

By Pat Aufderheide

# Hatred is the real enemy



Tony Toth/ADC

Catherine Leroy/God Cried

**I** HAVE LEARNED A LESSON FROM being a victim of violence," says Father Elias Chacour. "Hatred corrupts." Chacour was only a child when, in 1948, his family was expelled from their small village in Galilee. He doesn't hate the Jewish soldiers who moved into his house, leaving his family to sleep under their own olive trees before being moved on. He doesn't hate the Jewish farmer who hired his family to harvest what had once been their own olives. And he especially doesn't hate the thousands of Jewish settlers on the West Bank who soberly discuss building enclaves to hold in the more than one million Arab Palestinians who were already living there.

He is spending his time instead restoring a sense of elementary human dignity to the people of his homeland—whatever their background. His efforts are as small as visiting a Palestinian parishioner who is sick, or as ambitious as organizing summer camps where 5,000 Palestinian children

live with each other for three weeks, learning names of other villages and sleeping under olive trees planted by their ancestors.

He has established eight community centers where shattered social links are mended, founded secondary schools to keep villages from becoming storehouses for the aged rather than living communities, arranged Jewish-Palestinian encounters and fueled small libraries with books to educate the young.

And now he has written a book that he hopes will be read in libraries wherever there are Palestinians—that is to say, all over the world. The book is *Blood Brothers* (Chosen Books, Lincoln, VA 22078), written with David Hazard. His own life story, it could easily have been the tale of a victim; in part, it is a record of horror and struggle. But it is also a remarkable record of a person who practices a faith in God that is also an exercise of faith in human beings. The book takes him from a refugee childhood to young adulthood among liberation-theology-minded seminarians in France back to

the villages of his youth, where his grassroots work often raises eyebrows of church officials as well as of state bureaucrats.

What might seem quixotic if noble missionary activity looks to Chacour like responsible exercise of strength. He explains why during a Washington, D.C., stop on a November tour of several U.S. cities. He is convinced that the seemingly powerless Arab Palestinians in Israel, about a fifth of whom are Christians, are a repository of hope for Israel's future.

Their strength, he argues, is that of the spirit in a country where the dominant culture—shaped by Western values alien to the territory—appears afflicted by a terrible disease, that of insecurity and distrust. He understands the way that 20th-century holocaust has bred that attitude in Jews, but he knows as well that the solution is not for Palestinians to take the place of Jews in a cruel diaspora. Far from it: Palestinian self-consciousness, he can see, has broken down ancient social divisions in the last three decades, and created a new reality

as firm as the existence of the Israeli state.

These self-conscious Palestinians, to Jewish Israelis, are a problem. To Chacour they are part of the solution, one whose terms are all written down in the Sermon on the Mount. "I am much more powerful in Israel than the Jew," he says. The little cross on his lapel glints, but does not distract from his intense, dark-eyed gaze. "I have no weapons. I speak for reconciliation. I am morally much healthier. It is sad to see some of our young Jewish soldiers, who are wounded and scarred by the blood on their hands."

He describes a raging illness at the heart of Israeli society, evidenced in the fear that Jews in and outside Israel have of Palestinians. If he used the Western language of psychoanalysis, he would call it projection. "Let us look back. Who is the threat to whom? I was there on the land for thousands of years. I was there to receive Abraham when he came out of Iraq. I welcomed the remnants of the concentration

*Continued on page 15*