

Stirrings



Clifford Harper

A Basilian Peace & Justice Newsletter

Spring 2015

Seeking Peace in Jerusalem

By Bob Holmes CSB

A report from the Canadian Friends of Sabeel Conference held 23-26 April 2015 in Vancouver (Sabeel is Arabic for “Way” or “Spring”)

is that Christian Zionism is based on a tribal understanding of Scripture stressing exclusivity rather than inclusivity. It is a heresy which corrupts the heart of the Gospel of love and mercy.

This important conference focused on overcoming Christian Zionism in the quest for justice in the Holy Land. Because the Jewish Defense League (JDL) had threatened to disrupt the conference, CPTer Cathy McClean and I facilitated a nonviolence workshop for the conference volunteers in the afternoon before it began. We brainstormed what we might do and role played how we could intervene to de-escalate the disturbances. The JDL folk bolstered by Christian Zionists did come and protest outside. They did not enter and were in fact quite subdued by the presence of police who had been alerted to their threats.

Education

Understanding Christian Zionism was the goal of the first presentations.

The conference was opened by *Naim Ateek*, founder of Sabeel, the Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem. He gave an overview of the stages of development of Christian Zionism. It had its beginnings in England with Anglican preachers interpreting the apocalyptic predictions of the Bible as being realized in their day – the end time is near; Jesus second coming is imminent – but first the Jews must return to Palestine, where they will either be converted or perish when Jesus comes again. It really took wings among Protestant Evangelicals in the United States with the establishment of the state of Israel – for them, a clear sign that the end times had indeed arrived. Naim’s critique

What we must do is use the Old Testament as Jesus did – he never quoted the books of Numbers or Joshua, the “land title” for Jewish colonial imperialism. Instead, we must pay attention to the prophets who recognized that God’s promises were dependent on the ethical

keeping of the Sinai covenant.

Justice must always trump injustice when interpreting the scriptures.

Gary Burge, author and professor of New Testament studies, took us through the theology of the Christian Zionists noting that it is a political theology with many blind spots – not dissimilar to the political theology of Constantinian Christianity which embraced empire – blind to the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Don Wagner, co-founder of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, detailed the growth of Christian Zionism in Protestantism in the United States. Its roots are in the English Puritan settlers who saw themselves as God’s chosen people bringing faith to the New World. Divinely assured exceptionalism allows for exploitation as part of God’s plan. Hence the state of Israel must be established even if this requires the ethical cleansing of the indigenous people. Again, the covenant relationship has been inverted by the Christian Zionists.

continued on page 2



SEEKING
A JUST
PEACE
1-2

BASILIAN
VOLUNTEER
TEACHING
3

TIRED OF
BROKEN
HISTORY
4-5

TORAH
PROPHETS
WISDOM
6

VISITING
NAZARETH
TODAY
7

HOT DOC
THE PRICE
WE PAY
8

Sabeel Conference

continued from page 1

Canadian Politics

Several Canadians reflected on the present Conservative government's unwavering support of Israel regardless of the flouting of International Law and the violation of Palestinian Human Rights.

Ron Dart, professor and former Amnesty International staffer, spoke about Canadian Christian Zionism. Prime Minister Harper's embrace of Israel is the greatest foreign policy change in modern times. It appeals to both the eschatological (end times) Christians and to those who feel they cannot criticize Jews because of Holocaust guilt and who support their return to the promised land as a compensation.

Yves Engler, a non-religious author, picked up on the Canadian support for Israel explaining that the Conservative government unable to please the evangelical Christians on abortion or same sex marriage is seeking to win them over with this foreign policy of support for Israel and an aggressive anti-Terrorist (read Muslim) stance.

Carmen Lansdowne, of the Heiltsuk First Nation and an ordained United Church minister, spoke of the Israeli/Palestinian situation as messy, broken and heartbreaking – like the situation of the First Nations in Canada. She called for an upholding of International Law and ended her talk with an incredibly moving poem entitled "I'm tired . . ." (see pages 4-5).

Solidarity

Rabbi Alyssa Wise, co-Director of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) in the USA, noted that dialogue has often been a substitute for action and that what is needed is Co-

Resistance before there can be Co-Existence. JVP supports Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) as a nonviolent force to end the occupation. Campaigns must have a clear target – the person(s) who can make decisions. JVP has grown from 70 chapters to 150 in one year – every time Israel does something gruesome JVP doubles in size.

Jonathan Kuttab, a Palestinian attorney and human rights activist, pointed out that although the two state solution is not happening after 40 years of talk, we should not despair because good things are happening as we work towards a vision of equality, freedom, respect for human rights and international law and the end of racism.

Action

Listening is not enough – action is necessary. Two advocates for BDS detailed their advocacy work for divestment from corporations that benefit from Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

Hind Awaad, former coordinator of the BDS National Committee in Palestine now

studying in Toronto, spoke about the importance of BDS given the lack of effective international action. She outlined the three goals: 1- ending of the occupation and colonization, 2- recognition of Palestinian rights, and 3- recognition of the Palestinian right of return. The movement does not endorse a "solution," only the end of violations of human rights and international law. The Boycott targets institutions but not individuals. Is it working? YES! There have been victories: Veolia, which built the transit line connecting the colonies to Jerusalem, has lost contracts in Boston and Detroit; G4S, with security business in Israel, has lost 20 contracts elsewhere; the United and Presbyterian Churches has endorsed divestment; many colleges and academic associates have supported divestment in their institutions; many cultural stars have refused to perform in Israel.

Bob Ross, chair of advocacy for Israel/Palestine in the Presbyterian Church (USA), explained how they achieved a narrow (51-49%) decision to divest. "We are Christians for Christ's sake!" was their argument – "We cannot profit from companies who profit from human rights violations." After 10 years of failed negotiations with Caterpillar, Motorola and Hewlett Packard, they divested. Their opposition came both from within the Church and from outside.

There were 25 workshops, many facilitated by the speakers, which allowed the participants to become engaged in the search for Peace in Jerusalem.



Jonathan Kuttab, Alyssa Wise and Don Wagner enjoy a panel discussion

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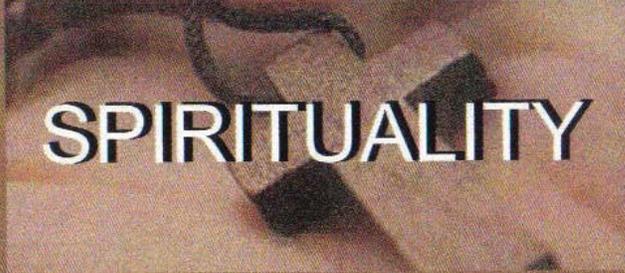
Neil Hibberd, Bob Holmes, Leo Reilly, Maurice Restivo

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www.basilian.org or write to
95 St. Joseph St. Toronto ON M5S 3C2
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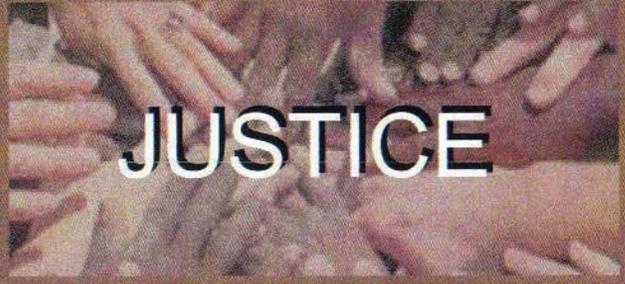
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Stirring: (adjective) exciting, arousing, awakening, animating, quickening

I'm tired...

By Carmen Lansdowne

I'm tired.

I'm tired of racism. I'm tired of ignorance and the millions of well-intentioned-church-going-folk who have no desire whatsoever to understand that this land on which they live was not empty when they got here but filled with thinking communities of human beings who were brilliant and dynamic and smart-not-savage.

I'm tired.

I'm tired of a legacy of brokenness that is so old and fragile that to start tinkering with what's down there under layers of decomposing flesh and brittle bones will mean the house of cards that I call home for this mixed-blood identity might fall down and the little parts of me I do know and understand will become vagrant – ungrounded spectres floating with the souls of stolen generations.

I'm tired.

I'm tired of holding a reverent position of authority backed by a church that inherited the colonial legacy of empires past, showing up to book club meetings and in a discussion on how it might be difficult to be a mixed-race woman being told that until I 'show up to church in a buckskin dress with a feather in my hair' I'm always going to be a little white girl.

I'm tired.

I'm tired of my beloved innocently, gently, asking why my uncle, Chief Wigwixba'walkus "owns" our crest and having to answer "I don't know..."



And what I really want to say is, "I don't know because until two hundred years ago my people were thriving until companies and governments intentionally infected them with smallpox and ninety-nine percent of them died and overnight we went from thirty-thousand strong to less than four hundred survivors and the missionaries helped them and they became Christians and they were happy and liberated but then the government, bent on assimilating us, and the churches, bent on 'civilizing' us stole our children and broke our families and broke our culture and never told the babies they were actually human so they grew up empty and hollow and not knowing who they were so they

couldn't teach my mother and she couldn't teach me and to talk about all of that would mean we might start crying and never stop."

I'm tired.

I'm tired of being accused of being anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish because I can identify with Palestinians who had a life fundamentally changed when the British and North American governments, who had enough economic power and legal procedures to create a nation state in a "land without a people," all of a sudden found themselves non-citizens before they had time to think or respond.

I'm tired.

I'm tired of well-meaning-white-liberals who acknowledge the sins of the past as if they are disconnected from the present – who ask me (as their token educated indigenous woman) to objectify myself by standing in front of them and asking me for answers to their problems-that-they share with-us-yet-cannot-acknowledge and "Oh, Rev... if you could remember this reflection is theological and not political... just tell us the right way to dole out charity so we can assuage our guilt and move forward" – at the same time and with the same breath they make statements about the

church needing to become more self-critical about its complicity with EMPIRE – whatever they think that means.

I'm tired.

I'm tired of the citizens who walk

proudly down urban streets – secure in their first world standard of living – and pass by the Drunken Indian on the corner and mutter under their disgusted breath to "get a job!" without stopping to ask him: what it felt like to be ripped from his mother's arms and be taken away in an airplane (which he'd never seen before), get sent to an isolated brick school – cold and imposing – be stripped naked by people who spoke only English (which he didn't understand) and then have his head shaved, delousing chemicals poured over him before being handed ill-fitting institutionalized clothes and a hand-me-down-pair-of-Oxfords from the boy who just died of TB; and then who was raped re-



peatedly by the older boys who are being raped themselves by priests and sometimes women and then they force him to eat a raw, dead, rat – all before his sixth birthday?

I'm tired.

I'm tired of the tension between wanting to be open and hospitable and welcome to the new immigrants who leave oppressed and oppressing lives in other countries to come to the land of the free, knowing that Canada's (and America's) dirty little secret that they think Indians are dirty will never be aired – not in the media or public school curriculum which don't teach that Native Savages – god forbid! – had any value in the history of these great nations which promise opportunity and salvation to these newcomers who will then (rightly?) be able to say that the genocide and racism and dehumanization of the first settlers was not their doing.... And trying not to hate them for that.

I'm tired.

I'm tired of reading page after page of philosophical mental masturbation about God's will and opting for the margins and the difficulty of responsible advocacy for the descendants of black slaves (who are over-represented in prisons) and undocumented workers whose lives are shit because our governments are scared to death of what changes might happen when people with brown skin are considered legitimate human beings – and all of this thought, written and printed within the context of a society or societies which do not ever except for one or two lines – if that – mention the Native Americans... and even then, only as an appendage or after-thought.

I'm tired.

I'm tired of the fact that this broken history has left my baby brother so lost and lonely that he had to write a master's thesis about himself and figuring out who he is so that he can diffuse the time bomb of junk-in-the-guts and stop himself from ripping the face off a colleague or client or both, and who has no idea how to explain what it felt

like at age thirteen to receive a piece of paper that said he was now legally Indian at the same time as he has no idea how to explain to his son why, at age one and a half, his own piece of paper saying he was Indian was taken away because his mom was white and "We're sorry, but he was never really Indian to begin with."



I'm tired.

I'm tired of being the sister of the dead-older-brother who couldn't handle his life and so took it from himself – not by hanging or drugs or a gun or drowning or slicing his arms or legs – but by slowly, carefully, and intentionally strangling himself in a position where once he passed out his body weight would finish the job.

I'm tired.

I'm tired of not having a place to call my own on an island that feels like home because there are no jobs for my people there.

I'm tired.

I'm tired of everyone thinking I get my education for free while I open my bank statement that says I'm fifty thousand dollars in debt after one year of doctoral-studies-so-I-could-learn-to-write theology (because apparently indigenous people don't know how to separate the theological from the political – we're so audacious like that!).

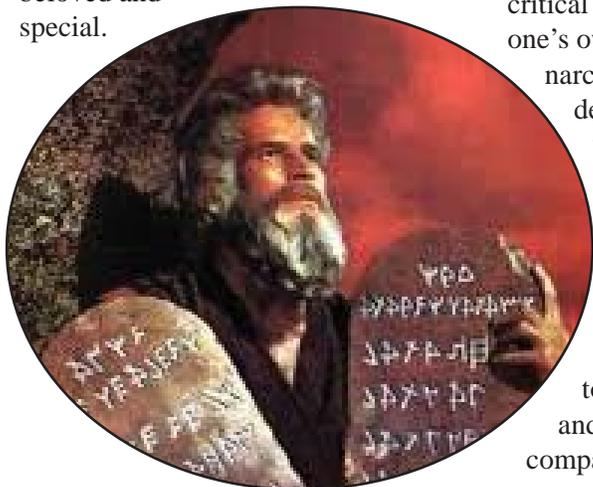
I'm tired.

It's five a.m. and it took me an hour to write this poem, and I'm tired.

Carmen is a Heiltsuk woman from the central coast of BC and an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada.

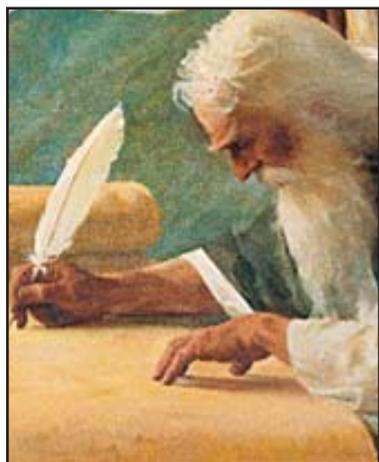


The Hebrew Scriptures are divided into three major sections: the Torah, the Prophets, and the Wisdom books. Walter Brueggemann says, and I think it's pure genius, that these three sections represent the ordinary and healthy development of human consciousness in a sequential way. The Torah gave the Israelites the Law and a sense of their chosenness. For healthy development, any culture or family must follow this pattern of first providing structure, which develops identity, boundaries, and self-worth as beloved and special.



The second set of books is the Jewish Prophets, and they represent the birth of critical thinking. The Prophets have clearly been the most neglected part of Scripture for both Jews and Christians, because neither showed much capacity for healthy self-criticism. You can see the rise of critical thinking in young people, but it is mostly oriented toward others instead of themselves. Parents often feel their teenagers oppose them on everything! And yet it is a necessary stage, though it often doesn't go far enough.

The Roman Catholic Church did not allow prophetic/critical thinking for almost 500 years after



Torah, Prophets, Wisdom

By Richard Rohr

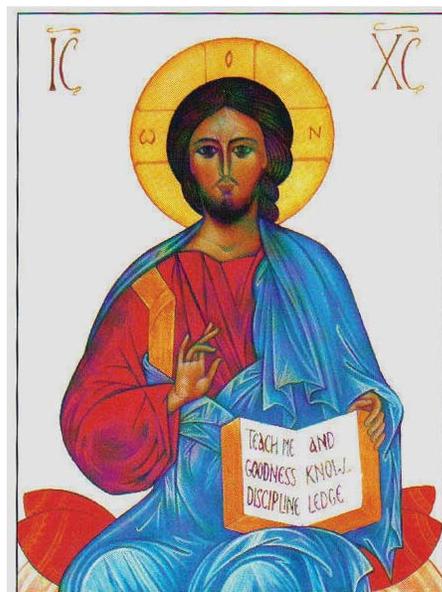
the Reformation, nor did America for most of its 200-year history. (Slavery and segregation are the most obvious examples.) When the floodgates opened in the 1960's, there was no stopping critical thinking. Now many Evangelicals are going through the same process in the emerging church movement.

On the individual level, self-critical thinking is necessary to see one's own shadow self and one's own narcissism. This is a small, early death, which only a minority undergo. Yet only when I encounter my shadow do I realize that my biggest problem is *me!* We have to go through a great interior death to get to the third stage of wisdom. Then can we begin to learn to live with mystery and paradox. It is the birthplace of compassion and wisdom.

The Wisdom section of the Hebrew Scriptures includes the books of Job, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and many of the Psalms. Such Wisdom literature reveals an ability to finally be patient with mystery and contradictions – and the soul itself. Wisdom people have passed through a major death to their ego. This is the core meaning of transformation. It opens you to what Marcus Borg (who sadly died recently) and others have rightly called *alternative* wisdom instead of the mere maintenance of social order (conventional wisdom).



It is from this third stage of alternative wisdom that Jesus teaches. Yet most of Christian history tried to understand Jesus inside the first stage of law and the need for social order. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is anything but maintaining the status quo, and it goes far beyond mere negative or critical thinking!



Adapted from *Way of the Prophet* (no longer available); and *Prophets Then, Prophets Now* (CD, MP3 download).

Nazareth Today

By John Bullas

We visited Sabeel Nazareth, a Palestinian Christian organization and met Violette Kahoury, the director. Her talk was very rich and this summary will not really do it justice. Here goes.

The Palestinian Christians are direct descendants of the early church. The holy places to them are not shrines but part of their history. Perhaps their ancestors played with Jesus. They built this country. This has never been an empty land to be given to a people from somewhere else without land.

800,000 Palestinians were expelled from Israel in 1948-49. The UN defined it as a human catastrophe. Trees were planted to cover the ruins of emptied

Arab villages. Lots were confiscated and given to Jews. In 1948 Nazareth became a refugee centre and swelled from 10,000 to 35,000 people almost overnight. The 150,000 Palestinians who remained in Israel were kept under military law until 1967. They are now second-class citizens subject to many discriminatory laws.

A ratio of 10-1 exists in services Jewish Israelis enjoy vs. Palestinian Israelis. Jewish Israelis enjoy tax breaks not available to Palestinian Israelis. Violette gave the example of a time when she and a Jewish friend applied to open a Pharmacy at the same time. She got a rejection letter while her friend got tax breaks and incentives.

The Jewish and Palestinian schools have different syllabi, and, as an example, the Jewish geography texts have no Arab villages in them. It is a policy of indoctrination which leads to fear and hate of the "other." She believes such a state of discrimination cannot be a democracy.

A new law has just been put on the books which states that Arab Palestinian Christians who are citizens of Israel are neither Arab nor

Palestinian. Newly-born children will be known as "Aramaics." Go figure. They are speechless at this latest tactic to divide Christian from Muslim Palestinians.



Sabeel tries to find and create harmony in the social structure and work for peace and justice through non-violent solutions in partnership with other groups. Their work is ecumenical and inter-faith. The theological bases are:

- Truth will set us free*
- *God's dream of justice for all*
- Paul's edict for us to remain free, and not to submit to slavery.*

John is a retired United Church minister living on Gabriola Island in British Columbia, Canada and was a member of the Basilian Peace & Justice Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in November 2014.

Basilian Peace & Justice Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

We have been brought not only to the Holy Land but also to meet the Holy People and to hear their stories.

We return home to the comfort and relative safety of our North American homes, but we return changed.

We return enraged by the injustices that we have seen with our own eyes and heard about through their stories.

We return humbled by their ability to live with dignity in the face of a bureaucratic nightmare designed to frustrate and humiliate.

We return inspired by their passion in resistance and their *sumud* (steadfastness).
a Pilgrim, November 2014



12-26 July 2015
contact:
mrestivo@basilian.org

The Price We Pay

By Neil Hibberd CSB

The obscenity of legally correct, morally bankrupt money magnates and a prospect for justice

Movies have a tradition of faithfully portraying the rich as wicked, uncaring, often crazed, bejeweled rajahs keeping the undeserving poor in their well-merited squalor. These bad guys are ever unmasked, forced to pay their due and end up undone and trounced as justice triumphs.

Charlie Chaplin's "*Little Tramp*," whose behind is ever on the polished boot of the mean, moneyed, rich miser, kicking him off his front lawn, denying him a handout, eventually triumphs over the rich, rapacious rascal who has consistently tormented him.

Frank Capra's "*You Can't Take it With You*" presents Edward Arnold's ruthlessly driven millionaire, driving others out of business and buying up whole neighbourhoods. Lionel Barrymore's character tells him, "You can't take it with you." He doesn't.

How did you like Michael Douglas' role in "*Wall Street*" and its sequel in 2012, "*Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*"? Ruthless. Grasping. Rampant avarice as a code of life. Leonardo DiCaprio is brilliant in the loathsome, disgusting, "*The Wolf of Wall Street*," depicting the sad orgies flowing from grand-scale, financial chicanery. Justice here is in the shallow, empty, soul-destroying rewards of duping the covetous, gullible, beak-stretched gulls desirous of scooping up "easy" money.

"*The Price We Pay*," a well-crafted documentary, offers a concise, engrossing and infuriating overview of the ways multinationals avoid taxes by stashing profits in offshore havens. By doing so they seriously undermine the ability of governments to provide services and safety nets for citizens of most countries. It's all legal. The movie provides a clear picture of the history of how this dreadful aberration came about. It is a present disaster galloping to future devastation – the growing income disparity in North America and elsewhere is increasing, the middle class is shrinking and being hit with the triple whammy of

diminished employment prospects, heavier tax burdens and fewer welfare benefit protections. All this while the "One Percenters," sock away as much as \$32 trillion in offshore tax havens.

This is a savage obscenity being visited upon ordinary people everywhere in the world. Has Gordon Gekko's creed, "Greed is good," become real, no more a mere entertaining fiction of moviedom, which we will "always have with us," as we will the poor? There is no escaping the scope of this growing disaster; it has the seeds of an epic upheaval of revolution, of a powerful surge of angry resentment shifting from its passive dormancy to explosive calamity.

Why is this obscenity of financial skullduggery able to continue, even as it becomes more openly exposed? Is it possible that we privately applaud the slick cleverness of the individual and corporate scoundrels, as in, "Gotta hand it to them. We'd pull off the same if we could get away with it."? Is it that it is considered a "genteel" crime, so vast, unimaginable and world-wide diminishing, that we can't get our heads around it, are we flummoxed into stasis, not daring to face the imagined, frightening consequences of challenging and changing it?

It will indeed take an accord of all nations working in consort to create laws to crush it: otherwise, any single nation will play the maverick and host

the monetary benefits of corporations which will simply move their profits from countries denying them these tax benefices. Most of this money "floats," ending up in the most advantageous haven, paying little or nothing to local governments. These wicked, conscienceless pirates are pitiless, and must be brought down and made subject to justice soon.

Among the possible solutions are a small transaction tax (Robin Hood tax) on stock sales and initiatives by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development to rewrite international tax rules: essential to such endeavours is public awareness of the issues, which this documentary helps to heighten; and to which you can contribute with a cerebral night out at the cinema. Perhaps you'll come away shouting Howard Beal's cry, "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to put up with it any longer."

