



Faith under Occupation. The Plight of Indigenous Christians in the Holy Land, published by EAPPI/JIC/WCC, Jerusalem, February 2012.

In the West, the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict is viewed as only a Muslim-Jewish one. Totally forgotten are the Christians in Palestine who constitute the cradle of Christianity. The study "Faith under Occupation" is published by "The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)" together with the "Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC)" and the "World Council of Churches (WCC)". <http://www.eappi.org/index.php?id=7530>

This report does not only aim to expose the grim realities of life under Israeli military occupation, and the impacts that it has on the Palestinian people in general, but it also aims to shed some light on the fact that Palestinian Christians are indigenous to the Holy Land. This report also disapproves of the unfounded Israeli and Christian Zionist propaganda that Palestinian Christians are depopulating due to Muslim fundamentalism in Palestinian society. Even more repelling is the fact that this report shows how Christian Zionist support for Israel's brutal military occupation of Palestine is threatening the existence of Palestinian Christians.

Palestinian Christians think that the international community is not doing enough to relieve their plight. They do not comprehend why so many people around the world, especially in the West ignore the existence of Palestinian Christian communities. These lacks of awareness compounded by the distortions promoted by fundamentalist Christians in the U. S are seen as major obstacles by Palestinian Christians. In such circumstances, appeals by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to Western Christian "brothers in faith" to stop encouraging the emigration of Christians from Palestine, are in vain. As long as Christians all over the world can freely visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem but Palestinian Christians are denied their right to freely worship there, because they need a special permit to enter Arab East Jerusalem, regularly denied by the Israeli occupation forces, there is something fundamentally wrong within the Western value system.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the Christian population of Palestine had greatly diminished. Their proportion in the population decreased from more than 18 per cent in 1948 to 2 per cent today. Once, Christians in Bethlehem comprised more than 90 per cent of the population. Today Christians make up only 15 per cent in the city. The main focus of this study is build around a case study about the impacts of Israel's military occupation of Palestine and how Christians are affected.

The views of the Evangelical pastor Wayne Smith on Israel are revealing. His attitude was initially strongly influenced by the June war of 1967 when allegedly Little David (Israel) defeated the "Arab goliath". It took him almost 40 years to review his erstwhile attitude. It occurred when he came across the book "Bethlehem besieged" by Mitri Raheb, a pastor serving the Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. Further books by Elias Chacour, Marc Ellis and Mark Braverman opened his eyes for the grave injustices committed by Israel's occupation regime. The glorious story of the birth of the nation of Israel fell apart by the parallel story of the forced expulsion of the indigenous owners of the land, the Palestinians.

Detailed case studies are presented about cities and villages such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Beit Sahour (a small village adjacent to Bethlehem, which has a long history of popular non-violent resistance), Beit Jalla, Nahhalin, Azzun (in which only two Christians are left), and Zababdeh. Further Christian communities are presented, including St. George's Greek Orthodox Church in Burqin, just west of the northern West Bank city of Jenin, or the 700 Christians in Nablus and the communities in Ramallah and its environs.

The report presents excerpts from the "Kairos Palestine 'Moment of Truth` document" of 2009 that was drafted after the Kairos South Africa document and presented in Appendix II. In the Palestinian document, the Christians declare "that the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity, and that any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings because the true Christian theology is a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed". It calls on the international community to stop the principle of "double standards" and to insist on international resolutions concerning the Palestinian problem. The document calls for a "system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel". This document has garnered support from churches all over the world but not in the mainstream Western media.

The study also sheds some light on the illegal policy of house demolitions and discriminations against Christian leaders, such as Suheil Dawani, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem. A letter from the Interior Ministry in Jerusalem says: "Bishop Suheil acted with the PNA (Palestinian National Authority L. W.) in transferring lands owned by Jewish people to the Palestinians and also helped to register lands of Jewish people in the name of the Church." It was further alleged that the Bishop forged documents. The letter also stated that Bishop Dawani and his family should leave the country immediately.

The study concludes by saying that Palestinian Christians are "disproportionately affected by the occupation". A further Christian emigration not only from Palestine but also from other Middle Eastern countries could transform a political conflict into a religious one between Islam and Judaism. The West bears heavy responsibility for the exodus of the Palestinian and Arab Christians because its one-sided alignment with Israel's occupation and its attacks on Iraq has led to a mass flight of Christians. If the West keeps trying together with their Arab allies to topple the regime of Bashar al-Assad, the consequences for Christian and minorities will be catastrophic.

When things are wrong for Palestinian Christians or the other Christian communities in the Middle East, they are wrong for all Palestinians and all Arabs. The root of Palestinian sufferings is founded in Israeli military occupation of their homeland and the occupation of Arab land by Western occupation forces helped by Arab stooges.

The value of the study lies in the fact that it has shed some light on the difficult conditions of Christians who do not live under Islamic rule but under regimes dominated by Western proxies that instigate sectarian division.

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http://www.palestinechronicle.com/view_article_details.php?id=19203

http://www.international.to/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5721:faith-under-occupation-the-plight-of-indigenous-christians-in-the-holy-land&catid=66:oped&Itemid=151

<http://between-the-lines-ludwig-watzal.blogspot.de/2012/04/faith-under-occupation.html>