

RECLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE HOLY LAND AND THE IMPERATIVE OF INTERFAITH SOLIDARITY TO RESIST EMPIRE: A PHILIPPINE THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO *KAIROS* PALESTINE

Introduction:

'The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived'. This is *kairos* time for the churches and faith communities in the Philippines to stand on the side of what is true and just on the Palestinian question.

We have gathered as an interfaith, multisectoral, ecumenical community for the Philippine Interfaith Solidarity Consultation Workshop on Kairos Palestine to reflect theologically - 'from the heart of Palestinian suffering', on the realities of our time, our country, and our world.

Our response to the Kairos Palestine document (2009) springs from our theologies and spiritualities formed by our continuing participation in the struggles of our people. We have in the past '[laid] bare the historical and political roots of the crisis in our world'; we have affirmed the faith of the poor and the oppressed'; 'condemned the sin of those who oppress, exploit, persecute and kill people' and called for the 'conversion of those who have strayed from the truth of our [respective faith communities] and commitment'. Then, we saw ourselves as walking our own 'road to Damascus (1989)' - seizing the moment and seeking conversion. Now we see ourselves as companions to our Palestinian brothers and sisters as they live this - their *kairos*, their appointed time. Now, too, is the time for the churches and faith communities all over the globe to be one with the Palestinian people in their struggle for justice, freedom and the fuller life.

1. Palestine, the Empire, and Our People's Struggles

- 1.1 The realities in Palestine reflect how much the empire is at work in our world today [By 'empire' we mean 'the combined economic, military, political, and cultural domination by a powerful state, assisted by satellite states and aided by local elites of dominated countries, to advance its own interests on a global scale. United States military dominance, conjointly with transnational corporate power, makes up the heart of today's empire']
- 1.2 The prolonged Palestinian crisis demonstrates the sophistication with which the empire has been casting its deathly shadow on every nook and cranny of this planet. This included the empires' cooptation of religious language; its forming a theological language for conquest and occupation; its ability to build a religious' consensus for silence if not support for crusader religious discourse. For many decades now, the occupation has thrived on the perverted militance and neo-crusader ethos of right wing Christianity, and on the macabre silence of much of the world's religions.
- 1.3 Secondly, the Palestinian situation mirrors the many faces of suffering in our world today. The tentacles of the empire move unrestrained causing much destitution and death from Palestine to the Sulu isles. Empire-sponsored occupation of other people's lands goes with other names in other areas. They are called 'neo-colonialism', 'strong republic', 'national security state', 'democratization', etc.
- 1.4 Thirdly, the Palestinian people's struggle amplifies the faith, hope, and love of resisting peoples and nations of the world. The peoples of the world are resisting all forms of aggression and domination. Palestine, being at the center of the

world, historically, culturally, and geopolitically, is central to the many narratives of national liberation. For this reason solidarity around the Palestinian people's struggle is crucial to the formation of a truly global network for emancipatory politics.

2. The Good News of the Holy Land.

- 2.1 Since the *Nakba*, and the creation of the Jewish state in Palestinian land, darkness has descended not only upon the land but to the global community as well. In its indifference and apathy if not outright culpability, the international community has participated in this colossal postwar crime. The faith communities and the churches, in particular, are doubly culpable for their silence and even rationalization and direct support of the Zionist cause.
- 2.2 The holy land was promised as a sanctuary of the poor and oppressed. The injustices of occupation and apartheid being inflicted by the Jewish state against the people of Palestine defy divine mandate as well as defile the divine historic economy of the holy land.
- 2.3 Moreover, biblical Israel's appointment was to become a blessing and light to the nations. Its historic mission is to proclaim the gospel of liberation and to spread the cause of freedom and peace in the world. That is the only real connection between ancient Israel and that of present-day Israel and the Church. The continuing occupation and oppression of Palestinian land and people are antithetical to the theology and missiology, the history and tradition of the 'promised land'.
- 2.4 Tragically, the Zionists' invocation of this ancient promised has been done in the same spirit and ways that roused the wrath of the Hebrew prophets and Jesus. The Palestinian resistance now stands in this prophetic tradition of reminding us how to live in justice and righteousness in the land – how to celebrate the 'holiness' and the gospel of the 'promised land'.
- 2.5 The only reality that hallows what is traditionally and historically, in religious geography, the 'holy land' is the Palestinian peoples resistance movement. It is the sole signifier that faith, hope, and love is still alive in that pit of darkness called Israeli- occupied Palestine.

3. Theologies of Occupation

- 3.1 Is there any possible religious and theological justification to the Israeli occupation of Palestine? All these Jewish, Christian, and other theologies rationalizing the occupation are built around ideologies and theopolitics of conquest and empire building. These are theologies and gospels that preach faith in walls and nuclear arsenals, hope in the sustainability of Zionist-western colonial-imperial ethos, and genocidal walled-in 'love'. Succinctly put, there is nothing theo-logical, Christian, Jewish, or Islamic, in the Israeli government defiling of the world's religious capital. God-logic is loving God and neighbor. The praxis of occupation ought be the object of our Judaeo-Christian and Islamic theological wrath. Imperial discourses masquerading as 'theologies' and 'gospels' need be exposed for what they are: theologies and gospels that feast on death.
- 3.2 Christian fundamentalism's crusader theology allied with Zionist interest must be exposed for what it is, an anti-biblical, anti-Christian theology that does nothing but instigate and perpetuate a theo-praxis of unrestrained genocidal

violence. Christian fundamentalism continues to construct among its vast constituency a god-logic that easily buys on the crusader idea of a clash of civilizations – and the need for it to take place in 'Megiddo', including the latter's spatial appropriations in places like Muslim Mindanao. It has not been unusual for Fundamentalist Christians in the Philippines to lump Palestinians with the 'Moros' of Southern Philippines together. In the perverted god-logic and crusader ideology of fundamentalist Christians both Moros and Palestinians should be impaled on sharpened Christian crosses.

3.3 Also, Christian pilgrimages to the holy land are now, in many cases, occasions to indoctrinate pilgrims into embracing Christian Zionism. Through these pilgrimages, Zionist Christians are actively involved in the formation of crusader theological consciousness among participants/pilgrims. Tragically, the spiritual directors, theologians, and chaplains of these [crusader theology-forming] pilgrimages are our priests, pastors, and lay leaders.]

3.4 Not unlike the ancient Israelites who were too often rebuked by the prophets for failing to write the law in their hearts, most of contemporary Christianity have failed to grasp what is at the heart of Judaeo-Christianity, and of the 'Abrahamic' faith. We have walked unashamedly with an oppressive empire, unkindly and heartlessly walked past the victims of the violent politics of occupation, and consented to injustice with our silence. We have failed to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

4. Resistance Theology for Palestinians

4.1 The God we worship is the God who hears the cries and sees the affliction of peoples. This is the gospel of the Old Testament. It is the same Gospel the Mosaic law labored to institutionalize, and the same gospel the prophets proclaimed when the former slaves, in violation of their divine and historic mandate, became a people's oppressors.

4.2 In the fullness of time, God in Jesus Christ empowered the suffering and afflicted. The healing of the sick and lame, the giving of sight to the blind, the release of prisoners, the proclamation of God's reign are all acts of empowerment – of liberation so that the afflicted may become people again, reflecting the image of God in them and in their life-together.

4.3 The act of resistance is an act in humanization. It, too, is a process in Jewish conversion, in Christianization and Islamization. Submission to God's will in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic faiths are not empty ritualizations, they are experiences of death and resurrection to fuller life and living.

4.4 Resisting occupation is an act against violence. It is an affirmation of humanity and a celebration of freedom. It is a life-affirming and pursuing struggle that touches on the heart of divinity – in all its facets, revelations, and historico-cultural incarnations.

4.5 In the Holy Spirit, God empowers and emboldens the poor and oppressed to rise against injustice, and enable them to creatively seek for ways to realize genuine peace and freedom in their lands.

4.6 The history and continuing reality of conquest, colonization and occupation in Palestine and other parts of the globe have already terminated the theological, ethical, and moral ground of any *conquistador* missionary reading of sacred scriptures. These missionary readings include the hitherto dominant 'promised

land' theology and consciousness of the North American Christian right, the colonial missiology of still unreconstructed fundamentalist Islamophobic and racist evangelicals, and the triumphalist readings of the establishment church. Biblical hermeneutics and theological reflections need to proceed from where the heart of divinity is, from where the heart of *Yahweh/Al-lah* is: the poor, oppressed, and marginalized.

4.7 The sacred scriptures cannot anymore be invoked to justify occupation, national security state, anti-terror campaigns, strong republics. This heresy and apostasy of using God's name in vain has to stop.

5. *Kairos* for the Church Ecumenical and Global Community

5.1 Funded by the many theologies of *Kairos* from the time it was first appropriated in South Africa against apartheid, especially the word as now understood and celebrated by the resisting peoples of Palestine, we understand and reaffirm *kairos* in this interfaith solidarity workshop as a moment of realization that our silence on the Palestinian question must now end, that the Palestinians are our neighbors, and that their struggle to resist occupation and regain their full humanity is our struggle, too.

5.2 *Kairos* does mean for us the appointed time to make a stand for the truth, for justice, and for peace on the Palestinian crisis.

5.3 We affirm with the peoples of Palestine that occupation is a sin – and that the peoples of the world need to struggle as one against this sin and the vast network of evil that is being built around it.

5.4 We affirm with the peoples of Palestine that so much of our Judaeo-Christian theological heritage have been corrupted to form anti-biblical, anti-Christian imperial and occupation theologies – and that we need to expose and combat these religious ideologies and imperial theologies in our churches and faith communities.

5.5 We affirm with the peoples of Palestine that resistance is the only way out for the Palestinian people, and that the other name for resistance is the peoples' 'faith', 'hope', and 'love' at work in their condition.

5.6 Finally, *Kairos* does mean for us the resolve to commit ourselves to accompanying the Palestinian people in their struggle. This act of accompaniment: of breaking bread together with our Palestinian sisters and brothers, is our *leiturgia*, a sacramental moment of realization of our at-onement with the merciful God of Justice – bringing to us enlightenment on the demands of truth, justice, and discipleship in the world in these critical times.

In faith, in hope, and in love, we affix these our signatures during this Philippine Interfaith Solidarity Consultation Workshop on *Kairos* Palestine held at the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Quezon City, November 14-15, 2011.