**Challenges of New Christian Communities in the Holy Land**

November 27, 2015

### David Neuhaus, SJ

Rev. Dr. David Mark Neuhaus SJ is Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Hebrew Speaking Catholics in Israel, a part of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Born in South Africa, he is a member of the Society of Jesus (Near East Province) and teaches Scripture at the Seminary of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in Beit Jala and in the Religious Studies Department at Bethlehem University. He completed a BA, MA and PhD (Political Science) at Hebrew University, Jerusalem. He then completed pontifical degrees in theology and Scripture in Paris (Centre Sevres) and Rome (Pontifical Biblical Institute). His publications include *Justice and the Intifada: Palestinians and Israelis Speak Out* (edited with Kathy Bergen and Ghassan Rubeiz), New York, Friendship Press, 1991 and (in collaboration with Alain Marchadour), *The Land that I Will Show You…Land, Bible and History* has been published in French (2006), English (2007) and Italian (2007).

* + - 1. Christians in the State of Israel.
1. Neuhaus’ theme is “new Christian communities” here, in the State of Israel.
2. The Roman Catholic Archbishop (or Patriarch) is Fuad, but he’ll be replaced.
	* + 1. Archdiocese of Jerusalem was created in 1847. It’s creation was a response to Lutheran/Anglican diocese of 1840. Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.
				1. “Most countries have many dioceses; my diocese has many countries.” Cyprus, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. In each country there is at least one vicar. In Israel, two: the traditional church (indigenous population of Palestinian Arabs), and since 1990) the “new church” whose natural milieu is not Arabic-speaking Palestinians, but in Israel, Hebrew-speaking Christians.
				2. Population. Although Christians are a small number (a little more than 2.4% in the state of Israel = 160,000. But they are not united, and there are denominational divides. Roman Catholics are a small minority in the ensemble of Christian churches.
			2. Numbers. 160,000 Israeli citizens are Christian (Israeli Bureau of Statistics).
				1. 10,000 Christians in Jerusalem carry blue identity cards, which means that they are not citizens. Is Jerusalem part of the State of Israel? No, and Neuhaus hopes it never will be. The State of Israel was recognized in January of 1949. The borders were then defined. Since then, Jerusalem has expanded. Benedict XVI says that Jerusalem is the “State of Palestine.” East Jerusalem belongs to the undefined entity, “occupied territory.”
				2. The 160,000 fall into two parts.

There are 120,000 who are Palestinian Arab citizens of the State of Israel. Aramaic was spoken by believers at the time of Jesus. But when did we know that some of the believers of Jesus speak Arabic (Acts 2). Some Jews came to Jerusalem at Pentecost. Among them were “Arabs,” Jews who lived in Arabia, who spoke Arabic, and who came to Jerusalem for the feast.

Apart from the 120,000, there are the Russians. 30,000-40,000 are recognized by the Israeli Bureau of Statistics. Neuhaus thinks that there are far more. They are citizens of the State of Israel. Not labor migrants or refugees. They got citizenship in the Jewish state, which is quite difficult for non-Jews. They are originally Russian-speaking people, who emigrated to Israel between 1990-2005.

* + - 1. A Jewish State?
1. Neuhaus came to Israel as a Jew in 1950, and was granted citizenship.
2. There are around 330,000 non-Jews in the population of one million who came between 1990 and 2005, and this includes 30,000-40,000 explicit Christians. All of these non-Jews and non-Jewish Christians are “part of the Jewish people.” In 1949-1950, David Ben Gurion said that “The State of Israel has a legislated purpose: to exercise the ‘law of return.’” The State of Israel is the state, not of its citizens, but of the Jewish People.
3. Statistics. In the laws of the State of Israel, all Israelis are either Jews or non-Jews. Most non-Jews are Arabs. The largest minority in Israel is made up of Muslims. A smaller portion are Christians.
4. Now there is a new category: Non-Jews (as distinct from “Israeli” non-Jews) who are part of Jewish society, not Arab society. These non-Jews are (1) the wives and husbands of Jews, (2) the offspring of Jews, and (3) other relatives of Jews.
5. History. How did this category arise?

1947 Partition Plan. The international community recognized the legitimacy of Zionism, the Jewish national claim for this land.

The partition plan envisioned a state for the Jews, and a state for the Palestinian Arabs. But a Palestinian State never actually arose.

In 1948, the Israeli Army took 78% of the land, supported by the Soviet Union, then the USA. A large part of the Israeli political elite was from Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union at first hoped Israel would be its satellite.

In 1948, 600,000 Jews lived in the Holy Land, and there were 1.3 million Palestinian Arabs.

1. The Law of Return. A Jew could be naturalized if he or she has a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism. The State of Israel identified itself as a nation of Jews, and not as a political reality like other countries.
2. Jews identified themselves apart from the question of religious practice.
3. What defined Jews was the question of the holocaust: “Would Hitler have sent me to Auschwitz?”
4. Many Christian religious (e.g., Edith Stein) were killed because they were “Jewish.”
5. Israel opened its borders to any Jews who wanted to come. Europe had become a “death camp for the Jews.” Many people’s Jewish identity was awakened by Hitler. They lived secularly in Europe, and came together to Israel with their wives. They were “Jews” (in Hitler’s view, i.e., belong to the “Jewish race”) but in practice they were Christians. Nehemiah said, “Leave your gentile wives behind.” But Ruth and Jonah corrected Nehemiah.
	* + 1. The New Reality for Christians: Living as a minority within a Jewish, Hebrew-speaking state and culture.
6. Christians today. There are 40,000 Christian citizens of Israel today. But many Christians “assimilate.” For Jews, “assimilation” is a problem. Many give up on the Jewish culture and want to be secular. Christians face the same problem.
7. Many Christians become assimilated into Israeli society, become secular citizens, and are lost to the church.
	* + 1. The Story of Osvald Rufhausen.
8. There has been a Hebrew-speaking Catholic community in Israel for 60 years. Osvald Rufhasen, a Polish Jew, lost his parents. Osvald and his brother were convinced Zionist. His brother was able to escape to Palstine. Osvald went into hiding, invented a false identity, and passed himself off as an ethnic German living in Poland. During WW2, he worked for the German Command in the town of Mir. It had an important Yeshiva (David Rosen graduated from it, and is now part of the dialogue with the Vatican). Osvald established contact with the Jewish ghetto. When the Mir ghetto was to be liquidated, he gave warning. He fell under suspicion.
9. Osvald Rufhausen sought refuge in a Carmelite Convent. He was baptized. He became Brother Daniel, a monk and priest. Afterwards, he returned to Israel as a “Jewish Christian.” He was a Zionist and a socialist. He received citizenship as one of the “righteous among the nations.” He received citizenship, not as a Jew, but as a righteous gentile.
10. Precedents.

Neuhaus: You can be a Jew who eats pork on Yom Kippur, but you can’t be a Jew who has become a Catholic priest.

In another case, a priest claimed the right of return. His mother had him baptized in Austria, he claimed, to save his life. According to the Talmud, a Jewish baby who is kidnapped and made a pagan, remains a Jew. He became an Israeli citizen.

An African family came from Zimbabwe. Their son, who was an African Jew, preceded him. He became ultra orthodox. The parents remained secular Jews. They then came to Israel. He accused his parents of being Christian. They were asked, “Are you Christian? No. Do you believe that Jesus is the messiah and the Son of God? Yes.” The mother had become a messianic Jew. There are 8000-12,000 messianic Jews in Israel, 50,000 worldwide. On Dec. 25, 1990, the Israeli high court decided: A Jew who believes that Jesus is Messiah, is a Christian, and therefore not a citizen of the State of Israel. The son is Jewish, because he was born to a Jewish mother. The mother is excluded, but the son is officially a Jew.

1. Conclusion. A population of Christians has moved to Israel as “messianic Christians” and as “righteous among the gentiles.”

The local Church does not know what to do with these exceptions.

There is strong secular assimilationist policy of the Israeli government. Ben Gurion’s model is: bring in Jews and make them modern Israelis. Ben Gurion, Golda Meir – they assumed Israeli names.

Neuhaus has a friend, Carmela, who changed her name. When he telephoned her, she said, “My name is not Carmela, my name is Suad,” a common Arab name. She had gone through years of therapy. She had come from Iran, and was given the Carmela name by the immigration official, because it was an Arab name.

* + - 1. The Identity of Christians is threatened by assimilationism.
1. Christians in Israel are in a secular society. For many Jews, religion is for old people, and should be discarded. The religious society of Christians in Israel (who are mainly Palestinians) are in danger of losing their Christian identity.

For many Jews, Israel is a secular state. Many children of Christians do not want to be Christians, but want to be secular Israelis. When they attain the age of 18, they enter the army. They meet spouses-to-be, usually Jewish. Neuhaus knows of only one Christian family (Polish great-grandmother and her husband, a man she saved) that has retained its Catholic identity.

For many European Jews who are Christians, Christianity is “Palestinian,” and so is not part of their culture.

There is no transmission of the Christian faith for most Jewish Christians who come to Israel. They are assimilated. Neuhaus, himself a Jew whose family emigrated from South Africa, is an exception.

1. How can we support Christian identity?
2. Most of Neuhaus’ work is aimed at preserving the Christian identity of Christians in Israel.
3. Neuhaus: “Religion divides Jews in Israel, and does not unite them.” Today, many Jews despise the European talmudic tradition, because they see it as contributing to the passivity of European Jews, who were powerless in the face of Nazi. Zionism reactivated interest in the Bible as the “master plan” for Israel’s right to the land.
4. Just as Poles root Polish Catholic identity in a powerful nationalism, so Zionism has reformulated what it means to be Jewish.
5. The Identity Called into Being: to be Christian in a Jewish, Hebrew-speaking, Israeli identity.
6. In Neuhaus’ vicariate, he celebrates Mass in Hebrew. Some prophetic figures believe that Hebrew must become a Christian language.
7. Roman Catholicism is the most institutionalized church in Israel. Western liberal Christians denigrate institutions, but Christians institutions that serve all people may provide young people with a sense of Christian identity.
8. This creates tension with the Palestinian Arab church. It is not committed to institutions. What does it mean to be “Christian” when you are Palestinian Arab or Israeli Jewish?

Coffee Break

* + - 1. Discussion. Michalowsky: How many heredim? Neuhaus: The Old City has a high percentage of ultra-orthodox Jews, but they’re only 5% of the population. Only half are practicing.
			2. Migrant Christians.
1. Categories.

Labor migrants.

Refugees.

1. Numbers. There are 160,000 migrant Christians in Israel. Of these:
2. There are 70,000 legal work migrants.

Palestinians are largely excluded. They have been replaced by other migrants. They did manual labor, construction and agriculture. Now China, Thailand, and Turkey provide laborers.

New Types of Work: rich white people don’t look after their old people, their sick, and their handicapped. So brown and yellow people abandon their old and sick, and come to work for Jews. Most are Filipinos, some Indians.

1. There are 15,000 people who have overstayed their legal visa. Brown and yellow people are rounded up and deported.
2. There are 90,000 illegal migrants. They came as pilgrims and tourists, and stayed for work. Eastern Europeans (Russia, Ukraine, Romania).
3. There are 47,000 “refugees.” They are fleeing war and violence. They are almost all Eritreans (35,000) and Darfurians (from Sudan, 12,000). They are feeling disease, famine and war. Israel is a signatory to the international conventions. But only three Eritreans have received refugee status (never anyone from Darfur). Only 153 people have been acknowledged as refugees in the history of Israel. The 47,000 refugees are not recognized by Israel. They cannot be deported to the countries from which they fled. But Sudanese Christians were deported to the “new” country of South Sudan.
4. Christians. The Roman Catholic Church is best organized in dealing with refugees. There are 25,000 Roman Catholic citizens of the State of Israel, of whom 24,000 are Palestinians. In addition, there are 50,000 migrants (out of 160,000) who are Catholics. Migrant Catholics are twice the number of Catholic Israeli citizens.
5. Menachem Begin gave citizenship to 800 Vietnamese boat people (not refugees) and 8,000 Lebanese (mostly Maronite) who entered Israel in 1999. They were collaborators with Israel. Now many have gone back to Lebanon or have gone to other countries.
6. Civil society says that the right to live in Israel depends on being Jewish. But all of the *children* of the migrant populations can go to school. Free schooling for all, but it is assimilationist.
7. Asylum Seekers.
8. One cannot deport Eritreans and Sudanese back to their countries. But they do not have a right to work, and they do not have medical insurance. There are 60,000 asylum seekers. Israel is turning them into criminals, for they must steal in order to eat. The Ministry of Interior refused to change their status, but it said they would not prosecute them. So they are the people who work long hours.
9. Since January 2014, Israel has said that it wants the Asylum seekers to disappear. It has opened an interment camp. There once were interment camps in Australia. Now they exist in Israel. Israel took out the oldest, most veteran Asylum seekers and put them in a desert camp two hours from Beer-Sheva in the Negev desert. Only unmarried. They have no money. They are located in Ktziot and in [Saharonin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saharonim_Prison). Israel wants them to voluntarily leave. They cannot leave unless they sign the papers.
	* + 1. The Response of the Churches.

Institutions.

* + - 1. When the church is institutionally active, it can protect people.
			2. Today, the biggest Christian population in the Holy Land lives in Tel Aviv. It was founded in 1909 as the incarnation of Herzl’s vision.
			3. But now there are tens of thousands on non-Jews. Work migrants and refugees make up the majority of Christians.

Our Lady Woman of Valor.

The Christian churches have begun an outreach to Christians in Tel Aviv. In February of 2014, the Catholic Church opened its first pastoral center in Tel Aviv: “Our Lady Woman of Valor.”

Migrants rely on mothers as “women of valor.” Often it’s the woman who has become the care-giver. The Filipino congregation is 85% female.

The pastoral center is in a slum. Palestinians are discriminated against, but Palestinian Christians are not that poor. They need to adopt a sense of mission. “We have to forget about our own woes,” said Neuhaus, “because we have a job to do – for the Eritreans, Sri Lankans, Filipinos.” Their children can read Hebrew, and they mediate the culture for the parents. There is a lack of communication of any depth between generations. The parents do not know in which world the parents live.

The children live in two worlds: the world of their parents (two hours per week) and the world of contemporary Israel (the rest of the time).

The Challenge of Resources.

* + - 1. The church of the Holy Land is needy. Its future is in our institutions (Bethlehem University, schools, and hospitals). They are discriminated against by Israeli society. There are 47 Christian schools. The state won’t support them.
			2. Local Christians should be asking for help on behalf of the migrants. A Palestinian religious order, “St. Mary of the Rosary,” has a school in Bet Hanina. The principal said, “Every child must bring a gift, wrapped for Christmas, for a child in Tel Aviv.”

Day Care.

1. If a migrant mother has money, she can put her baby into a day care. But there is no government day care. So the migrants have to create their own day care. They are a number of “babysitters” or “baby warehouses.” An untrained well-meaning woman is “stacking babies.” One woman watches 25-30 babies for twelve hours per day. They are swaddled or tied to a crib. They will be retarded in their development. They don’t develop speech properly.
2. The Crisis. “Thanks be to God,” said Neuhaus, “five babies died in South Tel Aviv in March.” One baby died of disease, one choked on a bottle, one was strangled by a plastic bag. It’s a tragedy, but finally the world has become aware of the horror. These are parents who are trying to survive.
3. The church is starting day care centers: 50 babies in eight family units. Six is the maximum number before the center can be taxed as a business. They are supervised by the NGO called [Unitaf](http://www.telavivfoundation.org/us/Project/Details/106) (Ehud Olmert’s wife was one of the founders.)

Catechism after School.

* + - 1. In Hebrew. Material must be written in this language. Christians use the Hannukah holiday to prepare Christian children for Christmas.
			2. Isolation. Often, when the children come home, there is no parent; or if the parent is there, the parent cannot speak Hebrew, and so cannot help with the schoolwork.
			3. Human Trafficking. A $31 billion industry worldwide.
1. Many of the migrants have been abused by traffickers.
	* 1. When there are brothers and sisters, the brother is sent to Israel, but the sister is kept as insurance. She can be raped, mutilated. The traffickers give the brother a cell phone, so he can hear from his sister what is happening to her.
		2. Israel is receiving brutalized people without medical insurance.
2. Response. An Eritrean sister and an Israeli psychologist in Tel Aviv have created a workshop that is a therapeutic environment. The migrants are stuck with no future, no rights. Suicide is a problem. An Israeli psychiatrist works free of charge in Jaffa to help the migrants. Pastoral workers have to learn the language of mental health. “Not everything can be solved,” said Neuhaus, “by saying the rosary.”
3. Christians in the Army. Migrant workers’ children can enter the army (not asylum seekers or refugees). When a child is registered in grade one, he or she has the right to stay in Israel until the child finishes school. The right ends at age 18, and they are candidates for deportation.

By doing army service, they become permanent residents (for their parents and siblings as well).

The Israeli government is aware of the migrant problem, but the problem is outside its borders.