

Churches, and others, concerned with issues of peace and justice in Israel/Palestine, have been caught up for years in the two-state paradigm and the Oslo framework. As such, they were paralyzed from offering any principled critique of Zionism, or Palestinian nationalism, for that matter. They were forced to avoid creative solutions or suggestions, or actions that ran counter to the “conventional wisdom” but instead were encouraged to “give peace a chance” by working within the parameters that were considered “the only game in town”. They refrained from attacking the PA, and treated it as a “state in the making” and followed its lead in their advocacy work, so that when the PA fell out with Hamas, they neglected any contacts with Hamas, and did not engage with it in any way, and in fact ignored all of Gaza and its population, because it was not on the forefront of the PA’s agenda. They also demonized the settlers, and avoided contacts or dialogue with them, even though they were essential stakeholders. They maintained the false hope that the removal of Netanyahu and the return of Labor to power (or some US President who is willing to pressure Israel and further Labor’s agenda) would bring peace – even as Labor’s electoral power fell to 5th place, and their rhetoric today more closely resembles Likud’s .

Now, however, after 50 years of the Occupation, the settlement movement has effectively foreclosed any possibility of a two-state solution. Blatant statements coming from Israel make it clear that it will never countenance a Palestinian State in anything but name and that there is absolutely no prospect at all of dismantling the Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. The latest statements from Washington about the removal of Jerusalem from the agenda have also helped seal the fate of the two state solution, and those concerned with peace and justice are now forced to lift their noses out of the sand and recognize the realities on the ground and drop the language and framework of Oslo and the two-state solution, which has become no longer a realistic organizing vision, but a useful alibi for continued and permanent oppression.

The reality today is that in the whole of historic Palestine there is today only one state that controls all aspects of life and exercises effective sovereignty over all the area; its borders, airspace subterranean waters, economy, currency, imports, exports, visas and residency rights, and every other aspect of life. In that area two populations reside: Jews, who are the lords and masters, with clear rights and privileges, and Arabs, who are fragmented into 5 separate population categories and granted various degrees of arrangements at the sole discretion and for the benefit of the dominant group. Many

have resigned themselves to limiting their peace advocacy to dealing with only one of these groups (West Bankers, primarily in Areas A and B of the West Bank,) while neglecting the other Palestinians : Gazans, East Jerusalemites, Israeli Arabs and Refugees in exile. Each of these groups have suffered from the Zionist program, but each group has been forced to deal with a different and separate set of problems in dealing with the Zionist enterprise. To ignore them, while claiming to deal with Israel/Palestine is no longer tenable.

What this means is that the pursuit of a two state solution, having been rendered ineffective requires a new approach, which may not be as easily communicated as a unifying theme as was the “two-state solution”. It may require that churches abandon the arrogant attempt to provide a “solution” and defend it within the confines of the power politics in the region, but rather to revert to the principles and values that led us to pay any attention to this conflict in the first place. These are values and principles of a deeply held faith and worldview, which are universal and applicable everywhere, and which we bring to this conflict as an expression of our faith and obedience, and witness, regardless of how “effective’ or “realistic’ it may be judged by the pundits and analysts. We can also “think out of the box” and challenge conventional wisdom. This view substitutes a grand political compromise, such as the two-state solution, with a reiteration of universal principles. A list of such principles, with their implications for the Israeli Arab conflict may be listed as follows:

1. Rejection of Violence and War as a solution to the problem.

As Christians, we need to point to Christ’s teachings on this subject, and tell both sides that violence is not the answer. This means that while we would urge Palestinians towards nonviolence, we should also urge Israelis against relying on weapons to achieve “security”. It means we would be skeptical of every arms deal, every military incursion, and condemning every use or reliance on nuclear, WMD, targeted assassinations, military incursions, as we would of armed struggle, and armed resistance to the occupation. It means being peacemakers, not just “peace keepers” supporting oppressive status quos.

2. Rejection of all forms of racism and discrimination.

This means an unwavering battle against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, but equally, a rejection of all laws and practices that favor Jews and discriminate

against Arabs in Israel as well as the occupied territories. It requires a rethinking of the very idea of a “Jewish state” that was initially offered as a response to anti-Jewish discrimination in Europe, but manifested itself as a settler colonial movement against the native Palestinians. To assert the rights of Jewish Israelis to live and thrive in Palestine without accepting the “right” to exist of a Jewish state becomes the new challenge. In the meanwhile, all forms of discrimination and racism in whatever political formula being suggested should be challenged and not tolerated. Equality is an essential ingredient arising out of our own theology and beliefs.

3. Assertion of Human Rights and dignity.

We assert those universal rights as part of our belief that humans are made in the image of God and deserve such rights and dignity, and not as a compromise or quid pro quo for the oppressed agreeing to accept and give ‘security’ to the other side. We assert those rights for all, and in all areas of the world.

4. Reliance on International Law, international institutions and strengthening UN and other bodies over narrow nationalist interests.

Praying for Peace includes supporting those mechanisms that serve all countries, just as we support Conventions against Global Warming, human trafficking, child labor and the like, and encourage international cooperation on health, education, gender equality. In Israel/Palestine, we also should promote and support greater reliance on international law, the end to the illegal siege on Gaza, the use of prohibited weapons (whether phosphorous bombs, explosive dum dum bullets, or assassination drones) as well as collective punishment, attacks on civilian targets.

5. We should refrain from demonizing and dehumanizing others.

This includes right wing settlers, as well as Hamas militants, and other groups that have been declares “terrorist” and illegal by the current “war on terrorism”. All are God’s children, and if we seek peace, we need to talk to all of them.

I am sure there are other steps and positions we can name that arise out of our theological perspectives. My point is that this is an opportune moment to do this type of thinking, and analysis and not be satisfied with approaches that have failed so far.