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Theological Reflection on the State of Israel After 40 years¹

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Introduction

By way of an introduction, I would like to point to two important factors which make this presentation important for me:

1. As I worked on this lecture, I could not extricate myself from what is going on around me with my people on the West Bank and in Gaza. The events of the last ten weeks cannot be taken lightly. The uprising reflects the genuine outcry of about 1.4 million people for the right to self-determination. This outcry is still denied and ignored by those who are in power and who have the power to offer a solution.

2. I have lived in Israel ever since its inception in 1948. Except for the ten years which I spent in the United States as a student, I have lived in the State of Israel continuously. It seems to me that there are events in a person's life and equally in a nation's life which leave a tremendous impact which cannot be erased or forgotten. Those events or experiences can, after many years, be recalled, retold, and retraced with great precision. The same applies to certain words and sentences which have great impact on those who hear them, who can recall them after many years almost verbatim. This is the way, I believe, the Gospels were written. For the impact of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, his crucifixion, death, and resurrection were of such magnitude that they were remembered, retold, and finally written down with great accuracy and precision.

Similarly, certain events in the lives of the Jewish people have had the same impact. The tragic events of the holocaust are of that nature. They have been retraced by the survivors with incredible vividness. And then they were picked up by the Jews everywhere in the world to become a part of the people's historic memory. Millions of non-Jews all over the world have joined the Jews in insisting that such a tragedy should never again be allowed to take place.

1 This paper was delivered at the Ecumenical Fraternity, Jerusalem on 25 February, 1988.

The events of 1948 have left a similarly indelible imprint on me and on my people. At the heart of what has been called the Arab-Israeli conflict is the Palestinian problem. Israel has for the last 40 years deluded itself into thinking that its problem is really with the Arab States around it, and that once it is able to achieve peace with them (and it is only a matter of time) the conflict will be resolved. The uprising of the last ten weeks proves that the problem in its core is not the Arab States versus Israel: it is, and will remain, the Palestinian problem. And as the holocaust has become and will continue to be for the Jews that great central event in their history which transformed their being and formed their identity, so it is with the Palestinians and the events of 1948. The Palestinian problem of 1948 which led to the sufferings of the Palestinians – their uprooting, dehumanization, oppression, and the denial of their human rights – have become the great central events which occupy their hearts and minds and has formed their self-identity. As the holocaust lives vividly in the historic memory of the Jewish people, so the tragedy of Palestine lives vividly in the historic memory of the Palestinian people. For example, I can recall with great detail and precision how my home town Beisan (Bet Shaen today) was occupied by the Jews on Wednesday, 12 May, 1948. No battle was fought over Beisan. The town was occupied by the Jews without any resistance. Some of the inhabitants fled out of fear. Many of us, however, stayed in our houses with nowhere to go. Fourteen days later we were ordered at gun point to leave. We were assured that it would only be for a few days and then we would return. My father begged to stay. He was told, 'If you don't get out we will kill you'. We left Beisan with only our clothes which we had on, never to return to it again.

Some Christian and Jewish scholars have asked, can theology be the same after the holocaust? I ask, can theology be the same after *any* great human tragedy when humans are reduced to less than what God has created them to be?

So the past of 40 years ago and the present of the last ten weeks, which make the 40 years seem only 40 days, make this theological reflection profoundly relevant. It stems out of a Palestinian's experience of the State of Israel.

Theological Principles

There are three significant theological principles which undergird this reflection. I do not want to spell them out in great detail, but I would like to emphasize their importance to me.

1. God's unfailing involvement in history

God has never isolated himself from history. Creation itself expresses God's love and concern. God is very near to us. He is accessible. From a Christian point of view, the ultimate event that illustrates God's concern and involvement in history is the Incarnation. God in Christ and through

the Holy Spirit is active in the affairs of people: saving, leading, guiding, encouraging, comforting, warning, and so on.

God's involvement does not minimize man's free will and responsibility in and over the created order. Man has a moral responsibility and God holds us accountable.

2. God's unfailing demand for justice

God demands justice in the world. This demand applies to and for all people everywhere and throughout all history. Abraham Heschel called 'righteousness' as 'God's stake in human history'. In Isaiah 28:17 we read that justice is God's measuring line and righteousness is his plumb line. Because God is a God of justice, he takes his unconditional stand with the oppressed and the neglected, the marginalized and the poor. God will not give up nor will he gloss over injustice. This principle applies to all people whether they know God or not. It is one of God's foundational principles for this universe. He will not abandon it.

3. God's inclusive character

In the development of man's knowledge of God, it has become evident that God has no favourite people or nation. To be 'chosen' is not to be a 'favourite'. He is inclusive in character. In the biblical tradition this fact was not easily discernible. It grew gradually until it found greater clarity in the prophets and found its culmination in the Gospels. I believe, therefore, that God does not look on one nation to prefer it over another. He does not employ two standards of judgment. He causes rain to fall equally on the just and the unjust, on the good and the bad alike.

Reflections

With these principles constituting the basis for my theological reflection, I want to go on to reflect on three areas which I have observed and experienced in my life in the State of Israel over the last 40 years.

1. Israel, Jesus, and Israel's Western friends:

By any standard of measurement, the physical development and progress of the State of Israel is undoubtedly phenomenal: the rapid creation and growth of new towns, new industry, and modern technology. This, I am sure, has been and is to most Jews the focus of their pride and joy: a vibrant State, pulsating with life and vigour. Most of the progress and development, however, have been the result of billions of dollars which Israel has received in aid from outside. Even so, one could not help but be filled with great admiration of this modern state and its accomplishment, if it were not for one problem that lies at the core of its foundation, and continues to haunt and menace it: the Palestinian problem. For those who do not recognize this problem; Israel must seem a wonderful place.

Among other radical effects, the creation of the State has given rise to a number of interesting phenomena in the relation of Jews and Christians.

(a) Some Jews in Israel (mostly of western origin) have become free enough in and within themselves to be able to take a new look at Jesus. They are few in number, but their re-thinking is worth noting. Much more needs to be done to dispel the myths, blunders, and falsifications which Jews have created against Jesus throughout the centuries. What has been done, to the best of my knowledge has not really filtered down to the grassroots of Israeli society. Although many western Christians feel a great affinity with Jews and Judaism, and engage in constant dialogue with them, the general and acceptable line of most Jews is that Judaism is basically closer to Islam than to Christianity. This was articulated publicly in an article on 12 September, 1985, in *Hamtzsan* when the director of the Department of Religious Education in the Ministry of Education, Yacoub Hadain, announced that Jews have more things in common with Muslims than with Christians. Muslims believe in one God like the Jews while Christians believe in the Trinity, ie, Father, Mother, and Holy Spirit.¹ So much more needs to be done to break the stereotype and falsification of the Christian faith.

On 16 March, 1987, the *Jerusalem Post* reported that the Education Ministry had issued an order prohibiting schools from using Bibles containing both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures (Old and New Testaments). Mati Dagan, Deputy Director of Religious Education Division in the Ministry said that the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures should not be taught as if they were equal, because the Hebrew Scriptures come from God and the Christian Scriptures were written by human beings. There is, I am afraid, a deep seated hatred of Christianity lying just under the surface. I emphasize this because the Christian Church, since the holocaust, has been doing a lot to undo the great damage and harm which Western Christians have perpetrated against the Jews. If anti-Semitism is by definition an irresponsible fear and hatred of the Jews, then 'anti-crossism' is by definition an irresponsible fear and hatred of Christians. There is very deep evidence of this in history and in the Talmud.

(b) This leads me to say more about Christian-Jewish dialogue. It has brought much in the relationship between Jews and Christians – mainly of Western extraction. I note this as a phenomenon without delving into how far or how deep this journey has taken the two sides. As an observer and sometimes a member of the Consultation of the Church and the Jewish People of the World Council of Churches I can vouch for the importance of such a relationship of dialogue.

Undoubtedly, the existence of the State of Israel has helped Jews to meet their Western Christian counterparts as equals and to confront them on issues of historical as well as of a theological nature. In many instances past events and theologies were looked at in a fresh way, going much further than simply *understanding* them in their proper historical contexts to reject them as shameful relics of past histories.

1 Sic (ed.).

It is very interesting to note that such dialogue groups have never been too successful in attracting the participation of indigenous Christian Arabs. The presence of the Arab partner makes the Jews uncomfortable. The basis of dialogue between Jews and Western Christians since the creation of the state has been three-fold: anti-semitism, the holocaust, and the existence of the State of Israel. Once the Western Christian accepts this, dialogue is possible. For the Palestinian Christians an additional basis for any dialogue is the admission that injustice has been done to the Palestinians by the Jews, and the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination and the creation of their own state. While these remain denied, the presence of the Palestinian Christians, therefore, only keeps pulling the dialogue back to its unacknowledged basic referent: the Palestinian problem. So their presence is not genuinely desired. Moreover, it is not only the Jews who seem uncomfortable in such meetings; the expatriate Christians are equally uncomfortable. Their primary aim is a Christian-Jewish theological dialogue unhampered by any other issue. The presence of these indigenous Palestinians would introduce a whole new agenda these westerners are not ready for, and which does not really constitute a priority for them. It would serve their purpose well, therefore, if along their journey of dialogue, they can find a docile and innocuous Palestinian Christian who will not disturb their agenda while making them look inclusive.

As a result of these interactions of Western Christians and Western Jews, a new Christian theology has risen. With it has arisen a growing number of Western Christian Zionists who seem to be totally dedicated to dialogue and to the support of the State of Israel.

(c) There is, however, at the other end of the theological spectrum, another group which has risen to the defence and support of Israel – the Christian so-called Fundamentalists. These self-styled Evangelicals have seen in Israel the fulfilment of their eschatological interpretation of certain texts in the Scriptures. The existence of the State fits in with the concept of the end of times and the Second Coming of Christ. Some in Israel may consider them useful friends both financially and psychologically, but those in Israel who know something about what these fundamentalists actually believe would, I am sure, abhor and reject them. As part of their biblical understanding of the last events in history is the annihilation of two thirds of the Jews and the Christianization of the last one third.

As a Palestinian Christian, I see these two groups of Western Christians as dangerous and to be rejected *for the sake of the integrity of the Jews*.

The first makes itself the champion of the state of Israel and removes Israelis out of the general plan of God in history by relegating them to a special and unique role. The other sees the state of Israel as a mere instrument fulfilling God's purpose in history. The first group puts Israel on the pedestal above all others – a very dangerous position for the Jews to be in. The other group makes of Israel a tool in a scheme (a means to an end), victims to accomplish an end – an equally dangerous position.

Contrary to appearances, the best friends of Israel are those who insist on its right to exist but who also possess the freedom and inner integrity to be critical as well as supportive as the occasion arises. Any blind support to Israel, or as a matter of fact to any group of people or any ideology, is dangerous and in the end counter-productive for those receiving such support.

2. *Israel, Power and Justice*

For centuries many Jews in the world have held that they have a vocation to suffering. Judah Ha Levi wrote in the 12th century that Israel, the heart of humanity, the suffering servant, bears the ills of all, and by this very fact allows God to reveal himself on earth. One of the great rabbinic dicta was 'Be of the persecuted rather than of the persecutors' (*Baba Kamma* 93a). Sholem Asch cried, 'God be thanked, that the nations have not given my people the opportunity to commit against others the crimes which have been committed against it'. The creation of the State has changed all of this. Menahem Begin has boastfully declared, 'We fight, therefore we are. Out of blood, fire, tears and ashes, a new specimen of human being was born, a specimen completely unknown to the world for over eighteen hundred years – the fighting Jew'.

Since 1948 the fighting Jew has become a powerful entity in the state of Israel. When I reflect on the last 40 years, *power* stands out above everything else as the one ingredient which has been held as essential for the continued existence of the State. More specifically it is *military* power that we are talking about.

Theologically and biblically speaking, God is the God of power and might. He is also the God of justice. In God, justice and power are in full harmony and unity. God, who is the source of all power, gives power to humans in order to fulfill his purpose for justice and peace in the world. Power is, therefore, entrusted by God to people; but like all other trusts, it can be either used responsibly or abused terribly. It can carry with it a blessing or it can become a curse. Such consequences are not inherent in power itself but in the sinful human condition that puts power to responsible use. Power can be used to maintain justice, peace, and order in society, or it can destroy it utterly. At its worst, power can be a 'poison which blinds the eyes of moral insight and lames the will of moral purpose'.¹

The possession of power by humans does not necessarily create or guarantee justice. It does in God. For human beings, it is not power that makes justice; justice itself is inherently powerful. This world, contrary to appearances, is governed by justice. This is so because God would not allow it otherwise, and in God both justice and power are harmonized. What is true of God regarding justice and power, however, is certainly not true of human beings. It is very easy for power to corrupt, intoxicate, and deceive humans. A good example is found in the 'woe' sayings of Micah 2:1-5. Micah is addressing the powerful elite of Judah's society who had come to see their power as giving them the right to act as they desired. 'The

1 Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Scribners, New York 1960, p 6.

source of their dreams is opportunity created by their power. Might has become their right. . . .'

Woe to those who devise wickedness
and work evil upon their beds!
When the morning dawns, they perform it,
because it is in the power of their hand.
They covet fields, and seize them;
and houses, and take them;
they oppress a man and his house,
a man and his inheritance.

The words of Micah seem remarkably relevant to our own situation today and to our experience with Israel throughout these last 40 years. Powerful modern Israel has been able to carry out, with exact precision, what Micah was warning his audience against doing. Under the guise of such slogans as national security or national interest, all kinds of injustice have been committed. One can point to a warning in the wisdom literature that illustrates this tendency:

Do not withhold good from those who have a right to it, because it lies in your power to do so. (Prov. 3:27)

This verse brings out the extent of the intoxicating effect of power on people. On the one hand, Jews, I am sure, agree that justice is much better for them than injustice; on the other hand, once in a position of power their sense of justice becomes clouded. As one put it, 'What is better for us in our powerlessness is not necessarily better for others when we are powerful'.¹ It is, therefore, part of the tragedy of the human predicament that justice is not usually given but almost always exacted. The powerful refuse to render justice, and power has to be challenged by power rather than by moral or rational persuasion. And if there is no power to match the power of the powerful and redress the wrong, injustice tends to be perpetuated and intensified.

I believe that Israel has fallen prey to the deception of power. I would like to highlight two areas:

(a) The first is what Reinhold Niebuhr has called 'the limitation of the human mind and imagination, the inability of human beings to transcend their own interests. . . .' Human nature is such that, while it is conceivable for persons to consider the rights and needs of their families, relatives, and friends, 'there are definite limits in the capacity of ordinary mortals which makes it impossible for them to grant to others what they claim for themselves'.² Power becomes a strong weapon for personal or national gain without any consideration for the rights of others. Self-interest or national interest blind reason and logic.

This is epitomized in the Arab-Israeli conflict over the last 40 years. Many western Jews have been in the vanguard of the struggle for human rights in the United States. This fact has been seen as stemming from the rich heritage of Judaism and rooted in the ethical teachings of the prophets. Paradoxically, however, many of them have lacked the capacity to discern

1 R. B. Coote, *Amos among the Prophets*, Fortress, Philadelphia 1981, p 39.

2 Niebuhr, op. cit. p 29.

acts of injustice by the state of Israel. Once the injustices are mentioned, they feel threatened and become defensive. They are quick to rationalize and justify those acts of injustice which they would have readily condemned had they been done by any party other than the state of Israel. (I am happy to say that we have seen some real exceptions to this).

One common realisation is to point out the great achievements of the state of Israel in raising the educational and economic standards of its Arab citizens and those of the occupied territories. 'The Arabs have never had it so good,' it is usually claimed. Israel's generosity and benevolence are supposed to be adequate compensation for any inconvenience or injustice which the Arabs feel. The fallacy of this principle lies in the old dictum, 'a slave with a full belly is still a slave'. People who have suffered from injustice look for justice rather than a higher standard of living.

It is part of the deception of power that Israel is deluded into believing that through benevolence it could lay the right foundation for harmonious relations with the people it rules. What the Palestinians really need is not benevolence but a sense of justice. A sense of justice is 'the product of the mind and not of the heart. It is the result of reason's insistence upon consistency'. However, the ability of reason to be consistent becomes totally inhibited by the intoxication and deception of power. It is far easier for repressive governments and military regimes to resort to philanthropy than to justice. Sympathy and philanthropy in such cases reveal the underlying hypocrisy. The guiding factor is basically the self-interest or national interest of the powerful and their unwillingness to render justice to others. *National interest can become so strong that neither democracy nor religion can be strong enough to guarantee the proper control of power when governments want to pursue their unjust ambitions.*

The worst examples of this kind occur when the controlling power pursues an absolute goal. The absolute ideal for many Zionists in Israel is the achieving of a Greater Israel. Conversely, for many Palestinians it is the regaining of the whole of Palestine. The achievement of such an absolute cannot be effected except through the use of force. This would risk the lives of thousands of people while gambling for the attainment of an absolute. Justice has no place in such ambitions, and invariably military power will take over, and the consequences of that will be unbearable tyrannies and cruelties. When the end in view is an absolute, no questions are raised about the means, as long as they lead to the end. Moral and ethical principles are ignored so long as the end is guaranteed.

Some people will argue that such extremism could be checked only by the development of rationality and the growth of a religiously inspired goodwill. The situation in the West Bank and Gaza which is prompted, in part, by the religious zeal of those in power does not substantiate such a theory. The pursuit of the absolute goal negates the possibility of bringing this fanaticism under the dominion of reason or conscience. The powers of force and coercion are the only instruments that can achieve the ideal. In such cases justice is sacrificed on the altar of force and becomes power's first victim.

(b) The second area I want to highlight is very similar to the first. It has to do with the ability of power to deceive us into believing that our desire for a life of security is possible only if we are able to subjugate and control others. Humans are unlike other creatures. In nature one can observe that animals kill when they are hungry and fight or run when they are in danger, but the human impulse for self-preservation can so easily be transmuted and converted into the desire for self-aggrandizement. The will-to-live becomes transmuted into the will-to-power.

The understandably strong will-to-live of the Jews, after centuries of dispersion, has found expression in the creation of the state of Israel. Some would attribute such a phenomenon to the instinct of survival in human beings. This survival instinct, however, has the propensity to develop imperialistic ambitions. Its defensive armour becomes aggressive armour. Its will-to-live becomes its will-to-power. The human spirit experiences a curious mixture of the fear of extinction and the love of power. Once power is attained, the individual or group finds itself in a sensitive position because it believes that its security can be maintained only by the extension of its power. This is translated into the acquisition of new territory and the subjugation of its inhabitants. In this way, temporary peace might be achieved but is always an uneasy and shaky peace, because it is an unjust peace. It has not been attained by the implementation of justice but imposed by the power of the stronger party. It can last only until those who are weak become powerful enough to challenge that power. As Niebuhr put it, 'The same power that prompts the fear that prevents immediate action, also creates the mounting hatred which guarantees ultimate rebellion'.¹ Therefore, the danger of impending conflict keeps looming continuously ahead.

In summary, it is important to re-emphasize the theological dimension of the extent of the ability of power to deceive and to delude. People who have power, and wield it whenever they choose, usually confuse themselves with God. Theologically speaking, this becomes the greater danger and menace in the abuse of power to those who wield it. It is idolatry in its starkest form, and human beings can so easily fall prey to this kind of idolatry. It is, therefore, my duty as a Christian not only to call attention to this basic danger but to expose its underlying fallacies. The ambiguity, deception, and corruption of power must be exposed because power becomes a god that is worshipped and obeyed. Furthermore, the demands of power escalate daily. We see this here in the way that the occupying power has to increase its coercive power in order to maintain control. The god of power increases its demands and eventually heaps destruction on its user.

It is my contention that when such dangers have been recognized and faced squarely, we can hope that positive moves can be made to achieve justice for all the inhabitants of our area, including justice for the Palestinians, and that people will be able to live together in reasonable harmony because power will be used as little as possible and as non-violently as

1 Ibid., p 19.

possible. Only thus can the destruction of millions, and the collapse of whatever justice and peace which has been achieved, be prevented.

3. Israel and the Land

From the point of view of an Israeli Arab the creation of the state of Israel has not solved the Jewish problem which I recognize as serious and vital. The two outstanding menaces for the Jews have been assimilation and anti-semitism. Neither of those has really been solved. In an article in 1986, Professor Roberto of the Hebrew University pointed out three worrying factors for the Jews, namely, their low birth rate; mixed marriages (50% of all Jewish marriages are mixed); and assimilation. Equally, anti-semitism has not subsided. The new factor in anti-semitism today is the fact that it is promoted and provoked by Israel itself. Israel cannot blame the world for it. Israel cannot intimidate people and generate in them bitterness and hatred and at the same time hope to reap peace and understanding.

After forty years, less than a quarter of the Jews of the world live in Israel today. Their presence in the Land has not solved either of their two great problems. Nor has it given Israel a greater sense of peace and security. Israel has failed to create peace with its neighbours. It is perceived by many people in the world as a land-hungry warmonger.

For me, the whole issue of the land must begin by a theological discussion on the nature of God, who God is and what God is like. Does God's character change? If human nature in its sinfulness remains what it has been all along, would it not follow that God's character and nature do not change? No, God does not change. He was not bad yesterday and good today! God's character or nature of goodness, love, mercy, righteousness, and justice, is totally consistent.

The biblical heritage offers ample evidence of how people's understanding of God and of the Land had to be shattered. Early in their history, the Israelites thought that God was confined to the borders of the Land, that he did not operate outside it. It was difficult for them to conceive how they could pray to God in a strange land, outside what they thought of as God's homeland. This narrow concept of God persisted in spite of the strong words of Amos who expressed a broad conception of God. Indeed for Amos, God was active outside the Land. He had intimate knowledge and grave concern for what was going on in the neighbouring countries – Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, as well as Judah and Israel. The narrow, land-bound concept of God was finally shattered by the Babylonian captivity. There, the Israelites had to learn that God is not confined to this land.

In fact some of the great events, if not the most important events, in the ancient Israelites' history took place outside the boundaries of the Land: the Exodus, the giving of the covenant, and the giving of the Torah. The greatest prophet of Judaism, Moses, never set foot in the Land. The great Babylonian Talmud was put together outside the Land. Among the greatest prophets were prophets like Isaiah of the Exile who prophesied outside the

Land. Jeremiah finished his ministry in Egypt. Ezekiel finished his ministry in Babylon. One can go on and on to show from the biblical material how often limited, wrong, and narrow people's understanding of God has been. It had been tribal and provincial. It took them hundreds of years to realize that he is the God of the whole world; that he is not simply the greatest God among the other gods, and he is not exclusively *their* God: he is the only true God and he is the God of the whole world. Throughout their history the people kept fluctuating between holding a narrower and a broader concept of God, between acknowledging an inclusive or exclusive character of God. Indeed, one can point to different strands within the biblical material which emphasize one or the other: the nationalistic or the universalistic concept of God.

For me, there is no doubt that the universalistic concept of God, which has developed in spite of the resistance which it encountered, is the higher concept of God. I say this not because it suits my Palestinian purpose, but because it is the only worthy concept of God – the true God. It fits the nature of God, the God who is the God of all, just in all his ways, inclusive in his nature. One cannot deny the existence of the nationalistic strand within the Hebrew Scriptures, but one can point to the development of a strong universalistic trend reflected in the work of Isaiah of the exile and the book of Jonah.

The state of Israel has to choose. Or has it already chosen the nationalistic trend? Obsession with the Land has proven throughout ancient Jewish history a curse and a holocaust to the Jews. For it is not the Land which carries a blessing to the people but faithfulness to the God of justice, righteousness, and mercy. This Land has been singled out as host to great events in history, but I do not believe that it is more holy than other lands. If God has done great things here, God has done great things everywhere. If God loves this land and its peoples, that is but a sign – a sacrament – that God loves each and every land and its peoples. The whole earth is the Lord's. This is all God's world. The whole world should be holy. It is all sacramental. When God told Moses to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground, it was in Sinai and not in Canaan (*Eretz Yisrael*). I return to my insistence that, theologically speaking, what is at stake today in the political conflict over the land of the West Bank and Gaza is nothing less than the way we understand the nature of God.

History teaches us that whoever puts his heart and mind in this Land will be cursed and the Land will vomit him out; witness the experience of the Crusaders, Christians who fell into this trap. The Land can, however, become holy to those who put their trust in the God of the whole Universe and whose nature does not change – a God of justice for all. The God who desires goodness and mercy for all people living in this and every land.

Some biblical scholars have been working on a new understanding of the pattern or shape of some biblical poetry which they believe occurs frequently in the prophetic literature known as 'chiasmus' or 'inverted parallelism'.

They observe certain literary patterns in some of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures where the theme of the lines or stanzas are repeated later in the text in an inverted order. One of these texts is Isaiah 43:25-44:8. I have been told by a friend, Dr. Kenneth Bailey, a biblical scholar who has been working on this for the last ten years, that this great exilic prophet whom we call Isaiah of the exile arrived at the remarkable discovery that the promise of God to the people after the exile is not about land and nationhood but about the outpouring of God's Spirit on the people. Isaiah's great theological breakthrough lies in his realization that it was no more the Land that was significant; God's concern is with the people on whom God's Spirit has been outpoured. It is this fact which makes sense of another striking fact: that the great prophets were never hesitant or reluctant to tell the people that they can lose the Land.

What I am trying to say is this: if the state of Israel clings to this obsession with the Land, it will only heap destruction on itself and on all the people living in this land. The blessing will only come when Israel transcends the narrow concept of a nationalistic God and arrives at the more universalistic concept of God. For its own survival, Israel and Jewry must recognize that this God is the God of the whole universe who loves and cares for all peoples, the God who desires justice and mercy. Their and our salvation in the here and now lies in acknowledging the truth of Micah's words: 'He has showed you, O man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'. (6:8)

Conclusion

I believe that the last 40 years have made many Palestinians accept the existence of the state of Israel and are willing to live with it. Does Israel accept the legitimacy of the rights and needs of the Palestinians for their own state? This is the crux of the matter. If Israel is genuinely seeking peace with security, it will have to look to the Palestinians. Put bluntly, only the Palestinians can give Israel security. I believe they want to do it. Likewise if the Palestinians want peace with justice I believe that only Israel can give it to them.

If this longed for peace, security, and justice is to be achieved for *either* people, for *both* peoples, many Israeli attitudes towards the Palestinians must change. In the words of the Preamble to the UNESCO constitution, 'Since war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed'.

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