



from Garth...

## The long shadow of the Balfour Declaration

**On November 2nd it will be a hundred years since the Balfour Declaration.**

This document has had huge significance and cast a long shadow over those one hundred years. It reflects the imperialism of a Britain that still had an empire, and the amazing way in which Britain was happy to give away part of someone else's land without conferring with the people themselves.



British Foreign Secretary  
Arthur James Balfour



To give you the historical context - in 1917, Britain's Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour sent a letter to Lord Rothschild which was later incorporated within the terms of the British Mandate for Palestine and so became a legal

obligation for Britain. It read as follows, **“His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object.”**

Today’s British government has said it is proud that this has been achieved and they want to encourage celebration. But there is a rather large problem – a very big elephant in the room - the next section of the Declaration goes on, **“It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”** This means that the Palestinians, who were 90% of the population at that time, were to have their rights protected – but this has not yet been achieved, there has not been

equality of support for the Palestinians.

Jewish historian Avi Shlaim says, "Britain, the pre-eminent power in the region in the first half of the 20th century, was no friend of the Palestinians and it is still no friend today... duplicity and double dealing were the hallmarks of British policy towards Palestine from the beginning." So to simply celebrate the establishment of the State of Israel is to ignore the rights of the Palestinian people.

What should be our response? Let's listen to the voices of Christians from Palestine – these are edited words from a letter by the National Coalition of Christian Organisations and Churches in Palestine – from Jerusalem, Gaza and Bethlehem – to the World Council of Churches.

## **A Cry from the Christians of Palestine on the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration**

"We are still suffering from 100 years of injustice and oppression that were inflicted on the Palestinian people beginning with the unjust and unlawful Balfour declaration,

"We are still suffering because of one political declaration from a Western Empire, based on a twisted theological premise.

"A hundred years later with thousands of lives lost, towns and villages razed from the face of the earth – millions of refugees, thousands of homes demolished and continued incarceration of prisoners, our Nakba (catastrophe) goes on. There is still no justice in our land!

### **Our Call**

"We need you now more than ever. We need brave women and men who are willing to stand in the forefront. This is no time for shallow diplomacy Christians. We urge you to hear our call and adopt the following:

1. That you call things as they are - recognizing Israel as an apartheid state in terms of international law and in agreement with what Desmond Tutu said and as the UN Economic and Social commission for Western Asia report said: "Israel is guilty of imposing an apartheid regime on the Palestinian people".

2. That you unequivocally condemn the Balfour Declaration as unjust, and that you demand from the UK that it asks forgiveness from the Palestinian people and compensates for the losses. We ask that churches and Christians support the Palestinians in their request for justice.

3. That you defend our right and duty to resist the occupation creatively and nonviolently. We ask that you speak in support of economic measures that pressure

Israel to stop the occupation. And go further to support sport, cultural and academic measures against Israel until it complies with international law and UN resolutions urging the ending of its occupation... This is our last peaceful resort. In response to Israel's war on BDS (Boycott, Divestment and sanctions). We ask that you intensify these measures...

"We are on the verge of a catastrophic collapse. The current status-quo is unsustainable. This could be our last chance to achieve a just peace. As a Palestinian Christian community, this could be our last opportunity to save the Christian presence in this land.

**Our only hope as Christians comes from the fact that in Jerusalem, the city of God, and our city, there is an empty tomb...**

**"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Cor. 4:8-9) "**

*You can read their letter in full [here](#)*

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**Amos Trust** have organised a 2000 mile walk from London to Jerusalem - **Just Walk to Jerusalem** - to mark the centenary of the Balfour Declaration and the 50 years of military occupation of the Palestinian Territories; the walkers left London on the 10th of June and will be walking through the West Bank into Jerusalem on the 2nd November, ending their walk as they join us for an event at St George's Anglican Cathedral in East Jerusalem. **I think it will be very moving as they finally reach Jerusalem - the Just Walk is a prophetic act in itself to remind people of the Balfour Declaration.**

I have prepared a **liturgy for St. George's Anglican Cathedral in East Jerusalem** which we will use there on the evening of **November 2nd**, which I will do with Dean Hosam Naoum, to pray particularly for the forgotten and ignored Palestinians. The establishment of the State of Israel has meant the Palestinians suffered the Nakba, or catastrophe, in



*St George's Anglican Cathedral, Jerusalem*

1948; 750,000 refugees were driven from their homes, and they have never been allowed to go back. So today Palestinians are refugees even in their own country, they are refugees in Gaza, in the West Bank, in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan; you may remember the Syrian camp of Yarmouk where they were brutally treated under siege and then under attack; many of them have got out now to other countries.

So - the largest refugee group in the world are still wandering, and still looking for redress. They have suffered massacres, brutality, occupation, and siege. Look at Gaza. It has experienced extraordinary brutality. It is almost inconceivable that the world has allowed them to be under such an offensive siege for the last ten years without insisting on their freedom.

The Prime Minister says she wants to celebrate but I think in order to treat the situation properly we need there also to be an act of penance, an asking of forgiveness, and a recognition that the only way forward is to treat both Israelis and Palestinians with equal rights. **This is something that the church can lead the way in. We understand forgiveness and penance and we understand going out to change our ways and to show our repentance in action.**

The Balfour Liturgy contains prayers, songs for peace, prayers for justice and equality, here is a prayer of repentance and hope.

## **Prayer of repentance and hope**

Holy God we lament one hundred years –  
in which Palestinians have been devalued and mistreated.

We repent of the failure of Britain  
to implement the second part of the Balfour Declaration.

We repent of our failure to look after the civil, religious  
and human rights of the Palestinian people.

We lament our country's duplicity and double-dealing  
and we ask that now there may be a generous spirit  
that supports the Palestinians, that brings them justice, and therefore peace;  
that treats them as equal human beings.

And as a result of this we pray that the same generous spirit  
will support Israelis and give them peace also.

So that in the end we are treating both Palestinians and Israelis  
with the dignity and humanity with which we should treat all people.

Amen

This following affirmation is part of the Balfour Liturgy. As well as in the Cathedral, it will be read at a short event in Banksy's **Walled Off Hotel** earlier in the day on the 2nd November, beside his Balfour Museum exhibit.

## **Affirmation**

It is time to treat all people equally.

It is time to respect international law  
with equal human rights for every community.

It is time to recognize the failure to support the Palestinian people.

It is time to repent and apologise  
for the lack of humane treatment and for the suffering  
they have experienced - and to make amends.

It is time for the implementation of the second half of the Balfour Declaration  
as well as the first.

It is time for fresh vision, for justice and for action.

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**Can I encourage you to do something in your church around the 2nd of November – perhaps Sunday the 5th. You could use the Balfour liturgy that I have produced – **available for download here** and do read a section from the Christians' call as well... they long for us to speak up on this issue.**

## **This is the 50th year of Occupation since 1967 – A prayer for jubilee:**

Gracious God, in this 50th year of the Israeli  
occupation of the Palestinian territories,  
we ask that this may be the year of your Jubilee  
for Palestine and Israel  
when all the inhabitants of the Holy Land will  
know liberation and therefore know hope.  
We ask that your Spirit will strengthen and renew  
the vision  
of all those in Israel and Palestine who work for  
peace –  
And we ask that past failures will not hold them

back.

We ask that Muslim, Christian and Jew, and  
those not from faith communities,  
will all recognise their shared humanity and  
equal worth –

as those created by you in your image.

We long for a time when differences will be  
celebrated -

neighbours will no longer live in fear of one  
another.



God of Justice we ask that equal rights will  
flourish –

under just laws that protect all people,  
so that all who call the Holy Land home  
will be able to celebrate their freedom and security.

We ask this in the name of the Prince of Peace,  
who is able to lift us from the valley of despair to the bright mountaintop of hope.  
Amen

*Garth Hewitt*



**Songs From the Fifth Gospel** is a double CD collection of those of Garth's songs  
which have been written while he was in the Holy Land, or inspired by the people of  
the Holy Land. You can order your copy [here](#)



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**Garth's passionate song for Palestinians *Humans Too* from his album  
*Stealing Jesus Back* is on YouTube here**

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