Viewpoints: **JAV1325**

# THE LITTLE-KNOWN PLIGHT AND IMPORTANT CAUSE OF THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN

by Mourice Mrabe

This article first appeared in the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 32, number 5 (2009). For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: http://www.equip.org

In 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank, I was only five years of age. As the youngest in a Christian family of twelve, I can still remember my mother grabbing my hand and leading me to the safety of our home in charming Ramallah. Belonging to the historic Arab Christian community in Palestine, my family itself came originally from Lydda (near Tel Aviv). Our family's history was rooted in Palestinian tradition for as long we were able to trace it back, and Lydda was the home of my grandfathers. But, as a result of the 1948 war, in which the Jewish forces took over most of Palestine, leaving only twenty percent of the land for the Arab majority, and displacing at least 750,000 from their homes and villages, we ended up, with many others, as refugees in the West Bank. Arab Christians of Palestine endured the same fate as Arab Muslims in this war.

Yet, taking refuge in Ramallah was not good enough, as the West Bank, and with it Ramallah, came under Israeli occupation. To add to the challenge, one of my brothers was in Jordan looking for work at that time and was not allowed to come back home. So, my family worked relentlessly trying to get him reunited with us in Ramallah, but the Israeli occupation authority rejected every application we submitted on his behalf. As a result, my brother ended up in Lebanon where he worked as a Journalist, and he consequently served some time in prison for criticizing the Lebanese government. After the beginning of the civil war in Lebanon in 1975 we didn't hear much of him; we had no idea what happened to him.

Observing the unfolding events in Palestine, my father, like many Christians, saw it as the fulfilling of biblical prophecies. So, when Israel bombed the PLO headquarters in Tunisia on October 2, 1985, my father thought of Israel's retaliation power as another proof for these prophecies. Sadly, three days later, we received the news that my brother was among those killed in the attack. My brother apparently had joined the PLO after suffering the loss of his homeland, offering his intellectual services. I am not sure how my father felt afterwards, but I vaguely remember him saying that my brother must

have influenced the PLO towards peace. And I kept hold of that idea, that my brother gave his life, not only for his homeland, but also for peace.

Palestinian Christians do suffer for being Christians; they also suffer for being Arabs. Yet, in spite of their sufferings, King Hussein once said that Arab Christians are the glue of the Middle East—no peace would be possible without their contribution. But, the number of Arab Christians in Palestine has dwindled significantly during the past century, and even more in the past few decades. Still, many Christians in the US seem to be ignorant or indifferent about the need to support their brothers and sisters in Palestine. One preacher reportedly went as far as describing Arab Christians as "Christians with a Muslim mind," apparently attempting to reduce the significance of their existence, or to disqualify their much-needed, balanced view of the ongoing conflict between Arabs and Jews.

Indeed, many Christians in the US are encouraged to think that Israel's presence can be a substitute for the Christian presence in that troubled part of the world. Nothing could be further from the truth. *National Geographic*, in its June 2009 issue, published an article that underscored the indispensible role of the Arab Christian minority in the Holy Land. As Palestinian Christians, we have been privileged with both a long history and a unique identity in Christ; we also have our own unique mission: through our living Christian witness we strive to bring individuals closer to God; and consequently, we give reason and hope for equality and reconciliation between the different groups in Israel/Palestine.

*—Mourice Mrabe*

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