

An old man in Gaza held a placard that reads: ‘You take my water, burn my olive trees, destroy my house, take my job, steal my land, imprison my father, kill my mother, bombard my country, starve us all, humiliate us all but I am to blame: I shot a rocket back’.

Noam Chomsky, ‘Palestine 2012 – Gaza and the UN resolution’, Israeli Occupation Archive, December 1st, 2012

<http://www.israeli-occupation.org/?s=Palestine+2012+%E2%80%93+Gaza+and+the+UN+resolution>
(viewed February 7th, 2013)

JESUS THE PALESTINIAN

A CALL TO CHRISTIAN REPENTANCE

CONSTRUCTED ON THE BASIS OF MATTHEW 25:31-46, LUKE 1:51-3, AND THE GOOD FRIDAY REPROACHES

1. In Jesus’ story of the Last Judgement (Matthew 25:31-46), the ‘goats’ are charged with failure to help the Son of Man. They protest: ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and did nothing for you?’ The Son of Man, who is now the king, replies ‘I tell you this: anything you did not do for these, however humble, you did not do for me’.

2. In the ‘Magnificat’ Mary, the expectant mother of Jesus, sings of the radical reversal in human affairs which God brings through her son (Luke 1:51-3): ‘He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away’.

3. Part of the Anglican Liturgy for Good Friday are ‘The Reproaches’. These are verses in which Jesus on the Cross is represented as ‘reproaching’ his people, us Christians, for our ingratitude, for returning evil for good. In one of the verses we are reproached for turning against the Jews with ‘persecution and mass murder’. *All* humanity, in its inhumanity, is the object of Jesus’ reproaches.

The voice of Jesus the Palestinian

I was oppressed and humiliated in the Holy Land; but you comforted and exalted my oppressors. You confirmed them and yourselves in the prideful imagination of your hearts.

An appropriate response

From cruelty, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, and contempt of your teachings, Good Lord deliver us.

Jesus

I was hungry and thirsty in the Holy Land; but you ‘put me on a diet’. I was sick and maimed in the Holy Land; but you embargoed medical aid. You supposed that your trickle of charitable relief was magnanimity and virtue.

Response

From cruelty, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, and contempt of your teachings, Good Lord deliver us.

Jesus

I was poor in the Holy Land; but you confiscated, contrary to all law and custom, what little was mine.

Response

From cruelty, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, and contempt of your teachings, Good Lord deliver us.

Jesus

I was homeless in the Holy Land. It was you who destroyed my home. It was you who cut down my olive grove and uprooted my fruit trees.

Response

From cruelty, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, and contempt of your teachings, Good Lord deliver us.

Jesus

I was a child in the Holy Land; but you killed my family and justified it as ‘collateral damage’ in your self-righteous ‘War on Terror’. You licensed crimes against humanity and bewailed a ‘humanitarian crisis’.

Response

From cruelty, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, and contempt of your teachings, Good Lord deliver us.

Jesus

I was a parent in the Holy land. You terrorized my children and traumatized them for life.

Response

From cruelty, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, and contempt of your teachings, Good Lord deliver us.

Jesus

You penned me into a prison in the Holy Land. You sold to my tormentors the instruments of my torment. You took the pieces of silver that were the price of my affliction.

Response

From cruelty, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, and contempt of your teachings, Good Lord deliver us.

Jesus

In my misery and affliction I cried out to God; but you reviled as anti-Semites those who would comfort me. You preached freedom and equality, but your gift to me was permanent subordination.

Response

From pride of nation, pride of race, pride of religion, and pride of culture, Good Lord deliver us.

A closing prayer

Lord, your mercy endures for ever. Open our eyes and teach us not to abuse your mercy.

Jesus appearing as the oppressed Palestinian? Is that really so surprising? Isn't that one of the lessons of the story of the sheep and the goats: that in standing with the oppressed against their oppressors we stand with Jesus? And aren't we rightly taught to recognize the face of Jesus in the face of the alien other.

If this representation of Jesus the Palestinian speaks to you in some way, your first duty is due diligence. Check out its authenticity. What authority does it have?

Christians generally recognize four sources of authority: the Spirit of God, Scripture, the Church, and human reasoning. Whether or not I've in some way caught the Spirit's echo is for you to judge. I can't really help you, except to say I sincerely believe I have. As to the third source, the Church, no ecclesial authority whatsoever, either individual or institutional, has yet endorsed this representation or its message. That leaves Scripture and Reason.

The representation is a composite of the two scriptural passages identified at the outset:

Matthew's account of Jesus' own vision of the Last Judgement, told in the metaphor of the sheep and the goats (25:31-46).

The central verses of the Magnificat, the Song of Mary, as told by Luke (1:51-3).

Have I misrepresented these two sources? Have I distorted their meaning, their intent? Check them out. (Of course, if you think the sources themselves are mistaken, then you'll have to take it up with a much higher authority than me.)

Finally, human reasoning: logical, factual, ethical reasoning, including considerations of common sense and common decency. (It's the last two, common sense and common decency that we religious people too often throw to the winds.) Does my 'Jesus the Palestinian' speak the truth about *our* times? That's the hard question: because if you suspect he does, then you are going to have to fight your way through swamps of misinformation and disinformation in the mainline media, much of it pumped in by fellow 'Christians'. There are aids, mostly on the internet. But finally, the pilgrimage of Reason is yours to make, and it can be as lonely as the pilgrimage of Faith.

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Recommended reading:

A Moment of Truth: Kairos Palestine (A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering). Ecumenical Three-Session Study Guide. Toronto: The Canadian Churches' Forum for Global Ministries, 2011.