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Is Denouncing the Occupation Antisemitic?

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The Kairos Palestine Declaration

On December 14, 2009, a forum representing the leaders of the Christian churches and association of Israel/Palestine published the Kairos Palestine Declaration, addressing the politicians of the region and, more especially, the churches in the West, asking them for gestures of solidarity. Among the signatories were Patriarch Michael Sabbah, Bishop Munib Younan, and Archbishop Theodosius Hanna. The declaration expresses indignation and protest regarding the conditions of injustice inflicted upon the Palestinian people. The leaders called their public statement Kairos, in memory of the Kairos Document published by a Christian forum in South Africa in 1985. The 1985 statement protested the Apartheid legislation and the silence of the Christian churches.

The Kairos Palestine Declaration decries the emptiness of the pronouncements and promises made by various parties about justice and peace in the region. It reminds Western Christians, who may not be well informed, of the harsh conditions under which Palestinians must live: the Israeli settlements on Palestinian land, the wall of separation built on Palestinian territory, the ravaging of agricultural lands, the humiliation at military checkpoints, the controlled access to holy places, the plight of refugees awaiting their right to return, the blockade of Gaza, Israel's disregard of international law, and the paralysis of the international community in the face of this catastrophe. The signatories of the declaration demand an end to the Occupation.

The declaration asks the churches in the West to address public opinion and the government in their respective country so that the Western powers will come to demand the end of the Occupation.

The Response of the Churches

The Western churches have been relatively silent on the situation of the Palestinians. There are several reasons for this.[1] One reason is the churches' feelings of

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guilt over the anti-Jewish rhetoric woven into Christian teaching almost from the beginning. The churches have now corrected this, yet since the old insults still dwell in their bad conscience, they are reluctant to be critical of the Jewish state. At the same time, regretting their former association with the Western colonial empires, the churches have learned to support the anti-colonial struggles of peoples, including the self-determination of the Palestinians. Because of this double sympathy, the churches have decided to express their solidarity with both Israel and Palestine, without taking sides.

There is another reason why the Western churches hesitate to respond to the Kairos Palestine Declaration and demand the end of the Occupation. Major Jewish organizations consider protests against the Occupation antisemitic.

In 2000, after the outbreak of the second Intifada provoked by Ariel Sharon's visit on sacred Muslim territory, the leaders of the Canadian churches, shocked by the explosion of violence, produced a statement on justice and peace in the Middle East.[2] For the sake of transparency, they sent the first draft to the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), yet were surprised when they received a discordant reaction. The CJC objected to the statement because it said that the Israeli settlements on the West Bank were built on confiscated grounds and because it supported the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1322 of October 7, 2000, which criticized Israel for the use of excessive violence and called for the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories. The Canadian churches' statement, the Christian leaders were told, would undermine Christian-Jewish friendship in Canada. Since Christians in Canada greatly value their friendship with Jews, the Christian leaders modified their draft, making it more even-handed by calling for justice and non-violence in both directions.

The war on Gaza and the subsequent blockade of the region in June 2007 has been strongly criticized by voices including UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and the United Nations Human Rights Council. The blockade does not respect the 4th Geneva Convention of 1949, which demands that an occupying power protect the civilian population, even though the Security Council specified in 1979 that the 4th Geneva Convention applies to the territories captured by Israel in 1967.

A motion reacting to the blockade of Gaza was proposed to the General Council of the United Church of Canada in August 2009. This motion asked the Church to support the boycott of Israeli products organized by various institutions in Canada, a tactic that had been adopted in the 1980s against the Apartheid regime in South Africa.[3] The committee that had prepared the motion had invited the comments of several Jewish observers. The representative of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) who had been invited said that the approval of the motion would do irreparable damage to Jewish-Christian relations in Canada. Because Canadian Christians love their Jewish neighbours, the motion was defeated.

The Geneva-based World Council of Churches (WCC), an international organization, decided not to be intimidated by the accusation of antisemitism. In the past, it had even-handedly advocated peace and security for Israel and a Palestinian state. Yet after the second Intifada of 2000, the WCC held consultations among the Christians of the Middle East and, in 2002, launched the Ecumenical Campaign to End the Illegal Occupation of Palestine. After the invasion and the blockade of Gaza, the WCC organized, in June 2009, the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, a series of religious services held in places where there was no peace and no justice. Prayer vigils were held at the Wall around Bethlehem, at demolished Palestinian houses, at local Palestinian parishes, and at locations near the illegal Israeli settlements.

The WCC campaign for peace and justice, which demanded the end of the Occupation and of the Gaza blockade, is supported by the churches of the Middle East and by Christian groups and organizations in the West, especially Sabeel,[4] the Jerusalem-based international theological network for the liberation of Palestine and the reconciliation with Israel. Yet the churches of the West hesitate to give vocal support to the WCC campaign, just as they hesitate to reply to the Kairos Palestine Declaration.

Jewish Calls for the End of the Occupation

Despite the hesitation of the churches, there is some good news for the signatories of the Kairos Palestine Declaration. Since the second Intifada of 2000 and, more especially, since the war and the blockade of Gaza, strong voices in the Jewish communities of the West have begun to criticize the policies of Israel, to call for the end of the Occupation, and to advocate the creation of a viable Palestinian state. The major Jewish organizations in Canada, the United States and Europe continue to give unqualified support to the State of Israel. They tend to look upon dissenting Jews as marginal, as misguided, or even as self-hating Jews. In response to this

view, the critical Jews have now reversed this argument. They say that from the biblical prophets on throughout its entire history, the Jewish tradition has praised and promoted social justice; it is therefore the State of Israel, by its unjust policies, that deviates from the classical Jewish tradition.

Reading on the Internet the declarations and statements made by the critical Jewish voices, I detect two distinct currents: a moderate one, representing democratic Zionism, and a more aggressive one, upholding international law and the resolutions of the United Nations.

The Moderate Current

The groups I designate as democratic Zionists embrace the Zionist project as formulated in the Constitution of the State of Israel, guaranteeing the human rights and the equality before the law of all citizens, whatever their religion or ethnic origin. This vision of Zionism is in keeping with modern ideas of justice, participation, and international peace. Democratic Zionists realized that under the present conditions it was impossible for Israel consistently to live up to the democratic ideal, yet they were convinced that Israel was moving in the right direction, trying its best to fulfill the promises of its Constitution. Yet, since the Second Intifada and, more especially, since the war and the blockade of Gaza, many of these Jews, convinced that Israel is moving in the wrong direction, have become vocal critics of its government.

Typical of this group is the prestigious left-wing American review *Tikkun*, founded in 1986 by Rabbi Michael Lerner, to which are associated the Tikkun Communities located in many cities throughout the US. While supporting the identity, safety, and well-being of the Jewish state, *Tikkun* has been critical of its unjust and oppressive policies in regard to the Palestinians. *Tikkun*'s commitment to social justice is religiously motivated: it is an expression of fidelity to God's covenant with the house of Israel. Since the war on Gaza and the subsequent blockade, the discourse of *Tikkun* has become increasingly critical. Even before that, *Tikkun* occasionally published papers that were more aggressive than its own editorial policy, such as an article in the May/June 2003 issue, written by the Jewish political scientist Joel Kovel, that presented Israel as a racist state, generating crimes against humanity, lacking the internal means of correcting them, and losing its public legitimacy. *Tikkun* offers space for a wide range of political opinions, yet its editorial policy remains loyal to Israel and fully supports democratic Zionists.

Major Jewish organizations in the US have accused Rabbi Michael Lerner, his review, and his movement of being enemies of Israel and the Jewish people. In May 2010, a group of radical Jewish Zionists vandalized Rabbi Lerner's house in California. They glued posters to his fence and his front door, denouncing him as an enemy of the Jews. Some posters depicted Rabbi Lerner with Judge Goldstone, the South African legal expert on war crimes and author of the United Nations report on the war crimes committed by the State of Israel and Palestinian groups during the invasion of Gaza. The government of Israel and major Jewish organizations in the US have accused Judge Goldstone, though Jewish himself, of anti-Jewish bias; *Tikkun* responded to this charge by giving him its 2010 human rights award. A poster on Lerner's house now denounces him and Goldstone as archenemies of the Jewish people.

When his friends asked what they could do to help him, Lerner wrote this thoughtful reply:

> You can demand of the Jewish world that it stop encouraging incitement by allowing people or groups to be labelled as antisemitic or "self-hating Jews" when the only evidence for those charges is disagreeing with the policies of the State of Israel or supporting strategies like boycott, divestment or sanctions against the State of Israel or against products produced by settlers in the Occupied Territories, or calling for an end to US military aid to Israel, publicizing the human rights violations taking place in Israel, or taking other non-violent but confrontational approaches to changing Israeli policy.[5]

Another example of democratic Zionists who publicly criticize Israel is the movement started on May 2, 2010, by a group of 150 French Jewish intellectuals. This movement calls upon the government of Israel to become reasonable. The declaration it composed, entitled "Call for Reason," was made public at www.JCall.eu. It gathered over 6,000 signatures within four weeks and continues to attract supporters among European Jews. Israel, the declaration says, faces existential threats. It is threatened by its external enemies, yet the danger also lies in the Occupation of Palestinian lands and the building of Israeli settlements on the West Bank and in the Arab district of East Jerusalem. These policies, the declaration continues, are morally and politically wrong

and lead to an unacceptable loss of legitimacy in the international world. The future of Israel, the declaration continues, depends on the achievement of peace with the Palestinian people on the basis of a Two State Solution. While the decision must be made by the Israeli government, the Jews of the Diaspora, loyal to Israel, must address this government in support of a peace agreement and the creation of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. Unquestioning support of Israeli government policies is dangerous and does not serve the true interest of the State of Israel.

"Call for Reason" has been criticized by le Conseil représentatif des israélites de France (CRIF), the umbrella representative body of the Jewish community in France. The declaration has also provoked a counter movement by European Jews of unquestioning loyalty to the Israeli government. The public debate in the Jewish community of the West over the Israeli Occupation of Palestine is a recent phenomenon, provoked in part by the war and the blockade of Gaza.

The European "Call to Reason" has a certain affinity with the American advocacy group called J Street,[6] founded in April 2008, which urges the US government to promote a just peace between Israel and Palestine and, more generally, to follow a new foreign policy that prefers dialogue over confrontation, diplomatic solutions over military ones, and multilateral over unilateral approaches to conflict resolutions. The members of the J Street lobby are, for the most part, Jews, although the cooperation of non-Jews is welcome. The new lobby works against the influence of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which promotes the policies of the Israeli government. J Street is controversial: radical Zionists attack it as being an enemy of Israel and Jewish people.

The Aggressive Current

A second group of Jews focuses on human rights, international law, and the resolutions of the United Nations. This group questions whether a state privileging a religion or an ethnicity is compatible with the contemporary ideal of democracy. The group now calls upon Israel to obey the resolution of the United Nations to end the Occupation and dismantle the Jewish settlements on Palestinian lands. Since the invasion and the blockade of Gaza, Jewish associations following this orientation have multiplied in North America and Europe; in many instances, they have coalesced in very large networks. In this article I wish to introduce this Jewish movement in Canada.

The Alliance of Concerned Jewish Canadians (ACJC), founded in 2005, brought together several smaller Jewish circles that were critical of Israel and supported the human rights of Palestinians. The Alliance argued that the State of Israel wrongly claims to speak in the name of the Jewish people and that the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) wrongly claims to speak in the name of Jews in Canada. The time has come, the Alliance said, for Canadian Jews who are critical of Israel's policies to become vocal and to present their alternative position to the Canadian Jewish community and the people of Canada.

When the Harper government created a parliamentary Israel Allies Caucus to mobilize support for Israel in February 2007, the Alliance severely criticized this political initiative. The Alliance objected to the change of Canada's foreign policy and its uncritical support of Israel, calling instead for a return to the policy of peacemaking. What the government should do, the Alliance argued, is to demand the dismantling of the illegal security wall, the end of the military occupation of Palestinian lands, and a just resolution of the Palestinian refugee crisis.

In 2009, the Alliance merged with a new movement, Independent Jewish Voices (IJV), which disagrees with B'nai Brith Canada and the Canadian Jewish Congress. IJV, which advocates justice for Israel and in Israel, in accordance with international law and the UN resolutions, sees itself as a pluralistic movement comprising Zionist Jews yearning for a democratic Israel and non-Zionist Jews convinced that no state should identity itself with a religion or an ethnicity.

In a meeting on March 22, 2009, IJV formulated its position and its policies in some detail. IJV supports Resolution 242 of the United Nations Security Council of November 1967, calling upon Israel to withdraw from the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, which it had invaded and occupied in June 1967. IJV favours a negotiated peace between Israel and Palestine and opposes attempts of an Israeli government to impose its own solution on the Palestinians. IJV urges an end of military assaults and other acts of violence that target civilians, thus pointing its finger at Israelis and Palestinians. IJV calls for the end of the Occupation of Palestinian territories and the end of discrimination against Arab citizens of Israel. IJV also asks the Canadian government to cease its one-sided support of Israel and demands

that Israel abide by international law in relation to the Palestinians. IJV supports the Palestinian call for a campaign of boycott, divestment, and sanctions to make Israel recognize the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people.

The Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism (CPCCA)was founded in November 2009: it wanted to focus especially on the promotion of solidarity with Palestinians on Canadian university campuses. B'nai Brith and others interpret CPCCA's actions as a new form of antisemitism. IJV sees CPCCA as a political project of the Harper government, seconded by some Jewish organizations, to designate calls for the end of the Occupation as expressions of antisemitism and in this manner curtail free speech, control public opinion, and prevent a democratic debate. IJV is strongly opposed to antisemitism and racism of any kind, and recognizes that antisemitism continues to be a current trend in the West and, more particularly, in the East, yet IJV protests against labelling the opposition to the military occupation of Palestine as antisemitic. A critical article on CPCCA by Scott Weinstein[7] records the efforts to use opposition to antisemitism to close down Israeli Apartheid Week on university campuses.

IJV is afraid that the worldwide movement denouncing Israel's colonial policies might lead to the demonization of the Jewish state and of Jews in general. For this reason, IJV thinks that its own movement and the public criticism of Israel by other Jewish voices offer protection against antisemitism, convincing the world that on the question of Israel, the Jewish community is divided.

The Only Democracy in the Middle East

The vast number of North American Jews believe that Zionism and democracy are perfectly compatible and are blended in the Constitution of the State of Israel. Yet a recent article by Peter Beinart in the *New York Review of Books*[8] offers an analysis of recent changes in Israel's political self-understanding. He quotes Israeli authors who show that beginning in the 1990s, a cultural bifurcation took place in Israeli society: on the one hand, the emergence of middle-class attitudes of optimism and personal success, accompanied by opposition to military struggles and a humane understanding of Zionism, and, on the other, the emergence of a pessimistic current, founded on the memory of persecution, genocide, and struggles for survival, distrustful of non-Jews and believing exclusively in Jewish power and solidarity. In Israel today, humane Zionism has little influence; the power has passed to politicians who are ready to defend the Jewish state against the world: they rely on military strength and police force and want no compromise with their Arab neighbours. Examining the Zionist understanding of political leaders such as Effi Eitam, Avigdor Liebermann, and Benjamin Netanyahu, Beinart concludes that they have no respect for human rights and democratic freedoms and do not want justice to define their relationship to Palestinians and their Arab neighbours. Beinart argues that the Jews in North America who love Israel and defend its policies uncritically—and this includes the major Jewish organizations—have not recognized the political transformation that has taken place in Israel. The democratic Zionism to which they are committed no longer guides the State of Israel. The refrain that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East has lost its meaning.

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In this article I have shown that the Kairos Palestine Declaration did not summon forth expressions of solidarity by the Christian churches. Only the Geneva-based World Council of Churches has joined the Palestinian Christians in calling for an end of the Occupation. Yet there is some good news for the authors of the Kairos Palestine Declaration. Recent events, especially the invasion and the blockade of Gaza, have exploded the unanimity of the Jewish communities in the West. Strong Jewish voices in North America and Europe now demand the end of the Occupation, a peace agreement for the Middle East, and the creation of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. These critical voices are proudly Jewish, committed to social justice in keeping with the classical Jewish tradition. To designate opposition to the Occupation as antisemitic has lost all meaning.

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1 Gregory Baum, *Signs of the Times: Religious Pluralism and Economic Injustice* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2007), 70–73.

2 Baum, *Signs of the Times*, 73–74.

3 Sandra Beardsall, "Clashing Symbols: The Failure of Jewish–United Church Dialogue in the 'Ethical Investment' Debate," *The Ecumenist,* Vol. 45, Spring 2008, 11–15.

4 The Sabeel Centre, www.sabeel.org.

5 www.tikkun.org/article.php/20100506114448838.Accessed June 25, 2010.

6 www.jstreet.org

7 www.canadiandimension.com/articles/2844. Accessed June 25, 2010.

8 Peter Beinart, "The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment," *The New York Review of Books*, June 10, 2010.

The Church's Tomorrow

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This article is an edited version of a lecture given on May 30, 2010, at the Centre for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Victoria. Parts of the lecture were published in Island Catholic News.

The great majority of Catholics in the Western world received the Second Vatican Council with enthusiasm. They welcomed the new solidarity with the entire human family and the new openness to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. They were greatly impressed by two new emphases: i) on baptism, enabling the laity to participate in Christ's office as priest and prophet and ii) on episcopal collegiality, summoning the pope and the bishops into dialogue and shared responsibility, thus overcoming the Church's monarchical image.

The great disappointment

This enthusiasm did not last. Many dedicated Catholics became frustrated because the conciliar teaching on dialogue, openness, and solidarity did not change the practice of the ecclesiastical institutions. The Church remained uncompromisingly clerical and monarchical, often turned in upon itself. Paul VI's condemnation of the contraceptive pill in 1968 was made without consultation with the episcopal college, a symbol of the return to the pontifical monarchy. Yet because Catholics did not receive the official teaching on contraception, they began to listen to the Roman magisterium with a critical mind.

In the 1970s and '80s, great numbers of priests as well as men and women in religious orders resigned from their institutions. Since then, Catholic parishes in Western Europe and parts of North America have been shrinking, many Catholics have drifted away, young people rarely participate, dioceses have financial problems, the active priests and religious are getting old, and there are few new vocations. Sociologists of religion now speak of the decline of the Church.

It would be wrong, however, to attribute the decline of the Church simply to the Church's failure to implement the teaching of Vatican II. To understand what has gone on in the Church, we also must look at the changes in the dominant culture of the West.

The dominant culture of the West

The industrialization of European society in the nineteenth century fostered the secularization of people living in the big cities, the centres of the industries. European sociologists became convinced that the trust in science and technology produced by industrialization undermined people's religious faith, since they were unable to prove its truth scientifically. This theory was verified in the countries of Europe, but it did not apply to the United States. From the nineteenth century on, European sociologists marvelled at the vitality of religion in the United States, despite its increasing industrialization. They asked themselves why the experience of the US was so different.

One reason for this difference is that from the seventeenth century on, every European country had an official Church, financed by the State, to which the people had to belong. In Europe, religious liberty was denied. By contrast, the people who created the United States at the end of the eighteenth century wanted their churches to be independent of the government; they longed for religious liberty and were quite willing to finance their own denominations. In Europe, people eventually reacted negatively to their Church because it had been imposed on them from above, while in the US, people looked upon the churches as voluntary organizations they had created themselves.[1]

In recent decades, the societies of the West have gone through a further cultural transformation. Several historical factors have produced what I shall call "the new pluralism." These factors include the growing urbanization, the increasing population mobility, the arrival of immigrants from other continents, and the spread of television, bringing into every home images of alternative values and lifestyles. This new pluralism has affected the culture as a whole. I follow here the thought of sociologist Peter Berger,[2] philosopher Charles Taylor,[3] and theologian Armand Veilleux.[4] The new pluralism names the social reality: that we all live shoulder to shoulder with people of different religions and of no religion. We are surrounded by images of alternatives. We no longer belong to walled communities where everybody thinks the same way. The family, the parish, the village, and the

neighbourhood now have porous walls. People now have to decide for themselves whether to become and remain believers They are no longer urged to believe by tightly woven communities. In the West, wall-to-wall religion has disappeared.

Charles Taylor defines the present secular age as the society where to believe in God is a personal option. Since the institutions and symbols of society are secular, people will have to decide for themselves if they want to be believers and follow a religion. They will follow their own conscience. Even if they regard faith as a gift, they must make a decision to receive it. Making up their own mind, they have to trust their own judgment. Trusting their own judgment does not mean that religious believers are individualists who are unwilling to learn from others. They may actually long for a spiritual home in which they share their convictions and find support for their faith. Yet because trusting their own judgment is important to them, they look for a spiritual home in which they are free to express their convictions and have their words taken seriously. If they choose to belong to a religious organization, they will continue to follow their own conscience, speak their mind, and object to the required unanimity. Today, believers emphasize the aspects of religion that help them and stimulate them spiritually, and disregard the aspects that do not correspond to their spiritual aspirations. The Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby refers to this phenomenon as religion à la carte.[5] This may not be a good image. For people pick out what they want to eat following their tastes, while people's choices in religion are guided by their spiritual aspirations, which can be an anguishing process.

The new pluralism affects the culture of Western society in another way. Since we live in the midst of people with different convictions, be they religious or secular, we learn very quickly to protect the peaceful relations with our neighbour by speaking about our religion with a certain modesty and avoid being aggressive. Today, people who tell others what they should believe are looked upon as sectarian. Sects are communities that refuse to be in dialogue with outsiders. People who come to our door to convert us to their religious beliefs make us uncomfortable. We have learned that for the sake of the common good, we speak of our faith in a modest way, to encourage cooperation with people who believe differently, promoting with them love, justice, and peace.

I may add that Catholics have been encouraged by the Council to respect people who disagree with them on religious issues. This respect is a requirement of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Related to this point is another cultural phenomenon. Believing Christians find it relatively easy today to move from one Church to another if they are so urged by their conscience. Since persons become believers based on their personal judgment and not through pressure by social forces, the confidence in their own judgment remains with them in the Church they join. If this Church fails to recognize their deep convictions, they feel fully justified in joining another one. I know several Catholic women whose call to the priesthood persuaded them to become ordained in the Anglican Church. I know gay and lesbian Catholics who joined the United Church of Canada, where they are respected. They hold that following their carefully considered conscience is the only way to please God.

Vast numbers of people following their personal judgment become secular. Some of them find support in a humanistic tradition; they commit themselves to justice and peace and other values that make society more humane. Many others, affected by the ethos of the capitalist market, become individualists and relativists, increasingly deaf to ethical and religious issues.

In addition to the new pluralism, two other factors have provoked the dramatic secularization of Western Europe. Dom Veilleux points to the anti-authoritarian revolt staged by the youth in 1968; Timothy Radcliffe, former Master General of the Dominican Order, argues that, after the bad experience of fascism and communism, ideologies that demanded total obedience, Europeans refuse to be totally defined by any organization, including the Catholic Church. As a consequence of these various factors, practising Christians have become minorities in the countries of Western Europe. Pope Benedict XVI repeatedly laments that Europe has betrayed its Christian inheritance.

The Churches in the US and Canada

In the United States, religion is still flourishing. We were reminded of this situation during the last two presidential elections, when the candidates tried to attract voters by confessing their religious commitment in their political speeches, a practise wholly inappropriate in Europe and Canada. Still, the new pluralism does have an effect on religion in the US. It has undermined the unanimity in the churches, including the Catholic Church: all denominations have become internally pluralistic.[6] As a reader of the *National Catholic Reporter*,

I am particularly aware of the non-conformity and the contrasting currents within the Catholic Church.

The religious situation in Canada is located between the European turn to secularism and the American enthusiasm for religion. Canada is becoming more secular, but not as dramatically as Western Europe. One exception is Quebec, a society that strongly emphasizes its secularity: Quebecers are still angry with the Catholic Church, which controlled their culture and their personal lives in the past, even though the Catholic bishops lost their power 50 years ago in the Quiet Revolution and have, for the most part, become spiritual leaders willing to listen to their people.

To account for the dominant culture of the West, I must mention briefly two other phenomena.

i) The new pluralism has had a secularizing impact in many parts and has produced non-conformity in the churches, but it has also provoked sectarian resistance. To protect themselves against the cultural impact of the new pluralism, some religious groups put up walls around themselves, denounce the society in which they live, and refuse to enter into dialogue with outsiders. There exist Christian and non-Christian sects, and there are sectarian trends within all the churches, including the Catholic Church .
ii) The fusion of religion and politics in many parts of the world and the outburst of religiously legitimated violence have made many people afraid of religion. As the terrible wars of religion of the seventeenth century provoked the atheism of several Enlightenment philosophers, so has the religious violence of the present brought forth a new current of militant atheism.[7]

Responses in the Church to the new situation

The Vatican's response to the new pluralism and people's habit of making up their own mind has been to promote a conservative movement in the Church. The Second Vatican Council has been put on the back burner. Cardinal Ratzinger/Benedict XVI often warns Catholics of the dangers of dialogue, openness, and solidarity, fearing that they will weaken the Catholic identity. To protect Catholics from the relativism that is widespread in contemporary culture, he is rebuilding the walls around the Church. The Instruction *Dominus lesus* of the year 2000 points to the errors of dissident Christians and the illusions of the world religions. Religious pluralism, the Instruction says, exists only "in fact"; for "in principle" there exists only one religion, Roman Catholicism. The present conservative movement fostered by the Vatican intends to restore the pre-conciliar form of this Roman Catholicism.

Vast numbers of Catholics, including priests and bishops, remain deeply attached to the Second Vatican Council. This was, after all, an ecumenical council confirmed by the pope, which is the highest authority in the Church. The problems raised by the tensions within the Church were examined in a series of lectures at Louvain University in Belgium. The first lecture, on February 8, 2010, was given by Dom Armand Veilleux,[8] mentioned above, whose reflections have stimulated my own thinking. Dom Veilleux argues that the conservative movement presently fostered by the Vatican does not take into account the cultural transformation produced by the new pluralism: that is, the dissolution of all protected communities and the need of people to rely on their own judgment in matters of ethics and religion. I have described this cultural transformation in the preceding pages.

Until now, the Church's magisterium always assumed that Catholic societies and fenced-in Catholic minorities in non-Catholic societies were able to transmit the faith to the next generation. Catholics used to obey the authoritative teaching and remain loyal to their parish and the wider Catholic community. Popes and bishops spoke to the Catholic people to strengthen their communities, demanding unanimity and denouncing dissent and nonconformity. According to Dom Veilleux, this pastoral policy does not work anymore. The dominant culture has changed. Today, people choose to be Catholic based on their own judgment. Living in the Church, they respect authority and are willing to learn, but since they continue to rely on their own judgment, they also want to speak and be heard. According to Veilleux, the Vatican offers its teaching as if Catholics still lived in stable communities with clearly defined boundaries, enjoying doctrinal unanimity and refusing to dialogue with outsiders. As he says, "The Church tries to be present to a world that no longer exists."

On the other hand, Veilleux argues, a look at contemporary Western society reveals that religious concerns have not totally disappeared. Many people leave the Church because they disagree with certain teachings or find the organization oppressive, but they continue to believe in the Gospel and commit themselves, urged by their faith, to works of love, justice, and peace. There exists, moreover, a widespread longing for spirituality: people want to be in touch with the depth dimension of

their lives in order to survive in today's troubled and conflictive world. There are people who call themselves agnostic and yet continue to interpret the human struggle of existence in images drawn from the Christian faith, such as love, forgiveness, service, and compassion. There are also secular people committed to justice and peace who appreciate the Church's teaching on social issues and advocate cooperation between believers and non-believers in a joint effort to make society more just and more humane. As an example, Veilleux mentions the secular German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who wants secular and religious humanists to stand together against the dehumanizing forces in society. Today, Habermas advocates what he calls "the post-secular society."[9] Veilleux argues that there is a spiritual dimension in the social movements for justice, for peace, for human rights, for the protection of the environment, for a moral economy, for equality between men and women, for the reception of refugees, for the respect of gays and lesbians, and for solidarity with the peoples of the global South. In these and in other movements, believers and non-believers work together without arguing about metaphysics.

Veilleux holds that the redemptive presence of the Spirit is universal, working in the hearts and communities of people. Yet the mystery of grace implicit in people's lives needs articulation; it must be proclaimed and communicated by the Church in a new evangelization that takes into account the dominant present culture. What such an evangelization entails calls for an open discussion. I wish to present the proposals of two theologians who have taken contemporary culture seriously.

The young Joseph Ratzinger and the old Karl Rahner

First are the reflections of the young Joseph Ratzinger on the necessary pluralism in the Catholic Church. Recalling that the early Church lived in the pluralistic society of the Roman Empire, he argues that the early Church's creativity around the Christian faith was largely due to the relative autonomy of the local episcopal churches. Here, the bishop, in dialogue with his people, was able to make the gospel respond to the challenges of the local culture. The episcopal churches were united through the loyalty of their bishops to the pope, the Bishop of Rome. The young Ratzinger favoured the restoration of the ancient synodal structure of the Catholic Church. He thought that the Church's institutional centralization in the papacy took place in Western Christianity in the Middle Ages, after the break with the Orthodox churches of the East. In his book on the Second Vatican Council,[10] the young Ratzinger presented as an important breakthrough i) the conciliar teaching on episcopal collegiality and ii) the conciliar recognition that the local churches were not administrative provinces of the universal Church, but full embodiments of Christ's Church in that locality. At that time, the young Ratzinger thought that the Council had initiated a new pluralism in the Church, allowing the bishops in various regions, in dialogue with their people, to incarnate the gospel in the culture of their region. He therefore advocated pluralisms in governance, liturgy, theology, and spirituality. Allowing the Church to respond to the regional culture would make it flourish in modern society where believers and non-believers lived side by side.

Joseph Ratzinger changed his mind about these matters when he became the Archbishop of Munich and, later, the prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. He became an ardent supporter of the centralization of the Church in the papacy.

More radical are the proposals Karl Rahner made as an old man in the 1980s, when the wave of secularization was sweeping over Germany and Western Europe and Rome put parentheses around the Second Vatican Council. In the book *Faith in a Wintry Season*[11] he recognizes that in the Western world, people make up their own mind in regard to religion, vast numbers will choose to be secular, and the Catholic Church will become "a Diaspora Church" – that is, an international network of minorities. The local Catholic communities will be linked to one another through their bishops, and the bishops will be united by their common loyalty to the pope. Rahner also recalls the situation of the early Church in the Roman Empire. Yet, in the present age, the ecclesiastical pluralism will be much greater. Vatican centralism and enforced unanimity will not survive. Catholics will be encouraged to think for themselves, be in conversation with their bishop and make their own contribution to the life of the Church. We will have to learn, Rahner writes, to live with diversity and remain brothers and sisters in Christ, even as we disagree with one another in matters related to our diverse cultures. In this international network of churches, Rahner writes, there will always be progressives and conservatives: progressives eager to respond to new challenges, and conservatives eager to protect ecclesiastical continuity. This tension will not disappear.

Karl Rahner also argued that since the Catholic Church will have a minority status in every country, it will lose the power to influence governments directly. Yet since it is no longer called upon to bless the societal set-up, the Church can exercise its prophetic mission and speak to society about justice for the poor and the excluded. Today, we also insist that the Church address society about the protection of the environment. If the churches are faithful to their prophetic mission, Rahner writes, then Rome, the papal centre, will have great influence on the world, not through control but through service.

The young Ratzinger and the old Rahner have made bold proposals. They have opened an important discussion in the Church. But will they be heard?

The great question mark

In his recent lecture, Dom Veilleux suggested that the culture I have named "the new pluralism" is spreading beyond the West among the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Students of religion are not in agreement on this finding. Some of them argue that the globalization of Western materialistic individualism is a threat to the local cultures on these continents and thus summons forth a conservative reaction, an ardent defence of people's religious identity.

A lengthy article entitled "Religion and Identity in a Globalising World,"[12] written by Chandra Muzaffar, an ecumenical Muslim thinker and activist in Malaysia, shows in some detail that resistance against Western capitalist culture has produced conservative movements in the world religions that emphasize identity, define it in restrictive terms, refuse to engage in dialogue, and develop indifference or even hostility to outsiders. Fundamentalism is just one manifestation of this trend. More moderate believers simply treasure the truth they have received and defend it against the errors upheld by outsiders or by some members of their own religious tradition. This moderate conservatism has produced religious vitality and dedicated living. It can even be argued that such a conservative movement also exists in Christianity, embracing fundamentalists and moderate believers, all stressing the difference between truth and error, between the redeemed and the unredeemed, between the seeing Church and the blind world. Even though Muzaffar does not say this, the present conservative trend in the Catholic Church, fostered by Pope Benedict XVI, fits into this picture: it, too, is a reaction to the new pluralism that threatens the Catholic identity. Will the stress on identity among Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists living in the West provoke a conservative emphasis on identity among Christians? Will this approach undermine the liberal tradition of Western civilization? Is Benedict XVI more in tune with what is happening in the world than his critics who advocate openness and pluralism?

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1 Peter Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).

2 Berger, Davie, and Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?*

3 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 2007).

4 Armand Veilleux, a Québécois Cistercian, presently Abbot of Scourmont Abbey in Belgium. On February 8, 2010, he gave a public lecture at Louvain University as part of a conference on the present crisis in the Church. He sent his manuscript to his friends in Québec. Eventually his and the other lectures will be published.

5 Reginald Bibby, *Fragmented Gods* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1987) and *Restless Churches* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004).

6 Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Alam Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

7 See the books of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris.

8 See note 4 above.

9 Gregory Baum, "The Post-Secular Society: A Proposal of Jürgen Habermas," in *Théologie et culture: hommages à Jean Richard*, Marc Dumas, François Nault, and Lucien Pelletier, eds. (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 2004), 7–35.

10 Joseph Ratzinger, *Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1966).

11 Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1989), 161 ff. See also *The Church after the Council* (Montréal: Palm Publisher, 1966), 31 ff.

12 http://www.peaceforlife.org/resources/faithresist/2009/09-0317-religionandidentity.html

Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation

By Robert Hurley
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When the white man came to our country, he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said, 'Let us pray.' After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible.

Musa Dube telescopes into this brief but powerful story the critical consciousness that informed the armed struggle for liberation in sub-Saharan Africa and that serves as a starting point for her own feminist, postcolonial interpretation of the Bible.[1] The themes evoked by this "narrative of resistance" belong to a larger set of concerns that are recurrent in the deconstructive hermeneutics of postcolonialist exegesis. Scholars attuned to this critical sensibility unmask the ways in which religion in general and biblical interpretation in particular have been used to promote the interests of Empire, justifying uneven relationships of power, imposing structures of domination and subordination, encouraging dependence and collusion, and seeking to ferret out all forms of resistance, including strategies of ambivalence and mimicry.[2] Although postcolonial theory and practice are very recent additions to the world of biblical exegesis, the number of texts already published under this banner has mushroomed. Rather than try to provide anything like an adequate overview of the current state of the field, I will limit myself here to providing a brief account of its origins and to introducing a few of its more eloquent representatives.

Postcolonial Studies, so like so many recent forms of biblical criticism, began as a branch of literary criticism. Critics studying literature produced in the countries of the former British Empire began to pay attention to the work of indigenous writers who dealt with themes such as the quest for identity, the rediscovery of one's own history, and the deconstruction of cultural models inherited from the colonial power. Unsurprisingly, such themes are echoed in other cultural and linguistic settings as well.[3] Since many postcolonial works predate the great decolonization that took place in the wake of the Second World War, the "post" of postcolonialism is best understood not as a chronological marker but rather as the indication of a move "beyond" the rhetoric and ideology deployed by colonial powers. The postcolonial phenomenon reasserts the dignity of peoples who have been made to feel inferior by imperialisms of all stripes, from the explicit ideologies of the nineteenth century to the cultural paternalism and Eurocentrism of colonial powers (especially France and Britain) in the first half of the 20th century.

Ferdinand Segovia, a postcolonial theorist who is interested in biblical studies, situates postcolonial critique within the larger class of ideological criticism. Each of the fields that he includes in this wider category addresses the question of power relations: feminist criticism foregrounds the question of gender; liberation criticism, that of class; minority criticism, that of ethnicity-race; queer criticism, that of sexual orientation; postcolonial criticism, the question of geopolitics.[4]

While the earliest works written in this voice predate World War II, this genre first comes into its own in the 1950s. Varying degrees of hybridity, syncretism, métissage, and intercultural exchange characterize the work of postcolonial authors writing in the English language. Many writers who fit the category live outside their country of origin[5]; without exception, they reject as illusory the quest for a return to a golden age in which their native culture was free of hegemonic external influences. Edward Said (1935–2003), an American critic of Palestinian origin, realizing that identity was not a thing to be recovered from the past, chose instead to unmask the troubling relationship between the Western world and the Orient. Said understood the exotic construction of the Orient in Western culture as a reification of the Other, which had the effect of reducing the East to an object of curiosity and of perverse joy that Westerners felt compelled to possess.[6] He further maintained that the revolution in biblical studies that took place in eighteenth-century Europe—Christians discovering the lands of the Bible—was one of the important factors that fuelled Western curiosity.[7]

Two other theoreticians of the postcolonial whose work continues to exert great influence in the field both hail from the Indian sub-continent. They are Gayatri Spivak[8] and Homi Bhabha.[9] Spivak is best known for her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" This text, inspired by the work of Antonio Gramsci, is considered to be a founding text of postcolonialist critique. Bhabha's *The*

Location of Culture is recognized as an important collection of essays on postcolonial theory.

Not long after postcolonial criticism captured the interest of many literary scholars, biblical critics began to realize its potential as an analytic tool suited to their own field of inquiry. The shift from literary to biblical studies took place within a very short period of time. Depending on the example being considered, it seemed to have emerged either from liberation hermeneutics, from extra-biblical postcolonial studies, from historical criticism, or from all three at once.[10] Indeed, as Stephen Moore points out, the presentation of the Bible against the backdrop of a succession of empires has been a constant feature of historical criticism since its inception.[11] What is new in postcolonial criticism is its insistence on the question of the use and abuse of "political" power as the central hermeneutical key for exegetical work.

Stephen Moore and Fernando Segovia describe the emergence of postcolonial biblical criticism beginning with a conversation they had at the 1997 annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). These two scholars were interested in attempting a rapprochement of biblical and cultural studies.[12] Given that a cultural studies section of the Society already existed, they settled on the related theme of Postcolonialism and Bible as a suitable handle for the work that they were interested in carrying forward.

A year earlier, Laura Donaldson had edited an issue of *Semeia* (1996) in which she and others exposed the importance of postcolonial critique as an analytical and political tool for use in Biblical Studies.[13] The contributors to this issue were interested in showing how the processes of imperialism were embodied in literary and theological forms:

> Within the Jewish and Christian religions, for example, some scholars have perceived parallels between the prophetic tradition of the Bible and the goals of emerging postcolonial literatures: both call individuals and societies to new ways of life and both proclaim the need for justice at all levels of society.[14]

Donaldson describes her own contribution to the thematic issue of *Semeia* as an example of a multiaxial approach: that is, one that moves beyond the single axis approach of scholarship that treats culture, race, class, and gender separately.[15]

During this same period, Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, a prolific scholar of Indian origin who was working in England, was also producing books and articles devoted to the postcolonial. In 1998, he published *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*[16] and edited *The Postcolonial Bible,* the first title of a series on postcolonialism launched by Sheffield Academic Press.[17] Sugirtharajah not only attempts to recover the emancipatory thrust of biblical writings by examining them from a postcolonial perspective, but also critically challenges them for their embodiment of colonial ideas:

> Postcoloniality brings a fresh set of questions to the Bible. The Bible as the book of the colonizer is well attested and documented in the mission history. But those who take postcoloniality seriously will go a step further and, instead of assigning blame to the missionary interpreters, will perceive the Bible itself as a literary product of the ancient world, both embodying and legitimizing colonial intentions, assumptions and power, and also reflecting the predicament of a frequent victim of its neighbour's imperial and colonial intentions.[18]

Focused on recovering the voices that have been marginalized or suppressed within a tradition, Sugirtharajah concerns himself with liberation hermeneutics.[19] His contextual hermeneutics, like those of Musa Dube, take up the task of biblical interpretation within his own cultural context. He denounces the application of Bultmann's program of demythologization in India as entirely inappropriate. Culturally sensitive, Sanskritic modes of biblical interpretation should have been preferred to the critical goals of European historical scholarship. Indian Christians traditionally construct inner, mystical, and allegorical meaning and transcendent knowledge from their sacred texts. Westerners, on the other hand, given their preference for scientific modes of thinking, have lost the sense of awe and wonder and a feel for the numinous. For Westerners, writes Sugirtharajah, demythologization serves as a way of engaging texts, historicity, and authorial intentions.[20] Postcolonial biblical interpretation demands culturally sensitive hermeneutics.

Some time before the emergence of postcolonial studies at the SBL, historical scholars had already been publishing research informed by similar critical sensibilities as those foregrounded by postcolonial critics. Stephen Moore refers to the work of this group of scholars as "empire studies," taking his cue from the mention of the word *empire* in so many of their titles. For these scholars, the Roman Empire pro-

vides a hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the New Testament. Researchers such as John Dominic Crossan,[21] Neil Elliott,[22] Philip Esler,[23] Dieter Georgi,[24] Bengt Holmberg,[25] Richard Horsley,[26] Helmut Koester,[27] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,[28] and N.T. Wright[29] (to mention only a few of the more prominent names associated with this trend) began looking to the theopolitical structures of imperial Rome as the interpretive backdrop for their exegetical work. This important new avenue of research builds upon earlier scholarship on the Jewish background of the New Testament and on the influence exerted by Greek philosophy and rhetoric on New Testament writers. New Testament texts were now seen as a form of implicit resistance to the central structures and values of Roman imperial rule.[30] As they compared the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the early Church with the political, religious, social, economic, ethnic, and sexual norms underpinning the Empire, these scholars began to understand that Christian values clearly conflicted with imperial values. They had uncovered a treasure house of material that sheds new light on the meaning of Christianity for the first Christians. The Christian movement saw itself as a political entity (an *ekklesia*), a heavenly commonwealth (*politeuma*) with its own king (*Christos*), whom they knew to be superior to the emperor. Christians adopted economic and social principles that placed them at odds with the most basic structures of the Empire as a whole.

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Postcolonial biblical criticism represents one of the most promising new forms of exegesis to have appeared on the scene in recent years. Its contextual hermeneutics place a new emphasis on audience-centred critique and on reception theory in general. In fact, postcolonialism has come to serve as a rallying point for many other forms of critique that once worked in relative isolation from one another. What the Bible has to say about social, cultural, political, and economic interaction, and how it addresses questions of sexuality and gender, may all be examined as examples of power relations.

Given the long pedigree this form of thought has enjoyed at the margins of historical criticism and the fresh interest it has galvanized among a new generation of scholars, it is a safe bet that postcolonial critique, political criticism, and ideological criticism are here to stay.

1 Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 3.

2 Stephen D. Moore, "Postcolonialism," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, 182–88, A.K.M. Adam, ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 182.

3 Durix and Joubert refer, for instance, to the francophone literature of Africa, the Antilles, and North Africa. See Jean-Pierre Durix and Jean-Louis Joubert, "Postcoloniales littératures," in *Encyclopædia Universalis*, 2008 (www.universalis.fr). Accessed June 3, 2010.

4 Fernando F. Segovia, "Mapping the Postcolonial Optic in Biblical Criticism: Meaning and Scope", 23–78, in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, eds. (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 23.

5 Neil Bissoondath, a Trinidadian of Indian descent, offers a case in point. He immigrated to Canada as a teenager and has become a well-known Canadian writer and critic working in the postcolonial paradigm.

6 Said's *Orientalism:Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Vintage, 1978) is generally considered the charter document of postcolonial theory.

7 Said *Orientalism,* 17.

8 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

9 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

10 Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse* – The Bible in the Modern World 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 14.

11 Stephen D. Moore, "Colonialism/Postcolonialism," in Adam, *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, 187–88.

12 Cultural Studies is an "interdisciplinary field concerned with the role of social institutions in the shaping of culture. Originally identified with the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (founded 1964) and with such scholars as Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams, today cultural studies is recognized as a discipline or area of concentration in many academic institutions and has had broad influence in sociology, anthropology, historiography, literary criticism, philosophy, and art criticism. Among its central concerns are the place of race (or ethnicity), class, and gender in the production of cultural knowledge." See "Cultural Studies," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* (www.search.eb.com/eb/article-9472155). Accessed June 3, 2010.

13 Laura Donaldon, "Postcolonialism and Biblical Reading: An Introduction," *Semeia* 75:1–14, 1.

14 On this issue, see Susan Van Zanten Gallagher, "Introduction: New Conversations on Postcolonial Literature," 3–33, in *Postcolonial Literature and the Call for Biblical Justice*, ed. Susan Van Zanten Gallagher (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 20, as cited by L. Donaldson, *art. cit*., 1.

15 Donaldson, *art.cit*., 8. She is referring here to a notion proposed by Pui-lan Kwok's *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

16 R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

17 R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible* – The Bible and Postcolonialism 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

18 Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 19.

19 Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 15.

20 Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 7, 11.

21 John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007); John

Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); Robert B. Stewart, *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

22 Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

23 Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology*. Monograph Series / Society for New Testament Studies (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

24 Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

25 Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

26 R.A. Horsley, ed., *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008); R.A. Horsley, *Jesus in Context: Performance, Power & People* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); R.A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); R.A. Horsley, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (Semeia Studies, 48, Atlanta, GA, 2004); R.A. Horsley, *Religion and Empire: People, Power, and the Life of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003); R.A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000); R.A. Horsley, *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); R.A. Horsley with N. Asher Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom: How Jesus and Paul Ignited a Revolution and Transformed the Ancient World* (New York: Fortress Press, 1997); R.A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995).

27 Helmut Koester, *Paul & His World: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Helmut Koester, *From Jesus to the Gospels: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

28 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000); *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

29 N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006).

30 In this regard, the work of James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) has been applied to New Testament studies by several exegetes, including Richard Horsley and Erik Heen.

Etienne De Jonghe: Thirty Years as Leader of Pax Christi

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Etienne De Jonghe was the Secretary General of Pax Christi International for thirty years. His work has given him an acquaintance with different cultures, insight into political conflicts, and a sense of universal solidarity with the victims of violence and injustice. After his retirement in 2008, he spent several months at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, to distance himself from the international office in Belgium and reflect in a new space on his work in the future. He wants to record his experiences in promoting peace and his insights into conflict resolutions in a volume that addresses people concerned with peace and reconciliation, whether they are Christian or not. He has a strong feeling that he has something important to say.

In May 2010, Etienne De Jonghe was interviewed at some length by Katherine Marshall, professor at the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, located at Georgetown University. The interview is impressive. Several reasons have persuaded me to make use of this interview to write an article on Etienne De Jonghe and the role he has played in the evolution of Pax Christi. The interview reveals to me two points in particular: i) Etienne's extraordinary gift as organizer and negotiator and ii) the unusual place Pax Christi occupies within the Catholic Church. I have met Etienne several times in Montreal and enjoyed his intelligent, humble, and cheerful presence, yet his interview at the Berkeley Center has made me aware of the originality, the daring, and the scope of this untiring Catholic activist.

Another reason for writing this article is the importance of faith-inspired movements in the Church and in religions in general. While religions as such are ambiguous historical phenomena, embodying inspiration as well as compromise, they manifest their creativity and resourcefulness in the religious movements within them. Since we presently live in "wintry times" in the Catholic Church—the expression is Karl Rahner's—we turn to the faith-inspired movements in the Church which, guided by the Spirit, respond creatively to the challenges of today's troubled world. Christians active in these movements listen to the demanding call of the Gospel and attempt to interpret its contemporary meaning. While most people in the parishes must try to adjust to the expectations of their society and make the necessary accommodations, people in the movements are ready to explore the radical implications of the gospel. In the past, the vital religious movements in the Church were mainly religious orders and congregations, yet at the present time movements and centres, organized by lay people, translate the imperatives of the gospel into life-giving action. If you want to know what the Christian message has to say regarding the Gulf War, the invasion of Afghanistan, and the militarism of the State, you do not turn to bishops for an answer: you address yourself to Pax Christi, study their analyses, and learn from their public actions.

A brief history

In his interview, Etienne De Jonghe recalls the origin of Pax Christi in a prayer movement started by a bishop and a laywoman in France. Pierre-Marie Théas was one of the few French bishops who, during World War II, publicly protested against the arrests and banishment of the Jews decreed by the Vichy government. Bishop Théas was eventually put into prison himself. Before the war ended, he began to pray for the moral renewal of Germany and its reconciliation with his own country. In the same year, 1944, a French Catholic woman, Marthe Dortel-Claudot, was troubled by the suffering of the German people under Hitler's domination and the bombardments of the Allies. Believing that Jesus wanted his followers to pray for their enemies, she founded a circle of like-minded friends to pray for the renewal of Germany and a lasting peace in Europe. Having heard of Bishops Théas, she contacted him in 1945, and together with him, founded a prayer movement for the German people. It was called Pax Christi. Since people were yearning for peace after the war, the prayer movement spread rapidly across France and entered Germany, long before the bishops of the two countries gave it their official blessing. Pax Christi, then and now, is ahead of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

In the 1950s, Pax Christi became international. It offered prayers for the renewal and reconciliation of all countries and their populations. The new movement had the support of Cardinal Roncalli, papal nuncio in Paris at

the time; he would later become Pope John XXIII. Ever since 1952, when Pius XII recognized Pax Christi as a Catholic peace movement, it had an ecclesiastically approved president, often a cardinal or a bishop committed to the promotion of peace. This presence communicated a certain authority to the interventions of Pax Christi and protected it from local bishops who were suspicious of the peace movement.

During this decade, Pax Christi discovered that prayer for peace must be accompanied by study and action—by the study of the conflicts that threaten peace and by actions initiating dialogue between the hostile parties. Gradually, Pax Christi became a Catholic-inspired non-governmental organization (NGO) promoting peace on the global scale and concerned with issues of human rights and social justice. Pax Christi was constituted by local chapters in various countries and an international office to address urgent global issues. Pax Christi International was eventually recognized as an NGO at the United Nations.

Etienne De Jonghe looks upon the evolution from a prayer meeting to an international movement as a significant fact. After all, this is how the Church itself evolved: from a prayer meeting in Jerusalem to a worldwide organization. Pax Christi continues to pray for peace and be sustained by a spirituality derived from the Gospel, even if there is no perfect unanimity in the movement. Some members are principled pacifists, while others hold that self-defence or the defence of the innocent may, under certain circumstances, justify military action.

In the 1960s, the Church's official teaching on peace evolved dramatically. In *Pacem in terris*, John XXIII declared that on account of the destructive power of modern weapons, war is no longer a legitimate means for settling political conflicts.[1] Modern war kills the civilian population in violation of the ancient principle upholding the immunity of non-combatants. That war had lost its ethical legitimacy in today's world was confirmed by Vatican Council II.[2] The just war theory is no longer valid. On October 4, 1965, Paul VI, addressing the United Nations, solemnly declared, "Never again war!" Yet like most of the Church's social teaching, the declaration that war has become unethical in principle was not widely assimilated by Catholics in the parishes. The American bishops took the new teaching seriously in their remarkable 1983 pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace*. But by the time the United States bombarded the populations of Iraq and Afghanistan, the bishops had become silent. A certain confusion was created by John Paul II's proposal that the just war theory was still useful for evaluating the moral legitimacy of humanitarian interventions—that is, military action to protect the innocent from harm.[3] President Obama quoted these papal texts in his speech when he received the Nobel Peace Prize,[4] ironically just after he had increased America's military presence in Afghanistan. While the American bishops were unwilling to apply the Church's teaching on peace to the military policies of their country, Pax Christi USA, a widely supported and well-organized movement in the United States, boldly provided Catholics with critical analyses, ethical reflections, and opportunities to support public protests.

Pax Christi's unique character

When Etienne De Jonghe became Secretary General of Pax Christi in 1978, the organization consisted of fourteen local chapters in a dozen countries. When he retired 30 years later, there were more than a hundred local chapters in 50 countries spread over all continents. This extraordinary growth and, as we shall see, the complexity of the organization reveal Etienne's uncommon talent to bring together people dedicated to peace, facilitate their mutual understanding, and negotiate the conditions that allow them to cooperate in a single organisation.

In his interview, he describes the differences within Pax Christi: each local chapter has its own history and its own approach to peacemaking, even if as members of the same organization they are at one in prayer and spirituality, and are united by their commitment to peace and justice. As I mentioned above, some local chapters adopt a pacifist approach, rejecting the use of violence under all conditions, while others hold that, on certain rare occasions, special circumstances legitimate military violence. As an example, Etienne mentions that the American military intervention to protect the people of Kosovo divided Pax Christi: the German chapter opposed it, while other chapters approved of it.

There are other differences between local chapters. Some are made of lay Catholic men and women, while others also include priests and bishops. For instance, Pax Christi USA has several bishops as members. Still, Pax Christi is essentially a movement organized by lay people. I wish to mention at this point that Pax Christi USA is an impressive organization, a movement supported by vast numbers of Catholics, and a bold critic of American militarism. Its website is worth consulting. Unfortunately, Canada had to wait until quite recently to have a chapter of Pax Christi.

Since some chapters had existed as organized groups before they decided to join Pax Christi, they are permitted to keep their special character. Most of the chapters have a Catholic membership, yet some also have Protestant members and others accept "marginal Catholics" (the expression is Etienne's)—that is to say, Catholics who are in disagreement with certain teachings of the Church or who are put off by the Church's heavy-handed authoritarianism, who prefer to think of themselves as outsiders. The chapters also differ at times in their analysis of the conditions of hostility; some put the emphasis on political factors, while others regard economic factors as more important. In the chapters in the English-speaking countries of the West, women play an important role and often assume positions of leadership, while this is not the case in some other countries. In his interview, Etienne emphasizes the leadership in the movement that is exercised by women. Etienne's successor as Secretary General of Pax Christi International is a Catholic woman from Haiti, Claudette Werleigh, who has been Minister of Foreign Affairs and served briefly as prime minister of her country. Because Pax Christi defines itself as a federation, it is able to unite peacemaking groups of various kinds in a single organization framework, an achievement that is largely due to the negotiating talent of its former Secretary General, Etienne De Jonghe. Pax Christi International has a world assembly, at which the local chapters are represented, that formulates the policies and actions of the international office on the global level.

Etienne's interview also reveals the original place that Pax Christi occupies in the Catholic Church, being both autonomous and within. Having a president approved by the Vatican, usually a cardinal or bishop, assures that Pax Christi cannot be silenced by local Catholic priests or bishops. Yet because Pax Christi adopts bold measures to promote peace, the Vatican is often glad to say that the Catholic peace movement acts independently and does not represent the Church's official position. Pax Christi's contact with the Russian Orthodox Church beginning in the early 1970s was supported by certain personalities at the Vatican, yet they also insisted that Pax Christi does not represent the official Church. When, after the assassination of Archbishop Romero, Pax Christi produced a report on the violation of human rights in four Central American countries, Cardinal Lopez Trojillo, president of CELAM, the Latin American bishops' conference, raised strong objections to the report. Yet prominent personalities at the Vatican trusted the work done by Pax Christi. What emerges from the interview with Etienne is that the hierarchical Church itself, including the Holy See, is made of men who are in disagreement about many of the unresolved conflicts in the world. Again, it is Etienne's talent as facilitator and negotiator that has allowed Pax Christi to become an autonomous Catholic movement within the institutional Catholic Church.

Pax Christi's engagement for peace

In his interview, Etienne mentions various social, political, and religious conflicts in which Pax Christi has been involved and in which he has played a significant role. The few brief stories he tells in the interview make the listener look forward to the book he plans to write, recording his extraordinary adventures of peacemaking. He mentions in passing the work of Pax Christi during the Cold War and its peace efforts in the Middle East, the Balkans, East Timor, Sudan, Rwanda, and the Congo. He speaks of the involvement of Pax Christi in the creation of the International Criminal Court, the reduction of the arms trade and the control of small firearms. He provides more detailed information about the work of Pax Christi in fostering the reconciliation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican and in promoting human rights in Central America. Looking back over the long years of engagement, Etienne recognizes the achievements of Pax Christi under his leadership as well as the mistakes that he and his colleagues made. Both the achievements and the mistakes, he adds, deserve close attention, because we must learn from them.

Pax Christi's contact with the Russian Orthodox Church began in 1972 in Japan at the founding assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP). Pax Christi started an ongoing conversation with the Russian Orthodox Church, at first discreetly approved by the Vatican and later more openly supported by Cardinal Willebrands, prefect of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Later, as Secretary General, De Jonghe visited the former USSR about 40 times. A delicate issue emerged during the Russian Orthodox Church's preparation for the celebration of its millennium in 1988. It was not clear at first whether the Russian Orthodox Church wanted representatives of the Vatican to be present, or whether Rome regarded its attendance at the millennium as appropriate. The Vatican asked Pax Christi to start informal inquiries, especially since Mikhail Gorbachev, at that time the head of State of the USSR, desired the Catholic Church's presence at the millennial ceremonies. Pax Christi inquired to what

extent Catholics living in the USSR were suffering discrimination and whether they would be offended by the Vatican's presence at the millennium. Efforts at reconciliation with the Russian Orthodox Church always raise problems for the Ukrainian Catholic Church, which has suffered oppression in the USSR and has been taken advantage of by the Russian Orthodox Church. Despite these unresolved difficulties, the Vatican decided to send three cardinals of the Roman Curia to the millennium. Etienne De Jonghe attended the event with Cardinal König, at that time the President of Pax Christi.

The frequent visits to Russia allowed Etienne to recognize the problems of the Russian Orthodox Church—especially its control by the government. He met young theologians with critical minds who knew how to make their ideas sound innocent, yet he also met churchmen who were staunchly conservative, nationalist, and anti-Muslim, nostalgic for the Church's glory of the past. Etienne's continued contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church make him aware of the internal struggle within that Church over its identification with the Russian people, its loyalty to the government, and its prophetic mission to renew the culture of its country.

The second, longer account that Etienne gives in his interview deals with the work of Pax Christi in Central America. Archbishop Romero invited Pax Christi, including its Secretary General, to foster the spirit of solidarity in the Central American Church. After his assassination in 1980, Pax Christi held hearings in four countries of the region and published a hard-hitting report that recorded in detail the violation of human rights. As I mentioned above, Cardinal Lopez Trojillo, the president of CELAM, accused the report of bias. To deal with this issue, Cardinal Augustino Casaroli, the Vatican's Secretary of State, issued a formal invitation to Etienne and his team to come to Rome for a conversation; instead of scolding them, he trusted them and respected their findings.

Another outcome of this report was a lawsuit filed against Pax Christi in a German court by the international relief organization World Vision. The report had accused the staff of World Vision in Central America of having links to the CIA and paramilitary groups. Now Pax Christi had to go to Frankfurt to defend its investigating work before a court. Pax Christi won the case on legal grounds. One reason for this victory was the fact that before launching the court case, World Vision had reorganized its work in Central America and dismissed several members of its staff, thus giving the impression that there was some truth to the accusation. Etienne remembers that soon after the trial, the senior staff member of World Vision invited his team and theirs to meet in a restaurant to make peace over a meal. World Vision was a Christian relief organization, helping poor and neglected children in particular, that did not question the structures of society nor the established economic order. Over the years World Vision has evolved; today it includes in its mission advocacy for greater justice.

Implicit in the interview with Etienne is an issue that deserves attention, even though he himself does not refer to it directly. Working for peace, facilitating dialogue between hostile groups, and negotiating agreements between them demands of the peacemaker that he or she not take sides. In order to maintain credibility with both sides, peacemakers must stay neutral. They are likely to have personal convictions about the conflict, yet in their peace efforts they have to disguise their feelings so that both sides will listen to them. Working for peace is therefore very different from struggling for justice. Demanding justice means taking sides. Pax Christi seems to engage in both kinds of activities, depending on the historical context. When Etienne De Jonghe worked towards reconciliation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican, he did not take sides. He did not accuse parties or groups that offered resistance. Rather, he acted as a diplomat, polite and aloof. Yet when working in Central America, recognizing that the people's oppression by the established powers was the cause of violent conflicts, Etienne took sides, recorded the human rights abuses, and accused the oppressor. The organizational complexity of Pax Christi allowed the movement to use both approaches: to facilitate reconciliation and to denounce injustice. This double function must have produced serious debates in the organization. Etienne's interview convinces his listeners that the book he wants to write will make an important contribution to the peace movement.

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1 John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* (1963), no. 127.

2 Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 80.

3 John Paul II, his speech to the 27th Conference of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (November 11, 1992) and his speech for the World Day of Peace 2000 (January 1, 2000).

4 For President Obama's speech at the reception of the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 2009, see http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34360743/ns/politics-white_house/. Accessed June 25, 2010.

Peace for Life: An Interreligious Movement for Peace

By Gregory Baum
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Peace for Life, a radical faith-based movement founded in 2004 in the Philippines, has become a global network of religious communities critical of empire, opposed to violence, and supporting the struggle for life. Because Peace for Life was created by people in the global South, and because its leadership has remained in the Philippines, the movement is not well known in North America. Another reason why the movement has attracted little attention in North America may be the outspoken manner in which the resolutions of Peace for Life denounce the American empire as the focus of all the forces that are presently destroying human communities and their natural environment. Yet this faith-based movement is a remarkable achievement that deserves attention. What is boldly original is that Peace for Life, founded by Protestants and Catholics in the Philippines, has been joined by Muslims living in that country and subsequently by people of different religions living in other parts of Asia.

This is how its website presents Peace for Life:

> *Peace for Life* is the organizational expression of a common yearning among people of different faiths and beliefs to use the power of 'spirituality' to build resistance to the life-threatening forces of global hegemony. Originally conceived as a Christian ecumenical initiative in solidarity with other faith groups, *Peace for Life* was affirmed in Davao City as a place for people whose varied spiritualities—regardless of creed—are nurtured as a collective resource for resistance to all forms of injustice. The Forum recognised the urgency of such coming together in the face of the flagrant misuse of religion for profit and as an excuse for war by the United States Empire and its allies.

Peace for Life traces its roots to the International Ecumenical Conference on Terrorism in a Globalized World, held in Manila in 2002. It was at the Manila Conference—jointly sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Christian Conference of Asia, and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines—that a collective decision was made to form a new ecumenical alliance that would gather faith-based resistance against the terror of war and economic globalization. The First People's Forum on Peace for Life was held in 2004 at Davao City in the Mindanao region of the Philippines, where an ancient Muslim community has struggled to obtain a certain administrative autonomy. The Forum was convened under the theme "Sowing Seeds of Peace in the Era of Empire: Christians in Solidarity with Muslims." From the very beginning, Peace for Life fostered interreligious cooperation and mobilized Christians to extend their solidarity to Muslims being persecuted in many parts of the world, partly as a result of President Bush's war against terror.

The First People's Forum decided to found Peace for Life as a movement where people converge, gather strength, and build on the transformative power of faith to press on with the struggle against global hegemony. It also commissioned Peace for Life to develop a shared understanding of the current stage of the US global hegemonic project, paying particular attention to the religious, ideological, and socio-cultural frameworks and value systems within which the US empire pursues its imperial objectives.

The First People's Forum was well attended: 321 participants had arrived from countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as a few from North America. I was among the North Americans who were asked to attend the Forum. I registered for the event, ordered my plane tickets and exchanged letters with John Carroll, S.J., the director of the Institute on Church and Social Issues, who wanted to welcome me on my arrival in Manila. Yet shortly before my planned departure, I felt physically weak—that sometimes happens to people over 80—and decided to cancel my flight and stay home. Years later, I discovered that the proceedings of the First People's Forum and several of the major speeches given during that occasion are available on the Internet.[1]

Peace for Life has a permanent secretariat at Quezon City in the Philippines; it has a "working council" of nine members chosen from the "continuing committee" of 50 members. Peace for Life provides a website detailing its activities, position papers presented at its meetings, and news about the suffering and the struggles of oppressed peoples around the world.

Peace for Life had held the following meetings: a Roundtable on the World Trade Organisation; the Empire

and Religious Wars in Hong Kong in December 2005; an International Solidarity Mission for Peace in Nepal in May 2006; an International Peace Festival in Mumbai in December 2006; an Interfaith Peace Pilgrimage and Solidarity Visit to Palestine-Israel in November 2007; a Consultation on Tourism in the Philippines in October 2008; the Second People's Forum on the theme "Without Fear of Empire" in Bogota, Colombia, in March 2009; and the Conference and Peace Festival entitled "World Without Empire" in New York City in April 2010.

Christians in the global South living under conditions that inhibit their lives often denounce "empire" as their enemy. This usage has a biblical ring. The people of Israel experienced oppression by the Egyptian empire, and after their settlement in Palestine, were dominated by one empire after another: the Babylonian, the Median, the Persian, the Macedonian, and eventually the Roman. The New Testament offers the harshest condemnation of the Roman Empire in the book of the Apocalypse. Yet it is not clear how useful this vocabulary is today.

In the past, many Christians looked upon the British Empire as the political focus of a humane civilization, without paying attention to its colonial conquests and the oppressive conditions it imposed upon the colonized peoples. Looking at the Empire from the centre makes it appear to be a sphere of freedom and justice, yet looking at it from the margin, from the perspective of the colonized and the exploited, gives visibility to its dark side, its capacity to oppress and damage human life. It has been said that the true nature of an empire is known only to people in the margin and to those who listen to them.

Christians in the North do not have the habit of denouncing the United States as the American Empire. The US does not have an emperor, nor does it rule over an assembly of colonies. If people in the North criticize the politics of the US, they prefer to speak of its unilateralism, its refusal to consult its allies, its lack of respect for the United Nations, its promotion of economic and cultural neo-liberalism, and its justification of pre-emptive military action. People in the North are conscious that the US spends about 70 percent of its revenue on armaments and the military, and worry about the many American military bases in countries all over the world. Yet we rarely speak of the American Empire.

The discourse of Christians in the global South is more hard-hitting. Since their voices are heard in international Christian organizations such as the WCC and the World Alliance of Presbyterian Churches, recent statements produced by these organizations recognize the destructive power of global empire and present Christian faith as a stance against it.[2]

Peace for Life is more specific:

> We challenge empire, and 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 the dominated countries, to advance its own interest on a global scale. U.S. dominance (400 billion dollars military spending per year and bases in over 150 countries) conjointly with transnational corporate power makes up the heart of today's empire.

Peace for Life analyzes the problems of the various regions of the world with reference to global empire. The Second People's Forum held in Bogota in 2009 produced a declaration that analyzes the forces that produce the suffering of the Colombian people, who have endured over 50 years of armed conflict. The present government exploits this long-standing conflict to advance the interests of the country's small elite, 3 percent of the population. But the people's pains are multiplied by the impact of the US global empire, often with the complicity of Europe. At present, the US is trying to establish its military power and increase its political influence in Colombia to secure its hold over Latin America and assure its access to Colombia's resources, especially oil. The declaration adds that there are signs that the power of the US is declining due to its own internal economic crisis, its unsuccessful invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the emergence of new industrial competitors such as China and India, and the spread of solidarity movements among people all over the world.

Peace for Life is opposed to violence. This faith-based movement organizes non-violent resistance to the death-dealing impact of domination. It denounces the use of religion by the empire and its allies to legitimate their sense of superiority and justify the financial control of the rest of the world. Yet Peace for Life relies on the religious faith of its members. At its meeting, the people express their resistance not only by producing analyses and declarations; they also celebrate their resistance and their hopes through prayers, singing, concerts, dancing, and personal witnesses. They compose liturgies celebrating their future liberation.

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1 http://www.peaceforlife.org/aboutus/index.html: see First People's Forum on Peace for Life.

2 See the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Presbyterian Churches in 2004, both in its Accra Confession and its Mission Report, and the 9th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2006.

Ethics to Reform Society

By Gregory Baum
Centre Justice et Foi, Montréal, Québec

Susan Neiman, *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-up Idealists*.
New York: Harcourt, 2008, 480 pp.[1]

Theologians committed to the emancipatory dimension of the Christian message will find in Susan Neiman's recent book a rich resource for a sympathetic dialogue with progressive secular thought. The American philosopher believes that reason provides moral norms for social action and thus has important practical relevance. While scientific inquiry tells us what 'is,' philosophical reason can tell us what 'ought to be' and give directives for public action.

On Reason and Social Action

Neiman complains in her book that over the last decades, American intellectuals have ceased to provide rational arguments for the reform of society. Some have been influenced by the pretension of scientists that research must be objective and value-free, while others have embraced the postmodern suspicion that universal moral norms are implicitly totalitarian and should be avoided. Today, left-wing intellectuals no longer support idealism; they only provide radical critiques of culture and society that cause frustration and produce social passivity.

Idealism, in the vocabulary of Susan Neiman, refers to the conviction that ideas can have a reformist impact on society. The ideas of freedom, equality, and solidarity, proposed by Enlightenment thought, produced a critique of the feudal-aristocratic order and supported movements of social change that eventually transformed the structures of Western society. Since the collapse of Marxism and the recognition that Marxism was a product of faith and hope, rather than of reason, many formerly progressive intellectuals have given up on idealism.

Susan Neiman argues that in recent years, American conservative authors have provided political theories that legitimated the domestic and foreign policies of the Bush administration. These authors drew their inspiration from the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who thought that human beings were by nature hostile to one another, that life tended to be a war of all against all, and that peace and order in society had to be imposed from above by a powerful sovereign. If this analysis is correct, then the present exercise of imperial American power on the global scale is a rational political project protecting peace and order in a chaotic world. Robert Kagan, a conservative political thinker, has pointed to the increasing difference between European and American political ideas. Europeans are Kantians, believing in goodwill, negotiations, and agreements based on compromise, while Americans are Hobbesians, recognizing that the United States exists in a hostile world and that American power is able to preserve global peace.

Kagan and other neo-conservative authors argue that the truth about the world is bad news. In fact, the truth is so painful and discouraging that most people prefer to turn to illusions and believe that the world is a friendly place. Because of this lack of realism, government must be exercised by an elite of courageous men willing to face the hostile world, while allowing the ordinary people to entertain the illusion that life is good. These ideas are more ancient than Hobbes. Susan Neiman shows that Leo Strauss found them in his reading of Plato. It was, in fact, Strauss's political philosophy that influenced neo-conservative thought and inspired several influential political actors in the Bush administration.

Against these conservative theories, Susan Neiman invokes the ideas of the Enlightenment. Because postmodern thinkers spread misinformation about the Enlightenment, Neiman's first task is to rescue the various Enlightenment thinkers from the caricatures that have been made of them. While they all trusted in reason, very few of them believed that reason was the source of inevitable progress. Most of these thinkers made modest claims and refused to make predictions for the future.

Neiman pays particular attention to Immanuel Kant. In fact, she wrote an entire book on this German philosopher. She fully agrees with Kant's ethical imperative calling for justice and equality. With Kant, she makes a strong distinction between the 'is' and the 'ought.' The 'is' is the given reality, while the 'ought' is the rational product of the human mind. Neiman is not an

Aristotelian: she does not hold that the 'ought,' i.e. the ethical obligation, is grounded in human nature. What we must do, she holds, is to work out what is to be done by using practical reason—in conversation with others, so that all perspectives receive a hearing.

Contemporary liberal ethicists, Neiman argues, tend to remain silent in the face of the burning political and social issues of the present. She regards this approach as a betrayal of philosophy. In her book she offers a devastating critical analysis of the Bush administration and of Bush's military aggression in Iraq. While most Jewish intellectuals shy away from denouncing Israel's policy regarding the Palestinians, Neiman boldly evaluates this policy in terms of the universal principle of justice. On the dust jacket of her book, an American philosopher writes, "It is a bracing and exhilarating experience to read Susan Neiman's *Moral Clarity*. In arguing the case for moral clarity, she exemplifies the courage and imagination we so dearly need. This is a necessary book for our times."

On Religion

Neiman offers important reflections on religion. The authors of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment reacted against the control exercised by the Church and against the hatred and the wars between Catholics and Protestants. Most of them turned to deism, the faith in God as the author of nature. Looking back over a different period of history, Neiman recognizes that religion has many faces. She has sympathy for the humanistic current in religion that provides moral clarity and supports social movements in favour of justice and peace. She distinguishes between two types of piety: one believes an action is good because God has commanded it, while the other believes that because certain actions are good, God commands them. Only the latter piety is acceptable to her.

She reflects at length on Abraham's willingness to slaughter his only son, Isaac, because God had commanded it. She reports that Jewish and Christian commentators prior to the Enlightenment used to praise Abraham's readiness to obey. For her, this is an example of the dangerous piety that is ready to sacrifice reason and commit murder to please the divinity. The piety she honours is confident that God commands an action because it is good. Respecting, loving, helping, and serving your neighbour is good: that is why these actions have been commanded by God. Here God supports the ethical imperative based on reason.

In the name of this imperative, Neiman argues, some believers have even resisted God. She mentions in particular Abraham's argument with God, who wanted to destroy the people of Sodom as punishment for their sins. Abraham, Neiman writes, advocated justice and mercy in opposition to the angry divinity. Abraham took the risk of displeasing God, who was stronger than he and capable of annihilating him. There are pieties, Neiman argues, that empower people to resist authority in the name of justice.

The conclusion she draws from these reflections is that, from an ethical point of view, it is irrelevant to divide humanity into believers and non-believers. The significant division of humanity runs along another line. On the one side stand believers and non-believers committed to justice, compassion, and peace, while on the other are believers and non-believers who have not been gripped by the ethics of universal solidarity. Because it is irrelevant in this context, Neiman does not tell the reader whether she is a believing or a secular Jew.

In a chapter on reverence, Neiman presents the harsh critique of religion offered by various philosophers of the Enlightenment. Many of them, as I mentioned earlier, turned to deism. In this connection, Neiman presents philosophical reflections that were quite new to me and that shed light on questions I have often asked myself. Abandoning piety, the Enlightenment philosophers made room for reverence. They rejected piety as an expression of fear and trembling, and turned to reverence as an expression of awe and wonder. Reverence is what people feel when they are overpowered by the realization that there are things that transcend human understanding and cannot be expressed in words. The thinkers of the Enlightenment marvelled at different aspects of reality, at life itself, at the starry sky, at the ethical voice in their conscience, at music and poetry, and at the nature studied by science. They also marvelled at the virtues and creativity of certain persons. The reverence of which Neiman speaks recognizes the limits of reason, corrects false pride, and makes humans humble. Reverence acknowledges the transcendent as a dimension of the world and human history—not the divine, not God, but still a pearl of great price, a great value or insight, fidelity to which may demand sacrifice.

The idea of reverence prompts theologians to rethink the spiritual situation of non-believers. It would be wrong to think that all non-believers are relativists, lack an experience of transcendence, and have no access to a spiritual life. In his 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in veritate*,

Benedict XVI offers the harsh judgment that humanism without God is an inhuman humanism. This judgment may be appropriate for secular people who have no reverence, who are so immersed in utilitarian reason that they are unable to marvel at greatness transcending their grasp and thus experience the unspeakable. Yet the Enlightenment thinkers, though they rejected the Christian religion, experienced reverence: they marvelled at the true, the good, and the beautiful; they recognized the limits of reason and stood humbly before the universe.

The secular men and women whom Christians meet in social movements and with whom they share the same social values know what reverence is, even if they do not talk about it. They have an ethical commitment, for which they are willing to make sacrifices, the reason for which they are usually unable to articulate. Their convictions are indeed rational, yet in most cases they are located in the heart.

Susan Neiman also offers interesting reflections on the present-day fundamentalist currents in the world religions, including the religious radicalism in parts of Africa and Asia. She is troubled by these developments and recognizes their danger. Yet she acknowledges that Western society has become so possessed by the exploitation of nature, the accumulation of wealth, the acquisition of consumer goods, and the dream of a pleasurable life that the sense of transcendence has almost disappeared from contemporary culture. What is largely absent is a higher loyalty summoning people to have ideals, help their neighbour, and commit themselves to the reform of society, even if this entails self-limitation and sacrifice. Neiman thinks that it is understandable that some people of faith do not want to belong to such a society and possibly regard it as possessed by an evil spirit.

These brief reflections reveal that for theologians, *Moral Clarity* is a rich resource for dialogue with progressive secular thought.

1 A revised paperback edition of *Moral Clarity* was published by Princeton University Press in 2009.

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