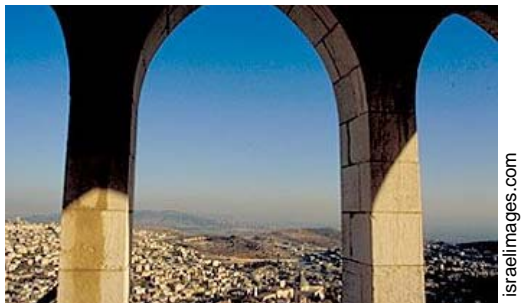


A Personal Reflection on Israel-Palestine

by Fr. Denis Scanlan

Many people in power throughout our world try to gag criticism of their policies by execution, imprisonment, blackmail, harsh financial penalties or simply name-calling e.g. “do-gooder”, “heretic”, “racist”, “unpatriotic”, “anti-semitic”, and so on. When I criticise my own Australian government for its policies of detention of refugees, that does not make me “anti-Australian”. It reflects my concern for the victims of this policy and our own long-term welfare because we cannot have real security if we refuse to exercise God’s justice and love i.e. be closed to the source of peace, God. In that context, I wish to assure you that in parts of this article, I’m criticising a policy of the State of Israel’s Government and not Judaism or the Israeli people who are Jewish, Muslim, Christian and secular.



While Israelis have every right to be secure from harm and to have a homeland, their Government’s policies inflict inhuman and unjust conditions on their fellow Semitic neighbours, the Palestinians. The Israeli Defence Force has continued to occupy Palestinian land long after the 1967 war. An old Palestinian Christian woman once told her children that war is horrendous but Occupation is much worse.

The Israeli Government’s policy of continued occupation means, for Palestinians, that the tragedy of military governance is a daily experience. This is manifested by towns and villages being isolated from each other by the “security fence”, subsequently causing the collapse of the tourist and agricultural industries leading to over 70% unemployment, lack of access to good health facilities (people die in ambulances which are delayed at checkpoints), confiscation of lands, destruction of olive orchards and homes, humiliation and restriction of movement at checkpoints etc.

Fr. David Scanlan, is Margareta’s parish priest back in Brisbane. He spent time in the International Secretariat helping the team in their work after his pilgrimage in the Holy Land.

[frdionysius@hotmail.com]



For young students especially, there are many disruptions to their education (checkpoints closed and therefore irregular access to school or university) and the prospect of over 70% unemployment (in Bethlehem), the inability to get permits to travel to Jerusalem for work and “profiling” which makes them security risks. These “externals” are continuously accompanied by psychological torment and situational depression for many.

Possibly, one of their greatest sources of discouragement is that many people outside Palestine (including many Israelis who don’t live near Palestinians) do not get told the whole truth of what’s happening in Israel-Palestine by the major media companies.

“Palestinians” are equated with terrorists and Israel is portrayed as struggling to survive against them (even though it is the 4th largest military power in the world and enjoys much financial and moral support from the “West”).

Palestine is the birthplace of Christianity – Jesus was a Jew and grew up, preached, died and rose in Palestine. The first Pentecost was in Jerusalem. The descendants of those early communities at Antioch, Bethlehem, Jerusalem etc still live in Palestine and have the added pressure of being a small minority (<2%) while many are emigrating because of the horrendous situation with the occupation. Feeling forgotten by us in the Western Christian Churches is also a great source of torment.

Currently, peace is being sought through the means of power whether militarily, financially or diplomatically. The concept of “might is right” has been disproved so many times through history that it is a foolish person/state who thinks it will work for them. The Roman Empire which controlled these lands in the time of Christ called their military goddess, “Victory” (the Latin name). There was a piece of first century graffiti that said, “Romans always win”. They believed that wars and power brought peace – the “Pax Romana”.

As Christians, we know that it is the way of Christ that is the way to peace. The book of Revelation (which was written for the early Church being persecuted by Rome) talks about embracing the cross, now a symbol of victory over evil and by our witness to the truth in all its forms. This is faith and action in partnership. The Truth is manifested in Jesus’ life. It is by living as Jesus lived with life-giving love no matter what. It is by doing what is right in the face of the evil, that true peace and justice will happen. Evil ways and means can never produce a good end.

Two twentieth-century prophets concur with this. Dom Helder Camara (from Brazil) talked about the spiral of violence. Violence (in whatever form) only leads to more violence – someone has to break the vicious circle. Martin Luther King (from USA) said that the ultimate weakness of violence is that it multiplies evil rather than defeats it and the only thing that can eradicate evil is not more evil but love.

What can a student do about the Israel-Palestine situation? Start with ourselves! How do I exercise whatever power I have in my life towards the “weaker”? What do I feel about those who are different to me whether it is a racial, religious or any other difference? Inform yourself about Judaism and Islam, fellow monotheistic religions with the same parents as Christianity – Abraham and Sara. Keep informed about the situation in the Middle-East. View the Western media critically, look for other sources of information to complement it e.g. use the web and keep in touch with peacemaking groups who are either Israeli or Palestinian or a mixture e.g. Rabbis for Human Rights (www.rhr.israel.net/), Sabeel (www.sabeel.org/), or IPCRI (www.ipcri.org/). Finally, discuss the situation with others and write to your politicians. Remember that one of the best ways to fight an evil situation is to speak the truth about it, to bring it into the light.

A young Palestinian whose surname is Aiteek, composed a song whose words I’ll finish with: “Let their faces move you, let their cries reach your heart. The compassion of Jesus is what sets you apart. If you’ve been searching for a way to please him, then you’ll listen – he has shown the way. Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God. How long will the earth keep silent? Who’ll say, ‘enough’s enough’?”