

**Address to the Palestinian Bible College Conference
March 16, 2010**

The Ethical Responsibility of the American Church towards Palestinian Christians

The topic that I was asked to address is a very important subject. It is the ethical responsibility of the American Evangelical church towards Palestinian Christians.

I believe the first thing that the church in the United States needs do in living out this mission is to first and foremost declare the gospel of Jesus Christ. That sounds simple, but I don't think the church has been declaring the whole gospel of Jesus Christ. Instead, it has been preaching a very individualistic gospel and it has not declared the gospel that Jesus wanted it to declare.

When Jesus came, He declared that "the Kingdom of God is at hand! The Kingdom of God is at hand! The Kingdom of God is at hand!" The parables of Jesus were about the Kingdom. When He taught His disciples to pray, He taught them to pray for the Kingdom to "come on earth as it is in Heaven." The emphasis must be put on the words "on earth"! His gospel is not simply pie in the sky when people die.

Understand that I am at that point in my life where it is good to know that there is a Heaven for those who trust in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, but having said that I have to add that Jesus came into the world not only to get people into Heaven when they die, but to declare a Kingdom that He wanted to see established here on earth—a Kingdom marked with justice and love.

I didn't get this message of the Kingdom when I was growing up. In my Baptist church in Philadelphia, salvation meant only one thing: getting ready for the next world. When I was 12 years old, I remember sitting in a pew as my minister raised his voice and looked straight at me

from the pulpit and said, “Are you ready to die?” I was only 12 years old! I’m glad that there is a Heaven and that there is a Christ who through Calvary gets me there, but at 12 I just wanted a little more time to get ready.

Presently, I belong to an African-American church in Philadelphia and it is a church that brilliantly handles the problem of dying. I remember the first time I was present at an African-American funeral. Being Italian, I had only been to Italian funerals before that, and they were quite different. We Italians scream and yell at funerals...and I have a feeling that Palestinians may act just the same way that we do. Consequently, going to an African-American funeral was mind boggling because at the service everyone seemed to be happy.

The minister spoke on life after death, and he made it sound so wonderful that halfway through his message, I wished that I was dead! Then he came down from the pulpit and went to where the family of the deceased was seated and spoke to them words of comfort, and his words were beautiful.

The last thing he did was that he went over to the open casket and for the last 20 minutes of the service, he preached to the corpse. He yelled, “Clarence! Clarence!” And he spoke with such enthusiasm and authority that I would not have been surprised had there been an answer. He said, “Clarence, there are a lot of things we should have said to you and we didn’t get to say them because you got away too quickly. Well, I’m going to say them now.” Then he went through a litany of beautiful, wonderful things that Clarence had done for people, thanking him over and over again for all the good that he had done.

When he had finished his sermon, this pastor simply shouted, “Well! That’s it, Clarence! There’s nothing more to say. And when there’s nothing more to say, there is only one thing to

say, Good night, Clarence! Good night!” Then he grabbed the lid of the casket and slammed it shut.

Shock waves went over the congregation and when he lifted his head you could see that there was a smile on his face and, speaking to the casket, he went on to say, “Good night, Clarence! Good night, Clarence! ‘Cause I KNOW—I KNOW—THAT GOD IS GOING TO GIVE YOU A GOOD MORNING!” With that, the choir stood and started to sing “On that Great Getting Up Morning, We Shall Rise, We Shall Rise.” The entire congregation jumped to its feet. I myself was hugging people and dancing in the aisles. It was then that I knew that I was in the right church—a church that could take death and turn it into a celebration. That is the church of Jesus Christ.

I wanted to say all of this because I do not want to minimize the individualistic salvation that gets us into Heaven when we die, but I want to go on to say that the main thrust of Jesus’ message is about a Kingdom here in this world where love and justice prevail.

Whenever my sociology students ask, “Can you concretize that, Professor? Can you give us specifics?” I always answer yes, and then I give them a variety of passages of Scripture, but the one I rely on most is in Isaiah 65, starting at verse 17. It reads that the Kingdom of God will be like this: “No more shall children die in infancy!” Every day, 25,000 children die of starvation or diseases related to malnutrition. This passage is telling us that in the Kingdom that will no longer be the case.

In the same chapter we read that all people will live out their lives in health and wellbeing. It goes on to say that people will build houses and that they themselves will get to live in them and not others. I was driven around Bethlehem and Jerusalem yesterday and I saw many houses that

people had built for themselves, but other people were living in them. But the good news is that when the Kingdom becomes a historical reality as described in Isaiah 65, this will no longer be the case.

These verses in Isaiah 65 go on to say that when the Kingdom comes on earth as it is in Heaven, everyone will have a job in the vineyard and each person will get the benefits of his or her labor and not somebody else. This passage says that “children will not be born to calamity.” For the environmentalist, there is the good news that “neither shall they hurt the earth anymore.”

This is a wonderful passage. It is very concrete. It specifies economic wellbeing, decent housing, good jobs, people living out their lives in health and wellbeing.

When we preach the gospel in the American church, we need to preach a holistic salvation that leaves no room for people who are not enjoying the benefits of the Kingdom. It is our duty to make the American church aware of the fact that not only here in Palestine, but around the world, things must change so that God’s will will be done in bringing love and justice into their lives. Jesus wants to change this world from what it is into what He wants it to be. I can’t emphasize that strongly enough. The Bible says, “For God so loved the world...” He wants justice to prevail in His world and I think that in addressing the Palestinian situation this fact may be ignored because the Evangelical church does not put sufficient emphasis on people living in the Kingdom in the here and now. Our responsibility is to call Christians into a movement that makes justice and love realities in the lives of all peoples of the world.

The second thing that we must do is to challenge the kind of nationalism that approves of American foreign policy without raising questions. There is a tendency for nationalism to

become a form of idolatry so that any who question our nation's policies are treated as though they are questioning what God has dictated.

Within American Christianity, there is a tendency towards what Emil Durkheim, the famous French sociologist, called "totemism." As Durkheim surveyed societies around the world, he asked himself a very simple question: "Why is it that everywhere people believe in God? The way in which God is defined is different in each and every society. Each societal system seems to come up with its own concept of God. Why is this so?"

In order to answer this question, he specifically studied a group of aboriginal people living in the interior of Australia. He wanted to observe them going through the process of creating their culture—and with it creating their concept of God. He noted the following:

Stage One—this group of aboriginal people, over a period of time, developed certain traits and characteristics that made them distinct. Certainly, when I am here with the Palestinian people, I observe a people who have a distinct culture and a distinct set of values that make them distinct from the traits and values of people in the Israeli culture.

Stage Two—He observed that, little by little, the people in this aboriginal society began to identify with an animal that in some way symbolized for them the traits of their tribe. Durkheim calls such an animal a "totem." He saw an innate tendency for people in many societal systems to identify their social traits with animals. A given tribe may say that its people are as strong as an ox. Another tribe may consider its people wise as owls. Still another, swift as a deer, and still another, sly as a fox.

Stage Three—Little by little, Durkheim observed that the people came to worship the animal and it is here that Durkheim springs his intellectual trap that troubles many Christian sociology students. He argues that if people end up worshipping an animal which is nothing more than a collective representation of their own traits and values, they are really worshipping themselves.

Durkheim's conclusion is a simple one. "Religion," he says, "is nothing more than a process wherein people end up worshipping a god that is little more than an incarnation of their own traits

and values.” Do not be shocked at this for it is exactly what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1 when he said:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the Immortal God for images resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles...They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.—Romans 1:19-25

In the words of George Bernard Shaw, “God created us in His image—and we decided to return the favor!”

You may be saying that God is not a totemistic deity in American Christianity, but I have to tell you that as I go across America, I hear Jesus being described from the pulpit and He comes across as a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Republican. We Americans have created God in our own image.

The problem with a totemistic deity is that when the people establish a totemistic deity, which I contend is common the United States, they never question their nation’s policies because they view the policies of their nation as having come from God. When America went to war with Iraq, we Evangelicals waved our flags more than any other group. We were sure that God was on *our* side. After all, why shouldn’t He be? We have made Him into an American and He stands for all that we stand for. Our religious loyalty to our government kept us from facing the realities of the Iraq war. There were 1,500,000 Christians in Iraq before that war broke out. Many of us tried to yell and scream that the invasion of Iraq would set back Christian missionary work in the Muslim world a thousand years, but the American church was not about to listen.

Today, there are less than 700,000 Christians in Iraq. Christians have fled that country. They are persecuted for the first time. Their churches are being burned down in Baghdad.

Nevertheless, Christians refuse to question a “born-again” president.

When American policy is drawn up in respect to Palestine and Israel, again American church people raise very few questions. While some liberal denominations have had leaders who have raised protests against what has been happening in Palestine with illegal settlements, Evangelical churches, led by some prominent television evangelists, have acted as though the Palestinian people have no right to any of the land that was designated by the UN Resolution 242 as belonging to the Palestinian people. We Evangelicals trusted our policy makers in respect to the Israeli-Palestinian problems as seeing the Palestinians as having little, if any, rights to live in the Holy Land. The time has come for American Christians, and the Evangelical community especially, to critique our policies in the Middle East from a biblical justice perspective.

The third thing we must do is to condemn racism, especially racism against Arab peoples. We American Evangelicals have allowed an increasing animosity to be generated towards people of Arab descent. There are great numbers of Evangelical Christians who don't even know that there are such persons as Arab Christians. Since 9-11, this animosity has increased dramatically. We have demonized Arab peoples on Christian radio shows and on certain Christian television programs.

Eric Hoffer, in his book, *The True Believer*, a book that has much insight for understanding what is going on in our day and age, said clearly, “A movement can exist without a god, but never without a devil. For a movement to exist, there always has to be a devil that must be destroyed.” Sadly, there are many religious leaders in the United States that have organized movements that

deem the Arab peoples living in Palestine in such demonic terms. There was a time when it was the Communists whom we Evangelicals deemed as the devil, but increasingly our animosity has shifted toward the Arab peoples, and, if there is an awareness that there are Christian Palestinians, there is a sense that, while they may be a milder form of the threatening Arabs, they do not deserve much consideration. Sadly, that is the case. It is the task of Christians to declare, in accordance with Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female—and that all are one in Christ Jesus.

As we attack racism toward the Arab peoples, we must simultaneously attack the racism that is so evident in anti-Semitism. I believe that the Zionists movement would not have existed without this prejudice. Christians have been largely responsible for the nurturing of this anti-Semitism, starting way back in the second century with the earliest church fathers such as Origen and Chrysostom. The latter wrote, “All Jews are murderers and racists. They are filthy people and their synagogues are the dwelling places of Satan and houses of prostitution.” We Christians have had a history of anti-Semitism down through the years, and wherever the Jews have gone they have found themselves oppressed and beaten down. Whenever they trusted in people, in the end that trust was betrayed. The latest, of course, as you all know, was in Germany, where they were fully integrated into the German society as scientists, musicians and academicians. They held high positions throughout society and then one day an evil man with a mustache stood up and yelled hatred towards our Jewish brothers and sisters, and the German people turned on their own neighbors. The Jews were shocked that this could happen. They couldn’t believe what was taking place. No wonder Herzl and Weizmann thought that the only hope for Jews to live in safety and wellbeing was to have a nation of their own.

We Christians always talk about living together as brothers and sisters with people of other religions. I have heard that kind of talk right here in Bethlehem. The Jewish people will often smile cynically at this talk because down deep inside they are convinced that they can't live as brothers and sisters with other peoples because, sooner or later, those other peoples will turn against them. The Church has a lot of repenting to do in respect to anti-Semitism, and not simply because of what happened back there and then. We all know that anti-Semitism is still alive and well and the Church does not speak out very much about this.

If the Jewish community that you live with looks with suspicion on non-Jews, and feels that they have to stand against us and at times to push against us to create room for themselves, we have to understand why they have these attitudes. When they bring in more and more Jewish people from other countries to build up their population so as to strengthen themselves as a nation, and when they arm themselves to the teeth and become the fourth greatest military force in the world, we have to understand the anxieties that give birth to these tendencies. Remember, in the Middle Ages Jewish people found themselves driven out of certain countries, and watched as the Talmud and the Mishna was burned before their eyes. When the crusades took place, Christians not only marched down to the Holy Land to attack Muslims, but on the way the Crusaders marched down the Rhine and killed every Jew in sight.

If there are any people on the face of the earth that should stand up against anti-Semitism, it should be the Christians. We worship a God who came into the world incarnated in a Semitic form.

I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in Philadelphia and was with Jewish people as the ugly stories filtered back from Auschwitz and Dachau. In my elementary school there were 3,000

students and only four of us were not Jewish, so Jewish people were very familiar to me. They were fun to be with and they were bright. Actually, my father moved our family out of an Italian neighborhood into a Jewish neighborhood because he wanted his son to take school seriously. The reality is that Jewish people have had a great tradition in scholarship and they deserve our respect, and we must fight against prejudices that diminish their dignity as persons.

Having declared opposition to the anti-Semitism directed at Jewish people, I now turn to the responsibility of American Christians to stand up against the anti-Semitism directed towards Arab peoples. And when it does not do so, the American Church should be ashamed of itself. The stereotyping of Arab people has increased dramatically since 9-11. The African-American community was furious when people were being stereotyped on the basis of race, but these same people are not saying much about the racial profiling of Arab peoples. In actuality, my African-American brothers and sisters are often hoping that there will be more stereotyping of Arabs so that they might be scrutinized in unusual ways so as to make the rest of us feel safer on airplanes. They put their own security, as do the rest of us, above the rights of Arab peoples to be treated as equals. Benjamin Franklin once said, "When a nation deems its security more important than rights, it will end up with neither." Thus, in the name of security, we must fight against any attempt to deny Arab peoples the rights to which they are due as members of the human race. In the name of security, anti-Arab attitudes have reached a fevered pitch in the United States, and the Church has not stood against this. I have not heard of a single sermon being preached against the demonization of Arab peoples.

Right now, we must deal with things that are going on right here in Palestine. For if judgment is to begin, it must begin here. Please understand that it is the responsibility of Palestinian Christians to stand up against some of the things that are being taught in the schools in the Gaza

Strip. You cannot teach boys and girls in classrooms a view of history and an attitude towards Jewish people that nurtures hate. The Churches here in Bethlehem must preach love for the Jewish people or they will have no legitimacy when they raise questions about the hatred that is often nurtured toward Arab peoples in some Israeli schools. “Let judgment begin in the household of God,” says the scripture. Let Palestinian Christians set their own house in order against all forms of prejudice and discrimination. Only then will our churches have legitimacy when we start talking about the prejudices being directed towards Arab peoples that are often propagated within the Jewish community.

I saw a film last night and you saw it, too. We saw what was happening in Hebron as young Jewish teenagers were yelling hatred towards Palestinians and calling for death to the Arabs. They were just young people in their teens, and we have to ask where did they get this hatred? Where did they get this evil? Where was this ugliness nurtured? We need to say to the Israeli government and to its community leaders that this attitude towards Arabs has to be condemned and extinguished. We have to ask those in the Knesset, “Are you dealing with the hatred that is being nurtured towards Arab peoples among the youth? Is there any attempt to bring an end to this from those who sit in the Knesset? Is there no understanding that there can be no peace between Palestinians and Israelis until hatred that is being nurtured on both sides of the wall that separates Jews and Palestinians is extinguished?”

There needs to be something akin to the Reconciliation Council that has worked so well in South Africa. Not only has the Reconciliation Council worked in Africa, but such councils have already been set up to deal with the evils and terrorist acts that have existed on both sides of the Protestant/Catholic divide in Northern Ireland.

I was walking though O'Hare Airport in Chicago when I ran into Peter Arnett, a one-time broadcaster on the CNN Network. We knew each other well and I called out, "Peter! Do you have any good stories to share with me?" He knows that I am a preacher, and I let him know that I was running out of stories.

He said, "Yeah, I do! I was in the West Bank, gathering a story in a small town, when a bomb went off and it blew people all over the place. Israeli troops moved in quickly and fenced off the whole area and wouldn't let anybody in or out. In the midst of these shocking circumstances, a man came running up to me with a bloody little girl and said, 'Mister, she is going to die if I don't get her to the hospital and the Israeli troops won't let me out of here. You're press, you can get through the lines.'"

Peter went on to say, "At great risk, I put the man and the little girl in the back seat of my car, covered them with a blanket and was able to get them through the checkpoint. As I was hustling as fast as I could to the hospital in Tel Aviv, I could hear the man holding the little girl in his arms and crying and saying, 'Could you go faster? Could you go faster? She's going to die! She's going to die! Please go faster!' I kept going as fast as I could, but it seemed like forever before we got to the hospital. We rushed into the emergency room where doctors took the child from us and took her in for care in the operating room. The man and I sat on a bench, completely dissipated, drained of all energy. Then the doctor came out of the room, looked at the man, and said, 'I'm sorry. She's gone.'

"The man started to cry," Peter said. "I put my arm around him and said, 'I have no children. I can't tell you what to do or what to feel. I don't know what it's like to lose a daughter.' The man stood up and exclaimed, 'Daughter? That Palestinian girl is not my daughter. I am an

Israeli settler. She's not *my* daughter!' Then the man stopped and said, 'But maybe the time has come for us to treat every child, whether that child is Israeli or Arab, as a son or a daughter.'"

That's the beginning of the end of the troubles that exist between the two peoples. We must sense the common heritage as members of the human race. Anti-Semitism must be attacked on both sides of the wall that separates the peoples that live in the Holy Land.

The fourth thing that we must do is to challenge dangerous theologies that create dangerous ideologies. I know that some of us here are into dispensational theology—a theology that was developed by John Nelson Darby. It was his purpose to come up with an interpretation of scripture that would solve what he believed was an essential problem for him and his followers. He pointed out that the prophecies in the Hebrew Bible concerning the destiny of the Jewish people had never been fulfilled. They had not become the great nation that would be a blessing to all humanity. Nor had they achieved the greatness that would make them the paragon of all nations. In order for those prophecies to be fulfilled, contended this 19th-century Anglican theologian, the Jews would have to return to the Holy Land and they would have their own government and rule as a mighty people.

It is important to note that up until John Nelson Darby not a single theologian had ever had anything like dispensationalism in mind. None of them talked about "the Rapture," a crucial part of dispensational theology. If you go to Calvin or Luther or Zwingli, you won't find anything about dispensationalism or the rapture in their writings. If you are Catholic and go to St. Thomas Aquinas or Augustine, you won't find that they had anything to say about this. It is almost as though this theology came out of nowhere.

As strange as this Johnny-come-lately theology may be, it has become a dominant way of thinking within Evangelical Christianity. It was made prevalent through the use of the Scofield Reference Bible published in the early part of the 20th century. Nearly everyone I knew in the Evangelical community had come to possess one of these reference Bibles. I certainly did. Most of we Evangelicals became convinced that the notes at the bottom of the page were just as inspired by the Holy Spirit as the text at the top of the page. Bible colleges grew up in which the primary curriculum was to promote dispensational theology, and they produced a whole generation of preachers who gave dispensational theology an impressive presence throughout the country.

If you were to go into any church and ask the congregation this simple question, “How many of you believe in a rapture in which all of God’s people would be caught up in the air, leaving reprobates behind to fall under the judgment of God? you would find almost a unanimous yes from the people.

Dispensationalism coming from John Nelson Darby has led an array of preachers to make predictions about exactly when Jesus would return. The real danger is that one of the doctrines connected with dispensationalism makes it clear that the Jewish people must be in total possession of the Holy Land prior to Christ’s return. The implications of this doctrine are all too clear. It means that all Arab peoples who presently live in the Holy Land either must leave or be the victims of some kind of genocide. I have had conversations with dispensationalists who actually see justification in the latter option.

The eschatology of the dispensationalist theologians discourages any kind of social action that would promote God’s justice in the world. It is commonly assumed among them that the world

will continue to get worse and worse and worse until such time that Christ will return to interrupt this social disintegration with what the dispensationalists call the rapture.

It is a good idea to get our eschatology from Jesus rather than from John Nelson Darby. In Matthew 13, we read of a kind of rapture that is diametrically opposed to the one described by dispensationalists. Instead of godly people being caught up from the earth, leaving unrepentant sinners behind, Jesus tells us in Matthew 13:41 that there is another kind of rapture that is diametrically opposed to the one described by Darby. In the scriptures we read the following:

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!—
Matthew 13:41-43

In that same chapter, Jesus lays out His view of history when He declares that the Son of Man goes out into a field and sows good seed, and the evil one comes and sows weeds. Jesus goes on to say that the wheat and the weeds grow up alongside each other until the end—the eschaton. At that time, the separation of the wheat from the weeds shall take place and the weeds shall be destroyed. (Matthew 13:36-40) Jesus makes it clear that, in agreement with the dispensationalists, the Kingdom of evil does grow stronger and stronger every day, but He also declares very clearly that simultaneous with the kingdom of evil is the growth of the Kingdom of God. That's what this parable is all about. He declares that as we approach the end times, evil will be on the increase, but the Kingdom of God will also be on the increase, and the end of history will not be the abolition of the Kingdom, but the fulfillment of God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

The Kingdom of God is growing and the church of Jesus Christ has never been more alive than it is today. This may not be the case in the United States, but if you go to Latin America or Asia or Africa, you will see in such places that the church is alive and blooming. They add 50,000 new people to the church by baptism in Africa every single week. You all know the great stories of the growth of the church in China. And in Latin America, Evangelical Christianity is expanding in a way that defies imagination. The nation of Honduras is now more Evangelical than it is Roman Catholic and there are more people attending Evangelical churches on Sunday morning in Brazil than are attending Roman Catholic churches. The two kingdoms are growing up alongside each other, but we know how it's going to end...WE WIN!!!

T.S. Eliot had a way with words, and in his book, *The Wasteland*, he tells us that the way the world will end will not be with a bang, but with a whimper. He was wrong! The way the world will end is that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and He shall reign forever and ever. Hallelujah, hallelujah! The future belongs to God and to God's people, and His Kingdom will come.

Our dispensationalist friends come back at us by pointing to Genesis 15 and declaring that this scripture lends support to the claim that the Holy Land belongs exclusively to the Jews. After all, they say, isn't the land promised to the seed of Abraham? I suppose I concur with them on that, but they have to be aware of the fact that the Arab peoples are also of the seed of Abraham. If you go to the book of Genesis, you will find that before Isaac ever was born, Abraham had a child from Hagar. His name was Ishmael, and though Sarah required Abraham to drive Hagar and Ishmael into the desert, Abraham never ceased acknowledging Ishmael as his seed. You can turn to the scriptures and find that upon Abraham's death he calls for his two sons, and Isaac and Ishmael together—the acknowledged seed of Abraham—lay their father in the grave. In short,

any claim that would make Genesis 15 legitimation for giving the Holy Land exclusively to the Jews has to be called into question with a careful examination of scripture, in that both Jews and Arabs are descendents of Abraham.

One of the things that I have always had trouble with when I was confronted with dispensationalist theology is the fact that if John Nelson Darby was right then the Apostle Paul was wrong and so is Jesus. Paul declares that the church in the first century should be waiting and watching for Christ's return. () According to Darby, what Paul was giving was a false alarm. If Paul had known what Darby claimed to know, then he would have recognized that Jesus could not return for a couple thousand years—until the Jews were back in the Holy Land and the temple was rebuilt. Furthermore, Jesus tells His disciples that all the things that needed to be fulfilled would be fulfilled before the generation of the disciples would pass away. () Finally, when the Christians in the early church called out, “Maranatha, Maranatha!—Come quickly, Lord!” as it says in the book of Revelation, the Lord should have said, “Don't you realize that 200 years must elapse before I can possibly come back? There are seven dispensations and seven eras of the church that must pass before I can return.”

To all of those dispensationalists who see only the disintegration of morality and spiritual wellbeing here on the planet, I have to ask if they are ignoring the facts such as the following:

- 25 years ago, 80 percent of the population was illiterate. Today it's only 20 percent.
- 25 years ago, one out of every six persons on the planet had no access to clean drinking water. Today it is one out of twelve. That means there has been a 100 percent improvement.

And these changes that I am describing have largely been the result of the work of church people around the world. I used to be able to say that in the last 24 hours 45,000 children died of either starvation or diseases related to malnutrition. I can't say that anymore because the figure is now down to 25,000. While that still is a horrendous number of children dying, it is a far different figure from the 45,000 that I talked about earlier.

God is at work in the world and, as it says in Ephesians 1, Christ will one day bring into subjection to Himself all principalities, all powers, all dominions, and all thrones—*through the Church*. Please note that the Church becomes the primary instrument of God through which change takes place in the world.

The good news is that when Jesus returns the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our God, and that's why I raise some questions about some of the new praise music. To sing, "Our God reigns" may be a mistake. It would be better if we said, "Jesus *shall* reign." Right now, God's will is not done on earth as it is in heaven, but one day it shall be. One day, He shall come and join the people of God and together they will complete the good work that He had been accomplishing through them. When the trumpet sounds, the completion of His work will be actualized. Some of the new praise music of the church may be mistaken. For instance, when we sing "Our God reigns," I believe it would be better if we resorted to the old hymn that said "Jesus *shall* reign." The Kingdom is not yet, but it will be. We live in anticipation. God calls us to participate with Him in changing the world that is into the world that ought to be, and we know that with His coming our hopes and dreams for the world that ought to be as described in scripture will be made a reality.

We also need to be truth tellers! The American church needs to be told that, in the war of 1948 320 Palestinian villages were destroyed and, since that time, more villages have obliterated. In many cases, people were ushered out of their homes at gunpoint. One of the villages that was destroyed has become a battle cry among Palestinians for several years. It is the village of Deir Yassin. This was a pacifist village that refused to enter into the military conflict. Nevertheless, armies came and destroyed their town and many of the people who lived there were killed. We need to remind the American church about the Sabra and Shatill refugee camps on the Lebanon border and how then General Sharon held back his troops while Christian troops from Lebanon slaughtered hundreds and hundreds of men, women and children. In this case, at least the Israeli government had the decency to deem General Sharon guilty and move him out of the government. Nevertheless, he eventually became prime minister.

We need to make sure that the American Christians know that what Amnesty International is saying about Jenin and Nablus.

American Christians need to know about the offensiveness and the ugliness of the wall that does not follow the Green Line which should properly define the borders between Israel and Palestine, and how that wall has not only encroached on Palestinian land, but how it has often divided Palestinian communities and prevented easy access for people in one part of Palestine to get to another. Descriptions of what happens at the checkpoints have to be made known to our brothers and sisters in the United States.

It can be argued that the wall was put up to diminish the terrorism that had haunted the Israeli people. We cannot escape the realities that bombs going off in buses and innocent people being slaughtered by terrorists greatly decreased once the wall had gone up. I have heard other

explanations as to why this decline in terrorism occurred, but it must be faced that terrorism has driven the Israelis to many extreme measures.

While the Israeli army undoubtedly overreacted when rockets were lobbed in Israeli settlements, that more wasn't done among the Palestinians to stop such offences cannot be taken lightly.

You must be aware that there are Jewish people in the United States who have been very upset by what the Israeli army has done. As a case in point, there are many Jewish brothers and sisters in America who believe that the intifada was deliberately created by Ariel Sharon who took 2,000 soldiers to the top of the holy mountain with the support of rocket-armed helicopters overhead. They note that the rabbinical councils, both in the United States and in Israel, declared that no Jewish people should be on the holy mountain until the Messiah comes. Only the Messiah would know where the part of the Temple designated as the Holy of Holies is actually located. Jewish people going up there prior to the Messiah's return could mistakenly walk on this holy place and, thus, commit sacrilege. Consequently, one has to ask what were Ariel Sharon and his troops doing up there? Was it a deliberate attempt to stimulate a reaction among Muslim Palestinians? Was he trying to create a violent reaction, knowing that during an intifada the electorate of Israel always moves in the direction of the political right, thus facilitating his election to prime minister? Do not think for one moment that Jewish people are not asking such questions. They are. Deeply committed to having Israel live out the values that have been articulated in the Hebrew Bible, they want the morality of Moses and the prophets expressed in the policies of the State of Israel.

Of course, American Christians have not, until recently, paid much attention to the illegal settlements on Palestinian land that now house almost 450,000 Israeli citizens. Nor do they know about the consequences of the walls that lead up to those settlements.

Finally, American Christians must contribute ideas that could facilitate a peaceful settlement between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. For instance, one *new* idea has been put forth by Russell Neely who serves in the Political Science department of Princeton University. He sees the two most serious barriers to peace agreements as being, on the one hand, the Israeli refusal to accept any peace agreement that entails the right of return for Palestinian refugees who are living in the Gaza Strip and on the West Bank. The reason the Israelis oppose this return is because Palestinians would outnumber Israelis and if they became citizens could literally vote the state of Israel out of existence and establish a Palestinian state in its place.

The second seemingly insurmountable barrier to a peace settlement has to do with the illegal settlements. The buildings that have been constructed for these settlements are substantial and the number of people who are living there cannot reasonably be displaced. Nevertheless, the Palestinian people rightly say that the land belongs to them and that these settlements must be dismantled.

Neely's solution to these two barriers to peace have many points, but let me cite the most salient ones:

1. That there be a two-state solution with capitals of *both* Israel and Palestine being in Jerusalem.
2. That all persons of Arab lineage must be citizens of the Palestinian state. This, of course, would require that the Palestinians living in Israel and who are Israeli citizens give up their citizenships and become citizens of the

- Palestinian state. On the other hand, all Israelis must be citizens of the state of Israel.
3. When it comes to voting, Israelis can only vote in the Israeli election and Palestinians can only vote in the Palestinian election.
 4. People do not have to move, nor do the settlements have to be dismantled. People can live anywhere they please. Jewish people do not have to worry that the Palestinians, when they return to their original homes within the state of Israel will have the ability to vote the Israeli government out of existence because they will not be citizens of Israel in spite of the fact that they may be living there. Likewise, the Jewish people living in the settlements on Palestinian land do not have to move because, even though they are living on Palestinian land, they are basically citizens of Israel.
 5. Significant funding must be provided so that Palestinian people will be able to purchase land within the state of Israel if such land is available for sale.

The plan is much more sophisticated and complex than I have stated in these brief comments, but should anyone want further information they should write to me at Eastern University, 1300 Eagle Road, St. Davids, PA 19087, USA.

The necessity for reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, and especially with Palestinian Christians, is a biblical mandate. We are called by Jesus to be peacemakers and agents of reconciliation. The stakes are very high. Samuel Huntington, in a bestselling book entitled *The Clash of Civilizations*, points out that unless there are some dramatic changes in the way in which the western world, with its Judeo-Christian heritage, relates to the Muslim world, the possibility for a massive conflict that will make World War Two seem mild by comparison is increasingly likely. Consider that between 1945 and 1995 every civil war or act of terrorism was over political/economic ideologies. The wars and terrorist acts were always representative of a Marxist-inspired ideology standing over and against democratic capitalism. Then Huntington goes on to point out that since 1995 just about every conflict has been over religion. Consider

what has happened in Indonesia, the Philippines, Nigeria, Sudan, India, Pakistan—the list goes on and on.

Friedrich Nietzsche once said that men never do evil with more enthusiasm than when they do it in the name of God. Religious wars in the 21st century could be the death of civilization.

We Christians are supposed to be people of hope. We are supposed to be declaring the good news about what God is doing in the world, and declaring the promise that one day the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our God and that He shall reign forever and ever.

In the story that may or may not be true, Bobby Fisher, having just won the world chess championship wandered with a friend into a movie theater in Manhattan to see the Bergman movie, “The Seventh Seal.” The story was developed around a medieval knight playing chess with the Prince of Darkness. As the story unfolds, we are taken from time to time to the chess board as the medieval knight and the Prince of Darkness make moves on each other. As the movie comes to an end, the Prince of Darkness makes a move and then declares, “*Checkmate!*”

As the curtain came down, it is reported that Bobby Fisher turned to his friend and said, “Why is the knight giving up? Did you notice those pieces? He can still win. **THE KING HAS ONE MORE MOVE!**” That’s what we must declare, not only to the American church, but to Christians in Palestine and Christians around the world. When the situation seems impossible and the problems insurmountable, we have to declare the good news which is simply this—**THE KING HAS ONE MORE MOVE!**