

British Christian's response to Kairós Palestine

In December 2009 a call was made from the Christian leadership of Palestine entitled *Kairós Palestine - A Moment of Truth*, described as “a word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering.” Kairós is a Greek word meaning a decisive time, a moment of intensity - and has in recent years been applied to critical moments in the history of people who are oppressed or treated unjustly. Calls such as this are not new to the Christian community.

In South Africa in 1985 a Kairós document was launched, a biblical and theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa. It informed and helped to move church communities globally to unite with NGOs, trades unions, professional groups and students in political action against apartheid.

Kairós Palestine speaks of occupation as a “sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights” and any theology that upholds this, it claims, is far from Christian teaching. The duty of the Christian community, it states, is to resist this occupation - but to do so with the “logic of love”, by peaceful struggle which result in ways of force giving way to ways of justice.

Disappointingly, official church structures in the UK have made little or no response to this Call. Instead, grass-roots activists within the churches, theologians and faith-based NGOs have taken up the challenge. I see this as strength as such networks are more likely to make things happen and are great allies for PSC and other campaigning groups.

A discussion and consultation began in Iona, Scotland in 2012 to “challenge the deafening silence of most churches”. Out of this a British Kairós network formed which set itself the task of creating a resource for Christians in Britain, to help them get to grips and work with the Kairós call. In August 2013 *Time for Action a British Christian response to a Moment of Truth, Kairós Palestine* was launched at a meeting of 500 people at the Greenbelt Christian Festival

Time for Action faces head-on our shame as a nation for Christian anti-Semitism and the part this has played in the creating within the Jewish community the need for a safe national homeland. At the same time, it recognises our complicity, since the Balfour Declaration, in political policies that have added to the suffering of the Palestinian community and their rightful demands for justice.

Time for Action also rejects any theological support for occupation or land cleansing that is endorsed by so many Christian Zionists. Instead, it affirms the teachings within the Jewish-Christian scriptures that call for the pursuit of justice, the protection of the poor and the sharing of land as a condition for being in the land.

One of the most important aspects of Time for Action, and one which perhaps exposes the problems that the institutional churches have in supporting Kairós Palestine, is the way in which it holds together the tension between working for justice and working for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Some churches and many NGOs have become embroiled in defending any work they undertake on behalf of justice for Palestinians, often at a cost to their own work. Maintaining good Jewish-Christian relations and dialogue is important but not at the expense of being silent on behalf of the Palestinians. Being open and honest about these tensions is not easy, but they must be faced and partners must be found at local and national level that can help navigate these difficult paths.

Four actions are called for. First, to ‘go and see’, encouraging individuals and groups who make visits and pilgrimages to use travel companies and NGOs that will open their eyes to the reality of occupation - to see the people and not just the holy places. Second, to take political action - taking part in lobbying and advocacy work (*it was encouraging to see more church-based groups involved in the November Lobby*); to explore the options of divestment and economic sanctions directed against the Israeli policy of occupation. Thirdly, to use resources for worship, study and prayer with church communities to tell the story of occupation and guide people to action for change. This could include taking part in the annual World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel; exploring church investments and use of resources; twinning with Palestinian churches, schools villages and towns. becoming a Kairós congregation. To date 13 organisations and several hundred individuals have endorsed Time for Action.

Read more about the Kairós Britain
<http://www.kairosbritain.org.uk/>

Time for Action
<http://www.kairosbritain.org.uk/resources/documents/Time-for-Action/Time-for-Action.pdf>

Kairós Palestine website
<http://www.kairospalestine.ps/>

Pat Gaffney
General Secretary, Pax Christi British Section