917 Balfour Declaration and other secret documents aimed at dispossessing them. Rebelling in 1936, the Palestinians called for a strike, and violent disturbances broke out. The British sent the Peel Commission to investigate the causes of the violence. In its report in July 1937, the Commission concluded that the desire for an independent Palestinian state could not be reconciled with Jewish nationalism and recommended partition of Palestine and the termination of the British Mandate. Ben-Gurion accepted the partition plan as a tactical step toward acquiring all of Palestine. His Zionist detractors criticized him for accepting the idea of a Jewish state in part of Palestine. "Lecturing to Mapai activists on 29 October 1937, Ben-Gurion explained that the realization of the Jewish state would come in two stages: the first, 'the period of building and laying foundations,' would last ten to fifteen years and would be but the prelude to the second stage, 'the period of expansion.'"\textsuperscript{24} In any case, the plan was never implemented, especially as war loomed on the horizon.

In 1939, George Antonius was part of the Palestinian delegation that went to King James Court to argue for Britain's implementation of the legal commitment made to Sharif Husain in 1915-1916. His 1938 book, The Arab Awakening, provided all of the irrefutable legal evidence, including detailed analysis and maps, of Britain's promises to the Arabs. However, "No matter how Antonius caught the British by the legal and moral tail, Great Britain continued to favor the Zionists, whose legal case was basically nil."\textsuperscript{25} The Jewish Agency was also invited to the same 1939 conference to search for a solution in lieu of the 1937 Partition Plan, unacceptable to Arabs; and the Zionists were unenthusiastic about it. As a result, the British, growing ever more concerned about war, issued a White Paper aimed at placating both parties. It stipulated that
The outbreak of World War II postponed further thinking on Palestine.

Post-World War II Developments

Violence and the Anglo-American Committee Report

At the close of the war, violence resurged in Palestine. The Zionists pushed for allowing unrestricted Jewish immigration. The Arabs feared becoming a minority in their own country, even losing their country entirely. Exhausted by war, Britain found it increasingly difficult to control the situation in Palestine.

In October 1945, Britain persuaded U.S. President Harry Truman to undertake a joint study of the Palestine problem. They formed the Anglo-American Committee and submitted their report on May 1, 1946. Their basic recommendations were to issue, for 1946, 100,000 permit entries to Jews to immigrate to Palestine; to call for a binational state in Palestine, with equal representation for Jews and Palestinians; to make Palestine a UN Trust Territory, which would prepare the two communities for independence in a binational state; and to base future immigration to Palestine on mutual agreement. Truman accepted only those parts of the recommendations favorable to Zionists. Britain favored the whole but said that it could not admit 100,000 refugees into Palestine until the Zionist paramilitary groups were disbanded and disarmed. Ben-Gurion rejected the whole report, focusing instead on Jewish statehood. He was not interested in sharing the state with Palestinians, although Jewish intellectuals like Buber and Magnes were.

The Zionist paramilitary organizations, including the Zionist Irgun (headed by Menachem Begin) and Stern Gang terrorist groups, continued their campaign against the British. As Khalidi notes:
The Jewish campaign against the British did not mean that Ben-Gurion considered his relationship with the British to be a "military" one or that he sought an all-out confrontation with them. Quite the contrary, as we are assured by Teveth [Ben-Gurion's biographer], he saw the relationship as an exclusively "political" one. In other words, all Ben-Gurion wanted from Britain at this stage was to clear out the way so that he could pursue his "military" relationship with the Palestinians and the Arab countries. And pursue it he did... in a massive program of arms acquisition and military buildup.

The UNGA Partition Resolution of November 1947

Before the UNGA Resolution 181 calling for the Partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state with Jerusalem as a corpus separatum administered by the UN was acted upon, the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was sent to Palestine. The committee recommended to the General Assembly that the Jewish refugee problem be considered an international responsibility. However, neither the UN as a whole nor the United States responded to this. In fact, the Zionists made every effort to restrict refugee migration to countries other than Palestine, with the intent of increasing demographic density in Palestine. While war was still raging, President Roosevelt favored an immigration plan that would open the doors of various countries to European refugees, especially Jews, each country designating a specific number it would be able to absorb. He lined up several. Roosevelt's representative, Morris Ernst, was sent to Great Britain during the war to determine how many the British could take. The British said they would take 150,000 if the United States would take the same. Roosevelt knew the U.S. would be a hard sell given the labor unions' fear of foreign workers; but the plan fell through, in any case. Ernst explained the defeat of the plan as follows:

[T]o me it seemed that the failure of the leading Jewish groups to support with zeal this immigration program may have caused the President not to push forward with it at that time. ... I was amazed and even felt insulted when active Jewish leaders decried, sneered and then attacked me as if I were a traitor... I was openly accused of furthering this plan for freer immigration in order to undermine political Zionism. ... I think I know the reason for much of the opposition. There is a deep, genuine, often fanatical emotional vested
interest in putting over the Palestinian movement [i.e., the Zionist project in Palestine].

After all the Zionist efforts to increase population density, Jews formed only one-third of the population in Palestine when the UNGA partition plan was passed on November 29, 1947.

The U.S. had pressured countries that had misgivings about the partition plan to vote for it. The USSR voted for it also, because it saw it as a quick way to get Britain out of the Middle East. The Soviets also hoped that the Communist and Socialist Jews in Palestine would join with Palestinians on the basis of class, overthrow nationalist Zionists, and establish a pro-Soviet country in Palestine. That, of course, did not happen.

The Arab states challenged the legality of the UNGA partition plan and its provisions. Among the requests made by the Arabs were that the International Court of Justice be asked for its opinion on . . . a) whether or not Palestine was included in the Arab territories that had been promised independence by Britain at the end of World War I; . . . c) whether partition was consistent with the principles of the UN Charter; d) whether its adoption and forcible execution were within the competence or jurisdiction of the UN; and e) whether it lay within the power of any UN member or group of members to implement partition without the consent of the majority of the people living within the country.

The Arab challenge went down to a U.S.-pressured 21-20 vote on a counter challenge that insisted that the UN did have authority to partition. In any case, the Zionists accepted the 1947 partition plan as a tactical move that would lead to establishing a "legal" foothold in Palestine from which to expand into all of Palestine and beyond. Ben-Gurion was on record in the 1942 Biltmore Hotel meeting of the World Zionist Organization as committed to the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish commonwealth, as contrasted to the notion of partition calling for a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. However, by 1946, he reverted to his tactical acceptance of partition. He explained his acceptance to his fellow Zionists as simply a first step toward fulfilling the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish Commonwealth.

"Teveth [Ben-Gurion's biographer] paraphrases Ben-Gurion's thoughts as follows: 'Only those with deep Zionism would appreciate his doctrine of
gradual implementation of the ideology. The Arabs rejected the partition plan. A few figures will demonstrate just how unfair the partition plan was.

Under the plan:

- Jews received 55 percent of the best land in Palestine, while owning less than 7 percent in all of Palestine and less than 11 percent in the allotted area, while Palestinians were allotted 45 percent of their land.
- The proposed Palestinian state would have 818,000 Palestinians, including the 71,000 Palestinians in the seacoast city of Jaffa, surrounded by what would be the Jewish state, and fewer than 10,000 Jews. The Jerusalem corpus separatum would have 105,000 Palestinians and 100,000 Jews. The Jewish state would have about 499,000 Jews and about 438,000 Palestinians.
- Eighty percent of the land in the Jewish state was owned by Palestinians, whereas only 1 percent of the Palestinian land was owned by Jews.
- The best lands were incorporated into the Jewish state where Palestinians had citrus and cereal production areas, their main exports. Moreover, 40 percent of Palestinian industry and the major sources of the country's electrical supply fell within the envisaged Jewish state.
- The plan also left Palestinians without air access or harbors and port facilities, except for isolated Jaffa.

Mainstream Zionists demanded what they felt was realistic in the 1940s: a Jewish state in the greater part of Palestine, which the partition plan offered. Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi notes that the Zionist acceptance of the partition plan was in essence acceptance of the Zionists' own demand. He states further, "It is difficult to see why a moral kudos appertains to the party that accepts its own program, and eternal opprobrium attaches to the party that rejects a transaction it perceives to threaten its national existence." Since that time, Israelis have said continually that had the Palestinians accepted the partition plan, they would have a Palestinian state today. However, given the fact that the 1947 proposed Jewish state had almost an equal number of Palestinians in the area allotted to the Zionists, it would not have been the Jewish state called for in Zionist congresses and literature but a binational state, a concept earlier rejected by Ben-Gurion. Moreover, given our contemporary knowledge of the planned expulsions, massacres, expansion strategy, and efforts today to deny Palestinian statehood on the 1967 Israeli-occupied territories, such pronouncements ring hollow.
The 1948 War

The UNGA 181 (II) was never implemented. In March 1948, the Zionist Plan Dalet (aka Plan D) was finalized. Building on previous plans, Plan Dalet was designed to secure the areas designated as the Jewish state in the partition plan as well as to secure areas beyond those borders. Well before the 1948 war, Palestinians were resisting what they considered to be Zionist colonialism, while Zionists preferred to call it a civil war. On May 14, 1948, the Jewish People’s Council, representing Jews in Palestine and the Zionist Movement, declared the establishment of the state of Israel. They rooted the declaration in that part of UNGA 181 (II) that called for a Jewish state while ignoring the parts that called for an Arab state and the internationalization of Jerusalem. Ben-Gurion resisted initiatives that could have prevented the war that followed the declaration, because he feared they would lead to a Palestinian state as well. “It was only Ben-Gurion’s profound opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state that undermined the Palestinians’ resistance to the Mufti’s call [to launch a war against the Zionist forces].”

War between the Arab armies and the forces of the newly declared Israel ensued. By the time the war ended, Israel had conquered 78 percent of Mandatory Palestine and had expelled or made to flee from the area some 750,000 Palestinians (Israel says fewer; Palestinians say more) of the 900,000 who had originally resided there. Some 150,000 managed to stay within what became Israel. The Palestinian refugees ended up primarily in camps in the remainder of Palestine, i.e., Gaza and the West Bank, and in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Some 400 to 500 villages (depending on whether subsections of larger villages were counted as villages) were demolished and Hebrew names given to the areas. Within what became Israel, a number of those who managed to stay became internal refugees, dispossessed of their lands. The total number of Palestinian refugees today is approximately 5 million, including those displaced in the 1967 war, 3.6 million of whom are registered for aid with the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA). They constitute 62.5 percent of the estimated 8 million Palestinian Arabs.

On December 11, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 194 (III), which has come to be known as the Right of Return resolution, although it also sought to reverse Israeli occupation and transformation of West Jerusalem and to place the whole of Jerusalem under a...
UN trusteeship. The resolution established a special legal regime to deal with the refugee problem. First, it called specifically and solely for the return of the refugees to their original homes and properties in what became Israel. Second, compensation should be paid to those not wanting to return but also to those returning "for loss of, or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible." Third, a special UN agency was created, the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), to "facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation." In recognition that the refugees required assistance until such time as 194 (III) could be implemented, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 302 (IV) on December 8, 1949, establishing the UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). This agency was meant to be temporary until the repatriation of refugees was effected. The UNCCP was unable to get the Israelis to recognize and implement UNGA 194(III) or to reverse its occupation and transformation of West Jerusalem. Israel was admitted to the United Nations in 1949, after agreeing to do both things. It did neither and within months declared West Jerusalem the capital of Israel.

The 1967 War and Its Aftermath: Stage-Two Expansion and the Demographic Dilemma for Israel

On June 5, 1967, Israel initiated a preventive war against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It handily defeated all three within a matter of days, occupying the Egyptian Sinai (returned to Egypt after the 1978 Peace Treaty with Israel), the Syrian Golan Heights (annexed to Israel in 1981), and the remainder of Mandatory Palestine, i.e., Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem (22 percent of Palestine). Israel began to place settlements in—i.e., colonize—the Golan Heights and the Palestinian territories. Unlike 1948, the majority of the Palestinians managed to remain on the land in the newly conquered territories, although there were 300,000 "displaced" persons.

Given the fact that Israel ultimately intended to keep the Occupied Territories, the existence of a large Palestinian population there recreated Israel's original demographic problem. A Whole Land of Israel Movement issued a Manifesto in 1967 affirming that "no government in Israel is entitled to give up [the
conquered territories which Zionists define as part of the whole of Israel, i.e., *Erez Israel* this entirety, which represents the inherent and inalienable right to our people from the beginning of its history." [Quoted in Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 28-29] Today, there are 3.2 million Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and over 1 million [the descendants of those 150,000 who managed to stay in Israel in 1948-49] within Israel proper. The Jewish population numbers some 5 million. Hence the ratio is approximately 4 Palestinians to every 5 Israeli Jews in Israel and the Occupied Territories.42

Given the Israeli dilemma of wanting to keep the land but not the Palestinian people residing on it, a debate took place in Israel regarding a solution to this dilemma. The "solutions" ranged from dependent autonomy for the Palestinians in areas of the Territories while Israel retained control over the land and would annex border areas to engineered emigration (read "ethnic cleansing") and *de facto* annexation of the Territories. The former was most often associated with Labor Party leader Yigal Allon and the latter was favored by Ariel Sharon and Yitzhak Shamir. In fact, no real action was taken to formalize a "solution."43 Camp David I produced a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1978, but failed on the Palestinian issue since Prime Minister Begin insisted on the concept of autonomy only for the residents of the Occupied Territories without territorial sovereignty. Refugee Palestinians were not considered at all. Israel continued building settlements in the territories and in Israeli-expanded East Jerusalem (which Israel annexed after the 1967 war), united it with West Jerusalem, and declared the whole the "eternal capital of Israel." Israel integrated the water resources and electric grid of the territories, placing them under Israeli control. More important, Israel embarked on a process of what scholar Sara Roy coined as "de-development," with the intention of precluding the growth of a viable economy in the territories that could undergird a possible Palestinian state.44

During the period from 1967 to the end of the first Gulf War in 1991, Palestinians resisted occupation, while the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), operating outside of Israel and the Occupied Territories, conducted operations against Israel and continued to advocate for Palestinian rights. The PLO ultimately publically agreed to a two-state solution in 1974. It was made explicit when the Palestine National Council (Palestinian policy body)
of the PLO declared a Palestinian state in 1988, rooting its legitimacy in the 1947 partition plan resolution UNGA 181 (II), but to be located in the 1967-Occupied Territories, i.e., 22 percent of Palestine instead of the 45 percent in the partition resolution. As part of that declaration, the PNC/PLO accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242, thereby recognizing Israel in the 78 percent of Palestine it conquered in 1948. There is nothing in UNSC 242 that calls for a Palestinian state, hence the reason for rooting the declaration in UNGA 181 (II). PLO moderation was not embraced by the Israeli government, given that Israel wanted to keep the 1967 Occupied Territories.

Nonetheless, the first President Bush insisted that the time was opportune, in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, to "resolve" once and for all the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The "peace process" was initiated in Madrid on October 31, 1991, with UN Security Council Resolution 242 as the sole legal framework. Secretary of State James Baker sent letters of assurance to the peace delegations. It was obvious from reading the letter to the Israelis that the U.S. accepted Israel's claim that UNSC 242 did not call for Israel's full withdrawal from the territories. Moreover, territories were defined by Israel as administered, not occupied, territories. The international community did not accept this definition, but U.S. backing allowed Israel to maintain it. Palestinians were denied representation by the PLO, which represented all Palestinians in the diaspora and under occupation.

The Palestinian delegation was made up of Palestinians in the 1967 Israeli-occupied territories only (where the demographic problem existed) and was made part of the Jordanian delegation. The Madrid process failed because the Palestinian delegation insisted that the negotiations be about removing the Israeli military occupation, as well as the illegal settlements. The Palestinians refused to accept dependent autonomy in the territories with no end result of a viable state. That is when the backdoor channel was opened to PLO head, Yasir Arafat, in Oslo. Arafat, by accepting the Declaration of Principles (which did not guarantee a Palestinian state) and by accepting the Gaza/Jericho first proposal, de facto conceded to Israel the "right" to determine from which, if any, land it would withdraw. Moreover, the terms set for allowing a Palestinian Authority in the territories were clearly defined to give Israel ultimate control and veto power over the Authority and its institutions. The Israeli intent was to rid themselves of responsibility for the occupied Palestinians (the demographic problem) but to keep control over the land and resources. Once the Palestinian Authority
was established in the territories, the PLO, representing all Palestinians, declined in its ability to advocate for the rights of all Palestinians, including the diaspora refugees. Arafat remained as head of the PLO, but in effect the PLO was "collapsed" into the Authority.

The Oslo process led to worsened conditions for the Palestinians. Israelis worked diligently to assure that a "solution" would not lead to a viable Palestinian state or to any loss of control of the territories by Israel. The symbols of sovereignty—for example, passport issuance, stamps, etc.—were allowed, but only within the context of dependent autonomy. It is not necessary here to review the stages of the disintegration of Oslo; Sara Roy's excellent "Oslo Autopsy" covers this well. Under the present [July 2004] Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Israel is pursuing the preferred Sharon "solution" of progressive engineered emigration by imprisoning Palestinians behind an apartheid wall aimed at producing conditions that will induce Palestinians to leave over time, Jordan being the obvious destination. The Likud always maintained that "Jordan is Palestine," in any case. Sharon has destroyed Palestinian infrastructure and institutions in the Territories and has crippled Palestinian security forces. In his effort, he has managed to apply the label of terrorism to the Palestinians, in place of legitimate Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and colonialism and to do it under the American umbrella of the "war on terrorism." The recent endorsement of Sharon's plans by President Bush and the U.S. House of Representatives gives full public clarity to what has been the implicit American position. Hence the "road map" for peace and the unofficial "Geneva Initiative" (which were but slight variations of Oslo) join Oslo on the junk heap of failed proposals. They do so because they did not call for the removal of the occupation and the recognition of the inalienable rights of the refugees and also because their terms implicitly sought to reward Israeli colonialism by allowing for more annexation of prime land in the West Bank in exchange for land unequal in quality.

All peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians have foundered on two issues: the establishment of a viable Palestinian state (a collective right) and on Palestinian refugees' right of return to their homes and properties in what became Israel after 1948 (Palestinian individual right). Statehood represents the collective right of Palestinians to self-determination as embodied in a number of United Nations General Assembly Resolutions: 181 (II) (1947); 2787 (1971); 2955 (XXVIII) (1972); and 3236
(XXIX) (1974), as well as the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Statehood in no way vitiates the individual right of refugees to return to their homes and properties in post-1948 Israel.

In all the “peace” negotiations and initiatives, Israel sought to limit the Palestinian collective right to a non-contiguous area in the West Bank and Gaza controlled by Israel politically and economically. Israel further sought to fold Palestinian refugees’ individual rights into the collective right allegedly “offered” by Israel during the Oslo process. That is, Israel attempted to get Palestinian leadership to sign on to a Bantustan “statelet,” to close the file on refugee claims by accepting to absorb refugees into the “statelet,” and to agree to minimal repatriation (basically non-child-bearing refugees) to be granted as an Israeli humanitarian gesture. Given Sharon’s policies and the apartheid wall, a two-state solution is no longer possible. The United States has failed to be an honest broker in this conflict. Neither has it supported the establishment of a viable Palestinian state nor has it encouraged Israel to accept legal responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugees and all that the latter entails under the relevant UN resolutions, international refugee conventions, and international humanitarian laws. Having expelled the majority of the refugees in 1948 to transform the demographics and having conquered all of the land by June 1967, Israel has aggressively fought refugee return and sharing the land of Palestine with Palestinians. In fact, Professor Benny Morris, whose scholarship revealed in detail the extent of Zionist use of terror to expel Palestinians, bemoans the fact that Ben-Gurion did not complete the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the 1948 war.49

In the end, however, Israel cannot go on forever using force to deny Palestinians their rights and to destroy their lives in order to maintain a Jewish state. Such an effort has already taken a high moral toll on Israeli society and on Palestinian lives and society. Sharing the land within a political formula that guarantees the collective national and cultural rights of both peoples is the ultimate answer for a durable peace.

Conclusion

Clearly, the political Zionists drew on the rich mythical symbolism of the alleged ancient Israel, which they combined with a new forceful Jewish identity, in order to promote their goals in Palestine and have them appear as legitimate and inevitable. The majority of the Israelis, however, are
secular. In order not to expose the contradiction, the Zionists never produced a constitution in which an identity would usually be proclaimed. Nonetheless, a number of settler movements, such as Gush Emunim, preach a biblical fundamentalism that claims Palestine as ancient Israel. They are vocal, but a minority, nonetheless. Palestinians have basically been secular in their social and political life. However, with the continuous Israeli effort to destroy Palestinian secular resistance, both armed and nonviolent, the Islamist resistance movement, which can reach people through religious institutions, has grown. This movement has unfortunately been welcomed by Sharon’s government because it provides the opportunity to lump Hamas and Islamic jihad with the fringe “Islamic” terror networks operating across borders. The misguided and immoral use of suicide bombers in the name of a distorted Islam has been particularly repulsive, even though such martyrs are considered by some as one of the remaining means to resist Israeli aggression and occupation. The use of terror tactics against civilians, as contrasted with state or cross-border terrorism, has unfortunately been part and parcel of earlier anticolonial movements of resistance. Think, for example, of the Algerian resistance to the French or the Mau Mau resistance to the British in Kenya. One must ask what level of desperation is experienced to produce this form of resistance.

Thus, on the one hand, there is a small group claiming ownership of Palestine through mythological biblical prophecy and a growing minority that invokes jihad through martyrdom to resist the occupation of Palestine. Hamas has proposed long-term ceasefire agreements to Israel, only to be rebuffed by Sharon’s government and to have its spiritual and political leadership assassinated.

In spite of the religious veneer, however, the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is a political conflict over land. The Zionists succeeded up to a point in transforming Palestine demographically and territorially into a Jewish state in control of all of Palestine. The Palestinians have resisted their dispossession and dispersal and seek to exercise their national collective and individual rights in their indigenous homeland in Palestine. The majority of the Palestinians still on the land and in the diaspora are willing to share Palestine with Israeli Jews on an equal basis but not to be excluded from their homeland to accommodate an exclusive Jewish state. Law and morality argue for a just solution.
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Endnotes

2. Ibid., 14.
4. Ibid., 47.
6. Ibid., 72. See also Ze'ev Herzog, "The Holy Land, Archaeology, and the Bible: Deconstructing the Walls of Jericho," Haaretz (Friday, 29 October 1999).
11. Ibid., 35.
12. Ibid., 36.
13. Ibid., 41.
15. All of the proposed maps were assembled from Zionist sources and put out in collected form by The Arab Women's Information Committee in their publication, "From the Nile to the Euphrates," in The Facts about the Palestine Problem

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(16) Bogle, The Modern Middle East, 142-43.
23. Ibid., 238.
27. For a good discussion of this period, see ibid., 16-42.
30. Ibid., 492-93.
32. Ibid., 17.
34. Ibid., 16.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 18-20.
45. Tomeh, ed., United Nations Resolutions, 143. UNSC 242 was unusual in the sense that it did not refer back to extant resolutions on the conflict.
46. See the Special Document File on "The Madrid Peace Conference," in Journal of Palestine Studies 21/2 (Winter 1992): 117-49. The letter to Israel appears on p. 120. Two key commitments made by Baker were these: "The U.S. will not support the creation of an independent Palestinian state" [and] "Israel holds its own interpretation of Security Council Resolution 242, alongside other interpretations."
48. Sara Roy, "Why Peace Failed—An Oslo Autopsy," in *Current History* 100/651 (8 January 2002); reprinted in Tobin, ed., *How Long, O Lord?,* 11-28. Countering Barak's claims of a "generous offer" and that "there is no Palestinian partner for peace" are the following important articles: Robert Malley and Hussein Agha, "Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors," in *The New York Review of Books* 48/13 (9 August 2001) and Uri Avnery, "Irreversible Mental Damage," in *Palestine Chronicle* (22 June 2004), available online at www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=5760&sectionID=22. In it Avnery notes, "This is the culmination of a process that began with the return of the then Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, from the 2000 Camp David summit. After the failure of that meeting, he coined the mantra that has since become the cornerstone of the policy of successive Israeli governments: 'I have turned every stone on the way to peace/ I have offered the Palestinians more generous proposals than any of my predecessors/ The Palestinians have rejected all my offers/ Arafat wants to throw us into the sea/ We have no partner for peace.' This mantra is based on a series of lies that have been exploded long ago. American eye-witnesses like Robert Malley, President Clinton's advisor at Camp David, as well as some of the Israeli participants and international researchers have published detailed reports that prove that Barak himself was responsible for the failure at least as much as Arafat—in fact, far more."

Reflections of a Recovered Christian Zionist

BARRY E. BRYANT

It is probably not a good thing to begin an article like this with an autobiographical confession. But here it is anyway. I used to be a Dispensationalist. I realize now that being one also made me a Christian Zionist. Neither is the case any longer. The journey from there to here has led me from reading Hal Lindsey to meeting Yasar Arafat with a group from the Sabeel Center as a witness to nonviolence. The outcome of this journey is that I can no longer accept Christian Zionism as a theological option, any more than I can accept acts of terrorism as one. For whatever it may be worth, this is the story that hopefully gives some of the reasons why Wesleyans and Methodists should reject Christian Zionism. In the course of telling the story, I offer a critique of Christian Zionism and why it is such an obstacle to Middle East peace.

Left Behind

For anyone growing up in the Holiness tradition in the South in the 1970s, it was hard to avoid Dispensationalism. The theological orientation began innocently enough. It started with listening to preachers telling Revelation horror stories about the “False Prophet,” the “Antichrist,” and the “mark of the Beast.” We were held spellbound and told about the seven-year Tribulation, the four riders of the Apocalypse and their horses, along with the Seven Seals. Worse yet, we were told about how all this would contribute to the torture and death of those who would be left behind after God “raptured” the church. We never batted an eye when we were told Christians would be snatched shirtless right on into heaven. This was “Dispensationalism 101.” It was the Bible. He was a preacher. It had to be true.

Of course, proclaiming the “last days” has been a part of preaching the gospel since the Apostle Peter’s sermon at Pentecost. Evangelists have been using the parousia as a scythe for harvesting souls since the days of Paul. But since D.L. Moody, preachers have used Christ’s return to make
people feel like sinners in the hands of an angry, apocalyptic God. It was a type of evangelism intended to scare hell out of and Jesus into a person. The “good news” was, all we had to do in order to escape both hell and all the horrors of being left behind was to give our hearts to Jesus. And I did.

It happened during a youth camp in the middle of a humid, mosquito-infested North Carolina summer, after a series of sermons on the “end times preached by someone brought in like a gospel gunslinger with the sole aim of seeing us saved. With sweat beading and veins bulging, he asked us all what would happen if the church got raptured there and then. Would we be ready? Would Jesus be able to snatch us to heaven? What would we do if we woke up one morning to find our families and friends gone, taken by Jesus into heaven as the church got raptured and we got left behind?

At the end of the sermon, a quartet of my friends sang a Larry Norman song, “I Wish We’d All Been Ready.” It described what it would be like to be left behind. There would be sword, famine, pestilence, disease, war, and bread worth its weight in gold. To the altar I went, with dozens of others who were probably just as determined as I was not to be left behind. When I made that decision, I did not intend on becoming a Christian Zionist. That was the next step.

Scofield, Darby, and Dispensationalism

That autumn I went to a Bible study on the “end times” and was told I needed a Scofield Reference Bible to learn how to read the Bible properly. I bought one, because I wanted to be able to peer into the biblical “crystal ball” of prophecy and see the future with my own eyes. Scofield’s Bible is largely how Dispensationalism crept like kudzu across the theological landscape of the twentieth century. Its contribution to spreading Dispensationalism throughout America cannot be overestimated. First published in 1909, his Bible established Scofield as the exegete par excellence of Dispensationalism. But if Scofield was Dispensationalism’s exegete, then J.N. Darby was its theologian. Scofield’s work was an attempt to popularize to an American audience the work of J.N. Darby, who has been credited as being the founder of Dispensationalism.

Darby was ordained in 1825 in the Church of Ireland and eventually became the leader of the “exclusive” Plymouth Brethren movement. Noted for his early indefatigable work trying to “evangelize” the Catholics, Darby was convinced of at least three things. First, Catholics are not truly
Christians and needed to be converted to the “true” faith. Second, when his best efforts to reform the church failed, a frustrated Darby concluded that it was too corrupt for God to be able to work through it. Third, Darby was convinced that God had personally revealed to him the divine plans for the future—an apocalyptic way of seeing things that he would share with the world as Dispensationalism. Generally, Dispensationalism is an elaborate, detailed, and convoluted theology put together piecemeal by some rather creative theological minds. At the risk of oversimplification, it can be reduced to five key points.

First, the Bible is to be taken literally, especially where prophecy is concerned. Without this point, the entire system threatens to collapse. For this reason, Dispensationalism shares with Fundamentalism the belief in biblical literalism. But the two movements are not to be confused. Not all Fundamentalists are Dispensationalists, but all Dispensationalists are pretty much Fundamentalists. Both groups share an aversion to any of the disciplines of biblical criticism. There is no need to try to get to the original meaning of a passage. Because of the literalism, anyone with the help of a good concordance is able to “rightly divide the word of truth,” as Scofield put it.

Divide is the operative word there. For the most part, Dispensationalists use a “cut-and-paste” method of proof-texting rather than careful sociolinguistic contextual analysis and exegesis of a passage. It amounts to biblical vivisection, which results in more disastrous consequences than most of the higher critical methods used by scholars. The goal of most biblical criticism is exegesis. The general outcome of Dispensationalists’ “rightly dividing the word of truth” is eisegesis.

Furthermore, there was also a strong emphasis on one’s private interpretation of Scripture. Nineteenth-century technology meant that for the first time in history the Bible could realistically become the private, personal property of everyone in the United States. The Bible could easily be placed into any open hand that wanted to hold one. The American ideal of democracy meant that when the Bible did fall into hands as personal property, one person’s individual reading and opinion was just as authoritative as any other’s. This inadvertently led to the privatization of Scripture and undermining the need for scholarship.

The result was a blatant disregard for the history of the interpretation of the Bible. For Dispensationalists, the past would not be much help in...
understanding Scripture since a great deal of prophecy was left obscure and misunderstood until now. In order to prepare us for the end times, Bible readers from the past did not have the key to unlock the end-time prophetic mysteries. Darby did; and now we do.

Second, there are two eternal covenants established by God, one for Israel and one for the church. The old covenant is not replaced by the new—Israel always has been and always will be God’s “chosen people.” God’s covenant with Abraham to bless him and grant him land is unconditional and irrevocable. Consequently, both covenants exist side by side in the eternal scheme of things. It is God’s desire that the Jewish people return to the land and occupy Jerusalem as the undivided capital. One of the objectives is to rebuild the Temple so that ritual sacrifice may resume. This distinction made between the church and Israel on the basis of covenant is Darby’s biggest contribution to Christian Zionism.

Third, according to Scofield, these covenants are worked out through seven dispensations of history: Innocence (Gen. 1:28); Conscience (Gen. 3:7); Human Government (Gen. 8:15); Promise (Gen. 12:1); Law (Exod. 19:3); Church (Acts 2:1); and Kingdom (Rev. 20:4). Each dispensation represents something of a theological progress that results in Israel replacing the church before the triumphant return of Christ. A bit more will be said about this below.

Fourth, there will be a secret rapture of the church. Based on a reading of 1 Thess. 4:16-17, the Rapture may occur before, during, or after the seven-year Tribulation, depending on how one “literally” interprets prophecy. In the Rapture, Christ will come quickly and quietly for the church, “like a thief in the night.” Then Christ will come again later in glory with a trumpet blast, accompanied by the church. The only question typically left for discussion is whether this return comes before or after the millennial reign of Christ on earth. Nearly all Dispensationalists hold to a premillennial view of the second coming of Christ.

Finally, after the church has been raptured, it will be replaced by Israel to face the Tribulation. It was this “replacement” theology that stirred the most controversy, even in Darby’s day. The concept did a good job in dividing the Plymouth Brethren. To Darby, because the church was corrupt and beyond salvaging, it was part of just another dispensation to be overturned later. In fact, his was a rather pessimistic theology that taught that the only thing Christians could expect would be to watch evil grow continually.
It is for this reason that Dispensationalists for a long time showed little concern for social or political issues. What was the point? It was a kind of fatalism in which God was seen as having preordained things to get only worse. This fatalism changed only when Israel eventually was established as a nation-state. Then Dispensationalists got involved with social and political issues that would directly aid Israel. In the end, this mindset subverts any sense of justice. Injustice becomes an accepted norm in a deteriorating universe and in a world where Israel must be supported at all, even unjust, costs.

Darby and Scofield created a Dispensationalist way of reading the Bible—a hermeneutic, if you will. While this hermeneutic had been a Dispensationalist tool in evangelism, it would become a weapon in Christian Zionism. All that remained was to read Hal Lindsey in order to learn a method of how to read the newspaper prophetically, with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

Christian Zionism

It was not long before someone put a copy of Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* in my hand. I read it with great amazement, enthusiasm, and vigor. At each Bible study, I joined in the endless and obsessive speculation about Gog and Magog of Ezek. 38:2, when Russia would invade Israel, or who the Antichrist might be. The only hint as to who that might be could be found in the mathematical conundrum known as the "mark of the Beast." With the right alphabet (English was preferred, of course; but Hebrew and Greek could also be used) and the right amount of algebra, 666 could be tweaked enough so that the Beast could be almost anyone. The theories covered everyone from John F. Kennedy to the Pope and often reflected a pronounced anti-Catholic sentiment. (Perhaps this accounts for the disregard of Christian communities on the West Bank now. They are nearly all Roman Catholic or Orthodox.)

The speculation increased over time. There was speculation as to what the Beast's "mark" might look like. Suggestions ranged from tattoos to bar codes, even Social Security number cards. We speculated when the Rapture might occur and tried to imagine the chaos created by sidewalks full of empty clothes, careening cars, and crashing planes. Living in the middle of the Cold War, with its constant threat of nuclear holocaust, we speculated about Armageddon a lot and about how God would use "weapons of mass
destruction" to bring sinners to their knees before the Prince of Peace. More recently, Lindsey has speculated that, according to Rev. 16:13-14, blood will flow horse-bridle deep for two-hundred miles, from the Sea of Galilee to Eilat.5 Another Dispensationalist, Timothy Dailey, disagrees slightly with Lindsey. Dailey speculates that the passage actually describes Tel Aviv being destroyed by Syrian-fired nuclear warheads.6 To a generation who had been taught to hide under desks in the event of nuclear attack, the Rapture sounded like a good deal and an easy escape. Thank God we would not have to suffer all that. We would not be left behind.

Two events served as watershed moments for Dispensationalism. The first was the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. From that point on, "biblical Israel" was synonymous with "political Israel." This event has been seen as the final fulfillment of God's unconditional covenant with Abraham in Gen. 12:3 to give him the land. According to Dispensationalist theology, the Jews had to return to the Promised Land and the nation of Israel had to come into existence before Christ could return. Based on Christ's apocalyptic discourse in Matt. 24:1-15, Luke 21:5-36, and Mark 13:1-37, this event started the countdown to Christ's return. It remains a popular belief that the generation that witnessed the founding of the State of Israel would not pass before Christ returns. I was taught that if we wanted Jesus to return, all Bible-believing Christians had to assist the Jews in getting, keeping, and defending the Promised Land. This led to the conviction that Zionism was essential to the Christian faith. Zionism and the State of Israel were inexorably bound to the Second Coming of Christ. Furthermore, if we really wanted Jesus to return, then Israel had to occupy all the territories of the Holy Land. To desire otherwise would be anti-Semitic, even unchristian.

The second watershed moment is the Six Day War in 1967. The preemptive invasion by Israel of Palestinian territories clearly demonstrated to the Dispensationalist observer that the Holy Land had to be defended against Satan and the "evil empires" of Communism (and now, since the fall of Communism, Islam) at all costs, even war. For many this was the reason for America's "manifest destiny." It is the job of Americans to protect Israel. Many have argued that God's words to Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you," is why America has been blessed so much. We have blessed Israel and God has blessed us.

The ironic thing is that most mainline denominations agreed with the international objections to the occupation of the Gaza strip and the West
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Bank. An example of how this came about for United Methodists can be seen in Rhonda McCarty’s article in this issue. Yet, in spite of resolution after resolution by the United Nations, Dispensationalists saw it as their divine calling and purpose to offer enthusiastic and unqualified support for Israel. They still support the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories.

All of these things are what make Dispensationalists more Zionist and more militant than many Jews. It should be obvious that not all Zionists are Jews. Histories of the Zionist movement have even suggested that Christians were Zionists before Jews were. Before Moses Hess, Leo Pinsker, and Asher Ginsberg—even before Theodor Herzl—and their vision of a Zionist state, there were Darby and Scofield, among others.7

But what might not be as easy to see at this point is that not all Jews are Zionists. There always has been a significant (and now growing) number of Jews who do not agree with the principles of Zionism. There have been many Jews who have opposed Zionism on political and religious grounds.8 This indicates quite clearly that it is possible to be anti-Zionist without being anti-Semitic.

Because of all this, I was taught that Palestinians were the enemies of Israel and, consequently, the enemies of God. I was never told how the Palestinians were dispossessed of their land, or that Israel would have never come into existence without the aid of Western colonialism.9 I was never told that there is an ancient and significant Christian community on the West Bank, which does not understand American Christianity’s support of the government that oppresses it. Gaza and the West Bank were seen as obstacles to Israel’s occupying all the land promised to them, and the communities there—even the Christian communities—have been seen as expendable. The Six Day War and Israel’s invasion of those territories were entirely justified. It would be Bible-believing Dispensationalist Christians and Israel against the evil of the world (that is, until the church got raptured and the Jews were left behind to face the wrath of the Antichrist alone. When they did they would either be converted to Christianity or killed by the Antichrist).

By now it is perhaps easy to see the attraction of this theology. No matter how bad things get, there is the assurance that God is in control. All the end-time suffering is necessary and painful preparation for the return of Christ. On the other hand, there was a comfort that the born-again Christian would not be left behind to suffer the worst of the suffering anyway. Furthermore, there was the sense of having the power of “inside
knowledge, of being able to see and understand the future and even current events in a way that the world could not. All of this adds up to a sense of empowerment that enticed a major group of Christians to get off the sidelines of history and into the game. It enabled them to use their hands to help shape history, instead of wringing them over its direction. Dispensationalists could now assist Jesus in his triumphant return.

An Exodus from Christian Zionism

There is no lack of theological reasons for rejecting Christian Zionism. But it was because I was introduced to Wesleyan theology that my exodus from Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism began. I gradually learned what it means to be a Methodist in theology. During the process of my Dispensationalist rehab, this "Wesleyanization" demonstrated quite simply that it is not possible to be a Wesleyan and a Dispensationalist at the same time. It was either Darby, Scofield, and Lindsey or Wesley and the theologians who follow in the Wesleyan and Methodist tradition.

There are lots of reasons for making such a choice. Ironically, none of them could be based on Wesley's own eschatology. To be honest, that is one of the most confusing and muddled doctrines in Wesley's writings. It is difficult even to know where Wesley stands on the millennium. Eschatology was one of those things about which Wesley felt he had to say something because it is referred to in the Bible. But his attention was more focused on here and now—the issues of evangelism and reaching out to the poor. Consequently, he did not give much attention or thought to the "last things." He had little to say about such matters. and what he did say he largely borrowed from Johann Albrecht Bengel, the German Lutheran theologian and Bible scholar. It is more what Wesley had to say about the use of Scripture, grace, covenant, and the image of God that dismantled the five pillars of Dispensationalism for me.

At the same time, one does not have to be a Wesleyan to critique and reject Christian Zionism. There have been several theologians who have offered strong and valid reasons for rejecting Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism. But I do think that there cannot be two theologies more incompatible than Dispensationalism and Wesleyan theology. I cite just a few reasons.

The first is the understanding and role of Scripture. Dispensational rehab begins with a change in attitude toward Scripture. Dispensationalists
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insist on biblical literalism, except for the parts that are critical of wealth and the parts about the rich going through the eye of camel. Neither are the prophetic calls to justice and mercy taken very literally. When it comes to these topics, there seems to be a sudden fondness for the symbolic and metaphorical or a preference for ignoring them all together. All this suggests something of a canon within the canon for Dispensationalists. There seems to be a preference of Ezekiel over Amos and Revelation over the Sermon on the Mount. It is the eschatological over the ethical.

Regardless of what one makes of the so-called Wesleyan “quadrilateral,” the theological method set forth in the United Methodist Book of Discipline suggests a use of tradition (along with reason and experience) when Scripture is read. The typical Dispensationalist reading of Scripture totally disregards the traditions relating to a passage or the history of its interpretation and exegesis. The voices of suffering from the past are muted as they try to speak to the church of today. For example, when read in its historical context, the Book of Revelation is about the integrity of Christian worship in the face of an oppressive empire. The cries of the saints around the throne of God become cries for justice in the face of wickedness and oppression. Theirs are cries in the face of the evils of empire. One thing that tradition does is to keep us listening to voices in the past.

Beyond the use of tradition one could also turn to Wesley’s understanding of “searching the Scriptures.” This consisted of reading, meditating on, and hearing God’s word. It recognizes the value of reading and meditating on the Bible and its devotional use in a Christian’s life. But “hearing” the Bible is a way of bringing our reading and meditation back within the community. Hearing means that one person is reading and another is listening. Hearing and reading are acts of community. Thus, Bible study is not complete until this communal event occurs. It is a reminder that personal pronouns regarding the Bible must be used carefully. We should not speak of “my” Bible as much as we speak of “our” Bible. It is as much the Palestinian’s Bible as it is the American’s. We simply cannot afford to read it without them. In fact, we need to hear the Palestinians read to us from the Bible more often. One thing that searching the Scriptures does is that it keeps us listening to voices in the present.

When Scripture is heard in this way, a different way of looking at the prophets emerges. Dispensationalist thought sees prophecy as gazing into a fixed future sealed by the covenants of God. The meaning of most
prophecy has been kept obscured until the end time. Now we have been
given the key to unlock the true meaning of prophecy. Finally, thanks to
Darby's insights, we can foretell the future by "rightly dividing the word of
truth." There is a significant Gnostic element here that should make a
student of church history more than a bit nervous. The reliance upon
"secret knowledge" renders the voice and experience of the early perse­
cuted church useless. Dispensationalism ultimately turns the prophets into
a version of "Gnostic gospel." The end result is virtually the same as it was
for Gnosticism in the early church: a cosmic dualism of good and evil and
of us versus them.

This use of prophecy does more to silence the genuine prophetic voice
than anything else. It has often been pointed out that prophecy is not "fore­
telling" the future as much as it is "forth-telling" the Word of God. Prophecy
is "truth-telling." The ironic thing about a Christian Zionist hermeneutic
where prophecy is concerned is that it ends up oppressing the very ones
whom the word of prophecy is intended to liberate.

There is one more element to this "Wesleyanization" that makes holding
any Dispensationalist thought impossible, namely, the doctrine of grace.
After reading the literature of Dispensationalism, one gets the sense that
grace and goodness are for the elect only. There is simply no sense of God's
universal, all-encompassing love and prevenient grace. The whole Dispen­
sationalist idea of election and covenant suggests that only the elect have
grace. Everyone else is left out in the apocalyptic cold and become dispens­
able creatures in order to bring about God's ultimate eschatological
purposes. To use an argument that Wesley used against the Calvinists of his
day, this makes God the author of evil. Moreover, history is nothing more
than a prearranged puppet show. Consequently, Dispensationalist thought
paints creation in dualistic ways of good and ever-increasing evil.

Because of this understanding of grace there is a lack of acknowledg­
dment of the image of God in all persons. Every person has been created in
the image of God. The sacred worth and divine character of each person is
ignored when others are seen as the evil enemy. Dispensations adumbrate
grace and covenant overshadows the image of God. Rather than viewed as
a universal human right rooted in the theological concept of the image of
God, justice is something for the elect, gained at the expense of others.

Dispensationalism is not a use of the Bible but an abuse of it. It is not a
document of working out God's eschatological purposes through grace and
justice but the perversion of these purposes. Once the pillars of Dispensa-
tionalism are destroyed, the house tumbles. And once the Dispensationalist 
house has collapsed, what possible reasons could there be for supporting 
Christian Zionism? They surely cannot be biblical, so they must be political. 
Once Christian Zionism becomes a political issue, it must be weighed in the 
scales of prophetic justice and the ethic of the kingdom of God that Jesus 
sought to establish. When weighed on those scales, it will be found lacking, 
for it has become a tool in oppressing the poor.

I abandoned the Dispensationalist point of view and joined the ranks of 
the theologically "enlightened" and thus the rehabilitation of my eschatology 
began. Admittedly, I have laughed and scoffed at their notions. I saw it as 
cartoon theology, caricatures of covenant theology filtered through creative 
and apocalyptic minds, misguided and misinformed as they were. It was just 
bad eschatology. But since then, Hal Lindsey has written nineteen more 
books and (depending on who is doing the counting) has sold somewhere 
between 15 and 20 million copies of The Late Great Planet Earth, the sacred 
text of Dispensationalists. Since then, Jenkins and LaHaye have sold in 
excess of 50 million copies of books in the Left Behind series. Pat Robertson, 
Jack Van Impe, John Hagee, and the like have started broadcasting their 
messages globally. Christian Zionists have been extremely active in lobbying 
Congress for support of Israel and a great deal of American foreign policy 
has been developed with Zionism in mind. Since then, we have seen 
American foreign policy influenced by conservative Christian Zionists and 
Palestinians denied their basic human rights. Dispensationalism is clearly no 
longer a marginal, obscure theology. It has become a significant part of 
American culture, a huge influence on American foreign policy, and an 
alarming opponent to peace in the Middle East.

There was a time when Dispensationalist thought seemed to be 
nothing more than a theological gadget in an evangelist's bag of tools. But 
it has become much more than that. At the heart of Dispensationalism, 
and constituting its theological lynchpin, is Christian Zionism.

I rather suspect that there are lots of people sitting in Methodist pews 
who have a story similar to mine. They bought into Dispensationalism 
because of the eschatological intrigue. During their migration to Methodism 
they may have brought Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism with them. 
There are perhaps others who have been lured into the mindset as a result of 
the "Left Behind" phenomenon. But many have taken their seats in a
Methodist pew without going through Dispensationalist rehab. It needs to be said that not all Christian Zionists are Dispensationalists. Many of the laity may discover Methodist clergy who are Christian Zionists without the Dispensationalist eschatology. They are often Christian Zionists for what they perceive as political reasons. It is difficult to voice support for the Palestinians without being accused of anti-Semitism. Consequently, Christian Zionism needs to be approached from two perspectives. First, one must dismantle the Dispensationalist theology and replace it with a biblically sound eschatology. Second, one must approach Christian Zionism as an issue not of eschatology but of peace and justice. To recast Christian Zionism as a peace-and-justice issue is not to be anti-Semitic. It is not to deny Israel its right to exist. It is to say that Palestinians have been created in the image of God and should be treated as such.

What I have come slowly to realize over the years is that there is a perversity to the logic of Dispensationalism. Mind you, it is one thing to use end-time scenarios to scare kids into coming to Jesus during summer youth camp. It is quite another thing to use the same theology to deny an entire group of people their basic human rights. It is one thing to say Israel has the right to exist. It is quite another thing to say that in order for Israel to exist Palestinians must be denied their right to exist. It is one thing to speculate about the parousia and another thing entirely to say that, as a consequence, millions of Dispensationalist Christians should feel no motive or incentive for peace in the Middle East. After all, according to the logic of Dispensationalism, peace postpones the return of Jesus. Moreover, the one group that seems to be the strongest ally to Israel holds a theology that maintains all Jews will either convert to Christianity or be killed by the Antichrist. Thus, while appearing to be pro-Israel on this side of the Rapture, Christian Zionism amounts to apocalyptic anti-Semitism.

Whether we believe that the Dispensationalist interpretation of prophecy will be fulfilled is no longer the point. Rather, the point is that Dispensationalism now has the power to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is no longer a laughing matter—mere cartoon theology—but a frightening apocalyptic vision taken seriously by millions of Christians around the world.

But there is a just and biblical alternative to all this. It is called the kingdom of God.
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Endnotes

1. For more about the Sabeel Center, see http://www.sabeel.org. For a statement from the conference, see http://www.sabeel.org/documents/5thConfStatementfinal.htm.
8. For a good online list of Jews in support of Palestine, see http://www.muhajibah.com/palestine.php?page=reviews.
10. Timothy P. Weber, On the Road to Armageddon (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 15. Weber makes this point in what is a good but largely uncritical historical summary of how the movement empowered itself.
United Methodists and the Israeli-Palestinian Situation

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As I was preparing to write this article in late spring of 2004, I was part of an interesting email exchange between a United Methodist layperson and a Peace with Justice coordinator in Texas. The Peace with Justice coordinator had forwarded an email from United Methodist missionaries in Bethlehem to her email list. The response, which was copied to all of the original recipients, was an overtly hostile objection to the missionaries’ letter. Specifically, the person objecting insisted that emails of this nature should not be distributed “in the name of The United Methodist Church.”

After rereading the original piece, I could find nothing that ran counter to the official position of the church. It recognized the rights of both Israelis and Palestinians to exist. It blamed both terrorism and militarism. It offered specific details about the human rights violations in Israel and Palestine. It offered specific suggestions about how to help that were consistent with the calls to action found in United Methodist resolutions.

I decided to respond to this man. I found that he had been raised in The United Methodist Church, was quite active, and, in fact, had his own copy of the 2000 Book of Resolutions. We agreed that only the General Conference has the authority to speak officially for The United Methodist Church. Yet he was completely unaware that the Conference had indeed spoken for quite some time on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. After taking the time to read the pertinent resolutions, he apologized to all involved, agreeing that the United Methodist Peace with Justice coordinator and the United Methodist missionaries had all acted appropriately and consistently in terms of the General Conference resolutions. He expressed sincere gratitude for the information.

I couldn't help but feel that United Methodists, particularly those of us who are committed to educating about this issue, had failed this man, and who knows how many others like him. It is one thing when a United Methodist has heard an argument for the church’s position on an issue and...
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disagrees. It is quite another when there is no awareness of it at all and therefore no opportunity even to consider how he or she may wish to respond.

My purpose in this article is twofold. First, I provide a critical analysis and interpretation of the resolutions and the parts of the Social Principles that apply to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Middle East peace. Second, I examine how the official position of the church in respect to this conflict might help United Methodists deal with issues of peace and justice. The above anecdote and countless similar episodes expose a huge gap between the existence of denominational resolutions and the understanding, attitudes, and actions of United Methodist clergy and laity. If we are truly to determine how United Methodists deal with these issues, we must look beyond the General Conference, the boards and agencies, and the episcopacy and into our annual conferences and the pulpits and pews of our local churches. Is it really enough simply to have Social Principles and resolutions? If they are of sound rationale, consistent with Christian theology and United Methodist doctrine, worthy of being supported by our General Conference delegates, bishops, and missionaries, then, at the very least, every United Methodist should have the opportunity to hear these positions and evaluate them for themselves. If this is not happening, then we need to find out why and determine how to overcome whatever barriers exist.

The Social Principles

The Social Principles are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.

As United Methodists, we do not dictate social principles to our membership. Rather, the "prayerful and thoughtful effort" of those who wrote them are submitted to us to consider, refine, and apply through "prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice." The inherent genius of this process—to be instructive and persuasive in the prophetic spirit—can happen only if some effort is applied toward instruction and persuasion.

In dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian issue, as with others, we rely some-
what on the teaching role of the episcopacy. While bishops are not allowed to vote at General Conference, they are responsible for transmitting doctrine to the broader church. While not authoritative in themselves, episcopal statements, when measured against General Conference decisions, may be determined to be consistent with the authoritative teachings of the church.⁴

Several pertinent statements have been made both by individual bishops and by the Council of Bishops. Outgoing Council President William Oden led the Council to a bold statement in 2001 after participating in a delegation of U.S. church leaders to Palestine in December 2000. The document reiterated the resolutions of the 2000 General Conference and cited ¶164 of the Social Principles as its base.⁴ It applied those teachings to what the delegation had witnessed in the Occupied Territories. It then called upon the United States and the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to take action consistent with that teaching. Perhaps even more important was a call to all United Methodists to become educated and to work toward deeper understanding of the issues.⁵

The Resolutions

In regard to the issue of Middle East peace, the Social Principles offer a sound framework for the more specific resolutions. Those who petition the General Conference for resolutions on peace and justice issues are doing so with the presumption that the church's attitudes and actions are to be based on the Social Principles.

Resolutions on peace and the Middle East first appeared in the 1968 Book of Resolutions. In the same year that the church addressed U.S. policy in Vietnam, racial equality, the cause of Christian unity, the urban crisis, anti-Semitism, and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolence, it also took on peace and the Middle East. The petition on The United Methodist Church and Peace focused on the unique role of the church "as an instrument of peace." The petition recognized that "no nation is ultimately sovereign," that indiscriminate use of weapons could not be morally justified, that self-determination was a reasonable expectation of all peoples, and that the United Nations was an institution worthy of the church's support. It also condemned war as a means of solving international disputes.⁶ Given the historical context, each one of these statements could be applied directly to our response to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip following the 1967 war, but Israel and Palestine
were not named specifically. The resolution was approved. Thus the foundation was laid for specific resolutions to follow.

The petition for a resolution on "the Middle East" was not approved that year but was included in the *Book of Resolutions* as a study document. It begins by objecting to what remains the crux of this conflict to today.

We cannot condone either threatened aggression or territorial expansion by armed force. We believe that boundaries of the states of the Middle East should now be determined by negotiations with a concern for justice, security, and the future peace of the area, and the integrity of these boundaries should be assured by international protection.7

It recognized the reality of the State of Israel but called for a just solution for the Palestinian refugees caused by the creation of the state. It suggested several possible means, one of which was to return the refugees to their homes inside Israel. The Board of Missions was encouraged to seek out ways in which United Methodists could give and serve. Dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims was proposed in a belief that the mutual concerns of the faithful would lead to reconciliation.8

By 1972, the suggestion for dialogue had gained enough support to be approved as a separate resolution, but with one glaring omission: Muslims were not mentioned. The resolution, entitled "Dialogue between Jews and Christians," expressed our gratitude for our Jewish heritage, referring ambiguously to "the heritage and hope of an Israel in the context of which Jesus labored." Christians were reminded of our "implicit and explicit responsibility for the ... organized extermination of Jews . . ."9

That same year, 1972, a petition was also submitted entitled "Israeli-Palestinian Struggle." It began with a reassertion that Jewish/Christian/Muslim dialogue was necessary for moving toward peace in the Middle East. The petition affirmed that some measure of justice for Palestinian refugees was essential. However, the petition was heavy with guilt-laden sentiment that, due to the Holocaust, we cannot begin to fathom the need that Israelis feel for security. The only action requested, therefore, was for all United Methodists to try to understand the conflict and work toward a solution utilizing nonmilitary means, which would allow Muslims, Christians, and Jews to coexist in the Holy Land.10 The resolution was not adopted but included as a study document.
The shift in the petitions during this four-year period is disturbing. United Methodists began by talking about dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims and about specific problems with Israel's continuing occupation of Palestinian territory. Within four years, we managed to exclude Muslims from the dialogue and dilute the treatment of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle to an expression of sympathy for refugees and Holocaust survivors. Compassion is without a doubt a necessary component of the church's response to situations of injustice. But sympathy, and more importantly, guilt are counterproductive. Professor and Rabbi Marc Ellis, director of the Center for American and Jewish Studies at Baylor University, believes that Jews and Christians have made a horrible mistake in letting guilt over the Holocaust adversely affect dialogue on a real and meaningful level. Holocaust guilt, which allows Christians to be silent about the injustice currently being done to the Palestinians, he says, is denigrating and patronizing to Jews.  

Four years and another war later, a substantial resolution on the Middle East was finally adopted. The 1976 resolution was poignant in that it linked security to justice and peace to meeting the needs of both the Israelis and the Palestinians. It was sensitive to the insecurity of Israeli Jews as well as to the dispossession of the Palestinian people. It was balanced in that it called for self-determination and human rights for both Israelis and Palestinians. It was specific in that it named violations of international law, such as Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territory. The actions for which the resolution called remain critical for United Methodists even today:

1. Promote educational programs at all levels aimed at helping Christians understand the intricacies of the problem . . . increased contact with and among Christians, Muslims, and Jews from the Middle East . . . and participation in ecumenical networks.
2. Organize action programs at the national, conference, and local levels to oppose the continuing flow of arms from all sources to the Middle East.
3. Encourage governmental officials to seek an overall solution rather than accept a partial settlement which is likely to magnify the tensions, increase the isolation of the dispossessed, and set states against one another.
4. In line with the precedent established by the United Nations Security Council . . . urge governments to seek participation of both the Palestine Liberation Organization . . . and the State of Israel in all future negotiations.
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With this firm foundation laid, the resolutions pertaining to peace and justice in the Middle East have shown increasing insight, foresight, strength, and detail in each subsequent quadrennium. Those who drafted the 1980 petition were obviously knowledgeable about the complexities of the Middle East peace process in its broad context and were already showing concern for how the conflicts and treaties with the surrounding Arab countries would affect the dispossessed of Palestine. The 1984 resolution includes the call to "resist simplistic theologies" vis-à-vis the Jewish people. This particular area still needs development, for at the same time as we are told to resist simplistic theology, we are also told implicitly that peace-and-justice issues involving this specific ethnic/religious group require a unique theological framework, compared to similar issues involving the rest of the world.

The 1988 resolution, entitled "The Current Arab-Israeli Crisis," offered the strongest direct challenge by The United Methodist Church to Israeli military policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians. For the first time, the church actually calls upon the Israeli government to "stop beatings, to end the killings, to cease destroying Palestinian homes, to stop deporting Palestinians, to enter into negotiations with Palestinian civilians and the Palestine Liberation Organization over their legitimate demands, including the fair and just distribution of disputed lands." However, it also called upon Palestinians and the PLO to "recognize the State of Israel with secure and recognized borders, and to enter into negotiations leading toward self-determination of all persons in the territories under military occupation, and to cease the support and initiation of all terrorist activities." The resolution specifically asks the U.S. government to oppose the establishment of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories and to withhold financial support to Israel contingent upon its cessation of oppressive policies against the Palestinians.

The most important addition to the relevant resolutions in 1992 was an expanded petition on an issue formerly mentioned only briefly, namely, Holy Land Tours. United Methodists participating in trips to the Holy Land were spending virtually no time with the indigenous Christians of the area. Instead, they were herded to and from holy sites by Israeli tour guides, who would often tell them not to speak to Palestinians and to be especially careful for their safety and property in, for example, Bethlehem, whose population was mostly Christian. Understandably, people on those
tours were missing an exceptional opportunity to learn firsthand the issues of peace and justice from a unique Christian perspective. Many of them left not knowing that Palestinian Christians even existed.

This resolution specifically urged United Methodists to work through our liaison in Jerusalem to arrange to spend a portion of their time in direct encounter with their brothers and sisters there. United Methodists like Bonnie Jones Gehweiler and Bob and Peggy Hannum, the United Methodist liaisons in Jerusalem at the time, were already involved in such encounter tours. With the support of United Methodists under Bonnie's guidance, one of the earliest tour operations in the West Bank, Alternative Tourism Group (ATG), was established. ATG offered Palestinian Christians in Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem, the opportunity to introduce American and European Christians not only to the land but also to their Palestinian Christian heritage. For most people who had this opportunity, the level of understanding and the conviction to work toward peace and justice increased dramatically. Alternative tours are not only invaluable in the education of American Christians but are also a form of direct aid to the oppressed Palestinian population by providing revenue from tourism, fostering relationships with American Christians, and gaining hope and encouragement from those relationships.

The 1996 General Conference offered three new resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, one regarding the settlements, one for economic assistance to the beleaguered Palestinians, and one for diplomatic intervention for Rev. Alex Awad, who had been commissioned by the General Board of Global Ministries to work in Jerusalem but who was denied a visa by the Israeli government. Perhaps more significant was the introduction in that year of a resolution on "the Middle East and North Africa." While space here does not allow detailed analysis of the resolution, it shows that our lens was becoming wider geographically and our concern was growing for such global issues as sustainable development, human rights, and peace and justice, all of which were included in this resolution.

The resolutions in 2000 offered nothing new in terms of the Middle East per se. The issue of interreligious dialogue was reexamined via three different resolutions: "Building New Bridges in Hope," which affirmed our special relationship with the Jews; "Called to Be Neighbors and Witnesses," which dealt with interreligious relations and dialogue in general terms; and the very brief "Prejudice against Muslims and Arabs in the U.S.A."
In 2004, four of the existing resolutions pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were due to expire. The issues were combined into one comprehensive resolution. The resulting petitions were extremely precise in naming the specific conditions of injustice and calls to action. Two very similar petitions actually went to committee with the recognition that both would not be approved. One, entitled "Just and Lasting Peace in Palestine/Israel," was submitted by the General Board of Global Ministries. The other, "A Just Peace in the Middle East," came from the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) and its Middle East Network. General Conference ultimately adopted the latter resolution. The MFSA petition, actually an edited version of the Global Ministries petition, was probably felt to be stronger in that it holds both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority accountable for the ongoing violence. The Palestinian Authority is urged to condemn all acts of terrorism against Israeli civilians and to engage in nonviolent means of resistance. MFSA was determined that the resolution not appear to support one party to the detriment of the other but rather to call for human rights for all involved.

The MFSA petition also reiterated former calls for United Methodist congregations to become more informed about the situation and to establish relationships with other faith communities, working together for peace and justice in the Holy Land. This is a critical component, as without communication and education, the resolutions would be nothing more than reference material. Both petitions agreed that an end to the occupation (a return to the 1967 borders) and the implementation of all United Nations resolutions vis-à-vis Israel were absolutely essential to any resolution of the situation.

Delegates were invited to attend a session prior to voting in which they had the opportunity to hear Rev. Sandra Olewine, United Methodist missionary in Bethlehem; Jeff Halper, director of the Israeli Committee against House Demolition; and Salim Shawamreh, a Palestinian Peace Activist. This team was ideally suited for demonstrating to United Methodists what the key issues are and for moving the church toward an appropriate response. They were able to speak not only to what the official position should be but also to the practical ways in which it might be implemented. With the generous financial and political support of the Minnesota Annual Conference, the Israeli Committee against House Demolition had, in the previous year, been able to rebuild Salim Shawamreh's home for the fifth
time after its being demolished by the Israeli government. This time it was opened as a peace center. Not only did the Minnesotan United Methodists give financially but they also launched a massive lobbying campaign when the home was being threatened again. Calls to Congress and eventually to Secretary of State Colin Powell stopped the destruction of the Shawamreh home for the time being. Known as "the Palestine Israel Justice Project," it is an ongoing excellent model of how the church's position translates into practical ways of dealing with issues of peace and justice.20

This is by no means the only example of appropriate response. In keeping with the resolutions, the General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries continue to work with ecumenical coalitions in a variety of ways. Soon after the 2004 General Conference, General Board of Church and Society General Secretary Jim Winkler participated in a National Council of Churches' delegation that met with UN Secretary General Kofi Anan and also had an interfaith leadership meeting with Secretary of State Colin Powell. The latter group, members of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Middle East Peace, made up of Muslims, Christians, and Jews, is lobbying for the United States to resume heavy involvement in brokering Israeli-Palestinian peace. While the State Department's position at this meeting implicated Palestinian violence as the reason for breakdown of the peace process, Winkler, consistent with the position of the General Conference, stressed the importance of simultaneous actions of both Palestinians and Israelis.21

The General Board of Church and Society also coordinates a network of grassroots peace-and-justice activists throughout The United Methodist Church. Annual conferences are not consistent in their appointment and utilization of Peace with Justice coordinators, educators, and advocates. However, in annual conferences where the position has the support of the bishop and other leadership, local churches benefit from the efforts of Peace with Justice coordinators in working not only on global peace-and-justice issues but also on local projects such as Shalom Zones and in education related to the Social Principles and the resolutions as well.

A handful of annual conferences with active Peace with Justice coordinators did take advantage of the 2004 General Conference resolutions as an opportunity for education. Steve Hodges, Peace with Justice coordinator for the Holston Conference, conducted a workshop at their annual conference linked to the Social Principles and resolutions. Rev. Bruce Case in
Alaska held a discussion forum on the issue. The primary tools used were the *Book of Resolutions* and the Social Principles, along with an article by the General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society. The Northern Illinois Conference has formed a task force that is extremely active in bringing guest speakers from Israel and Palestine, distributing copies of the resolutions and bishops' statements, as well as continually looking for creative ways to increase understanding about the issue. Texas Peace with Justice coordinators Brenda Hardt and Nelda Reid are tireless in their efforts to educate through a variety of means, such as sharing pertinent news and information via email and newsletters, participating in community peace organizations, hosting Palestinian and Israeli guest speakers, and arranging interfaith groups of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women. These simple steps could be taken in any local church by any concerned member, clergy or lay.

Unfortunately, these examples are limited. Many United Methodists are still surprised to hear that the church has a stance on this issue. When asked what is being done in their annual conferences or local congregations to facilitate general discussion of the Social Principles and the resolutions, disseminate information about the sociopolitical situation in Israel and Palestine, or the church's response to the issue, many people are unaware of anything's being done.

**Toward a Practical Understanding**

There is undoubtedly a gap between the church's official positions on social issues and the understanding that prevails "on the ground." The former is primarily the domain of the General Conference, the organizations that influence and implement the decisions of the General Conference, and the episcopacy. The domain of the latter, however, includes educational institutions, pastors, and laity.

As clearly and soundly based as the United Methodist Social Principles and resolutions are, at times their dissemination slows to a trickle. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this sometimes seems to be deliberate. In almost every congregation, there are those who will try to silence any position that runs counter to unequivocal and unquestioning support for Israel. On the other hand, there are those in leadership positions who are unable or unwilling to share this message with their congregations. It is not unusual for United Methodist pastors to admit that they are unfamiliar
with the theological, doctrinal, and/or historical-political material necessary to address this issue with confidence. Therefore, it is either discussed reluctantly and faintly or simply avoided.

It is also not uncommon to hear United Methodist clergy share theological, doctrinal, and/or historical-political material that is inconsistent with the United Methodist understanding of the issue as reflected in the denomination's Social Principles and resolutions. Lacking knowledge of theological, doctrinal, and/or historical-political material can be damaging to churchwide practical understanding, interfaith relationships, and peace-making. A pastor who tries to cover the issue with sound theological and doctrinal positions but lacks complete and accurate information about the issue cannot possibly defend the position of the resolutions. To be sure, the Israeli-Palestinian situation is complex and controversial. Yet United Methodist pastors are called upon to deal with many other complex and controversial issues. So, when a pastor is asked about the United Methodist understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he or she should be able to answer that question fully, regardless of his or her own opinion about it.

Theological Education

One way to bridge the gap between the church's official positions and practical understanding in the churches is through theological education and continuing education. It is not at all clear whether the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is being addressed in any consistent way in seminary and divinity school curricula. Courses can be found on world religions, various aspects of Islam, holy war, and interfaith dialogue; but there is little to suggest that the current geopolitical conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in its historical context, much less the appropriate response of the church, is a regular part of theological curricula. It would seem that the issue and the United Methodist understanding of it are being discussed incidentally more often than intentionally. Our seminaries could greatly impact consistent handling of the issue by giving clergy the confidence they need to address the issue from a sound theological base and good working knowledge of the church's response to the current situation.

Our goal as United Methodists should be to make the entire denomination fully conversant with the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Our seminaries and divinity schools represent a long-term strategy. In the interim, we can employ two ways to bridge the gap between official pronouncements and
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church practice. The "top-down" approach relies on changing the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of the clergy in such a way that the resolutions have "pulpit support." Laity involved in global ministry and peace with justice issues often complain that without pulpit support, they are constantly working against the current. Church members do take note of the issues their pastors consider worthy of support and those they choose to ignore. When discussion of a social issue is relegated to the last page of the newsletter and goes unacknowledged by the pastoral staff, the message is clearly different than when their support is front and center.

Until United Methodist clergy are willing and well-equipped, committed laity can build a bridge from the "bottom up." Those who are involved in issues not overtly supported by their pastor can sometimes muster a grassroots movement within a congregation, which in time may influence pastoral leadership or at least survive the lack of pastoral support. It has been my experience that pastors are thankul to have a canary to send into the mine. Many are surprised at the level of support for the church's official position among their members. Others are just relieved that someone else is willing to take on the issue. As the senior pastor of a large United Methodist church in Texas once said to me, "All pastors are thankful for the prophets in their churches, even if they don't want to be seen with them in public." In spite of their best attempts to avoid the controversy surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian issue, at some point pastors will have to face it. Ultimately, the clergy must be educated.

The opening paragraphs of this article were not intended as an indictment of those who simply have never heard the United Methodist position. To some degree it is an indictment, but of church leaders who do not know the official positions of the church. At the end of the day, the greatest responsibility rests with those of us who do know, believe, and act consistently with the church's position to work to increase the level of understanding of those who do not. The existence of resolutions, agency heads meeting with government officials, and bishops' statements are all steps in the right direction and helpful tools. But in and of themselves they do not create understanding among the clergy and laity that is substantial enough to help the church as a whole deal with issues of peace and justice in today's world.

The goal is to impact knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. The sincere hope is that with the right knowledge, changes in attitude and behavior
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The change we seek in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at a minimum “prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.” The knowledge that will provide the foundation for such change includes complete and accurate information about the current crisis; complete and accurate discussion of the historical context; a sound theological framework for discussing peace and justice, both in general terms and more specifically vis-à-vis the nation-state of Israel; and an understanding of the Social Principles and resolutions in terms of content and rationale.

Beyond the lack of knowledge about the historical context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the current factual information about the ongoing geopolitical conflict, the rationale for the United Methodist position, and the theological confusion about the meaning of God’s covenantal relationship with Israel, there are several pragmatic factors that cause United Methodist leadership to resist educating appropriately about this issue. When attitudinal and behavioral change does not follow knowledge, we have to assume that barriers other than ignorance are in the way. What might those be?

Ideological dissent on the part of the pastor is one obstacle. Even after being exposed to the appropriate information, he or she may disagree on theological or political grounds. Fear of fiscal or political repercussions from one of several sources, such as theologically or politically ultra-conservative church members or interfaith contacts in the community is another possible reason for withholding this teaching. Many pastors hesitate to get involved in “political issues,” thus choosing to avoid any issue that might polarize the congregation. One pastor was accused of violating the separation of church and state for mentioning the Israeli-Palestinian issue in an election year.

Complacency is often a factor. It is simply easier not to address the issue. It takes a tremendous amount of background knowledge, theological confidence, and diplomacy to be able to present the issue well. Genuine sensitivity to the feelings of others is an important factor. However, when leaders are inadequately prepared to deal with this issue, their well-intended sensitivity to the feelings of others, such as Jewish colleagues or families of those serving in the military, may take precedence over the pursuit of peace and justice.

Perhaps the most common reason why United Methodists avoid any discussion of the issue is the fear of being considered anti-Semitic. After
years of trying to repair the breach between the Christian and Jewish communities, we are now faced with an issue that is sure to challenge the level of trust that has been built. Any indication that our Jewish colleagues are sensitive to this issue instantly quells dialogue for fear that we will lose the ability to communicate altogether. Any public display of support for Palestinian rights often leads to an accusation of being anti-Semitic. The very people who are most likely to be sensitive to universal human rights will go to great lengths to avoid being perceived as anti-Semitic. Thus, as a silencing strategy, it is very effective.

Beyond the accusation of anti-Semitism, there is frequently the accusation of partiality, of taking sides. The irony of this is obvious to those who have seen firsthand the tremendous asymmetry of power between Israel and Palestine. A review of United Methodist resolutions indicates that they are actually quite deliberate in trying to provide as much balance as possible. However, justice requires restoring balance, not applying balance. As Stephen Charles Mott puts it, “The task of justice to which the Bible calls us, as exemplified by the prophets, is to restore the marginal. . . . Biblical justice accordingly has a bias toward the weak.”

David Wildman, executive secretary of Human Rights and Racial Justice for the General Board of Global Ministries, helped draft the petition for the 2004 resolution. Wildman was concerned that the MFSA petition’s stipulation that we study the conflict “from all perspectives” might actually weaken efforts for justice and peace for all in Palestine and Israel. He explains, “We should never forget where we as a church stand when it comes to doing justice. This resolution clearly states that as The United Methodist Church we stand against military occupation. So while we might include a pro-occupation perspective (Israeli government, settlers, AIPAC) we would still be clear that we oppose occupation and will work actively with all seeking to end the occupation through nonviolent resistance.”

Whereas the Social Principles and the resolutions of The United Methodist Church are of sound rationale, are consistent with Christian theology and United Methodist doctrine, and are worthy of the support of our delegates to General Conference, our bishops and our missionaries, I pray that in our efforts at disciple-making and peacemaking, we’ll find a way to scatter that seed broadly.
Rhonda McCarty frequently travels to Israel-Palestine, seeking a practical understanding of the conflict. A former Peace with Justice coordinator for the Northwest Texas Conference, she lives in Germantown, Tennessee.

Endnotes

4. Paragraph 164 covers "basic freedoms and human rights." Other pertinent sections are Section V, "The Political Community," and Section VI, "The World Community."
7. Ibid., 81-82.
8. Ibid., 82-83.
10. Ibid., 105-06.
17. The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church-2000 (Nashville: The
23. American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, the third-largest political lobby in the U.S.
At its inception, the religious implication of the conflict over Palestine was not directly conspicuous. In fact, for many years, no religious dimension was clearly discernible by the major players—Jews and Palestinians. It took over seventy years before the religious factors became politically dominant. In order to understand the background, one needs to be aware of three different and separate stories. Chronologically, the first is the story of Western Christian Zionists, followed by the Western Jewish Zionists and, finally, the story of the Palestinians.

Christian Zionists

The Protestant Reformation gave a new spiritual zeal to Europe in the sixteenth century. This was enhanced by the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. The monopoly of the church’s hierarchy to interpret the Bible was broken. The Bible became available to the common people and Christian charismatic leaders began to offer various interpretations of the text. With exciting and wonderful teachings also came some diverse and, at times, deviant ideas. The deeper biblical insights enriched the church and contributed to the spiritual maturity of many Christians. At the same time, literalist and exclusive readings of the text led to theological and behavioral aberrations.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, it became clear that one of the topics occupying the minds of Protestant and evangelical Christians in both Britain and the United States was the Second Coming of Christ. Some Christians began to calculate the end of the world and predict specific dates for the Second Coming. By relating and associating verses together from the Old and New Testaments, these Christians deduced elaborate systems regarding the end of the world. In these schemes, the Jewish people were perceived as playing an essential role in the divine scenarios of the end. Before Christ can come back, Jews must return to Palestine.
"their" promised land, and establish their own state. John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) produced an elaborate biblical scheme that outlined seven dispensations, beginning with creation and ending with the final consummation of history.1 Similarly, Lord Shaftesbury (1801–1885) concluded from his study of the Bible that Jews must return to Palestine, and in the 1840s he was lobbying the British government for their return.2 In 1891, William Blackstone lobbied President Harrison in the United States to send Jews back to Palestine.3 These Christians were interpreting the Bible with a definite theological mindset that led to different brands of millenarianism.4 They were interested not in the welfare of the Jewish people but in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy as they interpreted it. The point that needs to be emphasized is that long before the Zionist Movement was established, some Western Christians were embarking on their independent study of the Scriptures and formulating their own theology of the end of history in which Jews had a central role to play.

Jewish Zionists

Totally unaware of what some Protestant and free-church Christians were scheming, the Jewish community in Europe was facing some serious challenges toward the latter part of the nineteenth century. Pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe caused many Jews to emigrate from those countries to the western part of Europe and even to the United States. The malaise of anti-Semitism was deep and pervasive among many Europeans.

At the same time, Europe was expanding through its colonial ventures. Colonialism still enjoyed a positive aspect. It was perceived as exporting European culture and civilization to the "backward" people of the world.

Due to growing anti-Semitism, some European Jewish leaders concluded that it is difficult for Jews to live a fully European life among Christians who harbored anti-Jewish feelings. As a result of this analysis the Zionist Movement came into being in 1897, calling for the establishment of a Jewish state where Jews can live free of Christian bias. The early Jewish Zionists were secular and atheist and their project did not involve religion. In fact, the major religious Jewish denominations at the time condemned the Zionist Movement and considered it heretical. For them, it was only the Messiah that could gather in Jews from the Diaspora to Palestine. And as long as the Messiah has not come, any human attempt to accomplish that must be rejected.
For over seventy years, the Zionist Movement was dominated and controlled by its more secular and socialist leaders. Religion was exploited to achieve Zionist ends, but it never constituted its core. It was through the power, genius, intrigues, and manipulation of secular Zionism that the State of Israel was established in 1948 on the ashes of Palestine. The tragedy of the Holocaust and its aftermath of guilt feelings contributed much, especially among Western Christians, by ensuring a good measure of sympathy and support for the Israeli state.

It was only after the 1967 war that the Jewish religious element in the conflict began to crystallize. Most Jews perceived Israel’s victory over the neighboring Arab states as miraculous. The successful outcome of the war was the last evidence needed to convince many religious Jews that God had been active through Zionism to bring about Israel's redemption. The settler movement got under way with great religious vigor in the early 1970s. In the 1977 national election, the right-wing Likud party, with strong religious leanings, won. Religious Zionism was on its way to becoming the strongest and most dominant expression of Zionism. It is important to note that Likud’s ascent to power marked the beginning of closer ties between right-wing Jews and the American Christian Right. Since 9/11, they have entered into even closer alliances and, together with the neo-conservatives in Washington, have been influencing American foreign policy in the Middle East.

The Palestinians

The story of the Palestinians also has its own unique dimensions. As Europe was going through the period of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the Middle East was passing through its dormant period. Palestine, as well as all the Arab countries, came under Ottoman Turkish rule in 1517, which ended 400 years later at the close of World War I. At the end of the nineteenth century and approximately at the same time as the Zionist Movement came into being in Europe and started agitating for a Jewish state in Palestine, the Arabs in the Middle East, including Palestine, were agitating for independence from Turkish rule.

During World War I, the British government needed the Arabs to revolt against the Turkish Empire and in exchange pledged them their independence. Similarly, the Jewish Zionists were successful in 1917 in extracting a pledge from the British through the Balfour Declaration that promised...
them a Jewish home in Palestine. At the end of the war, Palestine had a population of over 600,000, where Jews numbered fewer than 60,000.6

The State of Israel came into being in 1948 on 78 percent of Palestinian land instead of the 54 percent allotted by the United Nations. In 1967, Israel occupied the rest of Palestine—the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. The first Palestinian intifada erupted at the end of 1987 with the hope of ending the illegal Israeli occupation and of establishing a Palestinian state on the basis of a two-state solution. Most Palestinians were willing to settle for a small state on the Gaza Strip and West Bank including East Jerusalem as its capital.

At the height of the intifada, Hamas came into being with ostensible backing of the Israeli authorities. Its slogans were clearly religious. The religious Jewish and Christian Zionist clichés were met with clearly Islamic clichés. Against the slogan that Jerusalem is Jewish, Hamas and other Islamic organizations lifted the slogan “Jerusalem is Islamic.” The religious-political language became the lingua franca in the streets. From then on, the whole conflict was cast in a religious frame. Many Palestinian Christians felt marginalized due to the religious emphasis. The unity between Muslims and Christians had been exemplary ever since the inception of the conflict. The struggle over Palestine was primarily political, calling for the independence of Palestine for all its citizens. Regrettably, the religious sentiment had taken over in a narrow and discriminatory way.

At the same time, some people felt that it was in the interest of the Israeli government to present the conflict as a religious one between Jews and Muslims. When perceived as a struggle between Jews and Muslims, Israel was sure that most Western Christians would stand on its side.

This brief background shows that, except for Christian Zionists, who started from a religious basis, generally the major interlocutors in the conflict started from a more political ideology in which religious factors were not primary.

Resources for Helping Christians Cope with the Conflict

Long before the religious component of the conflict became politically dominant, Palestinian Christians had resources of faith to help them analyze and interpret the conflict and provide them with comfort and strength. Obviously, like other communities, the Palestinian community includes believers as well as secular people and religious skeptics.
It is important to clarify that it is natural for believers to respond to different challenges through the resources of their faith, whether the challenge was religiously motivated or not. By and large, Palestinian Christians perceived the conflict in its origin as mainly political and not religious. Although they drew on the resources of their faith for comfort and strength, they were looking for political solutions. They wanted the implementation of international law and United Nations resolutions so that they could regain their rights on the basis of the execution of justice. Even when the religious factor in the conflict became predominant, Palestinian Christians maintained their emphasis on international legitimacy as a basis for solving the conflict. Furthermore, although many religious Jews and Muslims started emphasizing the legitimacy of their cause by basing it on religious grounds, Palestinian Christians continued to insist on international legitimacy. At the same time, Christians, through a Palestinian theology of liberation, articulated a religious and theological answer against all those who dragged religion into the conflict. In this section, I am restricting my comments to those Palestinians who responded to the conflict from a position of faith. Five main resources have been tapped.

The first and most natural resource for people of faith is prayer. In the aftermath of the 1948 war and the forced displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and the destruction of over 500 villages and towns, the tragedy was deep and painful. It was natural for believers to turn to God in prayer. This is usually expressed in cries and sighs similar to those found in the psalms. On the one hand, Palestinian Christians were affirming their faith in a God of justice and truth. On the other hand, they were lamenting the intensity and extensiveness of evil and were crying for the end of the occupation and injustice. This is the most popular level of response by the poor and oppressed. It is expressed through intimate prayer to God. In Palestine, it could be addressed to God or Christ or the Virgin Mary or to one of the saints. It is one of the deepest and most sincere ways of supplication when the anguished human spirit turns to the divine and lifts up a prayer seeking help and comfort. Prayer might not help the believers to analyze what is happening. However, it can help them to continue their trust and hope in the love and protection of God. Even if they feel miserable and, at times, abandoned, prayer gives them strength and preserves the flicker of hope.

A second resource that has always been present among Palestinian
NAIM ATEEK

Christians is a simple perception of God as a God of justice and truth. The Christian community in Palestine is largely Orthodox and Catholic and the Bible has not always been widely available. Generally speaking, however, there has always been a simple and intuitive perception of God, based on childhood exposure to the faith, whether through occasional church attendance, assimilating popular religious tradition, or through the mundane exchange of ideas and discussions among ordinary folk. Christians know that Christianity is a religion based on love and that at the center of their faith is a crucified Christ. Jesus did not wage battles as Muhammad or Moses. He lived and taught the way of peace and nonviolence. Many Christians have memorized verses of Scripture that reflect the irenic spirit of the Christian faith, such as “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God” (Matt. 5:9). They know that Jesus presented a loving and caring picture of God, who treats everyone justly and fairly. Even if Christians do not always act on these beliefs, they know that these are intrinsic to their faith. In times of challenge, Christians usually fall back on these beliefs and express them in their discussion with one another in spite of the skepticism and ridicule of some. For believers, this kind of faith is an important bulwark. They must continue to cling to their faith in God, who will ultimately vindicate their cause.

A third resource is the local community of faith. This has been a very important resource because it can provide analysis of the situation, an opportunity for discussion and feedback, care and fellowship, as well as worship and prayer. This can involve the local priests and their interpretation of events. Faith communities can provide strength and comfort by offering places where people can share their pain with others who also are clinging to faith in the midst of tragic experiences. It is the community of faith at worship where the Mass or the Eucharist is an important source of consolation and strength. The sharing of stories has been very significant throughout. Stories have been very important in comforting and strengthening fellow believers and encouraging them to put their trust and hope in God. It is in communities of faith that denominational boundaries are transcended as Christians share their mutual joys and sorrows and their faith and hope in God and stand together in the midst of common political adversities.

A fourth resource is the wider international community of faith. Over the years, especially since the first intifada in the late 1980s, friends from abroad have been coming to visit, expressing their solidarity with the
Palestinian community in general and the Christian community in particu­lar. Some people come on fact-finding missions; others come to stand with their friends in their pain and oppression. These friends believe in the justice of the Palestinian cause, and they use their voice and pen to keep educating and advocating for a just peace. Such encounters create important opportunities for analyzing and interpreting the situation and for articulating ideas for response.

A very important extension of this is the number of Jews both inside and outside the country who have become increasingly engaged in advocacy against the Israeli occupation. They have discovered the fallacy of the Zionist project and its oppressive policies against the Palestinians. Through their writings and activism, they champion for justice, truth, and peace.

A fifth resource is the Bible. Yet it has been a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it is an important tool to be used to advocate for peacemaking. On the other hand, many Jews and Western Christians have used Scripture to support Israel’s side. It is important, therefore, to focus on biblical interpretation and help Christians discover the deeper message of the Scriptures and encourage them to become active in their work for justice and peace.

Before doing that, it might be beneficial to consider how religion was taught to Palestinians in Christian schools before the creation of the State of Israel. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see today that so much of the teaching was based on false and unacceptable interpretation of the Bible. In their religious teaching, expatriate Christian missionaries, clergy and lay, Catholic and Protestant, who were working in church institutions in Palestine had a considerable influence on Palestinian Christianity. Whether intended or not, they were inculcating Christian Zionist interpretations of the Bible to young Palestinian minds. Basically, they were teaching that, according to the Bible, God has given the country of Palestine to Jews and they must return to it and reestablish their kingdom. Since such teachings were undoubtedly disturbing and offensive to Palestinians, the missionaries instilled in them the importance of accepting God’s will and enduring the pain and tragedy, because “God knows what is best for us.” As the Bible was presented and taught in a literal fashion, the spiritual and psychological impact was significant. Moreover, the virtue of being resigned to God’s mysterious providence was hammered into them. Undoubtedly, this was troubling and unsettling to many Palestinians, young and old, especially in the twentieth century, when they were witnessing the arrival into Palestine.
of tens of thousands of Jews, legally and illegally, to boost the Jewish population. Furthermore, the violent clashes between the indigenous Palestinian population and the incoming Zionists were escalating. The Palestinians became increasingly aware of the Zionist project for the acquisition of Palestine and were fighting to prevent it.

In light of this background, it is plausible to conclude that many Palestinian Christians found little meaning in the religious teaching they were receiving. It is no wonder that some turned away from God and religion because they perceived God as unfair and unjust. Others lived in a spiritual docility that refused to question the unfathomable wisdom of God. At the core of their being, the accumulated body of beliefs that they were given through their religious studies did not provide them with hope in the political struggle over Palestine. Basically, they were taught that God was not on the side of the Palestinians.

It was left to the advent of Palestinian Liberation Theology (PLT) to shatter this atrociously false theology, expose its fallacious biblical interpretation and exegesis, and call attention to the spiritual, theological, and political injuries it had caused to many Arab Christians, including Palestinians. It was only then that deeper meanings of faith based on a God of justice and peace were presented to the Christians, driving out the myths of a biased god. God always stands on the side of justice because God is faithful to himself as the God of justice and truth. God's bias is shown only with the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalized. This theology restored meaning and hope to Palestinians.

With the rise of PLT, this deeper biblical resource became available to Christians. The Bible had been a strong weapon in the hands of Christian and Jewish Zionists. Through a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, Christian Zionists were influencing millions of Americans in a misguided support of Israel. This abuse of the Bible made a religious and theological response necessary.

Palestinian theology of liberation focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. He becomes a model for the Palestinian Christian. Jesus is perceived as a Palestinian living under occupation. In fact, from birth to death, Jesus knew life only under a brutal Roman occupation. This means that all of his teachings and relationships were carried out in the milieu of the occupation. Reading the Gospels from this perspective opens up new avenues of insight that are not usually clear. For example, Jesus' teaching
regarding nonviolence takes on a new emphasis (Matt. 5:38-42). Similarly, the love for the enemy reveals the revolutionary nature of Jesus’ radical ethic in first-century Palestine (Matt. 5:43-48). At the same time, the fact that Jesus chose to read a passage from Isaiah that emphasizes the work of justice reflects a greater involvement on his part with issues of social, economic, religious, and even political justice (Luke 4:18-19). The repeated emphasis throughout the Gospels against the narrow religious and political nationalism of his day seems very striking and offers the modern-day followers of Jesus in Palestine immeasurable strength to resist the injustice of the occupation.

All the above and so much more that comes out from the life and ministry of Jesus are a wonderful refreshing breeze that helps the Christian not only to compare Jesus’ response to life under occupation with today’s Palestinian response but also to give Christians strength to continue in the struggle against injustice. Some of the most important challenges facing a Palestinian liberation response come from adopting a nonviolent approach in the resistance against Israel’s illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories. Indeed, it is important to resist evil without using the evil methods of violence and terror (Matt. 5:39; Rom. 12:17). Equally, it is important to resist and struggle against the racism and discrimination practiced by the Israeli government against the Palestinians in almost every walk of life. However, it must be done through the many nonviolent methods that are available.

One of the most unfortunate deteriorations in the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation of their country has been suicide bombings. The Palestinians did not use this method in the beginning. In fact, there were no suicide bombings before 1993, although the occupation of the Palestinian territories began in 1967. It was due to the escalation in the oppressive policies of the Israeli government and the increasing killing of Palestinians that Palestinians resorted to the use of their own bodies as instruments of attack. In spite of all the arguments for and against, from a Christian perspective suicide bombings must be condemned. Palestinian liberation theology cannot condone such actions and continue to promote a nonviolent approach to resistance. The example of Christ presents the Christian with a revolutionary model in which one accepts suffering on oneself rather than inflict it on others. Christ’s suffering critiques the phenomenon of suicide bombings and points to a different paradigm for the Christian.
Moreover, what is striking is the way Jesus focused on the injustices within his own community. The Gospels emphasize the way he addressed the economic inequalities within society (Luke 12:13-21; 16:19-31). He was sharply critical of the corruptions of the religious leadership of his day (Matthew 23). Undoubtedly, his blunt and pointed language contributed to the opposition and resentment against him. Similarly, Palestinian followers of Jesus Christ must address in a comprehensive way the various problems that oppress and dehumanize people. They need to follow in Jesus’ steps and face them with great candor and integrity.

Another dimension that has been of immense importance is that of the biblical theology of land and how it can help Palestinian Christians in challenging Jewish and Christian Zionist interpretations. Due to the abuse of the Bible by Jewish and Christian Zionists, the Bible has been used to support the exclusive right of Israel to the land and the negation of Palestinian rights. In a theology of land that deals with the whole topic in a comprehensive way, one discovers that the exclusive strand, though quite dominant in the Old Testament, does not constitute the authentic and holistic message of the Bible. Throughout the Bible, the movement is toward a more inclusive theology. Indeed, a plethora of material reflects a narrow and exclusive concept of the land that precludes non-Jews. Yet it is clear that the inclusive strand became increasingly prominent in some of the post-Exilic prophetic material. The New Testament clearly reflects an inclusive theology of land. When this inclusive theology is translated into the political arena, Palestinian Christians are able to promote a political solution to the land on the basis of the inclusion of others rather than their exclusion. Such a theology, based on sound exegesis of both the Old and the New Testaments, has been a tremendous resource of faith that has helped many Palestinian Christians in the promotion of a just peace.

Concretely, this means that peace requires the sharing of the land of Palestine between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. In other words, the illegal occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, must come to an end and an independent, sovereign, and viable Palestinian state must be established alongside the State of Israel. Both states must enter into peace treaties that are guaranteed by the international community and some form of economic interdependence that will ensure their economic growth and prosperity.

Religion is being used in the conflict today to alienate and oppress and
to make exclusive claims. However, the Palestinian Christian contribution is to advocate for a different perspective. Religion can be used as a reconciling factor in promoting the sharing of the country and the creation of a just peace, where Palestinians and Israelis can live together and find healing and well-being.


As one looks for a peacable solution to the conflict over Palestine, the parable of the rich fool provides helpful insight. The parable was given in response to a question put to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). This question remains the essential one that Palestinians continue to ask since they have been denied their inheritance. In the parable, one son usurps the legitimate rights of both brothers to their father's patrimony. The parable also implies that one of the brothers is stronger than the other and was able to shun him and deny his rights. It also assumes the need for outside arbitration.

Interestingly, Jesus refuses to arbitrate. "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus could see that the basic problem is greed. He realized that greed is a destructive force that can drive away even brotherly love and create enmity within the same family. He felt that the problem was not going to be solved by someone who would pontificate and pronounce a judgment on the share percentages between the two. The problem lies in a much deeper issue, namely, the underlying sin of greed, selfishness, injustice, and the absence of love between the brothers. Although Jesus refused to act as an arbiter, he nevertheless gave the solution through a parable that struck at the heart of the problem. In the conflict over Palestine, the following lessons need to be learned so that a solution can be found.

1. Beware of greed. Human life does not consist in the accumulation of riches. It is possible to be rich and powerful and still be miserable. It is possible to have everything one needs and still be insecure and fearful. Possessing all of Palestine does not guarantee a life of security for the Israelis. On the contrary, it will only lead to instability and fear, because the inheritance was not shared with the Palestinian brother and sister. The reverse is also true. Any exclusive claim to the inheritance is wrong.

2. The rich man in the parable was getting richer but, instead of becoming more compassionate towards the needs of others, he could think
only about enlarging his own estate. Instead of seeing the need of the poor around him and thinking of ways to be of help, he considered only his own interests. The expansion of Israel by confiscating more and more Palestinian land can only be achieved through the power of the gun, but it can never achieve peace. Recognizing the rights of others and sharing the land with them can bring prosperity for all. Compassion contributes to peacemaking, while the consequences of greed are bitterness and strife.

3. The Lord called the rich man a fool. He will not be able to enjoy any of his riches because he only thought of his own selfish needs and not of the needs of others. The exploitation of others leads to grave injustice and does not yield peace. Some people accumulate riches and prestige by stepping on the rights of others. This may earn them respect, wealth, and power in the eyes of the world; but in the eyes of God, they are fools who do not know how to make peace and how to create an equitable society where people's dignity can be respected.

Doing justice ensures a life of peace and security between the two brothers. Justice must be done in sharing the land of Palestine between Israelis and Palestinians. No solution will be viable if the inheritance is not shared between the two and the Palestinians receive their rightful share. On such a just basis, peace and reconciliation can be built. True prosperity comes in a life of peace and security with the neighbor and the brother.

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Endnotes

1. For a more detailed discussion on Dispensationalism, see the work of Stephen Sizer in his forthcoming book Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon? (InterVarsity, 2004), or online: http://www.christianzionism.org. See also Donald Wagner, Anxious for Armageddon (Herald Press, 1990), 85-95, and the article by Barry Bryant in this issue.

2. For more background on Lord Shaftesbury, see Barbara W. Tuchman, Bible and Sword (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 175-207.


4. On the various types of Millenarianism, see R.J. McKelvey, The Millennium
7. See Naim Ateek, Justice, and Only Justice (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 74-150.
10. As examples of the more exclusive strand, one can point to the promise of the land to Abraham as recorded in Genesis chs. 12, 15, and 17 and repeated many times since then. Deuteronomy (eg., chs. 7, 9, 13, 20) contains many extreme instances of an exclusive theology of the land. As examples of the inclusive strand, note the prophetic emphasis on God’s unbiased exercise of justice for all in, for example, Amos 9:7-10, Micah 6:8, and Ezekiel 47:21-23, as well as the Book of Jonah. The inclusive strand continues in the New Testament. Jesus’ emphasis on the kingdom of God is in itself an inclusive concept. The emphasis on God’s love and care for all people in John 3:16 and Matt. 8:3-13 are examples of this theology. Paul’s inclusive reinterpretation of the promise of land to Abraham in light of the coming of Jesus Christ is very striking (see Rom. 4:13).
A Jewish Renewal Understanding of the State of Israel

MICHAEL LERNER

Jews did not return to Palestine in order to be oppressors or representatives of Western colonialism or cultural imperialism. It is true that some early Zionist leaders sought to portray their movement as a way to serve the interests of various Western states. And many Jews who came brought with them a Western arrogance that made it possible for them to see Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land," and hence to virtually ignore the Palestinian people and their own cultural and historical rights. However, the vast majority of those who came were seeking refuge from the murderous ravages of Western anti-Semitism or from the oppressive discrimination that they experienced in Arab countries.

I try to tell this story in a nuanced and balanced way in my book Healing Israel/Palestine. I show how each move made by the Jewish settlers was interpreted in the worst possible way by Arabs as proof of their worst fantasies of what Jews "really wanted" (which, according to the feudal landowners who feared the Jews, was simply to displace the native population) and how each move made by the Arab leadership was interpreted in the worst possible way by Jews as proof of their worst fantasies of what Arabs "really wanted" (ending any Jewish presence in the Holy Land except on the traditional dhimmi terms, in which non-Muslims lived peacefully in apartheid-like conditions, as they had in most Islamic countries for the past thousand years). What I show there is that each side's interpretation "made sense" from the standpoint of their own history and cultural assumptions. So the struggle that emerged was in some way an outgrowth of the historical experience of each side—Arabs with the Crusaders and with contemporary European colonialism; Jews with the persecution in Europe and with the history of oppression in Islamic lands.

The Ashkenazi Jews who shaped Israel in its early years were jumping from the burning buildings of Europe—and when they landed on the backs of Palestinians, unintentionally causing a great deal of pain to the people...
who already lived there, they were so transfixed with their own (much greater and more acute) pain that they couldn’t be bothered to notice that they were displacing and hurting others in the process of creating their own state. Yet the task of paying attention to the pain they were causing was made more difficult by the startling fact—too often ignored in contemporary discourse—that the Arab leadership in Palestine, working with the surrounding feudal leadership of other Arab countries, succeeded in using Arab power to convince the British mandate holders of Palestine that they should not allow Jews seeking refuge from Hitler to enter into Palestine at precisely the moment when these Jews were being killed by the millions in Europe. Even after the war, when the dimensions of the genocide were fully revealed, the Palestinian leadership insisted that the British not allow hundreds of thousands of Jews in displaced-persons camps to come to Palestine, where they might rejoin families and start a new life. It was only the creation of the State of Israel that provided those refugees with a home to go to despite the opposition of the Palestinian population.

Jews’ anger and upset at the way they had been treated when it was they who were the refugees and victims of genocide formed the backdrop to their willingness to go along with a war to create the State of Israel that also involved forced displacements of the Arab population. Jews’ insensitivity to the pain that they caused and their subsequent denial of the fact that in creating Israel they had simultaneously helped create a Palestinian people most of whom were forced to live as refugees (their many descendants today still live as exiles and dream of “return” just as we Jews did for over 1800 years) was aided by the arrogance, stupidity, and anti-Semitism of Palestinian leaders and their Arab allies in neighboring states. These leaders dreamed of ridding the area of its Jews and, much like the Herut “revisionists” who eventually came to run Israel in the past twenty years, consistently resorted to violence and intimidation to pursue their maximalist fantasies, rejecting the United Nations 1947 offer that would have given Palestinians a state far larger than the one they are now talking about.

By the time Palestinians had come to their senses and acknowledged the reality of Israel and the necessity of accommodating to that reality if they were ever to find a way to establish even the most minimal self-determination in the land that had once belonged to their parents and grandparents, it was too late to undermine the powerful misperception of reality held by most Jews and Israelis that their state was likely to be wiped out at any
moment if they did not exercise the most powerful vigilance. Drenched in
the memories of the Holocaust and in the internalized vision of themselves
as inevitably powerless, Jews were unable to recognize that they had become
the most powerful state in the region and among the top 20 percent of
powerful countries in the world. And for over thirty years they have used this
sense of imminent potential doom to justify the continuation of the occupa­
ton of the West Bank and Gaza.

The occupation could only be maintained by what has become an
international scandal—the violation of basic human rights of the occupied;
the documented and widespread use of torture; the systematic destruction
of Palestinian homes; the grabbing of Palestinian lands to allow expansion
of West Bank settlements that had been created for the sole purpose of
ensuring that no future accommodation with Palestinians could ever allow
for a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank (since, as many settlers
argued, the land had been given to the Jewish people by God, thus
precluding any rights to Palestinians); and the transformation of Israeli poli­
tics from a robust democracy into a system replete with verbal violence
that sometimes spilled over into real violence (most notably, the assassina­
tion of prime minister Rabin because of his pursuit of peace and reconcilia­
tion with the Palestinian people).

The distortions in Israeli society required to enable the occupation to
continue have been yet another dimension of the problem. First, take the
pervasive racism towards Arabs, manifested in the willingness not only to
blame all Palestinians for the terrorist actions of a small minority but also
to treat all Israeli citizens of Palestinian descent as second-class citizens.
For example, East Jerusalem or Israeli-Palestinian towns receive lesser
amounts of financial assistance than Jewish towns. Second, observe the
refusal to allocate adequate funds to rectify the social inequalities between
Ashkenazi and Sephardic/Mizrachi Jews. Third, note the willingness of both
Labor and Likud to make electoral deals with ultra-orthodox parties intent
on using state power to enforce religious control over Israelis’ personal
lives and to grab disproportionate state revenues in order that they could
count on these religious parties to back whatever their engagement or
disengagement plans are in the West Bank.

Perhaps one of the greatest victims of all these distortions in Israel’s
political life has been Judaism itself. Judaism has always had within it two
competing strands, one that affirmed the possibility of healing the world
and transcending its violence and cruelty and the other that saw "the Other" (be that the original inhabitants of the land, who were to be subject to genocidal extermination, or later Greeks, Romans, Christians, or now Arabs) as inherently evil, beyond redemption, and hence deserving of cruelty and violence. I call this latter strand "Settler Judaism," because it reflects the ideology of settling the land that reaches its fulfillment as much in the Book of Joshua (and in some quotes in Torah) as in the reckless acts of Ariel Sharon and the current manifestations of the National Religious Party in Israel. This strand was actually a very necessary part of keeping psychologically healthy in the long period of Jewish history when we were the oppressed and we were being psychologically brutalized by imperial occupiers or by our most immoral "hosts" in European societies. It was an important bulwark to a sense of potential power among the most powerless peoples of Europe that we Jews could fantasize about a past in which we had been strong enough to conquer the land (though historians have doubted that such a conquest ever occurred) and emotionally powerful enough to proclaim ourselves "chosen." This happened at a time when, in fact, the rest of the world was treating us as their primary demeaned "other" and their mass culture portrayed us as devils with horns and tails, people who loved money and sexual conquest more than we loved life itself and who were destined for eternal damnation. In such a context, the fantasies of having power over others was an empowerment badly needed.

But today, when Jews are the rulers over an occupied people or living in Western societies and sharing the upper crust of income and political power with our non-Jewish neighbors, the supremacist ideas of Settler Judaism create a religious ideology that can appeal only to those stuck in the sense that we are eternally vulnerable. For a new generation of Jews, bred in circumstances of power and success, a Judaism based on fear and demeaning of others and used as a justification for every nuance of Israeli power and occupation becomes a Judaism that has very little spiritual appeal. Ironically, the need to be a handmaiden to Israel distorts Judaism and causes a "crisis of continuity" as younger Jews seek spiritual insight outside their inherited tradition.

Yet Judaism has another strand, what I and others call "Renewal Judaism." This strand started with the Prophets and has reasserted itself in every major age of Jewish life. It insists that the God of Torah is really the Force of Healing and Transformation and that our task is not to sanctify
existing power relations but to challenge them in the name of a vision of a world of peace and justice. Perhaps the greatest danger that Israel poses to the Jewish people is the extent to which it has helped Jews become cynical about their central task, namely, to proclaim to the world the possibility of possibility, to affirm the God of the universe as the Force that makes possible the breaking of the tendency of people to do to others the violence and cruelty that was done to them—the Force that makes possible the transcendence of "reality" as it is so that a new world can be shaped. If Israel is ever to be healed, it will only be when it is able to reject this slavish subordination to political realism and once again embrace the transformative spiritual message of renewal.

To believe in the God of the universe as the Force of Healing and Transformation is actually core to what Judaism was traditionally. The Hebrew name for God, יְהֹוָה, woefully turned into a pronounceable but distorted "Jehovah" by the King James mistranslation of the Hebrew Bible, is formed from the root letters וֹה, which is the Hebrew of the present tense of the word "to be." The יְ in front of that indicates future tense—that is, God as the movement from that which is to that which can be, the transformation of the is into the ought.

Yet most people are stuck in what the Bible calls idolatry—which in today's world is best translated as "cynical realism." To be a cynical realist is to allow "that which is" to determine your vision of "that which can be." Once you understand this, you can see why I believe that most people who claim to be religious, in the Jewish world and in almost every other religious tradition, actually don't believe in God but instead are cynical realists. They do not believe that the world can be healed and transformed and that it can be based on love, kindness, generosity, and openheartedness, because they do not believe that the God of the universe really has any capacity to enliven in humans that part of us that aspires to a world of this sort.

This is the key to understanding what needs to be done to heal Israel/Palestine. I am a strong supporter of the Geneva Accord. But I also believe that no political agreement will ever be sufficient for healing this struggle unless it is accompanied by a powerful spiritual movement that focuses on developing in both peoples a spirit of repentance and atonement based on a deep recognition that each side has been cruel and hateful toward the other. Each needs to do serious inner work to change the ways that they have portrayed themselves as the "righteous victims"
and the other as the embodiment of evil. On this foundation, a process of "truth and reconciliation" will be possible, and eventually a new attitude of openheartedness.

Because Israel has the greater power, I insist to my own people that it is we who should take the first steps by unilaterally ending the occupation and by giving the West Bank settlements to the Palestinian people as a step in the process of providing compensation for the decades of homelessness and refugee status. But this will be difficult in our post-9/11 world. It is tough enough to convince Americans, when fears of terrorism remain politically salient, that the best way to fight terror in the world is to follow The Tikkun Community's plan for a Global Marshall Plan in which the U.S. leads all the advanced industrial societies in dedicating 5 percent of their annual GNP to end global poverty and provide adequate educational and healthcare facilities and programs. It is equally hard to convince Israelis facing daily threats of terror to approach the Palestinians with the spirit of generosity that is needed. Conversely, I believe that the dynamics in Israel would totally reverse were the Palestinian people to embrace the philosophy of Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr., and proclaim a principled, not just a tactical, commitment to nonviolence. Yet, given the reality of daily oppression from the occupation, it is hard to convince Palestinians to change their approach and do what nonviolence can accomplish, namely, to convince the oppressor that they are seen not as evil forces to be destroyed but as human beings to be respected. This perception, once communicated effectively as King did to whites in the U.S., lessens the fear of the dominators that in letting go of their domination they risk their own extermination at the hands of the righteous indignation of those whom they had formerly oppressed.

The central problem underlying the frozenness of both sides—their inability to act in a spirit of generosity and openheartedness that could elicit the same from the other side—is the depressive conviction that the other side will never change and that the message of cynical realism is the ultimate truth, namely, that nothing much can change and that people are motivated more by fear and self-interest than by love and a desire to care for one another. That is why I believe that the most healing way out of this impasse is for each side to open itself up to the spiritual reality of the universe, because to the extent that it could do so it could let go of cynical realism and realize that the God of the universe makes possible a real
transformation toward love and kindness and generosity. Armed with that belief, they could make the changes in the way they treated the other side that would allow for a genuine and lasting peace.

In the meantime, I believe that our task in the United States is to change our own government's slavish subordination to the pro-Sharon, pro-Occupation forces so that it can play a more positive role. The United States should remain committed to Israel's survival and flourishing economically, politically, and militarily. The best way to achieve that end is for the U.S. to lead an international intervention to separate the two sides and impose a peace agreement along the lines of the Geneva Accord if the two parties are unwilling to come to that on their own in the next year. The U.S. should tell Israel that it will impose the same kind of economic boycott on Israel that it has imposed on Cuba until it implements fully the Geneva Accord. If necessary, it should be ready to mobilize an international force to separate and protect each people from the other until both sides understand that the world will not accept this killing any longer and will not allow Israel to occupy the West Bank or Gaza.

I believe that the mere threat of that kind of intervention will be sufficient, but only if it is accompanied by two other elements: (1) an offer of a mutual-defense pact with the U.S. should Israel comply in a spirit of generosity and openheartedness to the Palestinian people; (2) a declaration of support for Israel to remain a Jewish state with a majority of Jews and a commitment to Jewish culture until at least a hundred years after the time when anti-Semitism has disappeared from the face of the earth, at which point the affirmative-action nature of Israel will no longer be necessary and Israel should then become a normal society in which Jews have no special status. Without these two elements, any attempt to pressure Israel will have no impact except to give more power to the most fearful elements in Jewish consciousness. For that reason, it is a terrible error and a deal-breaker for the Palestinian people to ask Israel to accept a "right of return" that would, if implemented, eliminate the Jewish character of the state and put Jews back into the position they have been for the past two-thousand years, namely, at the mercy of non-Jews. This situation has worked out so disastrously for Jews that many would prefer to bring the rest of the world down into nuclear war than to go through that other experience again.

And here we come to the crux of the psychology of the issue: Jews are fearful and have reason to be. The legacy of anti-Semitism has not been
eliminated and still plays a role in the way that Israel is critiqued in the UN and in progressive circles. I have been unequivocal in my condemnation of Israeli human-rights violations, but I am also unequivocal in my condemnation of acts of terror against Israeli civilians. I do not believe that anything but a "progressive middle path" that is both pro-Israel and pro-Palestine can work. That middle path must show both peoples that the rest of the world truly understands their history and their fears and speaks to them with genuine compassion.

This has not been the case. Israel's sins deserve condemnation, but not apart from condemnation of far worse human-rights abusers. I propose using economic power to push Israel into a settlement; but I favor those same policies in reference to our treatment of the even worse human-rights violators, including China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, and the U.S. itself. When the progressive movement singles out Israel's sins for special attention while the world watches passively as far more people are killed in Rwanda and then in Darfur than were ever killed in the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, this selective prosecution reminds Jews of the long history of Jew-hating, whose legacy remains strong.

This is a truth that many have not fully understood: Even correct criticisms can sometimes be racist. Suppose in attending a meeting of a neighborhood association my son is singled out by a neighbor for criticism for making too much noise. Other neighbors point out that there is a whole gang of teenagers making excessive noise and my son is just one, and not even the worst one. This means that the neighbor who focused on my child might have just gotten the scene wrong. But if at future meetings that neighbor keeps on raising the criticism about my son and fails to mention the others, then the problem is not just my son but the irrational hatred of this neighbor, even though his criticisms are also correct. Singling out Israel in this way is anti-Semitism; and as long as that happens, Jews will not be in a space to listen to the content of the criticisms.

The solution is to change American policy toward both Israel and the rest of the world, so that it is consistently a supporter of human rights and willing to back that up with its full economic and political power. Moreover, it should work in concert with all the other nations of the world to impose a more just reality, not only in Israel but also in Darfur, Chechnya, Tibet, Kashmir, and a host of other situations. In that context, using American power to change Israeli policy makes a great deal of sense.
Yet most Americans are reluctant to think in these kinds of global transformative terms. There is good reason to want to restrain America when it acts by itself—the Iraq war serves as a current example. But America working in concert with the rest of the world and acting in a spirit of generosity that would be manifest when it first began to implement the Global Marshall Plan I mentioned earlier would be a very different force for peace and social justice than it is today.

How do we get there? By taking our belief in God seriously enough that we become active advocates for a new "bottom line" in our dealings with the world and with our own internal life in the U.S. Let this country become the world’s leading force for redistributing wealth so that we can eliminate global poverty, homelessness, hunger, and inadequate healthcare and education. Let the U.S. become the leading force for rectifying 150 years of global insensitivity to the environment, rather than as it is now—the leading force for blocking global ecological sanity. And let the U.S. implement a new bottom line of love and caring, so that institutions will be judged efficient, rational, and productive to the extent that they maximize not only money and power but also love and caring and ethical and ecological sensitivity and enhance our capacities to respond to the universe with awe and wonder.

This is an impossible task only in a world where we have accepted cynical realism as our guide. But a world in which we let God be our guide would provide for a fundamental transformation in America so that it could have the moral legitimacy to lead a coalition of forces that would lovingly and powerfully intervene in all places where people are currently oppressed.

It is for this reason that I have joined with Susannah Heschel (chair of Jewish studies at Dartmouth College and daughter of the famous Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel) and with Cornel West (professor of theology at Princeton University) to create a new international interfaith organization of the spirit called The Tikkun Community (from the Hebrew word tikkun, meaning "healing and transformation"). We are calling for these kinds of changes in the U.S. and in its policies toward Israel just as we are calling for Israel and Palestine to implement the Geneva Accord and develop a new approach of generosity and repentance.

If there is one thing I have learned from history it is this: The path of the realists leads to more violence and hatred, not to peace and generosity. It is time now for a new voice of spiritual activism to be formed in this
country that is a voice of love and kindness. I ask you to help me in this
effort by recruiting United Methodists and other Christian friends to join
with us when we go to Congress each year to urge the government to
support strategies like the Geneva Accord and other plans that reflect a
progressive middle path to peace. A joint Jewish-Christian-Islamic effort is
needed, and that is what we are building in The Tikkun Community. So
please join our interfaith organization, The Tikkun Community. Size
matters. If you and your friends join, you will be making a serious contribu-
tion to getting this middle-path perspective taken more seriously in
American life today. Together we can bring more of God's energy into
shaping the destiny of our world.

Rabbi Michael Lerner is editor of Tikkun and author of nine books, including
Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation (HarperCollins,
1995). The rabbi of Beyt Tikkun synagogue in San Francisco, he encourages
people who agree with his perspective to join The Tikkun Community at
http://www.Tikkun.org; email: RabbiLerner@tikkun.org.

Endnotes
1. Michael Lerner, Healing Israel/Palestine: A Path to Peace and Reconciliation
2. See my response to critics of the Accord in my book The Geneva Accord and
Other Strategies for Middle East Peace (North Atlantic Books, 2004).
The proposed title for this article may be seen as a question or as an invitation. Cynics will suggest that the question implies that current conversation in The United Methodist Church about being a global church claims too much and is inaccurate. Others will hear in the title the assumption that something is in process—that a long-term change is taking place and that we are moving toward incarnating in our church’s life the genuine nature of The United Methodist Church as a global denomination.

It is common for ideological perspective, political bias, or desire for political advantage to frame United Methodists’ response to the issue. As with most important questions in our church, persons view the actuality of our church’s life through a lens that allows them to see answers favorable to their needs.

A way out of the constant struggles around this question requires a different approach. It is for that reason that I recommend continued on page 84

Has The United Methodist Church ever been a global church? Will it ever be one? In the summer 2004 issue of *Quarterly Review*, I summarized some of my research about the past. Surprisingly, The United Methodist Church (or its predecessors, particularly the Methodist Episcopal Church) was more global in its missionary outreach a hundred years ago than for most of the twentieth century. Only in very recent years have central conferences outside the United States again risen in importance equal to or exceeding the level they enjoyed in the 1920s. The question about the global nature of the denomination has also received new attention in Bruce W. Robbins’s recent book *A World Parish*.

Why call The United Methodist Church a “global” church? And what is meant by global? Globalization has become a watchword for liberal economists and an invective for social-justice advocates. The term global is used in many ways but is continued on page 86
a different approach. To start with, let us undertake an exhaustive inventory of the actual location of United Methodist congregations and annual conferences. The question of "location" will force the conversation to be based in reality. The United Methodist penchant for record-keeping should make such an inventory relatively easy to assemble. By including the location of congregations that are in full connection with The United Methodist Church and firmly a part of an annual conference, we are able accurately to list the variety of nations where United Methodist people worship and witness.

Our inventory will take on special meaning when we remember that not long ago our Constitution was amended so that each annual conference is equal in status, standing, and value, regardless of its geographical location, cultural environment, or economic strength. Because of the nature of our polity, the congregations in all of these annual conferences share in this constitutional equality. All are of equal value in fulfilling God's mission to the world through the church.

This factual inventory will demonstrate that, following the reception of The Methodist Church of Cote d'Ivoire into membership at the 2004 General Conference, there are 120 annual conferences located in 39 nations. According to more recent information, these annual conferences have a total of 43,048 local congregations. This last figure is quite fluid because of the constant establishment of new congregations in many parts of the world. As an example, East and Southern Africa are growing in membership at approximately 30 percent per year. The Philippines is experiencing similar growth. In the United States, while membership gain is not impressive, there is an emphasis on new-church starts that will cause our count to fluctuate.

Do these numbers not make it obvious that The United Methodist Church is global in character? But there is a problem with the word global. The current debate over the positive and negative delimitation and impact of globalization can distract us from our quest for an appropriate descriptive term. The term international is not any better, for it introduces into the definition of our church the idea of the "nation state" (a social invention barely more than 200 years old).

When we examine the nature of our church membership, we are again compelled to admit to the planetary nature of our church. The language about church membership has changed through several General Conferences but the meaning has remained constant. When a person
unites in membership with one of our congregations, he or she immediately becomes a member of every other congregation in the connection. When a United Methodist relocates, he or she does not join the new congregation. Rather, the record of his or her membership is transferred as a symbol of his or her new setting for ministry.

In this article, focus is on the "essence" of The United Methodist Church. There are structural and financial issues to be resolved. However, if these issues are allowed to intrude themselves into the basic discussion, then in typical United Methodist fashion we will have made it impossible to answer the basic question. We discipline ourselves to identify our factual existence. Institutional questions, as complex as they are, will be resolved through the wisdom and organizational skill among our members.

Two remaining observations: (1) We must confess the sins of our past and present colonial mentality. Many denominations continue to define themselves based on their national origin. That is one way to define the church. It is not the United Methodist way. We must constantly remind ourselves that the United Methodist Constitution stands at the center of our life and will not allow us to think of ourselves as the "United Methodist Church of the United States" or of any other nation. (2) United Methodists in the United States need to free themselves from the belief that being the largest (that is, having the most money) gives them the right to control the church. I have heard statements like these in General Conference committees by delegates from the United States. It is not a position that can be defended in Scripture. We need to name it for what it is—the sin of arrogance. It ought to be an embarrassment of the highest order.

Conducting a careful inventory, such as I have recommended above, and examining our Constitution will produce an understanding of the essential nature of our church and our mission in the world. This will help United Methodists to remember that "mission" is central to our life. All other questions, as important as they may be, will find their answers in due time.

Are we a global church? Yes, of course! Are we growing into all that this implies? We are and we will!
open to misunderstanding. For my part, I prefer the specifically Methodist term worldwide connection.

If our church takes seriously the mission statement in its Discipline, it is called to be a worldwide connection. The mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ ends at no national border and brings believers together beyond any differences of nationality, race, gender, or other distinctions. Forming a worldwide connection is just another implication of inclusivity. It is the footprint of inclusivity in the larger ecclesial structures.

Ever again, people engaged in the mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ have presented the aim of building up autonomous churches in other lands. The aim is laudable. Much too often in the past, missionary efforts have resulted in dependencies. The cry for autonomy in many parts of the world has been a reaction to the suffering from remaining under the authority of foreign powers. But neither dependency nor autonomy (or “self-headedness,” to use Robbins’s phrase) is a biblically rooted concept for the body of Christ. The Scriptures talk of members in one body, linked to one another, where all suffer if one suffers and all rejoice if one rejoices. Members in one body live in an interrelatedness and interdependence that require constant connection.

The tension between dependency and autonomy has not yet been overcome in favor of a partnership in a worldwide Methodist networking structure. Economic disparities create dependencies ever again. For example, donors, with best intentions, think they know what is good for recipients and want to determine the project on which they spend their dollars. Even if the recipients have more urgent needs elsewhere, they have to settle for the support for the donor’s chosen project. (I know of numerous such examples in post-communist Europe.) The United Methodist Church still has to learn patterns of stewardship that reduce dependencies and strengthen the responsibilities of decision making among recipients. Such new patterns create partnerships instead of relationships of donors and receivers.

What is true of economic disparity is true also of disparities in administrative leadership. People in highly developed countries have educational privileges and practical means that give them advantages to fill leadership positions as missionaries, or “experts.” This is another factor that creates and often maintains dependencies and causes a cry for autonomy. Our
church has to learn leadership patterns that strengthen indigenous leaders in the mission of the church.

While the church's worldwide connectedness still perpetuates dependencies in places, we have made progress towards worldwide inclusiveness. In the past two decades, delegates from annual conferences outside the United States have become involved in general councils, boards, and commissions in new ways. Central conference representation at the 2004 General Conference rose to 10 percent. But let me add an observation from a European point of view.

Europe was the center of colonial powers for centuries. Decolonization after World War II has radically changed power structures. Within the Christian churches in Europe, mission boards have been among the first entities to promote new models of partnership with the former mission fields overseas. The mission boards and agencies for development in the European churches, among them the mission boards of The United Methodist Church in Europe, have acquired expertise in empowering churches in developing countries today. By comparison, the United States had no colonies and experienced no decolonization after the war. However, it has become the lone super-power; and, like all superpowers, it tends to dominate and pretends to know what is best for others. American Christians can easily fall prey to this tendency; unless they experience a spiritual renewal that sets them free to respect, honor, and promote indigenous forms of Christian witness. United Methodists have made progress in valuing the gifts and graces of Methodists in other countries and building up a network of personal relationships and structural connectivity; but the task is not yet fulfilled.

Our church's current structure still reflects a time when The United Methodist Church was essentially a U.S.-based church. General Conference and general agencies play an essential role for the U.S. church but an ancillary role for United Methodists outside its borders. Finances reflect that reality. Since The United Methodist Church outside the U.S. has grown in membership to almost 20 percent and will continue to grow, incongruities have given rise to searching questions. For example, is it appropriate for delegates outside the U.S. to make decisions at General Conference or in the Judicial Council that are binding for U.S. churches but able to be adapted by central conferences (for certain parts of the Book of Discipline)? Can the U.S. church continue to finance the growing non-U.S. part of the church's budget? Should all worldwide aspects of the church’s work be
centralized in the general agencies? Are there more time- and cost-effective ways to be as global as need be but also as local/regional as possible? Is it appropriate to fund central conference representation on general agency boards but not the programs they need in their churches?

The pressure for structural changes will increase. As before, some people are looking for the easy way out under the banner of "autonomy." Cut the connectional link between the United Methodist church in the United States and that of the rest of the world, they say. This way the U.S. part could keep its current general church structure intact. However, this proposal comes at a high price: division and retreat to national entities. Indeed, it would result in a form of congregationalism lived on an national scale! For my part, I opt for a Methodist way that maintains our connectional bonds and develops a structure that reflects a truly worldwide connectional church. In the 1996–2000 quadrennium, the "Connectional Process Team" did a good analysis of the problems even if the solution it proposed was inadequate. The United Methodist Church has to continue its search for solutions that take us forward and help us model a truly worldwide connectional church. The 2004 General Conference charged the Commission on the General Conference to bring to the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas, recommendations regarding the format and structure of future General Conferences. I pray that the Commission’s work will help us find ways to live truly as a worldwide connectional church.

Patrick Streiff is a clergy person in the Switzerland/France Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Endnotes

May 22, 2005—First Sunday after Pentecost
Gen. 1:1-2:4; Ps. 8; 2 Cor. 13:11-13; Matt 28:16-20

The author of Psalm 8 provides us one of the earliest commentaries we have on the opening chapter of the book of Genesis. Rightly, the psalmist focuses attention on the impact and the results of believing in this creator God.

“You have established your glory over against the skies (heavens)” (Ps. 8:1b). Genesis 1 begins with the majestic phrase, “In the beginning God created the sky (heavens) and the earth.” The psalmist makes plain that God’s “name” and God’s “glory,” two consistent designations of the very being of this God in the Hebrew Bible, are established “over against” (a better reading of the Hebrew than the familiar “above”) the heavens and “in all” the earth. The psalmist reminds us that God’s created sky and earth are not to be confused for their maker. This God is both in and over against all that God has made. To forget that claim is to move toward idolatry, exchanging the glory of God for images, as Paul was much later to warn (Rom. 1:23).

Still, an upward glance at that sky, at the moon and the stars (vs. 3), leads the psalmist not to airy contemplation of the vastness of space but to a deep reflection on the seeming triviality of humanity (vs. 4) In the context of countless stars (Gen. 1:15), observed for centuries as wheeling points of light far above our heads, and the silvery moon (Gen. 1:16), silent and cold and huge, yet monthly growing and dying in mystery, what possible value could weak and frail human beings have over against those eternal lights dotting the vast vault of the sky? Yet, wondrously, God has made them (us) “little less than elohim (gods, God), crowning them with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5). Here the psalmist points to Gen. 1:26-28 and the creation of humanity as only one of the significant events of the sixth day of God’s work.
But note that the psalmist gives us a powerful warning here, reminding us of something we often forget when we read the Genesis account of human creation. Too often, Gen. 1:26-28 has been used as a club that humans have wielded over their fellow creatures from God’s hands, emphasizing our “dominion over” and our “subduing of.” Too often, we forget we are “trivial” in the context of our creation. Too often, we need to be reminded, as was the angry Job, that we do not sit in the center of God’s creation. Like Job, we need further contemplation of mountain goats and ravens and lions and ostriches in order to remember that they, like us, are beloved of and cared for by God. Their value is not confined to what they can do for us; they are intrinsically valuable to a God who made them all. In fact, as God makes so clear to Job, God is forever caring for them; while Job seems to believe that all God really cares about is his claim for strict human justice, meted out mechanically by an all-too-predictable deity, Job’s worldview has become far too small, as, too often, has ours (see Job 38-39).

The psalmist concludes the reading of Genesis 1 with the familiar claim that “you have caused them to rule over the works of your hands; all things are under their feet” (vs. 6). Here again, traditional readings of this psalm and of Gen. 1:28 have led to no end of human theological and ecological mischief. If we humans have “dominion” and are rulers over whatever God has made, then our kingly/queenly power seems to have no limits. The world is our oyster, and we are free to exploit as we will. This can hardly stand as a way to see our ongoing relationship with the earth as created and loved by God.

Again, the psalmist, in that crucial fifth verse of the psalm, tells us to continue to ask the central question of human existence: “What are human beings that you remember them, mortals that you visit (care for) them?” Whenever our overweening pride and arrogance threaten to swallow our true selves, the poet of Psalm 8 rises up with that question: just who exactly do you think you are in God’s enormous creation? Hold to the paradox of triviality and godliness, for both define what it means to be human.

There is another, rather less-noted, place in the Genesis account that affirms this paradoxical view of human nature. The plural pronouns of 1:26 have brought on an ocean of ink. As God speaks in the plural imperative three times, commentators have speculated about ancient polytheistic contexts for the speech, or a kind of divine majestic plural (rather like the kings and queens of later times), or even the first biblical reference to the
Holy Trinity of later Christianity. Let me suggest a rather odder interpretation.

At the beginning of the sixth day’s work of creation, God set about making all of the earth’s wild and domesticated animals; for surely that is the simple division of the animal kingdom envisioned by the ancients: some are domesticated (cattle, horses, camels, donkeys) and some are wild (lions, tigers, and bears). Since these animals are the creatures just made by God, when God decides to make the human beings in “our image, after our likeness,” God may be said to be speaking to and of the animals. Hence, in the story before us, God determines to make the human creatures as much like the animals as like God. In all of us humans, then, there is a little bit of God and a little bit of beast!

So, like the warning of Psalm 8 about natural human insignificance, so here in Genesis we are warned that we are as much beast as God. I find such warnings highly salutary in a time of potential ecological disaster. When, in 1967, the historian of science, Lynn White, Jr., laid the degradation of our environment at the feet of biblical Christianity, he created a heated discussion that is still hot nearly forty years later. As easy as it may be to shoot holes in his argument (as been done many times since 1967), the fact remains that we need a new way to envision ourselves in God’s world than a traditional reading of Genesis has afforded us.

I suggest that, when read in the ways I have demonstrated, Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 offer an appropriate paradoxical understanding of the nature of humanity that can lead to an understanding of the human-God-earth relationship that is life-giving, earth-sustaining, and God-centered. We humans need a new way to envision all this; and that new vision, I suggest, is found in the ancient texts, after all. In this new vision, God is at the center of all God has made, and we humans are decentered. To be sure, we are a valued part of that creation, but only a part—and a beastly and godly part at that.

May 29, 2005—Second Sunday after Pentecost
Gen. 6:11-22; 7:24; 8:14-19; Ps. 46; Rom. 1:16-17, 3:22b-28; Matt. 7:21-29

The Lectionary selections in the story of Noah are very unfortunate. It has long been recognized that two accounts of this important story have been interwoven in Genesis 6-9, one usually assigned to the Priestly author of Genesis 1 and the other to the storytelling author (the so-called Yahwist) of Genesis 2-3. However much that may be true, the more important ques-
LECTIONARY STUDY

The question is this: what is a preacher to do with the story that we now have in Genesis 6–9? The Lectionary seems to have given us a kind of Priestly account in its selection of verses but, in so doing, has excluded the very heart of the story. No one should preach from the story of Noah and the flood without taking account of 6:5-8 and 8:20-22. For this reason, in what follows, I direct attention to those verses, too.

Genesis 6:5-8 provides the rationale for the destruction that is to come. Without these verses, God’s announcement that “the earth was corrupt in God’s sight” does not bear its full weight. Verse 5 is key: “God saw that the evil of humanity was great in the earth; indeed, every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil all day long.” The inclusiveness of that sentence is breathtaking. Not only is human evil great, but every inclination of the human heart’s thoughts (in the Hebrew understanding of anthropology, the heart is the seat of will and intelligence) is only evil all day long. In the face of such unprecedented evil, God resolves to act. But we are quickly told (vs. 6) that anger was not God’s primary emotion in the face of this evil. On the contrary, God was “sorry” and “grieved to the heart.” In human hearts was only evil, while in God’s heart there was only grief at the horror that humanity had become.

Unfortunately, human horror leads not to just human destruction but to the complete destruction of every living thing. God resolves to “wipe out” (as in blotting tears or wiping a dish clean) from the earth the human creatures and the animals and birds. Note that the destiny of the animal world is tied inexorably with the behavior of the human world. The eighth-century prophet Hosea recognized this inexorable connection as well (4:2-3). As we saw in our exegesis of Genesis 1, humans and animals are very closely intertwined, both in creation and in nature; and human dominion can too easily lead to animal disaster.

“But Noah found favor (grace) in the eyes of YHWH” (vs. 8). This stark sentence says very little, if anything, about Noah; he is one of those humans referred to in v. 5 as only evil. Yet, God treats him with favor in spite of that fact. Here we are told that God is able to find value and worth even in one of these wretches who precipitate the flood. No reader should search for any reason why Noah found such favor in God’s eyes; such a search begins and ends in God.

In this light, the Lectionary selection finds fuller meaning. As Gen. 6:11 makes clear, two words characterize God’s decision for destruction: corrupt
and violence. "The earth was corrupt in the eyes of God; the earth was filled with violence." The two words are connected as follows: because there is violence the earth is corrupt. The word violence occurs most often in contexts of injustice (eg., Amos 3:10; Jer. 22:3). Human injustice "corrupts" the earth. The word corrupt is used in contexts of spoilage, fouled springs, ruined palaces, and rotted clothing. As a result of human evil, here described as human injustice, the earth itself is spoiled.

The story closely connects human evil with earth's degradation. Once again, the ancients confront us with the reality of ecological disaster as a result of human misbehavior. The favored Noah's large and peculiar boat and all of its inhabitants will be all that remains of the world populated by God in Genesis 1. Whether we hear the famous "two-by-two" demand of 6:19 or the "seven-pair" demand of "clean" creatures of 7:2, this ark carries within it the future of us all, human and animal alike.

After the flood, described in two different ways in chs. 7 and 8, Noah is called by God to leave the ark, along with his human and animal cargo (8:14-19). But 8:20-22 are crucial for the ending of the story. Noah immediately builds an altar to YHWH and sacrifices an appropriate clean offering on it to the God who has rescued him, his family, and the earth's animal creatures. And in a delightful touch, "YHWH smells the pleasing odor" and speaks, not aloud but in the divine heart, the following amazing lines: "I will never again curse the soil on account of humanity, because (even though?) the inclination of the human heart is evil from their youth. I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have just done." In other words, human beings have not been changed as a result of the flood. Indeed, the apparent reason that the flood came at all (6:5) is because of human evil. But now we are told by God that human beings remain evil. Thus, it is not human beings who have changed. It is God who has changed, or at least God's perception of human beings. Despite human evil, God will never again destroy. The God of strict justice before the flood now has become the God of amazing grace. The perpetual promise of the seasons (vs. 22) seals the reality of this new, ever-forgiving God. The same God of grace we Christians celebrate in Jesus Christ appears already here in Genesis 8.

God is forgiving, loving us well beyond our deserving. But that wonderful reality does not dissipate the other reality announced by the ancient tale of the flood: human evil inexorably leads to environmental degradation. Human violence, person against person, the powerful against
the weak leads to ecocide. The earth, God's good creation of Genesis 1, is our home, a place for humans and animals and plants to inhabit in harmony. But human greed (the biblical "violence"), leading to imbalance of goods and services and inequalities of resources among the world's peoples, appears to be leading all of God's creation to chaos and death. The story of the flood, coupled with the story of creation in Genesis 1, offers an alternative to such inequities and death. In the eyes of the God of grace, all of the creation can find a new vision for equitable living. As Paul has it: "The whole creation is groaning (in labor pains) . . . while we wait for adoption"—that is, while we wait for our full understanding of ourselves as sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:22-23). Once again, in the ancient tale, we see a new possibility for living together in God's good world. The old story of the flood is a cautionary tale to those of us who think our dominion of earth is free, our subjugation of it God willed. Let us never forget our brothers and sisters whose violence brought the earth's near end, and let us never forget the grace-filled God whose love for us would have us live in the peace God desired from the very beginning of all things.

**June 5, 2005—Third Sunday after Pentecost**

Gen. 12:1-9; Ps. 33:1-12; Rom. 4:13-25; Matt 9:9-13, 18-26

This passage from Genesis is the lynchpin of the entire biblical story, not just of the Hebrew Bible. God's choice of the "foreigner" Abram and subsequent charge to leave all he knows and to journey to a place he has never seen establishes the fact that the God of all creation is a God who will stop at nothing in the attempt to return creation to the harmony of Genesis 1. To see that wondrous truth clearly, we must be reminded quickly of the movement of Genesis 1-11.

As we saw earlier, God's creation of heaven and earth revealed a God of order, balance, and design, intent on making a place of harmony and *shalom* for all of God's creations. Genesis 3, the fateful and funny story of the garden of Eden, began a downward spiral of disaster, as the first human couple disobeys the simplest of divine commands against fruit-eating and, upon discovering their nakedness, sewed loincloths from fig leaves to cover themselves up. The joke is this: Fig leaves feel like number-two-grade sandpaper! The story tells the truth about us: we forever try to cover our lies and deceptions with fig-leaf foolishness. Fig leaves are the very definition of human striving without God. And so, the first couple is banished from
the garden, not, however, before the bemused God offers them animal skins in place of the scratchy leaves. God’s grace is ever present.

The slippery slope of human willfulness reappears in chapter 4, when the elder of the first two brothers in history engages in fratricide. Cain kills Abel over some mystery of sacrificial acceptance and rejection and is banished from the ground from which he came. Abel’s innocent blood ever cries out from the ground (4:10), and God is always attentive to such cries. And even though Noah is born with the specific charge to “bring us relief (or, better, “rest,” the word from which the name Noah is derived) from the work of our hands” (5:29), at first this attempt to counteract the curse of the ground fails. The flood comes anyway, given the horror that humanity has become (6:5).

Following the flood, as we saw in last Sunday’s reading, God was revealed clearly as a God of grace, anxious always to restore the harmony of creation. Initially, the rainbow sign of chapter 9 is intended not for us but for God. In two places, 9:15 and 9:16, God states that when God sees the bow (the word used as in “bow and arrow”) in the cloud, God will remember the covenant made between God and “every living creature of all flesh.” You and I can rejoice in the bow in the cloud, but it is not first set there for us: it is first the colorful string tied round God’s finger, so God will never again forget the universal covenant that God has now made with all of God’s creation.

But the hoped-for harmony is once again thwarted at the tower of Babel (ch. 11). It is very unfortunate that the story of the tower of Babel is not included in the Lectionary, especially in connection with the day of Pentecost. After all, among other things, the story of Pentecost in the Book of Acts is a reversal of the story of the tower of Babel. At Babel, God confused the languages of the human tower builders in order to prevent them from foolishly building a tower (out of mud brick and pitch, and not for heaven’s sake!) with its very top in the sky itself—the sky made by God in Genesis 1. Of course, God cannot even see the silly thing where God lives and so God must “come down” to have a peek (11:5)! Thus are human pretensions to greatness satirically undercut. The result of this would-be titanism is the inability to understand one another, which leads to the separation and scattering of the human family “over the face of all the earth.” Thus, at Pentecost (Acts 2), the great miracle is that the Christ-event, and the resulting gift of the Holy Spirit, enables worldwide communication...
once again and the intended harmony of God begins to be realized.

Back in Genesis, God again faces the challenge of a recalcitrant, uncommunicative rabble bent on self-fulfillment and self-destruction. God is sent back to the divine drawing board, and this time the great architect designs a different path by which the shalom of creation might find its renewal. God turns to an unknown Mesopotamian patriarch to attempt to move the world once again toward harmony. Listen to the extraordinary words, so fateful for the rest of the Bible's story.

Take yourself from your country, from your kindred, from the very house of your father, to the country that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, making your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you. And through you all the families of the soil will be blessed (or "will bless themselves") (Gen. 12:1-3).

The mysterious Abram (his name means "great father") is asked to leave what he knows in an ascending order of difficulty—country, relatives, intimate family—and go to a place he has never seen. Once there, he is promised greatness. We might imagine the simple word great here to mean "large/magnificent/enviable in size." But that meaning is quickly undercut. Greatness here means blessing. If Abram is to be great, he must bless, and not simply his own family but also "all the families of the soil." I use the word soil here rather than earth, because that is the exact meaning of the word. Of course, we use the word earth as soil when we work in our gardens and that is clearly the meaning here. It is important to make that distinction. The ground, the soil, has been cursed by fruit-eating, fratricide, unjust violence, overweening arrogance, and hubris. Abram’s job is nothing less than the redemption of all that. Hence, he must bless "all the families of the soil."

And after that enormous divine charge, Abram, without remonstrance or complaint, takes up the task he has been assigned. Verses 4-9 give an itinerary of his journey in the land that will become Israel. Traveling with his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot, Abram moves from north to south, from Shechem to Bethel/Ai to the Negeb.

Still, amid this great call of God and Abram’s wonderful response is a nearly unobtrusive fly in the ointment of hope for the future. That tiny speck flew into the story almost unannounced, and many of us did not hear it. Back in 11:30, in the course of a long genealogy, the simple truth is
uttered: "Now Sarai was barren; she had no child." But this is not a speck! The sentence sounds like a thunderclap into our story. How will the great God found a great nation designed to bless all the nations out of a couple who has no children! That glorious promise of descendants in 12:7 rings hollow in the face of Sarai's barrenness. Even this wonder-working God, this God of shalom, will be tested to make this work. We read on in the story with hope in God, but we fear for the human beings, whose history thus far has been less than stellar. Can blessing for all come from this?

June 12, 2005—Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Gen. 18:1-15; Ps. 116:1-2, 12-19; Rom. 5:1-8; Matt. 9:35–10:8

We come this Sunday to one of the most delightful stories in Genesis. But since we are in the middle of a longer story, we need always to remember where we are. After Abram's response to God's call to leave his home and journey to a place he has never seen, many odd things have happened. In response to famine in his new land, Abram decides to take his wife to Egypt, the breadbasket of the ancient world, in order to stay alive. Before entering the land of the pyramids, Abram counsels Sarai to lie about their relationship, urging her to say she is his sister, "in order that it may be good for me, and so that my life may be spared on your account" (12:13). In other words, Abram is immediately prepared to throw the promise of God away so that he might live! The great act of his leaving his home at God's command is quickly undercut by this act of arrogance, fear, and apparent indifference to his wife. God fortunately steps in to save Sarai from the Pharaoh's harem; and the couple leave Egypt greatly enriched, with Pharaoh's taunts sounding in Abram's ears.

In short order, Abram disputes with his nephew, Lot, about a division of the land (ch. 13); Abram saves Lot from a kidnapping by a coalition of Eastern kings (ch. 14); God covenants with Abram again in ch. 15, promising him a "great reward." Abram now begins to question this whole enterprise, pointing out his childlessness and urging God to accept his servant as heir (15:2). God will have none of it and reiterates the promise, sealing it with a mysterious nighttime vision of smoky fire pots and flaming torches (15:17-21). Then Sarai decided to use her maid, Hagar, as a surrogate mother for a child; but when the plan works all too well, she is jealous of the pregnant slave and demands that Abram throw her out to die in the desert (ch. 16). Once again God intervenes, this time to save the
helpless woman. In the long ch. 17, God makes covenant again, sealed this time by circumcision. However, the important lines for the ongoing story are 17:17-18. In response to God's claim—again—that the aged Sarai will surely have a child, Abram falls on his face, laughing, and muttering the obvious problem with God's plans: "Can a son be born to a hundred-year-old man? Can a ninety-year-old woman give birth?" He mutters these absurd questions to himself but shouts out loud, "Let Ishmael (Hagar's boy) live before you!" Abram implies that this is the only son he is ever going to have; prune-faced geriatrics do not bear children!

God will have none of it. "My covenant I will establish with Isaac whom Sarah will bear for you about this time next year" (17:21). And that brings us to our story for today.

There is mystery and fun aplenty in this tale. It starts in the heat of the day, with Abraham (his name now changed in the preceding chapter) sitting at the flap of his tent. The desert heat rises into the air like the glow of an anvil. Looking up with half-closed eyes, peering into the glare of the afternoon sun, he sees three men standing near him, as if they had magically appeared out of the thin desert air. With the greatest of haste, the old man runs toward them and bows, nose to the ground in appropriate reverence for strangers seeking hospitality. Abraham speaks as one fully aware of the demands of Middle-Eastern hospitality. "My lord (the generic name for one's better); if I find favor in your eyes, do not pass by your servant." In other words, I am ready to play the part of host; do not snub my efforts, else all of us will lose face and you will forfeit a fine meal.

Again, typically, Abraham promises only a little of this and a drop of that and a moment of rest, when what he plans is a great feast and the finest of pleasures for these strangers. They agree. Sarah, listening at the tent flap, prepares an enormous repast, which Abraham politely serves and watches under a tree while the strangers eat.

Now the fun really begins. All three say in unison, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" These are odd strangers indeed! Abraham splutters out in response to this surprising question, "There, in the tent" (18:9). Now only one stranger speaks: "I will certainly return to you at the season of life, and without doubt Sarah, your wife, will have a son!" (18:9) Now Sarah was listening at the tent flap behind him (18:10) and "laughed to herself, saying, 'After I am old and my husband (lord) is old, will there be pleasure for me?'" (18:12) Her concern is not directly about the impossibility of giving birth but about the
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more general human concern of whether or not she and her aged husband are any longer capable of sexual joy. All of this is uttered to herself.

Then יוהו intervenes in vs. 13, "Why in the world did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Can I really bear a child when I am old?'" According to God, bearing a son and not sexual pleasure is the heart of the matter. There are at least two ways to hear the next famous line. The usual reading is, "Is anything too wonderful for יוהו?" However, the grammar will also bear the translation, "Is anything more wonderful (or "marvelous" or "astounding") than יוהו?" I rather like the joy and excitement of the second reading. יוהו is having a very good time in this story and likes nothing better than to show off the divine fun and power. "At the season I will return to you, precisely the time of life, and Sarah will have a son!" I hear God's joy spilling over like the joy of a child upon receiving a wonderfully unexpected gift. Or I picture Ebenezer Scrooge, now transformed by his ghostly visitors, feeding the family of his clerk, Bob Cratchit, and laughingly saving poor Tiny Tim from his crippling illness.

Sarah denied that she had laughed, for she was afraid. This is hardly surprising, seeing that her private thoughts have been heard as if they had been spoken aloud. "Oh, yes, you did," shouts God in high good humor. Perhaps it is often the case that the good humor of God is met by the serious fear and denial of God's people. When I think of the God I love, this is the God I imagine—the laughing, jesting creator of us all who is not above a great joke. But it is always a joke on our behalf, not at our expense. And, of course, the joke here is on Abraham and Sarah, for the jesting God is right. At the right season, at just the right time—the very next year—old Sarah gives birth to a son and old Abraham names the boy Isaac, which, in Hebrew means "laughter." What else would you call a child if you had one when you were one-hundred years old?

These glorious stories, perhaps three millennia old, announce enormous truths about us, about the whole of creation, and, most of all, about God. In some Sunday school rooms, on certain Sundays, lessons are still being offered that may be summarized in the moral phrases, "Let's be like Abraham, a man of faith," or "Let's be like Sarah, a woman of faith." Well, these phrases are not quite right, however much they have been and will be said. To be more accurate, we need to say, "We are like Abraham; we are like Sarah." Too often we attempt to force God's hand to run the world as we would like it to be run. Too often we lie and deceive to get our own way.
Too often we frown at a God whose will for our lives is fun and *shalom*, not serious piety or grim-faced religion. Genesis can teach us so much about ourselves. But more than that, Genesis can teach us about God, the creator of the ends of the earth and a fun-loving and joking Friend who makes a covenant with us that will never end. It is that God whom Jesus announces and that God who promises to be with us “to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). And it is that God who uses even us to perform the divine will. Paul had this just right when he said, “We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us” (2 Cor. 4:7). I can think of no better summary of the stories of Genesis. We are the “cracked pots” that God is always in the habit of filling up with God’s good gifts; but because we are cracked, those gifts are too often spilled or spoiled. Yet God continues to use us, because like Abram we, too, with God’s unfailling help and love, can be a blessing to all the people of the soil.

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**Endnotes**

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture translations in this article are my own.

The modern missionary movement was closely associated with the colonial expansionism of the West. Unfortunately, post-colonial guilt has resulted in what Max Warren termed "a terrible failure of nerve about the missionary enterprise." As the West is rapidly secularized and steadily dechristianized, and the Third World church grows autonomous and mature, the Western church has found itself unwilling and incompetent to engage in mission.

However, the church is a missionary community by its nature; mission is integral to its very identity and calling. Participating in mission, the church is drawn near to the loving and redemptive will of God for the world. What is thus urged on the church is not an abandonment but a holistic recovery of its intrinsic vocation. It needs to reexamine critically its own missionary motives and practices as well as to discern perceptively the new crises and challenges of the world today. As Wilbert Shenk well put it, the church is "continually to press on toward the frontier [of mission] but to do so in full awareness of the path the church has taken thus far."

This essay looks at crucial issues in world mission in terms of missional paradigm shifts, the rise of non-Western Christianity, and globalization.

Transforming Mission

In Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Orbis, 1991), the late South African missiologist David Bosch carefully investigates the transformations of the Christian mission during the past twenty centuries and explores a new paradigm of mission for the present crisis the church faces.

Bosch's thesis is that there have been major paradigm shifts in mission in response to profound crises and that our time and context legitimate another critical shift. The Enlightenment paradigm has heavily shaped the understanding and practice of the Christian mission since the eighteenth century. Now the new "postmodern" paradigm is emerging as the entire foundation of the Enlightenment is being challenged and is collapsing—
Bosch portrays thirteen interrelated elements of the emerging paradigm. His painstaking description of each element both enriches the understanding of the Christian mission and broadens its theological foundation. For Bosch, the most fundamental element of all is to recognize mission as God's mission, that is, mission derived from the very nature of God. The mission of the church is thus participation in and service to the mission of God that is already operative, embracing and affecting all people. For the church to be faithful to its missionary vocation, the local church needs to be rediscovered as the primary agent of mission, with the understanding that every Christian community finds itself in a missionary situation.

Bosch strongly emphasizes evangelism as an essential dimension of the church's mission. He constructs probably the most integral and comprehensive theology of evangelism. Bosch also stresses the intrinsically ecumenical nature of mission, since authentic mission presupposes authentic unity. "The mutual coordination of mission and unity is non-negotiable," he says, because God's people are one and they have one mission, the missio Dei (464).

Bosch's contribution as a missiologist is found in his encompassing systematic study of mission. With Martin Kähler, he believes that mission is the "mother of theology," since it was in the missionary context that the early church was forced to engage in theological reflection. He thus argues, "just as the church ceases to be church if it is not missionary, theology ceases to be theology if it loses its missionary character" (494). What the church today needs is not simply "a theology of mission" but "a missionary theology," in which mission becomes an undergirding agenda for theology.

Among the criticisms of Transforming Mission are that Bosch's emerging paradigm has not taken into account some significant elements, such as the role of women in mission, the growth of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, and the ecological crisis; that he has failed to provide criteria for evaluating the new paradigm; and that by engaging in dialogue primarily with scholars of the First World he has not recognized enough the contribution of Third World churches to the shaping of the emerging paradigm.

Norman Thomas edited a companion volume to Transforming Mission, titled Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity (Orbis, 1995), which contains primary source documents.
The Rise of Non-Western Christianity

A former Scottish Methodist missionary to Sierra Leone and Professor Emeritus of the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World at the University of Edinburgh, Andrew Walls, is credited with calling attention to the demographic shift of the center of gravity of Christianity toward the Southern continents and thus to the future direction of the Christian churches. His two seminal books, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Orbis, 1996) and *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Orbis, 2002), have contributed a great deal to reexamining issues in Christian mission on terms set by non-Western Christianity.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Christianity was distinctly a Western religion; more than 80 percent of Christians lived in Europe or North America. In 2004, Christians in the Southern Hemisphere—Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific—comprise over 60 percent of the world Christian population; Christianity has become a non-Western religion. Such a shift is neither strange nor surprising, since "there is some inherent fragility, some built-in vulnerability, in Christianity" (2002: 29). Walls illustrates this fragility by pointing to the past major centers of Christianity that are no longer: Jerusalem, Egypt and Syria, and, most recently, Western Europe.

Walls insightfully contrasts expansions of Christianity and Islam. Whereas Islamic expansion is "progressive" in nature, moving out steadily from its geographical center, Christianity is a "serial movement" that contains recessions as well as advances. Thus, the center of Christianity shifts from place to place, and its progress is never final.

Based on these critical observations, Walls brings home some significant points concerning world mission. First, Christianity must continually enter into and interact with new cultures, crossing cultural frontiers; if it does not, it will lose its vitality and thus fade. A cross-cultural movement or diffusion is at the heart of Christianity. In the process of the transmission of faith, both the translation of the gospel into and the conversion of a specific culture take place. When this translation process stops, Christianity inevitably withers.

Second, the rise of non-Western Christianity should encourage Western churches to listen to voices from churches of the Southern continents. More and more, Christianity will be associated with and marked by non-Western Christians. Therefore, states Walls, "the study of Christian
history and theology will increasingly need to operate from the position where most Christians are," paying heed to "Christianity as expressed in the experience of the Southern churches" (2002:47; 1996:146).

Third, what is needed between the churches of the West and the South is hospitality, reflected in equality and mutual respect and not dominant leadership by the former. The two should come together to make their witness credible and integral. What acutely concerns twenty-first-century Christianity are issues of ecumenism—not confessional and denominational but multicultural and intercontinental issues. Thus, according to Walls, "The great ecumenical issues will be about how African and Indian and Chinese and Korean and Hispanic and North American and European Christians can together make real the life of the body of Christ" (2002:69).

Walls's writings reflect great wisdom based on his missionary experience, a lifetime of reflection on and teaching of the missionary movement, and continued intercultural engagement. His essay "The Ephesian Moment: At a Crossroads in Christian History" is perhaps the most solid and convincing argument for the church to become multicultural. He asserts that "the very height of Christ's full stature [Eph. 4:13] is reached only by the coming together of the different cultural entities into the body of Christ" (2002:77). The original Ephesian moment was rather brief. Yet, Walls perceptively and hopefully points to the United States, with its growing Christian communities of the diasporas, as the most probable context in which a new Ephesian moment of multiculturalism could be realized.

Globalization and Contextualization

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, globalization has become the dominant force shaping and affecting the life and environment of the human community. Globalization is so significant and pervasive that it calls for new ways of understanding and doing theology and mission. Leading Roman Catholic missiologist Robert Schreiter critically examines implications and challenges of globalization to Christian mission and constructively addresses the relationship between contextualization and globalization in The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local (Orbis, 1997).

There have been three crucial changes providing impetus to the globalization phenomenon: politically, the move from a bipolar to a multipolar world; economically, the worldwide expansion of neoliberal capitalism following the collapse of socialism as an alternative economic ideology; and,
technologically, the revolutionary communications advancement. The world is increasingly becoming interconnected through a globalization process that extends the influence of modernity while compressing time and space.

According to Schreiter, "ambivalence" best describes the effect of globalization. It has generated greater material wealth, but the economic disparity between rich and poor is intensifying. It has promised progress but without a clear goal and often with dehumanizing consequences. The interconnected character of globalization has resulted in the unavoidable encounter between the global and local. Consequently, the local situation hardly remains unchanged. However, it does not necessarily surrender its own distinctness and often resists the globalizing forces with a heightened interest in the local.

Schreiter shows how the meaning of "context" has altered in consequence of globalization and highlights three critical, discernible changes (26-27). First, the concept of context has become deterritorialized: Boundaries concern difference rather than territorial space. Second, people simultaneously belong to or participate in multiple contexts, often occupying the same territory. Third, due to intense interaction among cultures, no context remains pristine and inevitably becomes hybrid.

Schreiter calls special attention to the fact that as the world is increasingly shaped by globalization, theology stands between the global and the local. Thus, the challenge for the church is to interact with and engage both the global and the local realities in its theological reflection and praxis. In response to the impact of globalization, Schreiter proposes to develop a new theological framework through "a renewed and expanded concept of catholicity," which is characterized by "a wholeness of inclusion and fullness of faith in a pattern of intercultural exchange and communication" (127, 132).

Whether Schreiter's vision of a new catholicity offers a responsible and viable way of thinking and of doing theology between the global and the local remains to be proven. In fact, he is much clearer in portraying and analyzing the phenomena and challenges of globalization than in propounding the theological framework that will help the church understand its mission. However, Schreiter is certainly right in drawing the church's attention to globalization as the context within which a crucial theological reflection is to be undertaken. Local congregations cannot but engage in such theological discourse in order to serve as a faithful witness and a transforming agent both locally and globally.

SPRING 2005
Other Issues and Resources

Over the past century, Pentecostalism has grown from fewer than a million adherents to over 500 million; it indeed has become a worldwide phenomenon and the largest category in Protestantism. It is neither possible nor desirable to understand global Christianity or mission while ignoring the remarkable explosion of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. For instance, we cannot adequately comprehend African Christianity without grasping the significance of Pentecostal renewal. Pentecostalism has its own shortcomings and weaknesses, just as do other traditions, but it deserves an open and sympathetic hearing.

Two major studies examine the Pentecostal movement from within as well as engage views from outside and raise important theological and missiological questions not only for Pentecostalism but also for the broader Christian church. The essays collected in *Called and Empowered* (Hendrickson, 1991) locate the corporate identity of Pentecostalism in global mission, and attempt to construct an integral mission theology informed and shaped by the Pentecostal tradition. Douglas Petersen's *Not by Might Nor by Power: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America* (Regnum, 1996) is an incisive study of the social concern and impact of the Pentecostal movement in Latin America and purports to dispel the common assumption that the Pentecostal church lacks both theology and awareness of social justice.

Jonathan J. Bonk's *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem* (Orbis, 1991) presents intriguing research on effects of the relative affluence of Western missionaries on mission—a serious issue that the Western church has often ignored and failed to address. Bonk critically explores the negative consequences of the economic and social disparity between missionaries and those among whom they serve in terms of relational, communicatory, and theological challenges. A son of missionaries, and wrestling with this predicament caused by Western missionary affluence, he turns to three central motifs of the New Testament—incarnation, cross, and weakness—as an empowering basis for an alternative way of life and service.

Although E. Stanley Jones's *The Christ of the Indian Road* (Abingdon, 1925; reprint, 2001) was first published over three quarters of a century ago, it is amazingly current and offers a very holistic and comprehensive Christian missionary vision. Jones's uncompromisingly christocentric and yet powerfully inclusive understanding and practice of mission and evange-
lism are particularly relevant in post-Christian, multicultural, and pluralistic North American culture.


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Endnotes

4. As Pentecostals trace their earliest roots to the Wesleyan and Holiness movements, Methodism in particular needs to engage Pentecostalism both sympathetically and critically. See, for example, David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church, by Lovett H. Weems, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003)

Abingdon Press has partnered with the G. Douglass Lewis Center for Church Leadership (at Wesley Theological Seminary) to launch with this evocative volume a new series on transformational leadership in the Wesleyan spirit, Discoveries: Insights for Church Leadership.

Weems is Director of the Lewis Center and widely respected as a writer, consultant, pastor, administrator, and advocate for leadership studies in theological education. Here he writes a practical manual, replete with helpful diagrams and pithy quotes, aimed at clergy and lay leaders who seek to guide congregations toward lasting change (change that values the unique stories of congregations).

Weems articulates gracefully and astutely his own integration of literature on preparing and moving through change. Summarizing much of current "best thought and best practices" in the field, he provides a road map for congregations to move through transformative processes of vision casting and renewal. While drawing expertly on the research and wisdom of numerous others, he reveals through case studies and anecdotes his own experience and passion for congregational ministry development in the Wesleyan spirit. (The endnotes are an excellent bibliography for the reader who wants to engage in further research.)

Given the number and variety of resources and consultants in the field of congregational leadership, one might wonder at yet another book on transformational leadership. Weems's contribution to the leadership literature on change and vision casting may be his focus on celebrating and preserving the best of the past while moving through transition, especially in congregations that are in earlier stages of perceived decline. His message to pastoral leaders includes a call to rehearse and affirm the congregation's story by drawing upon the richness of its unique communal narrative. Leaders thus serve as "bridge-builders" between congregational history and new or reframed ministries. The next step in faithfully fulfilling mission is a vision that is cast, shared, planned for, and enacted. The next chapter in a congregation's story is dealing with change positively. That is the change
that lasts. Weems also reminds us that vision is not created but discovered in God's own vision and our own stories—an encouraging word in the face of the often daunting challenge of moving forward.

Several components are less apparent (or even missing) in Weems's road map: discussion of the frequent systemic dysfunction that must be attended to prior to renewal and casting of new vision; the role of core values in the visioning process (central to much transformational literature); the centrality of sacramental and liturgical life as a context for communal transformation. Nevertheless, Weems's use of unique congregational stories is extremely helpful in reinforcing the key ideas he presents. These stories bring prescribed practices to life, inspire hope in the reader, and reinforce Weems's theme of narrative at the heart of leading through change. Perhaps future volumes of the Discoveries series will attend to some of the less-developed aspects mentioned above and to even broader denominational contexts. In the meantime, Weems's wisdom and integrity shine through in this first volume and will certainly encourage and orient those who are ready to "take the next step" in leading congregations toward unique participation in the coming reign of God.

Reviewed by Elise Eslinger, Elizabeth Wourms, and Richard Eslinger. They are associated with the Institute for Applied Theology at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.


Case reflects on a constituency integral to recent United Methodist tradition: "populist evangelicalism." The thesis of the book argues that the customary notion about the Good News movement as primarily a conservative reaction to the social and political unrest of the 1960s and 1970s fails to do justice to the movement. Rather, says case, "Good News is better understood as a movement authentically Methodist, authentically Wesleyan, in direct lineage with the doctrines and ethos of the Church's past, but with an eye to renewal in the Church's future" (12). Reflection upon historical events and characters in any time and place can be an enriching practice. Perhaps in this time and place following the 2004 General Conference careful critical reflection is especially needed.

Evangelical and Methodist assists me, a recipient of a John Wesley
Fellowship offered by a Foundation for Theological Education (176-77, 188, 221, 261) and a professor of evangelism at a United Methodist-affiliated theological seminary, to understand the unfolding of a history in which I find myself. Although not written chronologically, Case provides a narrative for the emergence of some of the structures that enable my ministry, yet the impetus of which began prior to my recollection.

Therefore, Case's history is not without implications for me, which naturally lead to questions, mainly of clarification. Clarification of terms such as populist and the at-times interchangeable use of fundamentalist and evangelical would provide helpful detail and alleviate confusion. Another important area of clarification, addressed by reference to a wider number of primary and secondary sources, is Case's understanding of "traditional Wesleyanism" (185). The late Albert Outler, leading Wesley scholar and "Mister United Methodist of the 1970s" (174), features in the history. However, little, if any, attention is given to the Neo-Wesleyan movement within theological education and the broader church. Similarly, the Foundation for Evangelism and its work in establishing faculty positions in United Methodist theological schools to encourage the theological study and teaching of evangelism also coincides with this narrative but is not featured.

The remarkable volatility of the present time within United Methodism demands careful critical reflection and attention to primary and secondary sources, interpreted with Christian charity. I hope that Evangelical and Methodist will not obstruct conversation between constituencies but will prompt readers to follow the model provided by the exchange between Robb and Outler, described by the latter:

It was . . . downright disconcerting to have Dr. Robb and some of his friends show up in my study one day with an openhearted challenge to help them do something more constructive than cry havoc . . . Here, obviously, was a heaven-sent opportunity not only for a reconciliation but also for a productive alliance in place of what had been an unproductive joust. Moreover, as we explored our problems, some unexpected items of agreement began to emerge (176).

Reviewed by Laceye E. Warner. Warner is Assistant Professor of the Practice of Evangelism and the Royce and Jane Reynolds Teaching Fellow at Duke University Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina.
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