

JCPA Background Paper

The Palestinian Christian Population



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PART I: Introduction

There are many Christian churches and organizations in the West - Protestant, Evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox - that have well developed and ongoing relationships with a variety of Palestinian Christian churches and institutions. The various Palestinian Christian communities in the West Bank live in a complex and pressured environment. For many historical and contemporary reasons the Palestinian Christian self-understanding and narrative has a strong resonance and emotional appeal to their Western Christian friends. Their circumstance is an important concern of these churches and Christian organizations in the West. The Western Christian connection to Palestinian Christians often runs deep.

In recent years, there has been a global campaign to delegitimize Israel that has strong backing among factions within some Western churches. These groups work in close coordination with Palestinian Christian groups. Together, Western and Palestinian Christians were active at the 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism, the gathering at which a global campaign was unleashed to brand Israel as an Apartheid regime akin to the one that once ruled South Africa. Many churches have entertained anti-Israel boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) and some have adopted policies in support of BDS.¹ Few churches or church leaders will recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state.

The narrative of a decreasing Palestinian Christian population is a central argument used to build support for and sympathy with their cause. Friends of Israel have a keen interest in this narrative because it is often used for the purpose of criticizing Israel and building support for anti-Israel initiatives including BDS. This background paper explores the relationship with Palestinian Christians and examines in depth their population data. As will be shown, the demographic data are often distorted, sometimes significantly, in order to slander Israel. A population that is presented as drastically decreasing is, in reality, holding steady or slightly increasing.

¹ *Episcopal Church 2005 - Corporate Engagement by the Episcopal Church on Issues Related to Israel and the Palestinian Territories; A Report with Recommendations by the Social Responsibility in Investments Committee - October 3, 2005 "The SRI Committee recommends corporate engagement, not divestment, because the Committee believes engagement is a more effective strategy to bring about social change."

*Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 2007 - the Churchwide Assembly adopted a resolution to "... underscore the call for economic initiatives by this church and its members in the Peace Not Walls campaign. Such initiatives, in consultation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, could include purchasing of products from Palestinian providers and exploration of the feasibility of refusing to buy products produced in Israeli settlements. Also to be explored is the entire investment activity by this church. Examination of investment would exclude the option of divestiture.

*United Methodist Church 2008 General Assembly - resolutions calling for divestment rejected at 2008 General Assembly. Several regional Annual Conferences have adopted resolutions in support of divestment (see www.unitedmethodistdivestment.org; www.neumc.org/pages/detail/375)

*Presbyterian Church (USA) 2004 - a resolution was adopted that called for phased selective divestment of multinational corporations operating in Israel. That section was rescinded in 2006 and replaced with a policy to urge that financial investments of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as they pertain to Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank, be invested in only peaceful pursuits..."

*United Church of Christ 2007 - the General Synod resolution supported use of "economic leverage, including, but not limited to: advocating the reallocation of US foreign aid so that the militarization of the Middle East is constrained; making positive contributions to groups and partners committed to the non-violent resolution of the conflict; challenging the practices of corporations that gain from the continuation of the conflict; and divesting from those companies that refuse to change their practices of gain from the perpetuation of violence, including the Occupation."

PART II: Understanding the Palestinian Christian Narrative

Who are the Palestinian Christians?

Palestinian Christians are Arab and Arabic-speaking Christians who are descended from the geographical area of the Mandate of Palestine (Israel, the West Bank and Gaza).² The largest segment of Christians in the West Bank are Greek Orthodox and Latin Catholic followed by smaller numbers of Melkite Greek Catholic, Anglican, Syrian, Lutheran, Coptic and Armenian Christians.³

Greek Orthodox	40.7%
Latin Catholic	35.7%
Greek Catholic	9.3%
Anglican	6.3%
Syrian	2.5%
Lutheran	2.5%
Other (Coptic, Armenian,)	3.0%

The community places a high value on education and traditionally has had access to foreign educational institutions.⁴ The Christian population in the West Bank and Israel enjoys a lower rate of unemployment in comparison to other Palestinians in the West Bank and to the Arab population in Israel.⁵ More than 80% of Palestinian Christians work in services and commerce (e.g. banks, insurance, education, tourism, medicine) and less than 1% in agriculture.⁶

What is the connection between Western and Palestinian Churches and Christians?

For Christians in the West, Christians in the *Holy Land* are a touchstone to the time and life of Jesus. Palestinian Christians play an important role in the preservation of these Christian holy sites that relate to the birth, ministry, and crucifixion of Jesus. There are ongoing relationships between Western and Palestinian Christians formed through study, travel, and in more recent years, advocacy. This advocacy is steeped in theological language and ideas that resonate powerfully with Christians in the West.

Palestinian Christians are involved in a century-long struggle between liberal and conservative wings of Christianity. Many conservative or evangelical Christians have embraced a form of Christian Zionism that is rooted in Pre-Millennial Dispensationalism. This is a theological position that supports the Jewish return to sovereignty as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Many liberal Christians vehemently oppose the stances taken by this group of Evangelical Christians.

To advocate for Palestinian Christians and the Palestinian cause in general, groups such as the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, the World Council of Churches (and its Ecumenical Accompaniment Program), and the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation disseminate ideas and information, almost all of it harshly critical of Israel. They are highly networked with church councils around the world that partner in advocacy. They hold conferences, send speakers to churches and seminaries throughout the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, and bring thousands of Christians on study tours that often present a uni-dimensional picture of the conflict.

² For the purposes of this paper, unless otherwise noted, "Palestinian Christian" refers to those Christians living in the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem – although Arab Christians living in Israel also self-identify as Palestinian Christian.

³ Palestinian Christians, Facts, Figures and Trends, 2008. Published by Diyar. Edited by Rania Al Qass Collings, Rifat Odeh Kassis, and Mitri Raheb p. 42. http://www.diyar.ps/media/documents/pal_chr_booklet.pdf (Henceforth Diyar (2008))

⁴ The Sabeel Survey on Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Israel, Historical Demographic Developments, Current Politics and Attitudes Towards Church, Society and Human Rights, Foreword, Summer 2006. at page 17, <http://www.sabeel.org/datadir/en-events/ev131/files/the%20sabeel%20survey%20-%20english%202008.pdf> (Henceforth Sabeel (2006)).

⁵ Ibid p 21

⁶ Ibid p 22

What is the most common narrative expressed about Palestinian Christians?

The demographic data about Palestinian Christians are frequently distorted to portray, inaccurately, a community that is swiftly declining or on the verge of extinction. Often this is done to bolster criticism of Israel. Examples include:

- *“Palestinian Christians, a small and dwindling community that is today less than 2 percent of the Palestinian population, are disproportionately affected by the ongoing conflict, occupation, political upheaval and economic deterioration. . . . These policies are contributing to the rapid decline of Jerusalem’s Christian population, from 31,000 in 1945, down to less than 8,000 today.”*⁷
- *“The overall decline in the Christian Population of the Holy Land has been very significant in recent decades and it is, as you’ve heard, accelerating in the West Bank and East Jerusalem very rapidly.”*⁸
- *“The decline in the numbers of Christians [in the Holy Land] has reached a critical point... there is a major possibility that the Holy Land will have virtually no Christian presence”*⁹
- *“Before the Israeli occupation of Palestine, Palestinian Christians were an active, free and visible group, comprising approximately 20% of Palestine’s total population. Today, however, less than 2% of the 4 million Palestinians that live in the West Bank and Gaza identify themselves as Christians.”*¹⁰
- *“Palestinian Christians have been part of the church since the first Pentecost, though many people do not even know they exist. Their presence, however, has dwindled from 15-20% of the area’s population to now less than 2%. The major reason cited for emigration is the political and economic instability of the region due largely to the Israeli occupation.”*¹¹
- *“The Palestinian Christian community is in free fall because of the conditions its members face in an occupied land. . . in 1920, 20 percent of Palestinians were Christians; today, less than 2 percent are.”*¹²
- *“Since the founding of Israel, massive numbers of Palestinian Christians have left the Holy Land, due to Israel’s occupation of their land and the dismal state of the economy in Palestinian towns. Today, they make up only 2 percent of the country, when they claimed 17 percent of the population around 1900.”*¹³
- *“A hundred years ago 90 percent of the population in Jesus’ hometown were Christians. Today the Christians are a marginalized community in the city. For only a few years ago, Bethlehem was a flourishing tourist city where Christian pilgrims from around the world filled up hotels and restaurants. Now there are almost none left. This is caused by the Israeli occupation.”*¹⁴
- *“Never have the Christian communities [in the Holy Land]...been as close to going out, as they are now.”*¹⁵
- *“The Christian population of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, around 20% a hundred years ago, has shrunk to a mere 1%.”*¹⁶
- *“The Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) held a Capitol Hill briefing this week featuring four Christian mayors of Palestinian towns in the West Bank. The panel focused on the causes for the population decrease of the Palestinian Christians to below 2 percent of the population, attributing it mainly to the economic stresses resulting from Israeli occupation measures.”*¹⁷

⁷ Churches for Middle East Peace May 2009 letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton www.cmep.org/content/cmep-sec-clinton-palestinian-christian-issues-may-5-2009. The 1945 data cover a broader area than the current estimate which is, itself, inaccurately low. The letter blames current Israeli policy without noting that the decline in population occurred more than 50 years ago. The 1961 Jordanian census reported 10,795 Christians in Jerusalem (not including West Jerusalem). The 1967 Israeli census reported 10,813 Christians in Jerusalem (not including parts of East Jerusalem). The 2010 Israeli census (table 2.4) reports 15,100 Christians in Jerusalem (not including parts of East Jerusalem). See Appendix A.

⁸ Archbishop of Canterbury, July 2011 www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2129/archbishop-launches-appeal-for-christians-in-the-holy-land

⁹ Sabeel (2006) at p 6.

¹⁰ www.thehumanrightsblog.com/?p=290

¹¹ Evangelical Lutheran Church In America: www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Peace-Not-Walls/Major-Issues/Christian-Presence-in-the-Holy-Land.aspx

¹² www.wrmea.com/backissues/1299/9912115.html

¹³ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/news/2003/aug8.html>

¹⁴ www.israelwhat.com/2009/03/20/portrait-of-a-norwegian-socialist/

¹⁵ A Vanishing Church, Tim Reidy, “The National Catholic Weekly,” December 30, 2010, www.americamagazine.org/blog/entry.cfm?entry_id=3744

¹⁶ The Cradle of Our Faith, The Enduring Witness of the Christians of the Middle East, 2006 (Presbyterian Church USA)

¹⁷ www.americantaskforce.org/in_media/pr/2009/02/25/1235593354_4

Why is a diminishing Palestinian Christian population a compelling appeal?

Stories about a vanishing Christian presence in the Holy Land have a deep emotional appeal. They impart an urgency to the narrative. Our Christian neighbors experience a bond when they travel to the region and meet with fellow Christians and hear their plea. *Holy Land* Christians are not just co-religionists, they are the custodians of the very place of Jesus.

While supporters of Israel may look across Israel's borders and see an amalgam of hostile "others" - Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims - each associated with violence, this is not the case for many Christians in the West who understand the conflict through the prism of their co-religionists, Palestinian Christians. In this view, the powerless Palestinian Christian minority is beset by an all powerful sovereign Israel.

The narrative of Christians from the West Bank and Gaza is a fundamentally Palestinian narrative. Their life story is one that generally stands in opposition to Israel and Zionism. The Christians leadership in the West Bank is united in its opposition to Christian Zionism, which they and their liberal Christian co-religionists view as a distortion of their faith. ¹⁸

How is the case made for a diminishing Palestinian Christian population?

As demonstrated by the above quotes, the case for a diminishing Christian population is generally made using combination of three elements.¹⁹

- 1) **Population:** The current Christian population in a Palestinian city or region (e.g. Bethlehem or the entire the West Bank) is presented. Sometimes hypothetical population growth data are used.
- 2) **Percentage:** The percentage of Christians is also given. The percentage is usually contrasted with a base year during which Christians constituted a higher percentage of the overall population in the area referenced.
- 3) **Narrative:** A narrative assigns blame to Israel, usually raising specific security measures in the West Bank such as travel restrictions.

Combined, these three elements: population, percentage, and narrative, form a framework to criticize Israeli government actions.

¹⁸ The Latin Patriarch and the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem issued a declaration that calls Christian Zionism doctrine a false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation. The document states that Christian Zionists teachings advance racial exclusivity and perpetual war, justify colonization and apartheid thus condemning the world to the doom of Armageddon. In response, leading Christian Zionist groups noted that "Christian Zionists do not base their theological position on end-time prophecy, but on the faithful covenant promises of God given to Abraham some four thousand years ago. They said they do not have a "thirst for Armageddon," and do not claim to know the sequence of events that will lead to it." The Christian Zionist groups touted their support for programs assisting "all the population groups in the land, including Israeli and Palestinian Arabs, Druse and others." www.casaisrael.com/defenseofchristianzionism.htm

¹⁹ See fn 6-16

Part III: Reality Check

What circumstances does the Palestinian Christian community face?

The Palestinian Christian community faces pressures including many related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They protest restrictions on visas and travel, family reunification, poor economic opportunities, and the difficulties of everyday life including checkpoints and in some instances residential separation from places of work due to the security barrier. These conditions are real.

The Palestinian Christian community also faces pressures related to the Muslim majority among which they live. For example, in 2007, the only Christian bookstore in Gaza was firebombed, its owner kidnapped and murdered.²⁰ These factors all contribute to emigration, which remains a real and serious concern. As discussed below, Palestinian Christians also have a relatively low birth rate.

Doesn't the predominate pressure facing Palestinian Christians come from Muslims?

Pressure from Muslims is certainly a significant factor that contributes to the challenges facing the Palestinian Christian population. Christian communities throughout the Middle East are decreasing.²¹ However, persecution by Muslims is not the narrative presented in public by Palestinian Christians.²² To the extent that Palestinian Christians leaders point to tensions with their Muslim neighbors, they generally blame the Israeli occupation for the radicalization of Muslims.²³ Allies of Israel are not considered to have sufficient standing to represent a different narrative for Palestinian Christians than they do for themselves.

What are the complexities in calculating changes in the Palestinian Christian population?

There are many complexities in analyzing changes in the Palestinian Christian population, as discussed below. First, the data are scarce. The Palestinian Authority gathers either does not collect or does not broadly report information related to the Christian population. Second, demographic data are often inconsistent in how they treat different cities and regions. Third, some data have been misreported in the past. Those unsubstantiated data have been used in subsequent, inaccurate, analysis.²⁴

Is the number of Palestinian Christians currently decreasing?

While the Palestinian Christian community is not thriving as we hope it might, the number of Palestinian Christians is most likely not decreasing. Palestinian Authority Prime Minister has reported in recent years that the Palestinian Christian population is growing.²⁵

Has the number of Palestinian Christians decreased since 1967?

No. The demographic data, including those from Palestinian sources, tell a different story than most have been led to believe. The Christian population in West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza is neither vanishing nor diminishing. The population was 42,494 in 1967 and today is at or above 50,000.

²⁰ www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/octoberweb-only/141-12.0.html

²¹ <http://www.wfn.org/2011/06/msg00143.html> noting decline in Christian populations in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and elsewhere. See also www.scribd.com/doc/60190431/Arab-Christians-as-Symbol-By-Hilal-Khashan

²² A 2006 Zogby International poll asked Americans and Palestinian Christians why they thought Christians were emigrating from Bethlehem. "45.9% of Americans answered Islamic extremism and 7.4% said Israeli occupation." In Bethlehem, 78% said Israeli occupation and 3.2% said it was the rise in Islamic movements. 12.5% attributed it to both." <http://old.zogby.com/news/ReadNews.cfm?ID=1224>

²³ www.lpi.org/Nonviolence/Patriarch/SF.html, <http://peacepalestine.blogspot.com/2005/01/naim-ateek-suicide-bombing-from.html>

²⁴ e.g. fabrication that there 350,000 Palestinian Christians in 1948 (vs. actual 125-145,000) cited in numerous places; Catholic Church assertion that 5,000 Christians a number that exceeds the actual Christian population in Gaza. See Part II.

²⁵ "The prime minister reported that data from 2009 indicates that for the first time in years, more Palestinians - including Christians - are returning to that region than leaving." www.holylandarticles.com/zenitjan1120112.html, and in 2011 he reported that "more Palestinians are returning than leaving". www.catholicchurch.org.uk/Catholic-Church/Media-Centre/Press-Releases/Press-Releases-2011/Signs-of-hope-in-Palestine

What is misleading about the way the story has been told about a diminishing Palestinian Christian population?

- 1) Population:** We are told that the population is small. In reality, though, it has never been large. The most important part of the story is that the significant drop in Christian population in the West Bank occurred years ago. Some Palestinian Christians became refugees in 1948. Others left during Jordanian rule from 1948-1967. Since 1967, when the West Bank came under Israel and later Palestinian Authority administration, the population has not decreased. In fact, according to almost all sources, it has increased – just at a rate slower than it would have increased without emigration. Hypothetic data showing how the population might have increased are speculative and questionable.
- 2) Percentage:** The percentage of Christians in the West Bank has decreased dramatically. This is largely due to the exponential increase in the surrounding Muslim population. Emigration and low birth rate are real, but pale in comparison to the dramatic increase in the Muslim demographic. In many instances, the data used for comparison reference different areas, making the decrease seem more stark than it really is.
- 3) Narrative:** There is no disputing the pressures faced by Palestinian Christians. But any narrative that fails to consider prominently those factors outside of Israel's control, such as Muslim demographics and Muslim-Christian tensions, at best tells a partial story, and at worst constitutes a false witness.

What are the actual numbers?

Population: The Christian population dropped precipitously between 1945 and 1967. The Christian population in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza has remained steady or increased since 1967. According to most sources, the Christian population in these areas is larger today than it has been at any time since 1945.

Christian Population²⁶

West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza²⁷

1945: 59,160

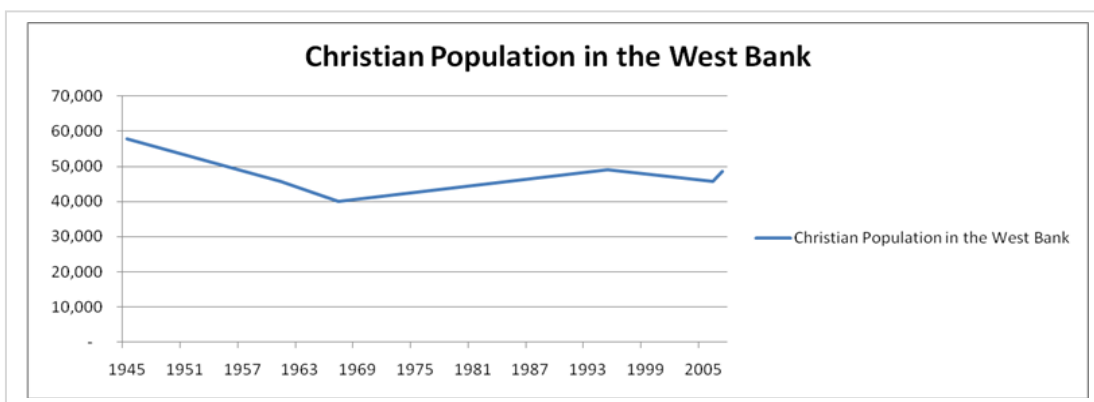
1961: 45,849

1967: 42,494

1995: 51,163

2006: 48,800

2007: 51,710



See also Appendix A

²⁶ Diyar 2008 pp 7-8 provide the data for 1961, 1967, 1995, 2006, and 2007 (with a correction for a slight mathematical error in the 1961 (45,849 vs. 45,855). For the 1945 figure, the Anglo-American Committee on Inquiry survey from 1945 was used, also cited in Sabeel (2006) Study. (Note: For the 1945 figure, the following data points from the Sabeel Study are used: Gaza – 1,300; Hebron – 170; Jenin – 1,210; Jerusalem (incl. Bethlehem) – 46,130; Nablus – 1,560; Ramallah – 8,410; Tulkarm – 380). The 59,160 figure can also be cross-referenced to the Sabeel Study on pg 46.

²⁷ Some variance in numbers can be expected due to inclusion or exclusion of areas controlled by Israel, Jordan, or the Palestinian Authority at different points in history.

Percentage: The percentage of Christians in the West Bank and Gaza has dropped. There are three factors that account for this. The first is emigration. The second is a low birth rate. The third, and most predominant factor, is the surrounding population growth, especially that in the Muslim community which has grown from 795,000 in 1945 to almost 4 million today. The drop in the percentage of Christians is exacerbated by the phenomenon of Muslims moving into once predominantly Christian cities such as Bethlehem.^{28, 29}

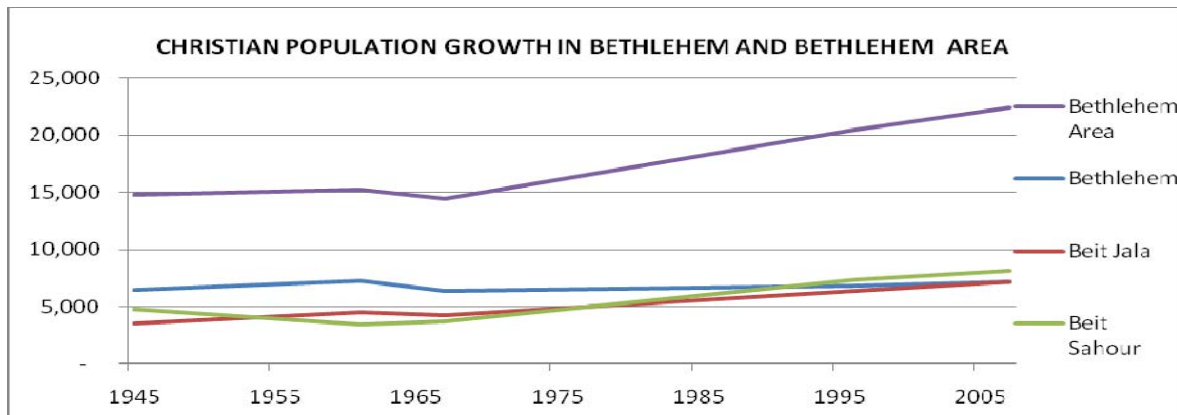
1945: 59,160 Christians among 795 thousand Palestinians³⁰ - 7.4%
 1961: 45,849 Christians among 1.17 million Palestinians³¹ - 3.9%
 1967: 42,494 Christians among 1.15 million Palestinians³² - 3.7%
 2007: 51,710 Christians among 3.77 million Palestinians³³ - 1.37%

What about Bethlehem?

Bethlehem is the area most commonly said to be experiencing Christian flight. As can be seen from the data below, even though the percentage of Christians in Bethlehem and Bethlehem Area has decreased, the total number of Christians in Bethlehem and the surrounding region has increased.

Population: In Bethlehem City, the Christian population dropped under Jordanian rule. Since 1967, it has grown by 11% on the city and by 56% in the district (figures below for city/district³⁴).³⁵

1945: 6,490 / 14,800
 1961: 7,246 / 15,234
 1967: 6,405 / 14,406
 1995: 6,799 / 20,487
 2007: 7,140 / 22,440



See also Appendix B

²⁸ Sabeel (2006), Diyar (2008)

²⁹ Janet L Abu-Lugod, Demographic Characteristics of the Palestinian Population, UNESCO, 1980
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0008/000822/082220eb.pdf>

³⁰ Sabeel Study, pg 42. ((Note: Consistent with the figure for total Christians in the WB, Gaza and Jerusalem, the following data points from the Sabeel Study are used: Gaza - 150,540; Hebron - 93,120; Jenin - 61,210; Jerusalem (incl. Bethlehem) - 253,270; Nablus - 94,600; Ramallah - 48,930; Tulkarm - 93,220).

³¹ Janet L Abu-Lugod, Demographic Characteristics of the Palestinian Population, UNESCO, 1980,
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0008/000822/082220eb.pdf>, at pg 24 (805,450 + 369,229 = 1,174,679) ~ 1.17m

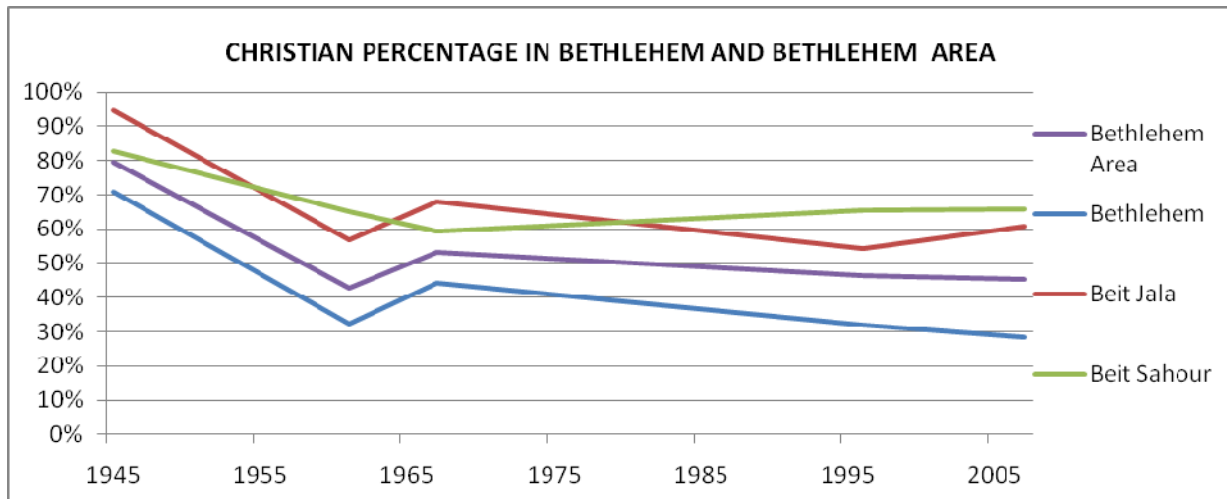
³² Janet L Abu-Lugod, Demographic Characteristics of the Palestinian Population, UNESCO, 1980,
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0008/000822/082220eb.pdf>, at pg 27 (1.15m represents the average amount of Palestinians in the WB and Gaza throughout the year. (June 1967: 1.35m, December 1967: 0.95m → (1.35 + 0.95)/2 = 1.15m)

³³ Diyar study at pg 8.

³⁴ The Bethlehem district includes Beit Jala and Beit Sahour

³⁵ Sabeel 2006 study at page 43, and Diyar 2008 study at pp 7-8

Percentage: The percentage of Christians in the Bethlehem City has decreased from 71% in 1945 to 28.3% in 2007. In the region (Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Shahour), the percentage of Christians has decreased from 79.4% in 1945 to 45.4% in 2007. A significant factor in this decrease is the growth of the Muslim population. If one factors in neighboring Arab villages, the drop has been even sharper.



See also Appendix B.

What about the Christian population of Jerusalem?

Palestinian Christians report around 10,000 Christians living in Jerusalem today.³⁶ In 2006, the Sabeel center reported 8,000 Christians in Jerusalem.³⁷ These figures do not include the area controlled by Israel since 1948. The data include only what they refer to as J1 and J2 only. J1 is the area annexed by Israel following 1967 including 10 Arab neighborhoods and villages. J2 is the area outside of the municipal boundary that was not annexed including Abu Deis and 30 other neighborhoods and villages. The 10,000 are factored into totals for the West Bank, even though some are within the municipal boundary that was annexed to Israel. Israelis count 15,100 Christians, of them 11,600 who are Arab, living in within the municipal boundary, including pre-1967 West Jerusalem and J1 – but not J2, the area under Palestinian Authority control (J2).³⁸

How else is the story distorted?

Sometimes, the figures presented are simply incorrect. For example, a fact sheet produced by the Jerusalem Inter-Church Center states that the Palestinian Christian population in 1948 was 350,000.³⁹ This figure is used to demonstrate a marked numerical decline to the 200,000 plus Christians living in the same area today (Israel, West Bank and Gaza). However, the 1948 figure is wildly distorted. The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry and the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine places the 1945 Palestinian Christian population at between 136,000 and 145,060.⁴⁰ For the population to have grown from 145,000 to 350,000 in three years would have required a 34% annual growth rate.

³⁶ <http://www.islamicnewsdaily.com/palestine-live/v2011/january/13-01-2011>

³⁷ Sabeel (2006) page 43.

³⁸ 2010 Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2010, table 2.4 www.cbs.gov.il/reader/

³⁹ "Palestinian Christians: Fact Sheet – on the Occasion of the Visit of His Blessed Holiness Pope Benedict XVI," May 2009: Jerusalem Inter-Church Center, an association of Jerusalem churches in association with Middle East Council of Churches and World Council of Churches.

http://www.norwichpcc.org.uk/Palestinian_Christians_fact_Sheet.pdf. The 350,000 figure appears in other documents but is not sourced in any of them

⁴⁰ The figure 145,060 appears in the United Nations Conciliation Commission For Palestine

http://www.mideastweb.org/palestine_population_un_1.htm. The 1945 Anglo American Inquiry states "It is difficult to estimate the Arab population precisely, as the official statistics are compiled on a religious basis and a small proportion of the Christian population is not Arab. At the end of 1944

What sources back these data?

The primary sources for these conclusions are the same as those used by Palestinian Christian groups. They include the 1945 Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, 1948 Israeli census, 1961 Jordanian census, 1967 Israeli census, 1980 UNESCO report, 1995 Heyer Freidrich report cited in Diyar, 2006 Sabeel Center Report, the 2008 Diyar Institute report, and 2010 data from the Catholic church. ⁴¹

What about birth rate and Christian emigration from the West Bank and Gaza?

Narratives about emigration and birth rates also sometimes distorted. For generations, Palestinian Christians have had a low birth rate and higher emigration rate than Muslims and Jews. ^{42,43} As much as a hundred years ago, connections to European and American educational institutions and familiarity with western languages and culture likely increased the outflow of Palestinian Christians to Europe and the Americas. The primary motives for emigration have been better economic and educational opportunities as well as family reunification. ⁴⁴ This emigration has continued until today and does negate some of the natural population growth that might otherwise have occurred. However, the figures presented for emigration are often inflated. In some instances, the emigration figures exceed the total population figure, even allowing for natural growth. ⁴⁵

What about hypothesizing growth rates?

Some activists present figures for the Palestinian Christian population that take a base year for the Palestinian population and contrast it with an estimate for what the population would be had it grown without emigration. The formula used by Professor Bernard Sabella and others is a 2% annual rate of growth. ⁴⁶ These extrapolations invariably assign the difference between the current and hypothetical figures to the Israeli occupation, inevitably failing to acknowledge that their low birth rate precedes even the birth of Israel and exists elsewhere in the Middle East. ⁴⁷ Also, the growth rate used is too high. Had the U.S. population grown at 2%, it would have gone from 146 million in 1948 to 510 million in 2011 instead of the actual 310 million.

the Christians numbered 136,000" <http://www.mideastweb.org/angloamerican.htm>. See also <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Maps/Story574.html>. The average growth rate globally is 1.1% <http://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/worldgrgraph.php>

⁴¹ The 2010 Statistical Abstract of Israel is also referenced in the section on Jerusalem and the section on Christians in Israel.

⁴² According to the 1945 Anglo-American Survey of 1945, the annual growth rate for Muslims in 1941-1945 was 30.71 per 100,000. For Christians the figure was 18.89. <http://www.mideastweb.org/palpop.htm>

⁴³ "In Ottoman times, 11 to 12 percent of the Palestinians were Christians, the rest Muslims (a category in which the Ottomans included Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Druze). As a result of a lower birth rate, emigration, and a higher mortality rate in World War I, the Christian population steadily dropped from 1914 to 1967 (11 percent in 1914, 9 percent in 1931, 8 percent in 1967) within the borders of Palestine. . . . There was considerable difference in the fertility of Muslim and Christian Palestinians during the British Mandate and particularly after 1948. During the Mandate period, the average Christian woman had two-thirds as many children as the average Muslim woman. In Israel, that figure was even lower. In the 1960s and 1970s, Christian Palestinian women in Israel had on average less than half as many children as Muslim Palestinian women. This differential was most likely due to cultural and economic variation. Christian women tended to marry later, thus leaving less time for childbearing. In 1931, for example, Mandate statistics show that 75 percent of the Muslim women aged fifteen to forty-four were married, but only 65 percent of the Christians. Whereas one-third of the Muslim women aged fifteen to nineteen were married, one-fifth of the Christians were. Christians were better educated and more urban: in 1931, 76 percent of Christians were urban, 25 percent of Muslims; 70 percent of Christian males over age twenty-one were literate, 18 percent of Muslim males). Both these factors traditionally reduce fertility. Christians, at least from the 1960s on, were also more likely to use methods of artificial birth control. Conversely, Muslim women married and began to have children early. In the 1970s, the average Palestinian Muslim woman had already had two or more children by age twenty-four, and an average of nearly six children by age thirty-four. Very few Muslim women used contraceptive techniques." (source www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Palestine-Remembered/Story559.html)

⁴⁴ Bernard Sabella, Palestinian Christians; Challenges and Hopes - <http://www.al-bushra.org/holyland/sabella.htm>

⁴⁵ The Christian population in Gaza numbered 1,300 in 1945, according to the 1945 Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry (cited in the Institute for Palestine Studies 1991 and the Sabeel Report (2006)) In 1967, there were 2,478 Christians living in Gaza according to the Israeli census. The 2006 Sabeel and Diyar studies report 3,000 Christians during the years 2006-2008. However, the Catholic Church reports that 5,000 Christians emigrated from Gaza between 1967 and 1992 - 38% of the total 13,000 emigration from the West Bank and Gaza. This is mathematically impossible. To sustain emigration of 5,000, during that period, the Christian population of Gaza would have needed an annual growth rate in excess of 10%, more than three times higher than the 3.35 growth rate for Gaza - which is the fifth highest in the world. www.american-taskforce.org/daily_news_article/2011/04/22/1303444800_8 ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population_growth_rate

⁴⁶ Ibid. Note Sabella uses a hypothetical 2% population growth rate. The current global average is 1.1% <http://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/worldgrgraph.php>

⁴⁷ e.g., Sabeel 2006; Diyar 2008

What about Christian emigration from elsewhere in the Arab world?

The Christian population is declining across the Middle East, both in real numbers and as a percentage, for many of the same reasons including lower birth rates, rapidly growing populations around them, emigration due to poor economic conditions and oppression. The remaining population has shrunk as a percentage of the overall population at rates similar or greater than that in the West Bank and Gaza.

West Bank and Gaza: Decrease from 7.4% in 1945 to 1.4% today⁴⁸

Jordan: Decrease from 18% in 1952 to less than 4% today⁴⁹

Syria: Decrease from 25% in 1920 to 10% today⁵⁰

Christian emigration from Arab countries and refugee migration among Arab countries is reported to have increased dramatically in 2011 due to protests against tyrannical regimes and violence resulting from those protests. Some Christian groups have been targeted, including Coptic Christians in Egypt.

What about the Christian population in Israel itself?

In Israel, the Christian population is growing - up about 346% since 1948⁵¹ and 114% since 1967.⁵² During many of those years, Christian growth outpaced Jewish growth.⁵³

1945: 85,900⁵⁴

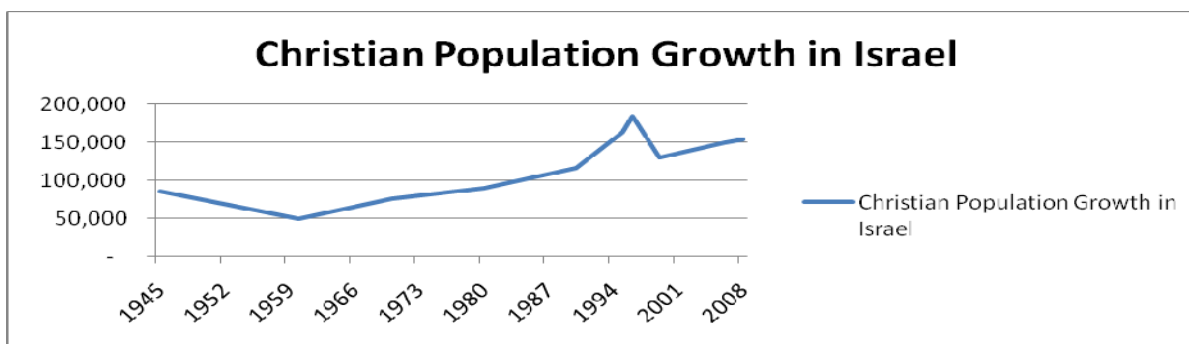
1948: 34,000⁵⁵

1967: 71,000⁵⁶

1995: 120,600⁵⁷

2007: 153,100⁵⁸

2009: 151,700⁵⁹



⁴⁸ See Part III "Percentage"

⁴⁹ See http://208.84.118.121/pf_current_christians.php, Wikipedia shows a decline from 18% to 7% (from early 20th century to today): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Christians

⁵⁰ see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Syria

⁵¹ The Christian Population in 1949 was 34,000, per the Statistical Abstract of Israel 2006, Population by Religion.

The Christian Population in 2009 was 151,700, per the Statistical Abstract of Israel 2006, Population by Religion. The population increase is thus 346% $((151,700-34,000)/34,000)$. The total Christian population in 1948 was 31,654

Acre 10,900; Beersheba 270; Haifa 5,184; Jaffa-Tel Aviv 1,900; Jerusalem 1,100; Nazareth 10,900; Ramle 1,400 (United Nations)

⁵² The increase is represented by a population in 1967 of 71,000 and a population in 2009 of 151,700. $((151,700-71,000)/71,000) = 114\%$

⁵³ In 1995, there were 4,522,300 Jews in Israel. In 2007, there were 5,478,200 representing a growth of 21%. The Christian population grew from 120,600 in 1995 to 153,100 in 2007, representing a growth of 27%.

⁵⁴ 2006 Sabeel Study, pg 42, and includes the following towns: Acre/Akko, Beersheba, Baisan, Haifa, Jaffa, Nazareth, Ramle, Safad, and Tiberias. The remaining towns are all in the West Bank or Gaza, and total 57,860. Note: $85,900 + 57,860 = 145,060$ - the total Christians as outlined by Sabeel

⁵⁵ Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2010, Population by Religion,

www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton_e.html?num_tab=st02_02&CYear=2010

⁵⁶ Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2010, Population by Religion, www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton_e.html?num_tab=st02_02&CYear=2010

⁵⁷ Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008

⁵⁸ Statistical Abstract of Israel 2009

⁵⁹ 2010 Statistical Abstract of Israel, table 2.4 www.cbs.gov.il/reader/

PART IV: Conclusions

What conclusions can we draw?

The Palestinian Christian population faces multiple and significant pressures. These include the unresolved conflict, life as a minority among Muslims, a continued low birth rate, and emigration. We should respect their condition. We should respect the connection our Christian neighbors have with their co-religionists in the Palestinian territories. We should join in advocacy with Christian friends for some of the concerns that Palestinian Christians face in the context of the as-yet unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We should do this because it is the right thing to do.

We can, however, dispute the myth of a vanishing or almost extinct Palestinian Christian population – and the near exclusive association of it with Israeli actions. The most significant drop in Christian population in the region occurred prior to Israeli control of the Palestinian territories. The drop in percentage is a present reality, due mostly to the increase in the Muslim population that surrounds them. The story of Palestinian Christians is complex. They have many valid concerns that should be heard. But the part of their story that relates to their total population and the percentage they constitute should not be distorted to slander Israel the way it has been.

Author: Ethan Felson
Research Assistant: Marc Schlesinger

Appendix A

		A	B	C	D	E	F
		Anglo-American Inquiry	Jordanian Census	Israeli Census	Hayer et al	Sabeel Report	Diyar Estimate
		1945	1961	1967	1995	2006	2007
Bethlehem District		14,800	15,234	14,406	20,487	22,000	22,440
of which	Behlehem City	6,490	7,246	6,405	6,799	7,000	7,140
	Beit Jala	3,540	4,530	4,271	6,343	7,000	7,140
	Beit Sahour	4,770	3,458	3,730	7,345	8,000	8,160
Hebron		170	168	200	-	-	-
Jericho		G	1,212	539	535	450	459
Jerusalem		H	31,330	10,795	10,813	11,910	9,260
of which	Jerusalem City			-	-	-	8,000
	Ezzariyyah			-	-	-	550
	Qubebeh			-	-	-	11
Ramallah & Al Birah District		8,410	15,371	10,597	12,362	12,500	12,750
of which	Ramallah		8,745	6,966	6,000	6,000	6,120
	Ain Arik		260	86	400	400	500
	Jifna		5,650	538	1,100	1,100	1,122
	Bir Ziet			1,351	2,200	2,200	2,244
	Taiyba		-	1,156	1,760	1,600	1,300
	Abud		716	500	1,017	1,200	1,224
Nablus (& Rafidiya)		1,560	3,069	688	1,041	700	714
Salfit					-	-	-
Qalqilya				1,628	-	-	-
Tubas					-	-	60
Tulkarim		380		100	-	50	16

Jenin District		1,210		1,045	2,789	2,100	2,951
of which	Jenin			123	537	300	306
	Zababdeh			922	2,252	1,800	2,500
	Kaferqod Village			-	-	-	24
	Deir Ghazeleh Village			-	-	-	8
	Jalamah Village			-	-	-	50
	Birqin			-	-	-	63
TOTALS		57,860	45,849	40,016	49,124	45,800	48,650

Gaza 1300 0 2,478 2,439 3,000 3,060

TOTALS		59,160	45,849	42,494	51,563	48,800	51,710
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- A** A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December, 1945 and January, 1946 for the Information of the Anglo American Committee of Inquiry. United Nations Conciliation Commission For Palestine www.mideastweb.org/palestine_population_un_1.htm also cited in Sabeel Survey (2006) page 42 reported in Diyar: "Palestinian Christians, Facts, Figures and Trends (2008), pp 7-8, table 1)
- B, C, D, E, F**
- B** Jordanian Census does not include Gaza
- D** cited in Diyar (2008), Heyer, Freidrich, History of Church in the Holy Land, 1995
- G** Per Sabeel Survey, the Jericho population is likely included in that of Jersalem (p 44)
- H** 1945 data include West Jerusalem. Subsequent data exclude West Jerusalem. In 2010, the Catholic Church estimated 10,000 Christians in Jerusalem (excluding West Jerusalem). In 2010,Israeli census counted 16,010 Christians in Jerusalem (excluding East Jerusalem)

Appendix B

		1945	1961	1967	1982	1996	M	2007
Christian Population								
	Bethlehem	6,490 A	7,246 F	6,405 F	no data	6,799 F		7,140 F
	Beit Jala	3,540 A	4,530 F	4,271 F	no data	6,343 F		7,140 F
	Beit Sahour	4,770 A, B	3,458 F	3,730 F	no data	7,345 F		8,160 F
	Total of 3 Districts	14,800	15,234	14,406	no data	20,487		22,440
Total Population								
	Bethlehem	9,140 C, D	22,453 G	14,439 J	22,453 G	21,314 L		25,266 F
	Beit Jala	3,740 C	7,966 H	6,281 K	6,040 H	11,658 L		11,758 F
	Beit Sahour	5,759 E	5,316 I	6,281 K	5,400 I	11,239 L		12,367 F
	Total of 3 Districts	18,639	35,735	27,000 J	33,893	44,211		49,391
Christian Population Percentage								
	Bethlehem	71.0%	32.3%	44.4%	no data	31.9%		28.3%
	Beit Jala	94.7%	56.9%	68.0%	no data	54.4%		60.7%
	Beit Sahour	82.8%	65.0%	59.4%	no data	65.4%		66.0%
	Total of 3 Districts	79.4%	42.6%	53.4%	no data	46.3%		45.4%
A Sabeel Study, pg 43, available at http://www.sabeel.org/datadir/en-events/ev131/files/the%20sabeel%20survey%20-%20english%202008.pdf								
B The 4,770 figure as provided by Sabeel, may also include surrounding towns. In the Anglo-American Study, available at http://www.mideastweb.org/palestine_population_un_1.htm , the 4,770 figure is correlated with "other towns" which contain a total population of 75,950. Other data show Beit Sahour with 2,770 Christians in 1945. See http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Bayt_Sahur_884/index.html								
C Anglo American Study, available at http://www.mideastweb.org/palestine_population_un_1.htm								
D The 9,140 figure is disputed by the Palestian Remembered site. According to Palestine Remembered, available at http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Bethlehem_536/index.html , the total population of Bethlehem is 8,820								
E As stated in tickmark B , Beit Sahour's invidual population could not be found. The population for Beit Sahour above is thus an extrapolation based on the percentage of christians to the total population in Bethlehem and Beit Jala. 5,611 was calculated as follows: $((6,490/9140) + (3540/3740))/2 = 82.8\%$. The Christian population of Beit Sahour, as determined by Sabeel, of 4,770 is divided by the 82.8% mean percentage to arrive at 5,759 total population.								
F Diyar Study, pg 7, available at http://www.diyar.ps/media/documents/pal_chr_booklet.pdf								
G Palestinians Remembered website, available at http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Bethlehem_536/index.html								
H Palestinians Remembered website, available at http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Bayt_Jala_866/index.html								
I Palestinians Remembered website, available at http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Bayt_Sahur_884/index.html								
J Jewish Virtual Library, available at http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0003_0_02860.html								
K These figures are estimates. They are calculated based on the total District Population of 27,000. For purposes of the estimate, we chose to give Beit Jala and Beit Sahour the same population $(27,000-14,419)/2$. There was insufficient data otherwise to come up with an accurate figure								
L The 1997 figures are from the Palestinian Census of 1997, available at http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabID=3354&lang=en , go to code 443 - "Population Report, Bethlehem Governorate - First Part (Final Results)," and open up the excel chart labeled "BETHL." There is another table by the PCBS (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics), which has slight different numbers: Bethlehem 21,673; Beit Jala 11,957; Beit Sahour 11,250 (available at http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/phc_97/bet_t1.aspx) - however the numbers are materially consistent								
M The figures used for the Christian Population is actually 1995 from the Diyar Study, page 7, See FN F; The 1997 figure is from the 1997 Palestinian Census, See FN L. The purpose of using the 1996 figure is to allow the chart below to be correct spatially.								