

war, you will bring the end of the Christian presence, of your faith, and my faith, in the Middle East.”

**EIR:** Have you attempted to meet with President Bush?

**El-Assal:** A number of times, but so far, we have not succeeded. . . . I think he is surrounded by advisors who tell him that these guys are this kind of a group, etc., etc. Or, the message never reached him, perhaps those around him don't share with him, that the heads of churches, or some of us, would appreciate an audience with him. But we would love to have an audience with the President, whoever the President is, so that we can share with him our pain, our suffering, and our hopes and aspirations for a Middle East completely different from the Middle East that will be, if things remain as they are today.

**EIR:** We have a Presidential election coming up here in about ten days; do you have any hopes that things might change after that?

**El-Assal:** Well, it is difficult to say. The polls say that it is going to be tight, but if there is a change, at least you will get rid of the Christian Right, and their influence on the President. People like Jerry Falwell and the like, who are influencing his mind and activity. Kerry will lead a completely different foreign policy. Foreign policy, it seems, is dictated to the President, rather than initiated by him.

Clinton could have pressured the Israelis to come to terms with the reality of the Palestinian and his right to a state of his own. But the moment he started talking about putting pressure on Israel—and I happened to be in New York on the very day that President Arafat came to meet with him, and President Clinton spoke of the need to persuade or pressure, and what happened? As Arafat was going down the steps from his private plane, someone pulled a drawer out, and presented the world with a case called Monica Lewinsky. And Clinton didn't meet with Arafat. They told him, we will make it difficult for you, if you pursue that road.

**EIR:** You referenced yesterday Pat Robertson's recent visit to Israel. Can you describe what the impact of that is on the Palestinian Christians?

**El-Assal:** Very negative. He came with 4,000 people, they marched the streets of Jerusalem, they hailed the Israeli government and its policy of occupation and building settlements. And warned the Israeli leadership not to give back any of the land, because this land belongs to Almighty God, and Almighty God gave it to you. . . . They challenged Israeli authority not to give back land to the Palestinians, as if this was their sacred right to occupy the land, and build it. They committed themselves to supporting Israel, and the government of Israel, with their lobbying for what Israel is after, and supporting it with funds. I don't know how much they brought with them this time, but I know that Pat Boone once came

with a check for \$15 million, and this was published in the *Jerusalem Post*. Another group came with \$60 million, and said they were committed to raising \$250 million; they handed the \$60 million to the Jewish Agency to help build more settlements in the occupied territories.

**EIR:** When Pat Robertson, or any of these so-called Evangelicals, the Christian Zionists, come, do they make any attempt to meet with the Palestinians?

**El-Assal:** No, to the contrary, they distance themselves from us, and they stay in hotels run by Israeli Jews rather than staying with us, the Arab Palestinian Christians. They don't mingle with us, they don't come to our services. They have their own kind of program, which is aimed at bringing hallelujah and praises to Israel, but they have nothing to do with us, the Christians of the Holy Land.

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## Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan

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# Non-Violence and the Struggle for Justice

*The following are excerpts from a speech by Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan, the Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem, to the Holy Land Ecumenical Foundation conference in Washington on Oct. 23. Subheads have been added.*

Dear friends,

It is an honor for me to be attending the Holy Land Ecumenical Conference for the second time. I bring to you the greetings of our Palestinian people and the Lutheran Church, assuring you that our people with the other peoples of the Middle East are yearning for justice and peace.

Oftentimes, the Christian Church is criticized for being prophetic and for promoting struggle, even in a non-violent way. I have heard people criticizing us, church leaders, for speaking out loudly against the Israeli occupation, against spiral violence and injustice. We were asked: “Why do you speak out so frankly? Shouldn't the church just focus on the gospel and leave politics alone!”

I am a Palestinian. My people and I are experiencing injustice and military occupation as well as the accompanying problems of hunger, illness, loneliness, imprisonment and being treated as strangers and intruders in our own land! What is my motivation in speaking out against these evils: Is it my personal or nationalistic feelings, or my political aspirations? No, my motivation is that I feel with my people

for I am part and parcel of their suffering and their well-being. I see and experience their oppression and pain. It is because I walk with God and God walks with me that I speak the truth and the love of God into our difficult and critical situation. And I am not only speaking truth toward those who oppress us but also toward myself and my own nation when I see injustice. How can I sing *Alleluia* or *Kyrie Eleison* or *Gloria* when people are suffering from injustice and the violation of their human rights? It is because Christ walks with God and I walk with Christ that the ultimate goal for God's creation is the liberation of humanity as well as the realization of justice. . . .

### **Occupation Is a Sin Against God**

The prophets of the Old Testament not only condemned the sin of other nations, but condemned the sin of their own people. This cost them a lot, for they were disturbing the power structures of their time in assuming their role of guardianship. Jeremiah, Amos, Micah, and Isaiah did not please their people and nation. Rather they pleased God, knowing they must obey God more than politics and injustice. This is much the same situation in the Palestinian church. We speak out against injustice, spiral violence, and oppression. We consider occupation is a sin against God and humanity. It deprives people of their God-given human rights and dignity. It demoralizes first the occupier and then the occupied. To demand an end to the occupation is to demand liberation for both Israelis and Palestinians from the sin of occupation. What Israel and Palestine need is only justice with peace.

Right now Israel is building a lengthy Separation Wall that is causing an immense human tragedy for Palestinians. When completed, the wall is proposed to be at least 403 miles (750 km), and in many places is made of concrete slabs 25 feet (8 meters) high. In contrast the Berlin Wall was 96 miles (155 km) and the average height was 11.8 feet (3.6 meters). It will have 41 gates for the Palestinians. The claim is that this is a wall of security, but in fact it is a wall of insecurity. It is bound to create more hatred, more anger, more outrage, because of enormous losses and suffering it is creating among the Palestinian people. The wall is being built deeply into the West Bank, taking a large area of Palestinian land. According to the World Bank, a total of 95,000 Palestinians are caught in the "seam zone," which is the area between the Separation Wall and the 1948 armistice line called the Green Line. There people are neither in Israel nor in the West Bank. They will become refugees, some of them for the third or fourth time since 1948. Other Palestinian people are losing their farmland, their olive trees and their citrus and fruit trees because the wall separates their houses from their land and their water resources.

Clemance, a teacher from one of our Lutheran schools, lives next to the newly erected concrete wall in Bethlehem.

She said: "The 8 meter-high concrete slabs are raised outside our garden and replaced with our fence. Now we only see gray wall and a small patch of the blue sky. We are, at least, glad we can stay in our home. When we previously asked about the route of the wall, no one knew and nobody cared. We have prayed and prayed. Why doesn't God hear us?"

Hanan Kandalaft, a Palestinian artist and architect, writes: "It was very interesting and totally unexpected to observe that this new barrier of concrete can give someone even more 'security,' yet it interferes in secure lives and futures. . . . The minute this image, the image of vertical concrete 'fence,' took part of our land, it created a new perception in everybody's mind . . . a new reality. It started to develop a new perception of the Open Space, an Open Space enclosed by an 8 meter-high wall. A new generation whose eyes will face a wall when looking at the Open Space and whose dreams can not take off beyond the cruel realities of life." . . .

### **Our Vision of Justice**

We have a vision of justice implemented for the liberation of Palestine from occupation and the creation of the Palestinian state according to international legitimacy. We support:

- a two-state solution, which means having the Israeli state and the Palestinian state side by side, living in peace, justice, equality and reconciliation.
- having a shared Jerusalem;
- solutions must be found to the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank including East Jerusalem and Gaza;
- the right of return for Palestinian refugees;
- shared water and other resources.

This vision is the key for justice and peace in the Middle East. The Palestinian Christian Church wants security for Israelis and freedom and justice for Palestinians. The reality is that the security of Israel is dependent on justice and freedom for Palestine, and justice and freedom for Palestine is dependent on the security of Israel. Once we recognize and accept this symbiotic relationship between the two, just peace will become reality. . . .

### **Religion Is Being Misused**

I would honestly say that there is no other conflict in the world where religion is as much misused, misquoted, or misinterpreted as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Holy Writings of the three religions have often been and are still being used to justify injustices, occupation, and the building of settlements, as well as to support actions to oppose the authorities, to retaliate or to defend one's own interests.

It is wrong that some followers of the three religions have voiced extremist opinions, claiming that these views represent their religion. Often these extremists are much more vocal and get more media coverage than the followers of the mainstreams of their respective religions. At the mo-

ment, extremists are hijacking the Middle East with their polarized visions. No one religion has a monopoly on extremism. We all have extremists, and it is our prophetic call as faith leaders today, to stand up clearly and persistently to say that any violence done in the name of religion is blasphemy and is against God's loving intention for humanity. Religion is based on the love of God and of all human beings, and should promote the respect of the rights of the other in order to achieve the common good and what is righteous for all people. When religion is twisted to fit a political agenda based on violence, hate and war, it is an abuse of religion.

In some Christian churches, the whole Bible—Old and New Testaments—is used in an eschatological way, using the apocalyptic books to justify the destruction of the Dome of the Rock and building a Third Temple, as a way of hastening the Second Coming of Jesus and the Armageddon War. I emphasize this type of Christian extremism because we Christians must clean our own house before we criticize others. With all modesty, I am afraid and ashamed that these sick ideologies, grounded not in grace but in fear, masquerade as Christianity. The Catholic bishops in Illinois in 2003 called this theology “false teachings.” I call it heresy.

### **Toward a Just Peace**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is primarily a political problem, not a religious one. Religion can, however, contribute positively to the search for a solution, and not inflame the situation further. For example, I very much respect the *Mea Culpa* prayer which his Holiness, Pope John Paul II, has made in confessing the sins of anti-Semitism of some members in the Roman Catholic Church. When we have the courage to be prophetic within our own religion, we contribute to the healing of the brokenness. This attitude of the Pope should encourage politicians, governments and leaders to recognize and confess the injustice being done to the Palestinians.

The religions have not done enough to bring about a just peace and reconciliation. All three religions have allowed extremism to grow and have a loud, influential voice. The truth is that God calls us to see the divine image not only in our own religion, but also in the others, whose faith is different from our own. When we accept the otherness of the other, we can then mutually recognize each other's human, civil, religious, national and political rights.

Religion is the art of teaching human beings not only to love God but also to love their neighbors. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us noble principles to love your neighbor as yourself and—to bless your enemy. Each of the three religions has teachings and values to support these principles and teach people to practice them. This is peace education: to renounce hatred and violence that separate us and return to

God's love and peace that bring us together. We as religions are to teach equality, tolerance, justice, reconciliation and forgiveness. We must practice it as the true religion teaches us and as it is written in the Holy Writings. . . .

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Dr. Gary M. Burge

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## **America's New Religious And Political Convergence**

*Dr. Burge, Ph.D., is professor at Wheaton College and Graduate School. He gave this speech to the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation in Washington, D.C., Oct. 22-24. Subheads have been added.*

I am a conservative evangelical. I teach at Wheaton College, named by some as an evangelical flagship. And I fear that sometimes our “house” may no longer be serving the goal of peace. We have become an obstacle, an important obstacle. But let me explain.

Since the tragic events of 9/11, American Christians have gained a new word: jihad. Those of us who are acquainted with Islam, have known this word and its sublime meanings for a long time. But for others, it has come to represent a militancy, a strident and negative force inside a religion that is dangerous.

In this view, here is what jihad sounds like:

There will be a final climactic war in which the forces of Islam are arrayed against the paganism of the Christian West. And in the midst of terrible and heroic fighting, when all seems lost to the enormous Western armies, the Lord returns in order to validate the truth of Muhammad and protect his followers. He will also lead a conquest that will purge the Holy Land of infidels. He descends with a cry and immediately horses and animals alike explode where they stand. Just the words of his mouth superheats their blood and it explodes through their veins and skin. The slain pile up everywhere and the stench is unbearable, but the purging must go on. A cry goes out from his heralds:

“It is a righteous thing with Allah to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest. I have taken vengeance on those who do not know Allah and who do not submit. They shall be punished with everlasting destruction.”

Horsemen try to evade the onslaught. Their riders leap from their steeds and try to control them with their