

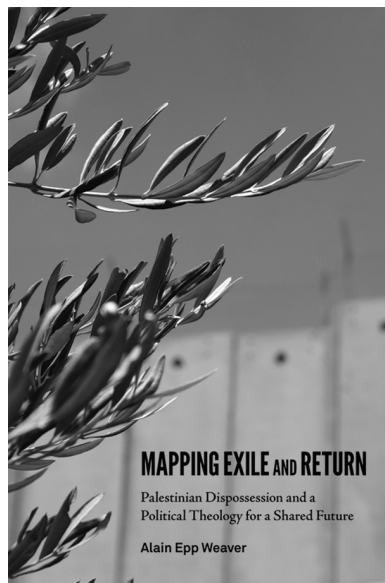
Zionism through Christian Lenses: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Promised Land, edited by Carole Monica Burnett. Foreword by Naim S. Ateek. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013. xxvi + 201 pages. \$25.00 paper, \$25.00 e-book.

Mapping Exile and Return: Palestinian Dispossession and a Political Theology for a Shared Future, by Alain Epp Weaver. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014. xv + 165 pages. Index to p. 174. \$39.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY MARK CHMIEL

In the United States, there are formidable obstacles in the way of the Palestinian Christian narrative. One is mainline Christian denominations' guilt for anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, which results in strong support for the Jewish state. Another is the power and reach of Christian Zionism, which deploys the Bible to validate Israeli expansionism and renders invisible the injustices faced by the Palestinians. These two new works, by Burnett and Epp Weaver, cut against this ecclesial mainstream by presenting alternative perspectives and practical interventions that prefigure a different future for both Palestinians and Israeli Jews.

Burnett herself is the editor of the *Fathers of the Church* series of books published by the Catholic University of America Press, as well as an adjunct faculty member at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC. In *Zionism through Christian Lenses*, she collects seven essays in nonspecialist language by scholars and ministers of various Christian traditions. Subjects include Zionism and the Bible, patristic teachings that counter ethnic exclusivism, and Catholic social teaching that informs the role of the Vatican. Reflecting Burnett's own perspective, the writers' academic and pastoral work is informed by solidarity with Palestinians in their struggle against a preponderant Israel.



The issue of church silence before oppression of the Palestinians features prominently in Paul H. Verduin's essay on the influential Protestant theologian Krister Stendahl, who made Christian humility before Judaism and Jews the foundation of his theological production. According to Verduin, Stendahl was committed to creating an "atmosphere of unvarnished appreciation for all things Jewish" (p. 134). This led to his championing the triumphant and expansionist Israel after 1967. Only after many years did Stendahl actually meet and interact with Palestinian Christians, such as Mitri Raheb, Jean Zaru, and Munib Younan. Though privately he expressed his anguish at what was happening to the Palestinians, Stendahl never spoke out publicly against Israeli abuses. Through Stendahl's story, Verduin highlights the

dangers of an uncritical philo-Semitism that inhibits prophetic intervention on behalf of those tormented by state power.

In Beverly Eileen Mitchell's moving chapter "Why the Caged Bird Sings," she chronicles how African slaves came into contact with Christianity after a forced exile and discerned and embraced its liberating power. She notes the similar experiences of defacement, the denial of basic humanity and respect both African slaves and Palestinians have had to endure. She asserts that "[t]here are those of us who understand that our welfare is tied to the welfare of the marginalized, the outcasts, and the dispossessed, and are committed to the fight for the preservation of the dignity and the well-being of the Palestinian people" (p. 129).

In the concluding chapter, entitled "The New Jerusalem: A Personal Perspective," David W. Good demonstrates a self-critical and sympathetic Christian perspective. Like those in churches seeking repentance for Christian anti-Semitism, he acknowledges the atrocities committed by Christians, for example, during the Crusades: "when I return home I visit with my Jewish neighbors and ask forgiveness for the damage done by a Christian theology that thought of Jerusalem as a possession and propagated the seeds for the Holocaust" (p. 189). He also writes compellingly of many experiences he has had in the occupied West Bank where he confronted the injustice the Palestinians regularly suffer. As a counter to Christian Zionism, he expresses his theological vision this way: "We can overcome our tribalism. We can learn to live in peace with one another. We can make this land of promise the place that God created it to be, a beacon of hope for all humanity" (p. 200).

It is the project of Alain Epp Weaver to give greater specificity to such a "beacon of hope." Having lived among Palestinian Christians for more than a decade, he begins *Mapping Exile and Return* by asking whether the Palestinian yearning for return can only mirror the Zionist return, that is, one marked by nation-state ideology. By way of an answer, he suggests that Palestinian cartographers and Israeli activists can offer a different set of practices for return and exile based on heterogeneity, inclusivity, and binationalism.

In his first chapter, Epp Weaver surveys the proliferation of Palestinian refugee memory production over the last twenty years in the form of interactive websites, atlases, village books, and encyclopedias. He pays particular attention to the maps created by Salman Abu-Sitta, for whom return is "an indestructible core of the Palestinian psyche" (p. 37). Epp Weaver stresses that "Abu-Sitta's cartographic productions, by reproducing and not erasing the Hebrew map, point to the possibility of a deeper form of counter-mapping, a counter mapping animated by the implied proposition that Palestinian return need not mean the erasure of the Hebrew map" (p. 38). He acknowledges an application of a favorite category of Edward Said, "a contrapuntal cartography," that advocates "a form of return that does not wall off or erase the Palestinian or the Jewish other from view" (p. 48).

Next, Epp Weaver critiques Zionist political theology for its demeaning of exile and exalting of return. He turns to Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder for resources on a more positive appreciation of exile. Accordingly, Christians must "cultivate disciplines of patience and openness as they join others in working together for the space of the city" (p. 70). What Epp Weaver proposes is a "binationalism of mutuality and interdependence" (p. 80).

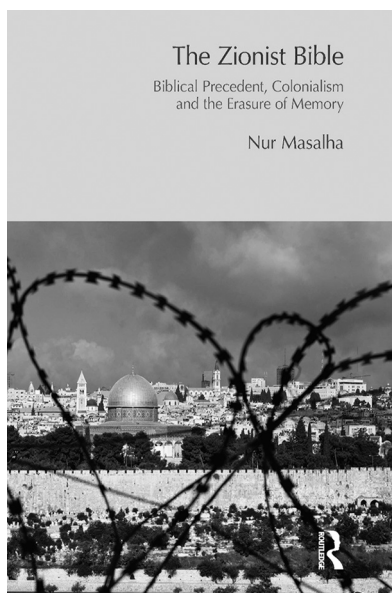
In the second half of his book, the author considers how Palestinians from the village of Kafr Bir'im have held fast to the hope of return. After the village was bombed by the Israeli Air Force in 1953, the land was transformed into a kibbutz, a national park, and a nature reserve. Central to

Epp Weaver's analysis is the role played by Elias Chacour, a local archbishop, and other residents in nurturing the "arboreal imagination." The author explains that "trees have been key markers on Bir'imites' mental maps of their former homes, and arbor images spring up throughout their protests of their ongoing dispossession and their assertion of their history, identity, and right to return" (p. 98). Chacour is able to acknowledge that Israeli Jews have roots in the land, though he does not accept that their rootedness should have caused such trauma to the indigenous Palestinians. Throughout, Epp Weaver is hopeful that Palestinian cartographies can point the way forward to a mutually respectful and interconnected sharing of the same land.

In his last chapter, Epp Weaver gives prominence to the work of Zochrot, a grassroots Israeli organization that seeks to tell the truth—in Hebrew—about the Palestinian Nakba. By organizing public actions, like posting bilingual signs that call attention to the Palestinian traces on the land, Zochrot activists subvert the Israeli sense of exclusive entitlement to the land. In addition, these activists engage in public mourning at the sites of what were Palestinian churches, mosques, and homes. Further, their "counter-mapping activities are much more directed toward the future, pointing beyond themselves to a coming future that disrupts nationalist topologies with the promise of heterogeneous spaces" (p. 143).

Burnett's contributors and Epp Weaver have variously come face-to-face with the Palestinian people and their experience of oppression. Burnett's book is certainly influenced by Palestinian liberation theology, and it offers theological responses to central issues for thoughtful consideration by fellow Christians who are beginning to be more critical of Israel's policies. Epp Weaver is committed to a kind of "liberation cartography," one that can envision the land and peoplehood in a post-national way where one people's return neither negates nor erases the other's.

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The Zionist Bible: Biblical Precedent, Colonialism and the Erasure of Memory, by Nur Masalha. Durham, U.K.:

Acumen, 2013. New York: Routledge, 2014. vii + 253 pages. Notes to p. 260. Bibliography to p. 286. Index to p. 295. \$99.95 cloth, \$99.95 e-book.

REVIEWED BY BASEM L. RA'AD

In his previous book *The Bible and Zionism* (Zed Books, 2007), Nur Masalha challenged "both the Zionist misuse of ancient history and the deployment of the biblical narrative in support of settler colonialism" (p. 318). *The Zionist Bible* extends that challenge, building also on the work of Michael Prior and others. What distinguishes Masalha's new work is wider documentation of on-the-ground consequences for Palestine's indigenous population.