

World Pressure Points - March 1988

1. Israel

For the first time in over forty years the Palestinians have the Israelis on the defensive. The spontaneous eruption of violence in recent months is a sharp reminder that the second generation of Palestinian ghetto children are not prepared to endure in silence the way their parents did.

Whenever Israel is mentioned, Christians tend to lose their objectivity and instantly align their sympathy with the Jews as opposed to the Arabs.

Dubious theology

There is an historical reason for this. Since the late 19th century, the erroneous teaching of dispensationalism — which views the secular state of Israel as God's chosen land and people today — has found a general acceptance, particularly among fundamentalist Christians.

The offshoot of all this is that Christians have ignored the plight of Palestinian Arabs while praying for the blessing of God to be on the Jewish people. They have lavished praise and economic aid on this small nation while turning a blind eye to incidents of Israeli terror, militarism and injustice.

Today four out of ten residents of the state are non- Jews. Soon, Palestinians will outnumber the Jews — what then?

The present wave of unrest is understandable. If every day you live as a stateless, impoverished people, seeing your homes destroyed and your land stolen (in Gaza 40 per cent of the land has been set aside as 'government land' for the use of Israeli settlers), it is only a small step to concluding that you have nothing left to lose except your misery.

PLO/Muslim plot?

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and his fellow conservative hardliners are determined to put down the unrest by harsh repressive measures. They are anxious to convince their allies that what is taking place is a Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Muslim fundamentalist conspiracy. However, liberals and peace protesters within the Jewish establishment, as well as thinking people around the world who see the pictures on their TV newscasts day after day, aren't convinced by this argument. That is not to say

that the PLO and other groups are not organising the continued protests. But they will not be able to sustain this without the support of the general population.

Israel is a secular state. This raises political and religious questions and, as Christians, we have to be objective in our consideration of both.

On the political front the fundamental question is this: can any country committed to the protection and practice of the democratic ideal of freedom ever maintain rule over another people by force and at the same time be true to its democratic ideal? Surely, in view of their history, Israelis dare not let circumstances push them towards 'master race' politics?

On the religious front the question is this: 'Will God condone violence, terror and injustice by the state of Israel any more than he will excuse it in any other nation?'

No simple answers

A thorough reading and examination of Paul's exposition concerning Israel in Romans and Galatians is sufficient to convince us of one thing: God's chosen people, in whom his interest centres today, are all who have received Christ as Lord, both Jew and Gentile; and God's land of promise to them is every nation of the world. These are the sons of the kingdom, the children of promise, the heirs of the covenant made with numbered with the ill-informed and prejudiced who give blind support to the inhumanity presently being shown towards Palestinians in Israel.

At the same time we don't offer simplistic answers; the situation is very complex. We don't support Arab aggression. We recognise that the fundamental roots of the problem are twofold: the Palestinians' denial of Israel's legitimate right to exist; and Israel's denial of an autonomous Palestinian national identity.

Prayer for Israel

This presents us with a political and religious impasse.

What we can pray for is a widespread spiritual awakening for the Jewish people in Israel, that even in the pressure — or possibly as a result of it — they will turn to Jesus Christ as their true Messiah.

Only this will equip them with the necessary wisdom beyond the natural in order to live harmoniously with their Arab neighbours in a bi-national state governed in justice and righteousness.

2. South Africa

Sir Richard Attenborough's film, *Cry Freedom*, is a vivid portrayal of the terror of South African apartheid policy. Initially focusing on the brutality and eventual murder of black nationalist Steve Biko, it unfolds to us the suffering, pain and hurt of racism — a particularly vile form of man's inhumanity to man.

This is a South African anniversary year. It is: 500 years since the land of the Afrikaner was 'discovered'

300 years since the arrival of the French Huguenots 150 years since the 'Great Trek'

80 years since the start of the National Convention which resulted in the creation of South Africa as a single country

40 years since the present National Party government assumed power

30 years since architect of apartheid, Hendrick Verwoerd, gained the leadership

10 years since the present Prime Minister, P.W. Botha, took over.

Vital choices

These anniversaries, are coming together while a revolution is in the making in the country.

It is time to face up to the fact: white supremacy and racism have no future in South Africa. The white South African government must begin urgent talks with leaders of all races for the peaceful transition of power to a parliamentary body that gives full and equal power-sharing to all races.

The only choice left for them to make is whether to lose their power violently or to share their power with their fellow South Africans of all races.

To choose the latter course will make for a peaceful and prosperous future in a country offering dignity for blacks, coloureds, Asians and whites together. To fail to choose this road is to guarantee that the soil of the nation will become one colour only — blood red.

Taking our stand

For us, as Christians, there is only one moral position to be taken, and that is to recognise the dignity and equality of all men and to repudiate the obnoxious racist policy of apartheid.

It will be our policy as a magazine from now on, until South Africans of all races are truly free, to carry a box item on this page highlighting the 'cry for freedom'. Israel and South Africa Join in Nuclear Holocaust

A report in The Guardian earlier this year drew attention to a new book by the Israeli academic, Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, entitled The Israeli Connection.

In it he points out that South Africa and Israel share the sense of being political outcasts threatened by their neighbours, and both see a military requirement for a 'clean', low-yield weapon that could be used tactically in a regional war of survival.

He says: 'Both countries realised in the 1960s that what they needed was tactical nuclear weaponry. This led to the development of the nuclear shell, fired from the 155mm howitzer or from a naval gun, tested in 1979.'

It is frightful to imagine what new terrors this could bring, since Syria is reported to have a similar capability. It is only a matter of time before nuclear weapons will fall into the irresponsible hands of terrorists around the world.

As Christians, we must take note of the prophetic dimension to this and find, between the dream of a better future and the fear of a nuclear holocaust, a place of trust in God and a practical expression of this faith at every level of life.