



Life with Dignity

The conference “Life with Dignity” was held in Bethlehem in December 2014 and was jointly organized by Kairos Palestine, Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum and the Alternative Travel Group.

A sincere expression of appreciation to all local and international authors who shared willingly their expertise, experiences and hopes for a better future for all the oppressed aspiring for a just peace with equity. We are terribly sorry not to have included papers that were not sent for publication, though many were of excellent quality.

Special thanks for Board members, staff and volunteers for all their support and to Tina Whitehead for meticulously editing all the papers. Appreciation also to George Sahhar and Khalil Touma for their translations of the Arabic papers.

This book was creatively designed and printed by Nasri Khoury, IDEAS Graphic Design and Printing Services in Bethlehem.

Nora Carmi
Project Coordinator

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	1
Biographies.....	4
Message from the Church – Michel Sabbah.....	10
Kairos Palestine: Five Years of Struggle and Prophetic Voice – Rifat Odeh Kassis.....	11
Opening Night Speech – Robert Owen Smith.....	15
Opening Remarks – Lily Habash-Hilal.....	18
Opening Meditation – Rafiq Khoury.....	20
Launch of Kairos Palestine Christmas Alert 2014 – Martha Tonsern.....	26

BIBLICAL REFLECTION: THEOLOGY AND JUSTICE

Challenging the Empire: Theology of Justice in Palestine – Munther Isaac.....	28
We Sow Hope – Nancy Cardoso.....	36

KAIROS AND CREATIVE RESISTANCE

Popular Resistance in Palestine – Mazin Qumsiyeh.....	43
---	----

COME AND SEE

Listening to Living Stones – Rajbharat Patta.....	51
A Palestinian Response to Pilgrimage – Yusef Daher.....	60

KAIROS: IDENTITY AND RIGHTS

Cry with Us: A Palestinian Hopeful Reading of Lamentations – Yohanna Katanacho.....	62
---	----

A THEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL KAIROS READING

The Moment of Justice Has Come! – Kim Yong Bock.....	66
Resisting Hope–Prophetically – Marc H. Ellis.....	69

KAIROS AND ADVOCACY

The Role of Media as an Advocacy Tool – Daoud Kuttab.....	74
---	----

KAIROS – TOLERANCE AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Abuse of Religious Threat to Perpetrate Violation of Laws and Values - Zoughbi Zoughbi.....	77
Religious Fundamentalism: Reasons and Contexts – Nassar Ibrahim	81

KAIROS AND WOMEN

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as a Source of Hope for the Liberation of Palestine – Anna Karin Hammar.....	90
--	----

KAIROS INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES: RESPONSES

“Are you able to help us to get our freedom back...!” – Gerhard Dilschneider	93
A Thousand Voices for Kairos Palestine – Peter Dettwiler.....	101
Preaching the Good News in a Bad Way – Páraic Réamonn	102
5 th Anniversary “Kairos Palestine. A moment of truth” – Edgar Antonio López	105

KAIROS INTERNATIONAL: EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD

Kairos Britain – Successes and Challenges in the Last 2 Years – Charlotte Marshall	109
--	-----

GAZA

Christian Presence in Gaza – Accomplishments and Challenges – Sami El-Yousef.....	112
A Voice from Gaza – Suhaila S. Tarazi.....	117

PRISONERS

Prisoners and Human Rights.....	120
DCI-Palestine – Ayed Abu Eqtaish	
Hurriyat – Helmi Araj	
Addameer – Randa Wahbeh	

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Vision and Reality: Kairos in the Next Five Years – Jamal Khader.....	123
---	-----

LIFE WITH DIGNITY: KAIROS PALESTINE 5TH ANNIVERSARY

Statement	127
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BIOGRAPHIES

Patriarch Michel Sabbah served as the Archbishop and Latin (Roman Catholic) Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem from 1987 to 2008. Patriarch Sabbah was ordained a priest for the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in June 1955. He was a parish priest for a few years before being sent to the University of St. Joseph in Beirut to study Arabic language and literature. Shortly thereafter, he became director of schools for the Latin Patriarchate. In 1980, he was named President of the Bethlehem University. In 1987, Pope John Paul II appointed him Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, making him the first native Palestinian to hold the office in centuries. Since 1999, Patriarch Sabbah has been the International President of Pax Christi, a Catholic organization promoting peace. Sabbah resigned as Patriarch in 2008. He is currently the Grand Prior of the chivalric Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, one of the knightly orders founded in 1099. Patriarch Sabbah is a co-author of the Kairos Palestine Document and believes in pluralism and equality in order to preserve the dignity of human beings.

Mr. Rifat Kassis has been active in advocating and campaigning for the effective application of international human rights and humanitarian law in Palestine, through various professional and voluntary positions. He has served the East Jerusalem YMCA as director for its rehabilitation programs in the West Bank, co-founded the Alternative Tourism Group (ATG), and founded the first Palestinian independent Child Rights' NGO- a national section of the Geneva-based global child rights' movement, Defence for Children International (DCI), later serving as President of DCI-Palestine and later becoming the President of the DCI movement at the global level. In January 2005, he worked in Geneva as the International Coordinator and Project Manager of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). He has recently served as Coordinator of Kairos Palestine.

Rev. Dr. Robert Smith serves as Academic Director at Tantur Ecumenical Center for Theological Studies and Special Advisor to the president of the Lutheran World Federation. He is the author of "More Desired Than Our Own Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism" (Oxford University Press, 2013).

Lily Habash-Hilal has currently been working as a Senior Governance Advisor for UNDP and the EU in Libya, and has contributed to the Palestinian society in her active membership in the Advisory Board of the Palestinian Human Development Report for 2009/2010, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program, in addition to her membership in advisory boards of the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation, and the magazine This Week in Palestine. Amongst her international awards, is the recognition of her efforts in peace making by the Women for World Peace Circle.

Father Rafiq Khoury is a member of Roman Catholic Church, a Palestinian theologian, teacher and author of many books with a focus on proper spiritual education. He is an active member of Al Liqa Center.

Dr. Martha Tonser joined the Kairos Palestine movement in 2012, seconded by the German Association of Development Cooperation (AGEH) and the Civil Peace Service (ZFD). She is responsible for Kairos Palestine's advocacy work. Tonser holds a PhD degree in European Ethnology and Culture Anthropology from Karl Franzens University Graz.

Biblical Reflection: Theology and Justice

Dr. Munther Isaac (PhD, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies) is assistant professor at Bethlehem Bible College and director of the influential Christ at the Checkpoint conferences. He is also a Vicar at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. His PhD research focused on the theology of the Promised Land.

The Rev. Dr. Nancy Cardoso is a Brazilian Methodist pastor, community organizer, member of the Land Pastoral Commission, and professor of Ancient History, Porto Alegre Institute of the Methodist Church, Brazil.

Kairos and Creative Resistance

Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh teaches and does research at Bethlehem and Birzeit Universities. He is director of the main clinical cytogenetics laboratory and director of the Palestine Museum of Natural History and Institute for Biodiversity Research. He previously served on the faculties of the University of Tennessee, Duke, and Yale Universities. He was chairman of the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between People and currently serves on the board of Al-Rowwad Children's Theater Center in Aida Refugee Camp. His publications include «Mammals of the Holy Land», «Sharing the Land of Canaan: human rights and the Israeli/Palestinian Struggle» and «Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment.»

Come and See

Rev. Raj Bharath Patta is a doctoral student in Theology & Religion at the University of Manchester.

Yusef Daher is Executive Secretary of the Jerusalem Inter-Church Center of the Heads of Churches of Jerusalem in association with the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches. He is a co-author of the Kairos Palestine Document "Moment of Truth." As an expert in tourism, Yusef has been involved in numerous official local and global tourism initiatives.

Kairos: Identity and Rights

Rev. Dr. Yohanna Katanacho is a Palestinian Evangelical who studied at Bethlehem University (B.Sc.), Wheaton College (M.A.) and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (M. Div.; Ph.D.). Dr. Katanacho serves as the Academic Dean for Bethlehem Bible College and as the Team Leader for Nazareth Evangelical College. He has authored

several books in English and Arabic including «The Land of Christ: A Palestinian Cry»; “A Commentary on Lamentations”; “The Seven ‘I AM’ Sayings in the Gospel of John”; and “The King of Peace and His Young Followers”. He is also one of the authors of the Kairos Palestine Document.

A Theological and Political Kairos Reading

Prof. Kim Yong-Bock is from Seoul, Korea and is presently Chancellor, Asia Pacific Center for Integral Study of Life. Prof. Kim has extensive background in research and teaching at numerous theological institutions and universities. He presently serves as Senior Advisor, Life and Peace Center, Korean National Council of YMCA's and Moderator of Peace for Life.

Marc H. Ellis is a retired University Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Baylor University. Professor Ellis is the author of more than 20 books, including “Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation,” now in its third edition, and more recently, “Future of the Prophetic: Israel's Ancient Wisdom Re-presented” and “Burning Children: A Jewish View of the War in Gaza.” His series of commentaries, “Exile and the Prophetic,” appears at Mondoweiss.net

Kairos and Advocacy

Daoud Kuttab is a Palestinian journalist and media activist. He is the former Ferris Professor of Journalism at Princeton University. He is currently the director general of Community Media Network (CMN), a not for profit media organization dedicated to advancing independent media in the Arab region. CMN is registered in Jordan and Palestine and administers Radio al Balad in Amman, and www.ammannet.net. Daoud is a columnist with Almonitor.com, the Jordan Times, Huffington Post and Project Syndicate.

Kairos - Tolerance and Religious Extremism

Zoughbi Zoughbi is the founder and director of Wiam, The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center. Zoughbi is a renowned speaker on interdisciplinary issues. He is a lecturer, trainer and mediator as well as activist in the dialogue of cultures and civilizations. He is the author of many booklets and articles and is published worldwide. He is the editor of four oral history books.

Nassar Ibrahim is a Palestinian researcher and writer. He is the general coordinator of Alternative Information Center and Director of OPGAI and has a Master's degree in sociology, development and international cooperation. He has several publications on development and social culture as well as a collection of short stories, many of them translated into several languages.

Kairos and Women

Rev. Dr. Anna Karin Hammar is a Swedish priest and theologian active in the Church of Sweden - Diocese of Uppsala. Her dissertation in systematic theology concerns the meaning of baptism in a multifaith context (The Mystery of Creation, the Sacrament of Creation). In the 80's Anna Karin took the initiative to the Ecumenical Decade - Churches in Solidarity with Women launched by the World Council of Churches. Anna Karin has been visiting Palestine frequently since the first Intifada began in December 1987. Her commitment to Palestine has been expressed in campaigns to end the occupation of Palestine and in building bridges between Christians and Churches in Sweden and Palestine.

Kairos International Initiatives: Responses

Gerhard Dilschneider is a retired Social worker and is married with two sons. He is in charge of Youth and Adult Education Projects with the Evangelical Church in Wuerttemberg and the United Evangelical Mission, Wuppertal, Germany, with a focus on ecumenical affairs and development education. He is the Head of the Institute for Youth and Social Work with the National Council of Churches in Kenya and Assistant to the General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Geneva, Switzerland, and also serves as a member of the Kairos Palestine Solidarity Network in Germany.

Rev. Peter Dettwiler is an Ecumenical officer of the Evangelical-Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich, Switzerland. He did his theological studies in Bern, Zurich and Richmond VA (USA). Peter is married to Helen and they have five children and five grandchildren. It was the Kairos Palestine Document which made him wake up and get committed to the cause of the Palestinians, following the invitation "come and see".

Rev. Páraic Réamonn is a minister of the Church of Scotland who has worked in rural parish ministry in Scotland, and in Geneva, Switzerland, as communications secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (1993-2004) and deputy coordinator of the partnership fund of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (2011-2014). He was coordinator of the Church of Scotland's Middle East and North Africa committee in the early 1990s and is currently the minister of St. Andrew's Scots Memorial Church, Jerusalem.

Edgar Antonio López, Ph.D. is a Colombian philosopher and theologian and an Associate Professor at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá. He earned his Bachelor in Philosophy from the Pontificia Universidad Urbaniana; Licenciado en Filosofía e Historia, Universidad Santo Tomás; Master in Philosophy, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and Master and Doctor in Theology, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.

Kairos International: Experiences from the Field

Charlotte Marshall began working for Kairos Britain in July 2014. Her role is to engage and inspire the UK church to act for a just peace in Palestine/Israel. She comes to the role with 10 years' experience in development and advocacy in the Middle East, gained mostly through working for a large UK-based NGO. She has travelled many times to Palestine and is passionate about the people, culture and injustice experienced there. Charlotte lives in London with her husband and 18 month old son, Jack.

Gaza

Sami el Yousef is the Regional Director of the Jerusalem field office of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, a Vatican agency set up in 1949 to aid Palestinian refugees. He is a native of the Old City of Jerusalem and belongs to one of the oldest families with continuous presence in Jerusalem for centuries. Sami has made hundreds of field visits to various institutions in both Palestine and Israel serving in education, health, and social services. During his current work he has made tens of visits to the Gaza strip to be in solidarity with our vulnerable yet brave people there. Sami resides in the Old City of Jerusalem with his wife of 30 years, Irene, as well as three of their children, Tala, Rona, and Michael. Their oldest son Rami is currently pursuing a medical career in the United States.

Suhaila Tarazi is a social activist and the Director of Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City which is under the patronage of the Anglican Episcopal Church in the Holy Land.

Prisoners

Ayed Abu Eqtaish has worked with DCI - Palestine since 2000 and currently holds the position of Accountability Programme Director. The main focus of Ayed's work is child detention issues, including the documentation of cases of ill-treatment and torture. Ayed studied social work and has a Master's degree in Advanced Studies in Children's Rights from the Fribourg University in Switzerland.

Helmi Araj is the Director of the Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights "Hurriyat". He is an ex-prisoner who spent 10 years in the Israeli Occupation jails, a writer and a left-wing political analyst. He was a law student at Damascus University in Syria 1978-1981 but dropped out because of his arrest and travel ban. He enrolled in Birzeit University in 1983 at the faculty of sociology and was re-arrested in his senior year on November 2, 1987. He was sentenced to 8 years imprisonment and released in 1995, after refusing to sign the commitment document according to the Cairo agreement of 1994 that was required to release political prisoners. Helmi enrolled again at Birzeit University in 1996 and completed his Master's degree in Political Science.

Randa Wahbeh has been the international advocacy officer at Addameer for two years. She represents Addameer at various meetings, international conferences and speaking events globally. She most recently returned from Bogota, Colombia where she met with political detainees and their families in an effort to build more solidarity for prisoners in Latin America. Randa studied at UCLA and Columbia, where she was a founding member of Students for Justice in Palestine.

The Next Five Years

Fr. Jamal Khader, born in Zababdeh (Jenin), has been a priest of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem since 1988. He has a PhD in dogmatic theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He has served as Associate professor at the Latin Patriarchate Seminary at Bethlehem University, as chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and is currently the Rector of the Latin Patriarchate Seminary. Fr. Jamal is co-author of the Kairos Palestine document.

Message from the Church

Patriarch Emeritus, Michel Sabbah

1. General Message from the Church

We ask for solidarity, understanding, and that the Church be a companion to the people who demand freedom and dignity. We do not wish to see anyone suffer from aggression; we want to see aggression stop, to see the occupation ended, and to see Jerusalem as a city holy to the three religions and the two peoples that reside in it. We ask God not to allow theology to be used as a weapon. Theology must remind us that God's essence is love and reconciliation. Some see theology not as a tool to guide people towards God and love, but rather towards fighting, more murder, hate, destruction of homes, and desecration of the Holy Land. It is not the responsibility of theology to spread war and death, but rather to spread more knowledge about the Creator who manages the universe and is loving to all people and calls upon peoples to love each other.

Nowadays, peace slips away because of racist laws, and we witness an increase in war and negation of Palestinian rights. What vision do they have? We do not know. Yet, our vision is based upon peace, justice, rights of both sides, and preserving the dignity of the land. Such is the message of the Church and theologians, namely to preserve the dignity of the land. The only path should be one that ends racism –meeting and recognizing the other, and calling upon human beings to look in the face of the other and see God. People must stop fighting, stop injustice, stop racism, and create justice and peace.

The message from the Church and theologians is to remind us, always, of the message of Jesus to love all, not to negate anyone, and not to give power to someone to bring about war and death on another. The Church and theologians must call for love, and the church and theology must be the door that leads to that love.

2. Message from the Local Church

By this I mean the message by all of us, since we are the church. Yes, we wait to hear the words from our leaders but we are the church, and we are in a procession towards love and justice. Through the Kairos Document: a Moment of Truth, we wanted to articulate a Christian position that helps transform reality and to have every Christian assume responsibility. It has been five years and a lot has been achieved. Tremendous efforts have been exerted to end hostilities – as a resistance effort in the logic of love. Our effort and our love fell on deaf ears and we were taken as hostile, despite the fact that our effort is one that seeks to build love and to put an end to hostilities.

Misunderstanding, or the lack of willingness to understand, is due to the call for boycott. We want boycott to be seen as a peaceful mechanism to create pressure

towards the path of peace. That effort too was misunderstood. Nevertheless we want to end the evil inflicted upon us, we want to help remove hatred from the hearts of our enemies, we want all to enjoy a safe life, and we want to help show the path. We hope the enemy will see by that path how to achieve the security it wants, and to come to realize that injustice inflicted upon Palestinians is not the path to security but rather is the path to evil, evil that breeds more and more evil. Respect for the human being, respect for the Palestinian, this good will breed more good.

Righteousness breeds righteousness while evil breeds evil. Regrettably, our fate is in the hands of those who possess power and weapons, and are the party that has to choose righteousness for us and them or evil for us and them. Yet our destiny is in our hands too, because we are strong due to our faith, hope, love, and perseverance. The message from the Church is one of education to all its followers and those who serve it, that they must take the right stance in relation to today's reality and to the occupation imposed upon us. Dignity and freedom for the Palestinian is God-given, and what God gave us cannot be taken away and it is our right and duty to protect it. Kairos South Africa became a clear message to the world and foes alike for five years. Yet our word, our love, and Kairos Palestine remain a topic of argument by many. The adversary continues to see Kairos as an act of aggression; however, the Moment of Truth is in fact God's grace and blessing. A day will come, only known to God and not known to us, when God's glory and righteous path will be revealed; and the land will regain its sanctity, and all the inhabitants – Palestinian and Jewish peoples included – will regain security, safety, justice, righteousness, freedom, and sovereignty.

Kairos Palestine: Five Years of Struggle and Prophetic Voice

Rifat Odeh Kassis

When Kairos Palestine published its document "A Moment of Truth," its messages were several-fold. More than messages, they were issued as calls to action, to cooperation, to solidarity.

The **first**, addressed to our fellow Palestinians, Christians and Muslims: to be patient and steadfast, engaging in popular resistance to the Israeli occupation, and that, for Christians, this kind of peaceful resistance is both a duty and a right.

The **second**, to the international community: that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is a classic example of military occupation of one foreign nation over another and that it is not a mere accident that the world has somehow failed to notice. It was a union of colonial forces and the international community's historical endorsement that created the Palestinian Nakba in the first place.

The **third**, to Christian communities and churches around the world: an invitation to

challenge those who justify the oppression of Palestinians on theological grounds, distorting the Bible and its good messages.

The Kairos Document was a call to remember that injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere and that the Israeli occupation is unjust and a sin against humanity and against God Himself. Only the end of injustice can generate justice. For this reason, Kairos Palestine endorses the global BDS campaign (boycott, divestment and sanctions) as a peaceful means to a peaceful end. BDS is a classic example of nonviolent resistance with love as its logic. It is also a proactive, productive answer to the question of what options are available to oppressed people in changing their own lives. Both history and psychological patterns show us that people often react with violence when they feel trapped and alone. BDS, then, is a way to replace that scenario with one that is creative, nonviolent and community driven.

Five Years of Achievements

Kairos was meant to serve as a vision and platform for action and not only a document or a message. Kairos Palestine has grown first as a national Palestinian social movement and later was advanced to become an international one, inspiring many people all over the world to work for justice for Palestine.

Kairos Palestine working groups have been formed and expanded in many countries and regions around the world. More and more churches are showing positive changes with respect to their position on the Israeli occupation of Palestine and many others have been reevaluating their investments so as to avoid supporting companies and organizations linked to the Israeli occupation. Others have definitively voted to divest from such companies or have adopted the entire BDS campaign.

Pilgrimage trends have been changing and evolving through Kairos Palestine's "Come and See" campaign, now providing a detailed theological analysis of Christian pilgrimages. Hundreds of groups have come to visit Kairos Palestine, speak with us, and work in solidarity with us; hundreds of conferences have been organized with the goal of networking and cooperating with Kairos; hundreds of articles, theses, and other materials have been written about Kairos Palestine in many different languages.

Kairos theologians have been engaged in wide-reaching dialogues with other theologians from all over the world. Tens of books have also been written about or with reference to Kairos by Palestinian theologians and laypeople. Various countries have been working on their own Kairos documents, challenging their own churches, societies and governments.

Most importantly, Kairos has been accepted by local Palestinian church-related organizations as their voice and unified message. Relationships between Kairos and Palestinian civil society, too, are growing: human rights organizations, coalitions like Civic Coalition on Jerusalem, Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO), and Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative

(OPGAI). The Palestinian youth movement is expanding around Kairos efforts, as well. All of our Christmas and Easter Alerts have been produced in close coordination and cooperation with Christian-related and secular civil society organizations. These connections are what bring Kairos Palestine's vision deep into the roots of society.

Kairos Palestine's Theological Analysis: A Prophetic Vision

Our five-year anniversary also prompts us to revisit the analysis laid forth in the Kairos Document itself as a means to take stock of our current moment. In doing so, we can see that our assessments were accurate, and remain relevant to the situation today:

Israel, despite all its efforts to the contrary, has failed to make the Palestinians surrender. We have not forgotten our cause or our rights. **(Kairos 2.1.2)**

This conflict is impossible to solve through military force. Israel has tried to destroy the Palestinian people by waging war after war. The most recent one occurred this summer, focusing its aggressions on Gaza – and on people elsewhere in Palestine who protested the onslaught. Israel managed to kill, injure, and dispossess thousands of people, but it failed to destroy their will. Resistance continues. **(Kairos 1.4)**

We won't truly advance in achieving our fundamental goal, peace with justice, if we focus our efforts and rely on external elements and countries: we can only empower ourselves in our own cause by focusing on ourselves and on God. **(Kairos 3.1)**

We warned the international community about the dangers of employing a double standard in its criteria for helping the oppressed and condemning the oppressors around the world (for example, the US discourse against Iran or Syria while it is highly tolerant of Israel's policies and practices against Palestinians). We warned that this approach would only lead to the creation and strengthening of armed groups and violence. **(Kairos 7.)** We look at where we are now, five years later: the Middle East is in flames.

We need a new kind of interfaith dialogue. A successful dialogue must be based on confronting injustice and working to create justice. **(Kairos 8.)** The current chaos and bloodshed in the Middle East, the raging conflicts between religions, shows that previous dialogues was limited and did little to eradicate sectarian hostility and distrust. Perhaps new dialogue, a truly constructive one, must involve all sectors of society, not just religious bodies; it must incorporate (and this is a serious challenge, but it is important) not just society's most moderate thinkers, but also those who are less tolerant, in addition to involving activists on the street – people who are more directly involved in society itself, whether through violent or nonviolent means.

Any religious state is dangerous – Muslim, Jewish, or any other faith. **(Kairos 9.3.)** Today, the major problem in the Middle East consists of various attempts to build religious states: in Israel on the one hand, and in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) on the other. Jerusalem is the key to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict: what happens to Jerusalem will

determine the outcome of the entire situation. (Kairos 9.5.) As I write these words, the Israeli government is trying to divide the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its surrounding complex; violent clashes have ensued there, and Jerusalem is burning. These recent escalations are capable of triggering a war not only between Palestine and Israel, but also between the entire Islamic world and Israel.

As we can see, the analysis remains pertinent today, and it is more urgent than ever for us to act toward the just peace that is our right.

Kairos Palestine's Challenges

Over the past five years, Kairos Palestine faced a number of key issues and challenges:

The heads of churches in Palestine and their response to Kairos Palestine. On the one hand, the Kairos Document was not directed to the heads of churches; it is a document, first and foremost, for the Palestinian people as a whole. Still, the reluctance shown by some of these church leaders to fully promote Kairos has been challenging.

Some churches' positions on the Palestinian question and their hesitance to act in solidarity. Despite certain positive developments in their stance, the Catholic Church, some Orthodox churches and some mainstream Protestant churches have offered limited support to Kairos Palestine.

The new trend toward recruiting Christians in the Israeli army, adopted by a small minority inside Israel. Although Kairos was very clear in its position, this campaign poses a serious challenge for – a serious threat to – the Christian community. Worrisomely, it creates the illusion within the international community that Palestinian Christians are treated differently by Israel; that Israel protects Christians.

Relationships with Muslims and with Islam. In Palestine, there are no serious frictions between Christians and Muslims. But intensified tensions in the broader Middle East are badly damaging relationships between these two religious communities. The new Islamic movements across the region are working hard to exacerbate conflict and destroy any chance for peaceful religious pluralism. We need to study the recent developments and come up with clear strategies to confront this destructive trend.

Christian emigration. Kairos Palestine offers a new vision for Christians, one that helps center them on their own land, in their own context. Now, however, given the turmoil in the whole region, Christians are fearful once again and many want to leave.

Moving Forward

Many people today are asking themselves, where is the light? What are our causes for hope?

First of all, our primary reserve of hope must be found in God and in ourselves: we must trust our own capacities, our own power and the power of people all over the

world. We must trust each other and walk together.

Today, we can see that the solidarity movement with Palestine is growing overall: through the global BDS campaign, through nonviolent protests across the globe, through the media, and through some governmental entities urging Israeli accountability.

Despite the bloodshed and misery afflicting the Middle East in general and Palestine in particular, many individuals and communities continue turning to Kairos, looking for hope. Kairos Palestine is growing and gaining momentum as a movement.

Israel, like any other oppressive regime, doesn't just fear the anger of the oppressed; it fears – perhaps even more so – their hope. Israel knows that its power and impunity are greater when people feel weak and hopeless. This means that Palestinians should continue their steadfastness and legitimate, creative popular resistance: resistance driven by love, not by hatred and revenge.

And Kairos is winning.

Kairos is winning because more churches are responding to the BDS call and participating in its campaign, entirely or in part. Kairos is winning because popular solidarity movements are growing everywhere. Kairos is winning because more and more people are joining and participating in its calls and alerts: its Christmas Alerts, Easter Alerts, and others. Kairos is winning because there are still people who believe that “...nation shall not lift up swords against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2-2:5).

And Kairos is winning because, despite bloodshed and hardship and injustice, there are people and communities who dream of “a new land and a new human being, capable of rising up in the spirit to love each of his or her brothers and sisters (Kairos 10).

Opening Night Speech – Kairos Palestine Conference

Robert Owen Smith

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

It is my pleasure to welcome you here to Bethlehem to participate in this conference co-convened by Kairos Palestine, the Alternative Tourism Group, and the Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) of the World Council of Churches. I serve alongside Dr. Muna Mushahwar as Co-Moderator of the PIEF Core Group, many of whom are present with us for this important gathering.

In June 2007, the Amman Call announced a challenge to the Global Church: “No more

words without deeds. It is time for action.” Since its inception, PIEF has promoted

1. actions challenging government support for the occupation;
2. actions challenging public support for the occupation;
3. actions challenging theological and biblical justifications for the occupation; and
4. actions maintaining viable the Palestinian Christian presence in the Holy Land.

In its effort to “catalyze and coordinate new and existing church advocacy” for just peace in Israel and Palestine, PIEF functions as a clearinghouse for the many ways the Global Church is acting. This is the global ecumenical movement at its best: when we are gathered around specific points of concern, confident that sisters and brothers the world over are engaged in “action for peace and justice that serves all the peoples of the region.”

PIEF is the WCC’s coordinating body for international, church-related efforts to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Palestinian voices are privileged within PIEF, especially the voices of the local churches and local Christian organizations. Exercising the preferential option for the oppressed keeps our shared work grounded in local realities and responses, even as we cultivate a global reach. The Kairos movement has provided a vital distillation of the Palestinian Christian voice.

Despite its global reception, “A Moment of Truth” is first and foremost a local document. Its message is directed primarily at Palestinian Christians living in this context, not to those of us who come from the outside. This was apparent when the document was launched in December 2009. At Dar Annadwa, the crowd of Palestinian Christians listened in electrified silence as His Beatitude Michel Sabbah presented the document in beautiful Arabic. As I sat next to the Patriarch and prepared to give one of the first western responses to the Kairos Palestine document, it was apparent to me that global participation and recognition was not the most important feature of the evening. Kairos Palestine – then and now – is about Palestinians speaking with one another about how they should analyze and diagnose their situation and the ways that situation should be resisted and changed.

My impression from that evening was crystalized in June 2011. The leader of a prominent western church had recently visited Israel and Palestine. In an interview about the status of Christians in the midst of the Arab Spring, this leader described Bethlehem, “a majority Christian city just a couple of decades ago,” as “now very definitely a place where Christians are a marginalised minority” due to the presence of more Muslims.

The Palestinian Christian response was swift and strong. The leader not only indicated a wedge between Muslims and Christians but also failed to mention Israeli occupation as a cause of Christian emigration. The letter from Kairos Palestine was particularly strong: “We request you and every leader, especially church leaders, not to use us and our cause for your own purposes,” it said. Why are you “suddenly interested to speak on our behalf? This troubles us. Palestinian Christians are fully capable of expressing their situation without needing anyone to interpret what they mean.” The message to all church leaders and to all of us who would speak about the

challenges facing Palestinian Christians is clear: do not speak until after you have listened and listened well.

The message is loud and clear: Kairos Palestine is a thundering declaration that Palestinian Christians refuse to accept all forms of oppression, both explicit and subtle. Israeli occupation is a sin against God and humanity; simplistic approaches to the situation they face are no less unacceptable. “Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back?” We do not have time to entertain anything less than your unreserved commitment to this goal.

What, then, is our responsibility as guests in this context? After we have listened carefully as Palestinians share their own analyses and perspectives, our commitment should bind itself to the core response of Kairos Palestine: Creative Resistance. Many have picked up the Kairos Palestine suggestion that economic pressures on the State of Israel – boycott, divestment, and sanctions – can be an effective form of non-violent resistance.

The Kairos call for creative resistance is not about addressing economic structures alone. Support for the matrix of Israeli occupation challenges the very nature of how we interpret the Bible and how Christian communities engage and challenge political powers and principalities. Israeli occupation is supported by global systems of economy, ideology, theology, and culture. Efforts to dismantle the occupation must work on a global level to address each of these spheres and more. We are engaged politically because we are not merely political.

How can those of us who are not Palestinian weave resistance into the fabric of our lives? One way is to identify how the structures perpetuating the sin of occupation inform injustices in our home contexts. This is what is intended as the message of Kairos for Global Justice. How do we participate in struggles against those injustices in our local contexts, consciously linking them to the quest for justice in Palestine? How do the theologies identified as harmful in Kairos Palestine harm others as well; how do those imperial theologies benefit not just Israeli power but power and privilege in many other places as well? In cooperation with Palestinian sisters and brothers, how do we incorporate music, drama, dance, and visual art in our own expressions of resistance?

The occupier and the oppressor would always prefer to control the terms of resistance. This is true in every context. Creative resistance – as called for in Kairos Palestine – is a rejection of those controls. It is a transcendence of imperially offered options. Creative resistance is a call to preserve humanity and beauty in the midst of the cold, bureaucratic oppression with its aesthetic of grey concrete and rubber-coated steel. I look forward to our time together here in Bethlehem, and especially to renewing our shared participation in creative resistance. Again, you are heartily welcome to this conference. I pray that our relationships will be deepened and our commitments renewed.

Opening Remarks

Lily Habash-Hilal

Good evening and a warm welcome on behalf of Kairos Palestine for your participation in tonight's opening ceremony.

Tonight, we are celebrating the fifth anniversary of Kairos Palestine, a landmark in the Palestinian scene to advocate the just cause of our people. We are celebrating this event in a world that has a tendency to no longer dare to ask about the difference between right and might, at a time when many amongst us seem to have given up on remembering that there is a strong sanctity and blessedness to life. Indeed, there is a strong moral base for mankind enshrined in all religions, in the universal idea of human rights and in our deep longing for dignity, freedom, self-determination, justice and equality. For, despite the dilemmas that we face in our day to day survival – the despair and fatigue brought on by humiliation, dehumanization, and deprivation – we still hope to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Amidst chaos, the overall picture includes the occupier's increasing unabated oppression that is continuing with impunity. The occupation thrives with the support of a decadent society and state which is rapidly sliding into more and more extremism, negation and isolation (e.g., the passing of the law on the Jewish nation-state), along with a crippled international law and sloping indecisiveness of those who have the ability to make a change but don't. Nevertheless, the Palestinians across the national and expatriate spectrum continue to pass on their message and work to generate a real change in the perceptions, attitudes and commitments of those who can support our national cause.

***“We are afflicted every day, but not crushed, perplexed, but not despairing.”
(2 Corinthians 4:8)***

Despite fatigue and perplexity, there is hope. This year has also been marked by the UN as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian people. There is movement in the parliaments of some European countries to recognize the Palestinian State and the BDS movement is proving effective in transforming positions that we never thought would change. We can see that there is a growing trend toward a more realistic stance with regards to Israel's continuous occupation and pre-meditated violations of human rights in Palestine.

Yes, all this has been signaling that change is possible.

This is why we need to exert all possibilities to spread the word of God, to exemplify his teachings of love, acceptance, and persistence to defend the sanctity of life and human dignity. The successful unity between the Church and its people in the quest for dignity, justice and equality has proven once again that the holistic meaning of the bible and Jesus' teachings are continuing, and will continue, to guide us throughout. This is where we can say again that Kairos has become the epitome of Christian action in Palestine and the world. It is a structured, focused and meaningful mission.

This is Christian theology at work in a continuously changing world. A world with a wide array of people, with too many diverging ideas and many constructions of different theologies to transmit “God’s message” are competing for influence over hearts and minds but not necessarily for confluence with the genuine needs of the people.

Throughout the past five years, Kairos Palestine has set its course of prayers, action and advocacy to speak to the world to support the Palestinian quest for justice, equality, dignity and self-determination. This is not the place to describe over and over again the ingrained suffering of the people of God because we continue to live it, both physically and spiritually and we live the constant violation of our dignity in every single moment of our daily lives. The occupation intends to remind us every day that it exists despite us and despite all universal values, beliefs and religions.

But then, isn’t it true that at least all three monotheistic religions call for the preservation of human dignity?

As a Christian, I have been taught - with love - that our unity in God means that we have to have strong respect for the other.

We are all born in the image of God. Hence, my understanding of this notion is that dignity means equality among humankind and that we are all alike and thus all people should be treated alike in dignity. Equal dignity entails reciprocity and mutuality and thus is closely related to justice, righteousness and morality.

As a Christian I have grown to believe that dignity is an imparted gift of God, hence it is our task to protect and preserve it. It is a great responsibility to assume!

This is why I have endeavored to explore what **dignity** means to me as a human being and as a Palestinian. I have been guided by the reasoning of certain philosophers. For, in their quest to grasp the truth, some have tried to deconstruct the notion of dignity by understanding its most important components. They have maintained that the three most important components of dignity are: “*the right to life*, as it entails the origin of human dignity; *the right to freedom*, which derives from a close relationship between dignity and autonomy; and the right to equality, which is based on the equal dignity of all people and is closely associated with justice. In their reasoning, consequently, dignity invokes equality as well as liberty. Equality then addresses systemic injustice and emphasizes the dignity of all people regardless of all differences, whilst freedom ensures that each individual can realize his or her potential by safeguarding self-determination under equal circumstances.” I can say that this is an explanation that goes in tandem with our efforts to explain the significance of human dignity and its relationship to our struggle for freedom and self-determination.

This year, Kairos, in partnership with the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) and Alternative Tourism Group (ATG) has set out an agenda that is very much in

sync with the evolution of our continuous action for justice as well as with the our communication with the world.

This conscientious and determined action has culminated in great success and highlighted the potential of the message to the world. Now, we need to gear our attention to all those who continue to negate our dignity.

By the end of this meeting, Kairos, with you all, will tune the course of action so that we can continue to build on the successes made during the past 5 years. Mainly, our discourse to the faithful and with the faithful will be refined and redefined and will be set toward those who continue to pretend that we do not exist, or who do not know, or who are unable to reconcile with themselves and see the mere essence of the human nature and dignity of the Palestinian. We will still need to preach to those who continue to deny us and remind them that they are also created like us in the image of God.

Allow me to welcome our honorable speakers who will be speaking tonight. But first, let me thank them for being the people they are. For, it is their work, steadfastness and commitment that have made their distinctive message and vocation prevail in the life of the church and the country and which continues to provide us with hope, courage and strength to go on.

My best wishes for a successful opening ceremony and meeting during the coming few days.

Opening Meditation

*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not driven to despair» (2 Corinthians 4:8)*

Rafiq Khoury

I was asked to start the day with a meditation. Meditation is to be in the presence of God in order to listen to His Word. Yet, this Word is not a neutral word to a neutral human being; it is not an abstract Word to an abstract human being, and not an imaginary word to an imaginary human being. It is rather a concrete Word to a concrete human being in his collective or personal circumstances. Let us leave personal circumstances aside and tackle the collective circumstances in our country and in the Middle East in general. When circumstances and the Word of God meet within us, we are then in a state of meditation. This dialogue between the Word of God, on the one hand, and the reality of our circumstances, on the other hand, is what opens up a new path or vision before us that leads to a new form of life. The Holy Spirit enriches this dialogue with its presence, because it is the Spirit which makes dialogue with the Word of God possible, rich and fruitful. Therefore we pray and say:

Holy Spirit,

*Inspire us, strengthen us, guide us, teach us, direct us, and lead us to the truth.
Holy Spirit, you who make things new,
give us a new heart that can appropriate the divine Word,
and transform it within us into life and spirit.*

The Word of God that this meeting chose as its title is the word of Saint Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians. These words are: «We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair» (2 Corinthians 4:8). The circumstances that this word links us with are those in our country and in the Middle East.

Let us first read the word of Saint Paul in its true context. The Second Letter was written to the Corinthians in an atmosphere of difficulties, crises and adversity that surrounded the apostolic mission of Saint Paul. There were difficulties from within (especially from inside the Christian community itself) and external difficulties. Saint Paul describes some of these difficulties, saying: «In affliction, in hardship, in distress, in beatings, in imprisonment, in riots, in labor, in watching, in fasting» (6:5). Saint Paul also enumerates the dangers he passed through and their source, saying: «Perils from my countrymen, perils from the Gentiles, perils among false brothers» (11:26). This explains the «blunt accent» and «strong fury» in the Letter, mixed with the «tone of love, reprehension, anger, and affection».

Amidst these difficulties, Saint Paul discovers his fragility, poverty, and weakness: «We have this treasure in clay vessels» (4:7) that can easily be broken. But he quickly corrects himself to assert that he is strong in the midst of hardships and that his strength comes from God. Therefore, he does not hesitate to utter the words taken as a title by our meeting: «We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair» (2 Corinthians 4:8).

Where does he get this strength from? First of all, from his very weakness, as he discovers that his weakness is his strength: «For when I am weak, then am I strong» (12:10), and «For my power is made perfect in weakness» (12:9). Here Paul sheds light on human weakness and fragility, underlining the evangelic paradox of weakness in strength, meaning human strength, and strength in weakness, where strength is divine strength. This strength does not come from muscles or from «chariots and horses» (Psalm 20:8), but comes from Christ dwelling in us. Saint Paul says he is «powerful in you» (13:3). Christ, who Saint Paul believes in, has been «crucified through weakness, yet he lives through the power of God» (13:4). He concludes, «For we also are weak in him, but we will live with him through the power of God towards you» (13:4). For in his death and resurrection, Christ is the foundation of our strength and invulnerability. He makes us undefeatable although we are besieged from all sides. We do not despair although we face calamities. These words indicate the struggle of a gladiator who finds himself at the edge of a precipice but does not surrender, nor despair or yield. Rather, he faces the battle with determination and strength.

At the end of the introduction to the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, the Arab Jesuit version of the New Testament states that the Second Letter to the

Corinthians provides guidelines and a solution to churches looking to regenerate themselves with new faces through whom they can be loyal to their mission (cf. p. 545). This leads us to the second part of our meditation, i.e. our current circumstances.

The circumstances in the Holy Land and the Middle East in which our people and our Christians are living are difficult ones. It is sufficient to look around at our country and countries in the Middle East to see that everyone, including the Christians, is in a situation where the walls seem to be closing in from all sides. They find themselves in a deadlock from which they do not know how to get out. What to do? The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians may guide us.

A glance at the Christians in the Holy Land and the Middle East reveals the fragility of these Christian communities. This fragility comes, before anything else, from within, as in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, a result of their division. It is said that difficulties emanating from out of the church strengthen the church, while difficulties emanating from within the church undermine and destroy it. At the end of his Letter, Saint Paul calls on the Christians of Corinth and the Middle East to «be of the same mind, live in peace» (13:11). As stated by the Catholic patriarchs of the Orient: «As Christians in the Orient we exist together or we do not exist.»

This fragility can be the result of external circumstances, mainly our small numbers. When we look at ourselves from a quantitative perspective, we perceive ourselves as few in the large sea of people we live among. Our small numbers may lead us to a minority mentality with all that entails of «deadly psychological and social after-effects « in which the minority is subjected to experiences of «regression, lack of self-confidence, lack of confidence in society, grievance, isolation, dissolution,» internal distress, and instability. We see fragility and weakness in our small numbers. Saint Paul calls on our Christian communities in the Holy Land and the Middle East to transform weakness into strength because we are strong when we are weak. This strength does not derive from external factors like strength in numbers, but from within, from the strength of Christ dwelling in us, who, with the power of his resurrection, transforms weakness into a spiritual power. And the spiritual power is what transforms the small numbers into salt, light and leaven. Our strength does not come from our numbers, but from our faith in Christ, who is our pivot which allows us to move in all directions «freely, confidently, joyfully, audaciously and enthusiastically» (The Christian Presence in the Middle East, 60). One example is the first Christian community to which Saint Paul writes, a small and modest minority, but distinguished by the vitality of the new man and his joy despite all internal and external pressures. This vitality stemmed from the depth of faith in Christ resurrected from the dead, who transformed weakness into strength.

One of the consequences of a minority mentality is the search for compensation that gives us a false feeling of our importance. This may take the form of extolling the past, adopting dazzling appearances to affirm our existence, like constructing huge buildings, impressive institutions, and attractive facades, with which we seek to compensate for our small numbers. In fact, our importance stems not from these external human factors, but from the vitality of our faith in He who conquered the

world. These false messianic doings never supported the Christian community. Rather, they simply distorted the image of this community and its mission.

This minority mentality leads us to avoid public life and to shirk our commitment to public life. It may ultimately lead us to migration, through which we abrogate ourselves and deny our communities the originality of our giving. We flee from our communities as if to say this «world» is not ours. Christians in the Holy Land fall into this danger. The Israeli occupation is still ongoing with no imminent end in sight and our communities are being eroded from within, not to mention the many difficulties in sustaining a livelihood. Amidst all of this, we may escape, detach ourselves, or migrate. Times such as these are not times for flight and closure on ourselves; these are times for commitment to our societies to seek a way out from the complex situation and impasses that we find ourselves in. Dangers surround us, but we are not crushed; we face dilemmas, but do not despair because our weakness is strength, and our small numbers are strength, and our model is Christ, who became poor for our sake so that through his poverty we might become rich (see 2 Corinthians 8:9).

The most serious danger Christian communities may face in the Holy Land and the Middle East under current circumstances is despair. The blows received by Christians and their peoples are unbearable. We do not blame these peoples, and the Christians among them, if they feel despair. Our communities living in the Holy Land and the Middle East face difficult and arduous circumstances. The pressures placed on these communities come from every side and make people prone to despair and fatalism, depriving them of the power or strength to face the grave challenges. Christians may be the most vulnerable to despair of these communities. Such experiences constitute surrender to the devil who crushes not only the body but also the soul. Amidst this state of hopelessness comes the voice of Saint Paul saying, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair.» We have seen how he remains strong while surrounded by affliction, distress, hardships, and challenges from every side. This strength comes from within; it is the faith in the power of Christ resurrected from the dead.

Despair is surrender to the forces of death and the weakness they engender. Surrender to despair is indeed walking to the grave. Despair is a bad omen; it paralyzes our actions, impedes our advancement, and makes us go around in circles unable to find a glimmer of light to help us out of the impasse. Despair is a bad omen as it leads to moral and spiritual suicide, or to flight, or to loathsome egocentric introspection without finding an exit from the deadening sense of hopelessness. Saint Paul penetrates this wall of despair and declares: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair.” Nothing can penetrate this wall except hope predicated on the experience of Christ resurrected from the dead, and experienced by the two Emmaus disciples who replaced disappointment with the power of hope. While despair paralyzes action by individuals and groups, hope liberates the faithful community and urges it towards creativity and innovation amidst the difficulties, impediments, calamities and challenges. Hope is an Easter message, and despair is the opposite of it. The present time is undoubtedly a time of hope par excellence, otherwise we would be clinically dead.

I would like to refer here to the document «A Moment of Truth: Kairos Palestine.» This document was issued by a group of Palestinian Christians who have been saying NO to despair despite innumerable reasons for despair. This is what pushes them to utter words of «faith, hope and love» in the face of a horizon that looks dark. I believe it is the duty of the active among our believers to stand by other believers in these difficult times, and to support and stimulate their hope as an incentive to confront the challenges in the spirit of Christ, who says to us: “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid” Mt 14:27). Thus, we can all act as messengers of hope for our communities. Despair is contagious. Hope is also contagious, moving from one person to another to engender a state of vitality that can be transformed into a creative power to face any situation, no matter how difficult. Saint Paul did not write his letters to Christian communities enjoying peace, stability, and calm. He wrote to Christian communities that were facing difficulties, distress, and calamities from everywhere. In the midst of all that, he continued to call them to the «work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope» (1 Thess 1:3). Palestinian communities in the Middle East have passed through many difficult stages in their history, maybe even more difficult than those witnessed today. Nevertheless, Christians have always stood on their feet, confronted the difficulties, and continued to move forward without surrender, struggling the struggle of the Spirit. As Christians today, we should echo this hope for ourselves and our communities. If despair prevails, we will remain in a state of death, although we are, in fact, invited to life in order to live and give life. We are invited to live with hope, to witness to hope, and to transmit it to all those around us, thereby enabling hope to lead us to action.

Despair is a bad omen that leads only to bad decisions. Despair is a state of death, and decisions resulting from despair are decisions of death. Despair may be another sword with which Evil strikes nations, suggesting to these nations that all doors are closed before them and the only way out is to surrender to the fate decreed for them by others. Hope, on the other hand, is a protest against this fate. The strongest of its justifications is the mighty power latent in individuals and nations, indeed in their conscience, that can open apertures for life in a thick wall that seems impenetrable. This power is not external to individuals and nations, but is latent in their innermost core. When this power is activated, it can work miracles. Our nations do not stand before a closed road, but before an aperture open to life. Despite all the calamities currently faced by Christians, there are opportunities in life that should be explored and that can open doors to hope. «For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us» (Rom 8:18). Hope is not a false bolster, but a real and powerful force that allows us to work, act and move to create change in history against violent and negative forces.

In this opening reflection, I would like to examine an aspect of these calamities, hardships and distress, namely their purifying power. While distress can constitute an experience of surrender and death, it can also provide an opportunity to purify us and our faith from the impurities we may be subjected to. Pains are fire and fire may burn, but it may also purify.

The first Christian communities lived «in much affliction» (1 Thess 1:6) of various types. In these conditions they received the letters of Paul revealing to them the meaning of distress, affliction and calamity. One of the meanings is the capability of pain to purify faith, as in the following examples:

«Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance» (James 1:2-3).

«Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life» (James 1:12).

«These things which God has done make you very happy. But now, for a short time, different kinds of troubles and difficulties may make you sad. The purpose of these troubles is to show certainly whether you really believe God. It is very, very important that you continue to believe in him. People put gold into a fire to make it completely clean. The fire burns everything that is not gold. So the fire shows certainly what is gold. But gold belongs only to this world, so it will come to an end. When you believe God, that is worth much more even than gold» (1 Peter 1: 6-7).

«We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint» (Rom 5: 3-5).

The terms used are “calamities” and “affliction.” We can see in these texts an extension of the Lord Christ’s words in the beatitudes on persecution.

As Jesus started with the word «blessed,» so did the letter of Saint James (1:12). What courage to call affliction «happiness» and «joy». How can affliction and calamity be happiness?

The texts link adversity to trial. Adversity puts us on trial. The accepted metaphor is fire, just as gold is passed through fire to be purified and to reveal the pure gold.

What does this mean for the Christians of the Arab Orient and their populations today?

For Christians, adversity purifies their faith, ridding it of impurities and tumors that may have attached themselves over time. Adversity places us before a choice between a false Christ who we reduce to fit our limitations and mentality, and the real Christ who appears in the Gospel and who we accept to challenge our limitations and mentality. Adversity tests our faith to transform it into something purified, profound and solid, a personal faith that can stand against all calamities and challenges.

For our people, adversity is an opportunity to revert to ourselves and explore the distortions in our social and religious culture that reduced us to this current state of affairs. Adversity purifies people and brings them back to their original state and to

the best within them. Adversity propels people to a moment of truth in which they review their history, attitudes and maxims to open up a brighter path towards the future. Adversity places us in a «crisis,» a difficult situation that urges us towards deeper understanding of the situation in which we live and the difficult choices that bring life.

«We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair.»

Thank you, Lord, for your Word of life.

Launch of Kairos Palestine Christmas Alert 2014

Martha Tonsern

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 5th anniversary of Kairos Palestine! During the last session of this wonderful evening I would like to introduce our Kairos Palestine Christmas Alert 2014.

More than two years ago we were brainstorming about how we could reach the local and international audience during the time of Advent the best way. As we all know – During the Christmas season the whole world is looking at Bethlehem, reading the story of the city from the bible, seeing the Church of Nativity on TV and looking at transfigured images of the city where Jesus was born.

To see the beautiful sights of Bethlehem is part of the Advent season, but at the same time it should become part of the Christmas time to see another reality on the ground as well: Our aim is that people from all over the world become more aware of a reality in Bethlehem, a reality which doesn't mean anything else than a city under occupation by all means.

That's why we've decided this year, for the third time, to prepare a Christmas Alert in the form of a four-week Advent guide booklet. First, to bring awareness about the situation in Bethlehem, and second, to encourage churches, parishes, lay-persons and clergy locally, regionally and all around the world to remember this season that marks the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ also in another way.

Since 2014 is the UN Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, in this Alert we highlight the deep impact of the Israeli occupation on all levels of life in Bethlehem, focussing on the human aspect. We have cooperated with the esteemed Palestinian Human Rights Organisations, Society of St. Yves, Hurryyat and Badil, who provided us with interviews as well as with facts and figures about the political situation. Thoughtful theological reflections were contributed by His Eminence Bishop William Shomali, Dr. Munther Isaac and Grace Zoughbi.

On the first Sunday in Advent we deal with the subject of imprisoned parents and the impact on spouses, especially on their children. The organisation Hurriyat interviewed the family members of the political prisoner Riyad Li'mour, who is in very bad condition health wise and deeply missed by his family, but still imprisoned after more than 13 years.

On the second Sunday in Advent we focus on refugees and the impact on their descendants. For this text Badil interviewed the Palestinian refugee Rif'a Hammad, who was forced to leave her home at the age of 15 during the Nakba in 1948. She has lived in one of the three Refugee Camps of Bethlehem, the Dheishe Camp, since then. We also hear the voice of her granddaughter May, who is now the third generation of refugees.

On the third Sunday in Advent we focus on the effect of Family Unification Laws on spouses. The catholic human rights organisation St. Yves brings up different stories of Palestinian families who are torn apart because of the inhumane laws the Israeli government is putting on them.

On the fourth Advent Sunday we wanted to give a voice to Palestinian women and men themselves and therefore asked Palestinian interview partners to respond to two questions: "What do you ask from your sisters and brothers worldwide to do?" and "What do you ask from your own people to do?"

With this third edition of the Christmas Alert we strongly feel again that with this publication we are able to fill a gap and managed to find a tool which builds a solid bridge between theological and political context. We were overwhelmed by the willingness of people from all around the world to assist in disseminating and translating the Alert. We are proud that the Christmas Alert is available in 12 languages this year: Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Catalan, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, English, Filipino, Finnish, French, German and Spanish. All of these translations were done voluntarily and are available on our website www.kairopalestine.ps.

On a personal note I would like to use the opportunity to thank all our partners, volunteers and colleagues from the bottom of my heart. This project would not have been possible without you.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to end my speech in the spirit of our 5th anniversary with the words of Pablo Neruda, a poet from Chile:

"You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring from coming."

In this sense: May Justice and Hope prevail.

BIBLICAL REFLECTION: THEOLOGY AND JUSTICE

Challenging the Empire: Theology of Justice in Palestine

Munther Isaac

The theme for our session is theology and justice. How can theology contribute to justice in Palestine – or any part of the world? Before I begin, just a short remark. Though we are talking about theology, we must remember that this is a political conflict. It is not a religious one. Yes, it has religious dimensions, and sadly this is increasing. We must, however, keep reiterating that at its core, this is a political conflict.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that we Christians have contributed to this conflict from its beginnings, often negatively. More than often, we have made things worse.

Theology matters!

My talk today is mainly drawn from my experience as a Palestinian Christian in speaking about the theology of the land and peacemaking in Palestine, especially in my role as the director of the Christ at the Checkpoint conferences and movement. [1] As I was thinking about this theme, theology and justice, I thought that a good way to tackle this issue is to ask: how did our theology contribute to injustice? In other words, before we talk about theology and justice, we must identify and deconstruct the theology of injustice.

Gustavo Gutiérrez wrote: “The denunciation of injustice implies the rejection of the use of Christianity to legitimize the established order.”[2]

“Christianity legitimizing the established order.” This I will call the “theology of the empire!” The language of “empires” is very common these days, [3] and I will try next to outline the theology of the empire as I have witnessed and experienced it firsthand. Of course, the “empire” here is not a particular country. It is institutional and structural injustice – the mentality of power and dominance.

(1) The Theology of the Empire is Prejudice

Theology and attitudes are related. Theology shapes attitudes and worldview, and the opposite is true as well. A theology that privileges a people group produces prejudice and even bigotry. And feelings of superiority produce a theology that reflects this. In a theology of the empire, Palestinians are viewed as an irrelevant after-thought. In most Western theologies, our place – if there is even a place for us – is secondary

to the interest of the empire.

And this has a long history. Let me explain.

Let us consider the infamous Zionist slogan: “A land without a people for a people without a land!”

I often wondered: did they know that the land had people?

Years before the birth of Zionism, Lord Shaftesbury (who was president of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews [now known as CMJJ]) said: “A country without a nation for a nation without a country.” Again, did he know that the country had a nation? I am sure he did, but you see, we were irrelevant. There was something more important. Quoting him again: “The Jews must be encouraged to return in yet greater numbers and become once more the husbandman of Judea and Galilee ... [They are] ... not only worthy of salvation but also vital to Christianity’s hope of salvation.” These are, of course, the roots of Christian Zionism. [4]

Lord Balfour, the one who made the infamous declaration, echoes the same mentality: “For in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country... The Four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism ... is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires or prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.”

In this mentality, the Palestinian Arabs were a “complete irrelevance.” “For the Zionist, Palestine was ‘empty,’ not literally, but in terms of people of equal worth to the incoming settlers” (Ben White). [5]

This, I believe, reflects a typical colonial – dare I say even Christian – mentality. The land had people, but we were irrelevant to the desires and plans of the empire. And as we read history, we realize that the Christians of the empire carried this mentality and supported the coming of the Jewish people to Palestine and the creation of the State of Israel. The land? It is “empty.” People can be moved.

You might wonder: why am I bringing in history? Didn’t things change? Well, you hope. Many Christians around the world continue to talk of the land as if it is empty. The Palestinians are missing in many if not most theology books that talk about the presence of the Jewish people in the land today, about God’s covenant with the Jewish people, or of Christians’ relationship to Jews or prophecy.

The same continues today! One example is sufficient at this stage. A Christianity Today article in 2012 debated: “Do Jews have a Divine right to Israel’s Land?” The debate was between two respected and influential evangelical leaders. [6]
This is 2012.

Divine right. Israel’s Land.

Can you imagine how I as a Palestinian felt when seeing the title of this article? What about the people of the land? This is a typical case of two American theologians, sitting in the comfort of their offices, discussing our land – as if it were empty.

(We pleaded in vain with the magazine to allow a Palestinian response!) [7]

(2) The Theology of the Empire Employs Fear

The danger is when this attitude of marginalizing becomes dehumanizing or even demonizing. Theology of the empire creates enemies and instills fear!

Eric Hoffer, in his book, *The True Believer*, said, “A movement can exist without a god, but never without a devil. For a movement to exist, there always has to be a devil that must be destroyed.” [8]

The empire understands this concept and capitalizes on it. Today, it is so easy to portray the Arabs and Islam as the enemy that we all need to fight and unite against. The world is divided into “good” vs. “evil.” This is why it suits many people in the West to characterize the conflict in Palestine as a religious one, where the good becomes the Judeo-Christian tradition (us), and the evil is Islam (them, the Palestinians). This in return justifies actions by Israel as war on terror, even fighting the war of God!

It is really ironic and sad: we say that we are saved by grace, but we carry ourselves in a way that says otherwise: we act as if we earned it! As if we are better than people of other faiths.

(3) The Theology of the Empire Expects, even Demands, Allegiance

I will talk here mainly about what has been called “Post-Holocaust Theology.” After the Holocaust, Christians, and rightly so, reevaluated their relationship and even theology regarding the Jewish people. Dual-covenant theology developed as a response to centuries of persecution of the Jewish people in the West which tragically culminated in the Holocaust.

Yet here is the thing: we now as Palestinian Christians must conform to this theology or else we are heretics. We must speak about the Jewish people in the same way European theologians speak, or else we are accused of being anti-Semites! This, again, reflects a mentality of superiority, a colonial mentality.

Let me give you an example: almost every time I speak on the land – a shared land theology, talking about the urgency of the matter for us Palestinians – I am almost always asked: do you believe in replacement theology?

Replacement theology?

Why am I asked this? You see, I am expected to arrange my thinking in a way that fits the paradigm of Western theology, a theology that came to solve a Western problem

(anti-Semitism), with the purpose of dealing with the inner guilt – all at my expense. I almost do not answer this question anymore. Stop defining me. Stop labeling me. Just listen to what I say.

The reference point of many theologies today is their relationship to the Jewish people. Do we believe that the Israel of today is a fulfillment of prophecy? The eternal covenant with God? The land? Do we endorse a two covenant theology? Do we reject replacement theology?

We are somehow expected to fit within their paradigm and answer their questions in order to have the right to protest our 66 years of tragedy!

Palestinian theologian Fr. Paul Tarazi writes:

“What puzzles us Middle Eastern Christians is that Western Christians, who say at least that they consider Western Christendom largely responsible for the Nazi holocaust and go on backing – very often unconditionally – the actual state of Israel, still want to convince us that they are not imposing any theology on us and that we are free to have our standpoint concerning biblical interpretation. How can they say this when they are repenting on our ground over a deed which happened on theirs – all this based on a premise we reject? This is a rare combination of both theological and political imperialism.” [9]

(4) The Theology of the Empire Silences the Prophetic

Today, there are strong attempts to silence Palestinian Christians. The most famous example is when in 2012, then Israeli ambassador to the USA, Michael Oren, tried to cancel the airing of a 15 minute segment that aired on CBS as part of the weekly show “60 minutes.” Yet this is not an isolated case. It is the norm that when we are invited to talk or lecture abroad as Palestinians that there are objections to those who invited us. I once faced this, and when the organizers of the event tried to explain to me that I should expect strong objections to my presence, I asked: “Why? Do they even know me?!” The response was: “It is because you are a Palestinian.”

In addition, when we speak about our story, whether in conferences or in writing, we are attacked, bullied, even dehumanized.

Why?

Why are we being silenced?!

I would like here to touch on a sensitive issue: Christian-Jewish dialogue. Those doing it are no doubt sincere and want to build bridges (I’ve done it). But more and more we are seeing that it is used to silence Christians who simply want to call for the rights of Palestinians, let alone criticize the occupation of Palestinian land. [10] Can there be a credible Christian-Jewish dialogue if the Palestinian issue is not

addressed? This question has taken on an extra dimension in the last few years with Israel insisting that the world recognizes it as a Jewish state.

In addition, I fear that interreligious dialogue is used to divide: Jews and Christians against Islam. This is not the kind of interreligious dialogue we want.

Interreligious dialogue must continue. But it must be bold. It must be a space where people of faith are willing and ready to be challenged. The old paradigms are simply no longer adequate.

(5) The Theology of the Empire is Religious, Yet Paradoxically Indifferent to Suffering
I believe that, in theory, an apathetic Christian is a contradiction in terms. Yet in reality, we Christians have become too religious, yet paradoxically indifferent to the suffering of many people worldwide.

Apathetic Christians are concerned mainly with individualistic piety. They come to Bethlehem to do a religious thing. And as they pass the checkpoint and refugee camps to go to the Nativity Church, I often wonder: Do they care about the occupation? The wall? Or are they mainly concerned with performing their religious duty?

For me, this is a deficient understanding of spirituality. It is of course based on theology that can be described as a “vertical-only” theology. Private piety is elevated above social concern! Me and God. Period. We watch them every day in Bethlehem. Again, we are an after-thought in their thinking.

This is why it is important to reiterate Kairos Palestine’s call to “Come and See”:

In order to understand our reality, we say to the Churches: Come and see. We will fulfill our role to make known to you the truth of our reality, receiving you as pilgrims coming to us to pray, carrying a message of peace, love and reconciliation. You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike (KP 6.2).

Theology and Justice:

A new religiosity is needed. We need a paradigm shift in our theological thinking. We need new terminologies, new starting points, new reference points. We need a theology that is free from the categories of the empire. I have nothing to prove. My main concern is the suffering of my people, and how to make sense of it – not to fit within the paradigms of Western theologies.

We need today a theology that challenges the empire.

(1) Land-rooted Theology

This theology must be rooted in the experience and heritage of the Palestinian people. All theology is contextual, after all. No one writes theology in a vacuum.

For us as Palestinian Christians, we carry and continue a long heritage as people of the land. This land, as Mitri Raheb reminded us, has witnessed one empire after another, and it was the meek – the people of the land – who inherited the land in the end! It is in this tradition of challenging empires, a tradition that goes back to biblical days, that we continue today.

This is the land of our fathers. The land of the oldest Christian presence and witness. Witness is very important and foundational for our theology. Witness to the crucified and risen Christ, and to the different kingdom he established here. We are also witnesses to our neighbors.

Today: Can we form a theology that puts Christ at the checkpoint? Our theology starts with Christ at the checkpoint: Christ as the center of our faith, and checkpoint as the symbol of our reality. This is where our theology begins. Kairos began, and rightly so, with the context (KP 1). If we are to produce a theology that serves the Palestinian church, we must bring theology in conversation with our reality. Kairos' affirmations, or words of faith, hope, and love, are all read and interpreted in this context:

We repeat and proclaim that our Christian word in the midst of all this, in the midst of our catastrophe, is a word of faith, hope and love (KP 1.5).

(2) Christ as the Reference Point

The theology of justice has Jesus as its reference point. Jesus is the true test of orthodoxy! And he is the true test of orthopraxy. Here in Bethlehem, Emmanuel – God with us – is the cornerstone on which we build.

Dare I say today that even Jesus must be liberated from the paradigms of the empire?! The Jesus of the empire wants to make the people of the empire richer and happier – at the expense of others! Jesus would not be silent over injustice. Jesus cannot teach apathy for the sake of being politically right. And no, his main concern is not individual happiness or fulfillment.

Jesus was an occupied Jew who embodied the prophetic and humbly and gently challenged the empire and introduced a new kingdom that embodies and elevates the realities of justice over power, equality over superior conceptions, humility over pride, peace over violence, and love over bigotry. [11]

Jesus' theology – his kingdom theology – is solidarity with the marginalized! Who were his friends? Whom did he honor? Where did he mostly preach (hint: not in Jerusalem)?

We need a theology today that emphasizes and even begins with the great declaration that in Jesus there is no Jew or Gentile, free or slave, male or female (Gal. 3:26-29).

(3) Theology of Truth

Today, many confuse love with compromise! Peacemaking today compromises the truth. There are today those I call diplomatic Christians! Toothless Christians. Christians who do not want to offend anybody. (Is this even possible in our context?!) We have a deficiency in our understanding of peacemaking. Is it about being polite? I do not think so. Tapping both sides on the shoulder? This is a theology that seeks to remain in the comfort zone. We'd rather remain comfortable than get into places that force us to take difficult decisions. This is where truth is compromised!

Peacemakers stand for the truth. As such, they sometimes take sides. Peacemakers must challenge the empire first.

What is happening in Palestine today is not a conflict – it is oppression! Let us call things by their names.

Again, we must listen to Kairos Palestine. When addressing the issue of occupying Palestinian land, there was no diplomacy:

We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation (KP 2.5).

(4) An Alternative to the Empire

Jesus challenged the empire. But he did so by offering an alternative way. His “kingdom” way. It sounds strange to counter the empire with a kingdom – but we all know what Jesus meant with the kingdom of God theme: a criticism of the empire and an alternative to it. Life on earth... differently!

Probably the best place where we find this is the sermon on the mount, and in particular in the Beatitudes. (This sermon rescued my faith. It is a favorite!)

I suggest that we read the Beatitudes as Jesus' way of challenging the empire: Consider, for example, the qualities Jesus introduces for the people of the kingdom and how radically these qualities are different from those of the empire:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (or justice), for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3-10 ESV).

The poor in spirit – not the proud.

Those who mourn – not those who live in prosperity.

The meek – not the powerful; not empire builders.

Those who hunger and thirst for justice – not for money, comfort, power, or fame.

The merciful – not the oppressors.

The pure in heart – not those who seek a “pure” society.

The peacemakers – not the indifferent.

Those persecuted for justice’s sake – not the ones who stay in their comfort zone and do not speak out.

Jesus’ way, his kingdom way, is radically different than that of the empire. It is not enough to criticize the empire. The best way to challenge the empire is to offer an alternative.

(5) A Theology of Mourning and Hope

The situation in Palestine today looks hopeless. Things went backward five years after Kairos Palestine was launched. Is there hope? Paul’s words, the conference theme, come to mind here:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 ESV).

Today we mourn the situation. We mourn the failure of the political leaders. We mourn the silence of the church. We mourn the theology of the empire.

We mourn... but in hope.

Here, in the land of the resurrection, the land that gave the world the gift of hope, we must continue to hope.

Is our Christian hope naïve? Wishful thinking?

Jesus is Risen!

Is this escapism? Quite the opposite. Our hope is our call to action. Hope is active by nature. Today, faced with the challenges in front of us, we must produce a theology of hope that is active and not satisfied with the current reality. It is because we have hope that we work tirelessly to change our reality.

Our Christian hope is our call to action ...

[1] See www.christatthecheckpoint.com

[2] Gustavo Gutiérrez: *Theology of Liberation*.

[3] See Mitri Raheb: Faith in the Face of the Empire. I have been influenced by Rev. Mitri, with whom I am privileged to serve in the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. See also Challenging the Empire, and Jewish liberation theologian, Marc Ellis: The Future of the Prophetic.

[4] For more, see Stephen Sizer: Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon? And Robert Smith: More Desired than our own Salvation.

[5] Ben White: Israel Apartheid.

[6] Christianity Today: June 20, 2012. Do Jews Have a Divine Right to Israel's Land? By David Brickner and John Piper.

[7] Christianity Today is representative of the evangelical movement in USA. Yet of course there are some evangelical leaders who speak for the rights of Palestinian and challenge the theology of Christian Zionism which is very common evangelicals. See for example Gary Burge: Jesus and the Land, and Whose Land? Whose Promise?

[8] Eric Hoffer: The True Believer.

[9] «Covenant, land and city: finding God's will in Palestine,» The Reformed Journal 29 (1979) 10-16.

[10] See Marc Ellis: Unholy Alliance.

[11] See my presentation: Who in my Neighbor? At the third Christ at the Checkpoint conference in 2014.

We Sow Hope: for an apocalyptic and anti-capitalist solidarity with Palestine

Nancy Cardoso

From Latin America I come back to Palestine and I dare to share theology. The first theology is life. I approach the lives of young Latin Americans threatened, persecuted and murdered in Mexico and Brazil ... and I find myself here before Palestinian youths threatened, persecuted and killed. Palestine! Mexico! Brasil!

**

Our losses:
Between two and eight martyrs each day.
And ten wounded.
And twenty homes.
And fifty olive trees...
Added to this the structural flaw that
Will arrive at the poem,
The play, and the unfinished canvas.¹

**

¹ Mahmoud Darwish, A State of Siege, <http://www.arabworldbooks.com/Literature/poetry4.html>

The model of Zionist domination today is part of the capitalist project of domination and war. Our solidarity with Palestine is also expressed in the anti-capitalist and anti-racist struggle and especially the religious character of capitalism and its agencies. In Brazil, in Sao Paulo in the month of July 2014, as the world watched in horror more Israeli destructive military intervention in Gaza, the Universal Church inaugurated the Temple of Solomon - a pretentious replica of the temple according to the biblical descriptions. Following is the news:

A vast replica of Solomon's Temple opened this week in São Paulo, with the capacity to seat 10,000 followers of the evangelical Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

The temple, which engulfs an entire city block and cost about £176 million to build, has polarised opinion, particularly among the Jewish community from which it borrows much of its most eye-catching symbolism.

The temple was built using stone from Israel and contains a number of conspicuous menorahs and an altar imitating the Ark of the Covenant.

Bishop Edir Macedo, who founded the Universal Church 35 years ago and masterminded the new temple, has a flowing beard and wears a yarmulke. A helicopter landing pad on the 11-storey complex will allow Mr. Macedo to drop in for sermons.

Alongside the temple is a garden of olive trees similar to the garden of Gethsemane, and the flag of Israel flies nearby, next to those of the Universal Church, Brazil and the United States, among dozens of other countries.

The Brazilian sociologist Ricardo Bitun told Folha de São Paulo that the Judaica was part of a «Jewish tendency» shown by the Universal Church, which uses symbols and rituals from ancient religions to confer authority and credibility.²

Nearby, in the same city on November 29, 2013, the poor homeless are organized in a taking of land and decide to name the camp Vila Nova Palestine:

In the extreme south of São Paulo, the most populous capital of the country, is the largest occupation of Homeless Workers Movement (MTST). Just as we are following the Palestinian people resistance, approximately 8000 people registered in New Palestine Vila camp are fighting for decent housing from the 29th of November 2013. The expectation of the residents is that, with the approval of the new Master Plan city, your dreams come true. Looking for something better than the precarious wooden shacks, canvas, clay and bamboo, when not junk artifacts, up to 6m².³

The struggle to free Palestine and against the Zionist apartheid model are not reasons outside of us, are not isolated news across the world, but are part of the complex

2 Bertodano, Isabel, It's Solomon's Temple, complete with helipad, The Jewish Chronicle Online, August 2014, in: <http://www.thejc.com/news/world-news/121002/its-solomons-temple-complete-helipad> (access 10/10/2014)

3 SÁ, Eduardo, Vila Nova Palestina: o maior acampamento paulista, FORUM, julho 2014, <http://www.revistaforum.com.br/blog/2014/07/vila-nova-palestina-o-maior-acampamento-paulista/> (access in 10/10/2014)

violent and unequal reality we live in Brazil and the complex class struggle that requires an internationalist struggle: globalize the struggle! globalize hope!

**

This land absorbs the skins of martyrs.
This land promises wheat and stars.

Worship it!

We are its salt and its water.
We are its wound, but a wound that fights.
Sister, there are tears in my throat
and there is fire in my eyes:
I am free.⁴

**

We identify with the Palestinian struggle from the Latin American struggle for land.⁵ Land as a place to live, a place of culture and memory. And from the land that moans with the shed of blood of sisters and brothers, and the suffering of the land slaughtered by predatory capitalism, we listen to the outcry of Kairos Palestine. We acknowledge that the politics of occupation of the State of Israel the last 60 years and the daily invasion of the Palestinian territory in the violent advances of the illegal settlements has generated thousands of deaths, thousands of thousands of exiled, thousands of prisoners. Those who organize and fight have experienced criminalization and the exasperation of the means of resistance and creation of alternatives.

**

A woman told the cloud: cover my beloved
For my clothing is drenched with his blood.

**

The collective effort of the Latin American peoples in recent years is huge and full of hopes and failures in a framework of a class struggle that eats our most cherished promises. We are defeated by a Latin American elite that updates and defends the interests of capitalism, delaying urgent revolutions to ensure land, housing, work, freedom and dignity for the poor majorities. With hands full of hopes and failures we come to Palestine. It is a difficult time, knowing how to listen to history and find dignity and its sister justice.

It's time for prophecy! And it's NOT time for prophecy. In time of crises and violence, prophecy can be confused, confiscated or reduced with reports, complaints, statistics. Description and explanation are no longer enough. To denounce and to be indignant are no longer sufficient ... not that they are not accurate, scientific and verifiable. They are... but it's the reality that insists on being too violent, too irrational, completely out of political traditional forms. Barbarism and absurdity out of control. Such violence disrupts the proper space of religion and theology. Between understanding and acting responsibly, there is a distance that leaves the words flying over our heads, repeating and losing strength.

⁴ Mahmoud Darwish, op.cit.

⁵ Kairos Palestine Brasil, Brazilian response to Kairos Palestine, in: <http://kairosbrasil.com/img/KairosBrasilEN.pdf>

There is this sense of urgency... is not just what I know, what's known ... but that which is hidden, which does not let itself be seen..., going beyond explanation and a bunch of data we find the reality imposing itself with unshakable powers, almost indestructible... we need to be more than prophets who denounce evil, error and violence. For many there is no way out and what is asked of us is a dose of realism, political pragmatism and common sense. But who got tired first? We did! Palestinian people and poor people around the world still fighting for their dignity... struggling against all hope. The poor and oppressed peoples: visionaries. We need to be visionaries, seers ... as an ancient possibility of understanding prophecy. We need apo-kalypto. In the precious words of Mahmoud Darwish:

**
we do what prisoners do
we do what the jobless do
we sow hope
**

There seems no way out! An empire succeeds another empire. An army another army. War and another. Taxes and slavery. Debt and extortion. It's the end of the world. Horror is everywhere and wants to be totality. The prophecy would say: it's the end! Objective. Concrete. No way out ... maybe future consequences. But the apocalyptic proposes a dream! A vision.

**
If you are not rain, my love be tree sated with fertility, be tree
If you are not tree, my love
Be stone
Saturated with humidity, be stone
If you are not stone, my love
Be moon⁶
**

Nothing to do with apocalyptic visions of Christian Zionists! Christian Zionists invariably have a pessimistic view of the future, convinced that there will be an apocalyptic war of Armageddon in the imminent future...and only they will be saved. They are deeply skeptical of the possibility of a lasting peace between Jews and Arabs and therefore oppose the peace process. Indeed, to advocate an Israeli compromise of "land for peace" with the Palestinians is seen as a rejection of God's promises to Israel and therefore support for her enemies. Zionists dream with the past. We dream awake with the future. Visionaries.

Let's try a quick exercise! Book of Daniel, chapter 2:⁷

⁶ Mahmoud Darwish, op.cit.

⁷ My complete exegese and study of this text can be found at: Cardoso Pereira, Nancy, Aprender da pedra: mineração, trabalho e revolta na literatura bíblica, Revista Caminhos, Universidade Católica de Goiás, in: seer.ucg.br/index.php/caminhos/article/viewFile/1200/846

31 “You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. 32 The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

This is an image of great splendor and terrifying appearance. Daniel takes a picture of the huge statue composed of four metals: head of gold; chest and arms of silver; belly and back of bronze; legs of iron. And the feet: part of iron, part of clay.

This statue, which was immense, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible (v. 31).

The word statue here has led commentators to identify the kingdoms represented by each metal in chronological order: Assyria. Babylon. Persia. Greece. Four metals. Five materials: the everlasting imperialism. But it is also the historical process of metal’s assignment of value as a mechanism of expropriation of nature and accumulation of resources that creates a continuum of power.

Pure historical materialism! In the text we should look at the forms of technological resolution presented as an idol to unveil – apocalypse! – the empire named but the process of domination remains in its organic form of the metal value. Imperialism. The use of metals / minerals in the texts can suggest a simple reference to values, as a representation of externality. But the apocalyptic language deals with the fantastic materiality and so we must take such metals / minerals not as external to the power, but ask about the objective and subjective conditions of these materials / metals in the metabolism of empires.

The statue as final and finished vision implies the unveiling of the economy of metals as a representation of the power of the empire as a process of domination. The metals that make the statue create a continuum in the form of power. The eco-geographical control, the control of the forms of work and technology create the objective conditions for the empires and its policies of domination.

But the apocalyptic text interrupts the claim to totality and invincibility of the Image. Verses 34 and 35 conclude the description of the dream:

You contemplated (the statue) when a stone was cut out without the intervention of any hand, came knocking on his feet that were of iron and clay, and crunched them.

Then the iron, bronze, silver, gold and clay are reduced to crumbs, blown away without leaving a trace, while the stone that had hit the statue became a high mountain, occupying the entire region. A stone interrupted the invincible continuum.

The immediate stone, the stone not cut by human hand can be understood as a reaction of the periphery and excluded ones, dominated by the power of metal. The stone hits the set, the entire political, economic and aesthetic model.

There are several possibilities of interpretation of this «stone»: stone would be a metaphor for a personal Messiah or represent the law of God, the Torah. BUT... considering the book of Daniel - probably the oldest work of Jewish apocalyptic - as a literary *piece de resistance*, written during the struggle of the Maccabees against the Hellenic occupation in the II century BCE, we could read the struggle of the stone against metal, the periphery against empire.

“Stone” as grassroots resistance, the ability to confront power. The stone is a mineral trace. The stones speak, the very stones cry out.

**
My love
Be stone
Saturated with humidity, be stone
**

Give me stones. Let me see what the young Palestinians see when they are throwing stones. It is and it is not what they see. They throw stones. They play stones. They fling stones. They sow hope.

I need their views and their words on visions for moving inside my religious tradition any stale complacency, fatalism and acceptance of powers of death. More than solidarity it is compassion, an understanding about the very place of Palestine in the international scenario and why it is so important to deepen our struggle here:

When the Palestinian people demand their right to return home, they not only challenge U.S. control over the entire region. They raise an issue that shakes the very foundations of monopoly capitalist power: the fundamental right of a dispossessed people to take back what was stolen from them. This is the right the people of Zimbabwe and South Africa are also fighting for. It is the right of Native and Black and Mexicano people in this country, of workers whose homes and jobs have been stolen by the banks!⁸

⁸ Cecil, Bill, Palestine and the global class struggle, WWP National Conference, 2009, in: http://www.workers.org/2009/world/bc_1203/ (access 9/9/2014)

Slavoj Žižek in his book⁹ identifies the four horsemen of the apocalypse: the ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances in the system itself (problems with intellectual property, the coming struggle for raw materials, food and water) and the explosive growth of divisions and social exclusion. The defense of “Free Palestine” needs to be made in the articulation of global struggles, beyond the goodwill of churches; it is necessary to break with the religion of capitalism and confront imperialism in all its faces. The cause of Palestine is the cause of the workers and oppressed everywhere.

It is a time of hopelessness or disillusionment that requires us to go the other way of illusion, to stop deceiving, stop waiting ... expressing that we no longer believe that workers and oppressed people can have their demands satisfied by the paths set in a particular order already given.¹⁰ The Palestinian demands that we think beyond the order is a dramatic mark on the world (dis)order and organization schemes against and beyond capitalism and its global religion.

We need a theological reflection and spirituality that opens a shortcut of not giving up the history. Abandoning all the triumphalism, cultivating theory and practice of liberation that confront the imperial powers’ continuum and the exercise of outstanding marks (wo)manship. Give me rocks to:

1. denounce historical and current relations of hegemonic Christianity with capitalism;
2. denounce Christianity trapped by the interests of global elites in exchange for favors that support the accumulation and concentration of wealth, which legitimize the systematic forms of exploitation of human labor and nature;
3. disown and denounce all worship of capital, consumption and all religion throughout Western fundamentalism that lurks and feeds the theological and Christian community spaces;
4. disclaim any and all use of the Christian faith and the Bible as justification for war, occupation and for the destruction of other religions and ways of life;
5. affirm ourselves as one religion among others, a people of faith among others to ***fight for justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God*** (Micah 6.8).

We in Brazil, living daily the contradiction and simultaneity of the “Temple of Solomon” and the “Nova Palestina” homeless struggle... we are learning how and why the project of Zionism it is not just a problem for Palestine. That is why I am here: give me stones! give me hope!

**

we do what prisoners do
we do what the jobless do
we sow hope.

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⁹ Žizek, S., Vivendo no fim dos tempos, Boitempo Editorial, in: <https://boitempoeditorial.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/vivendo-no-fim-dos-tempos-de-slavoj-zizek-introduc3a7c3a3o.pdf> (access 9/9/2014)

¹⁰ Iasi, Mauro, A desilusão: a hera na lapela, in: <http://blogdaboitempo.com.br/2015/02/27/a-desilusao-a-hera-na-lapela/> (access in 28/2/2015)

KAIROS AND CREATIVE RESISTANCE

Popular Resistance in Palestine

Mazin Qumsiyeh

3 December 2014 -- activists blocked the Jerusalem-Jericho road for settler traffic. Some four years earlier, on Thursday 6 May 2010, we sat in front of the massive bulldozer carving up the land of the small village of Al-Wallaja. We were an eclectic group of about 50 individuals: Al-Walaja residents, other Palestinians, internationals including Israelis, young, old, males, females, Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Peacefully we tried to explain to soldiers who were ominously gathering around us that we were there at the invitation of the land owners, that the colonial activity of building a wall on the people's land is illegal per international law. The soldiers acted with force to drag us away and arrest four: me, a Canadian young man and two brothers from Al-Walaja. They particularly abused the two brothers, using pepper spray and beatings. Three others were injured and one was hospitalized. These stories are ones of thousands of popular resistance in Palestine.

Learning the local context of popular resistance

As we reflect briefly on those it is important to reflect that 2000 years ago Jesus participated in a civil disobedience act that involved turning tables of money changers and traders in Jerusalem. We Palestinians thus have a long history of precisely this kind of action. The message of Jesus is loud and clear in loving our enemies, working diligently and non-violently to defend the weak, and acting in moral and ethical ways that are pleasing to God without concern for negative repercussion. That model is highly respected by his followers and those include Palestinian Christians and Muslims.

Before we understand the most recent episode of resistance in Palestine, we need to understand that Palestine is part of the Fertile Crescent. In this area of Western Asia, humans went from hunter-gatherers to agricultural communities. One of the oldest continuously inhabited towns on earth is Jericho with a 12-15,000 year history. This transition that included domestication of plants (barley, wheat, lentils, chickpeas) and animals (like goats and donkeys) allowed for civilization to flourish. This included evolution of alphabets (the Latin alphabet originated from our Canaanitic ancestors) but also evolution of laws and religions. Palestine was thus multireligious and rich in cultural and linguistic traditions for over 12,000 years of civilization.

All attempts to transform it to a monolithic system were rejected by the native people and failed. Resistance to repression is as natural as breathing. The latest attempt to transform it (to a Jewish state this time) was also rejected and these rejections started very early in our history. In 1886, villagers of Al-Khdaira and Malbas protested against the expansion of the settlement of Petah Tikva, causing the government to restrict settlement of those who entered the country as tourists and overstayed their

three-month entry visa. (Neville J. Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976, pp. 35–7.) Verbal protests in 1890 were followed by a petition from Muslim and Christian notables in Jerusalem on 24 June 1891 to the Grand Vizier to prevent foreign Jews from purchasing Palestinian lands. (Abdel Wahhab Al-Kayyali, *Tarikh Falastin Al-Hadith* [Modern History of Palestine], Beirut: Almu'assasa Al-Arabiyya Liddirasat Wa Alnashr, 1990, pp. 66–7.)

It is thus not surprising that here in the 1880s, we find the first demonstrations, petitions, and other forms of civil resistance. The two segments of society that were most involved in this resistance were the peasants (fellahin) and the intellectual elite who were able to read and understand the Zionist goals of transforming Palestine to a Jewish state. In the latter group we find Palestinian representatives in the Ottoman parliament such as Ruhi Al-Khalidi and Hafez Abdel-Hadi. The movement also had desires of independence based on pan-Arab nationalism (not a local form of nationalism). This movement actually succeeded in convincing the Ottoman Sultan to putting a halt to negative practices on at least two occasions around the turn of the century.

For the first 40 years around the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries, resistance was exclusively by civil and popular means and was led by groups with such names as “Christian-Muslim Association.” Armed resistance entered the picture in a very sporadic, small and unorganized way in the 1920s. The struggle at the popular level intensified in 1908. In December 1908, villagers of Kafr Kama (near Tiberias) tried to reclaim land taken by the Jewish Colonization Association. New newspapers like Al-Karmal and Filastine became vanguards of nationalist and anti-Zionist expression. A small uprising occurred in 1911 that set a pattern of uprisings separated by periods of relative calm for decades to come. The intervening periods between these uprisings usually spanned 8-15 years or more depending on geopolitical circumstances. There were thus distinct uprisings in 1911, 1920, 1929, 1936, 1956, 1972, 1987, 2000 [and 2010].

It was the failure of the Zionist movement to get further support from Ottoman rulers that caused them to turn to European powers. The Zionist movement looked in particular to two major powers: Britain and France. Building a lobby and exercising it took over 13 years to achieve the French Jules Declaration and the British Balfour Declaration in 1917. Palestinians learned of these declarations in the middle of WWI, a war that reshaped Western Asia as it did other parts of the world. The resistance to the British occupation and its attempts to develop a «Jewish national home» in Palestine accelerated after the end of WWI.

The British brutal and massive repression in the 1920s forced some of the locals to take up armed resistance. This armed resistance was small and insignificant and happened after 4 decades of purely non-violent resistance. But the civil popular resistance continued and actually accelerated. On March 11, 1920 many peaceful demonstrations were held in all major Palestinian cities concomitant with the foundation of the underground Haganna forces (forerunners of the Israeli army). The uprising of 1920-1921 was the first obvious mass movement for liberation

under an increasingly Zionized British administration of Palestine. The resistance only intensified as Britain decided to appoint the openly Zionist, Herbert Samuel, as first high commissioner of occupied Palestine in June 1920. As the nonviolent demonstrations were met with violence, the situation deteriorated. An uprising in 1929, known as Hibbet Al-Buraq involved both armed and popular tactics of resistance to the provocations and attempted takeover of Waqf land including the Western wall. It left in its wake 116 Arabs and 133 Jews dead and over 1000 were brought to trial.

The First Arab Women's Congress of Palestine gathered about 200 women and was held on 26 October 1929 in Jerusalem. The demands were the demands of the Palestinian people: against the Balfour Declaration, against the establishment of Jewish colonies, and for self-determination. They elected a 14 member Executive Committee headed by Matiel E. T. Mogannam. Mogannam later wrote a book titled 'The Arab Women and the Palestinian Problem' which detailed the activities of the movement.

Forms of nonviolent resistance escalated in the uprising of 1936-1939 and included demonstrations, boycotts, tax revolts, and other forms of civil disobedience. The British authorities responded to the growing civil resistance by declaring a state of emergency with general curfews and drastic measures against any disturbances. Villages and towns were fined for refusing to pay taxes. Personal properties were confiscated and homes were demolished. Hundreds of strike organizers were imprisoned. The worst of these measures for many Palestinians was the collective punishment by demolishing hundreds of homes in towns like Nablus, Bethlehem, Hebron, Lod, Safad, Al-Majdal, and Qalqilia. On the morning of 18 June 1936 the authorities demolished large sections of the old city of Jaffa leaving 6,000 homeless.

Lessons can be learned from this period. The 1936 uprising was highly successful where popular resistance with some limited armed resistance achieved a remarkable success in the first 8 months. This included the longest strike in Palestinian and perhaps world history. The uprising was weakened by a number of factors: 1) the massive oppression including destruction of large areas of some Palestinian towns like Jaffa by the occupation authorities (as form of collective punishment), 2) the collaborationist Arab regimes who pushed the Palestinians to «trust» the British authorities, 3) the Palestinian political leadership (most self-appointed) who first stood against the uprising, then claimed its leadership, then traded on its expense.

But the struggle continued and when Palestine was fragmented with the Nakba of 1948, 534 villages and towns were depopulated (creating the largest post WWII refugee population). But even here, Palestinians resisted and nearly 3000 villagers were killed trying to return to their homes and lands (some 50,000 succeeded). The Naksa of 1967 was an aggressive war that violated international conventions and lines of cease fire and left Israel controlling the Sinai, Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan. The war changed the geopolitical landscape in significant ways. The defeat of Arab forces in 1967 and the success of Fatah and other factions in Al-Karameh battle in 1968 changed the landscape; Fatah and other factions entered the PLO in 1969.

That PLO had major guerilla groups but also significant popular resistance sections such as the General Union of Palestinian Women and General Union of Palestinian Students. The Palestinians under the umbrella of the PLO soon forced a supine reluctant world not only to recognize their existence but to recognize that they had a national liberation struggle with political goals that are to be respected and are based on international law.

Inside of Palestine, the resistance also continued. Part of the problem for Israel is that unlike 1948, there was no mass exodus (ethnic cleansing could not be repeated) and so Israel was left as an occupation force over millions of Palestinians. The Palestinian cause received a significant boost by the Israeli oppression, by the connections between Palestinians throughout historic Palestine, and by the strengthening of Palestinian leadership after the dramatic failure of the Arab regimes. Self reliance developed slowly and made its most significant impact in proliferation of Palestinian institutions in the 1970s (including Palestinian universities). The intellectuals joined hands with the rest of society to develop various forms of popular resistance.

Resistance inside the Green line and in the areas occupied in 1967 took a few years to develop in strong and solidified directions after the lifting of the military rule on the former areas in 1966 and after the recovery from the 1967 war in the latter areas. A small uprising in Gaza in the early 1970s was put down brutally by Israeli forces led by the «bulldozer,» Ariel Sharon.

The increased mobilization among Palestinians inside the Green line took a dramatic and bold step forward in 1975-1976. A meeting was held in Nazareth on 6 March 1976 that included 48 heads of municipalities and local village councils and called for a day of protests and strikes on 30 March 1976 should Israel go ahead with land confiscation policies. When it appeared the strike day was a go, many areas outside of the Galilee decided to join, including in the West Bank. This day has become known as «Land Day» throughout Palestine to this day. The events actually started on 29 March with a demonstration against the Israeli army provocative mobilizations in the village of Deir Hanna. Later that evening, the village of Araba Al-Batoof demonstrated in solidarity and a young man, Khair Muhammad Yassin, was killed by Israeli soldiers, the first Martyr of the 1976 Land Day. More martyrs fell over the next 24 hours. The events were well organized and participation was high. The Israeli authorities reacted violently, resulting in many injured, six nonviolent protesters murdered, and hundreds arrested. The events coincided with a secret Koenig Memorandum that laid out plans for further discrimination and ethnic cleansing to 'make the Galilee more Jewish.' The Israeli government condemned the leaked memo, but no government official repudiated its racist content.

Much has been written about the brilliance and success of the 1987 uprising (also called Intifadat Al-Hijara, the Uprising of the Stones). Massive Israeli violence was met with demonstrations, boycotts, civil disobedience and all the arsenal of popular non-violent resistance tools. Live bullets were faced most with children throwing stones (and on rare occasions Molotov cocktails). But most of it was innovative acts of non-violent resistance that, despite massive Israeli propaganda

efforts, exposed the world to what this struggle was about. The uprising came only 5 years after the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, the Israeli cold blooded murder of unarmed demonstrators and a policy of «breaking the bones» (a literal application of instructions by Yitzhak Rabin). Israel became known for what it is: an occupying colonial power. Like the 1935-1939 uprising, the 1987 uprising provided a wealth of lessons and a wealth of achievements that give us hope for the future. The uprising was concomitant with the Arab summit in Amman (November 8-11, 1987) where the Palestinian cause was marginalized.

The unorganized and popular revolt generated leadership from the ground. Within one month, there were many people who became natural leaders of the resistance and those issued their first declaration and call to action January 4, 1988 under the “joint resistance leadership” which became highly organized and effective. The first call to action included a call for a strike and civil disobedience January 11-13. Subsequent calls ensued, including a variety of things, and all were implemented professionally despite the Israeli brutal tactics of oppression. According to many activists I interviewed, a core group met regularly to provide ideas and suggest actions and plan and execute them at the local level in every major town and refugee camp in the Occupied Palestinian Territories including Jerusalem.

The actions included calling for days of strikes, building public sites to commemorate victims of the occupation, refusal to pay tax (an action started in my hometown of Beit Sahour), developing self-sustenance through farming and other methods, mass resignation, refusal to pay unjust civil and criminal fines, holding public prayers, refusal to abide by military orders, flying Palestinian flags (illegal), and many more. During the tax revolt of 1988 and 1989, The Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement between People (PCR) invited Israelis and Internationals to help challenge the occupation policies such as by breaking curfews. This developed over the years and the same center led a march in December 2000 on a military base in Beit Sahour that succeeded in entering the base (at Ush Ghrab). This success led directly to the formation of the International Solidarity Movement.

The Israeli and International political leadership realized two facts: 1) that the 1987-1991 uprising became a way of life in the occupied territories at least in terms of self-reliance, and that 2) the PLO is the only major Palestinian political power that has a direct ability to end the Intifada. The US pushed to start the Madrid process and when Israel felt under pressure by the Palestinian capable negotiators, the Oslo process was concocted. It was low fruits picked in exchange for ending the resistance and the International pressure on Israel. Similar forces that ended the uprising of 1936 and the Oslo process also ended the popular resistance of the late 1980s.

An unusual situation developed with the signing of the Oslo accords, unprecedented in histories of resistance to colonial occupation. A «Palestinian authority» with a strong police force developed in the most heavily populated areas of the West Bank and Gaza while under direct Israeli occupation. The authority was expected to keep a restless population in check. This, combined with the talk of «wait for negotiations» made the initiation of any kind of resistance rather difficult. Popular

resistance persisted albeit at a reduced level. The first suicide bombing happened after the Israeli Baruch Goldstein massacred 29 worshippers in the Ibrahimi mosque and settlers were rewarded by dividing the mosque and closing areas of Hebron to native Palestinians to satisfy the settlers. Between 1993 and 2000, the number of colonial settlers in the West Bank and Gaza doubled. Israel also introduced massive restrictions of movements, isolated and intensified efforts to Judaize Jerusalem, forced economic stagnation, and fragmented what remains of Palestine.

People were fed-up and the conditions were ripe for another uprising. Barak gave his ultimatum to Yassir Arafat to sign a final deal that would leave Palestinians in large Bantustans and would abrogate basic rights like the right of return to Palestinian refugees. The straw that broke the Palestinian back was the visit of Ariel Sharon, surrounded by 1000 armed Israelis to the holy Muslim site of Al-Aqsa in late September 2000. The Al-Aqsa intifada (uprising) started on 28 September 2000 and continued until 2005. It involved most Palestinians and Internationals engaged in popular resistance and a few Palestinians engaged in armed resistance facing the most brutal violent assault and mass slaughter: 4000 Palestinians were murdered. Since then, Israel has killed a few thousand more Palestinians and the resistance continues in various forms.

A look to the future

Resistance to colonial occupation by any means is a right and an obligation recognized by all people and supported by international law. In Western media, there is far too much emphasis on only a miniscule part of the resistance and that is armed or violent resistance. Armed resistance is minuscule as a percentage of total daily acts of resistance and number of people engaged in it and is now almost non-existent. Perhaps this is why Israeli forces are focused on snuffing out popular resistance. As we saw, there is a rich and innovative history of popular resistance in Palestine that gives us energy to look to the future with hope. But there are other trends that give us strength.

The use of the internet and other modern communication tools (e.g. cell phones) makes it even harder for Israel to hide the atrocities committed in places like Nablus, Jenin, and Gaza. These tools also facilitated mobilizing grassroots activism locally and internationally to expose and directly challenge the colonial repression and defend human rights. The popular resistance in Palestine and around the world makes it impossible for the Israeli system to hide behind a history of anti-Jewish feelings in Europe in order to get away with ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

But we must also emphasize the thousands of forms of resistance that fall under the rubric “to exist is to resist.” Indeed, the fact that 6 million of us still live, work, eat, drink, learn, and have families here in Palestine is a remarkable testament to the power of that resistance. Just a week before the Kairos convention, we in the Palestine museum of Natural History were in the midst of a “Science Festival” where hundreds of school children from Kindergarten to High school came to participate in

hands on science learning. It was a remarkable thing to see the transformative work done mostly by volunteers succeed beyond expectations of teachers and students. There is resistance when my students at Birzeit and Bethlehem University come to classes. There is resistance when we do clinical service or when we do research on the harmful effects of Israeli industrial settlements. There is resistance with arts: music, folkloric dances, embroidered dresses, culinary arts, and more. Existence is indeed resistance especially when colonizers want us out of our country.

In this conference we will also hear about the growing movement for boycotts, divestments, and sanctions (BDS). BDS accelerated after the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) was launched in 2004. In 2005, 170 Palestinian civil society organizations issued a comprehensive call for BDS that is now the central organizing document for local and international activism. Hundreds of organizations, unions, churches, and other groups took up the BDS call in the past few years. This is bound to accelerate as Israel consolidates its apartheid regime in the guise of the process that is supposed to give rise to “a Palestinian state” (the so called “two-state solution”) and national governments in Europe and the US continue to fund and support Israeli apartheid. As in the time of Jesus, good people must stand-up and say enough is enough.

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COME AND SEE

Listening to Living Stones Towards theological explorations of Kairos Pilgrimages for Justice...

Rajbharat Patta

Introduction

*“Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more;
feed me till I want no more.”*

This has been a popular hymn sung on pilgrimages by pilgrims who have sought comfort and solace from the divine on their journeys. Pilgrimages have been as old as the religions themselves, and have given pilgrims a sense of self-edification and self-enrichment across all the religions.

Over the years, there has been a growing interest for people to travel to Palestine/Israel on pilgrimages, making tourism a major industry. Palestine/Israel is a unique tourist destination - its long history, religious significance and natural beauty make it an amazing place to visit. Palestine's importance derives partly from the fact that it is home to the three monotheistic and Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Every year it attracts many pilgrims, people of faith and scholars, who visit the holy places. Secular tourists come to explore the historical sites, Palestine's vibrant cities, rural life and natural reserves.

However, for most pilgrims, the narratives that they hear in the land of the holy one are those of Israeli tour operators who take the tourists/pilgrims only to the sites in Israel, and, in the name of security, frighten the pilgrims from visiting the sites in Palestine. Are pilgrims told that there are Palestinian Arab Christians in this part of the world, and is the local Christian experience acknowledged which could strengthen the faith of pilgrims who want to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ? Are pilgrims made aware that these friends in Palestine have a narrative to share about the Biblical sites in their land?

In such a context, the need for an alternative tourism came into the forefront, trying to explore what pilgrimage means for faith communities today. There has been little opportunity for pilgrims to the holy land to listen to the experiences of the living stones, the local Palestinian communities, to their narratives, their faith experiences, their stories and their lives. Therefore, alternative pilgrimage is envisaged to listen to the unheard voices of the living stones. This alternative pilgrimage, also known as justice pilgrimage, is a creative response to the changing signs of our times today,

its lone focus being pilgrimage as encountering the living God by engaging with the living stones.

I Rationale and Theology of Pilgrimage

1. The Rationale for a Theology of Pilgrimage

Why do we need a theology of pilgrimage today? What are some of the methodological issues that a theology of pilgrimage needs to delve upon in this 21st century, particularly in the context of pilgrimage to Palestine? These are some of the questions that need to be explored for it would set the tone in articulating the Christian faith response to pilgrimage. To consider some of the issues at stake:

- Christian tourists or the ‘pilgrimage market’ make up the majority of visitors to the ‘holy land.’ In 2008, 60% of tourists, about 1.7 million, were Christians, and over half of those identified as Catholic, which is a rise from 1 million in 2007.¹¹ Every year there has been a substantial increase of the inflow of tourists to the ‘holy land.’ All this has been done in the name of enhancing faith and for spiritual experience. However, so far there has been no attempt to try to articulate the theological underpinnings of such travels as pilgrims. Most Christian Churches have no theology of pilgrimage and therefore lack a starting point¹² for a Christian theological response.
- In the context of the political milieu of Palestine/Israel, the pilgrim is either unaware of the situation happening in the ‘holy land’ or possesses information from the dominant Zionist perspective where Palestine struggles are shown in antagonist moulds. Therefore a theology of pilgrimage could serve as an instrument for putting things in perspective and would serve to assist the pilgrim in understanding the context in a more critical way. A theology of pilgrimage would strengthen the whole arena of theological spectrum, for it would become a lens of operating in viewing, responding and understanding the Bible from a near-totally different perspective. The Bible has been used in and out by Christian Zionist groups to defend occupation, and therefore a theology of pilgrimage would help the pilgrim to critically analyze the Biblical and the present context of Palestine/Israel and would help to recover texts that have been used against the people in Palestine, for the gospel is indeed liberating.
- A theology of pilgrimage is an offering to the global Kairos movement for justice, for this endeavour is in continuation to the Kairos Palestine’s invitation to “Come and See” and therefore becomes a supplementary tool in committing to the cause of peace and justice in Palestine.

• This attempt at a theological articulation on pilgrimage would also help set the

11 Rami Kassis and Sami Khoury, “Destination Palestine at a Glance” in *Promoting Pilgrimages of Transformation to Palestine/Israel*, edited by Muna Killingback and Ranjan Solomon. ATG: 2011, p. 80.

12 Introduction in *Promoting Pilgrimages of Transformation to Palestine/Israel*, edited by Muna Killingback and Ranjan Solomon. ATG: 2011, p.10.

ethic of the Alternative Tourism Group and other such just tourism platforms to imbibe the essence of pilgrimage and incorporate them in organizing such pilgrimages.

These, in brief, explain the importance of engaging in exploring the theology of pilgrimage. One has to note that the theology of pilgrimage is a biblical necessity, a theological necessity and a contextual necessity. Therefore such an exploration is challengingly relevant to our times today, for this articulation of theology is an offering in response to the discerning signs of our times.

2. Towards a Pilgrim-imagining Christology: Jesus Christ Listening to Living Stones

The Pilgrimaging God sends God's son as a Pilgrim into the world to identify with other co-pilgrims. The word became flesh and pitched its tent among the other flesh. Jesus was always on a pilgrimage, for as an infant he had to go as a refugee to Egypt from Bethlehem and then again had to return to Nazareth. He was on a constant pilgrimage, healing people, touching people, condemning injustice and proclaiming liberation and peace.

The Pilgrimage mandate Jesus had and exercised was from Luke 4:16-18, which is to proclaim good news to the poor, to release the captive, to recover the sight of the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord to God's people. Therefore, Jesus was on a move, journeying for justice and making sure that his mandate of liberation and transformation is achieved. "Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to stay." Jesus, by stating this about himself, reveals his pilgrim quality, for he is on a constant walk, not static and always dynamic in his journey. J. G. Davis explains this pilgrimage of Jesus in his words,

*"In the case of Jesus, it will be recalled how the disciples on the way to Emmaus addressed him as a peregrinus who had come to celebrate the Passover (Luke 24:18), exactly as had his parents when they took him with them on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the same feast, a journey that they apparently made annually (Luke 2:41)."*¹³

Thus, Jesus journeyed as a pilgrim, as a sojourner, and the writer Luke provides a clue in the journey of Jesus to understand pilgrimage in the New Testament, for Jesus knew what it meant to be a pilgrim and what it meant to go on a pilgrimage. Naeem Ateek, the Palestinian theologian, explains that, "Palestine Israel is the land which is called 'holy land,' but the holiness is in the person of Jesus Christ, who was born, died and resurrected in this land."¹⁴ And he further goes on to say that "this land should be called the land of the holy one." Therefore, pilgrimage is highly Christo-centric in its essence and one has to follow the Jesus way in pilgrimaging in the land of the holy one today.

¹³ J.G. Davis. *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today*. (SCM Press: London, 1988) p. 208.

¹⁴ Personal Interview with Dr. Naeem Ateek on 18th June 2012 at Sabeel Center in Jerusalem, Palestine.

Jesus was on a constant pilgrimage as a pilgrim encountering the oppressed, discriminated against, and the stranger (e.g., Samaritan woman), and was brought to an unjust trial because he stood for the values of justice and peace all along. But resurrection came after his death and his pilgrimage continued...

Pilgrimage as Sacrament

One of the theological arguments in understanding pilgrimage in contemporary society is the encountering of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The holy land or the 'land of the holy one,' as Naeem Ateek puts it, is sometimes called the 5th gospel, for in order to understand the four gospels in the New Testament, the 5th one was needed. Therefore pilgrimage is understood as "the Sacrament of geography" where the people, the place and the past, tribe and terrain and time-story are very important to hold on to. Peter Scot explains the theology of pilgrimage as sacramental as follows,

*"Pilgrimage to Jerusalem is not therefore about a journey to manipulate God's blessing but is concerned with a return to our place – an environment, history and community – in which our faith, hope and love are deepened. We need not look to Jerusalem to tell us of our identity because in God 'humanity is faithfully kept for us.' Christians are not the first citizens of contemporary Jerusalem. Instead Christians are first of all citizens of the new Jerusalem. Our access to that Jerusalem is the Eucharist. The new Jerusalem activates and governs our engagement with contemporary Jerusalem. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the site of the Passion and the first Eucharist, may dramatize that access, as Christians meet at the altars of Christians living in Jerusalem."*¹⁵

Thus, one meets and encounters Christ in and through the Eucharist that we celebrate in any place, and not just connected to the holy sites in Jerusalem, for people of faith in Christ await a new Jerusalem, a Jerusalem from above, which is far from the old and present geographical Jerusalem. Pilgrimage in the contemporary world view is encountering God at any opportune time and space and trying to make relevant the very act of Christ on the Cross.

II

Implications for pilgrimage in today's context

After exploring the theology of pilgrimage in a candid way, we need to now discuss the implications of such a theology for our times, situations and people, so that we can become sensitive in overcoming the populist ways of doing pilgrimage. We need to take a serious role in listening to the living stones in the local contexts in Palestine who have been unheard and unrecognised. These implications are not exhaustive, but are some pointers and directives in moving forward.

¹⁵ Peter Scot, "A Theology of Eucharistic Place: Pilgrimage as Sacramental" in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, edited by Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2004), p. 116-118.

1. Pilgrimage As Solidarity With Living Stones, the Local Communities in Palestine

- Pilgrimage does not lie in merely receiving the formal invitation, or just going on a tour of the holy land, but in responding to the invitation by being willing to partake in an authentic encounter, be it a conversation, or dining together, as long as the meeting results in the invitee learning of the realities of the people in that very particular land.
- Pilgrimage expresses solidarity with the local communities. To identify with the Palestinian struggles is the need of the hour, and that is how one needs to perceive and experience a pilgrimage.

2. Pilgrimage as Walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ who pitched his tent among the struggling communities

- Pilgrimage as walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ can be better understood in the words of Jesus as he said: 'If anyone wants to follow me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.' In the context of the 'holy land,' pilgrimage is not merely walking on the sites where Jesus was supposed to have walked. Rather, it is to take up one's cross, the cross of identifying with the suffering under the occupation today, deny all our luxuries of superiority complexes, and then to find Jesus among those occupied communities and to follow him. Therefore, pilgrimage, in the context of occupation in the 'holy land,' is to walk along with those suffering communities who are living under bondage, fear, and constant threat to live a life of dignity, and in encountering them, to try to find Jesus among them, for Jesus Christ is still suffering along with them as they cry out for freedom and liberation.
- Pilgrimage as walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ can also be understood in the prophecy of Micah, when he summoned people with the question: 'And what does God requires of you? To do justice, to have mercy, to walk humbly with God.' To walk humbly with God is to walk with those suffering communities, for God is willing to walk with them in their quest for justice.

3. Pilgrimage is Locating God Among the Living Stones:

Many popular tour operators say that 'life is incomplete if one doesn't visit the holy land,' but this is deviant and deceptive, poignantly confirming that this is just a commercial tactic in attracting the tourists. How is life incomplete if one doesn't visit the holy land? Travel to the 'holy land' today is a very middle class, bourgeoisie affair. Only the upper middle class and those who can afford it are able to travel to the so called 'holy land.' What about those who cannot afford to travel because of their economic status and situation? Will every one of them have led incomplete lives because they could not undertake travel to the holy land? In pilgrimage one needs to demystify this very understanding, for pilgrimage is not a compulsory religious mandate for the Christian faith as in the case of other faiths. It is only an option. There too the goal of any pilgrimage is to seek God in the journey, and that

is possible only when the traveller is made aware of the local context and seeks to explore God among the 'living stones,' the local people, rather than in the remnants of the dead stones of the sites. In any pilgrimage, the traveller is called to find completeness in life, and that is found only when he or she can resonate with the living conditions of the people in suffering and pain. The aim of pilgrimage is to announce and pronounce life to all those who are striving to live amidst situations of lifelessness and death. Hence, the pilgrim is challenged to channel life to those who are living amidst occupation.

4. Pilgrimage is Listening to Living Stones and Transforming Pilgrims' Lives

Indeed pilgrimage should be a life changing spiritual journey, but unfortunately it is only made as a 'feel good' trip to visit the sites where Jesus lived and walked. Every pilgrim has to take into consideration the reality of the situation in the holy land. Why are there walls of division in the holy land? Why does a dominant Israel use the name of religion, scripture and God to occupy the land of Palestinians and take blood on their hands? What are the predicaments and pains of the Palestinians in their own land? These are some of the questions one needs to ask oneself as one visits the holy land. Travelling on a pilgrimage is not like going on a holiday. Jerusalem is not Disneyland or any other favourite holiday spot. On the contrary, one needs to ask critical questions about the context, and the journey must of compulsion be a life transforming experience as one travels to the various sites. Pilgrimage is definitely a life changing spiritual journey, for spirituality lies in locating God among the suffering, listening to the life stories of those occupied, and liberating those who are caught up in the pangs of discrimination.

III

Relevance for Pilgrimage today: Towards a Kairos Pilgrimage

Though the theology of pilgrimage in the holy land is the first of its kind, it draws its succinct yet wider relevance to several vertices around theology, church and pilgrims today, paving the way towards a kairos pilgrimage, a pilgrimage at God's appointed moment, a moment of truth that would lead to a movement of justice and liberation for Palestinians.

1. Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Listening Theologies, Listening Churches and Listening Pilgrims

*"After three days they found Jesus in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, **listening** to them and asking them questions." Luke 2:46.*

Faith and theology today needs to be more missional in its approach, more strategic in its direction and more practical in its application, for the goal of having faith in Jesus Christ is to promote life, life in all its fullness. In order to make theology and faith more relevant and local congregation-friendly, whatever be its method, whatever be its framework, whatever be its ideology and whatever be its orientation,

keeping aside its 'preaching/speaking' attitude, it needs to be rooted in the voices that emerge from the margins of society. It was said that 'if speaking is sharing, listening is caring.' Therefore today we are in need of listening theologies, listening churches and listening pilgrims rather than prescribing and describing theologies, churches and pilgrims. The context today is in need of theologies, churches and pilgrims that listen to the cries of living local communities, communicating the language of the people on the margins rather than the theologies that are abstract. "Faith comes from hearing" (Rom 10:17). Theologies that hear and listen can critically articulate faith in a particular context, and therefore a Kairos pilgrimage theology calls on pilgrims to be listening pilgrims, listening to the cries of the living stones. Listening then will move towards action and praxis, and by that theology becomes action-oriented and lively.

H.G. Atallah Hanna, Bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, shares that, "The Holy land is the 5th gospel, witnessing the life and ministry of Jesus. As much as the history of salvation is important, the geography of salvation, which is the holy land, is also important, and therefore there have been pilgrimages right from the beginning of the Christian Church in history." He further says that the call for pilgrims is, "not only to visit the holy sites, but to speak to the local communities, listen to their faith narratives and experiences, for Church here is made of people and not with memorial stones."¹⁶ Therefore the call to pilgrims is to engage in conversations with the local living stones, willing to receive their hospitality and be open to be challenged by their local life narratives.

Listening to the living stones will provide a space to listen to alternative narratives of the holy land from the Palestinian people, and will provide opportunities to listen and understand the local Palestinian Christians' experiences and stories of life. The call therefore for a pilgrim is to be a listening pilgrim, an advocating pilgrim, a just pilgrim, an action/activist pilgrim, and to make the best use and understanding of pilgrimage to the holy land.

2. Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for a Discipleship of Cross for the Pilgrims

"Then Jesus said to them all: «Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Luke 9: 23

Patriarch Michel Sabbah explains that "on a pilgrimage, pilgrims come in contact with holy places and receive blessings, and those blessings need to be shared with the people living in the local contexts as well." He further invites pilgrims to the holy land to "come here and find God and not tourism. See God in the holy land where God manifested in human beings here. Pilgrimage is a meditation in depth in finding the mystery of God, who is made visible in the lives of the people living here."¹⁷ Therefore, the call is to look for God among the living realities of people and their lives in Palestine, who have been under the rubric of the Cross of occupation, crucified, and are longing for an experience of resurrection of new life. Following

¹⁶ Personal Interview with Bishop Atallah Hanna on 18th June 2012 at his residence in Jerusalem, Palestine.

¹⁷ Personal Interview with Archbishop Michel Sabbah on 14th June 2012 at his residence in Tybeh, Palestine.

Jesus Christ today is to deny one-self, take up the challenges of crosses in Palestine and strive for their liberation.

3. Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Redeeming and Recovering the Zionised Biblical Texts and Interpretations

“Let my people go.” Exodus 8: 1

Reading and reflecting on Biblical texts is a challenge in itself, as the narratives have been appropriated by the occupiers in the name of written Scriptures as a sanction for them to occupy. Christian Zionism has conveniently taken deep root in most of our theologies, hermeneutics and churches today, calling Christians to take for granted that the biblical Israel is today’s political Israel and therefore there is a divine sanction for them in occupying land in Palestine. However, Kairos Pilgrimage provides us an opportunity to redeem and recover the Biblical narratives from the occupiers’ territory and to redeem them from the occupiers’ perspective by re-appropriating them to the given context of the imprisoned Palestinians, who are today’s biblical Israel, forced into slavery and occupation. We need to recover the Biblical texts from Zionist readings and interpretations, and try to relate the revelation of God to the given context of occupation, suffering and imprisonment today, for God stands on behalf of the crucified communities.

Rifat Kassis, the Coordinator of Kairos, expresses the anguish of how pilgrims come and go without any understanding of the local context. He laments that,

“Pilgrims and Pilgrimages have been successfully monopolized by the Israeli tourism industry and its accompanying political agenda. Beginning with coordinated Israeli propaganda at home, before their trips, tourists (including pilgrims) are received in Israel by Israeli tour guides, accommodated in Israeli hotels, and accompanied by Israeli stories and Zionist interpretations of the Old Testament. While visiting the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, an Israeli tour guide may offer a quip about Arab backwardness or a warning about Arabs’ exploitative nature; they may be discouraged from wandering beyond the immediate vicinity of the touristic zone and from patronizing Palestinian businesses; they are then ushered back onto their buses and sped through the checkpoint back to Jerusalem, which few Palestinians around them can do – a reality they may not even know.”¹⁸

4. Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Living Testimonies from Transformed Communities:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.» Acts 1: 8

Having come to the holy land for pilgrimage, the challenge is not to feel self-satisfied with the visit, but rather on engaging with the living stones, one can encounter the

¹⁸ Rifat Odeh Kassis, *Kairos for Palestine*, (Badayl/Alternatives: Ramallah, 2011) p. 141.

living God, and then go back to one's own locality to testify to the encountering of God by advocating for justice to Palestinians.

Naeem Ateek, the Palestinian theologian, explains that, "holiness is not in a place but in a person called Jesus Christ. There have been 'selective pilgrimages' by different faith communities that come to Palestine Israel. According to Orthodox spirituality, pilgrims that come during Easter, Passion Week, etc. feel that being physically near the place brings them a blessing. For Protestants, the Bible is more important than the place. Most Catholics want to go to Nazareth, to the place of Mother Mary etc. Therefore, each pilgrim comes with some motives and notions on their visit to the land here." He further says that, "the pilgrims are to look for the importance of the person in the place and search for the living testimonies that emerge from these places." He then challenges the pilgrims, by saying, "You run where Jesus walked."¹⁹ Pilgrimage, according to Ateek, is to spend time with the local faith communities, the living stones, striking a balance between the person and the place of the land.

Therefore the challenge is to come back from the pilgrimage as a transformed pilgrim, testifying as living witnesses to the injustices done to Palestinians and partaking in sensitizing the local congregations and churches.

5. Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Advocacy and Solidarity Pilgrims

"And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6: 8

As transformed pilgrims, the pilgrimage should inspire us to partake in global solidarity campaigns for justice in Palestine. The call is to organise forums in support of justice in Palestine, sensitise the local communities, join with other responsible civil society partners in garnering support for Palestine, and lobby with government authorities for justice to Palestinians. The transformed pilgrim has first-hand information about the realities in Palestine and therefore needs to be the first one to advocate for justice to Palestinians.

The call is to be prophetic in our faith, address the human rights violations done to the people under occupation, speak to the principalities and powers of occupation by joining in movements like Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), academic boycott movements, etc. to express our dissent with occupation.

The call is also to join with global advocacy in observing the World Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine Israel, etc., imploring government officials of our own countries to address these global human rights violations and make known to the world the unjust practices of the occupiers. The call is also to build movements of global solidarity for the release of people who are profiled and imprisoned on false charges of sedition and strive for their release. Being and becoming an advocate pilgrim is the greatest relevance of the theology of pilgrimage.

¹⁹ Personal Interview with Dr. Naeem Ateek on 18th June 2012 at Sabeel Center in Jerusalem, Palestine.

Epilogue

Pilgrimage is a vocation, not a vacation, which pilgrims are called to embark upon. In the backdrop of many popular pilgrimages being conducted in the land of the holy one, alternative pilgrimage or justice pilgrimage is a creative response in discerning the signs of our times critically. These pilgrimages are the need of the hour as we are challenged to listen to the unheard stories of the living stones, the local Palestine people, their narratives, their faith experiences and their cries for justice and life. Having been appraised of the history of pilgrimages, both politically and sociologically, the call of Christian faith to pilgrims is to see themselves as co-companions with God, for God in Jesus has been on a pilgrimage seeking life and justice. God accompanies the pilgrims in listening to the unheard living stones, for God dwells among the living stones and not in the stony buildings. For the companionship of God is not from distant, unknown territories, but co-companionship of God is to experience God as One who dwells along and among the living communities. God becomes a listening pilgrim, an advocating pilgrim, an activist pilgrim, a solidarity pilgrim and a justice pilgrim, and therefore calls us to become such pilgrims on our journey to encounter the living God.

The other call to the pilgrims is to inculcate and practice Jesus' pilgrimage, staying behind in the city, critically understanding the context, and voicing out the concerns for transformation and justice. It had been a routine ritual for Jesus to go on a pilgrimage annually, but he had done it not as a religious tourist but with a difference, as an alternative pilgrim, and as a justice pilgrim. He does his pilgrimage for transformation, exposing the exploitations done on the local people and countering the occupiers and those perpetrators of power. Jesus' pilgrimage involves listening to the local voices of the living stones and calls for transformation and liberation.

A Palestinian Response to Pilgrimage

Yusef Daher

In our Middle East context, and maybe more within the Muslim Arab culture we live in, a Pilgrim is a title one will carry for life. Once you visit Holy grounds, you become a Haj "Pilgrim." This means you become one of the elders, one who is wiser than before, and bearing this title means you need to be worthy of the respect and prestige it confers.

In our Palestinian context, which is well described by Mr. O Cuinn, the pilgrim is presented with a question. Are we here as pilgrims visiting with the occupier or the occupied? Are we here for our own sake or also for the sake of the other as well? This makes the difference between the common pilgrim and the pilgrim for justice. As one of our Palestinian leaders, the late Mr. Faisal Husseini, said, "We invite you to visit the prisoner not the guards." If we are here and we engage in a pilgrimage that

is organized or manipulated by the occupier, how much are we sharing in the crime or sharing in resisting it? How much are we contributing to making occupation legitimate or do we just refrain from coming and save the trouble of making all these decisions?

In general, any international engagement on the ground, whether relief or economic or otherwise, stands on a thin line of whether it is helping to end occupation in Palestine or just making it more accommodating and thus prolonging it. This is to some extent at the core of the first paper by Mr. O Cuinn. Perhaps, based on this same assumption, the second paper questions the relation of a pilgrim with the community under occupation, thus with brothers and sisters of the same faith or other faiths.

It is a choice every pilgrim should at least be given the chance to make. Unfortunately most pilgrims who come on a visit to this land are not given this choice and thus come on a pre-tailored program that includes so many sites with so little insights. When the disciples asked Jesus, "Where do You dwell?" he offered them, "Come and see."

The paper by Mr. Bharath Patta is an eye opener for pilgrims and the pilgrim industry stakeholders that give opportunities for those pilgrims who want an experience of knowing and not only receiving, those who want to share experience rather than buy one that is tailored and readymade. Not totally agreeing with the theology of Pilgrims as presented in the paper, at least I know many of our traditional churches would not agree totally that God is only present within the people and not the physical places; many would see God present everywhere. In Kairos we say that the holy land is holy as long as God is present in it. Some would also say God is not present at certain times! It is very difficult to answer these theological questions but one thing is certain, we must seek God and God's will and, as we know justice and truth and love are the will of God, then we must seek it in every step we make in our pilgrimage. I think this paper is trying to invite us to do this.

One last thing remains. Our duty as hosts is also the other side of the coin. How much are we ready and aware of the power of this theology and political impact of pilgrimage? Some would certainly argue that most of Palestinian tourism stakeholders do not really cater to this kind of creative resistance or transformation process within their promotion or organizing of these pilgrimages. Who presents the choice for the future pilgrims? If it isn't the tour operators here or at the country of commencement, then the sending church is the other partner that needs to allow the pilgrims to make their decision. But first we need to present the choice to them as a reminder and not as an option.

Thanks to both papers for succeeding in setting a standard for both the hosts and the guests in this respect.

KAIROS: IDENTITY AND RIGHTS

Cry with Us: A Palestinian Hopeful Reading of Lamentations

Yohanna Katanacho

My presentation seeks to present a theology of hope in the midst of tears. I will focus on the Book of Lamentations highlighting different human responses to the theo-political catastrophe in 587 B.C. My points are simply: there was no comforter, no prophet, and no hope. I will simultaneously point out significant correspondences with the Palestinian catastrophic realities. Last, I will present important lessons that Palestinian Christians need to consider in their prophetic imagination.

During the last Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2014, I was studying the Book of Lamentations. The similarities of pain shocked me and for the first time in my life I was moved to write a poem in English.²⁰ It reads like this:

This is a season of weeping and mourning, but it is not void of hope.

Our tears are the bridge between brutality and humanity.

Our tears are the salty gates for seeing a different reality.

Our tears are facing soulless nations and a parched mentality.

Our tears are the dam preventing rivers of animosity.

For the sake of the mourning men, cry with us to reflect your amity.

For the sake of the poor children, cry with us demanding sanity.

For the sake of lamenting mothers, refuse violence and stupidity.

Love your enemies and cry with them is the advice of divinity.

Blessing those who curse is the path to genuine spirituality.

Pouring tears of mercy and compassion is true piety.

Pray with tears, for the sake of spreading equity.

Followers of Jesus: crying is now our responsibility.

But don't cry for your friends only; but also for your Enemy.

I had many existential questions: What do we say or do when our cities collapse and hunger invades our streets? How do we respond when homes are destroyed and young children are brutally killed? What do we do when the teeth of evil are like nails from hell penetrating our souls? Why is God absent when the civic and moral infrastructures of our society collapse? Why does God forsake us when our holy places are defiled and our religious symbols are despised? The Book of Lamentations hosted my feelings and helped me to express my frustrations.²¹ It says, "Streams

²⁰ Yohanna Katanacho, "Cry with Us"; available online at <http://www.bmsworldmission.org/news-blogs/archive/a-poem-lament-both-sides-gaza>; accessed on Dec 1, 2014.

²¹ Many other contemporary scholars had a similar experience with the book of lamentations at harsh times. See for example, Adele Berlin, *Lamentations* (The Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); or Kathleen O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*. (New York: Orbis, 2003); or Collin Chapman, "A Lament over Lebanon," available online: <http://www.batrneoconwatch.blogspot.co.il/2006/08/lament-over-lebanon-by-rev-colin.html>; accessed on Dec 1, 2014.

of tears flow from my eyes because my people are destroyed. My eyes will flow unceasingly, without relief, until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees. What I see brings grief to my soul because of all the women of my city” (Lam 3: 48 – 51). No doubt that the Book of Lamentations is a place full of sorrow, sadness, and salty tears. This book is very relevant to our Palestinian situation. It can be a founding stone for our theology. My assumption is that the destruction of Jerusalem during the times of Jeremiah is similar to Al Nakbah in 1948 and to the series of catastrophes that Palestinians continue to experience.²² Based on the Book of Lamentations, I will highlight three areas: there is no comforter, there is no prophet, and there is no hope.

First, there is no comforter. The Book of Lamentations points out the destruction of the socio-religious infrastructure of ancient Israel.²³ The text describes the besieging of Jerusalem, its famine, its invasion by a powerful army, the execution of its leaders, the exile of its people, the looting of its religious places, and the collapse of any hope. It simply states that there is no comforter. The Book of Lamentations keeps repeating this statement: there is no comforter (Lam 1: 2, 9, 16, 17, and 21). It states that no one can help the people to deal with their pain and pitiful realities. No one is showing them mercy, or compassion, or offering them encouragement and hope in the midst of their trouble. There is no comforter for Palestinians. Israelis are not going to resolve their problems. Neither the Arab world, nor the European world, nor the Islamic world, nor the United Nations is going to help them. The world has abandoned them. There is no comforter. We therefore lament.

Second, there is no prophet. The text says that “the law is no more, and her prophets no longer find visions from the Lord” (Lam 2:9). God is silent and people are suffering. This has led to many reactions. Some rightly ask: where is God? No doubt that many Palestinians rejected God favoring atheism especially after Al Nakbah in 1948 and the failure of the church to speak up before 1967. We prefer to accuse God instead of boycotting him or eliminating his existence. Some believed that God had rejected them. The Book of Lamentations starts with a question about the suffering of the city, but ends with a question about the endurance of the rejection of God. Some preferred the path of self-pity, adopting a victim mentality that wants all people to see their pain (Lam 1: 12). Some preferred the path of revenge (Lam 1: 22; 3: 64). They dehumanized their enemies in order to facilitate destroying them. The Palestinian Kairos Document refuses to abandon the logic of love that prompts us to seek justice without abandoning the human dignity of all the inhabitants of Israel and Palestine. Revenge is not our path. I therefore strongly disagree with the popular statement: we shall not forget or forgive. This statement is a dangerous mistake regardless who says it, whether Netanyahu or Abbas.²⁴

22 In the Septuagint and Latin versions, the book of Lamentations starts with an introduction that points out that Jeremiah is its author. In the Syriac version, we have four lamentations followed by a prayer by the prophet Jeremiah. Furthermore, many church fathers, the Talmud, Luther, Calvin and others argue that Jeremiah is the author of the pertinent book. See R. Salters, Lamentations (International Critical Commentary; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2010), 5.

23 For further information see Robin Parry. Lamentations (Electronic Form on Kindle; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), Loc 112.

24 It is common that many Israeli leaders use the expression: we shall not forget and we shall not forgive. However, it was sad to see President Abbas using the same expression on September 26, 2014 as he was addressing the UN General Assembly in New York. The full text is available online at: <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Full-text-of-Palestinian-Authority-President-Abbas-address-to-the-UN-General-Assembly->

Third, the Book of Lamentations depicts a reality in which there is no hope.

It reminds us of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in which he wrote about the sign on the gates of hell. It says: "Through me you pass into the city of woe . . . All hope abandon ye who enter here."²⁵ In Palestine, we have an impossible task as we seek to find a political hope. However, the Book of Lamentations points out that hope does not depend on the circumstances but on seeing the divine perspective. The existence of a prophetic vision is indispensable for the existence of hope. Gladly, the Palestinian Kairos Document has a prophetic voice following in the footsteps of those who affirm faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13: 13). In I Corinthians, the literary unit of these three virtues is chapters 12-15 and concludes with a strong message of hope rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we follow in the footsteps of Saint Augustine. In his *Enchiridion*, or *Handbook*, he points out that hope is born out of faith.²⁶ Hope cannot exist without faith. He adds that "he who does not love believes in vain, even if what he believes is true; he hopes in vain . . . unless he believes and hopes for this: that he may through prayer obtain the gift of love."²⁷ Love unites us to God.²⁸ Good hope cannot exist without faith and love. In the Book of Lamentations the text says, "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam 3: 21 - 26).

This hope is confirmed and embodied in the book of Acts. God inflicted pain on Jerusalem in the Book of Lamentations, and Jerusalem revenged by killing the son of God. However, the Triune God ended this cycle of violence through faith, love, and hope. The Father loved all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the rest of world that he gave his only begotten Son on the cross. He paved the way of faith for whoever believes will not perish (John 3:16). The Son wept over Jerusalem and suffered at its hands but he forgave and embodied the path of love. Then the Holy Spirit comes to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter that will end our exile from God and will grant us a prophetic vision not rooted in an ethnocentric reality and not limited to one group whether it is Greeks or Hebrews. Instead, we are witnesses and prophets to the whole world (Acts 1:7-8). Palestinian Christians and more specifically the Palestinian Kairos Document are witnesses of the aforementioned Triune God. They are walking in the footsteps of the early church advocating faith, love, and hope. Hope is accessible to all those who call upon the name of the Lord (Act 2:21). The witness of Palestinian Christians is indispensable for embodying to both Palestinians and Israelis the power of faith, love, and hope. The multiethnic church continues to be

in-New-York-376388; accessed on Dec 1, 2014.

²⁵ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* (trans. by Henry Francis Cary. Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004), 13.

²⁶ Saint Augustine. *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love* (trans. Albert Outler; Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 76; available online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/enchiridion.pdf>; accessed on Dec 1, 2014.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 78.

²⁸ See 1 Clement 49: 5; Saint Clement, *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* (trans. J. B. Lightfoot; Athena: Athena Data Products), 24; available online at <http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/First%20Epistle%20of%20Clement%20to%20the%20Corinthians.pdf>; accessed on Dec 1, 2014.

God's hand to help the poor, challenge oppressive powers, fight discrimination, and spread the comfort of God to the ends of the earth. We are a sign of hope. Because of the presence and activities of the third person of the blessed Trinity in our midst, we hope to change the world one person at a time.

Some important lessons for Palestinians

1. We can cry in the midst of catastrophes. Lamenting is not hopelessness but it is human and it helps us to maintain our humanity as we mourn with those who are mourning. But let us cry together and let us cry as an expression of commitment to justice and to human dignity.

2. We will not abandon good hope. Those who abandon hope will also abandon the pursuit of justice. A bad hope will lead to a suicidal revenge but a good hope will remind us of God's mercy, and that we are covenant creatures and his people. Palestinian Christians are a covenant people who can expect the blessings of God despite the forces of death. The rays of hope through our Kairos actions penetrate the clouds of despair or the structures of injustices.

3. We will commit ourselves to faith, hope, and love. Our hope is not wishful thinking, or optimism, and is not founded on the typhonic political atmosphere. It is founded on the nature of our God who conquered death, established the church of the martyrs, and promised to be with us. Hope is the bridge that will help us to move from the current reality to the hoped for reality. It is a force of change. It can only be good change when it is accompanied by faith and love and submission to the Holy Spirit. It is not a surprise that the prophetic voice of the Palestine Kairos Document insists on human dignity from the perspective of faith asserting that all human beings are created in the image of God, averring the logic of love, and choosing good hope.

A THEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL KAIROS READING

The Moment of Justice Has Come!

Kim Yong Bock

Peace is a matter of justice. Only when peace embraces justice can there be life together (Sang Saeng: 相生). Justice is the core of Conviviality of life and the heart of Oikonomia. Now the time is ripe for the breaking in of the light into the darkness in this cosmos of life.

Just as Kairos is the right time for justice and peace in West Asia, there is Siwoon (時運) – the Coming of Time for right relations among all living beings in “cosmopolitics.” We believe that the moment has come, and this moment is Kairos and Siwoon for justice.

The Palestinian people in West Asia endured indescribable suffering under the colonial domination of the Western powers, and their destiny has been further twisted into a vortex of “apartheid” since the creation of the IS (Israeli State) in the post-World War II context.

The Korean people underwent indescribable suffering under Japanese colonialism, and their destiny has been twisted into the Cold War division of North Korea and South Korea (ideological apartheid) since WW II.

There are two pivots of injustice in the global geo-political ellipse: one is experienced by the people of Palestine in West Asia, and the other is experienced by the Korean Minjung. The people suffer due to the domination system of violent apartheid and division that generates brutal military conflicts carried out by massive, technologically efficient military regimes. The apartheid and division are controlled by the unjust economic regime of political and military occupation and economic embargo. This system of injustice is undergirded by the global empire and its allies.

This combination of global economic violence and global military regimentation is accelerating the economic injustice against the hungry and the poor without limit, and waging endless geo-political warfare on earth to the point that all living beings in the ecosphere of earth and heaven are under threat of “omnicide.” Cultural hegemony replaces human community, religious wars and conflicts become an everyday matter, and modern science and technology (the technocracy) takes over global society and cosmic community.

In this situation the people of the world, especially both of our peoples in the lands of apartheid and division, need to be in solidarity for justice, peace and life together.

The recent signs of the times point to a moment of Kairos, to a new cosmic household, radically different from the present world. The present world suffers under ubiquitous, permanent wars being waged by the military regime of the global empire, using the most technologically advanced weapons systems, ultimately backed by weapons of mass destruction. These wars are inherently intertwined with the disintegrating global economy, practicing its violence against the poor and powerless people and all other living beings. The symbiotic collusion of the global market regime with the global nexus of military hegemonic power thus acts to impoverish the people and keep them terrorized by warfare in their now relatively powerless nations in West Asia and East Asia.

The global cultural complex in the form of media, education and information reflects the same reality and re-enforces the process of destruction of life through wars and economic violence in the world. Religions are deeply implicated in this process, in the two pivots of West and East Asia.

Now is a critical time of Kairos and Siwoon. It is a time of justice, peace and life together. Right at this moment of dire reality, the hope for a new heaven and new earth of life together in justice and peace can be found in the convergence of our faiths, in our belief in a just God, in the convergence of our religious and philosophical convictions for cosmic peace (T'aiping 太平) and for the full life of the world. The convergence of these faiths and convictions can be the leaven of life throughout the cosmic household, the movement of hope for life together in justice and peace.

Forging an axis of global peace in the land of the Palestine people and in the land of Morning Calm at this moment of Kairos, our peoples are resisting the forces of injustice, war and violence, and – together with all peoples and living beings – are creatively incubating a new civilization of justice, peace and life together. We are here to celebrate the coming of this grand Kairos for this world.

Actions that can be taken:

1) An Ecumenical Faith Stance Against War, Occupation and Violence, leading to a common vision of justice, peace and life together on earth with the focus on Palestine in West Asia, linking faith stances from various global contexts into a global convergence. This demands radical theological reorientation.

The historical faith stances of various religions testify that any decisive moment of historical change involves an unusual “confessing” stance, which extends into actions for justice, peace and life together in resistance against the forces of injustice, war, violence and death.

Most recently we may refer to the South African Kairos Document (1984), the Confession of 67 of the United Presbyterian Church, the Theological Declaration of Korean Christians (1973), Die Barmer Theologische Erklärung (1934), the Social Creed Adopted by the Federal Council of Churches in North America in 1908, and so on.

All major religions of the world have a similar faith stance. Buddhist self-immolation, Hindu non-violent resistance, and Islamic jihad are of the same kind. Fasting is also a spiritual stance against violence in a similar fashion.

A macro-ecumenical convergence of faith stances of all the world religions is called for at this historical moment. In this connection the ACCRA Faith Stance (2004) and the Amman Ecumenical Call also are significant.

The Islamic response to Kairos Palestine is very important for this new direction. This response is the beginning of a convergent stance by all the world faiths for justice, peace and life together. All religions can participate to forge a convergent spiritual stance for justice, peace and life together on earth, beginning with the West Asian Context, and focusing on justice, peace and life together in Palestine.

2) An Ecumenical Convergence for Peace and common security of the people(s), with focus on Palestine in West Asia, for strong, globally coordinated policy and action. We have analyzed the global geo-politics of the empire, with its global nexus of military hegemony, undergirded by the global capitalist market regime and the global technocratic regime, and recognized the main geo-political pivots of West Asia around Israel-Palestine and East Asia around the Korean peninsula. Of course, there are many points of conflict and hegemonic struggle spread around the globe, in Africa, Central and South America, the Pacific, and Central, South and Southeast Asia.

Ecumenical convergence is very important in light of the weakness of international organizations such as the United Nations and its systems. It is also important in light of the inability of the nation states to make peace at regional and global levels, as they are institutionally “incapable” of safeguarding their peoples’ peace and security. The history of the 20th century – the century of world wars – demonstrates this reality clearly.

The mode of interfaith dialogue alone is not sufficient to forge a process of solidarity among peoples for the realization of justice, peace and life together. Interfaith convergence is to generate a common vision for justice, peace and life together and an ecumenical network of faith communities among the peoples of earth.

An illustration may be useful – that is, the March First Independence Declaration (1919), which was born out of the multi-faith convergence of Chundokyo (Donghak national religion), Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity and Korean national religious traditions. This declaration was made in the context of the worldwide independence movements of national peoples after World War II.

3) The sharing and linking of experiences of peace making and peace building from past and present in various global contexts, leading to a common,

comprehensive, integral policy study for the building of a just, peaceful life together of the people(s) in the land of Palestine in West Asia as well as in East Asia.

An integral, holistic policy for all peoples for Justice, Peace and Life Together must be made together through the convergence of the many and diverse dimensions of life and its convivencia (conviviality), without fragmentation.

Geo-politically, the global military regime of the empire cannot be relied upon to bring peace in our two pivots on the global geo-political ellipse. The global capitalist market regime cannot provide an adequate framework for justice in socio-economic terms. Nation states are too weak in political institutional terms to allow truly participatory democracy, and thus they are too weak to provide overall well-being and welfare. International organizations, including those in the United Nations system, are inadequate to deal with the global crisis of life of all living beings in the ecosphere.

An Integral Study of Life of All Living Beings Together may grow out of the macro- and micro-ecumenical convergence of diverse religious and faith communities, and may give birth to new wisdom of life among the peoples of the world.

Resisting Hope – Prophetically **Notes from a Jewish Theology of Liberation**

Marc H. Ellis

Is there a way forward? That's the question on everyone's mind as I toured Bethlehem and Jerusalem last week. While touring, I reread Kairos Palestine. The situation on the ground doesn't look good.

It isn't about what Jews or Palestinians want or don't want. It's a question of what's happening on the ground and what's likely to happen in the near future. On the 5th anniversary of Kairos Palestine there is little to celebrate. If we're honest the future looks bleak.

So in my lectures and book launch in Bethlehem and Jerusalem and in my writing as the 5th anniversary approached, I avoided hope and have been criticized for it. Some say I disparaged hope. I certainly have resisted it.

Meditating on hope, last night a phrase came to me – “resist hope.” I asked myself what this could mean. I experience such phrases as omens. Like years ago when I suddenly imagined the Torah scrolls in the Ark of the Covenant in every synagogue in and outside of Israel giving way to Star of David helicopter gunships. Ritualized and silver, the Star of David helicopter gunships were, at least in my mind's eye,

right there in the Ark.

Would we be better off without the images that come to us in the night? Better off not to write them down or speak them? These images are almost all against hope, Biblically speaking. They resist hope. Do they also invoke hope by resisting it?

Sitting with companions the next morning at breakfast, I discussed my “resisting hope” epiphany when it suddenly was completed with an additional image: “Resisting hope – prophetically.” But what could this mean?

I thought of the Biblical prophets like Ezekiel who, when called by God, was instructed to eat the text of his own doom. Strangely, and certainly against the grain, Ezekiel ate the text even after God had already told him he would be rejected and that the people Israel would not listen. God and Ezekiel were without hope, big time.

It is recorded in the Bible that the text Ezekiel ate tasted sweet. Just like honey. I would love to chat with Ezekiel, the LSD prophet, Psychedelic Ezekiel, and receive confirmation that in fact he wasn’t Biblically redacted into honey like Job’s prosperity at the end of his travails.

Most Biblical scholars believe that Job’s comeback was a late, tacked-on hope. I wouldn’t be surprised to learn that Ezekiel’s sweet tasting text was also a later addition. Is the sweetness found sometimes in exile – hope?

Is the 5th anniversary of Kairos Palestine, as difficult a time as it is, sweet? At least in my exilic life sweetness isn’t the word for doom, not even close. But gratitude that is struggled for – that’s another story. Is gratitude another way of resisting hope – prophetically?

Resisting hope – prophetically seems counterintuitive. After all, the Biblical prophets are always on the run. Backs are turned to them, even those who invoke the prophet’s name. The powers that be and often the people of ancient Israel wanted them somewhere else.

So “resisting hope,” even when those around you desire it, demand it, criticize you for not having it, even when your critics know the score like you do, even when they agree with you, even when they encourage hope in others when they don’t experience it in themselves. That isn’t hope. It’s pie in the sky.

But resisting hope – prophetically is a clarion call to resist injustice even when the chips are down. You see, a Jewish theology of liberation, which I first wrote about in the mid-1980s and which became known in the first intifada years, isn’t about hope. It isn’t even about resisting hope, only. A Jewish theology of liberation is about embodying a Jewish witness together with others, a witness to the indigenous of the people Israel, which isn’t the land and never has been. The indigenous of the people Israel is the prophetic and always has been. That’s how ancient Israel came into being in Egypt. That’s how ancient Israel was admonished and exiled in the land. Embodying the prophetic is the only reason to be Jewish. All the rest is commentary.

What does it mean to embody the Jewish prophetic today on the 5th anniversary of Kairos Palestine? Embodying the prophetic means a solidarity with the Palestinian people which is also, and at the same time, a deep solidarity with Jewish history. Embodying the prophetic is embracing Jewish destiny as the arc of the Jewish universe bends toward injustice.

Ethical Jewishness has left the historical scene. It has been squandered. Jewish history now dwells in a darkness from which there is no return. We have come to the end of Jewish history as we have known and inherited it.

We should resist hope about the return of Jewish ethics – prophetically. That is, without justice for Palestinians such hope is pie in the sky. This means that Jews inside and outside of Israel must begin with the confession which I first spoke of in Jerusalem in 1987 when I launched a Jewish theology of liberation. I have repeated it in every speech I have given since that time: “What we as Jews have done to you, the Palestinian people, is wrong. What we as Jews are doing to you, the Palestinian people, is wrong.”

What this confession meant in 1987 and what it means today is the same. However, the context of Palestinian and Israeli life has changed. In the last five years, even with the clarion call of Kairos Palestine, the situation continues to decline. It will change in the next five years too – for the worse. Even if a “peace” deal is struck in the coming years, it will only hide and solidify the injustices we see so blatantly today. Our Jewish witness has to change. As the facts on the ground continue to decline our Jewish witness has to deepen.

Among Jews in America in 1987, that is among Jews who knew we had come after the Holocaust – which we do – I was a lone voice. But since that time, and increasing today, the Jewish prophetic voice is exploding. The Kairos that Christians experience today is experienced by Jews in America, in the United Kingdom and in Israel itself, among those Israelis who remain and those who leave Israel.

Kairos for Christians is the prophetic for Jews. But, to be honest, both are independent of hope. Neither are deepened by hope. In both cases hope is tacked on. Rather when fully embraced, Kairos and the prophetic are experienced as a form of fidelity.

This is where we have arrived on the 5th anniversary of Kairos Palestine. Kairos/the prophetic are moments/lifetimes in the pursuit of justice. At its deepest level, though, justice is the pursuit of God and meaning which exist as difficult possibilities. Without justice, meaning is elusive. Calling on God is idolatry.

Kairos/the prophetic isn't hope for things unknown and unseen, or things that aren't going to happen. These lead to false hopes that eventually become slogans that faiths, political campaigns and sometimes resistance is organized around. This is what the interfaith ecumenical dialogue/deal has been and is organized around. I called this interfaith ecumenical deal to account decades ago. It remains today, battered to be sure, on the ropes, but hanging on. Sometimes it is resurrected, even

in the Holy Land, to keep appearances up. The dialoguers call it “balance.” Those of us who have been around know the drill.

But the true basis for an interfaith solidarity is elsewhere, in a Kairos/prophetic solidarity that resists the temptation of hope and instead resists in the dark waters that surround us. A new interfaith solidarity avoids cheerleading or even the proclamation that our witness leads somewhere. Which it might one day, perhaps, when history opens. In the Israel-Palestine of today it isn’t leading anywhere.

At this very moment, Kairos/prophetic is searching for light in the darkness, with the darkness of oppression prevailing and the light of resistance dim, though continuing, sometimes exploding, with many, too many casualties. The casualties increase daily, even after Gaza.

Has the world already moved on from the destruction of Gaza? It has. And with less and less room to breathe and with time running out, if it hasn’t already, political and religious institutions, including the friends of Palestine – the churches, NGOs and the United Nations for example – lack commitment. They continue to repeat rhetorical, mantra-like ethical and political positions that go nowhere.

I call these mantras “ritualized solidarity,” a solidarity we call on but don’t deepen through self-sacrifice. Not seizing the moment, no reckoning even after Gaza – the reckoning that wasn’t – and in the next five years, the reckoning won’t be happening either. The preference being? Cheap grace that Bonhoeffer named when the Nazi chips were down.

For the friends of Palestine a real solidarity is too costly in the arenas that have nothing to do with Palestinians. Like breaking publically with the Jewish establishment in the United States and Israel or calling the United States and the European Union to account. We’ve known the list for decades.

The programs being developed or inherited, the careers being made and unmade, all with good intentions, everything needs to be questioned now. The reckoning that wasn’t has to come. But a further difficulty lies here: Kairos Palestine was a reckoning that has and hasn’t come. Kairos Palestine was a reckoning calling for embodied action. The facts on the ground, all of them, are worse. The Jewish Prophetic, Kairos Jewish if you will, has come and hasn’t come. The Jewish prophetic is exploding. The facts on the ground, all of them, are worse.

To continue on in fidelity we have to clear the decks, collect our witness and move on. Kairos Palestine and the Jewish prophetic have to move and in so doing they will resist hope together – prophetically.

We can speak rhetorically but as we do we should recognize the limits of rhetoric. Our dreams, two states for two peoples or one state for two peoples are not going to be realized in our lifetime. Thus Kairos Palestine has to be re-thought/re-written on a number of levels. Is it possible to do this without breaking Kairos Christian

boundaries?

There is one state today, Israel from Tel Aviv to the Jordan River. That one state is enforced by Israel/America/Egypt/the European Union/Jordan/Saudi Arabia/the United Nations and beyond. This one state will remain for the foreseeable future. What will happen inside this one state over time is unknown. If the rhetorical dream of two states is realized it will take place within this actual one state.

When spoken of today two states in actuality means a dependent, truncated, geographically limited and militarily, economically and church/NGO occupied Palestinian autonomy.

On the 5th anniversary of Kairos Palestine we are down to one card, the biggest one of all, the prophetic wild card. With no way out, Palestinians still have to live. Palestinians continue to struggle. At the end of Jewish history, the Jewish prophetic remains constant. It isn't disappearing.

Could these Palestinian and Jewish strengths come together in an unexpected way, clearing the path for a new future of justice and equality?

KAIROS AND ADVOCACY

The Role of Media as an Advocacy Tool

Daoud Kuttab

There is always a problem for a journalist to be involved in advocacy campaigns. Journalists, by their nature, profession and ethics, have to be as neutral as humanly possible. It is therefore clear why it is difficult for a journalist to be too involved in a specific advocacy campaign.

But at the same time we know that journalists are never neutral, especially when it comes to an existential issue of their own people, and therefore while it is important to be fair and avoid exaggerating or belittling any particular element of a conflict, it is acceptable now that journalists' neutrality is never absolute and that so long as a person identifies himself or herself as say a Palestinian journalist, it is acceptable to give the public a specific point of view. This is one reason why I spend more time writing opinion articles than news reports.

By their very nature, opinions are opinionated and so long as my nationality and ethnicity are identified in the bio at the end of the article, it is totally acceptable to take a point of view, even a strong point of view. Of course, as the saying goes, you are entitled to your opinions but you are not entitled to the facts. So while one is free to form and articulate a particular opinion, if that opinion is based on a fact, it is important that this fact is genuine and credible. Modern technology today has helped a lot in this part. Hyper linking a particular fact is now possible to let the readers know that the fact you based your opinion on is in fact credible and the link allows the readers to determine for themselves the authenticity of the fact which was the basis of the opinion.

Now to the task at hand. How can we work with media or use media to advocate for peace and justice in the Arab Israeli conflict? How can we translate the Kairos statement into an advocacy campaign that can be effective and have strong impact? There are so many areas within the main Kairos document for advocacy work which can easily involve media efforts. One of the key items in the Kairos statement is its general positive nature. While the document and its authors don't shy away from confronting evil and speaking out against injustice, this is done in a respectful nature. Media activists on behalf of Palestinian Christians would do well to use the very same tone of the Kairos document in their efforts to get media coverage to the particular issue that they might be focusing on. For example, it is much easier to gain the respect of editors and journalists if you talk, as the Kairos statement does, about hope and love rather than continuously attacking the Israelis and the occupation. This doesn't mean a compromise on principles, but rather a much wiser approach in order to gain the trust and eventually the approval of the media's gatekeepers.

In this regard it is important that everyone takes media literacy education. In today's information revolution which has brought with it a ton of lies and articles that are totally bogus, it is crucial that anyone in the advocacy campaign field learn to decipher the media. This means understanding and internally ranking media by its credibility. A story in the New York Times is usually much more credible than a post on Facebook or a link on Facebook from an unknown or newly created website. This is not to say that the New York Times does not have need for improvements; it does. And in this respect one has to learn how to deal with a media as important as the New York Times. Checking the paper's own stated guidelines and ethics is a good place to start. If you read the guidelines and you notice that the journalists and editors are not living up to them this gives you a great way to make a difference. The New York Times also has something called the Public Editor. In other papers they call this post Ombudsman. These are usually veteran journalists who take the complaints of the public, investigate them and publish the result which sometimes is contrary to their own editors.

So if we are literate about media, both in terms of dismissing unimportant ones and holding brand names to their own ethics, it is important that those who are in the advocacy effort take a proactive role. Letters to the editors and comments are a perfect place to start. In this area one has to be careful to focus on a particular error in fact, a bias in presentation or a lack of symmetry and balance. It is recommended not to get into polemics and to stay away from accusations. State the facts, set the record straight and keep it short. If you are commenting on a website, avoid back and forth arguments; it is not a good idea especially since the other side has well paid individuals who will turn things around to fit their point of view.

Talking about online media brings us to social media which is quickly becoming the greatest gift to advocacy campaigners. Create your own social media accounts and use them cleverly and often to post ideas, articles and responses to others. When dealing with Twitter, use popular hashtags and be careful not to get into a back and forth argument. I've learned the hard way that sometimes you give people a bigger forum by responding. For example, I have over 10,000 followers on Twitter and sometimes a person reacts to my comments with a post that angers me and that is meant to force me to respond and I often do. But recently I've made it a practice to check out how many followers those making the comments have and I am often shocked that they have 30 or 50 followers. Therefore it has become clear that when I respond to their Twitter comments, all 10,000 of my followers are able to see their comments even though they only had 50 or so followers. So I've begun ignoring some of those people or if I felt a point of view is needed, I do it on my own without responding to their queries and giving them the benefit of my followers.

Some of you, especially those living in small communities, can do a lot with your local media. You can approach the editor with story ideas or opinion pieces or invite them to tackle an issue that is close to heart. This requires engaging with the media and its people (again media literacy allows you to know how the media functions and who makes what decisions). Often we blame a particular journalist even though his editor or publisher makes decisions on what stories to cover and what op-eds to

publish.

When pitching ideas, it is key to focus on the human side of the conflict. The Palestinian conflict is a just one but often it is badly marketed because there is too much emphasis on politics and polemics and too little attention to the human stories. People love stories and a moving human story goes a lot further in changing opinions than ideological arguments. At a time when there is so much racism and Islamophobia in western communities, there is nothing that can deflate such attacks when speaking about Palestine than by focusing on Palestinian Christians. Human interest stories that involve Christian Palestinians have so much more chance of being picked up and published/broadcast than stories that talk about Palestinians within the context of the Arab Israeli conflict.

The idea of using terms like faith, hope and love in the advocacy efforts naturally mean that the discussion is framed in positive, forward looking solutions rather than negativity about the current situation. Not that it is not important to expose the current reality, but it is important not to indulge in the negativity without presenting the positivity of faith, hope and love. The framing should be in the win/win framework of ideas like the two state solution rather than in simply cursing the occupation without giving any reason for hope and love.

Media of course today is not at all limited to words. Video, photos, cartoons, infographics and other visual elements are great at illustrating ideas. In this case, be careful of the issue of intellectual property. Make sure you know the source of the video or graphic, the date and the location before pushing it onto others and then finding out it was taken from another conflict or another period.

Media is no longer that unreachable castle that it once was. One person or many can have a big influence on media if they study the sector, know its key players and the rules of the game. Following up on these rules and inserting your well thought out humanistic ideas, or responding clearly and factually to mistaken or wrongly used facts, can help correct the record and stop the attempts at obfuscation, and focus on the need for peace and justice based on human rights and the rights of people to determine their own future.

The ability to have an effective advocacy campaign requires good research, smart and timely interventions and flexibility in offering what can produce the kind of published and broadcast media content that reflects the spirit and the content of the aspiration of Palestinians as expressed so passionately and gently in the Kairos Document.

KAIROS – TOLERANCE AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Abuse of Religious Threat to Perpetrate Violation of Laws and Values

Zoughbi Zoughbi

Tolerance is a problematic term. It is limited in time and duration. I tolerate you to a point and then what happens? Why not work for a culture of acceptance of each other as we are?

When we talk about religious extremism, let us not forget that there are three:

1-Islamic extremism: ISIS and al-Nusra Front and other sisters and brothers. When we talk about and expose Islamic extremism, we should not let the world ignore and forget Jewish and Christian extremism.

2-Jewish extremism: This doesn't need further explanation. Please do pay attention to the new racist laws of the Israeli Occupation, the blatant human rights violations by right wing groups and others or to the development in escalation regarding the Noble Sanctuary.

3-Christian extremism also known as Christian Zionism, which demonizes other religions, distorts the relationship between Moslems and Christians in the Middle East, embarrasses Arab Christians, and creates a pessimistic warlike atmosphere. The question which this imposes: Is Armageddon happening?

When we deal with such issues, we need to call things by their names. Let us call a spade a spade. Let me say that I don't want to have a seat in heaven or retaliate against the enemy. As Palestinians, we need transnational and restorative justice which redresses the wrongs rather than avenges them.

Lessons learned or certain remarks about what is called ISIS/ISIL/IS:

First: Let us make it clear that:

1. ISIS has killed more Sunni Moslems than other groups. They have assassinated more Moslem scholars than any other scholars.
2. ISIS is dangerous and catastrophic for all human beings: Moslems/Kurds/Shiite/Alawis/Druz/Yazeedis and Christians. Therefore, ISIS is dangerous to humanity and to the entire globe. In November 2014, the Security Council issued a statement expressing «deep outrage» at the ISIS killings, kidnapping, rapes and torture in Iraq, saying the group's actions “may constitute war crimes and crimes

against humanity.

3. ISIS' parents, sisters and brothers try to rule out the possibility of unity in the Arab world. ISIS has implemented what Israel has failed to do. ISIS has destroyed many cultural and archeological sites that have been preserved throughout the ages. Many symbols and relics of historic civilization have been destroyed. It is best for the Zionist entity to have small factional religious mini states which are always fighting against and with each other. Divide and conquer is the oldest and newest policy of colonial power with the support of local players and in coalition with the Zionist movement.
4. ISIS has really demonized Islam and Arabs to a point where no one believes that they are human beings. Earlier there were prefixes for Islam and Arabs – terrorists, fundamentalists, extremists. Nowadays, regrettably, ISIS is doing more damage to the image of Islam and Arabs than anyone else.
5. Colonial powers and Israel should be aware that enticing religious fervor against others will eventually turn against the instigators and the feeders.

Second: Interests are more important than values or human rights and definitely more than human security. There are no eternal friends or coalitions, only interests. Never trust a politician who says never on any level.

Third: The only way to disarm extremism is through enhancing the human security of the people and to assume collective responsibility.

Fourth: We need to focus on education and the curricula at schools/colleges/universities (formally and informally) which have the values of reciprocity, mutuality, dignity and acceptance.

Fifth: The Arab States should undermine the power of such groups through education, civil awareness, media, and religious open minded sermons, and not only through military means.

Sixth: Fighting extremism, as many thinkers and leaders believe, should not divert the focus from Palestine as being the central just cause.

Seventh: Hope can't coexist with fear. We should cast fear away. There are at least 365 verses in the Bible which say "don't be afraid." Fear is mostly fabricated and manipulated by the states to achieve their goals.

Eighth: There are more voices against such extremism in the Arab and Moslem World. It is encouraging and a sign of hope. There are more critical courageous voices who pay heavy prices and some who are facing death. Others have been threatened or maimed but they continue on the road less travelled. Al Mayadeen has a wise voice which exposes such narrow minded people and raises the awareness of our people. There are other scholars who voice their concerns as well, such as The Islamic Scholars' Association.

How to Move Forward and Create a Culture of Acceptance Void of Extremism and

Fundamentalism:

1. We need to embark on genuine dialogue – not lip service or photo opportunities or apologetics. Religion should bring about a dialogue of actions, common living and community, and in addition, and if necessary, replace a dialogue of words which so often is just lip service.
2. We need to be alert at all times. We need to act after careful search and research. Be alert.

Stay together, Friends.
Don't scatter and sleep.
Our friendship is made
of being awake.

Rumi.

We read this also in the Bible, in Mark 13:33 – “Be on guard, Keep awake, You don't know when the hour will come.”

3. We should work for diversity in Unity -- not work for uniformity but work for pluralism, putting more emphasis on celebrating differences. We need to halt by all means all strategies of Distortion of other Images, Demonization and Overgeneralization.
4. We should work for spirituality which is more inclusive and respect of all religions. Arab poet and philosopher, Khalil Gibran (1883-1931), said:
“I love you, my brother, whoever you are – whether you worship in your church, kneel in your temple, or pray in your mosque. You and I are all children of one faith, for the diverse paths of religion are fingers of the loving hand of one Supreme Being, a hand extended to all, offering completeness of spirit to all, and eager to receive all.”
5. We should work against militarization of societies, including the recruiting of children for military service. Nonviolence should be a strategy for resistance and the way to deal with and solve problems. We should work together for the nonviolent enforcement of human security.
6. Indeed, religion should be a personal relationship with God. We should work to separate state from church and work instead for citizenship. The issue of religion should be a personal relationship with the creator. People should be treated equally in the eyes of the law regardless of differences.
7. We need to affirm the Sanctity of life – every human being is created in the image of God. Rather, extremists have created God in their image. Thus God has become a real estate agent, cheer leader for war or a tribal God.
8. We need to break all stereotypes. Although people have used religion to provoke conflict, it is never the entire religion that is used as a source of conflict.

9. We should know which God we believe in. We have two conflicting images for God. First we have the punishing God and the retaliating God. However, confronting this perception, we have another image of God which illuminates Agape, acceptance, inclusion – a God of mercy, a God of restorative justice.
10. Let us refrain from selecting isolated verses from the Holy Books that suit our political means. We should not take verses out of context.
11. The practices of colonization were all justified through scriptural texts whether at the hands of Christians, Muslims, Jews or others. This scriptural selectivity is continued today in supporting the aggression of the Israeli Occupation.
12. I believe that religion is a call to celebrate differences. We need to work and incarnate the culture of acceptance. To accept others as they are. To let others accept us as we are.
13. Let us all assume collective responsibility. Let us shift and transform our focus from dwelling on victimhood, enhancing guilt, blaming and pointing the finger to collective responsibility. Dwelling on victimhood is suicidal and blaming is toxic. Salvation and freedom will come through collective responsibility.
14. In addition to the list of Human Rights that should be respected in the world and especially in the Middle East, I believe that the first should be the freedom of conscience that the state should guarantee, the best example of this being Algeria.
15. Secondly, the state should create a set of rules and orders to regulate the relationship between different faith communities and the state. Through this, the state would enhance security. Each one can practice his or her religion without interfering and without impeaching on another's right to practice. This can be done through the culture of acceptance, through the culture of understanding and respect of each other.

We can conclude by saying:

What is the purpose of religion?

To keep the morality, to keep us accountable, to be transparent, to feel that there is some power stronger than us if we misbehave or if we become unjust.

I believe that the principles of all religions can work to hold the state accountable to create an environment for respecting all human beings and ensuring human security.

The principles of religion contradict the traditional forms of security, and all religions need to work together to uphold and encourage the state to make human security a priority. Religion can work to create a viable society of compassion and acceptance that would instill human security for all people.

What is the purpose of religion?

It is not to manipulate and gain power over others. Rather, religion should be used to nourish people, to help their vitality, to create relationships, and not to create enemies.

Religion provides and offers protection to those who need it most, at all levels. Religion is the glue that is able to bind humanity together through the sanctity of human life. All religions sanctify human life, and that sanctification of life results in an atmosphere where human security is cherished.

When religion takes on its true form of being an injector of vitality, relationship, community, and love, we see that religion cannot only be a resource for peace, but also an accountable force to ensure that human security is maintained for all people.

Religious Fundamentalism: Reasons and Contexts

Nassar Ibrahim

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you. I am not a theologian nor a sheikh. I am Palestinian secular Arab. I love and admire you all so much because you have given me this privilege to be here so I will talk to you frankly.

- I believe that we meet today to affirm our religious values. We can make that affirmation wherever we may be, and there is no need to travel great distances in order to prove it. Also I do not believe that we came only to pray – with my respect of course to prayers – because we can also pray wherever we may be.
- The key task on the fifth anniversary of Kairos is to evaluate the experience, determine the difficulties and challenges, and to try to determine the responsibilities and tasks that will develop and propel this crucial initiative forward.
- Five years have passed since the initiative, and years of inter-religious dialogue, yet we see the Israeli army become vicious and violent in Gaza, Jerusalem, and all parts of Palestine. We are living now in a dangerous era characterized by lawlessness and religious extremism from all directions. We see violence and extremism that resembles a diabolic machine that threatens internal peace and the unity of communities and peoples the world over.
- What you have done, and what you are doing today for the Palestinian people, is excellent. Thank you, but at the same time please consider the work you are doing first and foremost as an act of resistance for yourselves as well. The achievements and steps forward remain insufficient, evidenced in the fact that injustice continues to exist and is becoming more ferocious, aggressive, and

widespread.

- In my opinion the problem is not in what cannot be achieved given objective, compelling, and understandable reasons. The serious problem to me is in what we can do but are not doing.
- Now I would like to pose a question: Can we regard what we are doing as sufficient? And have we done all in our powers? Accordingly, and in light of the answers, a direct and practical question is posed: What are the upcoming steps? This is the crucial and practical question posed to this conference.

How to understand religious extremism and put it into a context

- Key organizational ideas:
- Do not look for the reasons for religious fundamentalism in the sky, because the reasons exist here on earth.
- Standing up to a negative phenomenon necessitates that we go to the causes, and not to run forever after addressing the consequences. In other words, do not continue to collect the poisonous mushroom (according to Karl Marx) because you will never finish. We must find out why the poisonous mushroom grows here and there, as a matter of principle, and that is how we can stem decisively its growth.
- Given that extremism is a wide-spread phenomenon, confronting it, irrespective of the nature and source of that extremism, requires sound universal thinking and local action, and a consolidated effort.

Where is the problem?

I understand religion as “the divine intervention, and responsiveness by the people in order to gain their freedom and happiness on earth as well as in the heavens.” (God, in principle, does not need the people.) All religions, prophets, and holy books (even non divine religions) begin with standing up to ignorance, injustice, and oppression as the reasons for societal imbalances, and through such interventions, religion proves its presence and relevance, through confronting the direct physical and spiritual problems felt by the people. Religion, then, becomes the basis and the means for liberation – spiritually, physically, financially, socially, and at all levels. This is the fundamental challenge for religion, any religion, namely to maintain its function and role as the liberator of people.

Religion, in the long, complex, and compound framework, faces a counter challenge, which is: to what extent can it protect itself as an idea and a conviction so it is not transformed into a tool for oppression in the hands of the political authority (the state or political parties) or any other social force that will subjugate society and find excuses for injustice, colonization, and political, economic, or social exploitation?

Religion in its foundation is a force of resistance at all levels; at its core is resistance as the means to change reality and not merely to preach and issue moral calls. Sure religion has a spiritual, faithful, and divine role, or in other words a role as participant in resistance and towards change and ending exploitation. Religion's role is not only to preach, extend wishes, and pray. Prayer is no substitute for action but rather plays a supportive role.

Accordingly, the root causes of extremism become clear: when religious clerics and the faithful give up religion, and allow that religion to be confiscated by the political authority or any other force so that religion is used as a force of subjugation, allowing oppressive and unjust policies. When religion is exploited as such, the arena becomes vacant for whomever wants to fill the void.

- This is precisely why Karl Marx once said that ideology is always suffering from an inability to transform and adapt to reality (and I add, religion included).
- Therefore our basic responsibility is to work towards ridding religion and its institutions of terrorism and oppression in order to regain its role as a force of resistance socially and culturally, and to stand up in the face of oppression and exploitation in all its forms (this means that Liberation Theology in Latin America was successful and had a progressive value).

From this I begin:

When the brain, the human being, and societal culture are subjected to ignorance, it becomes of great importance that society, intellectuals, and religion stand up to protect society from the abyss of moral self-destruction and shallow-mindedness, irrespective of the banner, be it political, ideological, or social.

The key starting point is that religion is not the monopoly of a certain group, no matter how organized that group is. Religion is a divine phenomenon to some, and to others it is a socio-historic phenomenon. In both cases religion is a phenomenon that influences society as a whole whether the people are believers or not. So religion is not mere rituals, but rather genuine feelings that are reflected in people's behavior, culture, and social norms.

In summary, religion is not a tool for control and oppression (there are those who disagree). Religion is an idea, and a space for interaction based on respect even with those that disagree religiously. Any format other than that is a recipe for loss, and a breakaway with society's historic progression.

Today we are at an historic crossroads of great alarm, a stage where silence is no longer an option, nor is wheeling and dealing or compromise. We must stand up to fundamentalism, be it religious, political, economic, or cultural, including the extremism that emanates from religious pretense, in addition to dark forms of religion that lack depth of spirituality or humanity. This necessitates research in the context and reasons behind religious extremism, and to determine how to confront

it on the basis of a social contract that determines the relation between people and their roles as an existential necessity. Any compromise on people's rights to life and liberty in the name of religion serves as the basis for spiritual extinction and a religion void of its spiritual role, meaning, and primary function.

Over the last several years there has been international, regional, and local initiatives under the motto of religious dialogue. Their aim has been to stem extremism and conflict, and to strengthen coexistence and tolerance between religions, cultures, and peoples. Despite these efforts and activities, religious, social, and political extremism has been on the rise and has become widespread in unprecedented manners not only against other religions, but also against other groups and schools within the same religion and society. Such developments have brought social contradictions that are local, regional, and international to the forefront of the circle of violence and political and cultural terrorism. Most dangerous is the transformation of religious and social terrorism into political structures supported by social incubators.

The current historical era is evident in the Middle East, the Arab World, and in the Israeli occupation which is based on a religious narrative that has justified its ongoing aggression against the Palestinian people for more than one century. We can also see this in Western societies in the form of Christian Zionism, and in religious extremism in India and elsewhere.

Also, we are witnessing an expansion in the use of religious extremism and its political and intellectual incubators. This is done by local and international political forces for the benefit of political and economic agendas that contradict the interests of people, nations, and religions. Their work contradicts the true aim of religion, which is to enhance personhood, foster respect, freedom and rights, and encourage social interaction at all levels.

In order to impose the hegemony of religious ideology that considers others as heretics, a distinction was created between the individual, the homeland, and religion. Such extremism rejects the notion of belonging to a homeland and to a citizenship. It stems from the conviction that extremists subscribe to a divinity who is minimized to the stances, approximations, policies, and orders of the extremist party. Anything other than the extremist party is considered as a legitimate target of murder, terrorism, and negation. Such extremism is totally antagonistic to the social, secular, and national forces, in addition to being antagonistic towards other religions, sects, and whoever is different even within the same religion.

Looking at the Causes of Religious and Social Extremism

One: Religion and Confused Religiosity

Confused religiosity, while religiously and faith based, manifests itself in the form of too much attachment to, and emphasis on, religious symbols. It creates intellectual and social terrorism that begins by playing on the raw sensitivities of the group. The aim is to prevent criticism, freedom of expression, or the natural exercise of rights

of individuals and groups, and therefore to create a state of intellectual terror based on religious myth.

Confused religiosity amounts to aborting intellectual capabilities, analytical skills included, that are much-needed in dealing with the phenomena and daily social questions of great complexity. So that confused religiosity prevails and controls society, it pushes fervently towards spreading social ignorance as its best incubator. There is a mechanical form of religion, based on diverting the dialogue and behavior towards formalities, and whatever manifests religion as lacking depth.

Contemplative faith is usually the point of beginning for intellectual and philosophical transformations, and therefore it was no coincidence that Prophet Mohammed isolated himself in the Cave of Hira', and Jesus went to the desert for forty days.

Among the most dangerous ramifications and functions of confused religiosity (which is a religion in shape but not in practice) is that it prevents intellect and analysis, and tends to always generalize rituals and behaviors as the tool for control and preventing intellect (it resembles the function of a prison that subjugates, but here the tools utilized are the rituals that consecrate fragmentation and collective instinct). Examples of confused religiosity include extremism in attire, focus on details of kinetics, having the right to violate the rights of others under the pretext of safeguarding religion, how to walk, sit, carry out contracts, but the most dangerous restrictions are those imposed against women at all levels.

In a nutshell, religion is not a tool of control and oppression, but is rather an idea and open space based on interaction and respect for other religions. Anything other than that leads to loss and lack of communication with society and the historic progression of societal building.

Two: The Experience of Religious Dialogue

Religious dialogue initiatives focus on representatives of official religions, avoid critical voices, and pay attention to creating commonality between religions on a common moral basis. This is instead of standing up to challenges that face people and nations which include social justice, political liberation, and economic justice issues. The discussion topics should constitute the basis and core of the dialogue and change, and not the spiritual debate and affirming the brotherhood and common moral basis. What ought to be achieved is to build bridges with civil social movements including secular, nationalistic, and political forces. Because of this fundamental error, dialogue remains limited to the elite, in sitting rooms, conferences, and never becomes a serious dialogue with an informed and deep social action. That is why the world today is drowning in religious and social extremism, due to the absence of organized social forces that unify and are capable of stemming religious extremism and its consequences of social, political, and cultural extremism. The efforts exerted must encompass the social and intellect levels, with the aim of drying out the incubators of extremist behavior.

Three: Failure in Dealing with Social Inequities

Another reason for religious extremism is the social retraction towards it due to the paralysis in dealing with the problems faced by peoples and societies (political, economic, cultural, meeting people's basic needs, discrepancy in international relations in a manner that violates peoples' rights to live in justice, dignity, freedom, and independence).

The most blatant example is the rights of the Palestinian people (of course there are other peoples too) who want freedom, an end to the occupation and respect for their rights in their homeland.

In light of the failure, there has been an increase in political and economic crises in the form of poverty, unemployment, irrational investment in natural resources, increase in social crises because of the unjust distribution of wealth inside the single society and worldwide. This pushes people towards seeking solutions in other contexts and creates the incubator for religious, political, cultural, and social extremism.

Four: Utilizing Religious Extremism for the Benefit of Political and Hegemonic Agendas

Another reason for the surge of religious extremism is the illusion that religion can be used as a tool of hegemony by countries that want to achieve political agendas. This is what happened when support was given to Taliban and Al-Qaida movements in Afghanistan, support to terrorist groups in Syria and Libya, and sectarianism after Iraq was occupied in 2003. Silence by the countries that claim to defend human rights and democracy is insulting, such as the Salafist Wahhabi thought that prevails in the regimes of the Gulf and especially in Saudi Arabia. It creates a political, media, and financial incubator for terrorist movements that utilize religion to preserve their interests and political role.

Five: The Israeli Occupation

The Israeli occupation and Zionist ideology are the biggest engines for religion as an ideology to justify the occupation, murder, and displacement of Palestinians. All of this is done in the name of God. The occupation is supported entirely by most western countries, including the United States, and some Christian theologians (Christian Zionists) who provide excuses for this horrible behavior.

- I knew nothing about God Almighty as a real estate broker busy with land distribution between the people. The problem is when God is perceived as keen on the interests of a group of only six million people on earth! Something is terribly wrong!
- As to the concept of the "Promised Land," how could this apply to an occupation or displacement of one people on earth, namely Palestinians who have existed for 10,000 years, even before divine religions?
- The concept of the Jewish State, and the danger it embodies:

- The State should be for all its citizens, and not for the followers of one religion. Should we accept and promote the concept of a Jewish State, then ISIS has the right, too, to establish an Islamic State, and possibly we could have a Protestant, Lutheran, Shiite, Sikh, or any other type of religious state. This is a red line!
- Resolving the conflict should be only through the struggle to end the system and colonialist power relations in Palestine. The deep-rooted aim of the Palestinian struggle is not over the ratio of “land distribution” and the right to pray here and there despite its importance, and not the destruction of Israelis as human beings, but in fact it is to end entirely the colonial power relation in Palestine, which amounts to the basis and direct reason for all that the Palestinians and Jews have been subjected to since the beginning of the Zionist colonialist project in Palestine.

That objective will materialize only by ending the ideological, cultural, economic, and behavioral structures that govern Israel. Even when an independent Palestinian state is established, the conflict will persist so long Israel behaves on a colonial basis. Through achieving this objective (that requires a comprehensive struggle), the conflict will end on a sound basis and in a manner that guarantees Palestinian rights in all its entirety, in addition to the right of Israelis, to live normal lives according to their convictions, faith and full religious, social and political rights like any other nation, with no discrimination, colonialism, hegemony, oppression, and occupation. (For example, the ending of apartheid in South Africa, and ending the French colonial settler colonization of Algeria... whereby the two experiences were not against whites or French colonizers as human beings but rather against the power relation based on colonialist/occupation racism. Nelson Mandela never asked the whites to leave South Africa, and the Liberation Front did not ask one million settlers to leave the country after the revolution’s victory. All they said was that the power relations have to change, and that people who wish to live according to the new relations are welcome, but they should leave if they wish to live as colonizers.)

Six: Religious Extremism and the Concept of Citizenship/Nationality and Minorities (Looking at Palestinian Christians and Their Role in Society)

By looking at the factors that increase extremism, there appears the predicament about understanding the status and role of Arab Christians. Obviously interfaith dialogue did not increase the trust of Christian Arabs in themselves, and the prevailing feeling is one of minority and isolation (for example, the Christian citizen goes to the Church as a substitute for the State should he need anything, instead of consecrating the values of citizenship and belonging like any other citizen). Also the Christian Arab is encouraged to immigrate, isolate sartorially, and accept social marginalization instead of vital interaction. The situation is enforced through European policies that have exploited these Christians, and also evident in western military or political interventions where Christians are paying the price in the form of violence and expulsion, reminiscent of the Crusader era. This happened in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and before that in Palestine with Israel receiving full military, political, and economic support despite its aggression against Palestinians, including Christians.

Therefore, we must end once and for all the concept of a minority within the single nation (and end the perception of citizens as numbers, because numbers provide no information about their impact in society). We are all minorities in our stances: political, intellectual, and geographic belongings. If I perceive myself as a secular person among Palestinians, or as a minority among you right now, or as a Bedouin, I become that minority. If I look to myself as an individual where 65% of the population are refugees, then I become a minority person since I am not a refugee geographically but I am definitely a cultural refugee as it is inconceivable that 60% of the population is uprooted and whomever remains in place is considered as something natural – this just cannot be.

If I look to myself as someone from Jerusalem, Gaza, Nablus, or Hebron, immediately I become a minority person. If I look to myself as a political force then I remain a minority. Also, a British citizen is a minority in relation to the rest of the world, and so is every member of every nation, as you can imagine. Even followers of divine religions are relative in their status. Seculars could very well be a minority in this world. Therefore each one of us perceives reality from our vantage point, be it political, intellectual, economic, or cultural. So is there anything we can do about it? The concept of minority is a relative concept and in no way contradicts citizenship. The concept of citizenship constitutes the cornerstone and basis. We must put an end to the culture and devastating perception (that reflects the concept of devastating identity, according to Amin Maalouf). We are one people with great diversity, and this should be the basis and standard, rather than that we have conflict and contradiction. Accordingly people should be judged on the basis and structures of the social contract that governs relations, roles and functions which become a top and existential priority. In other words, individuals and groups have the full right to live their lives as per their choices, be they political, social, or religious convictions, on condition that they do not diminish the rights and convictions of others. Whoever allows the freedoms and rights of others to be diminished must expect a similar response and behavior. Such negative behavior leads groups and societies in a process of decay, contradiction, and internal self-strife.

Confrontation or Resistance

- Evaluating religious dialogue and initiatives, and to build on it based on accumulated positive experience, with the aim to launch initiatives that overcome gaps and negative aspects of such dialogue.
- Expanding the circle of community dialogue so it will include:
 - The Islamic and Christian forces that are critical and enlightened, and not to be limited to persons and voices in harmony with the official religious or hegemonic institutions.
 - Secular personalities and forces.
 - Political forces and activists.
 - Expansion of dialogue so it covers social, political, economic, and strategic cultural issues.
 - Confronting the exploitation of religion and its use in a manner contradicting citizenship and coexistence.

- Begin with the fact that religion and religious commitment is a force of resistance against injustice, oppression, and exploitation in all its forms. Religious clerics and the faithful must serve as a force integrated in social and cultural movements that are active in the field.

Jesus Christ as a Force of Resistance... One Last Thought

When Jesus entered the Temple and found thieves and thugs desecrating it, he carried a whip and turned the tables upside down. If Jesus were to live through the calamities that his people have been subjected to, meaning us, the Palestinians, during the last 65 years of dispossession, massacres, war, and destruction, would He suffice with prayer and preaching? In my opinion he would be out on the streets resisting with all his power, and definitely he would raise a whip until justice prevailed. Jesus realized the power of ideas, but also realized that at a certain moment the idea needs support other than words. Decisive action is needed while we continue to pray.

KAIROS AND WOMEN

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as a Source of Hope for the Liberation of Palestine; and a new community of women and men in the world

Anna Karin Hammar

For an action to be truly liberating, it has to have a smell and taste of life. Therefore many artists in the history of the Church painted the cross not just as a place for execution but as an expression of the compassionate love of God in Jesus. Hence, several artists painted the cross in the form of a flourishing tree. The presence of Mary and the disciple John at the cross contributed to this sense of care and love. Their presence at the cross signified a new community of women and men in the world.

The danger in all forms of conflict and war is that we lose sight of what is human. Women often work against all odds in creating a home and an atmosphere of care that can support the family network and the neighboring families. Women in all cultures have carried heavy and skillful work-tasks and workloads. And in all this, a sense of care and compassion. The interesting thing with the Bible is that it sees this expression of women not only as female but as human. Jesus is therefore called not only Mary's son but also the son of Sophia, wisdom, the son of wisdom. Women's way of being is affirmed as a pattern not only for women, but for humanity. Therefore, Mary, who praises a God that uplifts the oppressed and dethrones the dictators, is a sign of a new community in the world, a new community of women and men that serve one another and care for the most vulnerable in each generation.

It is my conviction that we as humanity need to turn from a culture of death into a culture of life. For this to happen, men need to learn from women. It means that men need to include women in all discussions on strategies and decision-making. Women need to be part of the decision-making, not at the very end, when everything has failed, but in the very beginning. Mary did consent to carry Jesus into the world. Heavenly messengers expect the will of women to be heard. It should be no less so in earthly families, also when marked by hardships. The will of women and the decision-making of women is an indispensable part of the human community. All suffer when women's will and wisdom are not taken seriously.

For a culture of life to flourish, we need to draw on all of our cultural and religious resources. In the Kairos document, I find the expression "creative resistance" as a recognition of the need for a culture of life in a world of death. In our actions, also when we resist evil and resist occupation and dispossession, we need to be able to sense a taste of life, a taste of compassion.

Let me go to the Kairos document and the call for ending the occupation by Boycott,

Divestment and Sanctions, BDS. Where can we detect the smell of life in BDS? The Israeli narrative is to combine boycott with a culture of death. As soon as the word “boycott” appears in the West it is counteracted by references to the Nazi persecution in Germany and the beginning of the road to genocide by refusal to buy from Jews. For those who treasure BDS, the narrative is the South African one. As Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions were powerful means to undo apartheid, *hafrada*, in the case of South Africa, so it has power to undo occupation and *hafrada* in Palestine. We could also take the example of the boycotts led by Gandhi in India.

How can we hence distinguish between boycott that belongs to the culture of death and boycott that affirms a culture of life? I would say it depends on two things. Firstly, the power relationships. Are those who are targets of boycott without rights and means or not? The Kairos document puts it wisely: the targets are described not as human beings but as the occupation. The call is for boycotting the occupation. Secondly, is there an invitation to a new relationship? Is there a scenario of life affirming relationships to develop?

This dream that the Bible affirms as the sheep and the lion living together in peace needs to be expressed and articulated in different ways. Creative resistance carries an affirmation of life. It carries a “yes” with the “no,” a “yes” that is expressed in the Kairos document as created in the image of God.

When Mary praises God who dethrones the mighty and exalts the lowly in the Magnificat, it does not smell of a cycle of revenge but of a cycle affirming the image of God in everyone. All empires that build on the suppression and denial of the humanity of the other are doomed to fall down, one day or another. Sooner or later. As Mitri Raheb has shown in his book, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, not one of them has lasted for ever.

How can women contribute to creative resistance? I have already mentioned the necessity of women in the processes of decision-making. Now I would like to offer a second necessity for a culture of life to flourish. Women need to build links with women, strategic alliances that can help to influence politics and policy. I therefore would like to offer a proposal, a Kairos Women’s Convocation for Women parliamentarians and women as contributors to peace in Palestine and the Middle East, embodying the UN resolution 1325. The network of women within Kairos Palestine is the core group within such an event that should be extended to embrace women peace builders from all the Abrahamic faiths and secular organisations. The place should, of course, be Bethlehem so that women from the West Bank can gather and the center of Kairos Palestine be affirmed. Such an event or Convocation could be the next step in extending Kairos Palestine into strategic cooperation with women from around the world and not the least from the Middle East. Bethlehem as a center for peace building in Palestine and the Middle East could be affirmed, taking responsibility for its own situation but seeing it in the wider context of the Middle East.

I have mentioned two actions necessary for a culture of life to flourish.

First, the will of women to be heard in decision-making as the will of Mary was heard by the angel, Gabriel.

Second, women forging alliances with women, as Mary and Elisabeth came together in support of one another when their lives were challenged.

Third, the need of men and women to deepen our spirituality in learning from the Magnificat and Mary's trust that God is at work, day by day, anchoring our lives in that deep love for humanity that we name God. In spirituality we are invited to taste the goodness of God, that we may be empowered to transform into reality the dream of God for humanity. A day of Liberation from war and tyranny. A day of Liberation for both the oppressed and the oppressors. Let us taste and see that God is good. Let us magnify the love of God in the world.

KAIROS INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES: RESPONSES

“Are you able to help us to get our freedom back...?”

Presentation on the Responses to the
Kairos Palestine Document from Germany

Gerhard Dilschneider

with the assistance of **Dr. Wilhelm Wille**

Introduction

The Kairos Palestine Document (KPD), “A moment of truth – A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering,” was launched in 2009. “Our word is a cry of hope”... and addressed ... “to all the churches and Christians in the world, asking them to stand against injustice and apartheid, urging them to work for a just peace in our region, calling on them to revisit theologies that justify crimes perpetrated against our people and the dispossession of the land.”

Then follows the core sentence:

“Our question to our brothers and sisters in the churches today is: Are you able to help us to get our freedom back ... to attain justice, peace, security and love?” with the additional request: and **“not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustice we suffer...?”**

How did the German Protestant churches and Christians in Germany respond to this cry of desperation? This paper tries to present an overview in a very brief summary and to give a rough idea about the responses from Germany, in particular from the Protestant churches.

Responses from the Churches

Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)

The document was disseminated by the *World Council of Churches* also to the central office of the *Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)* and to the 20 regional churches (Landeskirchen).

The EKD office of *‘Ecumenical Relations and Ministries Abroad’* confirmed the receipt of the KPD in February 2010, expressing its solidarity with the sisters and brothers but without reflecting on any further consequences.

The *Evangelical Middle-East-Commission (EMOK)* of the EKD was dealing with KPD and published a statement that they received the document “with thanks,” wanted to pay “great attention to the content” and intended to take its “concern seriously.”

In following up the matter, a number of questions and reservations were expressed. *EMOK* questioned whether, for example, “the occupation is the only reason for the desperate situation of the Palestinian people” and demanded urgently “lawful state structures” for the Palestinian society. The chair of *EMOK* suggested that the document should not be distributed without any further explanations because readers might misunderstand its content.

The Church Conference representing all regional churches of the *EKD* adopted the *EMOK* statement and with this move the *EKD* more or less closed the discussion. There was no further effort by the *EKD* to initiate a discussion on the national level or promote any effort in order to respond to the cry of the Palestinians: “Are you able to help us to get our freedom back...?”

Regional Churches (Landeskirchen)

A number of regional churches of the *EKD* - but not all of them – dealt with *KPD*. Mostly, they passed it on to synod committees or commissions which drafted non-committal texts that were forwarded by the synod without discussion. The Evangelical Church of Palatine launched a working paper designed for local church groups. A move in the right direction. An extensive debate about *KPD* took place in the synod of the Evangelical Church in Baden leading to a “brotherly-critical Letter to the authors of *KPD*.” However, the letter shows that in the end even here the advocates of the theological mainstream prevailed. In 2011 the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland released a low-key “proposal for discussion” including a demand for an end of the occupation of Palestine. However, it was never followed up by advocating concrete initiatives.

The General Theological Frame of Reference

One cornerstone of German Protestant church theology as it has developed after the historic convulsions of the last century is the belief in God’s unbroken faithfulness to his covenant with Israel, the promise of a specific piece of land in the Middle East given to the Jews being an essential element of this covenant. One stresses that the authority of international law has to be respected unconditionally as well as the human rights of Palestinians, but insists as well on the real significance of the ethnocentric connotation of the “promised land.” The relationship between the two assertions is never clarified. The resulting ambiguity allows for vagueness and evasion when it comes to *KPD* and, eventually, for reasons of political expediency, siding with the stronger party in the conflict.

Thus in all statements issued one reads about “God’s land inherited by Israel,” “the Jewish land,” “Israel the holy land,” “the land of promise,” “the chosen tribe and God’s covenant with the promised land” and “covenant and land belong together.” No distinction is being made between the religious biblical Israel and the Jewry as a faith community with a long tradition and the state of Israel as a modern nation-state.

The fatal confusion impedes a fair judgement on KPD. One can argue on an abstract theological - and, perhaps, even mythological level - avoiding the political reality and urgency. When KPD maintains that there cannot be “any biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringements of our rights...” and pleads: “...not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustices...” the German churches would immediately assent. Yet, they seem to be happy with a way of theological reasoning which justifies their not taking sides with the oppressed, and the question of whether KPD need not critically re-examine our theology went unheard.

The request for ending the occupation can also be considered from a different viewpoint. Thus KPD argues “...it distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation.” With the occupation, Israel is destroying its moral foundation. Interesting enough, this quote did not find any consideration in the German responses to KPD. Nor is it mentioned that throughout the Hebrew Bible the land is constitutively linked to doing justice and not to ethnos.

Almost all reactions of the German churches tried to refer to the main features of German protestant church theology. First and foremost, one wants to prove that one is not only sympathetic towards Israel but agrees with the Israeli narrative of the history of the conflict, hardly ever criticising its present political and religious self-understanding. On the other hand, although sympathy is expressed in words towards the fate of the Palestinians, their interpretation of the political situation is met with suspicion: “The concern of KPD is touching us” but “...we do not share the theological arguments and the subsequent consequences expressed in the document.”

Some Specific Issues

Apartheid

KPD is using the word ‘apartheid’ (...asking Churches and Christians...to stand against injustice and apartheid...) in describing one of the features of systemic and structural oppression. It witnesses to the connection between racism and the oppression of occupation. With this clear wording KPD also refers to the ‘Kairos Document’ (KD) launched by a prophetic South African (SA) group of engaged Christians in 1985, calling on the ecumenical community to recognize the devastating racial, political and economic structure of the country. Kairos SA was a prophetic document articulating a moral imperative and a tool in the struggle against oppression and occupation. It had a strong biblical foundation expressing a confessional stand. KPD links up to this theological position.

Most reflections of the regional churches did not pay much attention to this very important reference. Even the EMOK paper in its statement declares that the reference to the situation in South Africa under the apartheid regime is not applicable and “problematic” because it can be interpreted as an “ideological” position. A regional church declares KPD linking “Zionism to racism and the State of Israel close to the apartheid state of South Africa” as “improper” and “politically misleading.” The churches seemingly overlook the fact that KPD, in using the word apartheid, is

referring to the UN-Apartheid-Convention and apparently the German statements deny the seriousness of this problem. Also the age-long and complete disregard for international law and international solutions by the state of Israel does not play any role in the German reflections.

With the description about the results of the occupation (oppression, separation wall, confiscation of land, Israeli settlements, arbitrary arrests and detention, stealing of water resources, humiliation, expulsion, collective punishment, economic hardship, deprivation of freedom) KPD tries to highlight the effects, destruction and fragmentation of human, social, economic and political life of the Palestinian society. The rather obvious and not at all deniable problems do not really find emphatic responses. Even critique is raised that the description given is very much “one-sided,” does not recognize the “complexity of the situation” and presents a “mono causal” picture. More often than not the Israel narrative is repeated. One even complains that a “confession about their own guilt” by the Palestinians is missing.

One pastor, chair of the Christian-Jewish dialogue of one of the regional churches, says that the occupation “is of course not at all desirable but basically as a fact cannot be avoided.” Another theologian claims that “to declare Israel an apartheid state is unbearable.”

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

The state of Israel - not the Jewry - is aimed at in the KPD appeal to the ecumenical and international community “to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott” as a means of “peaceful non-violent resistance.” For the German churches this public appeal is not at all “acceptable” and across the board is rejected. Their position refers to the historical experience with the Nazis’ racist program of “don’t buy from Jews.” By referring to the German history, the BDS call is almost silenced. By avoiding BDS, the churches overlook the fact that during the Nazi time this policy was pursued to exclude, humiliate and destroy the life of one section of the population on a racial basis, whereas the BDS movement is meant to enforce justice, freedom and self-determination for all members of the society in Israel and Palestine according to universal human rights. For the Palestinians, boycott is also a manifestation of their right to decide the terms of their own struggle and their own freedom. German churches, on reflecting on this hot issue, did not enter the discussion that non-violent resistance as such is a right guaranteed by international law as expressed by Article 1(4) of Protocol 1 (additional to the Geneva Conventions). Criticism is levelled against BDS but Kairos Palestine rarely evokes any alternative suggestion in advocating their call. Interesting enough EMOK argues, “We recognize that ‘Kairos’ indicates that it is time for action.” But there is no mention in which ways the institutional church itself could express its solidarity in supporting the urgent demand: “Are you able to help us to get our freedom back...?”

Summary of the Churches’ Response

Assessing and responding to documents issued by brothers and sisters of the worldwide ecumenical churches, the following three-step-approach has proven to be helpful: See - Judge - Act. From this point of view the official and institutional

position of the churches in Germany can be summarized as follows:

German churches express their solidarity with Judaism witnessing to God's faithfulness towards his chosen people. Driven by a guilt-complex resulting from the holocaust, the state of Israel is unconditionally supported. This is linked with the unquestioned acceptance of the narrative of the Israeli victimhood in regard to its history and present. Though the "cry for hope in the face of despair" is heard, at the same time rather strong reservations are formulated over against the facts on the ground as presented by KPD. It is obvious that the institutional church does not really see and perceive what is going on in Palestine; that in the face of innumerable legal and human rights violations and abuses, the UN issued scores of resolutions that hold Israel accountable but to no effect. Furthermore the Israeli government is intent on destroying every political entity in the West Bank and Gaza and turning the Palestinians into a marginalized, fragmented people. The historian Baruch Kimmerling calls this 'politicide'.

Even a reproach is formulated: the KPD is "dramatizing the situation." One has the impression that the representatives of the German churches know better what is going on in Palestine, and even paternalistic tunes are not being avoided. The impression appears that KPD is discredited as theologically unsound and politically unacceptable. By studying the German churches' responses in regard to "Act" one gains the impression that a low profile and uncommitted position is preferred. Convincing suggestions showing their willingness and solidarity to participate in the struggle are more or less missing. Even the worsening oppression does not provoke any bold or clear action and to get involved in a long-term advocacy process is not reflected. The German theologian Bonhoeffer once said: "Truth is concrete. Ending up with generalities one remains entrapped in untruth."

Some regional churches expressed their willingness to continue the support of programmes and projects already in place, implemented in partnership with local churches and institutions in Palestine which hopefully will contribute to a just peace in the region.

It should be noted that the very popular and well attended biennial event of the German Protestant churches - Evangelischer Kirchentag - has up to now not taken up in its program the KPD challenge as a timely and urgent matter by offering an in-depth political and theological discourse. They argue that the Christian-Jewish dialogue, which is unquestionably important, should not be disturbed. They also claim to have touched the issue of Palestine in various ways.

Remarks Concerning the German Context

In regard to Israel and Palestine the official German churches and their representatives operate very carefully and in a restrained manner, avoiding any risk and daring discussions. This is very much in line with the general political mainstream of the country. Therefore the churches' reactions, discussions and papers dealing with KPD reflect this feature and are coined by the following background:

Historical Liability

The historical responsibility towards the holocaust and its implications - the “guild-complex” - plays an eminently heavy role. This history does not allow any harsh critique towards the state of Israel. Since Israel claims to be in its self-understanding a “Jewish state” any critique levelled towards its policy and devastating human rights record is immediately coined as anti-semitic. And of course nobody wants to be an Anti-semite.

Christian-Jewish Dialogue

After the Second World War, and under the impression of the Holocaust, the German churches and Christian communities started an honest and serious dialogue with members of the Jewish community. This inter-faith dialogue was undertaken to break down old barriers of fear and mistrust between the two communities and to overcome the theological Antijudaism entrenched in much of the church history. This project of penitence and self-scrutiny resulted in a profound and deep discourse touching theological and ethical reflections about the Old and New Testaments and its meaning for the Christian church. This process led to a deeper understanding about the two religions and coined in a new way the relationship between the two faiths. The fruits of this effort should not be touched and disturbed by the political Palestinian agenda resulting in accusations and subsequently feared de-legitimation of Israel. Facts about the occupation and the KPD appeal calling for solidarity for their fate are not welcome. The Reformed Church in Germany states that KPD “endangers the laborious results of the Jewish-Christian dialogue.”

Mark Braverman states: “The Christian impulse for reconciliation has morphed into theological support for an anachronistic, ethnic nationalist ideology that has hijacked Judaism, continues to fuel a global conflict, and has produced one of the most systematic and long standing violations of human rights in the world today.”

Israel Narrative

Israel skilfully repeats and propagates its narrative about the foundation of the state and its policy during the last 60 plus years. It presents itself as an age-long victim of the aggressive hostile Arabic nations and of course the Palestinians are part of the show. Therefore, one should agree that Israel needs to deal with ‘terrorists’ and anything possible has to be done to guarantee the security of the state. This view is officially and rather uncritically swallowed by most of the German Government and church representatives.

Raison d’Etat

The German chancellor Angela Merkel, as well as the parties forming the present coalition government, have declared that the security of Israel as a “Jewish and democratic state” is Germany’s Raison d’Etat (‘Staatsräson’). This creates a climate which does not really allow any serious criticism of Israeli politics. Restitution agreed upon after the Second World War and the subsequent complete and unquestionable support, loyalty and complicity ranks very high in the political agenda and official German circles. Trade of arms, modern submarines at discount prices or even donated, close cooperation with academic institutions, commercial trade and commerce and

even biennial joint cabinet-meetings have in the last 60 years created very close ties. Israel's age long systematic human rights violations, ignoring international treaties and justifying all activities are only occasionally met by the Government with critical remarks but without applying any consequences to the brutal military oppression.

When the topic of Israel and Palestine appears on the agenda of public meetings a very heated discussion can be expected. This first of all shows a very genuine interest in the issue. But the arguments soon narrate the Israeli position and people defending the KPD are accused of being completely biased and anti-semitic. But slowly the picture and mood in the public are changing, particularly after the last Gaza war when people recognized that something is going wrong. However, this has not yet made an impact on German politics and the mainstream of the churches.

All this has to be taken into account if one wants to understand the deplorable reactions of the German churches to KPD. Membership and leadership of the churches are not only reacting under the impact of a "guilt-complex." The leadership has always been rather sensitive with regard to the "Staatsraison." Undeniably, it is important to continue reflecting on the meaning of historical legacies, at any rate, one of the dimensions of the holocaust, and the sincerity of any individuals struggling with this legacy is not at all questioned. But clearly, the reactions of the German churches to KPD are influenced by a desire to toe the line of the state. Any critique will have to deal with this.

Reaction from church-based organisations, grass-root movements, action groups and other organisations in Germany

Whereas KPD on the official church level was received without much empathy and the core question posed was not addressed at all ("Are you able to help us get our freedom back...?"), Church groups at grass-roots, grass-root movements and actions groups started to pay attention to KPD with the conviction that the urgent cry of the Palestinian Christians and churches should not be overlooked. To mention just a few of these initiatives:

Jerusalems-Verein, a mission based society, has recognized the importance of the document for the Palestinian society and the ecumenical movement. It calls for an end of the occupation and refuses to accept that land claims can be based on biblical-theological arguments.

The Council of Churches Baden-Wuerttemberg (ACK) launched in 2010 a comprehensive study guide to KPD and included a report of delegates of the ACK on a visit to Palestine. The synod of the regional church (Evangelical Church of Wuerttemberg) recommended the study guide to the parishes.

Theological working group Ostfriesland expressed its solidarity with the KPD and concluded that there is only one option: "...to stretch out the hand and help."

Pax Christi, a well-known Catholic organisation, welcomed the document and appreciated the theological arguments leading to BDS. The organisation in the

meanwhile has started a campaign “Occupation tastes bitter” in support of BDS....

The **Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel** (EAPPI) strongly supported the request raised by KPD “come and see...”

The **Forum Friedensethik** (Forum on the Ethics of Peace) in the Evangelical Church of Baden organised seminars on KPD with Mitri Raheb and Jeff Halper and stressed the importance of the KPD paraphrasing a famous phrase of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Only those who cry out for the Palestinians stand in true solidarity with Israel.”

International Fellowship of Reconciliation - German branch (Internationaler Versöhnungsbund - Deutsche Sektion) “is impressed and touched by the theology ‘love of peace’ and the concept of non-violent resistance and recognizes that KPD represents an important contribution towards peace-building activities.

The **Kairos-Palestine Solidarity-Network** - a faith-based network - was launched in 2012 in Germany. It was initiated in response to the uncommitted, luke-warm and half-hearted reaction of the institutionalized churches in Germany on all levels. The network is a forum to exchange information, to raise awareness, plan and coordinate activities. The network working under the umbrella of **Kairos Europe** has published in 2013 an elaborate guide-book which is helping interested groups and individuals through reflection and background information to understand KPD. Recently the **Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz** (Evangelical Church of the Palatinate) launched a KPD guide-book designed to promote the reception and discussion in parishes and groups.

Due to the rather hesitant and reserved response by the official church, grass-root movements and action groups related to the church but not being part and parcel of the official structures or working outside the churches recognized the apparent deficits in responding to the call of the Palestinian sisters and brothers. They questioned the official position, took up the matter, started studying and promoting KPD and got involved by building up networks. By spreading the message, organizing public events and developing educational tools the movement is challenging the churches and keeping the issue alive and going.

It shows that initiatives are able to respond. In this way movements can become agents for change and there is still hope that the German churches could cease to side with the oppressor.

A Thousand Voices for Kairos Palestine

Petition of Christians for peace and justice in Israel/Palestine

Peter Dettwiler

“God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God’s land.” (Kairos Document, 2.3.1)*

We – a working group of church related persons – are deeply concerned about the unsolved conflict in Israel/Palestine. We acknowledge the longing of the Jewish people for a secure place after centuries of persecution, ending almost in extinction. But we also hear the voice of the Palestinian people stating: “It was an injustice when we were driven out from the land” (Kairos Document 2.3.2). We are especially concerned about the growing number of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the continuing construction of the barrier which makes a two State-solution more and more impossible. Any claim for the entire “Erez Israel” or entire Palestine is aiming at the displacement or the oppression of the other nation.

Aware of the fact

- that we are involved in a calamitous history of the marginalization and persecution of the Jewish people in Europe over centuries and that we therefore have a special responsibility in this conflict
 - that the Christian faith is and remains rooted in the Jewish faith
 - that through Jesus of Nazareth we are called to stand for justice, peace and love for everyone
- we stand**
- for peace in justice in the land of the Bible which guarantees security, freedom and acknowledgment to both the Israelis and the Palestinians
 - for the right of existence of Israel in the land of its biblical fathers and mothers – and for the right of existence for the Palestinian people in the land of their forefathers, according to the decisions of the United Nations for both nations
 - for the self-determination of the Palestinian people in a Palestine which enables an independent development.

Thoroughly convinced

- that the occupation, settlement and blockade of the Palestinian areas by Israel contradict international law and human rights
- that we have to take seriously the “cry of hope in the absence of hope” (10.1) of the Palestinians in an indefensible situation in the occupied territories
- that the churches particularly have to take into account that “any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings” (2.5)

we commit ourselves

- to be in solidarity with persons both in Israel and in Palestine who are standing up for peace and justice
- to support non-violent resistance against the Israeli politics of the occupation,

settlement and blockade of the Palestinian areas

- to support organizations and projects which are standing for peace, reconciliation and justice in Israel/Palestine.

We address this petition to the leaders of the Swiss Churches (the Federation of the Swiss Protestant Churches and its member churches, the Swiss Bishop's Conference, the Old Catholic Church, the Methodist Church in Switzerland and the Swiss Evangelical Alliance) urgently asking them

- to listen to the call of the Palestinian Christians who ask the churches around the world “to say a word of truth and to take a position of truth with regard to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land” (6.3)
- to encourage their parishes to discuss the Kairos Palestine Document “A moment of truth” and to engage in an open and fair discussion about the conflict in Israel/Palestine
- to actively support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, EAPPI, of the World Council of Churches.

“Our future and their future are one. Either the cycle of violence that destroys both of us or peace that will benefit both” (Kairos-Document 4.3).

March 2013

The document Kairos Palestine “A moment of truth – A word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering,” published December 2009, is to be found at: www.kairospalestine.ps.

German version: www.kairos-palaestina.ch;

French version: www.kairos-palestine.ch.

Preaching the Good News in a Bad Way The Inheritance of Abraham?

Páraig Réamonn

Every May, the general assembly of the Church of Scotland meets to consider reports from our councils and committees. These reports for some years have been posted in advance on our church website.

Last year, we posted online a report from our Church and Society Council entitled *The Inheritance of Abraham? A report on the ‘promised land.’* Immediately, we were inundated by a tsunami of Jewish criticism. Some of this was no doubt orchestrated, but much of it raised valid questions.

The report was hastily pulled from the website and revised, and a meeting was hastily

arranged to mend our fences with the Jewish community in Scotland and the UK. In Mel Brooks' film, *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*, the Sheriff of Nottingham has bad news for Prince John, and Prince John hates bad news. He suggests to the Sheriff that if he tells him the bad news in a good way, maybe it won't sound so bad. So Nottingham tries this, and of course it doesn't work.

«What are you, crazy?» says the prince. «Why are you laughing? This is terrible news!»

The *Inheritance of Abraham?* is the reverse of this: it preaches the good news in a bad way. And because it is available in both its original and its revised versions, it offers a case study both of what western churches should say about the conflict in this land and of how we should not say it. It is, in short, a cautionary tale.

The report is not explicitly a response to *Kairos Palestine*, but it does quote this text three times and is quite clearly influenced by it and more generally by Palestinian Christian voices.

The essential point it makes is that «Christians should not be supporting any claims by any people to an exclusive or even privileged divine right to possess particular territory.» It is a misuse of the Bible «to use it as a topographic guide to settle contemporary conflicts over land.»

In line with this, the key quote from *Kairos Palestine* is the third: «Our church points to the kingdom, which cannot be tied to any earthly kingdom... Therefore religion cannot favour or support any unjust political regime, but must rather promote justice, truth and human dignity.»

What is wrong with the Zionist project is that it aims to create a Jewish state for a Jewish people by riding roughshod over the rights and dignities of the other inhabitants of the land, including those it has driven out and dispossessed. And so far, as is obvious, it has been quite successful in this.

The report looks at three different views of the land.

The first view reads Genesis 12 to 17 as a territorial guarantee. God promises the land unconditionally to Abraham and his descendants, understood as the Israelites of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament and the Jews of Israel today.

Against this, the report asks, «How can Christians support the violation of human rights in the name of alleged divinely conferred exclusive rights to a specific area of land?» It quotes *Kairos Palestine*: «Our land is God's land, as is the case with all countries in the world... It is our duty to liberate it from the evil of injustice and war... God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God's land....»

The second view sees the promise of the land as conditional on good behaviour. It points to the contradiction between the ideals of equality in the state of Israel's declaration of independence and the policies and practices of this state from the beginning until today. It cites Bishop Mounib Younan's book *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and the World: The land is a gift, not a right, and one which brings with it obligations, most particularly to practice justice and to dwell equitably with the other.*

The third view of the land is the view preferred by the report. It takes its description of this view directly from *Kairos Palestine*: «We believe that our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God, open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land.»

Christians in the 21st century, it says, should not understand promises about the land of Israel literally, or as applying to a defined geographical territory. They are a way of speaking about how to live under God so that justice and peace reign, the weak and poor are protected, the stranger is included, and all have a share in the community and a contribution to make to it. The 'promised land' is not so much a place as a metaphor of how things ought to be among the people of God. This 'promised land' can be found – or built – anywhere.

Another way of putting this is that the true exile is not exile from the land but exile from God.

Now let me make two quick points in Scottish self-criticism – one political, the other theological.

Over breakfast in St Andrew's Scottish Guesthouse, a Jerusalemite Jew in the Reform tradition who now teaches in the United States gave me a beguiling metaphor: In 1949, he said, the world put Israel on trial and found the new state not guilty; in 1967, the state of Israel said, "Try me again."

In discussion of the original report with Jewish representatives, our church leaders said this: «The concern of the church about the injustices faced by the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories remains firm, but that concern should not be misunderstood as questioning the right of the state of Israel to exist.... There is no change in the Church of Scotland's long-held position of the right of Israel to exist.»

Our leaders could hardly have said otherwise. Since the 1980s, we have officially supported a two-state solution, and we have yet to revisit this support in the light of developments over the last three decades. But the statement fails to recognise the point of the demand that we recognise the right of the state of Israel to exist. It means: «Don't talk to us about the Nakba. Talk about 1967 if you must. But don't talk about the mass expulsion of Palestinian Arabs inherent in the creation of our state.»

In my view, it's high time western churches did.

The report was also criticised for supersessionism. In the strict sense this is unfair: it does not say that the church replaces the synagogue, still less draw any of the nefarious conclusions from that claim that historically Christians have drawn.

The report is not strictly supersessionist but it does suffer from an old-fashioned Christian superiority complex. The church is universal, the synagogue is particularist.

Well, that's just silly; and straightaway it undermines any claim we may make to stand for justice. The Christian and Jewish traditions are both universal and particular – Judaism in rooting itself in a particular people, Christianity in founding itself on a particular Jew. And Christians and Jews can both be a force for good or a force for evil, and historically we both have been both. Next time the Church of Scotland writes on justice and peace in this land, we should do so with a little more Christian humility.

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5th Anniversary “Kairos Palestine. A moment of truth”

Edgar Antonio López

I want to start by expressing my gratitude to Kairos Palestine, and also giving a special recognition to the Church of Sweden and the Theology Department of my University for making possible my presence here today. Thanks to all of you for being here to share with us your hope and your commitment as Christians.

Responding to the call of the Kairos document addressed to the international

community and to the Churches of the world from the context of the Colombian Roman Catholic Church, our university wants to let the Colombian society know what is happening in the Holy Land with Israeli military occupation and the illegal settlements that have served to take more land from Palestinian territory and to marginalize their people.

Even though the Colombian government has not yet recognized Palestine as a State because of the pressure of the United States and our political dependence on them, we have had a very deep historical and cultural relationship with the Palestinian people since the end of the nineteenth century because of Arab migration.²⁹ Moreover the long presence of Arab culture in Iberia branded our language, food, music and mood as a former Spanish colony.

Beyond its contribution to our culture, we identify ourselves with the Palestinian people because we have also suffered a war for more than six decades, a war in which economic powers have taken the land of six million human beings and their communities, using violence to obtain profit and condemning them to live under unacceptable conditions that deny human dignity.

After twelve years of increasing corruption during the last administrations, we are aware of how much pain and sorrow can be produced in the name of security and welfare spreading fear among citizens. But we are very happy now, not only because the end of our civil war seems to be closer than ever and we can start our long journey to reconciliation, but also because of the recent decision of the Swedish government and the parliamentary advances in Spain, England and France towards the recognition of Palestine as an independent State. In this emerging stage it might be less difficult to make Israel end the occupation and to observe international law, creating a possibility of reaching justice and peace between the Jewish and Palestinian peoples. Maybe the two states solution is closer now than the binational state solution.

In Colombia most of the people do not know the real situation in Palestine, and those who have heard about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict think it is rooted in religious ground. Many Colombians ignore that trying to repair the catastrophic damage of the Shoah, in the middle of twentieth century, European countries generated the Nakba in this region. The attempt to solve a Western problem created a new problem for the Middle East.

The Jewish people were helped by taking the land from the Palestinian people, but the media still present the conflict in a very simple way as an ideological conflict between Judaism and Islam, not as a long process that has led to the oppression of Israel policies over the Palestinian people. As Martin Bunton states, this process is longer and more complex:

29 Lopez, Edgar. "Colombia". In Juergensmeyer, Mark & Roof, Wade Clark (Eds). *Encyclopedia of Global Religion*. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks (Ca), 2011. Vol 1 (236-237).

Identifying 1897 as the beginning of the history of Palestinian-Israeli conflict is significant. It underlines the fact that this hundred (or so) years' conflict is neither rooted in ancient and religious animosities nor even are its origins so much Middle Eastern as European. Just as European Jews were responding to the national spirit spawned by the conditions of 19th-century Europe, so too was the identity of the indigenous Arab population about to be reshaped by the sharpening of a specifically Palestinian consciousness that formed around the inhabitants' resistance to the threat that Zionism posed to their own patrimony.³⁰

As in other Latin American countries, many new Christian churches have increased the number of their members in Colombia and promote among them a Christian ideology without any social or political prophetic sense, using the Bible for their ideological purposes. As theologians we have the duty to help the people to understand the commitment of their faith with justice and peace, which implies a stand against any violation of human rights anywhere. Not violent but creative resistance is the only way to transform this conflict into another where there is no place for violence. As the Kairos document states, Palestinian and Israelis are adversaries not enemies.³¹

Our theology must help us to deepen in the real sense of the election of Israel to serve all the nations of the world and the promise of the land as a key moment of God's revelation in the history of humanity. These two subjects must be seen from the perspective of universal love, in contrast to Zionist manipulation of Biblical traditions. As Michael Prior warns, the secular political Zionist project has undergone a process of sacralisation:

The claim that the Bible legitimates the implementation of the Zionist political programme is widespread. Although Zionism was a secular ideology and enterprise from the beginning, and it was bitterly opposed by the Jewish religious establishment, its supporters, when it suited their purposes, could look to the Bible for support, particularly the narratives of the promise of land to Abraham and his descendants, and the execution of the promise in the narrative of Joshua's conquest. Even for secular or atheist nationalists uninterested in it as the repository of a theological claim, the biblical narrative could function as the "historical account" of Jews' title to the land.³²

My recent research has to do with forgiveness and reconciliation among displaced people and massacre survivors in Colombia.³³ That work has taught me that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible only if justice comes first. Working

30 Bunton, Martin. *The Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 2.

31 "We are called to pray and to make our voice heard when we announce a new society where human beings believe in their own dignity and the dignity of their adversaries". Kairos Palestine. *A Moment of Truth*. Jerusalem, 2009, 11.

32 "Violence and the Biblical land traditions" In Ateek, Naim. Duaybis, Cedar & Tobin, Maurine (Eds.) *Challenging Christian Zionism. Theology, politics and Israel-Palestine conflict*. Sabeel Jerusalem: Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2005, 134.

33 López, Edgar. "Perdón, memoria y justicia. Proyección teológica de la reconciliación en Colombia". In Vijver, Enrique & López Edgar (Eds.). *Creer en la reconciliación*. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. Bogotá, 2014 (145-176).

on these topics from a theological perspective makes it necessary to pay special attention to human rights, otherwise theology can promote impunity. It is our duty to reflect critically on our understanding of Christian teaching and to be engaged in liberation processes. We have to warn Christian communities about the risk of supporting violence in any way and about the use of the Bible to legitimate injustice.

Against the ideological use of memory we have too much work to do because the Bible could be used to legitimate new ways of oppression. The victims of yesterday can become oppressors following hidden interests, and churches must alert our societies. The historical experience we share shows how easy we can get trapped in a vicious circle of violence when hatred and revenge are sought over forgiveness. Only forgiveness stops the violence, but forgiveness does not mean weakness. On the contrary, forgiveness needs a strength that comes from mercy and love.

The attention of many Latin American societies is focused on their own problems and we are tempted to think that our theology is the only theology of liberation in the world, ignoring that the fight for land and justice is a common issue among us that challenges the way we read the Bible to project a different society closer to the Kingdom of God. Biblical texts must be read by our communities as liberation narratives and studied by biblical scholars and theologians according to the spirit of the Gospel. In that sense, Naim Ateek asserts in the Palestinian context:

How can the Church, without rejecting any part of the Bible, adequately relate the core of the biblical message – its concept of God – to Palestinians? The answer lies largely in the doing of theology. The only bridge between the Bible and people is theology. It must be a theology that is biblically sound; a theology that liberates; a theology that will contextualize and interpret while remaining faithful to the heart of the biblical message.³⁴

The Kairos Palestine document calls for concrete actions. So we will start spreading its message to explain the real situation of the Palestinian people in this Holy Land and our inalienable responsibility as Christians. We will work with other churches and their theological institutions to reflect on our political commitment to justice everywhere. We can also engage Jewish and Muslim scholars to let the Colombian society understand the true nature of this conflict and the need to work together to overcome violence and discrimination.

This could be our modest contribution to preserve and to announce the Good News of justice and peace that God has given to us in Jesus through his Gospel.

Thank You.

³⁴ Ateek, Naim. Justice and only justice. Orbis Books. New York, 1989, 78.

KAIROS INTERNATIONAL: EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD

Kairos Britain – Successes and Challenges in the Last 2 Years

Charlotte Marshall

Background:

Kairos Britain was established as a network in 2012, following a conference on the Scotland island of Iona. A subsequent meeting in Shropshire brought together the steering group who wrote and published 'Time for Action' – the British Christian response to Kairos Palestine.

From 2012- 2014 (July) the network was run by members of supporting organisations and key individuals who had been part of its inception. In July 2014 the first paid employee was recruited, and has been directed with building the network and establishing effective advocacy work for Kairos Britain.

Successes and challenges in the major areas of work:

Building the network

- To date, Kairos Britain has recruited over 450 individuals who have endorsed Time for Action and signed up to the network
- We send a monthly newsletter to all of these, which includes news from Palestine, actions people can take, upcoming events and more.
- We have run 3 training events this year across the UK (Kairos Unbound), and have 3 more planned in 2015. So far over 100 people have attended these events, and the majority have signed up to be part of the network.
- In addition, we have the support of 18 organisations with similar aims, including the Amos Trust, Embrace the Middle East, Pax Christi and Friends of Sabeel UK. These organisations also form the management committee to help guide and steer the work of Kairos, and have contributed financially to support it.
- We are now challenging ourselves with a new idea – not just to recruit individuals, but also to ask communities to sign up and become active in campaigning. These 'Kairos Communities' will play a key role in recruiting more people to the network and building the supporter base for Kairos. We have currently recruited approximately 20 of these groups, and are pushing this work forward (with earnest!) in 2015.
- So far we have gained endorsement from several church leaders in the UK, including 3 Bishops and an increasing numbers of clergymen. Our aim is to reach and influence more of these leaders, who can spread the word across their

church networks.

Advocacy and campaigning

- This year we have seen several advocacy successes in the UK. We have worked in coalition with leading Palestinian campaigning organisations such as the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, EAPPI, CAABU, Palestine Mission and others.
- There have been two major lobbies of the UK parliament this year – the first on Gaza, and the second on recognising the state of Palestine. In both cases we asked members of Kairos Britain to lobby their MPs, and to attend the events in Parliament on the day of the debates. The response from members of all the organisations that supported this was fantastic – over 40,000 UK citizens emailed their MP through an e-tool created by PSC and endorsed by us all.
- The overwhelming vote in favour of recognition is a sign of the support Palestine has within UK society and at the political level, and is something we need to capitalise on in 2015.
- In other advocacy work we are working alongside PSC and other partners to advocate for a ban of settlement products in the EU, through a campaign led by the ECCP (European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine). Again, this work will become more prominent in 2015.
- We have also seen success at BDS demonstrations – including members of Kairos Britain lobbying G4S at their 2013 AGM, and campaigns at Elbit in Shenstone, the West Midlands.

Events

- We have been present and visible at several major events over the last couple of years. At Greenbelt, a major UK Christian festival, we have taken part in panel debates, and held our own talks about the work of Kairos. We have also handed out literature and resources.
- At the London demonstrations for Gaza in the summer we were present and spoke at the start of the demonstration, passing on messages of support and talking about Kairos Palestine in front of thousands of people.
- We have started planning a major conference for 2016, in which we will be inviting key members and advisors to debate and strategise on the future work of Kairos Britain.

Website and social media

- Kairos Britain was in desperate need of a coherent voice across all forms of media – both online and offline.
- Since starting in post, we have coordinated our twitter, Facebook, website, newsletters and communications to give a specific look, feel and tone, and create more of a ‘Kairos Britain’ brand that people can identify with and endorse.
- This has led to us recruiting over 120 new followers on twitter, and 319 likes on our new FB page. Our website is currently being rebuilt to include a new members area for Kairos Communities, and areas for new content.

- Our aim is to continue to grow our presence on social media and get many more people engaging with Kairos through this means.

Strategy and vision

- Kairos Britain has recently changed structure to try and build the network in the most effective way. We have a management group that meets once every 2 months to advise and strategise with the advocacy worker. Then we are in the process of creating the Kairos Britain Forum, which contains members who are both enthusiastic supporters of Kairos and influential people within their networks and communities. So far 10 people have accepted our invitation to be part of the Forum.
- The advocacy worker is also in the process of finalising the vision and goals for Kairos Britain for 2014-16. This will be the first time we have set down strategy and objectives, and the agreement will form the basis of accountability between Kairos and its stakeholders, specifically the Forum.

GAZA

Christian Presence in Gaza – Accomplishments and Challenges

Sami El-Yousef

Profile of Palestinians Worldwide

In order to understand the complexity of Gaza, one needs to look at the profile of Palestinians worldwide. In 1948, the Palestinian population was 1.2 million in historic Palestine, 8% of which was Christian. During the events of 1947 into 1948 and leading to the establishment of the State of Israel, at least 750,000 Palestinians became refugees as 418 Palestinian villages were destroyed. Today, the projected number of Palestinians is 11.55 million worldwide, distributed as follows: 38% in Palestine (West Bank including East Jerusalem and Gaza); 12% in Israel; 44% in the Arab world (mostly in the neighboring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt); and 6% around the world. It is worthy to mention that of those living in Palestine today, 39% are in Gaza which constitutes 15% of all Palestinians worldwide.

Today, there are close to 1.8 million Palestinians that call the crowded Gaza Strip their home, living in an area that does not exceed 365 sq. km, making it one of the most densely populated places in the world. As far as the Christian presence, official statistics still refer to anywhere between 3,000-5,000 Christians there. However, an unofficial survey conducted in June 2011 by the Myrrh Bearers Society puts the figure at about 1,500. A more formal household survey conducted by the YMCA-Gaza and published in May 2014 puts the figure at 1,313 (89% Greek Orthodox and 8.9% Catholic)

Recent Developments in Gaza

The Palestinian Authority has been governing Gaza since shortly after the signing of the Oslo agreements in 1994 and the Strip saw relative calm in the following years. In 2005, Israel, under prime minister Ariel Sharon, unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip after completing the construction of the separation wall. In 2006, Hamas won by a landslide in the elections of the legislative council and formed a national government. That same year the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was kidnapped and held hostage in Gaza. As a result, a blockade was imposed by Israel and the international community on the Gaza Strip. A few months later, in 2007, Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in a non-violent coup and kicked out the Fatah leadership, thus forming a separate Hamas government in the Gaza Strip. Thereafter, a very Islamic form of government was imposed making it uncomfortable for Christian individuals and institutions. This was exasperated by three successive wars on Gaza in a span of some 5 years. The first one started in December 2008 and ended in January 2009, lasting for some 20 days and left behind a lot of destruction, most of which remains

till today. The second war was launched in November 2012 and lasted for 8 days, and created further destruction. One also needs to keep in mind the change in leadership in Egypt in recent years that has already toppled two presidents, one of whom belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. During his term, favorable relations were fostered with the Hamas leadership in Gaza, which all came to a quick end when he was toppled.

Facts from the July 2014 war on Gaza

The third and most recent war on Gaza started on 7 July 2014 and ended 51 days later on 26 August 2014. No one really thought it would last for so long, nor did anyone think it would create so much destruction and human loss. Following are some facts and statistics compiled during and after the war, mostly from neutral United Nations sources and publications:

- IDF military activity included 5,085 airstrikes, 8,210 bombs and missiles dropped, 15,736 naval projectiles and 36,718 land projectiles. If one does simple math, that total translates to an average of one explosion of some sort per minute non-stop for 51 days.
- Hamas military activity included 1,676 mortar bombs and 4,584 rockets directed at Israel; most were primitive in nature, though some were sophisticated and reached areas deep in the north of Israel.
- Palestinians killed were 2,131 of whom 1,473 are civilians, including 501 children and 257 women.
- At least 142 families in Gaza lost three or more members in the same incident, for a total of 739 civilian fatalities.
- Israelis killed during the war were 71, including 66 soldiers.
- Palestinians injured were 11,231, including 3,436 children, 3,540 women, and 418 elderly. It is estimated that 1,000 of the children's injuries will lead to permanent disabilities.
- At the height of the war, over 500,000 were internally displaced as 50% of the land of Gaza was declared a military zone. After the war that number went down to 110,000.
- Housing units completely destroyed or severely damaged was 18,000, with an additional 37,650 units sustaining damages deeming them uninhabitable.
- Damage to the water supply infrastructure, leaving 450,000 unable to access municipal water.
- Destruction of the sole power plant translated to 18 hour power outages daily
- In the health sector, there were 62 hospitals and clinics that sustained damages, some totally destroyed.
- As for the education sector – 220 schools sustained damages including 22 schools that were completely destroyed.
- UNICEF reported that 373,000 children were traumatized during the war and are in need of psychosocial support.
- As for the business sector – 419 businesses and workshops were damaged and 128 were completely destroyed.
- Hostilities forced farmers and herders to abandon 17,000 hectares of croplands

as well as much of its agricultural infrastructure, including greenhouses, irrigation systems, animal farms, fodder stocks and fishing boats. Access to sea was completely prohibited for 51 days.

- Unemployment thereafter reached a record high of 70% of youth aged 20-24.

Emergency Response

As was the case with previous wars, a number of Christian charities came quickly to the rescue and provided financial and moral support to alleviate the suffering of the masses in Gaza. This took the form of providing medicines and medical equipment, covering medical costs and fuel for the institutions working in the health sector including the Ahli Arab Hospital, the Near East Council of Churches clinics and the Caritas clinic, as well as providing cash assistance, food packages, hygiene packages, and clean drinking water. Some Christian institutions opened up their doors and hearts and converted their premises to temporary shelters to house the countless displaced people and to be used as distribution centers. This included the Greek Orthodox convent and church premises, the Holy Family School, the Greek Orthodox Cultural Center, as well as parts of the Ahli Arab Hospital and the YMCA. Given that the war happened during the Holy month of Ramadan for Muslims, it was reported that the Christian institutions were some of the very few who provided a hot meal during the iftar, the meal breaking the fasting at the end of a long, hot and humid day in Gaza.

Immediately after the war, a number of homes and institutions went through a program to fix the war damages. In this process, the Pontifical Mission alone fixed over 80 homes and the premises of some 8 institutions. The institutional element was critical as the intervention meant that these institutions went back to normal operations in a very short period after the war. The case of the schools, and in particular the Rosary Sisters School and the Holy Family School, was a critical intervention that allowed the school year to open a mere three weeks after the war ended. In response to the various reports on the level of trauma sustained by the whole Gaza population, and in particular the children, a massive psychosocial program of intervention was launched in dozens of schools, kindergartens and health facilities, reaching tens of thousands of people. Such support continued well after the war, giving the Christian institutions an elevated status within the various communities in Gaza that were touched as a result of such presence. Many within the Christian community reported after the war that the people of Gaza appreciated the Christian institutional presence as they were seen to be at the forefront of the delivery of emergency services during and after the war and are an integral component of the malaise of Gaza. Thus better relations seem to have been fostered leading to a better acceptance and understanding between the two faiths.

Challenges for Christians in Gaza

Having painted a relatively bright picture for the Christian presence in Gaza after the latest war, one should not underestimate the challenges facing Christians in Gaza. One of the most difficult is the general situation faced by all Palestinians in Gaza

with the continued blockade imposed by Israel and more recently by Egypt where Gaza feels like a very large open air prison with travel restrictions in full force by both Israel and Egypt. Youth in particular feel the heat of such travel restrictions as there is a general blanket restriction prohibiting any youth (Christian and Muslim) in the age group of 16-35 from entering Israel and the West Bank. Even when permits are issued to Christians in Gaza during the main religious holidays of Christmas and Easter, this group is excluded.

The second challenge of Christian life in Gaza is certainly related to the complications of living under Hamas who wishes to impose Sharia Law. Alcohol, for example is prohibited in Gaza, even for the Christians. Women are expected to conform to Islamic sharia dress code, and in general freedoms are limited, especially for women. Women Christian students studying at universities in Gaza at times are asked to leave class if they do not have a veil over their head. Christian symbols at Christian schools, including a Christmas tree, are not viewed with positive eyes, and in recent years there has been an attempt to introduce the education segregation law. This law expects a total separation by gender in schools, not only of students, but also of teachers as well. To date, the schools have resisted such segregation.

Churches and Christian Institutions of Gaza

The largest denomination of Christians in Gaza is the Greek Orthodox, represented by a Bishop who resides in the convent belonging to the 1,600 year old Saint Porphyrius Church. As for the Catholic Church, it is represented by two Argentinian priests from the order of the Incarnate Word and they live on the complex of the Holy Family Church. There is also an Anglican church on the complex of the Ahli Arab Hospital, though there is no local presence to speak of. There is also a growing presence of the Baptist church. As for the religious congregations, the Rosary Sisters, the Daughters of Charity; the Sisters of the Incarnate Word, and the Franciscan Sisters all have a presence in Gaza, serving the Christian institutions and churches in Gaza.

The Christian institutional presence is diverse and provides services that are proportionately much larger than the Christian population. There are in total five Christian schools in Gaza providing quality education to approximately 3,000 students in a co-educational setting. The five are: The Latin Patriarchate School, The Holy Family School, the Rosary Sisters School, the Greek Orthodox School, and the Lighthouse School. There are less than 200 Christian students served through these schools with the majority being Muslim. In the health sector, the Ahli Arab Hospital, the three clinics of the Near East Council of Churches in Shajaja, Darraj, and Rafah, as well as the Caritas clinic provide quality medical services to tens of thousands of Gazans on an annual basis. In addition, the Near East Council of Churches operates four vocational training centers offering technical training to hundreds every year; as well as implements a variety of community development and employment projects. The Myrrh Bearers society offers a variety of programs to aid the community, and finally the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) with its 500 strong members provide sports, cultural, educational and social activities in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance.

An important element of the life of the Christian institutions in Gaza is that they are continuously looking for ways to expand and be of more service to the community. Four recent examples highlight this trend:

- Rosary Sisters School recently completed the construction of a new 3 story annex that added 12 additional classrooms as well as other facilities. This set the stage for a major expansion in enrollment.
- Ahli Arab Hospital recently added a new 3 story building which is planned to be the only diagnostic center serving all of Gaza's public and private hospitals.
- Holy Family School added a new third floor that includes a large multipurpose hall, a library, and additional classrooms.
- The Greek Orthodox Cultural Center is inching towards completion with the banquet hall and auditorium completed. Once operational, it has the potential to hire up to 20 people, as well as offer facilities that are unparalleled in Gaza to enrich the cultural and social life there.

Thus, these examples are not a sign of a dying community waiting for an exit visa to leave Gaza once and for all, but rather of a vibrant community that sees itself as an integral part of society in Gaza eager to make its contributions to the common good.

Christian Presence and Witness

With this brief survey about the small yet vibrant Christian presence in Gaza, it is important to point out that the services provided by these institutions in education, health, and social services are provided to all segments of society with no discrimination, with the Christian values at their core. These Christian institutions were never intended to serve the Christians alone, but rather the weak and poor and those in need of such services regardless of their background. These institutions are trusted and respected by all, including most Muslims who see the value of such Christian presence. Such institutions certainly have a huge role to play in interfaith dialogue which is lived day in and day out rather than preached in academic circles. There is also a huge role that these institutions play in building local societies. In many ways the Church and its institutions end up doing the work of governments. In conclusion, one must acknowledge the support from the various Christian communities around the world without which such presence could not have been sustained.

A Voice from Gaza

Suhaila S. Tarazi

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to celebrate with you Kairos' fifth Anniversary. It is both an honor and a pleasure to be here.

As I have done for so many years before, during my long career with Ahli Arab Hospital, I stand before you today to talk about the situation in Gaza. Each time, I was hoping to give you and other audiences a slightly better image of our daily life, but my hope remained faint and the situation in Gaza looks even more somber; it has actually worsened at all levels and the burden carried by every single person is heavy to carry and, in many cases, almost impossible to overcome.

I have dedicated some thirty years of my life to humanitarian work and, without God's help, I would have never succeeded. It would have been impossible to continue this noble, yet extremely difficult mission, for it takes lots of energy, courage, determination and sacrifice, particularly under the occupation and the drums of war.

The wonderful topic of this conference is about "dignity" and as I speak I shall try to shed the light on what it means to the Palestinian people.

Allow me to give you a brief overview of the situation in Gaza as I have lived it. Over the last five years, Gaza has been exposed to 3 brutal Israeli intensive military operations and ground incursions. I will not bore you with unnecessary figures, but some are inevitable to mention, precisely because of their magnitude and negative impact on an entire population.

In 2007, when Hamas took power, Gaza witnessed humiliation, aggression, blockades and abuse of human rights, restrictions of movement, electricity power cuts and fuel shortages. These are words you have heard so often, but if you take the time to reflect on each separately, you will realize how difficult it is for 1.8 million individuals to live under such circumstances.

Let me first tell you that Gaza wounds have not healed, the blood of the innocent people has not dried, and the rubble resulting from the destruction of the buildings is still piled up. It is wonderful to hear about the pledges to reconstruct Gaza and, because it is an important issue, it fills the media worldwide, but nothing has been done so far.

While I am standing here now, the cries of the six year old burn victim, Khaled Malaka – the only survivor of a family of 5 – calling his mom for help are still filling my ears. And the picture of Neveen El-Attar, the nurse at Ahli Arab Hospital is still vivid in front of my eyes. She saved the lives of hundreds of injured just one day before she was found dead under the ruins of her home. She is now survived by two orphaned daughters; the eldest is 2 and a half years old.

In Gaza, under the terms of the blockade, we are deprived of many basic items: from foodstuffs to medical supplies. The 1.8 million people are besieged: women, men, children and even patients are prohibited from any movement from and into Gaza; poverty and unemployment have considerably increased, the essential services and infrastructure have also seriously declined. Gaza has been deprived of any development. And it is not any better economically. At least 85 per cent of Gaza's factories are either closed, or working at less than 50 percent capacity. The blockade also prohibits most exports, and restricts the transfer of goods from Gaza to its traditional markets in the West Bank and Israel, along with the severe restrictions on access to fishing waters. It also prevents sustainable growth and perpetuates the high levels of unemployment, food insecurity, the loss of livelihoods and aid dependency.

With the Israeli destruction of the main power plant in June 2006, followed by the restriction on spare parts and fuel imports, Gazan people suffer from insufficient and irregular power supplies. The daily power cuts range between 12 and 16 hours. As a result, more than 30 per cent of households in Gaza are supplied with running water for 6 to 8 hours – only once every four days. Up to 90 million liters of partially treated sewage are discharged into the Mediterranean Sea every day, which will cause more environmental and health hazards.

The blockade has had a crippling effect on the health sector. Access to medical treatment outside of Gaza has decreased tremendously, and the health sector is still suffering from the ravages of the siege, imposed by the Israeli occupation forces for seven consecutive years. Shortages of essential drugs and disposables, and medical spare parts have reached the highest recorded levels. Due to the shortages of electricity and fuel, over 300 medical machines at hospitals are out of order, including the ONLY MRI machine at Gaza European Hospital. The average waiting time for some types of elective surgery at Gaza's largest hospital (Al Shifa) is over a year!

The latest war on Gaza has also affected about 60,000 housing units, of which twenty thousand were totally destroyed, leaving more than one hundred thousand people homeless mainly in Shajaeia, Beit Hanoon, Sha'af and Khozaa. Tens of thousands of hectares of croplands, as well as agricultural infrastructure including greenhouses, irrigation systems, animal farms, and water wells and fishing boats have been destroyed. Though access to the sea has been improved to six nautical miles, there has often been detention of and shooting at fishermen.

The war has also greatly harmed Gaza's health system, which had not functioned well beforehand. Many services and specialized treatments are not available to Palestinians inside Gaza. To name but a few, there is lack of medicine needed for cancer treatment, drugs for cardiovascular diseases, life-saving antibiotics, and kidney dialysis products. Moreover, there is a serious shortage of medical equipment spare parts. Hospitals were suffering from 18 to 23 hour power cuts, as well as crucial shortages of fuel for the use of the generators. While many of the NGOs health institutions were closed during the assault, Ahli was working round the clock to save

the life of many innocent, irrespective of their faith, gender or political affiliation. With Ahli's meagre resources, we succeeded in providing food, psychosocial support and shelter for many families. Those were extremely difficult times for doctors, nurses, patients and staff alike.

Gaza is living in a continuous manmade catastrophe. Unless Israel lifts the blockade and there is a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on justice and human rights, Gaza will remain hostage and Palestinians will never build their livelihood and economy.

Within a system which denies the existence of basic human rights, fear tends to be the order of the day: fear of imprisonment, fear of torture, fear of death, fear of losing friends, family, property or means of livelihood, fear of isolation and fear of failure.

It is unfortunate that in our world today, wonderful words such as Truth, Honour and Justice are being overlooked. Dignity is as essential to human life as water and oxygen, for without dignity, our identity is erased. Time will reveal who has it and who has it not. There is no honour in war, less in killing and none in dying, but there was true dignity in how Palestinians behaved themselves in battles.

Sufferings, disappointments, melancholy, despair should not be words to sadden us, but to render us more mature to confront the horror of the occupation. When we look in the eyes of Palestinian children wandering in the rubble, or see their innocent stare on television screens, expressing their feelings to reporters, we know that there is hope. In spite of the endless lies we hear, the distorted facts, the lack of conscience, the hunger for power, Palestine will never be forgotten; it will remain deeply engraved and anchored till the end of times.

For political reasons, the international courts of justice may not be working as efficiently as they should, but thanks to today's fast moving technology, where nothing can be hidden anymore, and where everyone is videotaping everyone else, JUSTICE will eventually be done.

Palestinians have the right to live in dignity; they cannot give up, and they have to fight for their right until: el Haq yirjaa la ashabo.

From this very specific town of Bethlehem in Palestine, I would like to send a message of Peace to the whole world. When on Christmas Eve, the bells of the Church of the Nativity start to ring announcing the birth of Jesus our Saviour, and all television channels worldwide stop their programs to carry a live transmission of this wonderful event, I ask you all to remember the Palestinian people in your prayers.

Be ambassadors of Justice and always spread the good word.

Thank you... and Merry Christmas to all!

PRISONERS

Prisoners and Human Rights

Ayed Abu Eqtaish, Helmi Araj, Randa Wahbeh

A. DCI-Palestine (Defence of Children International) - Ayed Abu Eqtaish

Defence of Children International – Palestine is a national section of the international non-governmental child rights organization and movement, Defence for Children International, established in 1979. DCI-Palestine focuses on issues of a) Accountability and b) Child Detention.

Affidavits collected by DCI-Palestine during 2012 and 2013 indicate that the ill-treatment of Palestinian children held in Israeli military detention is widespread and systematic. The cumulative effect of the ill-treatment experienced by all of the children must also be considered when assessing its gravity. In some cases this cumulative effect, coupled with the child's age, may result in the treatment being properly categorized as torture. It is important to note however, that both ill-treatment and torture are absolutely prohibited and criminalised under international law.

Most children held in the Israeli military detention system are arrested from villages located close to friction points, namely settlements built in violation of international law, and roads used by the Israeli army or settlers.

Recent amendments to the military orders relating to children have had little impact whatsoever on their treatment during the critical first 48 hours after an arrest, where most of the ill-treatment occurs at the hands of soldier, policemen and interrogators.

Recommendations

No child should be prosecuted in military courts which lack comprehensive fair trial and juvenile justice standards. DCI-Palestine recommends that as a minimum safeguard in the light of consistent reports of torture and ill-treatment, the following:

1. Except in extreme and unusual circumstances, all arrests of children should occur during daylight hours;
2. In all cases the use of single plastic hand ties and blindfolds should be prohibited and prohibition must be effectively enforced;
3. All children must have access to a lawyer of their choice prior to interrogation, and through the interrogation process;
4. All children must be entitled to have a parent present at all times during their interrogation;

5. In every case the interrogation of children should be audio-visually recorded;
6. In all cases evidence obtained as a result of torture or ill-treatment must be excluded by the military courts;
7. In all cases where incriminating evidence is obtained during interrogation when the child was not appropriately informed of his/her right to silence, this evidence must be excluded by the military courts;
8. The practice of using solitary confinement and administrative detention orders on children in Israeli military detention must be stopped immediately, and the prohibition must be enshrined in law;
9. Effective accountability measures must be introduced to ensure all credible reports of torture and ill-treatment are properly investigated in accordance with international standards and that perpetrators are brought to justice.

B. Hurryyat (Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights) - Helmi Araj
Hurryyat is a Palestinian non-governmental and independent organization that contributes to the protection of the Palestinian liberties, civil and political rights.

Hurryyat thrives to enhance the rule of law within the Palestinian society, and to provide legal, financial and psychological assistance to both the Palestinian prisoners detained in Israeli jails and their families. This is achieved on a human rights-based approach to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Activating the social involvement and participation of the Palestinian community in protecting the Palestinian civil and political rights.
2. Organizing systematic advocacy initiatives directed towards enhancing Palestinian prisoners' conditions.
3. Contributing towards the efforts aiming at influencing the decision-making process in ways that protects human, social and political rights of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Core values that make up the platform of Hurryyat's work are based on voluntary spirit, equality, participation, social justice, gender sensitivity, transparency and commitment to social development and democracy.

C. Addameer (Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association) - Randa Wahbeh

Addameer is a Palestinian non-governmental, civil institution that works to support Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli and Palestinian prisons. The center offers free legal aid to political prisoners, advocates their rights at the national and international level, and works to end torture and other violations of prisoners' rights through monitoring, legal procedures and solidarity campaigns.

Addameer contends that the practice of administrative detention in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory contravenes fundamental human rights. Israel uses administrative detention in a highly arbitrary manner without putting even the most basic safeguards in place, leading to other grave human rights violations, such as inhuman and degrading treatment and torture.

Addameer accordingly demands that all administrative detainees held on account of their political views or their activities carried out in resistance to the occupation be released promptly and unconditionally. Fair trial standards must be respected for all political detainees, including those accused of committing acts that are considered crimes according to international law.

Addameer further demands that the occupying power adhere to international law and that restrictions on the use of administrative detention be imposed. It insists that the judicial review of administrative detention orders must meet the minimum international standards for due process. The authorities must provide detainees with prompt and detailed information as to the reason for their detention, and with a meaningful opportunity to defend themselves.

(Information taken from the World Council of Churches publication, *Palestinian Prisoners: A question of conscience*. Edited by John Calhoun and Ranjan Solomon.)

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Vision and Reality Kairos in the Next Five Years

Jamal Khader

The Kairos document does not deal primarily with the past of the conflict, as the present and the future are the real challenges. This is true for the Kairos itself and the evaluation of the work done so far. We look back to the last five years to “celebrate” our successes, but most of all we look forward to the future to plan for the next five years. We had a vision and strategy; it is time to renew and review our strategy. We were hoping that we do not have to commemorate the anniversaries of the Kairos and that our goals are met; but it seems that this is not a time to celebrate as much as to renew our commitment to achieve the goal of the Kairos document: the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Prophetic document

Kairos Palestine was and is still a prophetic document. Prophets challenge the Status Quo and call for repentance. Prophets are not diplomats; they do not have a word that will please both sides; they speak truth to the mighty. Prophets can read the signs of time to explore God’s will for us here and today.

When the Kairos was launched five years ago, many churches and organizations felt the need to respond to the Kairos and they did. Many were honest enough to take seriously the theological challenge to review their theology, making it more compatible with justice. “We cannot support injustice with a self-justifying theology.” That was the answer of many theologians and churches. Other churches decided to wait and to mature their theology; I hope they will not wait until it is too late. Others just decided to dismiss the Kairos moment and ignore the document.

What are the signs of the times five years after the launch of the Kairos document? Re-reading the Kairos, we realize that many points are more evident now than they were five years ago: the matrix of control by the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands is more severe to the point of non-return; settlements, political prisoners, the Separation Wall, the denial of the right of return, the catastrophic situation in Gaza and religious freedom... these realities are a heavier reality in Palestinian daily life. The question now is not how to have an independent Palestinian State, but if such a state is still possible. We are facing old realities in a new and unprecedented way. What was possible five years ago seems impossible now. The rhetoric of a “viable Palestinian state” is no longer possible with the number and size of the settlements, the decline of the Israeli left and the new discriminatory laws in Israel.

Jerusalem is a clear example of how realities on the ground change rapidly; the

Israeli government is doing its best to make any solution impossible. The new laws in Israel define Israel as a “Jewish State,” or a state for Jews only. In the Kairos document, we said already that *“a religious state suffocates the state, confines it within narrow limits, and transforms it into a state that practices discrimination and exclusion, preferring one citizen over another.”*

On the other hand, we witness unprecedented religious extremism. What we witness in the Middle East in particular and in the world in general is an increase in sectarianism and religious extremism. Although it is clear with ISIS in Syria and Iraq, we cannot ignore the Jewish extremism, national or religious, witnessed during the last war on Gaza and in the new laws to define Israel as a state for Jews only. The Christian fundamentalism is not a foreign phenomenon expressed in Christian Zionism or in Islamophobia in countries with Christian tradition; it has a direct influence on our existence and the injustice from which we suffer.

Kairos is prophetic; it denounces the injustices and when it reads the signs of the times, it does it in order to listen to the word of God in our time. Kairos becomes a moment of decision, of conversion, where believers become more engaged in their lives when they realize the will of God here and now. To talk about the next five years of the Kairos is to look to God, to identify his will for us in these difficult times.

Kairos Palestine emphasizes Christian witness and hope. “Ritual solidarity,” as it is called by Marc Ellis, is not enough. Let us remember the “Amman Call” in 2006, where it talks about costly solidarity. It means that we may need to sacrifice something, or maybe take the risk of being accused of anti-Zionism or even anti-Semitism.

Many things happened during the last five years; we heard during these couple of days about the successes of the Kairos document. It is time now to face the challenges and to look ahead to the next five years. During the past five years, solidarity with the Palestinians increased. We witness several European parliaments voting to recognize a Palestinian state. Although some may see in that voting something too little too late, it shows a real change in the attitude of many people in Europe. The same can be said of the decisions of churches in favor of the BDS movement. At the same time, we witnessed more changes on the ground to prevent any possibility of an independent Palestinian state.

Keeping faithful to the message of Kairos

Instead of celebrating the success of the document in the last five years, let us concentrate on the present situation and look forward to the next five years. We took the hard path opposing injustice and working for a better future for all the inhabitants of this land. Recent events call us to continue.

On the **local level**, our plan is to continue working with local Christians, especially with youth and women. Several groups studied thoroughly the Kairos, discussed it, and began to travel around the world to present Kairos and spread it. This work was done directly by the Kairos or in collaboration with other youth and women’s

organizations and we will continue this fruitful collaboration.

At the same time, we continue our work with the Christian organizations in Palestine and the pastors. We are planning a theological workshop with local pastors of different churches about the Kairos and its relevance today. As we are not an organization as Kairos, Christian organizations consider the Kairos document as the roadmap for all of them, their own document. At the same time, we will continue working and collaborating with the organizations of the Palestinian civil society and the organizations of human rights.

The **theological discussions** continue, both locally and internationally. Locally with pastors and theologians, and internationally with different churches. We called upon different churches to review their theology concerning themes such as “land,” “promise,” and “chosenness,” and we will continue to read the Bible together to discover the call of God for us today to work for justice and reconciliation.

Global Kairos is another field of work. We are grateful for all of our brothers and sisters in the Global Kairos for their commitment. We need to strengthen the network for global justice. This is not only the task of the Kairos Palestine group, but of all of us.

BDS is a tool for non-violent resistance. It is not an end in itself, and the Kairos document is not primarily a BDS document. Let us remember that Kairos is a document of faith and action. Many people discuss the successes accomplished by BDS. We may continue our discussions, but we can all affirm that BDS is a non-violent tool to end occupation when it is supported by the international community, civil society, churches and international organizations. It is an anti-normalisation with an occupying state.

What are the points that need to be addressed in the next five years?

1. The situation faced by Palestinians inside Israel should be addressed. With the new laws defining Israel as a Jewish State, the discrimination inside Israel is legalized. Christians inside Israel face a crisis of identity: are they Arabs living inside Israel? Are they Palestinians? Arab Israelis? And now: are they Aramaic? The plans to separate the Christian community from the Arab population and make them serve in the Israeli army raises an important question: are we, as Christians, witnesses of the love of Jesus Christ or a separate minority?
2. The Kairos document talks about the sin of occupation. What we see now is a legalization of apartheid laws. If we need to name things as they are, we need to begin talking about the “Israeli apartheid.” How can the world accept legalized discrimination in a state that calls itself a democracy and at the same time defines itself as a state for part of its population? The population is classified: Jews are first class citizens (with many sub classes inside the Israeli society according to the origin of the Jews), then the Arabs inside Israel (divided into Druze, Christian, Bedouins, Arabs – Muslims), then the inhabitants of Jerusalem,

the Palestinians of the West Bank, Palestinians of the Gaza Strip, the refugees... this classification is unacceptable.

3. Islam is living a deep change in its identity with the new extremist groups. This new situation redefines the relationship between Christians and Muslims, and the role of Islam in public life. The new situation created in Iraq and Syria with ISIS and the massacres perpetrated against Christians create fear among the Christians in the Middle East and many others, including many Muslims. The Christians in the Middle East need a Kairos for them.
4. HOPE becomes more crucial and more important. Hope through suffering and through pain. To see the unseen; to hope against all despair; to believe what our eyes cannot see and what our minds cannot explain. Let us remember Good Friday and the darkness and despair on Golgotha. No one saw Sunday morning coming. The resurrection is the faith against all the powers of evil.

Thank you.

LIFE WITH DIGNITY: KAIROS PALESTINE 5TH ANNIVERSARY



Statement

From December 2 until 4, 2014, over 250 participants from Palestine and many other countries* gathered in Bethlehem to commemorate the 5th anniversary of “A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering,” known as Kairos Palestine. The document, produced by a broadly ecumenical group of Palestinian Christian leaders, offered a word of hope in a hopeless situation. It signaled a strong commitment for Palestinian Christians to participate fully in creative resistance to end Israeli occupation, a reality we again describe as “a sin against God and humanity.”

The document has developed into an active global movement. People in many other contexts, inspired by Kairos Palestine, have linked their local struggles for justice with the Palestinian struggle for freedom and dignity for all peoples in Palestine and Israel. We thank God for the many churches that have received, studied, and offered comment on the document. We thank God also for the many ways Kairos Palestine is accompanied by so many Kairos movements around the world, each seeking justice in their own context, joining their struggle to that of the Palestinian people.

Our gathering acknowledged that many aims and goals of the Kairos Palestine document have not been achieved. These five years have brought a great deal of suffering in Palestine, in Israel, and throughout the Middle East. Israel’s oppressive policies and its continued occupation of Palestinian land contribute directly to this suffering. The work of Kairos Palestine and the movement it has inspired is not yet finished.

ANALYZING THE CONTEXT

One of the strengths of Kairos Palestine was its clear analysis of the situation faced by all Palestinians. The context has changed during the past five years, mostly for the worse.

Regionally, the past five years have seen the events known collectively as the “Arab Spring.” Many Arabs have moved from great optimism for civil society to the brink

of despair. These developments have brought an eruption of religiously-sanctioned extremisms throughout the Middle East. Millions of people have experienced unprecedented suffering and displacement.

These regional developments have had negative outcomes on the Arab Spring and have shaped the context for discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Geopolitical analysts have suggested that regional concerns supersede the need for ending Israeli occupation. We remain convinced that ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an essential step toward healing the Middle East. We therefore urge policymakers around the world to take urgent steps to bring their national policies into line with international law so a just peace can be established.

The past five years have seen the further entrenchment of Israel's occupation. 2013 saw the greatest number of settler homes approved to be built on Palestinian land since 1967. Beyond the structural violence and oppression of Israeli occupation, we have witnessed a sharp increase in settler violence, including assaults on human life and attempted occupations of holy sites. Expressions of racism by Jewish citizens of Israel and religiously-sanctioned extremism on the street have been complemented by legislation proposing specific ways Israel should be considered an exclusively Jewish state. Along with continuing settlement policies, these dynamics within Israeli society make an independent state of Palestine existing in peace alongside the State of Israel almost impossible to imagine.

More recently, we have seen threats to the historic status quo governing the Haram al-Sharif (the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound). These specific tensions highlight the particular problems being faced in Jerusalem today. During this conference, we also heard the Palestinian Christian witness from Gaza, reminding us that our children have experienced three wars in five years.

Even with these negative developments, we are now experiencing a Kairos moment where focused action can have positive effects. US leadership is no longer at the center of the so-called peace process, signaling a change in the international political landscape. Palestinian political leaders are now approaching the United Nations and related institutions for a political solution and legal actions that limit the culture of impunity in the whole region. We see that many other powers—especially in Europe—are speaking in favor of ending the illegal Israeli occupation and recognizing the State of Palestine. The European Union and certain parliaments have taken tentative steps toward imposing trade restrictions on goods produced in illegal Israeli settlements. We urge them to intensify their efforts although we fear that their words may be too little, too late.

RESPONDING TO THE KAIROS CONTEXT

In June 2007, the Amman Call announced a challenge to the Church: “No more words without deeds. It is time for action.” The conflict afflicting both Israel and Palestine is surrounded by many words. We continue to call the Global Church to action through costly solidarity.

Participants in this 5th anniversary conference, therefore, affirmed the value of:

1. Listening carefully to Palestinian Christian voices

- We recommit ourselves to listening to Palestinian Christian voices, amplifying them and allowing their perspectives to guide our communication and action in our own contexts.
- With Palestinian Christians, we commit ourselves to be ministers of reconciliation and cultivators of hope. “We do not lose heart.... We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4.16, 18).
- We commit ourselves to accompanying Palestinian Christians in fellowship of the World Council of Churches in the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace.

2. Continued theological exploration and critique

- We commit ourselves to careful study of and dialogue with the Palestinian Christian theological narrative. Palestinian contextual theology should determine the ways Christians from other contexts comprehend and interact with the Palestinian context.
- We reaffirm the theological foundations of Kairos Palestine, which promotes a theology of faith, hope, and love. This Kairos Theology reaffirms life and calls each of us to costly solidarity. We will work to promote Kairos Theology not just in our own words, but in the offices of church-related institutions, including schools and seminaries.
- We take responsibility for the political implications of theological perspectives we have received and commit to developing alternative theologies that affirm the rights of all human beings.
- We seek responsible forms of theological and political engagement with Jews, Christians, Muslims and all people of good will committed to work toward a just peace for both Israel and Palestine.
- We support the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) goal of confronting theological concepts and interpretations of the Bible (including those promoted by Christian Zionists) that legitimize, promote or accept the illegal Israeli occupation.

3. Active participation in creative resistance

- Creative resistance respects and preserves the human dignity of all persons caught in the present system of oppression through steadfastness (sumud) and resisting empire, along with acts of noncompliance and civil disobedience and

all other practices of nonviolent resistance.

- Creative resistance links struggles for justice in many contexts to the struggle in Palestine.
 - Creative resistance incorporates literature, music, drama, dance, and visual art into public expressions of resistance.
 - Creative resistance finds ways to help keep the memories of Palestine alive in the Palestinian context so the Palestinian narrative continues to be deeply rooted in the land, steadfast like the roots of the olive tree.
4. Continued promotion of economic pressures
- Economic systems undergird every aspect of Israel's continued illegal occupation of Palestinian land.
 - We commit to investigating and critiquing tourism systems that create false perceptions of the situation in Israel and Palestine while developing positive ways to promote responsible pilgrimage and tourism models according to the Kairos call, "come and see."
 - We commit to promoting in both churches and in our societies the Kairos call, which echoes Palestinian civil society demands, for the implementation of boycott, divestment, and sanctions as appropriate non-violent avenues of creative resistance until the illegal Israeli occupation is brought to an end.
5. An inclusive vision of just peace throughout the Middle East
- We reiterate the Kairos Palestine objection to religiously-identified political systems. Trying to make the state a religious state, Jewish or Islamic, suffocates the state, confines it within narrow limits, and transforms it into a state that practices discrimination and exclusion, preferring one citizen over another.
 - With the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches, we call for Al-Quds/Jerusalem to be a shared holy city of two peoples and three faiths. We take seriously the call to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair.

(2 Corinthians 4.8)

Notes
