Elias Chacour, **Blood Brothers**, with David Hazard
A Palestinian’s struggle for reconciliation in the Middle East

The sub-title of this book could be ‘A truly autobiographical account of an Eastern Catholic priest who experienced the sufferings of a Palestinian Christian and his people caught in the middle of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between the years of 1948 and 1984’. His captivating story with its emotionally disturbing passages shows a loveable trait of honesty that goes as far as recognizing that he himself had “a wild creature in me” (p.113) and “was capable of vicious, killing hatred…not just the Nazis, or the Zionists or the Palestinian commandos – but me.” (p. 168) He begins with his experiences in his hometown Biram and its neighbouring Gish close to the Lebanese border. One can forgive an eight year-old boy when he writes about “our summer of tears” when “almost one million Palestinians were driven out of the newly-proclaimed democracy” as the result of a policy to “purify the land of Palestinian people” (p. 47-48) or when he reduces the proclamation of the State in 1948 to the somewhat cynical statement “a young man named David Ben Gurion assembled more than two hundred journalists and photographers to proclaim the establishment of the State of Israel” as if this momentous event was intended to be a show (p.48). His cynicism can be proved by the fact that the young man nineteen years later is called “the aging Ben Gurion” when in 1967 he ‘ranted furiously’ at Levi Eshkol’s talk of a “peace agreement with Arab nations.” (p. 177) His account ends with his experience in Lebanon and the subsequent report of the massacre of Sabra and Shatilla. (pp. 219-220)

It needs to be underlined that his interpretation of this conflict is colored by a mixture of the understanding of history and politics of a young child blended with the perspective of an adult Palestinian – at times his father’s - who wrote almost twenty years ago. He may be forgiven if he uses His experiences of degrading discrimination and injustice in an anti-Christian and anti-Palestinian environment as a platform to propagate his theological and political views that give the impression of hope in the midst of despair. For him, peace must come through the restoration of human dignity, through reconciliation of enemies who will accept each other as citizens of equal rights. His personal Christian experience and sense of calling is rooted in what he calls the ‘prophecies’ of the Beatitudes, – not the prophecies of the Hebrew prophets! - especially the ‘prophecy’ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God” (28). These views are appealing to Christians who share the position of Replacement Theology and an approach to reconciliation that is based on ecumenical inter-religious dialogue.

The title of this book signals a half-truth at the very outset. The sub-title contains the full truth: the book is about the **Palestinian** struggle. **Blood-brothers**, yes, but Isaac and Ishmael, to be correct, were half brothers only. Father Abraham who loved them both did not invite them to share the land together. The two lineages were further split in the next generation where Esau envied his brother Jacob because of his lost birthright. Esau’s offspring were the Edomites, the perpetual enemies of the Jews. The title’s underlying argument is that common ancestry brings the privilege of equality. Does it not also imply the right to heritage? **Psychologically**, the factual historic blood-brotherhood derived from an (assumed) common Abrahamic descendence of the Melkite family of the Chacours and their village as Christian Palestinians is extrapolated as a blood-
brotherhood of all Palestinians and Jews – EC identifies himself with ‘the Palestinians’ (without ever differentiating between the Melkite minority and the Arab majority who had only recently migrated into the land as a result of economic benefits). Could it be that Christians need to come to terms with the Biblical view that the Jewish “choseness” must be accepted as ‘God-given’ (rather than the right of the land) for the whole world to be accepted including the Palestinians? Theologically, “choseness” is part of the covenantal blessing of Abraham, even if it attracted jealousy and the envy from the start. But this is not the author’s worldview. His father did not give him a perspective that reaches back to the roots of the conflict. The relationship between the Old and the New Testament do not seem to be relevant anymore. It seems that “Blood” brotherhood may just as well have its roots in the brotherhood of humanity in terms of the Creator and that peace is to be maintained by reconciliation and living according to the ‘prophecies” of the Beatitudes. At the same time Chacour associates it with equality, dignity on dialogue. 

Sociologically, Palestinians in EC’s presentation consist of Christians only. Not once is their nature as a predominantly Muslim people mentioned. This reflects a lack of explicit recognition of the differences between Jews, Muslims and Christians, their concept of God and of love. The political fall-out of not dealing with the past beyond of what his father taught him, leads to serious conflict. Golda Meir who denied that Palestinians even exist (p. 188) is left with an unqualified insinuation that the author also considered her a “modern Jezebel…who sold herself to evil” against the Palestinians. One would expect that peace-makers who specialize in conflict-resolution (‘demanding a true resolution to our conflict…” p. 179) would understand the importance of seeking to understand the roots of conflict. Such superficiality lends little credit to comments about the plight of the Refugees, the Land question and the question of Settlements, the author’s attribution of the terms ‘victim’ and ‘aggressor’, ‘persecutor’ and ‘the persecuted’). For him the ‘plight of the refugees’ is the reason for the terrorist attacks of the ‘poorly trained commando groups.’ (p. 177) Further research would have shown him that the refugee problem is a political problem in spite of its deplorable humanitarian side.

Co-author David Hazard who is aware that “this could be ‘a controversial book’ in his preface claims that “this (book) is a story about people, not politics.” (vii) The fact is, that EC presents his political views in no uncertain terms, not just in occasional remarks (for instance: ‘the truth about Zionism’ of the time of the proclamation of statehood is related to “a disease of the spirit,” “a demon of violence,” “a demon of militarism” (126)), but also in lengthy sections like Chapters 7 (Paris) and 8 (Seeds of Hope).

“Blood Brothers” - The offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, considered to be the representative sides in this conflict are not “brothers” but half-brothers. The difference between the two sons is that from the point of view of the Biblical history of salvation, Isaac is Abraham’s “only son.” (three times in Gen 22). Elias Chacour (EC) does not mention this deeply significant statement even once. This does not mean that God has rejected Ishmael and his offspring - according to EC the Arab people including the Palestinians. It does not mean that Ishmael in God’s view has lost his “human dignity” because Ishmael is not the chosen one. It means that from the point of view of identity and calling, Isaac and his offspring – the Jewish people are the ‘chosen people.’ In biblical terminology, chosenness does not mean superiority; it means responsibility. God
is neither unjust nor a respecter of persons. He is therefore not partial. Impartiality, however, does not correspond to Chacour’s socialist ideal of equality.

There may be a deeper purpose for putting the emphasis on this ‘blood’ relationship. His father taught him that “our lives were bound together with the other people who inhabited Palestine – the Jews.” The Jews and they had suffered together under the “Romans, Persians, Crusaders and Turks” and sharing “the simple elements of human existence – faith, reference for life, hospitality…were the things that caused people to live happily together.” (p. 32) The longing to be seen as equals not only indicates the desire that the world recognize the ‘God-given’ right (p. 145) to inherit and to share the same piece of real estate. It also helps to alleviate the feeling of worthlessness and inferiority for lack of dignity. About his experience in Paris in the decade of the 1960s we read about their ‘wounded reputation’: “I became increasingly aware that, in western eyes, being Palestinian was a disgraceful thing – a stigma like leprosy.” (p. 107) While in Germany he begins to realize what must have happened to the German Jews during the Nazi time and equates it with that of the Palestinians. “I hurt for the Jewish people. Why had the civilized world allowed them to be persecuted? …Why did the world allow my people to be driven into diaspora only a few years after the holocaust?” (p. 113) The same attempt to establish equality is expressed in the context of the Zionist congress in Basel (see below).

**Theology/Sociology**  Should one give EC the benefit of the doubt with regard to the true nature of Islam? Is it the father of EC, is it the eight year-old or is it the Anglican Priest who speaks when he writes: “Father smiled, …the Jews and Palestinians are brothers – blood brothers. We share the same father, Abraham, and the same God.” (p.34) In either case, to imply that Palestinians – who are predominantly Muslims – have the same father and the same God would amount to the lie that seems to be widespread in the Western world of today. This points to an inherent weakness of EC’s book: the lack of differentiation when he talks about Palestinians. It is often left to the reader to guess if he speaks about Palestinian Christians or Palestinian Muslims, for there are no Palestinians without religious convictions and the convictions of the two kinds are not the same; about Christian Arabs or Muslim Arabs, for there are no Arabs without a religious identity in the Middle East. Where he speaks about Muslims he seems to downplay the difference between Muslims and Christians. The only statement that might be a correction of the heretical teaching of the oneness of the Christian and the Muslim God/god is found in chapter 10 which finds him in Ibillin close to Nazareth: “To me, it was an unmistakeable opportunity to bear the love of the cross into this shattered place that was perched between the star of David and the crescent of Mohammed,” (p. 154) and in chapter 11 (Bridges or Walls): “Jesus does not ask us just to preach to Muslims, but first to show His love….If we are going to present our God to Muslims, we have to choose. Do we build bridges…or walls?” and “…it was the mutual love for children that bridged the gap between our religions.” (pp. 174/175) There is no explicit correction of the confusion between the two ‘concepts’ of God anywhere in his book, not even where he reports about a special symposium organized by Hebrew University Professor David Flusser on “the concept of love as expressed in Judaism, Islam and Christianity.” The concept of love in Islam according to Flusser is not reported. (pp. 182/183).
Although EC was David Flusser’s only student in Greek Patrology for a whole semester, EC does not report one word about the teachings of the ancient Church fathers even though they are the source of replacement theology teaching that Israel has been replaced by the Church and that Israel as a nation has no future role to play. EC is at least honest enough to mention that according to Flusser, “God intended for the land of Israel to be a blessing for all nations – all people. Not just a few,” Palestinians included (p. 181). EC sums up the main impact of Flusser’s teaching on him in these words: “If only the whole nation of Israel - and the whole world – could understand that Jews and Palestinians can get along when they begin to treat each other with dignity.” (p. 181) It is nevertheless significant to note that EC avoids reporting the fact that Flusser had a clear understanding of the prophetic nature of Israel and thus did not share EC’s interpretation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see for instance Flusser’s preface to Claude Duvernoy’s ‘Controversy of Zion.’ “…the Return is no longer an eschatological dream, but historical reality.”) Flusser believed that ‘the resurrection of the Jewish people in its Land’ was a historical fact. Chacour believes that apart from those who fled from Germany, there was no reason for the Jews to return to Palestine. Had they not been tricked with the help of a ‘Zionist plot,’ even the Jews in Irak would not have helped fulfill the “the prophesied ‘ingathering’”, for those Jews “had lived undisturbed in Iraq for a long time.” (125)

“Jewish people in America were comfortable in their homes and businesses. Likewise, large Jewish communities in other countries showed no compulsion to uproot en masse and rush to the ‘promised land.” (p. 124) To his Bishop he replies, “Our young people need the hope of a future. They must learn that they are worthwhile and productive citizens. If they don’t gain self-respect they will always resent the Jews.” (p. 196) The question needs to be asked: Does EC really believe that self-respect and dignity can bridge the gap between Christianity and Islam, between Judaism and Christianity?

**History** EC begins with the Chacour family history handed down by his ancestors and related by his mother and father who “were convinced that no one could teach us better than they in such important matters as our heritage, culture and faith.” (p.25) The Chacour family traces its history back to the church of the apostles: “After all, our family were Melkite Christians. We were not like some weed newly sprung up after rain, but our spiritual heritage was firmly rooted in the first century” (p. 31). The Melkite Christians – named after the ‘King of Byzantium’ (melech, Arabic for king) – according to EC ‘united the splintered churches’ of the first century. We learn that the Melkites held firm to the teaching of the early church and “several centuries later …built bridges of reconciliation with Rome. The ability to reconcile opposing powers seemed to be an historic hallmark of our Church fathers.” (p. 32) This historic background seems to legitimize the claim of the Palestinian Christian home town of Biram to the “Galilean soil, for our people had long struggled to survive here. …Our family had tilled this land, had worshiped here longer than anyone could remember…our lives were bound together with the other people who inhabited Palestine – the Jews.” The epochs of the Romans, Persians, Crusaders and Turks were marked by happy coexistence and are skipped over in one sentence (p.32). The next chapter relates the arrival of the “Zionist soldiers” who
“evacuated” them from their land by deceit of “callous betrayal” and by force (he relates
his experience with what turned out later to have been a mass grave of ‘two dozen
bodies’ and made them refugees, leaving “us without a homeland or identity.” (p.45)

At this point the reader is given to understand that the village of Biram in upper Galilee is
representative of the whole of Palestine. The Zionist Haganah was fighting against the
British and Palestinians alike and Biram hoped that “the powerful nations of the world
who controlled the U.N. would reach a just ‘compromise’ solution, but to the shock of
“hundreds and thousands of Palestinians throughout the land…in a sweeping and one-
sided decision the Zionists were to possess the majority of Palestine – 54%… of the land
although they only owned 7%.” (p. 46) This extrapolation of Zionist aggression is
reinforced by the activities of the “highly-trained and single-minded Zionist organization
called Irgun” who blew up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem and massacred some 350
Palestinians in the village of Deir Yassin. The refugee problem (which EC had
experienced personally for almost two years (p.49) is thus attributed entirely to the
“Zionist forces.” This is just as much a myth as is the later accusation that “the Jewish
immigrants …who were pathetically desperate to escape the heinous death camps (under
the Nazis). were to become the pawns of the Zionist leaders” (p. 121)

The order of EC’s history of the conflict is basically chronological but at times he so
deviates from this order that the reader has to be careful to make sure what his comments
refer to. Somehow one gets the impression that he does not fully recognize the need for a
Jewish State in Palestine. “The people in the West held a view something like this. The
Jewish people, having suffered tremendous persecution, needed a haven – a national
homeland.” This leaves the impression that this is the Western viewpoint different from
his own. It is “their Zionist leaders” who “had chosen the ‘uninhabited’ land of
Palestine.” (p. 114) And the nations eventually sided with the Zionists. Referring to the
partition plan of the U.N. in 1947 we read that ‘the Zionists were to possess the majority
of Palestine – 54% - even though they owned only 7% of the land!’ (p. 46) This to him
signaled an injustice as is evident in his main chapter on the “true history of the Zionists
and the Palestine disaster.” (Chapter 8, 114-130). His account of the first Zionist
Congress in Basel, 1897, betrays every bit his aversion against this whole development.
There is no indication that he had studied the history of the Zionist movement, the life of
Theodor Herzl and his friendship with the Christian William Hechler (published in
Jerusalem in 1966 by Claude Duvernoy almost 20 years before EC’s own publication.)
What the messianic Jewish movement of the last thirty years of the 20th century sees as
divine providence in the reappearance of Israel, EC calls “an unholy marriage, an alliance
motivated by power and convenience, consumed in treachery”, “a strange marriage
between Zionist and Recreationist” (pp. 117, 118), between Christians who “believed
they might bring to pass – by manipulating world events and reestablishing the nation of
Israel – the Second Coming of Christ. The Zionists ignored this view, but the benefits for
them were obvious. They saw in Britain’s new hold on Palestine their secret inroad to the
Middle East.” (For EC’s own view on prophecy, see below.) “As one of its victims,” EC
writes, he had seen “the cruel face of Zionism.” To him, his own Palestinian people at the
time of the Congress in Basel “was also a downtrodden people, struggling and praying for
freedom…For hundreds of years we had suffered under the iron heel of the Turkish
 REVIEW OF ELIAS CHACOUR’S BLOOD BROTHERS

Implicit in this observation is the desire to draw a parallel between the suffering Jewish population and the suffering was “split on the location of this homeland.” His focus is on those Jews who objected to Palestine and EC’s undertone betrays his own resentments: “By what right could Zionists expect to create a state in Palestine? It was a land with established borders and, more importantly, it had long been inhabited by the people of an ancient, respectable culture. A homeland in Palestine, they declared with the overtone of a heinous prophecy, would have to be forgotten – or else established by force.” (p. 115)

The Jewish State, in short, was the product of Zionist power politics, of Zionist intrigues and betrayals, a story “convoluted with political intrigues and double-dealings” (p. 117), “political treachery” (p. 118). One can understand Chacour’s feeling of victimization but it is difficult to understand his interpretation of the Balfour plan when he claims that it “effectively handed over Palestine to the Zionists” when in fact the Balfour plan was never implemented as it was originally intended. The British betrayed it and the percentage that was left for the Jews was a despicable fraction of what had been originally stated.

Chacour’s book illustrates the need for a biblical understanding of history. When he writes,

“Aside from my seminary studies I begun to spend hours in the libraries of Paris, hunting down books and news reports on the true history of the Zionists and the Palestine disaster. Whole books and reports unifying these accounts would not be published until years later. Yet my study pieced together a startling, documented story” (p. 115)

he has already interpreted history in terms of his personal experiences as a Christian Palestinian who associates his identity with the non-Christian Palestinians (rarely even mentioning that the Christian Palestinians were a minority surrounded by Muslims – whose anti-Christian mentality he conveniently ignores.) He had already labeled the Zionists as “a group of foreigners” who had come to “forcefully crush a whole country full of powerless people” to “take over their land.” (105) He had already concluded that the Palestinians were the terrorized outcasts. He had already declared his personal opinion as the opinion of all Palestinians, another half-truth even at the time of his writing in 1984, that “The Jews are welcome in our country…we just want to bring peace back to our people. To reconcile Palestinians and Jews.” (p. 105). He studied history through the eyes of a Christian Palestinian who saw himself as part of those who had “no flag, no honor and no voice to shout our defense to the opinion-fashioning world press, the reputation of our ancient people had degenerated to the status of non-persons. We were the outcasts.” (p. 106)

Splitting the Jews into Zionists and non-Zionists (in order to express sympathy for the non-Zionist Jews) (pp. 126, 134) but speaking as it were as a Christian Palestinian on behalf of all Palestinians as if they were all Christians united in a Christian brotherhood is hardly a prerequisite for a commendable approach to history. His studies in Paris evidently did not help him to discover God’s plan with his people, God’s understanding of the promises to Abraham, the father of the ‘Blood Brothers.’
The need for a biblical understanding of history is also evident from Chacour’s misunderstanding of Galatians 3:28-29 (p. 137). For him, the phrases ‘neither Jew nor Greek’ which obviously refers to salvation by faith for both groups and Paul’s imagery in Romans 11 (the oneness between Jew and Gentile believing in the Messiah – although he only refers to the ‘grafting in’ of the Gentiles ‘among God’s chosen people of faith’) seem to imply that the Jews have no special role in history anymore. What has been grafted in has become indistinguishably one with the original plant. What does Chacour mean by the sentence “It is not only the natural children who are God’s children, but also the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (Rom 9:6-8) ? (p. 137). ‘The natural children’ (Ishmael and his descendants) are not ‘the children of the promise’ (Isaac and his offspring). To imply that this passage reinforces the oneness between Jew and Gentile amounts to a wrong application. “This is confirmed by the statement that Palestinians also have a “God-given right to live in Israel, to sow and reap from the land, and to live as equals, not second-class citizens. Were we not ‘children of the promise’ regarded as Abraham’s offspring.” (p.137).

It is ironical to read in this Chapter 9 (Grafted In) “How terribly sad that men could ignore God’s plan for peace between divided brothers, even supporting one group as it wielded its might to force out the other. “

The reader is advised to pay careful attention to the use of Chacour’s terminology at this point. The phrase ‘God’s chosen people of faith’ is not found in Scripture. ‘The children of the promise’ are the Jews. Gentiles are not ‘children of the promise.’ Christian Palestinians are part of the Gentile church. The church has never been promised the Land. As to the ‘God-given right to live in Israel’ in a biblical understanding of history, only those who accepted to worship the God of Israel had a right to live in Israel. In this perspective, Palestinians who do not worship the God of Israel may have a State-given right to live in Israel, but not a God-given right in the biblical sense. The claim of equality between Jews and Palestinians is a political claim. In the sight of God, the ‘divided brothers’, Isaac and Ishmael, were physically separated in that Abraham gave Ishmael the lands of the East. Sharing the Land was obviously not in God’s plan for the past. It is part of his eschatological program when the nations will come to worship the King of Kings in Jerusalem. God’s plan for peace implies the acceptance of the Prince of Peace.

How does EC answer his own question, “To whom does God say the land really belongs?” (p. 138) He concedes that he promised it to Israel but quickly adds that Israel was not the first to inhabit the land. “Melchizedek and his people had inhabited the land for some time before Abraham, honoring and worshiping God according to the old customs passed down from Noah and his fathers.” EC does not explicate this observation but one would not be surprised if such thinking were to imagine a Palestinian right to the land from an imaginary descendance from Melchizedek and his people. Abraham “knew he was not the first inhabitant of Canaan to worship the one true God by any means.” Are we to conclude that when God makes a promise he is not going to restrict it later on? Obviously not, but the promise is conditional. “What did God expect from the descendants of Abraham as caretakers dwelling in His land?” The Jews were expelled.
from it because they did not fulfill the conditions. The fact that God preserved them throughout history EC rightly explains according to Ezekiel 36 (and one could add Isaiah 43 and 48 also). God acts for His name’s sake and not because Israel deserves it. As in the case of God’s promise of the land, here also EC is unwilling to make an unreserved concession and adds, “to me, that was an incomplete view of prophecy” (p. 141). The complete view for EC is found in Isaiah 56:1-8. “God’s Israel included ‘foreigners’, those who were not of the fleshly tribes of Israel, but who had been grafted into his family – just as the branches had been grafted into his fig tree. And how sad, I thought, that we have been cut off like unwanted branches.”

Who does EC mean by saying “we”? The reader once more is left with the ambiguity that this refers to the people he calls Palestinians. The ambiguity is due to his identity problem. “To me, as a Palestinian, Israel had returned to the land not in righteousness, but as my oppressor. As a Christian, I knew that I was grafted spiritually into the true family of Israel – though it certainly had not kept me or my people from suffering injustice” (p. 142). Is this identity problem not aggravated by his confusion of Israel with the Church, by his confusion of the political realities of the present with the prophetic fulfillment of the messianic age? Isaiah’s Israel that will include ‘foreigners’ who worship the same God has not arrived yet. Confusion about identity is thus aggravated by the eschatological tension between what is and what is not yet. This is most acute when he continues: “The Beatitudes were prophecies!…’Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth’…” - “how could these nice sounding words make any difference when an unjust military government held sway, sending dissidents to their death?” Again a one-sided accusation. Does this book claim not to be about politics because it avoids any comments on the injustices of the Palestinian side?

Instead of admitting that we are not in the messianic age yet, Chacour says ‘the next words of Jesus (in the Beatitudes) struck me like lightening: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.” He “suddenly knew that the first step toward reconciling Jew and Palestinian was the restoration of human dignity…This, I knew at once, went beyond all claims of land and rightful ownership; it was the true beginning.”’ (p. 146). Instead of emphasizing that “…one of the first things that Jesus did when He reconciled man to God was to restore human dignity” (The reference is to the Samaritan woman caught in adultery), it would have been more accurate to state that the very first thing is to deal with the problem of sin, with repentance and forgivenness. Yet this comes to light in how he applies the “clarion-clear” call in his life of being a peace-maker in his ‘small experiment’ at the Church of Ibillin, “thirty minutes form Nazareth.” He seeks to show love to his parishioners with the help of three Catholic sisters whom he requested from his bishop. The month long experiment ends with a Church service in which he puts a lock at the inside of the church door to prevent his congregation from leaving the sanctuary before they had asked each other for forgiveness. Elias Chacour uses even sarcasm to bring about the desired results when he ends his sermon: “You can kill each other and I’ll provide for your funerals.” (p.171)

The Beatitudes are declared to be “prophecy.” (p. 144) They seem to be understood to be the keys to the kingdom of God on earth where Jews and Gentiles live together in
harmony and in peace. We are not told that there were any Jews reconciled in that experimental sermon in Ibillin. Prophecy, if he quotes the OT, is seen as moral injunctions rather than predictions about the future. Isaiah’s “justice and righteousness” (p. 146) may serve as a good example. EC casts doubt on the belief that today’s Israel is part of the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy: “...if Israel is so squarely in the center of prophecy and God’s will, why was the nation coming unglued from within?” (p.179)

The last three chapters of the book emphasize again the need for hope of a future. “They must learn that they are worthwhile and productive citizens. If they don’t gain self-respect they will always resent the Jews.” (196) We find him in Europe preaching his ‘ideas about peace.’ (p.199) He spells out that ‘the way of a peacemaker was difficult – it required forgiveness, risking the friendship of your enemies, begging for peace on your knees and in the streets.” (p. 200) He then gets in touch with Peace movements like Pax Christi and works for the growth of an increasing movement of ‘intercessors for peace.’ His numerous audiences and travels in the West and in Israel are truly impressive. The question must be raised, however, if his theology of reconciliation and peace, as impressive, attractive and reasonable as it is, is not built on a mixture of biblical and unbiblical foundations. In one of his articles on the Internet, entitled ‘We are all equal before God,’ we read “We are used to proclaim since the resurrection that there is no more privilege for Jews against Gentiles, for Man against Woman, for Lord against Slave. We are all equal.” As far as salvation through faith in Christ is concerned, this is biblically correct. Salvation is by faith. Yet as this equality in Christ has not abolished the difference between the Sexes, extrapolating soteriological equality to all else is a false conclusion. About the Jews, he then states: “They need a basic liberation from sorting out themselves and from accepting to single themselves out as being different from the others.” In other words, Palestinian Liberation Theology rejects the validity of those OT prophecies that relate to the ‘chosenness’ of Israel as a nation, it rejects even the truth that the Word shall go forth from Zion and that biblical Zionism is not racism. This interpretation of prophecy is at the root of Christian anti-Semitism that has characterized and split the Church since the days of the early Church councils.

If Chacour tells the Jews they need to be liberated from their notion of being a nation NOT like any other nation, God’s ‘chosen people,’ then the Palestinian Christians may need to hear that envying the “first-born” is not acceptable before the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or at least that the time has come for the Church to hear that she is called ‘to make the Jews jealous’. Forgiveness needs to reach back to the first Church councils where the Jews were discriminated against and persecuted by the Church and have been around far longer than today’s Palestinians. If Palestinian Christians reproach the Jews for not fulfilling their special mission to be God’s model nation, God’s prototype for all the nations, they need to realize that the threat of being exterminated once more is no basis for peace. To deny the Jews their right of existence, as does the PLO Charter, their right to the land and at the same time to claim that land for the very people who seek to exterminate them is an absurdity that makes the call for dignity and equality a farce. Admittedly, this book was written before the time of the intifadas and before 9/11 01. Yet the ideas of this book continue to be propagated by those who share the same theology. The injunction that we should neither pray for the Jews nor for the Palestinians but rather
for ourselves, lest we allow the middle-east conflict to divide them in our prayers instead of keeping them together in our hearts, as a Mennonite website suggests, is yet another half-truth. We had better pray that the Church return to the Book and allow God to define what He means by justice and peace in a kingdom that is not yet of this world, the kingdom of the King of the Jews.

**CONCLUSION**

This auto-biographical interpretation of the Israel-Palestine conflict, covering the period of 1948 and 1984, is a personal story revealing the development of the writers’ emotional and intellectual reactions and theological reflections often intermingled with political comments that may or may not originate in his later conclusions. At the same time it is the account of his struggle to find his own identity and calling as a Palestinian Christian with apparently an extraordinary long line of ancestry in the upper Galilean Lebanese borderland. This book seeks to have a mission of ‘educating’ others to the situation of the Palestinian people – ‘not to hate the Jewish people as a result’ (p. 218) - , of restoring the dignity of the victimized, suffering Palestinians, of reconciliation between Jews and Palestinians who are said to be ‘blood brothers’ with equal rights to the land. Dignity and equality are seen as the prerequisites for peace.

The real strength of this book lies both in the process of how a Palestinian overcomes his personal hatred of Zionism through repentance and forgiveness on the basis of the example of Jesus Christ. It lies in the message that the Church needs to demonstrate the “spirit of the Gospel” (p.174) in its own life in order to build bridges for peace. The application of a personal experience as a Christian Palestinian as a vision of hope for dignity and justice for a whole people, as Christian as this vision is, is not without problems where it is based on un-realistic assumptions. Even if it is correct that his Melkite Church has been in the land since the time of the first Christians, the Church is not a legitimization for the claims of the Palestinians as a whole that the land is theirs. Even if it is conceivable that the Jews would trust the loyalty of Palestinian Christians, this does not imply that the Jews could trust all the Palestinians, especially as the Muslim majorities have a history of hatred for Jews and Christians alike. On the other hand, the author has a sharp eye for the weaknesses of the Zionists in their dividedness, in their excesses of violence and injustice and in their own betrayals.

Its weakness is that in spite of its remarkable honesty this book is necessarily one-sided in its filtering out all aspects that do not correspond to this Palestinian perspective especially with regard to the history of Zionism and to historic facts such as the Pogroms as early as 1929. The charter of the PLO does not receive a single comment even though it reflects the goals of the Palestinian leadership. There is no discussion of reasons behind the refugee problem. As to the Zionist army (Chacour avoids the term Israel’s Defense Force), it is surprising that a Christian perspective as that of Chacour’s should expect the IDF to have an ethical standard that would do justice to the Sermon on the Mount. With regard to the return to
their former homeland, one gains the impression that the Jews were comfortably settled in their respective countries and that there was no real need for them to leave their respective countries. As to the problem of Islam, one would have expected to see it at least touched on, yet it is just as absent as the theological differentiation between prophecy and fulfillment of prophecy or a discussion of the influence of Catholic amillennialism vi on Chacour’s theology. Although history is recognized as important, there is no definition of a biblical concept of history in his thinking. One wonders if the history of Israel and the history of the nations in Chacour’s mind is really ‘His story’ or merely a human construct comparable to other conflicts in this world. One also wonders if an autobiography with its scraps of conversations reporting ever so often what others have said is a suitable literary category to interpret the complexity of the middle-eastern conflict, if boyhood snapshots of the political scenario and interim conclusions are not integrated in the framework of a mature portrait as the result of his research. Such practice can be dangerously misleading where the political reality is concerned. The reader would be well advised to balance Chacour’s presentation with books such as Joan Peters’ “From Time Immemorial“ (1984), Claude Duvernoy’s ‘The Prince and the Prophet’ (1966) and “Controversy of Zion” (1987), not to forget books that deal with the problem of Islam. Chacour may well claim that the greatest need for Palestinians is “hope for the future. Hope that one day we can reconcile with the Jews and live in dignity again.” (p. 184) What he, in spite of his key theme of the Sermon of the Mount, does not seem to see is that there is no hope for reconciliation between the two “blood-brothers” as long as there is no admission of the fact that the true nature of this conflict is not political but religious, not psychological or socio-economic but spiritual. Chacour’s Church like the Catholic churches adheres to Replacement Theology. On this basis it is all the easier to fall into the temptation of embracing Liberation Theology to imagine that the Beatitudes can be embraced without a return to the Jewish Messiah, the Prince of Peace who said “salvation comes from the Jews”.

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i Born November 29, 1939 in the village of Biram in Upper Galilee ‘in Arab Palestine’ into a Palestinian Christian family, members of the Melkite (Greek-) Catholic Church, an Eastern Byzantine Church in communion with Rome. He received his Ph.D. in Geneva Switzerland where he studied Ecumenical Theology after studies in Paris and Jerusalem. The first six chapters of his book can be read on the Internet. His Curriculum Vitae: [www.twelvedaystojerusalem.org/chacour/pdf/vitae.pdf](http://www.twelvedaystojerusalem.org/chacour/pdf/vitae.pdf)

His book was translated into 28 languages

ii This information is taken from Chacour’s website. The reader of the book is not informed of this identity, nor of the fact that the Melkite Church is a Catholic church in communion with Rome. It is only towards the end of the book that one learns that the village of Ibillin where Chacour had his first parish “was an old, old settlement, one of whose citizens was a Church father who played a masterful role in the Counsel of Nicea in 325.” (p. 153) “Moslems, Greek Orthodox and Melkite Christians were slammed together…with a mosque, an Orthodox sanctuary and our own church.”

iii Equality relating to the way, people are saved

iv URL mentioned

v Elias Chacour does not define what he understands by Zionism. He considers it to be the aberration of a militarist Jewish fraction, “victims of some demons of violence” and ‘a demon of Militarism’, (p. 126,127) that has to be distinguished from the Jews. The Swiss pastor Claude Duvernoy in his complementary work ‘Controversy of Zion’ begins his own book with what Chacour ought to have at least discussed in an Appendix, with the statement: “Zionism, when approached from the biblical angle, reveals a specific vision of history.” (1987, p. 12)
vi Amillennialism or the eschatological view that Rev 20 and related passages need to be interpreted allegorically and that prophecy – Old and New Testament - has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In other words, we live in the ‘Millennium’ and there will be no Millennium of Christ’s reign on earth. This view is held by most mainline Catholic and Reformed denominational churches. Evangelical, charismatic and pentecostal Churches as well as Messianic Judaism – Jews that recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah who will come again to set up his Kingdom on earth tend to be predominantly pre-millennialist.