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PALESTINE — A TURNING-POINT ?

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An address to Pax Christi Victoria, via Zoom 18th October 2020.

Before I attempt to show why Palestine is at a turning-point, let me underscore the significance of the Palestinian issue to the world. Why is the Palestinian issue so important?

IMPORTANCE

It is important because of the human suffering it has caused. Even before the state of Israel was established in May 1948, scores of Palestinians protesting the growing Israeli presence in their land lost their lives in conflicts with Israeli settlers from Europe who had begun to colonise Palestine from the beginning of the 20th century. What facilitated colonisation was the British mandate over Palestine.

Though the British mandate ended in 1948, Palestinian suffering continued. Palestine was now divided with the larger portion of the land occupied by Israel. Israeli occupation intensified in 1967 with its conquest of the West Bank and Gaza. Settler colonialism reinforced by occupation was further consolidated through regular armed assaults upon Gaza and through the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

It was the injustice associated with colonial settlement and occupation which increased Palestinian suffering. Not only were thousands of Palestinians killed, tortured and imprisoned. They were



also expelled from their lands and farms and their rights crushed mercilessly. Palestinian dispossession rendered them refugees within and without Palestine. In fact, their dispossession is the major cause of the Palestinian catastrophe.

The catastrophe or *Nakba* or more accurately, the on-going catastrophe, *al-Nakba al-Mustamera*, expresses itself in the drive to eliminate the indigenous Palestinian population which is seen as an obstacle to the usurpation of the whole of Palestine for the Israeli project. It is for this reason that the killing and expulsion of Palestinians is viewed as a genocide in various circles.

What reinforces this perception is the gross imbalance in physical power between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel has one of the most formidable armed forces in the world while Palestinian military power is so limited that it is incapable of providing even elementary protection to the Palestinian people. This huge disparity in military power underlines the help-

lessness of the victim in this conflict.

It is partly because of this utter helplessness and the desire to restore the dignity of the Palestinian people that almost all the wars fought in West Asia and North Africa (WANA) since 1948 has had some link or other to the plight of the Palestinians. The 1956 Suez conflict, the 1967 Israel –Arab war, and the 1973 war between Israel and neighbouring Arab states would be some of the earlier examples. In more recent times, the 2003 Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq; the 2011 NATO led assault on Libya; and the long-drawn attempt by the US and its allies within and without WANA to overthrow the Bashar Assad government in Damascus, emasculate the Hezbollah in Lebanon and isolate the Iranian government are all intertwined to a greater or

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DISARMING TIMES

A quarterly journal of Pax Christi Australia. It aims to provide members and interested peacemakers with peace news and views both local and international. We endeavour in each edition to reflect the three-fold emphasis of Pax Christi which engages members in study, Non-violent action and prayer for peace, justice, human rights, development and inter-faith and inter-civilisation dialogue.

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Lesser degree to the Palestinian question.

Finally, Palestine is also important to the relations between and among religious communities in the region. For many Jews, there is a deep religious connotation to the very birth and survival of the Israeli state. For Christians, Bethlehem in Palestine with its profound association to Jesus Christ will always remain special. For Muslims, Jerusalem is their third holiest city and has a spiritual significance that revolves around the mission of the Prophet Muhammad.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

This backdrop to the Palestinian question is crucial in understanding recent developments. It is intimately enmeshed with the recently announced 'Deal of the Century.' The deal does not address critical concerns such as the right of return of millions of Palestinian refugees; the viability and sovereignty of a Palestinian state as part of the so-called two-state solution; the role and status of Jerusalem; Israeli settlers on the West Bank; and the Palestinian/ Arab population within Israel. The deliberate marginalisation of these and other related concerns is an attempt by Israel and the US to erase the crux and the core of the Palestinian Nakba. The Palestinian question is re-cast as an economic concern confined to creating jobs and stimulating economic growth.

As expected, the vast majority of Palestinians and others in WANA have rejected the deal. Elites in certain countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain have embraced it and extended diplomatic recognition to Israel. Other governments who have forged close security ties with Washington DC or are dependent upon Saudi largesse may also follow suit. This may result in a more pronounced elite – mass dichotomy in the region as a whole.

It is a dichotomy that may eventually weaken the Sunni-Shia split --- a split which the Saudi elite in particular has in recent times exploited as a way of targeting preponderantly Shia Iran, its regional rival. Indeed, because the Iranian elite is

deeply committed to Palestinian rights, especially the right of self-determination, it is becoming increasingly obvious that Tehran is emerging as the most consistent and principled champion of the Palestinian cause. Political movements and social groups and individuals in WANA are now more inclined towards the Iranian position on Palestine and on issues related to hegemony and political independence. Shia majority Iraq and Shia majority Bahrain are cases in point. There is also the Shia dominant Hezbollah in Lebanon, arguably the country's most significant political actor. These forces ensure that there is a powerful counterweight to a Saudi-Israeli nexus in WANA, buttressed by the US.

An elite mass dichotomy and new emerging alignments in WANA have been rendered even more complex with the deepening involvement of other states within and without WANA in the region's political maelstrom. Since the Arab uprisings of 2011, Turkey is trying to play a bigger role in a region whose history has a profound link to Turkey's Ottoman Empire. China is also taking a greater interest in WANA partly because of its own dependence upon oil from major producers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. But the nation that has become really prominent in WANA in the last five years is Russia. AS the USSR in past decades, Russia had enjoyed a close relationship with the government of Hafiz Al-Assad, the father of the current Syrian president. That relationship has grown since 2015 through Russia's direct involvement in the Syrian war as a staunch defender of the Bashar Al-Assad government. It is a role that has brought Russia closer to Iran and to a lesser degree to the Hezbollah. Since the bond that holds Syria, Iran and Hezbollah together is the defence of Palestine, Russia's image within a segment of Palestinian society has also risen. Since Russia also enjoys a warm relationship with Israel, going back to the creation of the state in 1948, will this enable Russia to play a positive role in the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict? Indeed,

will Russia's increasingly critical role in WANA change the region's political landscape? Or are there vested interests more in the US than in Israel that will prevent this from happening?

These are questions of great import that should be raised because US influence in WANA is waning rapidly. The decline became obvious with the turmoil and turbulence that followed the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq of 2003. The colossal death toll, the massive destruction of infrastructure and the mammoth depletion of financial resources destroyed the US image in the region and elsewhere. Its debacle in Libya in 2011 further damaged its standing. Its concerted push to oust the Bashar government in Syria was yet another foolish manoeuvre surpassed only by its military support for the Saudi government in its reckless adventure in Yemen.

US decline in WANA has impacted negatively upon its role in Palestine exacerbated no doubt by some of the arrogant and ill-conceived moves made by President Donald Trump. These moves such as the decision to shift the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem have convinced Palestinians that they cannot expect even a modicum of even-handedness from the US Administration. The Jerusalem move, together with the deal of the century, demonstrates that the Palestinian catastrophe has reached a turning-point. Palestinian interests have been totally abandoned by the US. Even the fig-leaf of hypocrisy has fallen off!

That US hypocrisy has been exposed so blatantly is not the only reason why many feel that the Palestinian catastrophe has reached a turning-point. As we have observed, new dichotomies and alignments are emerging in WANA. Actors from outside the region are also beginning to shape the political landscape. All this will certainly impact upon Palestine.

WHAT DO WE DO?

What should we --- civil society groups and citizens in general committed to justice and peace in WANA ? Our first task is perhaps to raise awareness among people everywhere about the real issues in the Israel – Palestine conflict. Let us proclaim

with courage that the real issues are about the dispossession of the Palestinian people, their suppression and oppression and the Israeli threat to obliterate their catastrophe. Developing this type of mass consciousness is not going to be easy since Israel and Zionism backed by the US and a certain segment of Western public opinion have the media behind them. Nonetheless, we should use all channels of communication available to create an alternative narrative that is more just and genuine.

Translating the vast corpus of materials that exists in the English language and Arabic into languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Malay and Vietnamese would be a major undertaking. These translations should be converted into videos and easy to understand documentaries and widely disseminated. Cartoons and children's stories should also be part of this mass public education.

Having materials on the Palestinian catastrophe that will reach the grassroots is one thing. But they will not have the desired impact if groups and organisations do not exist which are prepared to carry the message forward, There should be more Palestinian support groups in different parts of the world that will play this role.

Support groups should not only articulate the Palestinian position but should also counter distortions and lies about their struggle through the local media and other platforms. This sort of combat often helps to advance one's cause. For instance, Christian Zionism which is opposed to the Palestinian struggle has to be confronted through the media. At the same time, there may be groups claiming to champion the Palestinian cause which may be advocates of senseless violence. Genuine Palestinian advocates should not hesitate to expose such groups.

This brings us to the question of the means employed by the champions of the Palestinian cause. There is more and more support today among young Pal-

estinians for peaceful resistance to Israeli and Zionist power and dominance. Such resistance should be nurtured.

Many young Palestinians are also deeply disturbed by the schism that separates Palestinian leaders and their factions --- specifically the division between Fatah and Hamas. This is the festering wound that hurts the Palestinian liberation movement. No liberation struggle in modern times has been as split as the Palestinian leadership.

If the leadership was united, it would be able to offer more meaningful support to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. BDS has revealed the magnitude of support that Western corporations, agencies and universities extend to Israeli occupation of the West Bank. In a direct sense, it has helped to convince ordinary citizens in the West that they should act on behalf of the Palestinian victim. It is this kind of networking that may hold the key to the future of the Palestinian struggle.

There is another type of networking that is vital not only for the future of Palestine and WANA. It is a relationship that is crucial for the entire human family. This is the relationship between Jews, Christians and Muslims. It is significant that in spite of the negative influence of Christian Zionists and some Muslim bigots, Christians and Muslims who are in the actual struggle for Palestinian liberation have developed strong ties. The strength of these ties reflected in various events and episodes, sometimes rooted in deep personal friendships, has endowed both Christians and Muslims in Palestine with a shared culture of sorts. It is a culture which some Jews also share.

If peace with justice descends upon the land, ----- a land which God had touched a number of times through various prophets ----- then Palestine may once again light a multi-faith lamp for the entire human family.

AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM'S COMMODIFICATION OF THE MIDDLE EAST'S 'HOLY LANDS'

Amy Fallas

SEP 21, 2020

On Jan. 18, 2018, Romany Erian Melek Hetta planned to tour the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., with a church group. What began as a journey through the historical and cultural heritage of his religious background turned into a racially and politically charged ordeal. In a civil complaint, Hetta says he was seized, detained, falsely imprisoned, interrogated by security, and reported to the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) as a terrorist threat. Hetta is an asylee in the United States because of the religious persecution he faced as a Coptic Christian [minority in Egypt](#).

This incident occurred not long after the Museum of the Bible was embroiled in scandal over the provenance and acquisition of its antiquities and manuscript collection. The museum [acquired and illegally imported](#) thousands of artifacts from the Middle East between 2010 and 2011 through its founder and main collections donor, Hobby Lobby CEO Steve Green. Just a few months before the museum's opening in 2017, Hobby Lobby was ordered by the Department of Justice to pay \$3 million in fines and forfeit the antiquities to federal authorities for [repatriation to Iraq](#). This year, an investigation found that Oxford classics professor Dirk Obbink appears to have [sold the museum](#) stolen papyri, including four he falsely claimed dated to the first century. (Green has since [announced](#) intentions to repatriate 5,000 papyri and 6,500 clay objects to Egypt and Iraq, respectively.)

More than just a series of administrative missteps, the museum's unethical collecting practices and racially based profiling mirror older patterns of American Protestant expropriation of the Middle East's sacred patrimony at the expense of its Christian populations. For centuries, Western Christians interpreted

modern Middle East geographies, customs, and peoples based on narratives of the ancient "Holy Land" outlined in the New and Old Testaments, an approach scholars call Biblical Orientalism. The Museum of the Bible's troubles are just the latest iteration of this pervasive and long-standing practice. Edward Said's profoundly influential 1978 book, *Orientalism*, describes the term as the West's portrayal of the East as decadent, static, exotic, and uncivilized. Most importantly, Said's work emphasizes how these constructions of this exotic "other" are rooted in the West's need to define itself as different from and superior to the Orient. While his analysis focused on European and American essentializations about Islamic civilization, another implication of orientalism is what these same Western observers thought about their coreligionists in the birthplace of Christianity.

Biblical caricatures

Starting in the 19th century during the Second Great Awakening, an expansive Anglo-American Protestant presence in the Middle East generated closer engagement between foreign and Indigenous Christians through missions, pilgrimage, and scholarly inquiry in the region. [The earliest U.S. missionaries](#) arrived under the purview of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM), eager to convert Muslims across the Ottoman Empire. When they faced setbacks and resistance, they turned to local Christian populations whose practices and beliefs they increasingly considered degenerate and heretical.

Much like their monolithic constructions of the Islamic East, American Protestants framed Christians from the region according to predetermined categories informed by scripture. David Grafton notes that Indigenous Christians, "were not portrayed as real people in their own right but rather as representatives of biblical characters and

themes." Using the Bible as a guidebook, American pilgrims and missionaries generated biblical dictionaries, travelogues, and archaeological guides replete with images and references to sacred landscapes and figures. These texts reflected a desire to see the Middle East as an idyllic pastoral or barren desert land inhabited with archetypes of figures like Noah among 19th century Armenians or Ruth through the activities of [rural Middle Eastern women](#).

Yet "the peoples of the Middle East, their cultures, their languages, and their contemporary matters were too strange, too exotic, and even too un-Biblical for Americans." These Protestant missionaries and travellers encountered diverse Christian communities with unfamiliar liturgies and clerical hierarchies they considered mired in ignorance and backwardness. Indeed, American missionary Edward Robinson [observed that](#) "all ecclesiastical tradition respecting the ancient places in and around Jerusalem and throughout Palestine, is of no value."

Not only did Middle East Christians fail to meet expectations of imagined biblical caricatures, but Protestants questioned their Christian authenticity altogether. In Egypt, American Presbyterian missionary [Andrew Watson wrote](#) that the Indigenous Coptic Orthodox Church resembled "the mummified human body taken out of tombs." Missionary Henry Harris Jessup, Watson's contemporary in Beirut, [wrote in 1891](#) that all Christian sects of the Middle East were "ignorant, illiterate, superstitious, idolatrous, despised" and were "an obstacle to the Christianization of the Mohammedan world." Despite being heirs to the land and patrimony where Jesus lived and conducted his ministry, Middle East Christians were accused of abandoning this sacred connection.

By associating spiritual stagnation with the ecclesiastical traditions of

Copts, Maronites, Armenians, Greek Orthodox, and other Christian communities, American Protestant missionaries implied a need for them to be reborn. So they expanded their institutions and projects at the turn of the 20th century in efforts to inculcate "proper" beliefs and behaviors. Motivated by a view that the United States was a "new Israel," they tasked themselves with ushering a spiritual awakening among Christians living in the land of the ["old Israel."](#) By claiming that local Christians neglected their sacred inheritance, American Protestants assumed a self-appointed role as stewards of its history and heritage. Systemic exclusion

In efforts to center the Bible in discourse about the Middle East, the ABCFM developed and adopted terms such as "Bible Lands" and "Holy Lands" to refer to the region. This put them in conversation with a broader network of American Christian scholars, diplomats, pilgrims, and travelers who positioned themselves as regional experts and engaged in extractive practices including archaeological excavations, language standardization, and later even [racial science research](#). They became the source and authority of purported "discoveries" of biblical relevance while local Christians became objects of inquiry.

This knowledge production and expertise was only made possible by the special legal, financial, and diplomatic privileges known as the capitulations — concessions given to European and American citizens across the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century. European imperial powers leveraged diplomatic pres-

sure to attain tax exemptions, land sales, and legal jurisdictions favourable to Europeans that incidentally also benefited the expansion of American missionary institutions and projects from Istanbul to Cairo. Of course, Middle East Christians were (and are) far from the monolithic representations crafted by the biblical orientalist imagination. They hold diverse doctrinal beliefs, worshiped according to different liturgies in several languages, and negotiated, colluded, and resisted missionary categorizations. They also practiced forms of religious and spiritual heritage preservation unacknowledged by American Protestant observers, including religious iconography and musical and oral traditions.

And while not all American Protestants participated in the exclusion of Indigenous Christians from their histories, the prevailing tone of literature generated by them during the height of the missionary enterprise during the late 19th century reflects a hierarchical belief in the superiority of their form of Christian practice.

Building the American mythos

Far from a vestige of the past, the baggage of biblical orientalist practice is still with us. It is what allows Middle East Christian asylees like Hetta to be treated as a threat, and it's what makes the hasty and unethical management of biblical antiquities easy to forget. It's what enables people like Oxford professor Dirk Obbink to acquire over 40,000 antiquities from the region and [claim](#), "We're buyers of items to tell the story" of Christianity and inerrant scripture.

This orientation has also contributed to an inviolable notion of American exceptionalism that inhibits us from reckoning with past and present hubris. The analogies of the United States as a "city on a hill" or a "promised land" leave little room for perspectives that do not glorify American saviourism. American biblical orientalism forges narratives about Christians in the Middle East to reinforce its own vision of Christian identity in the United States.

On July 15, 2019, in the dimly lit Capitol rotunda with the saintly portrait of an apotheosized George Washington overhead, American Pastor Dan Cummings [addressed](#) a gathering of Middle Eastern religious leaders and advocates on the eve of the second annual ministerial for religious freedom: "We are in the holy of holies of our nation" he said, "one of its most sacred spots." The claim to sacrosanct origins of the United States seemed particularly inappropriate in the presence of leaders who hail from some of the most sacred geographies in the Middle East. This dichotomy was made more acute as Middle Eastern Christian leaders stood in silence as American Christians took the helm of what was meant to be an intra-faith religious service at the heart of the nation's capital under a mile away from the Museum of the Bible. Although melodic sound reverberated throughout the rotunda as attendees joined in singing of hymns, the silences were deafening.

Amy Fallas is a Ph.D. student in history at the University of California, Santa Barbara and specializes in modern Middle East history.

A Holy and Peaceful Christmas to all our readers

*For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

*For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.*

*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;*

*he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of
Peace.*

*His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace,
with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore.*

FRATELLI TUTTI

AN OVERVIEW OF POPE FRANCIS' LATEST ENCYCLICAL

Brendan James

Pope Francis attributes his previous Encyclical, 'Laudato Si' - On Care for Our Common Home, to his encounter with Bartholomew, Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople. This Encyclical, 'Fratelli Tutti' - On Fraternity & Social Friendship, he attributes to discussions with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb of al-Azhar. This gives us an insight into Francis' eclectic approach, aligning himself with both of these ancient and rich traditions. Fratelli Tutti (FT) opens with a broad brush of the fractured society in which we currently find ourselves. He describes it as 'dark clouds over a closed world', rife with discrimination, inequality and violence. To address this situation, he recalls the Parable of the Good Samaritan, inviting each of us to ask the question, 'to whom am I a neighbour'? Significantly, the villains in this story turn out to be professional religious - a priest and levite - devoted to the worship of God! Sadly, he reflects, 'persons are no longer seen as of paramount value to be cared for and respected', especially the marginalised. Do we make time for them, like the Good Samaritan, or are we too busy to bother? He challenges us to 'emerge from our comfortable isolation' and 'be changed by our contact with human suffering'. Each day confronts with the decision whether to be 'Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders'. Our true identity, he points out, lies in connecting with others. Relationships can expand and enrich us, leading to genuine community. He encourages us to create a culture in which we care for one another. To illustrate this, he employs the metaphor of a melody, where individual notes combine to produce a resulting harmony. He seeks a new way of thinking that leads to a new humanity. 'Benevolentia' is the word he chooses for this - an attitude that wills the good of others. This Parable 'summons us to rediscover our vocation as citizens of the entire

world, builders of a new social bond'. (69-89)

Here are some of the issues he raises in the course of this Letter.

The Not Yet & No Longer Useful:

The unborn, poor, disabled and elderly are readily sacrificed for the sake of others, who are considered more useful to society. (18)

Poverty: Although wealth has increased worldwide, 'new forms of poverty are emerging'. Poverty, decadence and suffering in one part of the earth are a silent breeding ground for problems that will end up affecting the entire planet. Development aid for poor countries creates wealth for all, which will ultimately benefit all. (137)

Human Rights: These are not equally shared. 'While one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon and its fundamental rights discarded or violated'. The smallest, the weakest, the poorest should touch our hearts. (194)

Slavery: 'Millions of people today - children, women and men of all ages - are deprived of freedom and forced to live in conditions akin to slavery'. The kidnapping and trafficking of persons for the sake of selling their organs is a worldwide problem.

Conflict: War, terrorism, racial & religious persecution are affronts to human dignity. 'They have become so common as to constitute a real Third World War, fought piecemeal'. The drug and weapons trade, terrorism and international organized crime' adversely affect the lives of many. (188)

Migrants: We must regain our sense of responsibility to care for these brothers and sisters of ours, fleeing tyranny in their homelands. 'Our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate! Immigrants, if they are helped to integrate, are a blessing, a source of enrichment and a gift that encourages a society to

grow'. (39-41)

Dialogue: Is the way forward. It can lead to building bridges between people with different values. Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other's point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns. (203) Other cultures are not enemies from which we need to protect ourselves, but differing reflections of the richness of human life. (147) Let us arm our children with the culture of dialogue. (217)

Racism: 'is a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding and lurks in waiting'. The world exists for everyone because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of colour, religion, talent, place of birth or residence cannot justify the privileges of some over the rights of others. (118)

The Economy: Our prevalent economic systems continue to be manipulated by the rich and powerful. The response to the economic crisis of 2007-08 gave them even greater power. 'Only when our economy and social system no longer produces even a single victim, a single person cast aside will we be able to celebrate the feast of universal fraternity'. (110)

Private Property: 'Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute. It is always secondary and subordinate to the prior rights of those in need. (120)

Employment: 'The biggest issue is employment. Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work'.

Covid-19: momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, where one person's problems are the problems of all. It revealed once more the truth that we are part of one another, that we are brothers and sisters of one another' (32).

Politics: A better kind of politics is called for, 'one truly at the service of the common good'. (154) 'I appeal for a renewed appreciation of politics as a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good'. (180) 'The biggest concern should not be about a drop in the polls but about finding effective solutions to the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion'.

Hunger: World politics needs to make the effective elimination of hunger one of its foremost goals. When financial speculation manipulates the price of food, treating it as just another commodity, millions of people suffer and die from hunger. At the same time, tons of food are thrown away. Access to food is an inalienable right and hunger is a crime. (189)

Kindness: Kindness is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and is in urgent need of recovery. It frees us from the cruelty that infects human relationships, the anxiety that prevents us from welcoming others, the frantic flurry of activity that forgets another's need. (223-224) Once kindness becomes a culture within society, it transforms lifestyles and the way we communicate with one another. (223-224)

Our Role: Everyone has a role to play in writing a new page in history, one full of hope, peace and reconciliation. (231) Each one of us is called to be an artisan of peace,

by uniting and not dividing, by extinguishing hatred and not holding on to it, by opening paths of dialogue and not by constructing walls. (284) Involving ordinary people in this process is essential.

War: Every war leaves our world worse than it was before. We can no longer think of war as a solution because its risks are now greater than its supposed benefits. Just War theory no longer applies. Never again War! (258-261) Nuclear deterrence in the twenty-first century, far from providing security, increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between nations. The total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes a humanitarian imperative. The money allocated to weapons and other military expenditures, would be better spent on establishing a global fund that can put an end to hunger and boost development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent solutions, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life. (262)

Death Penalty: is inadmissible. The Church is committed to calling for its abolition worldwide. (263) The possibility of judicial error, the use made of such punishment by totalitarian and dictatorial regimes as a means of suppressing political dissident or persecuting religious and cultural minorities makes it morally

untenable. Life imprisonment is considered a secret death penalty. We need to recognize the dignity of even the most hardened of criminals and never give up on them. (269)

Patrick White is recorded as saying that without a vision, the people lose their way. In this letter, Pope Francis provides us with such a vision of a way forward. It is a vision of a 'kinder world', to quote Jacinta Ardern, New Zealand's Prime Minister. Given the parlous state of our society, we ignore Francis' renewed appeal at our peril. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks captures the essence of this vision with his synopsis:

*A nation is strong
when it cares for the weak,
It becomes rich
when it cares for the poor,
It becomes invulnerable
when it cares for the vulnerable*

POSTSCRIPT

Not surprisingly, women have expressed dismay at the overly masculine tone of this Encyclical. For a start, the title, FRATELLI TUTTI, is blatantly masculine. More telling, though, is this statistic. Of the 292 sources from 288 footnotes, none include women.

This is a wordy document. In its English translation, it is unlikely to be considered for any literary awards. But if readers persevere with panning its content, they will be rewarded with the golden nugget that lies within it.

BOOK REVIEW Towards a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace Navigating the Great Transition

Towards a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace: Navigating the Great Transition. Edited by Joseph Camilleri and Deborah Guess, Palgrave MacMillan, Berlin 2020

This book is a collection of the presentations at a major two-day conference; *Earth at Peace* held at Pilgrim Theological College, Melbourne, in April 2019. The conference explored the assumption that humanity is living through a time of significant crisis and transition. Climate emergency, the threat of nuclear war, the environmental crisis, food and water

shortages, increasing poverty, unequal wealth acquisition, violence and social division all come together to raise two fundamental questions: *Can humanity and Earth as we know it survive? What steps can humanity take and in which directions might it move to ensure that we and earth not only survive but live justly together?* Underlying this is a further question: *What is the contribution of the great faith traditions and faith communities to a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace.* The conference brought together a wide range of speakers from Australia and overseas, from a range of faith communi-

ties to explore different aspects of the crisis, including Professor Heather Eaton, Ecofeminist theologian from St. Paul University Ottawa, Professor Tony Birch, Indigenous scholar and activist, Dr Salim Farrar, researcher in Islamic law and Ethics, Dr Norman Habel, Lutheran theologian who specialises in the Book of Job, Environmental Theology and the Wisdom Literature and Professor Chaiwat Satha Anand, Professor of Political Science and scholar of non violence from Thammasat University, Thailand. The presenters do not offer "magic bullet" solutions to the challenges facing humanity

to the challenges facing humanity. Instead, they invite us to explore new understandings of who we are as people, as communities and nations and as humanity, how we come from and belong to earth and how the same spirit of life in all our traditions binds us together and binds us to earth.

The book is divided into three sections: 1. In Search of a Holistic Approach, 2. Cosmological and Religious Perspectives, and 3. Questioning the Colonial Mindset followed by two concluding reflections from Professor Mark Brett and Dr Joseph Camilleri.

In part 1, Heather Eaton asserts that humanity is at a Spiritual Crossroads. We are caught up in a culture of domination and violence which sees life as a series of fights, with increasing militarism, increasing violence by men towards women and increasing environmental degradation. She invites us to build a culture of nonviolence and active resistance, to construct cultural programmes which have the power to transform violence and to perceive the natural world as a larger sacred community of which we are part.

Ariel Saleh challenges us to move from the "Othering" of women under patriarchy, of strangers under colonialism and workers under capitalism towards "holding," a life giving exchange between human and natural processes.

In part 2, Zuleyha Keskin and Mehemet Ozalp write of an Islamic

world riven by conflicts and already feeling the threats of climate change. They remind us that God is Lord of the Universe and that we hold creation and our fellow humans in trust from God. Justice is protection of God's rights. Salim Farrar explores Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in Morocco and Aceh, set up under Islamic law but with reference to international human rights. Norman Habel from the Christian tradition explores the Wisdom Tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures and finds there a "tradition of innate ecowisdom." Drawing on the Books of Job and Proverbs, he finds an "Innate Life Force" at the heart of the cosmos which God has established in the design of the cosmos and its ecology on Earth. Dr Bruce Duncan explores Pope Francis' crusade to create an interfaith humanitarian movement to turn humanity around towards human and ecological peace and away from chaos. Drawing on the Buddhist tradition Chaiwat Satha Anand questions "thinking as the dominant mode of being human. He draws on the practise of "breathing" in Buddhist meditation and sees it as a connecting point between God who breathes life into the clay and humanity. Breathing involves breathing others in: *Hearing and seeing others* enables us to feel how they are and to care for them.

This is only a brief sketch of the ideas found in the book. We could sum it up by observing that the path

to Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace is not to wait on the "Principalities and Powers of This World." It begins in the hearts and minds of women and men, their awareness of who we are in the cosmos and how we belong to each other and the earth. We must learn to "live on the edge," learning how to live differently and invite others into the mystery of life.

The book is challenging read. It takes us on a journey into new perspectives and offers us hope of a way through the crisis we and the earth face. It confronts us with reality but invites us to go deeper into our spiritual traditions and experience to find hope and a basis for action. The good news is that most presenters write in elegant English to make their message accessible to the general reader. The price is a challenge but it is a book to be seen as an investment, a point of reference for the long haul.

The book is obtainable from the Publisher, Palgrave MacMillan, <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9789811550201> for \$163 hard copy, \$140 Ebook; also from <https://www.booktopia.com.au/search.ep?key=words=Towards+a+Just+and+Ecologically+Sustainable+Peace&productType=917504> and from bookshops

ECOLOGICAL ETHICS: CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME.

Brian Johnstone

A crucial feature of our time has been described as an "ecological catastrophe." Christians have sought to develop a theological response to the catastrophe. This article will draw on theological and philosophical resources with the aim of constructing a Christian ethical response. It will use two sources in particular; the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis, and the noteworthy theological contribution of Elizabeth A. Johnson. Johnson's book was the topic of study by a group from *Pax Christi*, Melbourne, Australia. This

article is a follow-up to that study. The question this article will address is: granted that the ecological catastrophe is occurring in our world, how might Christians, drawing on their traditions, develop an ethical response?

The encyclical "Laudato Si'.

"Laudato Si' mi' Signore: Praise be to you my Lord." These are the opening words of St. Francis of Assisi's song *Canticle of the Creatures*. They are cited by Pope Francis at the beginning of his encyclical *On Care for our Common Home*.

This provides a key meaning for the world that includes the human community and nature; this is recognized as "our common home; a term that indicates the nature and scope of the care that is required for that home. In his development of the notions of care and home the pope interprets the notion of friendship with nature in personal, domestic terms. He describes love for nature as love for a sister and for a mother. He is no doubt concerned to move people to an "ecological conversion," and so to dedicate themselves to care for our

common home. Hence, his use of personal terms and the language of love. Elizabeth Johnson has written: "Christian tradition has always interpreted the good we are called to do for other humans not first and foremost under the rubric of duty, but as an expression of love." Pope Francis extends this love to include all creatures and the whole of creation.

The task of an environmental ethics within the Christian tradition will be to clarify the meaning of love, as shaping the relationships between persons and the rest of creation so as to build a "common home."

Elizabeth Johnson finds in the scriptures three "models." Each suggests a different form of relationship between human persons and the other members of the common home.

The "dominion model." This is derived from an interpretation of the story of creation in Genesis 1:28. "God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

The "autonomy model." Johnson finds in Scripture another model, that we might call the autonomy model. This is represented by the Book of Job. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth" (Job, 38:4). Such questions put human beings in their proper relation to the rest of creation. Wondrous creation does very well without humans.

The "community of creation model." Here all creation, all creatures, including human beings are a community. Johnson writes: "The biblical vision of the community of creation opens a life-enhancing avenue of relationships."

Johnson wants to include the first model in her interpretation of a Christian ecology. This can be corrected by transforming dominion

into responsible stewardship. This can be corrected further, as will be explained later in this article. The article will argue that is better to include such a corrected version of the first model than to abandon it altogether as some writers would want.

However, the history of the treatment of the dominion model in contemporary ecological ethics has often followed a different route. Many have wanted to exclude the dominion model altogether rather than integrating it. Why they wanted to do this can be explained as follows. An historian, Lyn White Jr, proposed that "the orthodox Christian arrogance towards nature" may be the source of our disastrous relationship with the environment.

The charge was that the Christian tradition, by adopting the dominion model, supported a "anthropocentric" view of the environment; that is, the view that human beings are at the centre of things: damage caused to the environment by human agency was morally wrong solely because of the harmful effects on other human beings. That is, the harm to the environment itself was not an ethical issue. In subsequent debates some Christian authors proposed that the relationship should be interpreted not as "dominion" but as "responsible stewardship." Christians as responsible stewards of nature would want to protect nature from harm. Harming nature is itself irresponsible and thus ethically wrong. This view was widely accepted by Christian ecological thinkers.

In the encyclical *Laudato Si*, however, stewardship is not a major theme. However, is not excluded completely; there are, two mentions of the topic. Cardinal Turkson, who was largely responsible for the document, highlighted care for creation, rather than stewardship. He explained that stewardship implies a relationship based on duty. The notion of care, on the other hand, evokes something deeper; one cares

for something with passion and love. Stewardship ethics uses the language of principles and rules. The major objection to the ethic of stewardship was its failure to provide personal motivation. People are not motivated to act, it was argued, by being told to accept principles and rules and to act according to them. This article would agree that an interpretation of stewardship as implying an ethics of duty is to be avoided. In response to such arguments, many theological and philosophical ethicists have moved their attention from responsible stewardship to an ethics of virtue.

However, stewardship implies responsible action. We would want to include this in our ecological ethic. James F. Keenan, S.J. has written; "Virtue, being transformative, leads inevitably to action." This applies also to the virtue of love, *agape*. Some of the authors who defend an ethics of virtue interpret virtue in such a way that the necessary connection between love and action is not maintained. Virtue is interpreted as a "desire to become better, more compassionate people." This article argues that virtue, and, in particular the virtue of love, moves us to action. This action, to be an expression of genuine love, must necessarily be responsible. Stewardship, as correctly understood, is a responsible expression of love.

The move to an ethic of virtue has been widely accepted in contemporary ecological ethics. However, this has not been entirely successful. For example, some authors have sought to provide notable persons as models of virtue. But the persons whom they have chosen are sometimes those who have withdrawn from social and political conflicts to contemplate the beauty of nature.

The connection between virtue and ecological ethics can be illustrated by examples of such connection. The "autonomy" model can be linked to the virtue of "respect." For example, respect for the power

of the seas would lead us to reduce the gas emissions that are causing the warming that is leading to the rising of the oceans.

The virtue of magnanimity can also be invoked. This virtue would move us to challenge the false notions of grandeur and power that drove the many wars that have violently damaged so many ecosystems. The notion of the community of creation, especially when this is interpreted in strongly personal terms, in the way that Pope Francis suggests, relates to the virtue of love.

However, so far, ethicists who advocate the adoption of virtue as the key to ecological ethics have not succeeded in giving us a unified ecological ethic. Particular virtues are commended. But they are not integrated into a unified ecological ethic

The source of difficulty, I suggest, is an inadequate notion of virtue. To illustrate the problem, I refer to article by Longbottom entitled "Duty free? Virtue ethics in Laudato Si'." Longbottom, discusses a case. An oil company acts negligently and causes large scale pollution of the ocean and shores. We could categorize the behaviour of the managers as a failure to fulfill their legal duties. It would not get the plaintiffs very far in court to argue that the managers of the company had failed to demonstrate love for nature. Proving a legal case against the managers might compel them to pay damages. But the ethical question remains. We might compel a person to act by the threat of a fine. But how might we motivate them to engage personally, ethically, with the issue?

Longbottom, seeks to respond to this problem. He thinks that the required moving factor would be a desire to become a better person. This desire would provide personal motivation. It would move a person to an "ecological conversion."

The author is surely correct to focus on *desire* as the moving dynamism. But identifying the ob-

ject of this desire as "to become a better person" is not adequate. According to a traditional ethical theory there are two basic questions that we need to ask when we are reflecting on a project. One is: what is moving me? The other is: what response is this moving me?

A helpful way to focus these questions is to adopt an ethical theory of gift-giving. Thus, we ask first: what is moving me to give the gift? Secondly, we ask what is the gift that I am moved to give? We can translate this as: what is it that I am intending to give? The key word here is "intention."

Our author thinks that what the person is intending is to become a better person. The traditional theory, which I am applying, would answer: what the person is intending is to give the gift to the one I have chosen, out of love, to be the receiver of the gift. In short, what I am intending is action.

What is at stake here can be made clear by analysing the meaning of giving a gift. I am walking in a street. I meet a person, who is obviously poor, who holds out a hand and asks me for money to buy a cup of coffee. I reach into my pocket, find a five dollar note and give the person the note. He thanks me and goes on his way. On reflecting afterwards, I congratulate myself on having given him a gift; I feel that I have demonstrated that I am a good person.

The philosopher Derrida objects. He would claim I have not genuinely given the person a gift. Rather, I have satisfied my desire to feel I am a good person. I was not motivated by love of the person but by self-love. Derrida then drew a general conclusion: it is impossible to give a genuine gift. If this were true, it would mean that, when we seek to protect the environment, we are deluding ourselves. We would not really be seeking to benefit the environment; we would be seeking to have an image of ourselves as a "better person."

To solve this problem, we can make a distinction. When I give the note to the poor person, it is

indeed possible that I am motivated by the desire to be able to feel that I am a good person. In this case, what I intend is to acquire the feeling that I am a good person. I have not given a gift to the other out of love for that person. I have satisfied my desire to feel I am a good person. But there is another possibility. What I intend is to give the gift to the person. On giving the gift, I may well feel that I have done well and be happy about that. But my intention was not to produce the feeling that I am a good person. The feeling of being a good person is a welcome "by-product" of my good act of giving a gift to the poor person. In this case, I give a genuine gift to the other; my giving is motivated by self-less love for the other.

This article has offered a unified ethical theory based on the notion of what is required for our giving of a genuine gift. A genuine giving is a giving motivated by love. The giving of a gift to the environment would be described as "care for the environment." Care for the environment, in this view, is not a response to a feeling of "duty" but to passion and love. The inner source of this love is the virtue of love. The virtue of love moves us to act to benefit, that is to do good to, the environment. To be a genuine act of love the act of giving must be responsible. That is, it must be a response to the real needs of the environment. The giving and reception of the gift is the dynamism that joins us and our environment in the kind of unity that we can call "our home."

Brian V. Johnstone, C.S.S.R. is a Redemptorist priest and Moral Theologian. He has taught at Yarra Theological Union, Melbourne; The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.; and the Academia Alfonsiana in Rome.

FROM POLITICAL PRISONER TO CHAMPION OF HUMAN RIGHTS – THE WAI WAI NU STORY

Mariya Salim

Jn an exclusive interview, Wai Wai says her prison experience made her all the more aware of the need for human rights activism. What kept her going during her prison years was the desire to help other women inmates to 'have a dream'. "I feel I was privileged when I compare myself to the other young girls and women that I interacted with while I was in prison," Wai Wai says. "Most of them were unaware of how corrupt the political system was. I had a dream, a vision, whether or not I could achieve it because of my imprisonment was secondary. I felt I could help them have a dream. "The youngest of three siblings, Wai Wai (33), spent seven years as a political prisoner with her family. Imprisoned at only 18, she was forced to give up her education, her everyday life. Still, she came out of prison undeterred and today is an inspiration to many women and activists fighting for human rights and dignity of their communities and beyond. Her family is Rohingya, a Muslim minority in Myanmar which has been facing continued persecution and marginalisation by state and non-state actors alike. It was her father's activism that led to her imprisonment. Her father, who was elected to parliament in 1990, received a 47-year prison sentence, which was politically motivated. The family was released in 2012. Wai Wai has received many awards for her activism including the N-Peace award in 2014. She was named as one of the Top 100 women by BBC the same year and the Time magazine named her one of the Next Generation Leaders in 2017. However, she considers her most outstanding achievement to be the ability to emerge as a woman leader from her community and inspire many like her to be change-makers. "I started my activism when I was 25-years-old. Apart from the many challenges, I was faced with patriarchy from within my community initially as there were close no

women in leadership roles. Now I see an acceptance from the same community, and I am proud to have been able to break this stereotype". An achievement that Wai Wai sees as imperative though not tangible is being able to bridge the gap between the Rohingya in Myanmar, who are extremely marginalised and isolated from mainstream Myanmar, and the rest of Myanmar and society at large. "I speak Burmese fluently, I grew up in the city, and I think, through my activism, I have been able to break the stereotypes created in part by the media and address the Islamophobia around my community, which is seen by so many as alien," We (Rohingya) have played an important role in Burmese history, in its independence, and I want to remind the world of this too. Today a lot of young people see me as someone who did not give up and tell me how my story inspires them to continue to achieve. I value this more than any achievement or award that I have ever received. "Wai Wai recalls that she realised she needed to help women prisoners because of the stigma they faced during and after their incarceration. She says she needed to help these women because they suffered a double burden: they faced the direct consequences of being imprisoned, and beyond the prison walls, their suffering continued. Once they had finished serving their prison time, most were not accepted back into their families, those married were abandoned by their husbands and had to start their lives all over again. The fact that most came from impoverished economic backgrounds only worsened their situation. "I felt I could help fix this. "Wai Wai founded the Women's Peace Network in 2012. She says her father continues to fight for human rights and draws inspiration from religion despite suffering and facing the consequences of his activism, Wai Wai says he feels "he has the duty towards help-

ing those who need support." "I draw inspiration from his strength and beliefs in justice and equality," she says. Wai Wai has been an open advocate for democracy and human rights for all. While referring to Myanmar's transition to democracy, she says that it concerns her that the world celebrates a flawed democracy like Myanmar for its own geopolitical or economic gains. Here millions of people still live in a Genocide-like situation, and the effect is to legitimise a flawed democracy and help prolong atrocities and crimes against the most marginalised in the country. "When we talk of democracy, we need to ensure that human rights of all are protected, that there is political participation by all, freedom of expression and assembly are upheld," Wai Wai says. "When a state has marginalised an entire community and made them outsiders ... Where the military has used this transition to democracy as a means to maintain its power: To accept and celebrate this as a successful transition to democracy is like rewarding a State that has not even met the benchmark of basic democratic criterion." Of the many challenges that Wai Wai has faced, one that she has to continue to fight is that of others stereotyping her and manipulating her into limiting her work and her activism. "There are many who only want me to talk about the human rights of my community and want to limit my ability to contribute to other issues. Yes, I have the responsibility towards my community and my people, but that does not stop me from advocating for universal principles like democracy, empowerment of youth and justice and peace in society."

Wai Wai Nu is the founder and director of Women's Peace Network and serves as a fellow at the centre for the prevention of Genocide, US Holocaust Museum. Mariya Salim is a fellow at IPS UN Bureau

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We normally meet on the First Monday of each month at 6.00pm for shared meal that members bring and the meeting follows at 6.30 pm.

**Contact: Claude Mostowik
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The venue: 209A Edgeware Road, Enmore.

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Contact:
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0415 461 620
pancrasjordan@gmail.com

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Information:

ipan.inquiry@gmail.com

Submissions to

ipan.inquiry@gmail.com



Living the Change was initiated at the UN Climate Conference in 2017 by the US-based multi-faith organization, [GreenFaith](#), an interfaith organization whose mission is to educate, organize and mobilise people of diverse faiths to become environmental leaders. Serving to coordinate Living the Change, GreenFaith now has Implementing Partners who collaborate to shape a vision for a worldwide community of practice which drives life-style-related emission reductions.

Living the Change invites individuals to fortify healthy, balanced relationships that help sustain the earth. The three areas where religious leaders and people of faith are asked to

1. reduced use of transportation based on fossil fuels, ie, air and road transport
2. shifting towards plant-based diets, away from meat-based protein
3. energy efficiency and sourcing energy from renewables

Leaders in faith communities are encouraged to make their pledges to life-style changes publicly and promote these changes in their communities.

Further information: Australian Religious Response to Climate Change info@arrcc.org.au

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