

Reflection by Rev Paul Weaver - Uniting Church minister. August 2010

As a member of the NSW Ecumenical Council, affiliated with the NCCA, as well as the Council of Christians and Jews, I find myself in a challenging situation with regard to the recently released NCCA statement.....as one who sees himself as a friend of both the Jewish people and the Palestinian people. I have to express a degree of disappointment that there seems to have been little attempt in the emails I have read to really engage with the NCCA statement, or to seek to understand where it is coming from. Perhaps this is understandable: I do think it is a pity that the news release from NCCA focussed on the proposed boycott, without giving it a clear context or rationale.

If you wish to understand where it is coming from, I refer you to the document entitled **Kairos Palestine 2009**, which can be easily found using Google. It is a substantial (16 page) statement from 13 Heads of Churches in Jerusalem (Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran) giving their understanding of the current situation. It is a clearly Christian document, seeking to interpret the situation in the light of the Scriptures and Christian theology. It also reflects the Palestinian background of most Christians living in Israel/Palestine. Because of this, much of the story it tells may be seen as one-sided, and many will see it as distorted. It sees the Palestinian people as an oppressed people, living in an occupied land: many reading this will no doubt see such a description as unjustified, but most Palestinians will agree with the interpretation - and I have to say that during the wonderful time I had in Israel last year, I saw and learned much that would confirm it as at least a valid interpretation of the way things currently are. I think its viewpoint is incomplete, but there is a reality which needs to be addressed, not just fobbed off. (Perhaps one could say the equivalent thing to those who hold the opposite viewpoint!) Certainly during my time in Israel I saw a great unwillingness in the government and the Israeli media to consider seriously the grievances of the Palestinian people, which are expressed by too many of them in intolerable acts of violence.

What is important here is that we try to understand the Palestinian people (surely appropriate for an organization committed to dialogue!), even if we don't end up agreeing with their interpretation of events. (Perhaps some of us will!) I certainly see in the *Kairos* document a soft-peddling on the responsibility of the Palestinian leadership for their encouragement and support of violence, and the significance of terrorist acts: my reading of the Palestinian story is that most of their leaders over the years have been abysmal, and have increased the people's problems rather than helping to improve their situation. I would judge that the writers of *Kairos Palestine* have taken the easy path here. But they would argue that the people have reacted in the ways available to them to what they see as acts of war and oppression. Certainly, the current expansion of settlements on land which has been regarded as Palestinian, and the demolition of Palestinian houses in East Jerusalem, are seen by them (rightly or wrongly) as evidence that the authorities are not really interested in justice for the Palestinian people. "The roots of 'terrorism' are in the human injustice committed and in the evil of the occupation. These must be removed if there be a sincere intention to remove 'terrorism' " (4.3)

What about the boycott? It does not arise out of the NCCA trying to make their own dramatic point, or trying to attack Israel. It is seeking to put into action the message of this document. There we find a "call to individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance. These advocacy campaigns must be carried out with courage, openly sincerely proclaiming that their object is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice." (4.2.6) So the NCCA's idea of a boycott should be seen as an expression of solidarity with the Palestinian churches, **in the manner suggested by them**. The thought is that such boycotts played a part in bringing a change in South Africa in the 1980's: perhaps it can do so here. My point is that there is a background to the NCCA proposal which at least gives it some rationale. Do also note that it has a specific target: "a boycott of goods produced by Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories." (How identifiable such

goods are is not clear to me!) You may well argue (as many have) that such a boycott is not helpful and could be counter-productive - I am not sure myself - but *the idea comes from the Palestinian people themselves*.

As so many people have done over the centuries, I stood at the Wailing Wall 10 months ago and prayed for the peace of Jerusalem, reflecting that I was praying for a great miracle. But I do continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and for a land where all its people are at peace - *shalom* in its full sense of well-being, not just the absence of war!

I am sorry if what I have written is felt to be offensive, but if **we** cannot try to understand the other side, what hope is there for the people of modern Israel, with its decades of tension? As I have said, understanding the other person's view does not necessarily mean that you agree with it or accept every aspect of it. However, it does put you in a better position to consider the way forward, and to consider how to bring conflicted parties together.

May God's peace work within us, and may that peace be experienced before much longer in the land of the patriarchs, prophets and Jesus.

Paul Weaver