

About the Authors

Donald Neff

Donald Neff has been a journalist for forty years. He spent 16 years in service for *Time Magazine*, and is a former *Time Magazine* Bureau Chief in Israel. He also worked for the *Washington Star*.

In 1980 he received the prestigious Overseas Press Club's Mary Hemingway Award for best magazine reporting from abroad.

In recent years he has been a regular contributor for *Middle East International* and the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*. He is the author of five excellent books on the Middle East.

Grace Halsell

Grace Halsell was an award-winning journalist and author. Her books include *Journey to Jerusalem, Prophecy and Politics*, and *Forcing God's Hand*. She passed away in August 2000.

Christians in the Holy Land

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Christians Discriminated Against by Israel
by Former Time Magazine Bureau Chief Donald Neff

What Christians Don't Know About Israel
by Award-Winning Journalist Grace Halsell

Orthodox Jewish youths burn New Testaments in Israel
an Associated Press article not sent to U.S. media

“[Deputy Mayor Uzi Aharon] got into a loudspeaker car last Thursday and drove through the neighborhood, urging people to turn over the material [New Testaments] to Jewish religious students who went door to door to collect it.

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- **Associated Press**, May 20, 2008,
'Orthodox Jewish youths burn New Testaments in Israel'
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Christians Discriminated Against by Israel

By Donald Neff

Former Israel Bureau Chief for *Time Magazine*

Excerpted from *Fifty Years of Israel*

On Dec. 29, 1977, Christians in Israel and the occupied territories protested a new law passed by the Israeli parliament making it illegal for missionaries to proselytize Jews. Protestant churches charged that the law had been “hastily pushed through parliament during the Christmas period when Christians were busily engaged in preparing for and celebrating their major festival.” The law made missionaries liable to five years’ imprisonment for attempting to persuade people to change their religion, and three years’ imprisonment for any Jew who converted. The United Christian Council complained that the law could be “misused in restricting religious freedom in Israel.”

Nonetheless, it came into force on April 1, 1978, prohibiting the offering of “material inducement” for a person to change his religion. A material inducement could be something as minor as the giving of a Bible. Although the Likud government of Menachem Begin assured the Christian community that the law applied equally to all religions and did not specifically mention Christians, the United Christian Council of Israel charged that it was biased and aimed specifically at Christians since only Christians openly proselytized. Council representatives also cited anti-Christian speeches made in the parliament during debate on the law. Parliament member Binyamin Halevy had called missionaries “a cancer in the body of the nation.”

The next year Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, considered a political moderate, issued a religious ruling that copies of the New Testament should be torn out of any edition of a Bible owned by a Jew. Israeli scholar Yehoshafat Harkabi wrote that he was disturbed by “these manifestations of hostility—the designation of Christians as idolaters, the demand to invoke the ‘resident alien’ ordinances, and the burning of the New Testament.” Observed Harkabi: “Outside of the Land of Israel Jews never dared behave in this fashion. Has independence made the Jews take leave of their senses?”

Desecration of Christian property and churches—arson, window breaking, burning of the New Testament—had long marred relations between the two communities. A small but fanatical group of Jews wanted no Christians, whom they considered fallen Jews, in Israel. This virulent strain of prejudice had been present since before the Jewish state was founded.

For instance, after the capture by Jewish forces of Jaffa on May 13, 1948, two days before Israel's birth, there was desecration of Christian churches. Father Deleque, a Catholic priest, reported: "Jewish soldiers broke down the doors of my church and robbed many precious and sacred objects. Then they threw the statues of Christ down into a nearby garden." He added that Jewish leaders had reassured that religious buildings would be respected, "but their deeds do not correspond to their words."

On May 31, 1948, a group of Christian leaders comprising the Christian Union of Palestine publicly complained that Jewish forces had used 10 Christian churches and humanitarian institutions in Jerusalem as military bases and otherwise desecrated them. They added that a total of 14 churches had suffered shell damage, which killed three priests and made casualties of more than 100 women and children.

The group's statement said Arab forces had abided by their promise to respect Christian institutions, but that the Jews had forcefully occupied Christian structures and been indiscriminate in shelling churches. It said, among other charges, that "many children were killed or wounded" by Jewish shells on the Convent of Orthodox Copts on May 19, 23 and 24; that eight refugees were killed and about 120 wounded at the Orthodox Armenian Convent at some unstated date; and that Father Pierre Somi, secretary to the Bishop, had been killed and two wounded at the Orthodox Syrian Church of St. Mark on May 16.

Churches were again desecrated during the 1967 war when Israel captured East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, completing the occupation of all of Palestine. On July 21, 1967, the Reverend James L. Kelso, a former moderator of the United Presbyterian Church and long-time resident in Palestine, complained of extensive damage to churches adding: "So significant was this third Jewish war against the Arabs that one of the finest missionaries of the Near East called it 'perhaps the most serious setback that Christendom has had since the fall of Constantinople in 1453.'"

Kelso continued: "How did Israel respect church property in the fighting...? They shot up the Episcopal Cathedral [in Jerusalem], just as they had done in 1948. They smashed down the Episcopal school for boys...The Israelis

After receiving complaints, Aharon said, he got into a loudspeaker car last Thursday and drove through the neighborhood, urging people to turn over the material to Jewish religious students who went door to door to collect it.

The books were dumped into a pile and set afire in a lot near a synagogue, he said.

The Israeli Maariv daily reported Tuesday that hundreds of Jewish religious school students took part in the book-burning. But Aharon told The Associated Press that only a few students were present, and that he was not there when the books were torched. Not all of the New Testaments that were collected were burned, but hundreds were, he said.

He said he regretted the burning of the books, but called it a "commandment" to burn materials that urge Jews to convert.

"I certainly don't denounce the burning of the booklets," he said. "I denounce those who distributed the booklets."

Jews worship from the Old Testament, including the Five Books of Moses and the writings of the ancient prophets. Christians revere the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, which contains the ministry of Jesus.

Calev Myers, an attorney who represents Messianic Jews, or Jews who accept Jesus as their savior, demanded in an interview with Army Radio that all those involved be put on trial. He estimated there were 10,000 Messianic Jews, who are also known as Jews for Jesus, in Israel.

Police had no immediate comment.

Israeli authorities and Orthodox Jews frown on missionary activity aimed at Jews, though in most cases it is not illegal. Still, the concept of a Jew burning books is abhorrent to many in Israel because of the association with Nazis torching piles of Jewish books during the Holocaust of World War II.

Earlier this year, the teenage son of a prominent Christian missionary was seriously wounded when a package bomb delivered to the family's West Bank home went off in his hands.

Last year, arsonists burst into a Jerusalem church used by Messianic Jews and set the building on fire, raising suspicions that Jewish extremists were behind the attack. No one claimed responsibility, but the same church was burned down 25 years ago by ultra-Orthodox Jewish extremists.

ment-approved violations of human rights.

While Israel and its dedicated U.S. Jewish supporters know they have the president and most of Congress in their hands, they worry about grassroots America—the well-meaning Christians who care for justice. Thus far, most Christians were unaware of what it was they didn't know about Israel. They were indoctrinated by U.S. supporters of Israel in their own country and when they traveled to the Land of Christ most all did so under Israeli sponsorship. That being the case, it was unlikely a Christian ever met a Palestinian or learned what caused the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This is gradually changing, however. And this change disturbs the Israelis. As an example, delegates attending a Christian Sabeel conference in Bethlehem earlier this year said they were harassed by Israeli security at the Tel Aviv airport.

"They asked us," said one delegate, "'Why did you use a Palestinian travel agency? Why didn't you use an Israeli agency?'" The interrogation was so extensive and hostile that Sabeel leaders called a special session to brief the delegates on how to handle the harassment. Obviously, said one delegate, "The Israelis have a policy to discourage us from visiting the Holy Land except under their sponsorship. They don't want Christians to start learning all they have never known about Israel."

Orthodox Jewish youths burn New Testaments in Israel

By The Associated Press

International Herald Tribune, May 20, 2008

The Associated Press, inexplicably, did not send this news report to U.S. newspapers; it was only available internationally. Thus, Americans are not being informed about these types of activities in Israel.

Jerusalem: Orthodox Jews set fire to hundreds of copies of the New Testament in the latest act of violence against Christian missionaries in the Holy Land.

Or Yehuda Deputy Mayor Uzi Aharon said missionaries recently entered a neighborhood in the predominantly religious town of 34,000 in central Israel, distributing hundreds of New Testaments and missionary material.

wrecked and looted the YMCA...They wrecked the big Lutheran hospital...The Lutheran center for cripples also suffered..."

Nancy Nolan, wife of a physician at the American University Hospital in Beirut, who was in Jerusalem during and after the fighting, charged that "while the Israeli authorities proclaim to the world that all religions will be respected and protected, and post notices identifying the Holy Places, Israeli soldiers and youths are throwing stink bombs in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

"The Church of St. Anne, who crypt marks the birthplace of the Virgin Mary, has been severely damaged and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem also was damaged. The wanton killing of the Warden of the Garden Tomb followed by the shooting into the tomb itself, in an attempt to kill the warden's wife, was another instance that we knew first-hand which illustrated the utter disregard shown by the occupation forces toward the Holy Places and the religious sensibilities of the people in Jordan and in the rest of the world."

"The desecration of churches...includes smoking in the churches, littering the churches, taking dogs inside and entering in inappropriate manner of dress. Behavior such as this cannot be construed other than as a direct insult to the whole Christian world."

Desecration has occurred not only in times of war. As recently as 1995, an Israeli soldier, Daniel Koren, 22, entered St. Anthony Catholic Church in Jaffa and went on a shooting rampage, firing more than 100 bullets in the altar and the cross above it but causing no injuries. Koren said his Judaic convictions forced him to destroy all physical images of God, and admitted that he had staged a prior attack in Jerusalem's Gethsemane Church.

Perhaps the worst outbreak of organized desecration of Christian institutions came on Sept. 10, 1963, when hundreds of ultra-orthodox Jews simultaneously attacked Christian missions in Jaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem. (One has to say "perhaps because reporting on this sensitive subject in the U.S. media has been so poor over the decades.) At any rate, the attacks were a concerted effort to intimidate Christians in Israel by a religious vigilante group called Hever Peelei Hamahane Hatorati, the Society of Activists of the Torah Camp. In an attack on the Church of Scotland school in Jaffa, Christian children were beaten and considerable damage was caused to the school by at least 200 rampaging Jews.

Other attacks occurred at two nearby church schools, the Greek Catholic missionary school of St. Joseph and a Christian Brothers school. In Jerusalem,

attacks occurred at the St. Joseph convent and the Finnish Lutheran mission school. In Haifa, the American-European Beth El Messianic Mission Children's Hostel and School was attacked. No serious damage occurred in any of the attacks except at the Scotland school. More than 100 Jews were convicted in the attacks, none of them receiving more than small fines and suspended sentences.

The first half of the 1980s, with Likud governments in control, was a particularly active period for Jewish bigots. On Oct. 8, 1982, the Baptist Church in Jerusalem was burned down. Kerosene had been sprinkled on the church's wooden chapel, constructed in 1933. Although no one was ever charged in the arson, the Baptist Center's bookstore had been vandalized a dozen times in previous years, and Jews were suspected. When the Baptists sought to rebuild the church, Jews demonstrated against the project and the Jewish district planning commission refused to grant a building permit. In 1985, the Israeli Supreme Court advised the Baptists to leave the all-Jewish area.

On Christmas Day in 1983, a hotel in Tiberias where Christians held meetings was set afire, the latest in a series of attacks on a small group of about 50 Christians. Two Jews were arrested in the arson incident. Other attacks included stones thrown through windows at the hotel while the group was meeting and break-ins at the homes of members of the group. The anti-missionary group Yad Le'Achim complained that Christian missionaries were offering money, clothes, jewelry and tennis shoes to listen to Christian lectures.

Just over a fortnight later, on Jan. 11, 1984, suspected Jewish extremists stacked hymnals on a piano in a Christian prayer room in Jerusalem and set them afire. Also in the same week angry Jews protesting Christian proselytizing caused Beth Shalom, a Christian evangelical group, to withdraw its plans to build a multimillion-dollar hotel in Jerusalem. Beth Shalom took its action after about 150 Jews showed up at a city council meeting with placards reading "You can't buy me" and "I didn't immigrate to live next door to missionaries." A leader of the protest, Rabbi Moshe Berlinger, compared Christian missionaries to Trojan horses.

Jewish infringements on Christian rights became so bad by 1990 that on Dec. 20 the leaders of Christian churches in Jerusalem took the extraordinary decision to restrict Christmas celebrations to protest "the continuing sad state of affairs in our land," including encroachment by Israel on traditional Christian institutions. Among concerns expressed by the patriarchs and heads of churches were attempts by Jewish settlers to move into the Old City

Sulzberger had not only invited me to her home to meet her famous friends but, also at her suggestion, *The Times* had requested articles. I wrote op-ed articles on various subjects including American blacks, American Indians as well as undocumented workers. Since Mrs. Sulzberger and other Jewish officials at the *Times* highly praised my efforts to help these groups of oppressed peoples, the dichotomy became apparent: most "liberal" U.S. Jews stand on the side of all poor and oppressed peoples save one—the Palestinians.

How handily these liberal Jewish opinion-molders tend to diminish the Palestinians, to make them invisible, or to categorize them all as "terrorists."

Interestingly, Iphigene Sulzberger had talked to me a great deal about her father, Adolph S. Ochs. She told me that he was not one of the early Zionists. He had not favored the creation of a Jewish state.

Yet, increasingly, American Jews have fallen victim to Zionism, a nationalistic movement that passes for many as a religion. While the ethical instructions of all great religions—including the teachings of Moses, Muhammad and Christ—stress that all human beings are equal, militant Zionists take the position that the killing of a non-Jew does not count.

Over five decades now, Zionists have killed Palestinians with impunity. And in the 1996 shelling of a U.N. base in Qana, Lebanon, the Israelis killed more than 100 civilians sheltered there. As an Israeli journalist, Arieh Shavit, explains of the massacre, "We believe with absolute certitude that right now, with the White House in our hands, the Senate in our hands and *The New York Times* in our hands, the lives of others do not count the same way as our own."

Israelis today, explains the anti-Zionist Jew Israel Shahak, "are not basing their religion on the ethics of justice. They do not accept the Old Testament as it is written. Rather, religious Jews turn to the Talmud. For them, the Talmudic Jewish laws become 'the Bible.' And the Talmud teaches that a Jew can kill a non-Jew with impunity."

In the teachings of Christ, there was a break from such Talmudic teachings. He sought to heal the wounded, to comfort the downtrodden.

The danger, of course, for U.S. Christians is that having made an icon of Israel, we fall into a trap of condoning whatever Israel does—even wanton murder—as orchestrated by God.

Yet, I am not alone in suggesting that the churches in the United States represent the last major organized support for Palestinian rights. This imperative is due in part to our historic links to the Land of Christ and in part to the moral issues involved with having our tax dollars fund Israeli-govern-

relatively tiny state. I pointed out that I had not seen so many reporters in world capitals such as Beijing, Moscow, London, Tokyo, Paris. Why, I asked, did a small state with a 1980 population of only four million warrant more reporters than China, with a billion people?

I also linked this query with my findings that *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*—and most of our nation's print media—are owned and/or controlled by Jews supportive of Israel. It was for this reason, I deduced, that they sent so many reporters to cover Israel—and to do so largely from the Israeli point of view.

My learning experiences also included coming to realize how easily I could lose a Jewish friend if I criticized the Jewish state. I could with impunity criticize France, England, Russia, even the United States. And any aspect of life in America. But not the Jewish state. I lost more Jewish friends than one after the publication of *Journey to Jerusalem*—all sad losses for me and one, perhaps, saddest of all.

In the 1960s and 1970s, before going to the Middle East, I had written about the plight of blacks in a book entitled *Soul Sister*, and the plight of American Indians in a book entitled *Bessie Yellowhair*, and the problems endured by undocumented workers crossing from Mexico in *The Illegals*. These books had come to the attention of the “mother” of *The New York Times*, Mrs. Arthur Hays Sulzberger.

Her father had started the newspaper, then her husband ran it, and in the years that I knew her, her son was the publisher. She invited me to her fashionable apartment on Fifth Avenue for lunches and dinner parties. And, on many occasions, I was a weekend guest at her Greenwich, Conn. home.

She was liberal-minded and praised my efforts to speak for the underdog, even going so far in one letter to say, “You are the most remarkable woman I ever knew.” I had little concept that from being buoyed so high I could be dropped so suddenly when I discovered—from her point of view—the “wrong” underdog.

As it happened, I was a weekend guest in her spacious Connecticut home when she read bound galleys of *Journey to Jerusalem*. As I was leaving, she handed the galleys back with a saddened look: “My dear, have you forgotten the Holocaust?” She felt that what happened in Nazi Germany to Jews several decades earlier should silence any criticism of the Jewish state. She could focus on a holocaust of Jews while negating a modern day holocaust of Palestinians.

I realized, quite painfully, that our friendship was ending. Iphigene

and an “erosion of the traditional rights and centuries-old privileges of the churches,” including imposition by Israel of municipal and state taxes on the churches.

The statement added: “We express our deep concern over new problems confronting the local church. They interfere with the proper functioning of our religious institutions, and we call upon the civil authorities in the country to safeguard our historic rights and status honored by all governments.”

Anti-Christian prejudice helps account for the fact that the number of Christian Palestinians in all of former Palestine had dwindled to only 50,000 in 1995. They no longer were a major presence in either Jerusalem or Ramallah, and they were fast losing their majority status in Bethlehem.

When Israel was established in 1948, the Palestinian Christian community had numbered 200,000, compared to roughly 600,000 Jews in Palestine at the time. Now the Christians are not even one percent of the population of Israel/Palestine. Of today's estimated total 400,000 Christian Palestinians, most now are living in their own diaspora, mainly in the Americas.

What Christians Don't Know About Israel

By Grace Halsell

Award-Winning Journalist and Author

Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, May/June 1998

American Jews sympathetic to Israel dominate key positions in all areas of our government where decisions are made regarding the Middle East. This being the case, is there any hope of ever changing U.S. policy? President Bill Clinton as well as most members of Congress support Israel—and they know why. U.S. Jews sympathetic to Israel donate lavishly to their campaign coffers.

The answer to achieving an even-handed Middle East policy might lie elsewhere—among those who support Israel but don't really know why. This group is the vast majority of Americans. They are well-meaning, fair-minded Christians who feel bonded to Israel—and Zionism—often from atavistic feelings, in some cases dating from childhood.

I am one of those. I grew up listening to stories of a mystical, allegorical, spiritual Israel. This was before a modern political entity with the same name

appeared on our maps. I attended Sunday School and watched an instructor draw down window-type shades to show maps of the Holy Land. I imbibed stories of a Good and Chosen people who fought against their Bad “unChosen” enemies.

In my early 20s, I began traveling the world, earning my living as a writer. I came to the subject of the Middle East rather late in my career. I was sadly lacking in knowledge regarding the area. About all I knew was what I had learned in Sunday School.

And typical of many U.S. Christians, I somehow considered a modern state created in 1948 as a homeland for Jews persecuted under the Nazis as a replica of the spiritual, mystical Israel I heard about as a child. When in 1979 I initially went to Jerusalem, I planned to write about the three great monotheistic religions and leave out politics. “Not write about politics?” scoffed one Palestinian, smoking a water pipe in the Old Walled City. “We eat politics, morning, noon and night!”

As I would learn, the politics is about land, and the co-claimants to that land: the indigenous Palestinians who have lived there for 2,000 years and the Jews who started arriving in large numbers after the Second World War. By living among Israeli Jews as well as Palestinian Christians and Muslims, I saw, heard, smelled, experienced the police state tactics Israelis use against Palestinians.

My research led to a book entitled *Journey to Jerusalem*. My journey not only was enlightening to me as regards Israel, but also I came to a deeper, and sadder, understanding of my own country. I say sadder understanding because I began to see that, in Middle East politics, we the people are not making the decisions, but rather that supporters of Israel are doing so. And typical of most Americans, I tended to think the U.S. media was “free” to print news impartially.

“It shouldn’t be published. It’s anti-Israel.”

In the late 1970s, when I first went to Jerusalem, I was unaware that editors could and would classify “news” depending on who was doing what to whom. On my initial visit to Israel-Palestine, I had interviewed dozens of young Palestinian men. About one in four related stories of torture.

Israeli police had come in the night, dragged them from their beds and placed hoods over their heads. Then in jails the Israelis had kept them in isolation, besieged them with loud, incessant noises, hung them upside down and had sadistically mutilated their genitals. I had not read such stories in the U.S. media. Wasn’t it news? Obviously, I naively thought, U.S. editors simply

didn’t know it was happening.

On a trip to Washington, DC, I hand-delivered a letter to Frank Mankiewicz, then head of the public radio station WETA. I explained I had taped interviews with Palestinians who had been brutally tortured. And I’d make them available to him. I got no reply. I made several phone calls. Eventually I was put through to a public relations person, a Ms. Cohen, who said my letter had been lost. I wrote again. In time I began to realize what I hadn’t known: had it been Jews who were strung up and tortured, it would be news. But interviews with tortured Arabs were “lost” at WETA.

The process of getting my book *Journey to Jerusalem* published also was a learning experience. Bill Griffin, who signed a contract with me on behalf of MacMillan Publishing Company, was a former Roman Catholic priest. He assured me that no one other than himself would edit the book. As I researched the book, making several trips to Israel and Palestine, I met frequently with Griffin, showing him sample chapters. “Terrific,” he said of my material.

The day the book was scheduled to be published, I went to visit MacMillan’s. Checking in at a reception desk, I spotted Griffin across a room, cleaning out his desk. His secretary Margie came to greet me. In tears, she whispered for me to meet her in the ladies room. When we were alone, she confided, “He’s been fired.” She indicated it was because he had signed a contract for a book that was sympathetic to Palestinians. Griffin, she said, had no time to see me.

Later, I met with another MacMillan official, William Curry. “I was told to take your manuscript to the Israeli Embassy, to let them read it for mistakes,” he told me. “They were not pleased. They asked me, ‘You are not going to publish this book, are you?’ I asked, ‘Were there mistakes?’ ‘Not mistakes as such. But it shouldn’t be published. It’s anti-Israel.’”

Somehow, despite obstacles to prevent it, the presses had started rolling. After its publication in 1980, I was invited to speak in a number of churches. Christians generally reacted with disbelief. Back then, there was little or no coverage of Israeli land confiscation, demolition of Palestinian homes, wanton arrests and torture of Palestinian civilians.

The Same Question

Speaking of these injustices, I invariably heard the same question, “How come I didn’t know this?” Or someone might ask, “But I haven’t read about that in my newspaper.” To these church audiences, I related my own learning experience, that of seeing hordes of U.S. correspondents covering a