

## Examples of Cruciformity

### 7. Michael Chacour

On my first trip to Israel in 1990, I chatted with two Israeli Arabs on a rooftop balcony of a hostel in Tiberias: Michael, from Shafar 'Am, near Haifa, who was extremely bitter and angry about the loss of his family home in 1948, and Nicoli, from Ramle, near Tel Aviv, who had seemed to have forgiveness for his family's devastating loss. These conversations sparked an interest in me to learn more about how Christian Arabs in this land processed their losses and hardships.

In a nearby Christian book store, a book seemed to almost jump off a shelf and to beckon me to pick it up: *Blood Brothers* by Elias Chacour<sup>1</sup>. I wept deeply as I read the first few chapters of this book, first of all in sympathy with Elias Chacour and his family who suffered such horrific experiences during Israel's War of Independence. Most of my weeping, however, was a deep crying to the Lord for the same kind of love that I saw in Elias' father, Michael Chacour—a love that felt and identified with the pain and struggles of the Israeli soldiers who treated them so cruelly and shamefully and a love that expressed an unbelievably forgiving attitude towards them.

He faithfully continued our times of family prayer and never failed to pray for those who had made themselves our enemies. Night after night I would lean my head against Mother . . . and hear Father pray: "Forgive them, O God. Heal their pain. Remove their bitterness. Let us show them Your peace"<sup>2</sup>

One day, the Arabs of Biram were told that, because their village was in danger, they would have to leave their village for a few days and soldiers would protect their vacant homes. However, when a few of the villagers went back in two weeks to check, they were horrified at the damage and looting that had taken place. Soldiers leveled their guns at the Arabs, told them that the village was no longer theirs, and ordered them to get out.

The villagers then decided to walk to the next village of Gish, also a Christian Arab village, confident that the villagers there would help them temporarily. However, they found Gish almost deserted; most of the residents had fled to Lebanon. What had caused them to flee? They discovered a shallow grave where 24 bodies were found, having been shot to death.

Soon soldiers arrived in Gish and herded all the men and older boys into trucks and dumped them in Jordan, forcing them to flee into the desert, where they

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1 Elias Chacour, *Blood Brothers* (Grand Rapids, MI, Chosen Books, 1998)

2 Chacour, *Blood Brothers*, p. 49

almost died of hunger and thirst. Three months later, Michael had managed to make his way back home by foot. The only work he was able to find was tending what used to be his own fig orchard for a minimal wage.

"Children," he said softly, turning those sad eyes upon us, "if someone hurts you, you can curse him. But this would be useless. Instead, you have to ask the Lord to bless the man who makes himself your enemy. And do you know what will happen? The Lord will bless you with inner peace—and perhaps your enemy will turn from his wickedness. If not, the Lord will deal with him."<sup>3</sup>

Three years later (1951), the village elders petitioned the Supreme Court to let the villagers return to Biram from Gish; approval was given in early December. The soldiers there said that they needed time to pull out and that the villagers could return on Christmas Day. As they reached the top of the hill overlooking their village, singing happy Christmas hymns, they watched as bombs and bulldozers completely destroyed their village.

In spite of all that, Michael Chacour still said, "Forgive them."

Michael Chacour's cruciformity had a profound effect on his son Elias, who has been honoured in many countries for his work for peace:

Father Chacour has become an ambassador for non-violence and someone, who not only preaches, but lives the Sermon on the Mount. He travels very often between the Middle East and other countries around the world. In addition, hundreds of groups of visitors, fact-finding missions, and pilgrims have visited and continue to visit with him in Ibillin. He has received many International peace awards and been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize on three occasions. On March 10th, 1994, Father Elias Chacour received the prestigious World Methodist Peace Award that has been presented in the past to such pilgrims for peace as former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and the late Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat. On Feb 19th, 2001, Abuna was announced to be the recipient of the Niwano Peace Prize.<sup>4</sup>

Further, as I stated in the first paragraph, Michael Chacour's cruciformity affected me very deeply; from then on I started praying for the Lord to give me that same kind of love. This thesis contains a plea that many others on both sides of the conflict in Israel would receive from the Lord the grace to be cruciform like Michael Chacour.

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3 Chacour, *Blood Brothers*, p. 70

4 From the website of Mar Elias Educational Institutions, <http://www.meei.org/who/abuna.html>