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## Palestinian Protestant Theological Responses to a World Marked by Violence

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*Katanacho introduces major Palestinian Protestant responses to violence, grouping them into four response categories: biographies, apologies, Liberation theology, and Reconciliation theologies. Each category is described with a helpful critique. First, several pastors tell their stories, explaining their Christian faith in light of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Second, some theologians engage Islam or Zionism. Third, Palestinian Liberation theology is explained through the works of Naim Ateek, Mitri Raheb, and others. Fourth, Katanacho unpacks two kinds of reconciliation theologies: Sulha and Musalaha. The former focuses on Christian-Muslim relations and the latter concentrates on the relationships between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians.*

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According to an ancient Jewish commentary, the struggle over parts of the Holy Land goes back to Cain and Abel.<sup>1</sup> Cain murdered his brother in order to possess Zion, the future place of the temple. Sadly, since that time, Zion and its environs continue to be a locale marked by violence, suffering, and death. Both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews continue this tradition of violence, justifying it in many socio-political and religious ways. Some Israeli Jews claim the Holy Land as their ancestral inheritance and as their divine right. Similarly, some Palestinian Muslims claim Palestine as a sacred Islamic land. Just like Cain, both groups use violence, defiling the Holy Land and spilling the blood of innocent people. Both groups advocate violence not only against each other but also against minorities within their own groups. Meanwhile, Palestinian Protestants are caught up in the fury of this violent world.

What are Palestinian Protestants to do when people perpetrate injustice and killing in the name of God? How do Christians respond to such a world? The rest of this essay will sketch out and evaluate several major Palestinian Protestant theological

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responses.<sup>2</sup> Hopefully, these responses will not only pave the way for a better understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict but will also highlight concerns that must be addressed in a violent world. At the risk of oversimplification, the essay presents four main response categories: biographies, apologies, Liberation theology, and Reconciliation theologies. Although these four responses are interrelated and should not be viewed as mutually exclusive, they are useful taxonomical groupings.

### **The Biographies**

The first response of Palestinian Protestants to life in the war-torn Holy Land is the composition of biographies. Similar to the well-known story of Elias Chacour, the stories of Shorrosh, Rantisi, and Raheb, among others, provide captivating personal accounts and reflections.<sup>3</sup> Their works focus on the establishment of the state of Israel and its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.<sup>4</sup> Shorrosh recounts his heart-breaking story at its establishment in 1948, while the latter two describe the hardships of living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank.

Through their stories, Rantisi, Shorrosh, and others provide a framework that combines their cultural concerns with their religious beliefs. The common pattern of these stories is a description of the dehumanizing Israeli injustices against a Palestinian Christian family. These injustices raise many theological questions and social concerns in the life of the narrator. The narrator usually experiences divine transformation at a young age and is led to a Christian life, committed to nonviolent resistance, reconciliation, justice, and forgiveness. He or she then becomes a model for following Christ in the context of the Arab-Israeli strife, and the biography usually presents a few comments reflecting on vexing theological questions pertinent to the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>5</sup>

These and similar biographies are important shapers of Palestinian Protestant theology. The biographers have succeeded in presenting their tragic stories in a Christian spirit. They raise thoughtful questions about the justice of God, advocating love and reconciliation instead of hate and violence. They also promote peace and human dignity instead of war, advocating a loving God instead of a militant one and making theology relevant to culture.

However, their works fail in the following two areas. First, the dominating depiction of Israel in their works is negative. The Israeli Jews are seen mainly as oppressors and seldom as peace partners. Even if some Israeli peace partners appear, their efforts are usually marginal and seldom influential in changing the destiny of Palestinians. Consequently, the reader seeks justice for Palestinians but is less concerned with the complex problems of the Israeli Jewish society. Simply stated, the biographers present the issues in black and white and in very general terms. Palestinians are the oppressed; Israelis are the oppressors.

Second, the biographers' overemphasis on cultural concerns instead of biblical ones might eventually lead to the creation of a canon within the canon and to very limited insights concerning the biblical interpretation, especially of militant Judaism. Unfortunately, their hermeneutical model jumps to application without any indication of rigorous biblical research or dialogue with militant Judaism. As a result, they are in danger of eisegesis and of creating a tamed, national God.

## The Apologies

Apologies are the second Palestinian Protestant response. Before the advent of Islam, Arab Christians employed them in Greek, Syriac, or Coptic languages.<sup>6</sup> However, in the context of Islam, Arabic became the *lingua franca*, and, more specifically, it became the main language of Christian theology in the Middle East. Since that time, Islamic concerns have shaped the direction of Christian theological works in Arabic.<sup>7</sup> Muslims question the Trinity and the incarnation, and they accuse Christians of distorting the Scriptures. Many apologists respond to these challenges by defending Christianity, demonstrating the veracity of the gospel and some inconsistencies in Islam. Some of the more famous early apologists who wrote in Arabic include Theodore Abu Qurah, Habib Abu Ra'itah, 'Ammar al-Basri, and Severus ibn al-Muqaffa'.

Several contemporary Palestinian Protestants follow in their predecessors' footsteps, addressing three concerns: Trinity, Christology, and the corruption of Scriptures. Shorrosh and Shehadeh are two clear examples.<sup>8</sup> Shorrosh is the son of a Palestinian Arab evangelist, who suffered brain damage as a result of an attack by angry Muslim fanatics.<sup>9</sup> This violence against his father shaped the future of his life, his views, and his interests in Muslims. He describes the prophet of Islam as the antichrist and points out several mistakes in the Quran.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, Shorrosh writes several books, hoping to lead Muslims to Christ. Some of his most influential works are *Islam Revealed*, *The True Furqan*, and *Islam: A Threat or Challenge*.<sup>11</sup> In the first book, Shorrosh finds in the Quran many linguistic mistakes, logical contradictions, and theological inaccuracies. In the second, he raises many questions related to the nature and spread of Islam, revealing its violent nature.

Shorrosh's third book, *The True Furqan*, is a unique contribution. It responds to the following Quranic challenge. The Quran asserts that no humankind or Jinn (spirits) can produce a book like it.<sup>12</sup> Then it modifies the challenge, reducing the limit to ten Suras or chapters.<sup>13</sup> At last, the challenge is further reduced to one single Sura.<sup>14</sup> In other words, no one can combine 15 to 20 Arabic words that resemble the style and quality of any portion of the Quran. Interestingly, *The True Furqan* is a 366-page book with more than 77 Arabic Suras that seem to resemble the language and style of the Quran but challenge its teachings, presenting instead the Christian gospel.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike Shorrosh, Shehadeh is more cautious. He tactfully says that the "study of Islam helps refine Christianity's own understanding of itself."<sup>16</sup> In four helpful articles, Shehadeh summarizes some of his essential concerns that are pertinent to Islam.<sup>17</sup> First, he seeks to understand whether Christians and Muslims believe in the same God by probing textual, lexical, historical, and theological factors.<sup>18</sup> He concludes that though "Muslims and Christians may believe in the same God as *subject*, the *nature* of God as conceived by Islam is not at all identical to the nature of God in the Judeo-Christian faith."<sup>19</sup> Second, he seeks to understand the Islamic reasons for rejecting the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation.<sup>20</sup> He evaluates Islam's monotheistic understanding of God, clarifying that, according to Islam, the attributes of God stem from his will, not his nature. Consequently, their God is "essentially capricious," and "cannot be known or trusted."<sup>21</sup> Third, he discusses the reasons for Islam's rejection of biblical Christology in two articles, employing Sura five of the Quran. He concludes that Islam's rejection of the deity of Christ is based on an unbiblical system of theology.<sup>22</sup>

The above apologies have many theological and philosophical insights. They not only sketch out some of the key differences between Christianity and Islam, but they also inspire Palestinian theologians to consider the importance of sharing God's good news with Muslims. Further, they pave the way for addressing the Arab-Israeli conflict in light of Islamic doctrines. On the other hand, the pertinent apologies overemphasize logic and coherent argumentation, overlooking the important relational mentality that dominates many Middle Eastern minds. It would have been helpful if they had discussed doctrinal differences, not only in philosophical categories but also in relational ones, highlighting some points in Islam that provoke respect and appreciation.

In addition, both Shehadeh and Shorosh subscribe to a form of dispensationalism that accepts the ancestral connections of Arabs to Ishmael and Jews to Isaac and that predetermines the nature and future of these two groups based on a literal interpretation of the Abrahamic promises.<sup>23</sup> In other words, they are theologically supportive of a national Jewish state and find it difficult to find a theological justification for a Palestinian one. This belief, accompanied by sharp criticism of Islam, hinders their effectiveness among Palestinians. Shorosh says, "The strangest thing in the world of today's politics is the fact that the Arabs control 3,000,000 square miles of territory, but cannot let Israel, their kinfolk, have 10,000 square miles. The hallowed parcel of land, called Palestine, has actually been in the hands of the Arabs longer than the descendants of Jacob. Yet God promised it to the Israelites."<sup>24</sup> Such statements not only overlook the diverse pool of genes among both Israelis and Palestinians but also do not reflect sufficient understanding of their unique and complex identities.

The spread of dispensationalism among Palestinian Evangelicals and its widespread influence in Israel have provoked a Palestinian Christian response.<sup>25</sup> Yousif Odeh, for example, provides an apology for amillennialism. He describes different eschatological systems, then employs Scriptures and history to uncover several tenuous points in premillennialism. Odeh helps Palestinian Christians to see amillennialism as a plausible biblical option.<sup>26</sup> It would have been helpful if he had not limited his discussion to the traditional amillennial response, which does not take the unique Palestinian situation into consideration. Elsewhere, I also have provided a biblical study responding to dispensational Zionism, which promotes giving Palestinian lands to the state of Israel. I advocate a Christological ownership of the land or, more precisely, of *Haaretz*.<sup>27</sup>

### **Palestinian Liberation Theology**

The third Palestinian Protestant response is Liberation Theology, and Ateek is its ardent supporter. He is one of the main pillars of contemporary Palestinian theology. He says, "A theology of liberation is a way of speaking prophetically and contextually to a particular situation, especially where oppression, suffering, and injustice have long reigned."<sup>28</sup> Conditioned by the Arab-Israeli conflict, he moves "from an existential phenomenon" into seeking an understanding of the "metaphysical and ontological essence of the real," i.e. the integrity of the Old Testament and the identity of God.<sup>29</sup> This theological pursuit becomes more significant in light of his call to "de-stereotype" Western images of the people of the Middle East, to "de-zionize" the Bible, and to "de-mythologize" the state of Israel.<sup>30</sup>

Ateek proposes a Palestinian Liberation theology that focuses on the “heart of the biblical message,” namely, the liberating aspect of the Word.<sup>31</sup> He believes that a proper hermeneutical and biblical understanding is crucial for coining an effective Palestinian theological response. Consequently, he seeks to de-zionize the Bible, purging it from racist and Zionist abuses. His purging process entails several important aspects. First, he formulates a Christological hermeneutic for the Old Testament: Jesus is the true hermeneutical tool for understanding the Bible and is its center. The Incarnate Word of God interprets the words of Scriptures.<sup>32</sup> Second, Ateek argues that some Old Testament texts are racist.<sup>33</sup> He divides the Old Testament into three main traditions: nationalist, Torah-oriented or legalistic, and prophetic.<sup>34</sup> The nationalist tradition bases its arguments on Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings. From this perspective, God instituted the use of force in order to accomplish the desired goal. The Torah-oriented tradition focuses on religious beliefs instead of political power. Finally, the prophetic tradition bases its teaching on the prophets, who have a strong ethical and inclusive message. According to Ateek, this tradition entails the most mature understanding of God, and consequently, the first two traditions are useful only for pedagogical purposes.

Ateek raises valid concerns related to the nature and contribution of Scriptures to a contextual Palestinian theology. How can Palestinian Christians understand the “violent” passages in Scriptures and the holy wars that were executed on the ancient non-Israeli inhabitants of Palestine?<sup>35</sup> What is the significance of land for Palestinian Christians? What are the prophetic and peacemaking roles of the Palestinian church? What is the meaning and role of justice in a Palestinian context?

Ateek presents a stimulating work. Nevertheless, there are several dangers in his proposal. His proposal creates a canon within the canon, rejecting portions of the Old Testament and, as a result, depriving Palestinian Christians from seriously considering the whole council of God. Also, his subjective theological reading does not allow the text to challenge or transform his assumptions, and it denigrates textual authority. He says,

When confronted with a difficult passage in the Bible or with a perplexing contemporary event one needs to ask such simple questions as: Is the way I am hearing this the way I have come to know God in Christ? Does this fit the picture I have of God that Jesus has revealed to me? Does it match the character of the God whom I have come to know through Christ? If it does, then that passage is valid and authoritative. If not, then I cannot accept its validity or authority.<sup>36</sup>

Insightfully, Ateek focuses much of his attention on justice; however, he defines the word mainly in philosophical and cultural ways, without unpacking its canonical biblical meaning.<sup>37</sup> As a result, he neither gives sufficient emphasis to the important correlations between righteousness, justice, and holiness nor to the correspondences between human and divine justice. Ateek’s sociopolitical justice calls political oppressors to philanthropy, but it does not call sinners to radical conversion. It does not present the full picture of biblical justice.

Mitri Raheb is another important voice advocating Palestinian Liberation Theology. In his book, *I am a Palestinian Christian*, Raheb presents a cultural analysis of

Palestinian Christians, probing the socio-political, historical, and religious characteristics of their identity.<sup>38</sup> Then, he deals with important hermeneutical and theological concerns. First, he briefly examines the relationship of the Holocaust to a Post-Auschwitz Western theology, demonstrating that the latter has not been sensitive to the sociopolitical changes of European Jews. They are no longer the oppressed. On the contrary, they are oppressors in Israel/Palestine. Raheb adds that, due to hermeneutical flaws, Post-Auschwitz theology has not paid sufficient attention to Palestinian sufferings.<sup>39</sup> Thus, he suggests corrective interpretive principles that are more sensitive to Palestinian cultural concerns. These include:

1. The Bible is “nothing but testimonies of faith.”
2. Biblical interpretation must respond to historical critical questions, employing a socio-historical investigation. It should not employ typology or allegory.
3. Interpretation must consider the history of reception.
4. No interpretation that excludes faith and love is legitimate.
5. It is not possible to interpret the Old Testament rightly without the New Testament and vice versa.
6. Both testaments are testimonies to the one God, the God of justice.
7. The Bible is mainly a book about minorities and persecuted peoples.
8. Law and gospel are the hermeneutical keys for interpreting it.<sup>40</sup>

Raheb applies these principles to election, the promise of land, and the Exodus. He concludes that the church must be consumed with the promotion of justice and righteousness in creative, nonviolent resistance. This ministry will eventually lead to peace and coexistence between two equal peoples in Israel/Palestine.

Although Raheb raises many astute questions and important concerns, he does not address them in depth. Because he fails to reference sufficient reliable sources or counterviews, his argument is likely to elicit doubts within the minds of thoughtful, critical readers. Interestingly, Raheb combines his Lutheran theology, his historical critical methodology, his social scientific reading, his Liberation theology, his rejection of typology, his commitments to the authority of Scriptures, and his belief in the centrality of faith and love without pointing out any emerging points of conflict! A critical discussion of the way in which he relates these elements to each other would have provided more credibility to his cumbersome methodology.

### **Reconciliation Theologies**

The fourth Palestinian Protestant response is reconciliation theology, which exists in two major shapes: Sulha and Musalaha. Sulha is the Arabic cultural way of conflict management and of advocating peaceful coexistence through societal reconciliation and compromise.<sup>41</sup> Any offender is considered part of a particular group. His offense implicates his group and exposes them all to revenge. At the same time, the offended person is part of a community, whose honor and dignity is insulted whenever one of its members is violated. Thus, there are no merely personal problems in the traditional Arabic community. Consequently, religious leaders and dignitaries are continually involved in keeping the peace. Their activities include reconciling disputing families, religious communities, and different ethnic groups. Further, they emphasize understanding their identities and world in relational ways, highlighting what is common between different faiths.

Some examples of Sulha theologians include Abu El-Assal and Younan.<sup>42</sup> These, at first, attempt to describe the group to which they belong, in order to establish their rights and help others understand their complex identities, loyalties, and unique contributions as peacemakers. They then highlight their common ground, especially with Muslims. Finally, they focus on coexistence and the importance of dialogue and compromise.

Abu El-Assal, for example, describes his identity saying, "As a Christian I look to the Old and New Testaments for the origins of my faith. As an Arab I can trace my presence in the land at least to AD 33. . . . As a Palestinian I look for my ancestors among the Philistines."<sup>43</sup> In the same breath, he classifies himself as a brother of Muslims and a cousin of Jews.<sup>44</sup> In other words, Muslims have closer family ties. They are part of the group that represents him before his offenders, the Jews. Consequently, he highlights the common grounds between Islam and his understanding of Christianity. He says, "My studies taught me that Islam supports our faith in nearly every doctrine."<sup>45</sup> Then, together with Muslims, he works toward creating a future, in which coexistence, in dignity and honor, is possible.

Younan has a more sophisticated approach. In the first part of his book, *Witnessing for Peace*, he discusses the roots of his Palestinian Christian identity in the Jerusalem church, in the church of the Arabs, and in the inhabitants of Palestine before "the arrival of the Israelites under Joshua."<sup>46</sup> After establishing the identity of the group that represents him, he describes his mission to other groups around him, employing the theology of *Martyria*, i.e. being a witness in word, deed, and suffering.<sup>47</sup> He identifies three areas in which he applies the theology of witnessing. These relate to land, justice, and nonviolence. First, he sees the land as a gift from God, as the fifth gospel, and as sacred geography that bears witness to salvation history. Second, he asserts that justice is a prerequisite to peace. He explains that justice entails the end of occupation and the sharing of Jerusalem by the three monotheistic religions. Third, he condemns Palestinian violence and the violence of the Israeli occupation, clarifying that the way of nonviolence never abandons the way of justice or tolerates evil.

Like Abu El-Assal, Younan highlights the common grounds with Islam, shunning confrontations. He praises the prophet of Islam and his religious contributions, seeing Islam as a loving and peaceful religion.<sup>48</sup> Then, he asserts that Christians and Muslims must seek coexistence, even if it means obviating discussion of the "the nature of the Triune God, the divinity of Christ, or his salvific work through the cross."<sup>49</sup> Further, with coexistence in mind, the doctrine of incarnation is redefined as "the willingness of God to engage himself fully in humanity and restore its dignity."<sup>50</sup> In other words, Younan advocates an anthropocentric view of the incarnation that sees the restoration of dignity as its utmost concern. By not pointing out the sinfulness of humanity and its need for substitutionary atonement, Younan tries to provide an incarnational model that is less offensive to non-Christians.

In short, Sulha theologians have made several contributions in building bridges with Muslims. They have made it easier for Christians and Muslims to be neighbors and to seek the common good for both groups. At the same time, it seems that they have paid an unnecessarily high price. What does Christianity have to offer if it does not discuss Trinity, Christology, and atonement; or if it agrees with Islam in nearly every doctrine? Is it the same Christianity that the apostles proclaim? Further, it seems

that the superficial agreement with Islam cannot satisfy an informed critical mind, and the doctrinal disagreements with Muslims do not necessarily lead to conflict. It would have been better if Younan and Abu Al-Assal had followed the path of the ex-crown prince of Jordan, Al Hassan bin Talal. As a Muslim, he respectfully discusses the major Christian doctrines and then advocates coexistence.<sup>51</sup>

### **Musalaha Theology**

It is now fitting to discuss Musalaha theology. Massad and Munayer are two clear examples of this school of thought. Massad examines the Scriptures, seeking to reconcile Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews. He says, "The basic thesis of my dissertation is concerned with the theological foundation for reconciliation between the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael, through the crucified and risen Christ who is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant."<sup>52</sup> After highlighting the different historical and theological factors that led to the hostility between Palestinians and Israeli Jews, he rightly concludes that violence is not the answer to the Arab-Israeli conflict. He then discusses pertinent dispensational and non-dispensational theological differences, focusing on both the relationship of the diverse Scriptural covenants and of Biblical Israel and the church. Through his theological analysis, Massad discovers that Christ is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. His death and resurrection provide the best foundation for reconciliation, and his cross is the best model for it. He says, "The cross of Christ for us is not only the place of salvation where our sins are forgiven, or where we are to be reconciled to the Father, but it is also the place where we can experience healing of wounds which we have inflicted on one another."<sup>53</sup>

Massad adds that both Palestinian and Messianic churches have been focusing on the social and political dimensions of their dissensions overlooking peace education and the biblical message of reconciliation.<sup>54</sup> He clarifies that Israel's essential identity is inseparable from its calling as a divine agent of reconciliation.<sup>55</sup> The ultimate fulfillment of Israel's calling has been recognized in the ministry of the cross, where God reconciled humanity to himself. This reconciliation with God through the cross is the means for creating a new reality between both victims and oppressors, a reality in which all humans are sinners and the only permissible hostility is the enmity of enmity and the hatred of sin. The cross provides expiation for the guilty, power for the victimized, and a new, nonviolent social reality for belligerent communities.

Massad's fair and peaceful proposal has a lot to offer. However, he fails in two areas. First, he neither substantiates the notion that Arabs are the descendants of Ishmael and Jews are the descendants of Isaac nor engages those who believe that Palestinians are the descendants of the Philistines and other ancient inhabitants of Palestine. Such a belief creates different dynamics and requires a different course of action, especially when God doomed some of these ancient nations and their descendants to utter destruction. Their territorial losses are both a sign and a result of their curse. Would the cross reverse God's curse on them? In the wake of the cross, would God be reconciled to the descendants of these nations, and would this reconciliation and restoration entail a territorial dimension?

Second, Massad makes justice secondary. He says, "Let us pursue not justice but a community of love. We will never reach perfect justice, but let us pursue confession, repentance, forgiveness, and love, which will prepare us to embrace one another as



members of one body and will allow us to experience reconciliation.”<sup>56</sup> It seems that Massad is misunderstanding the biblical nature of justice. Biblical justice is at the core of confession, repentance, forgiveness, and love. The cross is equally a sign of God’s love and of his justice. Without the latter, there is no true reconciliation either with God or with people. Justice was never secondary in the Bible. Perhaps Massad’s sincere longing for unity with Messianic Jews has clouded his judgment on this issue.

Unlike Massad, Munayer asserts that justice is an uncompromised condition for reconciliation.<sup>57</sup> He first seeks to understand the Palestinian identity from the perspective of social and developmental psychology.<sup>58</sup> Then, in quest of reconciliation, he combines the social sciences and the theology of creation. He wants not only to understand the Palestinian Christian identity but also to bring it closer to the Christian identity intended in the new creation. In his sociopolitical analysis of both Palestinian Christians and Israeli Jews, he highlights the importance of sociopolitical justice. He also asserts that in order to have a fruitful dialogue between Palestinian Christians and Israeli Jews, the latter must accept that all Israeli citizens, including Palestinian Israeli Christians, should have “equal rights in all spheres of life.”<sup>59</sup> Further, Israeli Jews should end the occupation, allowing Palestinians to have their own state. Only then will a healthy dialogue be possible. Second, he points out that although the traditional issues discussed in Christian-Jewish dialogues in the West — mainly anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and the existence of Israel — are relevant to Palestinian Christians, they do not take into consideration the unique situation of the Christian minority under the sovereignty of Israeli Jews. Third, describing the encounters of Palestinian Christians and Messianic believers, he observes that most Messianic Jews are not sympathetic to the injustices that Palestinians face under Israeli occupation, and that some of them deny the existence of the Palestinian people. On the other hand, Palestinians do not show sufficient understanding of the complex Jewish identity.<sup>60</sup> Like the Messianic Jews, they dehumanize and demonize the other, claiming moral superiority.<sup>61</sup>

Munayer’s sociopolitical analyses reveal many of his theological insights. He asserts that all people are equally created in the image of God. “This realization counters the effects of dehumanization that we are subjected to in the circumstances of daily life in this country.”<sup>62</sup> He adds, “Being created in God’s image means that we act as He acts — that we interact with others and treat others as He would treat them — because we are His children.”<sup>63</sup> In other words, there are ontological and functional dimensions to being created in the image of God. Ontologically, we are his children; functionally, we act like him. The ontological dimension shapes the functional one. Simply put, our identity shapes our behavior, and the latter indicates our true identity.

Munayer not only asserts the first creation but also the new creation (redemption).<sup>64</sup> In relation to the first creation, the recognition that humanity is created in the image of God should counter dehumanizing misperceptions and demonizing attitudes.<sup>65</sup> In addition, reconciliation is part of the core identity of the new creation; it is the “heart of the Christian faith.”<sup>66</sup> Similar to Massad, he asserts that peace is inseparable from the redemption of the cross. He says, “The whole theme of the work of the Messiah on the cross was to break down the dividing wall of partition and to widen the tent to allow more people to come into the kingdom of God. It was a work of reconciliation through Jesus the Messiah.”<sup>67</sup> Munayer clarifies that the cross “models a response” for reconciling Arabs and Jews.<sup>68</sup> First, it transforms our identity from

sinners, victims, or oppressors into atoned and redeemed followers of Christ. Then it transforms how we interpret our reality and prompts us to view others in relation to creation and redemption. Christ's way of reconciliation requires practicing peace with all people. More specifically, it requires loving the neighbor and the enemy. It equally requires forgiveness, restitution, and a favorable sociopolitical atmosphere.<sup>69</sup> Munayer goes beyond Massad in asserting restitution and in highlighting the value of a favorable political situation. However, the need for a Palestinian biblical theology of justice is still left unmet.

### Reflections and Concluding Remarks

Understanding other cultures and religions helps us to perceive ourselves more clearly. It not only facilitates healthy acculturation in the midst of globalization but also equips us to present the multifaceted transcultural truth of the gospel effectively in pluralistic societies and in a world polarized by the violent clashes of civilizations. Thus, the following comments might be helpful not only to Palestinian Christians but also to their brothers and sisters around the globe.

First, Christians would benefit from dialoguing with each other. The different Palestinian Protestant responses sketched out in this paper seldom interact with each other. Sadly, they neither challenge nor enrich one another. Further, they have not produced any significant literature that reflects a discussion with non-Protestant Palestinians. In fact, the relationship between the two groups is tense and often disrespectful. However, Palestinian Protestants have the opportunity to initiate the reconciliation process with non-Protestants and to inspire them to be reconciled to each other. Their Christian disunity raises questions about their credibility before Muslims, Jews, and other inhabitants of Israel/Palestine.

Second, Palestinian Protestants must seek to engage Islam respectfully, truthfully, and lovingly. They can present their faith in relational ways. In other words, neither the apologies nor the Sulha theology is sufficient in itself. A doctrinal analysis of Islam should not be divorced from a sociopolitical analysis of Muslims in the Middle East. Palestinian Protestants need to see Islam as both a religion and a sociopolitical system. In fact, after Hamas (The Islamic Resistant Movement) won the Palestinian elections, separating the Islamic religion from its sociopolitical system in Israel/Palestine would be a fatal mistake. In short, some apologies help us to understand the doctrine of Islam while Sulha theology points out important sociopolitical dimensions. It seems to me that formulation of a historical Arabic theology would help both groups present their concerns. They could investigate the socio-historical and cultural backgrounds that have shaped the theology of the "church of the Arabs" since its inception.<sup>70</sup> Within this enterprise, they might clarify the relationship of Islamic doctrines to folk Islam and to coexistence between Muslims and Christians. Such investigation might help Christians better understand some of the major events that shape the identities of both Palestinian Christians and Muslims and their attitudes toward each other.<sup>71</sup> It would also help Palestinian Christians to be more effective in presenting an Arabic gospel to Muslim Arabs.<sup>72</sup> This could be a joy to the global church, which is struggling to address Islam effectively.<sup>73</sup>

Third, Palestinian Protestants would benefit from engaging Israeli Jews, and vice versa. Gladly, some of them are faithfully carrying the flag of reconciliation between

Arabs and Jews. Musalaha theology in particular rightly highlights the significant contributions of the theology of the cross and the doctrine of new creation in bringing down the walls of enmity. However, there are still many areas that can be advanced. Palestinian Protestants can help modern Israel to reinterpret its identity in light of the Old Testament. This enterprise entails formulation of a Palestinian theology of the Holocaust and an understanding of Biblical Israel's calling to be an agent of reconciliation and a light to the nations. The Palestinian theology of the Holocaust should help Palestinian Protestants not only to understand the complex identity of Israeli Jews but should also equip them to be more sympathetic and effective in their Christian-Jewish dialogue. Further, this dialogue should enhance their self-understanding. After all, the Holocaust has shaped the events and theologies that impact their own destiny and identity.

In addition, dialoguing with Israeli Jews might protect Palestinian Protestants, more specifically some Liberation theologians, from modern Palestinian Marcionism that denigrates the value of the Old Testament.<sup>74</sup> It would also demonstrate the diverse hermeneutical Israeli approaches to the Old Testament that disagree with Christian Zionist interpretations of the promise of land, the election of Israel, and its eschatological program.

Fourth, dialoguing and partnering with Western Christians would result in mutual benefits in several areas. Taking advantage of the Western freedom of speech, Palestinian Protestants can critically study the history of relationships between Muslims and Christians, providing a culturally sensitive approach to dialoguing with Muslims without compromising the truth of the gospel. They can employ their linguistic, cultural, and theological skills in presenting an accurate understanding of the challenges of Islam.

Further, Younan rightly points out the importance of the witness of the Holy Land. Cooperation between global and Palestinian Christians would bless the latter and help them to prepare all the components that would advocate a spiritually refreshing pilgrimage to the earthly homeland of Jesus of Nazareth. The study tours would encounter not only rich history and archeology but also an active church serving God in a multi-religious community. They would facilitate utilization of Israel/Palestine as a witness to salvation history, witnessing to many tourists and to Jewish and Muslim pilgrims about the ways of God and his salvific acts.

Finally, in light of a better understanding of the church of the Arabs, Western churches have a great opportunity to reach out effectively to their brothers and sisters in Israel/Palestine. They can become divine agents and participate in quenching the Middle Eastern thirst for divine justice, biblical love, security, and Shalom. Together with God's people in the Middle East, they can present to Muslims and Jews a captivating biblical form of Christianity, not the violent Christianity of the crusaders that hurts Muslims, or of the Holocaust that victimizes Jews, but that of the Christ.

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## Notes

1. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Genesis I* (trans. H. Freedman; 3d ed. London: Sconico, 1983), 187.
2. Palestinian Protestants are the Palestinian churches that trace their origin to the Protestant reformation. For understanding non-Protestant Palestinian Christians and some of their perspectives, see Michael Prior and William Taylor, eds., *Christians in the Holy Land* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1994). See also Norman A. Horner, *A Guide to Christian Churches in the Middle East: Present-Day Christianity in the Middle East and North Africa* (Elkhart, IN: Mission Focus, 1989), and Donald E. Wagner, *Dying in the Land of Promise: Palestine and Palestinian Christianity from Pentecost to 2000* (London: Melisende, 2001).
3. The stories of Shorrosh, Rantisi, and Raheb resemble the renowned story of Elias Chacour, a Melkite priest. For further details, see James C. Hefley and Marti Hefley, *The Liberated Palestinian: The Anis Shorrosh Story* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1975); Audeh G. Rantisi and Ralph K. Beebe, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: A Palestinian Christian in the Occupied West Bank* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990); Mitri Raheb, *Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004); Elias Chacour and David Hazard, *Blood Brothers* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Chosen Books, 2003); Elias Chacour and Mary E. Jensen, *We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli Who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2001). See also Alex Awad, *Palestinian Memories: The Story of a Palestinian Mother and Her People* (Bethlehem: Bethlehem Bible College, 2008).
4. For a brief Palestinian introduction to the Arab-Israeli conflict, see Alex Awad, *Through the Eyes of the Victims: The Story of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Bethlehem: Bethlehem Bible College, 2001).
5. The biography of Riah Abu El-Assal, an Anglican bishop of Jerusalem, does not follow this pattern. He weaves many personal stories with some helpful socio-political analyses. For further details, see Riah Abu El-Assal, *Caught in Between: The Story of an Arab Palestinian Christian Israeli* (London: SPCK, 1999).
6. Arab Christians precede Islam. For further details about Pre-Islamic Arab Christians, see J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (New York: Seabury, 1979), see also the general history of Arab Christians by Cragg. Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1991). Maaouf informs us that the label "Arab" is ancient and may be associated with some of the following Old Testament figures: Joktan, Ishmael, Keturah, Cush son of Ham, Job, Jethro, Jael, Jether,

Queen Sheba, the authors of Proverbs 30 and 31, and the Recabites. Tony Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel: The Unfolding of God's Prophetic Plan for Ishmael's Line* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 20–21. Interestingly, many pre-Islamic Arabic kingdoms had become Christian (for example the Nabateans, Ghassanids, and Lakhmids).

7. Sidney Harrison Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), vii. See also Sidney Harrison Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine* (Burlington: Ashgate, 1992); Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi, eds., *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990).

8. Munayer also addresses these concerns. Nevertheless, his main ministry focuses on reconciliation between Palestinians and Israeli Jews. Consequently, he is discussed under reconciliation theology. In his coauthored work, *New Creation Book for Muslims*, he aims at evangelizing Muslims in a style and language familiar to them. For further information, see Phillip E. Goble and Salim Munayer, *New Creation Book for Muslims* (Pasadena, Calif.: Mandate, 1989).

9. Hefley and Hefley, *The Liberated Palestinian: The Anis Shorrosh Story*, 16–17.

10. Anis Shorrosh, *Jesus, Prophecy & Middle East* (Daphne, AL: Anis Shorrosh Evangelistic Association, 1979), 112–113.

11. Anis Shorrosh, *Islam Revealed: A Christian Arab's View of Islam* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1988); Anis Shorrosh, *The True Furqan* (3rd ed.; Duncanville, TX: World Wide Printing, 2002); Anis Shorrosh, *Islam: A threat or a Challenge* (Fairhope, AL: Nall, 2004).

12. Sura 17:88.

13. Sura 11:13.

14. Sura 2:23. For further details, see the new translation of the Quran by Haleem. M. A. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 6, 137, 180.

15. In addition to the seventy seven Suras, it includes the opening prayer and an epilogue.

16. Imad N. Shehadeh, "Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?," *BSac 161* (2004): 14.

17. Shehadeh's dissertation has been the foundation for several insights found in these articles. Imad N. Shehadeh, "A Comparison and a Contrast between the Prologue of John's Gospel and Qur'anic Surah 5" (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990).

18. Shehadeh, "Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?," 16.

19. *Ibid.*, 26.

20. Imad N. Shehadeh, "The Predicament of Islamic Monotheism," *BSac 161* (2004): 142.

21. *Ibid.*, 162.

22. Imad N. Shehadeh, "Reasons for Islam's Rejection of Biblical Christology," *BSac 161* (2004): 288; see also Imad N. Shehadeh, "Additional Reasons for Islam's Rejection of Biblical Christology," *BSac 161* (2004): 412.

23. For further details, see Imad N. Shehadeh, "Ishmael in Relation to the Promises of Abraham" (Th.M. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1986); Shorrosh, *Jesus, Prophecy & Middle East*.

24. Shorrosh, *Jesus, Prophecy & Middle East*, 72. Sakhnini, another Palestinian leader, accepts the state of Israel as the fulfillment of prophecy but at the same time asserts the importance of justice. Fouad Sakhnini, "The Gospel and Arab Thinking," in *Prophecy in the Making: Messages Prepared for Jerusalem Conference on Biblical Prophecy* (ed. Carl Henry; Carol Stream: Creation House, 1971), 139–140. On the other hand, Bishara Awad sees depriving Palestinians from the land of their ancestors as a "crime against God and humanity." Bishara Awad, "Speaking from the Heart: The Palestinians and the Land of Their Fathers," in *The Bible and the Land* (ed. Lisa Loden, Peter Walker, and Michael Wood; Jerusalem: Musalaha, 2000), 184–185.

25. Cf. Naim Stifan Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, and Maurine Tobin, *Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics and the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London: Melisende, 2005); Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, and Maurine Tobin, *The Forgotten Faithful* (Jerusalem: Sabeel, 2007).
26. Yousif Odeh, *Almajeea Althani Lilmassih* (Kufr Yassif: Odeh, 2003).
27. Yohanna Katanacho, "Christ is the Owner of Haaretz," *CSR* 34 (2005): 425–441. See also Shukri Habibi, *Man Hua Sh 'b Allah?* (Beirut: Nafir, 2008).
28. Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989), 6.
29. Bryson Arthur, "The Hermeneutics of the Cross: A Treatment and Development of Naim Ateek's Hermeneutical Key," in *Unpublished Essay* (Galilee: Mar Elias Educational Institutions, 2002), 1.
30. Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, 159.
31. *Ibid.*, 6.
32. *Ibid.*, 80.
33. *Ibid.*, 82.
34. *Ibid.*, 93.
35. Several Palestinians associate themselves with the ancient inhabitants of Palestine. Unfortunately, I am not aware of any convincing studies that demonstrate this connection. In fact, Sabella points out that some Palestinians are originally from the Caucasus' mountains, North Africa, sub-Saharan African, central Europe, Armenia, Ethiopia, Egypt, and other places. Bernard Sabella, "Religious and Ethnic Communities," in *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians* (ed. Philip Mattar; New York: Facts on File, 2000), 346–348.
36. Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, 82.
37. *Ibid.*, 115–116.
38. Mitri Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian* (trans. Ruth Gritsch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 1–52.
39. *Ibid.*, 57–58.
40. *Ibid.*, 59–64.
41. For a short description of Sulha in a Palestinian context, see Abu El-Assal, *Caught in Between: The Story of an Arab Palestinian Christian Israeli*, 119–124.
42. *Ibid.*; Munib Younan and Frederick M. Strickert, *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003). See also Mansour who presents a positive picture of Palestinian Christian-Muslim relations and share some of the characteristics of this school of thought. Atallah Mansour, *Narrow Gate Churches: The Christian Presence in the Holy Land Under Muslim and Jewish Rule* (Pasadena, Calif.: Hope, 2004).
43. Abu El-Assal, *Caught in Between: The Story of an Arab Palestinian Christian Israeli*, 57.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, 126.
46. Younan and Strickert, *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and the World*, 4–5.
47. *Ibid.*, 42.
48. *Ibid.*, 89, 113.
49. *Ibid.*, 133.
50. *Ibid.*, 95.
51. Hassan bin Talal, *Christianity in the Arab World* (London: Arabesque, 1995).
52. Hanna Massad, "The Theological Foundation for Reconciliation Between the Palestinian Christians and the Messianic Jews" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2000), 210.
53. *Ibid.*, 212.
54. *Ibid.*, 221.
55. *Ibid.*, 168.
56. *Ibid.*, 273–274.



57. Salim Munayer, "Relations Between Religions in Historic Palestine and the Future Prospects: Christians and Jews," in *Christians in the Holy Land* (ed. Michael Prior and William Taylor; London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1995), 147.

58. Salim Munayer, "The Ethnic Identity of Palestinian Arab Christian Adolescents in Israel" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales, 2000), 110.

59. Munayer, "Relations Between Religions in Historic Palestine and the Future Prospects: Christians and Jews," 147.

60. Salim Munayer, "Reconciliation from a Palestinian Point of View and the Challenge to the Jewish Believers," in *Seeking and Pursuing Peace: The Process, the Pain, and the Product* (ed. Salim Munayer; Jerusalem: Musalaha, 1998), 103–106.

61. Salim Munayer, "On the Road to Reconciliation," *Mishkan 35* (2001): 34–36. See also Salim Munayer, "Who Hates More? Who Is More Evil?," in *In the Footsteps of Our Father Abraham* (ed. Salim Munayer; Jerusalem: Musalaha, 2002), 105.

62. Salim Munayer, "What is Peace?," in *Seeking and Pursuing Peace: The Process, the Pain, and the Product* (ed. Salim Munayer; Jerusalem: Musalaha, 1998), 79–80.

63. *Ibid.*, 80.

64. Munayer has also used the concept of new creation in evangelizing Muslims. For further details, see Goble and Munayer, *New Creation Book for Muslims*.

65. Munayer, "On the Road to Reconciliation," 36.

66. Munayer, "Reconciliation from a Palestinian Point of View and the Challenge to the Jewish Believers," 103.

67. Munayer, "What is Peace?," 71.

68. Salim Munayer, *Reconciliation and the Cross* (Jerusalem: Musalaha; accessed January 16, 2006); available from [www.musalaha.org/articles/CR.htm](http://www.musalaha.org/articles/CR.htm).

69. Munayer, "Reconciliation from a Palestinian Point of View and the Challenge to the Jewish Believers," 105–106.

70. For further information about the church of the Arabs, see Riad Jarjour, "The Future of Christians in the Arab World," in *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?* (Betty Jane Bailey and J. Martin Bailey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 20–21.

71. Some of the major turning points in the relationship of Muslims and Christians in Israel/Palestine came about as a result of the advance of Islam to the Middle East, the agreement between Umar ibn al-Khatib and Sophronius the Patriarch of Jerusalem (560–638 A.D.), the persecution of Christians during the rule of Abu Ali Mansur al-Hakim (996–1021 A.D.), the Crusades, the ministries of Francis of Assisi and Raymond Lull, the Turkish rule, the Protestant missionary movements, and the Christian Zionist movements.

72. For a general understanding of evangelistic and church planting activities in Israel/Palestine, see Ray G. Register, *Back to Jerusalem: Church Planting Movements in the Holy Land* (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress, 2000).

73. The recent Muhammad cartoons controversy testifies to this struggle. The public controversy began on September 30, 2005, after a Danish newspaper (Jyllands-Posten) published cartoons depicting the prophet of Islam in provocative ways. However, the roots of this controversy had been present for a long time and unfortunately were ignored by most of the followers of Christ in the West.

74. Register, *Back to Jerusalem: Church Planting Movements in the Holy Land*, 46–50.



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