

your conscience is clear, and you feel yourself a wise man... No, sir, that's not philosophy, not thinking, not breadth of vision, it's laziness, fakirism, a dreamy stupor.⁵

We Canadians need to put fakirism to one side and as citizens once again engage in the ongoing struggle for equality.

Edward Broadbent, J.S. Woodsworth Chair in the Humanities from 1997 to 1999, delivered this public lecture sponsored by the Canadian Association of University Teachers at Capilano College in Vancouver, British Columbia on March 17, 2002. He was invested with a Companion of the Order of Canada at UBC in February 2002. He is currently Visiting Fellow at the Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs, Carleton University, Ottawa.

A Revolutionary Coincidence

—Marc H. Ellis

In January 2002 Marc Ellis, Professor of American and Jewish Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, spoke at SFU's Halpern Centre. His lecture, entitled "Practicing Exile: a Reflection on the Prophetic Call in the 21st Century", was sponsored by the Institute for the Humanities.

Marc Ellis is a Jewish theologian and religious-studies scholar who spent 14 years teaching at Maryknoll School of Theology, a liberationist Roman Catholic seminary. His PhD is from Marquette, where he was inducted into the Jesuit Honour Society. He was with us as part of a western Canada lecture tour. His books include works on Catholic radicalism, the Holocaust, the Israeli-Palestinian question, Jewish-Christian dialogue and Jewish renewal. Of his book, Ending Auschwitz, Richard L. Rubenstein, one of his mentors, has written, "Ellis skillfully combines excellent writing, fascinating narrative and thoughtful reflections on Judaism, Christianity, Auschwitz, Israel and the Palestinians. Ellis is representative of neither the Jewish nor the Christian mainstream. Nevertheless, he is one of the most influential Jewish thinkers of his generation." He has taught at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Florida State, Harvard, and is now at Baylor University where he is Director of the Center for American and Jewish Studies.

This year [2002], by mere coincidence, the remembrance of the Holocaust and the commemoration of Deir Yassin share the same calendar date, April 9th. The Jewish calendar is a lunar one, so its corresponding date on the English calendar changes every year. April 9th is the date of the massacre at Deir Yassin, as it was on that day in 1948 that Jewish irregular forces committed their atrocities on the Arab villagers.

Coincidence is both chance and possibility and while the fact of this shared date should not be exaggerated, it cannot be ignored. For the renewed violence in the Holy Land reminds us of a history of struggle and blood and poses the even more important question about the future of Jews and Palestinians. Will the past cycle of violence and atrocity that continues today persist and define the future of the Holy Land? Are Jews and Palestinians prisoners of a historic conflict and will that conflict come to be identified as the essence of the Jewish and Palestinian people?

There is no need to compare the tragedies that have befallen both peoples. The uniqueness of the Holocaust is well established, as is the catastrophe that has caused so much suffering for the Palestinian people. Comparison of historical events, in terms of magnitude and consequences, trivializes the events themselves. Victimization is a fact in history impossible to ignore and all peoples, at one time or another, have felt the blow of terror and dislocation. Devastation comes in all sizes and shapes; atrocity knows no boundaries and too often no limits.

Instead of uniqueness and comparison, connection and solidarity should be emphasized. If we dwell on the negative, life

⁵ Anton Chekhov, "Ward No.6" in *Stories*. New York: Bantam Books, 2000, pp.199-200.



and history can overwhelm us. We do not have to dwell in a fantasy world to try to glimpse light where there seems only darkness.

At this point in time in the history of Israel/Palestine it does seem almost fanciful to accentuate the positive, but to do so is witness to a possibility beyond the present impasse. It is to place before Jews and Palestinians, indeed the global community, a message of hope. The intractable is not intractable, the catastrophe is not irredeemable, the Holocaust does not have the final word.

Yet a message of hope is only heartening if the issues before us are honestly approached. On this day of remembrance, can we be bearers of a message that is honest, that is rigorous and confessional and hopeful, that is providing a glimpse of a future beyond our own limitations of voice and vision?

I believe this possible. It is also necessary.

If this year's commemoration dates are coincidentally on the same day, the fact that Yad VaShem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, and Deir Yassin are in eyesight of one another is not. The situation of Jews in Europe at the dawn of the 20th century was difficult, if not yet impossible. By the 1930s and after it was intolerable. The impetus for the creation of the state of Israel lies in this European situation, but the solution to this problem, as so often has been the case, was found outside of Europe.

Deir Yassin is but a symbol of this 'solution'—one that, through conflict, war and expansion led to the emptying of the part of Palestine that is now Israel.

Jewish and non-Jewish visitors to Yad VaShem understand the Jewish anguish and tragedy. Those who come to Deir Yassin or remember it know the Palestinian anguish and tragedy. Yet the question today is how many people remember each tragedy alone and how many connect these two? The isolation of these tragedies compounds the calamity itself. For after all is said and done, once violence and atrocity occur, it is what we do with terrible events that defines us. This is true for us as individuals. It is also true for peoples and nations.

The purpose of remembrance is found among the living after the calamity. Analysis is crucial here in laying bare the reasons for the disaster, but, especially when so much human suffering is involved, history cannot become a mere curiosity or a place from which power is asserted. Both trivialize those who suffered and those who live after the suffering. Remembrance is for the living to mourn the dead as well as to foster a commitment to personal and communal life beyond such events. Is there anything worse after catastrophe than a memory that encourages further dislocation and death?

What can our remembrance be, and the commitment that comes from remembrance, so that we will not foster a future so calamitous that even the victims of the Holocaust and the Palestinian expulsion will cry out from the earth to end the cycle of violence and atrocity they experienced?

With the Oslo process in shambles and the Al Aksa intifada continuing, it seems we are starkly confronted with two possibilities: either a complete withdrawal of Israel from the West Bank and Gaza with a fully shared Jerusalem or the declaration of a bi-national state in all of Israel/Palestine. There are good reasons to pursue either or

perhaps even both together. For the healing of Jews and Palestinians can only come through independence and interdependence, joining particularity with universality, so that a future without abuse and armaments can be enjoyed by both peoples.

On this day of commemoration, this coincidence that may become, through our efforts, a turning toward each other, let us embrace a forgiveness oriented around justice, a revolutionary forgiveness that gives birth to a future worth bequeathing to our children. In synagogues, churches and mosques, in public halls of debate and government, lets us commit ourselves to a new beginning for the sake of Israel and Palestine, in the name of Jews and Palestinians, and for a future worthy of our people's history.

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