

THE LA GRANGE DECLARATION CHALLENGING CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Editor's Note: *This statement is reproduced in Seedbed in order to illustrate some of the initiatives taken by American Christians to seek balance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.*

This statement was prepared and endorsed in 1979 by 5000 American church leaders, including many in the evangelical community.

As believers committed to Christ and his kingdom, we challenge the popular assumptions about biblical interpretation and the presuppositions of political loyalty held so widely by fellow Christians in their attitudes toward the conflict in the Middle East.

We address this urgent call to the church of Jesus Christ to hear and heed those voices crying out as bruised reeds for justice in the land where our Lord walked, taught, was crucified, and rose from the dead. We have closed our hearts to these voices, and isolated ourselves even from the pleading of fellow Christians who continue to live in that land.

We call on Christ's followers to repent from their complicity—through either their indifference or their uncritical embrace of US policies—in the continuing cycle of Middle Eastern violence, accelerated by our tax dollars and

We are anguished by the fact that countless Christians believe that the Bible gives to the modern State of Israel a divine right to lands inhabited by Palestinian people, and divine sanction to the State of Israel's policy of territorial acquisition. We believe such an understanding must be judged in the light of the whole of biblical revelation affirming that in the revelation of Jesus Christ, God's covenants find their completion. Therefore, we plead for all Christians to construct a vision of peace in the holy land which rests on the biblical injunctions to correct oppression and seek justice for all peoples.

Forthrightly, we declare our conviction that in the process of establishing the State of Israel, a deep injustice was done to the Palestinian people, confiscating their land and driving many into exile and even death. We are further grieved by the ongoing deprivation of basic civil rights to those Arabs who live today in the State of Israel.

Moreover, for thirteen years, large portions of the holy land and its people, including the West Bank of the Jordan River, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, have suffered under foreign military occupation, even as in our Lord's time. Land is seized from its inhabitants. Water for farming is rationed and restricted. Schools and universities are closed by the Israeli military authorities. And 100,000 people

have been arrested in large part for speaking their convictions. Of these, some have been subjected to brutal torture, described by the US Consulate in Jerusalem as 'systematic' and documented beyond any question.

We confess our silence, our indifference, our hardheartedness, and our cowardice, all too often, in the face of these dehumanizing realities.

Earnestly, we pray for a new anointing of the Spirit in our hearts, creating us into a more faithful people used to break every yoke of oppression and let the broken victims go free.

We extend our hearts to our Jewish brothers and sisters, common sons and daughters of Abraham. Like us in the United States, their corporate national spirit is being corroded by the weight of the government of the State of Israel's reliance on rampant militaristic policies and actions. We would pray for them, and with them, for a vision of security rooted in expanding channels of trust rather than escalating arsenals of armed might.

Historically and today, the State of Israel's territorial ambitions have been justified as security needs. Through the decades, this has instigated a cycle of violence and counter violence that still continues, engulfing all sides, and leaving none unblemished from the spilling of innocent blood. We pray with the Psalmist for every bow to be broken and every spear to be snapped.

Too many of us have been lulled into the shallow hope that peace can be built in the Middle East through the US supply of more weapons, with the continued military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, and while basic human and political rights of the Palestinian people are denied. We call on Christ's followers to repent from their complicity—through either their indifference or their uncritical embrace of US policies—in the continuing cycle of Middle Eastern violence, accelerated by our tax dollars and our government's political decisions.

The Arab people and their land have been plundered for centuries by Western Christendom. We acknowledge and confess a continuing legacy of prejudice, evidenced today, toward Arab people, both Christian and Moslem.

We repudiate with equal and uncompromising fervour the enduring prejudice toward the Jewish people still present this day in our society and in our churches (those churches include, ironically, many of those churches with staunchly pro-Israeli biases, drawn from their versions of biblical interpretation).

Overcoming these divisions and hatreds, we affirm, as God's revelation declares, our common humanity with all.

We believe that any biblical hope for peace and security for all peoples in the Middle East must encompass some form of restitution for past wrongs. Life, peoplehood, and land are all God's gifts. These gifts enjoyed by the Jewish people in the Holy Land have been denied to the Palestinian people. Therefore, we yearn and we call for the building of a peace that includes the clear expression of political self-determination and justice for the Palestinian people. This includes leadership of their own choosing, and a sovereign state. Our firm conviction is that through asserting these rights, the way can be opened for Jews in Israel and Palestinian people to find peace and true security in that land.

We pledge ourselves, and we invite others, to an urgent devotion to see God's purpose of peace, justice, and reconciliation realized in this land. In that spirit, we call upon all Christians to join with us in re-examining assumptions regarding biblical revelation and views of the conflict in the Middle East; we commit ourselves and our resources to active and ongoing dialogue with other Christians on these questions; and, we pray that the Body of Christ will extend its life as a humble, sacrificial and unswerving servant of peace/salaam/shalom in the land where God sent his Son to live among us.