

**Pride and Prejudice:  
(The Presbyterian Divestment Story)**

Will Spotts  
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### Abstract

The Middle East policy statements of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and their centerpiece, divestment from corporations operating in Israel, were marred by several flaws and unwarranted assumptions.

- The General Assembly heard one-sided testimony from those who supported the divestment decision and excluded other relevant voices. Two non-Presbyterians communicated with the assembly, Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, and Rt. Rev. Riah Abu el-Assal. The views of Israeli settlers, Israeli Christians, Israelis who opposed divestment, and American Jewish groups who opposed divestment were not considered.
- The General Assembly relied on flawed sources of historical background information. Walter Owensby's *U.S. Policy and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* and Joel Beinin's and Lisa Hajjar's *Palestine, Israel, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: a Primer* were the two main sources used. Both display elements of one-sidedness, biased language, and disputed factual assertions.
- The General Assembly depended uncritically on the testimonies of Palestinian Christian leaders. Those same Palestinian Christian leaders have made public statements that raise clear questions of credibility.
- Several offices and permanent committees of the PC(USA) have demonstrated severe and long-standing bias against Israel. These include the Presbyterian News Service, the Washington Office, and the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy.
- Over-cooperation between the employees of the PC(USA) and the employees of other denominations affected Presbyterian policy in violation of the Presbyterian form of government.
- The General Assembly employed several quirky and potentially dangerous theological ideas to justify Middle East policy statements. Among these are elements of replacement theology and the use of explicitly Christian imagery to demonize Israelis.
- The General Assembly apparently did not consider potential damage to Christian Jewish relations, the danger of contributing to the increase American anti-Semitism, and the danger of encouraging further violence in the Middle East.

These problems render the whole Middle East policy of the Presbyterian Church (USA) morally suspect, extra-Christian, and potentially harmful. The actions of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly obscure the Christian witness of Presbyterians everywhere, whether or not they individually supported them.

## The Acts of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

It was a kind of perfect storm, really, on July 2, 2004, when the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) rather proudly announced to the world that they had decided to take a firm and moral stand for justice: they passed a series of resolutions concerning Palestine and Israel. One condemned the security barrier – both because it was viewed as a land grab and because “the best hope for security for both Israelis and Palestinians may be found in . . . finding ways to build bridges of peace rather than walls of separation.”<sup>1</sup> Another criticized terrorism, but firmly asserted that all violence in the Middle East has its root cause in the occupation. A third called for an end to the occupation.<sup>2</sup> While the PC(USA) has used the term occupation to refer to those areas acquired in the 1967 war, the same term is also often used for the whole state of Israel. In fact, a Presbyterian News Service article from June 30, 2004, speaks of “the 57-year-long Israeli occupation”.<sup>3</sup> A fourth resolution expressed opposition to a religious/political philosophy labeled Christian Zionism. And a fifth instructed the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee “to initiate a process of phased, selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel.”<sup>4</sup>

The Presbyterian News Service ran the headline, “Assembly Endorses Israel Divestment.”<sup>5</sup> Stated Clerk Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, in his predicted “Top 10” list of most interesting likely actions of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, completely overlooked Israeli/Palestinian issues.<sup>6</sup> Once news of the divestment decision filtered out, however, reaction was swift, widespread, persistent, and mostly hostile. The decision itself and the reactions to it were the results of several factors, completely predictable, and mostly unexpected. The long term effects of this action are not yet clear; already the WCC have endorsed it; already the United Church of Christ, the Episcopalian Church (US), and the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church have followed suit. Relations between “mainline” Protestant denominations and many Jewish groups are tense and deteriorating. Relations between these denominations’ leaders and many members are also tense and deteriorating.

Shortly after the bureaucratic apparatus of the Presbyterian Church (USA) became aware of the controversy surrounding its chosen policy, it initiated emergency damage control measures. The PC(USA)’s leaders portrayed themselves as misunderstood victims of bad press coverage and released statements trying to recast the action and claim the moral high ground. Sadly, many of these statements were misleading. Departures from fact have been advanced nationally and repeated, either knowingly or unknowingly, on the presbytery and local levels. The members, ordinary Presbyterians, sincerely want to believe that our leaders are honest, honorable, and well-intentioned. Presbyterian members and elders, I know this is unpleasant, but before we can even

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<sup>1</sup> Comment from the General Assembly Council included with the Assembly Committee on Peacemaking report to the 216<sup>th</sup> GA, June 30, 2004. (Currently available online at:

<http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/commreps/comm12rep.pdf> )

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, July 2, 2004 (Available online at:

<http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/minutes.htm>

<http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/jul2-2pm.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> “No promised land”, June 30, 2004, NR GA04075 (Available online at:

<http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/news/ga04075.htm> )

<sup>4</sup> Minutes of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, July 2, 2004 (Available online at:

<http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/minutes.htm>

<http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/jul2-2pm.pdf> )

<sup>5</sup> Alexa Smith, PNS article, July 2, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/news/ga04121.htm> )

<sup>6</sup> Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, PNS article, February 19, 2004 (Available online at:

<http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2004/04092.htm> )

consider the merits of the divestment decision itself, its purposes, likely results, and moral character, it is essential that we plainly grasp what was actually done. I urge everyone interested in the topic to read the minutes of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly for themselves.<sup>7</sup> I would point out seven counter-factual or misleading assertions contained in official, public attempts to explain the divestment decision and related actions of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

1. Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick and others denied any intention of comparing Israel to South African apartheid. In a statement issued on July 20, 2004 Rev. Kirkpatrick said, "Although the decision to 'initiate a process of phased, selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel' may be presumed by some to invite comparison of Israeli policies with those of apartheid South Africa, the assembly has not asserted any moral equivalency between the two. The two situations are distinct."<sup>8</sup> However, in an October 14, 2000 letter to President Clinton, Rev. Kirkpatrick, speaking on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (USA) had this to say: "Surely you can understand the frustrations of Palestinian Christians and Muslims forced to live under a clear form of apartheid."<sup>9</sup>

2. Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick and Moderator Rick Ufford-Chase, the Presbyterian News Service, (and many others) have said the decision "authorized exploration of a selective divestment of church funds . . ."<sup>10</sup> This is disingenuous at best. The actual wording of the General Assembly's action is "initiate a process of phased, selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel."<sup>11</sup> That language does not describe a commitment to research and bring findings back to future General Assemblies for their consideration. Yes, it is true that the words phased and selective do necessitate research on the part of the Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee. It is untrue that there is any undecided or uncertain element in this decision.

3. Rev. Kirkpatrick, Moderator Ufford-Chase, and others have said that this divestment initiative is directed at terrorism as well.<sup>12</sup> Nothing in the text of the resolution supports such a claim. In theory the Presbyterian Church (USA) previously had policies in place that would allow it to divest from companies involved in military-related production or funding violence, but nothing in *this* set of resolutions addresses that issue. In November, 2004, Rev. William Somplatsky-Jarman, staff director for the Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee, insisted that "addressing Palestinian violence is within the mandate of MRTI, even if it is not explicitly stated in the divestment legislation."<sup>13</sup> It strikes me as significant that prior to the controversy surrounding divestment and Israel, no action had been taken by the MRTI committee addressing terrorism. This strongly suggests that the PC(USA) did not previously consider that a priority.

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<sup>7</sup> Minutes of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, July 2, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/minutes.htm> <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/jul2-2pm.pdf> )

<sup>8</sup> Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Statement, July 20, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/newsstories/israel.htm> )

<sup>9</sup> Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Letter to President Clinton, October 14, 2000 (Available online at: <http://www.cmep.org/Statements/s31.htm> )

<sup>10</sup> Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Statement, July 20, 2004

<sup>11</sup> Minutes of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, July 2, 2004

<sup>12</sup> Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Statement, July 20, 2004

<sup>13</sup> "Criteria set for Israeli divestment targets", November 9, 2004, NR 04497 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2004/04497.htm> )

4. The Stated Clerk, Moderator and others have repeatedly asserted that the divestment initiative involves companies “whose business in Israel is found to be directly or indirectly causing harm or suffering to innocent people, Palestinian or Israeli.”<sup>14</sup> This is untrue. Again, the language of action only necessitates that it involve “multinational corporations operating in Israel.”<sup>15</sup>

5. It has been widely reported that the decision to divest focused solely on the occupation.<sup>16</sup> Another misrepresentation. The text of the decision mentions only “multinational corporations operating in Israel.” While the occupation was condemned by the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly as “the root of evil acts committed against innocent people on both sides of the conflict”, nothing in the divestment resolution targets those companies directly involved in the occupation.<sup>17</sup>

6. We have been told that the Presbyterian Church (USA) has consistently supported a safe and secure Israel. This is not entirely forthcoming. The net effect of the policies endorsed by the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly demonstrates a lack of concern for Israel. In citing the occupation as the root cause of violence in the region, Israel is being blamed for the murders of its own civilians. In calling for an end to the occupation, the creation of a Jew free Palestinian State is envisioned. Supporting right of return for 1948 Palestinian refugees while ignoring the claims of Israeli refugees from other countries in the Middle East, can hardly be construed as even handed. To call for a pluralistic Israel with an eventual Jewish minority is to advocate the destruction of the current State of Israel. A UN peacekeeping force would hardly improve the situation. Condemning the security barrier (which seems to have significantly reduced the number successful terrorist attacks) while passing a resolution that asserted that the appropriate immediate response to terrorism was to try to thwart it is mind-boggling.<sup>18</sup>

7. Rev. Kirkpatrick and other Presbyterian Church (USA) sources have publicly asserted that this initiative came from The Presbytery of St. Augustine, and the national organization was merely responding to the voice of its members. This characterization, while partly true, tells an incomplete story. It suggests that the divestment idea was novel to the national apparatus of the PC(USA) and that they did not invite such a proposal. However, PC(USA) missionaries, Elizabeth and Marthame Sanders have been calling for a campaign to divest from Israel and to boycott Israeli products for several years.<sup>19</sup> Their website advocated a blanket boycott – which is the equivalent of the blanket divestment proposal from St. Augustine Presbytery. Rev. Glenn Dickson, who spearheaded the St. Augustine divestment overture, reportedly credits the idea to a discussion he had while on a

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<sup>14</sup> Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Statement, July 20, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/newsstories/israel.htm> )

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, July 2, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/minutes.htm> <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/jul2-2pm.pdf> )

<sup>16</sup> Rev. Vernon Broyles, “Money, Morals and Israel” and “Occupation is the Issue”, *The Christian Century*, February 8, 2005

<sup>17</sup> Minutes of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, July 2, 2004

<sup>18</sup> Minutes of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, July 2, 2004

<sup>19</sup> The Sanders’s website advocated the use of economic leverage and recommended a campaign for a blanket boycott of Israel. (Archived Sanders website from 2002 available at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20021224174955/www.fpc-wilmette.org/sanders/action.html> and the linked campaign website, “Boycott Israeli Goods”, from 2002 is available at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20030217010350/www.boycottisraeligoods.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=Section&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=3&page=1> )

Christian Peacemaking Team visit to Palestine and Israel. It “arose around the question, what can we do to confront the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land”.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly enough, this Christian Peacemaking Team visited with Elizabeth and Marthame Sanders on October 21, 2003.<sup>21</sup>

The Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee has released its list of targeted companies. At the top was Caterpillar, which figured prominently in the discussion, and was decided long before the “research” phase of the process. Caterpillar manufactures equipment that is used in the demolition of Palestinian buildings, the uprooting of olive trees, and the construction of infrastructure. Also included were Motorola because they unfairly compete with the Palestinian cell phone company, ITT because they supply “the Israeli military with communications, electronic and night vision equipment”, United Technologies because they have “provided helicopters to the Israeli military”, and Citigroup because they have been accused of funneling money to terrorists.<sup>22</sup> The MRTI is fully empowered to make these recommendations to the General Assembly Council. It is important to note, however, that, although they bundle these together and imply there is some link to the divestment initiative, only the first four were authorized by the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The common denominator between them is that they do business with Israel. Divestment from Citigroup was authorized by prior actions unrelated to Israel.

Divestment and the related measures adopted by the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly were not Presbyterian initiatives. The Communist Party USA, for example has asserted for many years that peace starts with “ending the occupation”, and implied that the occupation is the root cause of violence in the Middle East. The Arab League has had a boycott of Israel since December 2, 1945. While this initiative waned during the 1990’s, it was revived in April, 2004. Recent divestment initiatives have been attempted by many colleges and some towns.

As lamentable as the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s official lack of candor may be, and as much as that tendency may need to be addressed, it has no bearing on the actual merits of this package of decisions. Let me be clear: the pursuit of true peace and justice is a noble thing; there is nothing inherently wrong with criticizing the actions of any government or organization – as long as those criticisms are fair and accurate; and showing support for people who live under difficult circumstances is generally good. However, as Presbyterians, we should be asking ourselves several questions about these initiatives. Are they moral? Are they morally neutral? If they are morally neutral, are they Christian? Are their intended results good? Are their likely results good? The more I examine this, the more it strikes me as a bad decision. I am persuaded that any analysis of all the relevant facts will reveal these decisions to be neither moral nor Christian. Scrutiny will also demonstrate that, while some people intended good results others seem to have intended harm. I am also convinced that the likely outcomes of the Middle East policy of the PC(USA) are all negative. It is for this reason that I ask Presbyterian members, elders, pastors to revisit and reconsider the actions of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, to reexamine all the information, to reexamine the decision making process, and to seriously consider reversing them.

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<sup>20</sup> James Wall, “When Legend Becomes Fact”, Americans For Middle East Understanding, December 2004 (Available online at: [http://www.ameu.org/uploads/vol37\\_issue5\\_2004.pdf](http://www.ameu.org/uploads/vol37_issue5_2004.pdf))

<sup>21</sup> “Hebron Delegation Report”, Christian Peacemaker Teams, October 15-28, 2003 (Available online at: <http://www.cpt.org/delegations/hebdelrpt.php>)

<sup>22</sup> “Presbyterian Church (USA) Names Companies for 'Progressive Engagement' Over Role in Middle East Violence”, August 5, 2005 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/mrti/actions.htm>)

The divestment decision strikes me as morally suspect from the outset for two relatively minor reasons. First, divestment itself represents a potential misuse of funds. People give money to the Presbyterian Church (USA) with specific purposes in mind. Often they are supporting ministries or giving special offerings for disaster relief or humanitarian purposes. People rarely give money to the PC(USA) intending it to be used as leverage toward political ends. It is true that many pastors support divestment, and that their retirement funds are directly involved. This legitimate consideration must be balanced against the potential breach of trust between the PC(USA) and those contributors who object to divestment.

Second, at the time the decision was made, the majority of Presbyterians had not really thought much about divestment. Among those who had, substantial majorities of members and elders opposed it and a slight majority of congregational pastors supported it.<sup>23</sup> Given that the Presbyterian Church (USA) has a partly representative structure, it is difficult to account for the overwhelming General Assembly vote in favor of the initiative. To me, the only possible rationalization for such an outcome would be if the issue in question had very clear biblical support or were definitional to Christianity. In either case, the burden of proof would lie with the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

These two issues represent moral ambiguities. They do not, in themselves, render the decision bad. They do cast a pall of moral uncertainty over the church's witness on the Middle East; but if these were the only considerations, then we could put the issue to rest and move on. I have, however, found several more serious moral issues surrounding the actions of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

### **The Problem of Exclusionary Bias**

Of far greater concern to me is the fact that the stands that were taken on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict seem to be a product of a biased and intrinsically unbalanced process. The results of such a process ought to be regarded as poisoned fruit of a poisoned tree, and consequently excluded from any description as moral. Vernon Broyles III, associate for corporate witness in the PC(USA)'s National Ministries Division, argued in *The Christian Century* that the imbalance of power between Israelis and Palestinians necessitates an imbalance in action.<sup>24</sup> In a letter to members of the New Covenant Presbytery, Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick offered the same argument.<sup>25</sup> If only Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip are in view, Rev. Broyles and Rev. Kirkpatrick might have a point; in the larger context of the Middle East such an argument becomes problematic at best. Even if I could rationalize an unbalanced response, I can find no justification for an unbalanced process. If we, as Presbyterians intended to position ourselves as honest peacemakers, we would have had to have heard and considered testimony from *all* parties to the conflict. Instead, Presbyterians have sought the views of Palestinian Christians and Palestinian Muslims. Only after the decision was taken did Presbyterians solicit the testimonies of Jewish groups who supported divestment. Notably absent in the decision making process were the views of Israeli settlers, Israeli Christians, Israelis who opposed divestment, and American Jewish groups who opposed divestment. When a commissioner asked about the lack of any statement from “our

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<sup>23</sup> “Poll: Most PC(USA) Members Unaware of GA Divestment Action”, February 10, 2005, PNS (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2005/05085.htm> )

<sup>24</sup> Rev. Vernon Broyles, “Money, Morals and Israel” and “Occupation is the Issue”, *The Christian Century*, February 8, 2005

<sup>25</sup> Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Letter to Presbyterians in Dialogue for Peace, June 13, 2005 (Available online at: <http://www.palpres.org/article.php?story=20050616094035996> )

Jewish allies”, Victor Makari, the PC(USA)'s coordinator for the Office of the Middle East and Europe, answered, "We have an interfaith office. . . They know our positions and we know their positions and *their attitudes*. We will listen to their voices but our church is free to express its conscience."<sup>26</sup> Exclusions of this kind telegraph to the world that the PC(USA) devalues and delegitimizes the life experiences and opinions of some people based solely on who they are. Intended or not, this can easily be construed as a most odious form of bigotry.

### The Problem of Flawed Sources of Information

In addition to the exclusionary bias in the process by which decisions about the Middle East policy have been made, a related moral problem is a persistent and uncritical reliance on flawed sources of information. The commissioners to the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly are not entirely to blame for this lack of real examination – they were dependent on the materials provided to them by the bureaucratic offices of the church. The Presbyterian Church (USA) has treated as true the claims of some Palestinian Christians while it has chosen to ignore their more appalling public statements and writings – statements and writings which cast some doubt on their credibility. The PC(USA) also seems to have made rather creative use of histories of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

There were two major sources of employed by the Presbyterian Church (USA) for historical background on the situation in the Middle East: Walter Owensby's *U.S. Policy and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*<sup>27</sup> and Joel Beinin's and Lisa Hajjar's *Palestine, Israel, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: a Primer*.<sup>28</sup> Both display elements of one-sidedness, biased language, and dubious factual assertions.

Owensby indicates that Palestinians trace back a lineage to pre-biblical antiquity while European Jews are distinguished from “the ancient people of biblical Israel”. Beinin and Hajjar inform the reader that, “The politics of Zionism were influenced by . . . colonial ideas about Europeans' rights to claim and settle other parts of the world.” Both sources concur that Israel ended up with three quarters of the historic territory of Palestine as controlled by the British – this effectively ignores the territory given to the Emirate of Trans-Jordan. Beinin and Hajjar refer to “the country once known as Palestine” – though there never was such an independent country from the time the Romans named it until today. Owensby insists the Jews were trained and armed by the British. Both agree that Israel caused the Palestinian refugee crisis. Owensby attempts to describe U.S. support for Israel – which he credits to familiarity with the biblical name, guilt over the holocaust, and Jewish skill at politics. It should be noted that, while Beinin and Hajjar (partly because of the larger scope of their work) at least mention that some facts they present are in dispute, the composite background material prepared by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy in 2003 ignores all of this information.

Two non-Presbyterians who communicated with the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and are credited with persuading the commissioners of the need for divestment were Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb and Rt. Rev. Riah Abu El-Assal.<sup>29</sup> Embedded within the overture from the Presbytery of Chicago,

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<sup>26</sup> Paula R. Kincaid, “Assembly Urges PCUSA Divestment from Companies Operating in Israel”, *The Layman*, July 7, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.layman.org/layman/news/2004-general-assembly/assembly-urges-pcusa-divestment.htm> )

<sup>27</sup> Walter Owensby, *U.S. Policy and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Where Are We and How Did We Get There?*, Prepared for Churches for Middle East Peace (Available online at: <http://www.cmep.org/documents/uspolicy.htm> )

<sup>28</sup> Joel Beinin and Lisa Hajjar, *Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: a Primer* (Available online at: [http://www.merip.org/palestine-israel\\_primer/toc-pal-isr-primer.html](http://www.merip.org/palestine-israel_primer/toc-pal-isr-primer.html) )

<sup>29</sup> Rev. Bruce Gillette, “Address to the United Nations”, March 8-9, 2005 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/un/gillette.htm> )

“On Confronting Christian Zionism”, is reliance on the testimonies of two other prominent Palestinian Christian leaders, Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour and Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek.<sup>30</sup> The commissioners were not, however, privy to other public statements, writings, and actions of these men. Provocative actions and offensive statements do not automatically render their testimonies false. They do call for careful evaluation and the consultation of other witnesses – precautions that seem not to have been taken by the General Assembly.

Of these four men, Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, is the most careful (and least extreme) in his statements. “He describes the irony that Israel, once miraculously delivered from Pharaoh’s bondage, has now assumed the role of Pharaoh.”<sup>31</sup> He describes the “arrogance” of the Israeli occupation – playing on tensions between Christians and Jews:

“How else can we explain the arrogance of the Israeli occupation, which reoccupied Bethlehem shortly before Advent and the Christmas Season, demonstrating that they do not care for the whole Christian World? If they wish they can smash the “little town of Bethlehem”. It is too “little”, compared with the might of their tanks.”<sup>32</sup>

The Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, the Rt. Rev. Abu El-Assal is well-known for his illegal contacts with Yassir Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization dating back thirty years. An argument can be made, however tortured, for these contacts as peacemaking gestures; Abu El-Assal’s public statements are less defensible. He asserts that the land of Jesus’s birth has been under foreign control for the last hundred years – apparently unaware of the Ottomans, the Crusaders, the Byzantines, and the Romans. Abu El-Assal compares Jews to Roman soldiers and describes divisions among them in unflattering, stereotypical terms:

“The Orthodox, with their ringlets, stove hats, and black suits, stoning their unorthodox brothers and sisters, who form the majority, if they attempt to drive their cars on the Sabbath.”

He complains of “Zionist propaganda”; he talks of the Jewish forfeiture of Israeli identity by rejecting Christ. He complains of Sharon’s visit to what he terms “Islam’s holiest site” – apparently not Mecca. Abu El-Assal also claims that Islam served Christ.<sup>33</sup>

In an interview with Robbie Low, Rt. Rev. Abu El-Assal offers a perspective on the “consistent threats to annihilate Israel and sweep them into the sea” that can only be described as unique:

“That is like when a mother is angry with her children and says, ‘I will kill you!’ We speak in an Eastern way, they think in Western terms. In 1923 there were 56,000 Jews if we had wanted to we could have killed them then.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Overture 04-34, “On Confronting Christian Zionism – From the Presbytery of Chicago”, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/overtures/ovt0434.htm> )

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Loudon, “Living Stones of the Holy Land: A Palestinian Christian Theology” (a review of Mitri Raheb’s *I Am a Palestinian Christian*), *Sojourners*, July-August, 1996 (Available online at: <http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article&issue=soj9607&article=960732e> )

<sup>32</sup> Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, “As Advent begins in Bethlehem...”, 2002 (Available online at: <http://www.annadwa.org/curfew/advent.htm> )

<sup>33</sup> Rt. Rev. Riah Abu El-Assal, “Religious Freedom: A Palestinian Christian Perspective” 2000 (Available online at: <http://www.hcef.org/hcef/index.cfm/ID/40> )

<sup>34</sup> Robbie Low interview with Riah Abu El-Assal, *New Directions*, no 14, July 1996 (Available online at: <http://trushare.com/14JUL96/JY96LOWI.htm> )

In 2003 Abu El-Assal reportedly made the extraordinary claim that Palestinian martyrs “live in the kingdom of heaven.” He seems to have quoted from the Koran to support this viewpoint, “Do not consider those that were killed for the sake of Allah as dead, but alive with their lord.”<sup>35</sup>

Rev. Dr. Jarjour, the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches freely engages in demonizing Israel in a 2003 letter:

“Bereft of power to do otherwise, we stand and watch as a whole people is victimized, terrorized, debased, degraded, and even slaughtered. A madness has absorbed Israel, and a war criminal sits in its highest position of power. Under his direction, genocide is being perpetrated, and there is none able to stand against him except the desperate people who are his victims.”

And:

“We feel the presence of the Prince of Darkness . . . . On the day that marked the outbreak of the new Intifada his servant was grinning into the press cameras as he paraded through the Muslim sanctuary with the intention to desecrate. And that same servant went on to assert his rule over the instruments of force and coercion and degradation. His faithfulness to his master is long standing.”<sup>36</sup>

Not to be outdone in this task of vilification is the Rev. Naim Ateek, director of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. In “An Easter Message from Sabeel”, Ateek handily resurrects a medieval portrait of Jews as “Christ-killers”:

“In this season of Lent, it seems to many of us that Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of Palestinians around him. It only takes people of insight to see the hundreds of thousands of crosses throughout the land, Palestinian men, women, and children being crucified. Palestine has become one huge Golgotha. The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily. Palestine has become the place of the skull.”<sup>37</sup>

Obviously, the Presbyterian Church (USA) is not accountable for the actions or statements of various Palestinian Christians. The PC(USA) is correct to attempt to listen to their perspectives; and it is probable that they have legitimate complaints. However, uncritical listening is not a laudable thing. Given the apparent intent of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the PC(USA) to assign blame in the conflict between Israelis, Palestinians, and their neighbors in the region, and given the intent to take concrete action based on that assignment, intense scrutiny of information sources seems to me to have been called for. The public actions and statements of witnesses upon which the General Assembly relied needed to be examined. The biases and factual errors of background materials needed to be confronted. The time devoted to this matter on the floor of the General Assembly precluded that kind of deliberation. When this fact is combined with the exclusionary bias that prohibited commissioners from hearing any conflicting testimony, a picture emerges of a fatal, moral flaw in the process that destroyed the possibility of arriving at any morally sound conclusion.

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<sup>35</sup> “Palestine: Anglican Bishop: “Eternal Life for all Martyrs of Palestine”, February 14, 2003 (Available online at: <http://www.comeandsee.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=415> )

<sup>36</sup> Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour, “Letter to International Partners and Friends”, April 5, 2002 (Available online at: <http://www.kultour-service.de/lage/020405c.htm> )

<sup>37</sup> Rev. Naim Ateek, “An Easter Message From Sabeel”, 2001 (Available online at:

### The Problem of Institutional Bias

I cannot avoid the observation at this point that there exists (and has existed for some time) an overwhelming anti-Israeli bias in the permanent bureaucracy of the Presbyterian Church (USA). This is a structural, institutional problem. Bias based on ethnicity, religion, and nation of origin is by no means universal in the PC(USA). There are several shining counter-examples – for instance, the Spring, 2005 issue of *Insights*, the faculty journal of the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, provided a cogent and balanced preliminary look at Dispensationalism and divestment.<sup>38</sup> However, this particular anti-Israeli prejudice is considered acceptable in many sectors. The significance of such a bias for official stands of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly lies in the fact that the General Assemblies depend on information from the offices, agencies, and staff of the PC(USA) in order to make decisions. The suggestion of this systemic prejudice will be considered offensive and has been emphatically denied.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, the publicly available documents released by these offices demonstrate clear patterns of one-sidedness.

### The Presbyterian News Service

The institutionalized bias in the Presbyterian News Service is nothing less than extraordinary. The PNS is the official news agency of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Its editorial guidelines include, “reporting the facts accurately, clearly, fairly, impartially, and promptly.” Its stated purpose is “to seek and to tell the truth.”<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, from January 1, 2000 to June 30, 2004, the PNS ran over ninety stories on Palestine and Israel [*see Appendix A*]. Thirty-five of these could be regarded as neutral. Fifty-seven portray Israel negatively. None portray Israel positively, and none portray Palestinians negatively. The only Israelis who receive favorable coverage by the PNS are Women in Black, members of Peace Now (or related groups), and “refuseniks”. During the same time period China garnered seven stories. Two portrayed China positively; four neutrally; and one story, picked up from Ecumenical News International, criticized China for its religious repression. Saudi Arabia merited one article. It was the same ENI piece that criticized China. Iran was featured in seven stories. Five were neutral; two were negative. One of the two negative stories about Iran was the ENI article mentioned above.

Inaccuracies abound in stories the Presbyterian News Service carried about Palestine and Israel. Politically charged and biased language is employed; Israel is blamed for an almost freakish assortment of things; and demands are made that the PNS partly acknowledges would spell the destruction of the current State of Israel. In some cases the PNS simply reports the offensive quotes of others, but never does it correct misinformation contained in those quotes.

In the stories carried by the Presbyterian News Service Israel is called an apartheid state at least nine times.<sup>41</sup> The “occupation” is cited as the source of all violence and conflict in at least

<sup>38</sup> (Available online at: <http://www.austinseminary.edu/news/documents/insightsspring05.pdf>)

<sup>39</sup> Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Letter to Presbyterians in Dialogue for Peace, June 13, 2005

<sup>40</sup> “About Presbyterian News Service” (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/about.htm>)

<sup>41</sup> “Palestinian Christian leader calls for shared Jerusalem”, July 19, 2001, NR 00265. “Despite violence and hatred, Holy Land’s Christians still hope for peace”, October 13, 2000, NR 00351. “Peace delegation meets with Israeli leaders, issues final statement at press conference”, December 14 2000, NR 00450. “Arafat warns that the Palestinians are facing ‘a disaster’”, December 19, 2000, NR 00453. “Witnesses for peace keep the faith in midst of escalating violence in Holy Land”, February 27, 2001, NR 01081. “Christians say non-violence is the key to struggle against Israeli ‘apartheid’”, March 2, 2001, NR 01084. “A Lenten Letter From Bethlehem”, March 12, 2002, NR 02096. “Suffering Christ tells best the story”, May 14, 2003, NR 03238. “Gaza situation called tantamount to apartheid”, August 27, 2003, NR 03357. (PNS stories are archived online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/archive.htm>)

eight articles.<sup>42</sup> Israel is accused of ethnic cleansing.<sup>43</sup> Israelis are compared to Hitler.<sup>44</sup> The occupation and other Israeli actions are compared to stones like the stone that sealed Jesus's tomb.<sup>45</sup> Israel is described as colonial.<sup>46</sup> American politicians are said to be pandering to the Jewish lobby.<sup>47</sup> Sharon's provocative visit is regarded as the cause of the current Intifada. In two articles Sharon is described only as having visited a Muslim holy site; no mention is made of the fact that the Temple Mount is also considered *the most holy* Jewish site. Also absent is the fact that Sharon sought and received permission from the Palestinian Security chief for his visit.<sup>48</sup> The Mohammed Al Dura incident is mentioned in detail, and clearly considered the equivalent of deliberately targeting children. In no case are the serious doubts that Israelis could have fired the shot that killed Al Dura presented.<sup>49</sup> Israel is blamed for Palestinian violence,<sup>50</sup> for the decrease in the Christian population,<sup>51</sup> and even one man's increased cigarette smoking.<sup>52</sup> Israelis were soundly rebuked for uprooting olive trees.<sup>53</sup> Israeli soldiers were depicted making a game out of breaking Palestinian children's bones.<sup>54</sup> Demands were made for an international peacekeeping

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<sup>42</sup> "Latin Patriarch tells Israeli soldiers to stop attacking Christian village", October 30, 2000, NR 00380. "Starvation threatens Palestinian villages, Vatican official warns", December 14, 2000, NR 00409. "Consultation on Israeli-Palestinian conflict decides on coordinated ecumenical action", August 10, 2001, NR 01269. "Israeli troops occupy Lutheran complex in Bethlehem", March 12, 2002, NR 02097. "WCC sends people to accompany those vulnerable in Palestine, Israel", August 30, 2002, NR 02330. "Sabbah says hapless Israeli, Palestinian leaders should step aside", December 19, 2002, NR 02499. "Coalition raps Bush on Israeli settlements", April 16, 2004, NR 04182. "20 new companions arrive in Palestine/Israel", April 26, 2004, NR 04198. (PNS stories are archived online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/archive.htm> )

<sup>43</sup> "Church leader accuses Israel of 'ethnic cleansing' of Palestinians", October 20, 2000, NR 00364. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2000/00364.htm> )

<sup>44</sup> "Keeping the faith in Bethlehem", December 13, 2002, NR 02493. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2002/02493.htm> )

<sup>45</sup> "In Easter messages, Christian leaders call for end to Palestinian suffering", April 17, 2003, NR 03200. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2003/03200.htm> )

<sup>46</sup> "Church leader accuses Israel of 'ethnic cleansing' of Palestinians", October 20, 2000, NR 00364. "Christians say non-violence is the key to struggle against Israeli 'apartheid'", March 2, 2001, NR 01084. "Israelis caught dozing", January 6, 2003, NR 03003. (PNS stories are archived online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/archive.htm> )

<sup>47</sup> "Presidential candidates statements on Israel are under scrutiny", September 5, 2000, NR 00319. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2000/00319.htm> )

<sup>48</sup> "Despite violence and hatred, Holy Land's Christians still hope for peace", October 13, 2000, NR 00351. "Palestinian pastors decry excessive use of force by Israel", October 13, 2000, NR 00355. "Christian leaders determined to continue their witness in Jerusalem, despite dwindling numbers", December 13, 2000, NR 00446. "Witness for peace keep the faith in midst of escalating violence in Holy Land", February 27, 2001, NR 01081. (PNS stories are archived online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/archive.htm> )

<sup>49</sup> "Palestinians fret for rock-tossing youngsters", October 27, 2000, NR 00378. "Starvation threatens Palestinian villages, Vatican official warns", December 14, 2000, NR 00449. (PNS stories are archived online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/archive.htm> )

<sup>50</sup> "Presbyterian mission volunteer in Jerusalem pleads for peace", October 31, 2000, NR 00381 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2000/00381.htm> )

<sup>51</sup> "Pope calls meetings on dwindling Christian population in the Holy Land", November 29, 2001, NR 01438. "Slim pickin's", September 12, 2003, NR 03389. "Coalition raps Bush on Israeli settlements", April 16, 2004, NR 04182. (PNS stories are archived online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/archive.htm> )

<sup>52</sup> "Bethlehem's business owners sing the blues", February 20, 2001, NR 01058. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2001/01058.htm> )

<sup>53</sup> "Violence keeps Palestinians from olive harvest", November 21, 2000, 00418. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2000/00418.htm> )

<sup>54</sup> "Beating the odds?", February 6, 2003, NR 03080. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2003/03080.htm> )

force<sup>55</sup> and right of return.<sup>56</sup> President Bush was accused of reversing his position on right of return – a puzzling charge as US policy has never focused on right of return.<sup>57</sup> Two astonishing and absurd factual statements went unchallenged: that Palestinians descended from the ancient Canaanites<sup>58</sup> and that Palestinians “were the ones to export the gospel so successfully”.<sup>59</sup>

### The Washington Office

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is more selective and polished in its comments on Palestine and Israel than is the Presbyterian News Service. Nonetheless, its one-sidedness, difficulties in presenting full and accurate historical facts, quirky working assumptions, unreasonable demands, and deliberately incendiary and emotive language provide a consistent drumbeat of criticism of Israel. Its twenty-seven quarterly bulletins and action alerts on Israel and Palestine between January of 2000 and June of 2004 illustrate this.

United States political support for Israel is consistently portrayed as pandering to the powerful Jewish lobby.<sup>60</sup> Later this charge is modified to include pandering to the Jewish lobby and the Christian Right.<sup>61</sup> The possibility that a person actually believed Israel to be in the right in the conflict, or at least neutral, does not seem to have occurred to the Washington office. The United States is described as “coddling Israel”; Israel is, of course, labeled “colonial”.<sup>62</sup> Among the peculiar assertions of the Washington Office is the notion that Israeli Occupation of Palestinian lands is the cause of terrorism – not just in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, or East Jerusalem, but in New York City on September 11, 2001, as well.<sup>63</sup> According to the Washington Office Israel

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<sup>55</sup> “Church Coalition asks president to help deploy peacekeepers to Israel/Palestine”, August 23, 2002, NR 02317. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2002/02317.htm> )

<sup>56</sup> “Palestinian Christian leader calls for shared Jerusalem”, July 19, 2000, NR 00265. “Peace delegation meets with Israeli leaders, issues final statement at press conference”, December 14, 2000, NR 00450. (PNS stories are archived online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/archive.htm> )

<sup>57</sup> “Stated Clerk decries Bush’s Middle East shift”, April 27, 2004, NR 04202. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2004/04202.htm> )

<sup>58</sup> “Old Testament ‘war stories’ wound Palestinian Christians”, August 24, 2000, NR 00302. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2000/00302.htm> )

<sup>59</sup> “Suffering Christ tells best the story”, May 14, 2003, NR 03238. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/2003/03238.htm> )

<sup>60</sup> “Support for Sharing Jerusalem Grows”, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2000. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-000300.htm> ) “High Priority for the Israeli-Palestinian Talks”, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2000. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-000550.htm> ) “Current U.S. Debate Lacks Palestinian Christian Viewpoint”, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2002. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-020515.htm> )

<sup>61</sup> “Christian Commitment to Peacemaking Is Distorted by Christian Zionists”, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2003. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-030610.htm> )

<sup>62</sup> “Demand on Settlements Must Be Bush’s Response to Israel’s Aid Request”, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2002. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-021205.htm> )

<sup>63</sup> “Freeze Israeli Settlements”, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2001. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-010510.htm> ) “Mideast Peace: New Strategies for a New Era”, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2001. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-011113.htm> ) “Filling the Void of U.S. Inaction”, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2002. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-020228.htm> ) “While Eyes Are Focused on Iraq: An Update from Washington on Israeli-Palestinian Issues”, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2003. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-030314.htm> )

caused the al-Aksa Intifada – sometimes through Ariel Sharon, other times through the settlers.<sup>64</sup> We are also informed that if the peace process fails it will have been Israel’s fault.<sup>65</sup>

The Washington Office persistently calls for an international peacekeeping force in Israel and Palestine without acknowledging the difficulties that finding such a force would pose.<sup>66</sup> The Washington Office calls for the removal of the security barrier (interestingly enough before any General Assembly spoke to the matter) because it is a “symbol”; because it “will cause Palestinian poverty, bloodshed, and resistance”; because it equals “Palestinian imprisonment”.<sup>67</sup> The security barrier is said to “destroy the possibility of peace”<sup>68</sup> and to “destroy Palestinian civil society, farming, economic and family life, education, health care, governance, and infrastructure.”<sup>69</sup> The Washington Office demands the Palestinian right of return and, extraordinarily enough, an admission of guilt from Israel for creating the 1948 refugee problem.<sup>70</sup> This demand ignores the obvious practical impact such an action would have on the current State of Israel. It ignores the 800,000 Jewish refugees from Muslim countries who were also dispossessed in the 1948 war. It ignores both the roles and the responsibilities of Israel’s neighboring states in bringing about the refugee crisis and in their subsequent treatment of displaced Palestinians.

Perhaps the most incomprehensible statement from the Washington Office is the assertion that the Palestinians’ “great” (and only necessary) compromise was acknowledging the right of Israel to exist.<sup>71</sup> This is an extraordinary and audacious claim given the oft’ repeated assertion that nothing must interfere with negotiated solutions to the conflict. It would seem that this statement indicates that the Washington Office has no interest in negotiations between the parties, but only in wringing concessions from Israel.

The Washington Office also engages with some regularity in the vilification of Israel – choosing phrases and reporting incidents intended to foster a broader negative impression. For example, in the 2004 first quarterly report, the Washington Office correctly objects to the

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<sup>64</sup> “Sharing Jerusalem Central to New Negotiations”, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2000. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-001100.htm>) “Freeze Israeli Settlements”, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2001. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-010510.htm>)

<sup>65</sup> “Mideast Peace: New Strategies for a New Era”, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2001. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-011113.htm>)

<sup>66</sup> “Mideast Peace: New Strategies for a New Era”, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2001. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-011113.htm>) “Current U.S. Debate Lacks Palestinian Christian Viewpoint”, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2002. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-020515.htm>) “While Eyes Are Focused on Iraq: An Update from Washington on Israeli-Palestinian Issues”, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2003. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-030314.htm>)

<sup>67</sup> “The Holy Land Needs Bridges, Not Walls”, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2003. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-031125.htm>)

<sup>68</sup> “Actions and Inactions by Sharon and Bush Put Two-State Solution at Risk”, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2004. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-040528.htm>)

<sup>69</sup> “Elusive Peacemaking Compels Concrete Action”, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2004. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-040316.htm>)

<sup>70</sup> “High Priority for the Israeli-Palestinian Talks”, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2000. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-000550.htm>) “Palestinian Refugees - Still Waiting”, 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter, 2000. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-000800.htm>) “Cycle of Violence Requires Larger U.N. Role”, 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter, 2001. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-010912.htm>) “Elusive Peacemaking Compels Concrete Action”, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2004. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-040316.htm>) “Actions and Inactions by Sharon and Bush Put Two-State Solution at Risk”, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2004. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-040528.htm>)

<sup>71</sup> “High Priority for the Israeli-Palestinian Talks”, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2001. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-000550.htm>)

characterization of Palestinians as “monsters because of the horrendous attacks of suicide bombers”; in the same paragraph Israelis are recast in the “monster” role: “Israel’s vaunted military, which has secured the tiny state from attack by armies is being used against civilians and the militant fighters in their midst.”<sup>72</sup> The 2000 first quarterly report offers the toll of “human rights violations faced by the 200,000 Palestinians of Jerusalem.” Included as a human rights violation is the charge that “there are few parks.”<sup>73</sup> In the January/February 2004 Washington Report, a story is related about a priest required to remove his cross by a young Israeli soldier at a checkpoint. The Washington Office goes on to inform the reader, “This is not an isolated incident.”<sup>74</sup>

### **The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy**

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy of the Presbyterian Church (USA) prepared a document – Resolution on Violence, Religion, and Terrorism – which was subsequently approved by the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. While the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly clearly disapproves of terrorism, Section 3 of this resolution attempts to explore its causes. Economic inequities, colonialism, imperialism, globalization, and the warped values of Western nations are all cited. Then “Conflict over the Holy Land” is described as “among the most powerful forces behind the development of modern terrorism.” The resolution goes on to say:

“The efforts, often violent, to establish a Jewish homeland on land occupied for millennia by Palestinians have been a source of the resentments that lead to terrorism.”

And later in the same paragraph:

“Violence may quite understandably arise from within a group that presently feels it has been deprived of the use and control of the land over which it has had a long period of recent control.”<sup>75</sup>

In 2003 the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy submitted a resolution on Israel and Palestine, *End the Occupation Now*, which was subsequently approved by the 215<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. This resolution has much that seems ill-advised and offensive, yet it escaped the notice of most people. The background paper upon which the resolution is based seems to seethe with loathing for Israel, while, of course, insisting that “the church has shown concern for both Israelis and Palestinians.” In describing the Zionist Movement the ACSWP asserts that it “sought to provide Jews safety from waves of anti-Semitism, and to resettle them in a homeland related to the ancient people of biblical Israel.” The differentiation between Jews and the ancient people of biblical Israel is significant given the Palestinian claim that Jews never lived in the Holy Land. The ACSWP further insists that Zionism has been “Influenced by colonial ideas about Europe’s right to claim and settle other parts of the world.”

The Balfour Declaration is characterized as “a consolidation of Britain’s imperialist goals in Palestine and a warrant for an envisioned future national, political entity for world Jewry.” The ACSWP informs the reader that the British gave up the mandate of Palestine because of “Jewish

<sup>72</sup> “Elusive Peacemaking Compels Concrete Action”, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2004. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-040316.htm> )

<sup>73</sup> “Support for Sharing Jerusalem Grows”, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2000. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/me-000300.htm> )

<sup>74</sup> “Desperation Deepens for Palestinians in Occupied Territories”, Washington Report, January/February, 2004. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/jan-feb04.htm#2> )

<sup>75</sup> *Resolution on Violence, Religion, and Terrorism*, prepared by the ACSWP and approved by the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 2004. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/acswp/pdf/violence-religion-terrorism01.pdf> )

and Arab attacks on British Mandate troops and *Jewish terrorist actions against the Arab population.*” This paper perpetuates the false, but common assertion that Israel created or supported the terrorist group Hamas. The causes and circumstances of none of the four major wars between Israel and its neighbors are mentioned; however, the Sinai War (of 1956), seems to be regarded by the ACSWP as somehow related to the November 10, 1973 UN Security Council resolution 338. Saddat is, of course, given credit for the treaty between Israel and Egypt – though Israel ceded the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and offered to cede Gaza. The ACSWP asserts that Israel today targets “individuals, groups, and entire segments of the Palestinian population.” Israel is said to persist in the “plundering of Palestinian towns, villages, and refugee camps; leaving in its wake large numbers of innocent victims, described with scorn as ‘collateral damage’.” The resolution sums up its case with what appears to indicate that the PC(USA) objects as much to the existence of the State of Israel as it does to the post-1967 occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem:

“For over fifty years of Israeli rule in Palestine, and more than thirty years of illegal occupation, the world has witnessed a flagrantly unjust treatment of the Palestinian people by the State of Israel, [and] atrocities frequently committed against them by the Israeli military . . . .”<sup>76</sup>

### Presbyterian Miscellany

Bias based on race, religion, and nation of origin is present in many other areas of the Presbyterian Church (USA). During the period from January of 2000 to June of 2004, *Presbyterians Today* ran four “The Church in Society” columns written by the inimitable Vernon S. Broyles III that venture opinions on Palestine and Israel. Vernon S. Broyles III is the associate for corporate witness in the PC(USA)'s National Ministries Division. He makes the required comparison to South Africa;<sup>77</sup> asserts that terrorism is caused by despair and desperation; and describes what he considers “the systematic, official violence of the Israeli government” as a “form of terrorism”.<sup>78</sup> He mentions “Ariel Sharon’s death-wish for Palestinians and their suicidal retaliation against Israelis”.<sup>79</sup> Broyles objects to the fact that “No U.S. administration has been willing to take the political risk of absolutely demanding an end to Israel’s rapacious domination of the Palestinians – settlement building, confiscating Palestinian land, general humiliation of the Palestinian populace, and now the construction of a wall that makes the Berlin Wall look amateurish.”<sup>80</sup>

Presbyterian mission worker Douglas Dicks has written regular letters that are posted as “Mission Connections” on the PC(USA) website. These contain a litany of complaints against Israel. The writer repeats comparisons of Israeli treatment of Palestinians to the “Via Dolorosa”

<sup>76</sup> *A Resolution on Israel and Palestine: End the Occupation Now*, prepared by the ACSWP and approved by the 215<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 2003. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/ga215/business/commbooks/comm12.pdf>)

<sup>77</sup> Vernon S. Broyles III, “Symbols of Brokenness”, *Presbyterians Today*, October, 2003. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/today/department/church-society/past/2003/cs-1003.htm> )

<sup>78</sup> Vernon S. Broyles III, “A New Direction”, *Presbyterians Today*, January/February, 2004. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/today/department/church-society/past/2004/cs-0104.htm> )

<sup>79</sup> Vernon S. Broyles III, “Not Swords, but Love and Mercy”, *Presbyterians Today*, April 2002. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/today/department/church-society/past/cs-0402.htm> )

<sup>80</sup> Vernon S. Broyles III, “A New Direction”, *Presbyterians Today*, January/February, 2004. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/today/department/church-society/past/2004/cs-0104.htm> )

and to the placing of stones in front of the tomb of Jesus.<sup>81</sup> He reports astonishing church criticisms of Israel for “rewarding violence” by allowing the construction of a mosque near Nazareth’s Church of the Annunciation.<sup>82</sup> He labels the situation in Palestine and Israel apartheid.<sup>83</sup> He also asserts that, “Many Palestinians came back to their homes in Ramallah only to find that Israeli soldiers had defecated on their coffee tables, urinated on their carpets and walls, looted their personal possessions, vandalized and destroyed their furniture.”<sup>84</sup>

On October 17, 2004, Ronald Stone made some rather startling comments that were reported on Hezbollah’s television network:

“We treasure the precious words of Hezbollah and your expression of goodwill towards the American people. Also we praise your initiative for dialogue and mutual understanding. We cherish those statements that bring us closer to you. As an elder of our church, I’d like to say that according to my recent experiences, relations and conversations with Islamic leaders are a lot easier than dealings and dialogue with Jewish leaders.”

It is important to note that Presbyterian Church (USA) leaders labeled Stone’s comments reprehensible.<sup>85</sup> However, it is also important to note that Presbyterian leaders later “apologized” for the statement that used the word “reprehensible”,<sup>86</sup> and that Ronald Stone, an elder from East Liberty Presbyterian Church, has served on the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy – which has provided information on the Middle East to General Assemblies, as a professor of ethics at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (a graduate, professional institution of the PC(USA)), and as a content editor for the Presbyterian publication, *Church and Society*.

The Middle East Office joined (on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (USA)) an umbrella organization, “The US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation”, which favors a one-state solution. While many religious and humanitarian organizations are involved with this umbrella group, a third of its members openly call for the destruction of Israel, the destruction of the Jewish state, the destruction of the “Zionist colony”, or advocate non-violent activism as a complement to violent resistance [see *Appendix B*]. That the Middle East Office would cause our church to make common cause with these things strikes me as repellant. Given the PC(USA)’s often repeated claim to support Israel’s right to exist, and to oppose violent action on all sides, its concurrent membership in this group leaves only two possible conclusions. Either the spokespeople for the Middle East Office know full well the conflict, in which case, they are lying to Presbyterian members and Jewish groups, or they are unaware of it. The second option suggests a level of incompetence that precludes their offering a meaningful opinion on the situation in Palestine and Israel.

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<sup>81</sup> Douglas Dicks, Letter, May, 2001 (Available online at: [http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/dicksd/dicksd\\_0105.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/dicksd/dicksd_0105.htm) )

<sup>82</sup> Douglas Dicks, Letter, June, 2000 (Available online at: [http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/dicksd/dicksd\\_0006.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/dicksd/dicksd_0006.htm) )

<sup>83</sup> Douglas Dicks, Letter, August 14, 2000 (Available online at: [http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/dicksd/dicksd\\_0008.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/dicksd/dicksd_0008.htm) )

<sup>84</sup> Douglas Dicks, Letter, May 14, 2002 (Available online at: [http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/dicksd/dicksd\\_0205.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/dicksd/dicksd_0205.htm) )

<sup>85</sup> Peter Smith, "Presbyterian Leaders Denounce Members' Hezbollah Visit", *The Courier-Journal*, October 23, 2004 (Available online at: <http://vh80015.vh8.infi.net/localnews/2004/10/23ky/A1-pres1023-7278.html> and <http://memri.org/bin/media.cgi?ID=104004> )

<sup>86</sup> “Denominational Leaders, ACSWP Delegation Exchange Letters Over Fallout from Hezbollah Visit”, December 15, 2004, NR 04547 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2004/04547.htm> )

### “Steps toward Peace”

On February 10-12, 2005, the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church sponsored a “damage control” conference to communicate the actions of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to officials from the synods and presbyteries. An information packet – *Steps toward Peace in Israel and Palestine* – consisting of twenty-four papers was prepared for the conference cooperatively by several offices of the church. Some of the papers were professional and informative. Others were marred by omissions or misrepresentations of facts and the presence of considerable anti-Israeli bias.

United States support for Israel is cast as pandering to Jews and some Christian groups, as being motivated by guilt over the holocaust, and as representing economic, political, and security self-interest.<sup>87</sup> The Occupation is cited as the source of violence in the region. Suicide attacks are said to reflect desperation and hopelessness, and it is reported that most violence perpetrated by Palestinians is directed at military checkpoints, soldiers, and settlers (as opposed to civilians). The reader is reassuringly told that the Palestinian National Authority has repeatedly condemned suicide bombings inside Israel.<sup>88</sup> No mention is made of the calls by Chairman Arafat for Palestinians to go to Jerusalem “as martyrs by the millions.”<sup>89</sup> No mention is made of PNA Communications Minister, Imad Al-Faluji’s statement, “The Palestinian Resistance will strike in Tel-Aviv, in Ashkelon, in Jerusalem, and in every inch of the land of natural Palestine.”<sup>90</sup> No mention is made of the operational links between the PNA and the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade.<sup>91</sup>

Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war are described as having fled “from violence or the Israeli army.”<sup>92</sup> Omitted is the fact that many went in response to the call from the Arab Higher Committee and others for Palestinians to leave their homes. The invasion of five Arab armies in 1948 (with the declared intent of “extermination and momentous massacre of the Jews”) was described in this way, “The Arab nations intervened in violence between Jews and Palestinians.”<sup>93</sup> Israel is said to have gained from the 1948 war seventy-eight percent of the Palestine Mandate.<sup>94</sup> This is misleading as it omits the creation of the territory Trans-Jordan in 1922 and the state of Jordan in 1946 on almost eighty percent of the Palestine Mandate. The reader is told, oddly enough, that Jews came to Israel after 1948 from Tsarist Russia.<sup>95</sup> It is also implied that the Great

<sup>87</sup> “The United States and Israel”, February, 2005. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/7usandisrael.pdf>)

<sup>88</sup> “Al-Aqsa Intifada – 2000 Intifada”, February, 2005. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/13alaqsaintifada.pdf>)

<sup>89</sup> “Yasser Arafat: A living legend yet”, Al Ahram Weekly, 18 - 24 November, 2004, Issue No. 717 (Available online at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/717/profile.htm>)

<sup>90</sup> Special Dispatch Series - No. 194, MEMRI, March 9, 2001 – quoting *Al-Safir* (Lebanon), March 3, 2001

<sup>91</sup> “Fatah committed to Aksa Martyrs”, Jerusalem Post, June 21, 2004.

<sup>92</sup> “Who are the Palestinians?”, February, 2005, (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/3whoarepalestinians.pdf>)

<sup>93</sup> “Who are the Israelis?”, February, 2005. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/4whoareisraelis.pdf>)

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. “Christian Presence in Israel and Palestine”, February, 2005. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/5christianpresence.pdf>)

<sup>95</sup> “Who Are the Israelis?”, February, 2005. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/4whoareisraelis.pdf>)

Arab Revolt of 1936 occurred as a reaction to Irgun and Haganah tactics, completely ignoring the role of Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini.<sup>96</sup>

In the paper “The Separation Barrier – the Security Barrier – the Wall” it was acknowledged that terrorism decreased since construction began. However, the quirky assertion was repeated that this decrease is attributable, not to the barrier, but to “the realization by many Palestinians that such acts damage their cause.”<sup>97</sup> In the paper “Peace Groups in Israel and Palestine” Al-Awda, the Palestine Right to Return Coalition is prominently featured.<sup>98</sup> Since Al-Awda’s vision of a single, “independent, democratic state for all its citizens in all of Palestine”<sup>99</sup> necessitates the dismantling of the current State of Israel, and since Al-Awda also supports “the struggle for the liberation of Palestine”<sup>100</sup>, the description “peace group” is something of a misnomer.

One document in the information packet, *Steps toward Peace in Israel and Palestine* is in a class by itself – “Productive Dialogue with Our Jewish and Muslim Neighbors”. It is riddled with patronizing and demeaning statements that target neither Zionists nor Israelis, but Jews. Point 6 informs the reader:

“The clear intention of the Jewish community, in most cases, is to change our minds. This is not, for them, simply an opportunity for open sharing to learn from and better understand one another. It is clear that there is an effort underway to convince and stir up enough Presbyterians to change the decisions of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2004).”

While the authors of this paper apparently object to the lack of openness of Jews to learn from Presbyterians, it is unclear what exactly they are expecting Presbyterians to learn from Jews as they have ruled out the possibility of changing the stance of the General Assembly. In point 1 the Jewish response is characterized as “highly emotional”. In point eight the reader is told:

“Jews *feel* [emphasis in original] that our actions are an attack on Israel, and that this feels to them like an attack on the Jewish people themselves, which in turn feels like an attack on them as individuals.”

And:

“Some Jews have said that even when they can understand with their minds that in particular policies we are not attacking Israel, they nevertheless feel fear and an immediate need to go on the defensive.”

This is juxtaposed to the “real situation of the Palestinian people.” In point 9 the issue is clarified for the reader: “In the end, the issue is not how American Jews or Muslims feel, nor how American Presbyterians feel, but what will make for peace.”<sup>101</sup>

In point 10, the reader is warned about the “emotional rhetoric that Presbyterians encounter in conversation with Jews [that] can easily derail the conversation or turn it away from issues of justice and peace.” Yet in the list of ideas for more productive conversations, the reader is advised to “bring the conversation to the level of personal sharing and away from the sharing of positions.”

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> “The Separation Barrier – the Security Barrier – the Wall”, February, 2005. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/12barrier.pdf>)

<sup>98</sup> “Peace Groups in Israel and Palestine”, February, 2005. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/15peacegroups.pdf>)

<sup>99</sup> “Points of Unity”, May 6, 2004. (Available online at: <http://www.al-awda.org/pointsofunity>)

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> “Productive Dialogue With Our Jewish and Muslim Neighbors”, February, 2005. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/25productivedialogues.pdf>)

Apparently, Jewish emotions are invalid because they distract from Presbyterian positions and Jewish positions are invalid because they do not involve personal sharing. In point 10 one potential Jewish argument is portrayed as “introducing an unhelpful level of guilt into the conversation.” This statement is remarkable, given the fact that the PC(USA) has demanded an admission of guilt from Israel for the creation of the 1948 refugee situation. Point 10 tries to derail the charge of “anti-Semitism” by labeling this charge an *ad-hominem* attack. The reader is also helpfully reminded “to talk about terrorism as well as the demands of justice.”<sup>102</sup> Arch Taylor, reporting favorably on this conference for the Witherspoon Society, provides disconcerting details of the presentation on “Productive Dialogue with Our Jewish and Muslim Neighbors”:

“Sarah Lisherness reminds us as Christians we have received a gift of discernment, not to be controlled by our animal passions, our reptilian brain, fight or flight reaction to conflict.”<sup>103</sup>

In the years leading up to the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, in the decision making process of that assembly, and in the official responses to the negative reaction to the decisions concerning Israel and Palestine, the bureaucratic apparatus of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has demonstrated an alarming degree of demonstrable bias. Sometimes this bias has been directed against Israel; sometimes it has been directed against American Jews; sometimes it has been aimed at conservative Christians. Whatever the cause of them, these institutional biases interfere with the ability of the PC(USA) to see the situation in Israel and Palestine clearly enough to offer a meaningful opinion. Even if, by some quirk, the PC(USA) happened to come to a correct conclusion about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in spite of this handicap, these deeply held, long-standing biases destroy the credibility and moral authority necessary to make any kind of statement.

### **The Problem of Over-Cooperation between Denominational Bureaucracies**

Even the least observant will note the recent spate of condemnations and criticisms of Israel coming from many traditional, “mainline” Christian churches. Several have decided to divest. The official actions and statements by these organizations have often not represented the views of their members. A question naturally arises: How is it that churches with disparate histories and theologies, and with widely varied forms of governance, appear to be acting in concert? One thing these denominations have in common that they do not share with many other Christian groups is the fact that all have long-standing ecumenical relationships with one another.

A cursory glance at Middle East advocacy in these denominations would reveal the recurrence of the same names in different places. For example, Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb is an Evangelical Lutheran. Yet he taught at Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville and worked for the National Ministries Division of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Rev. Dr. Raheb spoke in favor of divestment to the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the PC(USA). Rt. Rev. Abu El-Assal is an Anglican. He too spoke at the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. Rev. Victor Makari is coordinator of the PC(USA)’s Office of the Middle East and Europe, and argued from the floor of the General Assembly against considering Jewish opinion when debating Middle East issues; his

<sup>102</sup> “Productive Dialogue With Our Jewish and Muslim Neighbors”, February, 2005 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/25productivedialogues.pdf> )

<sup>103</sup> Arch Taylor, “Toward peace in Israel/Palestine”, March 2, 2005 (Available online at: [http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2005/pcusa\\_conf\\_on\\_palestine.htm](http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2005/pcusa_conf_on_palestine.htm) )

son, Peter Makari is the UCC and Disciples of Christ area executive for the Middle East and Europe and helped craft the midnight divestment resolution at the United Church of Christ.

That such ecumenical Middle East policy determinations have been made without consulting any of the deliberative bodies of member denominations was announced by the Presbyterian News Service in August of 2001. This article describes an ecumenical consultation populated by employees of various churches. The Presbyterian Church (USA) was represented by Victor Makari. Of particular interest is the plan of action agreed to by this group:

“The main outcome of the consultation was the decision to form a small consultative group to develop realistic proposals for action with local and international partners in seven areas:

coordinating advocacy with governments

boycotting goods produced in Israeli settlements in the occupied territories

strengthening the “chain of solidarity” through prayer vigils

resisting the destruction of property and uprooting of people from their homes and land

encouraging and enabling the presence of ecumenical monitoring teams

improving communication, interpretation and media reporting on the conflict and its causes

increasing church, ecumenical, and interreligious delegations to and from Israel and the occupied territories.

It was also agreed that, together with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and local churches, the WCC would develop a coordination point for ecumenical action in Jerusalem, and explore the possibility of linking it with an international coordination center.”<sup>104</sup>

Such policy making over-cooperation between the employees of the PC(USA) and those of other denominations raises questions about the legitimacy of subsequent actions and represents a monumental shift in Presbyterian polity.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has a long history of commitment to fostering ecumenical relationships. This is reflected in the Book of Order. Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick has perhaps overstated the case when he asserted that “to be Presbyterian is to be ecumenical”, but an ecumenical emphasis is certainly present. Most Presbyterians understand ecumenicalism to mean cooperation with other denominations in operational ways where we share common policies and goals. These priorities and goals, however, are not set by our ecumenical partners but by Presbyterian elders and pastors meeting together. This is definitional to our form of government.

That being the case, it is incumbent on the General Assembly to carefully determine policy, and it is incumbent on the bureaucratic apparatus of the church to carry out that policy. In such a system, employees of the church have no role in trying to affect the policy deliberations of the assembly, whether by lobbying, by controlling the flow of information and debate, or by publicly committing the church to a policy beforehand. Any of these would represent a clear and grave violation of our form of government; such an oligarchic and hierarchic model of leadership has never been a Presbyterian concept. Did General Assemblies vote on Middle East policies? Yes, but this was an effective formality. The bureaucratic apparatus of the church failed to provide

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<sup>104</sup> Sara Speicher, “Consultation on Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Decides on Coordinated Ecumenical Action”, August 10, 2001 NR 01269 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/pnews/oldnews/2001/01269.htm> )

complete and accurate information, limited who could speak at the assembly, and publicly endorsed actions upon which the assembly had not voted.

### **The Problem of Flawed Theology**

In addition to the moral problems tied to the Middle East policies of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) several theological issues merit scrutiny. One seemingly minor problem is the ubiquitous application of the label “prophetic” to these decisions.<sup>105</sup> The term prophetic indicates that the PC(USA) is claiming to speak for God. Very few things can stop a conversation as quickly as “Thus sayeth the Lord.” This description of our own opinions can easily result in an unwillingness to actually entertain evidence that contradicts what we have declared to be true – namely that Israel is to blame for violence in the region, that Israel is to blame for the Palestinian refugee crisis, and that Israel is morally deficient for attempting to use a physical barrier to protect its citizens. Since this prophecy has been issued in our name, we, as Presbyterians might do well to remember the stern biblical condemnation of the practice of claiming to speak for God where God has not spoken.

A second theological issue is the seeming desire of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to anchor its moral pronouncements not on Christian principals, not on Scripture, not on any objective standard, but in United Nations resolutions, United Nations Security Council resolutions, the International Criminal Court, and international opinion. We opposed the security barrier in part because the International Criminal Court ruled against it. We demanded adherence to one particular interpretation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242. The opinion of Kofi Annan was cited within the rationale for the overture condemning the security barrier.<sup>106</sup> If a church derives its moral teachings from these things, then it has become a redundancy and retains nothing to offer the world.

A third issue is an assumption inherent in many liberation theologies – that the unempowered party to a conflict can be assumed to be the morally correct party. This is an attitude indicated by Vernon Broyles III and Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick when they advanced the argument that the imbalance in power between Israelis and Palestinians justified an unbalanced reaction by

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<sup>105</sup> For Example: 2004 Annual Report of the Office of the General Assembly labels Rev. Kirkpatrick’s comments “about Israel and Palestine” as “Speaking Prophetically” (Currently available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/annual/oga.htm>); Susan Andrews, Moderator of the 215<sup>th</sup> General Assembly is quoted using this label in: Leslie Scanlon, “PC(USA) Divestment Plan: Dealing With ‘Ripples of Reaction’”, *Presbyterian Outlook*, September 25, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.pres-outlook.com/HTML/divestmentplanripples092504.html>); The Presbytery of the James suggested that description in its “Introduction to the Issue” (Available online at: [www.presbyteryofthejames.org/Israeli%20-%20Introduction%20to%20the%20Issue.doc](http://www.presbyteryofthejames.org/Israeli%20-%20Introduction%20to%20the%20Issue.doc)); On February 8, 2005, *The Christian Century* carried several opinions on divestment. The editor, John Buchanan said, “Some parts of the Christian community have also disagreed, whereas some are proud of what they regard as a prophetic stand for justice and peace.” (Available online at: [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1058/is\\_3\\_122/ai\\_n10300866](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_3_122/ai_n10300866)) In August of 2003 Aram I, Moderator of the World Council of Churches suggests a quirky use of the word prophetic – asserting that all religions speak prophetically. It is hard from his comments to distinguish between speaking prophetically and expressing political opinion. If that is the sense in which prophetic is used by the PC(USA) then the use of the word is clearly misplaced. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/perspectives/oct03/wcc.pdf>)

<sup>106</sup> Overture 4-33 “On Calling for an End to the Construction of a Wall by the State of Israel—From the Presbytery of Chicago”. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/overtures/ovt0433.htm>)

the PC(USA).<sup>107</sup> The struggle for empowerment becomes by itself a virtue, regardless of either the means or motives of the un-empowered. This is a false assumption and comes dangerously close to suggesting that the ends justify the means – a cynical philosophy at utter variance with Christianity. The goals of the un-empowered (as imagined by the liberation theologian) are meant a form of legitimacy without examination of the actual statements of the un-empowered; no moral evaluation is permitted. Rick Ufford-Chase, Moderator of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly suggests guidance for our conversations about PC(USA) decisions on the Middle East that reflects this rejection of moral evaluation: “The refusal to choose good over evil offers us the promise of a new dialogue.”<sup>108</sup>

The remaining theological concerns raised by the decisions on Palestine and Israel are bound together with the fact that the church as a whole has never consistently and competently articulated the relationship between Christianity and Judaism – over the course of the last 2000 years. I will not attempt to untangle this history now. It is, however, imperative that we who claim to be Christians understand what is self-evident to everyone outside the church: this oversight has had and continues to have tragic consequences. What might have seemed to the church fathers to be acceptable polemic when Christians were a marginal group on the fringes of the Roman Empire seeking to define their theology was transformed in later centuries into the basis for blood libels when the official church held near absolute political power.

Even the reformers were infected by this dangerous practice; Martin Luther, for example, wrote horrifying things that would later be used to rationalize the holocaust. Regardless of our claim that such teachings represent distortions of Christianity, the official church has wrought tremendous evil on Jews and others as a result of them. We cannot avoid responsibility for the fact that theological statements have very real, sometimes devastating consequences; even if they are non-malicious and merely careless. As Queen Victoria’s Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli put it (in one of the most startling understatements of all time): “Nineteen centuries of Christian love have taken their toll.” It is through this lens that we must view the disturbing theological statements made by or implicit in the actions of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

In confronting Christian Zionism, the Assembly did not supply any compelling theological or Scriptural argument. The General Assembly did offer a quirky and unflattering description of Christian Zionism. The General Assembly also cited the 1944 decision of the PCUS to label Dispensationalism a heresy in order to discredit Pre-Millennialism and Christian Zionism. This is a misleading tactic. The resolution admits that there is a distinction between Pre-Millennialism and Christian Zionism, but it also asserts that “Dispensationalism gives Pre-Millennialism a system”, that Pre-Millennialism is a reaction to turbulent times, and in a remarkable twist of logic, that Pre-Millennialism is Anti-Semitic.<sup>109</sup> Dispensationalism and Pre-Millennialism are treated as preconditions for Christian Zionism. This is not quite accurate; some Christian Zionists are Dispensationalists. Others are not. Christian Zionism predates the origin of Dispensationalism by decades – to argue that Christian Zionism is a product of Dispensationalism is not supportable.

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<sup>107</sup> Rev. Vernon Broyles, “Money, Morals and Israel” and “Occupation is the Issue”, *The Christian Century*, February 8, 2005; Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Letter to Presbyterians in Dialogue for Peace, June 13, 2005 (Available online at: <http://www.palpres.org/article.php?story=20050616094035996> )

<sup>108</sup> Rick Ufford-Chase, “Is Peace Possible?”, *Presbyterian Outlook*, December 20/27, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.pres-outlook.com/HTML/ufford-chase20041220.html> )

<sup>109</sup> Resolution 12-03, “On Confronting Christian Zionism”, Minutes of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, July 2, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/minutes.htm> <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/jul2-2pm.pdf> )

Resolution 12-03 also draws heavily from Dr. Gary Burge's "Christian Zionism, Evangelicals, and Israel" – to the point of directly quoting six paragraphs.<sup>110</sup> This dependence creates additional theological difficulties. Dr. Burge posits a type of Replacement Theology that is echoed in the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s resolution. For example, both documents share the same paragraph on the "Christian Zionist" core belief on the covenant (which Burge, and presumably Presbyterians reject):

"God's covenant with Israel is eternal and unconditional. Therefore the promises of land given to Abraham will never be overturned. This means that the church has not replaced Israel and that Israel's privileges have never been revoked."

The PC(USA) did remove Dr. Burge's last two words, "despite unfaithfulness". Dr. Burge goes on to insist that God's covenant with Abraham was revoked due to unfaithfulness, though this conditionality is not contained in the Genesis accounts of the Abrahamic Covenant. (See Genesis 12:1-4, 12:7, 13:14-17, chapter 15, chapter 17 (this does require circumcision), 28:13-15 (Jacob is the inheritor of this covenant).) Later covenants were conditional, but there is no warrant to say these nullified the first. Dr. Burge maintains that Christians are heirs to the promises to Abraham (which surely does not indicate a promise of land), and that Stephen was martyred, not for saying he saw Jesus at the right hand of God, but for telling the Jews that the land and temple had become secondary. (See Acts 7 – Stephen did indeed quote Solomon and Isaiah about the temple, but he didn't reference the land.)

The Presbytery of Chicago tries to get around Replacement Theology by suggesting that Jews still have a calling. They do not inherit the promises of the Hebrew Bible but only its moral obligations. In the overture "On Confronting Christian Zionism"<sup>111</sup> the Presbytery of Chicago endorses a document, "Theological Reflection #1" that indicates God's will for Jews is to remain in exile, living in dependence on God, continually working for the good of their host countries, and enduring suffering and persecution with patience and without apparent hope of ending. The author of this reflection extols an idealized portrait of Jewish exile history – where people "were able to maintain identity without turf or sword, community without sovereignty." The failure to mention the treatment of Jews throughout much of their exile is startling.<sup>112</sup>

A theologically inexcusable practice engaged in by both the offices of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and by several of our ecumenical partners in the Middle East is the demonization of Israelis using explicitly Christian imagery. Comparisons to the crucifixion, to Herod's slaughter of children, to putting stones in front of the tomb of Jesus effectively resurrect the charge of collective deicide. No responsible reading of the New Testament allows for such a thing. Whatever the dubious rhetorical intent of this language of demonization (and however successfully it has been employed in other "liberation struggles"), it has historically consistently led to collective blame being placed on Jews and it has consistently encouraged violence and hatred.

Given the abysmal record of the official church's treatment of Jews, dissemination of irresponsible and dangerous theological ideas, and misuse and misapplications of legitimate Christian teachings, Presbyterians ought to have erred on the side of caution. Sadly we do not

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<sup>110</sup> Gary Burge, PhD., "Christian Zionism, Evangelicals and Israel" (Available online at: <http://www.hcef.org/hcef/index.cfm/ID/159>)

<sup>111</sup> Overture 4-34 "On Confronting Christian Zionism—From the Presbytery of Chicago". (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/overtures/ovt0434.htm>)

<sup>112</sup> Alain Epp Weaver, "Seeking the Peace of the City: A Critique of Zionism", Theological Reflection #1 of Churches for Middle East Peace, July 25, 2002 (Available online at: <http://www.cmep.org/theology/2002Jul25.htm>)

seem to have done so. The confusion or carelessness of our recent theological pronouncements dulls the possibility of having an effective witness even in those areas where it might be desirable or needful to do so. In the context of Christian/Jewish relations, suspicions of anti-Semitism, far from being *ad hominem* attacks (as our leadership has claimed)<sup>113</sup>, appear instead to be reasonable and warranted conclusions.

### Intentions and Results

At this point the question of the intention of the actions of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly arises. I am persuaded that many of the commissioners who voted for these initiatives were, in fact, well meaning. I am convinced they erred, but that this error was made in a good faith effort to accomplish something noble. I do believe they really desire peace in the Middle East, and they were simply outmaneuvered by those who vetted this policy. I believe that many genuinely (and rightly) are concerned with the conditions under which Palestinians live. I also suspect that many think they have done a good thing. In their defense, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with criticizing the policies of a government (such as that of Israel) or with standing up for the rights of oppressed people. However, to take such a moral stand requires having and considering all the facts, and considering what the likely results of that stand will be. In both of these areas, the well-intentioned commissioners to the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly failed. I believe their judgment was clouded by the idea that trusting the information presented to them by the offices and committees of the church was a virtue. I'm not sure uncritical trust on the part of a deliberative assembly is ever warranted – as it is the task of that assembly to sift through the data itself. In this particular case, given the loathsome bias repeatedly demonstrated by these offices and committees, that uncritical trust was disastrous.

Though I believe the assembly in general acted without malice, and was only mistaken, I am forced to ask: What was the intention of those who vetted these initiatives? What result did they envision? The Presbyterian Church (USA) has relatively few members, less than 1% of Americans. The PC(USA) holds about seven billion dollars in assets to which the divestment campaign would apply. The amount of money actually invested in targeted companies is far less. No one imagines that the financial impact on either these companies or on the State of Israel will be significant. No one imagines that Presbyterian divestment by itself will lead to peace in the Middle East. It seems unlikely that the goal is solely to prevent the church from profiting by investments that trouble the consciences of Presbyterians – or the church would not have continued to make money from them in the meantime.

So what is the goal? I can only speculate. I believe the intent of those who pushed for this initiative was rhetorical. This initiative seems to have been designed to induce others to follow suit by adding an air of legitimacy to activism directed against Israel, which, up until now in the United States, has been regarded as the purview of the radical fringe. Harvard's trustees rejected divestment when it was proposed by the faculty. The town of Somerville, Massachusetts decided to divest, then immediately reversed itself. Because the Presbyterian Church (USA) is considered a mainline denomination with a long history of respectability, its involvement suggests that anti-Israeli activism has become an acceptable mainstream phenomenon. So far there has not been a

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<sup>113</sup> “Productive Dialogue With Our Jewish and Muslim Neighbors”, February, 2005 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/25productivedialogues.pdf>)

pile on effect; divestment has been limited to churches, and only those denominations that already have bureaucratic entanglements with the PC(USA) have followed our lead.

A second intended result of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s policies seems to have been to use press releases and official communications to convince those in power that anti-Israeli sentiment is held by a wide array of people. This intent is implied by the portion of Resolution 12-03, "On Confronting Christian Zionism" that calls on the Stated Clerk to "inform current government officials that Christian Zionism does not represent the majority of American Christians and the faith of the Presbyterian Church (USA)".<sup>114</sup> Presbyterian Panel statistics indicate that support for actions directed against Israel is not even to be widely found among Presbyterians. As late as November of 2004, the majority of Presbyterians remained unaware that the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly had acted.<sup>115</sup> The involvement of the World Council of Churches (of Christ) with its specious claim to represent four hundred million members was more effective at conveying this false impression.

A third goal seems to have been to loan the label "Christian" to the cause of Palestinian liberation. Perhaps this is an attempt to combat Christian conservatives and Evangelicals who strongly support Israel and who also have a great deal of public exposure. Adding the name "Christian" will go a long way toward persuading some undecided moderate and progressive Christians that opposing Israel is an acceptable way to distance themselves from the religious right.

I believe a fourth and more sinister intention was harbored by some of the proponents of divestment. This is best expressed by college divestment proponent and columnist Amer Zahr:

"What we want is not actual economic divestment from Israel. Everyone knows that the US will never pull investments out of Israel like that. Instead, we are looking to shift the dialogue to whether or not to divest from Israel, without extraneous discussion of the basics. We hope that in 10, 20 years the public will just take for granted the premises that Israel is an apartheid state, and then we can move from there."<sup>116</sup>

The idea is to firmly establish in people's minds that Israel is a human rights violator, morally inferior to other countries. Words and slogans like "genocide", "ethnic cleansing", "the occupation equals violence", and comparisons to apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany are generously supplied. These are meant to change the discussion to one that begins with a forgone conclusion: Israel is wrong and solely responsible for the problems in the region. This is a propaganda tactic designed to shift scrutiny away from legitimate questions about violence and abuses of power on all sides, to a conversation about just how evil Israel is. People will seek to mediate the more extreme claims by arguing in favor of a less evil, but still morally deficient Israel. The demand from the Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (USA) that Israel admit sole guilt for the creation of the Palestinian refugee crisis illustrates Presbyterian interest in this propaganda technique. The continued application of this type of language will transform what would once have been considered unacceptable claims into moderate positions.

Whatever the intentions of the commissioners to the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, the decisions taken are rather unlikely to advance the causes of peace and justice in the Middle East. I also

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<sup>114</sup> Resolution 12-03, "On Confronting Christian Zionism", Minutes of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, July 2, 2004 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/minutes.htm> <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216/business/minutes/jul2-2pm.pdf>)

<sup>115</sup> Jack Marcum, "The PCUSA, divestment and Israel", *Presbyterians Today*, June 2005 (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/today/departments/go-figure/past/2005/gf-0605.htm>)

<sup>116</sup> CAMERA: On Campus, Vol. 13, #1: spring 2003, "Directing Campus Discussion: A Case Study", Rachel Roth

highly doubt that, even were the visions articulated by that assembly to be realized, the end result could accurately be called just. I do, however, see four predictable results of the divestment initiative and the intentional assignment of all blame to Israel.

The decisions of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) will do irreparable harm to relations between Presbyterians and Jews. This can already be seen to have happened. The Presbyterian News Service has carried a couple of stories on favorable reaction by certain Jewish groups – even these were tepid. The very fact that these PNS stories are considered newsworthy suggests that such reactions constitute a rare exception. The lack of willingness to solicit opinion from Jewish groups and to listen fairly has been interpreted as Presbyterian arrogance and betrayal. This has undermined decades of productive dialogue. If, as the proponents of and apologists for divestment believe, we are dealing with an issue of human rights and justice, then interfaith relations must take a back seat. Nonetheless, this deterioration is a factor that Presbyterians ought to consider.

Of far greater concern is another likely result of Presbyterian anti-Zionism (which is likely to be officially admitted) and anti-Israeli bias (which is clearly demonstrable): these two combine to encourage prejudice against all Jews. The effect can be seen in Europe, in the Middle East, and on U.S. college campuses. Examples abound – from charges of Jewish foreknowledge of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to sermons in Palestinian mosques calling for the murder of Jews everywhere, to the increase of violence against Jews occurring in Europe, to the PC(USA)'s claim that Jews are trying to stir up opposition to divestment among Presbyterian members,<sup>117</sup> to the quotes from the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* employed by guest speakers on college campuses across the country. For Presbyterians to contribute to this dangerous and eminently predictable situation is inexcusable.

A third possible outcome of the recent decisions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is equally dire and has already been demonstrated by the reactions of Hezbollah and Hamas and in the writings of the founders of the International Solidarity Movement. All regard divestment (and similar actions) as a non-violent supplement to assist them in achieving their goals. The PC(USA) has provided encouragement in the struggle to reverse the Nakba and erase Jewish presence from the entire Middle East. It is probable that our actions will increase and encourage violence in the region and result in more death for innocent bystanders, Israeli, Christian Arab, and Palestinian. If this should occur, as Presbyterians we will, of course, abhor violence and wring our hands, but I wonder if we will acknowledge the role our foray into international politics will have played.

At this point, once a position has been staked out, these commissioners will understandably hold onto it through pride. Criticisms of their decisions will often be often interpreted by them as personal attacks, and many commissioners will likely be unable to hear the very real objections to their actions. This creates an unfortunate and unpleasant situation. Nonetheless, preserving the pride of the commissioners who were legitimately misled at the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly must take a back seat to opposing the injustice and potential harm of the actual decisions of the assembly.

I am persuaded that the one-sidedness of the General Assembly process, the refusal to hear other viewpoints, the institutionalized racial and religious prejudices of the offices permanent committees of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the uncritical reliance on severely flawed sources of information, and the apparent collusion between and violations of trust by the employees of the PC(USA) and our ecumenical partners all render the decision of the 216<sup>th</sup> GA on Palestine and

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<sup>117</sup> “Productive Dialogue with Our Jewish and Muslim Neighbors”, February, 2005. (Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/25productivedialogues.pdf>)

Israel immoral. The quirky theology embedded in these decisions render them extra-Christian. The apparent intent of some of those who vetted these initiatives, and the likely results of their enactment are intolerable. The existence of this situation obscures the Christian witness of Presbyterians everywhere, whether we supported the actions of the 216<sup>th</sup> GA or not, because these actions have been taken in our name.

All that remains to be seen is what Presbyterians are willing to do. Some Presbyterians will, of course, agree with the process and the actions of the 216<sup>th</sup> GA. As puzzling as I may find it, some will share the biases of the offices of the church. For those who do not – who are either troubled by the process or find the decision flawed – it is possible in Presbyterian polity for elders and pastors to act to correct the situation. Pastors and elders, both elected by ordinary members, currently retain the authority and means to compel accountability from our representatives, and from the employees of the church. Primarily through the overture process, we can require fair representation at the General Assembly, and we can insist on a thorough, competent, and unbiased re-examination of this matter.

Will Presbyterians decide that fair, moral, Christian, and wise public stances are unimportant to us? Will Presbyterians continue the long-standing policy of focusing on our local churches and missions while neglecting the national and international uses of our money and our name? Will Presbyterians continue to demonstrate a colonized mind and accept falsehoods and misleading statements from those who would abuse our trust – as long as those statements are couched in terms crafted to sound vaguely spiritual? Or will Presbyterians take responsibility to honestly consider the matter, stand up, and say, “Enough”?

## Appendix A

### Presbyterian News Service Stories on Palestine and Israel 2000 – June, 2004

#### 2000

2000 Years after Christ's Birth, Bethlehem's Shepherds Are Dwindling [6 January 2000]  
 Arafat warns that the Palestinians are facing 'a disaster' [December 19, 2000]  
 Christian leaders determined to continue their witness in Jerusalem, despite [December 13, 2000]  
 Christian, Muslim leaders discuss status of Jerusalem, holy sites [August 9, 2000]  
 Church leader accuses Israel of 'ethnic cleansing' of Palestinians [October 20, 2000]  
 Despite violence and hatred, Holy Land's Christians still hope for peace [October 13, 2000]  
 Ecumenical Christian group organizing prayer campaign for peace in the Middle [November 22, 2000]  
 Israeli, Palestinian peacemakers find themselves roommates in Louisville [July 19, 2000]  
 Jerusalem's Lutheran hospital caught up in the conflict [October 13, 2000]  
 Latin Patriarch tells Israeli soldiers to stop attacking Christian village [October 30, 2000]  
 Moderator undertakes Middle East peace mission [October 24, 2000]  
 Most PC(USA) mission personnel in Jerusalem will be evacuated in the morning [October 13, 2000]  
 Old Testament "war stories" wound Palestinian Christians [August 24, 2000]  
 Palestinian Christian leader calls for shared Jerusalem [July 19, 2000]  
 Palestinian pastors decry excessive use of force by Israel [October 13, 2000]  
 Palestinians fret for rock-tossing youngsters [October 27, 2000]  
 Peace delegation meets with Israeli leaders, issues final statement at press [December 14, 2000]  
 Presbyterian mission volunteer in Jerusalem pleads for peace [October 31, 2000]  
 Presidential candidates statements on Israel are under scrutiny [September 5, 2000]  
 Starvation threatens Palestinian villages, Vatican official warns [December 14, 2000]  
 Stated Clerk urges President to step up Middle East peace efforts [October 16, 2000]  
 Violence keeps Palestinians from olive harvest [November 21, 2000]  
 Violence, unemployment dim Christmas glow in Bethlehem [December 19, 2000]

#### 2001

Amid fears for future, Jerusalem's churches embark on prayers for peace  
 Bethlehem's business owners sing the blues  
 Both Jews, Palestinians identify with terror victims  
 Christians say non-violence is the key to struggle against Israeli  
 Church, orphanage invaded by Israeli army  
 Consultation on Israeli-Palestinian conflict decides on coordinated ecumenical action  
 Jesus' birthplace at center of new round of Mideast violence  
 Palestinians say trenches, barricades are weapons in Israel's war for  
 Pope calls meeting on dwindling Christian population in the Holy Land  
 Stated Clerk appeals to Israeli, Palestinian leaders as violence flares  
 Wasteland: Holy places in strife-torn Bethlehem are attracting few  
 Witnesses for peace keep the faith in midst of escalating violence in Holy

#### 2002

A call for 'a just peace'  
 A Lenten Letter From Bethlehem  
 Bethlehem residents say this latest siege is designed to crush hope  
 Christian leaders from Jerusalem blocked from attending interfaith meeting in London  
 Christmas steals into Bethlehem  
 Church Coalition asks president to help deploy peacekeepers to Israel/Palestine  
 Church leaders embark on Mideast visit

Dreaming of peace: Ecumenical companions begin work in Palestine and Israel  
 Israeli troops occupy Lutheran complex in Bethlehem  
 Israeli, Palestinian Religious Leaders Meet to Find a Way to Peace  
 Israelis caught dozing  
 Jerusalem hospital faces closure by Israeli tax  
 Keeping the faith in Bethlehem  
 Negotiations under way over besieged Bethlehem church  
 New Jewish-Christian partnership to support Israel announced  
 Palestinian Christians see bleak Easter  
 PDA eases poverty, hunger of Palestinians  
 Presbyterian Moderator installed as cathedral canon in East Jerusalem  
 Reflecting on Palestine and the PC(USA)  
 Religious communicators ponder Mideast news coverage  
 Religious leaders beg Bush to help end Middle East Violence  
 Stated clerk issues plea for 'just and lasting peace' in Israel and Palestine  
 War comes to Jesus's birthplace  
 WCC calls for end to Israeli occupation, Palestinian suicide bombings  
 WCC seeks Middle East 'guardian angels'  
 WCC sends people to accompany those vulnerable in Palestine, Israel

### 2003

The Israeli, the Bedouin woman and the Palestinian priest  
 Second group of ecumenical companions to start work in Palestine/Israel in March  
 Jerusalem's Anglican bishop threatens to sue Israelis over church bombing  
 Salads a staple of Palestinian cuisine  
 In Easter messages, Christian leaders call for end to Palestinian suffering  
 Moderator to host Middle East conference at Montreat  
 Interfaith leaders launch Middle East peace effort  
 Beasts of burden  
 Beating the odds?  
 'What we feared has happened,' say Middle East church leaders  
 Tough times still blight Bethlehem's prospects  
 Row seethes in Bethlehem over keys to the birthplace of Jesus  
 Jerusalem churches urge protests against wall in West Bank  
 Gaza situation called tantamount to apartheid  
 Christians, Jews and Muslims get Holy Land meeting place  
 In Holy Land, Christmas is a low-key affair  
 Holy Fire  
 'Refuseniks' say loyalty has limits  
 'Suffering Christ tells best the story'  
 In semi-denial  
 Slim pickin's

### 2004

Holy Land Christians See a bleak Easter in the offing  
 More pilgrims celebrate Easter in Holy Land in 2004  
 Coalition raps Bush on Israeli settlements  
 20 new companions arrive in Palestine/Israel  
 Wall of Babel  
 Stated Clerk decries Bush's Middle East shift  
 Intimate Implications: Political stress interrupts mother-baby bond in Gaza City  
 Holy Land Christian leaders believe prayers answered  
 RCA calls 'Christian Zionism' an obstacle in Mideast  
 'Tear down this wall'

## Appendix B

### Statements from End the Occupation and Member Groups

**From The US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation:** Phyllis Bennis, “A Memo on Palestine & the US, On Palestinians & Americans”, August 15, 2001, listed as a strategy paper (<http://www.endtheoccupation.org/article.php?id=24> ).

“We speak of renewing an older vision, a single state in Israel-Palestine in which a civil rights-like struggle for equality will one day create a nation for all its citizens.”

“We speak in slogans, a dangerous shortcut made easier, perhaps inevitable, by Israel's recalcitrance and its refusal to even acknowledge its responsibility for the 1947-48 refugee crisis, let alone to recognize its obligations under international law to redress al Nakba.”

“And our movements here reflected the ANC's carefully crafted strategy for liberation—a strategy itself cohered around what was then a more than 60-year-old vision of a non-racial South Africa.

”The ANC's strategy included within it plans for domestic mobilization, political education, international economic and diplomatic engagement, **military activities**, and a host of other strategic tasks assigned to particular constituencies. Here in the U.S. the ANC-led strategy targeted institutional corporate investment for divestment, demanded tighter enforcement of the arms embargo and later economic sanctions, and conducted expose-oriented education campaigns. And because the ANC told us that those efforts were what was needed at a particular time, Americans joined those campaigns in huge numbers—it was a broad and truly democratic kind of democratic centralism written on an international stage.”

### **Member Sites are Often affiliated with the International Solidarity Movement, the Palestinian Solidarity Movement, or Al Awda.**

#### **From the Palestinian Solidarity Movement:**

Calls “for the full decolonization of Palestinian Land.”

*[This is a call for the destruction of Israel – not a 2 state solution, or even a one state solution. Palestinian land is regarded as the historic territory of Palestine. Decolonization is the removal of presence. Thus it is a call for the destruction of Israel.]*

#### **From New Jersey Solidarity – affiliate of PSM: (<http://www.newjerseysolidarity.org/home.html> )**

“We are opposed to the existence of the apartheid colonial settler state of Israel, as it is based on the racist ideology of Zionism and is an expression of colonialism and imperialism, and we stand for the total liberation of all of historic Palestine.”

*[Again this is a call for the destruction of the state of Israel.]*

**From the leaders of the International Solidarity Movement:** Huwaida Arraf and Adam Shapiro, “Why Nonviolent Resistance is Important for the Palestinian Intifada: A Response to Ramzy Baroud”, January 29, 2002 (<http://palestinechronicle.com/story.php?sid=20020129050221695> ).

“While we agree with Mr. Baroud that to date the Palestinian leadership and resistance has failed to empower and sustain a nonviolent resistance, we must object to Mr. Baroud's argument and offer an alternative vision and outline for how nonviolence can be used effectively, though not exclusively, in resisting and overcoming occupation.”

*[Non-violence is seen as a complement to violence.]*

“First and foremost, there is no guarantee that the use of nonviolence as a strategic element of resistance as part of a larger Intifada would end the occupation, deliver justice or resolve the conflict. It is simply a strategy, one that can be employed to attain specific, pre-determined goals. Additionally, the use of nonviolence is about control and power – those who maintain nonviolence and exploit the use of violence by the oppressor maintain control and power, which is something that can be manipulated to present a story, a case or an image.”

*[Their philosophy is here shown to be about manipulating people into supporting their cause – not any affinity for non-violence.]*

“The Palestinian resistance must take on a variety of characteristics – both nonviolent and violent. But most importantly it must develop a strategy involving both aspects. No other successful nonviolent movement was able to achieve what it did without a concurrent violent movement – in India militants attacked British outposts and interests while Gandhi conducted his campaign, while the Black Panther Movement and its earlier incarnations existed side-by-side with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.”

**From Al Awda (the Palestinian Right to Return Coalition):** (<http://www.al-awda.org/pointsofunity>)

Advocates “the formation of an independent, democratic state for all its citizens in all of Palestine.” (From the “Points of Unity”).

*[A single state – not a state of Israel. It is interesting to note that “Israel” is always used in quotation marks – and is referred to as the “settler state of “Israel””.]*

“This Coalition supports the struggle for the liberation of Palestine and views it as a struggle against all forms of colonialism.” (From the “Points of Unity”)

*[They do not specify what type of struggle they support – whether violent or non-violent. The implication is that they support violent struggle.]*

*[Al Awda does not acknowledge a Jewish state – which is the existing state of Israel.*

*As one of their affiliate sites phrased it:]* “We are for a unified democratic Palestine that encompasses all the territory of historic Palestine. We oppose the existence of the colonial-settler state of Israel.”