

Justice should shape our attitude

"Christians, take positive steps to bring Christ to Israel"



Franklin Pyles
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A Christian leader in the Middle East recently told me that Israel's place in prophecy is the only way to explain the fact that the whole world continues to be focused on a piece of land the size of a postage stamp. I agree with his analysis.

However, I disagree that an interpretation of prophecy should shape the attitude of the church toward the pain and suffering, the blood that is shed, within Israel. Our attitude should be shaped by justice.

However, even the question of justice is complex beyond speaking. As Thomas L. Friedman wrote in *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, there is a divide in Israel so profound that it will swallow up anyone who tries to straddle it.

Justice with balance

Nevertheless, I believe that when Christians in Canada speak, they must seek to speak with balance. This balance requires the recognition of a number of truths. And as I note them,

I am aware that even these truths may be disputed.

The state of Israel is a fact. It was founded by action of the United Nations. Israel's existence is not to be questioned. As a nation and ally of Canada, Israel deserves our support.

The Palestinian people have a certain birthright in the land. The fact that they have lived there for millennia is without dispute. Whatever solution is arrived at it, must acknowledge this.

Acknowledging the right of both to live in the land means that both Jews and Palestinians must have political franchise.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that both sides have perpetrated injustices, injustices that range from small to great. No political solution can overlook this.

While the best minds in international relations have seen one proposal after another for peace in Israel shipwrecked, it may seem foolish to think that there is anything constructive that an average Canadian Christian can do. Against such despair, I propose that Christians take significant action.

First, Christians need to recognize that being loyal to the Bible and being interested in prophecy does not align them with either the status quo or a particular plan to change the status quo. Instead, a desire for justice should be the guiding light at all times.

Second, Christians need to have less concern about the machinations of power brokers and realize that ulti-

mately no state is a friend of the church. It is the church in Israel that we should be concerned about.

The church in Israel has suffered greatly. This is true of the church among the Jews and the church among the Arab people. Not many years back, a significant proportion (some say more than 30 per cent) of the Arabs were Christians. Sadly, many have been forced to flee the land because of the conflict. Recently, the manager of the Christian bookstore operated by the Palestinian Bible Society was murdered.

Jewish Christians have been persecuted. A Christian bookstore operated by the Christian and Missionary Alliance has repeatedly been picketed and employees harassed.

I call on Christians in Canada to speak out for the protection of Christians in Israel.

As well, Canadian Christians need to act to build up the church. While Canadian Christians spend millions to visit the holy land, they allow the small evangelical churches to languish in poverty. After my son died in Israel, I established a fund to train Palestinian pastors. Much more needs to be done to strengthen the national church. Currently reports of the moving of the Spirit are so encouraging.

Christians, take positive steps to bring Christ to Israel.

Franklin Pyles is president of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada. The Alliance has worked with people in Israel for more than 100 years.