When the Stories of Bethlehem and Zurich Rhyme

Palestinian Theology and Experience and What They Might Say to Anabaptists

Byron Rempel-Burkholder

In the spring of 2016, my wife, Melita, and I volunteered for three months at Bethlehem Bible College (BBC) in the West Bank, Palestine, under a short-term ministry program of Mennonite Church Canada. Our schedule allowed us to sit in on an English-language class taught by Jonathan Kuttab, a BBC board member and an internationally recognized Palestinian human rights lawyer. The course offered a Christian perspective on international law and peace in the Middle East.

As a Mennonite, I naively expected the course to draw heavily on my Anabaptist peace traditions and resources. Weren't we—the historical "peace" churches—the global authorities on the matter? Instead, I saw only one or two Mennonite authors on the course reading list. Kuttab drew on other sources, including Middle Eastern thinkers and, of course, his own vast experience as a peace practitioner.

Encounters with Palestinian Christians and Palestinian theology that year and in the years since have taught me how a gospel commitment to peace, authentic to its own setting, was already rooted in the restive and conflicted land that is Palestine today. To expect Palestinian peace witness to look like, or use the same language as, Western Anabaptism was paternalistic and ethnocentric.[1] My task

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1 True, Kuttab and several other Christian leaders of his generation have attended Anabaptist institutions through their contact with Mennonites who have done

was to recognize the work of the Spirit in its own right, in that setting—to learn from it, to be challenged by it. Could it even help unlock a renewal of my own faith in this worrying time of mounting political upheaval in my corner of the world, Turtle Island (North America)?

In this personal narrative reflection, I have picked three themes that recur in historic Anabaptist theology and resonate with much of what I have heard, read, and observed in my encounters with Palestinian Christians. I will favor the voices of several emerging leaders under age forty who are adding fresh meaning to the theologies that their seniors have been forging in the contemporary Palestinian context.[2] I will also highlight the relevance of these observations in the current context of Israel's war on Gaza via the following themes:

1. A Christ-centered gospel of love for neighbor and enemy
2. Mutual accountability in the community of faith
3. Baptism as martyrdom

I have chosen the language of *rhyming* because the correspondences are sometimes slanted rather than direct; rhyming connotes hints of similarities, suggestions of relatedness that can be pondered and explored, like poetry.

1. A Christ-Centered Gospel of Love for Neighbor and Enemy

During our sojourn at BBC, I came to know Anton Deik, a faculty member who is now completing his doctorate in New Testament studies through the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, with plans of returning to teach. Deik grew up in the Catholic church of St. Catherine, adjacent to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Of all the teaching he received as a child, the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew were central.

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humanitarian and development work in Palestine and Israel since 1949, mostly through Mennonite Central Committee. These have included Bishara Awad, founder of Bethlehem Bible College, and his brother Mubarak, a leader in nonviolent peace protests in the West Bank during the late 1980s. And yet, their way of expressing peace theology, for me, did not feel transplanted and derivative. The many people we met from other traditions—Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and evangelical—spoke a similar language and reflected an authenticity that belonged to Palestinian culture and experience.

2 My staples over the past eight years have been works in English by Anglican and Lutheran Palestinians: Naim Ateek's pioneering work in Palestinian liberation theology, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989); Mitri Raheb's *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014); and Munther Isaac's *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020). Their focus on justice and liberation is also reflected in other Western theologians' writing on Palestine and Israel, including Jewish (the late) Marc Ellis, and evangelical scholar Gary Burge.

"For Palestinian Christians, 'love your neighbor' and 'love your enemy' are community markers," Deik told me in an interview. "I'm not saying that we're a perfect community, but for us, Jesus's ethic of love is what makes a Christian *Christian*!" That this conviction would take hold in the context of the West Bank moved me, given the deepening enmity between Palestinians and the Israelis who occupy and control their land in contravention of international law.

Deik's upbringing had also taught him how, since Pentecost, the Christian communities of Palestine have historically negotiated ways to live in relative peace with their Jewish and then their Muslim neighbors—until recent decades, and especially now.[3]

Deik's faith was severely tested shortly after graduating from university. While serving abroad with an international youth mission group, he was shocked to meet so many Christian peers who, almost as a tenet of their faith, supported modern, secular Israel as an instrument of God's will in direct continuity with the ancient covenant people of God.

How could it be that God was on the side of a regime that had forcefully taken over Palestinian land in 1948; conquered and occupied the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem in 1967; and continued to build more and more Jewish settlements in those territories in violation of international law? How, Deik asked, could fellow Christians bless a government that kept his people subjugated and bereft of basic rights to movement, water, citizenship, and self-determination? If God was on the side of the self-proclaimed and militaristic "Jewish state," where did that leave Palestinian believers? How did it square with the teachings of Jesus?

What Deik was encountering was Christian Zionism, an ideology of end-times formulas drawn from the Old Testament and Revelation, with little reference to Jesus. By contrast, Deik and the Palestinians I encountered circled back to Jesus as the hermeneutical key to the Bible. As with Anabaptists, their rootedness in the Gospels, the universal love of God, and the call to love even the enemy ran through their biblical reflection.[4]

The centrality of radical, Gospel-centered love was also at the heart of a document that has helped the global church understand the experience of Palestinian Christians today. In 2009, in the wake of the Second Intifada and decades of failure in peace efforts, Palestinian Christian leaders from across the theological

3 The parade of imperial powers that have administered and colonized Palestine down through history—from the Romans to the Byzantines, to the various Muslim overlords, to the Ottomans—has mostly allowed the religious and cultural diversity of Palestine to flourish well together. Ironically, the bloodiest times of conflict came from the West—first the Christian Crusaders in the Middle Ages, determined to take back the Holy Land by force and to slaughter the Muslims, and, more recently, the colonization and displacement of Palestinians by European Jews fleeing persecution and genocide.

4 See note 2 on key theological works by Palestinian Christians.

spectrum in Israel and Palestine—Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, evangelical—issued "A Moment of Truth—A Cry of Hope from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering." This manifesto boldly named the Israeli occupation a "sin against God and humanity."[5] It was explicit in its call to resist the occupation but not through the militant armed resistance that just war theorists might have called for and that jihadist groups favored.[6] Instead, it called for a "logic of love."

Love for Israelis, the "enemy," was not a matter of Palestinians sacrificing their identity and dignity to the oppressor; rather, it meant working toward a liberation of the enemy from a destructive culture of domination and supremacy: "Through our love, we will overcome injustices and establish foundations for a new society both for us and for our opponents. Our future and their future are one. Either the cycle of violence that destroys both of us or peace that will benefit both."[7]

In his 2020 book *The Other Side of the Wall* (InterVarsity Press), BBC academic dean and Lutheran Pastor Munther Isaac puts it this way: "Christ's [kingdom] was the kingdom of the meek—the lovers of righteousness, justice, and truth—and the cross symbolizes that kingdom. Not the cross of the Crusaders but that of Golgotha, that of sacrificial love."[8]

Sacrificial love for others, including enemies, is a principle etched into my Anabaptist identity and faith, tested historically in the fires of persecution and iconized in the story of Dirk Willems rescuing his jailer from a frozen pond. What was new to me in the Palestinian context, however, was the call to pair the "logic of love," as found in the Gospels, with political resistance to oppression:

> Resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as its logic. It is thus a creative resistance for it must find human ways that engage the humanity of the enemy.[9]

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5 Kairos Palestine, "A Moment of Truth—A Cry of Hope from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering," section 4, accessed September 26, 2024, https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document.

6 "A Moment of Truth," section 4.2.2: "When we review the history of the nations, we see many wars and much resistance to war by war, to violence by violence. The Palestinian people has gone the way of the peoples, particularly in the first stages of its struggle with the Israeli occupation. However, it also engaged in peaceful struggle, especially during the first intifada. We recognize that all peoples must find a new way in their relations with each other and the resolution of their conflicts. The ways of force must give way to the ways of justice. This applies above all to the peoples that are militarily strong, mighty enough to impose their injustice on the weaker."

7 "A Moment of Truth," section 4.3.

8 Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 71.

9 "A Moment of Truth," section 4.2.3.

Occasionally, I've asked my Palestinian interlocutors whether they are pacifist. The answers I've gotten are usually ambiguous. As Deik told me, the term has become "tainted" and would not define the self-understanding of Palestinian Christians. It suggests passivity and non-engagement. Echoing the authors of the Kairos document, Deik and his peers prefer the term "nonviolent resistance."

"The ethic of loving both neighbor and enemy is very important for us Christians," Deik told me. "This is what our community offers as an alternative to any ideology that glorifies military might, whether Christian Zionism, or Palestinian militancy: nonviolent creative resistance, which is more powerful than armed resistance."

Such words stand in contrast to Mennonites and other Anabaptists who defend the quiet-in-the-land language of "nonresistance"—who resist confrontation, or who promote mid-way, both-sides stance of mediation and compromise. The Kairos document may not satisfy those who wish for a more explicit renunciation of the sword. Palestinian Christians do, however, call for a robust, active engagement in peacemaking that is rooted in the gospel. They follow in a stream of lights such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Walter Wink, who don't bear the Anabaptist label but with whom many Anabaptists find resonance.

The question of whether Palestinian Christians would ever take up arms is hypothetical (just as it has always been for members of our peace church traditions, despite our professed ideals). It is for Palestinians to answer in their context. Still, it is remarkable that the impulse toward nonviolent resistance and loving concern for the enemy persists in Palestine, given the suffering they have endured in recent decades. Would Western Anabaptists today muster the same courage if they found themselves in those circumstances?

2. Mutual Accountability in Apocalyptic Times

Palestinian notions of how Christ-centered peace theology plays out in practical discipleship is intertwined with another key principle often cited as a distinctive of historic Anabaptist faith and practice—mutual accountability in the church. This tenet, expressed as church "discipline" survives in our confessions of faith, notwithstanding far too many instances of its abuse in church life.[10] We still hold on to the notion that we need each other to remain true to the faith we profess. In my congregation, baptismal candidates promise to be open to give and receive counsel. We rely on each other to remain centered in Jesus and his way.

10 In my denomination's *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1995) page 55, church discipline, rightly exercised, is intended to "liberate erring brothers and sisters from sin, and restore them to a right relationship with God and to fellowship in the church" and it "gives integrity to the witness of the church in the world."

Can this congregational practice apply in a global church setting and across denominations? Especially since the start of the Gaza War—but for years before, too—Palestinian churches and leaders have been asking the Western church to scrutinize its theology of Israel, the Land, and justice. The Kairos Palestine "Moment of Truth" statement cited above is one instance of that. But now, the nudge has become more insistent.

In October 2023, just days after the horrific eruption of the war, Daniel Bannoura, a native of Beit Sahour (adjacent to Bethlehem) and currently a PhD candidate at the University of Notre Dame (South Bend, Indiana), met online with three fellow faculty members from Bethlehem Bible College to discuss their response to the crisis. Melita and I had met all of them in our visits to Palestine: The others were Anton Deik; Yousef Al Khouri, who grew up in Gaza; and academic dean Rev. Munther Isaac, who pastors Bethlehem's Christmas Lutheran Church and has become a prominent voice for a just peace in the region. All except Isaac were men in their thirties who were completing doctorates in preparation for ministry in Palestine and were already part of a robust network of young Christian leaders in Palestine and in the diaspora.

As I heard Bannoura describe the meeting, I had a fleeting picture of another, earlier moment of reckoning: the gathering of Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock, and Felix Manz—a group of young adults in the Zurich of 1525 who for months had found themselves at odds with what they felt were unbiblical requirements of the magisterial church of their city. At this gathering, they debated their dilemma and then prayerfully followed what they sensed to be the Spirit's leading: They expressed their resistance by rebaptizing each other in an act of civil disobedience, eventually going on to affirm a discipleship in Jesus's way of peace.

And now, here were four emerging Palestinian leaders responding to a crisis. They prayed, they lamented, and from there they moved swiftly to action: They wrote an open letter to leaders and members of the global church. While condemning the death and suffering among both Israelis and Palestinians on October 7, 2023, and since, their "Call to Repentance: An Open Letter from Palestinian Christians"[11] summoned Christians around the world to condemn the massive retaliatory response of Israel to the October 7 Hamas attacks.

The call, endorsed by a wide assortment of Christian organizations in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem, launched on October 20. More than twenty-one thousand people across the world signed the attached petition.[12] Then, as the war ground on into 2024 and the scale of destruction and death mounted in Gaza, the letter helped energize grassroots movements of protest, marches,

11 Kairos Palestine: A Movement of Truth website, accessed September 26, 2024, https://www.kairospalestine.ps/images/A_Call_for_Repentance__An_Open_Letter_from_Palestinian_Christians_1.pdf.

12 The petition is still open for more signatures at https://chng.it/QqykNS4p58.

and prayer for peace, including Mennonite Action[13] in North America, and the Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage,[14] a global initiative of evangelical progressives and neo-Anabaptists, including Shane Claiborne, Jarrod McKenna, and Lisa Sharon Harper. Hymn-singing activists were arrested for occupying the rotunda of Washington's Capitol. Peace theology, expressed in "creative resistance" was on full display. But it wasn't the sea change that would stop the war.

In May, Bannoura, Deik, AlKhoury, and Isaac were among the speakers at BBC's 2024 "Christ at the Checkpoint," a biennial conference sponsored by Bethlehem Bible College. The gathering brings Christian leaders, theologians, and other interested persons from around the world to join Palestinian peers in reflecting biblically on peace and justice in the Middle East. The Gaza war, raging less than sixty miles away, complicated travel into the region, with canceled flights and other barriers. But the sessions went ahead, and over one hundred internationals were able to come in person. I joined many more on the livestream. The sessions featured Palestinian leaders as well as others, mostly from contexts that rhymed with that of Palestine: South African, Latin American, and African American.

Bannoura told delegates how the "Call to Repentance" had come about.[15] He recounted how Russell Moore, editor of the evangelical *Christianity Today*, had urged Christians everywhere to exercise "moral clarity" by standing with Israel in its war on Gaza.[16] This distressed Bannoura and his colleagues. While not excusing Hamas's actions, they were shocked that Moore and so many other Christian leaders in the West were supporting the massive and disproportionate response of Israel. How could they not see that a sixteen-year blockade of Gaza—along with the decades of occupation and dispossession since 1948—had created the conditions ripe for the explosion of violence that October?

Bannoura recounted how just months earlier Moore had written a book in which he challenged evangelicals to recover their ethical authority and to rediscover the Sermon on the Mount as their guide through polarizing times.[17] "Ironically, Moore fails to quote the Sermon on the Mount in support of the war," Bannoura lamented. That negligence lay at the root of the concluding words of the open letter:

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13 See https://www.mennoniteaction.org/.

14 See Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage: A Via Dolorosa of Solidarity, https://www.gazaceasefirepilgrimage.com/.

15 Daniel Bannoura, "CATC2024 Day 2: A Call for Repentance–Daniel Bannoura," June 3, 2024, YouTube video, 24:44, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfZkDKmWsrM.

16 Bannoura, "A Call for Repentance," https://youtu.be/cfZkDKmWsrM.

17 Russell Moore, *Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call for Evangelicals in America* (New York: Penguin, 2023).

> We are deeply troubled by the failure of some western Christian leaders and theologians to acknowledge the biblical tradition of justice and mercy, as first proclaimed by Moses (Deut 10:18; 16:18–20; 32:4) and the prophets (Isa 1:17; 61:8; Mic 2:1–3, 6:8; Amos 5:10–24), and as exemplified and embodied in Christ (Matt 25:34–46; Luke 1:51–53; 4:16–21).[18]

In another address at the conference, Deik explored the impact of Christian Zionism on the mission of the church. "Knowingly or otherwise, these theologians depict God as a racist, tribal deity, who favors the Jews over the Palestinians," he said. "These theologians portray God as a warlord."[19]

Deik noted the upcoming Fourth Lausanne Congress in South Korea—a large global gathering of evangelicals designed to empower the global church to "declare and display Christ together to a watching world." "If Lausanne is serious about declaring and displaying Christ to a watching world," Deik said, "then addressing Christian Zionism is an imperative—unless we want to declare and display . . . a god of favoritism, who supports ethnic cleansing and apartheid." The world will be watching, Deik agreed, but will it be convinced that the God we proclaim is a God of love and justice for all?

The most poignant "ouch" moment of the conference for me came in the plenary address given by Munther Isaac, principal organizer of the conference. In it, he called out the "peace churches" for being too weak in their witness. Isaac acknowledged their—our!—efforts to teach and speak for peace, pray for peace, and give generously for humanitarian efforts. Now, with the Gaza war raging, the peace churches even issued statements calling for peace.

However, Isaac lamented, most of these declarations "lacked the assertiveness needed to respond to war crimes. They felt harmless. You see, the church stays away from speaking truth to power . . . from calling things by their name [in order] to avoid controversy. This is a problem . . . . True peacemakers discern what is really happening, call things by name, and speak truth to power. They also act."[20] Isaac challenged the church to demonstrate, write letters, nag political leaders, and join sit-ins. Words are not enough.

Was the Call to Repentance issued by the Palestinian church something the early Anabaptists would have signed? How many Anabaptist Christians today signed it?

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18 Kairos Palestine, https://www.kairospalestine.ps/images/A_Call_for_Repentance__An_Open_Letter_from_Palestinian_Christians_1.pdf.

19 Tony Deik, "CATC2024 Day 4: Missiology After Gaza: Christian Zionism, God's Image, and the Gospel—Tony Deik," June 3, 2024, YouTube video, 41:20, https://youtu.be/GTw5U6fLO5Q.

20 Munther Isaac, "CATC2024 Day 1: A Christian Response to Gaza—Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac," June 3, 2024, YouTube video, 37:32, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6Rc7makz08&t=1782s.

In addition to the call to be Christ- and gospel-centered, therefore, I saw church accountability in action—in this case, not so much at the congregational level (although it may have repercussions there, too, as we learn to speak hard truths to each other) but at a global level. How can we Anabaptists, especially those of us in the West who are not as directly affected by war and military oppression, be more open to prophetic words from outside our privileged context? For those of us who have come from a tradition of missionizing and evangelizing, often under colonial protection, can we become listeners? As a Canadian, will I wrestle with my own complicity, my own negligence, my own anger and frustration in not adequately recognizing the plight of Palestinians and other oppressed peoples? Am I really open to having my discipleship be costly? This last question is at the heart of the third rhyme of my reflection.

3. Baptism as a Radical Commitment to the Kingdom of God and a Repudiation of Empire

The theme of believers baptism, such a key issue for the early Anabaptists, jumped out at me on January 4, 2024, as I sat in on the weekly online prayer service and Bible study hosted by the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre in East Jerusalem. At this service, Christians of many traditions from around the world sit with Palestinian Christian leaders to discern what messages the weekly lectionary text are speaking into the current political realities of Palestine.

That day the meditation and discussion were led by Sabeel staffer Samuel Munayer, a twenty-six-year-old Palestinian Jerusalemite with Israeli citizenship. The text was the Gospel of Mark's account of the baptism of Jesus. My ears perked up as he introduced the meditation: "With the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the overall seventy-five years of settler colonialism and suffering for us Palestinians . . . it is clear to me that we should understand baptism as bound up with martyrdom."[21]

Munayer went on to explain how "baptism is a realignment of power and time, which sets the mandate of our discipleship. Moreover, it is an act of committing oneself to the loyalty of love, not nationality; humbleness, not pride; losing oneself for the sake of the God of the oppressed, not attempt to gain it by one's own might. . . . Authentic baptism that is of the Holy Spirit is a political act."

Now describing himself as "ecumenical," Munayer was raised evangelical, although his parents come from Orthodox and Anglican traditions. Baptism was a personal recognition of Jesus as Savior (evangelical), or it was an induction into an institutional church long steeped in Constantinian alliances of church and state (Anglican and Orthodox). But baptism as a political act?

21 This and subsequent quotes are taken from the text of Munayer's meditation sent in an email to me.

Baptism as martyrdom was not a topic I had discussed with Palestinians or read about in their writings. Yet here was this insight emerging in a Bible study conducted amid Palestinian angst over the future, as Israel was destroying Gaza and accelerating the theft of West Bank land for more settlements.

The "rhyming" with the Anabaptist movement, for me, was unmistakable. For early Anabaptists, Christian discipleship included not just a baptism of water and of the Spirit but also a "baptism of blood."[22] For many that meant literal martyrdom at the hands of the state. But for all, the phrase connoted something deeper and more universal—a daily willingness to give up one's entire life to following Jesus, whatever the cost. To quote Balthasar Hubmaier, "The flesh must daily be killed since it wants only to live and reign according to its own lusts . . . . Day and night he practices all those things which concern the praise of God and brotherly love."[23] By rejecting infant baptism and its alignment with the powers of the state, early Anabaptists repudiated the supremacy of those powers, recognizing instead the supremacy of Christ and his kingdom.

The trinity of water, Spirit, and blood in baptism persists in my denomination's *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. The confession reminds me that while the prospect of physical martyrdom is quite remote in my context, those who are baptized "follow Jesus in giving their lives for others, in loving their enemies, and in renouncing violence, even when it means their own suffering or death."[24]

Munayer's reflections came at a time when religious extremism and settler violence were on the rise, causing fear in the church communities. Like their Muslim counterparts, Christian Palestinians were being pressured off their land to make way for new Israeli settlements and restricted roads. A Christian cemetery just outside Old Jerusalem had been desecrated just a year earlier by extremist settlers, and parts of the Armenian (Christian) Quarter of Old Jerusalem were under threat of being forcibly taken over to expand the Jewish Quarter. In the past year, a young Anglican woman was incarcerated and held without charge for nonviolent protests against the occupation. In a variety of ways, the church is being threatened by increasingly extreme ethnoreligious forces that contradict the moral values of all three monotheistic religions.

For Munayer, baptism entails being willing to suffer, standing firm in faith and in a commitment to a peace that is rooted in justice. "We must be like John the Baptist and Paul the Apostle and pray that our churches be baptized with the

22 C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 1997), 161.

23 Cited in Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 161.

24 *Confession of Faith in A Mennonite Perspective*, Article 11 on "Baptism," 47.

Holy Spirit and center themselves to martyrdom. The waters of baptism both cleanse and drown."[25]

Embracing Our Palestinian Siblings in Faith

Can North American Anabaptists who confess unity with Jesus-followers everywhere allow Palestinian Christians to help us sharpen our own identity and witness in a troubled and divided world? I believe we must—with great humility and open eyes. As a North American, I am tainted by a history of settler-colonial land theft and genocide. My society still marginalizes Indigenous folk and people of color. Supremacist and ethnocentric assumptions have tainted the history of my church's missionary efforts. All of these are reasons to embrace Palestinian siblings in faith, who suffer these historic ills right now. Listening hard to their voices might help us find better ways of spreading the hope of the gospel in the world.

When it comes to confronting the systemic injustices perpetrated by Israel, we must be honest about antisemitism in our history. The silent complicity—and in some cases active support—of Mennonites regarding the genocidal policies of the Third Reich must be acknowledged and repented of. Antisemitism today, especially in the wake of October 7, 2023, is a scourge that we must oppose as vehemently as we oppose other forms of racism. We must root it out of ourselves. None of this, however, requires that we hesitate to work for justice or that we ignore the plight of the Palestinian people, who had nothing to do with the Holocaust and yet are paying for it as Israel occupies and ethnically cleanses their land. In fact, as Anton Deik noted in an interview, "True repentance from antisemitism is expressed in solidarity with Palestinians."[26]

For our Anabaptist witness today, the Palestine-Israel dilemma can help us reexamine and reclaim the core of our faith—Jesus, the one who revealed God's universal love to all people, who stands with the downtrodden. In our commitment to mutual accountability in the church, the current crisis may remind us of our call to listen intently to our siblings in faith who are living under the thumb

25 *Martyr* language is current in Palestine these days—invoked to describe people who are dying at the hands of the Israeli military, whether because of nonviolent protest, stone-throwing, armed resistance, or acts of terrorism, or simply being caught in the crossfire. The various connotations of the term in both English and Arabic should be judged carefully, especially regarding armed resistance and terrorism. Whatever the spectrum of meaning, the word nevertheless reflects a willingness to give one's life to a different and better world that has yet to be born. For Palestinians as a whole, that means a society of equal justice and dignity for all—Jews, Muslims Christians. For Palestinian Christians, the vision includes this, but it also goes beyond: It points to the new heavens and the new earth of the Kingdom of God.

26 Author's interview with Anton Deik, June 5, 2024.

of Empire—in this case, the alliance between Israel and Western colonial powers like Canada and the US—and to prioritize over our comfort their plight within a system of domination. And finally, it can remind us of our own baptismal commitments in following Jesus, who calls Christian witnesses (*martyrs* in Greek) to the way of the cross, dying to our own selves as we usher in the Kin-dom of God.