

Imperial Theology, Colonization, Settler Colonialism, and the Struggle for Decolonization: A Review Essay

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Raheb, Mitri (2023). *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible*. Maryknoll NY. Orbis Books

_____ (2014). *“Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible Through Palestinian Eyes*. Maryknoll. NY. Orbis Books. And

Introduction:

Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian native, a Lutheran minister, and Founder and President of Dar Al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture in Bethlehem, is renowned for his writings on topics such as history, theology, imperial plunder, colonialism, and occupation of his homeland. His father was born during the Ottoman rule, became a British subject as part of the Mandate for Palestine, then living in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. and died under Israeli occupation. Mitri Raheb was born during the Israeli occupation of his homeland which began with “Nakba”—the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. During his less than 60 years of life, he has witnessed 10 wars. Raheb has published numerous books and articles on the history, theology, Theopolitics, and geo-politics of the Middle East. The above two excellent books (reviewed here) highlight the current sufferings of the Palestinians and their struggle for decolonization in historical and structural context. The two books are compact, well-researched, provide information and suggestions for further research in the area of Imperial Theology, Theo-politics, colonization, and the resulting geopolitical conflicts. The “conflict” between an occupying power and the occupied, and particularly the fallacy of an exclusive “divine” rights to the land are the two crucial issues. Raheb challenges the uncritical acceptance of the settler colonial state narratives, and its supportive theology and historiography.

Raheb has been an eyewitness to the ugliness and brutality of occupation and the daily life of Palestinians under military and police rule. Raheb describes the current situation of occupation and traces this to the beginning of Palestine's history of which the Bible (Old and New Testaments) is only a part of. As a sample of the daily life under Israeli occupation Raheb wants to help the readers to imagine, as difficult as it may be, the brutality of living under occupation by briefly describing his experience with checkpoints as manifestation of occupation by traveling "...from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, which looks more like a big prison with watchtowers, trip wires, cameras, turnstiles, metal detectors and scanning machines,sophisticated surveillance equipment, ...all manifestations of the empire controlling the flow of goods and peoples.... More Often than not there are long lines of weary folk waiting to walk through the checkpoint and only one line out of three existing lines is operational....Behind the bullet-proof windows sits a young Israeli soldier...with a machine gun...Then arises the cry of an old Palestinian woman ...raising both hands toward the sky imploring loudly in Arabic "Wenak ya Allah?-...."Where are you God?" It is "a three-thousand-year-old lament the inhabitants of Palestine have passed from one generation to the next. It is a question that echoes throughout the bible" (2014:68). As Palestinians continue to resist the occupation, the occupier resort to harsher measures to dampen their spirits. They experience more barbed wires, uprooting of trees, demolition of homes, more check points, watchtowers, surveillance, cameras, metal detectors, scanning machine and all forms of ancient and modern means of humiliation, demonization and dehumanization are used to sustain occupation. This treatment of the natives with minor variations is common to all colonial empires of the past. Israelis have inherited and utilized the means of control and the mechanisms of occupation with the assistance of functional (officially sanctioned and tested) social, psychological, and anthropological theories and methods. The most important responsibility of the colonial ideologues has been invariably to manufacture narratives based on the benevolent "civilizing mission," "saving" the hapless souls. Perhaps the most damaging treatment involved declaring the "land without people" allowing the colonizers with the blessing from the church to seize the land. In the case of Palestine, the land is inhabited by the natives and in order for Israel to seize the rest of the land, it has to either coopt the population to accept their fate or depopulate through mass killing, expulsion and or replacement of the natives. This practice dates back to the 15th century and in the case of Palestine, it is no more than one hundred years old with the last seventy-five as the most intense process of depopulating the land. It began with the British colonization of Palestine through the Balfour Declaration in the early twentieth century and continues to be made possible by the American empire" (2023:130). Raheb considers the state of Israel resulting from that declaration "as an integral part of the [Anglo-Saxon] empire or empire-by-proxy" created by imperial decree (2023:130). The definition of Empire, whether defined in the context of secular or progressive theological discourse is accorded the same set of characteristics. The

Accra Confession of 2004, defined empire “as the convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic, and military imperial interests, systems and networks that seek political power and economic wealth” (2023:130). Imperial Theology (Christendom) has been in use for many centuries to justify Slavery, Apartheid, Native genocide in the Americas, and Australia, among other places. The Empire in control of Palestine today is linked to the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition that became a code for cultural and ethnic supremacy (2023:65). Since the “Doctrine of Discovery”¹ was issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493 in support of Spanish conquest of the new World (deemed land without people!) it has become, in legal lingo, a “precedent” allowing the powerful to seize the land. With the bible as their weapon the colonialists have robbed the indigenous population in North America, Australia South Africa (civilizing them!) and now in Palestine (2023:131). Israel is more closely connected to this system and supported by all available means. The destruction of natural resources, theft and/or control of water resources, destruction of agriculture, illegal settlements, and land confiscation are only a part of the imperial strategy of Israel. The empire in control of Palestine has all of the supporting institutions and infrastructure particularly those alienating elements particularly in theological constructs that the Iranian social philosopher and polymath Ali Shariati (1969, English Translations, 1979, 2023)² identified for successful “stupefaction” as means of control common to all hegemonic structures.

Raheb identifies the primary source of the problem as the hegemonic theological discourse on Palestine. This theology is characterized by “rejection,” explicit hatred, violence, and dehumanization of the occupied Palestinians. Israel and its allies have

¹ The “Doctrine of Discovery” has been used to legitimize the colonization of lands outside of Europe. In 1823, the US supreme court unanimously ruled that the Europeans had the right to the New World and that the Natives only had the right of occupancy which could be abolished as well. On the basis of this precedent, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in 2005 denied the Oneida people from regaining lands in modern-day New York. <https://blogs.cornell.edu/cornelluniversityindigenousdispossession/2021/01/04/ruth-bader-ginsburgs-notoriety-in-indian-country-and-cornells-campus-landscape/> Multinational corporations have employed this precedent to confiscate resource rich land from indigenous people. Recently the Catholic Church formally repudiated the “Doctrine of Discovery’ because of its disregard for the indigenous peoples’ rights.

² In the case of Islam, Ali Shariati (1979, 2023) described the development of an Islam with of the imperial characteristics alongside the “revolutionary Islam.” To him Islam as anti-colonial force, became a colonizer similar to the Judeo-Christian colonial empires, first and foremost by becoming colonized at the hands of the alleged followers of Islam and the politico-religious leaders professing Islam.

been successful in creating an image of a victim while frequently use the terms "terrorist," "violent" and lately "human animal" to justify the brutality of occupation. As the sixth most powerful army equipped with nuclear weapons, and powerful allies particularly in the West, Israel utilizes all resources to justify the occupation. And in this context some of the mainstream "God fearing" "good Christians" from the West with good intention but extremely naive speak of the necessity of teaching Palestinians "nonviolence!" They have accepted the lie that occupied people are committing acts of violence and some go as far as claiming "genetics" as the cause of violence, thus considering the occupation forces as victims. Eugenics is dead long-lived eugenics. Gaza is a manifestation of such an imperial attitude. It should be defined as the repetitive and planned calendar of murder and mayhem, which includes instances of abrupt, and terrifying mass murder and genocidal attacks. Where All of the violence, bloodshed, killing, buried under bombed building, emaciated and bloody faces of children, hunger and thirst, unclaimed bodies and limbs, agonizing pain, and cries aloud and in silence and not knowing what tomorrow would be like, define Gaza. Gaza is now synonymous with the utter savagery of a powerful, well-trained army with sophisticated weapons aimed at a terrified civilian population without a safe place to go. The purpose of referring to the assault on Gaza as a "war" is to sanitize the carnage by creating the impression that there are two organized armies facing each other. The reality is too gruesome. No need to read dungeon stories, scary novels, watch re-run of documentaries about WWI, WWII, the Holocaust, the Nazi gas chambers, tale of Pol Pot's inflicted horror in Cambodia, the killing fields of Vietnam, Afghanistan, 1948, 911 among many others in the illustrious history and the structure of Cain--man's history of fratricide. They are all present now, alive, in real time, and well-choreographed by the "respected" genocidal characters in three-piece suits. Miles and miles away from the killing fields of Palestine, a child is stabbed to death 16 times by an elderly white man in the city of Chicago Illinois because the child resembled the victims in the killing fields of Palestine. The killer, in all likelihood, was a church going faithful whose pastor's interpretation of the bible may have made it easier to murder. Of course, this does occur among religions particularly in Abrahamic religions- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The ongoing horrors of violence and humiliation inflicted on Palestinians with the latest in Gaza—the World's largest prison- has continued albeit with varying degree of brutality and dehumanization. As the suffering of the people of Palestine reaches a level that no longer can be ignored by the Western governments, their allies and the entire media industry, the shameful repeat of a pacifying lie of a "path" to "two state solution" (a slogan repeated by every US president since the beginning of Nakba and laughed at by every leader of Israel), is plastered all over the media landscape. Discussions and debates in think tank boxes, institutes, and the "experts" (paid opinion

makers) and guests, speaking in one voice in condemning the victim. What is glaringly obvious is the standard script from a clearing house either in Washington or Tel Aviv among other places or getting approval from Tel-Aviv before allowed to be considered safe and “newsworthy!” Journalistic treatment of the issue, particularly when there is a “flare ups” have their place, as do sensational outrage when the reality on the ground becomes too gruesome. How can a counter censorship strategy, and awareness of journalistic misconduct in an environment where only sanitized and biased news is permitted be effective? Even TikTok with 170 million users (young people among them who have shown sympathy with the victims in Gaza) in the United states is targeted to be banned because in their view it is promoting “anti-Semitism.” What has been consistent throughout the past seventy-five years occupation of Palestine, is the loud and obnoxious pulpsters (including “jackleg” preachers and opportunists) in support of the application of Imperial theology of Christendom. The theology of Christian Zionist with their messianic beliefs, including the presence of a strong Israel as an on-ground precondition for the second coming of Jesus may appear tame and non-violent as compared to other Zionist strains. The most violent “non-state” actors have identified themselves as Zionist Jews, “Neo-Zionist” including Religious Zionist, and Nationalist Jews. Inspired by the ultra-right nationalist Rabbi Meir Kahane (the founder of Jewish Defense League –JDL), Kahanism has become synonymous with violence against the Palestinians in the occupied territories and has aided the perpetual occupation by Israel.

In the colonial settler entities, the dehumanizing and demonizing language and analogies against Native Americans, Africans, and now the Palestinians have always been a characteristic of occupation and control. The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) with organization in 95 countries with millions of followers in more than 170 countries, Capitol Hill Prayer Partners (CHPP) and Reformation Prayer Network (RPN) and similar Christian Zionist groups have used biblical passages and stories to justify the assault on Gaza (Aidan Orly, Truthout, October 22, 2023). Often Christian Rights, particularly the Zionist group, propagates the false notion that Palestinians, particularly Hamas, are the descendants of Amalek - the violent biblical tribe that God promised to exterminate. And contemporary US politicians unabashedly calling on Israel to “level the place” and to “eliminate them” and some even declared that any solidarity with the innocent Palestinian masses is tantamount to solidarity with the terrorists. Christian Zionist organizations and Christians United For Israel (CUFI) — the largest pro-Israel lobby group in the United States, with over 10 million members with their “messianic” and apocalyptic vision, have been active on several fronts to unconditionally support Israel’s policies in Palestine. In cahoots with the

Zionist Christian organizations are a large segment of American political class, think tanks, higher education institutions, large firms in major industries and closely monitored by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). AIPAC raises millions of dollars every year particularly during elections in the United States in support of pro-Israel candidates. AIPAC is so powerful that without exception, all major Presidential candidates must pay a visit to its annual gathering and deliver a speech specifically pledging allegiances to Israel. Pro-Israel U.S. politicians wave the flag of “stand with Israel” because in their view it is (among other attributes), “the only democracy in the Middle East.” Rarely they are asked to explain the contradictions between being a “democracy” and an “Occupying power.”

Conflating Zionism with Judaism has been very effective in justifying settler colonialism and when challenged, it becomes a magnet for the label of anti-Semitism. Since 1991, Israel lobby has imposed a new definition of anti-Semitism "...that puts the state of Israel above any criticism. It has launched a global campaign of criminalizing any criticism of state of Israel, as “hate speech” thereby muzzling any form of resistance to Israel’s colonial settler project. “This is particularly evident in Germany, where journalists, the church and state officials are banned from using words such as “apartheid” or “settler colonialism”³ in regard to the state of Israel” (dw.com, May 17, 2019; Aljazeera English, December 12, 2022, cited in Raheb 2023:135). The former American President Jimmy Carter and few Israeli politicians and peace activists sounded the alarm that Israel was becoming an “apartheid state” and now they agree that indeed Israel is an “apartheid” state (2023:136). Most of the world is witnessing the horror of what has been done to the Palestinians and the carnage continues with savagery of an empire attempting to depopulate the land. A portion of American public which is interested in the developments in the “Holy Land,” relies on their church for direction on the issue and the information from the networks openly in support of Israel and either dismissive and or outright hostile towards anyone opposing Israel. Accordingly, the history of this tragedy to most began in 1948 and the establishment of Israel.⁴ However, Raheb demonstrate that this sordid history is much older and deeper. His excellent distinction between biblical story and Palestine history enables him to question the very text—the foundation of the settler colonial state in Palestine.

³ Settler Colonialism was coined by Patrick Wolfe in 1999 and expanded with further contribution by Lorenzo Veracini in 2010 (cited in Raheb, 2023).

⁴ In his “State of the union address” President Biden provided a recent version of the history of the “conflict” between Israelis and the Palestinians by announcing that this conflict began on October 7, 2024!!!

Contrary to the post-colonial situation where colonialism officially has ended, settler colonialism is an ongoing reality rather than a singular event in the past. Settler Colonialism encompasses settlement of colonies in an occupied land. The settler colonialists establish and enforce state sovereignty and legal control over the indigenous land with the ultimate aim of eliminating the natives (2023:3). To give it a legal, moral, and theological justification, “indigenous land is described as terra nullius—empty, barren land waiting to be discovered” (2023:3). This is where “...theology becomes a crucial ingredient, and missionaries become an important strategic phalanx” (2014:120)⁵. Christian theology has been involved in almost all settler colonial projects, including North America, South Africa, and Australia (2023:5). The crucial task is to liberate the faith by removing the fragments of centuries of ignorance, abuse, superstitions, and malicious biblical interpretations.

Prelude to Settler Colonial State: Historical and Structural Context

Palestine has been the battleground of the empires for many centuries. Raheb takes a “*longue duree*” approach and documents that there is a different version of the history of Palestine when viewed through Palestinian eyes-- *the biblical history is only a part of Palestinian history*. The history of Palestine is much older than the history of the Bible, Israel, and from the ancient to the present has witnessed a fierce competition between empires for colonization, occupation, and control. This version of history challenges the Eurocentric and deliberate misrepresentation and misreading of the bible by the traditional Christian theology, variety of Christian and Jewish Zionists. Raheb states that he has taken 180 degrees turn from “...dancing to the rhythm of European organ music and theology” while relying on European methodologies (2014:3). Raheb examines the historical writings by Christians regarding Palestine and identifies two approaches: “The first is biblical history” which begins with “Abraham and continues up until the time of Jesus”—a period when Palestine was at the mercy of Assyrians,

⁵ Speculations regarding Israel’s plan for Gaza includes, declaring it “a land without people” that must be seized and annexed, transferring the inhabitants to the Negev Deseret as refugees, and with acquiescence of the Egyptian authorities transfer them to Sinai also as refugees. Once the removal is successful, it will be followed by a new name for Gaza with influx of Jewish (mostly American) settlers who are beginning to purchase the confiscated land for personal and business purposes (<https://mjx847.substack.com/>). There are precedents for the application of “Doctrine of Discovery.”

Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. This approach to Palestine history does not interest them, as they are writing about biblical history. And the second approach is the early church history taught as ‘World history and mainly as Western history’ proceeding from Constantine to Byzantine to Holy Roman Empire to Crusades to the era of Scholasticism, to Reformation to Mission history and concluding with contemporary history. With the exception of the first two centuries and the time of Crusade, Palestine remained absent. This is what Raheb considers not a *Palestinian history*, but *exclusively a biblical history which is a part of Palestinian history*. Changing political and imperial realities compelled Palestinians to change “...their language from Aramaic to Greek to Arabic, while their identity shifted from Canaanite, to Hittite, to Hivite, to Perizzite, to Girgashite, to Amorite, to Jebusite, to Philistine, Israelite, Judaic/Samaritan, to Hasmonaic, to Jewish, to Byzantine, to Arab, to Ottoman, and to Palestinian, to mention some” (2014:12).

Raheb (2014:11) also identifies two meta historiography, “sacred historiography” and “secular historiography” which have been moving in parallel but separate from each other. The former espouses biblical history and little political relevance nothing else and the later focuses on colonial history (2014:11). The context is Palestine where Judaism, Christianity and Islam have been major actors. Raheb points out that both Christian scholars and modern historians agree that the Israel-Palestinian conflict began with the Zionist movement in the late nineteenth century by the powerful and wealthy Jewish individuals and families such as Hyman Weiseman, Walter Rothschild, and Theodore Hertzl. However, he does not believe this is sufficient and does not comprehend the historical continuity. Two trends have been examining the history of Palestine-- as "sacred historiography" with little relevance for Palestinians today or as "secular historiography" with no ties to previous history. In other words, one focuses on biblical history and the other on colonial history (2014:11). Raheb views this historiography as the “Judeo-Christian discourse” and an integral part of a “subtle colonial ideology that looks at Islam as inferior” (2014:29). In this context wherein the majority of inhabitants are Palestinian and Muslim, there are two strikes against them.

In the tradition of Liberation Theology, Raheb sets out to decolonize the Bible, and to deconstruct the dominant theological discourse. A colonized theology, as an imperial imperative has proven to be an effective force in colonizing the land and the natives. Empires can’t sustain themselves by socio-economic, political, and military means alone. They require ideological and theological framework. This was true of all empires of the past (Romans, Byzantium, Crusades, the Muslim Empire, and it is true of the contemporary empires --the American, and the Israeli (2014:64). He outlines a widely overlooked or dismissed distinction between the Bible-the Old and the New

Testaments, as stories and the history of Palestine. To understand the contemporary situation, his *longue durée* approach takes him to the beginning of the history of Palestine and at some point in the context of that long history, he encounters the biblical stories of various peoples in the land. And within that history he encounters people who are told they are “chosen,” that they are the true natives and heirs of the land. And he discovers that those who subscribe to a particular story or claim exclusive connection to it as a source of identity, rights, and privilege, have by extension excluded others. Raheb effectively deconstructs the exclusionary Biblical stories in the context of the long history of Palestine thus shattering the implied supremacy of one group over other groups and rejects exclusive land ownership claim. He challenges the use of language, and the words used by the empires in their design to deny people their history and identity. He also discovers with solid evidence that Palestine does not refer to a single political, religious, or ethnic entity but rather to a multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious region that was able to include diverse identities and peoples within its boundaries (2023:60). Contrary to malicious designation, the Palestinians of today are not “the *philistines* of the bible, although the philistines are a feature of Palestinian ancestry” (2023:60). “The oldest name of the land is Canaan (covering Palestine, Lebanon, and the Western part of Jordan and coastal Syria.” The region had a flourishing and prosperous economy during the second and third Bronze age (3200-2200 BC). “The first textual and historical evidence of Canaan dates from around 1800 BC, one millennium older than the oldest biblical text” (2023:58). Clay tablets left over from Akkadians, dated to 1360-1332 BC mention Canaan and Canaanites 12 times along with their most important deities such as El, Baal, and Asherah with focus on fertility (common to agricultural system of production), are mentioned. The Old Testament also refers to the land as Canaan and its inhabitants as Canaanites over 150 times (2014:58). The name Canaan and its people were in use until the 5th century AD. The books of Matthew, Mark, and Genesis refer to the land as Canaan also. However, the Palestinians of today are not the Canaanites, but Canaanites are without doubt part of Palestinian ancestry (2023:59).

Due to its geo-political position, Palestine has been a prized land for various empires. The land has been the battleground between hostile forces competing for control in the past two to three centuries. The Ottomans, the French (under Napoleon) and Muhammad Ali Pasha who seized Egypt after Napoleonic withdrawal, aiming to create a modern state similar to those of Europe of the time. His son Ibrahim Pasha occupied Palestine and Syria and was perceived as a threat by both the Ottoman rulers and the Europeans (2023:33-34). The Europeans decided to aid the Ottomans against the Pashas who were expelled from Palestine and Syria. A decade later in 1850s the French

and the British with the aid of Austrians and evangelical Christians, and the Zionist movement began drawing a plan to have the Western European Jews manage the expected nation-state and as an “outpost of Western Civilization” with the Eastern European Jews as laborers (2023:6-7). The British consulate built a church named Christ Church, which became a Zionist Anglican congregation for Jewish converts in Jerusalem. In the nineteenth century the European powers mainly the British who replaced the Ottomans were determined to find a place to relocate the European Jews. In 1840 the British Anthony Ashley Cooper known as the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury was a prominent figure in the Evangelical movements and a member of the British House of Commons advocated the relocation of the Jews. He expected them to accept Jesus and eventually disappear from the face of the Earth....Shaftesbury, Churchill, Balfour were the three prominent figures in the British Empire who had similar ideas about the relocation of European Jews (2023:32-33). A Christian view of history and biblical prophecy to escape Europe, resulted in the conversion of Zionism into a “political agenda.” Theodore Herzl agreed with and adopted the British plan of using cheap Jewish labor ostensibly to develop Palestine. In 1841, Churchill wrote a letter to Sir Moses Montefiore the President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews promising a strategy for Jewish settlement in Palestine by bringing Syria and Palestine “under European protection” and “...governed according to the Spirit of European administration” (2023:34). Inspired by Shaftesbury, “in 1860, Sir Moses Montefiore sponsored the establishment of the first Jewish colony in Palestine, just outside of the Old City in Jerusalem” (2023:33). The official historiography either omits or twists that which can enable the victims to pursue justice. In this regard Biblical history is no exception, particularly if the omissions and twists are for the purpose of justifying colonialism and hegemonic purposes. William Marcy’s “to the victor belong the spoils” and Churchill’s “...history is written by the victors..” are still in most cases truism. No doubt, in the past those with power and resources manufactured narratives as a substitute for truth and historical accuracy. Although this sense of historical ownership on the part of the powerful continues, increasingly with the assistance of technology and awareness on the part of the victims of history, the tide is beginning to turn. However, the emphasis must be on greater decoupling of the power of the rulers of capital and technology and the empire as part of the struggle to revise and correct the terrible historiography. The case of disregarding or denying the presence of Palestinians in the land is an example of, to put it mildly bad historiography. The issue is not to acknowledge or deny any of the groups in the region as a result of dominant historiography, but it is to pursue the truth-historical truth. The existence of “Israel” is not to be denied as a secular reality, neither anyone can deny the sufferings of the Jewish people throughout their history. Raheb has no intention of denying their identity, but

to demonopolize the biblical stories so that they become more inclusive. However, the purpose is to debunk the writing and the consumption of that history, which regards the Palestinians as strangers in the land and simultaneously debunking a theology that violates its own principles.

Raheb first identifies the nature and characteristics of a colonized theology and grounds it in the historical and structural context up to the present. In the process, he identifies the sources of support and the enabling factors in its reproduction. He debunks the language employed by the Christian ideologues to justify and rationalize corrupt behavior. In his opinion, it is the case of "weaponization of the bible" in the service of settler colonialism while disregarding international law, and numerous United Nations resolutions due to support from the dominant veto power - the United States. Raheb exposes the uses and abuses of biblical story as history in support of settler colonial project. To Raheb, decolonization of the faith requires an understanding of the language, as well as the concepts and phrases that enable the creation of a worldview, which in turn facilitates colonization. Biblical passages and terms such as "exodus," "divine rights," "promised land," "Judea," "Temple Mount," "Israel," "biblical entity," "the land," "election," "chosen people," "David and Goliath," and "Armageddon," are loaded biblical terms that Raheb thinks must be decolonized if the Bible is to regain its anti-oppression role in human history. Raheb sees the decolonization of the faith, an arduous task, but possible. He proposes a change in thinking, a paradigm shift in Christian theological thinking beginning with Palestine. To begin with, Raheb prompts people to think of the Bible as a **story** and not as **history**. It is a story, "not necessarily God's own story..." for God's own story cannot be confined to such a short period of the universe's history...." Christians do not believe that the "Bible simply descended from heaven..." But they do believe that it "is the Word, Christ, that descended from heaven" and "written in certain sociocultural, religious, and political contexts, and with specific aims." It is "the story of people with God. It is a story of a certain group of people at certain times over a one millennium, with certain cultural background" (2023:115). Thus, these "...stories are not innocent" of ideological, political, cultural/social influence and geographical location." Biblical story made history because of its relevance to "diverse contexts in the imperial hegemonic oppression world-wide" (2013:117). In Raheb's view "Biblical hermeneutics that prioritizes the Bible as a book of history, whether the history of a certain people or the history of God, are a critical characteristic of **religious fundamentalism**" (2023: 115). The fundamentalists believe that only their reading and interpretation of the bible has meaning and is legitimate and by extension they view all other readings incorrect. Thus, Fundamentalists' reading of the bible cannot and has no

place in the “decolonial theological approach” (2023:115). For instance, “Christian dogma will not help us understand the *sitz im leben* of the notion of *election*, for political story cannot be understood outside of its contexts and its geopolitical settings” (223:119). In 1970s, Walter Brueggemann wrote the “claim of the promised land” as found in the Old Testament is not an innocent theological claim but a rigorous ideological assertion on an important political scale (2014:34). Brueggemann reveals the national Israeli Agenda behind religious packaging of concepts. As Brueggemann (2015:10-11) put it, “...the Bible refuses to speak in a single voice...” And “Any ‘straight line’ reading from ancient text to contemporary issues...is simplification...that ignores historical distance..., is ideologically driven and...wish nothing but the destruction of “the other.” In the context of occupied Palestine, the "other" is the Palestinian people. When “faith is objectified or even absolutized by any particular individual or group, it loses its *sitz im leben* and develops into a dangerous ideology” (2023:116).

Raheb shows that the stories of the bible are not to be viewed as exclusive to a particular people. Just as an example, the story of “Exodus” (liberation of a people from bondage) is applied exclusively to the Israelites leaving Egypt. But there are also the exodus of the Philistines from Caphtor, and the exodus of Arameans from Kir” in the book of Amos (3:2; 9: and Hosea 13:4-8). Therefore, these stories of Exodus renders the story of “election” universal rather than particular (2023:117). Decolonization of the Bible is the de-monopolization of it and all of the power that a monopolized story can provide to a particular group. “The term ‘land of Israel’ took root in Rabbinical Judaism only after the destruction of the temple in 586 BC” (2023:62). “It is, therefore, imperative to distinguish between history and the biblical story, between Israel as a name of the Northern Kingdom and Israel as a theological concept and references to the ‘people of God.’” In turn both must be distinguished from the contemporary State of Israel” (2023:62). Raheb’s argument is supported by Brueggemann (1977, revised 2022) who challenges five major developments in the Old Testament studies; one of which is the “promised land.” Once again, it is not whether something exists or not, but the extent that something exists particularly if the claim is at the expense of others. The Northern Kingdom established by David is a crucial element in the history of the region, particularly that of Israel as theological as well as political identity. But where is the evidence? In Egypt, the Jews were slaves and when Moses took over the leadership, he took them out of Egypt but stranded in the desert for 40 years. Then came David to the rescue. He is believed to be the second King of Israel (after Saul) to have built a small kingdom, defeated the Philistines killed their *Goliath* and expanded the borders westward (2014:30). This is the most prevailing belief. However, “...there are no

historical or archeological records that correspond to the biblical story of David.” Raheb speculates that David “was a guerilla fighter from Judah who rendered and sold his fighting services and who was able to take over the twelve -acre Canaanite city of Jebus with its couple of thousand Jebusite population and transform it into his political base” (2023:61). The Bible describes the establishment of Israel as a political entity in Palestine to king David and his son Solomon who may have lives in Canaan in the first Iron Age period, around 1000 BC. “The Biblical story retroactively glorified the time of David and Solomon as the climax of Israel.” Raheb cites contemporary research (such as Samuel Pagan, 2012, and Philip R. Davies ed. 2015, cited in Raheb, 2023:61)⁶ which has revised the entire history and concluded that this a pure exaggeration to turn a small territory with few hundred fighters into a story (biblical) which end with the period of Solomon as if it were an imperial powerhouse controlling all of Palestine. And the name Israel was chosen in the twentieth century and applied to a modern political entity, the “State of Israel,” which projected an exclusive ethno-national and religious and religious state into the bible...” and used by the Israeli state to continue with land colonization (2023:62). Zionists settlers borrowed the term to replace the term Palestine which was used by all including the Europeans and even the first-generation Zionist leaders (2023:63)⁷.

Religious nationalism requires among other things a strong belief in one's own superiority. Whether in the form of Jewish nationalism, or White Christian Nationalism, they adhere to a particular brand of biblical interpretation which in appearance is very religious imbued with the notion of “chosen” but in reality in the service of hegemonic global system led by the West including Israel. And the “Election

⁶ The American School of Biblical Archeology represented by William Allbright and John Bright, claims that the conquest by Joshua was real; The German School of Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth argue that the Israelites peacefully infiltrated and settled and the third is put forth by George Mendenhall and Norman Gottwell arguing that the Israelites were Canaanite peasants who revolted against the socio-political and economic system and moved to highlands to form a new society. (2023:61fnt).

⁷ Renaming as means of conquest and deculturalization or legitimation of conquest, is an important aspect of colonial project. Renaming of other peoples' land has been a distinct colonial practice and it is one of the hallmarks of Zionist and Christian colonial settler project in contemporary Palestine. ⁷ For instance, the name Carthage was changed to Africa after the Roman conquered the region and later the name was extended to the entire continent.... Spanish renamed “Anahuac” to America ((2023:65). Senegalese Historian Cheikh Anta Diop believes the ancient name of Africa was “Alkebulan”-meaning the “Mother of Mankind.” “Egypt,” “Indochina,” “Indonesia,” “Near East,” “Middle East,” and “Far East,” are all European designations and renaming.

returned to theological prominence with the blending of religion and nationalism at the height of nineteenth century imperialism” (2023:110). Citing a Harvard study (William Hutchison, 1991), Raheb (2023:110) states “... how “chosen people” ideologies were a crucial element of imperial policies in Germany after 1870. In Great Britain, and in the United States “...chosenness was made part of both the domestic and foreign policy...and the idea of chosen people was utilized within the national discourse ...” leading to “an alliance between Christianity and nationalism.” However, the analysis of 'election' in the modern context must focus on the three manifestations of the notion of election in the political arena. Now it must be seen as an integral part of the European nationalism and Christianity mediated by the notion of “chosen people,” and settler colonialism (as illustrated by Donald Hartman Akenson (1992, cited in Raheb, 2023:112). Three groups of settlers South Africa, Israel, and Ulster have a “covenant mind set”—seeing themselves as chosen people, and American exceptionalism (with a biblical twist) presented by the Christian Right which considers America as chosen and that “faithfulness to America” is “faithfulness to Jesus Christ”(Andrew Murphy , 2008 cited in Raheb, 2023:110-112). The dilemma for the Palestinians has been this “biblical” concept of “election” and the claim of “chosen people” which recognizes the Jews as the only legitimate heir of the land. The Jews believe that according to the Old Testament, they were chosen and remain chosen by God to fulfill a mission—to do God’s work on Earth. This is particularly troubling for the Palestinians since it is extended to the question of “land” at the present. Raheb questions the prevailing narrative, demystifies the claim of “election” and negates the purported link to the current dispute over land. This is the core of the Palestinian decolonial perspective on the notion of election and chosenness. In the absence of deconstruction and decolonization, this narrative has remained the dominant belief on the basis of which the modern state of Israel lays claim to the land as legitimate proprietor. By claiming the exclusive right to be God’s “chosen people,” based on biblical narrative has been the dominant belief. Raheb deconstructs this belief particularly with respect to the problematic genealogy of Patriarch Abraham and his descendants. Perhaps one of the greatest manipulations of the bible in the service of political exclusion and appropriation is the lineage from Abraham which Raheb attributes its demystification to the Qur’an and specifically the elevation of Ishmael to the level of Isaac and his sons Jacob and Esau. The story of Abraham the Patriarch is that he had two sons Ishmael and Isaac. Isaac had two sons Jacob and Esau. Jacob had twelve sons of whom one Yousef was the preferred (preferential treatment) one and rose to power. At the heart of this story is the problematic of the theology of “election” which turned into selection- selecting one and disqualifying others. Raheb suggests that if we were to read the story “backward,” while considering the geopolitics of Palestine, it will “free us from

a literal understanding of the story and allow us to realize that the people of Palestine were negotiating their relationship. The three Patriarchs, Abraham in Negev, Isaac in Beersheba and Jacob in Bethel and Samaria represents a united three diverse traditions and identities. But what of Ishmael? He is not any part of the story. The Qur'an takes up the issue of election where the Bible left off. In Medina, the prophet Muhammad noticing that the Jews refused to accept his message, considered themselves to be "chosen people" claimed the story that runs from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob exclusively for themselves. They considered the Arabs as the descendants of Ishmael," occupying a "marginal role in the history of salvation" (2023:15-126). "Prophet Muhammad took up the cause of the excluded and marginalized represented by Ishmael by rescuing Ishmael from the shadows of the linear salvation history and making him equal with Isaac and Jacob" (The Qur'an, 2:136, 3:84). The Prophet attempting to clarify the matter with the Jews and the Christians, stated who exactly the descendants of Abraham were thus providing a critique of their sense of monopoly of salvation and election (2023:126).

The story is as much about the colonized Bible (one exclusive group claiming land ownership) as it is about the European Christians whose recent history shows a determination to relocate the European Jews (to eliminate their "Jewish problem") to Palestine. This was somewhat a different approach than the fourteenth century, a time when the Jews were blamed for every calamity including the plague). "In Christianity, particularly within the theological framework of Calvinism, election involves God choosing a particular person or group of people to a particular task or relationship, especially eternal life." Election to eternal life is viewed by some as conditional on a person's faith, and by others as "unconditional." "Chosenness" initially implied a condition of powerlessness in the face of the empire. Continuing with the demystification of "election" and "chosen," Raheb (2023:93-97) asks, what is an appropriate hermeneutical key to understanding an ancient text such as the Old Testament at the present? "Who is elected": individuals?, a group of people?, a nation? "Israel?" Raheb distinguishes four different usages of the word, "Israel." How do we define Israel? A race? A religion? A State? The Church?" Historical and biblical name of Israel refers to the Kingdom of Israel or House of Omri (10th century to 722 BCE). This political entity must be distinguished from biblical Israel as an abstract theological concept to describe "God's people." Both are different from "Ancient Israel as a modern construct that confuses certain aspects of the biblical story with history, thereby projecting an exclusive ethno-national and religious state into the Bible (Keith W. Whitelam, 1996 cited in Raheb 2023:94). Then there is a modern political entity called the State of Israel (2023:94). These four names of Israel are not interchangeable and

must be distinguished from each other, from Judaism, and people of Jewish faith. Also, “it is important to distinguish between the Judeans of the bible, meaning the people who were living in the Southern part of Palestine, and the Jews of today, on the one hand, and between the Israelites of the Bible and Israelis today, on the other” (2023:94). When Raheb uses the term “people of the land or the people of Palestine,” he does include all of the inhabitants of the land regardless of ethnicity, religion, and other identities (2023:94).

The use of biblical concepts such as "God's chosen people" and "land promise" have been a source of support for the occupation of Palestine (2023:97). Equating biblical Israel with the State of Israel, renders Israel as a Theopolitical entity with “theological qualifications” and the people as chosen people with “divine rights” thereby legitimating violence against Palestinians whom they consider savages and uncivilized and worthy of no other form of control except through military occupation (2023:97). To Raheb, the Biblical mythistory and the depiction of native Palestinians as savage terrorists and Jews as democratic and civilized serve the settler colonial project. As part of the empire Israel as a police state has extraordinary power over the native people. Israel has been using the tactics of the empire in use since Babylon. But the question is how to resist the empire? Not through violence but through faith- through creative resistance as outlined in the “*Palestine Kairos Document 2009*” (2023:78, 105). The question then is if “non-violence” is the proper approach, how should the empire built on violence be confronted? How should the structure that uses violence and recognizes no language other than violence be approached? Raheb points out Ghandi (confronting the occupying British Empire in India) and Martin Luther King (struggling within the United States which allowed for reform) as role models for resisting Empires. Raheb recognizes that the temporal and spatial differences between the three contexts are enormous, but he wishes for the rise of a united front composed of enlightened faithful to join the struggle. Raheb wishes the good and well-informed Christians who visit the “holy land” to join Palestinian in their struggle to resist the empire. He believes that they must be reminded that the Bible is not on the side of oppression, but on the side of the oppressed. It would be a difficult change in one's worldview and belief in which the individual feels so secure and righteous. This historiography challenges the forged dominant narrative through what he calls “the weaponization” of the bible disguising the colonial land grab. In the “traditional theological approach” the application of biblical passage to the modern context is sufficient and appears innocent enough. And precisely for this reason, the traditional theology cannot be part of the decolonial struggle. The relationship between the traditional/uncritical theology and the empire has always been a symbiotic relationship.

A systematic denial of the rights of the inhabitants of Palestine to the land became a theological imperative in the service of the empire in control of the land. This marriage of convenience between theology and geopolitics culminated with the Balfore Declaration in the early part of the twentieth century. The Western colonial powers who defeated the Ottoman Empire began dividing up the Ottoman's colonial possessions amongst themselves and found different uses for them. British Mandate in 1920 was to prepare the ground for transfer of European Jews to Palestine. As Palestinian began revolting against the Mandate and the eventual departure of the British forces on May 15, 1948, (Nakba" for Palestinians) the European Jews in Palestine declared independence and the "state of Israel" was created. In 1947 Jewish population of Palestine owned 5% of the land. In 1948 war, Israel took 77% of historic Palestine and expelled 3/4 of millions from their homes and seized their property. This was only the beginning of an imperial expansion with obscure boundaries, facilitated by the imperial theology and modern weapon systems. "The creation of the state of Israel with an ancient biblical name caused confusion" and for scholars familiar with the land, its history, and the peoples, it became a theologically, historically, and anthropologically anomalous (2023:11). Israel and the Jewish organizations branded it "biblical entity" as if they were hinting at the type of conduct then new entity was charged with. Specifically, the conduct of this "biblical entity" in its treatment of the natives and the consideration of every Jew as a citizen of Israel regardless of where they were. The Jewish migration to Palestine was hailed as a miraculous "return to their ancient home" (2023:11). From the beginning language was to be used an important means to reinforcing the aim which was total ownership of the land.—it was an "exodus." The problem was not just the behavior of the new State. The Palestinians as the continuous inhabitants of the land have been subject to external forces—invaders—which interrupted the historical consciousness. Raheb refers to the interruptions as cases of "amnesia." Which inadvertently aided the colonization of their homeland and interrupted their continuous existence on the land. Raheb identifies three developments that led to the loss of Palestinian memory and history: "ecclesial amnesia" on the part of the imperial church, which "made it impossible to recognize the anti-imperial dimension of the Bible" and led to the Bible's "depoliticization" through the use of allegory and topology; "religious amnesia" resulting from Islamization; and "political amnesia," resulting from the "influx of Jewish immigrants into Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." These three developments forced the Palestinians to erase their memory particularly with "the establishment of a state with a biblical name- Israel-- on their "ancient" homeland (2014:15).

While on the ground, the state of Israel became militarily stronger due to the unconditional financial and military supports from the West, particularly from the United States and Germany. Raheb uses the analogies of “hardware” and “software” as two categories of aid to Israel free of charge. “Hardware” refers to military weapons including but not limited to missiles, jet fighters, bulldozers, and submarines and “software” which include among others, Christian Zionism, subtle scientific Fascism, archaeological tourism, holy land terminologies, post-holocaust theology, Orientalism, media, and film industry and their “racial typecasting” of Arabs, , and the presentation of Israel as a successful high tech startup country. Perhaps the greatest Western theological (software) support provided by groups, organizations, and societies enable Israel to tap into the bountiful mercy of the parishioners and consumers of uncritical and static theology.

In 1962 Karl Barth a leading theologian set the tone for others by calling Israel “... a new sign of God’s faithfulness to the seeds of Abraham” (2023:40). This was a powerful endorsement of the State of Israel as a biblically “exclusive entity.” Palestinians recognized the evolving grand usurpation design for their homeland by the West. In 1965, Fayez Sayegh director of Palestine Research Center, published a booklet with the title of “Zionist Colonialism in Palestine” warning of the plan to “pumping in Jewish migrants” and “pumping out Palestinians natives” (2023:14). The Palestinians witnessing these developments, saw the need for a defensive approach to counter an all-out effort to achieve the goals of settler colonialism. In 1964 Palestine National Council led to the creation of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). With the defeat of Arab armies by a newly found small country in six days (another biblically loaded term) in 1967 was impressive to all but terrifying for the Palestinians. The strongest Arab States (Egypt and Syria) were subdued, and the Palestinians began searching for strategies to defend themselves. The PLO found itself with no option but to resort to guerrilla tactics and skirmishes with the Israel forces on the fringes. Armed struggle provided Israel with more assets in demonization of Palestinians and more opportunity to seize more land. The developments in North America and Europe were nothing but in the direction of solidifying Israel as an outpost of Western Civilization in the Middle East. After the intoxicating victory, liberal Christians began seeing themselves as “defender of the Jews and a lobbyist for Israel.” Dutch Reform Church in 1970 issued a statement considering “biblical Israel not only a religious community but a historical reality”(2023:40-41). The liberal Christian Zionists whose work later referred to as “Post-Holocaust theology” were influenced by the Jewish writer among them Holocaust survivors such as Eli Wisel, Richard Rubenstein, Emil Fackensheim, and Irvin Greenberg, made the Holocaust the “hermeneutical key for Christian Theology after

1967” (2023:39). Israel’s victory in 1967 War, “...triggered Jewish messianism” and energized the pro-Israel Christian groups. Starting in the sixties, a Zionist political narrative of ‘unity of God, land, and people’ and a ‘theological attribute to the State of Israel’ became prominent features of Protestant liberal theologians” (2023:40). Six-day war boosted Jewish religious nationalism followed by settler colonial movement in the West Bank naming it Judea and Samaria –a religious designation and not geographic. Shortly “Judaization” of the newly conquered territories began in earnest. In the post “six-day” war, Israel communicated its intentions regarding Palestinian lands by presenting itself as a victim surrounded by the hostile Arab armies bent on destroying the “Jewish state.” This is the premise upon which the state of Israel formulates policies with respect to the occupied territories, depopulation, Jewish immigration, and regional rivals.

In December 1987, the World came to know of a people under occupation when they rose against the occupier. By doing so, their existence was to some extent acknowledged by the outside world. Two years after the first Intifada, in 1989 Israel was granted a “major non-NATO ally” status allowing for greater access to advanced weapon systems. Influential governmental and non-governmental entities such as The Institute for National Security (INSS) in collaboration with Tel Aviv University in Israel regularly conducts research and analysis on all aspects of national security and international conflicts. Several years after the initial intifada Israel and its powerful allies "negotiated a compromise-- Oslo Accords I (1993) & II (1995) allowing the PLO to establish a self-rule in limited areas of the West Bank (2023:16). Oslo was not a threat or a deterrent to Israel's "settler colonial state project" and Israel's military superiority vis-a-vis the Arabs (2023:18).The greatest source of its invincibility has been the all-new influential Theo-political construct – the Christian Zionism advocating the expansion of settler colonialism. Settler Colonialism as a discipline was absent from theological discourse until the publication of Finish Old Testament scholar Pekka Pitkanen’s recent study of the book of Pentateuch and Joshua (2023:4). Referring to Israel-Palestine context Pitkanen convincingly shows how the first six books of the Old Testament include all of the prominent features of settler colonialism (2023:4). Raheb shows that through their use of language and theological ideas, Christian Zionist defend, legitimize, and sustain occupation. Christian Zionists comes in many shapes and manifestations. Deeply rooted in evangelical circles beginning in Europe and spreading to North America and elsewhere, the contemporary Christian Zionists is a “Christian lobby” in support of settler colonialism by using biblical and theological constructs within metanarrative (2023:31). If the Settler Colonial outpost is to expand and become successful, it requires more land preferably without population. Israel’s policy of

depopulating the Palestinian land has been multi-prong; the dehumanizing check points, destruction of peoples' homes, the elimination of native trees such as oak and Hawthorne replaced by pine trees and other non-indigenous trees (*Green colonialism*), systematic uprooting of sources of cash crops such as olive trees, almonds and figs, among others have been used as means of depopulation. Water resources in the West bank and Gaza are controlled by Israel. "Israel uses over 80 percent of the scarce natural water resources of the West Bank, leaving only 20 percent to the native Palestinians." In Gaza which lost access to water after October 7th, 2023, (the day Hamas attacked the Israeli side of barbed wire), the water supply is also controlled by the Israelis (2014:58). These conducts are means toward the greater goal of depopulating the land. Indeed, the entire history of Palestinian experience under occupation particularly of late, is what Achille Mbembe (2019) would describe as "necropolitics"-- being at the mercy of a state that kills at will and turn bodies into a physical, social, political, and cultural corpse. "Necro-violence" in its explicit and implicit forms is the process of producing "living dead"- the defining characteristic of the social and the political conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories (Al-Kassimi, 2022). In spite of all restrictions, the Palestinians have been incredibly resilient. Even when the outside world is told about the plight of Palestinians, the propaganda machine in favor of Israel goes into overdrive explaining away the "incidents" and triggers messianic Christian and Jewish nationalism. The Europeans have used the Jews for their own geo-political, theological, and nationalistic benefits. They have also supported the Jews particularly in the Post-Holocaust history.

"The invention of Jewish People" as told by the Jewish historian Shlomo Sand show how Jewish intellectuals in Germany, influenced by European nationalism, embarked on a project of retroactively inventing a modern Jewish people, where 'would no longer be a rich and diverse religious civilization' but rather became 'an ancient people or race that was uprooted from its homeland in Canaan and arrived in its youth at the gates of Berlin.'" Sand in his 2012 book, also points out the invention of "Jewish homeland" by the evangelical Christians and Jewish Zionists to facilitate the colonization of Palestine...and all reflective of nineteenth century European racism (cited in Raheb, 2014:33). Marc Ellis (1987), a Jewish Liberation Theologian, describes the relationship between the Jewish Synagogue and Christian church in the West as "*the ecumenical deal*"— Post-Holocaust interfaith ecumenical dialogue with strong influence from Israel. The purpose was redemption and repentance. In Germany, the socio-economic and political elites provided Israel with an unconditional support and today we see a continuation of that approach as exemplified by the sale of Submarines by Germany, restrictions by law in using terms such as Zionism and the support from German certain

intellectuals and philosophers such as Georgene Habermas explaining away the genocidal war on Gaza and any criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic. Germany has been one of Israel's most dependable allies. Back in 2008, Angela Merkel in a speech in the Israeli Knesset, "described Israel's security as "part of the German *raison d'état*." Immediately after the "October 7th attack on Israel, Olaf Schultz declared 'there is only one place for Germany: by Israel's side.' This unconditional support for Israel followed by a "tenfold increase in the export of German weapons to Israel" (Daniel Marwecki. 2024). However, what is readily available and applied with no restriction is the label of "anti-Semitism" to even legitimate criticism of Israel and even to progressive Jewish organizations in pursuit of peace such as Jewish Voices for Peace⁸. Once upon a time, this label had some credibility and its use appropriate. It was coined in the late nineteenth century to describe demonization and discrimination of Jewish people in Europe. But gradually became a potent political weapon muzzling any criticism of Israel. Christians supported Israel as repentance for antisemitism and the Holocaust. "As Israel became more abusive towards the Palestinians, Christians remained silent. Failure to support- or worse, criticism of -Israeli policies was viewed by the Jewish dialoguers as a return to anti-Semitism" (2023:131). The dialogue became a deal; silence on the part of Christians earns no criticism of anti-Semitism from Jews. "It was part of a larger political deal in the American political scene. Any criticism of Israel by a political figure was their death knell, and accusations of anti-Semitism were the bullets..." (2023:131-132). In Western societies equating Zionism with racism and any criticism of Israel—a secular state in its occupation of Palestine also would be labeled as anti-Semitic. Even when the United Nations passes resolutions against Israel (which are supposed to be binding but invariably ignored and/or dismissed by Israel), are labeled anti-Semitic. Raheb points out an anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim racism on the part of Christian Zionists particularly in relation to their advocacy of settler-colonial geopolitics.

Raheb argue that it matters what the Christians in the West know and how they think about Palestine since they constitute the greatest most powerful allies of Israel. Given the developments in the Western, particularly America political landscape, their education is more urgent now than ever before. Whereas the natives of Palestine see Palestine as the land of their ancestor and their home, to the Christians in the West (evangelicals, Christian Zionists, and mainstream theologians of various denominations), Palestine is an imagined land based on vague description of it in the Bible. Perhaps the most preposterous claim by these fundamentalists is that "Palestine

⁸ The label of "self-Hating Jew" has been used against any Jew who is critical of Israel. The American scholar/activist Norman Finkelstein is a case in point.

did not exist before 180 A.D.” Of course, selective Biblical passages serves as the basis of the anti-Palestinian narratives. Passages that generate fear continue to be a prominent feature of the narrative with emphasis on “Apocalypse,” and “Armageddon.” and exclusively in regard to the U.S. policy in the Middle East. The Anti-Christ that is to fight Israel, will be confronted with a sword wielding Jesus in Israel. As a battleground between various empires in the fertile valley of Palestine another biblical concept emerged—the “Armageddon” (2014:51; 2023:81). Armageddon “wasn’t a revealed vision of the end times, but it corresponded to the political reality of the region.” It is mentioned only once in the bible and now the fundamentalist Christians have taken this to be the reckoning day-- the day “Jesus returns.” The prevailing narrative that Jesus riding a “white horse” will lead an army “behead’ all of the unbelievers, creating rivers of blood making the land safe for the believers! And since the US and Israel are only two nations that are supposed to do “God’s work” on Earth, the Americans must join the Israel Defense Force (IDF) to defeat the Anti-Christ. Biblical passages on America missiles and tanks and biblical references by the military brass reflect the influence of Christian Zionists in the United States military. This construct has been reproduced and perpetuated the colonization of the mind of theologians and their flocks worldwide while providing a solid base of support for Israeli occupation of the land. In the 1960s, the "Zionist political narrative of 'unity of God, land, and people' was popularized in American "Anglo-Saxon churches" and espoused by prominent Christian theologian. Decades later, Zionism was embraced by such conservative politicians as Mike Pence (Donald Trump’s Vice President and the darling of Christian United For Israel-- CUFI) and Donald Trump, whose kinship with Israeli leaders is rooted in the country’s appeal to an evangelical base and in America’s own colonial history. Nevertheless, these two politicians are not exceptions to the rule. Raheb asserts that both the U.S. and Israel "are settler nations who occupied the lands of native peoples and pushed those people into small reservations." They are both empires and Israel uses all techniques perfected by previous empires in colonizing and subduing the conquered people. Yet the Christian fundamentalists believe that both nations are here exclusively to “honor God.” Christian United For Israel has 7.5 million followers and raises millions for Israel every year. Their activities in support of Israel are not limited to their own countries of residence. They have been visiting Israel and therein given a script stating that the “Temple Mount,” is an exclusive Jewish heritage upon which the “invading Muslims” have built their Mosques. References to “Temple Mount” (2023:55) by the Christian Zionist is for the sole purpose of supporting settler colonialism. Referring to the whole area as Temple Mount, “...often panders to radical Israeli settlers who are determined to colonize the Muslim shrines and turn them into a Jewish site (2023:55). During the past five decades Settlers have attempted to destroy the two Mosques (The Al-Aqsa

Mosque and The Dome of the Rock) so as to build another temple and now an “...organization founded by an Israeli military officer , Gershon Salomon is determined to build the Third Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem...” (2023:55). In addition to the plunder of resources, the erasure of cultural heritage and national identity associated with them (deculturalization), and desecration and demolition of sacred religious sites is consistent with the imperial practices of dehumanization and degradation. “With a history of Jewish settler colonialism that resembles the acts of the Crusaders, theologians cannot employ the term ‘Temple Mount’ in innocence” (2023:57). This leads to the question, “How can we liberate theological minds from this invisible colonization?” How to break away from a language that plays into the hands of Jewish settler colonialism, Christian Zionist ideology, and Islamophobic rhetoric?” (2023:57). This story has been weaponized by both Jewish and Christian Zionists as the historical reference for the settler colonial narrative and practice. Changing the names of towns, regions, and monuments, from Arabic to Jewish, is part of the process of deculturalization. “Christians acquainted with the biblical story confuse it with history and subconsciously side with the state of Israel in seeing Palestinians as intruders on the land. Palestinians are often depicted by non-native Christians as the strangers” (2023:63). Raheb recalls a conversation with a Bible quoting American woman who naively cited a 22:21 and 23: 9, references to God telling Israelis to “take care of strangers.” Raheb replies, "I am not the stranger!" “Nor are my people,” “We were made strangers” (2014:37). That woman's perception of the natives ---Palestinians as "strangers" is the hallmark of a colonized biblical story. “The most important segment of the biblical story for Jewish and Christian Zionists, the Torah and book of Joshua frighteningly contain all of the elements of settler colonialism as a political practice” (Pitkanen ,2014 cited in Raheb, 2023:64). “The book of Joshua is the blueprint par excellence of a settler colonial ideology and theology” (2023:65). “David Ben Gurion used the book of Jashua to advance the settler colonial project (Rachel Havrelock, 2022 cited in Raheb, 2023:65).

Referring to the Palestinians as terrorists has been part and parcel of the script whose matrix confines uninformed ordinary people and unscrupulous theologians and politicians. Raheb “refuses” and advises against separating the “reality of this world with the reality of the bible by preaching a ‘cheap ’gospel’ that neither challenges reality nor is challenged by it” (2014:2). “The occupation of Palestine by Israel at the present is thus another link in a long chain of uninterrupted occupation” (2014:4). People subject to vicissitudes under occupation have no choice but to adjust to changing political and imperial realities (2014:12). Palestinian “... identity was forced to change and develop according to the new realities imposed by empires in which they found

themselves under (2014:12). Yet Raheb maintains that as a people –the natives of the land, they identify as Palestinian and not as either Jew, Christian or Muslim. Christian population of Palestine is no more than 3% of the total population and the majority being Sunni Muslim, the question is often asked, where are the Arabs? The Arab governments are very comfortable with their own division of labor in the global economy and with the Palestinian status quo (put up with occupation and we will send you funds). In certain Arab countries, the Palestinians are not even allowed to own land. These regimes pursue their own “national” interests and the Arab masses have only superficially accepted Palestinians as their brethren.

Raheb states that there is a need for a historiography beyond mainstream that challenges both the Palestinian masses who have a “different understanding of their identity” and challenges the assumptions by “mainstream Christians, Zionist Jews, and biblical scholars.” R.S. Sugirtharajah, states, the “mainstream scholarship is insular and obsessed with its own fixed and rigid Eurocentric questions”....On the whole, current biblical scholarship has generated artificial needs and convoluted the biblical histories, complicated textual reconstruction, and led its readers astray from the true needs and wants of the people” (quoted in Raheb, 2011; Raheb 2014:6). In other words, the bible has become a legitimate source of oppression or a blueprint for aggression. As stated earlier the label “Six Day” war is also of biblical significance, since it is a recital of the victory of “David” (reads Israel) over ‘the Goliath’ (the Arabs). The outcome of the 1967 War gave a boost to greater settlement activities by the Jewish extremists in the West Bank which they renamed Judea and Samaria. The ongoing process of Judaization includes extensive Archaeological excavation in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount. The ultimate goal is to create the “greater Israel” after the “kingdom of David.” In the post 1967 discourse the native Palestinian people were seen as the Canaanites whose land had to be occupied by Israel (2014:18). However, “the modern-day Canaanites can thus be tolerated only as servants and cheap laborers under an almost ‘divine Jewish race’.” This is the context in which radical Jewish groups openly call for ethnic cleansing base on selected and out of context biblical passages. “Monumental efforts were made by the state of Israel and Jewish organizations globally in branding the new state as a biblical entity” (2014:17). In the post-1967 War, Israel encouraged numerous archeological excavations in search of buried Jewish heritage. Radical Jews such as Dayan Aharoni, “..advocated a greater Israel after the Kingdom of David” (2014:18). Yet the talk of two state solution continues without the Israelis ever

⁹ More than 150,000 Palestinian workers from the occupied West Bank, pass through the checkpoints and enter Israel daily for work, mainly in construction, and agriculture.

uttering the phrase “two state solution.” Their approach is that of “Pax Romana” – speaking of peace while continuously expanding the boundaries of the empire.

Settlements or cities built on conquered land is unique and an important aspect of the matrix of control by the empire (2014:58). Indeed, control of movement, resources, , terrorizing indigenous people to submission is a time-tested imperial practice. The wall built by the Israelis (a universal imperial practice), in The West Bank is allegedly for security purposes and to protect the settlements. But its location suggests a different reason and that is greater ease of grabbing more land and more importantly built on the land above aquifer (water resources of the West Bank) and other resources (2014:58). Indigenous people know well, that living under the empire means living in a world constructed by others with minimal rights and the gradual loss of identity. During the past seventy-five years of occupation, Palestinians have endured the most dehumanizing and brutal treatment at the hands of Israeli occupation regime. And today the Palestinian Authority has according to most Palestinians been doing the dirty work of Israelis in the West Bank. Its riot police is created primarily for the control of the Palestinians which previously was done by the occupying Israeli army. In other words, localization of imperial means of control and Palestinization of the conflict will only postpone the day when the Palestinians can overcome the empire.

Where does the land grabbing drive and or occupation stop? Is there a limit to how vast the contemporary geography of the state of Israel is envisioned. Perhaps the “supportive” biblical reference can answer the question as to the occupier’s intent; “Our biblical ancestors envisioned a land stretching “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gn 15:18). The interpretation of this verse by some evangelical Christians is that the two waterways –the land between the Nile and the Euphrates (Palestinians land with the natives—Palestinian people) “should be the ultimate boundaries of a greater Israel.” Some of them consider “the two blue lines on the Israeli flag to symbolize these two great rivers” (2014:127-128). “The meek shall inherit the land” (Psalm 37), to Raheb, is the land of Palestine which is the fifth Gospel. He also talks about the sixth gospel which he means in order to understand the bible, we need to listen to the people of the land (2014:96-97). But there are also historical precedents; For Raheb, the contemporary empire with its sophisticated and refined mechanisms of control and exploitation is an evolution of that which existed during the time of Jesus. For Jesus it was imperative for faith which means resistance, salvation, and the power to dismantle oppressive imperial apparatus, to grow and take hold as a barrier to further imperial plunder and exploitation (2014:101). To Raheb, the political project of Jesus was to save which means to liberate (2014:101). Uninformed Christians have been uttering the word “save” but with very little attention to its deeper meaning.

Rarely “saved” is viewed in the context of resistance to Empire and oppression. A disturbing level of ignorance is displayed when the good-hearted American Christians do not see the systemic causes of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and more often they it a matter of the absence of interpersonal communication and deep distrust of the Arabs and Muslims. Raheb wants the readers to know that not all Christians and Jews share this view and have decided not to join their most extreme brethren. But as Raheb argues, when it involves “land,” it seems the progressive Jews and Christians are on the side of the nationalist Jews and mainstream and Christian Zionists. The preconceived notions regarding the “conflict” are indeed difficult to overcome. After 1967 War as James Crossley shows, Jesus and Christianity presentation are for the sole purpose of providing support for the empire. The Palestinian affirmed that they can convey their stories better than anyone while respecting conscientious and responsible efforts on behalf of others. Edward Said, the famous son of Palestine in exile vehemently rejected the “Orientalist” version of who he is and decided to educate others about his people. After the 1980s Palestinian uprising, a substantial number of Palestinian scholars from various disciplines began writing, formed theological centers, and organized conferences just to tell the Palestinian story to the World and to counter who the Imperial theology and media presenting them as. “Elias Chacour, Giries Khoury, Munib Younan, Naim Ateek, Odeh Rantisi, Rafiq Khoury, Riah Abu El-Assal, Jean Zaru, Nur Masalha, Michael Sabbah,” and of course Mitri Raheb are among them. These theologians were determined to create resistance to domination through a liberated theology. To them, faith must create a barrier to domination. They also realize that among the enlightened believers in every major faith there are voices in support of Palestinians. But the critical factor is the massive number of Christians in the West who must see the potential and power of their faith if and when liberated. “Creative resistance” mediated by Faith is the key to dismantling the empire as emphasized by the *Kairos Palestine Document* 2009 (2014:121). “The most dangerous thing for the oppressed and occupied is that at some point they lose faith in themselves, in their ability to change the status quo.” Restoring people’ confidence and faith is a crucial step towards liberation (2014:101). This is true of the imperial crowd and the colonized victims. Palestine is Raheb’s home, and Christianity is his faith. He lives there and as all Palestinians under occupation he is worried for his children and his people. He is not sure when there will be peace, but he is hopeful. The dominant peace model –the Pax Romana where the empire dictates peace through settlements, land confiscation, and colonization cannot sustain itself indefinitely (2014:125-126). Pax Romana was rejected by the Judeans of the first century, and similar models are understandably rejected by the Palestinians of the twenty first century. The decolonization of Palestine requires exposing the sources and factors that rationalize, support, and reproduce colonial

mindset, narrative, and strategy. The inability of supranational organizations such as the United Nations' Security Council, dominated by the powerful countries with veto power and a shameful record of "resolutions" with no desire to enforce in restraining the powerful. Having faith in the power of community to oppose the empire is a faith of resistance. In the meantime, humanity will continue to hear a universal lament of the disinherited resisters worldwide--"Where are you God?" The hope is that similar works lead to an alliance of the oppressed in resistance to the Empire-- the answer to "Where are you God?" In the specific case of Palestine, only the dialogue of two war weary peoples --the Israelis and the Palestinians with no outside interference can lead to creation of a Palestinian state within a common market-- a permanent peace. These two books provide a strong counter-hegemonic narrative, a documented rejection of Imperial theology, a negation of the prevailing "rejection theology" and are highly recommended to all of those whose humanity and decency are insulted by the prevailing narrative regarding the existence, history, and the occupation of Palestine.

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