

Arab Believer in Israel Calls for Equal Support of Palestinians and Jews

Salim Munayer, who attends a Messianic congregation, questions charismatics' one-sided support for Israel

American Christians, possessing only a superficial understanding of Middle Eastern issues, are unwittingly promoting anti-Arab sentiment in the region and should refrain from expressing their love for Israel at the expense of other groups in the area, says a key Arab Christian leader in Jerusalem.

"True love is tough love," said Salim Munayer, founder of Musalaha Ministries, in a recent interview with Charisma. Musalaha, or "reconciliation" in Arabic, seeks to unite Jews and Arabs who are believers. Political and cultural differences should not transcend biblical unity, Munayer said.

"There is hostility because we are of a fallen nature, and this hostility has to be dealt with through the cross together," he said, referring to relationships between Arabs and Jews. Ironically, the reconciliation process Musalaha seeks is often hindered by American Christians who have great zeal for Israel but limited knowledge of the complexities of Middle Eastern issues.

"To love the Jewish people doesn't mean to hate the Arab people," he said. "Jesus died for all."

Munayer said U.S. believers, particularly charismatics, take political positions quickly without in-depth knowledge, often

endorsing right-wing Israeli leaders who do not act biblically.

“They are becoming an obstacle for us to witness about Jesus,” he said of these Christians. “They are coming up with anti-Arab statements that come across as hateful.”

While support for Israel is important, it does not mean supporting every action taken by the Israeli government, he believes.

“Are we endorsing unbiblical acts? Are we endorsing things that are causing a stumbling block for the gospel, when it’s very clear only Jesus should be the stumbling block?” Munayer questions.

For many, the chief issue in the Middle East is the land. He agrees the land is obviously an important matter but that it shouldn’t be the primary focus.

“Sometimes I feel we are willing to die for the land but not willing to die for our faith in Jesus,” he said. “I think the land is secondary, in my opinion, because the land belongs to God at the end of the day. We don’t worship the land; we worship the Lord.”

Munayer, who was born in Israel, attends a Messianic congregation. He says believers should be able to disagree with one another without breaking fellowship in the Lord. Spirited discussions sometimes occur among his own staff members, who have differing political views.

“It’s a question of maturity,” he pointed out.

When believing Jews invite believing Arabs or Palestinians to their homes, or vice versa, they often are scorned for their action by their own people. Munayer praised the “commitment and willingness to take risks” by Christians in the region who want their bonds in Christ to come ahead of cultural bonds.

Munayer directs Bethlehem Bible College in Bethlehem with branches in Galilee, Nazareth and Gaza. This year’s graduation exercises had to be postponed from May to June because of military actions in Bethlehem. For much of the school year there were 24-hour curfews.

“For two months, people were not allowed to go out of their homes. Every few days, you are allowed only to buy food,” he said. Curfews create hazardous conditions, he added: “If you go out of your house, you are in danger of being shot.”

Munayer described the Western church as materialistic and shallow. He encouraged American Christians to make short-term missions trips to Israel and other countries where they could see God at work in a context outside of American affluence. He told about a group of elderly Methodists who came to Musalaha to do volunteer work.

“At the end of the two weeks, they came to us with tears in their eyes. They said: ‘We’ve discovered our Christianity. We discovered who the Lord is,’” he said, and added that he believes too many American Christians are passive about their faith.

Richard Daigle in Jerusalem