

Introduction

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AS WITH ALL ONGOING conflict situations opinions are deeply divided not simply over what are perceived to be the “rights and wrongs” of the situation but also of course over what the way ahead may be. Justice and truth as well as peace and reconciliation, terms often associated with deeply divided societies, oppression or conflict situations, themselves become flexible and negotiable terms, not always in a good sense. Some years ago Rosemary Radford Ruether mentioned to Lisa Isherwood that it seemed to her American peace and reconciliation hinged on, we make our peace you reconcile yourself to it! A statement akin to a popular “joke” circulating at the time about the Henry Kissinger peace zoo where the lion lies down with the lamb. When asked how this is achieved the man himself, American political scientist and diplomat Dr. Henry Kissinger, replied “It is easy, we get a new lamb every day.” No flippancy is meant in either of these examples rather to highlight that even when we think we are talking about the same things some clarification is needed and a range of possibilities lie within even apparently transparent words and situations. And of course even peace is a highly politically motivated concept and does not guarantee justice.

What then can we do if even the terms and concepts we hope may bring resolution are themselves contested and open to further injustice? We have no answer except to say- keep talking, examining and investigating the very foundations of the conflict and give up on final answers and solutions rather work in the here and now to change where we can never believing that this is the end or that it contains “the right” but merely that it is different and in that difference there may just be more humanity, more peace and more justice- but probably never enough.

The issue of land is of course a basic one, we need a place to plant our feet if we are to build and identity and feel safe enough to be open to others. It is from my perspective a tragedy that anyone of us can feel we own what is after all a free gift to be nurtured rather than owned and dominated. However we are also aware that in that statement there may be a note of naiveté because even if we do not wish to own it we may wish to grow from it and be owned by it. It seems self evident [!] to Lisa as a Celt that we are grown by the land but also that with the arrival of those who think differently that foundational relationship is changed and the people who hold it often marginalised. This was that struck most forcibly struck Lisa in the testimonies of the older people in the documentary film *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008). For many of them, Palestinian refugees driven out from their villages and land in 1948, the issue had not been about religious conflicts or even Jewish attachment to the land; as they explained there was no conflict between Jews and Muslims in the land prior to the arrival of modern European colonial-settlers in Palestine. The issue was European Jewish settlers, people who treated Palestine as “a land without people” (*terra nullius*) and sought exclusive control, ownership and domination of the land; colonial settlers who did not approach it with the same philosophy or way of life. This is we know just one of many of the complex issues involved but it was is point that speaks of clash of culture (colonial *versus* indigenous) and approach to land that we are perhaps not always aware of under the layers of religious and political rhetoric involved around this topic.

The collection concerns the development of contextualised theologies of liberation in Palestine and as part of the indigenous Palestinian people's struggle for justice and liberation. The work is innovative because of its inclusion of indigenous perspective within its remit and the introduction of new concepts such civil liberation theology. The collection offers other ways to look at biblical discourses and their impact on the ongoing conflict, ways to live peace, ways to be ethical when visiting these conflicted lands, understandings of resource ethics and even a new way to understand how we approach our understanding of liberation theology. No one claims they have found the answer and encouragingly none of the authors falls back on scapegoats and easy villains, the papers are more nuanced and creative than that. This is one small contribution to the ongoing conversation. This work goes beyond standard academic collections: it is aimed not only at the scholar experts/students but also at peace activists and policy makers. The editors hope the work will be

of use not only in academic courses but also for practioners of conflict resolution , peace and reconciliation.

This collection is organised into three distinct parts:

- The first part, with chapters by Naim Ateek, Samuel Kuruvilla, and Marc Ellis, explores the evolution of theologies of liberation Palestine-Israel in contextual and comparative perspectives
- The second part, with chapters by Nur Masalha and Gareth Lloyd Jones, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Lisa Isherwood explores oppressive, fundamentalist, and power-driven imperialist approaches to the Bible and the Palestine-Israel conflict
- The third part, with chapters by Nur Masalha, Mary Grey and Mark Braverman, explores new paradigms and new approaches to liberation theology in Palestine

In chapter 1 Samuel Kuruvilla focuses the development of a theology of Christian liberation and contextual polity from its early origins in Latin America to one of its present manifestations as part of the Palestinian people's struggle for justice and freedom from the state of Israel. This chapter will be primarily dedicated to a historical and political analysis of the theological context, which includes three different strands. First, there was the development of theologies of liberation, as they are made manifest in Latin America and elsewhere. Next, there was the theology of other Palestinian Christians, and particularly that of the Al-Liqa group that contributed to the development of a contextual Palestinian theology of liberation within the 'occupied' context that is Palestine today. And finally there was the case of Palestinian Protestant Christian theologians such as the Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek and the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb who have raised definitional issues regarding liberation theology and Palestinian contextual Christianity.

In his contribution in chapter 2 Naim Ateek, a priest and pastor of the Arab Palestinian Congregation at St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem, describes the evolution of Palestinian liberation theology and reflects on the economical of Sabeel from 1992 to the present. He locates the roots of Sabeel and its distinct brand of Palestinian Christian liberation in the first Palestinian Intifada (uprisings) which erupted in late 1987:

Every Sunday, the sermon [at St. George's Cathedral] revolved around the injustice of the Israeli occupation, its oppressive expressions, and the human toll it was exacting on Palestinian lives. Every Sunday after

the church service, the Christian community of St. George's Cathedral together with some Christians from other churches gathered together to reflect, in light of the Gospel, on their life under the oppressive illegal Israeli occupation. People shared their stories and experiences. They struggled around the meaning of their faith. They were greatly inspired by Jesus Christ who lived all his life under the occupation of the Roman Empire. Jesus' life, teaching, and example became the standard and criterion for their own life. The most frequent questions were, how did Jesus respond to and resist the Roman occupation forces, and how can we respond today? How did Jesus help his followers maintain faithfulness to God living under the oppressive Roman occupation? The gospels provided guidance, invigorated discussion, and gave comfort, encouragement, hope, and strength to the local Christian community. The community of faith was doing theology on the ground in a deeply contextual, pragmatic, and meaningful way. The credit goes to the people themselves. The best critiques and ideas came from them. When reflecting on their faith and resistance, there was no doubt they were all sure that the way of Jesus is the way of nonviolence. Escapism and flight were not an option. It was clear to most of them that the armed resistance was not the way of Jesus, nonviolence was. This was the first established foundation for a Palestinian Liberation Theology. That is where it all began. If the Nakba of 1948 marked the destruction of the Palestinian community, the Intifada of 1987 marked the return to national consciousness, grassroots activism, and "liberation from below."

Marc Ellis's contribution in chapter 3 is a "encounter" kind of essay - especially his encounter with Naim Ateek and his work on Palestinian liberation theology. Marc Ellis asks: does the birth of a Jewish and Palestinian theologies of liberation have anything to say about the future of Israel-Palestine? For many years Ellis has been writing on the question of theologies of liberation in Palestine-Israel. This began with an article in 1984 and a book, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation* in 1987. Independent of his work, Naim Ateek's Palestinian theology of liberation was also being written during this same time period. Ellis argues that the link between a Jewish and Palestinian theology of liberation is much closer than assumed. Ellis shows how he and Ateek journeyed together and this journey combines an intellectual, spiritual and personal learning process which is relevant to time periods beyond their own. Ellis argues that, though the optimism of their theologies of liberation seems distant today,

it may be time to once again broach the possibility of justice, reconciliation found in the pages of both works.

In Chapters 4 and 5 Nur Masalha and Gareth Lloyd Jones explore the evolution of a fundamentalist theology of dispossession in Israel after 1967. Masalha argues that in modern times, a whole range of colonial enterprises have used the Bible. The book of Joshua and other biblical texts evoking the exploits of ancient Israelites have been deployed in support of secular Zionism and settler colonisation in Palestine. The mega narratives of the Bible, however, appeared to mandate the ethnic cleansing and even genocide of the indigenous population of Canaan. Masalha argues that, with the rise of messianic Zionism since 1967, a Jewish theology of zealotocracy, based on the land traditions of the Bible, has emerged in Israel—a political theology that demanded the destruction of the so-called modern Canaanites; since 1967 fundamentalist rabbis have routinely compared the Palestinian people to the ancient Canaanites, Philistines and Amalekites, whose annihilation or expulsion by the ancient Israelites was predestined by a divine design. This chapter focuses on the politics of reading the Bible by neo-Zionists and examines the theology of the messianic current which embraces the paradigm of Jews as a divinely ‘chosen people’ and sees the indigenous Palestinians as no more than illegitimate squatters, and a threat to the process of messianic redemption; their human and civil rights are no match for the biblically-ordained holy war of conquering and settling the “Promised Land.”

Chapter 6 by Rosemary Radford Ruether discusses competing theologies in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict between the Israeli state and the Palestinian people. The chapter focuses on competing theologies among Christians, both in the West and in Palestine, as these theologies interact with the Jewish community, both in Israel and in the West. Ruether outlines the major patterns of theology found in mainline churches which reinforce collaboration of these Christian churches with Zionism. These include an acceptance of the thesis that God has given the Jewish people the whole of the land of Israel/Palestine permanently and irrevocably in a way that ignores the rights the other peoples of the land, that the state of Israel is a fulfilment of prophecy and that the Christian churches owe uncritical support for the state of Israel as compensation for the Holocaust. Ruether illustrates such Christian Zionist theology in several major spokesmen

for mainstream Churches, and show how such views arise in the context of manipulated Jewish-Christian Dialogue sessions.

Ruether (unlike Masalha or Lloyd Jones in chapters 4 and 5) does not focus on the more fundamentalist and millenarian forms of Christian Zionism, important as these are, but rather the often unnoticed and unnamed themes of Christian Zionism which have shaped the behaviour and politics of the main bodies of Western Christianity. These expressions of Christian Zionism are deeply entwined with Western Christian imperialism toward the Middle East, represented by then British empire and now by American empire. Ruether also argues that the Jewish voice is also increasingly divided, in defense or in critique of the policies of the state of Israel. Christians interact with these divergent Jewish voices, as they seek to overcome the legacy of Christian anti-semitism and its horrific results in the Holocaust, but also in the debate in relation to the state of Israel. At the same time Palestinian Christians seek to unite their historically divided community to speak with one voice against their oppression and the ethnic cleansing of their land by the state of Israel and to provide an alternative vision of a future Palestine for Israeli Jews and Palestinian Christians and Muslims. Ruether begins with an exploration of the theology of Christian Zionism, particularly as this has shaped mainstream Western Christianity.

Ruether's arguments are closely related to Palestinian liberation theology which has exemplified in the work of Naim Ateek and Sabeel above. Her works forms an important part of the systematic critic of Christian Zionist theology and its apologia for Zionism and the State of Israel and its representation of an authentically inclusive liberative theology of justice for all people. Ruethers' approach helps put Palestinian liberation theology in context of the global liberation theology movement and argue for its inclusion in international gatherings of liberation theology, such as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.

In Chapter 7 Lisa Isherwood considers the part monotheism plays in theologies of land and suggests a new approach to the concept of transcendence that neutralises the worst affects of monotheism which in her view leads to mono cultural and religious thinking that traps us in an unending vertical theology that is self perpetuating. Isherwood does not feel the fluidity that is possible in this different approach is at odds with the God of the Hebrew scriptures and she suggest a new "horizontal wrestling" as a way out of the monotheistic trap.

Chapter 8 by Mark Braverman offers a new paradigm for a theology of land. He argues that Christian confrontation with the Nazi genocide produced a radical re-evaluation of theology with respect to Christianity's relationship to the Jewish people. Motivated by the urgent need to atone for the sin of Christian anti-Judaism, this revisionist movement focused on the repudiation of replacement theology. This revisionism has had profound implications for the current discourse on the political situation in historic Palestine. It directs and frames "interfaith" conversations in the West and promotes church policy designed to protect relationships with the Jewish community at the cost of the church's social justice mission with respect to human rights in historic Palestine. On a deeper level, this revisionist theology serves to support Christian triumphalist tendencies. Whereas the confrontation with the Nazi Holocaust presented an opportunity to confront this quality in Christianity, Christians instead chose to focus on anti-Semitism as the primary Christian sin. As a result, Christian triumphalism is actually reinforced, through an identification with a rehabilitated Judaism and an affirmation of the exclusivist nature of God's covenant with the Jewish people. In addition to this reversion to particularism, Christianity's spiritualization of the land has been disavowed, and a superior Jewish claim to the land is legitimized. In this chapter, Dr. Braverman discusses the implications of these issues for the development of a theology of land and the current quest for peace in historic Palestine and issues a call to the church to respond to this challenge.

Mary Grey, in chapter 9 reinforces Mark Braverman's perspective by focusing on new positive aspects to the situation now faced by the Palestinians and the new political context in the Middle East that is bringing much hope. She argues that despite what appeared to be political stalemate, despite the daily suffering and humiliation of people in the West Bank and Gaza, (and escalating harassment of the Israeli government) there are indications that the tide has turned. She also addresses challenges for spirituality, Church and theology.

In the final chapter Nur Masalha coins a new expression: "civil liberation theology" in Palestine. Masalha argues that while feminist, black and post-colonial theologies of liberation have flourished in the West, there is little discussion of indigenous and decolonising perspectives or civil and secular-humanist reflections on liberation theology. Inspired

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by the works of Palestinian visual artist Naji Al-Ali and public intellectual Edward Said, the chapter brings into the debate on theologies of liberation in Palestine-Israel a neglected subject: an egalitarian, none-denominational theology rooted in decolonising methodologies. This civil liberation theology attempts to address the questions: how can exile be overcome? How can history be transcended and decolonised? And how can indigenous memory be reclaimed? The chapter brings into focus indigenous, humanist and non-religious ways of thinking on which Edward Said and Naji Al-Ali, in his famous figurative character Handhala, insisted. The character of Handhala, the eleven-year-old barefoot child, was inspired by real stories of barefoot Palestinian children in Lebanon's refugee camps. Handhala has become a powerful icon of Palestine and the symbol of Palestinian refugee struggle in the post-Nakba period for truth, justice return and liberation. The character of the witness/martyr Handhala, which epitomises contemporary civil liberation theology in Palestine, draws on contrapuntal approaches, decolonising indigenous methodologies and egalitarian non-denominational theologies derive from the cultural diversity and experiences of "historic Palestine." This civil liberation theology celebrates multiplicity of non-denominational voices and nurtures humanist, progressive, creative and liberative theologies which occupy multiple sites of liberation and can be made relevant not only to people of faith (Muslims, Jews, Christians) but also to secular-humanists.