

THAW!

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IN THIS ISSUE...

An essay by Harold on God in History; the discovery of a saint we never knew; and a section on "Hearing Silent Voices", since the cries of oppression are easily silenced.

GOD IN HISTORY

Several Sundays ago the lectionary presented a singular challenge: the gospel reading was about the shepherd who sought the lost sheep and the housewife searching for a lost coin. The message was: God will go to any lengths to save the lost.

But the Jewish Scriptures, that day, presented a different picture. Jeremiah was saying that God was fed up to the teeth with disobedience and lip service. Israel had run out of chances. There would be no more forgiveness. Judgement would be stern and final.

Now, the homilist spoke at length about the gospel reading. There was never a whiff of smoke from Jeremiah. No matter what, we would all be brought

into the sheepfold, including the beefy middle class laity who were hoping not in vain to hear something good. As we left Church, there was a buzz. Everybody felt fine.

The next Sunday it was the celebration of the harvest. We plowed the fields and scattered. At home, our tables were groaning with turkey, puddings. It was a celebration of Canadian plenty.

The homilist told us that we had to give thanks. That was the key to life; gratitude and thanksgiving. He was not preaching in Darfur or Ethiopia, or Palestine, or Iraq or Afghanistan. He would not have been such a jolly purveyor of good news where starvation and child poverty were the norm. He was preaching to that minority of the world where the over-abundant circumstances of our lives have always given a false truth to the gospel of gratitude and thanksgiving.

Like the homily one week earlier, where was the judgement? Where was the righteousness of God? Beyond a glass of Pepto-bismol and a belch or two, that is?

The question raised is this: do we bother with the expectation of divine judgement? Do we actually hope and pray that "He shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead"? Is salvation conditional; we who are saved will go out and save others? Will God's forgiveness evaporate if we do not also forgive others? Is God active in history bringing abundance of life to the world? Let's look at these questions from some prominent points of view.

Here's one. If I were a Jew and someone mentioned the Providence of God - God in history - I'd get out the shotgun.

Jews know that God in history is a very mixed blessing. The prophets wrote as much about punishment as they did of blessing. One would learn to brace oneself for the coming of God, to expect that Providence would be as much bad news, as good.

Yes; God sent Moses to lead His children from Egypt into the freedom of the wilderness. And God presented the Jews with Canaan as a homeland, more or less.

But God's punishments were unforgettable.

First, God took his people away in bondage to Babylon. Nebukadnezzar was his agent. A forerunner of Hitler?

Then God destroyed the Temple in the year 70 of the Modern Era. Supposedly for Jews having crucified Jesus Christ. Whatever the reason the temple, which was supposed to last forever, was finished.

Finally, God sent Holocaust to the Jews. Shoa. Wasteland. Obliteration.

I would not be the only Jew to think that God was Enemy Number One and that if, at any moment, God was thought to be entering history once again, then out would come the weapons, the armies, the decisions for instant and lethal opposition.

History would have to be controlled by Israel, not by God, if the state of Israel were to survive or if the Jewish people were to survive.

This is not new. Moses influenced God's decisions. Why not modern Israelis?

Today, people think that Palestinians, or Iranians or the Arab federation - is the enemy of Israel. Not so. God is the potential enemy of Israel and the Jews know it and will not tolerate it.

Palestinians are caught in the middle. They may think of themselves as the opponents or Israel but it is God who is prompting them. And against God there can be no whiff of delay. Against God there has to be instant retaliation.

Here's another view, closer to home. Unlike the Zionist Jews, aging white anglo-saxon Christians like me actually trust Providence. Our experience of God in history has been more positive, more comfortable. The Providence of God has been a jolly good influence in the world's affairs. God showed the divine hand at Dunkirk. God saved the British Expeditionary Force through a series of miracles in May 1940, which included the rise of Winston

Churchill and the strange decision of Adolph Hitler that Panzer units should not drive the Allies into the sea. Indeed, God, they say, was setting the stage for an Allied victory, 5 years later and for the final defeat of the forces of darkness.

We take our cue from WWII.

The cost of Allied victory was terrible, but nothing compare to the cost of defeat. I realize that, in 1939-45, one was witnessing a decisive point in the development of the world; but now we are as safe as ever. Laus tibi Deo.

Ever since, we have assumed God to be on "our side". We have lived in abundance, while most of the world has starved. Even in the face of modern tasks, such as the

rehabilitation of aboriginal peoples throughout the world, no one can succeed like us. Providence has been with us. Perhaps, after all, God has been listening: – to us.

Building on this confidence, the West has sorted out recent catastrophes into shades of black and white. 9/11 was obviously the work of the Devil, and the attack on Afghanistan and Iraq and Palestine the unavoidable work of the forces of light. Not as clear a crusade as was the fight against the Axis in 1939, but we can assume our deeds are in good faith.

All in all, we think we are divinely right, always have been, and will continue to dominate the world with democratic institutions, fairness, the market place and technologically superior armies. Oh yes; and God; Whose Providence will continue to be in the right place when needed.

Now here's a third view. If I were an Islamic Jihadist, I would have yet another view of Providence.

I would see that God wished to destroy the forces of world injustice, led by the United States. I would look with anger at the millions in world poverty; I would see that the "have" nations prospered by exploitation of the "have-not" nations. I would see the successful attacks of 9/11 as signs of the future action of God. I would see the market place slipping away from Wall Street towards China and India. I would see that the great powers were at a tipping point. I would see the state of Israel as an incursion into Arab lands and I would be more than a little aware of the suffering imposed on

Palestinian people by Israel with the backing of the United States. I would embark on changing the world order.

Here, then are three different pictures of God-in-History. Each justifies and even animates national and international policies. The ideas of Providence are very powerful, perhaps the most powerful of all energies in the array of world causes.

Where do you stand on these questions? Do you think that the mind of God can change, by pleas of compassion? Or that God's choice against Hitler in 1940, is the sign God's pro-democratic bias; of where God will always be? Or that world poverty has become the divine cause and that God will destroy any regime which continues to impose?

One option is not on: that God is absent from history, that God is found only in personal life or family life or parish life. And that God, with the holocaust and WWII, vanished from the world scene.

HAYDER ABUL-SHAFI - A SAINT WE NEVER KNEW

On Saturday, September 29, Dr Hayder Abdul-Shafi passed away at his home in Gaza; he was 88 years old. Many of you know Dr. Hayder and have met him. He was always a great supporter of the NGO movement in Palestine and abroad. Sabeel often took groups to Gaza, meeting Dr. Hayder and hearing his analysis of the situation. Below is a moving tribute to Dr. Hayder by Dr. Naseer Aruri - professor, author, and activist. Following the tribute is additional reading for those who are interested, and following that is a copy of the speech Dr. Hayder gave in Madrid in 1991.

Thanks to Kathy Bergin in Ramallah for passing this around.

Our condolences go out to all Palestinians on the Death of Dr. Haider AbdelShafi. He was arguably the most notable living Palestinian. **OBIT**

"I met with Dr. Haider on dozens of occasions, before, during and since his time as the head of the Palestinian delegation to the Madrid Conference, the first and only serious peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. They were undermined after 11 rounds by the secret "back channel" Oslo process, which although hailed as Peace talks, were seen by Dr. Haider for what history has proven they were: permanent occupation talks. (They were in fact secret, as Dr. Haider insisted he never was given a heads up on them).

During those two years, Dr. Haider was profoundly proud of the potential, insisting that it was the first time the Israelis had really come to understand and appreciate Palestinian grievances and aspirations, as well as being helpful in giving Palestinians understanding of the depth of Israeli fears. Subsequently, Dr. Haider continued to insist that the progress, while slow, would achieve two states, and that Oslo couldn't.

Most importantly, Dr. Haider was a rare diplomat, respected by virtually all Palestinians and many Israelis. His gentle, intelligent character coupled with his passion for peace was cut across all party, ideological and religious lines. At the same time, he was uncompromising on the impact of settlements on peace, on the rights of refugees, the place of Jerusalem and the aspirations of Palestinians to self-determination. Thus he was a living symbol the very hopes he worked to fulfil. It is not coincidental that, even living in marginal Gaza, he topped the polls in the Palestinian elections.

May he rest in peace, and his legacy be carried on."

A SPEECH BY HAYDER ABUL-SHAFI PART 1

Madrid 31 October 1991

"In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. O esteemed audience. Allow me first to extend greetings of thanks and appreciation to the State of Spain, king, government, and people, for hosting this historic conference. I would also like to extend greetings of pride and appreciation for the sons of the Palestinian people who are still struggling for freedom and independence. I will now speak on their behalf to you and the various democratic powers in the world in English.

Mr. Baker, Mr. Pankin, ladies and gentlemen: On behalf of the Palestinian delegation, we meet in Madrid, a city with a rich texture of history, to weave together the fabric which joins our past with future, to reaffirm a wholeness of vision which once brought about a reverse of civilization and a world order based on harmony in diversity. Once again, Christian, Muslim, and Jew face the challenge of heralding a new era enshrined in global values of democracy, human rights, freedom, justice, and security. From Madrid, we launch this quest for peace, a quest to place the sanctity of human life at the center of our world, and to redirect our energies and resources from the pursuit of mutual destruction to the pursuit of joint prosperity, progress, and happiness.

We, the people of Palestine, stand before you in the fullness of our pain, our pride, and our anticipation, for we long harbored a yearning for peace and a dream of justice and freedom. For too long, the Palestinian people have gone unheeded, silenced and denied. Our identity negated by political expediency; our right for struggle against injustice maligned; and our present existence subdued by the past tragedy of another people. For the greater part of this century we have been victimized by the myth of a land without a people and described with impunity as the invisible Palestinians. Before such willful blindness, we refused to disappear or to accept a distorted identity. Our intifada is a testimony to our perseverance and resilience waged in a just struggle to regain our rights. It is time for us to narrate our own story, to stand witness as advocates of truth which has long lain buried in the consciousness and conscience of the world. We do not stand before you as supplicants, but rather as the torch-bearers who know that, in our world of today, ignorance can never be an excuse. We seek neither an admission of guilt after the fact, nor vengeance for past inequities, but rather an act of will that would make a just peace a reality.

We speak out ladies and gentlemen, from the full conviction of the rightness of our cause, the verity of our history, and the depth of our commitment. There in lies the strength of the Palestinian people today, for we have scaled walls of fear and

reticence, and we wish to speak out with the courage and integrity that our narrative and history deserve. The cosponsors have invited us here today to present our case and to reach out to the other with whom we have had to face a mutually exclusive reality on the land of Palestine. But even in the invitation to this peace conference, our narrative was distorted and our truth only partially acknowledged.

The Palestinian people are one, fused by centuries of history in Palestine, bound together by a collective memory of shared sorrows and joys, and sharing a unity of Purpose and vision. Our songs and ballads, full of tales and children's stories, the dialect of our jokes, the image of our Poems that hint of melancholy which colors even our happiest moments are as important to us as the blood ties which link our families and clans. Yet, an invitation to discuss peace, the peace we all desire and need, comes to only a portion of our people. It ignores our national, historical, and organic unity. We come here wrenched from our sisters and brothers in exile to stand before you as the Palestinians under occupation, although we maintain that each of us represents the rights and interests of the whole. We have been denied the right to publicly acknowledge our loyalty to our leadership and system of government. But allegiance and loyalty cannot be censored or severed. Our acknowledged leadership is more than the justly democratically chosen leadership of all the Palestinian people. It is the symbol of our national unity and identity, the guardian of our past, the protector of our present and the hope of our future. Our people have chosen to entrust it with their history and the preservation of our precious legacy. This leadership has been clearly and unequivocally recognized by the Community of nations, with only a few exceptions who had chosen for so many years shadow over substance. Regardless of the nature and conditions of our oppression, whether the disposition and dispersion of exile or the brutality and repression of the occupation, the Palestinian people cannot be torn asunder. They remain a united nation wherever they are, or are forced to be.

And Jerusalem, ladies and gentlemen, that city which is not only the soul Palestine, but the cradle of three world religions, is tangible even in its claimed absence from our midst at this stage. It is apparent, through artificial exclusion from this conference, that this is a denial of its right to seek peace and redemption. For it, too, has suffered from war and occupation. Jerusalem, the city of peace, has been barred from a peace conference and deprived of its calling. Palestinian Jerusalem, the capital of our homeland and future state, defines Palestinian existence, past, present, and future, but itself has been denied a voice and an identity. Jerusalem defies exclusive possessiveness or bondage. Israel's annexation of Arab Jerusalem remains both clearly illegal in the eyes of the world community, and an affront to the peace that this city deserves.

We come to you from a tortured land and a proud, though captive people, having been asked to negotiate with our occupiers, but leaving behind the children of the intifada, and a people under occupation and under curfew who enjoined us not to surrender or forget. As we speak, thousands of our brothers and sisters are languishing in Israeli prisons and detention camps, most detained without evidence, charge, or trial, many cruelly mistreated and tortured in interrogation, guilty only of seeking freedom or daring to defy the occupation. We speak in their name and we say: Set them free. As we speak, the tens of thousands who have been wounded or permanently disabled are in pain. Let peace heal their wounds. As we speak, the eyes of thousands of Palestinian refugees, deportees, and displaced persons since 1967 are haunting us, for exile is a cruel fate. Bring them home. They have the right to return. As we speak, the silence of demolished homes echoes through the halls and in our minds. We must rebuild our homes in our free state .

And what do we tell the loved ones of those killed by army bullets? How do we answer the questions and the fear in our children's eyes? For one out of three Palestinian children under occupation has been killed, injured, or detained in the past four years. How can we explain to Our children that they are denied education, for schools are so often closed by the army? Or why their life is in danger for raising a flag in a land where even children are killed or jailed? What requiem can be sung for trees uprooted by army bulldozers? And most of all, who can explain to those whose lands are confiscated and clear waters stolen, a message of peace? Remove the barbed wire. Restore the land and its life-giving water. The settlements must stop now. Peace cannot be waged while Palestinian land confiscated in myriad ways and the status of the occupied territories is being decided each day by Israeli bulldozers and barbed wire. This is not simply a position. It is an irrefutable reality. Territory for peace is a travesty when territory for illegal settlement is official Israeli policy and practice. The settlements must stop now."

Part 2 will be published in next month's issue.