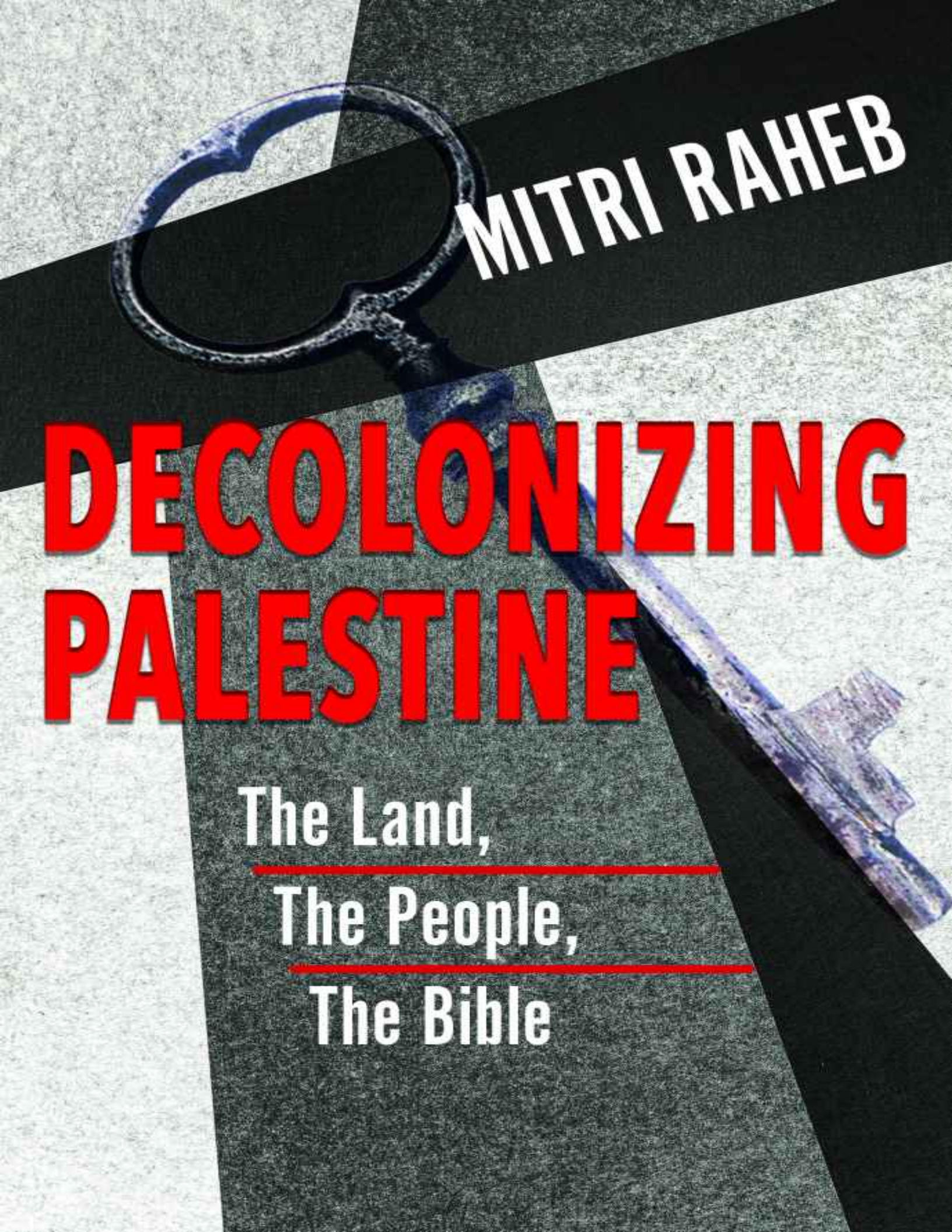
MITRI RAHEB
DECOLONIZING PALESTINE
The Land,
The People,
The Bible

4

Chosen People?

The issue of chosenness is much more problematic than people or even theologians might think, and on so many levels: theological, philosophical, and political. Theologically speaking, election is not one specific and isolated theological *topos.* It poses the fundamental question of biblical hermeneutics: how to understand the biblical story and how to translate it into our period of time. Election does not stand alone but is connected to theological topics such as chosen people, covenant, and promised land, and it is embedded within larger Christian–Jewish relations. What hermeneutical key is appropriate today for Christians when dealing with an ancient text, especially that of the Old Testament? Who is elected: individuals, a group of people, a nation? "Israel"? How do we define "Israel"? A race? A religion? A state? The church?

In this book, we make a point to distinguish between four different usages of the word *Israel*. Biblically and historically speaking, the name *Israel* refers in the Bible mainly to the northern part of Palestine during a relatively short period of time known as the Kingdom of Israel or House of Omri (tenth century to 722 BCE). This political entity must be distinguished from biblical Israel as an abstract theological concept to describe "God's people." Both are different from "Ancient Israel" as a modern construct that confuses certain aspects of the biblical story with history, thereby projecting an exclusive ethno-national and religious state into the Bible.[1] Then there is a modern political entity called the State of Israel. These four different "Israels" are not interchangeable and have to be distinguished from each other, from Judaism, and people of Jewish faith. At the same time, it is important to distinguish between the Judeans of the Bible, meaning the people who were living in the southern part of Palestine, and the Jews of today, on the one hand, and between the Israelites of the Bible and Israelis today, on the

other. Any confusion leads to theological misconceptions and political misjudgments. Meanwhile, Palestine does not refer to a political, religious, or ethnic entity but to a multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious region that was able to include diverse identities and peoples within its boundaries. When using the term *people of the land* or the *people of Palestine*, I refer to this inclusive nature of the people who resided on it irrespective of their religious, ethnic, or national identity. This inclusive nature of Palestine and its people remained until 1948, when the name Palestine was replaced with Israel.

Confusion was triggered after 1948, when persecuted European Jews established a state in Palestine and chose the name Israel for it. This confusion became more obvious after the 1967 war. For centuries prior, mainstream Christian theology propagated that the Jews, previously elected by God, were rejected because they did not accept Christ as their Messiah and that the Christians are now the new elected ones and God's chosen people. This supremacist Christian "rejection theology" was the theological undercurrent of the social discrimination experienced by Jews in Europe that culminated in the Holocaust. This tragic history, coupled with a concentrated effort by Jewish theologians against *supersessionism,* known also as *replacement theology* (meaning that the church has replaced Israel), pushed many Christian theologians to rethink their traditional approach to the notion of election.

While they could not give up the notion that Christians are the elected people, Christian theologians in the 1950s started opening up their theological tent to include the Jews, stating that God's promises in the Old Testament remain valid for modern-day Jews. In the United States, this development followed closely after the political classification of Jews as White in the G.I. Bill (along with Irish and Italian Catholics) under the Roosevelt administration.[2] It is no surprise that Western theological revision and racial upgrading went hand in hand. While challenging the traditional Christian *replacement theology,* Christians unintentionally created a theology that, politically speaking, replaced Palestinians, the indigenous people of the land,

with European Jews. Palestinian rights to a life in freedom and dignity on their native land was the sacrifice offered by European theologians as restitution for Christian anti-Judaism and the Holocaust.

While churches in the West moved to include Jews in their theology, Muslims were excluded. But if followers of the three monotheistic religions believe that God has elected them, how can we deal with multiple claims of election by Jews, Christians, and Muslims? The seventeenth-century Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza complicates the question, asking, does it make sense for God to divinely elect a particular group of people?[3] Can we, who live in a post-Enlightenment era of human rights and fundamental equality between people, believe in a God who discriminates between people, with some being elected, and others not elected or even some elected to be damned (Genesis 6:8; 9:18–27; Deuteronomy 7:2)? Furthermore, how, then, are we to justify God's command of genocide against the unelected, like the Canaanites and the other people of the land (Deuteronomy 7)?[4]

Additionally, we must address the context in modern history in which the notion of an elected and chosen people was developed and utilized. What was and is the *Sitz im Leben* for divine election in modern Western nationalism? What reception history lies behind it? Is there a responsible way to talk about election today, or is it better to leave it behind? There is no way to deal with all of these difficult questions in this particular chapter, but I will try my best to tackle the most pressing questions that arise from within the Palestinian context.

Election as a Challenge for Palestinian Christians

As if these questions were not complicated enough for the Palestinian people in general, and Palestinian Christians in particular, they constitute theological and theoretical challenges and, significantly, an existential threat. Many Palestinian Christians

struggle with the question of how to understand the issue of election in the Old Testament, which constitutes an integral part of the biblical canon. Palestinian Christians feel that their existence is threatened when the Hebrew Bible is interpreted as the history of Jews as people and when the notion of election is weaponized politically to give modern Israelis a *carte blanche* for their discriminatory policies. Palestinian Christians feel threatened when election is connected to the notion of a *promised land* as a theological pretext to occupy their Palestinian homeland. For Palestinians who have lived under several forms of Israeli occupation for over seven decades, the Bible has often been used to legitimize the occupation of Palestinian land and people. Israel does not occupy the land of Palestine purely with the military *hardware* (hard power) provided by the United States and several European countries, but the State of Israel, Zionist Jews, and their many Christian Zionist allies weaponize the Bible to provide the occupation with the needed *software*, that is, soft power. Divine election is an integral part of this *software*.

The military occupation of Palestinian land and people is blurred with biblical concepts like “God’s chosen people” and “land promise.” Political and military injustice are covered up by a theological language that equates biblical Israel with the State of Israel today. In this context, the State of Israel is not judged in the same way as any other state, but rather as a theopolitical reality, as a state with theological qualities, and the Israelis are judged as people with a unique divine destiny. This results in a political bias toward the State of Israel that bears important military ramifications. In the Palestinian–Israeli context, “divine rights” are often used to legitimize the violent violation of Palestinian human rights.

Conversely, within this apparently “biblical logic,” Palestinians are equated either with the Philistines of the Bible, as the enemies of “Israel,” or as the nonelect, as cursed Canaanites. As Arabs and Arab Christians, Palestinians are seen as the descendants of Ishmael, meaning people with a lesser theological status than the descendants of Isaac, who are represented by the Israelis of today.

As Arabs, Palestinians are equated with Muslims, resulting in Christians preferring Jews over and against Muslims. This choice blends with the Islamophobia of the post-9/11 era and further complicates the already complex. These racist connections are widespread among Jews and Christians, often present in subconscious bias if not explicitly expressed in social and political life. Biblical interpretation of election provides the blueprint for racial and ethnic discrimination. While some Christians might sympathize with the humanitarian situation of Palestinians, their emotional and theological bond remains with the Israelis because they are seen as God's elected people with a unique entitlement.

Despite the importance of this topic, no Palestinian theologian to date has published a monograph or scholarly piece explicitly discussing the notion of *election* or *chosen people* in the Bible. Before presenting my own theological understanding of election in this chapter, I briefly present three different Palestinian theological perspectives that have dealt with the issue to some degree. Palestinian theology is diverse, and differences do not necessarily run along denominational lines. I have chosen three prominent Palestinian figures from three different Christian denominations: the Anglican theologian Naim Ateek, representing mainline Protestant theology; Father Paul Tarazi, a Greek Orthodox theologian; and the Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah. Ateek and Sabbah wrote first and foremost in their pastoral capacity, while Tarazi wrote as a scholar teaching biblical theology. Sabbah's pastoral letter was a collective effort by several priests and theologians of the diocese.

Naim Ateek

Naim Ateek was born in the Palestinian city of Bisan in 1937. In 1948, during the *Nakba*, his village was destroyed by Israeli forces, forcing his family to leave and to seek refuge in Nazareth. Ateek completed all of his theological studies in the United States and was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1967. In 1989, during the first Palestinian uprising known as the Intifada, Ateek established Sabeel, the ecumenical

liberation theology center. In that same year, he published his book *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*.[5] This was a first attempt by a Palestinian Christian to articulate a theology of liberation for the Palestinian context. Although Ateek does not address the issue of election explicitly in this book, the hermeneutics presented shed enough light to extract his understanding of the subject. As a pastor of a Palestinian Anglican parish, Ateek struggled in the context of the Intifada to find a hermeneutic that would allow his parishioners "to identify the authentic Word of *God* in the Bible, and to discern the true meaning of those biblical texts that Jewish Zionists and Christian fundamentalists cite to substantiate their subjective claims and prejudices."[6]

For Ateek, the hermeneutical key is "nothing less than Jesus Christ himself. For in Christ, through Christ, and because of Christ, Christians have been given a revealed insight into God's nature and character."[7] Based on these criteria, Ateek distinguishes between three different strata in the Old Testament that represent different stages in human understanding of God: the nationalist, the Torah oriented, and the prophetic. He found the nationalist stream in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, best represented later by the zealots. "These books are characterized by their favorable reporting of the use of force to achieve the Israelites' national goals. The later proponents of this tradition believed that the Jews had a special, privileged relationship with God."[8] He found the Torah-oriented stream in the first five books of the Bible, best represented later by the Pharisees and Rabbinic Judaism. The third stream is the prophetic, which possesses a "deep, profound, and mature understanding of God."[9] The Prophets "were able to produce profound truths about the universal and inclusive nature of God, although these insights are set within a massive quantity of material that is narrow, nationalist, and exclusive."[10] For Ateek, Jesus clearly stood in this prophetic tradition and represented its clearest form amid the prevailing nationalistic and legalistic concepts of his time. The core value of the prophetic tradition is justice, which explains the title of his first book *Justice and Only Justice,* and a later book *A*

Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice and the Palestine-Israel Conflict.[11]

Based on this hermeneutic, Ateek understands election as a symptom of the nationalistic stream and a tribal understanding of God. This tribal understanding of God is already questioned in the Old Testament by prophets like Jonah, Amos, and Isaiah. Thus, the Bible is clear and moves from the particular to the universal, from the election of one nation to the calling of one people from all nations through Christ. For Ateek, this movement found its climax in Jesus; as Christians we cannot afford to revert to a tribal or nationalistic notion of God or God's people.

Paul Nadim Tarazi

Paul Tarazi's family was originally from Gaza. Paul was born in Jaffa. In 1948, his family was displaced and found refuge in Egypt before moving to Lebanon. Paul completed all of his theological studies at the Orthodox Theological Institute in Bucharest, Romania. In 1975, he migrated to the United States where he was ordained as a priest and served two Orthodox congregations, later teaching at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York. There is no way to examine all the writings of Paul Tarazi regarding his understanding and handling of the *election theme*. His biblical commentaries and introductory volumes are too many to cover.[12] Rather, I will focus here on two publications: *Land and Covenant* published in 2009, and his article "*Hermeneutical Shifts vis-à-vis Palestine in the Twentieth Century: Romans 9–11.*"[13] Neither of these pieces tackles the notion of election directly, but they discuss hermeneutics in general and covenant in relation to land in particular.

Tarazi's hermeneutical key is different than that of Ateek. For Tarazi, it is important to realize that the Bible, which Tarazi keeps referring to as the biblical story, has a clear beginning and a clear end. It ends with "Jesus's teaching being carried out to all nations until the end of age." As such, the biblical story is complete and closed. It does not

have a sequel, nor does it allow for a history of a people to be continued beyond the limits of the scriptural canon.

To consider that it does is sheer blasphemy since the assumption would be that there is still something of value for the human beings besides or over and above the teaching Word of God in the Old Testament and the teaching Word of Jesus in the New Testament. The fact that the biblical story is complete and closed as the Word of God and the Word of his ultimate messenger is reflected in that it forms a "canon," which is a Greek term (kanon) meaning "rule" or "ruler," that is, an authoritative reference.[14]

Unlike Ateek, Tarazi does not distinguish between different streams within the Bible. For him, the biblical story is not a human story or history but is first and foremost the story of God, and the "only 'history' they contain is a repeat of the biblical story."[15] To clarify this point, Tarazi refers to three features of the Bible. First, "the traditional nomenclature of the biblical books and sections do not reflect an interest in human history." Rather, the titles of the three main parts of the Old Testament—Law, Prophets, and Wisdom—reflect an interest in the teaching.[16] Second, the biblical authors themselves were not interested in any historical events except to show that the Kings of Israel and Judah were unfaithful to God's law. Other historical aspects of the monarchs are dismissed with the stereotypical formula that they are "written in the Book of the Chronicles." In the Bible, the glorious deeds were not performed by the people themselves or by their heroes but by God himself, which makes the whole Bible nothing but God's story and law. For Tarazi, it is very clear "that the Bible is neither a book describing the history of a given people nor one containing the decipherment of future events. It is intended to be an instruction, a lesson."[17]

With this hermeneutic in mind, Tarazi addresses Romans 9–11. There, he dismisses the thesis of two independent paths to salvation. "God's olive tree is one and its branches are the one progeny of Abraham as defined in 4:13–25."[18] The two covenants theory is an

expression of a “dispensationalist aberration” that was triggered, according to Tarazi, prior to 1948 by Karl Barth, who was influenced in his “church and Israel” theology by the German dispensationalist theologian Stroeter. Barth injected this dispensationalism into post–World War I theology, and, through students like Paul van Buren and Jürgen Moltmann, Barth was able to influence a whole generation of post-Holocaust Christian theologians.[19]

Tarazi is critical of such dispensationalism that granted the Jews a theological status. Based on his hermeneutic, the resulting theological status of election is not canonical but was read into the text itself by later theologians. “How can something still be a canon, a rule by which everything else is to be assessed and judged, while it is subjected to our consistently shifting understanding or, to use a technical term, to its Wirkungsgeschichte?”[20] Tarazi refers here to his idea of the biblical story being complete and closed. To clarify this further, Tarazi gives an example from the New Testament.

All the Pauline letters are addressed to localized communities, even when the same letter is addressed at the same time to many churches (Gal 1:2). This means that any other church, even when within the same province, is only secondarily addressed…However, this does not give license to the 21st century Corinthians or Thessalonians to assume that they are in a more privileged position than the rest of us. The reason is evident: the community Paul addressed is bound not only in space (area), *but also in time…* The same principle applies to the Old Testament scripture.[21]

For Tarazi, the main hermeneutical problem is that many Christian and Jewish theologians assume that they are *as such* the “church” or the “people of God,” thus projecting the textual context into their own time and space. Such an understanding led European Christians in the Middle Ages to consider Jerusalem *their city,* thus waging the Crusades.

It is on the same basis that 20th century Jews considered Palestine, and even greater Syria, as *theirs* and, as a corollary, considered any non-Jew living there as a Canaanite to be exterminated or removed through a form of apartheid. For one who claims to believe in scripture as a canon, such extrapolation is sheer blasphemy against the scriptural God who did what he did and said what he said one and for all times within the special and temporal limits of the already closed canon.[22]

For Tarazi, all realities within scripture are "exclusively scriptural realities, including God and Israel"[23] and are nothing but a challenging message, a *masal*. Any attempt to project it beyond the spatial and temporal limits of scripture would leave the scripture at the "mercy of the highest or most cunning bidder."[24] For Tarazi, it is clear that the Palestinians are the ones asked to pay the price of such a theology. Based on this understanding, Tarazi rejects any exegesis that reads Romans 9–11 or election "as a 'mystical' prediction of the fate of the Jews in the 20th and 21st centuries."[25] Such a reading would make Paul a fortune teller and not an apostle.

Patriarch Michel Sabbah

Michel Sabbah was born in Nazareth in 1933. He did his priestly studies at the Latin Patriarchal Seminary in Beit Jala and was ordained as a priest in 1955. His PhD was completed at the Sorbonne in Arabic language. In 1988, he became the first native and non-Italian Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem. Patriarch Sabbah was one of the authors of the Kairos Palestine Document.[26] In 1993, two months after the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, Patriarch Sabbah published his fourth pastoral letter, entitled "Reading the Bible Today in the Land of the Bible."[27] Sabbah wrote this letter to his priests, nuns, and parishioners, mainly Arab Palestinians and Jordanians, who had lived through the political conflict and experienced anguish and doubts when confronted with the Bible.[28] "Reading the Bible, the Word of God, is a difficult, sensitive and delicate task," he wrote, "since the

matters to be tackled are related to our daily life. They even concern our very national and personal identity as believers, because unilateral, partial interpretations run the risk for some people of bringing into question their presence and permanence in this land which is their homeland."[29]

The pastoral letter aimed to address three questions. The first related to the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. The second related to the violence that is attributed to God in the Bible and how it is to be understood. The third was, "What influence do the promises, the gift of the land, the election and the covenant have for relations between Palestinians and Israelis? Is it possible for a just and merciful God to impose injustice or oppression on another people in order to favor the people He has chosen?"[30] Before answering these questions, the letter discussed the nature of the Word of God and presented its hermeneutics. The letter made clear from the beginning that the whole Bible, the Old as well as the New Testament, is God's Word. Yet, it is a divine work through human deeds and words.[31] To fully understand the Word of God, and in a good Catholic fashion, faith within the community is a prerequisite: "Today, we can develop a true understanding of Scripture only in communion with the Church, in the light of Tradition, and through the living liturgy and progress in Biblical studies."[32]

The document goes on to present what it calls a "progressive revelation," meaning that "the truth concerning God and the message of salvation was not communicated only at one time, once and for all. God adapted Himself to the history of humankind and its ability to understand His revealed Word."[33] This progression becomes visible through the different covenants expressed by God through human history, starting with the covenant with Noah involving the whole of creation; then the covenant with Abraham, the father of Jews, Christians, and Muslims; followed by the Sinai Covenant with Moses through the law; to the covenant with David combining the royal throne and temple; and ending with the new covenant of Jesus and the establishment of the church as the new people of God.[34] The

letter makes it very clear that Jesus is the hermeneutical key to reading the scripture. In a dialectical way, Jesus fulfilled this while at the same time critiquing all three parts of the Old Testament: Law, Prophets, and the Wisdom Writings. Thus, Jesus represents both the continuity of God's history of salvation and a discontinuity by introducing a new covenant.[35]

Following this extensive hermeneutical discourse, the final section of the pastoral letter translates its hermeneutics to the question of election, covenant, promises, and the gift of land. This section discusses the political dimension of the existential question. Since the letter was published in November 1993, two months after the signing of the Oslo Accords at the White House, it avoids talking about the occupation and deploys an optimistic tone as if a new political era with hope for genuine peace were around the corner. It reiterates that the Bible is concerned first and foremost with the salvation of humanity. The letter explicitly asks the question that is on the mind of many Palestinians: Why the election of a people? It is interesting that the letter avoids calling people by name such as the Jewish people. This may have been a deliberate move to avoid confusing the people of the Bible with modern-day Israelis. It is also interesting that the letter quotes the Quran, talking about God choosing the *Children of Israel "Bani Israil."*[36] It is as if the Patriarch wants to assure his parishioners that the idea of election of a people is not only biblical but also Quranic.

The letter answers the question "why choose a people" by stressing that God chose a particular people to prepare the way for the coming of the Savior of the whole world: "In Scripture, God chose the Jewish people through whom He would call all the peoples of the earth to faith in God and in the Messiah whom He would send as the Saviour of the world."[37] This corresponds with the notion of a progressive revelation explained earlier. The letter proceeds to explain that election is, therefore, "a gratuitous act of love on God's part." It has nothing to do with any merit on the part of the people and requires from the chosen people a responsibility before God and humankind.

Suddenly in this section and without any introduction, the letter moves on to speak in a pastoral tone about the election of individuals: “Every person is the object of God’s choice and Love,”[38] while in other sections, it seems to address the two national or three religious groups living in the Holy Land: “It is in the humility lived by both, and in their common vision of God’s action, that they will come together in love, justice and finally to reconciliation.”[39]

The letter then discusses the issue of covenant and land, demonstrating the idea of “progressive revelation” as the guiding principle from the time of Abraham, who wandered through the land, to the time of Joshua with an armed conquest, to the careful administration of the land according to the law. The prophets warned of losing the land and being exiled because of idolatry, and, while in exile, they spoke of a new beginning with a new covenant and a new people. Yet, throughout salvation history, it was clear that the land belongs to God and the people are guests. In the New Testament, the land is then transformed and spiritualized. Heavenly Jerusalem replaces earthly Jerusalem.

The concept of the land had then evolved throughout different stages of Revelation, beginning with the physical, geographical, and political concept, and ending with the spiritual and symbolic meaning. The worship of God is no longer linked to a specific land. A specific land is not the prime and absolute value for worship. The sole and absolute value is God and the worship of God in any place in the world.[40]

In the concluding part of the document, Sabbah tackles the real dilemma facing the people living on the land today. On the one hand, there are Jews who understand themselves as a people connected to the Old Testament and who found refuge in Palestine from the European pogroms. On the other hand, the Palestinians also understand themselves as a people and have been living on the land for centuries. On top of those national realities, there are people of three faiths, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, for whom the land is holy. Two peoples claim political rights, and three religions claim religious

rights. For Sabbah, the distinction between political rights and religious rights is important.

Religious rights do not constitute political rights. Political rights and claims have to adhere to international law. Religion can provide moral and human values that can help guide politicians. Yet, the pastoral letter is aware that religions were often part of the problem.

In certain periods of the history of salvation, political or military action was directly attributed to God. God was the God of armies. He fought with His faithful to defeat the pagans. God was immanent in history from an anthropomorphical and national perspective. Today humankind is better able to perceive God's transcendence. The word of faith is able to raise God above human conflicts in order to see Him as He is: a God who has chosen a people, but who is at the same time Father of all His human creatures, and no longer a God of war, a friend of one people, and fighting against another people.[41]

In this sense, Sabbah pleads to free the Bible from political manipulation and to see it as the Word of God in an invitation for people of faith to seek justice and reconciliation.

Election in the Modern Context

In a traditional theological approach, one would stop here in the belief that analysis of the biblical passages and their application of the findings in the modern context is sufficient. Yet, there is no way to write about election without looking at its *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) and its utilization in modern history. In this context, it is imperative to briefly mention three recent manifestations of the notion of election in the political sphere: nationalism and Zionism, settler colonialism, and American exceptionalism. All three have had a global impact on international politics and a direct impact on the Palestinian issue.

Nationalism

Election returned to theological prominence with the blending of religion and nationalism at the height of nineteenth-century imperialism. In a comparative study conducted at Harvard Divinity School in 1991 on *Divine Election and Western Nationalism*, several scholars examined the notion of chosen people in Protestant Europe and the United States between 1870 and 1914, arriving at the following conclusion:

Nothing inspired this symbiosis of nationalism and Christianity more than the chosen people model as it derived, accurately or not, from the Hebrew scriptures. Indeed, without such symbols as the "Old Testament" account of a chosen people, a people united under God, the frequently powerful union of nationalism and Christianity might well have been less feasible in nations like Great Britain, Germany, or the United States. This biblical narrative…provided a mythical structure capable of defining the goals and aspirations of a nation.[42]

The Harvard study clearly showed how chosen people ideologies were an important element of imperial policies in Germany after 1870, Great Britain, and the United States. "In these cases, to differing degrees, the claim of chosenness was made part of both the domestic and the foreign policy outlined by the ruling groups. In such cases the chosen people *topos* served as a means of legitimation for domination and as a tool of suppression for those who did not conform."[43] The idea of chosen people was utilized within the national discourse to combat the modernization, de-Christianization, and secularization of Europe by creating an alliance between Christianity and nationalism.[44] In this context, the nation-state was projected into the Bible, and biblical Israel became the prototype of the chosen nation. It should be no wonder that, during this time, Christian Zionism experienced a revival with a zeal to revive "ancient Israel" in Palestine.

Influenced by both European nationalism and Christian Zionism, Jewish Zionism emerged in Europe as one of the answers to the Jewish dilemma of persecution, conversion, or assimilation. Following

the ideals of romantic nationalism, European Jews in pursuit of normalcy wanted to be a "nation like all other nations," with an ideal land (Palestine), (socialist) state, special language (Hebrew), identifiable national customs, and a unique mission to "once again become the chosen of the peoples!!"[45] Martin Buber warned of blindly copying European nationalism while abandoning election as a religious task, for doing so would mean nothing less than "national assimilation."[46]

It is important here to mention that not all Jews have embraced Zionism. In 1885, the Pittsburgh conference of the American reform movement declared, "We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the administration of the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state."[47] Unfortunately, a third stream in European Judaism got the upper hand and developed to be the best organized in today's State of Israel. These are the Jews who pursue a settler colonial policy against the Palestinian people and land. However, it is important to consider this broad spectrum of Judaism, from anti-Zionist Judaism to settler colonial Judaism, and the different ways Jews have been interpreting election over time.[48]

Settler Colonialism

The belief in a kind of *divine election* and mission has been an important feature of settler colonialism in different regions and at different periods, from the Spanish and Portuguese colonization and settlement of Latin America, to White settlement in southern Africa, and the Zionist conquest and settlement in Palestine.[49] In his book *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster*, Akenson looked at Ulster Presbyterians of Northern Ireland, Afrikaners of South Africa, and Jews in Israel.[50] What the three groups have in common is a "covenantal mind-set." These settler colonial groups view themselves as a chosen people with a sacred claim to a promised land. They cultivate a devotion to a warrior god, a

belief in a threat of an external enemy, and an exodus experience. While some countries like Canada and Australia are trying to confront their country's history of settler colonialism, the State of Israel is proudly and unapologetically pushing their settler colonial project with full power by de facto annexing Palestinian land while excluding the Palestine native people.

American Exceptionalism

The notion of election has played a prominent role in American culture over the past five decades. The 1967 war gave a boost to American Christian Zionism. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the fact that the United States lost the war in Vietnam while Israel won against several Arab states was seen both as proof of Israel's divine election and as a sign of American jeremiad.[51] The notion of election is often translated into American culture as American exceptionalism. The American Christian Right views

America as the New Israel, or less directly, as a divinely elect nation of the contemporary world chosen to save the world via its politics, economics, and culture as well as its own innate moral goodness, if only it stays true to its true self. These narratives interweave elements of the biblical narrative with those of American history and myth, resulting in a syncretized nationalist narrative of American chosenness that equates faithfulness to America with faithfulness to Jesus Christ, thus making American national identity a gospel imperative.[52]

The bond between the State of Israel and the United States is of a strategic political and military nature, and is grounded in a common belief of being a chosen people as a settler community called to rule. In today's context, election is often expressed as White supremacy and as a Jewish (Ashkenazi) supremacy with racist undertones. Such ideology has had a profound and dangerous international influence on American policy on Palestine and the larger Arab world. The domestic danger of this theology was evident in the act of

insurrection on the US Capitol in January 2021, incited by President Trump, when members of the American religious right, including many Christian Zionists, stormed the Capitol, leading to the deaths of five people.

Toward a New Decolonial Understanding of Election

The three theological perspectives presented here are important and helpful in their own ways. However, there is an important element missing in them. While all three authors struggle with the current realities triggered by having a state with a biblical name, "Israel," they read the Bible through a purely Christian biblical lens that does not give enough attention to the sociopolitical context of the Bible itself. The perspectives tend, therefore, to be dogmatic in nature that would make sense only to Christians. In this section, I will present a decolonial perspective of the notion of election that I have developed in my work as a Palestinian theologian in the early twenty-first century.

Story or History

A fundamental question in biblical hermeneutics is how to view the Bible. Is it a story or history? Biblical hermeneutics that prioritize the Bible as a book of history, whether the history of a certain people or the history of God, are a critical characteristic of religious fundamentalism and have no place in a decolonial theological approach to the theme of election. The Bible is a story, not necessarily God's own story but the story of people with God. It is the story of certain groups of people at certain times over one millennium, with certain cultural backgrounds, including Semitic and Greek, in a certain geographic radius, including Palestine and the Middle East, with God. God's own story is bigger, richer, and more difficult to grasp.

God's own story cannot be confined to such a short period of the universe's history or reduced to one region, or, as a matter of fact, to

one planet. God's story is not the exclusive story of people with God. As Christians, we do not believe that the Bible simply descended from heaven to us. It is the Word, Christ, that descended to us from heaven, not words (John 3:13). The words were written by people like us, written in certain sociocultural, religious, and political contexts, and with specific aims. Those writers were inspired to write this story with God.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims continue to relate to and feel inspired by this particular story that we know as the Bible. The story is not self-explanatory and needs to be retold and reinterpreted. To keep the story relevant, the monotheistic religions have had to keep translating the story for each generation and for each context. "Stories are never innocent of point of view, plot, ideology, or cultural values. We tell our stories of the past in a historical context, looking at the past from a particular point: the present. We cannot be objective, neutral observers…Our views of the past are also affected by our geographical, political, and social location."[53] This is why interpretation is so critical. The one who interprets assumes power, while the one who dominates the story makes it their story. The more the story is remembered and repeated, the easier it is to develop into a mythical history. This is the struggle when dealing today with the notion of election.

A Faith Perspective

The Bible is a story of people with God. It is not an objective observation or investigation about God. It is a perspective of faith and can be understood only from this angle. It cannot be objectified or seen from a distant perspective. The phenomenon of individuals or groups who view their story with God as unique and believe themselves to be chosen is one shared by all monotheistic religions. Pious Jews believe that they, or rather their people, are the chosen people (Exodus 19:5–6); pious Christians, on the other hand, believe that they have become the chosen people through Christ (1 Peter 2:9–10); Muslims have similar beliefs (Q3:110). One should respect

and honor such an expression of faith, but one need not consider it to be an objective truth or a historic reality. The structures of faith are very like the structures of love. Just as a lover cannot help but see his or her beloved as "the one," unique and special, the "lily among the flowers," so a believer cannot do other than view his or her connectedness to God as unique and, to a certain degree, exclusive.

If this statement of faith is objectified or even absolutized by any particular individual or a group, it loses its rightful *Sitz im Leben* and develops into a dangerous ideology. There is a very thin line between faith and ideology. Christians believe that, without any effort on their part, God has chosen them through Christ. But this does not mean that they must immediately declare that they are the only chosen one and that "the others" are not chosen or are even rejected. Nor can they cultivate any kind of "objective" theological dogma about who is elected or not, or to be able to discern about the election or rejection of other people. We human beings in this world have no business determining who is or who is not chosen, or who is chosen and who is rejected. This is God's business. It does not mean that this does not happen. It occurs in the Bible, it has occurred over and over again in history, and it is taking place today. When this occurs, it is a sign of human and religious hubris that has no place in the realm of faith. Such hubris has more to do with ideology than with theology.

Particular versus Singular

While the biblical story is one particular story related to a certain time and place, it made history because of its relevance to the diverse contexts of imperial hegemonic oppression worldwide. In sharing their particular story (biblical story), many people facing imperial oppression were able to relate to this story and find meaning in the face of empire. The particularity of the story, however, does not mean singularity. This is why election can never be an entitlement to a particular land or people. In a context that faced empire, it was time for prophets to warn: "You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos

3:2; see also Hosea 13:4–8). Yet, this same prophet, Amos, who spoke these words about the particularity of election, was also the one to remind his people, saying on God's behalf, "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? says the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and Arameans from Kir?" (Amos 9:7). Amos shows that the Exodus was not a singular rescue involving only biblical Israel. God also dealt with the other branch of the people of Palestine, the Philistines, in a similar way and had a particular exodus story with the Arameans. God does not cease to be Creator and preserver of the whole world. The particularity of the biblical story with God does not mean that God had or has no interest in other peoples. The Prophet Isaiah underlined this by including in the story the two main empires surrounding Palestine: "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance" (Isaiah 19:23–25).

This nuance between particularity and singularity is reconfirmed in the book of Jonah, when the prophet spoke to his people who thought that they had a monopoly over God's story and mercy. The Jonah story made it clear that God's plans encompass all the peoples of the world. God felt sorry for Nineveh, its inhabitants, yes, even the animals there (Jonah 4:11), even though Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The New Testament continued this trend and clearly showed that, although the story is particular, it cannot be understood as an entitlement. The essence of the story from its inception was meant to be an inclusive invitation to all people without exception. This is the question that Paul deals with in his letters and especially in Romans 9–11.[54]

It is important to underline that Paul deals in these three chapters with a personal struggle that he had as an apostle: the fact that his

coreligionists did not believe in Christ. Ultimately, Paul interprets the essence of God's story as one that shows God's promise against all odds. Paul does not deal here with any speculation about the future. To read these chapters as a guide to the future is a fundamentalist interpretation. These three chapters do not deal with the relationship between Judaism and Christianity or between the modern State of Israel and the church. This is an imposition on the text. If there is one lesson that this text teaches us, it is that election is God's business, and no one has a monopoly over it. God's salvation surpasses all understanding, and God remains the God of surprises that all our theological systems cannot contain.

A Geopolitical Perspective

Christian dogma will not help us understand the *Sitz im Leben* of the notion of election, for the biblical story cannot be understood outside of its contexts and its geopolitical settings. In this section, I further develop work that I have previously published in *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes*.[55]

In the middle of the second millennium BC, two major centers of power evolved in the Middle East. Their development was closely connected to geography and water: at one end there was the Nile, and on the other, there were two rivers: the Tigris and Euphrates. At approximately the same time and in close proximity, three other regional powers were developing the boundaries of the region: Persia/Iran to the east, Hittites/Turkey to the north, and Greco–Roman Europe to the west. The history of the region over the last three millennia shows that the Middle East was controlled for most of the time by one of these five empires, albeit with different names, constellations, and degrees of power.[56] The small strip between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River known as Palestine was too small and lacked the geographical location and resources to develop into an empire. Palestine was located between these other empires, its fate dictated by its geography as a land in the eye of the storm. The people of Palestine were aware of this geopolitical reality: "This

is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her" (Ezekiel 5:5); "Behold, a people who dwells apart, and will not be reckoned among the nations" (Numbers 23:5).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Palestine's location between five empires does not necessarily make it the center. In fact, the opposite is true: Palestine is a land at the periphery, a land on the margins. Contrary to its religious reputation, in its geopolitical reality, the land lies on the periphery of the Fertile Crescent and is a peripheral borderland for diverse empires, making Palestine the location where the different magnetic fields of the regional powers would collide. Situated between different empires, the fertile plains of Palestine often became the battlefield for the surrounding empires to keep their wars and tragedies away from their heartlands. Due to its geopolitical position between powers, Palestine has often been an occupied land: occupied by the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Ottomans, British, and now by the Israelis.[57]

This is the background behind the notion of election. It is not by chance that the verses that deal with election were developed mainly in the context of the Assyrian and Babylonian occupation and exile: in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic literature, in Deutero-Isaiah, and in the Psalms. The verb used for election *(bahar)* first appeared as late as the sixth century, although the concept itself might be older. It is when Palestine was devastated and burned down; when the empires were proving triumphant over the tiny political structure in Palestine; when the imperial Gods were celebrating their victory over the God of the people of Palestine, be it Israelites or Judeans; when everything seemed to be lost and the spirit of the people crushed, two different religious explanations emerged. The first explanation declared that the defeat was not so much an indication of foreign imperial power, but rather a sign that God had abandoned and rejected God's people because of their sins. We find this especially in the book of the prophet Jeremiah: "They call them rejected silver, because the Lord has rejected them" (Jeremiah 6:30); "I have

forsaken My house, I have abandoned My inheritance; I have given the beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies" (Jeremiah 7:12).

Yet, in this same context of devastation, another explanation was given. Other prophets felt that what people needed was comfort and hope. It is here that the notion of *election was evoked* with the aim of restoring people's hope in themselves over and against the tragic political reality they were experiencing. We see this clearly in the book of Deutero-Isaiah, the prophet in exile who wrestles with the desperate:

But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. (Isaiah 49:14–16)

and

But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"; do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:8–10)

Election was and will always be a statement of faith; it is solely a promise. It is a promise to those weak and powerless, to those who begin to despair about themselves. It is to them that election is proclaimed. This is the *Sitz im Leben* of the notion of election. Election is connected to the balance of power. Election, correctly understood, is therefore a promise to those crushed by imperial power, encouragement to those discouraged by the political realities, and consolation to the desperate, as seen in the book of Deuteronomy:

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:6–8)

It is with a notion like election that the people of Palestine were able to face the diverse imperial occupations throughout millennia. Such faith generated so much power that it enabled the people of Palestine to be resilient and to survive against almost impossible odds. When everything had fallen apart and nothing seemed to have any meaning, it was this notion of election that enabled the people of Palestine to survive and resist the diverse imperial oppressions they were facing.

This was not the only *Sitz im Leben* for the notion of election. Palestine was often a divided land and stood in the sphere of influence of two of the five empires simultaneously, which led naturally to having the land divided into two or more entities. This was the case, for example, when the Assyrians occupied the northern part of Palestine, leaving some distance from Egypt's sphere of influence in the south. After the Assyrian occupation, two different identities developed in Palestine: one in the northern part where the people later became known as Samaritans, and another in the south where the people became known as Judeans. In this context, the notion of election was weaponized to give one group, mainly the Judeans, religious entitlement over and against the Samaritans: the temple of Jerusalem against the Samaritan temple on Gerizim (John 4:20). While there were many places of worship and religious cults in Palestine throughout centuries, many of them going back to Canaanite religions, election became a tool for religious and exclusive national hegemony that does not tolerate any alternative

with the notion that God has chosen Jerusalem as God's place of worship (Deuteronomy 12—18). This notion of election is the other feature of Deuteronomy–Deuteronomic literature.

Thus, it is important to always keep in mind these two different and opposed religious utilizations of the notion of election: one as a message of hope for the weak and devastated, and one as a tool for religious and national ideology. These two opposing interpretations cannot be identified from a biblical or dogmatic approach to the issue but through a geopolitical lens and analysis of the prevailing balance of power. Today, the State of Israel has developed to become the regional power, an empire in proxy. The Palestinians now live in a situation similar to the Israelites of the Bible: occupied, crushed, their children driven into exile, and left with little land and no resources. When the notion of election is applied today to the State of Israel, it runs contrary to its original *Sitz im Leben* and has developed into an imperial tool for oppression and dispossession. It is the Palestinians who often feel abandoned, who need to hear that God did not forsake them and that they continue to be a people dear to God's heart.

Reading the Story Backward

A major misunderstanding of the notion of election drives from the interpretation of the story of the patriarchs through the lens of *salvation history (Heilsgeschichte)*. Election here is understood as a continuous act of selection (Genesis 12—50). Abraham had two sons: Ishmael the first born, the son of Hagar, and Isaac, Sarah's son. Yet, Isaac becomes the chosen one and the only elected one while the story of Ishmael more or less ends here. The story continues through Isaac and gets even more complicated. Isaac has twins: Esau and Jacob. Here another selection takes place and Jacob becomes the bearer of the promise rather than Esau his twin. Of Jacob's twelve sons, Yosef was the preferred one who rose to power. This is how the biblical story of the patriarchs is told and retold, as a continuous process of election and selection leading to preferential treatment of one and biblical disqualification of the other. What happens to the

theology of election if we read this story backward while looking at the geopolitics of Palestine? Doing so will free us from a literal understanding of the story and allow us to realize that the people of Palestine were negotiating their relationships.

The three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) represented diverse traditions and identities from three regions that were not necessarily connected (Abraham in the Negev, Isaac in Beersheba, and Jacob in Bethel and Samaria).[58] The story casts them in a father–son relationship, thus uniting the different tribes and regions of Palestine together in one single story of three generations and constituting a unity among the diverse peoples of Palestine. At the same time, the story wants to clarify the relationships to the neighboring tribes and regions. So, in Jordan, east of Palestine, resides the group of Lot. The story includes Lot not as a foreigner but as a relative, Abraham's nephew and a neighbor (Genesis 12:5). The story of Ishmael negotiates the relationship with the tribes in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula (Genesis 21:21). They are not foreigners because Ishmael is also Abraham's son. The same is true for Esau, whose tribe resides in Edom, southeast of Palestine. He too is a relative, the brother of Isaac. Those do not reside in Palestine and are thus not considered part of the (elected) people of Palestine, but they are related. This reading of the story leads to a different conclusion, a conclusion that is less about selection and rejection and more about the struggle to unite the different tribes in Palestine while at the same time negotiating the relationships with the tribes around Palestine. A geopolitical reading of the story of the patriarchs opens up the possibility of including rather than excluding groups, tribes, and peoples.

The Continuation of the Story in the Quran[59]

The story of the patriarchs continues beyond the Bible. An interesting critique of election as a continuous story of selection and exclusion is found in the Quran. As long as Prophet Muhammad hoped that the Jews of Mecca might still believe in him, Ishmael was a prophet

without any importance (Q6:86; Q21:85). However, in Medina, it became clear to Muhammad that the Jews of Medina would not believe in his message. They were proud to be the "chosen people" and claimed the *story* that runs from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob exclusively for themselves. They considered the Arabs as the descendants of Ishmael and playing only a marginal role in the history of salvation. The Jews in Medina, in our terms, claimed the story as history and wrote Ishmael out of it.

Prophet Muhammad took up the cause of the excluded and marginalized represented by Ishmael by rescuing Ishmael from the shadows of the linear salvation history and making him equal with Isaac and Jacob (Q2:136; Q3:84). In the context of his dispute with the Jews (and Christians), and in an effort to clarify who Abraham's descendants were, Muhammad reverted to the religion of Abraham: "They [the People of the Book] say: You have to be a Jew or a Christian if you are to be on the path [of salvation]. Say: No! [For us there is only] the religion of Abraham, a *hanif*, who was not one of the idolaters" (Q2:135). By reverting to the religion of Abraham, Prophet Muhammad is critiquing the claim of exclusivity of the Jews and Christians and their monopoly over the story. Muhammad uses an argument similar to that of Paul in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 by reverting to Abrahamic faith (Genesis 15) that preceded his circumcision (Genesis 17). For Prophet Muhammad, election does not run exclusively through the line of Isaac and Jacob (as believed by Jews and Christians), but rather equally through Ishmael, and through him to the Arabs. This is demonstrated in Abraham's prayer at the *Ka'ba*: "Lord, send them (i.e., the descendants of Abraham and Ishmael) a messenger from their own ranks who will recite Your signs (revealed verses) to them, who will instruct them in the scripture and wisdom, and purify them (from the pollution of paganism). You are the Almighty and the All-wise" (Q2:129). Prophet Muhammad is thus elected with a clear mission: to include the descendants of Ishmael in God's story. Muhammad was able to elevate the Arabs and his followers to become equal with the Jews of his time.

Conclusion

Election is an important theological *topos*. Traditionally, theologians dealt with it from the perspective of the *history of salvation.* This approach led to misunderstandings, prejudices, and exclusive theologies that had and continue to have disastrous implications for the Palestinians, particularly Palestinian Christians who continue to struggle with it today. It is imperative to develop new approaches to election that are inclusive and that take the geopolitical context of the text and its *Wirkungsgeschichte* seriously. Election cannot be an innocent exercise in theological semantics but must include analysis of its sociopolitical and cultural manifestation. Election should not constitute a theological premise for a political claim.

For people of faith to believe that they are elected by God is one thing; to use this belief as a pretext for supremacy or entitlement to occupy other people's land is not permissible. Violations of human rights in the name of "divine right" should not be tolerated. Election is a statement of faith. Otherwise, it becomes a dangerous ideology that sanctions religiously based nationalism, settler colonialism, and racial exceptionalism with disastrous ramifications. Palestinians and many other indigenous peoples are paying the price of this ideology. When it is understood correctly, election has the potential to give hope to the marginalized and to offer much-needed support for creative resilience.

[1]Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[2]For details, see Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

[3]David Novak, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People*, reissue ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 22–49.

[4]See, as an example, Stanley N. Gundry et al., *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2003).

[5]Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

[6]Ibid., 79.

[7]Ibid., 79–80.

[8]Ibid., 94.

[9]Ibid., 96.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).

[12]A complete list of Tarazi's publications is found on his website: https://www.paul-nadim-tarazi.org/publications.html.

[13]Paul Nadim Tarazi, *Land and Covenant* (St. Paul, MN: OCABS Press, 2009); Paul Nadim Tarazi, "Hermeneutical Shifts vis-à-vis Palestine in the Twentieth Century: Romans 9–11," in *The Invention of History: A Century of Interplay between Theology and Politics in Palestine*, ed. Mitri Raheb (Bethlehem: Diyar, 2011), 167–84.

[14]Tarazi, *Land and Covenant*, 241.

[15]Ibid., 249.

[16]Ibid., 253.

[17]Ibid., 265.

[18]Tarazi, “Hermeneutical Shifts vis-à-vis Palestine in the Twentieth Century: Romans 9–11,” 169.

[19]Ibid., 171.

[20]Ibid., 177.

[21]Ibid., 178.

[22]Ibid., 178–79.

[23]Ibid., 181.

[24]Ibid., 184.

[25]Ibid., 180.

[26]“Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth. A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering” (Bethlehem: Diyar, 2009).

[27]“Fourth Pastoral Letter of Patriarch Sabbah, November 1993,” Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, https://www.lpj.org/website-archives/fourth-pastoral-letter-patriarch-sabbah-reading-bible-today-land-bible-november-1993-5e45d3114195b.

[28]Ibid., 2.

[29]Ibid., 3.

[30]Ibid., 8.

[31]Ibid., 10–12.

[32]Ibid., 14.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., 16–22.

[35]Ibid., 25–32.

[36]Ibid., 48.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., 49.

[40]Ibid., 52.

[41]Ibid., 54.

[42]William R. Hutchison, *Many Are Chosen: Divine Election and Western Nationalism*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 288.

[43]Ibid., 292.

[44]Ibid., 287.

[45]Paul Mendes-Flohr, "In Pursuit of Normalcy: Zionism's Ambivalence toward Israel's Election," in *Many Are Chosen: Divine Election and Western Nationalism*, ed. William R. Hutchison and Hartmut Lehmann (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 220.

[46]Ibid., 224.

[47]Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibovitz, *The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel, and the Ordeals of Divine Election*, reprint ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 30.

[48]For more details, see S. Leyla Gurkan, *The Jews as a Chosen People: Tradition and Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[49]Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 11.

[50]Donald Harman Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Ithaca, NY: NCROL, 1992).

[51]Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment from New England to 9/11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[52]Braden P. Anderson, *Chosen Nation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 250–51.

[53]Philip R. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History—Ancient and Modern* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 11.

[54]A detailed though older exegesies of Romans 9–11 can be found in Mitri Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 67–69.

[55]Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014).

[56]Ibid., 43–47.

[57]Ibid., 49–54.

[58]See Mitri Raheb, "Land, Voelker und Identitaeten; ein palaestinensischer Standpunkt," *Concilium* 43, no. 2 (2007): 174–81.

[59]In this section, I closely mirror my article: Mitri Raheb, "Contextualising the Scripture: Towards a New Understanding of the Qur'an—An Arab-Christian Perspective," *Studies in World Christianity* 3, no. 2 (1997): 180–201, https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.1997.3.2.180.