

been made: maybe pro-Davis, maybe pro-Jordan. Whatever the result, the community would have known that representative democracy had, in some important sense, had its innings.

We all know that sort of thing was never in the cards. Honesty regarding race, and especially race in history, no longer is possible. Those who attempt to display it get flayed. Why, the chief of New Jersey's highway patrol lost his job recently just for remarking publicly on the statistical truth that a lot of black people are involved in drugs. Hush! You don't say such things. Even if they're true.

Truth? We're not interested in *that*. We're interested in—well, face it. Peace is what we're interested in. Don't yell at me! Pleeeeeease. You can say what you want, believe what you want. Just don't—sob, sniffle—call me a Racist/Sexist/Homophobe.

"If there is one thing more unedifying than a ruling class in a position of dominance," Malcolm Muggeridge wrote nearly 30 years ago, without even having visited modern Dallas, "it is a ruling class, like ours, on the run. They are capable of every folly and misjudgment, mistake their enemies for friends, and, of course, vice versa, and feel bound to go out of their way to encourage whatever and whoever seek their destruction."

Failure of nerve. Coming to a community near you—if it isn't already living there under an assumed name.

*William Murchison is a nationally syndicated columnist for the Dallas Morning News.*

## Letter From Gaza and the West Bank

by Tom Jenney

### Easter in Palestine



"Welcome to the world's largest open-air prison." That was how Tom Getman, the Israel country director for World Vision, introduced us to life in the Gaza Strip. Our pilgrimage tour bus motored away from the Erez security checkpoint, with its coils of barbed wire and walls of sandbags, and onto the highway to Gaza

City. Soon we were winding our way through the sea of concrete hovels in the U.N.-serviced Jabalia refugee camp, the buildings sitting brown and gray and dusty in the April sun. When the bus doors opened at the Jabalia Health Center, we were met by the twin stench of open sewage and never-collected garbage. In less than five miles, we had gone from one of the wealthiest countries in the world (Israel's per-capita GDP is around \$17,000 U.S.) to a scene of intense economic devastation, where 36 percent of Gaza's Palestinian populace lives on less than \$650 a year, unemployment hovers between 20 and 30 percent, population density is over 7,000 per square mile, and some 400,000 people live in squalid refugee camps.

For most of us, this was our first acquaintance with the largest and longest-standing refugee problem in the world. In Gaza alone, there are approximately 700,000 refugees, and the total number of Palestinian refugees in the world approaches 3.5 million. This figure represents not only the original 750,000 Palestinian Arabs (and their descendants) who fled from Israeli terrorism and ethnic cleansing in the late 1940's but also those who have been pushed off their land by Israeli settlers moving into Gaza and the West Bank since the 1967 Six Day War, when Israel conquered and began to occupy those territories.

From Jabalia, we went to Gaza City to tour the Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children, run by an American woman named Gerry Shawwa. After lunch, Gerry's husband, Isam, a local bigwig with the Palestinian National Authority, briefed us on the precarious water situation in Gaza. As in the West Bank, since 1967 all of the best sources of water have been owned, controlled, and diverted for consumption by the Israelis. One million Gazans are left to draw their drinking water from several brackish and contaminated aquifers, while farmers work with water that is too saline for anything but modest citrus production.

Our last visit in Gaza was to the Latin Patriarch School, run by Fr. "Abuna" Manuel Musallam. Although there are only 2,000 Christians in the Gaza Strip, Father Abuna is known as the "priest of the million" because of his efforts to maintain good relations between Christians and Muslims. As he explained, Palestinian Arabs of the two faiths had a long history of peaceful coexistence in the region and had banded together to

fight off a series of outside aggressors: the Crusaders, the Ottoman Turks, the British, and the Zionists. Abuna is also known as the "political priest," and I noted that the reception room was watched over by twin photo portraits of Pope John Paul II and Yassir Arafat.

The day concluded with a driving tour of Gaza, where we saw more evidence of the "de-development" caused by the Palestinians' forced isolation from the rest of the world. Since 1967, Gaza and the West Bank have been economic colonies of Israel, serving as captive markets for Israeli goods and pools of cheap labor for its industries. The construction of a seaport and an airport in Gaza—allowed under the Oslo talks—has been hampered by Israeli authorities. Add these facts to the diversion of water and the constant encroachment of Israeli settlements, and one begins to suspect that domination—rather than security—is the driving rationale behind the continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Also, with the Palestinian Authority so dependent on foreign aid, it is not surprising to find rampant corruption and mismanagement of funds.

In recent years, this economic isolation has been tightened by the crippling effect of long-term closure, a form of collective punishment that has actually intensified since the Oslo Accords were first signed in 1993. Under closure, acts of terrorism are met by a complete shutdown of Palestinian movements to Israel. Some closures—like the two-week one for Passover in April 1997—are precautionary measures, applied on top of permanent general restrictions on the movement of Palestinians. Currently, permits for Palestinians to enter Israel are only issued to married men over the age of 35 and single women over 30. The West Bank and Gaza are almost completely isolated from each other, and visiting Jerusalem for religious reasons is out of the question. Indeed, during the closures in 1995, 1996, and 1997, Tom Getman's people had to bring the Easter Holy Fire from Jerusalem to Orthodox Christians in Gaza.

While we were at the Jabalia clinic, the director explained that they received visits from tour groups only three or four times per year. Why ruin a perfectly nice pilgrimage to the Holy Land by visiting the Gaza Strip and the West Bank? Why not opt for a standard tour, with an Israeli guide, where the pilgrims are steered away from all the troubled areas? Why

not learn about all the things the “people without a land” have done for the “land without a people”? Or about how democratic (technically true, inside the confines of pre-1967 Israel) and religiously tolerant (unless you want to risk fines and jail time by proselytizing on behalf of Christianity) the new nation is? Indeed, why endure all the expense and jetlag when you could simply go to Epcot Center? Part of the answer may be that when Jesus said “Follow me,” He was going to the Cross, not to Disney World.

Our pilgrimage was coordinated through the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., and organized by Don Kruse, a former State Department lifer who served as U.S. Consul in Jerusalem from 1976 to 1980. The tour’s first objective, of course, was to see the lands where Jesus walked and the sites which commemorate key events of His life, death, and Resurrection. The second was to meet some of the quarter-million Palestinian Christians, the “living stones” who inhabit the land today.

One of our first stops was the West Bank town of Bir Zeit, home of Bir Zeit University and famous during the years of the *intifada* as a hotbed of resistance and demonstration—as well as brutal suppression by the Israeli Defense Forces. We had come to Bir Zeit to spend Easter at the Roman Catholic parish of Fr. Emil Salayta. The weekend was actually that of Orthodox Easter, but Father Emil, in a remarkable gesture of ecumenism, had delayed his parish’s celebration for a week. Saturday evening, after a tour of the parish, we joined the Orthodox community for the parade of the Holy Fire through the town, then went to stay overnight with families from the parish. The next morning, Father Emil gave the pulpit over to our pastor, Craig Barnes, and translated into Arabic Barnes’ Easter homily.

The following week, after day tours in and around Jerusalem, we would return to our hotel to hear speakers. The first was Ms. Dina Asfour, a Nazarene Christian who used to work at the American Consulate General and now works for Palestinian politician Hanan Ashrawi. Like every Palestinian we talked to, she expressed grave dissatisfaction with the terms of the Oslo Accords, which will leave them with—at most—little more than ten percent of the original land of Palestine. (In 1947, before the U.N. partition plan officially punished the Palestinian Arabs for the sins of the Nazis,

Zionist settlers had peacefully acquired only seven percent of that land.)

The next night’s speaker was Susan Harris Roleff, a nonreligious Israeli Jew who represents the Israeli Labor Party. Roleff is one of the many members of such Israeli organizations as B’tselem ([www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)) that sympathize with the grievances of the Palestinian people. Many of these voters align themselves with Labor, which professes to be more willing to trade “land for peace” than the Likud Party of recently defeated Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Indeed, based on that assumption, thousands of American Jews flew to Tel Aviv in May to vote for Labor in the national elections. Sadly, Labor’s actual record on the issue of settlements—achieved by “doves” like Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres—is almost as bad as Likud’s.

The next day, we toured Efrat, a West Bank Israeli settlement south of Jerusalem. Our guide was Arty Geldman, a self-described McGovernite liberal who grew up in Chicago during the 60’s, found his identity as an Orthodox Jew, and moved to Efrat to have a nice place to raise his children. Efrat is a quiet neighborhood—on the dull side, actually—and save for the yellow ubiquity of Jerusalem limestone bricks, it could be a housing tract somewhere in Orange County. As Arty explained, there are two kinds of schools in Efrat: religious

schools, and “more religious” schools.

I asked Arty to compare the Zionist experience with the European displacement of the North American Indians. The question was meant as a softball, an admission that Americans had also lived by the sword and weren’t in a good position to judge Israel. But Arty wasn’t swinging. There was, he said, no comparison. God gave the land of Palestine to the Jews, and the Palestinians have no claim to it. Period. He later added, “Without our biblical claim to the land, we don’t have any right to it,” and explicitly disowned Zionist founding father Theodor Herzl.

Arty’s argument represents an interesting shift within Zionist ideology. Although the founders of the state of Israel were nonreligious Jews of a socialist bent, carrying out a secular version of the grim action in Joshua and Judges, today’s staunchest defenders of “Greater Israel” expansionism are religious Jews, many with literalist interpretations of the Bible. I left Efrat wondering why these scriptural arguments based on the Old Testament would be conclusive for Christians looking at the issue of Palestine. Providentially enough, one of our next stops was Bethlehem Bible College, located in the famous little town of the same name.

Over lunch at the college, I sat with a new teacher, Hanna Katanacho, who told me that Palestinian Christians felt as

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“ . . . hilarious spoof . . . right on the money . . . delightful parody . . . a work of genius”—Roger Kimball, *The New Criterion*. “accurate and savage”—Edward O. Wilson, Harvard University. “wit, astuteness and sheer intelligence”—Alan Charles Kors, University of Pennsylvania. “&%#! Eurotrash”—Lulubelle Shreclikite, Lagado University.

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if they had been forsaken by the rest of Christendom, especially American Christians. For several decades, American Christian attitudes toward Israel have been dominated by the dispensationalist school of fundamentalist theology, which continued in the tradition of Britain's turn-of-the-century Christian Reconstructionists. Using a Gnostic interpretation of Bible passages, they conclude that the final battle of Armageddon will be a nuclear exchange between America and the land of Magog (seen, during the Cold War, as the Soviet Union), and that America must therefore be allied militarily with the state of Israel. (For a fascinating look into this world, see Grace Halsell's *Prophecy and Politics: The Secret Alliance Between Israel and the U.S. Christian Right*.)

Returning from Bethlehem, we convened to hear Israeli attorney Linda Brayer. After describing herself as a 54-year-old, South African-born Jewish grandmother and Catholic convert who practices law on behalf of Palestinian rights, she exclaimed, "Look, *bubbie*, I'm not responsible for all of these paradoxes!" Understandably, many of Linda's views have been influenced by the South African experience. She compares the bizarre archipelago of Palestinian-controlled lands (areas A and B under the Wye River Accord) with the *bantustans* created by the apartheid regime. She sees the current peace process, and the emerging two-nation solution, as an "absolute dead end" that will be killed by Israeli security prerogatives. She certainly seems to have a point: Every time a bomb goes off, the peace negotiations grind to a halt, allowing settlers to grab more Palestinian land. Instead, Linda argues for the creation of a single state, a liberal democracy with freedom of religion, full civil liberties, and aggressive reconciliation measures like affirmative action. She has a very strong and stubborn hope that a one-state solution is possible.

Some of Linda's hope comes from the South African experience, but she is quick to identify Christ as the main source for her optimism. As she put it, Jesus was "a marginalized Jew, from the middle of nowhere, with a funny accent. No chance . . . and yet!" We saw this same kind of tenacious optimism in Christians all over Palestine. In Gaza, Fr. Abuna Manuel told us that his people are happy because they are "keeping faith, keeping hope, and looking forward to this peace." "We know," he said, "that

we must suffer, to accept this peace, but this is now the 'War of Peace,' where we must overcome violence by love." At Bethlehem Bible College, we learned about the college's outreach efforts in the community and its attempts to create ties with the small number of messianic Jews in Israel. Salim Munayer also told us about the various means of nonviolent resistance available to the Palestinians.

After three days in Jordan, the tour took us to the north of Israel. In Ibillin, near Nazareth, we visited Mar Elias College, founded in 1982 by Fr. Elias Chacour, a Melkite Catholic and author of *Blood Brothers* (1984) and *We Belong to the Land* (1990). His college opens its doors to students of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds, and many of his Arab students engage in exchange visits with *kibbutzim* and other Jewish communities. In concluding his talk with us, Father Chacour was especially adamant on one point: No matter what the State of Israel does, Christians must not hate Jews.

As odd as it may sound (even to Christians), the Palestinians' greatest hope may lie in the fact that they are powerless in any meaningful military sense. Thanks to over \$55 billion in cumulative aid from U.S. taxpayers, Israel has routed or pacified most of its Arab neighbors and

survived to become a regional economic and military power. T-shirts in shops throughout the country sport images of fighter planes over the slogan, "Don't Worry, America—Israel is Behind You." (Even so, you and I are still sending them at least three billion dollars a year!) Indeed, the greatest blow suffered by the Zionist Goliath thus far was the p.r. disaster inflicted when the Israeli Defense Forces attempted to suppress the rock-throwing youth of the *intifada*. The IDF's campaign of tear-gassing, beating, imprisonment, torture, and murder did not look good on television (Israeli television included), and Palestinians won the opportunity to represent themselves at the Madrid and Oslo talks.

Other than a handful of bus-bombing radicals—who do more harm to their cause than good—Palestinians now understand that their only real option is to use nonviolent means to win the hearts of their oppressors. Meanwhile, they continue to make their case in the court of world opinion. While the rest of the world has decided in favor of the Palestinians, the American jury is still out.

Tom Jenney writes from Arlington, Virginia. To learn more about Palestinian Christians, visit [www.hcef.org](http://www.hcef.org).

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FILM

**Oedipal Angst**

by George McCartney

**American Pie**

Produced by Universal Pictures

Directed by Paul Weitz

Screenplay by Adam Herz

Released by Universal Pictures

**Summer of Sam**

Produced by 40 Acres & a Mule  
Filmworks and Touchstone Pictures

Directed by Spike Lee

Screenplay by Victor Colicchio and  
Michael Imperioli

Released by Buena Vista Pictures

**Eyes Wide Shut**

Produced by Warner Bros., Hobby Films,  
and Pole Star

Directed by Stanley Kubrick

Screenplay by Frederic Raphael and  
Stanley Kubrick from Arthur Schnitzler's  
novella *Dream Story*

Released by Warner Bros.

Oedipus reigns once more at our neighborhood movie theaters, at least in his Freudian guise. In Hollywood's most recent calumny of hormonally disturbed adolescence, *American Pie*, he turns up as a high-school senior, a beefy mouth-breather suitably played by Jason Biggs. When this lad's mom bakes him an apple pie, he can't resist having his manly way with it. Needless to say, his father discovers him at the kitchen counter *in flagrante delicto*. Whoa! Talk about your Sophoclean irony! And then there's this other kid? He, like, gets seduced by his friend's drunken mother? On a pool table? Major, man, major. 'Too bad they didn't, like, include some eye-gouging expiation. I mean, like, that would've been really cool. And maybe a chick hanging herself, too, by her bra or something? Hey, like, why not? Can't

figure out those prude dudes at the MPAA giving this film an R rating. I mean, like, do they really want to deprive our youth of a light-hearted introduction to one of our most enduring classics?

Far more portentously but perhaps just as inanely, Spike Lee's *Summer of Sam* includes its own dose of Oedipal angst. Putatively concerned with the infamous "Son of Sam" murderer, David Berkowitz, and his 1977 New York City killing spree, Lee's new film seems far more interested in the fortunes of a young Italian with a Madonna/whore fixation.

Vinny (John Leguizamo, poorly cast) is a Bronx hairdresser who feels compelled to cheat on his young wife. It's not that he doesn't love her. He does. That's just it. She's too pure for what he has in mind. He can be a tiger with her cousin in the backseat of his car, but he can't bed his wife without squirming in uncontrollable remorse. Wherefore all this guilt? Spike Lee knows. Look at all those close-ups of crucifixes and Virgin Mary statues. Catholicism strikes again, thwarting yet another sex life. Hey, Spike, time to get some perspective, no? Check out those classics. That Vinny is unable to reconcile women's sexual and maternal identities, that he's devastated to discover they exist in a natural continuum—all this has a long, long history. His problem reveals a profound but hardly invincible ignorance of the moral theology of the Church to which he nominally belongs. If he had paid any attention at all to Brother Augustine John in the tenth grade, he might have learned that intercourse and motherhood are—gasp!—supposed to go together.

What has all this to do with the Son of Sam? I can only guess, but with the way Lee cuts back and forth between re-creations of the blood-spattered Son of Sam shootings and the neon-spangled disco clubs Vinny haunts, I'd have to say he is trying to hang disco on Berkowitz along with the murders. Seems plausible. Who can doubt that the disco craze sprang from a madman's mind?

At some point during this haphazard project, Lee must have realized he had a turkey on his hands. You can sense his desperation as he swings his camera right, left, up, down, and diagonally, feverishly trying to impart some ersatz excitement to his shapeless story about aim-

less people pursuing pointless lives. Even more desperately, he tries to lay some sociological heft on the proceedings by bringing in veteran New York journalist Jimmy Breslin, who, some will remember, wrote a tabloid book about Berkowitz. At the beginning and end, Breslin faces the camera and intones that there are eight million stories in the big city, and this is one of them. Based on Lee's film, I'd say the other 7,999,999 are more compelling.

While Lee has been routinely overpraised, there's no denying he has made some interesting films. This, however, is not one of them. With *Summer of Sam*, he seems to have tripped over his own swollen accolades. The Greeks called it *hubris*.

The late Stanley Kubrick (he died four days after finishing *Eyes Wide Shut*) may have suffered from the same affliction. If so, he had far greater warrant. Take his magisterial *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Thirty-one years after its release, it remains the benchmark of science-fiction filmmaking. Nothing else comes close to its poetic meditation on our cosmic destiny.

Although Kubrick's technical cleverness sometimes overwhelmed his thematic intentions, his films were always visually arresting. Even the misconceived *Barry Lyndon* is worth watching, if only for its scenery. And Kubrick never sought to flatter his audience with market-tested subject matter. If he had, he would not have made *Eyes Wide Shut*, a film that deliberately mocks fashionable contemporary sexual attitudes at every turn. It dares to assume that, in matters of both the heart and loins, men and women are fundamentally different and that the perennial misunderstandings between them are not socially constructed but biologically determined. How's that for sailing into the wind?

Kubrick takes on nothing less than the perennial contradictions that bedevil our lives, the conflicting claims of reason and impulse, society and individuality, order and energy, to say nothing of those forces of nature, Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise.

And so the big question: Is the much ballyhooed Kidman-Cruise-Kubrick collaboration worth seeing? I must answer with a qualified "yes." It's not a great film, not even a very good one. It's often silly, and many will find it offensive in