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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

EDITORIAL

John Howard, in his first major statement of the 2007 election, said that the economy has never been stronger in our history than under his government. He went on, however, to admit that not everybody has shared in the bounty of this economy (according to ACOSS, that is 1 in 10 Australians who live below the poverty line).

So, for the education of the Prime Minister, we would like to demonstrate what his eleven years have meant for the Australian people whose contributions created that economy AND TO THE BADGE OF SHAME WE ALL CARRY FOR HIS POLICIES.

BLOOD, SWEAT and TEARS

BLOOD

Firstly, the blood of every one of the innocent Iraqis who have died so that the United States could pursue its self-interests around the world. This blood is on our hands for blindly and disgracefully grovelling into Iraq at the US request.

The blood of the Aboriginal people through deaths in custody, suicides and short lifespan due to government neglect and persecution culminating in the 'invasion' of their lands in the Northern Territory.

The blood of workers who have died on the job because of inadequate safety equipment and the rabid pursuit of profits.

SWEAT

The sweat of every working Australian whose former on-the-job conditions, wages and rights have been withdrawn by the Howard Government's industrial relations legislation - longer hours, shorter pay, worsened conditions, forbidden union representation, exploitation and downright lying regarding the role of the trade union movement, which has been responsible for all the on-the-job conditions still existing. These conditions had turned workers from slave labour to gaining some semblance of dignity as workers.

Their sweat has produced the economic results that Howard boasts of, sweat that has produced mega-profits and mega-salaries for CEOs but little for ordinary working people.

TEARS

Tears of shame for the 'children overboard', the treatment of asylum seekers, the demonising of the Muslim community, for David Hicks and others who have been denied natural justice.

Tears of grief for the hundreds of thousands who are not enjoying John Howard's 'economy', who are homeless, suffer mental illness, drug and alcohol dependency, who cannot afford to buy decent food for their families or who are having their homes removed because they cannot afford the mortgage re-payments.

Tears for the environment which is being raped for jobs and profits with little thought for the future of this planet and tears for those who simply cannot or will not take the time to look at the issues and recognise the enemy of the people and their policies.

BLOOD SWEAT AND TEARS: When will we learn that WE have to take control of our society for it to work for working people everywhere.

Israel, Palestine and the Hypocrisies of Power

An interview with Noam Chomsky

In the course of an interview given to the Lambeth and Wandsworth (London) branch of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in July 2007, the celebrated American intellectual and activist Noam Chomsky provided a devastating insight into what lies behind the continuing conflict - and could lead to the death of the Palestinian nation itself, if the 'rejectionists' are allowed to prevail against overwhelming public opinion, East and West.

What is your view of the situation in Gaza today? Could it mark the beginning of the end for the Palestinian Authority?

Some background is necessary. Let's begin with January 2006, when Palestinians voted in a carefully monitored election, pronounced to be free and fair by international observers - despite US efforts to swing the election towards their favourite, Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah party. But Palestinians committed a grave crime, by Western standards. They voted 'the wrong way'. The US instantly joined Israel in punishing Palestinians for their misconduct, with Europe toddling along behind as usual.

There is nothing novel about the reaction to these Palestinian misdeeds. Though it is obligatory to hail our leaders for their sincere dedication to bringing democracy to a suffering world - perhaps in an excess of idealism - the more serious scholar/advocates of the mission of 'democracy promotion' recognize that there is a 'strong line of continuity' running through all administrations: the US supports democracy if, and only if, it conforms to US strategic and economic interests (Thomas Carothers, head of the Law and Democracy Program of the Carnegie Endowment). In short, the project is pure cynicism, if viewed honestly. The US project should be described as one of blocking democracy, not promoting it - dramatically so in the case of Palestine.

The punishment of Palestinians for the crime of voting the wrong way was severe. With constant US backing, Israel increased its violence in Gaza, withheld funds that it was legally obligated to transmit to the Palestinian Authority, tightened its siege and, in a gratuitous act of cruelty, even cut off the flow of water to the arid Gaza Strip. The Israeli attacks became far more severe after the capture of Corporal Gilad Shalit on 25 June, which the West portrayed as a terrible crime.

Again, pure cynicism. Just one day before, Israel kidnapped two civilians in Gaza - a far worse crime than capturing a soldier - and transported them to Israel (in violation of international law, but that is routine), where they presumably joined the roughly 1,000 prisoners held by Israel without charges, hence kidnapped. None of this merits more than a yawn in the West.

There is no need here to run through the ugly details. The US-Israel made sure that Hamas would not have a chance to govern. Of course, the two leaders of the rejectionist camp flatly rejected Hamas's call for a long-term ceasefire to allow for negotiations for a settlement in terms of the international consensus on a two-state settlement, which the US-Israel reject - as they have done in virtual isolation for over 30 years, with rare and temporary departures.

Meanwhile, Israel stepped up its programmes of annexation, dismemberment and imprisonment of shrinking Palestinian cantons in the West Bank, always with decisive US backing, despite occasional minor complaints accompanied by the wink of an eye and munificent funding. The programmes were formalized in Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's 'convergence programme', which spells the end of any viable Palestinian state. His programme was greeted in the West with much acclaim as 'moderate', because it did not satisfy the demands of 'greater Israel' extremists. It was soon abandoned as 'too moderate', again with understanding - if mild - notes of disapproval by Western hypocrites.

There is a standard operating procedure for overthrowing an unwanted government: arm the military to prepare for a military coup. The US-Israel adopted this conventional plan, arming and training Fatah to win by force what it lost at the ballot box. The US also encouraged Mahmoud Abbas to amass power in his own hands - steps that are quite appropriate in the eyes of Bush administration advocates of presidential dictatorship. As for the rest of the Quartet, Russia has no principled objection to such steps, the UN is powerless to defy the Master and Europe is too timid to do so.

Egypt and Jordan supported the effort, consistent with their own programmes of internal repression and barring of democracy, with US backing.

The strategy backfired. Despite the flow of military aid, Fatah forces in Gaza were defeated in a vicious and brutal conflict, which many close observers describe as a pre-emptive strike, targeting primarily the security forces of the brutal Fatah strongman Mohammed Dahlan (Alistair Crooke, Jonathan Steele, and others).

However, those with overwhelming power can often snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, and the US-Israel

quickly moved to turn the outcome to their benefit. They now have a pretext for tightening the stranglehold on the people of Gaza, cheerfully pursuing policies that the prominent international law scholar Richard Falk describes as a prelude to genocide that 'should remind the world of the famous post-Nazi pledge of "never again"'.

The US-Israel can pursue the project with international backing, unless Hamas meets the three conditions imposed by the 'international community' - a technical term referring to the US Government and whoever goes along with it. For Palestinians to be permitted to peek out of the walls of their Gaza dungeon, Hamas must: (1) recognize Israel or, in a more extreme form, Israel's 'right to exist' - that is, the legitimacy of their expulsion from their homes; (2) renounce violence; (3) accept past agreements - in particular, the Road Map of the Quartet.

The hypocrisy again is stunning. No such conditions are imposed on those who wear the jackboots: (1) Israel does not recognize Palestine, in fact is devoting extensive efforts to ensure that there will be no viable Palestine ever, always with decisive US support; (2) Israel does not renounce violence - and it is ridiculous even to raise the question with regard to the US; (3) Israel firmly rejects past agreements, in particular, the Road Map, with US support. The first two points are obvious. The third is correct, but scarcely known. While Israel formally accepted the Road Map, it attached 14 Reservations that completely eviscerate it. To take just the first, Israel demanded that for the process to commence and continue, the Palestinians must ensure full quiet, education for peace, cessation of incitement, dismantling of Hamas and other organizations, and other conditions. Even if they were to satisfy these virtually impossible demands, the Israeli Cabinet proclaimed that 'the Roadmap will not state that Israel must cease violence and incitement against the Palestinians'. The other reservations continue in the same vein.

Israel's instant rejection of the Road Map, with US support, is unacceptable to the Western self-image, so it has been suppressed. The facts did finally break into the mainstream with the publication of Jimmy Carter's *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. The book elicited a torrent of abuse and desperate efforts to discredit it, but these sections - the only part of the book that would have been new to readers with some familiarity with the topic - were scrupulously avoided. It would, rightly, be considered utterly ludicrous to demand that a political party in the US or Israel meet such conditions - though it would be fair to ask that the two states with overwhelming power meet them. But the imperial mentality is so deeply embedded in Western culture that this travesty passes without criticism, even notice.

While now in a position to crush Gaza with even greater cruelty, Israel can also proceed, with US backing, to implement its plans in the West Bank, expecting to have the tacit co-operation of Fatah leaders, who will be amply rewarded for their capitulation. Among other steps, Israel began to release the funds - estimated at \$600 million - that it had stolen in reaction to the January 2006 election, and is making a few other gestures. The programmes of undermining democracy are proceeding with shameless self-righteousness and ill-concealed pleasure, with gestures to keep the natives contented

- at least those who play along - while Israel continues its merciless repression and violence; and, of course, its immense projects to ensure that it will take over whatever is of value to it in the West Bank. All thanks to the benevolence of the gracious rich uncle.

To turn, finally, to your question; the end of the Palestinian Authority might not be a bad idea for Palestinians, in the light of US-Israeli programmes of rendering it nothing more than a quisling regime to oversee their extreme rejectionist designs. What should concern us much more is that US-Israeli triumphalism - and European cowardice - might be the prelude to the death of a nation, a rare and somber event.

Do you think that there are any conditions under which the US might change its policy of 'unconditional support' for Israel?

A large majority of Americans oppose US Government policy and support the international consensus on a two-state settlement - in recent polls it's called the 'Saudi Plan', referring to the position of the Arab League, supported by virtually the entire world, apart from the US and Israel. Furthermore, a large majority thinks that the US should deny aid to either of the contending parties - Israel and the Palestinians - if they do not negotiate in good faith towards this settlement. This is one of a great many illustrations of a huge gap between public opinion and public policy on critical issues.

It should be added that few people are likely to be aware that their preferences would lead to cutting off all aid to Israel. To understand this consequence one would have to escape the grip of the powerful and largely uniform doctrinal system, which labours to project an image of US benevolence, Israeli righteousness and Palestinian terror and obstructionism, whatever the facts. To answer your question: US policy might well change if the US became a functioning democratic society, in which an informed public has a meaningful voice in policy formation. That's the task for activists and organizers, and not just in this case. One can think of other possible conditions that might lead to a change in US policy, but none that holds anywhere near as much promise as this one.

What message do you think the appointment of Tony Blair as the Quartet's envoy will send to the Palestinians and others around the region?

Perhaps the most apt comment was by the fine Lebanese political analyst Rami Khouri. He said that 'appointing Tony Blair as special envoy for Arab-Israeli peace is something like appointing the Emperor Nero to be the chief fireman of Rome'.

Blair was indeed appointed as an envoy, but not as the Quartet's envoy, except in name. The Bush administration made it very clear at once that he is Washington's envoy, with a very limited mandate. It announced in no uncertain terms that Secretary of State Rice (and the President) would retain unilateral control over the important issues, while Blair would be permitted to deal only with problems of institution building - an impossible task as long as Washington maintains its extreme rejectionist policies. Europe had no noticeable reaction to yet another slap in the face. Washington evidently assumes that Blair will continue to be 'the spear-carrier for the Pax Americana', as his role

was described in the journal of Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs.

Do you think that the corporate media in the US should worry about its lies and fantasies being exposed by online fringe media (ZNet, Counterpunch, GNN, etc), or is there a finite limit on how far these alternative media can ever penetrate in a population like the US?

For the present, the media – and the intellectual community – need not be too concerned about the exposure of 'lies and fantasies'. The limit is determined by the strength and commitment of popular movements. They certainly face barriers, but there is no reason to think they are insurmountable ones.

Do you see any cracks in American Zionism? Do you see any factors that would at least temper it, and force a more pragmatic policy?

One has to be cautious in speaking of American Zionism. The most strident and extremist voices are those of the organized Jewish community. They do not reflect the opinions of most American Jews. That is probably true of ethnic diaspora communities generally, but it has been dramatically true in this case since 1967, when attitudes towards Israel changed radically for a variety of reasons, many of them having little to do with Israel.

For the late Edward W Said, the solution was one state where all the citizens (Arabs, Jews, Christians ...) will have the same democratic rights. Do you think that because of the situation in Gaza and the ever-spreading settlements, the pendulum will now swing towards a one-state solution, as being the only possible end point to the conflict?

Two points of clarification are necessary. First, there is a crucial difference between a one-state solution and a bi-national state. In general, nation-states have been imposed with substantial violence and repression: for one reason, because they seek to force varied and complex populations into a single mould. One of the more healthy developments in Europe today is the revival of some degree of regional autonomy and cultural identity, reflecting somewhat more closely the nature of the populations.

In the case of Israel-Palestine, a one-state solution will arise only on the US model: with extermination or expulsion of the indigenous population. A sensible approach would be advocacy of a bi-national solution, recognizing that the territory now includes two fairly distinct societies. The second point is that Edward Said – an old and close friend – was one of the earliest and most outspoken supporters of a two-state solution. By the 1990s he felt that the opportunity had been lost and he proposed, without much specification, a unitary state – by which I am sure he would have meant a bi-national state.

I purposely use the word 'propose', not 'advocate'. The distinction is crucial. We can propose that everyone should live in peace and harmony. The proposal rises to the level of advocacy when we sketch a path from here to there. In the case of a unitary (bi-national) solution, the only advocacy I know of passes through a number of stages: first a two-state settlement – in terms of the international consensus that the US-Israel have prevented – followed by moves towards bi-national

federation, and finally closer integration, perhaps to a bi-national democratic state, as circumstances allow.

It is of some interest that when bi-nationalist federation, opening the way to closer integration, was feasible – from 1967 to the mid 1970s – suggestions to this effect (my own writings, for example) elicited near hysteria. Today, when they are completely unfeasible, they are treated with respect in the mainstream (New York Times, New York Review of Books, etc.). The reason, I suspect, is that a call today for a one-state settlement is a gift to the jingoist right, who can then wail that 'they are trying to destroy us, so we must destroy them in self-defence'. But true advocacy of a bi-national state seems to me just as appropriate as it has always been. That has been my unchanged opinion since the 1940s. Advocacy, that is, not mere proposal.

Looking ahead, what do you consider to be the best case, worst case and most likely scenarios for the boundaries and control of occupied Palestine in the next 10 years?

The worst case would be the destruction of Palestine. The best case, in the short term, would be a two-state settlement in terms of the international consensus. That is by no means impossible. It is supported by virtually the entire world, including the majority of the US population. It has come rather close, once, during the last month of Clinton's presidency, the sole US departure from extreme rejectionism in the past 30 years. The US lent its support to the negotiations in Taba, Egypt (January 2001), which came very close to a settlement in the general terms of the international consensus, before they were called off prematurely by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. In their final press conference, the negotiators expressed some hope that if they had been permitted to continue their joint work a settlement could have been reached. The years since have seen many horrors, but the possibility remains.

As for the most likely scenario, it looks unpleasantly close to the worst case – but human affairs are not predictable: too much depends on will and choice.

The University and College Union in Britain has recently voted in favour of considering an academic boycott of Israeli universities. Do you think that this and other types of boycott are appropriate measures and could have a positive effect on Israeli policies?

I have always been sceptical about academic boycotts. There may be overriding reasons, but in general I think that those channels should be kept open. As for boycotts in general, they are a tactic, not a principle. Like other tactics, we have to evaluate them in terms of their likely consequences. That is a matter of prime importance, at least for those who care about the fate of the victims. And circumstances have to be considered with care.

Let's consider South Africa and Israel, which are often compared in this context. In the case of South Africa, boycotts had some impact, but it is worth remembering that they were implemented after a long period of education and organizing, which had led to widespread condemnation of apartheid, even within mainstream opinion and powerful institutions. That included the US corporate sector, which has an overwhelming influence on policy formation. At that stage, boycott became an effective instrument.

The case of Israel is radically different. The preparatory educational and organizing work has scarcely been done. The result is that calls for boycott can easily turn out to be weapons for the hard right, and in fact that has regularly (and predictably) happened. Those who care about the fate of Palestinians will not undertake actions that harm them.

Nevertheless, carefully targeted boycotts, which are comprehensible to the public in the current state of understanding, can be effective instruments.

One example is calls for university divestment from corporations that are involved in US-Israeli repression and violence, and denial of elementary human rights.

In Europe, a sensible move would be to call for an end to preferential treatment for Israeli exports until Israel stops its systematic destruction of Palestinian agriculture and its barring of economic development.

In the US, it would make good sense to call for reducing US aid to Israel by the estimated \$600 million that Israel has stolen by refusing to transmit funds to the elected government. And the cynicism of funnelling aid to the faction it supports should be exposed as just another exercise in undermining democracy.

Looking farther ahead, a sensible project would be to support the stand of the majority of Americans that all aid to Israel should be cancelled, until it agrees to negotiate seriously for a peaceful diplomatic settlement, instead of continuing to act vigorously to undermine the possibility of realizing the international consensus on a two-state settlement.

That, however, will require serious educational and organizational efforts. Readers of the mainstream press were well aware of the shocking nature of apartheid. But they are presented daily with the picture of Israel desperately seeking peace, but under constant attack by Palestinian terrorists who want to destroy it.

That is not just the media, incidentally. Just to illustrate, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government published a research paper on the 2006 Lebanon war that has to be read to be believed - but is not untypical. It's by Marvin Kalb, a highly respected figure in journalism, head of the Kennedy School's media programme. According to his account, the media were almost totally controlled by Hezbollah, and failed to recognize that Israel was 'engaged in an existential struggle for survival', fighting a two-front war of self-defence against attacks in Lebanon and Gaza. The attack on the pathetic victim from the south was the capture of Corporal Shalit. The kidnapping of Gaza civilians the day

before, and innumerable other crimes like it, are more self-defence.

The attack from the north was the Hezbollah capture of two soldiers on 12 July. More cynicism. For decades Israel has been kidnapping and killing civilians in Lebanon, or on the high seas between Lebanon and Cyprus, holding many for long periods as hostages, while unknown numbers of others were sent to secret prison-torture chambers, like Facility 1391 (not reported in the US). No one has ever condemned Israel for aggression or called for massive terror attacks in retaliation. As always, the cynicism reeks to the skies, illustrating imperial mentality so deeply rooted as to be imperceptible.

Continuing with the Kennedy School version of the war - it demonstrates the extreme bias of the Arab press with the horrified revelation that it portrayed Lebanese to Israeli casualties at a ratio of 22-1, whereas objective Western journalism would of course be neutral. The actual ratio was about 25-1.

Kalb quotes New York Times correspondent Steven Erlanger, who was greatly disturbed that photos of destruction in South Beirut lacked context: they did not show that the rest of Beirut was not destroyed. By the same logic, photos of the World Trade Center on 9/11 revealed the extreme bias of Western journalism by failing to show that the rest of New York was untouched. The falsification and deceit - of which these are a small sample - would be startling if they were not so familiar. Until that is overcome, punitive actions that are well merited are likely to backfire.

All of this raises another point. For the most part, Israel can act only within the framework established by the Great Power on which it has chosen to rely ever since it made the fateful decision, in 1971, to prefer expansion to peace, rejecting Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's proposal for a full Israel-Egyptian peace treaty in favor of settlement in the Egyptian Sinai. We can debate the extent to which Israel relies on US support, but there can be little doubt that its crushing of Palestinians and other violent crimes are possible only because the US provides it with unprecedented economic, military, diplomatic and ideological support.

So, if there are to be boycotts, why not of the US, whose support of Israel is the least of its crimes? Or of the UK, or other criminal states? We know the answer, and it is not an attractive one, undermining the integrity of the call for boycott.

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Peter Ferguson's CV

As a young man in his early 20's Peter Ferguson came to Australia from South Africa and studied at Moore College in Sydney. Peter graduated with a degree in theology from the Australian College of Theology with First Class Honours in Greek.

Peter was ordained into the Anglican Church in Canberra and served in parishes in Wagga Wagga and Lake Bathurst, near Canberra.

In 1965 Peter was appointed Rector of Clanwilliam in the northern part of the West Cape Province of South Africa. He was deeply involved in the struggle against apartheid and after a brush with the Bureau for State Security (as if Peter could be a threat to the State!) he and his family returned to Australia in 1973.

Peter was Rector of Melville (a parish in the Diocese of Perth) from 1973 to 1980. During this time he was involved in the peace movement and the campaigns against racial exploitation. Peter was president of the WA Peace Committee from 1979 to 1983. The WA Peace Committee was affiliated with the World Peace Council in Helsinki and was strongly backed by various trades unions, especially the Seaman's Union.

In 1978 Peter was a delegate to the 5th All Christian Peace Conference in Prague and was elected to the International Standing Committee for Economic Development. He subsequently took part in its deliberations in Budapest and Warsaw in 1981 and 1985.

From 1978 Peter was also involved with the ABC (Radio National) writing and presenting several Encounter programs on themes such as the ownership of Australian companies by multinational corporations, nuclear war, unemployment, economic monetarism as well as a documentary on anti-Semitism.

In 1984 Peter was awarded a Postgraduate Diploma (with distinction) in Applied Science (Media Studies) WACAE. For several years he served as Vice President of the Christian Television Association and on the Media Committee of the Anglican Diocese of Perth.

From 1984 to 1993 Peter was Anglican Chaplain at Curtin University of Technology. He was chairperson of the School and University Chaplains' Deanery for much of that time as well as being secretary of the national ecumenical Tertiary Campus Ministries of Australia.

From 1988 to 1994 Peter was chairperson of the Youth Ministry Council of the Diocese and was also a member of Senior Staff.

In 2000 Peter resigned from the Anglican Church and in November of that year, with the help of several like-minded men and women, the first meeting of the Unitarian Association of WA was held in the Subiaco Scout Hall.

The rest, as they say, is history.

A faith for

I have called this address a faith for the third millennium.

And in order to look forward, and suggest some ideas and practices that may be appropriate for the shaping of a belief system for our times we need first to look back through the corridors of history and identify the leading features that were common within nearly all the religions of the past.

One very important common factor emerges from such a study and that is the practice of sacrifice.

Archeologists testify to the fact that most ancient cultures and civilisations had altars. Sacrifice was used for the promotion of fertility in crops, animals and for humans. Drought, pestilence, epidemics and other calamities were universally regarded as the working of supernatural forces.

Sacrifices were offered for offences against societal taboos and the laws of their supernatural powers.

Sacrifices were believed to appease and placate these sacred powers and were used to expiate sins and offences against the deities and restore the broken relationship with the offended supernatural power.

The offerings included fruit, grains and even vegetables. The sacrifice of birds, sheep, goats and even cattle was a common phenomenon.

Generally, the practice involved the ritual slaying of the animal that was then eaten, buried or offered up as a burnt offering.

More chilling was the practice of human offerings e.g. the Aztecs believed that the sun was nourished by the sacrifices of human beings.

It is estimated that 20,000 young people perished annually in pre-Columbian America in order to satisfy and appease the divinities.

Young female victims were flayed alive in what we would understand as a cruel perversity. At the same time there was the requirement that the victims of this torture agreed willingly to take part in their own suffering.

The religious belief was that the infliction of pain and death was to safeguard and promote the welfare of the majority of the population and were thus regarded as legitimate goals.

the third millennium



From very early on in the history of the Christian Church, the death of Jesus was understood as sacrificial like the victims of the Aztecs and the Celts. Jesus voluntarily offers up his life as a sacrifice for the propitiation of sin.

The Celtic rituals in Europe tended to be without the shedding of blood. The mainly female victims were drowned.

In the sacred scriptures of the Judeo Christians – the Bible – what we refer to as the Old Testament an elaborate system of sacrifice is laid out.

The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy all lay down the procedures for the offering of cereals and the sacrifice of animals.

These are the instructions for the sacrifice of a sheep from Lev. Chapter 1.

'If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord and if his offering be of a sheep to be a burnt sacrifice it shall be a male without blemish and he shall kill it on the north side of the altar and the priests shall sprinkle its blood upon the altar and burn it upon the altar. It is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord.'

In the story of Adam and Eve their sons Cain and Abel make sacrifices to the Lord. Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground is rejected but Abel's sheep offering enjoyed the respect and favour of God.

After the Great Flood, Noah's first action was to build an altar for the Lord. 'And Noah took every clean beast and one of every clean bird and offered them as burnt

offerings on the altar.'

And the text states the Lord smelled the sweet savour and was satisfied and the Lord said in his heart, 'I will not again curse the ground anymore for man's sake.'

In the story of Abraham and his son Isaac – Abraham does not appear to be surprised at God's order for him to offer up his son as a burnt offering. He does not plead for Isaac's life. Human sacrifice was common throughout the Middle East at that time.

In the Second Book of the Kings there is the story about the King of Edom who slaughters his son in the hope of some divine intervention against his enemy's armies.

Also in the Book of the Kings, the Old Testament patriarch, Jephthah, makes a rather foolish pact with the Lord.

If God gives him victory over the Ammonites, he promises to sacrifice the first person he sees coming out of his

house when he returns victorious. God readily agrees with Jephthah's offer. Jephthah emerges victorious and destroys twenty enemy cities in a very great slaughter.

But on his return home the first person to greet him is his beloved daughter. Tragically, there is no divine help for the child and Jephthah duly sacrifices her as a burnt offering to the Lord in recognition of the divine help he had in his victory over the Ammonites.

So it can be said that practically all the civilisations of the classical world were committed to placating the supernatural forces through sacrifice.

From very early on in the history of the Christian Church, the death of Jesus was understood as sacrificial like the victims of the Aztecs and the Celts. Jesus voluntarily offers up his life as a sacrifice for the propitiation of sin.

Alluding to the Leviticus text about the sacrificial lamb

John 3: John the Baptist says 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'.

In 1 Corinthians 15.3 Paul writes 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures'.

In 2 Corinthians 5.21 Paul states 'For God had made Christ to be sin who knew no sin'.

Galatians 1.4 'Our Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil world'.

Hebrew 9.28 'Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many'.

1 Peter 3.18 'For Christ also has suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God'.

And in Revelation 1.5 Jesus Christ is described as 'him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood'.

So very clearly in Christian theology the sacrifice of Jesus Christ takes the place of the paschal lamb at the Jewish feast of the Passover.

Jesus was understood as being sinless: thus an ideal victim, especially in view of the fact that he willingly accepted death.

I believe that for most of us our view that the notion of Jesus Christ as a human sacrifice to appease an offended God belongs not to the 3rd millennium but to more primitive times.

It belongs in another age when people believed that all natural phenomena emanated from supernatural powers.

Today we know that thunder and lightning are atmospheric events: Global warming may be caused by us but who would dream of offering sacrifices as a solution?

We know that the sun is a massive ball of nuclear fission.

We don't need to go to Jesus Christ or God to get forgiveness of our sins. We can forgive one another without recourse to sacrifice whether animal or human.

All our belief systems are the products of the human imagination: past, present and future!

When we view the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ there is nothing unique about it. It was all part of an age-old tradition of sacrifice of both human and animal and plant life.

Yet we still have the insistent demand from the Christian churches with very few exceptions that it is only through the cleansing blood of Jesus that human redemption and eternal life are possible. The basic statement of belief is that Jesus died for your sins and you will inherit eternal life.

Those who disbelieve are condemned to an eternity of torture in the flames of hell. (John 3: 16, 17)

The most sacred point in the mass or holy communion comes when the priest consubstantiates, or in the Roman Catholic tradition, transubstantiates the bread and wine so that it becomes the body and blood of Christ – that which cleanses us from sin and unites us with God and one another.

This is how the Anglican consecration prayer goes:

'Lord, in your tender mercy you gave your only son Jesus Christ to suffer death on the cross for our redemption, who made there by his one oblation of himself once offered a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.'

As I read and travelled more widely and mixed with people outside the church I began to move to the beat of another drum.

When I was an adolescent my evangelist Uncle Jimmy visited our town. One night he got me on my own and asked me if I had accepted Jesus Christ as my own personal saviour. I replied that I hadn't.

He told me of the consequences of not doing so. That I would go to hell where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched. He told me that Jesus Christ died for me so that I on my part should live for Jesus. To a 16-year-old, that seemed a logical equation.

After all, I had been a Sunday school student for many years and knew the language of the Christian faith.

Uncle Jimmy then whispered to me 'You know, Peter, Jesus would have died that terrible death on the cross even if you were the only person in the world.'

And so that night I gave my life to Christ and felt an enormous obligation and debt to him. My sins were forgiven. I was on my way to heaven. My life was no longer my own, but his.

God who had once been my enemy, according to the Bible and Uncle Jimmy, was now my friend.

The signature tune of my life became: 'Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found was blind but now I see.'

The euphoria lasted for a few years. Enough to make me study theology and find ordination as a priest of the Anglican Church.

And very importantly we believe that in our faith journey we should take our brothers and sisters with us and actively support those who are suffering and not able to share the good life with us.

As I read and travelled more widely and mixed with people outside the church I began to move to the beat of another drum. I embraced evolution and the miracle and wonder of life – the incredible diversity of species. Anthropology, archeology, the studies of the past stretching back into our human prehistory thrilled me. The Bronze Age stories of placating angry deities became increasingly less valid in my experience. And so the time came when that guilty feeling of obligation to Jesus Christ for saving me fell like the rotting carcass of the albatross that once fell from the Ancient Mariner's neck. I was free at last.

I would like to move on now to the broader question of the value of sacrificing one's own interests in the interests of another.

I agree with Nietzsche's insistence that our primary responsibility is towards ourselves. Sometimes we misuse the word sacrifice and give it nobility of which it is not worthy e.g. parents may feel they need to make some kind of self-sacrifice on behalf of their children. It could be far better described as an act of parental generosity.

At another level we ought to question the sacrifice that may be expected of us in the name of patriotism.

In the Great War of 1914-18 twenty million or more, mainly young men under the age of 30, were killed in places such as Gallipoli and the trenches of France and Belgium.

We should think very carefully before we send our young men and women to fight in wars.

At a more domestic level, countless are the women who have been doormats for their husbands; who have sacrificed their egos to the dominant male ego.

We Unitarians believe that each of us has a duty to self-fulfillment and self-realization just as much as we have a duty to others.

To sacrifice one's own interest smells of masochism or a desire for victimhood.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ imposes a permanent sense of obligation and burden of guilt upon its followers who are called upon to be living sacrifices.

But surely real love is a love that seeks to remove any obligation rather than impose them?

When we love another, it should not be because we feel obliged to but because we choose to do so.

Surely the time has come for a new beginning in the matters of religion.

Perhaps we have reached the end of a road, a road that has come a long way from the Bronze and Stone Ages to the present time. It is time for the Christian churches to revisit their teachings about the human sacrifice of

Jesus and to confront the negative consequences of this belief.

Just as we have left behind the crude laboratories of alchemy to pharmacy and chemistry and moved from the superstitions of astrology to astronomy, so too in religion.

What would life be like without the faith that Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice for our sins?

Will life lose its purpose if there is no God and no life after death? I don't think so!

Can humanity find a faith worth living for, a faith that does not have its roots in the confected superstitions of the Bronze Age?

How about something like this:

A possible faith for the third millennium would embrace the challenge of living a good life, of pursuing meaningful work, of making discoveries in all areas of life, of reading, of practising skills of art and craft, of enriching our life through travel and leisure, of watching sunsets, of caring for animals and nurturing plants and trees and attending urgently to the health of our ailing Mother Earth, of making friends, of loving our parents and children, of the pleasures of sport and exercise and a drop of good wine.

And very importantly we believe that in our faith journey we should take our brothers and sisters with us and actively support those who are suffering and not able to share the good life with us. Those who are unjustly dealt with by tyrannical governments in lands beyond our shores. For them we need to seek justice.

At home too we need to be ever alert to make sure that none of our citizens is unjustly exploited. The first Australians, refugees, the casualties of our political, economic and social system deserve a very special place in our hearts. In this respect the Peace Memorial Church of Melbourne is a beacon of light for us all as that fellowship of believers in justice strives to make Australia an even more humane and good land to live in.

Our religion, our faith for the 3rd millennium includes the challenge of intellectual autonomy and moral accountability.

Today's Sacred Text

Hansard and its record of debate in the House of Representatives on Wednesday
14 May 2003

JOHN HOWARD: Not only was the military operation completed quickly and successfully but it is also worth recording that all of the doomsday predictions, particularly the many that came from those who sit opposite were not realised.

The oilwells were not set on fire; there were not millions of refugees, and there was no long, drawn out, bloody, street-to-street fighting in Baghdad. For all of this we must be immensely grateful, but it is a reminder of the hysteria and the doomsday predictions that often accompany operations of this kind ... the predictions on this occasion have been proved wrong.

The decisive victory of the American-led coalition reflects enormous credit on the strength and the determination of the leadership of President Bush. Again I remind the House of the way in which his role was vilified ... by many of those who sit opposite and of the way in which speaker after speaker from the Australian Labor Party impugned his integrity, assaulted his judgement and called into question his ability to lead the United States in this very difficult conflict. History has proved them wrong.

A death in Durban

BY ADAM MA'ANIT

South African environmental activist Sajida Khan sadly passed away on 12 July after a long struggle with cancer. Khan campaigned for over a decade against the Bisasar Road waste dump in Durban - one of the largest municipal dumps in the southern hemisphere - that she was forced to see, hear and smell every day outside the window of her Clare Estate home.

The dump came to international attention when it was revealed that the World Bank was planning to invest in so-called 'clean development' financing of a landfill gas capture project on the site. Khan quickly realized that the dump would need to stay open even longer than originally planned in order for the project to generate the desired number of 'carbon credits' - which northern countries would then purchase, and put towards meeting their Kyoto Protocol commitments.

As she put it: **'The poor countries are so poor they will accept crumbs. The World Bank knows this and they are taking advantage of it.'** For Khan and many other residents, this was unacceptable. Having lost her nephew to leukaemia and neighbours who had contracted tumours and other illnesses, she was convinced the dump was at least partly to blame for their ill health. That the dump was now getting a new lease of life thanks to the supposedly environmental Kyoto treaty was a bitter irony. With the support of the Durban Network for Climate Justice and others, Khan made contacts with environmental justice activists across the world, learning about similar struggles elsewhere and finding support for her work back home.

She organized petitions and demonstrations, lobbied government officials, and provided exhaustive testimony and documentation. She studied landfill economics and relied on her background in chemistry to prepare a 90-page Environmental Impact Assessment that is said to be one of the major factors behind the World Bank's

subsequent decision to pull out of the project. The city of Durban and the South African Government are still hoping to attract carbon investment for the dump - something South African environmental justice activists are calling 'eco prostitution'.

Thanks to Khan's diligence and dedication, we are all better informed about some of the dangers of so-called 'carbon trading' and 'carbon offset' projects - and, more importantly, of the need not to lose sight of the human dimension of climate change and our own consumption. She will be sorely missed.

For more information on Sajida Khan and the Bisasar Road dump see:

Green Gold

A film on carbon trading by Cheekystreak productions which features Sajida Khan and details her struggle.

<http://interact.newint.org/blog/adam-maanit/green-gold>

Who killed Sajida Khan? by Patrick Bond and Rehana Dada

<http://gristmill.grist.org/story/2007/7/16/123156/311>

Durban's perfume rods, plastic covers and sweet-smelling toxic dump by Trusha Reddy

www.carbonradewatch.org/news/trusha.html

New Internationalist September 2007

from our readers



Dear Beacon Staff,

Enclosed please find our subs for two years.

Thank you for your handwork and dedication to truth and humanity. If only the mainstream media aspired to such values ...

In unity,

R. Engert & K. Harris, NSW

The Editor, The Beacon,

Thanks and congratulations to Peter, Marion, Julie and Loris for doing such a good job in producing The Beacon. What a bolt out of the blue each edition constitutes, jam-packed with robust challenge to the sluggish status quo. I love it and it inspires me. The Beacon is always a refreshing and invigorating read. Issues that might be left to bubble under are resurfaced and discussed in a forthright and lively way. I like it that a broad range of topics are featured which all have a relevance to current life in Australia. The effect is one instilling optimism in the reader because of the lively critical vigour that characterises the treatment of subject matter. Personally, I would like to see a copy of the Beacon given away in, say, next week's edition of New Idea or Who Weekly, just to see what that does both for the Beacon's subscriber numbers and the enjoyment of political debate in this country at a grassroots level. Bring on the election.

That said, I would like to see more articles on theological topics, UFOs and the arts. So often these topics are treated in a stuffy, esoteric manner, which isn't necessary and destroys people's potential interest in them.

Cheers and all the best with future issues.

P. Haslem, TAS

The Editor

Marion Harper's talk was one of the best I've ever heard.

Thanks for forwarding same and good luck in the way you continue to serve humanity.

Sincerely,

B. Croft, VIC

The Editor

I have been a subscriber to the Beacon for a very long time and was shocked to read the article in the July issue regarding Australian and US military activities in Northern Australia.

I loaned the magazine to a friend and although I have asked for its return on a couple of times, I have not received it. Please if you could send me another copy it would be appreciated.

Quite often I share the Beacon with neighbours who have similar thoughts as well as those of different opinions.

Yours sincerely,

J. Thorpe, NSW

PS: I hope you can read my note but I am 83 years old and have muscular degeneration. But I am still concerned with the degeneration of world standards, lies and injustices in the world today.

Dear Donna,

Congratulations to all concerned for their successful activities. It is very pleasing to note that many people are beginning to realise how badly we are governed.

Keep up the good work.

Best wishes,

O. Ponting, VIC

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Peter Abrehart

Marion Harper

Loris Schlotterlein

Julie Stafford

The Editorial opinions expressed are those of the Editorial Board.

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