

## **Part 5**

### **The Palestinian Plea: “Are you able to help us get our freedom back?”**

In 2009, Palestinian Christian leaders issued the historic document, “[A Moment of Truth](#): A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering.” We named Palestinian realities as they are and described life as God is working to redeem it. We wrote, “Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two people attain justice, peace, security and love? (KP 6:1)”

Now, thirteen years later, as conditions in Palestine rapidly worsen, our question is an urgent, earnest plea: “Are you able to help us get our freedom back?”

The venerated Israeli human rights organization, [B’Tselem](#), titled its January 2021 report, “A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid.” Palestinians have been saying it for decades. Now, human rights organizations have said it. United Nations officials have said it. Politicians have said it. Theologians have said it. South African leaders, who lived apartheid and understand apartheid, have said it. Even Jewish Israeli politicians and legal experts have said it. Facts on the ground speak loudly and clearly. The evidence is here to see.

“What will you do about it?” we Palestinians ask the Church, “How will you respond? Are you able to help us get our freedom back?”

#### **Your answer shapes our future**

For Palestinians, our struggle for freedom is a matter of utmost importance. We are talking about people’s lives and livelihood. We are talking about our very existence on the land of our ancestors. Israel’s apartheid policies and actions directly and negatively impact millions of Palestinians. The existence of Palestine as a thriving state is in jeopardy. Yet, Israel acts with impunity. The world refuses to hold Israel accountable. Aside from verbal admonitions, Israel suffers no consequences for its failure to adhere to international laws and human rights conventions.

The current situation is unbearable. As a result, many families—Christian and Muslim alike—are choosing to leave, seeking a better life and a just future elsewhere.

The existence of the Palestinian Christian community is at stake. Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem have expressed their deep concern about the tangible threats to the future of Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

As the church ignores these realities, its credibility is questioned. Silence before injustice is equivalent to taking part in the injustice. Silence empowers the oppressor. “Are you able to help us get our freedom back?”

### **Words matter**

We say, “Words matter.” The words the Church uses says a lot about the Church and its response to the issues of the day. We urge our brothers and sisters not to choose words that soften the harshness of the crimes perpetrated upon Palestinian. When the Church refuses to call Israel’s laws and actions *apartheid*, the Church contributes to the continuation of apartheid.

We are troubled when our sisters and brothers are more concerned about their relations with religious dialogue partners than they are concerned about our reality under harsh occupation. We are troubled when our sisters and brothers are more concerned about their image than they are concerned about our suffering. Often, when we speak boldly about our oppression and Israeli apartheid, we are told that our cry is too loud. But when we spoke softly, we were ignored. Too much is at stake—for Palestinians, for the Palestinian church, for the global Church—for us to speak softly and employ euphemisms to describe our suffering.

The church should not wait for the international community to officially describe and condemn Israel’s apartheid. No, a prophetic church should shape and lead the international community. A prophetic, faithful church does not watch from the sideline and act when it is safe, when it has nothing to lose. The prophetic church speaks truth to power. When it comes to justice, human dignity and human rights, we join Peter and the apostles who counseled, “We must obey God rather than any human authority (Acts 5:29).”

### **Theology matters**

The global Church has too often contributed to the suffering of Palestinians. The policies of colonial British power were heavily influenced by a theology that sought to gather the Jews in Palestine in preparation for the church’s redemption. Christian Zionism has been a negative force in Middle East politics. Christian Zionist influence is evident both in massive financial support given to Israel each year and in political lobbying that supports Israel and ignores Palestinian Christians.

In our plea, A Moment of Truth, we wrote that “certain theologians in the West try to attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights.... The ‘good news’ in the Gospel itself has become ‘a harbinger of death’ for us. We call on these theologians to deepen their reflection on the Word of God and to rectify their interpretations so that they might see in the Word of God a source of life for all peoples (KP 2.3.3).” We urge the Church to revisit the Scriptures and to reject any theology that favors one people over another.

## **A New Vision**

Emeritus Palestinian Patriarch Michel Sabbah shares a vision in which the land becomes “like the garden of Eden, a dwelling place for God with humanity, and a homeland for all the children of God.” His vision of an inclusive community expresses the Palestinian Christians’ understanding that the land belongs to God, not to any nation, ethnicity, or religion. We all belong to the land, God’s land.

As we wrote in our 2009 plea, A Moment of Truth. “We believe that God’s goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here ‘a new land’ and ‘a new human being’, capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters (KP 10).”

The struggle for our freedom is not about our targeting the state of Israel. In A Moment of Truth, we have told the Jews that

Even though we have fought one another in the recent past and still struggle today, we are able to love and live together. We can organize our political life with all its complexity according to the logic of this love and its power, after ending the occupation and establishing justice (KP 5:4.2).

So, we ask once again. “Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two people attain justice, peace, security and love?”