

## EIGHT

### *From Galilean Shores to Israeli Checkpoints* *Jesus's Way of Non-Violence as Contemporary Challenge*

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THE THEME OF NON-VIOLENT resistance in the New Testament is an integral part of Jesus's preaching of the Kingdom of God that offers an alternative to the violent occupation of the Roman Empire in Judea. From the shores of Galilee to the final confrontation in Jerusalem, Jesus's life-style deliberately embodied a just and peaceful way of coping with the oppression that threatened to remove all hope from the Galilean people. Today, faced with the violence and injustice of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, could drawing on New Testament inspiration offer hope of survival, regaining dignity and finally justice for the land and its people?

#### Setting the Scene: The Shores of Galilee and The Context of Violence

It was no accident that the young Jesus of Nazareth, at the beginning of his ministry, chose to leave his home town of Nazareth and journey to the shores of Lake Galilee as the setting for his mission. As Ched Myers stated, at the Sabeel Conference 2011 in Bethlehem:

It was precisely and specifically by the shores of the Sea of Galilee that the radicality of Israel's God confronted the *normalcy* of Rome's civilization under Herod Antipas in the '20s of the first century CE.<sup>1</sup>

On his way from Nazareth, Jesus would have passed through Sepphoris (Zippori), built by Herod the Great, once the capital of Galilee, until Tiberias was founded by

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<sup>1</sup> Ched Myers, "Sea-changes Part I: Jesus' Call to Discipleship as Resistance to Colonizing Economics," in *Challenging Empire: God, Faithfulness and Resistance*, ed. Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, and Maurine Tobin (Jerusalem: Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Centre, 2012), 110.

Herod Antipas in 20 CE, as resort and stronghold. After Herod's death in 4 BCE, a major Judean insurrection broke out, and Josephus tells us that one of the most important skirmishes was the sacking of the royal armoury at Sepphoris, led by Judas, son of Ezekias. In retaliation, Varus, the Roman legate of Syria, razed the city and sold the Jewish rebels to slavery. So it is important to take on board that Jesus, a radical Jew, grew up with the painful memories of violence as well as its daily realities. That is the first link with the contemporary context.

Many scholars think that if we assume that Jesus laboured as a carpenter or construction worker (*tektōn*) in Nazareth, one hour's walk from Sepphoris, then it is highly likely that he worked there rebuilding the city.<sup>2</sup> The trauma of Sepphoris' destruction and reconstruction as an imperial city right at his doorstep would have had a profound impact on his consciousness, infusing in him a keen sense of the suffering of his people under the Roman Empire. Two great cities, Sepphoris and Tiberias: yet they did not form the context for his ministry.

After reaching the high road, the Via Maris, Jesus would have passed Gennesaret and arrived at Heptapegon, (the Seven Springs—later Tabgha, and presumed site of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes). This was the fishing ground for Capernaum's fisher folk. Arriving at Capernaum, it was here where he chose his base for most of his ministry, among humble peasant people. It became his own town—but there is no outward reason as to why he would choose it. Archaeology only reveals its ordinariness—with no palaces or exceptional buildings. Capernaum was a frontier town, with a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles (a population of about 1,500), people who had long suffered the effects of the Roman Empire's domination. Mystery surrounds the character of Capernaum—a hotbed of unrest? Of economic protest? A small garrison was stationed here that protected the frontier and provided back-up for the tax collectors. The custom house of Matthew, the tax collector, stood close to where the Via Maris passed close to the lake.<sup>3</sup> Capernaum had also been on the crossroads of a trade route between Egypt and Syria. Not far away in the hills were the hidden Zealot strongholds—and it is clear from Scripture that at least one of Jesus's apostles was a Zealot.<sup>4</sup> Now long ruined, Capernaum lies peacefully on the edge of the Sea. In the light of recent excavations of what may have been Peter's house, the first century synagogue, and customs buildings, it is increasingly possible to imagine life in New Testament times.

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<sup>2</sup> This, however, remains in the realm of conjecture, as does the suggestion that the house of Joachim and Anna, parents of Mary, the mother of Jesus, was in Sepphoris. See, for example, Bargil Pixner, *Paths of the Messiah and Sites of the Early Church from Galilee to Jerusalem: Jesus and Jewish Christianity in Light of Archaeological Discoveries* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 53–76. For a recent account of the contemporary history of Sepphoris, Arab Saffuriya, now Israeli Zippori, at the time of the 1948 war and after, see Adina Hoffman, *My Happiness Bears No Relation to Happiness: A Poet's Life in The Palestinian Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus through Galilee according to the Fifth Gospel* (Rosh Pina: Corazin Publishing, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Luke 6.15 speaks of "Simon who is called the Zealot."

The Sea of Galilee, a large freshwater lake about seven miles wide and thirteen long, was dotted with villages connected with the local fishing industry, the most prosperous segment of ancient Galilee's economy. Since 1970 archaeology has made it possible to put on the map some sixteen ancient harbours unknown until recently. When Jesus encountered fishermen, he walked right into an economically threatened landscape. The ancient fishing industry depended on boats constructed of wood and often in need of repair. As a *tektōn* from Nazareth, Jesus may have been drawn away from Nazareth to seek work at the lake repairing boats. As an itinerant labourer, Jesus would have moved up the coast from harbour to harbour, a fact which may explain his appearance in Capernaum, an important centre of the fishing trade.

But what is vital for the argument here are the two characteristics that the Galilean ministry exhibits and what they say about the nature of the non-violent kingdom.<sup>5</sup> These are *itinerancy*—always being on the move—and *commensality*, table fellowship. The focus on itinerancy which became the norm in the first fifty years after Jesus's death, until the firm establishment of Christian communities in diverse geographical areas, should not be understood by contemporary Christians as a fixed recommendation to become nomads, or contemporary Bedouin. Rather, it reflects the refusal of Jesus to have a central base, to found a specific centre for the Kingdom of God and make people come there.<sup>6</sup> Yes, Capernaum was a base, to be returned to now and again, but normal life was to move from one village to the next and accept hospitality. Commensality is not about going around with a begging bowl and accepting charity, but about the just sharing of food as the material basis of life, of life that belongs to God.<sup>7</sup>

These two features addressed the fractured life of poor people under the Roman Empire, because they reflect the unjust land situation—and thus another link with today's situation in Israel and the West Bank for the Arab population. Undoubtedly some larger landowners were enriched; but many poor farmers' lands were amalgamated with larger estates and freehold farmers became tenant farmers or day labourers. So, even if the *later* tradition encouraged the voluntary leaving of land and possession "for Christ's sake," Jesus's own practice was rooted in resisting societal corporate injustice. *Commensality*, or eating practices, were also linked with justice. This is linked not only with the fact that—as is usually stated—Jesus "ate with prostitutes and sinners"—but more associated with the reality that the unjust distribution of land meant massive hunger. Because the unjust situation of Antipas's Kingdom had gone so far, there was no possibility of insisting on just land redistribution:

All that was possible was to attempt the redistribution of land and healing, of the material and spiritual bases, from the bottom upward. That was the

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<sup>5</sup> Here I acknowledge my debt to John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Text* (London: SPCK, 2001), 125–35.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

Kingdom of God. On Earth.<sup>8</sup>

Because the *Pax Romana* had fractured the ancient safety nets of peasant kinship, the new discipleship around Jesus attempted to restore this through table fellowship. Even more striking is how this was reflected in the prayer of Jesus. The Jewish Torah had stressed the importance of justice for the land and release from debt. The prayer of Jesus, the Lord's Prayer, changes the priority to *food* and debt. "Give us this day our daily bread" speaks directly to the hunger of poor people. A growing number of biblical scholars now understand the Jesus movement as a movement of resistance to the Roman Empire and the transformation of this regime of violence and oppression into an alternative society of justice, peace, forgiveness, and love.<sup>9</sup> For example, Ched Myers argues that this is *exactly* the reason that Jesus came to Capernaum by the Sea, with its seventeen fishing villages, to begin his ministry.<sup>10</sup> *Go where the pain is felt the most*, he asserts. So, it is no surprise that given Jesus's compassion for the misery of the fisher folk that the call of Matthew to be part of the movement happens so soon. Matthew (Levi) had probably sold fishing rights to the people and charged interest on his services. As a street-level representative of the Roman system, his conversion becomes a reminder that Jesus called both poor and rich. It is not merely as a decorative symbol to choose the fish as Christianity's earliest emblem, since the Gospel call has both economic and social dimensions. The fishing industry was for the poor people of this region the public face of the injustice of the Roman Empire. Yet there is an even more radical level to the agenda for the Kingdom, which will now be discussed.

### **An Agenda for the Kingdom: the Sermon on the Mount**

Wherever is decided as the authentic site for the Sermon on the Mount, it is the Mount of the Beatitudes that points to the heart of the non-violent mission of Jesus and his proclamation of the Kingdom of Peace and Justice. The intention here is not to follow the imagined footsteps of Jesus—but to make his message central in the contemporary struggle for the peace and justice of the Kingdom in Israel/Palestine. To visit Capernaum, Tabgha, and other sites by the lake, is almost like being pulled by an invisible thread to the Mount of the Beatitudes, simply because their message has been recognized through the centuries as being Jesus's legacy to us in the struggle for peace. Today's Melkite Archbishop of Galilee, Elias Chacour, refers in his many works to the pull of this mountain in his life.<sup>11</sup> As a small boy he would take refuge here, as the presence of Christ seemed to him to be tangible. There is a rich legacy of inspiration for today's

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Ched Myers, Richard Horsley, John Dominic Crossan, Christopher Ferguson.

<sup>10</sup> Ched Myers, "The Call to Discipleship: Resist Colonizing Economics!" Challenging Empire: God, Faithfulness and Resistance, Eighth International Conference, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Bethlehem, Feb 25, 2011 (personal notes).

<sup>11</sup> Elias Chacour, *We Belong to The Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli Who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 143–44.

Peace Movement, from the way Leo Tolstoy was influenced by the Beatitudes, and the way this impacted on Gandhi and then Martin Luther King. Gandhi read the Sermon on the Mount every day and it was also prayed by the community in his ashrams. Still today peace activists cherish and live by his message. The inspiration and mission of the Beatitudes are interwoven with Jesus's own passion for justice and peace as he traversed the sea and journeyed through its adjacent villages. It is important not to sentimentalize this message: "Blessed are the poor" probably means "blessed are the impoverished." Thus, the impoverished situation of the peasant communities in the time of Jesus is paralleled by the suffering of the Israeli-Arab political context today.

### The Suffering of Galilee Today

In the light of the present realities, how shall we re-read the sacred texts to inspire justice and peace today? Here, almost in the shadow of the Mount of the Beatitudes, with the words "Blessed are the Peacemakers" ringing in our ears, can we avoid the centrality of the message of peace in the Gospels?

Tragically, far too often do we read *out* of the text of the Gospels their call to peace with justice as the central message of the Kingdom. What did Mark do in the first chapter of his Gospel (Mark 1.14) but proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and call for a change of heart (*metanoia*)? And what is the Good News exactly? It is the proclamation that the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of peace and justice, and is offered by God as alternative to the Roman Empire with its *pax Romana*. Why have we become so deaf to the fact that peace is the major theme of the New Testament? Is it because it would demand too much of us in today's context?

In his wonderful study of this theme, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics*,<sup>12</sup> William M. Swartley points out that Jesus stands directly in the prophetic tradition of *shalom* of Isaiah and the other prophets. (It is no accident that that Isaiah functions almost as a fifth Gospel for Christians).<sup>13</sup> Yet *shalom* does not mean simply "peace," but the kind of wellbeing and flourishing that is based upon justice and a quality of right relation permeating society. This meaning persisted in Rabbinic Judaism from the second century to the mediaeval period. What is important is that there was an *ethical category to shalom*, which is frequently missed:

*shalom* primarily signifies a value, an *ethical category*—it denotes the overcoming of strife, quarrel and social tension, the prevention of enmity and war.... The pursuit of peace is the obligation of the individual and the goal of various social regulations and structures.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> William M. Swartley, *The Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> See for example, John F. A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Aviezer Ravitsky, "Peace," in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Con-*

Have we forgotten this ethical quality of *shalom* and thus pushed the centrality of peace-making to the edges of our consciousness, or to an individualized notion of contentment? The Roman Empire has long fallen, but others have risen to take its place. The waters of Galilee have watched the Ottoman Empire, British, and Jordanian powers come and go: but the might of the Zionist Government backed by the Americans, the lack of moral tone and any element of justice in the so-called Peace Process, means that the current situation is strikingly similar to the days when Jesus offered poor fisher folk and farm labourers an alternative to the regime of the *Pax Romana*.

In the early twentieth century, when Palestine was still under the Ottoman Empire, followed by the British Mandate, Galilee was inhabited by Arab Christians and Muslims, the Druze,<sup>15</sup> and Jews, while minorities from elsewhere in the Ottoman empire—including Circassians and Bosniaks—were also settled here by the Turks. From the nineteenth century Zionist immigrants had slowly begun to inhabit the land. Once the state of Israel was declared as the new homeland for the Jews in 1948, things changed drastically for indigenous inhabitants through what Arabs call *Al Nakba*, the catastrophe.<sup>16</sup> The Palestinian version of events is disputed by the Zionist Government: it is frequently said that “they went away, leaving the houses and buildings empty.”<sup>17</sup> Jewish settlers are seldom told the truth of the empty houses to which they are assigned on arrival from many European countries. The very word “*Nakba*” was ordered to be erased from school textbooks, its veracity denied. *Al Nakba* is one of the most tragic and defining events for Arab memory. Each village has its own stories, its own inhabitants with their memories.<sup>18</sup> One witness writes:

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*cepts and Movements and Beliefs*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes Flohr (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 686.

<sup>15</sup> The Druze—of whom there are about a million in the world—are an esoteric, monotheistic religious community found primarily in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan, which emerged during the eleventh century from Ismailism (a large branch of Shia Islam). The Druze people reside primarily in Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. The Israeli Druze are mostly in Galilee (81%), around Haifa (19%), and in the Golan Heights, which is home to about 20,000 Druze. The Institute of Druze Studies estimates that 40%–50% of Druze live in Syria, 30%–40% in Lebanon, 6%–7% in Israel, and 1%–2% in Jordan. See Bejtullah Destani, ed., *Minorities in the Middle East: Druze Communities 1840–1974* (4 vols; Slough: Archive Editions, 2006); Robert B. Betts, *The Druze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> The facts are easy to relate, but they may obscure the profundity of the tragedy that was inflicted on the Palestinians and continues to haunt them till this day. The Arab inhabitants of Palestine were driven out of 531 villages by Israeli soldiers; about 750,000 people were displaced, forced into becoming refugees, in Bethlehem, Lebanon, Syria, and the rest of the world.

<sup>17</sup> See Nur Masalha, *A Land without a People: Israeli Transfer and the Palestinians, 1949–96* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997); *The Politics of Denial: Israel and The Palestinian Refugee Problem* (London: Pluto, 2003); Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, DC: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> See Sabeel Centre, *A Time to Remember: Palestinian Towns and Villages* (Jerusalem: Sabeel Centre for Ecumenical Theology, 2008). James Penn tells us that one in every three refugees in the world is Palestinian. There are approximately 7 million Palestinian refugees in the world and they can be categorized as the original “*Nakba* refugees” and their descendants (4.5 million), the 1967 Six Day War refugees and descendants (1 million) and “low intensity population transfer” refugees and other refugees.

The new rulers have moved into our lands, our homes, claiming them as their own. The great promises of our brother nations and of the world are forgotten. We flee or are driven out of our homes and families. We wander, exiled. Many families seek refuge in neighbouring lands or distant countries, but many of us become refugees in our own land—squatting in tent camps as we watch our land, our home become home to another people.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the sophisticated techniques employed to destroy collective memory and identity, now, sixty-seven years on, *Al Nakba* is still firmly enshrined in Palestinian collective memory (in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank and globally with the Diaspora population), despite some evidence that some of the younger generation have a diminished attachment to their ancestral village. *Nakba Day*—May 15—is still celebrated by the villagers and many international supporters, with pilgrimages to the old sites and non-violent resistance marches to checkpoints and other places of significance. But remembering *Al Nakba* is one thing; living as second class citizens, as a minority within a Jewish state is another.<sup>20</sup>

Wherever we look, Arab Israelis suffer discrimination—with high unemployment, poor health care, under-representation in Parliament, and a desperate sense of insecurity, heightened by the consciousness that Israel is demanding an acceptance from all citizens that this will be a Jewish State. And I have not even touched upon the situation in the West Bank and Gaza; this is the context for the contemporary search for peace.

<sup>19</sup> Walid Khalidi, in Sabeel Centre, *A Time to Remember*, 47.

<sup>20</sup> There are about one-and-a-half-million Palestinians living within the borders of the Israeli state. Arab citizens of Israel form a majority of the population (52%) in Israel's Northern District and about 50% of the Arab population lives in 114 different localities throughout Israel. In total there are 122 primarily, if not entirely, Arab localities in Israel, 89 of them having populations over two thousand. 46% of Israel's Arab population (622,400 people) lives in predominantly Arab communities in the north, Nazareth being the largest Arab city, with a population of 65,000, roughly 40,000 of whom are Muslim. Jerusalem has the largest overall Arab population. In 2000, Jerusalem housed 209,000 Arabs and they made up some 33% of the city's residents. But these facts do little to convey the realities faced by Arab Israelis who face discrimination, racism, and poverty on a daily basis. Almost 140,000 Palestinian families in Israel are below the poverty line, more than 50% of Palestinian children live in these poor families. Poverty now reaches into the third generation. 60% of Palestinian families suffer from housing shortages but 44% cannot afford to rent or purchase a new house or apartment. Permits to build are almost impossible to get—hence the often desperate act of building without a permit, with the frequent consequence of the house being demolished by the Israeli authorities. This is well documented by Jeff Halper, the founder of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD). Thousands of demolitions have been carried out over the years, under the aegis of five government bodies. The underlying purpose is to “de-Arabize the land”: the purpose is to confine the 3.7 million Palestinians of the Occupied Territories, together with the 1.3 million Palestinian citizens of Israel, to small, disconnected enclaves (referred to by Sharon as “cantons”) within about 15% of the entire country. But the overarching plan of ridding the Jewish state of Arabs is given a cloak of legality: demolitions are couched within dry, technical, seemingly neutral master plans. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Arab citizens a “demographic problem.” Avigdor Lieberman, Deputy Prime Minister, has called for the execution of the Arab members of the Knesset, and supports the idea of the forcible transfer of the Arab community.

### Galilee: the Sea of Challenge for us today

From the shores of Galilee, Jesus set his face to Jerusalem, the Gospels tell us. Now he would have to face the checkpoints—notably Qalandia, scene of routine humiliation of Palestinians. His was the freely chosen path of suffering love, emerging from a being, totally reconciled with the power and source of life and justice. Following this path today means a costly discipleship:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5.17)

I want to offer two types of insights here as to flesh out what this costly discipleship involves. The first is from Gandhi's thoughts, the second from Feminist Liberation Theology. People often speak of Gandhi as a failure—not least in India, where his ideas on village republics are considered anachronistic. The complexity and profundity of his thought is often unexplored. How is it relevant for the argument here?

First, Gandhi thought that most of Christianity today is a negation of the Sermon on the Mount. He was speaking directly of what the West thinks of Christianity and how it lives the reality:

By all means drink deep of the fountains that are given to you in the Sermon on the Mount; but then you will have to take up sackcloth and ashes.... The teaching of the Sermon was meant for each and every one of us. You cannot serve both God and Mammon.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, non-violence, *ahimsa*, is no passive concept but a highly complex idea based on a lifelong practice of self-purification. It is a quality of the heart, a passion expressed in every act, even the smallest. But it should not be dismissed as a private act: Gandhi saw it as the basis of engagement with political parties, especially those who disagreed with him:

We have to be patient with them and convince them of their errors and be convinced of our own. Then, proceeding further, we have to deal patiently and gently with political parties that have different policies and different principles. We have to look at their criticism from their own standpoint, always remembering that the greater the distance between ourselves and others, the greater the scope for the play of our non-violence.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, "The Place of Jesus" (Dec 8, 1927), in *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Raghavan Iyer (Oxford: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1993), 149.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 252; "The Fundamental of non-violence."



The power of *ahimsa*, is the power of truth, expressed in *satyagraha*, its public expression: “*Satyagraha* is pure soul-force. Truth is the very substance of the soul. That is why this force is called *satyagraha*.”<sup>23</sup> Gandhi’s views on truth are at the very heart of the revolution he proposes, the complete opposite of the ethic that “might is right” and “the survival of the fittest.” *Satyagraha*

proposes a deeper sense of shared humanity to give meaning and energy to its sense of justice. The sense of humanity consisted in the recognition of the fundamental fact that humanity was indivisible, that human beings grew and feel together, and that in degrading and brutalizing others, they degraded and brutalized themselves.<sup>24</sup>

The most impressive example of *satyagraha* in action, the Salt March of March 1930, was an important part of the Indian independence movement. It was a direct action campaign of tax resistance and nonviolent protest against the British salt monopoly in colonial India, and triggered the wider Civil Disobedience Movement. Gandhi led the march from his Sabarmati Ashram near Ahmedabad, to the sea coast near the village of Dandi, where the group extracted salt from the sea. As he continued on this twenty-three-day, 390-kilometre march to produce salt without paying the tax, growing numbers of Indians joined him along the way. Women were particularly enthusiastic. When Gandhi broke the salt laws at 6:30am on April 6, 1930, it sparked large scale acts of civil disobedience against the British Raj salt laws by millions of Indians. Salt seemed especially symbolic as it should be a gift of nature, not taxed by a foreign power. What was particularly poignant was that when brutally attacked by soldiers, with some dead and thousands injured, the *satyagrahis* made no attempt to resist and fight back. It is the spiritual and moral power of this action that lives on today.

My second example comes from Feminist Christology and its non-violent understanding of atonement, or the processes of redemption. Yes, Jesus set his face to Jerusalem to confront the powers. But Feminist Liberation Theology stresses the community dimension of Christ’s setting his face to confront the power of empire. Christ-and-messianic community together embodied the struggle for truth and justice—even though the redemptive self-giving that led to his crucifixion was unique to Jesus. He—not his followers—is the Saviour of the world. It is a mistake to idealize and glorify crucifixion—as some traditional theologies have done: this can so easily happen if the dimension of justice is removed. Putting justice central means there is a task for us all as we struggle anew against oppression in our different contexts.

The non-violent struggle that appeared to end with crucifixion was a protest against all crucifixions, against the necessity of the violent putting to death of the innocent, poor, and vulnerable. As Beverley Harrison wrote in a widely quoted passage:

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 309; “Soul-force and *tapasta*.”

<sup>24</sup> Bhikhu C. Parekh, “Is Gandhi still Relevant?” in Antony R. H. Copley and George Paxton, eds, *Gandhi and the Contemporary World: Essays to Mark the 125th Anniversary of His Birth* (Chennai: Indo-British Historical Society, 1997), 376.

Jesus's death on a cross, his sacrifice, was no abstract exercise in moral virtue. His death was the price he paid for refusing to abandon the radical activity of love.... Sacrifice, I submit, is not a central moral goal or virtue in Christian life. Radical acts of love—expressing human solidarity and bringing mutual relationship to life—are the central virtues of Christian moral life.... Like Jesus we are called to a radical activity of love, to a way of being that deepens relation, embodies and extends community, passes on the gift of life.... To be sure, Jesus was faithful unto death. He stayed with his cause and he died for it. He *accepted* sacrifice. But his sacrifice was *for* the cause of radical love, to make relationship and to sustain it, and above all, to righting wrong relationship, which is what we call “doing justice.”<sup>25</sup>

In a similar way, Rodolfo Cardenal of El Salvador quoted his Jesuit colleague, Ignacio Ellacuría, murdered by the government soldiers, as saying,

To liberate means to take the crucified people down from the Cross. But the world of oppression and sin cannot tolerate that the people be taken down from the Cross.<sup>26</sup>

Those women who stood steadfast at the cross of Christ in the presence of the violence and brutality of the soldiers were ready to receive the empowerment of Christ's resurrection. We cannot escape the significance of the fact that these women disciples—like the Samaritan woman—had already experienced forgiveness and reconciliation within the community of those who struggled in suffering love for a new order of living. They had already accepted a ministry of peace-making and reconciliation. Equally, their resistance to the established order was made possible because they were already empowered by Jesus's vision of a world graced with reconciliation.

What is important for this non-violent understanding of atonement is that, yes, as the Kairos Palestine document makes clear, resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian, but *it is resistance with love as its logic*, a creative resistance seeking human ways that engage the humanity of the enemy.<sup>27</sup> It urges “seeing the image of God in the face of the enemy ...” (4.2.3) and suggests many practical ways of non-violent resistance. As Gandhi made clear: you have to *be, embody* the very change you want to bring about.

If the mission of the Samaritan woman of John's Gospel was to evangelize her own people, our task in today's redemptive journey to peace, as the Kairos document declares,

<sup>25</sup> Beverley W. Harrison, “The Power of Anger and the Work of Love,” *Making the Connections* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 18–19.

<sup>26</sup> Rodolfo Cardenal, “The Timeliness and the Challenge of the Theology of Liberation,” in *Reclaiming the Vision: Education, Liberation and Justice*, ed. Mary Grey (Southampton: LSU College, 1994), 21.

<sup>27</sup> See Kairos Document, *Kairos: A Moment of Truth* (Bethlehem, 2009)

“is a call to stand alongside the oppressed and preserve the word of God as good news for all.”<sup>28</sup>

### Conclusion—On the Open Road to Galilee

But, readers might be saying, many groups are already practising non-violent resistance in the spirit of Gandhi. The tireless work of Sabeel and groups with whom they are in touch, like human rights groups B’t Selem, Rabbis for Human Rights, ICAHD, EAPPI programmes, the many voices who are speaking out, the heroic non-violent movement that Mazin Qumsiyeh leads, will never give up, yet so far do not seem to have succeeded. If Gandhi’s example and that of other heroic activists teaches us anything, it is that relational power, the power of non-violence appears fragile in the eyes of the world. Recently in Israel, I met a young female soldier—part of a group called Musalaha—who admitted to me that she had charge of the Qalandia checkpoint I mentioned earlier. She said, “You can’t imagine how many knives we confiscate from Palestinians!” I said, “But look at the guns you yourselves confront them with!” It illustrated for me the imaginative power needed to persuade people that there can be a different way. Secondly, this is the imagination Gandhi was calling for to form an empathic understanding between hostile peoples. And there are many groups who work in this way. For example, the team at St Ethelburga’s Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, London, inspired by the work of peace activist, John Paul Lederach,<sup>29</sup> are skilled in facilitating encounters between groups of people from contemporary conflict situations.

Another approach to revisiting and transforming memory, re-casting identity so that it is not diametrically opposed to the other’s, not dissimilar to Martin Buber’s, is taken by Rabbi Michael Lerner in *Embracing Israel/Palestine*.<sup>30</sup> Lerner calls for strategies of generosity to listen and embrace “the other.” He calls for recognition that Israel suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>31</sup> This condition is traced back through centuries of persecution and suffering, the experience of homelessness of the Jews, and antisemitism culminating in the Holocaust (*Shoah*). It remains an unhealed trauma: collectively, many Israelis find it hard to think outside this box. “Survivors of trauma,” asserts Lerner, “Create relationships in which they psychically reproduce the circumstances of the original trauma.”<sup>32</sup>

The link with the recasting of memory is what is experienced by the disciples in the light of Easter, when they are invited to re-encounter Jesus on the shores of Galilee, where it all began. Here, Peter receives forgiveness and the command to love. Lerner

<sup>28</sup> “Kairos Palestine,” 6.1.

<sup>29</sup> See John Paul Lederach, *The Journey Toward Reconciliation* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1999); *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Michael Lerner, *Embracing Israel/Palestine: A Strategy to Heal and Transform the Middle East* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> See Michael Lerner, *Healing Israel/Palestine: A Path to Peace and Reconciliation* (Berkeley: Tikun Books, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Lerner, *Embracing Israel/Palestine*, 207–8.

recognizes the injustice inflicted on Palestinians and calls upon Israelis to recognize the terrible injustice of what they are doing. At every point in history when a decisive action was taken, *it might have been otherwise*. Jewish settlers could have recognized the rights of indigenous peoples. Palestinians might have had some sympathy for post-holocaust survivors and what now seems like a pathological need for security on the part of the Israelis. The point now is to understand that reconciliation begins with a movement of the heart and the transforming of consciousness, if we are to build a culture/political movement that helps people believe in the possibility of a world of love—that Gandhi also dreamed of. Yes, truth-telling is hard, as Gandhi knew, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote, “It has grave consequences for one’s life and reputation. It stretches one’s faith, one’s capacity to love, and pushes hope to the limit.... No-one takes up this work on a do-gooder’s whim. It is not a choice. One feels compelled into it.”<sup>33</sup>

Concretely, this means many tasks and they are urgent. First, being in solidarity with the work and commitment of ordinary people—so has it ever been with Liberation Theology. A consequence of this is working for the BDS campaign—Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions—because this is what the Palestinian people have asked us to do. Secondly, engaging in reading the Bible differently means seeking interpretations of difficult texts which are empowering for both peoples of the land. Thirdly, engaging with justice-seeking Jewish people<sup>34</sup> in the search for a solution to the conflict is crucial; difficult issues like the different meanings of “chosen-ness,” “election,” “superiority” and the image of God behind all these notions need tackling as a joint theological project between Christians and Jews. Fourthly, Christian Zionism’s fundamentalist reading of Scripture must be challenged in order to awaken a vision of the just sharing of the land. And finally, the vision of non-violence as the way to peaceful cooperation through a transformed Easter consciousness needs to be wholeheartedly embraced. The coming of the Kingdom is a dream shared. To make this real—peace in the Bible lands—“leaders need to have a vision, to have faith in that vision, and to be able to rally the people to share that faith.”<sup>35</sup>

As Gandhi said:

Europe has disapproved Christ. Through ignorance it has disregarded Christ’s pure way of life. Many Christs will have to offer themselves as sacrifices at the terrible altar of Europe, and then only will realization dawn on that continent. But Jesus will always be the first among these. He has

<sup>33</sup> Desmond Tutu, “Realizing God’s Dream for the Holy Land,” *Boston Globe*, Oct 26, 2007, [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial\\_opinion/oped/articles/2007/10/26/realizing\\_gods\\_dream\\_for\\_the\\_holy\\_land/](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2007/10/26/realizing_gods_dream_for_the_holy_land/).

<sup>34</sup> By “justice-seeking Jewish people” I refer to many groups in Israel like Rabbis for Human Rights, Gush Shalom, B’tselem, Machsom Watch, and globally to the many Jewish people who are committed to the state of Israel but also respect the human rights of Palestinians.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

been the sower of the seed and his will therefore be the credit for raising the harvest.<sup>36</sup>

The way of revenge and violence has prolonged the conflict into its sixth decade, even exacerbating it to a more bitter level. Is it stretching the bounds of possibilities that at this juncture the non-violent vision of Gandhi and Jesus could offer a peaceful and hopeful future for the Bible Lands, when so many people are tempted to give up any such possibility?

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<sup>36</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, "Satyagraha—Non-violent Resistance," in Iyer, ed., *Essential Writings*, 311.