

Methodist Recorder Jan 2017

From the Rev Brian Brown:

MEMBERS of the 13 indigenous Palestinian Churches whose leaders called for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, as a contribution to ending their occupation, must be feeling more affirmed than usual. The call was made in 2009 in the Kairos Palestine document and in the intervening years the issue of occupation was not voted on by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Then on the eve of Christmas came Resolution 2334, reaffirming the injustice of Israel's occupation. It didn't mince words: The settlement policy must be immediately and completely ended as construction on Palestinian territory is a "flagrant violation" of international law, having "no legal validity".

Failure to see a self-evident truth has given rise to the phrase, "It's the economy, stupid". Our Palestinian sisters and brothers have long understood what is primary in regard to their situation, "It's the occupation". Grace generally prevents their completing the phrase! With the B'Tselem human rights body in Jerusalem estimating that there are now 580,000 illegal settlers in the Occupied Territories the magnitude of this ethnic cleansing is difficult to comprehend, as is its collective suffering.

As UN member states agree to accept the decisions of the Security Council it is tragic that Israel has consistently failed to implement the many similar resolutions that have, since 1967, called for international law to prevail. The Fourth Geneva Convention clearly applies to the Occupied Territories and declares that you can't settle your population on land won through war.

The response of the Israeli administration to this latest resolution has been to label it as shameful and disgraceful, while claiming its purpose is not against the settlements, but rather an anti-Israel resolution against the Jewish people. This strategy seeks to have the primary moral argument about the illegal dispossession of Palestinians kicked into the long grass. Instead, Israel's leaders clothe themselves in garments of

victimhood and play their anti-Semitic card: A condemnation of Israel is a condemnation of all Jews!

I decline to buy the insinuation that criticism of Israel is a primary tenet of anti-Semitism. Is "Israel" to be seen as the new Jewish identity, or religion, or both? Isn't Jewishness expressed in the religious practices of Torah and the Prophets, as well as the traditions, culture and learning that have long enriched us and our society?

The danger of constantly crying wolf by screaming anti-Semitism, particularly at a time when the pernicious evil of a racist anti-Semitism is resurgent, is that the concept and claim are trivialised. Am I to be condemned because I write with pleasure that the UNSC has once more voted that Palestinians and Israelis must share in peace with justice?

Must I embrace a "new" understanding of anti-Semitism so that it can be used as a buttress against criticism of the state of Israel and the policies of Palestinian dispossession? Does this fear of being smeared require that fellow members of the body of Christ, who long to have their freedom back, must also shut-up? Granted, US President-elect Trump sees it differently, but as his campaign was "endorsed" by virulent anti-Semitic groups he is not my moral compass on this issue.

When in my earlier life the world (rightly) condemned the policies of my apartheid South Africa I didn't view this as an anti-White expression. It was the apartheid, stupid! This same history now reminds me of black friends who would tell of my fellow whites arriving in the Cape and teaching the locals to close their eyes and pray - only to find on opening them that they had lost their land.

On the recommendation of Conference, Methodists have, commendably, prayed for the Israel/Palestinian situation over the past two years. An awful lot of land theft has occurred during this time of special prayerfulness. Now we must anticipate that our informed prayers will culminate in inspired and prophetic action. - **Brian Brown**, 28 Nigel Avenue, Birmingham.



An Israeli settlement spread across a hillside on the West Bank.

# Methodist Recorder

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