

Stirrings



A Basilian Peace & Justice Newsletter

Summer 2014

Clifford Harper

Uncertainty, Fear and Determination

Notes from the Basilian Peace & Justice Pilgrimage to the Holy Land 2014

By the 2014 Pilgrims

“Uncertainty” was the name of the game. It began in Toronto with the cancelling of the Air France flight just after nine pilgrims arrived at the airport. After the FAA in the US banned flights to Tel Aviv because a rocket from Gaza landed in the area near the Ben Gurion airport, three pilgrims from Phoenix decided not to join us. Air France switched us to Alitalia which still had scheduled flights to Tel Aviv.

When we arrived in Rome our flight to Tel Aviv was cancelled and we were taken to a hotel in Rome – except for Juan Carlos, a Basilian from Colombia, who was not allowed into Italy without a visa. He spent the night in the airport. The last shall be first – he flew out to Tel Aviv the next day while the rest of the pilgrims visited St. Peter’s and caught up with him a day later.



At our evening reflection/prayer time in Rome we realized that our uncertainty was small potatoes compared to that of the Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied territories of the West Bank.

A Peace & Justice pilgrimage visits not

just the holy places but also the holy people – the peacemakers: Israelis, Palestinian and international; Jews, Muslims and Christians.

It has been a difficult, but meaningful

pilgrimage because of the tensions raised everywhere by the bombing in Gaza. Fear is destructive of peace. In the places we visited we were never in danger, but Palestinians we met were afraid that Israeli soldiers and



L to R: Liam Lacy, Mark Lacy, Mary Baldasaro, Molly Sutkaitis, Bob Holmes, Dolcie Lobo, Claude Gosselin, Ray Ritari, Juan Carlos Rojas Ramos, Maurice Restivo

settlers who are on edge might become violent and Israelis we met feared that Palestinians may turn their anger over the situation in Gaza against them. But both the Palestinians and the Israelis we met were very thankful for our coming to see and hear their stories which we promised to retell at home.

In this issue of Stirrings you will be introduced to several of these peacemakers.



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Building Bridges

We Refuse to Be Enemies



In the afternoon we left for **Tent of the Nations**, a farm outside of Bethlehem owned by the Nassar family – Christians from Bethlehem – since 1916. It is surrounded now by five Israeli settlements, and they want the Nassar land. **Daher Nassar**, grandson and namesake of the 1916 purchaser, gave us a tour and spoke of his hope. He and his brother Daoud (David) now run an organic farm, where people come from around the world to volunteer and learn. Children come for summer camp.

Their motto, painted on a stone at the gate, is “We Refuse to Be Enemies.” Their mission is building bridges between people and between people to the land – bridges of understanding, reconciliation, and peace.

Recently, settlers from a nearby Israeli settlement destroyed 1500 mature fruit trees. Daher was pleased to inform us that a group of Palestinians, Israelis, and internationals – Christians, Muslims, and Jews – worked together to replant more trees than those that were destroyed.

Maurice Restivo

Stirrings

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Race to the Bottom

By Paul English CSB (from a homily 3 August 2014)

Each evening, religious women and men, priests and lay people pray Evening Prayer, which includes the beautiful prayer of the young Virgin Mary, when the Angel Gabriel announced to her that she would be the woman that all Jewish women hoped to be, the mother of the savior. Her prayer is called “the Magnificat,” when she recognizes that God is about to turn everything upside-down – or maybe right-side-up:

“he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”

From the mouth of the young Virgin, God states his mission in our world.

On the other hand...

The mission of publicly held corporations is to produce something. We may think what it’s producing is widgets, or the best quality product or the finest service, or being the most humane, showing a strong commitment to sustainability or a concern for human beings and their community... but we would be wrong.

The mission of publicly-held corporations is to produce quarterly profits for their shareholders. And if they don’t, they’re not being faithful to their mission. They would be committing the business equivalent of a “sin.”

They may practice those other things, as long as they don’t detract from quarterly profits, but when quarterly profits shrink, then protecting the Earth, or the quality of their product, or humaneness, or the good of the town, the region or the nation are the first to go along with good wages and benefits for the people who work there.

In order to fulfill the mission of maximizing quarterly profits, they will often see it as their duty to move to another town or state or nation or continent where they can be most profitable and to move again if some other town or state or nation can provide workers for lower wage and benefit costs, and cheaper raw materials.

Or they can sell the company to another corporation whose mission is also maximizing quarterly profits, but who usually have no connection or allegiance to the people of the town or state or nation, and who can hire people at a much-reduced wage and decide whether even to provide benefits. ...And then may move the whole enterprise out of the region if it is not profitable enough.

I don’t have to tell you that this leaves families and neighborhoods and towns and regions in awful shape because they really are not part of the mission of corporations. They are at best, an economic factor in their mission of maximizing quarterly profits. This, in our time, is called “the race to the bottom.”

The Pope has spoken and written a lot lately about this, and it challenges our way of thinking quite a bit.

In his magnificent letter “The Joy of the Gospel,” he wrote these challenging words: “The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule. Behind this attitude lurks a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God...”

Through the prophet Isaiah, the one true God is calling out to the victims of the selfish race to the bottom in Isaiah’s time, and saying, “I am with you. I am taking your side: come and

enjoy all the security and relaxation that only a small few lavish upon themselves now!”

You see, God is also in a race to the bottom. But God is racing to where suffering people are, to share with them in solidarity, and help, protecting them, lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things.

In my nearly 30 years ordained, I’ve noticed that the Church attracts needy people. It’s not a “bug,” it’s a feature. And it’s been this way at least since Jesus walked the lands of Palestine and ministered to the needy as well as the sinful. So I can imagine the crowds that followed Jesus were needy people. We might call them the non-elites, the halt, the blind, the lame, widows, orphans, “riff-raff,” women and children.



So in today’s Gospel on the loaves and fishes, at the end of their long day, I feel like shouting, “Good for the disciples, feeling concern for the people’s needs!” This shows me that they accepted and internalized Jesus’ message, his mission, God’s mission.

God’s mission is the common good. People’s good. His beloved children’s good, of all faiths and races, of all skin tones, all shapes and sizes. He’s very active in making the common good come about. In the earliest times, He sent teachers, judges, prophets and preachers, and even his own Son to show us how to be actively concerned like God is – and our mission is Christ’s mission.

So what’s stopping us?

Well, scarcity scares most of us, just like it did the disciples when they saw so many thousands of people and only a few fishes and loaves of bread. We might be thinking, “What would I do if my corporate employer abandoned this place?” “Or fired me for having Christ’s values and not quarterly profit maximization values?”

And as long as that fear freezes us in place, deters us from acting and doing what we know is needed and is right, we’re always going to live with scarcity!

But Jesus doesn’t. He sees the goods of this world as things that serve humanity, for our well-being, whether that’s loaves of bread and fishes or whether it’s money.

Pope Francis wrote: “Money must serve, not rule! The Pope loves everyone, rich and poor alike, but he is obliged in the name of Christ to remind all that the rich must help, respect and promote the poor. I exhort you to generous solidarity and to the return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favors human beings.”

Jesus said to his disciples, “There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves.” With their human eyes, where the disciples see only scarcity, Jesus sees possibility, opportunity to show God’s covenant of love and protection in action.

So while his disciples weren’t the rich elites, they did have two things: something they could give to people in need and Jesus who with confidence tells them that giving will turn out better than their fear of scarcity allows them even to imagine.

Let’s find ways of actively promoting the common good as a parish family, trusting the Lord, not fearing scarcity, but loving as he loved and loves now, though his people, the Church.

Paul is pastor at St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish in Rochester NY.

Occupied East Jerusalem

onion layers of laws and walls



We headed out after 2:00 for the main focus of the day, a tour of East Jerusalem by a young Jewish woman, **Chaska**, of **Israeli Coalition Against Home Demolition**.

We drove to the lookout and saw the stark contrast between the booming West Jerusalem with its construction cranes and greenery, and the often unfinished buildings of East Jerusalem in very dry neighbourhoods. We could also see the settler communities encroaching on and surrounding Palestinian East Jerusalem.

Chaska described the onion layers of laws and walls, that effectively isolate Palestinians and add to their economic and social challenges. The Wall has restricted movement and affected families.

Because of the required identity cards, and their implications for movement and employment, even whom you might consider marrying is an issue. My most powerful impression was that the idea that the Wall is for security is a lie. It is being constructed to exert economic and political control over the Palestinians, and has not increased Israeli security.

We got a up-close look at a horrible injustice. *Mark Lacy*



Bereaved Parents' Circle

no difference in the taste of their tears



Upon returning to Jerusalem we met with two people—a Palestinian and an Israeli—from **Bereaved Parents' Circle** an organization of both Israelis and Palestinians who have lost immediate family members in the conflict. **Moira** (born in the Caribbean, raised in the US, and now Palestinian) told us of her husband Ziyad's death, shot by Israeli soldiers as he was returning to his house to take his family to the beach. She learned to reach out to others; someone invited her to a meeting of the Parents' Circle and she learned to speak to the other, to see Israeli Jews as brothers and sisters. She told us of her two daughters, who reluctantly attended a summer camp program for children who have lost family members, and who now are enthusiastic about their Jewish Israeli friends.

Ben, an Israeli Jew, born in Israel, lost his daughter in a suicide bombing at an Israeli military base. He received an invitation to a weekend hosted by Parents' Circle and slowly came to understand that his first desires for revenge would not solve his grief. He learned that the color of Israeli and Palestinian blood is the same, and that there is no difference in the taste of their tears.

Ben told us of different projects done by the circle, such as Hello Peace, a phone conversation opportunity, in which 1.8 million Palestinians and Israelis (out of a total population of 9 million) were connected with each other through a computer (for anonymity) for a phone conversation with each other. *Maurice Restivo csb*

Palestinian Refugees Welcome The Pope

Photos By Kelly Lynn

An activist from Aida Refugee Camp walks with spray paint in hand toward the Wall near Rachel's Tomb, on May 24th, 2014 after the military gate and a section of the sniper tower were painted over in preparation for Pope Francis's visit to Bethlehem.



Activists from Aida Refugee Camp paint slogans on a newly painted portion of the Apartheid Wall and military gate near Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem on May 24th, 2014

Israeli soldiers stand beside a recently painted slogan after opening the military gate near Rachel's Tomb in response to Palestinian activists from Aida Refugee Camp May 24th, 2014.



PA (Palestinian Authority) soldiers block the sidewalk toward the Israeli military gate near Rachel's Tomb, after Palestinian activists were chased away following their activity on May 24th, 2014

The story behind the iconic photo at the Separation Wall on May 25, 2014

Mohammed Abu Srour, 23, writes slogans on the military gate which was painted over twice in preparation for Pope Francis's visit May 25th, 2014. The completed slogans read, "Pope, we need some1 to speak about justice," and "Pope, Bethlehem look like Warsaw Ghetto."



Pope Francis prays at the military gate in the Israeli built Apartheid Wall on May 25th, 2014



Children from Dheisheh Refugee Camp wave as Pope Francis passes in a caravan on his way to meet with young refugees from Bethlehem's three camps, Dheisheh, Aida and Azza, on May 25th, 2014

Jordan Valley ecological displacement



Today was our Jordan Valley Day. We went to the **Auja Ecological Center** just north of Jericho and learned about the effects of the Israeli military occupation and colonization on the ecology of the Jordan Valley. Palestinian farmers have been forcibly displaced from 96% of the Valley and now have control of only 6%. The displacement process is as much ecological as military and colonial.

The Jordan River used to be a source of water for the local farmers, but Israel has dammed it up at the Sea of Galilee and redirected the water west to Israel. To irrigate their banana and date palm farms the Palestinian farmers constructed water aqueducts to carry water from the many springs fed by the rain water from the mountain areas to the west. When the Israeli settlers moved in they sank deep wells and redirected this spring water to their settlements and their plantations. Now, except in the rainy season, there is no water for the aqueducts and the Palestinian lands have turned to dust while the Israeli plantations flourish with the stolen water.

Hammid, our ecologist guide, took us to the source of the Auja Spring and showed us the dry aqueduct and one (out of 8) Israeli deep wells that are sucking the Auja spring dry. He also showed us the lush plantation of a settlement, which has only one Israeli settler, but has plenty of water. It was adjacent to a Palestinian Bedouin village which has no water. Although it is near the Auja spring, they have to buy their water from the Israelis.

Bob Holmes csb

Stirring: (adjective) exciting, arousing, awakening, animating, quickening

Bethlehem

*we will never seek revenge
neither will we remain silent*



We first met with **Sami Awad**, a passionate Palestinian Christian, who is the Executive Director of Holy Land Trust which he founded in 1998. The purpose of **Holy Land Trust** is to engage pro-actively Palestinians and Israelis in the ways of non-violence.

With present leadership both sides seem only to operate out of their past grievances and know far too well how to manage, manipulate and use fear with their people. Sami has begun to develop programs of leadership that teach “non-linear thinking.” In other words, nearly all decisions that leaders (and we ourselves) make are based upon past experiences and narratives that prevent them from moving forward in a positive way and establishing peace. Present leadership on both sides is stuck!

Palestinians and Israelis are challenged to see the impossible as possible. Each must understand each other’s historical narratives, i.e. where each has come from, each other’s sufferings, etc. and to work at healing and closure. Israelis and Palestinians are challenged to be transformed, recognize the equal rights of others, and actively reach out to the mainstream folk in order to change the communal negative mindset where so many people on both sides of the barrier find themselves.

Sami’s grandmother, after losing her husband in the 1948 war, planted the seeds of nonviolence in Sami when she said, “We will never seek revenge. But neither will we remain silent about the injustice done to us.”

Raymond Ritari

Beautiful dream of Israel

*Everyone ought to be sad at what the beautiful old dream
of Jewish redemption has come to.*

Everyone ought to grieve the death of innocents.

By Gabor Maté

As a Jewish youngster growing up in Budapest, an infant survivor of the Nazi genocide, I was for years haunted by a question resounding in my brain with such force that sometimes my head would spin: “How was it possible? How could the world have let such horrors happen?”

It was a naïve question, that of a child. I know better now: such is reality. Whether in Vietnam or Rwanda or

and the old, you who have cruelly blockaded Gaza for years, starving it of necessities, you who deprive Palestinians of more and more of their land, their water, their crops, their trees – you care about life?

There is no understanding Gaza out of context — Hamas rockets or unjustifiable terrorist attacks on civilians – and that context is the longest ongoing ethnic cleansing operation in the recent and present centuries, the ongoing attempt to destroy Palestinian nationhood.

The Palestinians use tunnels? So did my heroes, the poorly armed fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto. Unlike Israel, Palestinians lack Apache helicopters, guided drones, jet fighters with bombs, laser-guided artillery. Out of impotent defiance, they fire inept rockets, causing terror for innocent Israelis but rarely



Syria, humanity stands by either complicly or unconsciously or helplessly, as it always does. In Gaza today we find ways of justifying the bombing of hospitals, the annihilation of families at dinner, the killing of pre-adolescents playing soccer on a beach.

In Israel-Palestine the powerful party has succeeded in painting itself as the victim, while the ones being killed and maimed become the perpetrators. “They don’t care about life,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says, abetted by the Obamas and Harpers of this world, “we do.” Netanyahu, you who with surgical precision slaughter innocents, the young

physical harm. With such a gross imbalance of power, there is no equivalence of culpability.

Israel wants peace? Perhaps, but as the veteran Israeli journalist Gideon Levy has pointed out, it does not want a just peace. Occupation and creeping annexation, an inhumane blockade, the destruction of olive groves, the arbitrary imprisonment of thousands, torture, daily humiliation of civilians, house demolitions: these are not policies compatible with any desire for a just peace. In Tel Aviv Gideon Levy now moves around with a bodyguard, the price of speaking the truth.

I have visited Gaza and the West

Stirring: (noun) the act of moving or putting into motion, activity

has become a nightmare

Bank. I saw multi-generational Palestinian families weeping in hospitals around the bedsides of their wounded, at the graves of their dead. These are not people who do not care about life. They are like us — Canadians, Jews, like anyone: they celebrate life, family, work, education, food, peace, joy. And they are capable of hatred, they can harbour vengeance in the hearts, just like we can.

One could debate details, historical and current, back and forth. Since my days as a young Zionist and, later, as a member of Jews for a Just Peace, I have often done so. I used to believe that if people knew the facts, they would open to the truth. That, too, was naïve. This issue is far too charged with emotion. As the spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle has pointed out, the accumulated mutual pain in the Middle East is so acute, “a significant part of the population finds itself forced to act it out in an endless cycle of perpetration and retribution.”

“People’s leaders have been misled, so they that are led have been confused,” in the words of the prophet Jeremiah. The voices of justice and sanity are not heeded. Netanyahu has his reasons. Harper and Obama have theirs.

And what shall we do, we ordinary people? I pray we can listen to our hearts. My heart tells me that “never again” is not

a tribal slogan, that the murder of my grandparents in Auschwitz does not justify the ongoing dispossession of Palestinians, that justice, truth, peace are not tribal prerogatives. That Israel’s “right to defend itself,” unarguable in principle, does not validate mass killing.



Die-In on Bloor St. in front of the Israeli Consulate in Toronto, 8 August 2014. Organized by grassroots Jewish Women

the daily savagery depicted on our TV screens. We both feared the rancour that would arise.

But, I want to say to my friend, can we not be sad together at what that beautiful old dream of Jewish redemption has come to? Can we not grieve the death of innocents? I am sad these days. Can we not at least mourn together?

(Published in the Toronto Star on Tuesday July 22, 2014)

Gabor Maté, M.D., is a Vancouver-based author and speaker.



Aida Refugee Camp

there is time to find happiness in this madness.



Finally, our group made its way to the **Aida Refugee Camp** in Bethlehem where we met with a dynamic and hope-filled man by the name of **Nidal Alazraq**, a refugee himself of Aida, who shared with us that Aida refugee camp is:

1. The worst refugee camp in the West Bank. Although, as Nidal said, “This is a five star hotel compared to Gaza!”

2. Aida refugee camp is like a prison, surrounded by the barrier wall on two sides and a Israeli military base at the rear of the camp.

3. Aida refugee camp was established in 1951 and was meant to be temporary.

4. There are 6,000 persons in 66,000 square meters. HALF of the refugees are under the age of 18.

5. The PLO offers no services, the UN only collects trash and operates overcrowded schools, there are NO health clinics, and the city of Bethlehem is prohibited from offering services.

6. There is no space to enlarge in the camp, so much so, that one could hop from one rooftop to another.

7. Life is tough, particularly for young teenagers, many of whom have been arrested several times in the past, have suffered emotional trauma from their brutal prison experience, etc.

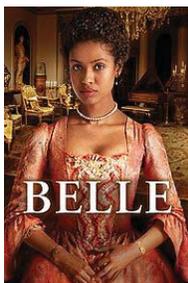
Nidal reminded us that, “there is time to find happiness in this madness.”

Raymond Ritari

Belle, Ida and Uvanga: triumph over bias, prejudice and discrimination

By Neil Hibberd CSB

Belle, Dido Elizabeth **Belle**, is the illegitimate, mixed race niece of great-uncle, William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield, Lord Chief Justice of England, who raises her and her cousin, well-born, white, Lady Elizabeth Murray, in this British film, inspired by the 1779 painting of Dido (Belle) and Elizabeth, which still exists. **Belle** is beautiful, well-educated, clever, cultured and, when she inherits her father's wealth, sought after by suitors who privately mock her, scorn her colour and despise her. Her beautiful, but penniless cousin is suitor-deprived. Can wealth cancel out the savage discounting of illegitimacy and colour? Belle falls in



love with a young lawyer, who espouses the abolition of slavery. He is dismissed by her guardian, great-uncle, the Lord Chief Justice, who has before him the very significant case of a slave-ship captain who has thrown overboard, in chains, his "cargo," and filed with his insurance company for the losses. It was known as the Zong massacre. Belle and her young lawyer are able to have a profound influence on the Lord Chief Justice. His court decision will influence the eventual abolition of slavery by Britain. It is a British movie, in the Hollywood, costume-style drama; beautiful, well-acted, spiced with drollery and the shabby nastiness of the rich gentry, worth seeing for these merits, and for its depiction of an historical moment in the gradual abolition of slavery.



Ida is a Polish movie, in black and white, with sub-titles. It lacks all the profuseness and grandeur of **Belle**, relying on stark simplicity and realism for its profound effect, and its beauty. Its two women stars are exceptional, even superb. It would be surprising were this film not to be nominated as Best Foreign film. **Ida** is a young girl, raised in a Roman Catholic orphanage.

She is soon to take her final vows as a nun. Her Mother Superior sends her to spend some time with her only known living relative, Aunt Wanda, who soon reveals to her that

she is, in fact, Jewish, the daughter of parents murdered by Nazi collaborators. Wanda also lost her family to the same murderers. The two women set out on a search to find the burial plots of their murdered families. Wanda is a retired Polish judge, now dissipated and alcoholic, cynical and jaded, brought low by her losses. Oddly, their travels draw them closer. A picture of a grim, colorless, Communist Poland, its life almost wrung out of it, fits remarkably well with the emerging, grim, horrible story of their betrayed, murdered family members - a terrible revisitation of the Holocaust, on an individual, personal level, makes it repugnant in its universality. What happens to **Ida** and her aunt Wanda, makes this great movie even more attractive. This is a remarkable, brilliant movie. See it. You will be wonderfully entertained and will not be unmoved.

Uvanga is a Canadian movie, a Nunavut-shot film of striking, natural beauty. **Uvanga** means "myself." Anna had a short-lived affair with a married, Inuk man, when she worked as a teacher in Nunavut, 14 years before. She has brought her son, Tomas, from Montreal, where he was raised, to Nunavut, to learn about his First Nations, Inuk origins. There is a mystery about his father's death which engages both Tomas and his step-brother, Travis. Initially resitant, Tomas gradually is won over by Travis and the natural warmth and welcome of his relatives, acted by residents of Nunavut, with a winsome charm and naturalness which is captivating. A treasure chest of Inuk life, pastimes, connectedness and culture is opened as the story progresses. Quarrels are unravelled, friendships initiated, light is cast on mysteries, people find themselves, especially Tomas, who finds himself in this most unlikely place. There is a very surprising, unexpected ending which brings all that has gone before into superb, meaningful

synchronicity. It would be a great pity if this wonderful movie does not receive wide distribution everywhere. It has great truths to present as well as stunning beauty and quiet, valuable commentary on First Nations' life.

Uvanga is a triumph over bias and prejudice of every kind, the brutal, inhuman slavery of **Belle**, the unimaginable horror of the Holocaust of **Ida**.

It is a small testimony that, "I truly find myself, (**Uvanga**), only in the other, in you." I can not kill nor enslave nor spurn, disdain or maltreat another person because of birth, colour, ethnicity, tribal origin, religion, sexual orientation or anything else.

These three movies help us to understand this within.

