

Comments on the Kairos document from churches around the world

1. Reformed Church in the Netherlands – Rev. Arie van der Plas

I welcome this document as a courageous cry from the heart of the Palestinian people. During a visit last June I have experienced the truth of what is written in 6-2: come and see. It's necessary to urge churches in Europe and all over the world to come here and see the circumstances which people have to face on a daily base. Visiting Israel and Palestine means as well: to contact brothers and sisters in faith, to speak and share with people who are united with us in faith, hope and love.

Important to me is the choice for non violence as the message of the church. It's a choice which might make you vulnerable, but at the same time a choice for the truth of gospel, trusting the way of Christ, is the way of life. Please allow me to make now some comments:

It's good that the document tries to connect theological issues with international law and every day's practice. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands has tried to do the same in the document Israel and Palestine. We have put more emphasis on the election and the special place of the people of Israel, which the Kairos document does not mention. We believe these promises are still valid, giving responsibility to this people of Israel, for the Lord is God of justice and peace.

Meanwhile we must be careful not to mix these theological issues with practical policy and international law, we can connect them, but not mix them. Yet I think they cannot be left out, seeing Bible speaks clearly about them. This way we think a bit different about 2-2-2 and 2-3, because many Protestants see a certain connection between this election and the presence of Jewish people in this land. But let me be clear: biblical texts can never be an excuse or a reason for taking away land of other people or harming their human rights and international law. This way we agree with 2-4 and condemn people who try to use the Bible for political purposes which harm other people.

I don't want to take too much of your time, so now some smaller comments: the document speaks about civil disobedience, respecting lives and trying to find ways of bridging the gaps between Palestinians and Israelites, reminding us of former times when both people lived together. The document does not speak about the ways this will be put in practice by Palestinians and what the role of Jews can be who want to struggle together with Palestinians for a just and fair peace. The document asks for economic sanctions and a boycott of Israel, but in 4-2-6 this is limited to everything produced by the occupation. These two statements must be co-ordinated.

Speaking about practical consequences for our church. Kerk in Actie has supported several projects of Palestinian people and will continue this, above all projects of reconciliation between Palestinians and Jews. On December 22 this document will be officially presented to delegates of churches in the Netherlands, followed by a seminar. You may know that there is hardly any item which evokes more emotions in our church than the issue of Israel and Palestine. Our synod has accepted a policy, recently worded in the Israel-Palestine- document. Following this policy the board of our synod will underline the support for the cry of distress to the government of Israel. Next to that the board discusses the issue how to give a practical follow-up answering the questions asked in chapter 7, which ask for responsible and sustainable enterprise. This way we will continue with you the path of faith, hope and love.

2. United Church of Canada - Rev. Dr. Bruce Gregersen

Brothers and sisters in Christ! Thank you for the invitation to be part of this historic event. On behalf of my colleague from the Presbyterian Church in Canada, I bring you greetings. Together we welcome this document as an important step in seeking a just peace in this holy land. It is important because it offers a distinctive and clear voice of Palestinian Christians. It is a call to Christians throughout the world to acknowledge that this land is not first about sacred places, but rather about living communities of faith, people who are the living stones of the gospel story in this time.

For far too long the voices of Palestinian Christian have been silenced or dismissed. This document is a clear call to the global Christian community to listen clearly and faithfully to what you are saying. Our commitment to you is to share this document with Christians throughout the world.

You have graciously asked for comment and critique. It is of course your document and needs to be honoured as that. But with your invitation, I wish to offer three thoughts. First, the heart of this document is the naming of the occupation as a sin against God and humanity. It is a significant statement. It challenges us to think through carefully the religious justifications of the occupation, in our context primarily from the way that Christian theology is used to support the continued expansion of the settlements.

But I want to offer a further thought – that the occupation is also a sin against the land. We have learned that we cannot separate humanity from the rest of creation. All parts of creation are inter-related. The destruction of olive groves for example, only one of the expressions of occupation, is not simply an economic punishment, but a savaging of the land. The tragedy and evil of the occupation is that it not only prevents both peoples, Jews and Palestinians, from living in peace, it also denies the potential of this land as a gift to the world.

Second, I want to note that the occupation is an expression of empire. The history of this land is a history of the empires of the world, and the occupation is a continuation of this tragic reality. For the church, the issue is the manner in which theology is corrupted to support the position of the powerful against the oppressed. Throughout history, Christian theology has been used to bless empires and has become complicit in great evil. The document challenges the global Christian community to reflect on the implications of its beliefs and the ways in which its teachings give license to the occupation.

Finally I want to tell you about my own church and our challenge to support the search for a just and peaceful end to the occupation. The United Church of Canada is one of Canada's largest Protestant churches with almost 10% of the Canadian population self identifying as being a member. We are a church that has been willing to openly debate issues of the occupation. Like the document before us, we have tried to be consistent in affirming the safety and security of both Israel and Palestine. But we have been clear in naming the end of the illegal occupation as the critical step towards peace in the region.

Last summer we faced a significant and public debate over a number of motions before our senior governing body. The motions in various forms called for a national boycott against Israel as a means of pressing for the end of the occupation.

In the end the decision was not for a national boycott but for all parts of the church to “immediately enter into consultation, dialogue, study and prayer, and then to take appropriate action towards ending the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and enter into conversation as to how to move the two peoples toward reconciliation (including, but not limited to economic boycott).”

The reality we know all too well is that churches face significant opposition and in particular charges of participating in “the new anti-Semitism” in any attempts to be critical of Israel’s policies and actions. This is the charge that was made against us throughout this debate.

We do not believe that such false claims can be allowed to go unchallenged. Criticism of Israeli policies in the occupation must not be silenced by claims of anti-Semitism.

What is needed is for churches around the world to take collective risks as an exhibition of authentic solidarity. In other words we must act together to ensure that the clear voice of Palestinians seeking a just peace can be heard throughout the world. In this document you have given us a clear call to prayer and action.

Thank you again for the invitation to be present with you today.

3. Tree of Life – Holy Land Education & Peace - Dr. Mark Braverman

Masa al kheir – good afternoon.

I want to express my gratitude to the World Council of Churches for inviting me to participate in this historic and critically important gathering, to Reverend Mitri Raheb and the Bethlehem International Center for your hospitality, to the distinguished guests and participants assembled here today, and most of all to you, my brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, for welcoming me into your midst.

Ana falastini yehudi.

I am a Palestinian Jew. My grandfather was born in the Old City of Jerusalem in the year 1900. My prayer is that someday, the phrase “Palestinian Jew” will not sound strange to the ear. It does not sound strange to me. In the short time allotted to me I want to talk about the journey that has brought me here, the issue of interfaith dialogue, and my conviction that the path to peace in historic Palestine lies in the actions of the global church.

As a Jew born in America in 1948, I was raised in an amalgam of rabbinic Judaism and political Zionism. I was taught that a miracle had blessed my generation and redeemed my people from the suffering of millennia. Over the years, living for a time in Israel and visiting frequently, I became increasingly concerned about Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians and about its illegal settlement activity. Still, I held to the Zionist narrative: Israel’s militarism and expansionism were the price of security. Then I went to the West Bank. I saw the separation wall and knew it was not for defense. I saw the damage inflicted by the checkpoints on Palestinian life and on the souls and psyches of my Jewish cousins in uniform. I saw the Jewish-only settlements and the restricted roads. I witnessed the vicious acts of ideological Jewish settlers. I learned that the events of 1948, what I had been taught to call the War of Liberation, was for Palestinians the Nakba. As my defenses against the recognition of Israel’s crimes crumbled, my fear for my own people grew. It grew in proportion to my horror, anger and sadness over the injustice that was being perpetrated in my name.

When I returned home and began to speak about justice for Palestine as the only path to peace, Christians, across denominations, received my message warmly and gratefully. But I also found that many of these same Christians felt constrained from speaking out, for two reasons: 1) their sense that the Jewish people were owed a state because of their history of suffering and 2) their feeling of responsibility for having caused that suffering. In fact, I discovered that for Christians, a new theology had grown up after WW II in an effort to reconcile with the Jews and to atone for the evil of anti-Semitism. This revisionist theology exalted the Jews as God’s chosen and lauded our quest for safety and self determination. In this view, the Jews were no longer condemned to wander the earth. In fact, we had been reinstated as God’s elect -- the original covenant between God and Abraham was in force. Christianity’s correction of the anti-Judaism is in itself laudable – but there is a problem with this new theology: it includes a real estate deal. Christians

were now being asked to support the superior right of the Jewish people to the territory of historic Palestine.

Examples of this tendency abound among contemporary Christian theologians. James Carroll writes in *Constantine's Sword*: "The God of Jesus Christ, and therefore of the Church, is the God of Israel. The Jews remain the chosen people of God. And with this comes the Land."ⁱ In a May 2009 article, John Pawlikowski, a progressive Catholic theologian, wrote that the Vatican's 1993 recognition of the State of Israel was pivotal in correcting Christianity's historic anti-Judaism. With that act, he wrote, "the coffin on displacement/perpetual wandering theology had been finally sealed."ⁱⁱ I find this an astonishing argument: recognizing the Jewish state corrects Christian theology! Just as astonishing, Palikowski goes on to repudiate a core feature of Christianity: its spiritualization of the land by lifting it out of the original tribal context of the Abrahamic covenant. In the original Christian revisioning – and this was a revolutionary and critically important development -- Jerusalem itself became a symbol of a new world order in which God's love was available to all of humankind. But Pawlikowski was now maintaining that this spiritualization of the land was a betrayal of God's covenant with the Jews – that it had deprived us of our birthright! It was now, therefore, incumbent upon Christians to honor the claim of the Jewish people to the Holy Land, and indeed to Jerusalem itself.

We have to be very concerned about this -- generations of mainstream pastors and theologians in the West have been educated in versions of this revised theology. Vigilance against anti-Semitism has trumped prophetic opposition to injustice. The Christian impulse for reconciliation has morphed into theological support for an anachronistic, ethnic-nationalist ideology that has hijacked Judaism, continues to fuel global conflict, and has produced one of the most egregious, systematic and longstanding violations of human rights in the world today.

But this is where we are today, and here is why the Kairos statement is so important. Christians in the West today are in a bind. They are caught between the desire to preserve over 60 years of interfaith reconciliation and their mounting awareness that all is not right with the Jewish national homeland project. To be in such a bind is not comfortable – but the times call for hard choices. Because of the well-intentioned and confessionally-based desire to atone for Christian anti-Judaism, Christians, individually and institutionally, have been muzzled from principled criticism of Israel's human rights violations. This is a disaster for Christianity and for world peace. Never before has it been so urgent for Christians to hold fast to their faith in pursuing the clear social justice imperative of justice for the Palestinian people. The Kairos statement shines the brightest when it talks about the universal mission of the land. Christianity's spiritualization and universalization of the land, so clearly articulated in the document, is the clearest example of how the new faith came to fulfill the prophetic message of the Bible.

This is the theology that must be lifted up today. And this should not be seen as Christian exceptionalism or triumphalism. Rather, the faithful Christian witness to the urgent need for justice for the Palestinian people represents a challenge to Judaism and to the Jewish people. Judaism is the faith from which Christianity sprang. Universal justice is where

Judaism was always headed in its depiction of a God who brought the Jewish people out of slavery. This same God requires us to do justice for all of creation -- without preference or particularity. In the words of the Kairos document: “the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election of the people of God [is to] open up to include all of humanity (emphasis added).” It is urgent that my people embrace this fundamental principle. For it is clear to me that Israel has lost its way. We brought to the world the teaching of one God, a God who seizes us by the arm, binds us to his covenant, and demands justice – but now we are enacting the creed of a tribal God who commands conquest. We have yielded ourselves up to tribalism and exceptionalism in the most profound and destructive way. And the evidence is before us the checkpoints of Bethlehem, Nablus and Jenin, the blackened olive trees of Bil’in, the empty marketplaces of Hebron, the devastation of Gaza, and the evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan.

The Kairos document talks about the unity of the scriptures. Theology too should unite, not separate. I am grateful to Naim Ateek for lifting up for me the passage from Ephesians chapter 2 about humankind united in the household of God, with Jesus as the cornerstone of the Temple:

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets...In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a Holy Temple of the Lord.

We know that it was not a physical Temple nor a city of stone and mortar that Paul was describing. But the new “interfaith” theology represents a U-turn: a turning back from the vision of a single community of humankind united in pursuit of social justice. It affirms not a universal vocation for the land, but an idolatry of land possession. It reaffirms particularism and the election of the Jews – going so far as to say that God always intended, through his grace, to fulfill his goal for humankind through the election of the Jews. This can be argued theologically, but the question is what is the use that is being made of this theology today? And the answer is – stated bluntly -- this theology is being promoted as a guilt offering, to help make Christians comfortable with the more than uncomfortable reality of the human rights abuses of the State of Israel. But I have found that Christians are not comfortable with the actions of the State of Israel. They know what is right and what they are called to do about the injustice they see before them.

The church is poised to fulfill its calling, as it did against Apartheid on a global basis and as it did in the U.S. against the institutionalized racism of Jim Crow segregation. Engaging in the struggle for justice in historic Palestine is the most important thing that the church, on a global basis, can do today. Gathered here today in support of this historic document, we call to mind the words of Reverend Martin Luther King, responding to his fellow clergymen who were urging him to delay his plans for nonviolent resistance:

The judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the

loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century.ⁱⁱⁱ

What is needed to bring peace to this land is not negotiations between politicians but a broad, global social movement that will change the political wind. And it is in the church that this movement will be initiated, led, and grow in strength. You are here – wide, deep, strong, organized -- with the scriptures pointing you directly to the divine imperative to do justice. And we Jews, who have suffered too long, must turn away from our history of suffering and dedicate ourselves instead to a process of reformation in which we purge ourselves of the exceptionalism and triumphalism that has brought us to this perilous pass.

I know that for Christians in the U.S. today, taking this prophetic stance puts the interfaith reconciliation work of decades at risk. Professional, personal and family relationships are on the line. That is painful and that is hard. But as Walter Brueggemann reminds us, the prophetic requires us to deal with the full range of emotions, especially those we want to avoid -- sadness and grief chief among them. Only by acknowledging what has been broken can we be open to the new.

I close with words from the final book of the Bible, words that stirringly call on us to commit ourselves to the work we have gathered here today to undertake, united in hope and in faith:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
"See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

4. From India: A Dalit Perspective - Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar

Introduction:

I am deeply grateful for having been invited to comment upon this very important document 'A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith and Hope from the heart of Palestinian Suffering'. Especially as someone who has been invited to reflect upon this historic document from the perspective of Dalit Theology – which is committed to the struggles of the 'outcaste' Dalit communities in India, this invitation is an invitation to, what I would term as, '*being co-yoked*'.

In my opinion as co-workers in the reign of God, we are also called to be '*co-yokers*' - people called to take upon ourselves the *prophetic yoke* of 'truth-telling' of 'speaking truth to power' and 'speaking the truth in love'. The use of the biblical metaphor *yoke* here is intentional not only because it is biblical but also because it connotes that the task ahead involves hardships, which can be best achieved by working resiliently in affirmative partnerships. Moreover, inherent in the metaphor of the yoke is the possibility of fruition amidst struggles – which instills in us hope amidst struggle.

A Caveat

Before I begin my reflections I would like to make it clear that though the popular Pauline understanding that 'if one member suffers, all suffer together' (1 Cor. 12:26) undergirds and provides an archetype for Christian solidarity, it needs to be understood that any rhetoric about empathetic co-suffering has its limits. We can, so to speak, '*stand in the shoes*' of 'others', however, the shoes can '*never become our own*' in the fullest sense. To claim complete knowledge of the depth of the suffering in Palestine without the experience of such suffering would be a distorting enterprise, which needs to be avoided. However, it is legitimate to explore points of convergence between the stories of people here and elsewhere. For example, convergences can be drawn between the Palestinian situation as reflected in this document and the Dalit situation of oppression. One of the issues which strikes an immediate chord with me regarding the situations of Palestinians in Israel and the Dalits in India is the issue of emigration (mentioned in section 1-3), which becomes an 1 Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar teaches Christian Ethics at the United Theological College, Bangalore. He is the author of *Challenges of Transition: Religion and Ethics in Changing Contexts* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2007) and *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010) inevitability in the absence of hope for peace and freedom. The Dalit poet Bapurao Jagtup captures the tendency among Dalits to emigrate in a moving manner in the concluding lines of his poem *The Country is Broken* as follows:

Let us go to some country brother,
Where, while you live,
You will have a roof above your head and where,
When you die,
There will at least be a cemetery to receive you.

Such a drawing out of convergences will help provide perspectives on how an alignment of our different struggles can be made possible. In this light, it is only with the humble

recognition and acceptance of the Pauline challenge to ‘co-suffer’ as more of a mandate to enter into affirmative solidarity, that I offer my reflections upon this important document from the perspective of the Dalit Theology.

A Note on the Dalits:

Dalit communities, previously notoriously known as the ‘untouchables’, are the worst victims of the Indian caste system which is based on notions of purity and pollution. Dalits are considered the most polluted in this system and have traditionally been denied social equality and dignity, forced into economically exploitative living conditions and occupations such as manual scavenging, culturally and ritually denigrated, denied access to privilege and opportunity. No wonder then that the Dalit poet Pralhad Chandwanker, in his poem *Audit* questions:

This country which, demands a pot of blood for a swallow of water, How can I call it mine? though, it gives the world the (empty) advice of peace. Though the conditions of the Dalit communities have improved considerably in the 21st century, it is ironical that the atrocities against them continue unabated. Their struggles for justice have taken different forms including, religious conversion to other faiths considered to be egalitarian like Christianity, Islam and Buddhism; Dalit social movements, empowerment through education and through the development of a Christian Dalit Theology. It is from the perspective of Dalit theology that I offer my reflections on this document today.

Reflections:

1) Let me begin with an acknowledgement of the profundity of the theological depth of this document. Such theologising can only be born out of what Dalit theology would call a ‘pathos’ experience – which recognises God’s own involvement in human suffering and takes up the creative project of restructuring justice and reconstructing hope from such an awareness. This pathos experience makes this a truly ‘passionate’ document.

2) Our faith and hope emerge, as this document makes it clear, from our belief in the Triune God. The perspective of God as the creator of everyone in *imago dei* undergirds our theological rationale to resist every attempt to tarnish this.

3) Concerning the liberative role of Jesus Christ, Cruz Durai a Dalit liturgist says ‘Dalits who are heavily loaded with this unjust and inhuman society cling on to Jesus to straighten themselves up in order to live as dignified human beings’.² The force of the biblical revelation of the true messiah lies in the fact that he is the one ‘whose appearance was so marred beyond human semblance’. However, it is he who would startle the nations (Isaiah 52:13-15). Christ the ‘startler’, who shares our brokenness - is the one whom we follow in ushering in the reign of justice and peace.

4) With regard to the reflection upon the Holy Spirit in this document, as the indweller with whom we are called to be co-workers (3.2), it needs to be mentioned that in Dalit theology we recognise the Holy Spirit as the ‘life-giver, unifier and empowerer for the liberation struggle of the Indian Dalits’.³ The Holy Spirit has the capacity to revive dry

bones, give them life and unify them and make an army out of them. In a context where there is potential that divisions emerge even within the struggling communities (as is mentioned in 1-5-1) the **role of the Holy Spirit as unifier** cannot be neglected. Further, Dalits also recognize the Holy Spirit as our comforter ‘who ‘groans’ along with us in our sufferings’.

5) I was deeply touched by the ex-centric (‘ex’ connoting the outward looking aspect of our focus) or the ‘other-centred’ dimension in this document - which is reflected in the way in which the feelings of fear and insecurity which envelopes Israeli society is recognized. It is remarkable that in a context ripe with suspicion, paranoia and mistrust, this document offers assurance which has the potential to allay their fears.

It is also challenging to note that your understanding of the ‘other’ seeks to engage and respect the humanity of the other and not denigrate or dehumanise it further.

6) The resolute resilience which you have creatively appropriated to sustain a wholistic vision of total liberation – even for your oppressors - despite the horrifying constraints imposed by the excruciatingly painful and blatantly violating conditions,

2 S.Cruz Durai ‘Dalit Liturgy’, (Unpublished Paper), Cited in Philip Peacock, ‘Dalit Spirituality’, in James Massey and S.Lourdusamy (eds.), *Dalit Issue in Today’s Theological Debate*, (Delhi: Centre for Dalit Subaltern Studies, 2003), (pp. 131-135), 134.

3 A.P.Nirmal, *Towards a Christian Dalit Theology*, in A.P. Nirmal (ed.), *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute), (pp.53-70), p.60. speaks volumes about the radically subversive task of re-humanisation that you have taken. This task is possible only through a commitment to enable the flourishing of what Dwight Hopkins beautifully captures as the ‘grace of possibilities inherent in full human potential’.⁴

7) It is heartening to see articulation of hope in a context of gloom. Regarding your point of the resurrection being the source of hope (section 3-4), I need to say that this is something which enjoys resonances with Dalit theology as also with most Asian liberation theologies. As Dalit theologian Bishop V. Devasahayam puts it, it is with that hope of the resurrection ‘we affirm God’s continuous presence among the burning thorn bushes of Asia’.⁵

8) In the light of the resurrection, the hope that we hold on to is a resolute hope because, to use a paradoxical metaphor, it is like walking a tight rope anchored by the poles of the crucifixion and the resurrection, both of which obligate of us a faith in action.

9) However, I would like to further reflect upon the resurrection hope in the light of a poignant and radically challenging experience that I encountered in my conversations with a Dalit refugee recently in a refugee camp in Orissa, a state where Christian Dalits have suffered alarming persecution. This conversation opened my eyes to the power of the resurrection to not only invigorate hope, but also to **the power of the resurrection to convert the oppressors**, something which is not thought about often. When I asked a Dalit what he thought about the people who had burned his house and driven him and his family out of the village, his answer left me spellbound. Amidst the uncertainty and the miserable conditions of the refugee camp, he said that he and his family prayed that

the power of the resurrected Christ would touch his persecutors in the same way that it touched Saul and converted him into Paul, an apostle who was now even willing to risk his life for the cause of the very people he once wanted to completely annihilate. Such is the understanding of the power of the resurrection that the Dalits have. There is space needed in our document to touch upon this life transforming power of the resurrection that has the power to change even the persecutor and radically reverse their approach. The life-transforming capacity of the resurrection needs to be acknowledged.

10) I would like to emphasise that the challenge for the global church is not just to align ourselves to the struggles of our brothers and sisters but also to recognise the complexity and ambiguity involved in the situation – particularly reflecting upon the ways in which ***we can be*** and ***have been*** co-opted, often unintentionally and unconsciously, into the schemes of those who have wrought in the situation and who perpetuate the situation of injustice in Palestine.

11) Only out of such awareness will be born a resistance, which is both concrete and practical and which seeks actively to divest itself of any collaboration in perpetuating injustice. Our true solidarity can no longer be business as usual. *Plerosis* (fullness) is never complete without *kenosis* (emptying).

12) Before I finish I would like to thank you for trusting us and inviting us to be part of your struggles. The possibility of risking trust when it is also likely to be misunderstood is essential for the project of liberation. This helps in ‘making friends’ for the cause of justice.

13) A vivid biblical example that springs to mind is the popular parable of the Good Samaritan who risks trust as he seeks to make the innkeeper an ally in the task of healing and restoration of wholeness. There is no guarantee that the motivations of the Samaritan would not be misunderstood, his intentions and involvement in the whole process questioned, or that even his invitation to the innkeeper to share in the completion of the healing process be rejected. Yet he invests and risks trust in a context of possible suspicion and fear and what emerges out of this process is reciprocity of *diakonia* across divisions out of which blooms the possibility of wholeness.

14) My fervent hope and prayer is that this document will generate life-transforming decisions across divisions and reinvigorate new attempts to end the ongoing injustice in Palestine. And in response to your question – whether we would be able to help you get your freedom back – my response is ‘through the enabling grace and sustenance of the Triune God, we surely will’.

Jewish Fast for Peace: Rabbi Brian Walt

Salaam Aleykhum/Shalom Aleichem I am so honored to participate in this sacred event and am deeply moved by the generosity of your invitation. For me, as a Jew and a rabbi, it is a gift to be with you today.

I was struck by the spiritual commitment to resistance to the injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people along with a profound openness to the humanity of the oppressor. The bold claim in the document that action for justice for the Palestinian people will also bring liberation for the Jewish people struck me as particularly important.

This claim is of particular importance to me because I stand here today as a Jew, one who bears responsibility for the oppression. While I don't live in Israel, Zionism and the rebirth of the Jewish/Hebrew culture in Israel in Israel is a very important part of my personal history and identity as a Jew. It is extremely painful to see a movement that promised our people so much hope, and our great spiritual tradition, violated day by day by the cruelty of walls, checkpoints, land confiscation, home demolition and countless other vile acts of injustice.

God calls on all to end the Occupation. Without justice for the Palestinian people, the Jewish people will never be liberated from being an oppressor, a reality that violates the call of God to Abraham that his spiritual descendants would always act with justice and righteousness. As a rabbi I join with you in the resistance to occupation both because I my faith calls me to resist any injustice and also because this injustice corrupts my people and our sacred traditions. . As it is stated so powerfully in your document: "Primary responsibility rests on the perpetrators of injustice they must liberate themselves from the evil in them and the injustice that they have imposed on their brothers and sisters."

It is in this spirit that I am with you today.

For all Jews the path to acknowledging that we must take responsibility for injustice inflicted on the Palestinians and work to end it is a difficult and painful one. Most people in our community know very little about Palestinian history and reality. Most of us choose not to know. Acknowledging that your people is oppressing another people pain is a difficult reality to live with.

Many Jews are beginning to walk this path.

For me, as for many Jews, there has been profound change in our relationship to Israel over the past year. In response to the suffering imposed on the people of Gaza, first by the siege and then by the assault in December, Rabbi Brant Rosen, my colleague, and I founded Jewish Fast for Gaza. Jewish Fast for Gaza is dedicated to breaking the silence, lifting the Israeli siege on Gaza, and supporting a negotiated settlement between Israel and all relevant Palestinian parties, including Hamas. While Jewish Fast for Gaza is inspired by a group of rabbis, it is an interfaith effort. We are rabbis, ministers and

imams, Christians, Muslims and Jews who are working together to end the siege of Gaza. I believe we need to build a movement of people of all faiths working together to change American policy, to be advocates for justice for the Palestinian people and to partner with Israelis who are working actively to end the Occupation.

Working together across the lines of our faiths, is not uncomplicated. Perhaps most complicated is the power imbalance. I am a person of privilege and power in this situation. Many Jews in Israel and around the world have become advocates for justice but we need to follow you, the oppressed. We share a common humanity but as long as the oppression continues we need to acknowledge the power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians, between victim and oppressor. This task is very challenging for Jews since we have suffered so bitterly in history and see ourselves as victims.

The document you have created is indeed a source of hope. It brings hope for a new reality for the Palestinian people and it brings hope for a new reality for the Jewish people as well. Thank you for offering hope at this dark time. Last week in synagogue we read the portion about the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau. Jacob says "to see your face my brother is like seeing the face of God". The Kairos document is a vision of seeing the face of God in one another and ending the cycle of oppression that violates that image of God in the oppressed and in the oppressor.

Tonight Jews will light small candles of hope adding another candle each of the nights of Hannukah. Thank you again for inviting me to participate in this gathering of hope and may your sacred and courageous effort bring light to your people, to my people, and to all who share this Holy Land.

As you wrote:

God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God's land: *"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it"* (Ps. 24:1).

To which I say: Amen!

Shukran/Thank You

All Africa Council of Churches – Melaku Kifle

1. First of all, we salute our Sisters and brothers in Palestine for their strong hope and embracing love derived from their solid faith in living God in the situation they find themselves. In the face of harsh situation of hopelessness, they refuse to give up hope in the triune God. Inspired by their faith in the Almighty God, they are determined to make love and justice the basis of their struggle against evil and all forms injustices. This is their strength and a great challenge they share with all of us as they look forward to the day when they will live in the land in peace with Israel and other neighbours.
2. Secondly, Africa due to its own past and recent history of acute suffering, stand in solidarity with Christian Palestinians and all those who suffer oppression, insecurity, human dignity and discrimination. With them we carry from the depth of our hearts to hasten the time when lasting freedom and human dignity will be restored to all human beings. In this respect we find paragraph 3-3-4 a great sign of hope coming from the Christian Palestinians.

“In addition to all that we have mentioned, we see a determination among many to overcome the resentments of the need to restore political rights to the Palestinians is increasing and Jewish and Israel voices, advocating peace and justice, are raised in support of this with the approval of the international community. True, these forces for justice and reconciliation have not yet been able to transform the situation of injustice, but they have their influence and may shorten the time of suffering and hasten the time of reconciliation” (Kairos document, p.6)

3. Thirdly, we appreciate the commitment that our Sisters and Brothers in Palestine have to the word of god as a source of life for all peoples. In a very powerful way they affirm the importance of the Bible as the Word of God, and in the same breath speak against all those who want to use the Bible to justify the suffering and injustice that they face in the land.

The document makes the point clear when it states,” Certain theologians want us to suffer for our faith because we are Christians. Faced with this, our task is to safeguard the Word of God as a source of life and not death, so that “the good news” remains what it is- “good news” for us and for all. In the face of those who use the Bible to threaten our existence as Christians and Muslims Palestinians, we renew our faith in the Bible because we know that the Word of God can not be the source of our destruction (Kairos document, p.5)

4. Fourthly, the Christian Palestinians powerfully remind us, particularly we in Africa of the mission of the church has been prophetic which must be spoken “courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events”. If the church should take sides it must be “with the oppressed, to stand alongside them, just as Christ our Lord stood by the side of the poor person and each sinner, calling them to repentance, life, and the restoration of dignity

bestowed on them by God and that no one has the right to strip away.” (Kairos document, p.6)

5. Fifthly, as a follow up on the above, it is important to thank our Christian Palestinians for sharing with us some of the lessons they have learned from the cruel circumstances they have lived and continue to live. Their suffering has helped them “ to clarify their faith and to identify their vocation better. We have studied our vocation and have come to know it better in the midst and suffering and pain: today, we bear the strength of love rather than of revenge, a culture of life rather than a culture of death. This is a source of hope for us, for the Church and the World” (Kairos document,p-7).

In conclusion, we should all join our Sisters and Brothers in Palestine, Israel and the neighbouring countries in prayer to the Almighty God, asking that in the struggle to correct the evil and stop the aggression of all kinds and to all peoples:

- In love we shall see the face of God in every human being,
- In love we shall find new ways of relating to each other with dignity and respect in the resolutions of conflicts,
- In love we shall realise that we cannot resist evil with evil; though this is an extremely difficult commandment yet it alone can bring lasting freedom, peace and human dignity in the land

In love we appeal to all, Jews, Muslims, and Christians that they should make their states be states for all its citizens, with the vision constructed on respect for religion but also equality, justice and respect for pluralism and not on domination by a religion or a numerical majority.

From South Africa, Ujama Centre for Community development- Solomuzi Mabuza

Salutations and greetings

I am travelling with two South Africans who are part of the Kairos South African Theologians Forum. Stiaan Van Der Merne is someone who in the old dispensation could be classified as an enemy. Edwin Arrison was classified as “coloured” in the dark days of Apartheid. Obviously, I have been a black skin and we classified by an apartheid system. We have travelled across to the Middle East to pledge our solidarity.

We thank God for this moment. – Your moment in the Occupied Palestine Territory! The Palestine Kairos document launch is your moment. South Africa had a preview of this process. As this was done under strict orders “under embargo” we accepted your wishes and kept confidentiality . Some feedback was given to the PKD group coordinator Rifat Odeh Kassis.

Forget not!

Twenty years ago, the Berlin wall fell. The Israeli Apartheid Wall will fal too! Fifteen years ago, Apartheid South Africa collapsed – it imploded within. In the saem breath the Israeli Occupation will end! As people of faith we should not lose hope in the God of Justice.

A few comments

As a South African, I dare not critique your document and efforts. This is not the day –time-moment or place. Your document affirms our African notion of concept of Ubuntu. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu spoke a lot about this philosophy. Put simply, Ubuntu is expressed in the phrase that, “Umuntu Nsumuntu Nyabantu” I am because you are. In your document you articulate this profoundly. Israel can never be whole/complete until Israel affirms and acknowledge Palestinian Humanity. Unless Israel treats Palestinians as it wishes to be treated Israel will not enjoy her humanity

Thank you for foregrounding Human Rights as a fundamental starting point. This is a stance that should not be negotiated or compromised. At the core of this poignant point is the biblical and Christian teaching. All of us are created in the image of God.

Land is another pivotal point. The P K Document correctly affirms the biblical principal (Psalms 24:1). Land belongs to God and all who lice in it. Your document further elevates the importance of this land – by declaring it has “ A universal mission” . For this is an existential connection – not an abstract phenomenon! So, it makes this event more important and more then an academic exercise.

In the process of crafting this document you dared to venture where few go. Your emphasis on love and the manner of engaging the enemy is powerful. Thank you for rebunking the International Community as well. As South Africans we will do what we can do to address the issue of “ Double Standards”. We will engage our government and all stakeholders who matter.

Lastly , thankyou for speaking directly to your people and your neighbours – Israel. Indeed, internal divisions will not serve your cause well, platforms such as that August one should be used to allow other voices and views to be heard.

Finally, as the Patriarch said this is a process. I implore to engage your wider Palestinian Community, viz Palestinians in Israel, OPT, exiled and diaspora

From the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – Rev. Robert Smith

Sisters and brothers, in this *kairos* moment, I bring a North American Christian word of gratitude and conviction. In this time of great crisis, when optimism seems naïve and despair is an ever-present option, we have in this Palestinian Christian Kairos document a proclamation of hope.

First and foremost, the document has been crafted to sustain the weary with a word of hope, to remind Palestinian Christians that even when things seem bleak and when they appear powerless, hope does not disappoint (Rom 5:4–6). It is no coincidence that this word has appeared in Advent; although the current realities have not "even a glimmer of positive expectation," these Christian leaders have given us a beacon of light, reminding us that our savior has come and will come again to finally defeat all the powers of sin and death. We are now experiencing the beginning of the birth pangs. This hope grounds the call for resistance to "[put] an end to evil without walking in the way of evil or violence" (4-2-1).

My more specific response is to the document's direct appeal to western theologies that "try to attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of [Palestinians'] rights" (2-3-3), including "fundamentalist theological positions that support certain unjust political options" (6-1). These are important challenges to which, in this moment, western Christian theologians *must* pay heed.

I have had the privilege of several dialogical encounters between western and Arab, especially Palestinian, Christians. We have learned in those encounters that European and North American theologies concerning Jewish-Christian relations and, thus, the State of Israel are best presented as contextual theologies resulting from our own experience. While there is much to appreciate in the last sixty years of western theological reflection on these questions, much of the global Christian community, including Palestinian Christians, do not share our experience and thus have not been forced by responsibility to our particular history to ask the same questions. Palestinian contextual theology—such as that reflected in this Kairos document—is necessarily quite different from our own.

We are called to revisit and challenge our theologies because *theology matters*. While Christians in the West often cannot see the effects of their theology in civil society and culture, this document comes from an ecumenical Christian perspective *confident* that their word will contribute directly to the lives of their people and the surrounding realities, unlike many western churches who sometimes seem to have lost their nerve. These Palestinian Christians are confident in their word and in God's word to inspire hope, and to foster hopeful resistance. Many Christians in the West have become less aware of the power of Christian hope to change political realities. As a result, those political realities supported by theological systems—the baptizing of western settler/colonial imperialism and the perpetuation of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land perpetrated by many forms of Christian Zionism, for example—are less likely to draw a theological or church-based response. We have too often been unaware of these theologies and ignorant of how they are exported to other contexts in order to support conflict and political division.

This document calls us to greater responsiveness to political realities, and, with our Palestinian Christian sisters and brothers, to exercise with boldness the prophetic power of the Church through the proclamation of hope, to resist the forces of oppression and violence that encircle us every day.

Since this is a response from a U.S. perspective, I will close with a quotation from one of our country's greatest contextual theologians:

There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on . . .

— Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (16 April 1963)

A Latin American Theological Response

My initial word regarding this document is of gratitude. First, it is a privilege to respond to this important theological statement. And also we need to recognize and to congratulate the group of Palestinian leaders that took the time and efforts to prepare this creative and pertinent writing. This Kairos Document includes the aspirations, dreams and hopes of the peace with justice loving people in Palestine, Israel, Latin America, and the rest of the World. Indeed this is a very well written and thought theological text, and you will see how «The Moment of Truth», within the coming years, will be studied and quoted in seminaries, universities and church bodies around the world.

To start my responses I should say that indeed this Document is produced in a special Kairos moment... When the dynamics of respect and dialogues of peace seems to be at a dead end, and when the sufferings, pains and tragedy of the Palestinian community seems to be hurting the very soul of this people, the Kairos-Palestine Document is a firm message of hope, a solid statement of faith, and a serious prophetic word of encouragement, vision, dignity, and future. This Document represents a relevant moment of truth, hope and verticality, in a context of half truths, semi-truths, almost truths... and complete lies. It also affirms God's justice in a context of superficial discourses of peace without serious commitments to justice and without firm political will.

The reading of the Kairos Document, which its 10 specific areas of concern for the Palestinians (e.g., reality, faith, hope, love, and resistance), makes me remember the contexts where our Latin American theologies of liberation grew and were developed. The way it describes the realities of Palestine reveals some of the same problems, similar difficulties and common institutional sins that were also present in our hurt Continent.

For instance, the separation wall between Jerusalem and Bethlehem is similar to the one being built between Mexico and the United States. The Gaza embargo is similar to the one experienced by Cuba from the USA for half a century. The development and implementation of policies of discrimination and segregation, based on racist, irrational, and colonial readings of some biblical passages, are similar to the ones implemented in Latin America during the European conquest of our Continent, mainly from Spain. The humiliations of the Palestinians at the checkpoints... the violence, hostility and hate of some settlers... the division and segregation of the Palestinian families... the reality of political prisoners... and the racist ideology behind some administrative and military decisions... are all very familiar experiences in our Continent.

When I was reading the Kairos-Palestine Document I was able to see and feel parallels and similarities, and also some differences, with our Latin American experience... It is in these contexts of continuities and discontinuities, that I must clearly state my first theological affirmation: Evil does not have nationality, neither recognizes frontiers, nor respect identities or distinguishes ethnic or national grounds. The fundamental aim of evil, in both Latin America and Palestine, and all over the world, is to oppress, control, occupy, corrupt, hurt, conquer, discriminate, humiliate, offend, restrict and kill... Its most fundamental objective is to destroy the image of God which is present in every human

being... And in our immediate context that evil aims to destroy the soul and most inner spirit of the Palestinian people by taking this land...

I must add in reference to this same theme that the evil that is hurting the Palestinians is also affecting the Israeli society. Those forces of discrimination and hatred are affecting the spiritual DNA of the Jewish people living in Israel and in the Diaspora. They know very well the realities of captivity and oppression, and they also know very well the power of a liberating God. They have written about these themes, because they have cried to the Lord to be liberated! When they manifest oppressive and discriminatory attitudes, they are going against the most sacred traditions of their own prophets (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel).

It is at this moment of my reaction that I should say it very clearly: The fundamental and most important problem within the Palestinian and Israeli societies is the occupation with its political, spiritual, social, economic, military, and human rights ramifications... The rest of the problems identified in the Kairos-Palestine Document are consequences of that reality.

It happens in Latin America, and also in Israel and Palestine: There must be something wrong if you need to have a complex military system to maintain the stability of the nations... There must be something extremely wrong, if to sustain a peace environ you must engage in a military race with include nuclear and atomic power... There must be something absolutely wrong if at once you have dialogues, meetings and negotiations on peace, and at the very same time you continue with the building of more settlements in the Occupied Territories... I am convinced indeed that in these lands politicians are very much interested in peace dialogues; I am not that sure, however, that they are interested in the real implementation of peace with justice...

One of the more important contributions of the Kairos Document is related to what we can call transforming education: We should not wait for this reality to change in order to create transforming programs! This Document is creating a new Palestine! It is not waiting for the peace agreements to be approved and signed! The Kairos-Palestine Document is bringing the future to our present!

I want to end this brief reaction with a note of hope and future, and with a firm statement of salvation and life... Although this «moment of truth» is politically complex and sociologically difficult, we are able to discern within this document clear signals of hope. The main characteristic in this Kairos Document is not resentment, bitterness, hostility, hate...

We are able to see the power of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Future is not predicated in terms of passive resignation or silent acceptance of this sinful reality. Hope is alive because it is active in the resistance to the forces of occupation, and also because it prepares the way to enjoy a better Palestinian society...

A society that respects the human rights... A society of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, mutual respect and pluralism... A society able to overcome the forces of hate and resentment... A society that affirms love, forgiveness and reconciliation as necessary

values in their educational systems...A society that recognizes and celebrates the importance of human dignity and democracy...

And that is the reason why from Latin America we salute and celebrate the visionary spirit of this Kairos-Palestine Document: The Moment of Truth...

Dr. Samuel Pagán
Dar al-Kalima College

ⁱ Carroll, J. 2001. *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, a History*. Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin.

ⁱⁱ Pawlikowski, John, 2009. Land as an issue in Christian-Jewish dialogue. *Cross Currents* 59:2.

ⁱⁱⁱ King, Martin Luther Jr. 1963. Letter from Birmingham Jail.