

Consensus

Volume 22

Issue 1 *Canadian Lutherans and Social Justice:
Sampling of a Heritage*

Article 19

5-1-1996

I am a Palestinian Christian

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Recommended Citation

Finch, Pauline (1996) "I am a Palestinian Christian," *Consensus*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 1 , Article 19.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol22/iss1/19>

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blasphemy. This last is “radical evil”, the final stage in the journey from anxiety to the “destruction of the inner soul” (p. 217). It is at this stage, when all of God is negated, that one is open to the powers of evil as these are focused on Satan and satanic cults.

Throughout this work the reader is made conscious of the melding of the social sciences and theology. If one is not adept at these some of the arguments may be lost. There are aspects of this book which are troubling for me, among these the writer’s venture into including women’s experience, which is not helpful and comes across as paternalistic, the argument against homophobia, and a number of recreated terminologies which are challenging, to say the least. Even so, the book is well worth reading as it challenges our own understandings of sin, faith and grace and nudges us towards new insights and new growth.

Juliette J. Trudeau
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I Am A Palestinian Christian

Mitri Raheb

Translated by Ruth C.L. Gritsch

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995

xii + 164 pp. \$14.95

Most books—unless they are dictionaries, catalogues, encyclopedias, or holy scripture—are intended to be read from first page to last. Traditional literary structure and intention demand that reader and author, temporarily at least, share the same continuum of experience.

But there are compelling exceptions to every rule. For anyone concerned about the Middle East in general, and the plight of Palestinians in particular, the sheer volume and subjective diversity of current writings on the subject can seem overwhelming. No wonder so many Western-world observers tend to recoil in confusion and despair, hoping that the ongoing “peace process” between the Israeli government and Palestinian Liberation Organization will sort things out, someday.

Instead of waiting for that hypothetical “someday” when the whole situation will become crystal clear or puzzling briefly over the apparent oxymoron of Raheb’s title (aren’t all Palestinians Muslims?), try going straight to page 47, to a chapter called Daher’s Vineyard. The parallels with an Old Testament man called Naboth (I Kings 21) are striking, but there’s more.

Suddenly, “someday” is right now. What looks at first to be a modern parable is the true-life story of what it’s like to be threatened with homelessness and dispossession; what it’s like to be the underdog in a world that associates Palestinians only with violent extremism; what it’s like to be

systematically hounded into destitution after generations of diligent hard work.

In this simply told, yet powerfully moving account of a family served by his own parish (the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church of Bethlehem, in the Occupied West Bank), Raheb delineates in microcosm the pain and frustration of an entire people. Deprived of their ancestral lands, mobility, legal rights, gainful employment and educational resources, not to mention services as basic as adequate water, electricity, and sewage treatment, an increasing number of Palestinians see no future but emigration— exactly what the most militant Israeli settlement supporters want.

But against seemingly outrageous odds, Raheb preaches a contextual theology that works by example; a theology that challenges mind and spirit, while getting its hands literally into the dirt. In describing how Bethlehem Christians and Muslims alike rallied in a bid to save Daher's Vineyard from being confiscated for yet another Israeli settlement project (a campaign still in progress as the book went to print), Raheb gives us an object lesson borne out by an often-ignored fact of history. As a minority culture in the Middle East for more than seven centuries, circumstances have honed Palestinians of both faiths into patient and skilled mediators, the activities of Hamas (a violent Islamic terrorist splinter group) notwithstanding.

As well as giving heart and meaning to numerous statistics and anecdotes that describe the subjugation of his people, Raheb never lets one forget the deeper meaning of the title. Being Christian and a Palestinian is to be virtually invisible in the larger world. Worse still, Christians who have uncritically supported the state of Israel in all of its actions—what Raheb calls a reparation complex to atone for the Holocaust—have contributed to the possible extinction of their own brothers and sisters in the faith, just because they happened to be living on an inconvenient piece of land. To most, that should come as a shocking surprise.

No matter where one starts reading, every page of *I Am A Palestinian Christian* is a vivid, absorbing, and remarkably credible account; one that has a better chance than most "special interest" books of being translated into meaningful response.

But of course, that part is entirely up to us.

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