

THAW!

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IN THIS ISSUE

An editorial on the recent meetings of the General Synod; a poem on the work of the Synod; an article drawn from the New York Times on birds; a cry of pain from Palestine by Sabeel on 40 years of occupation. Sabeel is an ecumenical Christian organization which speaks from the experience of detention in the 40 year old camps on the Israel borders and within Palestinian territory. This is about peace and the causes for its lack.

EDITORIAL

Many have been following the proceedings of the General Synod, just concluded, as its delegates laboured their way through the heavy seas which buffet the church today. So first off, I would like to express my thanks to them for the hours and hours they spent exhausting themselves away from home for such a long period of time. Secondly, we would all like to congratulate Bishop Fred Hiltz on his election and

installation as our new Primate. And thirdly, I want to thank Andrew Hutchison our outgoing Primate for his leadership, not only at the Synod but through the high tides of the past three years.

There is no doubt that change is moving through the parishes and dioceses of the Church, not at the same rate and degree, but the direction ahead is coming clear. The Church is growing in acceptance of gospel accreditation of gay and lesbian people. The fact that blessing same sex unions was deemed to be not in conflict with the core doctrines of the Anglican Church of Canada was an important indication of change. The fact that this sanction was passed by such a slim majority in the House of Bishops was another important indicator. Furthermore, the strong vote among the laity and clergy in favour of authorizing dioceses to institute blessings was an indicator and the slim vote against, disallowing the motion, among the bishops was another, finger-in-the-dyke kind of indicator of where the Church stands today. The likelihood is that same sex blessings will proceed without the mandate of the General Synod but with some form of mandate from certain dioceses. It is not clear that such a mandate is required, now that the Synod has affirmed that ss blessings is not in conflict, etc., etc. In the meantime the vigilant Primates of the Anglican Communion, waiting to pounce, (one thinks), will have little to complain of, as they think they enjoy over the actions of the Episcopal Church.

It is surprising that in the highly charged atmosphere surrounding these issues for several years, the General Synod was able to take such little steps and to move slowly in ways that do not immediately alarm.

Tomorrow, however, will be another day.

BIRD CONGREGATION DECLINING

Anglicans may rue the decline in church congregations over the past decades but it's nothing compared to the decline in the bird population. S. Francis, who once preached to the birds would have to look harder and farther for his feathered congregation, today.

He might read, from the New York Times:

Last week, the Audubon Society released a new report describing the sharp and startling population decline of some of the most familiar and common birds in America: several kinds of sparrows, the Northern bobwhite, the Eastern meadowlark, the common grackle and the common tern. The average decline of the 20 species in the Audubon Society's report is 68 percent.

Forty years ago, there were an estimated 31 million bobwhites. Now there are 5.5 million. Compared to the hundred-some condors presently in the wild, 5.5 million

bobwhites sounds like a lot of birds. But what matters is the 25.5 million missing and the troubles that brought them down — and are all too likely to bring down the rest of them, too. So this is not extinction, but it is how things look before extinction happens.

The question is whether we will see the distinctness of the field sparrow — its number is down from 18 million 40 years ago to 5.8 million — only when the last pair is being kept alive in a zoo somewhere. We love to finally care when the death watch is on. It makes us feel so very human.

But in the past 40 years, we have killed all those millions of birds or, let us say, unintentionally caused a dramatic population loss, simply by going about business as usual.

Agriculture has intensified. So has development. Open space has been sharply reduced. We have simply pursued our livelihoods. We knew it was inimical to wolves and mountain lions. But we somehow trusted that all the innocent little birds were here to stay. What they actually need to survive, it turns out, is a landscape that is less intensely human.

In our everyday economic behavior, we seem determined to discover whether we can live alone on earth. E.O. Wilson has argued eloquently and persuasively that we cannot, that who we are depends as much on the richness and diversity of the biological life around us as it does on any inherent quality in our genes. Environmentalists of every stripe argue that we must somehow begin to correlate our economic behavior — by which I mean every aspect of it: production, consumption, habitation — with the welfare of other species.

This is the premise of sustainability. But the very foundation of our economic interests is self-interest, and in the survival of other species we see way too little self to care.

GENERAL SYNOD

It is not impossible it cannot be allowed
to be impossible that we speak to
one another and speaking,
hear

‘though the edges of our discourse
be light years apart and the very concept
of light years is not a shared
learning.

It is not enough that we all watch
Good Morning Canada, in French
and sees the same identical smile super
empty.

People themselves must talk together
about the things that matter, like sex
and death and suicide and holiness and
kids.

A conversation taking place
a two way – God, a dialogue! –
is the only way towards a caring,
a unity

and a peace, the only way
for growth. That is why
Canada always needs a
General Synod.

Sabeel's Statement on 40 Years of the Israeli Occupation

How Long O Lord? – Enough is Enough!

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear?

Or cry out to You, "Violence!" and You will not save?

Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble?

For destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.

So the law is weakened and justice never goes forth.

For the wicked surround the righteous, so justice is perverted.

Look among the nations and see; wonder and be astounded.

For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.

(Habakkuk 1:2-5)

As the prophet so eloquently notes, strife and contention are evident everywhere as we mark 40 years of the Israeli Occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. The brutal assault on Gaza continues unabated. Israel's army daily invades communities and kidnaps and kills Palestinians in the West Bank. The spreading violence is now destroying the stability of Lebanon. The breakdown in civil society in these besieged areas has reached a very dangerous level. Palestinian Christians and Muslims who have been working for many years to preserve and maintain a level of

non-violent resistance have seen their work turn to ashes over and over again, and yet they courageously continue their efforts. However, the level of fatigue and discouragement is higher than it has ever been.

The reasons for the current feelings are clear. The Israeli government and the Israeli army are implementing a long term strategy to destroy the infrastructure of the Palestinian government, economy, and civil society. Each day new regulations, policies, and actions rob the people - people who are not at all related to any militant group - of their dignity, their livelihood and their future. The civil strife and the violent clashes among political parties, families, and gangs in Gaza and the West Bank can be traced to the effects of the long-lasting Occupation. We can never condone violence. We can never condone self-destruction no matter how dire the situation, but we can seek to examine and understand it.

The illegal 1967 Occupation of the 22% of mandate Palestine remaining after the *Nakba* of 1948 and the systematic plan to confiscate and control even the fragments remaining to Palestinians have left not only the Palestinians, but also the world, vulnerable to even greater disasters. When any nation or group is allowed to flout safeguards of international law, humanitarian law, and the Fourth Geneva Convention, along with basic moral standards, the whole of humankind is in grave danger. Yet, the Israeli government and its Zionist architects have been given a green light over the past 40 years of Occupation. The methods they have developed - targeted assassinations, imprisonment without trial, starving and collectively punishing whole populations - are now part of common practice and openly advocated and accepted in many places in the world. Such practices after World War II were seen as totally unacceptable yet these atrocities occur daily in the occupied areas of Palestine with little international reaction. The rules of civil society are being ignored and chaos reigns, most obviously in Gaza but also increasingly in the West Bank. Hopelessness and despair increase. When there is nothing to lose, some will strike out as we have seen recently in many places.

Most Israelis continue to live in fear and to act out of fear, not least because of the ongoing illegal Occupation. Through the past 40 years, they have failed to learn two lessons:

First, brutal military measures do not work. Militarism never works because the human spirit and the quest for freedom cannot be destroyed. The evil of seeking to steal the dignity of the other simply magnifies the desire to resist.

Second, to dehumanize the other is to dehumanize the self. The basic quest to be fully human lies within all of God's children. To put others down in order to be powerful and controlling and to use others as scapegoats to cover one's own inadequacy is self-defeating and self-destructive. The soul of the Israeli people is at stake in this treacherous battle of will and spirit. When common humanity is

forsaken, evil prevails.

Understanding violence does not mean condoning violence. Sabeel continues to work, pray and advocate for non-violent responses to the Occupation. The only safe and secure way out of the current pit is justice. Justice and only justice. Justice is served when the dignity of every human being is honored and respected. Justice is served when love motivates and heals those who need justice and those who must in the last analysis give justice. Much progress will be made when the people of Israel return to their own values, values that have been battered and distorted by the Zionist agenda and the facts of Occupation. Progress will be made when Palestinians are relieved of the hate that so easily builds up under the oppression of Occupation and are thus freed to respond in love to those who acknowledge their shared existence as children of God. There are many layers to peel before the common humanity of all can be celebrated.

Although we are walking in the darkness of Occupation now, we know that the light of Christ will shine one day. We know that the truth will bring freedom and that one day Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs, will walk hand in hand toward the light of God's justice. But now we ask that all our friends pray, work, and speak against the Occupation and the injustice that rule every aspect of our lives. Silence allows evil to prosper.

Jesus said, "I tell you that if these are silent, the stones will cry out!" (Luke 19:40)

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