LEADERSHIP AND JUSTICE: RECIPROCAL TRANSFORMATION

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My prayers accompany this project thesis that it may, by the power of the Holy Spirit, help leaders and communities walk the path of transformation and justice. Transformation is a life journey that does not come to an end. Although I like to do things properly, I am reminded of my own vulnerability and my work's relativism. I echo what Al-Imad al-Isfahani, a 12th century Islamic scholar, said:

> I have observed that no one finishes writing a script who does not say afterward: had this change been made, the script would have been better; had this item been added, the text would have been more appreciated; had this topic been moved forward, the work would have been beautiful. In this lies the most important lesson: all humans are inherently imperfect.[1]

[1] The citation is originally in Arabic, and it is attributed to Al-Imad al-Din al-Isfahani (1125-1201), who was from Persia and studied jurisprudence in Baghdad, then held a variety of positions before eventually becoming the personal secretary of Saladin. Some scholars, however, challenge its attribution to al-Isfahani and argue that it was first crafted by al-Qadi al-Fadil Abd al-Rahim al-Bisani al-Askalani (1131-1199) who wrote much beautiful prose, essays and poems. (Muasi 2016)

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Dedication

To my parents

Botrous and Etaf

Your endless love and care made God’s love and care touchable.

To my helpmate in life and ministry

Ruba Gammoh

Your love and dedication are immeasurable.

To our children

Philippe and Andrew

Your continual understanding, support, and sacrifice inspire me.

Acknowledgement

Soulful and societal transformation is a life journey, a pilgrimage with companions who make travel agreeable. Faith and leadership on the road bring us into direct contact with fellow pilgrims, who light our path with love, inspiration, care, support, patience, perseverance, hospitality, and encouragement to change. Without them, the journey is cold and lonely. Encountering and walking with fellow sojourners is the underpinning of transformation. In them and through them we encounter God. That is the principal lesson of transformation and justice: never walk alone. Throughout the journey I met many people who contributed in one way or another to making this work possible. I owe all of them respect, love, and gratitude.

First, I thank my family: my father and mother's love, encouragement, and prayers sustained me in times of discouragement. Ruba, Phillip, and Andrew provided much love, care, and sacrifice to help me complete my degree and finish my thesis.

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The thesis is complete, yet the mission of transformation and justice continues with rigor and commitment to transform souls and societies for greater justice and mercy.

Abstract

This thesis maintains that leadership is an inevitable force for soulful and societal transformation, especially in contexts of violence, hatred, and oppression. Religious leadership takes part in the messianic project, the in-breaking of divine reign embodied in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the commissioning of the church to transform the world. This thesis argues that transformation is reciprocal: when leaders immerse themselves into contexts of injustice and pragmatically engage with victims, they themselves become transformed and better able to bring change to the world. The thesis aims at discovering and addressing forces that prevent religious leaders from engaging for greater justice and mercy. Its fundmental purpose is to help leaders become aware of these constraining forces and effective when addressing injustice in their contexts. I argue that leadership is called to *accompany* victims in their particular situations, to *listen* to their life stories, to create, nurture, and sustain an inquiry consciousness, to *immerse* themselves in their suffering, and to *advocate* for God's aspirations. My five-part paradigm helps transform leaders and victims of injustice. Transformed leadership confronts injustice, accomplishes healing, inspires communities, and repairs the world. The journey of transformation leads to new inquiries, new discoveries, new learning, and new possibilities. Transformation is joyful and liberating, but also painful. It requires facing challenges, confronting the status quo, and enduring resistance. Leaders who wish to address crises in their communities will benefit from walking the path of transformation and justice.

Introduction: Framing the Problem

Like most Palestinian clergy, I was born into a devout Christian family in a predominantly Muslim culture under military occupation. I grew up with stories of divided families. Four out of six of my uncles and aunts were out of the country when Israel took control of the West Bank in 1967. They became refugees abroad, unable to reunite with those of us at home. Assassination, incarceration, restrictions on movement, humiliation, and fear were norms during my childhood. I was 14 when the first Palestinian uprising broke out in 1987, turning life into a nightmare of structural violence, arrests, killings, terror, economic deprivation, anxiety, and hopelessness. I grew up hearing bullets, screams of pain from people with crushed limbs, F16 jets breaking the sound barrier. We hid to avoid arrest. I witnessed many Palestinians, particularly young people, fleeing to other countries looking for better life.

Most excruciatingly, I grew up listening to and asking challenging questions: Why do Palestinians suffer? Why would people hurt and kill one another? Why do the strong dominate and exploit? How should Palestinians react to occupation? What does the Bible say? What does the church say? What is the church's reaction to our situation?

The year 2017 marks the centenary of the Balfour Declaration; 70 years since the United Nation launched its Partition Plan; almost 70 years of the Palestinian *Nakba*[2] beginning in 1948; 50 years since the occupation of the state of Palestine – the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip; and 30 years since the outbreak of the first

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[2] Nakba, Arabic for catastrophe, refers to what happened to the people of Palestine as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and the establishment of the state of Israel on their land.

intifada. The compelling question many Palestinian Christians continue to ask is: What role should the church play in this context of oppression?

The church has always been central to my family life. My grandfather was a priest in the Greek Melkite Church. When he passed away during the first uprising, the Melkite diocese in Haifa did not appoint a priest to serve in the West Bank. Perhaps no priest was willing to take on a small parish in a conflict zone. The church building was closed and the community scattered.

We embarked as a family on a spiritual journey through different denominations. During our sojourn, we experienced denominationalism, religious discrimination, resistance, and harassment. We lived as a disqualified community surrounded by a Muslim culture, itself oppressed under military structures. We have always been referred to by other denominations as outsiders. I still recall how a Catholic priest reprimanded me when I attended youth meetings at the Episcopal Church. My family recalls ostracism. Although we were welcomed by the Episcopal clergy in town, we were never considered church members, but merely "friends of the parish."

Throughout our journey, the focus was on personal salvation and community wellbeing. Evangelism saved those who accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Friendship was viable only within the "saved" community made up of the "baptized." Hope would be realized in Christ's *Parousia* and through the promise of eternal life. The world was evil. Other Christian denominations were excessively ritualistic. The political sphere was to be avoided: "It corrupts the spirit and leads to alienation from Christ and church." Justice was practiced within the framework of pastoral care: supporting the poor through financial aid, visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, etc.

Eventually the members of my family adopted divergent religious paths: I joined the Episcopal Church and in due course became a priest. My brother was ordained in the Melkite tradition, reopening the church where our grandfather had ministered. “The church is resurrected and the community has come back to life,” one parishioner said at the building rededication.

I met my wife Ruba while serving at St. Paul’s in Amman, Jordan. Three months before our wedding in 2002, the diocese decided to relocate us to St. Andrew’s in Ramallah on the occupied West Bank. I implored for reconsideration since my wife, a Jordanian, would have difficulties obtaining even a visitor’s visa in the context of Israel’s suspension of family unification laws following the second Intifada in 2000 – more than 50,000 Palestinians have no certainty of seeing their spouses under the arrangement. The Bishop denied my request. I moved to Ramallah and Ruba remained in Amman. After many letters to Israeli officials, I got Ruba a six-month visa. She visited, and then had to leave, and we started the process over again. After four years of agony, we decided that Ruba should stay on after the expiration of her visa. In the context of hundreds of checkpoints throughout the West Bank, this means that she is confined to our home.

Rana, a parishioner at St. Andrew’s, lives illegally in Ramallah, the only option allowing her to remain with her husband. When St. Andrew’s celebrated Epiphany at the baptismal site on the Jordan River, Rana’s family in Jordan traveled to the other side of the river, just four meters away. It was heartbreaking. After years of confinement, Rana developed depression and stopped going to church. How should I as a church leader react? Should I counsel her or confront structural injustice that has caused her suffering? Counseling her was my preference; confronting structural injustice was not an option.

Our context is Palestine – a country that has embraced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It embodies faith, hope, and love, but also suffering, conflict, oppression, and death. One cannot understand the journey of transformation without understanding the particularities of the Palestinian context, mainly its confusion, fragility, and death; but also its faith, integrity, hopefulness, *sumud* (steadfastness), and life.

Metaphorically, Palestinian Christians trace their history back to the first Church in Jerusalem, from where Christianity spread to the world. Throughout history, Christians in Palestine have been persecuted: by Jewish elders, the Romans, the Persians, Muslims, the Crusaders, the Turks, British colonialism, and the Israeli occupation. For Palestinian Christians, persecution and oppression are integral parts of life. Palestinian Christians identify with Jesus Christ, whose life includes the cross and the resurrection, death and life. Jesus was born under Roman occupation and fled to Egypt for safety. He was rejected by his own community, handed over by his disciple, denied by his friend, and crucified by an oppressive power. It is this perplexing ambiguity of Jesus' ministry that continues to dominate in the Palestinian context: the cross and empty tomb. This ambiguity is still present today and provides Palestinians with hope and *sumud*: that justice will one day prevail over injustice, hope over despair, and life over death.

Christians are a tiny minority within a predominantly Muslim population and under the occupation of Israeli military forces. There are many challenging forces that affect the emotional field of a minority. Palestinian Christians, often referred to as "Living Stones," are keen to keep the ministry of Jesus Christ alive in its birthplace through active presence and ministry. Living faithfully to Jesus's model, Palestinian Christians are active in their practice of hospitality, generous in their love, and faithful to

God's message. Each day, they walk the land Jesus walked with an intimate understanding of the geography and culture in which Jesus' stories and parables are set. Palestinian Christians maintain the Christian faith in spite of hardship: regional strife, immobility and residential restrictions, economic struggles, social discord, and political oppression. Inspired by Jesus's paradigm and empowered by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they teach forgiveness, embrace reconciliation, and work tirelessly for peace.

In the Palestinian context, church institutions are hierarchal. Patriarchs and bishops make decisions, and clergy and communities follow. Clergy exert authority within their parishes over members who consider themselves "sheep" following shepherds – an esteemed metaphor in Palestinian culture. The pastor-parishioner relationship mostly functions within a giver-recipient framework.

Many Palestinian Christians would likewise describe their religious leaders as "alienated" from the conditions of their communities, leading to strife and disengagement. In the Occupied Territories, the Orthodox Church is the largest among 13 recognized denominations and a handful of officially unendorsed evangelical churches. Its leadership is Greek. Palestinian Orthodox Christians consider expatriate leaders indifferent to their situation, creating tension. Recently the Vatican has appointed an expatriate apostolic administrator to "fix the institution" in the Latin Patriarchate, as described by Fr. Ibrahim, priest of the Holy Family Catholic Church in Ramallah. The Episcopal Diocese in Jerusalem was forced to take a retired bishop to court when he attempted to declare church property to be his own. Some Palestinian Christian leaders emigrate as soon as they retire. Some have taken early retirement, or been suspended, for challenging hierarchies. These and other troubling realities have harmed already-

oppressed communities trying to cope with social, political, economic, and cultural challenges. In *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World*, Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel maintain that transformative leadership must confront lies, whether in the church or in society. They write:

> The Church has, unfortunately, been complicit in perpetuating some societal lies. This is more painful and destructive for the oppressed – particularity for believers who are suffering injustice – than unjust actions by the broader society. The Church's complicity manifests in its repetition of societal lies or its silence in the face of them, ignoring the Scriptures. (Salvatierra and Heltzel 2014, 69)

Aside from internal pressures and problems, Palestinian Christians face multiple and substantial pressures leading to the decrease in their numbers. These include unresolved political conflict, life as a minority among Muslims, lack of economic opportunity, low birth rate, and emigration.

Emigration poses an existential crisis affecting Christian communities in Palestine. In 1920, Christians were about ten per cent of the population; today, they make up around one per cent. Declining Christian communities threatens Christianity's existence at its birthplace. Some leaders fear that "churches will soon be turned into museums." "Communities have already disappeared in some villages and towns." Young people continue to search for opportunities "to flee conflict, economic privation, and rising Muslim fundamentalism" (Haaretz 2010). How can church leaders challenge this dreadful crisis? How can they develop a transformation consciousness, one that not only maintains communities but transforms societies? These are the questions I will try to answer in my thesis.

I do not claim that church leadership is dysfunctional in Palestine; rather, my thesis asserts that church leaders are sincere pastors who strive to preserve their

communities. They are honest witnesses to the love of God in Jesus Christ. They organize and lead church activities, administer services in their parishes, preach the Good News, visit the sick, and support the needy. Most denominations run educational, health, and social institutions including hospitals, clinics, schools, homes for the elderly, guesthouses, etc. However, this thesis claims that church leaders have not effectively addressed root causes of religious, social, economic, political, or environmental crises that affect their communities and society. I argue that leadership's primary vocation transcends maintaining communities and involves transforming the world-as-it-is into a world-intended-by-God. Its scope is the Kingdom of God which includes social, economic, political, and environmental domains. The mission of the church cannot be limited to sustaining communities or dressing the wounds of injustice. "We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice," asserts Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself." How can religious leaders move from avoidance and disinterest toward attentiveness and engagement? How can we inspire ourselves and our parishioners to pursue transformation, justice, and the common good? My project and thesis explores these questions. Injustice, suffering, and pain do not represent God's aspiration. Sustaining communities so that they accommodate unjust structures is not the kind of mission that Jesus intended for his movement. This project and thesis attempt to explore God's aspirations and Jesus's paradigm of leadership.

In 2012, I enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Virginia Theological Seminary. The program helped me to ponder God's aspiration for his world and leadership paradigms for the 21st century. Toward that end and in the company of ordained and lay community leaders, I embarked on a journey toward rediscovering the

role of leadership in a context of injustice. We stepped into the context-as-it-is in Palestine with a vision to help transforming it into a context-as-intended-by-God. We immersed ourselves in situations where injustice was the rule. We sojourned among victims. We discussed, reflected, and traveled, guided by the Spirit and within the parameters of human capacity. We accompanied victims, listened to stories, inquired and researched, shared pain, and advocated compassion, justice, and pursuit of the common good. We sought the unusual, the unreachable, and the unspeakable. In short, we have seen the context from the standpoint of victims – and this was a new perspective.

Palestinian Christians continue to question the roles played by local, regional, and international church leaders in addressing their suffering. Their quest for justice has been obstructed by biblical literalism, theological fundamentalism, political and military control, and most significantly by indifference and incompetence. When church leaders fail to stand up for justice, the institution becomes irrelevant to the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, who always have been the focus of Jesus's proclamation of the Kingdom of God. When religious leaders fail to address what keeps a community in pain, faith wavers. Leaders must be commissioned to transform oppression into freedom, disparity into equality, hegemony into hospitality, and hostility into neighborliness. By applying the paradigm proposed in my thesis, Palestinian religious leaders will become effective and competent in addressing challenges that threaten their communities.

This thesis examines the Palestinian context, but its conclusions apply more broadly. Injustice, suffering, and oppression are on the rise in our world. Allen Boesak claims that we are in the midst of a "new global apartheid" (Boesak 2015, 3). Religious leaders must not react with avoidance, indifference, or incompetence, but must embrace

liberation and transformation. Leaders, by virtue of their vocation, are responsible for charting an alternative course toward the transformation of souls and societies.

In *Leadership and Justice: Reciprocal Transformation,* I hope to encourage leaders to take the initiative in transforming self and context, beginning with intensive immersive engagement in local settings. Leadership for transformation and justice paradigm involves five stages: accompaniment, listening, inquiry, immersion, and advocacy. Through *accompaniment*, leadership shares the ground with those afflicted, transforming perception into discernment. Through *attentive listening*, leadership liberates itself from subjective prejudice and seeks empirical and holistic knowledge. *Inquiry* reinforces reconstruction of emerging perceptions and acquired knowledge toward self-evident truths. *Immersion* takes leadership into deep waters – away from individualistic sanctuaries and toward inter-being[3] and inter-acting with victims. Immersion involves taking risks. Through inter-being and inter-acting, leadership not only becomes part of the suffering context but also shares in victims' suffering and follows their paths to liberation. Building on contextual realities and equipped with biblical, theological, spiritual, pragmatic and prophetic traditions, *advocacy* involves witnessing God's aspiration for his creation and initiating an alternative: transformation and justice consciousness. This paradigm aims to transform leaders into equipped, active, pragmatic participants of change. The five-part paradigm reminds us throughout that a

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[3] Zen monk Thick Nhat Hanh coined the term "interbeing" in his book: *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993. The term is also used by Jay B. McDaniel in his book: *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue*. Wipe & Stock: Eugene, Oregon, 2009. McDaniel uses the term to describe personal wholeness as an affirmation of connectedness with all creation. McDaniel writes: "humans are connected beings, bound together with others in a seamless web of life." He goes on to quote Zen monk Thick Nhat Hanh's phrase "interbeing," and concludes stating, "As we open ourselves to rich connections, we realize that we ourselves, at the deepest core, are interbeing among interbeing." Jay B. McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Diologue* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009, 2-3).

ministry of justice and transformation is not about personal glory, but about building responsible communities who can themselves take the lead in transforming the world.

This thesis attempts to respond to questions that religious leaders have long posed: "How can we effectively challenge injustice in our context?" "How can we promote peace, reconciliation, and tolerance among people in a time of careless individualism?" "How can we efficiently respond to inequality, racism, intolerance, and the suffering of our community?" and "How can we prophetically advocate the common good?" In religious, social, and political crises, the afflicted look to religious leaders to answer such questions and find paths forward. When leadership fails to stand against injustices afflicted upon a community, people become confused and disillusioned not only with the role of leaders, but also with the authenticity of religion and its authority and capacity to address human suffering. Suffering, coupled with silent, indifferent, and ineffective leaders, creates hopelessness and eventually despair and violence. On a collective scale, this leaves communities hurt and fragmented.

"A Lifeless Toddler"

The Palestinian *nakba*, catastrophe, with its dire consequences on the Palestinians and the region is not the only crisis our world faces today. September 2, 2015 was a day of global anguish. A photo showed the world a three-year-old boy in a red T-shirt, blue pants and tiny shoes lying face down, the way toddlers sleep. Ocean water lapped around his face and lifeless body. The boy was among twelve people drowned on the beach of one of Turkey's most popular holiday resorts, near Bodrum. He and his family were from Syria, fleeing war and trying to unite with émigré family members. Three in one family died: the boy, Aylan Kurdi, his brother, Galip, and their mother, Rehen. The

heartbreaking photo went viral on social media and sparked anger toward leaders doing little to help refugees. The *Independent* wrote, "If these extraordinary powerful images of a dead Syrian child washed up on a beach don't change Europe's attitudes for refugees, what will?" (Withnall 2015)

The toddler, Aylan, was one of many victims. Federico Soda, Director of the IOM's coordinating office for the Mediterranean in Rome, stated: "Since the beginning of the year, about 2342 migrants have died in the Mediterranean, 2326 in the Channel of Sicily, making the area the most deadly migrant crossing point in the world" (International Organization for Migration 2015). The father of the toddler, urged the international community to focus on preventing similar episodes: "We want the world's attention on us, so that they can prevent the same from happening to others. Let this be the last" (Al Jazeera 2015). The story reminds us of the circumstances facing millions of people escaping civil wars, economic difficulties, and religious persecution. It reminds all of us that unless we act, more victims will suffer unpredictable fates.

What should the reaction of leaders be to such tragedies? This thesis argues that religious leaders should and can do more than condemn, lament, despair, and pray. When leaders confine their responses to condemnation, indifference, and even prayer, then real problems go unaddressed.

A Glimpse at the World

In the last hundred years, the world has witnessed unprecedented technological, social, economic, political, and environmental developments. Movements have emerged that advocate freedom and equality, and that address poverty, slavery, racism, bigotry, fundamentalism, and ecological spoilage. Breakthroughs in civil rights, women's rights,

and proportionate equality have occurred. Philanthropic societies have provided extraordinary support to victims. Compared to other historic periods, the present one has allowed humanity to make progress toward human rights principles, rule of law, accountability, and transparency. But the world continues to host violence, disparity, oppression, extremism, terrorism, and environmental degradation.

Injustice is not a modern phenomenon. It has accompanied humanity since creation. Abel was unjustly murdered by his brother Cain (Gn 4).[4] Hagar was unjustly sent away by her master to perish in the wilderness (Gn 21). Joseph was unjustly sold by his brothers (Gn 37). Some prophets were oppressed by a queen (1 Kgs 19) and others unjustly beheaded by a king (Mt 14). Naboth the Jezreelite was unjustly stoned and his vineyard expropriated by Ahab (1 Kgs 21). Jesus was unjustly crucified. Christians have endured persecution over many centuries. Catholics and Protestants oppressed and killed each other. Jews unjustly oppressed Christians, and Christians unjustly oppressed Jews. Humans continue to abuse and degrade the earth. Colonization, slavery, domestic violence, discrimination, and human trafficking have recurred in different forms. More than half a million Iraqis have been killed in the last three decades, millions more forced to migrate, and additional millions live under existential threat. More than 200,000 Syrians have been killed in the last five years, and millions are now refugees. Syria's heritage of historical and religious sites has been vandalized and destroyed.

Poverty is ubiquitous in our world. According to the World Bank, "A quarter of the Palestinian workforce remains unemployed," and "a quarter of the Palestinian population lives in poverty, with rates in Gaza twice as high as in the West Bank" (World

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[4] All Scripture quotations , unless otherwise indicated, are *taken* from the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Bank 2014). The gap between haves and the have-nots is growing. A recent Oxfam report concludes that extreme inequality "corrupts politics, hinders economic growth and stifles social mobility. It fuels crime and even violent conflict. It squanders talent, thwarts potential and undermines the foundations of society" (Seery and Arendar 2014, 7). Oxfam points out that: "Poverty and inequality are not inevitable or accidental, but the result of deliberate policy choices [thus] can be reversed" (Seery and Arendar 2014, 7). "Some inequality," suggests the organization, "is necessary to reward talent, skills and a willingness to innovate and take entrepreneurial risk. However, today's extremes of economic inequality undermine growth and progress, and fail to invest in the potential of hundreds of millions of people" (Seery and Arendar 2014, 9).

The Church in the World: An Incarnational Transforming Agency

"If many have distanced themselves from the church," writes Oscar Romero, "it is precisely because the church has somewhat estranged itself from humanity." Romero continues: "A church that can feel as its own all that is human and wants to incarnate the pain, the hope, the affliction of all who suffer and feel joy, such a church will be Christ loved and awaited, Christ present. And that depends on us" (Romero and Brockman 2004, 102-103). Nancy L. Bieber recalls Thich Nhat Hanh as saying: "People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air but to walk on earth" (Bieber 2010, 95). To walk on earth is the miracle of incarnation. Putting "boots on the ground" implies delving, learning, analyzing, and reflecting on a context where leadership is necessary.

Transformation is about being mindful of the "here and now." Leaders who immerse themselves into the darkest places of human experience, their mission becomes

relevant. Incarnational leadership brings the Good News of the Kingdom of God to our imperfect world.

Leadership for transformation and justice is a journey where self-transformation is part of social metamorphosis. Leaders who accompany the broken-hearted, the neglected, and the oppressed, their eyes open onto a new world hidden under the ruins of disintegration. Leaders who attentively listen to victims, their ears discern truth in minds and hearts. Leaders who search for truth, truth shall set them free. Leaders who advocate for the marginalized, the forgotten, and the voiceless, they become their brothers' and sisters' keepers and defenders. Leaders who immerse themselves in the lives of the injustice-stricken and put their lives and ministry in the hands of those who have no choice and power, their minds and hearts reflect the heart and mind of God. By walking the stages of the journey, leaders are transformed, able to walk the way of the cross and lay down their lives for friends. Leaders foster communities to lead the way. They nurture hearts to love, eyes to see truth, and minds to care. Incarnational leadership sets hearts on fire, helps hands get dirty, and leads feet toward fresh journeys of accompaniment, listening, inquiry, immersion, and advocacy. When engaged communities take shape, transformation ensues, and justice prevails.

Christianity is a missional religion. It has a message to share with the rest of humanity. Jesus began his ministry proclaiming the in-breaking of the reign of God and calling on men and women to follow – not only to "talk the talk" but to "walk the walk." Writing the forward for Tony Campolo's *Red Letter Christians: A Citizen Guide to Faith and Politics*, Jim Wallis asserts that "Christians have a serious problem. Most people have the idea that Christians and the church are supposed to stand for the same things that

Jesus did. When we don't stand for the things Jesus did, people get confused and disillusioned" (Campolo 2008, 9). Jesus preached the Good News of the Kingdom, carrying out his mission to towns and villages, teaching and bringing wholeness into the lives of the oppressed. His vision and mission were manifest: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19). After Jesus' death and resurrection and by the power of the Spirit, his followers felt the urgency of bearing witness to the risen Lord, often at risk of imprisonment or even death.

The church has a transforming mission in this world – one that is an integral part of salvation, inaugurated by a loving God who created everything and "saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gn 1:31). The *ecclesia* comes into full being through involvement in God's relationship with the world. The church mission is part of God's global mission toward all creation. In *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* Jurgen Moltmann explains that the church does not have its own mission other than to walk in the path of God. Moltmann writes: "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill to the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church, creating a church as it goes on its way" (Moltmann 1993, 64). To proclaim the news of the dawning Kingdom is the first and most crucial element in the mission of Jesus, the mission of the Spirit, and the mission of the church. Moltmann writes:

> If the church sees itself to be sent in the same framework as the Father's sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, then it also sees itself in the framework of God's history with the world and discovers its place and function within this history. Modern Catholic and Protestant missionary

> theology is therefore right when it talks about the *missio dei*, a movement from God in which the church has its origin and arrives at its own movement, but which goes beyond the church, finding its goal in the consummation of all creation in God. It follows from this that the church understands its world-wide mission in the trinitarian history of God's dealings with the world. With all its activities and suffering, it is an element in the history of the kingdom of God. The real point is not to spread the church but to spread the kingdom. (Moltmann 1993, 11)

If the church has an integral mission in history, then it has worldly responsibility. The chief concern of this thesis is how the church can present itself as a spiritual, social, economic, and political transforming force. First, the church needs to accept that spiritual, social, and political arenas are inseparable. Soulful and societal transformation are one and the same. Freedom from economic exploitation and political oppression is as important as liberation from sin. Repentance means confessing our sins against God and humans – neglecting the poor, forgetting the oppressed, abandoning the marginalized, and degrading the earth. The church's mission against injustice involves identifying false ideologies and theologies that keep people impoverished, exploited, and oppressed and to provide alternatives based on divine patterns. Liberation theologies reinterpret biblical texts and reconstruct theology from the vantage point of the poor. Moltmann explains:

> Reading the Bible with the eyes of the poor is a different thing from reading it with eyes of the man with a full belly. If it is read in the light of the experiences and hopes of the oppressed, the Bible's revolutionary themes –promise, exodus, resurrection, and Spirit- come alive. The way in which the history of Israel and the history of Christ blend with that of the hungry and the oppressed is quite different from the way in which they have often been linked with the history of the mighty and rich.(Moltmann 1993, 17)

Although each context is unique, the freedom sought is a common freedom – fellowship with God, humans, and nature. Working for liberation means siding with the oppressed and humiliated, with the marginalized and weak, with the poor and deprived; it means engaging in suffering and standing up against oppressive systems.

Leadership for Transformation and Justice: Limitation and Liberation

A journey of immersion entails risks but also brings about liberation. The mission of transformation presents challenges and requires dealing with interlocking systems and forces. Transformation is an exhausting journey, and unless leaders recognize this, they can become frustrated. Oppressive social structures aspire to have sheep without shepherds. They seek to tame leaders through alienation, intimidation, and enticement. They understand that effective leadership gets in the way of their ambition to control. Transformation entails crossing borders, swimming upstream, and "singing outside the herd." Transformation and justice depend on leaders ready to challenge hierarchy, share pain, confront the status quo, dismantle false ideologies, and adapt to change. It anticipates backlash, which requires conviction, prayer, commitment, supportive community, and advice on spiritual direction. Transformation calls for linking theory and practice. Theory guides how to do things and practice gets hands dirty. This is praxis. It requires leaving comfort zones, abandoning quick fixes, and stepping into challenging spaces. Confronting injustice is emotionally and psychologically fraught. Transformative leadership should be prepared for daring decisions and innovative actions in order to transform challenges into opportunities.

Leadership and Justice: Reciprocal Transformation

Humanity is "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" who have encouraged others to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1). For millennia, religious leaders have captured human imagination and inspired human capacity for transformation. As wellsprings of justice, leaders have commitment, spiritual wisdom,

and social endorsement to articulate visions that guide collective engagement. Leaders can awaken community consciousness and help shape involvement with God’s world.

Life is a pilgrimage with and for others. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visit the Holy Land every year to worship at historical manifestations of their faith. They pray, light candles, and walk the Via Dolorosa. Christians travel through life as pilgrims. They meet fellow pilgrims. They encounter the divine, sometimes disguised as the oppressed, marginalized, and neglected. When sojourning in life, believers carry Christ to new places and people, and encounter Christ in individuals and communities struggling for peace, justice, freedom, and life. In *A Walk in Jerusalem: Stations of the Cross*, John Peterson quotes the late director of St. George’s College in Jerusalem, Gilbert Sinden, who shared his experience leading pilgrims through the Via Dolorosa. Sinden said: “For I found myself living with a people to whom the simplest natural justice has been, and still is being, denied in order to do justice to another people to whom they have done so much less harm than the rest of us” (Peterson 1998, xi).

The majority of Christian pilgrims who visit the Holy Land each year do not connect with suffering communities in Israel-Palestine. Some do not even know that there are Christians in the Holy Land or that people live under occupation. Others are afraid to engage. Some are forbidden by law to visit the Occupied Territories. Life pilgrimage is very much like pilgrimage to the Holy Land: pilgrims’ reactions to what they encounter are personal. Some pilgrims may be overwhelmed in the busyness of life. Some may balk at limitations and restriction, or avert their gazes. Yet pilgrimage always offers opportunities to transform self and others. A spiritual journey incorporates a social journey. Soulful transformation occurs through social engagement.

Thesis Structure

The five-part paradigm proposed in this thesis, and undertaken by Sojourners in the project that led up to the writing of the thesis, aims to help leaders effectively and competently engage in transforming souls and societies.

This thesis consists of an introduction, a description of my project, followed by chapters on each of the five elements of my immersion paradigm: accompany, listen, inquire, immerse, advocate. Each chapter includes a phenomenological description of the group's immersion experience, and biblical, theological, and social sciences underpinnings to explain each theme. A chapter on signs of transformation follows to evaluate and measure the impact of the immersion experience on Sojourners and victims. A final chapter on transformation and justice consciousness concludes this project.

In the accompaniment chapter, I will recall the "on-the-road" quality of the Christian faith and present it as a model for leadership. In the listening chapter, leaders become students, and victims become teachers. The inquiry chapter affirms that ignorance and inaccuracy are not options when one engages in transformation and justice. The chapter on immersion calls on leaders to experience suffering alongside victims. To immerse requires daring commitment and willingness to share pain. Advocacy involves enacting justice, peace, and neighborliness. Advocacy is an act of solidarity, a commitment to a different life and a different consciousness. The "Transformation: Liberation and Limitation" chapter explores how immersion transforms both victims and leaders. The last chapter concludes by introducing a prophetic-servant leadership paradigm, one that helps leaders undertake a trajectory of life committed to creating and nurturing a transformation and justice consciousness.

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Chapter One: Project Thesis: Sojourners for Transformation and Justice

Why Sojourners? The Online Etymology Dictionary (accessed March 30, 2017) defines sojourn as "a temporary stay." As a verb, to sojourn involves traveling and residing elsewhere, but not on a permanent basis. The word's etymology derives from the Old French *sojorner,* "to stay or dwell for a time," and from the Latin *subdiurnare*, "to spend a day." A sojourner is a "temporary resident". A sojourn is also a stay for a specific purpose or goal. Sojourning describes the ministry on a journey of soulful and societal transformation. It reflects the nature and mission of the Christian faith.[5] It connotes the vocation of leadership for transformation and justice. It contains the paradigm that this thesis project proposes for social and societal transformation.

Purpose, Participants, and Process

Purpose

Sojourners move in their context with a clear vision, mission, and trajectory. This project envisions effective and skilled Palestinian leaders who are able to enact change in their context, a kind of change that will transform souls and societies for greater justice and mercy. Our mission is to help develop effective Palestinian Christian leadership. Our method is to accompany, listen, inquire, immerse, and advocate.

[5] Sojourning also contains the theological premise of movement: God is ever-moving – accompanying his people in their particular space and time. Sojourning has historical and spiritual connotations as well: when an institution such as the church settles into safety, success, and ritual, it becomes dull and ineffective.

The purpose of this project thesis is to examine what prevents Palestinian Christian leaders from success in enacting transformation and justice. I explore the kinds of changes that are possible when leaders take part in an immersive paradigm – when they accompany the afflicted, listen to first-hand stories, open themselves to further inquiry, immerse themselves in victims' experiences, and advocate God's aspiration.

Transformation and justice involves accompanying the oppressed, poor, and marginalized into their contexts. It requires listening to victims' voices, as well as to their silences. It necessitates inquiry and research for truth. It includes tireless immersion in the complexities of suffering, as well as taking risky decisions. It entails prophetic advocacy on behalf of others: speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves and standing for those who endure a lonely journey of suffering. Sojourners recognize that their journeys are about both personal transformation and empowerment of oppressed and vulnerable communities, so that more can participate in God's aspiration for his creation.

Participants

I drew together a group of community leaders from different traditions of the Christian faith in Ramallah. Initially, I approached 12 community leaders and explained to them the vision, mission, and trajectory of the project I hoped to launch. Five out of 12 declined for various reasons: "I'm overloaded with work and cannot commit," said a director of a human rights organization. A faith leader told me, "I am happy to participate in discussions, but I can't promise to sojourn." "I am not sure I will be of much help," said another priest. "Let me think about it and come back to you," replied another, who never came back. "I have travel plans in the coming months, but I'll join when I return," answered another. Those who agreed to participate were four men and three women, four

of whom were ordained (Catholic, Episcopal, Baptist, and Lutheran) and three of whom were lay persons (a director and program coordinator of a Bible Society, and a university instructor.) In detail, the Sojourners were:

- Fr. Ibrahim Shomali, a Catholic parish priest from Beit Sahour, born in 1974 and ordained in 1999. Fr. Shomali graduated from the Latin Seminary in Beit Jala and has served parishes in the West Bank, most recently Ramallah. Fr. Shomali is a senior priest, and alongside his parish responsibilities, he is Director of the Catholic School and a visiting instructor at the Latin Seminary in Beit Jala. He earned his Master's Degree in Rome. Fr. Shomali joined the project while it was in progress, as some activities conflicted with his degree program.
- Rev. Imad Haddad, a Lutheran pastor, also from Beit Sahour, born in 1978 and ordained in 2008. He graduated from the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon. He serves the Lutheran parish in town and teaches Christian Education at the Lutheran School in Ramallah. Rev. Hadded joined the project at its outset and has been an active member throughout.
- Ms. Luna Ma'louf, a human rights program coordinator at the Bible Society in Ramallah. The Lebanese civil war that broke out in 1975 forced her family to relocate to Jerusalem. Israeli authorities subsequently deported them to Ramallah. On marrying an Arab Israeli, Ms. Ma'louf received Israeli citizenship, which brought new restrictions into her life. After living for some time in Germany and Jordan with her husband, she moved back to Ramallah to live with her mother. Israeli law forbids her to live in the Palestinian territories, despite that her mother is here. She has lost her social security and healthcare benefits, and may lose her

Israeli citizenship and become undocumented if she continues to reside in Ramallah. She joined the project at its outset and was active throughout.

- Rev. John Yoo, a Baptist minister of Korean origin serving the Baptist community as a missionary from the United States. Rev. Yoo continues his graduate studies at the University of the Holy Land in Jerusalem, a small evangelical school. Rev. Yoo joined the project at its outset and participated in several reflection sessions, but withdrew as a result of differences over the role of leadership. He believed that the leader's role is to save souls rather than to engage with the social order.
- Ms. Abla Aranki, a visiting university instructor from Birzeit. Ms. Aranki completed her primary and secondary schooling and two years of college in Birzeit. She finished her undergraduate and graduate studies in the United States, where she worked at the Federal Reserve Bank in San Francisco for 25 years before returning to Palestine to teach English at Birzeit University. She relies on an Israeli permit to live in the Palestinian Territories, renewal of which is a complex and difficult procedure. Ms. Aranki had not previously been active in church life, but she showed much interest in our program. She joined the project at its outset and was an active member.
- Nader Gheineim, an employee of the Bible Society in Ramallah. He studied business but switched to law during the second intifada. Travel restrictions complicated the completion of his law degree, so he enrolled in Bible Studies at Bethlehem University, from which he graduated. He later earned a Master's Degree in Democracy and Human Rights from Berzeit University. Mr. Gheineim is a youth leader. He joined the project at its outset and showed much interest.

- Fadi Diab. I am an Episcopal priest from Zababdeh, a predominantly Christian town in the northern West Bank. I was born in 1973 and ordained in 2001. I earned my Bachelor's Degree in Theology from the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. I undertook this project and thesis to complete a Doctor of Ministry Degree from Virginia Theological Seminary in Virginia. I have served parishes in Jordan and the West Bank. Although I designed the project, group members participated in it and shared experiences, i.e., the process, discussions and reflections, discerning immersion experience, and follow-up evaluation were shared among group members. Thus I would describe my role as facilitator, co-participant, and co-learner rather than director or leader.

We are a group of leaders in the Palestinian context (henceforth Sojourners), grounded in the Christian faith and ministry exemplified in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. We seek to sojourn in particular spaces and with particular people, in the footsteps of Jesus, who sojourned through Palestine (cf. Lk 9:58). We seek to transform souls and societies through journeys of immersion, and through a paradigm: Accompanying victims of injustice, assiduously attending to the unheard voices; diligently inquiring and searching for truth; tirelessly immersing in the complexities of the least among us; and prophetically advocating justice and liberation. We sojourn for truth that will set us free from prejudice, ignorance, indifference and ineffectiveness.

Process

The process started with selecting participants. I initially sought a diverse group including Muslim and Jewish leaders. But Ramallah does not have a Jewish community, Israeli law prohibits Israeli citizens to visit Palestinian towns, and connections with

nearby Israeli settlements are impossible. Muslims and Christians co-exist in Ramallah, but inter-faith projects have faced difficulties from both sides. A number of participants in my project preferred a Christian focus for doctrinal and cultural reasons.

The project started in October 2014 and continued through July 2015 with a month break each for Christmas and Easter. We decided to meet every Tuesday for reflection and immersion. Some sessions were canceled due commitments on the part of the majority of the group, others had to be re-scheduled depending on circumstances.

The first session started with a prayer. Members then introduced themselves. I described the project, and then opened discussion to suggestions and feedback. Participants indicated interest in the theme of leadership and justice, but uncertainty as to what immersion entailed. “What does immersion mean?” asked Luna. “How can we do that?” “Would visiting prisoners be possible?” asked Abla “Can we meet Israelis?” inquired Nader. “I am not good at social engagement,” remarked Abla. “Will immersion involve risks?” asked Imad. “What should we tell people?” asked John. The session concluded with agreement on a kind of a road map: we would engage in reflection and discernment, followed by immersion, and finally evaluation.

Reflection and discernment

- One session setting a kind of a code or values: How will we do that?
- Three sessions for reflection on our context: What is our context-as-it-is?
- Two sessions for discussion of the concept of justice in the Palestinian context, with a focus on identifying victims of oppression and negligence in our midst: Who is a victim? Who is Lazarus at our doors?

Immersion

- A pre-immersion session to identify potential immersion experiences and to discuss logistics. Where, with whom, and how should we immerse?
- An immersion experience with a victim of injustice, applying our method of accompaniment, listening, inquiry, immersion, and advocacy.
- Post-immersion discussion and reflection on the experience. What have we learned? What changed in us? And what changed in the victim's conditions?

Evaluation

Two to three sessions of evaluation of religious leadership as seen through the eyes of victims, with particular emphasis on integration/disintegration, justice advocacy, and factors leading to possible disengagement or disinterest. What is Christian leadership? How does a community of victims perceive Christian leaders? What might prevent leaders from accompanying victims, listening to them, inquiring about their situations, immersing in their particular suffering, and advocating their causes?

I suggested that we converse with colleagues, family members, and community leaders to gain knowledge of the Palestinian context. I proposed walking our streets, talking to people, and listening to what they said when alone and in groups. "The purpose is to be open to our context, and let context reveal itself," I explained.

The process went smoothly, members showed considerable commitment to reflection sessions and less interest in immersion experiences: attendance was always higher during reflection sessions than immersions. One member confessed to

introversion: “I don’t like too much socializing.” Another was selective, joining particular immersion experiences and avoiding others. One disagreed on the value of some engagements, for example meeting with city officials to discuss beggars’ use of babies to solicit money on the streets. “This is not our role, the governor has advisors and that is their task,” he protested. “Observing and talking to workers crossing checkpoints is not a Christian leader’s role,” John protested. John was not in agreement with the rest of the group on biblical, theological, and methodological levels. “What will people think and say,” “how people will look at us,” and “we need to pay more attention to our own communities,” were some of John’s particular concerns. After five sessions, he retreated. When I inquired his absence, the reason he gave was “I cannot commit because I am overwhelmed with my studies at the university.”

Project Description

Reflection and Discernment: What is our Context?

For three sessions, we had intensive discussions about our context – our world-as-it-is. I suggested that we consider three questions: What is our context? What is the identity of Christian leaders in relation to our context and ministry? And what are the characteristics of our mission in relation to our location? Discussion about our context revealed several observations:

1. *Context is not a location.* It is the multiplicity of forces and factors that shape the characteristics of that location. Our context is defined not only by geography, but by history, politics, religiosity, culture, and internationalism, i.e., interest in the Holy Land, in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, political ideology, heritage, etc.

2. *Context constantly changes.* The direct context of our immersion project was the West Bank city of Ramallah. A quiet town into the 1970s and 1980s, Ramallah has turned into a vibrant metropolis since the Oslo Accord was signed in 1993. It has become the "temporary" capital of the Palestinian Authority, location of dozens of government buildings and home to hundreds of non-governmental organizations, diplomatic missions, international and national media agencies, cultural centers, schools, hotels, restaurants, etc. It attracts not only Palestinians from other Palestinian districts, but also internationals – diplomats, NGO employees, educators, journalists, activists and volunteers who visit, stay, and commit to the pursuit of justice for Palestinians.
3. *The Palestinian context involves displacement and relocation.* At the heart of our context is the story of a Christian community in crisis – people who have been uprooted from their land and forced to live elsewhere. Even though we are not refugees, half of the Christian community in Ramallah is made up of persons exiled from their homes during the *nakba*.[6] The other side of the Ramallah story is the existence of large numbers of community members abroad, often in the United States. More than 70 per cent of the Christian community in Ramallah emigrated in the last hundred years. Today, Palestinian Christians comprise less than two per cent of the Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories, with the majority having fled in search of more secure context and better futures.

[6] There are many scholarly works on the uprooting of the Palestinian people from their land in 1948 and 1967, resulting in their relocation elsewhere. For further reading, see Elias Chacour and Mary Jensen: *We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation*; Sandy Tolan*: The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East*; Audeh Rantisi and Ralph Beebe: *Blessed are the Peacemakers: A Palestinian Christian in the Occupied West Bank*; and Naim Ateek: *Justice and only Justice: A Palestinian Liberation Theology*.

"Many people have told me that they do not want to leave, but they are worried about the future. They want a better life for their children," explained Nader.

4. *Our context embraces privilege and suffering.* Sojourners showed much awareness of our heritage. "Jesus lived in our land. He was born in the Palestinian town of Bethlehem," asserted Ibrahim. For Palestinian Christians, identity, faith, and context are interlocked. "Jesus sojourned in the towns and villages of Palestine, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and offering an alternative to an oppressive and dominating Roman Empire. Our present conditions are very much like his," said Luna, and others agreed.
5. *Our context is very complex.* Internationally, the "Occupied Territories" of Palestine should be locations where international charters for such territory operate. In fact, the land we call home is contested on religious grounds. Jews believe that the Promised Land was given by God, so they feel justified in claiming it as theirs. Israeli military and diplomatic power maps the facts on the ground. For Palestinian Muslims (and Muslims around the world), Palestine is a "*waqf*"[7] land; that is, consecrated for Muslims across generations. Abandoning it, or part of it, violates religious strictures. For Christians, Palestine is the Holy Land, where God revealed himself and where Jesus was born, lived, died, and was resurrected. It is the birth place from which Christianity spread to the world. Christians, Muslims, and Jews have lived in Palestine for generations.

[7]The literal meaning of the word *waqf* is "detention." A *waqf* is held so that "its produce or income may always be available for religious or charitable purposes." It is perpetual and non-transferable. The notion of *waqf* is interconnected with the religious life and social economy of Muslims. When a religious property becomes *waqf, it* belongs to God and is endowed with a specific purpose applying only to Muslims. Madhubala Solanki, "Concept of Waqf Under Muslim Law," Academike, October 8, 2017. Accessed December 2, 2017. https://www.lawctopus.com/academike/concept-waqf-muslim-law/.

6. *Our context is characterized by division and conflict.* Another circumstance that dominated our discussions was the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process and its implications. In 1993, Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization signed the Oslo Accord, granting some administrative control over portions of the Occupied Territories to the Palestinian Authority and starting a process of negotiation to end the occupation. The Oslo Accord divided the Territories into three parts:[8] Area A (17 per cent of land on the West Bank, where over 50 per cent of West Bankers live) falls under the full control of the Palestinian Authority and is accessible to Israeli military forces as required; Area B (24 per cent of the West Bank, where 41 per cent live) falls under Palestinian administrative governance but Israeli security control; and Area C (59 per cent of the West Bank, with four per cent of the Palestinian West Bank population) falls under complete Israeli administrative and security control (Andrews 2016, 205). The status of Jerusalem, borders, water, refugees, and prisoners was not decided at Oslo; these fall under complete Israeli control. Final resolution of these issues has never taken place, and they continue to drive conflict. Since the negotiation process has failed to reach settlement, the status quo governs.
7. *Our context's religious system is multifaceted.* It not only includes three religions, but also a multiplicity of denominations, traditions, ideologies, spiritualties, monasteries, ministry orientations, etc. Within Judaism there are the Ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed, secular, and Messianic traditions. There are Mizrachi, Ashkenazi, and Sephardic Jews. Christianity includes Orthodox, Catholic or Latin, a range of Oriental Christians – Coptic Orthodox and

[8] See Appendix for maps

Catholic, Syriac Orthodox and Catholic, Melkite, Armenian, Ethiopian, and Maronite – as well Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and local Anabaptists. There are Jehovah's Witnesses and atheists, mostly of Christian descent. Within Islam: radicals, conservatives, progressives, and secular adherents. There are also minority faiths such as Druze and Baha'i.

8. *Context and Status quo.* The religious arrangement under which we live provoked much important discussion and research. Status quo is a major concept having to do with relations among religious faiths in the Holy Land. The status quo[9] (or *statu quo* as it is commonly called in the Holy Land) in its present form is a decree issued by the Muslim Caliphate in 1852 governing the status of Christian communities and religious sites in the Holy Land. The decree came about after a long dispute that led to conflict among Orthodox and Catholics, which also involved "colonial" powers. The Ottoman decree divided custody of the holy sites among the main Christian traditions (Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian, Franciscan, Coptic, and Syrian). It continues to govern the relationship between secular powers and denominations, as well as relations among denominations themselves. The status quo is non-negotiable, untouchable, and un-discussable. It is the "sacred" system that no one dares to challenge without risking conflict among different political and religious traditions. The status quo also gives the governing political power the right to endorse heads of churches in Jerusalem who cannot

[9]In a broader sense, status quo "refers to the relations between the Christian communities of the Holy Land and with the government of the region." Specifically, it applies "to the situation within the sanctuaries, both alone and in conjunction with other rites within the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in Jerusalem." The main principle is that the holy sites are inseparable from the political powers governing the Holy Land. The status quo persisted during periods of control by different political powers, including the Ottoman Empire, British mandate, Jordanian governance, and the Israeli authority. Custodia Terrae Sanctae. "Status Quo," CTS, n.d. Accessed May 2, 2017. http://www.custodia.org/default.asp?id=433.

function without the states authorization. Heads of denominations receive benefits from the governing political power, i.e., stress-free travel passes, diplomatic license plates, VIP status, and residency in Jerusalem, among other things.

9. *Context, culture, and minority consciousness.* The Palestinian Christian context "has changed little since the Ottoman era," and the *millet*[10] system is still in operation. "Ten Christian denominations have full legal recognition and are regarded as competent to operate religious courts…These are churches belonging to the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Protestant traditions" (Andrews 2016, 206-207). There are other Christian denominations that are recognized neither by the state of Israeli nor by the Palestinian Authority, and they function as societies. The *millet* system appears to be an important element in understanding the existence and function of Christianity and in particular Christian leadership. The state recognizes each *millet* through its leader.

10. *Context and leadership identity.* One major topic that kept recurring was the identity and capacity of leadership. What capacity do leaders have to enact change in the social order? Church leaders in the Palestinian context are divided into two

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[10] The word *millet* (Arabic *millah*) means religion, nation, or community. It is used to refer to religions and communities, whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. Its purpose is to allow limited power to non-Muslims – sometimes referred to as "infidels" or "Dhimmi" – communities to organize their affairs, traditions, and religious rites without interference from the state. During the Ottoman period, the term maybe defined as a religio-political system granted to non-Muslims in order to organize affairs under ecclesiastical heads. The non-Muslim *millet* usually was considered inferior to the Muslim *millet* and its laws could only be applied to its adherents, and were not permitted to conflict with state laws. In "Millet System in the Ottoman Empire," Efrat Aviv writes: "The Ottomans used it to give minority religious communities within their Empire limited power to regulate their own affairs, under the overall supremacy of the Ottoman administration...Christians and Jews were people of the Bible, known as *dhimmi*, who were not forced to convert to Islam but allowed to live under the Muslim arrangement with certain prohibitions while practicing their religion and paying the *cizye* and military exemption tax…Non-Muslims had to be part of a millet to be considered citizens of the empire." Efrat Aviv, "Millet System in the Ottoman Empire," Oxford Bibliographies, November 28, 2016. Accessed May 3, 2017. http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0231.xml#obo-9780195390155-0231-div1-0003.

main categories. Category One comprises appointed or elected senior leaders, i.e., Archbishops, Patriarchs, Bishops, and denomination representatives. This category receives state recognition to function as “accountable,” that is recognized, denominational representatives to the state. The head of a given denomination is responsible to secular authorities for his community, and represents his constituency to officials of the state. This group of leaders forms the Council of the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem. Each head of denomination frames and leads, in theory, with diocesan councils and committees, the mission and ministry of his denomination. Category Two consists of parish priests, community ministers, and institution directors reporting to senior leadership. Clergy in the second category serve as pastors, chaplains, and directors of church institutions. The first category exercises much influence by virtue of position and authority. It has power over clergy, institutions, and communities. It directs the overall trajectory and mission of ministry. Since Category One has power and authority, people identify its leaders as responsible for the community’s wellbeing, which puts them under direct scrutiny and criticism.

11. *Context, leadership and hierarchy.* The church system in our context is hierarchal, which can limit freedom in subsystems. The head of a denomination has power over committees, clergy, councils, vestries, and institutions. This situation is pervasive in almost all denominations, although differences in methods and practices apply. Sojourners shared testimonies of clergy who were not allowed to participate in projects deemed to have political, social, interdenominational or cultural implications. For example, a priest was banned by his bishop to appear on

TV and comment on social and political issues. Another was banned from attending services at other denominations. Yet another was banned from participating in ecumenical programs. Another was banned from conducting questionnaires. This created resentment, loneliness, retreat, and withdrawal on the part of some clergy. Moreover, Sojourners reported to one another how clergy and communities nod their heads in front of senior leaders while in private look for confidants to whom to express their disappointment. Sojourners learned how difficult it sometimes was not to comply with hierarchy. We shared stories of confrontation with senior leadership, carrying psychological, social, and even economic consequences. Clergy told stories about stress, exclusion, and suspension of salaries. Describing our options, an often-repeated piece of advice among clergy is, "Do what you are told, and you will be OK." Upsetting the hierarchy is the last thing clergy want to do, leading to sameness rather than diversity. "To control requires making junior leaders anxious," explained one Sojourner. Sojourners who were clergy admitted that in the face of confrontation, they often chose avoidance and compliance.

12. *Context, leadership, and the church institution.* One of the main features that dominated Sojourners' discussions was church institutional structure. "There is no clear system in the church institution," I asserted. "In a hierarchal structure, the system functions according to bishops," explained Imad. Sojourners generally agreed about the dysfunctionality of the church institution. "Dis-institutionalism," that is, lack of clear, systematic structures, means that the head of a denomination functions as its system, while clergy, communities, committees, and church

institutions function as dependent, conforming subsystems. There are few if any checks and balances. Arrangements change every time the head of a church changes. The bylaws and constitution of a church institution usually function according to the will of its head. Dis-institutionalism appears to be one of the major challenges to leadership development and effectiveness.

13. *Context and congregational models.* Consideration of congregational and leadership models took up much of our discussion time on context, leadership identity, and mission. Congregations in Ramallah are dependent on denominationalism. Their circumstances derive from the person, theology, spirituality, governance, and style of leaders most directly involved. The Palestinian congregational context practices and cherishes a shepherd-sheep leadership paradigm, where the shepherd is overwhelmingly active in parish administration and life, and the sheep follow along. "The identity and mission of parishioners lack development and engagement in the polity and ministry of the parish," affirmed John. "I tried to stir my parishioners, and in particular the vestry, toward involvement and participation in parish administration and life but was not successful," confirmed Imad. The predominant congregational model in our context is the house of worship model. "For the majority of our parishioners, the concept of the church is defined by worship. Church means attending service," explained Nader. I shared Penny Edgell Becker's congregational models to help illuminate the phenomenon in our context. In *"Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life* Becker identifies four models of congregational sociodynamics: a family model, a community model, a leader

model, and a house of worship model. Becker affirms that the dominant model of a congregation shapes the nature and mission of the community. Reflecting on Becker's models of congregations, Sojourners discerned that the house of worship model is predominant in our context. Congregations in this model "concentrate on the core tasks of worship and religious education. The primary goals are to provide an intimate and uplifting worship experience and to train members, especially children, in the denomination's heritage, doctrine, and rituals" (Becker 1999, 13). Sojourners also identified elements characteristics of the leader model. In this model, worship and education are important. However, the values that congregations express "spring more directly from the official tenets of their denomination or tradition and less from members' own interpretations and life experiences" (Becker 1999, 14). However, Sojourners agreed that our congregations lack what this model represents in terms of active witness and going beyond the congregation, engaging in political and social action beyond the congregation's wall. (Becker 1999, 14). Sojourners also identified elements of the family model, which is characterized as "a place where worship, religious education, and providing close-knit and supportive relationships for members are the core tasks" (Becker 1999, 13). Members in the family model care about each other's lives, and connections are informal and personal. This model is run by "a small group of long-term lay leaders who are all good friends and belong to extended family networks" (Becker 1999, 13). The family model in our context is precluded by denominational interest; that is, congregations are constructed and maintained within the parameters of the denomination. It is reasonable to

conclude that Palestinian communities are denominationally worship-oriented rather than socially and culturally oriented. “Some Palestinian Christians even confess that they do not belong to the culture they live in,” added Luna.

Immersion: Who is the Victim in our Midst?

In order to be immersed in a context of injustice, it is imperative to identify victims of injustice accurately. After defining the central characteristics of our context, we sought to identify victims in our midst. Who is Lazarus at our doors? Reflecting on this question, we compiled a list of groups and discussed the situation of each. Then we immersed ourselves in particular situations by accompanying them, listening to their stories, inquiring into their conditions, sharing in their pain, and advocating their causes.

The first category, identified by Abla, was the elderly. Abla told us the story of her late mother, who in her last years had been left alone because her children were abroad. The children admitted her into a home for the elderly. “It was painful for her as well as for all of us,” Abla concluded. In our pre-immersion session, we discussed the situation of the elderly in our context, sharing stories, doing research on elder care, and looking at conditions in homes for the elderly. “Palestinian culture is family-oriented, and it is ‘disgraceful’ for children to put their parents in institutional homes,” explained Imad. I shared the story of Ms. Shehadeh, who was left alone when all her brothers emigrated to the West. “She resented the idea of moving into an elderly home. When her relatives moved her, she developed depression, and after six months died. Abla Massad, another elderly parishioner at St. Andrew’s, strongly rejected the idea of moving into a home for the elderly. When her relatives admitted her after she developed Alzheimer’s, she did not eat, and passed away after two months. Sojourners examined interlocking factors that had

led to agony among institutionalized seniors, and planned an immersion experience. It involved each member visiting three elderly persons in his or her community, as well as a group visit to an elderly home. The objective was to accompany victims in their locations, to hear their stories, and to study their conditions. We also wanted to find out how the elderly evaluated the role of religious leaders in relation to their situations.

In our immersion experience together, three Sojourners out of seven attended. The other four apologized because they ran into unexpected schedule conflicts. We decided to visit *Arrafah* home for the elderly. After calling and asking for consent, we drove to the home together. The manager, a Muslim woman, welcomed us into her office. She explained how she had initiated the project and ran it, also describing some of the challenges she faced. “I felt the need for an elderly home in Ramallah since the city has only one facility. And upon hearing stories about seniors aging alone, I thought it was worth doing it,” she explained. “The building is rented, and our major challenge is how to cover the rent. Some occupants come from poor families or have no one to pay for them. We depend on support and donations from the community,” she continued.

The building has three stories: one for administrative offices, a simple physiotherapy clinic, and a meeting area. The other stories were residences, one for men and one for women. There are nine men and seven women residents. There are three employees: two women and one man. The majority of occupants are bedridden, and some suffer from dementia. The facility has simple furniture and no elevators linking the three stories. When we inquired about how the elderly managed to move in and out without an elevator, the manager explained that “they need to be carried, but we are working on installing an elevator once we secure the resources.”

We conversed with two residents. The story of Mr. Khalaf, originally from Ramallah, got our attention. He went to the United States on an Israeli laissez-passer, lived there for a few years, and decided to return to Ramallah. Upon arrival at the airport, an Israeli immigration officer told him that he had lost his residency in the West Bank because he had been absent more than three years. He never obtained U.S. residency or citizenship, and now he is undocumented in his own town. Mr. Khalaf is a single senior, and all his relatives live in the United States. He is sick and needs monthly prescriptions. As undocumented, he is covered neither by Israeli nor Palestinian heath systems. He does not have money to pay for his residence at the elderly home, or to pay for his medication. He is literally abandoned by family, community, state, and church. “I cannot go to church because of my illness. And no priest or church people have ever visited me,” he told us. “Clergy look after wealthy people, and young people to come to church. Why would anyone care about someone like me, old, sick, and poor?”

In our post-immersion session, three members reported on visits to seniors in their extended families, or neighborhoods. The rest had their reasons for not doing so. “I am not very good socializing with others. I did not know what to anticipate,” said Abla. “I was very busy last week and could not visit any seniors in my parish, but during our worship, we prayed for the elderly. I also told my vestry that we need to pay attention to seniors in our community,” said John. “I had to travel to attend a committee meeting and could not visit any seniors in my congregation,” explained Imad. Encountering seniors and listening to their stories left us with more questions that prompted research.

We discovered that after Israel occupied the Palestinian territories in 1967, the Israeli military performed a census. Every Palestinian who was abroad for any reason was

stripped of his or her residency rights. Thousands of Palestinians who worked or studied abroad were prevented from returning. Since 1976, Israel has imposed martial law aimed essentially at encouraging Palestinians to leave. And once they leave, they are prevented from returning. When I was a student at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, I could not return for any reason until I had stayed abroad for nine months. I could not travel to see my family at Christmas or Easter. I had to spend both holidays alone in the dormitory because Israeli laws applying to West Bankers require that if their stays exceed one month, they can only return after nine months. And if a Palestinian from the West Bank leaves for three years, seven years for those in Gaza and Jerusalem, right of return is cancelled. "Many Palestinian families have been separated by the permit regime, and Israel refuses to grant them the necessary permits to visit their family or friends in other parts of the [occupied Palestinian territories] or inside Israel" (Alqasis and al-Azza 2015, 20). Most persons prevented from returning are students or young professionals working abroad to support their families. Akiva Eldar writes:

> Israel stripped more than 100,000 residents of Gaza and some 140,000 residents of the West Bank of their residency rights during the 27 years between its conquest of the territories in 1967 and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. As a result, close to 250,000 Palestinians who left the territories were barred from ever returning…Palestinians who went abroad were required to leave their identity cards at the border crossing. Unlike those from Gaza, who were allowed to leave for seven years, these Palestinians received a special permit valid for three years. The permit could be renewed three times, each time for one year. But any Palestinian who failed to return within six months after his permit expired would be stripped of his residency with no prior notice. (Eldar 2012)

Beside those whose residency has been revoked, there are many others who have opted to emigrate in response to conflict and economic difficulties. Others have been expelled for political activities against the occupation. The result of these factors has been dire on parents of children abroad. Many parents have been left alone. Their crises are magnified

by a political and social system where there is no social security, inadequate health coverage, and limited organs of state to provide for them.

Our first observation was that none of eight Christian churches in Ramallah runs a home for the elderly. Two private homes exist, one managed by a society and the other by the business woman we visited. “The only seniors’ Christian homes in the Ramallah area are owned and run by the Catholic Church in Taybeh and Catholic nuns in Qbebeh,” mentioned Nader. Our second observation was that our busy schedules sometimes prevented us from paying attention to the least among us. “We should have considered these victims as priorities in our ministries and trained lay people to get involved in caring for the elderly,” I said. “We need to raise awareness of the elderly among our communities,” said Ibrahim. We also talked about Mr. Khalaf, and how we could address his needs. Since he desired to receive communion, I called the Orthodox priest in town and reported his desire. Left-behind elderly in the Palestinian context include those aging alone by choice or because their children are careless, and also those suffering as a result of political restrictions. Evon Amerrah is a parishioner at St. Peter’s, Berzeit. Her children emigrated, and none is able to return to take care of her. I tried to help obtain a visitor’s permit for her daughter, but the Israeli authorities refused to grant one.

This immersion experience left us bewildered. It opened our eyes to a group of congregants that had clearly been neglected. The experience awakened our commitment to engage with seniors in our context, to challenge the root causes of their suffering, and find ways to accompany those left behind.

The second category of victims among us was the Palestinian workforce. With limited job opportunities in the Occupied Territories, workers seek permits, or resort to

illegal and dangerous means, to enter Israel. What are the legal and illegal methods of crossing the separation line? Who gets work permits? What methods are successful? What are the consequences for breaking the law? What working conditions might a worker have to endure? These and other questions led us into a new sojourning experience. Our first observation was that we knew very little about Palestinian workers in Israel. I will discuss our findings and experiences with the Palestinian workforce in detail in the second chapter, on accompaniment.

The third category was prisoners. This is the focus of my third chapter, on listening. Political prisoners and administrative detainees are generally Palestinian activists and freedom fighters who have challenged the occupation. The immersion experience with political prisoners opened our eyes to their pain and that of their families. Listening to first-hand stories, inquiring about prison conditions, being immersed in family suffering, and advocating for the cause transformed us into active opponents of political oppression.

The fourth category of victims with whom we engaged was Christian families who had left Gaza for the West Bank, including Ramallah. These families live in their own country illegally, as their registration is for Gaza, not the West Bank. They cannot travel anywhere legally. The Christian community in Gaza is tiny, consisting of only around 2000 people among approximately 2 million Muslims. The Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip since 1967, intra-Palestinian fractures, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the Israeli blockade of Gaza have put enormous pressure on the Christian community there. The fact that many have decided to move elsewhere is unsurprising. Sojourners discovered that they knew very little about Gaza – actually, none of us had visited Gaza,

as this requires a special permit unobtainable for West Bankers. We met with Ramus and his family in their small apartment. Their case is the focus of the chapter on inquiry.

The fifth category was victims of deportation. These consisted of political and human rights activists who challenged the occupation. Sojourners participated in a solidarity campaign against a deportation order issued against a Palestinian activist. Her case is reported in the chapter on immersion. What does it mean to stand with those facing deportation? What are the consequences? This immersion experience led to other solidarity campaigns with victims of oppression, hatred, and violence.

The last immersion experience had a different focus. It attempted to build connections with Israeli society. The impetus was to reach out to the unreachable other, making ourselves visible to a different category: the Israeli public. What does it mean to connect with the "other," when a political system dictates separation? What does it mean to cross boundaries into the context of a neighbor who is supposed to be an enemy? What does backlash feel like, when it comes from your own people who oppose normalization with Israeli society? We discovered that we all are victims of systematic structures that oppress, sustain disestablishment, and promote fear of the other. We met for the first time with an Israel family. We exchanged emails and organized visits. We planned joint programs, promoted connectivity and mutuality, and built friendship. Together we sought to dismantle the walls of fear, prejudice, and separation.

These immersion experiences helped us better understand our context and the situations of victims. They also helped us understand our identity and ministry. "It was as if we were foreigners to victims' situations," said Imad. "How can we respond to Jesus' words: 'I was a prisoner and you visited me,' when prisoners and their families are far

from our attention and ministry?" "Why don't churches have peace and justice commissions?" asked Abla. "It is not unusual that we, lay people, do not know about Palestinian victims, but I thought clergy knew," Luna stated. "Being at the checkpoint and watching workers crossed every day to provide for their families made me think that we live in another world," said Ibrahim "It was heartbreaking to see and talk to children holding pictures of their incarcerated fathers," Lune exclaimed.

These experiences helped us understand what victims think and how they perceive their situations, the community's role, and religious leaders' duties in relation to their suffering. In a nutshell, we saw context through the eyes of victims. This was a new perspective that challenged our perceptions about our ministries and missions. The immersion experiences taught us much about ourselves. We are called to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, care to the sick, and companionship to those in prison. Being immersed with victims helped us understand who we are in relation to our calling. We learned that ministry in a context of injustice requires being immersed in the lives and experiences of victim of oppression.

The immersion project was not just a Tuesday activity. It was an ongoing mission that we undertook with mindfulness about the conditions in our context. Unplanned follow-up by group members demonstrated that immersion experiences left group members determined to enact change. Luna, for example, called to inform the wife of Ramus of a job opportunity. Many times we confessed that we had neglected the poor and the oppressed. We talked about the project whenever we met outside project settings. We became attentive to victims in our context as well as in the world. News stories about persecution, refugees, poverty, incarceration, and humiliation found their way into our

discussions. We participated in and arranged solidarity movements, talked to church leaders about social concerns, and planned reach out programs. Victims occupied the center of our attention and ministry.

The experiences revealed that although we live in a context of “occupation,” we knew less than we should about these conditions. Immersion helped us discover that we knew very little about the situations of Palestinian victims of oppression. Those we accompanied helped us discover what victims of oppression think about the church and its leadership. Victims of oppression revealed that the religious system had not been helpful. We asked them: “How do you perceive the role of the church and religious leaders in regard to your situation?” Their responses were shocking: “Leaders do not care.” “No comment.” “Leaders are far removed from the real suffering of their communities.” “Priests care about young and wealthy people.” “Leaders care only about themselves and their families.” “Some are active, others are not.” “The priest was helpful, he visited us a couple of times.” “They are judgmental. I was afraid to talk to any priest.” “Israel controls them.” “Leaders have privileges that blind them.” “Leaders do not care about their communities.” “Their job is difficult; may God help them.” “Leaders are inactive because they are under pressure, they are not free.” It was clear that dissatisfaction over the role of leadership prevails.

Evaluation: Why Disintegration and Disinterest?

“These were shocking perspectives. Why would victims have such negative perceptions of religious leadership?” we asked. We all agreed that this question required more discussion and assessment. I suggested that we reflect on what prevents leaders from engaging with victims of injustice.

In three evaluation sessions, Sojourners asserted that injustice is an evolving phenomenon, accompanying life itself. Personal, cultural, social, political, biblical, and theological explanations may prevent leadership from effectively addressing injustice. Detachment may take the form of indifference, as in "Am I my brother's keeper," (Gn 4:9); or underestimation, as in "Suppose they do not believe me or listen to me," (Ex 4:1); or incompetence, as in "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent" (Ex 4:10); or hopelessness, as in "if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?" (Judg 6:13); or rejection, as in "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house," (Mk 6:4); or panic, as in "Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, I do not know the man," (Mt 26:74); or feebleness, as in "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak," (Mt 26:41); or exasperation, as in "send her away, for she keeps shouting after us," (Mt 15:23); or distraction, as in "because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food," (Acts 6:1); or insufficiency, as in "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" (Mk 6:37); or self-indulgence, as in "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" (Mt 26:15); or personal glory and power, as in "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory," (Mk 10:37). The following excuses were detected as particularly salient in the Palestinian context. They recur globally:

- *Obliviousness* to injustice. This prevents leaders from engaging in the experiences of victims and in advocacy. When leaders are ignorant about the conditions of victims, they become indifferent to suffering. When Rami, a Palestinian prisoner, was released, we visited. He told us about his detention, stories we had never heard. We learned how oblivious we had been to the experience of imprisonment.

- *Incompetence* among pastors in biblical, theological, and ministerial complexities. Many Orthodox priests are appointed to serve without adequate training. Many clergy qualify for ordination after months of liturgical education but little else, limiting their role to performing services. Incompetence affects clergy who discontinue scholarship. Although advanced education has become more commonplace among Catholic priests in the last 20 years, only four out of 24 clergy in the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem have engaged in continuing education within that period. The number is smaller in the Orthodox Church. Incompetence can mean sticking to one's comfort zone, since competence requires moving into unfamiliar territory. Incompetence reduces engagement. In "We Make the Road by Walking: Reflections on the Legacy of White Anti-Racist Activism," Sally Mac Nichol explains that silence in the face of oppression may arise from ignorance. "Silenced knowings," a term crafted by liberation psychologists Helene Shulman Lorenz and Mary Watkins, refers to "understandings we carry that take refuge in silence, as it feels dangerous to speak them to ourselves and to others… Once silenced, these knowings are no longer available to inform our lives, to strengthen our moral discernment. Once pushed to the side these knowings require our energy to sustain their dissociation, and our numbing to evade their pain" (Mac Nichol 2004, 193).
- *Carelessness* in an individualistic culture. After I was ordained deacon, I was appointed to serve the community of the Schneller School in Amman, Jordan under the supervision of a senior priest. One cold December evening, I visited a family living inside the school premises. I inquired whether their heater was on.

The host explained that he could not afford fuel. After the visit, I kept thinking about his children. At home, I decided not to turn on my own heater so long as parishioners were deprived. The next morning, I met with my mentor, who advised me not to be silly – "You'll get over it in time!" Carelessness in the face of injustice keeps us behind the wall of solidarity. Mac Nichol argues that in order to confront white supremacy, we need "'to do our first works over,'" by which she means recovering our participation as well as recognizing our indifference to false ideologies instead of "reinforcing the historical amnesia of the larger political culture that functions to keep structures of sin and domination tightly woven and in place" (Mac Nichol 2004, 193). Silence against oppression maintains personal privilege. Mac Nichol writes: "I asked questions. I got no answers…The message was clear: Don't think about it. Don't talk about it. That's just the way it is. Put it out of your head. Just enjoy the good things we have because we are good people" (Mac Nichol 2004, 203).

- *Fear* of confronting injustice. Fear is a paralyzing emotion. Confronting oppressive structures and hierarchal institutions is risky and requires courage and resilience. Fear of being labeled anti-Semitic has caused leaders to avoid advocating justice for Palestinians. Fear of losing one's job, position, privilege, and status, as well as fear of physical and psychological violence, are reasons for withdrawal. John wrote about those who believed in Jesus but feared consequences: "Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes

from God" (Jn 12:42-43). A parish priest whose bishop forbids him from participating in advocacy may hold himself back from engagement in justice ministry. Fear of Israeli retribution against their dioceses keeps leaders from criticizing Israeli violence and advocating for victims. Many Patriarchs and Bishops in Israel-Palestine, for example, have opted not to endorse *Kairos Palestine*, fearing Israeli retaliation. "We shall never be cured of fear by escapism or repression," asserts Martin Luther King (King 1981, 117). Leaders are called to a costly discipleship that confronts fear and anticipates backlash. King continues:

> Faith does not offer an illusion that we shall be exempted from pain and suffering, nor does it imbue us with the idea that life is a drama of unalloyed comfort and untroubled ease. Rather, it instills us with the inner equilibrium needed to face strains, burdens, and fears that inevitably come, and assure us that the universe is trustworthy and that God is concerned." (King 1981, 123)

Fear impedes risk-taking. Fear is anti-transformative. Fear conceals honest opinions. Fear leads to compliance, since the end result of a *No* cannot be predicted. In *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope,* Joan Chittister writes:

> Fear cripples us more than any disease ever could…Fear tempts us to sell our souls in exchange for the grossly lesser prize of false security. We see it as security because it buys us time. But it is false because those who refuse to honor our questions will refuse to honor our person any time it suits their needs. Worse, fear keeps us from being who we ourselves really want to be. Fear keeps us from being someone we ourselves can admire." (Chittister 2003, 46-47)

Unless leaders understand the implication of healthy and unhealthy fear and transform it into a sacred fear, a force for transformation and justice, it will continue to impede integration, engagement, and transformation.

- *Hopelessness* against the need for transformation and justice. When leaders lose hope, claiming that "nothing will change," they become disinterested in any

mission of transformation and justice. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has lasted for so many years that some people cannot envision peace or justice. When victims lose hope, they turn to despair and violence. When leaders lose hope, they accommodate, sequester themselves, or emigrate. Out-migration continues to entice religious leaders away from a context that needs them.

- *Misunderstanding* biblical texts. When leaders are confronted with misinterpretations of biblical texts, they tend to withdraw or concede. Many Palestinian priests, for example, are unaware of Christian Zionism and its ideology of dispensationalism, or its modern offshoots such as pre-tribulation and pre-millennialism.[11] Some Evangelical missions require indigenous leaders to embrace dispensationalism. "When I could not consent to their request, they told me that I could not remain part of the mission," said Reverand Rishmawi.
- *Resistance* to enacting change. "The reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order," writes Machiavelli (Luecke 2009, 74). Transformation is a threat to the status quo and its supporters. "Some people clearly enjoy advantages that – rightly or wrongly – they view as threatened by change. They may perceive change as endangering their livelihoods, their perks, their workplace social arrangements, or their status" (Luecke 2009, 74). Effective leadership challenges the status quo. Leaders must take risks to transform disappointments into learning. Change requires abandoning favorite concepts, privilege, and comfort zones. To

[11]Dispensationalism was proposed by J.N. Darby in 19th century Britain and took root in the United States, where it influenced evangelicals and some Catholics. Dispensationalism, pre-tribulation, and pre-millennialism defend Darby's basic outline: "Israeli returns to the Holy Land, the church is raptured, a seven-year tribulation brings the final battle of Armageddon, and Christ returns to inaugurate judgment and set up his Kingdom on earth." Gary M. Burge, "Theological and Biblical Assumptions of Christian Zionism," in *Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, eds. Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis and Maurine Tobin (London: Melisende, 2005), 47-48.

avoid backlash is to avoid transformation. Change threatens cultural traditions, religious beliefs, political codes, and institutional privilege. Patriarchates and dioceses are comfortable with the systems they have, because leaders retain power. “This is the way it has always been” dominates cultural, religious, and political spheres. Women, for example, continue to receive half of what men receive from inheritance, and in many cases they are dispossessed of that half. When women call for equality, they are considered aggressive. Leaders have not been vocal on this topic even though the law allows Christians to have their own inheritance arrangements. Recently, the Lutheran Church adopted gender equality when dividing inheritance. Resistance may take the form of violent opposition or passive indifference. Resistance is a normal reaction to transformation.

- *Avoiding conflict*. Leaders in general tend to appreciate struggle-free lives and ministries. Avoiding struggle for the sake of tranquility can lead to avoiding transformation. Joan Chittister writes:

  > If we give up in the midst of struggle, we never find out what the struggle would have given us in the end. If we decide to endure it to the end, we come out of it changed by the doing of it. It is a risk of mammoth proportions. We dare the development of the self.” (Chittister 2003, 2)

  Struggle, argues Chittister, is unavoidable for growth. It brings us into direct contact with self and the world. “The great secret of life,” concludes Chittister, “is how to survive struggle without succumbing to it, how to bear struggle without being defeated by it, how to come out of great struggle better than when we found ourselves in the midst of it” (Chittister 2003, 13).

- *Hierarchy.* Church institutions function according to the desires of patriarchs and bishops. Parish leaders and parish councils comply or face repercussions. Bishops

may request that clergy not participate in particular social or political programs or justice activities. One bishop asked his priests not to attend Sabeel's[12] conferences and programs. Another requested that his priests not allow visiting women clergy to sit in the sanctuary. Another rebuked a priest for appearing on TV to discuss injustice. Bishops have suspended priests' salaries and isolated them in monasteries. Fr. Jamal told us how he was removed from his parish and relocated to a convent in Jerusalem because he did not comply with his bishop. Clergy who criticize their institutions' silence in the face of injustice endure cutoffs and reprimands. Fr. Elias told us that his Patriarch forbids him from participating in other denominations' services and activities. Fr. Yousef was suspended because he attended an ecumenical program at another Church. Obedience to ecclesial authority is considered a virtue. Yet obedience need not eliminate identity and mission or result in uniformity and sameness which is the case in most traditional churches. "Divine obedience overrides all obedience to unjust rulers," asserts Allan Boesak. When Peter and John appeared before the Sanhedrin in Acts 5, the apostles' response to their strict orders was "We must obey God rather than any human authority." (Acts 5:29). Boesak explains, "It is when that power is 'divorced from the fear of God' that it becomes abusive, oppressive, and illegitimate, in other words, a 'deadly evil.' And as such it has to be resisted" (Boesak 2015, 57). The leadership of the Orthodox Patriarchate, a Greek expatriate, "has not shown much interest in the life and experience of the local community, which has been a source of strife," said an Orthodox priest. The

[12]Sabeel is an ecumenical Palestinian liberation theology center in Jerusalem. It promotes ecumenical activities among the various denominations in the Holy Land.

Patriarch has had taken retributive measures against indigenous priests, ranging from sacking them to suspending their salaries. Indigenous clergy and community members consider such acts as “blackmail.” The only indigenous Archbishop in the Patriarchate said, “Cutting salaries does not scare us to stop our mission” (Middle East Monitor 2016).

- *Supremacy* that alienates leadership from community and context. In Israel-Palestine, religious leaders enjoy religious as well as social eminence. People revere religious leaders. Religious and social elevation puts leaders into different ranks from common people. This is more recognizable in a context of poverty and oppression. It could also be nurtured by social and political systems that give leaders status and privilege. The Israeli occupation, for example, offers privileges to Christian leaders that alienate them from the experiences of their communities. Jesus reprimanded leaders who seek honor and privilege; he said: “They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi” (Matt 13:6-7). Supremacy also reduces leaders’ sense of responsibility toward victims. Mac Nichol maintains that upsetting supremacy from within requires translating rhetoric “into programmatic commitments to eliminate white supremacist structure in church and society.” She concludes:

> Historical responsibility has after all to do with action –where we place the weight of our existence on the line, cast out lot with others, move from individual consciousness to a collective one. What the stories of white people who have chosen to stand up against white supremacy have to teach us is that the antidote of guilt, self-hatred, and despair is struggle, collective struggle a praxis of self-awareness and history responsibility. (Mac Nichol 2004, 210-211)

- *Denominational dissension* that prevents church leaders from working for the common good. Although there have been ecumenical breakthroughs in the last two decades, denominationalism is still a devastating phenomenon in the Palestinian context. In circumstances of injustice, cooperation among religious faiths is essential for change. Palestinian denominational dissension drains leaders' energy and distracts them from focusing on common threats affecting the Christian community. In the wake of the heinous terrorist attacks on churches in Egypt on Palm Sunday in 2017, I organized a march with clergy and parishioners in solidarity with suffering Copts. An Orthodox priest refused to march with Catholics or use Catholic liturgy. I negotiated alternatives to ensure the participation of all clergy and parishes. Denominational dissension continues to be a key force impeding cooperation, transformation, and justice.
- *Unresponsiveness* of communities toward social involvement. This factor contributes to leadership withdrawal and indifference. Some clergy have reported how difficult it is to nurture social consciousness, especially among younger generations. Disappointment is inevitable even for stalwart leaders.
- *Dualism*, meaning separating the spiritual realm from the socio-economic sphere. Many Palestinian faith leaders choose to avoid the "evil" world of politics. Their mission, they claim, is to save believers from the world and bring them into the domain of the spirit. For these leaders, the advice "Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world," (1 Jn 2:15) is understood to block political engagement. For centuries, dualism has held back Christian believers from involvement in the actual world. Today, for

example, many Palestinian priests consider secular music as belonging to the world, not to the church. Secular songs that evoke social and political concerns corrupt the Christian spirit, they think. "Various Christian traditions have attempted to draw strict boundaries between music suitable for sacred use and music that is not suitable," explains Don E. Saliers (Saliers 2007, 55). *In Music and Theology*, Saliers contends that: "Music and song in times of great pain and disorientation illuminate the truth for generations long after. Hearing and singing some music makes us understand ourselves and our world better – even when there are not explicitly theological texts." Saliers argues that we need to go beyond the dichotomies of sacred and secular into what he calls the "'sacrality' or even the 'sacramentality' of music wherever and whenever we are moved out of ourselves and our habitual, common-sense world" (Saliers 2007, 60).

- *Al Qadah wl Qadar.* This is not a Christian doctrine, but in a predominantly Muslim culture, it affects Christian thought, life, and action. Although distinct from the Presbyterian concept of predestination, "fatalism"[13] has to do with lack of human free will and with the pre-knowledge and "will" of God. Everything in life, including human actions, occurs by the will of Allah. The Surat al Tawba reads, "Say: Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us. He is our Protector, and in Allah, let the believers place their trust." (9:51) The Hadith reads, "If the *Qadar* was mentioned, abstain from discussion." This philosophy can lead to the conclusion that injustice inflicted on a victim is God's *Qadah*, will. Whatever happens is *Qadar,* fate. Acceptance of the will of God

[13]Al Qadah wl Qadar has other theological and philosophical implications. I use the term here as culturally understood, to point to consequences in terms of how leaders rely on the idea to avoid standing against injustice.

should not mean accommodating unjust structures. *Al Qadah wl Qadar*, as culturally understood, is accepting all things as destined, thus blocking leaders from initiating change. Instead of challenging injustice, *Al Qadah wl Qadar* may compel people to accept it.

- *Economic inequity.* Leaders' incomes are at or above the average level for Palestinians as a group. But given 25.9 per cent unemployment, a poverty rate of 25.8 per cent, and an extreme poverty rate of 12.9 per cent, inequality in Palestine is devastating to victims. Religious leaders, especially senior leaders, enjoy lifestyles that may look luxurious to the poor. Patriarchs, bishops, and senior religious leadership may own fancy cars. I was surprised to learn that the bishop of East Tennessee drives his own car over hundreds of miles, while Palestinian bishops hire drivers to travel tiny distances. How do victims of poverty and movement restrictions perceive their leaders' comfortable travel? What message does a priest's lavish lifestyle send to a poor parishioner? When a bishop from the U.S. visited St. Andrew's two years ago, and was asked to preach on Matthew 6:25-34, he paused when he came to the verse "And why do you worry about clothing?" Then he said: "It is difficult to preach about this verse because we, bishops and priests, worry extensively about clothing." A leader's lifestyle sends a message to his community about the possibility of integration.
- *Distraction* is a perennial deterrent to integration and societal engagement. Multi-task ministries may deprive communities of leaders willing to participate in others' lives and experiences. In Palestinian culture, time management is challenging. The priest must be multifunctional. Beside pastoral tasks, a priest

must teach, oversee institutions, lead committees, and participate in programs. Cultural indifference to time makes matters worse. Political and security restrictions eat into time, especially when engagement requires moving from one place to another. Palestinian clergy also travel abroad. During my project, Sojourners had to call off some meetings and immersions due to lack of time.

- *Lack of or mismanagement of resources.* "Good interventions also take into account the resources available" (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 35). Lack of resources can limit leaders' involvement and impede development. Community outreach programs in Israeli-Palestine have for a long time depended on contributions from international supporters. Institutional centrality reduces the impact of donations, which in many cases do not achieve their purposes. Some international entities stopped sending donations through patriarchates and dioceses after learning that funding had failed to reach its destination. Moreover, "the church owns assets in the form of property and pilgrimage revenues, but mismanagement deprives communities of programs that could create employment, reduce poverty, and limit emigration," said Ibrahim, and we agreed.
- *Suffering*. Some regard this concept as punishment from God. Others think pain should be avoided since it is against God's will. God came to earth so that people may have life, and have it abundantly. Success, prosperity, and tranquility are cherished as God's providence, whereas poverty and challenges are seen as evil. The Suffering Servant in Isaiah is not an attractive model. Righteous suffering for the sake of others has been discredited by many contemporary religious leaders. In *Leading from the Heart: Lifetime Reflections on Spiritual Development*, Robert

Boyd Munger writes: “Today, much of the drive is for grabbing and getting rather than giving; for security and comfort, not sacrifice, for self-interest rather than self-giving. Today, we want to be entertained, not enlightened” (Munger 1995, 100-101). In his life and ministry, Jesus went to places of forsakenness and denial, sharing the conditions of the poor and the weak, the defenseless and the fearful, those considered nothing by the privileged and the powerful. Suffering for the sake of justice was Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the cost of discipleship. For Bonhoeffer, discipleship means standing where Jesus stands, “under the cross.” Boesak writes, “As he followed the path of costly discipleship ‘step by step,’ Bonhoeffer understood more and more that that place –‘under the cross’ – is to be found with the ‘children, and the morally and socially ‘least of these’, those viewed as less worthy.’ These were the ones who were being crucified, the ones who represent Christ ‘in our midst’” (Boesak 2015, 72). For Bonhoeffer, all those whom the Nazis rejected, despised, and persecuted – Jews, homosexuals, the disabled, Roma, communists, resistors – are Christ’s companions. To stand where Christ stands is to inter-be and inter-act with victims of oppression. Boesak claims that Bonhoeffer took us back to the New Testament *martyria.* Boesak writes:

> [*Martyria* is] standing with Christ and suffering with Christ for the sake of righteousness and peace, amidst and against the harsh realities of pain and suffering, humiliation, hunger, and death... We dream the dreams of God: namely of justice and peace, of mercy and compassion; of a different, more humane world we work to make possible through our acts of *martyria*. *Martyria* is resistance. (Boesak 2015, 73-74)

- *Minority consciousness*. Palestinian Christians are a minority in a relatively unfriendly Muslim culture. Such context encourages disinterest and alienation.

But most devastating is the minority consciousness that develops within the Christian ethos in a community that is excluded. In "The Five Stages of Minority Consciousness," Pajah Willians asserts that minority consciousness can lead to grief in all its stages – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. "The effects of racism, sexism, and homophobia," writes Williams, "are both pervasive and systematic," and can internalize hatred that leads to alienation or violence. (Williams 2016). When people are ostracized, they react with frustration about identity, context, and belonging. When anger is internalized, it can lead to disintegration and alienation; when it is externalized it can lead to violence. "Externalized anger is ever-developing in the African American community today in light of recent events involving wrongful killing and police brutality," explains Williams (Williams 2016). While anger is a natural response to exclusion, when it overwhelms a group it produces cynicism and disinterest. (Williams 2016). The Christian community exists in a conflict situation where it suffers religious and political entrapment. An entrapped minority perceives itself as weak and ineffective. Minority entrapment leads to disinterest, disintegration, and/or cutoff. The Christian community in Israel is entrapped in its homeland, in the occupying state of its identity, in a culture with which it shares some characteristics. Palestinian Christians, although Israeli citizens, continue to live at the political, economic, and administrative mercy of an occupying regime they did not choose.

- *Lack of vision*. "Where there is no vision, the people perish," reads Proverbs (29:18 KJV). Effective leadership inspires vision, one that steers a mission. Such vision is prophetic, seeking advancement rather than accommodation to a status

> quo that leaves the community inactive and reactive. Leaders read the signs of the times, envision the future, and strategically plot out change. Vision must inspire the community to participate in realizing it. Effective leadership enables people to envision possibilities and opportunities for change. It fosters teamwork. It nurtures an atmosphere of mutual interest and sets an example for others to follow. Shared leadership is an antidote to hierarchy.

The excuses and challenges above can cause voluntary and involuntary retreat. They may extinguish the flame of change. Understanding these factors requires rethinking the role of religious leaders. Limitations are transformable through deep philosophical, religious, political, cultural, and theological reconstruction. Leaders need to reconstruct and reframe their identities and missions in relation to these limitations in order to bring change.

Identity: Who are we in Relation to our Context?

The next question Sojourners engaged in was that of leadership identity. What is religious leadership? What does it mean to be a priest, a pastor, a community or church institution leader? Thus we ask, "Who are we?" in relation to the context. The classic advice, "Know thyself," is imperative. Unless we know who we are in relation to our context, our sojourn will be pointless and worthless. The wellbeing and effectiveness of leadership for transformation depends on clear understanding and articulation of leadership identity. "The recovery of oneself," asserts Thich Nhat Hanh as quoted by Bell Hooks, "can be realized in just one portion of one second. And to be aware of who we are, what we are, what we are doing, what we are thinking, seems to be a very easy thing to do – and yet it is the most important thing to remember – the starting point of the

salvation of oneself" (Hooks 2001, xi). Soulful and societal transformation starts when leaders define their identities and missions in relation to the context and its anxieties. Looking for an alternative, the Jews sent messengers to the Baptist asking for an alternative to their situation. The evangelist narrates:

> The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.' (Jn 1:19b-23)

In prison, John the Baptist himself searches for the identity of Jesus the Messiah. Astonishingly, Jesus provides an alternative identity – one that is interconnected with mission, thus becoming a missional identity.

> [John] sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.' (Mt 11:2-6)

Pondering on the above texts, one can observe that John had already heard about Jesus and what he was doing, but it seems that John doubted that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Jesus' missional identity was an unanticipated alternative to the dominant consciousness. His is an identity of capacity to witness "what you hear and see." His missional identity is for those who are neglected, marginalized, and forgotten: the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, and the poor.

Jesus himself was aware of the importance of properly defining and articulating his identity. On the way to Jerusalem to be crucified, Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and

still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah'" (Mk 8:27-29). Jesus was not satisfied with what others expected. He was concerned with true identity, confessed by those who shared his journey. Identity can be imposed, framed or defined by others; it is easy for leaders to fall short and let others define them. Jesus renounced the imposition of false definitions and rebuked Peter's rejection of an unconventional, unexpected identity: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (Mk 8:33b). Jesus' identity, thus, is an untraditional, unconventional, divine missional one, and as such it is dynamic and always tied to action, purpose, and impact.

Identity is a force that requires definition and articulation at the very genesis of a mission of transformation. What does it mean to be a leader in relation to the context of occupation, economic injustice, racism, movement restrictions, and intolerance? What are our core values? How are we differentiated from other traditions, faiths, and leaders? What is our capacity to carry out a mission of transformation? What are our weaknesses and strengths? What opportunities do we have?

These questions are imperative for leadership for transformation. Sojourners asserted that our identity should be defined only by us, and not dictated by others or reactive to others' expectations. "We usually follow the identity of our bishops and denominations," explained Imad. "Sometimes the political system or culture defines the leader's identity. The culture imposes itself and dictates who leaders need to be and what they are required to do," added Luna. In the Palestinian context – and in other contexts – diverse forces attempt to define the identity of leadership: the largely Muslim culture, the restrictions and/or enticements of the occupying force, world powers, national interest,

interfaith relations, ecumenicalism, and many other factors that prevent or restrict Christian leadership from defining its identity and mission as it sees fit. By no means dose the articulation of identity separate leadership from its surroundings; on the contrary, leadership defines itself in relation to external forces but strives for self-differentiation. “We are not political leaders, nor should we accommodate the desires of cultural or senior leaders, or be defined by any other power. We are followers of Christ and define ourselves in relation to our calling,” I stressed

Sojourners recognized the “identity crisis” among Palestinian Christian leaders, and the complex motivations of religious, social, cultural, and political forces trying to define our identity for us. Christian leaders in the Palestinian context are Palestinians, Arabs, and Christians; they may be citizens of Israel, the Palestinian Territory, Jordan and/or elsewhere. Identity definition and formation entails articulation, but also self-defense, mainly against stereotyping. In his book, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, Naim Ateek describes the complex identity of a Palestinian leader in terms of conflict, but also in terms of stereotyping. Ateek writes:

> As a person who comes from the Middle East, I embody the different stereotyping to which my people has [have] been subjected. Once I define or introduce myself, a number of contradictory images surface in the minds of many people. Some are curious; others are stunned… There are four important words that, cumulatively, make up my identity: I am a Christian, a Palestinian, an Arab, and an Israeli. If I wanted to add to the confusion of the reader and complete the picture, I would add that I am an Episcopal (Anglican) and a clergyman.” (Ateek 1990, 13)

Leadership identity can be a mighty force for justice, but it can also be a defeating force. An identity crisis may trigger shame, fear, antagonism, and withdrawal. In *Caught in Between: The Extraordinary Story of an Arab Palestinian Christian Israeli*, Riah Abu El-Assal gives us the unique insight of a bishop who defines himself as an Arab,

Palestinian, Christian, Israeli" (Abu El-Assal 1999, ix). Abu El-Assal, provides a good example of a Christian leader who is a Palestinian Christian but also an Israeli citizen trying to confront the injustice of an oppressive occupation – that is, his own state. The dilemma of leadership identity has dire consequences for the mission of transformation and justice, including what Abu El-Assal describes as being a "Prisoner in my Own Country." Abu El-Assal's political advocacy made him prisoner after he was forbidden to leave Israel for a period of one year. He writes: "Such accusations made me afraid for my life and especially for my family, since [the government] left us open to attack from any radical element which chose to believe them" (Abu El-Assal 1999, 115).

Are Palestinian religious leaders prisoners in our country through political, theological, cultural, or psychological forces? Are we prisoners of fear, of losing legal status or prestige? Are we prisoners of false ideologies or ignorance? When the heads of churches visited the President of the State of Israel, Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos said on behalf of the group: "We take this opportunity of this holiday gathering to express our gratitude for the firmness with which you defend the freedoms that lie at the heart of this democracy, especially the freedom of worship" (The Tower, 2016). Commenting on the Patriarch's address, Palestinian leader Hanan Ashrawi replied that the Patriarch was "very well informed of the Israeli violations of freedom of worship of his own community…and the occupation of the Saint John Convent nearby the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, today turned into another illegal Israeli settlement." Ashrawi asserted that the Patriarch's message contradicted the facts about Palestinian Christians. She said: "Thousands of Palestinian Christians cannot access their holy sites in Occupied East Jerusalem due to Israel's illegal annexation Wall and other movement

restrictions…Undoubtedly, Patriarch Theophilos knows very well the situation of thousands of Palestinian families including hundreds of Christian families that have been divided due to racist Israeli citizenship laws." (The Times of Israel 2016).

Sojourners maintained that clear leadership identity is imperative for healthy, efficacious societal engagement and transformation. The question that needs to be raised continually is, "Who do we say that we are?" Answering it defines what kind of mission we embark upon toward greater justice and mercy.

Mission: What is our Mission in the Context we Live in?

Related to knowing our context and our identity is knowing our mission: What is our vocation in the context in which we live? What is our responsibility toward a context where injustice is pervasive? What is our vision? Who defines our mission? These questions helped link Sojourners with the purposes of their journeys.

Sojourners offered several observations after pondering these questions. First, the context in which we live and serve is a complex situation where many universal, regional, national, political, religious, economic, social, and cultural forces interact. The second observation was that the chief victims of this complicated situation are the poor, the marginalized, women, the elderly, prisoners and their families, those who have lost children to conflict or emigration, the mentally or physically challenged, and the environment itself. The "wealthy and strong may also be victims, but they are often able to find ways out, or to manipulate the situation to their own advantage," elaborated Imad.

The third observation concerns the role of the church and its leadership in our context. It was our view that "the church believes it demonstrates commitment to assist victims by providing pastoral care, aid to the poor, and substantial support to the

educational and health sectors." Nonetheless the community of victims largely characterizes church leaders as "busy," "indifferent," "unaware," "fearful," "self-interested," and "vain."[14]

The fourth observation, which emerged as we tried to find adequate descriptions for the lives, experiences, and conditions of the victims, was that we had very little previous knowledge of their contexts. Our lack of knowledge prevented us from being able to help them in their oppression and to advocate effectively for them. We discovered that although we knew our parishioners and their individual trials, we knew little about the political, social, and economic pressures on the larger community. Most of what we knew came from second-hand stories or the media, blocking engagement on a personal level. But not knowing is not an excuse to fail to defend the weak.

This project helped us recognize that the unknown needs to be made known. We confessed, "Yes! We were supposed to defend the weak. We were supposed to condemn terror, occupation, and oppression, and help dismantle oppressive structures that continue to dehumanize our community." Acknowledging our ignorance was the sign of our transformation. Confessing prompted us to keep embarking on journeys of personal transformation, which are steps toward engaging in societal transformation.

In a TED talk entitled *How We Cut Youth Violence in Boston by 79 Percent*, Jeffrey Brown describes stepping out into the streets of the city to understand what was happening. After witnessing first-hand a violent incident, Brown realized the gulf between his church and his neighborhood: "It was like we were in two completely different worlds." He explained:

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[14] These were some of the victims' answers to the questions: How do you describe the church leadership's response to your suffering? Was church leadership available to help you in your suffering? Did you seek the church? Was the church involved in your suffering?

> And so we decided to walk together, and we would get together in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city on a Friday night and on a Saturday night at 10 p.m., and we would walk until 2 or 3 in the morning. It was probably a really odd thing...They were watching us, and they wanted to make sure…we were going to be consistent in our behavior, that we would keep coming out there; and then secondly, they had wanted to make sure that we weren't out there to exploit them…So…they decided to talk to us…We decided to listen and not preach. We said to them, 'We don't know our own communities after 9 p.m. at night, between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m., but you do. You are the subject matter experts, if you will, of that period of time. So talk to us. Teach us. Help us to see what we're not seeing. Help us to understand what we are not understanding.' And they were all too happy to do that, and we got an idea of what life on the streets was all about, very different than what you see on the 11 o'clock news, very different than what is portrayed in popular media and even social media.' (Brown 2015)

With a group of community leaders, Brown walked Boston's neighborhoods and discovered how this experience helped him uncover the truth about his context and conceptualize a new theology. Brown says: "I have learned some of my most important life lessons from drug dealers and gang members and prostitutes, and I have had some of my most profound theological conversation not in the hallowed halls of a seminary but on a street corner on a Friday night, at 1 a.m." (Brown 2015). Brown argues that transforming his neighborhood did not come about through sermons, television ministry, building cathedrals, or buying property for the church, but through immersing himself in the hidden particularities of the city. It is all about having one's boots on the ground and risking leaving one's comfort zone. (Brown 2015)

On the streets of his neighborhood, Brown discovered that what he thought he knew was false. He learned how to connect the threads of failing housing policies, poor educational structures, persistent unemployment and underemployment, poor health care, street abusers, and dysfunctional governing strategies. On the streets, myths are dismantled and the truth is uncovered. With "boots on the ground", leaders discover

interlinked forces that provide the very definition of community oppression and suffering. In understanding the roots of community dysfunction, leaders learn the importance of collaboration for the common good.

As Sojourners stepped out of our institutional comfort zones, we were shaken by what we experienced. When leaders are agitated by direct experiences, they become agitators. Reformers who changed the path of history were agitators. "Christ was the greatest Agitator the world has ever known, directing his efforts as he did against long cherished customs, habits, opinions, institutions, and religion of the world, his career was calculated to shake the very foundations of the social impact." Harriet Beecher Stowe continues:

> As [Jesus] went from place to place proclaiming views, at war with the most venerable institutions to the age, he was seized as a disturber of the public peace, and the excited multitude hurled their invective upon his defenseless head. He was changed with moving the people to sedition and rebellion against their rulers. He was stigmatized as an enemy to 'law and order.' In short, he was arrested, condemned, and crucified as an Agitator, too dangerous to be abroad. (Stowe 1853, 2)

In the footsteps of the great agitator, reformers and transformers like Peter, Paul, Luther, Calvin, Wickliffe, King, Mother Teresa, and Desmond Tutu, to name a few, were also agitators who sought to change their contexts. Stowe argues that agitation, as a social "law," brings about societal improvements in proportion to the diffusion of knowledge and truth. When people aspire to live their days only as they lived yesterday, individuals, communities, and societies become stagnant in the face of hierarchy, tyranny, and corruption.

The role of the church today in stagnant situations of injustice is to stir souls, minds, and consciences and to push individuals and communities toward reform. Throughout history, reformers and transformers were agitated by the spirit of freedom

and love to bring change to institutions and societies. Martin Luther not only reformed the Church but also encouraged communities and societies to reject stagnant faith and make moral and spiritual decisions. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the greatest agitators in modern times. King understood that the spirit of God is ever-moving, ever-freeing, and always filling people's hearts and minds with the ability to see themselves as God's children. Stagnant faith accepted slavery. Agitating faith rejects subjugation of the human mind, soul, and spirit. Agitation is not an arbitrary force, neither is it irresponsible. It engages in examining possibilities and restrictions in order to achieve its goals. It empowers communities to change their situations. Stowe writes:

> [Agitation] is not always the rushing whirlwind, nor the 'full stiff breeze,' not yet always the gentile gale. It is sometimes one, and sometimes another of these forces…It bears torch and hammer both. It overthrows, to lay deeper and broader foundations. It de-story's, to con-struct. It tears down, to build up. It agitates, to quiet. It shatters, to solidify. 'It is a conservative of all that is good –a reformer of all that is evil; a conservative of knowledge, a reformer of ignorance; a conservative of truths and principles, whose seat is the bosom of God…a reformer of those earthly wrongs and abuses, which spring from the great Law of Human progress. It is Reforming Conservative, and Conservative Reformer.(Stowe 1853, 8-9)

Methodology

The methodology used in this immersion project is phenomenological: I attempt to understand the interrelatedness among leadership, justice, and transformation in the Palestinian context. The purpose of phenomenological methodology is to examine reciprocal effects of elements in a paradigm, e.g., transformation in terms of social, political, and religious systems from the perspective of victims of injustice. To accompany, listen, inquire, immerse, and advocate for victims of injustice takes leaders out of the seminary, the pulpit, their offices, and church premises. The process requires

leadership repertoire to read context accurately, generate meaning that gives rise to reflection, and help reveal the richness of possibility. When a suffering context gives an intelligible account of itself and its patterns, it can teach truths beyond subjective experiences. The paradigm I adopted aims to open minds and provoke critical reflection and action. In his book, *Water Buffalo Theology*, Kosuke Koyama describes his methodology as a theological experience. He states: "My theological experience in the community of faith in Thailand became an open-ended methodology" (Koyama 1999, x). Koyama's "*lived methodology*" came as he learned the Thai language and when he began "to see the face of God in the faces of people" (Koyama 1999, x). He argues that "'Third World Theology' begins by raising issues, not by digesting Augustine, Barth, and Rahner" (Koyama 1999, 3). Koyama's methodology raises the question: how can one know where one is going before starting to walk? A lived methodology is a free methodology – one that does not preclude possible surprises. Koyama asserts that "the Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, treasure the image of the one who went out 'not knowing where he was going'" (Koyama 1999, xi). Lived methodology spawns humiliation and dependency – two virtues required for transformation. Koyama writes: "For me, learning the language was a spiritual experience of repentance. And what is theological methodology if it is not repentance?" (Koyama 1999, x).

Immersion is a methodology of engagement in the social, economic, and political order. In *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*, Willis Jenkins begins with the assertion that Christianity, like other traditions, must be equipped to sustain its meaning and relevance in changing conditions, or face collapse (Jenkins 2013, 67). Jenkins proposes theocentric pragmatism to elevate the engagement

of Christianity in seeking social, economic, and environmental justice. “Christian ethics should work from problems rather than worldviews because problems mediate theologically charged demands, thus driving the inventiveness of communities seeking to open practices of faith through their responses” (Jenkins 2013, 95).

Immersion as a method of engagement is inductive rather than deductive. Perceptions and beliefs become guidelines for discovering God’s presence and work among the oppressed and poor. An inductive methodology for transformation and justice cherishes the journey rather than the results. Quoted by Bell Hooks, Martin Luther King Jr. affirms that “Salvation is being on the right road, not having reached a destination” (Hooks 2001, iv). The linkage of leadership and context makes possible an encounter where divine ethos meets human pathos.

A transformative immersion methodology is corporate and collective. It necessitates teamwork, and seeks the wellbeing of society at large in addition to that of the individual, denomination, and community. In a context of injustice, corporate strategy is necessary for success. Sojourners cherished the support we provided to one another. The joint services and parish activities that we established between the Episcopal and Lutheran communities in Ramallah would not have been possible without the commitment the project engendered. We noticed how our habitual self-centeredness hampered development of relationships. The context of injustice we faced together heightened our concern for sustaining community and institutions. We began to look at our society as a whole, where each one of us is a member. Through the project, we learned that our actions were most effective when undertaken collectively. We participated in sharing, discovering, and advocating justice together – a breakthrough for

ecumenical relationships. The power of being and working together transformed our divisions. Relational action toward a shared vision involves communal crafting of a mission as well as communal execution of it. Relational action for justice is an act of continual revision, made possible by the rich diversity of participants.

Transformative immersion is by nature praxis-oriented, empowering others' lives through the life journeys of leaders, who themselves grow through sojourning in ever-changing contexts. Being on the road implies transformation in process; that is, through praxis. Disappointed by the reaction of theology and ecclesiology in an oppressive context, liberation theologians have taken action to help the poor, the marginalized, and the defenseless. Christian theology and mission, they argue, must begin with a view of life from below, as seen and experienced by the oppressed. Among the features of liberation theology is its grounding in praxis. Alister McGrath writes:

> Liberation theology involves critical reflection on practice. As Gutierrez puts it, theology is a 'critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the word of God.' Theology is not, and should not be, detached from social involvement or political action. Whereas classical western theology regarded action as the result of reflection, liberation theology inverts the order: Action comes first, followed by critical reflection. (McGrath 1997, 117)

Reflecting on the connections among liberation theologies worldwide, Mary Potter Engel and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite emphasize that liberation theologies have a common praxis model – one that gives emphasis to historical and social settings. Praxis should be understood as a "web of relationality rather than action or practice" (Thistlethwaite and Engel, 1998, 8). Engel and Thistlethwaite explain: Liberation theologies "go beyond the liberal tradition, however, in calling attention to the economic and political complexities and particularities of the social dimension of theology. For

liberation theologians praxis means that the historical process in one's social location is critical to the theological task" (Thistlethwaite and Engel 1998, 7).

A transformative immersion methodology takes place within a contextual ethical framework rather than within a framework of universals. Proposing a single ethical framework for addressing complex and nuanced issues is bound to be challenging – when it is possible at all. Trying to create a shared, globalized moral ethic, argues Jenkins, often results in a vague set of standards that become difficult to act upon in concrete situations. For example, determining who should have the right to declare this moral ethic is not easy. In the end, standards are likely to be set by those with power and privilege. Jenkins states, "An ethic with ambition to transform lived moralities across the world in the light of its novel vision could easily become globalizing cultural imperialism" (Jenkins 2013, 124). In *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*, Jenkins proposes an alternative approach based on projects that religious communities have addressed. These community-driven projects aim at environmental justice, social justice, and equality, operating within a framework of pragmatic pluralism. It is often the case, notes Jenkins, that ethical inquiry begins from a place of values and worldview, and *then* moves to address concrete problems (Jenkins 2013, 17). Jenkins presents an alternative model that begins with confronting an issue *before* engaging in ethical interpretation of it:

> [This] book therefore argues for a more pragmatic way of thinking about the task of religious ethics and its role in adaptive social change. I start from climate change, rather than beliefs about creation or moral worldviews, in order to illustrate how ethics can develop its task from attention to concrete problems and critical engagement with initial reform project. Those efforts are chronically inadequate, but good reform projects make that chronic inadequacy a source of normative creativity, expanding

> the competence of their traditions through innovative ways of practicing their meaning. (Jenkins 2013, 20)

Pragmatic pluralism allows for work on issues of shared concern across religious lines and among diverse communities. In this sense, Jenkins ensures the relevance of the Christian community, and at the same time asks it to connect with other perspectives:

> My approach is pluralist and nonfoundationalist in that it does not suppose that the world needs to share a common faith or worldview in order to cooperate in confronting shared problems. Insofar as gathering all humanity in one shared belief has been a special emphasis of Christian evangelism, I argue that religious ethics should not be methodologically "Christian" in that way. The world does not necessarily need a shared metaphysics of nature of creation story in order to conform to climate change. (Jenkins 2013, 6)

Jenkins holds the view that approaching pressing matters such as climate change requires communal effort of partners. Pragmatic pluralism is useful in the Palestinian context because Its approach facilitates a "practical solidarity in a pluralist world," (Jenkins 2013, 131) that is, it accommodates a diversity of global world views, and encourages relationships to address issues of common concern without the assumption that all beliefs, values, or worldviews will be the same. Pragmatic pluralism requires a shared vision of "good," and a belief in the value of relationships.

The immersion experiences of Sojourners drew together and nurtured a diverse community of learners who wanted to identify problems through encounter and research. Via experiential learning, we came to believe that advocating justice required transforming our perceptions, prejudices, faith, and praxis. The journey started within ourselves and moved into our churches, institutions, streets, and society. We discovered truths that had been hidden. At the core of our immersion experiences was learning about ourselves, about the treasures in our contexts, and about the need for capabilities to sharpen our missions.

A Sojourning Theology

The book of Genesis describes the ever-moving wind of God sweeping over the face of the waters (Gn 1:2) – a depiction of a spirit over an ever-changing context. St. Paul describes human life as a sojourn on this earth toward a permanent residence (2 Cor 5:1-10). Jesus sojourned with his companion sojourners throughout his incarnation, death and resurrection. To sojourn toward the Sacred is to enter into being with those whom Jesus called brothers and sisters. To have faith in an accompanying God is to live and walk with God and fellow creatures. To live is to sojourn – humans recognize that faith is a journey encompassing all that God has made. Transformative leadership asserts that a faithful journey must be walked with others and for others. As humans journey together, they acknowledge that their sacred walk will uncover pain and vulnerability. Ultimately, our sojourns should amount to acts of faith in a God who reaches out to his people to provide solutions: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry…Indeed, I know their sufferings…And I have come down to deliver them…and to bring them up…to a good and broad land" (Ex 3:7-8). Like Moses, humans recognize that in a mission for justice, we "stand on holy ground" (Ex 3:5). We should accede to the call of a liberating God to observe the misery of people, hear their cries, know their suffering, deliver them from oppression, and bring them to goodness.

What does theology have to do with the Christian life? With the development of scholasticism, theology became a discipline somehow separated from the life of the church and community. It is no wonder that victims ask what theology means for them. Theodore W. Jennings Jr. contends that "indeed a gulf of mutual suspicion and even antagonism seems to separate the work of systematic and constructive theology from the

institution and corporate life of denominations and communities of faith" (Jennings 1988, 10). In *The Liturgy of Liberation: The Confession and Forgiveness of Sins*, Jennings argues that the loss of a relationship with the world has harmed both theology and the church. Jennings asserts:

> The result of this malaise is that theology as a reflection on the basic character of Christian faith seems nearly to have disappeared, while the community of faith takes on the character of a voluntary association whose Christian identity is simply assumed but seldom made evident. Theology appears sterile. The church appears barren. Both have become preoccupied, gazing at themselves in a mirror—turned inward. Both have lost their principal theme—the identity and meaning of the Christian faith. (Jennings 1988, 11)

The impetus of theological reflection in the first half of the 19th century was toward church practice, including proclamation and mission. With the colonization of the "Third World," new questions had a huge impact on theological reflection and the construction of theology. Questions that arose in the context of colonialism have changed the face of theology. Is Christianity a European religion? Can it be non-European: African, Asian, Latin America, or Palestinian? What does theology have to say about imperial powers and how they affect colonizers? Does theology have anything to say to those whose lives are at stake? These questions on Christian identity and responsibility paved the way for liberation theology, where the vivacity of community and robustness of theology are closely intertwined. Jennings explains: "Only by way of serious attention to the identity, the life, the actual practice of the Christian community can theology once again become a meaningful and vigorous discipline. Only by way of a critical reflection on the basis and aim of its practice, and its life, can the Church acquire a compelling sense of its identity and mission" (Jennings 1988, 12).

The mission of the church today is to sojourn. The church has millennia of experience in addressing injustice toward the homeless, refugees, outcasts, the poor, battered women and children, and the marginalized. Church leaders, by virtue of their calling and commitment are accountable to their communities to help transform their world-as-it-is into a world-as-intended by God. Leadership stands on the front lines in the fight against unjust structures. It has the ability to create, nurture, and promulgate an alternative paradigm dedicated to ushering in the divine reign. God bursts into human history to bring righteousness, justice, freedom, and hope. As Sojourners, we contend that God has called on us not to maintain a system or preserve the status quo, but to follow in the footsteps of the one who made kings worry (Mt 2:3); who agitated worshipers' rage (Lk 4:28); who confronted traditions (Mk 7); who made rich people grieve (Mk 10:22); who overturned temple businesses (Mk 11:15-16); who scattered the proud (Le 1:51); who brought the powerful down from their throne (Lk 1:52); who sent the rich away empty (Lk 1:53); who blessed the servant (Lk 1:48); lifted up the lowly (Lk 1:52); gave good news to the poor, released captives, offered the blind recovery of sight, freed the oppressed, and proclaimed the Lord's favor (Lk 4:18-19); touched and healed lepers (Mt 8:3); gave the deaf hearing (Mk 7: 34-35); made the demon come out (Mk 5:8); helped the paralyzed arise (Mk 2: 11-12); and brought the dead back to life (Mk 5:41).

In the footsteps of Jesus, religious leadership has, for millennia, fostered human imagination and stirred human capacity. Inspiration and education are now being harnessed for justice and social change. As wellsprings for justice, leaders have historical experience, spiritual development, and social endorsement in articulating sacred-human relations, guiding human affairs, and orienting community involvement. As agents in

God's Kingdom, leaders reflect God's role in providing compassion and justice. Leaders should ask what their contributions will be to bringing justice to the world. Where do opportunities exist? And how should we seize these opportunities?

An unjust system prefers sheep without shepherds. The Gospel tells us that when "Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 9:36). Oppressive systems reject, deport, intimidate, and destroy leaders, because they threaten the status quo. Structures of injustice thrive on passivity and compliance. By targeting leaders, unjust systems destroy forces of resistance and sources of alternatives. Daring and competent leadership should be a priority for any movement to oppose controlling structures.

Our immersion project helped us claim our identity and mission in the Palestinian context. We expressed emotions, desires, dreams, challenges, and differences. We discovered stories that had not been told. We embarked on missions that had not been tried. We accompanied the forgotten; discovered the invisible; listened to the neglected; immersed in the unfamiliar; and advocated for the defenseless. We looked for truth in city streets, where we found learning resources, signs, and mysteries. We tried to interpret them in light of the love of God. We chose to step outside the walls of our sanctuaries and comfort zones and to accompany rather than invite; listen rather than preach; inquire rather than articulate; immerse rather than withdraw; advocate rather than accommodate. The beginning of our own transformation has come from the opportunity to live among those whose lives depend on the in-breaking of God's reign in the human context. Continuing the process requires effective and competent leadership to transform conditions of injustice to oases of peace, love, justice, and brotherliness.

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Chapter Two: Accompany

Jewish and Christian faiths have journeying traditions. There is nothing static about Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Moses, Ruth, David, Mary, Jesus, or Paul, to name a few. Faith has been a nomadic undertaking. Jesus was always on the road; likewise, the first disciples wandered far afield to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. In their travels, individuals and communities share faith and hope as well as experiences of suffering and oppression. "Christianity," affirms Joerg Rieger, "is not primarily a matter of pews and buildings; Christianity is a matter of the road" (Rieger 2015, 10).

Today, religion is often treated as a static thing, where communities bind themselves to particular buildings and places of worship. For many, church is a space, and anywhere outside that space is not church. In this chapter, we will rediscover faith in its travels. We will examine what happens when leaders hit the road, reaching out for stories and engaging in new situations. The paradigm of leadership for transformation and justice starts on the road with one's boots on the ground. To accompany means to inter-be with victims of oppression in their very particular contexts. Accompanying others on their journeys helps leaders broaden horizons and think and act outside institutional premises. It brings leaders into neighborhoods, society, and the world where suffering, poverty, oppression, hopelessness, and fear are inescapable. .

This chapter examines our immersion experience at a border checkpoint for workers entering Israel territory. It helps rediscover accompaniment in biblical narratives.

It constructs a theology of accompaniment. It uses lenses of social sciences to help better explain the impact of accompaniment on leadership.

A Checkpoint Early in the Morning

Checkpoints and roadblocks frame historical, geographical, political, economic, social, and spiritual aspects of life. Israeli military checkpoints limit movement for all Palestinians, but their consequences are among the most pervasive for the workforce. The Israeli economy uses Palestinian labor, and hundreds of thousands of Palestinian workers depend for their livelihoods on jobs in Israel. They need permits to work in Israel and the settlements, so every day, they show their papers at checkpoints.

Our group of Sojourners had questions about the everyday working lives of Palestinians. Abla mentioned: “Notwithstanding the fact that I hold an American passport, I couldn’t travel to Jerusalem to see my sister because my working permit is restricted to “Judea and Samaria.”[15] “I am afraid that Israel will revoke my permit if I try to travel. Then I will lose my job. I can’t jeopardize either my work or my ability to continue to live in Birzeit, my hometown,” Abla explained. This led us into a discussion about movement restrictions and checkpoints.

Palestinian leaders, including church officials, receive travel passes that allow them to use special crossings through VIP passageways not accessible to common people. It is possible for religious leaders to “pass by on the other side” (cf. Lk 10: 31) and not experience checkpoints as most Palestinians do. Ramallah has military checkpoints located at every entrance. One of these is designated for diplomats and dignitaries, including religious leaders, to cross without hindrance. Leaders have the

[15] “Judea and Samaria” is the name Israel uses for the West Bank.

privilege of avoiding going through ordinary checkpoints, which invariably have long lines. Ibrahim, Imad, John, and I have special permits. We also receive permits to travel through Israel's airport, Ben Gurion, which is not possible for most Palestinians. We have other VIP identification cards that allow us to travel to Jordan without enduing the experiences of most Palestinians. Recently, some clergy including Ibrahim and I received special permits to drive our own cars into Israel. Our discussion raised questions: "What about those who are far less fortunate?" "What kind of restrictions do they undergo?" "What consequences do restrictions of movement have on work opportunity, income, families, relationships as well as self-respect and human dignity?" Regrettably, we could not give an adequate account of the Palestinian workforce experience.

Sojourners decided to accompany Palestinian workers. The group we accompanied starts the process of crossing into Israel very early in the morning to arrive at work on time. Only three Sojourners embarked on the journey. Imad, Nader, and I decided to go; the rest of the group opted out. Ibrahim said, "It will be difficult to do it in the morning because I have a day-long commitment." John asked for time to think, but did not call to inform us of his decision. Abla and Luna said the experience might be dangerous. We planned to drive in two cars, since Nader had to be back at 7:00 a.m. We arrived at 4:00 at Qalandia military barricade. The first thing we learned was how difficult it is to get up so early in the morning and how much life there is on our roads in the early hours of the day. Considering that there is sometimes conflict along the road we traveled, the drive to the checkpoint made us anxious.

Sojourners spent four hours at the checkpoint, close enough to observe but not so close as to arouse the suspicions of Israeli soldiers. Workers had already started to line up

for inspection. At the checkpoint, there were two internationals, one from Germany and the other from Norway. We introduced ourselves as clergy from Ramallah doing an immersion experience. They told us about their Accompaniment Program.[16] We learned that rush hour is between 5:30 and 8:00 a.m. We talked to one worker who arrived early. He explained, "It's better to wait at outside my job site than to get stuck here during rush hour, arrive late, and risk losing my job." Another said, "One never knows how much time it takes to cross. It depends on the soldiers at the checkpoint." Another said, "my work starts at 7:00 and I leave home early to avoid being late." A journey to work taking 20 minutes without checkpoints may take as long as three hours in present circumstances.

Talking to workers at the checkpoint was not easy because workers need to hurry inside the crossing area and queue. The checkpoint consists of four separated areas. When the main door closed, we were able to talk to workers, but as soon as it opened, workers rushed inside. One worker was not in a hurry. We explained what we were doing and asked whether he was willing to talk to us. Amjad is from a village near Ramallah. He is married and has two children. He has been working in Israel for the last seven years. He leaves home at 5:00 a.m. and usually gets back after 9:00 p.m. We asked whether he gets a chance to spend time with his family. He said, "I leave when they are asleep and come back when they are asleep." "Why not find a job in the West Bank?" we asked "There is no work, and if one is lucky enough to find a job, the wage is too low to support a family. Some contractors cheat us, but my contractor in Israel is very

[16] The Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) is a program coordinated by the World Council of Churches (WCC) to bring internationals to the West Bank. Its mission is to accompany vulnerable Palestinians and help local communities facing threats from the military or settlers. Its work involves witnessing life under occupation, engaging with local Palestinians and Israelis, challenging the international community's involvement in the conflict, and urging internationals to act against injustice in the region.

supportive. In Israel, the wage is higher and I do another job after work." Amjad works at a construction site in an Israeli settlement. We asked, "What does it feel to work in a settlement built on a Palestinian land?" "I need to support my family, and working in the settlements is profitable. A worker in Israel makes triple what one gets in the West Bank. There is always a chance to have a job in the settlements," he replied.

We learned from the EAPPI volunteers at the checkpoint about a "humanitarian pathway" that opens at 6:00 a.m. for sick people going to hospitals in Israel, teachers, and students. A quarrel was occurring: a young Palestinian man was shouting, and the soldiers were threatening to arrest him. I went and talked to him about this. He explained: "I am accompanying my sick father to the hospital in Jerusalem. He was already transferred from a Palestinian to an Israeli ambulance. But I was not allowed to ride in the Israeli ambulance. Now I am trying to catch up to him and help him get admitted to the hospital. They won't let me because my permit says I am accompanying a patient. They are telling me to get my father back so I can cross with him."

We spoke with a number of people at the humanitarian gate who appeared to be traveling for medical reasons. Among them was a mother accompanying her daughter, who was wearing a hospital mask. The mother told us that she was taking her daughter for a follow-up visit, which happens weekly. Others who passed through the gate were teachers and students. One traveler was ten years old; he crosses to school every day.

Hundreds of workers line up to file into a cage-like metal path and finally to the inspection area. When they reach the area, they pass in groups of three through a remotely opened door into a locked space where they go through a metal detector and have their fingerprints scanned and their IDs and work permits checked by a soldier in a

security booth. Only when one group exits is another allowed into the inspection area. On the other side of the checkpoint, workers wait for public transportation, or if they are lucky, pile into company buses. “Getting through the inspection can take as long as 90 minutes, depending on the soldiers operating the controls,” said one worker.

The German volunteer explained that he was monitoring the crossing for human rights violations. He told us that one of his duties was to make sure that the humanitarian gate opened on time. While we were present, he called to report that the gate was not open as it should have been. After he called a second time, it opened at 6:30 a.m.

We left the checkpoint shocked. “If I had to go through this every day, I would quit my job,” I remarked. But, what about those who can only find work in Israel? What about those who cannot obtain work permits? What about women workers? What happens if a worker is late? Sojourners acknowledged how little we knew about working conditions for Palestinians. We decided to remain in touch with EAPPI and to make contact with human rights organizations focused on abuse of workers. We agreed to do preliminary research prior to our evaluation session one week later. Thus, we embarked on another quest and another loop of learning.

I identified human rights organizations online and made appointments with one. I also spoke with a handful of members of the community who work in Israel or the settlements. In so doing, Sojourners learned about the existence of a segment of the workforce who cannot obtain permits, and who sneak through the separation wall or travel with smugglers who abuse them and charge exorbitant fees. We heard stories of life-threatening experiences where workers caught trying to cross at unsanctioned locations were arrested, imprisoned, and shot at. We learned about the conditions that

"illegal" workers endure on the job, including being deprived of social security and medical entitlements, and being subjected to abuse by their bosses. As our understanding grew, we dug deeper, asked more questions, and bore in mind the conditions of workers every time we crossed a checkpoint. This accompaniment experience widened our horizon with new learning and promoted us to seek new quests of listening and inquiry.

Israel has created hundreds of permanent roadblocks and checkpoints in the occupied West Bank and between the West Bank and Israel. In 2002, Israel started building a concrete wall that separates the West Bank from Israel. The wall, sitting on mostly Palestinian-owned land, not only isolates the West Bank from Israel, but also snatches fields from farmers. The wall has ruined farmland, orchards, and water supplies. According to a recent study by the Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, "78 Palestinian villages and communities with total population of 266,442 will be isolated." Israel has declared the land between the wall and the "Green Line"[17] a "seam zone," and all residents and landowners in this area must obtain permits to stay in their homes and use their own land, or to cross from their homes to their farmland (Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign. n.d).

The high unemployment rate in the Occupied Territories means that Palestinian workers depend on movement for survival. They are victims not only of political occupation, but also of systematic economic deprivation manifesting itself as immobility. According to B'Tselem,[18] Palestinian workers have terrible working and living

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[17] The internationally-recognized border between the state of Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

[18] B'Tselem in Hebrew literally means "in the image of," and is used as a synonym for human dignity. The word is taken from Genesis 1:27 "And God created humans in his image." B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories "was established in February 1989 by a group of prominent academics, attorneys, journalists, and Knesset members. It endeavors to document and educate the Israeli public and policymakers about human rights violations in the Occupied Territories,

conditions due to movement restriction and control. A recent B'Tselem study showed that workers' movement restrictions involve "reaching working places…[and] living in rough conditions at their workplaces, with no option of leaving." These Palestinian workers "are the most invisible of all" (B'Tselem, 2015). The study reports:

> [Workers struggle for a] "work permit, yet must stand for endless, humiliating hours on line at a crowded checkpoint, people for whom every moment of their daily routine is part of a struggle for survival, for whom getting safely home is not a given. Under such conditions, a struggle for fair pay, reasonable working hours and a pension is no more than a distant pipedream. (B'Tselem, 2015)

The study argues that this reality is a direct outcome of systematic efforts to prevent development of an independent Palestinian economy that would provide employment for residents in the Palestinian territories. Many Palestinians have no option except to work in Israel. For workers who cannot obtain permits, the struggle starts as they leave for work, continues at work, and increases on their way back to their homes. A nurse working in the city of Beersheba in southern Israel says:

> I don't travel every day from home to my place of work in Beersheba. I feel that's practically impossible, even though I know that many workers do so. I prefer to sleep at my workplace despite the rough conditions, rather than endure every morning the ordeal of the exhausting journey from home, through the checkpoint, and then to my place of work. (B'Tselem, 2015)

Many workers lose their jobs because they are late due to checkpoint delays. One worker who explained his crossing experience said that the checkpoint nearest his home is open only from 5:00 to 7:00 a.m. for those traveling into Israel, and from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. for those returning home. At the checkpoint, "the ordeal begins – the humiliating inspections and searches. You're inspected while other workers around you are pushing

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combat the phenomenon of denial prevalent among the Israeli public, and help create a human rights culture in Israel." "Workers from the Territories," B'Tselem, http://www.btselem.org/workers/20150501_international_workers_day (accessed May 10, 2015).

each other, and on the other side you hear the security personnel shouting" (B'Tselem, 2015). Most workers labor in tough conditions, sharing meals with other workers, and spend as little as possible on food so as to save money. "All I have is a mattress on the floor and a blanket. There's no heating or basic washing or hygiene facilities. In winter I'm very cold and in summer the heat is terrible. It's nothing like the conditions I have at home, but there's no choice" (B'Tselem, 2015).

Workers not only endure terrible movement restrictions and working conditions, but also separation from family. "It's really tough on me and on my children and wife. I miss them all week. But even if I went home in the middle of the week, I wouldn't really have time to be with them" (B'Tselem, 2015). Only married workers can obtain permits. Single workers and others without permits sleep in poor conditions, share tiny rooms, eat unhealthy food, live in constant fear of being arrested and imprisoned, and receive no health insurance or basic medical services. One construction worker testified:

> 'I sleep on the floor. I barely leave the building, especially at night. I'm afraid of getting caught by the police and being arrested. I ask other workers who do have permits to buy me food and other things. I feel like I'm working in a small prison. But despite all the hardship, I do make 300 shekels [approx. USD 75] a day, which is much more than you can make in Hebron, if you're even lucky enough to find a job. (B'Tselem, 2015)

The anecdotes cited above represent a small portion of what we discovered online and through informal contacts as a result of our experience at the checkpoint. Our experience opened a new door to thinking about "job opportunity" from the vantage point of victims of immobility. As leaders, our circumstances separated us from the challenges workers faced, but as accompaniers, we were able to experience their vulnerability. The loop of learning kept cycling. Sojourners established connections with the community of workers, and what had been evident on the surface became part of our own lives.

At the heart of our accompaniment experience was gaining an understanding of community life from the vantage point of location. Power in given locations shapes social and economic realities, and creates social class. Our evaluation session after the checkpoint experience prompted theological discourse on class. I took this discussion into further research through reading. I discovered Susan Thistlethwaite, Joerg Rieger, and others, discussed below. My reading of these authors inspired additional discussion on victimhood. Sojourners determined that economic success in conflict zones depends on free movement and opportunity more than on education. Status, virtue, and productivity are important but secondary contributors to success. They become irrelevant for those who cannot reach work locations: fields, offices, or business sites. More than any other factor, workers depend on location for success. “Many Palestinians prosper after they emigrate. Renowned Palestinian physicians, architects, entrepreneurs, scientists, etc. thrive outside the Occupied Territories,” remarked Abla.

Immobility has dire social and economic consequences for a community’s wellbeing. What can a theology of mobility mean to those rendered immobile? How can leadership understand the impact of immobility when it enjoys travel privileges? How can leaders understand the threat of unemployment from a vantage point of economic security? Power differentials limit leadership’s understanding of the suffering of victims. Loss of opportunity makes people poor, anxious about how they will obtain food for their families, and willing to fight to retain the little influence they have. Leaders who have not experienced immobility may miss opportunities to engage in challenges: exploitation, inequality, corruption, and risk-taking.

The Bible and Accompaniment

Accompaniment is a central theme in the biblical narrative. In his book, *Faith on the Road: A Short Theology of Travel and Justice*, Joerg Rieger argues that "The Bible is a dynamic collection of a great variety of books, many written on journeys, in the midst of nomadic wandering, during exiles and through the kinds of open-ended tensions and struggles with which many travelers are familiar" (Rieger 2015, 16). From Abraham and Sarah to Moses to the wandering Israelites in the wilderness, to Jesus and the early missionaries, the Bible is a narrative on the road. God asks many people to leave their homes, families, comfort zones and sojourn toward higher purposes. Jesus' ministry takes place on the road, as he sojourns through the villages of Palestine. His travels led him to Bethlehem to be born, to Egypt as a refugee, to Nazareth as a child, to towns as a teacher, to Jerusalem as king and prophet, to Golgotha as a martyr, and to heaven as lord. Jesus asserts that "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9:58). On "the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza," Philip baptized the "Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians" (Acts 8:26-27). Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9). He established churches in various parts of the Roman Empire sojourning from one place to another. Paul describes his ministry as consisting of a journey (cf. 2 Cor 25-29).

The Bible presents a Christian faith and leadership that is on the move, unconstrained by offices, building, and temples. Domesticated leadership has grown accustomed to rest and comfort, which in turn causes indifference to injustice. The prophet Amos recognizes the effects of comfort on leadership. He condemns the tendency to rest while the oppressed are crushed and the marginalized are neglected.

Amos sees in leadership that builds "houses of hewn stone" and plants "pleasant vineyards," (Am 5:11) an obstacle to discerning evil and injustice in the community. Comfort zones eliminate the possibility to see the pain of others. They "turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground," (Am 5:7) enticing leadership to "hate the one who reproves in the gate" and "abhor the one who speaks the truth" (Am 5:10). A comfortable lifestyle may result from trampling on the poor and "taking from them levies of grain." The desire to retain comfort may encourage leadership "to afflict the righteous," "take a bribe," "push aside the needy in the gate," and coerces "the prudent" to "keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time" (Am 5:11-13). Amos writes: "Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph (Am 6:4-6).

Jesus wanted his followers to be on the move. Sending them out to travel, he said, "take nothing for your *journey*, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, *stay there,* and *leave* from there" (Lk 9:3-4 italic added). Jesus called his followers to occupy specific places: *stay there*. Susan Thistlethwaite explains that in order to recruit followers, Jesus traveled all the way to Galilee to call disciples – fishermen who were affected by Roman commercialization of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus wanted followers who understood empty nets. He recruited followers who had failed to catch fish all night. He commissioned followers who knew the constraints of an oppressive system. By recruiting victims of exploitation, the opportunity-deprived, and economically unsuccessful, Jesus accompanied those afflicted

by injustice, pressing them to become fishers of men. He told parables about landowners' exploitation of day laborers. In his context, like ours, the market reigned, and those who lacked capital were excluded from success in the dominating system. His liberating message was grounded in his analysis of class dynamics. His preaching to poor peasants offered an alternative based on the jubilee – the year of the Lord's favor. Jesus challenged the existing exploitative system that robbed peasants and workers of their dignity.

Reflecting on the devastating conditions of the workforce during the Social Gospel movement, Robert Craig writes: "It is striking how these workers' understanding of a prophetic Christianity differed from the dominant religious ethos of the period" (Collins 2013, 107). Quoted by Sheila D. Collins, Robert Craig states:

> Workers found a Christ who was…an agitator such as the world had never seen before nor since…despised and finally murdered to appease the wrath of the Ruling Class of His time…The lot of working-class people was thought to be analogous to the captivity of Hebrew slaves and their struggle for freedom, another Exodus. (Collins 2013, 107)

Jesus not only accompanied victims of economic exploitation but also challenged a system that dominated and exploited workers. Workers who line up at an Israeli checkpoint remind us of the parable of workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16. In his book, *Jesus the Prophet: His Vision of the Kingdom of Earth*, David Kaylor suggests reading the parable for its explanation of socioeconomic conditions – the historical context of Jesus' ministry. The parable is set in a period of exploitation that caused unemployment. It shows a system where there are "large estates worked by a plentiful supply of day laborers and the client-patron model of relations assumed as the economic background" (Kaylor 1994, 132). The dependency and disparity that prevailed in the Roman world are clear in the parable. Kaylor writes:

> The client-patron system resulted from many economic forces at work in Palestinian society as early as the Hasmonaean period, exacerbated by Herod and by direct Roman rule: high taxes resulting in debt for many peasants, loss of land due to debt, disruption, or confiscation. The client-patron system disrupted the traditional pattern of patriarchal families and villages, where ancestral land tenure helped cushion the impact of economic hardship on the poor. Roman domination broke down this patriarchal structure. Peasant families ridden by debt could no longer rely on protection by the head of the family. Thus, loss of ancestral lands, debt-slavery, and unemployment were common experiences of those on the margins. The practices of sabbatical year and Jubilee could have provided relief for families, had they been fully implemented. (Kaylor 1994, 132)

The parable shows that workers were not lazy or unwilling to work but exploited by a system that robbed them of opportunity. They had no regular employment and they depended on bosses to hire them. The system, not the workers, was responsible for their unemployment. The exploitative system affected workers' relationships, provoking jealousy and resentment. A system "robbed workers of their dignity and humanity. They appeal not for justice but for fairness" (Kaylor 1994, 133). Kaylor concludes:

> [The Parable] is about human relationships fundamentally, relationships that are in disarray because of the reality of their present lives and the attitudes that present conditions foster in those who are the victims. The marginalized laborers have been so molded by the system under which they jointly suffer that they can see only threats in their fellow sufferers. (Kaylor 1994, 135)

In *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*, Marcus J. Borg argues that the way to understand the parable is to appreciate it from the perspective of the peasant audience to whom Jesus spoke. Borg doubts that the listeners associated the landowner with "what God is like" but rather saw him as an example, "an indictment of how wealthy landowners behave" (Borg 2006, 182). Landowners obtained land through foreclosure on debt, and turned former owners into day laborers. They tried to use as few workers as possible. Those not hired did not go home but waited. The irony in the landowner's question, "Why are you standing here idle

all day?" was as painful as oppression itself: it assumed that idleness was the workers' fault. Thus, asserts Borg, the parable is not about God, but about a system of domination that exploits workers and tries to present itself as generous and helpful to them at the same time. For Palestinian workers stuck at checkpoints, reading the parable is reading their own story. Not only does the military occupation confiscate their land, but it also ridicules them for being idle and controls their movement so that they have no choice but to remain idle, even failing to work their *own* land.

A Theology of Accompaniment

A theology of accompaniment implies a process of theological reflection rather than consummation. Theology is a journey that keeps wheeling ahead and unfolding, never reaching completion. Such a journey invites leaders to engage in soul-searching to achieve transformation of self and society for greater justice. Accompaniment means sojourning with God for God's purpose. God journeys with his oppressed community. He is a moving God. A theology of accompaniment is a theology of freedom – one that is not contained within a dominating oppressive structure.

A theology of accompaniment requires us to relocate into victims' contexts in order to help organize movements of change and build thriving and caring communities able to take charge of their own ministries and missions. "Going forth" implies leaving one's easy lifestyle and relocating among those whose lives are at risk. In his book *Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing it Together and Doing it Right*, John M. Perkins expounds on the concept of relocation in community development and its importance in empowering communities to live and enact the Gospel of Christ. "By beginning with the people's felt needs," asserts Perkins, "we establish a relationship and a trust, which then

enables us to move to deeper issues of development" (Perkins 1995a, 18). Perkins sums up the "felt need" concept in a Chinese poem:

> Go to the people
> Live among them
> Learn from them
> Love them
> Start with what they know
> Build on what they have
> But of the best leaders
> When their task is done
> The people will remark
> 'We have done it ourselves.' (Perkins 1995a, 18)

Perkins argues that in times of crisis, the church cannot stand on the sidelines while brothers and sisters are struggling for justice and freedom. Crises, asserts Perkins, are opportunities for the church to engage. Perkins writes:

> In every crisis there is opportunity. Much of the credit for the success of the civil rights movement must go to Black clergy and White northern liberal churches. For the most part, White evangelicals stood on the sideline as their Black brothers and sisters struggled through this critical period in American history. This is a matter of fact, not blame. However, the game is not over. There is still much unfinished business. The moral crisis that we are facing in this country is crying out for spiritual leadership. (Perkins 1995a, 10)

Reflecting on Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, Perkins explains that Jesus' mission was centered on those disqualified and at risk. His goal was to affirm human dignity and break down the wall of distrust. He attended to the needs of his community as he immersed in their spiritual, social, economic, and political situations. Perkins writes:

> Jesus goes directly to the people and loves them and affirms them. Because they trusted him, many come to believe in him. Jesus' method of ministering to people around their needs offers us a powerful example. Jesus met the Samaritan woman around her felt need (having her dignity affirmed), loved her around that need (by boldly initiating a dialogue), made her need his very own (by asking for a drink), then shared with her the 'wonderful plan' by helping her discover for herself her spiritual need. (Perkins 1995a, 20)

Christian community development "begins with people transformed by the love of God, who then respond to God's call to share the gospel with others through evangelism, social actions, economic development, and justice" (Perkins 1995a, 21). Perkins' community development paradigm consists of three pillars: relocation, in which leaders move physically to live and minister among the poor; reconciliation, where people make peace with God and neighbor; and redistribution, which involves putting our lives, our skills, our education, and our resources to work to empower people in a community of need. In Israel-Palestine, the community in general, and the Christian community in particular, are at-risk as they continue to struggle with spiritual, social, economic, political, and environmental crises. For leaders to be able to address socioeconomic and political issues like subjugation, poverty, racism, sexism, classism, gender inequality, environmental injustice, etc., Perkins argues that leaders need to place themselves among the poor, begin with felt needs, respond to those needs holistically, and empower the community "to build the ancient ruined cities that have been devastated for generations" (Isaiah 61:5) (Perkins 1995a, 31).

Relocation, living in an at-risk community, may entail returning to a poverty-stricken environment that one has worked hard to leave. This can produce deep emotional responses. Perkins asserts that for effective community development, relocation is indispensable. In a context of increasing individualism, Palestinian religious leaders are seeking to emigrate not only to different countries but also to safer locations inside their communities. Religious leaders tend to prefer serving big, wealthy, highly educated communities rather than small, poor, uneducated locations. There is always an incentive to move from poor parishes into well-established ones. We have noticed that newly

ordained clergy are assigned to serve small, poor, remote communities. Relocation means recognizing that the mission of Christ is one of self-emptying. Perkins concludes that we will not fully understand the real problems facing the poor unless we relocate to at-risk communities. It is then that their problems become ours. Relocation provides connections, builds relationships, and enables cooperation and development. Relocation empowers and fosters talents and abilities among those leaders willing to share in developing themselves and their communities (Perkins 1995a, 104-105).

A theology of accompaniment reflects on a free God who enters into history to alter it. Such a theology does not accommodate oppression but rather stands with victims. It is unfortunate that the church in Israel-Palestine has not clearly sided with the oppressed, nor has it called for democracy or equality. It remains indifferent to forces that maintain the status quo whether that is of the occupation or of the Palestinian Authority. Fear of persecution should not define theological reflection. Maintaining status should not be the church's premise for any theological discourse. A contextual theology of accompaniment emphasizes liberation from fear, and transformation of identity and mission. It calls on the church to confront anxiety preventing accompaniment of the marginalized. Gustavo Gutiérrez explains that "hostility led the church to seek the support of the established order and economically powerful groups in order to face its adversaries and assure for itself to what it believed to be an opportunity to preach the Gospel peacefully" (Gutiérrez 1974, 101). Gutiérrez adds that the process of liberation started with Christian communities learning "to read *politically* the sign of the times" and demanding "commitment to the oppressed peoples of this exploited continent" (Gutiérrez 1974, 101-103). The movement of liberation traveled upward among priests, who

demanded that the church "break its ties with an unjust order, and they wanted it – with renewed fidelity to the Lord who calls it and to the Gospel which it preaches – to cast its lot with those who suffer from misery and deprivation" (Gutiérrez 1974, 105).

Priests who engaged in confronting oppression were considered "subversives," and they faced backlash: surveillance, becoming fugitives, imprisonment, expulsion from their countries, or being murdered by terrorist anti-communist groups. "For the defenders of the status quo," asserts Gutiérrez, "the 'priestly subversion' is surprising. They are not used to it" (Gutiérrez 1974, 106). The problem in the Latin American church, explains Gutiérrez, was among bishops. Some were seen as ill-prepared for their functions and some were "awakening to the social dimension of the presence of the church and a corresponding rediscovery of its prophetic mission." Gutiérrez explains:

> The bishops of the most poverty-stricken and exploited areas are the ones who have denounced most energetically the injustices they witness. But in exposing the deep causes of these injustices, they have had to confront the great economic and political forces of their countries. They naturally leave themselves open to being accused of meddling in affairs outside their competences and even f being friendly to Marxist ideas. (Gutiérrez 1974, 106-107)

Accompaniment is partnering with God. It echoes God's involvement in human history and his desire to redeem history. Kathryn Tanner asserts that, beyond sharing plentitude, God actually becomes our companion and commissions us to be co-workers. This "enables human beings to recognize and consciously to correspond in their own acts to God's will for the world," and consequently to accompany God in performing good deeds (Tanner 2001, 44-45). God is relational with all creation – He is his creation's companion. God made humans relational – as parents, siblings, partners, neighbors, and friends. Humans are born to live among other beings. As Dorothee Sölle writes, "We are made communally" (Sölle and Bowden, 1990, 34). She continues: "Hearing the name of

co-creator bestowed on me heightened my awareness of my own creative power. Creative power is something we all have but often ignore or relinquish. My creative power is my power to renew the world for someone or for a community" (Sölle and Cloyes 1984, 37). God calls on us to establish relationships and to use creative power to accompany those whose power needs restoration. Creative power allows humanity to be present in the life of God's creation and to work alongside God, who accompanies his creation.

A theology of accompaniment addresses circumstances in particular locations. God looks different from the viewpoint of ghettos than from churches. Fredrick Herzog commences his book, *God-Walk: Liberation Shaping Dogmatics*, with the observation, "We often grasp more about God on a walk than through a book" (Herzog 1988, xi). Reflecting on what he calls "the street Jesus," Herzog contends that "the Jesus of the road is a key today because he teaches us the limits of human control within which alone the engine of historical change can move history on constructively" (Herzog 1988, xiii).

A theology of accompaniment is the act of leaving one's comfort zone, where control is assured. Control obstructs our vision of God. It masks human vulnerability and finite creatureliness, and lures humanity away from dependence on God. It was Abraham's decision to leave home and journey into the unknown, dependent only on God, that made him the father of all belief. A theology of a tent-dwelling God reminds us of a God who resides in a mobile tent and who accompanies his people through different times and places. Susan Thistlethwaite, in her book *#OccupytheBible: What Jesus Really Said (and Did) About Money and Power*, says, "God is a movement God, and unless we as Christians quit mistaking our institutional form of faith for the movement of God in history, we won't be able to see the signs even if they are written in letters a thousand

feet high" (Thistlethwaite 2013, 112). She asserts that "the gospel needs to be read through movement eyes, through the lives of people who are struggling economically and whose lives, property, and business are being dominated by an unjust system" (Thistlethwaite 2013, 39). The Bible shows a God who wanders among people and dwells with them where they dwell. A journeying God is involved in day-to-day activities. "A 'tent-dwelling God' is a movement God who nevertheless occupies a specific place. Location, therefore, is a very important way to begin to understand God's power for change and the positive changes of justice and mercy that the biblical prophets call for over and over" (Thistlethwaite 2013, xii).

To control movement is to oppose God's will and to misunderstand his being. God moves with people through checkpoints. He lines up with them and suffers with them. God waits with workers in line to go to their jobs or come home. He endures humiliation and delay, opens doors, confronts restrictions, and provides opportunity. A journeying theology meets the immobile, bringing their pathos into God's moving ethos. Accompaniment relates to God's character and mission. God visits human locations to invite people to come into the divine location. Movement and location are intertwined.

Reflecting on a sign reading "I am a Man" carried by a worker during the Memphis garbage strike of 1968, Thistlethwaite asserts that the event "was over basic human dignity and worth, not simply specific working conditions. The sign implied 'it's not right to do this to me, to us, because we are as fully human as you'" (Thistlethwaite 2013, 45). A labor struggle is not only that. At its best, it is about the sacred image of God in humanity. In working for justice by accompanying the afflicted, leaders advocate human sacredness. This is the vision and mission of leaders who march with people

seeking restoration of rights and redress of injustice. Advocating the right to decent and dignified work depends on understanding humanity as the image of God and as participants in God's creation. Helping humans achieve decent and dignified work consists of helping them become who they are intended to be. Reflecting on the worker movement and the image of God, Thistlethwaite asserts:

> What makes us not only people, but human beings with dignity and transcendent worth, is our capacity to work creatively in this world. When a society exploits our contribution to the whole and refuses to recognize the moral obligation we have to one another to ensure decent working conditions, a living wage, and the means to support our families, it violates our human dignity and denies the reality of the Kingdom of God in our midst." (Thistlethwaite 2013, 46)

To accompany is to meet God on the road, among victims whose experiences teach leaders how to broaden not only their theological understanding but also their ministry.

The Bible constantly calls on us "to go forth" (Gn 12:1); "go, I send you" (Ex 30:10); "to whom I send you, you shall go" (Jer 1:7); and to "go make disciples." (Mt 28:19) A movement God calls on leaders to sojourn and to preach the Good News that only God is truly in control. For Jesus and his followers, movement meant living "in the Kingdom of God right now, and not letting people be controlled by the kingdom of Caesar or the Jewish Temple elites" (Thistlethwaite 2013, xii). For the church today, movement means following God and confronting any system that is not God's – transforming a world of restriction into a world of free movement.

The prevailing interest among church leaders is what goes on inside the walls of their church buildings. Clergy want people to come inside. Communities tend to locate themselves in buildings, leaders in offices, and community activities on church premises. Rieger asks: "Have we lost our ability to think outside of the ecclesial box?" Journeying the road does help a community of faith broaden its "horizon in important ways that are

transformative not only for the world but for the church itself" (Rieger 2015, 10). That Christianity is always on the road should be understood literally as well as metaphorically. Church sanctuaries are not ends in themselves; they should transform communities of faith, empowering them for missions in the world.

In its Greek etymology, *ekkelesia* is a group of citizens "summoned to assemble in order to take action for the defense and welfare of the city as a whole" (Jennings 1988, 14). The gathering of the community of faith in worship has a purpose beyond the assembly itself. Liturgy should exhort the assembly to act. Places of worship should never be places of "rest" and observation, but should provoke participation in the world. In *The Liturgy of Liberation: The Confession and Forgiveness of Sins*, Jennings writes:

> This assembly of the citizens was the *Ekklesia*. When the church is called the *Ekklesia* it means that it is composed of those who are summoned to take responsibility for the world. But unlike the assembly of the Greeks, this *Ekklesia* includes slave and free, male and female, Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian. It includes all those who have been set free and summoned to responsibility…in order to act on behalf of the city of God, God's world. (Jennings 1988, 15)

The spirit of liberty that leads a community in worship sends the community on a new mission toward God's aspiration. During worship, the community is restored and set in motion. An *ekklesia* is not only a liberated but a liberating community. An *ekklesia*, asserts Jennings, does not rest victoriously but mobilizes itself for the sake of the world. The mission of the *ekklesia* reflects the mission of God in Christ, who sees realities, proclaims liberty to the oppressed, provides food to the hungry, releases prisoners, comforts the grieving, and condemns economic exploitation, political occupation, and social discrimination. "The reign of God," explains Jennings "means the abolition of injustice, the reign of peace, the banquet of the Messiah, the abolition of death and sorrow, the coming of the eternal dance and song of joy. These images far exceed all our

wildest dreams and fantasies and point to a complete transformation of our lives and world" (Jennings 1988, 27-28). In *Transforming Evangelism,* David Gortner asserts that "the evangelistic success in each ministry is completely dependent on individuals who, having come together as fellow pilgrims and having learned a spirit of evangelism, carry good news out on their journey into a waiting and hungry world, bearing grateful witness to God's transforming love" (Gortner 2008,71).

The accompaniment experience permits us to see the social order anew, and to influence today's world. Seeing the world from a pulpit or an office gives one a different view from the perspective of the street. Rieger says that accompaniment is an opportunity to change people's identities and missions. Those who sojourn "are in a position to make important contributions in today's world. These include a habit of thinking on one's feet, the broadening of horizon, a flexibility that comes with having to give up control, various challenges to the status quo and much-needed awareness of our limits and finitude" (Rieger 2015, 12). Ideas and innovations conceived while accompanying a victim of injustice are more authentic than those conceived behind desks. Discernment and reflection on one's feet more closely match the needs of people who are suffering.

Accompaniment is a journey that goes beyond the demands of a particular community. It is an "organic" experience that does not go through filtration. It is a direct exposure to realities. Such an experience brings transformation of perspectives, perceptions, and prejudices. It has a two-way impact. Rieger explains that "in earlier periods, conversion was usually seen as a one-way street, where religious travelers sought to convert those whom they encountered in their travels" (Rieger 2015, 66-67). Rieger suggests instead a two-way experience where accompaniers are themselves converted.

Accompaniment seeks to enhance the lives of those accompanied and to broaden leaders' perspectives, perceptions and prejudices. A transformed leadership can reframe alternative to help communities transform their conditions. Rieger asserts:

> If 'mission in reverse' is truly to make a difference to us, it can happen only when we begin to realize what is really going on in the world. We need to learn and understand who we are in relation to each other, and we need to begin to address the existing power differentials. Unless true mission in reverse is able to break open and transform these power differentials, the one-way street remains and the enrichment of the powerful is the result. (Rieger 2015, 67-68)

Accompaniment requires willingness and audacity. It necessitates leaving a comfort zone and being exposed to pain. It requires sacrifice of time as well as space. "What does it mean to go there?" asks Hala Gorani, CNN International London-based anchor and correspondent. She answers her own question:

> It does not mean reading about it. It means packing a bag and going there and talking to the people. Talking to activists in secret, activists risking their lives for speaking to a Western journalist in Damascus, talking to people on the margins of the story about how they're affected by the decisions of those much more powerful than them. That is why I go there to get the story firsthand. (Gorani, 2014)

One of the most difficult aspects of Christian discipleship in our contemporary era is sacrifice of comfort and serenity. Having an office creates a power differential of which leaders are not always aware. The radical paradigm of Jesus's accompaniment program understands this power differential. Jesus accompanied people where they were. He did not summon the poor, oppressed, and marginalized to him, but traveled to where others would find him accessible and approachable. Even those whom he summoned as disciples did not forget that he called them where they were. To accompany means to sacrifice even safety to reach victims in their context.

Leaders are called on to cross checkpoints with their communities, to get in line, to listen to life-changing experiences, to ask questions, to monitor and report injustice, to challenge misbehavior on the part of security personnel, and to cherish God's image in those seeking freedom. Leadership cannot be tame in the face of cruel conditions, nor should it become confused by the claim that there are 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. In "Religion and Class in the Construction and Deconstruction of the Myth of American Exceptionalism," Sheila Collins asserts that "with members of the management class in their pews," church leaders and ministers "often sided with management against striking workers, not daring to bite the hand that fed them" (Collins 2013, 107). Leaders should never take side with an oppressive system that provides them with privileges.

A theology of accompaniment anticipates threats, and strives to make sense to victims. It trusts in a surprising God who challenges the status quo and undermines easy assumptions. A settled theology that defends leadership survival is purchased at the cost of others' suffering. To be agents of transformation, leaders need to expect the unfamiliar and difficult. A journeying theology transforms concepts of "charity," and of "doing good," all of which restrict leaders' missions of attacking systematic injustice. Sheila Collins studies American efforts to accompany the oppressed, identifying two major impediments to success: "lack of class consciousness on the part of those in the pews, and the still relative economic comfort in which most Americans live" (Collins 2013, 112).

Finally, accompaniment is not about teaching and preaching; it is about being, and opening one's mind and heart. An open presence does not try to control the accompaniment experience, but instead allows the process of transformation to take control. Avoiding personal control is especially important when dealing with victims of

violence. “A dominating system has exerted control over a victim’s life, and the victim does not need any reminder of oppression,” explained Imad. Relinquishing control is necessary for the accompanied and the accompanier, allowing both to deepen their understanding of God, self, and life. Rieger writes, “All of this points to a fundamental paradigm change in our relationship to God: If we realize we are not in control, we can begin to learn and deepen our experience of the struggles of life” (Rieger 2015, 74). The knowledge that one is not in control makes transformation possible. Leaders no longer see their own experiences as norms. They learn to recognize brokenness in others and in themselves as part of humanity. Rieger explains, “Breaking through our self-centeredness helps us become open to being challenged by others and to become more fully human, as well as more fully Christian, together” (Rieger 2015, 74).

Consulting Social Sciences

A relevant theology of accompaniment requires leaders to stay abreast of developments in contemporary social sciences. In his Encyclical letter on climate change *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis urges dialogue among academic disciplines, as they have much to teach one another, and as each is needed for the wellbeing of the earth. He asserts that “science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understand reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both” (Francis 2015, 45).

Leaders need to consider solutions from the entire repertoire of possibilities and capabilities. Leaders would benefit from theories and models that explain their context. Drawing on research in anthropology, education, sociology and psychology conducted by scholars such as Heifetz et al., Argyris, Friedman, Perkins and others, I lay out four

components of an effective accompaniment experience: diagnosis, systems thinking, intersectionality, and loop of learning.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis of both the leader's skills and the context's intersecting forces is fundamental for change. Experience strengthens "understanding of the processes and practices of leadership so that [it] can address the adaptive pressures that challenge current individual and collective competence" (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 3). "Adaptive leadership," explain Heifetz et al., "is an approach to making progress on the most important challenges you face in your piece and part of the world, presumably in your professional life but perhaps in your personal life as well…[It] helps you mobilize people toward some collective purpose, a purpose that exists beyond your own individual ambition" (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 3). Injustice is the most important challenge requiring adaptive leadership in today's world. Heifetz et al. conclude that adaptive leadership consists of two core processes: diagnosis and action. They write:

> The practice of leadership, like the practice of medicine, involves two core processes: diagnosis first and then action. And those two processes unfold in two dimensions: toward the organizational or social system you are operating in and toward yourself…But to lead effectively, you also have to examine and take action toward yourself in the context of the challenge. In the midst of action, you have to be able to reflect on your own attitudes and behavior to better calibrate your interventions into the complex dynamics of organizations and communities. You need perspective on yourself as well as on the systemic context in which you operate. (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 6)

Heifetz et al. call for diagnosis of three elements: What? How? And what next? Answering the first question involves examining the problem at hand through data collection and analysis. Once the problem has been identified, leadership should interpret

how the crisis came to be, and why it matters. Then leadership can propose interventions (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 6). Accompaniment helps leaders diagnose their context by stepping into its very particularities. We asked: What is our context? Who is the victim among us? Answering the "what" question requires a direct experience with the situation of injustice, data collection, and group reflection. Sojourners then asked: how did injustice come to be in the first place? This required digging deep into historical, theological, social, political, and economic considerations. We then asked: What next? This led to examining possible solutions to the problem: in our case, effective and competent leaders who are able to enact change in their context.

Because injustice challenges authenticity and competence, leaders often opt for quick fixes to solve challenges. Quick fixes may misdiagnose the nature of a crisis because they "minimize the time spent in diagnosis, collecting data, exploring multiple possible interpretations of the situation and alternative potential interventions," and underestimate "both the system-level and the self-level sections of the adaptive leadership process" (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 7). Accompaniment, to use the metaphor of Heifetz et al., puts leaders on the dance floor as well as on the balcony – thus affording them different perspectives to diagnose the nature of injustice inflicted on victims. Heifetz clarifies:

> To diagnose a system or yourself while in the midst of action requires the ability to achieve some distance from those on-the-ground events…the metaphor of 'getting on the balcony' above the 'dance floor'… depicts what it means to gain the distanced perspective you need to see what is really happening. (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 7)

Diagnosis helps leaders address the root causes of the challenges affecting their communities and the larger context. Unlike quick-fixes that may solve problems momentarily, diagnosis helps create an ethos of care rather than cure. When leaders

diagnose their contexts, they become personally involved. They encounter the victim in the process and develop caring attitudes rather than curing tactics. In his book, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*, Henri M. Nouwen advocates “care” rather than “cure” because the compulsion to cure often derives from desire for personal glory as opposed to deep examination of self and others. “An alternative is to care for ourselves, each other, and our world. We wouldn’t need change and cure if we were in a constant caring mode” (Nouwen 1974, 10). Cure promises a quick fix, but eliminates any engagement on the part of the distressed in the process. Care involves sharing pain and “touching wounds with a gentle and tender hand.” It is “being present to each other,” and that is “what really matters.” Care calls for “courage to enter deeply into human suffering and to become present” in a victim’s own pain, so as to give the distressed “the power to speak healing words” (Nouwen 1974, 38-39). “Cure without care,” asserts Nouwen, “makes us into rulers, controllers, and manipulators, and prevents a real community from taking shape. Cure without care makes us preoccupied with quick changes, impatient and unwilling to share other’s burdens. And so cure can often become offending instead of liberating” (Nouwen 1974, 40).

Leaders need a “diagnostic mind-set” to “understand what is going on inside, how they are changing over time, and how they as a system interact with their organization as a system” (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 184). To be effective in a mission of transformation, Heifetz et al. assert, “You have to remind yourself that you are different today than you were yesterday. You, the roles you play, and the organization of which you are a part evolve and grow as you all interact to tackle challenges” (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 185). Through self-diagnosis, leaders identify and prioritize

their loyalties among colleagues, community, and ancestors who have shaped their beliefs and perceptions. They tune their unique selves, identify their own triggers, and broaden their repertoire of techniques and skills – strengths, weaknesses, and tolerance – needed for an accompaniment experience. Diagnosing leaders' systems defines the scope of their authority, and articulates and prioritizes their purposes in relation to their mission of transformation (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 182-230).

Accompaniment achieves learning, growth, and development for both parties. It trains a caring leadership able to form and shape a caring community, one that recognizes mutual vulnerability, and one that diagnoses forces impinging on communal freedom.

Systems Theory

Modern systems theories derive from General System Theory, which seeks to describe the conduct of complex, organized systems of all sorts. Systems analysis necessitates systems thinking, which is a way of looking at a context as a product of interrelated forces.

Leadership is a system that functions in relation to forces including self, family, denomination, culture, society, politics, and economics. A leader is "a complex individual with competing values, and interests, preferences and tendencies, aspirations and fears" (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 178). Heifetz et al. argue that leadership of an organization is as complex as the organization itself, and its context. They write:

> Whenever you are trying to lead a group or organization through an adaptive challenge, you may experience conflicts among your various loyalties. That is because you are a system (an individual) within a system (your organization). Within yourself as a system, your interests, your fears, your various loyalties all intersect and affect your behaviors and decisions. Understanding the system that is yourself can help you make

> the personal changes needed for you to lead adaptive change successfully in your organization. (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 178)

Understanding leadership as a system helps leaders define their identity and mission amid competing forces that influence choices and behavior. "Exercising adaptive leadership," assert Heifetz et al., "is about you (an individual system) making interventions in a social system of which you are a part. You have to understand not only the larger system you step into…but also yourself in its full complexity, multiplicity, and inconsistency. And then you have to think about how the two systems interact" (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 183). Knowing one's own system allows a leader to "march into the world with clarity and confidence," thus permitting the leader's community to "know what to expect" (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 183). The accompaniment experience helped Sojourners to look at their own individual system within the many different systems and forces that impinge on us, i.e., education, faith, theology, family, etc., and understand it within the matrix of the context's system. We are parish leaders and we function within the larger system of our institutions and within the even larger system of religion and culture. All of these factors affect a leader's identity and mission.

When leadership steps into a victim's context, a relationship forms and an emotional field develops. A leader grows proficient at use of a variety of tools that facilitate effective interaction with the larger system. Accompaniment, however, should not infuse the leader's system with the system of victims or the larger system. In order to effectively engage in transformation, it is important for the leader to differentiate oneself from the larger system. Undifferentiated leadership accommodates the system, giving up and giving in to please self and others and to preserve security. Self-undifferentiated leaders are vulnerable to anxiety. They react emotionally to forces that challenge or

threaten their authority, authenticity, and competence. Self-differentiated leaders take a stand based on values and beliefs; focus on personal growth through connections with others; and set goals and construct trajectories to achieve them. They cherish challenges and new quests that stretch their imagination (Steinke 2006, 29-30).

Leadership for transformation misses the mark when it approaches its role in addressing social injustice in individual model, response mode, or cause and effect linear mode. "In the individual model," asserts Ronald W. Richardson, "there is little sense of people's interconnectedness or of how one's behavior can affect that of others" (Richardson 1996, 25). An individualistic model sees particular people as problems and blames others for failure. The systems model recognizes that no one lives or acts in isolation, and everyone is affected by the behavior of others. "A systems perspective," explains Peter Steinke "offers a more panoramic view of what is happening. Health and illness depend on all the parts intersecting; no single part or group promotes health or illness. Everyone contributes" (Steinke 1996, xiv). The crisis of a victim, therefore, is not an isolated problem: "The problem is in the whole, not the part" (Steinke 1996, 4). In a systems approach, leaders know that life processes interrelate and produce interaction and influence. Steinke maintains that "With a systems approach, we 'see' the *interactions* that take place, the *information* that is exchanged, and the *influence* that is reciprocally reinforced" (Steinke 1996, 5). To inquire how a social crisis came to be, leaders need to examine the multiple forces establishing the crisis. They need to examine the "whole" rather than its parts (Steinke 1996, 6).

Concentrating on the immediate needs of a victim rather than the systems that have shaped a crisis may lead away from changing the structure of injustice. One cannot

hope to respond to the injustice inflicted on the Palestinian workforce, for example, without understanding the multiple factors shaping work experiences, including personal and family needs, the reality of high unemployment, dysfunction in the Palestinian Authority, Israeli restrictions, the greed of brokers and employers, the unfair educational system, etc. The accompaniment experience exposes these forces as leaders interact in the context of victims, and as they examine the multiple sub-systems contributing to the crisis. We were surprised to learn that a good number of Palestinian workers prefer to work in Israel rather than in their settings because of the mistreatment of Palestinian landlords and the dysfunction of the legal system in protecting workers' rights.

Systems thinking, argues Edwin Friedman "focuses less on content and more on the process that governs data; less on cause-and-effect connections that link bits of information and more on the principles of organization that give data meaning" (Friedman 1985, 15). Friedman explains that "to take one part of the whole and analyze its 'nature' will give misleading results, first, because *each part will function differently outside the system*, and second, because even its functioning inside the system will be different depending on *where it is placed in relation to the others*" (Friedman 1985, 15).

In Palestinian context, education, belief, personal interest, family, friendship, and hierarchy are subsystems that intersect in a parish leader's emotional system. These systems, in turn, contribute to denominational and ecumenical systems, the system of Muslim culture, the system of decision-making by the Palestinian Authority, the system of Israeli occupation, and finally to regional and international systems. The behavior and choices of parish leaders are affected by all these systems. When the Israeli occupation, for example, places movement restrictions on denominational leadership, and leaders

decide to comply in order not to upset their political masters, this choice affects not only parish priests, who cannot take a stand against injustice, but also communities, who cannot engage in transformation and justice. A parish leader is not an independent actor, but one whose behavior is circumscribed by other elements in the system. When church leaders surrender to external forces, the forces affect their own identities and missions. Self-differentiation is necessary to maintain a healthy self and mission. Friedman defines differentiation as: "the capacity…to define…life goals and values apart from surrounding togetherness pressures, to say “I” when others are demanding “you” and “we.” It includes the capacity to maintain a (relatively) non-anxious presence in the midst of anxious systems, to take maximum responsibility for one's own destiny and emotional being….Differentiation means the capacity to be an “I” while remaining connected” (Friedman 1985, 27). Lack of self-differentiation reduces leadership capability, blurs its identity, and confuses others. The accompaniment process – the interplay of accompaniment, research, group reflection, discernment – helps leaders to recognize elements of systemic embeddedness in their own ways of thinking, being, and leading and open cognitive and emotional doorways for deeper understanding of self and context. There is always a danger of over-identification with the oppressed that one accompanies. The key for leaders to avoid this danger is to self-differentiate themselves from the context they step in and to maintain their identities, goals, values, and missions.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a theory developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, argues that different forms of injustice, e.g., poverty, racism, sexism, immobility, tend to form a web. Crenshaw pointed out that “the particular challenge in the law was one that was grounded

in the fact that anti-discrimination law looks at race and gender separately" (Adewunmi 2014, 7). Crenshaw used the theory of intersectionality to examine the experiences of black women in society and within movements for equality. She observed that discrimination based on gender, race, and class were mutually reinforcing, with social institutions and structures limiting access to resources and information, and privileging some groups over others, to maintain power. Crenshaw argues that:

> Many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discriminations as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of these experiences separately. (Crenshaw 1991, 1241)

Intersectionality posits that people have layered identities – gender, race, ethnicity, ability, opportunity, and class, among others. The theory describes ways in which these identities affect a person's certainties and experiences, thus forming perception, mission, and ability to relate to other people. Uncovering one's various identities can help clarify how one will respond to privilege and repression. C. Nicole Mason, in "Leading at the Intersections: An Introduction to the Intersectional Approach Model for Policy and Social Change," describes intersectionality as referring to:

> the ways race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, status and other markers of differences intersect to inform individual realities and lived experiences…An Intersectional perspective or framework encourages policymakers and social change leaders to identify the ways in which race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability and status influence public policy outcomes at the national, state and local levels. This approach can also inform advocacy efforts aimed at increasing equity and equality in society. (Mason n.d., 5)

Intersectionality assumes that everyone has "points of privilege and points of oppression" (Mason n.d., 7). The ultimate goal is to ensure that all groups and communities have a voice in social change and policy advocacy efforts. And since the

systems of discrimination and oppression are related, it is not possible to encounter one system without encountering the other.

Loop of Learning

Transformative accompaniment helps leaders frame and reframe perspectives and perceptions. Accompaniment, thus, requires adaptive leaders who can mobilize "people to tackle tough challenges and thrive." (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 14-16). Adaptive work incorporates the double-loop learning paradigm introduced by Chris Argyris in his book, *Overcoming Organizational Defence*. Argyris points out that the technical work of single-loop learning, where "people attempt to fix the problem simply by changing the actions," often results in "the quick, incremental, technical solution, [which] tends to produce only temporary results and can often allow for deeper errors and problems to continue unchecked" (Gortner 2009, 127). In "Looking at Leadership Beyond Our Own Horizon," David Gortner, reflecting on Argyris, clarifies that in single-loop learning, "people tend to keep revisiting the loop through 'skilled unawareness and incompetence,' unhelpful routines of perception and action so well practiced that people are unaware of them themselves" (Gortner 2009, 127). Double-loop learning requires a reflective process that seeks transformation of both leader and context.

One of the most beneficial aspects of the accompaniment experience is its capacity to stimulate research and learning. Our experiences at the checkpoint prompted Sojourners to ask questions and initiate further inquiry. It introduced us to organizations that document human rights violations at checkpoints. Our learning resonated in our minds, sermons, and counsel. Our experiences became an accompaniment consciousness,

where our minds looped back to review what we had gained, and then moved forward based on new knowledge. Transformation is about learning and growing.

Sojourners have heard leaders criticize Palestinian Christian youth as “lazy”, “indifferent”, or eager to get out of Palestine. By accompanying young people and listening to their stories and dilemmas, we were converted to a different perception. As Sojourners, we discovered how hard young people’s lives are in their immediate context and how desperate they are to find jobs, build or support families, and dream of a better future. We listened to young adults confide that the church has played no role in addressing their conditions. The church has constructed housing projects to encourage young families to stay in Palestine. But Sojourners learned that the projects sometimes discriminate on the basis of denomination. “This is a Catholic project; if I were a Catholic, they would have considered my application,” said Amin, a parishioner at the Lutheran church. “If you become Orthodox, the church will help you find affordable housing,” Luna advised. St. Andrews’ housing project initially aimed to provide affordable housing to young families, but it ended up helping the affluent, as well as church leaders and diocesan employees. Two bishops, the diocesan general accountant, the diocesan property manager, a school principal, the ex-mayor of Ramallah, and parishioners who work as university professors and self-employed managers own apartments at the housing project.

As we learned from our experiences with young workers, our goals and priorities shifted to include those who were not part of our ministries. This helped us question our mission: Why we were not engaged in advocating workers’ rights? What message does the church have for landlords who abuse workers? Why has the church not engaged in

advocating an adequate minimum wage? We clergy were silent. We were satisfied with what we made ourselves. These were painful questions. We had taken for granted that poor people came to church for financial support; we accepted that they should! What kind of power did that give us? Questioning goals and practices that one assumes as foundational is uncomfortable. Anita Farber-Robertson and co-authors build on Argyris' "'double-loop learning,' the kind of learning in which you ask questions not only about the way you are doing something but about why you are doing it. It is as though you are doubling back, going beyond the presenting question, to the first question that precedes it" (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, and Whiman 2000, 63). The authors write:

> I am asking you to step back from your practice and look at yourself as someone else might look at you. And then I want you to ask? 'Why?' 'Why did I do that?' 'What was I thinking?' 'What was I feeling or intending?' 'What was I concealing?' 'Whom was I serving?' 'What values and purposes was I serving?' 'Ought they be served?' I am raising more than the matter of how you can do something better –namely, the question of whether you should be doing it at all. (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, and Whiman 2000, 63)

Double-loop questions expose who we are and what we do. They reveal truth about "something we accepted as 'always being that way' was not always that way, or does not need to be so" (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, and Whiman 2000, 63). Immersing in a context of injustice is by nature double-loop learning. Pre-immersion sessions, immersion, and post-immersion helped us step back and ask why we had missed opportunities at the very core of our ministries. Immersion exposed us to new realities that made the ethic of "we have always done things this way" unacceptable.

The Accompaniment experience helped Sojourners question our espoused theology and ministry. We admitted that we had given ourselves excuses for not confronting a structure that kept victims suffering. We had not challenged what had been

presented to us as our work. We were able to function within a system set before us, but we were not able to question the status quo. We did not ask the "why" and "why not."

Accompaniment brings a whole person into being within a context. It involves the intellect and the body with all its senses. The whole leader presence is what makes accompanying unique in its ability to transform. Injustice is not an *act* but a *state of systematic abuse of power* that can only be understood with a powerful mind and body. The primary existential crisis of the human condition is injustice, which is a tangible reality, not an abstraction. Accompanying a victim requires involvement of the soul, which asks "How is it possible that we have not noticed?" An effective accompaniment experience involves a double-loop of learning and engaging that decodes a context and enriches a leader's judgment and ability to act, including in new contexts.

Accompaniment spurs leaders to gather historical information that illuminates context. Accompaniment transforms leaders into researchers. Leaders cannot understand the Palestinian context, for example, without studying Middle Eastern history and geography. Likewise, one cannot effectively advocate equality for African Americans in the United States without knowledge of the slave trade and the civil rights movement. Transformers cannot advocate what they do not know. Learning about context involves sojourning in history, and sometimes becoming uncomfortable with what one learns. History may reveal personal and institutional indifference, or even complicity in suffering. This is the case with many denominations during the eras of Nazism, slavery, apartheid, and Zionism. As one sojourns in the Occupied Territories, one sees Greco-Roman, early Christian, Byzantine, Mameluke and Ottoman remains, British colonial vestiges, demolished villages, refugee camps, checkpoints, and separation walls.

Journeying a context of oppression inspires leaders to understand the context of the weak, the oppressed, and the marginalized.

In a context of conflict, there will always be competing interpretations of history. Accompaniment helps leaders listen and learn without unconsciously adopting any one narrative. It allows one to collect and scrutinize all narratives, seeking patterns and frameworks. It helps leaders craft timelines revealing interconnected forces that must be understood from a holistic perspective.

Conclusion

Accompaniment is an antidote to individualism, alienation, and estrangement. It reflects God's response to his creation. It embodies the Christian responsibility toward God, fellow humans, and non-humans. To accompany means to confront selfishness and self-centeredness and to challenge leaders to take responsibility for others, especially victims of injustice. Accompaniment travels into the pathos of the world, liberating and transforming it, and drawing it into God's ethos. Accompaniment enacts theology through active engagement in the lives of the oppressed. It stands on the same ground, experiences the same circumstances, lives the same stories, exposes itself to analysis, generates rational argument, and shapes community. It exemplifies Jesus' enactment of the in-breaking of the reign of God. Jesus' ministry, asserts Thistlethwaite, "included healing, eating and drinking with friends and with those who have been excluded, and enacting a new understanding of community based on mutuality and peace, not violence and greed" (Thistlethwaite 2013, 40). Accompaniment spurs leaders to see God working in and through victims, and to encounter God there. Accompaniment leads to conversion and to transformation.

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Chapter Three: Listen

Attentive listening to victims of injustice transforms listeners as well as narrators. When a crisis hits, victims seek help, ask questions, reflect on the meaning of life, expound on their travails, and challenge God, faith, beliefs, the state, society, and tradition. They need to share what they have endured. “The purposes in the human mind are like deep water,” reads Proverbs, “but the intelligent will draw them out” (Prv 20:5). Conversing to a caring person provides a chance for healing and transformation.

Any leader can learn to be a good listener through discipline and practice. Created in the image and likeness of God, humans are inherently relational, and thus able to nurture the practice of attentive listening. Listening is one of the most operational gifts with which God has endowed us – in the aim of providing comfort and support. Sojourners need to nurture this gift in order to serve God’s purpose of transforming the world. Leaders will discover that listening powerfully affects human behavior. It affirms that victims have had experiences worth telling and hearing, and that others care to hear. Listening asserts a simple fact: that listener and narrator come together for healing and transformation. When leaders attentively listen to victims of oppression, they welcome them to a sacred space. In this chapter, an immersion event will unfold, and we will contemplate Jesus’ listening paradigm, construct a theology of attentive listening, consult social sciences, examine signs of transformation, and assess challenges.

Encountering Imprisonment

Sojourners sought to encounter the unfamiliar and obscure in our context. We discussed the arrest of Judeh in our post-accompaniment session. Judeh is a Christian from Ramallah. He is married and has two children. Of the last seven years, Judeh has spent six in Israeli detention. Administrative detention is different from imprisonment. In administrative detention, a person can be held without being indicted. A court may extend the detention order for "security reasons," which always are classified. After six months or so, the Israeli authority may release the detainee for a month or two and then re-arrest him or her. This has been Judeh's ordeal for the last seven years.

One of the oppressive circumstances of life in Palestine is political imprisonment. Sojourners were aware of the agonies of Palestinian political prisoners. But our awareness was shallow, and we lacked tools to be effective advocates for their cause. Sojourners tried to come up with an adequate description of procedures for arrest, detention, and imprisonment, as well as the rehabilitation process, but failed to do so. We discovered that what we knew about this category of victims needed to be expanded. Sojourners discussed the possibility of visiting prisoners for a first-hand encounter. However, we discovered that this was impossible, as only immediate relatives could do so, via Red Cross permits. Luna offered a suggestion: "A prisoner's wife is a colleague of my cousin; I can approach her and see if she is willing to talk to us." The wife lived in a nearby village, and another member, Abla, suggested hosting the meeting at her home. Five Sojourners traveled to meet Manal, wife of a political prisoner sentenced to 12 years. After introducing ourselves and explaining our motives, we assured her of her rights and the protection of her privacy. Manal then narrated her story:

“It was after midnight when I heard loud knocking at the door. I woke up and saw that Amjad was fully dressed. I asked: What’s happening? He said: Israeli soldiers! We opened the door. The soldiers immediately grabbed Amjad, turned the house upside down, and took him away without explaining anything. Is this a dream? I asked myself. What is happening? I eventually called my parents and told them what had happened. Since then, my life has not been the same. I woke up to a new reality, a new life that I never imagined. It’s strange how one’s life can turn upside down in a minute.

“The journey of agony started as soon as my husband was arrested.[19] I did not know where he was taken, nor could I get any information about allegations against him. The only thing I could do, I learned, was to report the arrest to the Red Cross office and wait. The process was exhausting spiritually and physically. After three weeks, the Red Cross informed me that Amjad was in a detention center and was accused of helping others who had attacked Israeli military forces. I was told that I could not visit him during the detention period. During interrogation, I learned, Israeli authorities do not allow visits, in an attempt to break prisoners psychologically so they will confess. Amjad was convicted of assisting with atrocities against Israeli military forces. He was sentenced to 12 years. After Amjad was transferred to a prison, we could apply for permits to visit him through the International Committee of the Red Cross. Every month, I apply for a permit and wait until I receive approval for the visit. Many times I was not granted a permit, so my chance to see my husband slipped to the next month.

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[19] There are many reports about political detention and imprisonment in the Occupied Territories. See for example “Kept in the Dark: Treatment of Palestinian Detainees in the Petah Tikva Interrogation Facility of the Israeli Security Agency” by two Israeli human rights organizations B’Tselem and Hamoked. B'Tselem and Hamoḳed. "Kept in the Dark: Treatment of Palestinian Detainees in the Petah Tikva Interrogation Facility of the Israel Security Agency." B'Tselem, October 2010. Accessed December 15, 2017. https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/201010_kept_in_the_dark.

"I had to get used to a different kind of a life. My family asked me to request a divorce, but I couldn't abandon Amjad and add to his suffering. He himself asked me if I wanted a divorce. During the first two years, I went through anxiety and depression. I sought help from Addameer, a non-governmental organization that cares for prisoners and their families. I went to many counseling sessions and had to take medication for more than a year. Even after ten years, I continue to wake up with nightmares and occasional panic attacks, many of them prior to visiting Amjad in prison. Palestinian governmental organizations for prisoners were not helpful. I had to sell some of my personal belongings to raise money for an Israeli lawyer who knew how to get the shortest sentence. I had to look for work and find a way to sustain myself, our baby, and pay for lawyers and visits. There is little support for prisoners' families, and the government does not even cover prisoners' expenses while in prison.

"I was alone. Even with the support of family and friends, this is a journey that one walks alone with no real emotional support. I learned a lot by going from one place to another and talking to other families on the way to visit Amjad. But I had to depend on myself. People, and especially officials, show understanding and support, but that is all. One needs to belong to a particular political party or know influential people in order to get attention. During my troubles, even though I was alone, I did manage to learn from the experience. I learned that God has never abandoned me. I felt his hand always directing me to do certain things. I strongly believe that my faith in God is what kept me going, even helping me succeed in my work. I got promoted and have a good job that supports me and my family. This is my story and I hope you will spread it so that people are aware not only of the suffering of political prisoners but also of their families."

Sojourners asked Manal about prison conditions, and what she expected from the rehabilitation and assimilation process after Amjad's release. She reminded us that prisoners came out into a different world, saying she was worried about how Amjad would manage reintegration. After assuring Manal that we wanted to do more to help her, Sojourners left, feeling sad and perplexed about how unaware the church was on the conditions of political prisoners' families. We wondered how we could relate to Jesus' comment, "I was in prison and you visited me" (Mt 25:36). In our reflection session, we asked ourselves how we could get to know more about the category of prisoners in our midst. We discussed the conditions of prisoners' families: if there are roughly 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners and detainees, then there must be at least 70,000 immediate family members – fathers, mothers, spouses, children, brothers, and sisters – also suffering due to loved ones' imprisonment. We asked: "How did we not notice?" "What happens to a family once a husband, wife, father, mother, brother, sister, son or daughter is detained or imprisoned?" We decided to look to the Bible, and to our theology, to think through what the church's mission should be. The listening experience opened our eyes and minds to new realities about our context. We asked ourselves whether we had failed to pay attention to the problem because most prisoners and families are not parishioners or Christians. Was the mission too difficult for us? Whatever the reasons for our lack of engagement, the fact remained that Palestinian political prisoners and detainees and their families were suffering without significant attention on the part of the church or its leadership. Attentive listening opened our horizons, got us to ask questions, launched us on a search for more information, and forced us to analyze the mission of the church toward this category of victims.

I looked for organizations that worked with political prisoners and discovered Adameer[20], Arabic for "conscience," an organization that studies the circumstances of prisoners[21] and detainees[22] in the Occupied Territories. From their website and reports, I gathered these information:

> Since the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory in 1967, more than 800,000 Palestinians have been detained under Israeli military orders…This number constitutes approximately 20 percent of the total Palestinian population and as much as 40 percent of the total male Palestinian population…It also includes approximately 10,000 women jailed since 1967, as well as 8,000 Palestinian children arrested since 2000. As of December [2016] the number of Palestinian political prisoners and detainees is 5,033, spread around 17 prisons, four interrogation centers and four detention centers. All but one of the prisons are located inside Israel, in direct contravention of Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states that an occupying power must detain residents of occupied territory in prisons inside the occupied territory. The practical consequence of this system is that many prisoners have difficulty meeting with Palestinian defense counsel and do not receive family visits as their relatives are denied entry to Israel (Addameer, 2014).

Jesus the Attentive Listener

Jesus was a good listener – one who provided space for others to speak. At the age of 12, his family "found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Lk 2:46). Whether in the midst of a large crowd (Lk

[20] "ADDAMEER (Arabic for conscience) Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association is a Palestinian non-governmental, civil institution that works to support Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli and Palestinian prisons. Established in 1992 by a group of activists, the center offers free legal aid to political prisoners, advocates their rights at the national and international level, and works to end torture and other violations of prisoners' rights." For more information, see Addameer website at http://www.addameer.org

[21] Imprisonment in this section refers to the arrest, detention, imprisonment as well as after-imprisonment punishment of Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. "Political prisoners" are individuals arrested, detained, indicted, and imprisoned in relation with the occupation, as opposed to convicts suspected or convicted of classic crimes or felonies unrelated to the occupation.

[22] In violation of international law, administrative detention is a procedure that permits the Israeli military to hold detainees until further notice, based on undisclosed information, without indictment and without trial. This procedure authorizes military superiors to detain a person for up to six-months in renewable periods. Just before an expiration date, a detention mandate is often renewed. This practice can be sustained *ad infinitum.* A Palestinian detainee can be interrogated for a total period of 90 days, during which he/she is often subjected to some form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, whether physical or psychological, and ranging in extremity. For more information, see Addameer website at http://www.addameer.org

18:31-34), during the tribunal of the adulterous women (Jn 8:6-7), before the high priest and Pilate (Mt 26:63; 27:14), or on the way to Emmaus (Lk 24:17), Jesus practiced attentive listening. He appreciated learning about people's concerns, values, and dilemmas. He listened to words, and to the sense of urgency in people's tones of voice (Mk 5:22-24). Luke's story of the blind beggar on the road outside Jericho reads:

> As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, 'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.' Then he shouted, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' He said, 'Lord, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God. (Lk 18:35-43)

The behavior of the people walking with Jesus was odd to the point of being unkind. Why would those "in front," or in other translations "leading the way," rebuke a blind beggar calling for mercy to "be quiet"? Did they want to prevent the beggar from disturbing the liturgical process of pilgrimage? Then comes Jesus' question to the beggar: "What do you want me to do for you?" It is a simple question that seeks understanding. "Seeking understanding" is theology as traditionally defined by Anselm of Canterbury.

Leading is about paying attention to those at the side of the road, even when they disturb a comfortable lifestyle or liturgical process. Those in front rebuked the beggar for a reason: perhaps they did not understand what his needs were, or they sought to preserve calm and avoid any disturbance to tradition, liturgy, harmony, law, etc. Rebuffing the requests of the least among us today has many motivations, including patriarchy, supremacy, personal security, social or economic privilege, self-righteousness, familial concerns and safety, and indifference.

Jesus' question to the beggar is a lesson for leaders: seek those who call for mercy and justice and learn what drives them; understand human needs before acting; listen to victims of oppression and provide them the space to tell their stories. The story advises us that Jesus "stood still," disturbing the rhythm of journey and perhaps the flow of traffic on the road, in order to attend to a person who sought mercy. Human need, affirms Jesus, is more important than pursuit of one's personal goals. Jesus' question provided a sacred space for the beggar to state what he wanted, and to receive an attentive hearing.

Listening is a pervasive theme in the Bible. The Book of Exodus states that listening to the oppressed is among the first steps toward knowledge and liberation. God heard the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt: "I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings (Ex 3:7b). The verse implies that through listening, one achieves knowledge. God tells Moses, "I have observed…, I have heard their cry… Indeed, I know their suffering, and I have come down to deliver them" (Ex 3:7-8). Listening also produces action. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus listened to the disciples as he accompanied them on the way, "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them" (Lk 24:15-17).

For Jesus, listening to others is like listening to the Father; not to listen is to reject God: "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me" (Lk 10:16). James advises: "be quick to listen, slow to speak" (Jas 1:19). Transformation occurs as leaders listen and learn.

A Theology of Listening

A theology of listening is constructed on sacred *space*, out of a sacred *presence* and sacramental *attentiveness* that allow transformation and liberation to occur. A

theology of listening involves sacred communication, during which stories of human existence, human fellowship, and human responsibility within the story of God are permitted to unfold. The book of Exodus presents a wonderful image for liberation. God prepares holy ground at Horeb in “a flame of fire out of a bush” (Ex 3:2). God then arouses Moses to “turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up” (Ex 3:3). That space where Moses stands, where the divine and the human encounter each other, “is holy ground” (Ex 3:5). Moses’ “Here I am” made him henceforth part of God’s plan for liberation. He did not run away, hide, or ignore the burning bush. He said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up” (Ex 3:3). In that *encounter* and on that *holy ground* God declared to Moses his identity: “I am the God of your father”; his nature: “I have observed…heard…know”; and his purpose “have come down to deliver…and to bring them up” (Ex 3:7-8). Reflecting on Israel’s history as a story, Jon D. Levenson asserts that “Israel does not begin with the statement that YHWH is faithful; she infers it from a story. And unlike the statement, the story is not universal. It is Israel’s story, with all the particularities of time, place, and *dramatis personae* one associates with a story and avoids in a statement that aims at universal applicability” (Levenson 1987, 39-40). Levenson concludes that the theological implications of history do not come from “introspection or philosophical speculation, but from the recitation of a story.” He writes: “Telling the story brings it alive, actualizes it, turns it from past into present and bridges the gap between individual and collective experience, by enabling Israelites of the present generation to become the Israel of the covenant” (Levenson 1987, 42).

God made a connection with his creation and incarnation through the power of story. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells a story that reaches its climax in the story of Jesus' journey, with each account building up to the story of Jesus' life in a unique way. Scriptures also narrate stories of individuals and communities whose lives were shaped by their own stories in relation to the story of God, and whose accounts have helped others find entry points where personal and collective stories can be interpreted.

Stories not only recount past experiences, they prepare the way for the present and future. When leaders listen to a victim's story, they do not bring the story into being – on the contrary, they move, themselves, into the past to become part of it. Then they move forward to the present, this time not alone but accompanied by the victim and the community of victims into a different present that aspires to a transformed future.

Attentive listening, thus, creates a sacred space where God intervenes in the speaker as well as the listener. Listening, therefore, is revelation – it reveals divine presence and mission in human experience. Dietrich Bonhoeffer asserts that leaders who no longer listen to others "will soon no longer be listening to God either." Quoted by Howard Clinebell in *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth*, Bonhoeffer writes:

> Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because Christians are talking when they should be listening. He who no longers listens to his brother [or sister] will soon no longer be listening to God either…One who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and never really speaking to others, albeit he be not conscious of it. (Clinebell 1984, 72)

Leaders are challenged to be God's compassionate listening ears. Our ability to love God's children is evident when we provide a place for them to share their needs. When

they are able to feel God's presence in the process of narration and listening, their lives will be transformed, our lives will be transformed, and the world will change.

Attentive listening provides victims with opportunities to untangle the thoughts in their hearts. An attentive listener lets people express themselves without being judged, interrupted, redirected or preached to. Transformative listening allows a leader to enter into a speaker's situation. It requires an act of withdrawal, so that another can open up and talk. "We create the space for others to be themselves and to come to us on their own terms" (Nouwen 2010, 97). Henri Nouwen quotes James Hillman speaking about the withdrawal of the listener. Hillman writes:

> For the other person to open and talk requires a withdrawal of the counselor. I must withdraw to make room for the other…This withdrawal, rather than going-out-to-meet the other, is an intense act of concentration, a model for which can be found in the Jewish mystical doctrine of Tsimtsum, God as omnipresent and omnipotent was everywhere. He filled the universe with his Being. How then could the creation come about? . . . God had to create by withdrawal; He created the not-Him, the other, by self-concentration...On the human level, withdrawal of myself aids the other to come into being. (Nouwen 2010, 97)

Attentive listening brings affirmation rather than answers. The listener's ultimate job is to listen, not to provide solutions. When listening is successful in opening up holy ground, it transforms the listener and heals the speaker.

In *Human Development and Faith: Life-Cycle Stages of Body, Mind, and Soul,* Felicity Kelcourse provides a useful compendium of materials about human development and the importance of relationships and internalization. Kelcourse affirms that "in relation to others, we learn about their reality as they become real to us, sharing their stories and life experience in close proximity. And we develop a *sturdy sense of reality* when our lives are sufficiently experienced with others who love, affirm, rub, contact us in ways that give us confidence about what to expect next" (Kelcourse 2004, 212).

Stories told face to face form a link of engagement between a narrator and listener. It is through this link that transformation takes place, because neither the narrator nor the listener is the same after the encounter. Narrative fosters connections and nurtures fellowship, which in turn helps listener and narrator grow and refine their concepts of what is true about human existence and relations. Kelcourse asserts that "getting a useful grip on reality, especially emotional reality both in self and in others, does not come automatically. It is the result of a process of thousands of ongoing internalizations of the truth about self and others that happens within the context of intimate human interactions" (Kelcourse 2004, 214). Relationships start and develop by telling stories – life stories. Edward T. Chambers, in *The Power of Relational Action,* points out that the Latin root of the verb "relate" makes clear relations are constructed around "relating" stories (Chambers 2009, 12). A solid, face-to-face encounter "brings up stories that reveal people's deepest commitments and the experiences that give rise to their core values. In fact, the most important thing that happens in a good one-to-one is the telling of stories that open windows into the passions that animate people" (Chambers 2009, 21).

Sojourners paid close attention to stories entrusted to us, and also to the connections that developed among group members, victims, and others, as our learning and reflection deepened. After Sojourners listened to the prisoner's wife, they offered her their support: "Please, be assured of our prayers," "we are here to listen to you," "if you need anything, please let us know." Manal then asked if the story would be published, imploring us to "make sure that the news gets out; I'm counting on you!"

During our evaluation session, a strange idea occurred to us: "Should we ask Manal to participate in the foot-washing rite at our Maundy Thursday service?" The

suggestion was unusual because Manal is Muslim. Even though hosting her at such an event would have been unprecedented, no one opposed the suggestion. Sojourners decided to call her and ask if she wanted to participate. She was thrilled and appreciative, but explained that she had to take her child to the hospital at the time of the service. The story, our unusual proposal to Manal, and her gracious response, constitute elements of theological reflection and transformation, and of sacramental living – seeing the divine in the suffering and struggles of the oppressed. Stories help form community among those with shared existence. In her excellent book, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction,* Mary Clark Moschella contends that:

> Through ethnographic listening practices, pastors and rabbis can begin to hear their communities' stories, told in many voices and versions. By weaving these stories together, leaders can 'read' the theologies that are expressed and enacted in the everyday life of the group. Then by sharing their research results back with their congregation or agency, leaders can stimulate more honest theological reflection and trusting relationships within the group. This process sows the seeds for spiritual and social transformation within the faith community and beyond. (Moschella 2008, xi)

For those seeking transformation and social change, theological reflection of a story-based type could be the style of interaction that is most appealing to and appropriate for the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalized. It carries forth accounts of strong men and women who endure oppression and emerge responsible, trusting and faithful to a God who sustains victims of ordeals of all types. Theological reflection that is story-based stretches the mind to discover God in unexpected circumstances. Sojourners were transformed by their experiences with Manal, who endured distress, kept the faith, and became a hardworking, successful woman. We were astonished to hear her say: "I never anticipated arising from this turmoil. Many times, I thought this was the end; life was not worth living. I felt lost and abandoned, but I believe that it was God who kept me strong,

persistent, and faithful. He accompanied my husband through this mayhem and also kept me going. It was God, I have no doubt." To be able to encounter the divine in the stories, suffering, and faithfulness of victims is transforming. At a time when Sojourners were frustrated at their inability to recognize and succor victims, the stories we heard restored faith in a God who is present in the suffering of his people.

As a consequence of our listening experiences, Sojourners learned how to reflect theologically, and also how to help narrators reflect on their own stories. A story-based model can help vulnerable people gain the ability to articulate personal experiences and make relevant theological and emotional connections. Furthermore, attentive listening encourages leaders to perceive beyond the oral, the visible, and the imagined into the unspoken, the unseen, the unexpected, and the unimagined. In *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore points out that all communities face conflict and pain: some in plain sight, some under the surface. Answering her own questions: "Where then is hope? What is God's call for Christians?" Moore asserts that the answers require understanding *God's call to practice sacramental living – living that mediates divine grace in the church and the world*" (Moore 2004, 22). Moore explains that sacramental living is grounded in God and in the signs of God's grace in the world. Using the image of a tree, Moore elucidates: "Sacramental theology is like a towering tree, impressively large and bountiful with fruit. What is less apparent is the deep roots that hold the tree in the ground, sending nourishment to its branches. Each root reaches far under the ground, intertwining with others, as roots are wont to do" (Moore 2004, 22). People expect to see what is above the surface and usually forget about roots, which not only nurture the trees above them but also hold firm against devastating winds. Moore identifies the roots of

hope in sacramental theology as encounters with God, where believers are marked with grace and vulnerability, two key elements for transformation.

Transformers fall in love with stories. Liberation and transformation pertains to the interaction of God's story and the human story – the bad news of oppression with the good news of God. Naim Ateek constructs his theology of liberation on God's liberating story, as it recounts the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and on the author's painful personal story – one of exile in his own country. Naim writes:

> I am a Palestinian. I had just turned eleven in 1948 when the Zionists occupied my hometown, Beisan (Beth Shean). We had no army to protect us. There was no battle, no resistance, no killing; we were simply taken over, occupied, on Wednesday, May 12, 1948. Our house was on the main street, so as a boy I watched the Zionist troops, the Haganah, come into town past our door, watched them enter every house in the neighborhood, looking for weapons. They searched our house, too, but did not find any. My father had never owned a gun; he did not believe in doing so….When the soldiers occupied our town in 1948, our simple and unpretentious life was disturbed…We lived under occupation for fourteen days. On May 26, the military governor sent for the leading men of the town; at military headquarters, he informed them quite simply and coldly that Beisan must be evacuated by all of its inhabitants within a few hours. My father pleaded with him, "I have nowhere to go with my large family. Let us stay in our home." But the blunt answer came, "If you do not leave, we will have to kill you." I remember vividly my father's return from headquarters to give us the bad news. With great anguish he said, "We have been given no choice. We must go. (Ateek 1990, 7-9)

Leaders like Naim could bear losing a home but could not accept losing hope for liberation; could undergo the end of a story but could not fail to believe in resurrection.

Sojourners reflected on their awareness of their own presence while listening to Manal's story. "I was listening and kept thinking what I would do if the story is mine. I could not imagine being in Manal's shoes," said Luna. "I wonder how these prisoners and their family can manage. It is a life crisis. One is stuck in there for years," commented Imad. The story of victims is so tense with emotions that it brings the listener into

emotional state of recognizing human pain, mutual; presence in the face of pain. Howard Clinebell writes, “All of us have known the empty, depersonalizing feelings resulting from conversing with a person who isn’t really *present*. The opposite of this experience is required to produce a healing, growthful relationship” (Clinebell 1984, 75). Presence forms a connection but does not perform professional counseling. Clinebell asserts that presence is “the first, vital strand of what will become a sturdy bridge connecting the islands of awareness of two human beings. The bridge is called *rapport*. Presence-focused listening is not easy, as leaders often feel inclined to respond, clarify, and instruct. Instead, they should try to learn, to reflect on themselves in relation to the victim’s story of pain, and try to see God in steadfastness and transformation.

The archetype of evangelism, for many, is preaching, teaching, instructing, and converting people through discourse. Christian leadership is trained to seize opportunities to speak in order to cure a victim or change a context. But victims of injustice are so saturated by experience that they often cannot absorb more. People in general and victims of injustice in particular want to be listened to rather than preached to.

Consulting Social Sciences

Transforming Trauma

By definition, victims’ experiences are traumatic. Prisoners in Palestine are generally apprehended by soldiers, usually in the early hours and in the presence of their families, who wake up to shock and fear. Prisoners go through aggressive and life-threatening interrogation procedures that leave them with physical, emotional, and spiritual scars. The experiences of prisoners, detainees and their families haunt them for

years, and may paralyze parts of their lives. The damage done to victims and their families often extends to communities. As of January 15, 2017, the American Psychological Association defined trauma on its website as:

> an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives. Psychologists can help these individuals find constructive ways of managing their emotions. (American Psychological Association, n.d.)

In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman explains that traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They break victims. They destroy understanding of self in connection to others. They violate faith and undermine belief systems (Herman 1992, 51). Trauma echoes beyond its initial impact, in that victims are forced to relive struggles over independence, initiative, competence, identity and intimacy when these themes arise later in life (Herman 1992, 52). Herman explains that conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them is the primary source of tension in psychological trauma. Herman explains that trauma robs victims of their sense of power and control, both needed for recovery. Thus the basic goal of listening to victims of oppression should be to restore these two key attributes (Herman 1992, 159).

Although social scientists recognize that whole families are traumatized by arrest, detention, and imprisonment of one member, less attention is given to this problem than it merits. Reflecting on the Syrian refugee crisis, psychologist Froma Walsh asserts that “going beyond the traumatized individual when treating refugees is crucial.” She argues that including family members in treatment speeds the healing process of the individual directly traumatized. Walsh states that “the shock waves reverberate throughout the family…But the family also holds the key to healing…We focus on the strengths that

enable people to endure and overcome trauma and tap into the natural resources for resilience in the family" (Clay 2017).

There is a redemptive dimension to many stories of oppression. Attentive listening to a victim's story prompts the *kairos* – the opportune moment – of the story to emerge, thus reducing doubt, fear, shame, and embarrassment. Attentive listening also challenges guardedness, which binds a victim to the past and prevents formulation of an alternative that makes healing and advocacy possible. Storytelling exposes repressed feelings. When victims of oppression are able to recount their traumatic experiences within a caring environment, their guilt, fear, and shame can be transformed into a new identity, opening new possibilities to helping other victims of oppression.

Physical and psychological violence is traumatic. Judith Herman, as quoted by Susan Thistlethwaite, asserts that "traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death." Thistlethwaite affirms that "unhealed trauma is shattering for the human self and can result in disempowerment, disconnection, and alienation. Trauma produces an existential crisis, a threat to basic trust in the self, others, the world, and God" (Thistlethwaite 2015, 175). Attentive listening to victims of oppression and violence opens the way for empowerment, connection, and healing. Transformative leaders working in conflict zones or in peace-building and justice can learn from Trauma Theory both theologically and practically. Thistlethwaite describes how Leymah Gbowee drew on trauma work to shape the framework of the women's peace movement in Liberia. Gbowee volunteered at the Lutheran Church in Liberia to help repair the social and psychological damage caused by the war. Thistlethwaite quotes Gbowwe as saying "'Peace-building to me isn't ending a

fight by standing between two opposing forces. It's healing those victimized by war, making them strong again, and bringing them back to the people they once were, and to repair the whole society" (Thistlethwaite 2015, 176). Sadly, many leaders in conflict zones including Palestine have only limited knowledge of Trauma Theory and how to deal with traumatized victims. We have noticed that very little attention if ever has been given to traumatized Palestinian victims and their families. Sojourners agreed that neither our ministry nor the church's ministry at large had any program to deal with trauma. We also confessed that it did not find a way into our teaching, preaching, and pastoral care. Neglecting trauma and its impact on victims, taking a "get over it" approach, or simply trying to spiritualize it, can be devastating to victims. Thistlethwaite writes:

> There is no 'getting over' our national trauma and no getting past the traumas of others nations or our role in global trauma. Concerted effort towards healing must be part of our peace work. And let us remember, we ourselves can be survivors or perpetrators, and we are certainly witnesses of many forms of trauma. There is no dealing with it. But that does not mean we cannot be creative about how we do so. In fact, creativity is indispensable to making meaningful space for real change. (Thistlethwaite 2015, 177)

Telling a story is therapeutic. It helps victims share themselves with the world and feel part of a community. In his book, *The Psychology of Counseling*, Clyde Narramore contends that talk is useful for clarification, for freedom and for "ventilation" (Narramore 1960, 44-45). In her book *Sites of Violence, Sites of Grace: Christian Nonviolence and the Traumatized Self* Cynthia Hess argues that only when a traumatized person places his or her whole self into the narrative of Jesus and with the help of the community of faith can he or she experience transformation (Hess 2009, 111). When stories of trauma are welcomed and the description of an instance of trauma is re-internalized with compassionate support of a caring community, healing can begin to take place (Hess

2009, 111). Re-contextualizing stories of trauma in light of the resurrection of Christ helps to temper fear with hope, since the resurrection narrative does not override or refute the cross but recognizes and embraces it; as such, trauma requires dealing with painful memories and emotions (Hess 2009, 122).

In her book *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* Cynthia Crysdale offers a new theological model for trauma. Crysdale perceives resurrection as a "means of claiming a voice, naming victimization, claiming human dignity and then discerning responsibility." By naming the sources of our victimization and embracing travail, Crysdale contends that an "alternative truth – the power of one's dynamic human spirit in relation to God – goes hand in hand with encountering Jesus' life-giving Spirit and confessing 'the whole truth'" (Crysdale 1999, 17).

During post-immersion reflection, Sojourners related the stories they heard to other stories either personal or encountered. Sharing these stories with the victim does not make the victim's story less unique but affirms the corporate suffering of the whole community and in a way relieves the victim. The victim does not feel alone in suffering. Suffering is shared in a context of conflict and oppression. Victims share their suffering with other victims. Manal told us how she and other women spent their time together as they traveled or waited to visit prisoners. She recounted how she would help other mothers and how each would comfort the other. "Sometimes, I felt comforted when I listened to other wives and mothers whose sons are sentenced for life. It was a time of connection and every visit was a time of fellowship. Families tell stories, share information, and give advice. "I have learned from other wives and mothers more about imprisonment than from any lawyer or institution," explained Manal.

Visiting with Manal led us to engage with other prisoners. We visited Rami, who was released from prison. We connected with Hanin and Muna, other wives of prisoners. Listening to their stories, Sojourners embraced them with love and made connections. This prompted action: to invite them to share their stories with others, to participate in a foot washing ritual, to advocate freedom and to organize vigils and campaigns. Sojourners organized an ecumenical vigil service for Palestinian prisoners and accepted the challenge to partake only of "Salt and Water" in support of the mass hunger strike[23]. Sojourners felt connected to another category of victims that had escaped our attention.

Telling a story is not merely talk when it takes place within a sacred space, and with sacred presence and sacramental attentiveness. Talking becomes therapeutic when the listener is fully attentive and caring. The structure of therapeutic talk is holistic, involving the speaker, listener, and community, as well as the hope in a liberating God. In line with Michael White and David Epson, who highlight the connection between knowledge and power in their *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends,* Moschella argues that the re-authoring process is where changes in actions and attitudes bring knowledge about self and the world. Change happens when speakers co-author stories, articulating, reflecting, re-evaluating, and revising them. Moschella writes:

> Practitioners of narrative therapies for individuals suggest that change comes about when we tell our stories, listening for themes and subplots, and identify the guiding myths or the underlying convictions by which we live. Articulating and evaluating these myths can then lead to a re-authoring process, wherein we begin to change our actions and attitudes and thereby begin to author — claim authority over — new, more intentional plotlines. By altering the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and about the world, we can start to imagine new ways of conducting our lives. (Moschella 2008, 6)

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[23] The "Salt and Water" challenge drew attention to the hunger strike of Palestinian political prisoners. Numerous local and international individuals agreed to drink salt and water in solidarity with hunger strikers

Sojourners reflected on Manal's strong character. We expected to see vulnerable, broken distressed woman but we met a very poised victim. Manal's explanation made sense: "the Israelis want to break our spirit, and our success despite pain sends a message that our pride will triumph." Nader observed that "we were supposed to convey a message of hope to the victims, yet it was we who actually received hope." This was a moment of awe. How could these people preach hope and bring transformation? It is this kind of marvel that testifies to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of victims.

The Palestinian victims of oppression rarely acknowledge the need to grieve. Manal mentioned that she would "cry for hours but alone in my room without letting anyone notice." Crying and grieving could be perceived in the Palestinian culture as a sign of weakness and this is the last thing victims want to reveal. Toward the end of our meeting with Manal, and as she was speaking about her son's encounter with his father, she started crying. She apologized. We assured her of our love and confirmed that "it is OK to grieve." Manal resisted the idea saying, "I do not want crying to be a habit. I do not want to get used to it. I do not what to cry when I visit my husband or in front of my son. It would break their spirit. I should be strong for them. I cry when I get to my room." Pride and honor are very important in the Palestinian culture. For many Palestinians losing pride is losing life.

In *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way we Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* Brene Brown defines vulnerability as "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" (Brown 2012, 34). Brown explains that shame derives its power from being unspeakable. She suggests that one of the ways to become free of shame is to own one's story. If victims of oppression own their stories, they can narrate the endings

(Brown 2012, 80). Telling a story is a means of release from shame. Brown contends that by appreciating their own vulnerability and imperfections, victims of oppression can transform their lives into hopeful missions into the world (Brown 2012, 131).

A victim who has experienced trauma and survived can, within a community of caring listeners, retrieve forgotten memories, discover a redemptive way of telling a story, and in so doing, become free to talk honestly about the traumatic past, thus empowering change. Trauma Theory tells us that when truth is finally recognized, victims can begin recovery (Herman 1992, 1). Theologies of trauma suggest that trauma can both challenge and deepen the mission and identity of a community, and provide new ways of thinking about the community's collective story (Hess 2009, 6). When a community and its members deliberately participate in a process of "re-membering" a traumatic past, an alternate story of triumph over trials can be constructed that will support the community's vitality and health.

Attentive listening brings healing to victims of oppression by conveying a holistic message of sacred and sacramental inter-being that engages and encourages transformers to encounter God in stories of suffering and resilience. Within such relationships, the victim builds capacity to reconstruct a new understanding of his or her trauma, thereby developing a changed sense of identity, *sumud*, and mission. Within a community of listeners, the victim incorporates past, present, and future, but also integrates self within the community. Thus the victim begins to see in trauma an opportunity to advocate justice for those who have undergone similar trauma. A community of caring listeners transforms a victim into a prophetic witness for justice.

Ethnography: It's All about Stories

Ethnography is a method of immersing oneself in a context in order to learn about and from it. Moschella defines ethnography as:

> a form of social research used by sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and other scholars to study living human beings in their social and cultural contexts. Participant observation is the hallmark of this kind of social research. Ethnographers go to the places where people live, work, or pray in order to take in firsthand the experience of group life and social interaction. (Moschella 2008, 25)

Listening and learning are at the heart of ethnography. Listening is a liberating practice – one that honors the sacredness of another's experience, insight, and passion. In a foreword to Moschella's book, Mary Elizabeth Moore writes: "People change more profoundly, and their passion for prophetic ministry and social transformation is enacted more fully, when they engage in listening, observing, and learning from one another" (Moschella 2008, ix).

Ethnography delves into issues like power, intercultural relationships, myth and metaphor, and social and political matters. Ethnographers strive to uncover patterns. In observing, listening, and studying history, leaders form a broad view of a context and its theology. Moschella contends that through "ethnographic listening practices, [leaders] can begin to hear their communities' stories, told in many voices and versions. By weaving these stories together, leaders can 'read' the theologies that are expressed and enacted in the everyday life of the group" (Moschella 2008, xi). Ethnography offers a mandate for spiritual and societal transformation. Leaders who seek to bring about change need to observe the habits and customs that characterize the context.

Sojourners agreed that we generally resist change, and request that others change to conform to our visions and missions. Moschella points out that "Religious leaders have

to be willing to be curious, to be surprised, to be moved." She adds that when leaders "develop the ears to hear…people in their cultural complexity, [leaders] will likely come to appreciate them more, to feel compassion, admiration, or to understand a bit more about them…Honest engagement requires this: that our view of a person, a community, and ourselves be enlarged in some way" (Moschella 2008, xv)

Listening to stories helps leaders feel life's undercurrents, including those that explain victimization. When the invisible becomes visible, leadership acknowledges that the suffering of those denied justice has meaning. When Manal talked about loneliness, she also expressed longing for another child. When asked whether she had ever considered "sperm smuggling," she said yes, and openly described a discussion she and her husband had had. Three Sojourners confessed on our evaluation session that they had never heard of the practice. This introduced a new line of questions. How does it happen? What about security? What about ethics? A new wave of discussion brought a new wave of information, reflection, and consideration of theological implications: How can an unfamiliar concept open new horizons on human suffering and human steadfastness? Oppression cannot break the human will to live. Prisoners and their families hope for a better future for their children, where the children will continue the struggle for freedom and justice. That is the Palestinian concept of *sumud.* To maintain continuity and hopefulness behind prison bars is a clear sign that life is stronger than death, that freedom overcomes oppression, and that justice prevails as long as victims continue to struggle.

Justice requires truth. One of the most difficult aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the presence of considerable "twisted" truth in narratives, augmented by biased media reporting. Whereas Palestinians claim their story to be true, Israelis too claim their

version of the story is true. Encounters with truth in the form of first-hand stories set leaders free of prejudice and authenticate advocacy. Seeking truth in the story of a victim requires a holistic understanding of a victim's context. This entails analyzing, interpreting, and reinterpreting narratives to which one has listened, as in ethnography. Attentiveness involves co-authoring and reformulating stories in the leader's own way and words, so that they will illuminate new and different contexts and eventually new realities. Interpretation prevents stories from becoming museum pieces or historical artifacts, and they guard truth from distortion and superstition.

In her article, *Transitional Justice Models and their Applicability to the Zionist-Palestinian Conflict and the Palestinian Refugee Issue*, Jessica Nevo, an Israeli sociologist and political activist of Argentine origin, acknowledges that "complete denial and blindness to the Palestinian narrative that was integral to the 'official story' we were exposed to, and in consequence, my complete ignorance of the Palestinian narrative upon my arrival to Israel, has made me feel embarrassed up till now" (Nevo 2004, 11). Narratives expose listeners to realities that require critical examination and scrutiny. Nevo experienced "an 'awakening journey' that includes processes of unveiling facts and stories" (Nevo 2004, 11). Narratives connect listeners and speakers to intuitions about where the truth lies. They introduce leaders to new aspects of what they formerly considered self-evident. Narratives uncover a new world of evidence and reality.

Attentive listening to victims' narratives is a truth-seeking mechanism – one that validates memories about what really happened. Truth commissions were established in eras of transition from oppression to freedom, sometimes to discover the truth about conflicts. Truth commissions address human rights abuses, whose details can be quite

shadowy. Through attentive listening, leaders function as truth-seekers in a manner akin to that of commissions, where listening is also key. Like participants in truth commissions, leaders are commissioned to uncover truth and to advocate justice and reconciliation, democracy, and accountability. Truth-seeking is an opportunity to expand community awareness and commitment to justice. For victims, narratives offer paths to reclaim memory and reach a hopeful future. This is social transformation.

In religious communities, like those in Palestine, stories usually have a dimension of faith; that is, people interpret their life stories within the framework of an understanding of God, who accompanies them through difficult times. Victims often recount perseverance during an ordeal. They tell of how God was a source of empowerment, keeping them going and helping them build successful lives. Palestinian Christian refugees tell about how they were forced to leave their homes and relocate, with God accompanying them and helping them adapt and thrive. Manal repeatedly asserted that when she had felt most alone, God empowered her to search for solutions to the needs of prisoners' families. By narrating their stories in a space of trust, victims practice their freedom, an experience that helps their identity to develop. A healthy and loving environment allows people to freely express themselves and grow into healthy persons.

In *Women's Bodies as Battlefield: Christian Theology and the Global War on Women*, Susan Thistlethwaite explains that personal stories of injustice are among the most compelling. Writing about violence against women, Thistlethwaite posits that stories, and especially first-hand, personal stories, are crucial to the work of justice advocacy as they present "personal testimony to what actually happens," which has the power to move the general public "to awareness and break through the silencing"

(Thistlethwaite 2015, 2-3). Stories are nonnegotiable facts because they are what they are. They reveal not data but human ordeals and human truths. Thistlethwaite states:

> Data…are important, of course, but it is crucial to confront the massive amount of violence against women at ground zero. *Ground zero* is defined here as the painful injuries to women's bodies and the threat of this pain, even to death, that causes widespread fear. Stories begin to address this physical level. (Thistlethwaite 2015, 3)

Storytelling is vital for the lives of those who suffer injustice, as it allows them to explore different ways of being and of making connections. As Sojourners wandered through the narrow streets of a refugee camp, the people they met welcomed them, sharing stories: Where had they come from? How had they ended up at the camp? They recounted arrest, imprisonment, and victimization by military incursions. They moved from one story to another. They seemed eager to share – to make their suffering known. They invited Sojourners into their homes, places of work, locations of projects they had developed, even to places where they had witnessed arrests, shootings, and home demolition. Thistlethwaite asserts that listening is an act of paying attention to a physical experience from the "topography of pain." She writes:

> Listening is a central part of witnessing, it is not turning away from women's bodies as battlefields and from battlefields in war but paying close attention to the physical experience and understanding was from that topography of pain. The human being is one body and soul together and what happens to the body is of consummate importance.(Thistlethwaite 2015, 77)

Stories of oppression and liberation are passed from one generation to another. God ordered Moses to keep the story of oppression and liberation alive among the Israelites as they celebrate Passover, "You shall tell your child on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt" (Ex 13:8). Reflecting on the formation of the identity of Israelites, Jon D. Levenson asserts that "Israel began to infer

and to affirm her identity by telling a story" (Levenson 1987, 39). He contends that a story is not the past but preparation for the present and assurance that it can continue into the future. It is a communal enterprise that protects the growth of identity. Levenson writes, "Telling the story brings it alive. The historical prologue brings the past to bear pointedly on the present. In the words of the rabbinic Passover liturgy (Haggadah), 'each man [sic] is obligated to see himself as if he came out of Egypt'" (Levenson 1987, 38). Levenson writes:

> What is public is made private. History is not only rendered contemporary; it is internalized. One's people's history becomes one's personal history. One looks out from the self to find out who one is meant to be. One does not *discover* one's identity, and one certainly does not forget it oneself. He appropriates an identity that is a matter of public knowledge.(Levenson 1987, 39)

In *African American Pastoral Care,* Edward P. Wimberly, drawing on the rich cultural heritage of storytelling in the African American community, describes the role of the storyteller in responding to emotional, interpersonal, and spiritual needs. Wimberly recognizes that the storyteller is part of a village structure used to sustain community. He states, "The eschatological narrative practice of trusting God's leading and God's unfolding story of restoring village functions helps sustain and build vital marriages and families" (Wimberly 2008, 89). Wimberly stresses that the storyteller is still an essential and powerful figure in the present-day church, in that he or she brings constructive engagement to bear on contemporary problems facing African Americans. He also recommends using stories as a means of enriching awareness of God's drama, bringing healing, sustenance, guidance, and reconciliation: "God's unfolding story is a drama made up of episodes, scenes, chapters, and a plot" (Wimberly 2008, 39).

Conclusion

Narrative is foundational in Scripture and the basis for theological reflection. What people choose to tell or not tell, and what they choose to explore or not explore, charts a path for them. Palestinian victims have built communal narratives about their suffering and spent years reinforcing these narratives through communal reflecting to form a framework of past, present, and future. Thus, stories have become part of collective history, dreams and aspirations.

When leaders listen to stories of victims of injustice, they dedicate themselves to the work of the Spirit, who transforms them so that they may be effective advocates for justice and witnesses to the love of God that they first heard about in stories. When leaders listen to accounts of suffering, they become aware that oppression and marginalization are living experiences requiring attention and support. In our evaluation session Sojourners acknowledged that "attentive listening opened our eyes to new dimensions of human suffering and experience." Sojourners appreciated "being able to represent victims' suffering to the wider context as they shared these stories." We felt "privileged to be able to facilitate uncovering hidden stories."

Stories are not history. They make history. They shape the way history is perceived by the people who live it. Attentive listening revitalizes leaders' faith in a surprising God who never ceases to accompany, support, and transform the lives of victim. We witnessed "determination for survival, and strength of mind and character among those who have built new lives and started new ministries or missions." Victims' determination "to find a job, build future and succeed in life are great lessons to us, especially when we lose hope."

Chapter Four: Inquire

Leaders who sojourn in their contexts are likely to encounter various categories of injustice. Sojourners have witnessed new ground open and new questions arise when they accompany and listen to victims of injustice. Leaders who set transformation and justice as goals are compelled to uncover victims' entire stories. During our experiences with the Palestinian workforce, Sojourners learned so much from accompanying and listening that they felt prompted to new inquiries and research, embarking on a quest that included visits to governmental and non-governmental organizations responsible for documenting labor violations. We spoke with human rights organizations as well as lawyers who defend workers and prisoners. We surfed websites to gather statistics and additional information that would produce a coherent picture of the trails of both prisoners and their families. Inquiry is an inevitable force for learning and transformation.

The simple thesis of this chapter is: ignorance is not an option for those trying to enact transformation. Truth is the cornerstone on which justice is constructed and strengthened. Involvement in a context of injustice requires critical examination of facts and research, as well as self-questioning about one's own identity and beliefs. Inquiry transforms leaders into researchers – a process that sets them free of prejudice, presupposition, and false reasoning. "Every event of knowing the truth," argues Mark A. McIntosh, "is inherently spiritual and theological at its depths" (McIntosh 2004).

Sojourners discovered that one of the major obstacles to transformation is lack of understanding brought about by lack of investigation. Conflict zones, like Israel-Palestine, contain multiple narratives of causation and responsibility. Personal, communal, ideological, national, and international interests all impinge on truth.

Conflicting parties manipulate and distort truth. Inquiring about and finding truth converts ill-informed leaders into competent transformers. Transformation and justice need critical reflection on concrete conditions. In this chapter our immersion experience is an encounter with a Christian family from Gaza relocated to Ramallah. It discusses the biblical, theological, social and behavioral sciences of inquiry and advocates creating, nurturing, and sustaining an inquiry consciences among leaders and communities.

Inquiry about Gaza

One morning, a young man called and introduced himself as Ramus. He requested to visit me at my office, where he requested financial aid. “My family is in need and I have no means to support them,” he said. Ramus is a Palestinian Christian from Gaza, who, with his wife and three children, took advantage of a “Christmas permit[24]” to leave Gaza for good. In the last ten years, many Christians have abandoned their homes, businesses, and relatives in Gaza and moved to other places including the West Bank. Since the rise of the Islamic resistance movement Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, Christians have found themselves trapped not only in the crossfire of the violent conflict between Hamas and the state of Israel, but also, since 2007, in the Israeli/Egyptian economic blockade of Gaza and in Hamas’s arrangements for Islamic-influenced governance. Those who have the financial means to leave Gaza have done so in large numbers. Ramus was granted a permit to visit Bethlehem during Christmas in 2012 and has not gone back. For him, it was a one-way permit.

[24] Israeli authorities issue 30 to 50 permits twice a year for Christian residents of the Gaza Strip to visit Bethlehem (at Christmas) and Jerusalem (at Easter). For Christians in Gaza this opportunity constitutes the only way out, other than illegal border-crossing, which puts them at risk of being shot.

I shared Ramus' story with Sojourners, and we decided to expand our knowledge of victims of forced relocation. We called Ramus and offered to visit. Four Sojourners took part; one had to travel to Bethlehem and one had another engagement. We found Ramus and his family in a two-room apartment containing only one window. The sun rarely entered, and the apartment smelled of mold. The children looked pale. A toddler coughed all the time. Sojourners asked why Ramus and his family had chosen to move to Ramallah, and how they were getting along in a context that was not theirs. Ramus narrated their story:

> Before Hamas seized control of Gaza, I worked at the Ministry of Tourism. We barely managed with our low income, but were grateful to have our home and family. When Hamas took over, our life has changed. First, I was suspended from my job, so I started working as a taxi driver. As one of 3,000 Christians among less than 2 million Muslims, we felt unwelcome. First, my brother was kidnapped. For two weeks we couldn't find him. Then he showed up and claimed that he had converted to Islam. We found this very hard to believe – we think he was forced. Life became more dangerous and we felt targeted by extremists. Our friend from the Bible Society was killed, but no one investigated his murder. Half of the Christians in Gaza have left over the past few years. We wanted to leave, but our resources were limited, and the blockade prevented us from trying to get into Israel or Egypt, so we opted to take advantage of a Christmas permit and left for good for Ramallah. We left everything: our home, our families, our relatives, our possessions behind. After we relocated, we lived with relatives for a while. Then I started to look for a job, but it wasn't easy. With the help of relatives and friends, we rented a house in a Muslim village that was cheaper than Ramallah. We wanted to live near other Christians, but our Identity Cards say we're from Gaza, and we're afraid of getting stopped at a checkpoint and deported. It's difficult to live or work in the West Bank if your ID says Gaza. For the last four years, we've lived in constant fear. I've contacted the Palestinian Authority, but they haven't been able to do anything. I've phoned church leaders but they won't take my calls. Their secretaries kept telling me they'll call back, but they never do. We left Gaza because life there was unbearable, but the restrictions here in the West Bank are unbearable too. We can't move around and I can't work in Israel. We're Christians, and we thought the Christian leadership and community could help. We feel rejected by everyone. But God is good, and we believe in his care. We have faith that this too will pass and that God prepares the best for His children.

We offered to pray with the family. After some discussion, we departed dismayed about the situation of a family struggling alone. The same questions kept popping up: How could we learn more about the plight of brothers and sisters in Gaza, one of the most densely populated and poorest regions in the world?

Our inquiry experience with Ramus haunted us. Without coordinating, Sojourners tried to assist the family. During the reflection session, members of the group mentioned making inquiries with officials and church leaders on how to help the family. One contacted a friend at the Ministry of Social Welfare, others tried to identify jobs for Ramus, and another pressed a counselor to help the family with anxiety and depression.

No Sojourners have been to Gaza. Our knowledge about the situation there is limited. We wanted to get more involved, but we doubted our ability assist with what we did not understand. We asked: How can leaders engage in advocating justice for victims if all that they know is based on media reports, and these, most of the time, serve some personal, ideological, or national interest rather than serving the victims' interest. Inquiry, we contended, was a fundamental element of transformation. When leaders inquire for knowledge and truth, they competently enact transformation and are transformed themselves. Transformative inquiry is a skill that leaders need to nurture.

In our pre-immersion session, Sojourners decided to carry out a simple study where 20 ordained priests and five lay leaders in the Ramallah area, including Sojourners, answered a simple question: "Have you carried out any research on any topic related to a situation in your context? If yes, what kind of research? If not, why?" The results showed that among the 25 leaders, three clergy and two lay leaders had carried out comprehensive inquiries into particular topics related to their social contexts. Among the

five who said they had conducted research, three engaged in projects as part of formal graduate studies. One lay leader undertook research in connection with his job. Sojourners concluded that the sample group saw research as part of ministerial training, not as part of ministry in social contexts. Apparently, leaders are not keen to undertake learning apart from degree programs, and once they have finished those, research stops.

The Bible and Inquiry: "Are You the Only Stranger…?"

Inquiry involves pursuing a thorough investigation to discern the nature of a subject at hand. Discerning truth is a pervasive theme in Scripture: "then you shall inquire and make a thorough investigation" (Dt 13:14). Moses' curiousness made him "turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up" (Ex 3: 3). The Magi inquired: "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?" (Mt 2: 2). The shepherds' inquiry led them to go with haste: "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us" (Lk 2:15).

As we have seen in the previous chapter on listening, Jesus' pedagogical methodology is based on inquiry and learning about what others want in order to transform their lives. Jesus takes time to inquire before answering or acting: "Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?'" (Mt 22:20). "And he said to them, 'How many loaves do you have? Go and see'" (6:38). On the way to Emmaus, Jesus accompanied two disheartened disciples. "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them" (Lk 24:15). Jesus then inquired "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" (Lk 24:16). This prompted Cleopas to question Jesus' lack of knowledge of the context: "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"

(Lk 24:18). Jesus continued to inquire: “What things?” (Lk 24:19). The flow of information gathered strength as the disciples neared a new level of knowledge: “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him…” (Lk 24:28-31).

Inquiry compels leaders to avoid quick fixes and creates an opportunity for learning and reflection. When leaders, for example, encounter poverty, suffering, pain, or trauma, they may, out of compassion, make hurried decisions that amount to offering succor or emergency aid. Leaders need to understand the distinctions between humanitarian and developmental aid. The former may produce dependency, whereas the latter encourages learning and growth. Emergency assistance may well be necessary in the short term, but it must be followed by the type of assistance that lets victims become independent. Compassion helps best in the long run when it is accompanied by justice.

Seeking justice for victims of oppression entails an inquiry consciousness that looks critically at forces causing suffering and pain. It seeks to develop victims’ capacities to build independent lives. In *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)*, Robert D. Lupton contends that compassion without justice can sometimes be destructive. He writes:

> [Kindness and justice] lead us to holistic involvement. Divorced, they become deformed. Mercy without justice degenerates into dependency and entitlement, preserving the power of the giver over the recipient. Justice without mercy is cold and impersonal, more concerned about rights than relationships. (Lupton 2011, 41)

Inquiry provides leaders with the opportunity to learn and reflect on a concern. To inquire is to reflect on leadership capacity and think outside the box. Jesus asked questions that made people reflect, learn, and act. When a large hungry crowd followed him, Jesus did not apply a quick fix by sending the group away or by providing food immediately. He asked, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” (Jn 6:5).

John informs us that Jesus was posing a challenge: “He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do” (Jn 6:6). Philip chose to deny the possibility of a solution, replying, “‘Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little” (Jn 6:7). Andrew did research, allowing him to report: “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish” (Jn 6:9). The outcome of the miracle was not only Jesus’ feeding the multitudes, but his teaching his disciples how to inquire into their context and to seek alternatives and bring change.

A Theology for Inquiry: A critical Reflection on Seeking and Understanding

Inquiry generates a fundamental question for religious leaders: Are we strangers in our context who do not know the things that have taken place in these days? Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109), crafted the phrase *fides quaerens intellectum, “*faith seeking understanding.” Anselm’s ontological argument “appealed to reason on matters of theology, and [appreciated] the role of logic” (McGrath 1997, 43). Inquiry done with faith, thus, is theology, encountering the divine in revealed truth. Among the variety of current understandings of what theology should do, asserts Daniel Migliore, is to inquire. Theology arises from the questions that necessitate reflection. “Faith and inquiry,” argues Migloire “are inseparable” (Migliore 1991, 1). Theology is not “mere repetition of doctrines,” but a persistent search. Migloire writes:

> Theology arises from the freedom and responsibility of the Christian community to inquire about its faith in God…As continuing inquiry, the spirit of theology is interrogative rather than doctrinaire; it presupposes a readiness to question and to be questioned. Like the search of a women for her lost coin (Luke 15:8), the work of theology is strenuous but may bring great joy. (Migliore 1991), 2

Asking questions is "doing" theology – using the dynamism of faith to pursue truth not yet acquired, or only segmentally possessed.

Christianity affirms that God is a mystery, but also that God has provided humans with the capacity to perceive his mystery in creation, redemption, and transformation. It is this faith in God that incites Christians to seek understanding. Migliore explains:

> Christian faith invariably prompts questions, sets an inquiry in motion, fights the inclination to accept things as they are, continually calls in question unexamined assumptions about God, ourselves, and our world. Consequently, faith has nothing in common with indifference to the search for truth, or fear of it, or the arrogant claim to possess it fully. True faith must be distinguished from fideism. Fideism says we reach a point where we must stop our inquiry and simply believe; faith keeps on seeking and asking. (Migliore 1991, 2)

Inquiry means searching for truth and for the work of God in that truth. Encountering the divine in truth gives leaders their ability to transform. Discerning truth begins with the confidence that human knowledge is embedded in God's desire to be known. It is God's wish that we understand him and his aspiration for creation. Inquiry that leads to discernment of truth is a divine commission.

Liberation theology emphasizes reflection on self, values, doctrines, and common understandings of human suffering and pain. "Only with this approach," asserts Gustavo Gutierrez, "will theology be a serious discourse, aware of itself, in full possession of its conceptual elements." Gutierrez concludes that theology as critical reflection incorporates "a clear and critical attitude regarding economic and socio-cultural issues in the life and reflection of the Christian community" (Gutiérrez 1974, 11). Critical thinking helps introduce better understanding of self, others, and context. Critical thinking requires reading the context of injustice and reflecting on it in light of the word of God.

Inquiry leads to learning new principles, methodologies, and techniques that broaden leadership horizons and capacities to lead a transforming ministry of justice. Martin Luther King Jr.'s inquiry and application of Gandhian philosophy, for example, broadened his skills at nonviolent resistance (Blackwell 2003, 219).

Transformation and justice require delving to uncover what causes pain and what sustains oppression and violence. Unless leaders examine the "deeply embedded cultural, economic, political, philosophical, and religious forces that make this whole outrage not only possible but also necessary and justified," they cannot holistically understand the roots of oppression and violence, and consequently cannot effectively address these conditions (Thistlethwaite 2015, 167). Thistlethwaite maintains that Christian theology needs to "deal with the constant realities of suffering, injury, and death of bodies from violence" by examining the different forces in a particular "here and now." Thistlethwaite asserts that "The 'here and now' is a crucial starting place for recognizing how Christian theologies need to change in order to be less complicit in the War on Women and war in general and instead more deeply support a change practice that will strengthen peace movements" (Thistlethwaite 2015, 167).

Inquiry nurtures a critical consciousness that examines the foundations of oppression. It encourages leaders to ask daring questions. To inquire about Christian theology, for example, from the vantage point of a victim of oppression requires examining theology's role in shaping cultural philosophies and practices that explicitly and implicitly contribute to oppression, violence, and/or indifference. "Theology begins," asserts Thistlethwaite, "where the pain is." "What that means is that the actual condition of human beings – especially as they are subject to such a wide range of suffering, injury,

and death – is crucial information we need to know as Christian theologians" (Thistlethwaite 2015, 168). Thistlethwaite adds that theology requires "the work of a critical consciousness" willing to question theologies. Inquiry does not reside in absolutist philosophy, but is willing "to dig down into the dirt of our religious heritage" (Thistlethwaite 2015, 169). Thistlethwaite writes:

> Witnessing to the vast amount of human pain in the world is just a beginning, however, another crucial change is to deeply question why this would be the case. This is the work of critical consciousness and it genuinely provides a way forward. As my colleague and friend, Mary Potter Engel, once said, 'The most liberating question you can ask is, "who the hell set things up this way?"' (Thistlethwaite 2015, 168)

Inquiry consists of critical examination of the status quo, whether that be philosophical, theological, or cultural. It exposes hierarchies. Those who benefit from hierarchies often treat inquiry as the consummate disobedience. Thistlethwaite asserts that "it is crucial to understand oneself in the image of the disobedient God, the God of Jesus, the unruly Nazarene who protested moneychangers in the Temple and who was ultimately killed for his refusal to submit to the reigning political and religious authorities" (Thistlethwaite 2015, 172).

When leaders begin in inquire, they see oppression in their contexts and around the globe. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, was very much concerned with apartheid in South Africa and with the plundering of the African continent by imperialists. Although the immediate context of injustice in the United States received his major focus, his broader knowledge became a part of him. After all, leadership is concerned with humanity – and empowering one community helps to empower another. Inquiry is an effective method for soulful and societal transformation.

Consulting Social Sciences

In this section I will examine three concepts that may help leaders understand and utilize inquiry: the ladder of inference; leadership identity, mission, and transformation; and creating, nurturing, and sustaining an inquiry consciousness.

The Ladder of Inference

When interacting with a given context, leaders generate beliefs about themselves, their communities, and their social, cultural, and political systems. They embrace these beliefs based on conclusions inferred from what they have observed, as well as from past experiences. They have good reason to think of their beliefs as concrete and true. Yet they may not test them often enough through observation and assessment.

The reasoning process seems reasonable and happens quickly. Sometimes we made proposals that do not survive testing. On the way back from the checkpoint, I suggested that we start a kind of ministry among people waiting to cross. When I tested this suggestion with my companions, they reminded me that our mission consisted of dismantling unjust structures, not accommodating them. When our ministry is restricted to succoring the victim of injustice without challenging the structure of injustice, we provide longevity to unjust systems. Inferences that generate assumptions need to be tested before they are turned into beliefs that direct our action.

The ladder of inference is a hypothetical construct crafted by Chris Argyris to explain how people make inferences that lead to decisions. Argyris explains:

> [People make inferences] by experiencing some relatively directly observable data, such as conversation. This is rung 1 of the ladder. They make inferences about the meanings embedded in the words (rung 2). They often do this in milliseconds, regardless of whether they agree with

> the meanings. Then they impose their meanings on the actions they believe the other person intends (rung 3). For example, they may attributes reasons or causes for the actions. They may also evaluate the actions as effective or ineffective. Finally, the attributions or evaluations they make are consistent with their theory-in-use about effective action (rung 4). (Argyris 1993, 57)

Argyris puts at the first rung of the ladder "relatively directly observable data, such as actual conversations and nonverbal clues." The second rung "represents the culturally understood meanings that individuals with different views or different axes to grind would agree were communicated during [a] conversation…" The third rung includes "the meanings that individuals impose on second-rung meanings…" The fourth rung consists of "theories of action individuals use to craft the conversations and to understand the actions of other people" (Argyris 1990, 88).

The immersion paradigm with its five stages helped Sojourners return to the first rung and reexamine their inferences about victims' contexts. It helped us use reflection to test our inferences and assumptions about prisoners, political activists, and workers. Inquiry helped us develop our repertoires of responses and reframe our ministries to include people who were either neglected or formerly assumed not to be of concern to us.

Our immersion paradigm tracks in some respects with empirical research related to the ladder of inference. Argyris argues that using a research methodology consistent with the ladder of inference "will minimize any gap between the knowledge produced by the research and its actionability" (Argyris 1993, 253). After our pre-immersion discussions, Sojourners stepped into their context and gathered directly-observed data while accompanying, listening, inquiring, and immersing in contexts of suffering. Our data consisted of our observations of context and the views, agendas, and values of victims. Data was analyzed by reflection among the community of Sojourners. We agreed

and disagreed. Whenever we felt something was missing, we went back and researched it, and discussed our findings at feedback sessions. We made predictions, asked questions and went forth to test these questions, having consulted experts in the field through literature reviews, website searches and visits with leaders and organizations. We confessed to one another when we discovered inconsistencies between beliefs and actions, and we reflected on how to reframe our ministries according to new findings. In short, we repeatedly ascended and descended the ladder of inference. We confronted our vulnerability and supported one another as we affirmed and cherished our limitations.

We assumed, for example, that Palestinian prisoners were victims of incarceration, so we acted according to our assumption: we prayed for them. We assumed that we could not ease prisoners' suffering because we had no access to them. We assumed that associating with political activists would provoke backlash from Israeli authorities. Our encounter with the prisoner's wife brought us into contact with victims of victims, who were somehow not part of our awareness. Our solidarity sit-in with political activists slated for deportation tested our assumptions and proved them wrong. We did not face backlash, and in any case, we accepted that we would have to learn to manage it. We assumed that Palestinians helping to construct settlements were traitors. Yet our encounter with workers reframed our beliefs: these were not traitors but victims of an unjust social structure. Sojourners agreed that the immersion paradigm helped us gather observable data, test our claims and recast our beliefs and consequently our missions.

The ladder of inference implies a process of knowledge and action. The more we believe that Palestinians are violent, the more we alienate ourselves from victims. The more we believe that Muslims are extremists, the more we exaggerate malevolent

behavior. The more we believe that Israelis are war-mongers, the more we become defensive. We jump to assumptions without testing our beliefs and we leap to action thinking that what we are doing is authentic and sensible. The good news is that beliefs are testable and changeable. Using the ladder of inference in a transformative way helps leaders bring judgments and actions into harmony with reality.

When Sojourners discussed the possibility of connecting with Israeli society, some members were apprehensive. They argued that it would be difficult, would provoke opposition from our parishioners, and would harm our ministries. The belief was inferred from data gathered through conversations and experiences, and enforced by social and cultural understandings. Sojourners climbed to the second rung, narrowing their options based on culturally understood meanings. As they climbed to the third rung, imposing individual meanings on cultural beliefs, they reasoned that contacts with Israelis were inadvisable. On the fourth rung, they predicted the responses of others, and used these predictions as reasons to rule out contact across the Separation Wall. "Most of the time when we are acting," explains Anita Farber-Robertson, "we do so from the third and fourth rungs, quite distant from the actual data that spurred the activity" (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, and Whiman 2000, 47). Farber-Robertson continues:

> By the time one reaches the highest level of the ladder of inference, one is so far from the data that generated it that error are unavoidable, unless the actor travels continuously up and down the ladder, confirming or disconfirming each new inference and attribution…the only antidote to being 'oxygen-deprived' (data-free) is to constantly review, recheck, and reconfirm, what we believe to be true in a given situation against the directly observable data. Each time we do that checking, we can adjust, correct, or refine our understanding. Our decision, and our actions will be more responsive to the actual situation, and our effectiveness will increase. (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, and Whiman 2000, 49)

Immersion brought us back to the first rung, obliging us to gather directly observable and verifiable data. As we started testing our assumptions through reflection and research, we discovered that our decisions were based on false assumptions. Our immersion experience with the Israeli school and synagogue proved that engagement with Israeli society was possible and worthwhile, even if difficult. Checking and validating assumptions before one acts is important for leaders and communities.

Leadership Identity, Mission, and Transformation

One of the explicit themes of this project is that transformation requires knowing, identifying and assessing one's self and context. Transformation occurs when leaders first and foremost discover their own identities and capabilities to carry out particular missions. To inquire incorporates not only exploring and learning about a particular context, but also examining and assessing leadership identity and repertoire.

Inquire of Thyself: Leadership Identity and Transformation

To "know thyself" is necessary if one is to "know thy context," and thus to participate in soulful and societal transformation. Self-reflection and self-doubt are signs that one is on the path to health and strength. To know oneself requires deep and faithful self-inquiry. Leaders need to ask, who am I as a leader? What is my vision, and what are my core values? What are my weaknesses and strengths? What are my educational, relational and social capabilities? What is the vision of the church or organization I represent? What are the characteristics, capacities, and repertoires of the community I serve? Answering such questions is easiest if one sees his or her attributes, both positive and negative, as gifts from God, and to some extent beyond human power to control.

Sojourners reflected and agreed that "we rarely engage in asking ourselves these questions." "We usually think of them as part of our theological and ministerial training, but once in ministry, we tend to forget about them." Ibrahim explained that "we become busy with people's identities and with training others to discover their vocations that we forget to remind ourselves of our own identity and mission." "We tend to consider our identities as de facto, as static and thus neglect the need to revisit them," I added.

Self-knowledge requires humility, letting go, and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to illuminate hearts and minds. "Discernment," asserts McIntosh, "grows out of self-knowledge, in this sense, because it is the best practice for learning to see things as they truly are: in motion from God and toward God, mystically radiant with the divine goodness that delights to create them" (McIntosh 2004, 59). Self-knowledge is interconnected with the knowledge of God and God's project for his creation. McIntosh continues: "This knowledge of yourself, and of me within yourself, is grounded in the soil of true humility" (McIntosh 2004, 60).

Inquiry's main goal is discerning what sort of person a leader ought to be and what style of intervention is best suited to one's leadership. A discerning life springs from a contemplative mode, extending into a practical mode and returning to the contemplative (McIntosh 2004, 5). A journey of discernment helps leaders analyze a situation on the ground and provides them with various opportunities for engagement. It is a process of discovery, of growth, of transformation. Discernment that is inquiry-driven is always a process of discovery and forward movement. As long as God's relation to his creation is an ever-evolving progression, inquiry assumes that discernment also involves repeated decisions and judgments. "The more an individual or community holds

discernment open toward contemplative wonders in God," explains McIntosh, "the more actually useful, insightful, and productive of real transformation its discernment will be in the world as it now appears" (McIntosh 2004, 22).

Leadership's understanding of its sense of identity is very important for communication. A leader who does not know his or her own convictions, values, skills or repertoire cannot competently communicate with surroundings. Beyond knowing one's name, gender, nationality, occupation, social and political affiliation, all of which "help or hinder effective interaction with and action in the world," one must comprehend "aspects such as personal strengths, core values, limitations – and yes, the narratives (grand or otherwise), of which one is a part," asserts David Gortner (Gortner 2009, 15).

Leadership and organizational identity are important. Likewise mission identity. The primary line of inquiry into this last is, who is God calling us to be and what is he calling us to do? Inquiry consciousness helps leaders and their communities move beyond self-perpetuation. Leadership needs to have knowledge of its own capacities, proficiencies, and persistence to lead effectively in certain contexts. Communities follow leaders who have "clear knowledge of self-identity and what that identity will withstand when pressure is applied" (Gortner 2009, 15).

Authentic inquiry into self is foundational for the wellbeing of any mission. "Identity matters. People's sense of identity can affect personal well-being, relationships with one another, sense of belonging, speech, and behavior" (Gortner 2009, 12). Martin Luther King Jr. developed a critical consciousness by "constantly raising and reflecting on the basic questions he posed: 'Where are we?' 'Who are we?' 'Who are we meant to be?' And '*where are we going from here: Chaos or community*'" (King 1967, ix).

Transformation has reciprocal impact: the inner conversion occurs as leaders enact their faith in society and share the gospel of Christ. Leaders are transformed by sharing their faith and seeking God's liberating love in all aspects of life. A transformed self can transform society and the world. In *Family Ties that Bind: A Self-help Guide to Change through Family of Origin Therapy,* Ronald Richardson contends that a leader's self-knowledge and self-differentiation from his context begin when he or she defines how to be true to self and still have connections with others. Richardson narrates the words of a Chassidic rabbi on his deathbed. He writes:

> When I was young, I set out to change the world. When I grew a little older, I perceived that this was too ambitious so I set out to change my state. This, too, I realized as I grew older was too ambitious, so I set out to change my town. When I realized I could not even do this, I tried to change my family. Now as an old man, I know that I should have started by changing myself. If I had started with myself, maybe then I would have succeeded in changing my family, the town, or even the state – and who knows, maybe the world. (Richardson 2011, 35)

Inquiring into one's self and identity leads to learning, reframing, and adopting new wisdom, and effectively setting the stage for transforming one's context and the world.

Inquire into Thy Context: Context Identity and Transformation

Contexts of conflict and oppression are messy. After all, injustice is more than a simple act: it is a structure of interconnected systems and forces. Distortion and manipulation of facts and truths are standard operating procedures in any context of injustice. Misinterpreting or misjudging one's context surely jeopardizes one's ability to transform it. Inquiry transforms leaders' assumptions about truth. No leader makes the same recommendations after learning the truthful version of a story. People react differently when they discover truth. Thus the notion of the scholarly community, in

which researchers jointly seek knowledge, has arisen. “Precise demonstration of truth,” assert Wayne C. Booth et al, “is important, but not as important as the communal pursuit of it” (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2011, 130).[25] In any given context, search for truth helps leaders test their ground, authenticate stories, make sure that reflection is genuine, evaluate accomplishment, discover new connections, and choose among priorities.

One of the most influential forces in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is media. Media sources deluge people with “facts” about politics, economics, social realities, the market…etc. Some analyses are comprehensive; most are not. Listening, for example, to reporters from different media outlets describe the war on Gaza in 2014, one doubts that they see the same reality. CNN coverage of the war in Syria, to give another example, differs greatly from portrayals of the same issue by Fox News or Al Jazeera.

Inquiry does not mean listening to one’s favorite news program, following social media, or getting a friend’s advice, although these are generally useful practices. Inquiry means rolling up one’s sleeves and digging through a variety of sources, using the research of others, evaluating finding, and struggling to report them clearly and accurately. The kind of truth one discovers about context depends on the quality of research one puts into the process. Injustice thrives on mystery and dilemma, and these can only be cleared up through analysis. With the development of social media, the art of manipulating facts has taken on new dimensions. In *The Craft of Research*, Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams provide examples of the floods of misinformation washing over all of us. They write:

> Since 9/11, our government has had to counter bizarre claims that have circulated around the world: No Muslims were among the hijackers; Jews had advance notice and stayed home; the attacks were the work of the

[25] Page number refers to kindle e-book “location”.

> CIA. These claims have been widely believed, even though no evidence backs them up. But we should also recall some bizarre stories believed by many Americans: The CIA started the AIDS epidemic to kill homosexuals and African Americans; the government still hides the bodies of aliens in Area 51; bar codes are a UN conspiracy. Every society falls for outlandish claims, but we can learn to see through them once we understand how to make a good case for what we should believe, based not on fear or paranoia, but on reliable evidence and a sound argument. (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2011, 152)

One of the challenges that Sojourners faced was the multiplicity of interpretations of facts and events in our context. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is saturated with prejudices. In his book, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: A Palestinian Christian in the Occupied West Bank*, Audeh G. Rantisi explains how the Zionist movement, “promoted Palestine as ‘a land without people’ just waiting and ready for the Jews, ‘a people without land’” (Rantisi and Beebe 1990, 29-30). The phrase, in fact, was crafted by the Earl of Shaftesbury, a deeply devout Christian who looked forward to fulfillment of biblical prophecies and return of the Jews to the land of their ancestors. He wrote in his personal journal, “there is a country without a nation; a nation without a country” (Ateek 1990, 24). Naim Ateek notes that early Zionist leaders “had not visited Palestine or learned much about its inhabitants; they must have assumed that the country was vacant” (Ateek 1990, 26). Explaining how immature assumptions lead to bad decisions, Ateek writes:

> In fact, Jewish philosopher Martin Buber tells in one of his books an anecdote about Max Nordau, one of the most famous German Jewish personalities of the Zionist movement. Upon hearing for the first time that Palestine was inhabited by Arabs, Nordau, deeply shocked, ran to Herzl exclaiming, ‘I didn’t know that! We are committing an injustice.’ (Ateek 1990, 26)

In a conflict zone, it is always easy to jump to conclusions that one side is responsible or to blame the other side for atrocities and/or failure. Conspiracy theories abound in the

context of the Middle East. Leadership cannot base decision-making on assumptions and claims. Transforming a context of injustice requires letting the truth unfold.

Inquiry is not a one-time action. It is a process of mental training – hard but rewarding work. Research findings always open new paths. Charting these paths entails new research. "Research follows a crooked path, taking unexpected turns, sometimes up blind alleys, even looping back on itself" (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2011, 157). Leaders for transformation and justice need to seek information through books, articles, and the media, as well as from friends, neighbors and other formal and informal conversations. They need to observe, probe, ask for clarification, and test their findings. Leaders may feel that at certain stages, research leaves them frustrated or confused, but they will also find that it brings satisfactions, and that confidence increases as one becomes proficient at learning. Searching for truth is a spiritual discipline – one that reminds leaders that they do not have the truth, but need to sojourn to look for it. Thus, new discoveries transform leaders to think outside the box. Inquiry teaches leaders that what they know matters less than what they discover. Booth and his co-authors write:

> Research is hard work, but like any challenging job done well, both its process and its results can bring great satisfaction. No small part of that satisfaction comes from knowing that your work sustains the fabric of a community of people, who share your interests, especially when you discover something that you believe can improve…lives by changing what and how they think." (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2011, 196)

When confronted with a complex situation, leaders need to ask themselves what they are trying to achieve through inquiry and what they lose without it.

There are many different methods of research and many different styles of learning. Our research showed an unprecedented rise in violence against the poor, the weak, and the oppressed in Gaza. Today, hundreds of national and international,

governmental and non-governmental agencies provide reports about human rights violations, atrocities, and injustices. Statistics are available about poverty, hunger, lack of civil liberties, social and economic disparities, and violence against women, children, and same-sex couples. Leaders benefit from visiting reliable agencies that promulgate information about particular contexts. Throughout our project, Sojourners visited human rights organizations, national and international agencies, and many websites to collect information and form a better understanding of the Christian community in Gaza.

In “Palestinian Christian: Western Christians Don’t Understand the Gaza/Israeli Conflict,” Alex Awad posits that “Western Christians fail to fully grasp the suffering of Palestinians, including its Christian population.” Awad claims that most Western Christians don’t “know the realities” on the ground in Gaza. “They do not know who is occupying whom, who is oppressing whom, who is confiscating whose land, who is building walls to try and separate people from each other.” Awad asserts that the news media “doesn’t tell [a] comprehensive story where the average person will understand the causes and effects.” He explains:

> The Palestinian Christians in Gaza today, they suffer as much as the Palestinian Muslims in Gaza. They are under bombardment. They have only eight hours of electricity of every 24 hours. They have a hard time getting fresh water…They don't live in an isolated area where oh, this is a Christian town. No, they live among the Muslims in Gaza and therefore as much as the Muslims are suffering, the Christians are suffering, not only in the Gaza strip but also in the West Bank. (Lee 2014)

The resources we gather about Gaza and the Christian community allowed us to start connecting threads as to why Ramus and his family had left Gaza. An incident occurred during our reflection on Ramus’ situation that brought forth the need for more inquiry. A priest claimed publicly that Hamas treats Christians in Gaza better than any previous leadership, and that those who leave Gaza do so for reasons having nothing to

do with religious intolerance. His remarks caused a huge reaction among persons in both Gaza and the West Bank who have experienced things differently and who concluded that religious leaders know very little about their communities' hardships.

In *The Third Side: Why We Fight and How We Can Stop* William Ury writes: "Healing can come from acknowledging the truth." Ury explains how Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa aimed to unlock the healing power of truth. He writes: "The purpose was to use the healing power of the truth to help put the brutal past to rest. Limited by time and resources, the investigation could not possibly satisfy everyone's need for justice, but it did help many victims and their families" (Ury 2000, 165).

Inquiry Consciousness: A Quest for Transformation and Justice

Based on Jesus' model, leaders have always considered that teaching in their communities is one of their primary duties. Most religious leaders are trained to preach and teach, but to the extent that they think of themselves primarily as teachers rather than fellow learners, their impact diminishes. Religious leaders need to embrace learning in order to teach transformation. An inquiry consciousness helps with this process.

The habit of inquiry casts light on identities, conditions, perceptions, and dogmas. It analyzes received wisdom. It delays declaring success. It assumes that facts themselves evolve. In *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith,* Brian D. McLaren points out that dogmas are man-made conceptions that involve human understanding at a time, and time consists of ever-changing experiences. Knowledge is an open system that grows as humanity develops. McLaren explains that, "paradigms and dogmas remain profoundly vulnerable when anomalies are present. They can be undone

by something as simple as a question" (McLaren 2010, 16). In this sense, inquiry is not simply information-seeking: it is a consciousness that helps leadership board moving processes. Inquiry is critical by nature and thus does not accept self-evident facts without examination. Martin Luther questioned the issuance of indulgences, a common practice in his time. He determined that selling indulgences commercialized God's house and commodified redemption. Luther posted a note on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg that read: "Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed" (McLaren 2010. 17). Luther's questions provoked debate that raised church standards. Reflecting on Luther's process of critical examination, McLaren affirms that "that's what *statements* can do: create *debate* (and sometimes, sadly, *hate*) and move us into a new *state*" (McLaren 2010, 17). Inquiry is not statement but quest. It allows leaders to question the status quo and embark on "a new radical and transformative quest." According to McLaren, "only *questions* can inspire *new conversation* that can launch us on a new *quest*." He writes:

> At this moment in history, we need something more radical and transformative than a new state: we need a new *quest*. We need more than static location from which we proclaim, 'here I stand!' Instead, we need a new dynamic *direction* into which we move together, proclaiming 'Here we go!' We need a deep shift not merely from our current state to a new state, but from a steady state to a dynamic story. We need not a new set of beliefs, but a new way of believing, not simply new answers to the same old questions, but a new set of questions. (McLaren 2010, 17-18)

Inquiry implies that leadership should seek new ways of believing rather than new sets of beliefs. An inquiry consciousness compels leadership to question the status quo even if things "feel just fine" or "seem to be working OK." It expects challenges and criticism. "If our quest is a betrayal," affirms McLaren, "it is only the most faithful kind of betrayal: a betrayal of the actualities of the past and presence of mind to seize the

future possibilities…If it is a critique of the past, it is a critique of only the worst moments while simultaneously celebrating the best moments and the best aspiration" (McLaren 2010, 19). Leadership for transformation initiates daring quests, through which better understandings of God, the Bible, faith, the church, context, authority, purpose, relationships, the future, others, and our mission can emerge. Questing sets leadership free to imagine and to draw on new resources. McLaren concludes:

> We cry out to preachers and theologians, 'let us go! Let us find some space to think, to worship God outside the bars and walls and fences in which we are constrained and imprisoned. We'll head out into the wilderness – risk hunger, thirst, exposure, death – but we can't sustain this constrained way of thinking, believing, and living much longer. We need to ask the questions that are simmering in our souls…So we set out on our quest, our exodus, driven out of familiar territories and into unmapped terra nova. (McLaren 2010, 22)

Through inquiry, effective leadership finds new ground and develops alternative frameworks. Inquiry consciousness also gives leaders skills at choosing among various potential frameworks that may fit given situations. This requires looking at context through different lenses, and testing alternatives. An inquiry consciousness maintains an ever-learning process that helps transform injustice and also leadership itself.

Contexts of conflict and oppression are not amenable to spur-of-the-moment judgments or quick fixes. They require critical examination, scrutiny and community assessment. Self-evident truth is only self-evident as long as it provokes quest. Contenting oneself with stagnant knowledge and familiar situation hinders research, learning, and transformation. Inquiry-driven leadership participates in interaction, borrowing, lending and sharing information. Competent leadership acknowledges its incomplete awareness, assesses its tools, and strives to do better. It honors challenges, sets clear directions for research, revises findings and conclusions, and empowers

communities to assume new responsibilities and undertake new quests. In *Learning While Leading: Increasing Your Effectiveness in Ministry*, Anita Farber-Robertson et al., building on Chris Argyris' Model II social virtues, assert that transformation requires a community of inquiry. "Such a community," writes Farber-Robertson et al., "*cherishes* its critics, those inside and those beyond, because it understands that the prophetic voice and the word of God are often spoken by those we do not really want to hear" (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker and Whiman 2000, 106). A community of inquiry does not exclude those who disagree, but cherishes them as sources of illumination. Farber-Robertson et al. quote Ronald C. Arnett on his concept of an ethical community, writing:

> The essence of a lasting ethical community requires a conscious commitment to labeling and examining the shortcomings of the community. Shielding the community from scrutiny or criticism is not of long-term benefit to the organization. A community can only strive to be ethical by listening closely to its critics. (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker and Whiman 2000, 106)

When leaders nurture an inquiry consciousness in their communities, they invite others to join on the basis that each person's engagement is valuable. Critics are partners, not foes, in the process of learning. Inquiry and learning are both communal, that is, done with others who share differences and disagreements. Farber-Robertson et al. write:

> Because you are trying to change yourself, and because you have become so skillful at designing your own blindness, you will need others, those whom you trust, to be truth tellers for you. You need people who can give you the feedback you need to hear. They will tell you, even if you are the emperor, when you are wearing no clothes. People can do the difficult and loving work of giving and receiving honest feedback in authentic community. Authentic community is forged and deepened as its members build relationships based on the kind of respect, support, and integrity Model II engenders. In such an open and honest learning environment, community thrives. It releases the power of the creative spirit that calls and empowers you to do your holy work. (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, and Whiman 2000, 108)

An inquiring consciousness demands hard work. It may lead to periods of uncertainty, to mistakes, to not knowing where a process is leading. But the process itself is transformative. One may come out in a different place from one's original destination. The ultimate goal is achieved when concepts are converted into reality and truth, and truth may take leaders in a completely new direction.

An inquiry consciousness prompts leaders to opens the door to new possibilities and set off for new territory. It encourages them to move out of traditional church ministries and into the world, with all of its unknowns and discomforts. Engaging in the world requires learning new methods that speak to current realities. Abraham Lincoln said, "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. As our case is new, we must think anew and act anew."

As Sojourners learned quickly, lack of knowledge about contextual and global crises limits leaders' repertoires of skills: leaders engage most effectively in what they know. Leaders who are unfamiliar with or uncertain about how to address a problem may accede to hierarchal forces or follow cultural norms. They may act in ways that protect personal interests, safety, or even an institutional status quo. When leaders acknowledge their limits and accept that a mission has been ineffectual, further inquiry will empower them to grow and reach for different strategies that can make a difference.

An inquiry consciousness helps leaders not only to expand knowledge, but also to discern when their actions contradict their beliefs. Few if any Christian leaders fail to know what the Bible says about feeding the hungry, helping the poor, standing with the oppressed, welcoming the stranger, providing shelter for the homeless, etc. The words of Jesus at the synagogue in Nazareth are carved into the lintels of churches, and fixed in the

minds of believers. There is no doubt that leaders, who want to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, know that their missions involve "bringing good news to the poor… proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19). But leaders may not see that this assumes willingness to have contact with the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, and the forgotten. Why is there so often a gap between faith, ethics, and values as espoused by leaders and their actual engagement with victims? The needs of victims are obvious, and information on how to help is available. Why do leaders fail to act?

Anita Farber-Robertson and her co-authors explain: "Since all behavior is designed, and since awareness is a part of our behavior, then unawareness, or blindness, is also designed. The presence of design suggests that other designs are possible and that we can become more aware." Farber-Robertson et al. conclude that "a key to dismantling this maladaptive behavior is to understand our thinking and reasoning processes" (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, Whiman 2000, 11). For Farber-Robertson et al., the question is not whether one is able to see new information, but how designed blindness inadvertently trains us for professional ineffectiveness. "Designed blindness," write the authors, "is one of the central features of the universal pattern of ineffectiveness. It is a behavior in which we routinely engage and which gets us into trouble" (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, Whiman 2000, 9). Farber-Robertson et al. continues:

> Those who cry 'Hypocrite!' have designed their own blindness to the ways in which they too practiced behaviors at odds with the ones they profess. We cannot spot incongruent behavior in others while remaining unaware of our own. Because the unawareness is designed, the possibility of our attaining awareness is always with us…We leap to judgment of others, without reflecting on ourselves, and we judge others by criteria from which we have excused ourselves. We do not do it intentionally. Neither are we aware of what we do. Yet we do it consistently and

> predictably. We design blindness when we produce our behaviors and make our judgment. We do not know what others can clearly see – that we judge others negatively for behavior in which we engage ourselves. (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, Whiman 2000, 9)

Argyris' Model II Theory-in-use helps leaders confront designed blindness through skills and tools that construct alternatives. Model II thinking requires questioning what leaders "know" to be true and effective. Model II social virtues advocate:

- Helping others become aware of reasoning processes, gaps and inconsistencies, rather than offering praise or telling them what they want to hear.
- Respecting others' capacities for and interest in learning, rather remaining silent if they display reasoning processes that merit comment.
- Being strong: reflecting "a high capacity for advocacy coupled with a high capacity for inquiry and vulnerability without feeling threatened;" rather than showing "capacity to hold your position in the face of another's advocacy." (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, Whiman 2000, 27, 19).
- Maintaining integrity: acting "on your point of view in such a way as to encourage confrontation and inquiry into it;" rather than sticking "to your values and principles" and rejecting comment on them in advance. (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, and Whiman 2000, 27, 19).

Model II social virtues help leaders be learners rather than dogmatists intent on proving themselves right. They cherishes inquiry, learning, and discovery. Model II thinking advocates checking out assumptions and their implications. It calls on leaders to try to understand the whole rather than only those parts that interest them or strike them as straightforward. Model II advocates learning how "to elicit information, identify resources, and encourage the challenges that can help. These skills can help us be more

effective in the immediate situation and enable us to use that learning in the future" (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker and Whiman 2000, 39). Model II helps leaders gain knowledge and interpret and use it effectively. When knowledge is transformed into skill, and when skills are practiced, leaders are transformed into practitioners of change. Farber-Robertson et al. write:

> If we can retrieve the reasoning, the assumptions, and the meanings we have made that led us to ineffective, maladaptive, or defensive routines, we will have the skills and tools we need to construct alternatives. If we learn how to retrieve our internal processing, we will have skills and tools we need to construct alternatives. We are already controlled by our reasoning processes, but they are often unavailable to us and not subject to our scrutiny. Bringing them to awareness is a way to take charge of ourselves, and the ways in which we live with one another. (Farber-Robertson, Handspicker, and Whiman 2000, 11)

Inquiry implies forsaking power and control, and accepting vulnerability for the sake of enabling transformation. Control and power isolate leaders from change.

Fear in general and fear of the unknown hinder inquiry, learning, and interaction. After attending a provincial meeting in Luxor, Egypt with four other clergy from Israel-Palestine, I noticed that Stephen, an Arab Israeli priest, appeared anxious as he watched me converse with a Muslim woman who sat next to me on the plane. Seeing my collar, the women confessed that she had never met a priest, and innocently asked to take a picture with all of us after the plane landed. Stephen refused to join. On the terminal bus, we met a nun returning from Egypt. I discovered that she came from the same town where Stephen serves. I introduced her to Stephen, thinking that he might be interested in meeting a person from his context. To my surprise, Stephen turned aside and stopped talking to us. After getting out of the bus, I inquired about Stephen's strange behavior. He burst into anger, saying that speaking with anyone traveling to Israel might cause trouble – "they might tell security." Also, "they could be undercover agents," he reasoned. For

Stephen, the habit of interacting with people, including talking them, listening to them, and getting to know them, is a dangerous enterprise.

Inquiry can help in situations like this. Stephen's suspicions, no matter how ill-founded and limiting, arose from his fears. Effectiveness depends on leaders' willingness to analyze their own reactions and expose themselves to new encounters. Inquiry embraces experimentation as fundamental to learning. Inquiry puts principles under thorough examination and experiment. It encourages their use once they have been tested. When a truth is discovered, it may not become relevant unless it is applied in the aim of effecting change. "Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into" (Dewey 2008, 38). In such a situation, there is a need to "constantly regard what is already won not as a fixed possession but as an agency and instrumentality for opening new fields which make new demands upon existing powers of observation and of intelligent use of memory" (Dewey 2008, 75). Problems that occur during the process of learning are stimuli to further thinking. They arouse in the learner an active desire for new ideas and tools. Experience gained through learning leads to improvements in the social order. Educational truths are in fact hypotheses. They must be tested and revised. Also, experimental methods demand keeping abreast of new ideas, activities, and observed consequences. "To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences" (Dewey 2008, 87).

A spirit of inquiry and discernment leads leaders to observe, search, test, and apply what they have discovered to bring about change. Inquiry must be practiced and refined. It is not an act of fact-finding, but a process of opening oneself to evolution.

Conclusion

In order for leadership to engage in transformation, it needs to examine identity, context, and mission. Palestinian leaders should not content themselves with received wisdom or media views of their context. Accompanying and listening to victims of oppression, inquiring as to how their circumstances developed and what can be done to help them, are processes that my project put into practice. Sojourners came to understand that Ramus and his family were not simply strangers whose fate carried them by chance to Ramallah. Their case study engaged our minds and launched us on learning processes.

Transformation requires new quests and new discoveries. The truth will open paths of compassion and justice-seeking. Sojourners reacted spontaneously to the case of Ramus, initially transforming their distress into prayer and reflection. Later they turned to action, making plans to visit Gaza, establishing contact with more Christians there, and reaching out for opportunities to help. The encounter with the Gazans impelled us to study history, geography, demography, and culture. Some of our assumptions were proven false and others sustained.

Religious leaders need to create and nurture an inquiry consciousness that reads signals of injustice. Inquiry exposes the oppression of Palestinians, the marginalization of African Americans, the plight of Syrian refugees, violence against women, and environmental despoliation. Inquiry challenges leaders to commit themselves to the expansion of God's mission, treasuring its successes and yet looking to the future.

Chapter Five: Immerse

Sojourners for transformation and justice have described immersion as “the soul of transformation, an active move into the unknown.” To immerse in a context of injustice requires physical presence, daring commitment, and common experience. It implies sharing in the suffering of victims – mentally, spiritually, and physically. At the heart of immersion is direct involvement, which transforms leaders not only through “inter-being” but through “inter-acting” with and for victims of oppression.

Accompanying a victim, listening to the victim’s life experiences, and creating, nurturing, and developing an inquiry consciousness prepares leaders to immerse in their own personal experiences of injustice: to feel humiliation, to place oneself in the victim’s life-challenging circumstances, to join hands with marchers for justice and freedom, to abandon personal privilege and power, to leave one’s comfort zones and move into difficult situations, and to put oneself in another’s shoes and risk oneself for another.

Accompaniment requires presence. Listening involves sacred attentiveness. Inquiry necessitates quest. Immersion, as a next step, involves direct experience and action. Immersing in a context of injustice, leaders experience what it means to be poor, neglected, humiliated, and oppressed. Accompaniment, attentive listening, and inquiry thus prepare leaders for an intentional move into the realities of life.

Experience is what immersion is all about. The word experience derives from the Latin term *experientia*, “‘that which arises out of traveling through life’” (McGrath 1997, 223). In religious terms the word has acquired a specific meaning. Alister E. McGrath expounds on the interconnection of experience and subjectivity. Experience, McGrath writes, “has come to refer to the inner life of individuals, in which those individuals

become aware of their own subjective feelings and emotions" (McGrath 1997, 223). Religious experience emphasizes the subjective aspects of faith and practice. It asserts that Christian faith is not about concepts and notions; rather, it is about "the interpretation and transformation of the inner life of the individual" (McGrath 1997, 223). In this chapter, I argue that experiencing the conditions of victims brings about an inner subjective experience of transformation as well as explicit outward transformation. What causes the internal transformation is the external experience of the world around us. Our experiences asserts Patrick Oden are significant because "they are where we encounter God and it is in our encounters with God that our particular questions and issues become substantive for us, even if not for others" (Oden 2015, 41). The experience of immersion does something to those immersed: it changes them from within. "The most important part of any journey," affirms Joerg Rieger, "is the experience of having one's eyes opened, of returning home and beginning to see things in a new light" (Rieger 2015, 24).

Immerse: An Experience that Anticipates Challenge and Risk

In a context of occupation and oppression, standing for what is just has consequences. To confront dominant powers is not easy. To stand with a victim of injustice against a politico-military system takes not only courage but also prayer, discernment, wisdom, and power. Before deciding to undertake an immersion case, leaders should ask: "What kind of immersion should we engage in?" "What kind of risk can we handle?" What sort of consequences will the immersion experience bring with it?" Immersion may entail resistance and rejection as well as risk.

During one reflection session, Sojourners mentioned the deportation of a political activist from Ramallah. Khalida Jarrar is a Palestinian feminist, human rights activist and

lawyer affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a party banned under Israeli martial law. Jarrar is also a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Israeli authorities consider her human rights advocacy, political activism and criticism of the occupation to mount to security threats. In 2015, Jarrar was convicted by a military court and expelled from her home in Ramallah to Jericho, 35 kilometers away.

Human rights activists initiated a campaign outside the Palestinian Legislative Council, where supporters stood in solidarity with Jarrar. Sojourners discussed participating in the solidarity campaign and decided to engage, knowing that the act might have consequences, including disapproval of travel permits, harassment, and arrest. To stand in solidarity with a banned political party is dangerous in a territory under occupation. Four Sojourners chose to associate themselves with Jarrar and the activists against the unjust verdict. One eventually opted out of participation and two found that they had other engagements when the time came. Jarrar welcomed the visit of Christian clergy. Those Sojourners who went to the solidarity site left with mixed feelings of pride, fear and anxiety. We discovered that we had done the right thing: to stand with those who are convicted because of their activism for justice and freedom. But we wondered whether we would continue to receive travel permits or risk summoning interrogation.

This immersion experience paved the way for other experiences. The Sojourners who participated in the initial immersion enacted their beliefs in the face of risks to privilege and safety. During our reflection session afterward, we proposed a new immersion with political prisoners and detainees. Four members joined at the solidarity site. To sit with released prisoners, to watch mothers holding their sons' pictures, to talk

with a child whose father had been sentenced to 25 years, and to look into the eyes of fathers whose children are in prison brought only one response: “We stand by your side.”

These immersion experiences helped Sojourners nurture commitment to protesting injustice. When ISIS slaughtered Egyptian Christian workers in Libya, Sojourners decided not to remain idle but to initiate a solidarity movement with the families of victims. All of the Sojourners and religious leaders I contacted agreed to participate. In coordination with the Coptic Church in Ramallah and the Egyptian Representative Mission, religious leaders joined with political leaders and members of the community in a vigil. We marched in solidarity with the victims and their families in the streets of Ramallah, holding not only candles but also hands.

Immersion entails taking the risk of being treated as an active agent for transformation. It means speaking truth to power and anticipating criticism, reproach, and exclusion. An immersion experience encompasses “roots and wings”[26]: being rooted in God’s mission to transform the world according to his aspirations, and having wings to freely choose the areas of one’s commitment.

Inter-being and inter-acting is Christ’s commitment to God’s aspiration. Christ came to earth be with the oppressed and to enact their salvation. Oscar Romero asserts that commitment to the Christian faith is to follow Christ in his incarnation. He writes:

> If Christ, the God of majesty, became a lowly human and lived with the poor and even died on a cross like a slave, our Christian faith should also be lived in the same way. The Christian who does not want to live this commitment of solidarity with the poor is not worthy to be called Christian. (Romero and Brockman 2004, 191)

[26] The phrase “roots and wings” was first introduced by Rabbi Eugene Levy and then used by Jay B. McDaniel in his book *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue.* The phrase was first used to explain the importance of raising children familiar with their roots but also to give them freedom to think, initiate, and innovate. McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Diologue*, 23.

Inter-being and inter-acting with victims of oppression is following Christ's example of humility and love and dedicating oneself to the same things Christ stood for: the liberation of souls and transformation of societies.

During the immersion project, three of the original seven Sojourners (three by virtue of their positions as clergy) were involved alongside officials from the municipality of Ramallah in Christmas festival planning. Christmas 2015 came during a time when dozens of Palestinians and Israelis were being killed in a cycle of violence. Israeli military forces refused to release the bodies of the Palestinian martyrs, five of whom had lived in refugee camps around the city.

During a festival planning meeting, the Mayor of Ramallah asked the clergy's opinion on whether a celebration seemed appropriate in light of escalating violence. I strongly argued that Christmas should be different in 2015 in response to the worsening political situation. "We cannot merrily celebrate Christmas while neighboring refugee families are mourning the loss of their loved ones," I insisted. The other two members of the Sojourner group agreed. After an extended discussion, all clergy in Ramallah unanimously decided to alter the planned Christmas program: to maintain activities within church premises but to reduce municipal events to a vigil instead of the traditional Christmas parade, and to invite the bereaved families to march in the vigil. Also, the committee decided not to light the Christmas tree erected at the city center.

The motivation for the vigil march was to send a message to the bereaved families (all of them Muslim) that Christians intended to celebrate Christmas standing with them in their pain. As for not lighting the tree, the motivation was to signal that Christmas is Emmanuel; God is with us in our suffering, and he became human to experience human

vulnerability and despair. To celebrate God's incarnation is to celebrate our incarnation – to be with those who mourn. To celebrate "God with us" means to be with others, especially the oppressed, the marginalized, and the bereaved.

We thought that our Christmas commitment was fitting under the circumstances of the time, so we never expected a massive negative reaction from religious and political leaders as well as from the larger Christian community throughout the Occupied Territories. Criticism flooded social media: "Do not extinguish the joy of Christmas," wrote several Christian leaders. The larger Christian community rejected our planning for solemn rather than celebratory events. Local political leaders conveyed a message through the Mayor of Ramallah that "we need to show the world that life in Palestine is normal and that the Christian community celebrates Christmas without any limitations."

Then, Christian clergy in town received an invitation to visit with the President of the Palestinian Authority. Toward the end of the meeting, the President stressed the importance of celebrating Christmas and lighting the Christmas tree. "Celebration and joy are signs of resistance," he emphasized. He politely conveyed a request that the Mayor light the tree. I felt that I needed to make sure our original goal was clear, so I said: "Mr. President, when I was a child, the tradition in my hometown was that when someone died during Christmas, whether a relative or not, the whole village would agree not to celebrate the holiday as an act of solidarity with the mourning family. This is a matter of faith. Christmas, we believe, is God's act of solidarity with human brokenness. How can we celebrate Christmas and witness God's solidarity with humanity when we ourselves are not in solidarity with our brothers and sisters?" The President was grateful for our concern over the bereaved, saying that the stance was a noble one. But he reiterated: "Joy

is another form of resistance. The Israelis do not want the Palestinians to be happy. We should resist giving the Israelis what they want. Palestinians deserve to celebrate and send a message to the world that we live and mark holidays like all other people."

The delegation left the meeting very confused. "What should we do?" some asked. We were convinced that our decision was correct; after all, the only change to the festival was to replace the parade with a vigil, and to erect and decorate the Christmas tree but not to light it. Our motivation was simple: to convey the meaning of Christmas to our communities and neighbors. After a thorough discussion, we decided to stick to our decision, conveying it to the President through his advisors. Later that restless night, the Mayor received a call from the President's staff, who said that the President respected the decision of the clergy to celebrate Christmas with joy but also with solidarity. So we stood firm in our belief that justice, compassion, peace, and coexistence are the ultimate desires of God's love in Christ.

Martyrs' fathers and mothers marched with Christians and Muslims honoring victims and marking the Christmas season. Many Muslim parents approached clergy and thanked us for sharing their pain. The following Christmas, a Muslim woman appeared on a TV report on Christmas in Ramallah, recalling that "the previous year, Christians stood in solidarity with families of Muslim victims. I have never participated in a Christian festival, but this year I have come to share in their joy."

The Bible and Immersion

Scriptures portray a God who knows human misery and is immersed in human suffering and liberation (cf. Ex 3:7-8). To know the suffering of the oppressed is to experience suffering and to offer an alternative – liberation. Sharing in the suffering of

victims is a pervasive theme in Scripture. The suffering servant in Isaiah is despised and rejected by others. He has borne the infirmities and diseases of others and was wounded for someone else's transgression. Isaiah writes:

> The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Is 53: 11-12)

Christians see in the image of the suffering servant a prophecy of Jesus' suffering and death. Jesus' immersion in human history was manifested in his inter-being with humanity, and in his inter-acting for its redemption. Jesus pointed out that the way of discipleship entails carrying the cross: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). The life of discipleship is not an easy life; it encompasses risk and loss. Thus, "those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10:39). Suffering is an integral part of what it means to be a follower of Christ. For Paul, Suffering is a privilege granted to the faithful. Paul writes to the Philippians, "For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well" (Phil 1:29). To know Christ is to follow his example; "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death" (Phil 3:10). Peter points out that Christians are called to suffer for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom. He writes: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pt 2:21). Suffering for the sake of Christ is virtuous. It is even a blessing, and thus should be honored: "But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear and do not be intimidated" (1 Pt 3:14).

Jesus' experience is the archetype for immersion. God's physical presence in human history is the ultimate solidarity of divine inter-being with broken humanity. God's inter-being also offers an alternative – the Kingdom of God. Jesus' life, teachings, suffering, death, and resurrection are the very manifestation of the Kingdom of God. To follow Jesus is to walk in his steps through his presence, ministry, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Many Christians cherish imitating Jesus' life and teaching but sidestep suffering, death, and resurrection. To be Jesus' disciple is to follow his full example.

For some leaders, the path of suffering may be extreme; however, transformation and justice require pursuit to degree that Jesus endured. To be immersed in a context of injustice is incarnational: leaving personal glory and interest and moving into the conditions of victims, sharing in their poverty, repression, rejection, danger, humiliation, suffering, and death. Writing to the Philippians, Paul summarizes Jesus' model in these words: "Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-8).

The Christological hymn of *kenosis* (literally, "emptying") reflects the action of deliberate self-emptying and self-expenditure on the part of Christ for the sake of others. Through Christ's incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection humanity witnessed the self-emptying of God, who united himself with human vulnerability in a mutual self-giving of love and service. *Kenoticism* is "a form of Christology which emphasizes Christ's 'laying aside' of certain divine attributes, or his 'emptying himself' of at least some divine attribute, especially omniscience or omnipotence" (McGrath 1997, 572).

This notion of *kenosis* emphasizes that the second person of the Trinity "reduced himself totally to the level of humanity" (McGrath 1997, 355). Daniel Migliore points out that *kenosis* is best described as the unity of divinity and humanity in Christ, rooted in the spirit of mutual self-surrendering love since "it is the very nature of God to be self-giving, other-affirming, and community-creating" (Migliore 1991, 151).

Why is Jesus' *kenosis* an important model for leadership? Religious leadership involves divine commissioning and attributes. Trappings of divinity sometimes isolate religious leaders from history and humanity. Immersion reminds leaders of their *kenosis*, their willing and eager abandonment of honor, eminence, and privilege, consistent with the paradigm of the one who freely emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, and suffering, even dying, for the mission of God in the world. *Kenosis* is the transforming power that enables leaders to enact the reign of a liberating and transforming God. Following Jesus' model, Christian leadership is called to a mission of immersion, one that takes the form of involvement with the enslaved, the poor, the oppressed, the homeless and stateless. Such ministry leads to redemption, transformation, and liberation.

Immersion creates opportunity for alternate engagement and broadens leadership horizons by provoking change. Such change provides a context for new hope and new encounters with God, who is present and active in victims' lives. The flame that flickers through the early process of accompaniment, listening and inquiry shines when leaders are immersed in being and acting. The two Emmaus disciples in Luke 24 recognized Jesus only after they had invited him into their home. The spark in their hearts ignited as they gained awareness of the divine they had encountered. This story of the Emmaus disciples has been read to emphasize Jesus' role in transforming two depressed souls. I

contend that their transformation began as they themselves considered their experience on the road. Jesus opened their hearts to the truth in God's messianic project. Their inter-being and inter-acting with a stranger brought them to the risen Lord. It is caring for someone walking alone at night, taking the risk of inviting him into one's home, and honoring him not only by sharing a meal but also by presiding at the table that allowed them to realize that the Lord has risen. The disciples' attitude embodied Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God, making their immersion experience transformative. They risked their safety, food, and family for the sake of a stranger. Inter-being with the stranger and inter-acting on his behalf made possible their awareness of the Lord.

Jesus' journeys compelled him to step out of his contextual tradition and meet people "to whom the religious leaders of the day had little connection" (Rieger 2015, 27). Jesus met a local Samaritan woman and conversed with her. He met a Syrophoenician woman, who presented him with yet another manner of faith. Reflecting on this Syrophoenician story, Rieger contends that the Syrophoenician woman "changes Jesus' mind about foreigners." Rieger explains:

> Jesus, who up to that point had believed himself to be sent to Israel only, is effectively persuaded by this woman to extend his ministry and heal her daughter. Amazingly, the horizon that is broadened here is not just the human one but the divine: through Jesus, the divine mission itself begins to travel further. Without Jesus' travel to Samaria and the region of Tyre, none of these things would have happened. (Rieger 2015, 27)

The story of the Syrophonician woman has been interpreted as emphasizing Christ's omnipotence and desire to test the woman's faith. This, to some, implies manipulating a suffering being and excluding her from God's love and healing. In fact, it was the woman's faith that transformed Jesus' ministry. His encounter came as a result of leaving a familiar zone for new territories where identity and mission had to be transformed.

A Theology of Immersion

A theology of immersion echoes the messianic project, the in-breaking of divine reign embodied in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a theology of inter-being and inter-acting with historical realities. Such a theology offers a critical reflection on the human condition and enactment of God's aspiration. It challenges human desires for power and domination. By participating in suffering and pain, it emerges into new life.

A Theology of Immersion: "Inter-being" and "Inter-acting"

A theology of immersion is one of encounter, enactment, and liberation. With "boots on the ground," leadership makes clear that it shares the realities of the oppressed and marginalized. Leaders, through immersion experiences, become God's partners and co-creators of divine reign. Encountering the divine brings soulful transformation, whereas partnering with God brings societal transformation. Encountering God requires seeking God in the world – where God is at work among the poor and the downtrodden. Writing on the Missionaries of Charity, an order established by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Leonard DeLorenzo explains how the members "found Christ and touched him in the broken bodies, in the lost children, in the dying." DeLorenzo writes:

> But not only did the missionaries *bring* the love of Christ in their comfort and compassion, they also *found* Christ and touched him in the broken bodies, in the lost children, in the dying. The work of a Missionary of Charity is contemplation of Christ in the poor, the same Christ they adore and receive in the Eucharist that is the center of their life of prayer. In serving the poor, they touch Christ's wounds and they love him; in receiving this love, the poor in turn receive the peace of Christ who has mercy on them. Caring for those with no one to love them was, to Teresa, the way to practice heaven right now: loving as Christ loves, helping as he

> helps, giving as he gives, serving as he serves, rescuing as he rescues. (DeLorenzo 2016)

Encountering God is the ultimate need of the human soul. “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you,” says Augustine. When leaders encounter God in the resilient faith of victims, leaders marvel at how God is in and with victims, sustaining them through turmoil. Leaders are inspired by the steadiness of the victims’ faith amid suffering and hopelessness. Encountering such faith is illuminating and transforming. Leaders who stand with those suffering are even more inclined to partner with God, who never leaves his children. Partnering with God makes leaders co-workers in the transformation of societies.

Immersion is a step in a process, one whose urgency impels action. When leaders are immersed in the suffering of the oppressed, they recognize that their comfort is less significant than the drive to enact change. If accompaniment, listening, and inquiry encourage leaders to envision change, immersion awakens them to the urgency of action. Reflecting on Moses, Rieger writes: “Princes do not associate with common people, and Moses might have ended his life in the safety and comfort of the court if not for an encounter with some of the enslaved Hebrews that wakes him out his royal slumbers and puts him on the road” (Rieger 2015, 19). Moses’ violence and retreat did not solve the problem. It was after Moses *took off his shoes, stood on holy ground, and received a divine commission* that he could return and carry out his work of liberation.

A theology of immersion is a theology of engagement, born out of solidarity with those who are struggling. It is an act of sharing in human need and suffering. Writing the preface of *Theology in the Americas* Robert Brown quotes Gustavo Gutiérrez, who said: “‘All the political theologies, the theologies of hope, of revolution, and of liberation are

not worth one act of genuine solidarity with exploited social classes'" (Torres and Eagleson 1976, xii-xiii). Elaborating on the process of doing theology, Brown writes:

> The process is finally an engaged process. From start to finish…those who 'do theology' in this fashion must be doing it with their lives as well as with their minds. Theology is not so much a matter of the classroom (though it can also be that) as of the arena of human need, immersed in the stuff of politics, engaged in the struggle with the oppressed, being open to personal risks for the sake of those whom the world counts as nothing. The key word here, a word always in danger of being co-opted and defused, is praxis. Thinking must be engaged thinking; it must come out of doing and not just cogitating. (Torres and Eagleson 1976, xii)

A Theology of Immersion: Incarnational, Missional, Transformational

A theology of immersion advocates integration with the world. It carries out inter-being and inter-acting with social, political, and economic conditions. Immersion requires genuine presence on the part of leaders committed to God's mission to transform the world. Christian leadership generally understands its mission to consist of representing the mission of God, who emptied himself and took the form of a "slave" in order to transform servitude into divinity. Incarnational theology integrates with the conditions of the world in order to bring human pathos to God's ethos. Christianity holds Jesus to be fully human: not pseudo-human, but a man who lived in a particular place and time. Jesus was deeply influenced by social, cultural, religious, political, and economic realities of his era. He experienced hunger, thirst, pain, agony, and grief. He had his own temptations. To confess Jesus' humanity is to recognize his inter-being and inter-acting with the human race. Reflecting on Jesus' human nature, Migliore writes:

> If God in Christ is not present to us in the depth of our human finitude, misery, and godforsakenness, then all that this person said and did cannot be a saving event for us who know finitude, misery, and godforsakenness all too well. If God in Christ does not enter into solidarity with the hell of our human conditions, we remain without deliverance and without hope. (Migliore 1991, 146)

Incarnational leadership affirms full inter-being with human circumstances and brokenness. Immersion affirms that inter-being goes beyond programs of outreach into transforming conditions of suffering. Jesus' incarnation is fundamentally linked to redemption. Being is intrinsically active with respect to altering conditions of oppression. Incarnational leadership is transformative, converting false ideologies into God's aspiration. Jesus' life and ministry interrupted human history. Migliore describes Jesus as a "disturbing and revolutionary human being." He writes:

> He proclaimed the coming reign of God and acted in God's name with an astonishing freedom. He spoke of God as Abba, 'dear father," taught his hearers to love their enemies, and announced God's grace to sinners and the poor…Jesus' proclamation and ministry transgressed the supposed boundaries of God's grace and thus shocked the sensibilities of the guardians of religious traditions. He blessed the poor, healed the sick, befriended women, and had table relationship with sinners. His words and actions seemed blasphemous to his critics. Further, his announcement of the in-breaking reign of God made him vulnerable to the charge of being a political conspirator. This disturbing ministry of Jesus thus led to his crucifixion as a blasphemer and a possible threat to imperial rule. (Migliore 1991, 146)

Incarnational leadership, following the model of Jesus, is called to full humanity. When leaders stand in solidarity with broken humanity, they not only side with the victim but expose the failures of the dominant system. When leadership fails to disturb the powers that oppress people, immersion is reduced to compliance with the world-as-it-is. Jesus' radical teaching and enactment of the in-breaking of the divine reign always has "a critical and subversive dimension; it will be iconoclastic in relation to conventional understanding of God and the support that these understandings give to oppressive attitudes and relationship" (Migliore 1991, 147).

A theology of immersion as incarnational anticipates discomfort, resistance, and suffering. In his encyclical "Evangelii Gaudium," Pope Francis reflects on the church's

mission, emphasizing the presence of the church in the world – not as a separate, static, domesticated entity, but as a challenging force. “Each Christian and every community,” asserts Francis, “must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel” (Francis 2013, 20). In the footsteps of Christ, the church is called to an active presence in the midst of human brokenness. Pope Francis asserts that presence in the world requires us “to go out from ourselves” and “to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed” (Francis 2013, 21). Francis writes:

> An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. *1 Jn*4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast… An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. (Francis 2013, 24)

A Theology of Immersion: Disturbing the Oppressor and Sharing in Suffering

Suffering is a dominant theme in Scripture. When Moses reacted to injustice, he suffered alienation. When Elijah criticized the monarchy, he endangered his life and had to flee into the wilderness. When Jesus proclaimed his mission, the crowds became enraged, “got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff” (Lk 4: 29). Stephen’s criticism of religious tradition ultimately got him stoned to death (cf. Acts 7:51-53).

Whether we like it or not, people cherish easy, stress-free circumstances. They avoid challenge and confrontation. Our preference for tranquility and comfort has infiltrated leadership discourse and stymied action. Confronting a system of injustice produces stress, risk and suffering – not what most leadership desires. To struggle with

one's faith, community, and society brings about healthy learning and change. There is no struggle-free life, and there is no struggle-free immersion. To be immersed in a context of injustice means to embrace struggle as a way of life. Joan Chittister writes:

> To struggle is to begin to see the world differently. It gives us a new sense of self. It tests all the faith in the goodness of God that we have ever professed. It requires an audacity we did not know we had. It demands a commitment to the truth. It leads to self-knowledge. It builds forbearance. It tests our purity of heart. It brings total metamorphosis of soul. If we are willing to persevere through the depths of struggle we can emerge with conversion, independence, faith, courage, surrender, self-acceptance, endurance, purity of heart, and a kind of personal growth that takes us beyond pain to understanding. Enduring struggle is the price to be paid for becoming everything we are meant to be in the world. (Chittister 2003, 19)

In conflict, war, and oppressive political contexts, confronting injustice entails struggle and endangerment. Leaders, like other comfort-seeking creatures, may opt for ministries of accommodation, evading threats as they manage their parishes, organizations, and dioceses. Leaders may also avoid placing their positions, privileges, and status in jeopardy. The impetus for a theology of immersion is Jesus' call to disciples to "take up their cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24-25). Christian faith is a journey into the realities of the world, where poverty, anxiety, fear, stress, conflict, and war are rife. A leadership that avoids these avoids the world, and thus cannot be incarnational. To follow Jesus means to create, nurture, and develop a combat consciousness that not only anticipates challenge, risk, and suffering, but that initiates these elements. Leaders should anticipate trouble; prepare to disturb calm waters, and make political systems anxious.

Suffering is an inevitable consequence of practicing disturbance leadership. When leaders challenge injustice, they invite retaliation. Jesus anticipated the hostility of the oppressive system of his time. He said to his disciples: "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be

killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly" (Mk 8:31-32a). When Peter criticized Jesus for anticipating suffering and death, Jesus proclaimed that liberation was commissioned by God. Jesus tells Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (Mk 8:33b). Jesus concludes:

> …If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? (Mk 8: 34b-36)

The words of Jesus are strong, almost brutal by contemporary criteria. But the Christian faith and mission do not allow for comfort-seeking. In *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, Richard Rohr describes suffering as a path to growth and transformation. This type of suffering is necessary, and involves what Rohr calls losing the "false self" in order to find the "true self." Rohr states: "Your false self is your role, title, and personal image that is largely a creation of your own mind and attachments. *It will and must die in exact correlation to how much you want the Real*. 'How much false self are you willing to shed to find your True Self?' is the last question" (Rohr 2012, 85).

Conventionally, struggle has implied either changing what one cannot endure or enduring what one cannot change. Joan Chittister suggests a different approach: "We could be transformed by the possibility of new beginnings. The essence of struggle is neither endurance nor denial. The essence of struggle is the decision to become new rather than simply to become older" (Chittister 2003, 23). Suffering is divine as well as human. When a victim of oppression suffers, God is present and active, sharing pain and providing alternatives. Christians since the early years of the church have reflected on their suffering in relation to the suffering of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the pastor and theologian, was imprisoned for his active opposition to the Nazi regime. He found in the

midst of his trials a suffering God who never abandoned a victim. In the midst of his own suffering, Bonhoeffer concluded that only God, suffering also, could help.

Suffering is a dominant theme in the biblical tradition as well as in the history of Christendom. Researching suffering in the early Christian era, Judith Perkins maintains that "the popular and widely distributed *Acts of the Martyrs* presented the message that to be a Christian was to suffer" (Perkins 1995b, 204). Suffering, whether sharing in the suffering of Christ or suppressing the body for the redemption of the soul, was perceived as heroic, a source of healing and inspiration for the community. "In the reversed rhetoric of Christian discourse, suffering in all its horror is transformed into treasure, and the sufferers are honored. In the same way, Christian martyrs had insisted that their torture was victory and their death, life" (Perkins 1995b, 206). Suffering aimed at introducing and maintaining new roles in cultural consciousness. Perkins concludes:

> Christian narratives…introduced new categories of subjects – the poor, the sick, the sufferings – and functioned to reform the cultural notion of the human community…The production of this subjectivity, the recognition and acceptance of a self-definition of sufferer, was essential for the growth of Christianity as an institution. Christianity offered itself as a community of sufferers and could not have developed had it lacked subjects present to respond to its call. (Perkins 1995b, 213-214)

Mother Teresa followed in the footsteps of Christ to initiate transformation. She has become an inspiration to people around the world who try to emulate her example of compassion and self-sacrifice. She left the comfort of family, friends, and convent to immerse herself in the slums of Calcutta as an apostle to the poorest of the poor. "To bring 'tender love and care' to those who are otherwise unwanted, unclaimed, and unloved," affirms Leonard DeLorenzo, "is to make something very beautiful, in obedience and out of love for the One who seeks comfort and compassion for the poor from the Cross." (DeLorenzo 2016) The pain and suffering Mother Teresa witnessed and

experienced in the slums stayed with her. It revealed to her the Cross of Calvary, where Jesus cried, “I thirst.” That moment in her life became a turning point. She met Christ in the streets and touched him by touching the poor, the dying, and the unwanted. Encountering God in the victim is the most transformative experience leaders can have. The Church recognizes as saints those who walk the walk, setting an alternative example that transforms souls and societies. Mother Teresa became an example of transformation, a miracle of love. Her iconic white sari bespoke poverty, simplicity, dedication, and love. “She counseled heads of state, she conferred with popes, she intervened in international disputes on behalf of the poor, she received the Nobel Peace Prize.” It was the thirst of Christ that moved her to leave happiness behind and find joy through Christ in the victim. DeLorenzo writes:

> The cost of going to India in the first place was leaving her “happy family.” The cost of going to the Poorest of the Poor was leaving the happiness of the Loreto Order. The cost of sharing in the passion of those who were “unwanted, unclaimed, unloved” was leaving the happiness of Jesus calling her “My own spouse . . . my little one.” For fifty years, she herself thirsted for what she gave. (DeLorenzo 2016)

This is the way of transformation. This is how leaders change injustice into joy and service. Love for God becomes love for all that God has created.

A Theology of Immersion: Soulful and Societal Resurrection

The path to transformation is a rocky path. Leaders who follow it welcome challenge, even in the form of rejection and retaliation. Immersion pushes religious leaders to anticipate risks, to participate in the marketplace, and to focus on what is burning in God’s creation. Immersion helps religious leaders redefine their missions in

terms of God’s mission. Immersion requires willingness to be vulnerable and to walk the dusty roads of the world. Pope Francis writes:

> I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures…More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: ‘Give them something to eat’. (Francis 2013, 49)

Religious leaders understand that immersion in suffering is the mission of God, who enters into human history to make it just. Jesus’ life, ministry, suffering, and death establish a new reality where no one need be left behind. Jesus was concerned about those deprived of a path in life. Richard Rohr says that this is why Jesus “made the sinner, the outsider, the Gentile, the Samaritan, the woman, the Roman centurion, the poor person, and the leper the heroes and heroines of his stories” (Rohr 2012, 142).

A great cloud of witnesses, including Dorothy Day, Teresa of Calcutta, Helen Keller, Oscar Romero, Gandhi, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Desmond Tutu, Naim Ateek, Michel Sabbah, etc., has stood on the side of the poor and oppressed. These witnesses did not seek or gain honor, privilege, titles, or positions. They understood their mission as one of immersion with and for the least among us. Helen Keller, a blind and deaf woman, escaped her wretchedness and undertook a life of service. She willingly dedicated herself to those left behind. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s understanding of discipleship inspired him to commit himself to justice and peace in the face of imperial opposition. For Bonhoeffer, to become a follower of Christ was to make

tough choices that "led to a further decision: to set aside his desires for the academy and become committed to the church." Reflecting on Bonhoeffer's life, Allan Boesak writes;

> Knowing and following Christ means that understanding those *kairos* moments that call for acts of justice and peace are moments that call for discernment, and decision; for conversion and commitment and religious, risk-filled choices. It is the kind of conversion and commitment that would lead to a better understanding of the cost of true discipleship.(Boesak 2015, 70)

This sharing of vulnerability – suffering in solidarity with those left behind – is what makes individuals into a transforming force. By giving life they gain life. This is Jesus' liberating method: to serve, not to be served. Jesus' model of conversion and commitment prompted me to renounce VIP travel status, which for years had made crossing checkpoints less stressful, in favor of ordinary status, accorded to people who must endure restrictions and hazards. I asked myself, would Jesus have accepted entitlement to cross checkpoints with less difficulty, as many local religious leaders do? No. In his time, Jesus was not a "**V**ery **I**mportant **P**erson" and he would have had to join the very long lines and endure the indignities that many Palestinians face in order to cross into Israel. Jesus *personified* a new type of human life, and he was conscious of that. By living with people and thinking and feeling in their presence, he reproduced his own life in others and they adopted his faith. When people discover religious leaders flying first class, enjoying executive lounges, living in fancy homes, retiring abroad, owning property, running businesses, and playing the stock market, they lose faith. The one who traveled rough roads in sandals; had no place to rest his head; who had no money for comfort; and who died on a cross surely was not a VIP.

Today, individualism is on the rise. It encourages behavior that undermines community and hinders contact with those left behind. In recent years, nationalism has

also been on the rise, threatening the family of humanity and marginalizing the poor, refugees, and foreigners. The new United States President has declared as a goal “America First.” In Britain, Brexit is a manifestation of a culture of separation and disestablishmentarism. In Europe, forthcoming elections may portend a shift toward nationalism and exclusion.

Capitalism is another force undermining the humanity of the poor and relegating people to the status of economic units rather than children of God. Consumerism continues to dominate most world cultures. In the midst of such false ideology, immersion promises solidarity with all of God’s people. Immersion helps remind leaders that the forgotten are a force among us.

The leading characteristic of liberation theology is engagement in God’s mission among those left behind. Liberation theology has added a new dimension to Christian theology – one that asks where and how God acts in the world. Traditionally, theologians have sought to determine the nature and existence of God through contemplation and church ritual. Liberation theology steps out of this context and into the world. The task of liberation theology is to discern the presence of God “here and now,” and to join with God in the project of transformation, so that the world can move closer to the Kingdom of Heaven. God is active in the suffering of the poor. The liberation theologian Jon Sobrino identifies persons who, in Jesus’ time, would have been considered “poor”: “the socially excluded…the religiously marginalized…the culturally oppressed…the socially dependent…the physically handicapped…the psychologically tormented…and the spiritually humble” (Sobrino 2008, 22).

Liberation theology confronts the dehumanization of economic and political power and challenges exploitative practices and their rationalization. It recognizes that economic inequality denies our shared humanity. Immersion provides an accurate picture of economic realities, and forces leaders see how disparities in opportunity, income and wealth affect our brothers and sisters. Coming from Latin America, Pope Francis is familiar with economic inequity, and prone to referring to this topic in his Encyclicals. In "Evangelii Gaudium," he writes:

> While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation…A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules…To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. (Francis 2013, 56)

Sharing in actual poverty is different from donating money to charity or offering outreach programs to the poor. Immersion as inter-being shares in poverty, as it unites leadership with the victims of want and incapacity. In sharing the hunger of the poor, leaders come to understand the forces that bring about and compound exploitation. Those who have lived with hunger are able to commit to effective engagement to eliminate it. Immersion is the antidote to alienation. Alienation is a barrier to salvation. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), Jesus stresses how holding ourselves apart from suffering people precludes our own transformation and salvation. The story of Lazarus teaches how separation from the poor leads to repudiation of responsibility for their needs, in violation of God's will. Separation destroys community, which is grounded in commitment to care for the poor and vulnerable. It also prevents the possibility of confronting economic, political, and social forces that reinforce suffering

and indifference. Sharing in the suffering of victims shapes a community of brothers and sisters who enjoy common blessings as well as pain (cf. Acts 4:32, 34-36).

Immersion transforms leaders so that they have skills to advocate for the vulnerable and capacity to intervene with those in power. The poor are dehumanized by systemic isolation and exploitation to the point where they become invisible – they disappear from our offices, churches and consciousness. Immersion restores them to our sight. Integral to a successful immersion experience is understanding history and society from the underside. Immersion is the *conscientization* of leadership who commit to standing with the poor and the oppressed in their struggle for freedom. Immersion requires time and commitment as well as a justice consciousness. Immersion is a state of being, a way of life, and a key component of leadership practice.

Sharing in the suffering of victims and shaking up oppressive systems cause discomfort but also make possible sharing in the suffering of Christ and God. God is a victorious as well as a suffering God. He vindicates the suffering servant, bringing life and glory. Migliore writes:

> Jesus' passion and death for us is not just the martyrdom of another innocent victim in an unjust world; it is also God's suffering, God's taking death into the being of God and there overcoming it for our salvation. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not the victory of a solitary human being over death; it is God's victory over sin and death for us all in the raising up of this man Jesus. *God* acts, suffers, and triumphs in and through Jesus. In Jesus Christ we do not have less than God's own presence in our humanity. (Migliore 1991, 148)

God vindicates Jesus's suffering and death by resurrecting him to glory. In the actions and suffering of the obedient servant who "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). "Christian faith," asserts Migliore,

"sees no less than God in the transforming, suffering, and victorious love at work in Jesus' ministry, cross, and resurrection" (Migliore 1991, 149).

Immersion requires that leaders embrace unfamiliar experiences and engage in new thinking, reflection, skills, habits, and methods. In *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, Mary Moore explains how Christians need to leave behind conventional expectations. God astonished humans with Jesus' incarnation and messianic project, exceeding the Jewish people's aspirations for a Messiah. "Expecting the unexpected," for Moore, is "an attitude and action, important to sacramental teaching because it represents the expectation that God works wonders in the world" (Moore 2004, 40). Expecting the unexpected is a kind of spirituality that expands human capacity. It is defined not by mastering but by searching, not by acquiring but by making oneself vulnerable, not by clinging to what we know but by being open to what God can do. Moore writes:

> To engage with God is to seek God's movement in every ordinary and extraordinary moment of every day…that the Christian community might catch a vision of expecting the unexpected – experiencing the wonder of God's work in the midst of everydayness, including moments of joy, routine, and tragedy. This happens when teachers and learning communities open themselves to God's wonders and unleash their imagination to be blessed by mystery." (Moore 2004, 42)

Immersion makes room for the work of the Holy Spirit. "The wind," said Jesus, blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:8). God's wonder is revealed in every accompaniment, every story, every inquiry for truth, and every movement for human justice and freedom. Immersion moves us toward openness to God's aspiration. God will surprise us with creative intervention, healing, and transformation. We should clear the way and create space for God to act.

Consulting Social Sciences

Immersion as a Holistic Experience

Immersion helps leaders discover their own abilities and vulnerabilities in relation to calling and ministry. It helps them assess and develop their repertoires of skills as agents for change. A leader finds a new self in relation to context and mission. Immersion in unfamiliar circumstances unlocks additional dimensions of self in relation to the needs of context. As leaders grow, they discover what their evolving missions are and sometimes what they are not.

Inquiry and research provide leaders with opportunities to gather information about a particular victim, situation or context of injustice. Leaders test research by putting it into action. This is learning with head, heart, and hands. Immersion is learning through experimentation. Engaging in immersion experiences includes not only physical and emotional elements but also elements of action. An immersion experience is a two-way, reciprocal relationship, where leadership acts in a context but also where context changes leaders' orientations. This is the heart of immersion as an act of transformation. For an effective transforming experience, it is necessary to act out what has been learned in order to assess its effectiveness. Reflection helps leaders to process an immersion experience and consider its potential effectiveness in a different environment. Participating in a rally for social justice is different from reading about social justice, listening to a debate about social justice, or inquiring about social justice. Marching with workers protesting restrictions on freedom of movement is different from listening to their views, or reading about their challenges. Campaigning against political imprisonment is an experience that goes far beyond hearing a radio program about prison

life. Immersion enables leaders to be at the heart of human experience. Immersion is like performance, where leaders collaborate, act, display, assess, and reframe their skills to address injustice effectively.

Immersion as a Transformational Experience

Transformative leadership requires learning, growth, and development. The immersion experience is a different method of learning, involving enactment and interaction with subject matter. In pedagogy, the concept that transformation should be a goal of education has become quite popular. In "Transformative Learning in Integrational Education," Amy Hunter defines transformational learning and how it enhances normative learning and development. Reflecting on the work of Jack Mezirow, who first articulated the theory of transformative learning, Hunter explains: "In the simplest terms, *transformation*…is a deep and structural shift in the basic premises of our thoughts, feelings, and actions; it represents a permanent evolution in the way we filter, engage in, and interpret the world around us" (Hunter 2008, 94).

Hunter expounds on the difference between meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. "Life experience that causes a student to reorganize existing schemes in order to accommodate new information and negotiate new environments," explains Hunter, "represents learning that leads to normative development. On the other hand, life experience that challenges students to reconsider the fundamental reasoning behind their most basic notions of the way the world works can precipitate an entire change in perspective. Learning of this nature is said to be transformative" (Hunter 2008, 94-95). In this sense, transformative learning is

> a process that precipitates a deep and structural shift of perspectives in students through new experience. When learners are challenged to reflect critically on disorienting dilemmas in light of personal biases, when they are encouraged to test and validate their new thinking in discourse with others, and when they are given the opportunity to integrate their learning into the fabric of their lives through action, the possibility of transformation exists. (Hunter 2008, 100)

Presented with new information, observations, or situations, learners in normative development retain as their frames of reference previous ways of thinking. They fit new experiences into existing meaning perspectives. "Previous ideas and concepts," explains Hunter, "are reorganized to allow room for the disparate information. This strategy results in learning but does not demonstrate a change in perspective" (Hunter 2008, 95). Transformative learning occurs when learners' struggles with new information, observations, situations, or dilemmas lead to changes in their frames of reference. Hunter explains, "Change in perspective, based on examination of the premises, assumptions, and presuppositions underlying the framework, results in a shift of paradigm. The new way of thinking, feeling, and valuing is based on a reinterpretation of not only *what* to consider but *how* to consider the meaning schemes" (Hunter 2008, 96).

Immersion applies transformational learning by introducing leaders to situations that require processing and action at a deeper and more direct level than previously. Leaders may perceive these experiences as confusing. Transformative immersion requires active engagement in potentially disruptive learning. Reflecting on educational immersion methodology, Hunter proposes three types of program design. These are: critical reflection, discourse, and action.

- Critical reflection serves to "increase learners' sense of self-awareness, while also engendering a desire to think dialectically about the world around them." Unlike *content reflection*, which focuses on an experience itself, or *process reflection,*

which focuses on fixing a problem, transformation occurs through *premise reflection* which "requires learners to evaluate and explore their long-standing, culturally constructed attitudes, values, and beliefs in the face of new and unfamiliar experiences" (Hunter 2008, 99).

- Discourse is a critical dialogue whereby "learners engage to make and share meaning of the world around them in a nonjudgmental way." The key purpose is to stir learners to consider differences as a chance for knowledge and to inspire them to make efforts to find points of agreement, which "leads to the development of new understandings of the world." Transformative discourse involves "an effort to set aside bias, prejudices, and personal concerns, and to do our best to be open and objective in presenting and assessing reasons and reviewing the evidence and arguments for and against the problematic assertion to arrive at a consensus" (Hunter 2008, 99).
- Action is an indispensable element in facilitating transformation. It is "a by-product of self-actualization and an expanding worldview," and is considered "the utmost objective of learning," that aims "to liberate the lives of its learners so that they may bring about change for the greater good" (Hunter 2008, 99). Hunter quotes Paulo Freire, who asserts that change occurs when learners take part in a cycle of reflection, "acting on one's insights from reflection, then critically reflecting again on that action, or *praxis*…[P]ersonal emancipation from previous patterns of thought is not the ultimate aim of education. It serves only as a necessary starting point for social change" (Hunter 2008, 100).

Immersion experience is learning through praxis. It does not coerce change but provides educational opportunities "in which transformation is made possible" (Hunter 2008, 101). In the research phase, leaders become researchers for truth. They construct learning experiences, designing processes to examine interpretations of the world. In the immersion phase, leaders test their perspectives through action that stretches the body and mind to achieve more in life. Praxis helps leaders control their actions and master their missions of transforming self, souls and societies.

Any experience can serve as a landmark in a leader's memory, a cornerstone on which to build the public good. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls this optimal experience, "something that we *make* happen" (Csikszentmihalyi 2009, 3). Csikszentmihalyi developed "a theory of optimal experience based on the concept of *flow* – the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (Csikszentmihalyi 2009, 4). Csikszentmihalyi explains:

> For each person there are thousands of opportunities, challenges to expand ourselves. Such experiences are not necessarily pleasant at the time they occur. The swimmer's muscles might have ached during his most memorable race, his lungs might have felt like exploding, and he might have been dizzy with fatigue – yet these could have been the best moments of his life. Getting control of life is never easy, and sometimes it can be definitely painful. But in the long run optimal experiences add up to a sense of mastery – or perhaps better, a sense of participation in determining the content of life – that comes as close to what is usually meant by happiness as anything else we can conceivably imagine. (Csikszentmihalyi 2009, 3-4)

The immersion experience draws leaders into flow, involving self and skills in relation to challenges and goals. Transformation occurs when leaders are aware of themselves, their identities and repertoires, and are able to frame and reframe their skills to match new missions to transform the world-as-it-is into a world-intended-by-God.

Transformation happens when leaders acknowledge their calling, discover their identities, and then develop their skills to match opportunities for action. Csikszentmihalyi writes:

> This happens when psychic energy – or attention – is invested in realistic goals, and when skills match the opportunities for action. The pursuit of a goal brings order in awareness because a person must concentrate attention on the task at hand and momentarily forget everything else. These periods of struggling to overcome challenges are what people find to be the most enjoyable times of their lives…A person who has achieved control over psychic energy and has invested it in consciously chosen goals cannot help but grow into a more complex being. By stretching skills, by reaching toward higher challenges, such a person becomes an increasingly extraordinary individual. (Csikszentmihalyi 2009, 6)

An optimal experience of immersion entails free participation in the life of a victim of injustice. One invests time and energy in nurturing the victim and in developing one's repertoire of skills to address his or her needs. Transformation occurs as goals are reached. The mission of determining the course of one's life and mission and transforming suffering into freedom and contentment is an optimal experience for leadership for transformation and justice. Transformation occurs as leaders witness changes they make in the lives of those left by the roadside. Witnessing transformation in a victim's life is itself transformative for leadership.

In a context where pastors do not organize rallies, where sympathy with perpetrators is common, and where fear and indifference prevail, organizing and marching to defend neighborliness can be transforming event, despite its dangers. Full investment demands skills to open doors for change. For Sojourners, immersion in the experience of a persecuted minority led to a flow moment. They willingly stepped into unfamiliar territory. Flow is a challenging, even painful experience. It demands rising above personal, parochial, and denominational good and striving for common good.

The immersion experience is jarring and hard to forget. It produces flashbacks when shared and reflected upon. Many leaders who, for example, have visited the Palestinian territories and become immersed in the situations of victims have continued to feel haunted, with a transformative effect on their actions. Immersion, therefore, occurs when accompaniment is transformed into commitment to change, making effective advocacy possible.

Boyd Evans, a seminarian from the School of Theology at Sewanee, spent three months in Ramallah. Before his arrival, he read books written by Palestinian theologians and leaders. I advised him to open up to real life experiences of Palestinians in every way possible. The tutoring process offered him complete freedom to find his way in the context. Although Evans felt somewhat lost at the beginning of the process, he soon started participating in activities. At the end of his immersion, Evans emailed: "It was definitely life changing, and I will always carry the Palestinian people in my prayers and in my heart. This experience will certainly shape my ministry for years to come." Here are excerpts from his report:

> During this experience, I developed a great appreciation for the food, language, hospitality, appreciation of family and neighbors, music, liturgy, relationships, and connection to the land of Jesus held by Palestinian Christians... Palestinians take their hospitality very seriously and welcome guests as if they were welcoming Angels…..The ways in which each church ministers to those in its context reflects incarnational and sacramental aspects of the church. I see the grace of God through Jesus acting in the ways needed by both contexts…During my time in Palestine, I was forced to let go of my desire to control situations and circumstances and fully trust in faith that Jesus would guide and support me during my time there….While I was in Palestine, I experienced Christ's presence and love in many people that [I] met…I found the love of God in many of the Muslims that I encountered as well. I particularly experienced a powerful presence of Christ in all of the children from this region. It was with some fear and intimidation that I went to serve in the summer camps at the Palestinian refugee camps, but I was stunned by the love, joy, and

> welcome that I received from the children that I met there. This experience reinforced my love of youth/young adult ministry and has strengthened my belief that the most powerful encounters with Jesus arise when one encounters other cultures. (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-31, Mt 25:31-46).

Responding to an evaluation question about the difference that “boots on the ground” made for him, Evans writes:

> Books… gave me a good background on the complexities of the situation, but they could not in any way help me to experience what it felt like to live in this area… I traveled through the checkpoints with my Palestinian brothers and sisters while I was there, and I experienced the hardship and inconvenience that these present…During the time that I was in Palestine, I was also subjected to the water restrictions imposed on Palestinians by Israel. Palestinians are not granted permits to build wells, and the Israeli-controlled municipalities only send water to the West Bank twice per week during ordinary time…Mohammad was a student at the Episcopal High School in Ramallah where I volunteered who was shot by an Israeli soldier in May of 2014. On the anniversary of his death, the children posted pictures on Facebook of him lying in the street as he was dying. The psychological trauma that this event must have on these children is unimaginable to me. What does it do to a child to see their friend’s life taken as if it meant nothing? What sort of anger and hurt does this stir up? What sense of hopelessness and isolation? My heart was broken to see such violence committed against one of the children that I had been in ministry with at the school…Contrary to the depiction of Palestinians living in the West Bank found in the American media, I was greeted with joy and love by all that I encountered in the West Bank, both Christian and Muslim…I encountered many tour groups during my time in Palestine, and I was surprised by the contrast between their experience and mine. It seemed to me that the groups arriving in the tour buses were in their own little “happy bubble.” Their experiences appeared to be highly controlled by the guide services, and they seemed oblivious to the conditions of those around them.

In Evan’s immersion experience, one sees transformation in the life of the one immersed. Evans came back to Ramallah in 2016, bringing his wife and staying for another two months, working with Palestinian churches and institutions. The couple committed to participating in a camping project designed to give children safe educational space.

Immersion exposes religious leaders to something novel and unexpected, leading to new knowledge and understanding of self and mission. In *The Wondering Brian: Thinking about Religion with and beyond Cognitive Neuroscience*, Kelly Bulkeley employs new research in neuroscience to explain intensely real experience that she calls wonder, defined as "feeling excited by an encounter with something novel and unexpected, something that strikes a person as intensely real, true, and/or beautiful" (Bulkeley 2005, 3). She emphasizes that wonder has often been associated with moral and religious traditions. Wonder, explains Bulkeley, involves a sudden decentering of the self. It happens when one faces something surprisingly novel and powerful that leads to dramatic alteration of personal identity, acquisition of new knowledge and understanding, and ultimately recentering of self. Wonder is fundamentally transformative because it goes beyond experience, alters perception, and provokes growth. Wonder leaves a person wholly engaged in reflection about self and the world. Bulkeley explains:

> The profound impact of this decentering and recentering process is evident in both the intense memorability of the experiences and the strong bodily sensations that often accompany them. People speak of being stunned, dazed, breathtaken, overwhelmed, consumed, astonished –all gesturing toward a mode of experience that exceeds ordinary language and thought and yet inspires a yearning to explore, understand, and learn.(Bulkeley 2005, 4)

Wonder stimulates critical inquiry and research. Bulkeley uses descriptions of pre-frontal cortical activity to show the ability of wonder to disturb, de-activate, and re-activate specific brain functions. These motivate the brain to increase its aptitude for reasoning and processing radical experiences that require extra capacity. The brain changes depending on the novelty and intensity of the experiences it undergoes. As an existential surprise, wonder provokes curiosity and therefore change. (Bulkeley 2005, 198-199).

In the accompaniment phase of my paradigm, emphasis was placed on discovering one's broken humanity through decontrolling. In the immersion phase, accompaniers abandon personal comfort and safety to step deeper into human suffering. Tactics that intensify immersion include direct exposure to life threatening situation and willingness to share brokenness. The modern concepts of 'toxic tourism" and "environmental racism" illustrate what sharing brokenness can consist of. These concepts refer to organized excursions to sites of environmental devastation in deprived communities. Joerg Rieger explains that "on toxic tours, tourists are asked to expose themselves to the costs of human greed: poisoned air, polluted water, degraded land, and bodies that are diseased, deformed, and dying" (Rieger 2015, 75). In such immersion excursions, tourists share what it means to inhale poisoned air, drink polluted water, live under military restriction, wait in line to cross checkpoints, and be exposed to violence.

Immersing involves facing backlash. Many leaders avoid immersion for exactly these reasons. It may incur restrictions, intimidation, arrest, or travel bans. Patricia Rantisi describes how her husband, the Rev. Audeh Rantisi, was banned from leaving his country because of advocacy for justice. She writes: "For the past six months he has been restricted in his movements, not being allowed to leave Ramallah on military order" (Rantisi and Beebe, 1990, 99). After explosions injured the mayors of Ramallah and Nablus, Rev. Rantisi received ominous phone calls from persons who warned him: "Be quiet! Your turn is next….You are a dead man" (Rantisi and Beebe, 1990, 98).

Rachel Corrie, an American activist, came to the Holy Land to volunteer with an organization engaged in direct action against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Corrie lived in one of the most devastated refugee camps in Gaza. She and

other activists attempted to obstruct housing demolition by Israeli military forces. She was part of a human shield in front of a Palestinian home when an Israeli bulldozer driver ran over her and then backed over her again. A young woman "brimming with idealism, anger at injustice, and a determination to make a difference, however small," she wrote in an email to her family and friends before her death, "No amount of reading, attending at conference, documentary viewing and word of mouth could have prepared me for the reality of the situation here. You just cannot imagine it unless you see it" (Sherwood 2012). In another email to her mother, Corrie wrote, "I'm witnessing this chronic, insidious genocide and I'm really scared, and questioning my fundamental belief in the goodness of human nature. This has to stop. I think it's a good idea for all of us to drop everything and devote our lives to make it stop" (Sherwood 2012).

Omer Goldman, the daughter of the deputy head of Mossad, has served time in jail for refusing national service in the Israeli Defense Forces. Goldman is not the only Israeli to choose imprisonment over deployment to the Occupied Territories, but her story is an extraordinary one. Goldman expected rejection, humiliation, and incarceration, but she stood firm in her decision not to participate in a force that has oppressed Palestinians. Goldman initially joined activists protesting Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands. She rebelled against her father and her state and went to have a look at life on the other side of the wall. Immersion in the Palestinian context exposed her to a different truth. Telling her story to a news reporter, Goldman pointed out that "the crucial moment of her metamorphosis occurred…when she went to a Palestinian village where the IDF had set up a roadblock. Someone she had considered her enemy all her life stood beside her and someone who was supposed to be defending her opened fire at her" (Serna 2008).

Goldman refused to serve in the army because she was deeply committed to her moral beliefs, which led to her imprisonment for 21 days. She will refuse to serve again and will be tried again – and again – until the army tires or she tires (Serna 2008).

It is unfair not to mention more of those who have offered their love, time, effort, suffering, and death for the sake of the poor and oppressed. Humanity is "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Hebrew 12:1) who have transformed lives and societies. Dietrich Bonhoeffer lost his life for rejecting Nazism, Martin Luther King Jr. lost his life because he stood against racism and injustice, Oscar Romero lost his life for the sake of the poor and oppressed, and the list can go on and on. These leaders shared victims' suffering, stood firm in their beliefs, and brought about change and liberation. They knew that no one should be left behind and that every life matters.

Immersion: Restoring Interconnectedness and Community

At the heart of the immersion experience is restoring and expanding community, so that religious leaders can minister to their own flocks and beyond. To unite with those left behind, struggling alone, is to bring them back to the attention of the church. The presence of leadership through the immersion experience restores a leader's role in society and sets an example for others to follow. When asked whether they would participate in demonstrations, a large majority of Palestinian religious leaders said that they did not envision doing so. Even those who are outspoken for justice said that they did not believe they were called to protest publicly. "I do not see myself holding a sign and protesting in the street or marching with people," said one leader. Even those who suggest that the potential for violence is the reason for which they have not participated in rallying admit that they have not sought alternative peaceful demonstrations.

Immersion as inter-being and inter-acting helps form interconnections and community. Sojourners marched with thousands of Palestinian employees against a new Palestinian social security law. It was a unique experience for some to see clergy marching with workers. “Fathers, so you also march?” Our answer was, “We stand by those who are treated unjustly by the new law!” “We stand for justice!” The march let people meet, chat, laugh, chant, and even share private matters. It was an opportunity to reconnect with one another. Marching for justice is a social act that builds community.

Marching with the oppressed and marginalized is a prophetic act. Being immersed with those who march for justice aligns leaders with justice and freedom. It strengthens community and challenges alienation. Encountering marchers face-to-face and joining with them hand-in-hand builds communal understanding of justice. Inter-being and inter-acting with victims of injustice establishes a public relationship with a separate other. In marching encounters, leaders do not intentionally seek friends, yet friendships develop naturally. Such friendships mature over time, based on shared experiences. They may last a lifetime. Immersion as inter-being and inter-acting aims at creating public relationships, nurturing community, and developing mutuality.

Immersion as a community-forming is a transforming experience since it reframes leaders’ personal plans and courses of life to meet collective interests. Immersion widens leaders’ horizons, which sometimes requires redirecting vision and mission. Such change is healthy since it derives from community as well as from individual leaders. When leaders’ ordinary lives unfold in extraordinary space and time, a communal approach takes shape, where mutuality forms the basis of mission. The poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized become co-authors of a leader’s vision and the center of his or her mission.

Built on the experiences of accompaniment, attentive listening, and inquiry, immersion delves deep into victims' suffering, establishing new frameworks for understanding the role of leaders engaged in advocacy. To be able to reframe the mission of leader is itself a transforming experience. Leaders who master the ability to see and shape what is best for a given a situation experience a liberating sense of confidence and competence. Leaders who develop novel ideas that address the needs of communities are properly attuned to people and events in their surroundings.

Conclusion

Immersion means taking daring steps into the realities of oppression, a step that changes perception of self, community, and mission. Though painful and confusing, immersion leads to liberation. It goads leaders into activism, beginning with putting oneself fully into the experiences of others and taking these experiences inside oneself. Immersion is having one's boots on the ground and choosing to risk personal and institutional interest for the sake of victims and for the good of God's creation. It requires denying self and carrying one's cross for the transformation of the world.

Sojourners have reflected extensively on how experiences changed their perspectives, priorities, and theology. For Sojourners, the context of immersion became God's context. Immersion, therefore, is a human journey into the divine project. Jesus' immersion was achieved by the tangible reality of his presence and ministry. He surprised people, challenged traditions, anticipated resistance, and accepted suffering. Immersion is the interconnectedness of self and context. It is accepting one's earthliness and recognizing one's unity with the creation, but especially with suffering creation. Immersion is being in touch with the soil and the soul.

Chapter Six: Advocate

Advocacy bespeaks faith in a God whose love is working to redeem the world. Leaders who advocate justice and neighborliness signal that they have been converted. As leadership accompanies, listens, inquires, and immerses, it cannot but advocate the purpose of God for his creation. Sojourners discovered that advocacy arises naturally from encounters with victims of oppressive structures, sometimes through deliberate group decisions and sometimes as one member and then another felt the need to act. As leaders journey into the victims' contexts, they encounter a liberating God who sides with the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized.

The mission of transformation cannot be accomplished unless leaders step forth to join the way of Christ, who encouraged the poor, freed the oppressed, and healed the lame so that they would "stand up and walk" (Mt 9: 5). Advocacy is not limited to acts of solidarity, but rather requires commitment to a different consciousness. Rieger writes: "As we see God at work in the travel of migrants, refugees and exiles, those of us who have the privilege to travel under less pressure have a choice to make. Do we continue to travel with the privileged elites and make every effort not to be bothered? Or do we travel in ways that allow us to stay connected with the common people?" (Rieger 2015, 26).

Advocacy deconstructs indifference and builds neighborliness. Advocacy defends those who cannot defend themselves, protests for those who cannot speak up, and uses every opportunity to tell the truth and fight for what is righteous. It proclaims the Kingdom of God in the face of those who prefer the kingdoms of the world. Advocacy

means caring for the other, even though he or she may not be brother, sister, friend, or colleague. It transcends personal interest, religious affiliation, politics, and citizenship. The "Abrahamic paradigm of advocacy" inspires leaders to hold to their beliefs and take all necessary steps, even those that might jeopardize privilege, familial welfare, and group or national security, to defend victims against violence and annihilation.

Advocacy is the ability to witness to God's faithfulness in relation to human experience and suffering. Transformative advocacy is prophetic, that is, committed to God's purpose. In *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World*, Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel define the identity and mission of a prophet as one who "addresses root causes of social problems – including the flawed structure and systems created by and reinforcing human sin." They write:

> The prophet exposes the lies societies believe that legitimize injustice, and convey the sacred truths that counteract those lies. Prophets reveal the ways that societies institutionalize sin and the sweeping changes necessary to cleanse and heal our institutions, so that people are free to become all God intended them to be. Prophets cast the vision for a healthy society with just structures that ensure fair treatment for all and support the fullness of life for every child. (Salvatierra and Heltzel 2014, 123)

Religious leaders are called to this commission: to advocate a world-intended-by-God. Such a mission requires innovative and daring actions. To advocate justice and transformation is to be faithful to one's beliefs, even when other people, situations, cultures, and structures all pull in the opposite direction.

Advocate: Commitment to Justice and Neighbourliness

Inspired by the power of relational action, Sojourners embarked on another journey. This journey, which began in March 2015, took us to the opposing side in the

Israeli-Palestinian struggle, Israel. It culminated in establishment of an innovative project: “Schools for Shalom-Salaam.”

In our region, the Israeli occupation, coupled with unwillingness on the part of both Israelis and Palestinians to open toward the other, have brought about division and enormous distrust. The Separation Wall that Israel built around the Occupied Territories makes it impossible for Palestinians and Israelis to come together spontaneously. Israeli laws prohibiting Israeli citizens from entering Palestinian cities and towns in Area “A”[27] prevent relationships and cooperation from developing. The necessity for permits, issued on a limited basis to allow some Palestinians to work, receive medical treatment, worship, and engage in tourism in Israel, ensures that links between Palestinian and Israeli civil society are task-oriented, and that human interaction is restricted. Sojourners discussed a hypothetical act that would counteract the system that sustains separation.

Sojourners considered possible connections with Israeli entities, but found that the system did not facilitate our identifying a partner. Even among Sojourners, there were some who resisted the idea of making contact with Israelis, arguing that our communities might see this as normalization with the occupation and betrayal of the Palestinian cause. Just as we were about to drop the idea, an opportunity opened allowing us to make contact with people in Israel through a German foundation that supports the Episcopal School in Ramallah and an Israeli School in Haifa. This was a chance for us! After a long discussion, we asked that the German partners initiate the connection. Sojourners wanted to move gradually, requesting that I meet with an Israeli counterpart to test the ground.

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[27] The Oslo Interim Agreement divided the Occupied Territories into three areas: Area “A” is under Palestinian civil and security control; Area “B” is under Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian security control; Area “C” is completely under Israel security and civil control. At the entrance to every Palestinian city and town in Area “A” big red signs read: “Palestinian Authority Territory; Area A ahead; No entry for Israelis; Entry illegal under Israeli law.”

After several emails, we decided that would I travel to the premises of the Episcopal Diocese in East Jerusalem to meet a representative of the school in Haifa. Just prior to the meeting, my Israeli counterpart asked if we could change the meeting place to West Jerusalem – his family was anxious about travel to the eastern part of the city. We met in West Jerusalem, speaking for two hours and agreeing to meet again in Haifa.

Two Sojourners decided to take the risk and travel to Haifa to meet Jonathan, an English teacher at the Israeli school, who invited us for lunch at his home. We had never visited an Israeli family at home. Anxiety on both sides subsided as we exchanged life stories and cultural experiences. We spent the entire afternoon discussing a possible school link. Our hosts explained that one of their children did not like the idea of a visit by Palestinians. She came out of her room, said hello, and then went back into her room. Toward the end of our stay, she too sat with us and conversed. We discovered many commonalities in terms of culture, traditions, and political views. We certainly looked forward to more visits and connections. Our mutual decision to advocate justice, peace, and neighborliness made an impact on both sides, and changed our perceptions of the other. Later, in an email, Jonathan wrote:

> When we, as teachers and parents, make our children and students aware of the fact that the 'other side' exists and has names, faces and a history (in other words, is just as human as we are, as banal as that sounds), that will affect at least some of them, and probably in a positive way. When I talk with my two sons, and hear them talk among themselves and with friends, I notice that their meeting Palestinians, no matter how short and - unavoidably - superficial, has somehow changed their own perceptions and perspectives. For them, 'Palestinian' is not simply something amorphous and faceless anymore. Whenever they see Palestinians on the news, those people have names and faces. The same goes for Yael, and it has had and continues to have an impact on my own perspective and views as well. That in itself already is some sort of achievement, no matter how tiny and uneventful. Let's hope we can achieve a little more.

When Israeli settlers attacked a Palestinian family in the West Bank, burning their home and killing everyone except a toddler rescued by neighbors,[28] Jonathan wrote:

> It is not that I know what to say, or that I can offer you or anyone else any comfort, but I felt I had to write you somehow. When I woke up this morning, I checked the news and read about the horrible murder of poor Ali Saad Dawabsha. I can only imagine the agony of his parents. Earlier this week I organized all the digital pictures that I have of my own three children, many of them from the time that our two sons were still babies. You don't have to be a parent to feel for other parents whose children are hurt, maimed, or murdered, but now the baby pictures of my children Evyatar and Itamar are playing around in my head, I cannot help it. Violence and terror are always abominable, but when children are hurt the horror becomes almost more tangible.

The "Schools for Shalom-Salaam" project emerged from our visit to Jonathan, which left us convinced that we needed to set up alternatives to the oppressive structures of separation and rigidity that have made enemies out of neighbors. God desires neighborliness, common good, and justice. Advocating transformation and justice requires stepping beyond cultural norms into God's aspiration for his creation.

In August 2016, "Schools for Salam-Shalom" brought together Sojourners and teachers from both schools in Stuttgart, Germany for a week-long workshop to discuss further connections and links. During an evaluation session, the teachers who participated in the workshop asserted that the program had initially seemed unimaginable, but that it had turned out to be an eye-opening, mind-changing, and life-transforming experience. To this day, the program is in operation with the goal of defending neighborliness and justice for all people in our context.

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[28] The Dawabsha family were Palestinians attacked by Israeli settlers who burned their home while they slept on 31 July 2015. The father, 32, mother, 26, and their 18-month-old baby died, but an older child, 4, survived with serious burns. Charlotte Silver, "Two Israelis Charged in Fireboming that Killed Palestinian Family," The Electronic Intifada, January 4, 2016. (Accessed August 29, 2016). https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/charlotte-silver/two-israelis-charged-firebombing-killed-palestinian-family.

The Bible and Advocacy

The Abrahamic paradigm is my model for advocacy. Abraham took stalwart action to defend powerless and innocent neighbors. He jeopardized his personal and familial interests for the sake of the other. In Genesis 18, we are told that Abraham welcomed strangers into his house. He offered them water, bread, and rest, and eventually servanthood and longstanding hospitality. Abraham was reassured when he received a that he would be granted a child at his age. God then informed Abraham "how great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin," (Gn 18: 20) advising Abraham of his plan to destroy the city. Abraham decided to intervene on behalf of the righteous, and through the righteous on behalf of the entire city. He started a process of arbitration, bargaining with God.

> Then Abraham came near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." Abraham answered, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." Again he spoke to him, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." He said, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. (Gn 18:22-33)

Abraham never lost sight of what is important: justice and compassion.

The Abrahamic paradigm contains many elements worthy of study, but three are relevant for this project:

- "*Then Abraham came near and said*" (Gn 18:22-23). Abraham did not run away. Destruction was imminent, and his rational move would have been to hide. In today's world, where individualism prevails, many opt to remove themselves from the fray. Abraham's engagement is a model for breaking down the self-interest and indifference that are at the heart of the world's problems. Intervention requires *coming near,* advocating for others. Abraham had just received the news that he would have a son. He could have excused himself to take care of Sarah, or to plan a celebration. He could have avoided asking more of the one who had just granted him a gift. But he chose to be a faithful advocate for the other. That Abraham remained standing before the Lord reminds us that we need to stand firm in our missions and not retreat in the face of challenge.
- *"I who am but dust and ashes"* (Gn 18:27). Advocacy is the recognition of one's creatureliness, meaning solidarity with all creatures. Recognizing his creatureliness, Abraham reclaimed interconnections with those who were also but dust and ashes. Creatureliness encompasses recognizing one's identity in relation to others. Abraham did not say: "I don't live in Sodom – so why should I care about it? What goes on there is not my concern!" He asked himself, "Shall the victim be destroyed, and I not speak one good word for him?" He no doubt abhorred the wickedness of the Sodomites, yet he mediated with God for their benefit. Abraham stood in solidarity with the family of God.

- *"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"* (Gn 18:25b). Abraham challenged God on the basis of his understanding of God's nature. Self-centeredness breeds violence, whereas advocacy brings about redemption. Abraham was a confident and faithful servant of God, who used daring for the sake of others. His paradigm reclaims the notion that receiving a blessing is not enough; one must strive to bring blessings to the world.

The Abrahamic paradigm establishes a model for advocacy, perseverance and refusal to accept failure until all receive mercy.

Jesus advocated God's aspiration. He announced that his mission was to "bring good news to the poor…to proclaim release to the captives…recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (cf. Lk 4:18-19). He defended those who were left behind by political, religious, and social circumstances. He stood by the poor and the marginalized, befriending them. Jesus taught that advocacy means going out at midnight to comfort or feed a friend in need. Advocates do not fail to act because they are safe at home, or because they encounter locked doors, personal comfort, disappointment and failure as long as a friend is hungry (cf. Lk 11:5-8). In a parable reported by Luke, a host goes out at midnight and bothers his neighbor for the sake of a hungry visitor, even though he must awaken his neighbor's entire household. "Do not bother me," the neighbor answers from within. "The door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything" (Lk 11:7). By modern standards, the host is pushing the limits of friendship. But in the culture of the biblical world, the neighbor falls short in not responding to human need. The host seeking bread is not acting to benefit himself but to feed a guest. He interferes

and intercedes for another, who is hungry. He displays no shame in asking for help to meet the requirements of hospitality. The parable implies persistence to the point of importunity in prayer, as well as persistence in intervention when others' needs are at stake. Like Abraham, the friend did not respond, "I have no bread left," or "it is late," or "I am not hungry myself," or "I'll bring you something in the morning." For his friend's sake, he imposed on his neighbor. This is advocacy: reclaiming creatureliness, brotherhood, and neighborliness.

Advocacy does not accept excuses. Common ones include: "This is God's will," "I can't do anything about it," "What does it really matter?" "I live far away," and "This is not my business." Advocacy is the antidote to indifference and inertia. The Abrahamic paradigm teaches us that every believer is called to intervene on behalf of marginalized fellows. Jesus taught about the extent of God's desire for justice. The parable of the unjust judge in Luke 18 teaches persistence in countering oppression. The parable reads:

> In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.' (Lk 18:2-5)

The judge is unimpeachable – someone with so much power that he sees himself as God. And along comes an ordinary woman, overlooked and ignored, with a complaint. The judge could easily brush her aside. But she keeps on, and on, and on, and on, and on, until the judge concedes. An obvious interpretation of the parable of the judge is to see God as the judge and the widow as a human in prayer. Jesus himself seems to draw the comparison. But if Jesus is the widow and the oppressor is the judge, then Jesus aligns himself with the marginalized and the powerless. So, Jesus as the widow makes sense,

and Jesus' persistence in the cause of justice is an invitation to follow his path. In this construct, Jesus left questions for his audience: Who is ready to advocating for the powerless? Jesus calls people to join him, hoping that when he returns he will find faith on earth (cf. Lk 18:8).

The evacuation of the Amona settlement near Ramallah came about as a result of resilient advocacy against the state of Israel. Construction of the settlement on Palestinian-owned land began in 1995. In 1996, the owners of the land filed complaints with the police that their fields had been confiscated. They eventually appealed to the Israeli judicial system, joining with an Israeli human rights and peace organization to make the case that the land had been seized first by the Israeli military and then given illegally to settlers. In 2014, a higher Israeli court upheld the original court's verdict that the seizure had indeed been illegal, and ordered the evacuation of the settlement. After some 20 years, one land owner "feels a partial sense of relief, knowing that the Israeli security services evacuated the settlers who had been living on his land" (Rasgon 2017). Advocacy is resilient and daring conviction to stand against injustice as long as it takes.

Martin Luther King Jr. believed that the "arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." It is this kind of resilience that undergirds advocacy. King states:

> We shall overcome because Carlyle is right: 'No lie can live forever.' We shall overcome because William Cullen Bryant is right: 'Truth crushed to earth will rise again.' We shall overcome because James Russell Lowell is right: 'Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne. Yet, that scaffold sways the future and behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.' With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. (King 2017)

Advocacy is constructed on human willingness to bear witness to God's nature and mission. God empowers humans to speak truth and defend justice. Jesus taught his disciples advocacy, and he practiced it every day as he witnessed the Kingdom of God. In all of his circumstances, Jesus found a way to bear witness to God's desire for his people. Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning" (Jn 15:26-27). In Acts, Luke describes how the Holy Spirit came with power to the community of believers and bestowed on them the ability to testify to the liberating acts of Jesus Christ. In his first letter, Peter exhorts his community: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1Pt 3:15). Advocacy is the work of the Spirit who transforms faith into speech and action. In this sense, advocacy is evangelism. When leaders advocate the cause of the oppressed, they are bearing witness to the liberating love of God. Advocacy means enacting the Kingdom of God in the midst of life. We are not Christians if we keep silent.

Advocacy is a journey that never grows tiresome. It leads one to oases in a desert of injustice, where bareness and despair turn into promise. It involves inward as well as outward journeys and self-discovery, so long as one does not run away or blame problems on someone else. It requires facing one's inner fears, listening with the heart, and submitting to God's guidance. Advocacy is *sumud,* steadfastness, in the face of injustice. Advocacy means faithful engagement with struggling brothers and sisters. It brought Sojourners into new communities and new commitments that we would not treat anyone as a stranger and not tolerate walls.

In advocating justice, leaders cannot avoid danger, but they can confront and resist it. Resistance is a sign that advocacy is having an impact. Powers of oppression will always resist truth. The apostle Paul writes to Timothy, affirming that "Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tm 3:12). The path to transformation and justice is narrow and rocky; advocacy means that we keep walking, holding firm our faith that God is beside us. Advocacy is standing by those who cannot take their own cases forward. Advocacy means persisting until justice arrives and brotherhood and neighborliness prevail.

A Theology of Advocacy

Advocacy is bearing witness to God's nature and to God's liberating acts in history. Advocacy involves creating and nurturing a critical consciousness about self, community, and context. It involves constructing an alternative prophetic paradigm, one that bears witness to the in-breaking of divine reign.

Advocacy: Witnessing the Liberating Acts of God

As Sojourners immersed with victims of injustice, they became different kinds of leaders. Advocacy involves witnessing one's own transformation. Advocacy sharpens our ability to see our own lives and actions within the larger context of God's redemptive story. To speak coherently about the purpose of God revealed in his liberating actions is the very nature of the Christian faith and life. The people of God are charged with bearing witness to those acts, through discourse and deeds that will reach subsequent generations. Advocacy allows one to transfer learning to others, helping them engage,

grow, experience, and transform. It educates the world on behalf of those who have limited ability, capacity, and resources to advocate their own causes.

A theology of advocacy is constructed on the categories of neighborliness and the common good. It rejects polarization. It targets oppression, not the oppressor; poverty, not the wealthy; sin, not the sinner. It strives to see the opponent's point of view, to learn new perspectives, and to prepare ground for discussion. Advocacy sees opponents not as enemies but as victims of structures in need of dismantlement. Martin Luther King states:

> Here is the true meaning and value of compassion and nonviolence when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves. For from his view we may indeed see the basic weakness of our own condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition. (King and Washington 1992, 142)

This is the way of Christ. The goal is salvation, not destruction; compassion, not hatred; justice, not enmity. Advocacy should never aim to dehumanize opponents, but rather to set a table of fellowship for the sake of transforming souls and societies. Advocacy is love enacted. "Love," asserts King, "is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality" (King and Washington 1992, 159). King states:

> We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation…As Arnold Toynbee says: 'Love is the ultimate force that makes for the saving choice of life and good against the damning choice of death and evil. Therefore, the first hope in our inventory must be the hope that love is going to have the last word.'(King and Washington 1992, 150)

Advocacy is not limited to speech, but can include symbols, rituals, music, and lament, as long as they "multiply the impact of our messages if we choose to utilize them in our public communication" (Salvatierra and Heltzel 2014, 124). Following in the footsteps of the ancient prophets who were called on to break a potter's earthenware jug (Jer 19), to marry a wife of whoredom (Hos 1:2b), or to sit on a donkey's colt (Jn 12:14-

16), advocates practice their own rituals, including prayer, fasting, gardening, sit-ins, and candlelight vigils. The aim is to bring a message of change, however this is best articulated – by praying for the poor before a city council, or tending a garden to undercut use of chemicals in agribusiness, or displaying a bumper sticker protesting indifference, or lamenting the situations of refugees in a public demonstration. Transformative advocacy requires creativity to reach hearts and souls in order to inspire others to join the struggle. Prophetic acts, whether organized or improvised, invite change. They invite leaders and communities to imagine a new world. Salvatierra and Heltzel write:

> By taking our liturgies to the streets, we can reimagine the space and time currently reigned over by consumerism, baptizing the community into festival time. From the ancient ringing words of Scripture to our symbols, ceremonies, music and rituals, we have creative instruments for the transformation of perspectives and the conversion of hearts that go far beyond analysis and policy recommendations. When we seek to spread new ideas among humanity, we can turn to story, poetry, music and movement to inspire the heart and imagination – in our private conversations with the powerful, in formal hearings before official bodies, and in the streets. (Salvatierra and Heltzel 2014, 132)

Advocacy helps leaders and communities dream up solutions and present alternatives based on God's aspiration, and on human capacity to innovate.

Advocacy: An Alternative Prophetic Paradigm

Leaders for transformation recognize that advocacy may bring them into conflict with religious, political, or social forces. Biblical texts attest to the many arrangements that attempted to suppress Jesus's ministry. His own family "went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind'" (Mk 3:21). A disciple "took him aside and began to rebuke him" (Mk 8:32). The religious status quo "watched him and sent spies who pretended to be honest, in order to trap him by what he said, so as to hand

him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor" (Lk 20:20). It questioned his authority: "Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things? Who is it who gave you this authority?" (Lk 20:2). Jesus himself prophesied resistance: "Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town" (Mt 23:34).

The Israel-Palestine context is not exceptional in terms of generating resistance to advocacy. Many Palestinians, Israelis, and international activists know the costs of advocating for Palestinians. Religious, political, social, ideological, and psychological factors interfere with efforts to promote justice. Activists who have dared to speak up for Palestinian rights are accused of anti-Semitism or of being self-hating Jews. Advocates may find theological, pastoral, or spiritual excuses to withdraw in silence.

Sojourners discussed resistance to advocacy in the Palestinian context, coming up with four classifications. Category One consists of *psychological* factors. Fear in general is a strong motivator against involvement in dangerous circumstances. Fear of being challenged by Israel's allies, fear of appearing to betray Jewish friends, fear of harassment – all limit advocacy. Akin to fear is "atonement": a feeling of guilt over Jewish suffering, which leads some to avoid criticizing the occupation. Category Two consists of *cognitive* factors such as ignorance and prejudice about Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims. Prejudices constrain advocacy in mighty ways. Category Three involves *relational* factors such as shared Scriptures and traditions between Christians and Jews, long-established interfaith relations, familial links, friendships, and commercial and educational ties. All these conspire to give Israel a pass in its treatment of Palestinians.

Category Four consists of *religious* factors*:* interpretations of the Bible, claims about God-given land entitlements, etc., that get in the way of clarity about injustice.

Due to one or more of the factors, many leaders choose to be "balanced," or to engage superficially, or to avoid advocacy. Leaders who opt for silence become obstacles to prophetic advocacy, and choke off others' voices. Leaders who see suffering and oppression but fail to speak about it fail to bear witness to the liberating mission of God. A few days after leading an antiwar protest involving more than 5,000 marchers, Martin Luther King, Jr., addressing Clergy and Laity Concerned, said: "A time comes when silence is betrayal. That time has come for us in relation to Vietnam" (King and Washington 1992, 136). King added that some people found it difficult to oppose their government in a time of war and became conformists out of fear. He recognized that speaking truth to power is often a vocation of agony. He writes:

> We must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak. And we must rejoice as well, for surely this is the first time in our nation's history that a significant number of its religious leaders have chosen to move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of consciousness and the reading of history…Over the past two years, as I have moved to break the betrayal of my own silence and to speak from the burnings of my heart.(King and Washington 1992, 136)

For King, advocacy means speaking up for brother and sister victims everywhere. King's argument for engagement is based on a theology of brotherhood and sisterhood. "The good news was meant for all," asserts King, "for communists and capitalists, for their children and ours, for blacks and whites, for revolutionaries and conservatives" (King and Washington 1992, 140). He concludes:

> I believe that the Father is deeply concerned especially for his suffering and helpless and outcast children, I come tonight to speak for them. This I believe to be the privilege and the burden of all of us who deem ourselves bound by allegiances and loyalties which are broader and deeper than

> nationalism and which go beyond our nation's self-defined goals and positions. We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for victims of our nation and for those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers [and sisters]. (King and Washington 1992, 140)

Condemning his government's involvement in Vietnam, King called for nurturing a "consciousness objection" to the evil of war. By this he meant placing one's life and mission on the line against injustice, recreating interest in the common good, entering the struggle, challenging the status quo, defying the system, and providing an alternative (King and Washington 1992, 147).

Silence in the face of poverty, oppression and violence betrays the life and ministry of Christ. It obstructs justice. When leaders fail to address injustice out of fear, ignorance, self-interest, or alliance, they side against the oppressed. Transformation and justice are not trivial vocations. They require charting a course through territory containing obstacles and challenges. Leadership for transformation takes the mantle of the prophet Amos: "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (Am 3:7-8)

Advocacy is most likely to produce desirable results when one diagnoses the underlying causes of injustice rigorously. One must know what kind of weapon caused a wound, and what the motivation was for wielding it, if one is to prevent use of the weapon again. Injustice cannot be addressed solely in the manner of treating a wound – with emergency aid, charitable handouts and counseling sessions. A racist society, argues Susan Thistlethwaite, "must not be reduced to individual 'prejudices' best addressed through 'dialogue' and 'inclusion,' but as a major part of the way Western societies have developed law, economics, politics, and religion and anchored them in racism"

(Thistlethwaite 2015, 5). Leaders for transformation must analyze forces of injustice, and bring misconceptions and fallacies to light, if they are to convince others that the weak and marginalized are victims in need of advocates.

Advocacy calls for revolution against oppressive practices that have become norms. King points to a mentality of supremacy, arrogance, and control in our era as in other times. Being a Good Samaritan is not enough: one must transform the "whole Jericho road…so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring" (King and Washington 1992, 148)

The prophet does not fear speaking truth to power. Prophetic advocacy dismantles the arguments of power and constructs alternative systems based on the common good. Transformative advocacy is the best hope for our context and world, and that hope lies:

> in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and materialism. With this powerful commitment we shall boldly challenge the status quo and unjust mores and thereby speed the day when 'every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain. (King and Washington 1992, 150)

Prophetic advocacy entails willingness to be a witness for one's faith. Advocating justice is the responsibility of all people of God. Persons who have been baptized have taken vows, or have had the vows accepted for them: "Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? The response is: "I will, with God's help." And "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?" The response is: "I will, with God's help" (Episcopal Church 1986, 305).

Jesus was a prophet. He advocated justice for the oppressed, the disinherited, and outcasts. He assumed a prophetic mantle from the beginning of his ministry. At the synagogue in Nazareth, he recapitulated his mission, reading from the book of Isaiah:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me
> to bring good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
> and recovery of sight to the blind,
> to let the oppressed go free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Lk 4: 18-19)

Jesus’ ministry begins with a prophetic act, the reading of a text from Isaiah, after which he says, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21). Bart Ehrman asserts that “Jesus is given the opportunity to read and comment on the Scriptures…After reading the Scriptures, Jesus sits and begins to proclaim that the predictions of the prophet have now come to fulfillment – by implication, in him” (Ehrman 2016, 159).

In reaction to worshipers’ questions about his identity, Jesus launched into a sermon about two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, sent by God to Gentiles. Jesus’ advocacy challenged the status quo by attesting to God’s love for the leper and the widow – both non-Jews and both discriminated against. Jesus challenged prejudice, addressing one core problem facing his society – ostracism of non-Jews. These prophets “ministered to Gentiles outside of the people of God,” explains Ehrman. By referring to the stories, Jesus makes his mission clear: he too is a prophet who will be cast out by his own people.

Jesus, like prophets before him, was “a spokesperson for God, a messenger sent by God to his people. Often the message he brought was quite straightforward, involving a call to the people of God to mend their ways and return to God by living in accordance with his will” (Ehrman 2016, 160). Jesus’ birth affronted the prevailing empire. Unlike kings, he was born in a manger; unlike the anointed, he fled his country to take refuge in

Egypt. Jesus' prophetic advocacy brought him into confrontation with religious leaders trying to maintain tradition, power, and the status quo. Jesus challenged the standards of his time. He challenged the Sabbath, reminding contemporaries that "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mk 2: 27). He rebuked those who prioritized ritual over ministry, advising the Scribes and Pharisees that they had "neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" (Mt 23:23).

Jesus confronted not only rigidity in religious and legal practices but also the Roman Empire itself, the primary force crushing the weak and the poor. Like John the Baptist, whose prophetic advocacy was so blunt that it led to his execution, Jesus did not flinch even when he learned that Herod wanted to kill him. He sent a message to Herod: "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work" (Lk 13:32). When Herod interrogated Jesus, "Jesus gave him no answer" (Lk 23:9) – a silent message that he would not give the empire the upper hand. In front of Pontius Pilate, Jesus' prophetic witness did not cease. He maintained faith and advocacy, advising, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here" (Jn 18:36).

Jesus' prophetic advocacy manifested in acts. Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem, his triumphant entry into the city, his "indictment of the temple," the teachings on authority, the parable of the vineyard and tenants, and the question of taxes, were all prophetic acts that confronted the status quo. For Borg, a prophetic act is:

> a planned political demonstration, a counterdemonstration. The juxtaposition… embodies the central conflict of Jesus' last week: the

> kingdom of God or the kingdom of imperial domination. What Christians have often spoken of as Jesus' triumphal entry was really an anti-imperial entry. What we call Palm Sunday featured a choice of two kingdoms, two visions of life and death. (Borg 2006, 232)

The non-violence of Jesus is the core of the message of the Kingdom of God: God is the only sovereign, and those who commit to his Kingdom must abide by truth and act against injustice and domination. The workers of the Kingdom of God are in continual confrontation with exploitative kingdoms of the world. Jesus placed himself in this prophetic tradition and anticipated the fate of a prophet: "Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem'" (Lk 13:32-34). Jesus highlighted the dilemma of leaders whose commitment to truth puts self-interest and relational interest at risk. When justice is at stake, accommodation is not an option. Pursuit of personal, communal, national, or imperial interests will not lead to truth and justice. Only a prophetic witness can confront dominating powers that exploit the poor and marginalized.

One of the important terms in early Christian theology is *martyria,* which refers to the act of witnessing Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The word martyr, from the Greek *martus,* which literally means "witness," soon took on the meaning of "those who 'bear witness' to Christ even to the point of death" (Ehrman 2016, 553). Stephen became the first martyr of Christianity, at the hands of those who rejected Jesus' message and went on to persecute his followers. Throughout the Book of Acts, Christians confronted hostility confidently, refusing to comply with arbitrary demands. For the early Christians, to witness to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection meant to endure resistance and suffering.

Martyrs were Christians who faithfully confronted hostility and were executed for their faith. They anticipated their fate with confidence and joy. The ideal Christian

martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, was arrested and condemned to death “by being thrown to the wild beasts of the Roman arena. Far from shuddering in the face of his coming martyrdom, however, Ignatius embraced it ecstatically; he looked forward to the opportunity to be torn apart and devoured for the sake of Christ” (Ehrman 2016, 504). Christians are called martyrs because they are faithful witnesses to Christ, willing to pay the price of death rather than deny their faith.

Today, the context of martyrdom is different from that in the first and second centuries. In the Palestinian struggle for freedom, the word martyr has gained a specific meaning. In Islam there is no clear distinction between religious and political realms; thus martyrdom can happen in either. A *shahid* usually denotes a person who was killed directly or indirectly as a result of the occupation. In the West, a martyr can be a person killed defending country, freedom, or democracy. There is disagreement among Palestinian Christians about what constitutes martyrdom. Some prefer to retain the term for religious purposes, whereas others have come to use it to refer to defending freedom.

Transformative advocacy requires recapturing the concept of martyrdom and reconstructing a theology for its use in the prophetic tradition. Martyrs, like advocates, choose to be faithful witnesses to the in-breaking of God’s reign. They anticipate persecution and endure hardships for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Prophetic martyrdom seeks justice on a rough road, speaking truth to power and never leaving behind those who have been excluded by oppressive systems.

Christian leaders need to use the concept of martyr to refer to those who courageously witness the love of Christ and imitate him by word and deed. Martyrdom should entail fulfilling God’s aspiration: including for the outcast, the marginalized, the

oppressed, and the different other. Prophetic martyrdom is the knowledge of God's word and will – "to let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Am 5:24). Prophetic martyrdom means knowing what is good and what God requires – "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mi 6:8). Prophetic martyrdom means imploring change for the sake of the disinherited. Martyrdom is a commitment to truth, to articulation of justice, to courage in speaking out, to confronting the oppressor with God's love and justice, to enduring consequences, to suggesting alternatives, and to working for healing and reconciliation. Following the assassination of the civil rights leader Medgar Evers, King said: "if a person has not found something to die for, that person is not fit to live…In essence, physical death under such circumstances of conscience is 'redemptive'" (Blackwell 2003, 2019).

Prophetic martyrdom recognizes human vulnerability and fear. At the same time, it draws on God's empowering Spirit. Many leaders avoid engaging in prophetic martyrdom because they are not willing to pay the price. Yet Jesus' teachings implore us to participate in costly missions, to defend those with whom we share a global home, and to treat fellow creatures as family. Prophetic martyrdom challenges religious leadership not to cease trying to nurture and develop community willingness to engage in social, political, and economic spheres in the fight against injustice and oppression. Church leadership has a prophetic role to play in improving the well-being of God's creation. It has a responsibility: to provide alternatives to exploitive systems.

Although the Christian leadership paradigm may be constructed according to a diversity of models, transformative leadership espouses the paradigm of the prophetic tradition personified in the life, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' life and ministry offered an alternative leadership paradigm to those that existed during his time: "They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority!" (Mk 1:27a). The first lesson religious leadership learns from Jesus is that to lead is not to imitate, but to initiate an alternative based on the understanding of a loving, just Father who entered into human history to for the sake of his creation. An alternative prophetic paradigm aims at the emancipation of humanity from authoritarianism and oppression. The task of leadership is to dismantle authoritarian structures, and establish an alternative: a prophetic paradigm for transformation.

Sojourners identified a noteworthy phenomenon in the Palestinian context: in the midst of struggle, conflict, war, and suffering, church leadership seemed not to want to take a stand. In times of trouble, people look to leaders for guidance, but in recent years, Palestinian Christians have not been able to find them. Leadership silence leaves room for other voices, some of which may divert communities from brotherhood, neighborliness and the common good. During the Israeli military offense against Gaza in 2014, for example, communities waited for a response from church leadership to the killing of thousands, among them women and children. A press release appeared a month into the campaign, but contained nothing that had not previously been said on the news. When sectarian disputes threaten Christian-Muslim coexistence, leaders also tend to remain silent, giving rise to speculation, anger, and misrepresentation of the positions of Christians. Sojourners decided to approach the Council of Churches in Jerusalem to investigate why Church leaders were invisible during periods of turmoil. We received these kinds of answers: "This is a trivial matter," "the problem will subside on its own," "the archbishop is out of the country," "the bishop is busy," "leadership does not take

sides." Advocacy is willingness and ability to witness God's aspiration in the face of opposing power. It is the capacity to put one's faith into words and actions and not remain idle in a context of injustice.

Advocacy: The Task of Critical Consciousness.

The critical consciousness that leaders develop as they hone their identities and define their missions incorporates theology. Transformative leadership becomes proficient in its operant theology as well as in the theology of the church institution. The Reformation had as its vital commission criticism of the existing form of the church, including its doctrines and rituals. The authentic task of theology "is the emancipation of the human being from the powers of authoritarianism and self-deception," writes Theodore Jennings (Jennings n.d., 12). The main business of theology at times of reformation is housecleaning, using biblical texts as tools. John Wesley, two centuries after martin Luther later, was concerned not about reform of doctrine but about reform of Christian life and practice. As a theological movement, Wesleyans undertook critiques of inadequate living and of the kinds of guidance from the church that made people content with inadequate living. Theology gained energy not from the church itself but from criticism of the church, its life, and doctrine (Jennings n.d., 12). Jennings writes:

> The examples of the 16th century reform and of the 18th century reform point to an essential task of theology. Theology is the criticism of the church. "Theology does not exist to legitimate what the church says and does, its practice and its ideology. Theology exists to criticize the church, to expose its compromises, to challenge its claims, to oppose its pretentions. (Jennings n.d., 15)

Theology becomes a critical science when it "separates the Church from the Bible," because, argues Jennings, the Bible can be read "as the book of the institution, as the legitimation of the Church as it is, as the word which founds and authorizes the

Church; as the proof text for its doctrines and the legitimation of its practices" (Jennings n.d., 15). Advocacy as a task of critical consciousness urges leadership to scrutinize operant theologies and practices where the Bible is treated as merely a means to legitimate the status quo. The Bible is the liberating word of God, and it never ceases to critique the people of God, directing them from their own purposes toward God's. When theology begins to be biblical, it begins to be critical. (Jennings n.d., 15)

Leaders should advocate not only with respect to the many forms of injustice in society, but also with respect to theology, particularly when that contributes to injustice or excuses indifference toward the world outside the church. Prophetic advocacy is ineffective when it addresses the social order but neglects its responsibilities toward church doctrine and practice. To give an example, in the Book of Acts, the writer tells us that the disciples appointed seven deacons to manage an outreach program for needy widows. The disciples maintained that their mission was the word of God: "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables" (Acts 6:2b). They gave the deacons the task of administrating the outreach program so that they could devote full attention to the word of God. Reflecting on his experience, former Roman Catholic Archbishop of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah asserts that Church leaders have taken on institutional management and of necessity given the gospel to deacons. Sabbah asserts that when bishops are in office, administration of their dioceses often takes precedence over preaching the word of God. It is only when they retire that they can become full-time evangelizers. It is the duty of leadership, argues Sabbah, to prepare deacons and laity to take on administrative duties so that teaching the word of God is not neglected.

Advocacy seeks to reform doctrine and practice so that the church is best able to carry forth the word of God. When reformation becomes reactionary and rests on its achievements, leadership's critical consciousness undertakes another reformation. And as was the case with Wesleyan reform, which did not assume that Martin Luther had done all that was necessary, liberation theology did not rest on the achievements of the Wesleyan movement, but instead advocated liberation of souls and societies.

Liberation theology sprang from a context of suffering and oppression, but was nurtured by critical consciousness of the church's relationship with the social, economic, and political order. Liberation theology critiqued the church's silence and "unleashed the energy of the poor and suffering, by the determination to make their plight and protest the center and norm and source for a theological reappropriation of the biblical witness" (Jennings n.d., 18). He explains:

> For the reform of the institution of the Church must be one which promotes rather than prevents the transformation of personal Christian existence. And a transformation of persons which does not lead to a transformation of the way in which they participate in the public world of economy is, as Wesley also insisted, an illusion…. But what is called liberation theology is above all a pastoral theology--a theology which takes seriously the idea that the Church is to exist as witness to the liberating promise and deed of God. And on this basis liberation theology becomes a critique of the Church's life in the world. It is a critique of the Church which aims at the liberation of the Church from its bondage to the structures of the world (Jennings n.d., 18-19).

In this sense, liberation theology recognizes that unless religious leaders are liberated from ties to the social order and freed from alliances with wealth and power, their missions will remain captive to the idols of prestige, of self-regard, superiority and control. In these circumstances, they cannot embody or express the divine call for transformation of God's creation. Advocacy as critical consciousness calls the church and its leadership back to the purpose of God.

Advocacy means engaging with victims of injustice, but not on a permanent basis, as the long-run strategy is to help victims become able to engage for themselves. Bringing good news to the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized requires mobilizing them to become advocates for their own causes. Advocates walk with victims rather than walk in the place of victims – the first nurtures mobility and transformation, the second dependency. The role of the advocate is to facilitate, encourage, aid, present, and organize missions of advocacy. Effective advocacy depends on how successful leadership is in helping victims unravel episodes of injustice.

Transformative leadership builds communities that thrive on participating in repairing the world. Prophetic advocacy gathers those who understand that faith requires advocating justice for victims of economic disparity, political oppression, and social marginalization. Prophetic leaders play the role of engineers of movements able to effect change. In *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, Mary Moore emphasizes that prophecy is not the "ministry of a few daring and charismatic leaders," but rather "an action of God to be received and enacted by *all* God's people." The role of daring and charismatic leaders is "to mediate the call of God to the whole people – to call the people into prophetic action" (Moore 2004, 37). Moore writes:

> What is needed today is a new way of thinking about leadership, particularly about prophetic leadership. Rather than bemoaning the lack of leaders, people might look toward *prophetic communities* — sacramental communities that seek to discern God's call and to respond by reconstructing their community life and repairing the world. (Moore 2004, 38)

Although leaders must strive to solve problems that affect their communities, they are not problem solvers. They ought not only "to address the problems daily confronting the lives of the disadvantaged and the negligence infecting the lives of the better off, but

also to redress these matters in progressively efficacious ways"(Blackwell 2003, 218). Prophetic advocacy calls for marshaling "of all the tools at one's disposal to seek to identify and eliminate the inequities that frustrate the lives of many and disallow their full participation in the dynamics of citizenship" (Blackwell 2003, 218). Michael Blackwell explains that: the mission of the social gospel is:

> a conviction that there is no genuine security until everybody has life's existential needs: food, water, shelter, clothing, income, sense of belonging, spiritual wholesomeness, a sense of meaning and purpose, and ability to communicate. It is an ongoing process that leads to a comprehension of the causes of systemic social problems faced by oppressed peoples, which in turn leads to the movement from a disposition of caring to constructive engagement, informed advocacy, and radical action. (Blackwell 2003, 2018)

King was a nonviolent preacher, but not submissive. He asserted that his belief in the teachings of Christ did not contradict but complemented the right to carry the weapon of protest. King's advocacy for justice was influenced by his anticipative conviction "that the universe is on the side of justice" (Blackwell 2003, 2019). Such faith in justice as a natural component of the universe helped King search for alternatives in order to create the best possible society.

Prophetic advocacy is a courageous movement toward truth and change. Prophetic advocates gave support to Occupy Wall Street protestors, calling themselves "Occupy Faith." They saw themselves "as being in solidarity with a movement that they understood was expressing the values of love, compassion, justice, community, and sharing that are at the heart of all the world's great religions" (Collins 2013, 114). During the encampment in New York's Zuccotti Park, Occupy Faith served as the "movement's representative in negotiations with Trinity Wall Street Church, which owned a vacant lot in lower Manhattan that occupiers sought to use. When Trinity – one of the largest

landowners in lower Manhattan – refused, several members of Occupy Faith, including a retired Episcopal bishop, committed civil disobedience and were arrested" (Collins 2013, 115). As in the Occupy Wall Street Movement, where sit-ins were signs of protest, Sojourners sat with an interfaith group of clergy and lay people in the "Solidarity Tent" with prisoners' families in support of their cause. The participation signaled advocacy for the oppressed and the neglected.

Consulting Social Sciences

Advocacy and Conflict

Prophetic advocacy arouses suspicion, disagreement and conflict. It calls for stepping forward and disturbing the status quo, which pushes back. "To lead," argues Adam Kahane, "means to step forward, to exceed one's authority, to try to change the status quo, to exercise power, and such action is by definition disruptive. There is no way to change the status quo without discomforting those who are comfortable with the status quo" (Kahane 2010), 116.

It is difficult to engage in transformative advocacy. Personal, familial, spiritual, hierarchal, societal, economic, and political forces may stand in the way. Every leader knows a case where advocacy has become dysfunctional. This may result from desire to avoid conflict. In fact, effective transformative advocacy promises conflict rather than accord. It anticipates change, and any change risk backlash. To avoid change and conflict is to avoid advocating justice and transformation.

Sojourners learned throughout their immersion experiences that the chief obstacle to advocating justice was their desire to avoid conflict of all types:

- on a personal level, "where it is physically and psychologically exhaustive,"
- on a familial level, where "it may entail dangerous consequences,"
- on a community level, where "the status quo may seem comfortable and reactive,"
- on a societal level, where it brings "loneliness and retribution,"
- on an economic level, where "it limits opportunity and causes financial instability," and
- on a political level, where it promises "constraint, limitation, and confinement."

Those who know injustice know the consequences of fighting it. These range from forced immobility to deportation to arrest and imprisonment.

To provide an example of advocacy in relation to maintaining the status quo and avoiding change and conflict, the controversy over investment versus divestment is suitable. The Episcopal Church, during its 78th General Convention, overwhelmingly rejected three resolutions advocating boycott, divestment, and sanctions in protest of Israel's military occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Reporting from the Episcopal Church Convention in Salt Lake City, the Episcopal News Service wrote: "Bishops overwhelmingly oppose divestment in Israel, Palestine, urging solidarity, restorative justice, and reconciliation." The House of Bishops sent a firm and clear message that divestment from corporations involved in business related to the State of Israel was "*not in the best interests [italics added]* of the Episcopal Church, its partners in the Holy Land, interreligious relations, and the lives of Palestinians on the ground" (Davies 2015). Reasons for rejecting the resolution fall into two categories. The first emphasizes action and defensive reasoning:

- "As Anglicans, we have the gift and ability to reach out to people on both sides in the conflict…allowing us to be peacemakers";
- "positive investment is a necessary means to create a sound economy and a sustainable infrastructure in the Palestinian Territories"; and
- "Palestinian jobs depend on investment, not on divestment" (Davies 2015).

The second reason emphasizes fear of upsetting the status quo:

- "Any hint of divestment will hamper the ministry of Archbishop Suheil Dawani and his priests and congregations in the Middle East" (Michie 2015); and
- "operating out of fear is never a good thing for people of faith" (Davies 2015).

The desire to avoid reprisal was made clear by James Michie. He writes:

> According to reliable sources, Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori has maintained a covenant with the Archbishop of Jerusalem, Suheil Dawani, a Palestinian, who also has publicly voiced opposition to the ECUSA joining the BDS campaign. Archbishop Dawani is opposed to the church adopting BDS against Israel reportedly because he fears reprisal from the Israeli authorities in threatening his travel, residence in Jerusalem and administration of the diocese. Hence rejection by the ECUSA of imposing non-violent BDS protest of Israel's occupation ostensibly secures status quo for Archbishop Dawani. (Michie 2015)

Michie also quotes Bishop Jay Magness, who cited the original Episcopal News Service piece: "Any hint of divestment will hamper the ministry of Archbishop Suheil Dawani and his priests and congregations." The line was later deleted under the rubric "Editor's note: The quotes from Bishop Magness have been changed to clarify the purpose of his message to the House of Bishops" (Davies 2015).

In "Episcopal Bishops Did Not Reject Divestment from Israel," Rev. Winnie Varghese, a first-hand witness, explains how fear, conflict, and manipulation hampered any resolution that would criticize Israel. She writes:

> We functioned slowly because of the fear of talking about the four Israel, Palestine resolutions…In the last three years our bishops, as well as lay and clergy leaders, have been targeted (or wooed) by advocacy groups that have offered Episcopalians trips to Israel to show us that we should not comment on the political or economic situation in the Occupied Territories…The Dean of St. George's Cathedral said we should not comment on the situation; and an AIPAC rabbi invited the chairs out to dinner. It was pretty clear that most of the bishops opposed any language of looking at our investments…The fear from the bishops was that if we had an honest conversation amongst ourselves about the use of our own money, that might contain a criticism of Israel, and that was not to be allowed…We are currently being targeted by advocacy groups whose agenda is to insure no public criticism of Israel, none, not of occupation; illegal settlement; or illegal attack…On the final day of the committee's deliberations, in a very dramatic (and out of order) turn, a bishop asked a staff member of the Episcopal Church who looked like a cast member from *Mad Men* to stand up and provide us with even more expert information. Apparently things weren't going the way this bishop had intended. The staff member seemed to be crying behind his thick plastic frames and told us that the Bishop of Jerusalem had informed him that the government of Israel had made it clear to him that any action like the one we were considering would mean that his freedom of movement and his capacity to support his thirty institutions in Israel and the Occupied Territories would be threatened. Blackmail. (Varghese 2016)

In the Middle East, the decision not to divest, and the Episcopal News Service report, provoked enormous disappointment, disagreement and criticism. The office of Archbishop Dawani in Jerusalem released a short statement indicating that he had neither attended the Convention nor been represented by anyone. Daoud Kuttab, in an article "US Episcopalians throw Jerusalem's Anglican Bishop under the Bus," wrote:

> The Episcopal Church of America deviated from their prophetic mission for peace and justice this week by refusing to stand with the oppressed Palestinian people. In their efforts to justify why they wouldn't begin discussing the potential for future divestment from Israel, they badly hurt the reputation and image of the Anglican bishop of Jerusalem and essentially turned down a chance to stand up for peace in the Middle East. (Kuttab 2015)

For any open-minded observer, the issue of divestment appears sensitive and challenging. My aim here is not to argue for or against divestment *per se*, but to look at

the case as an example of Church intent to pursue justice and peace that in the end failed. In not making a decision, the Church created upheaval and confusion, and disheartened victims of injustice. The people involved in the process, including the Committee, the Anglian Archbishop in Jerusalem, and those who criticized the decision, became trapped by the decision and by their reaction to it.

"Conflict," asserts Chris Argyris "is frequently avoided or pushed underground rather than dealt with openly" (Argyris 2012, 1). When that happens, people "nod their heads in agreement in meetings, and then rush outside of the room to voice complaints to sympathetic ears in private. Worst of all, when people are asked if things will ever change, they throw up their hands in despair. They feel like victims trapped in an asylum" (Argyris 2012, 1). Chris Argyris contends that individuals and organizations get trapped in the status quo by behavior that inhibits learning and change and runs against their best interests. Thus trapped, people feel powerless to effect change even though they are competent and try hard. People value and advocate openness, honesty, integrity, justice, freedom, respect, and caring; nevertheless, when confronted with conflict or challenging, upsetting, or threatening situations, they tend "to act in ways that undercut these values" (Argyris 2012, 2). In such situations – when learning is most needed – traps shut down dialogue, contact, analysis, and self; thus traps are "anti-learning and anti-correction." They prevent detection of problems and effective change. Argyris writes: "Traps inhibit learning when learning is especially needed. These counterproductive consequences are found in all organizations, private or public, large or small, successful or in failure. They exist regardless of the gender, race, education, and wealth of its participants" (Argyris 2012, 3).

Leaders who are trapped tend to blame anything and anyone save themselves. They "deny that they are denying by making the subject undiscussable" and the "undiscussability undiscussable" (Argyris 2012, 4). Traps are serious obstacles. They can close off conversations, undermine confidence and capacity, and hamper personal learning and development. People who get trapped avoid difficult areas and rule out decisions that might upset the status quo. People who get trapped fail to display or elicit openness and transparency. They therefore inhibit teamwork and cooperation. Argyris explains that one key reason for counterproductive results "is the fact that we all possess two theories of action, one of which we espouse, and one of which we actually use. These theories contain fundamental, systematic mismatches, making them inconsistent" (Argyris 2012, 62). Argyris goes on to explain that when people face challenging, threatening, or embarrassing situations, they apply what he terms "Model I" as their theory-in-use. Model I imperatives are to: "(1) be in unilateral control; (2) win and do not lose; (3) suppress negative feelings; and (4) behave rationally" (Argyris 2012, 63). Model I aims to guard and preserve the self against essential, disruptive change. As people become "skillful in using Model I," asserts Argyris, "they develop a defensive reasoning mind-set that they use to explain their actions and to design and implement future actions" (Argyris 2012, 36).

One can clearly see defensive reasoning in operation in the case of the Episcopal Church debate on divestment. Facing a challenging decision, the presiding bishop, the House of Bishops, and the Archbishop in Jerusalem acted unilaterally, preventing discussion. The divestment discussion degenerated into an effort to win. Disagreement was suppressed. The outcome appeared to be rational, even worthy of advocacy, with its

emphasis on interfaith reconciliation, restorative justice, the plea of the Bishop of Jerusalem, etc. But instead of standing in solidarity with victims of injustice, the decision produced confusion, hurt, and discouragement. Even the suggestion on the part of the Committee to investigate existing investments and prepare a list of products made in illegal settlements was not carried forward. Information about the decision was unclear and inconsistent. Advocacy groups on both sides played a "win and not lose" game, which prevented learning and growth. The question of investment and ethical use of Church resources turned into an effort to avoid jeopardizing the mission of the Church in Jerusalem – a defensible and explainable action, but not the matter at hand.

Argyris proposes what he terms "Model II" theory-in-use to achieve and advance consensus decisions. Per Argyris, Model II has the following objectives: (1) "to seek valid (testable) information"; (2) "to create informed choices"; and (3) "to monitor vigilantly to detect and correct error" (Argyris 2012, 64).

Reacting to the decision of the Episcopal Church on divestment, Naim Ateek criticized the Episcopal Church USA, which, he argued, was afraid to take on a challenge, thus hampering action for justice. Ateek writes:

> It is basically fear that prevents bishops and governments, or for that matter anyone, from taking a stand against the rich and powerful and on behalf of the weak and marginalized. It takes strong leaders with the courage that Jesus Christ and the prophets modeled for us to champion the cause of the oppressed and that is precisely where the church must take its stand. (Ateek 2015)

Ateek sees in the bishop's inaction a breach of the Church's baptismal vows: "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?" Instead of a resounding "yes", asserts Ateek, the bishops' response was a resounding "NO" (Ateek 2015).

In *Around One Table: Exploring Episcopal Identity*, David Gortner maintains that the prophetic goal is to speak the word of God especially when God's word and purpose are neglected and distorted. Such a mission requires saying difficult things to individuals, communities, and nations in order to call them back to God's purpose. (Gortner 2009, 82-83) Gortner asserts that the prophetic identity "represents a direct contrast with both the pastoral identity theme and the Middle Way theme" that most Episcopalians cherish. The prophetic requires not only responding "to unjust actions, but also to inaction by those who refuse to take stance or to those who attempt to ignore the unjust practices around them" (Gortner 2009, 83). Gortner argues that the challenge of being prophetic has to do with claims to truth, and with the need for the community to test and discern the identity of a prophet in relation to the message delivered, and its impact on the receiving community. Gortner writes:

> Testing one's own truth-claims becomes increasingly difficult, the more passionately one feels about them. Testing another's truth-claims becomes increasingly difficult, the more passionately one's community opposes them. In these cases, scripture, tradition, reason, and experience can be used in humility to test truth-claims, or they can be used as part of a more egocentric effort to bolster one's own position or counter another's claims. (Gortner 2009, 84)

Prophetic advocacy is a journey toward truth. It immerses itself in God's character and passion and in human experiences to proclaim truth and justice.

Conclusion

Transformative advocacy enables leaders to reclaim prophetic traditions of the past. The prophetic is a tool that empowers religious leaders to go beyond pastoring and develop healthy communities committed to change and pursuit of the arc of justice. It preaches God's alternatives against the dominating power of false ideologies.

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Chapter Seven: Transformation: Liberation and limitation

I maintain that leadership is a great force for spiritual and societal transformation toward greater justice and mercy. Leaders become effective and competent agents for transformation and justice when they accompany victims of injustice, listen to the their stories, nurture an inquiry consciousness, immerse in actual suffering, and advocate for victims. Sojourners experienced transformation, manifesting itself as growing interest in and interaction with context; growing knowledge of identity and mission; ability to reframe perspective, perception and acts of ministry; enthusiasm for carrying out new programs within their communities and the larger context; and willingness to continue working together on potential immersion projects.

It is also useful to recall that transformation is the task of the Holy Spirit. It occurs as leaders step out of comfort zones and ride "on the tide of the Holy Spirit's movement" (Gortner 2008, 41). In *Transforming Evangelism*, David Gortner asserts that transformation follows as leaders permit the Spirit "to take the lead, trusting that God is already at work in all people, allowing ourselves the possibility of being transformed by new encounters with God's grace" (Gortner 2008, 42). When Sojourners encountered victims, we witnessed outward signs of faith, love, steadfastness, and courage to accept what God was doing. Seeking to transform the lives and conditions of victims, we acknowledged that transformation involves a deep internal change expressed, though not fully, externally. Gortner writes: "Conversion is transformation, turning, the shift of will and motivation that happens in a person, family, or community – the work of deep,

mutual, internal, conversation between the Holy Spirit and the one coming to recognize Love's story" (Gortner 2008, 42). Spiritual transformation takes place deep in the human heart, where change cannot be assessed by frameworks that count or measure. The work of the Spirit exceeds human capacity to understand. Transformation requires being open to God's surprises. These include faith, joy, marvel, steadfastness, and persistence in the face of suffering. When asked, "What keeps you strong?" the victims we encountered answered: "Allah kbeer," God is great, greater than anyone; "Allah Shaif," God is attentive; "Allah Ma'na," God is with us; "Allah ma bitrik h'ada," God never leaves anyone; "Allah Be'een," God helps. These answers provoked marvel at the ability of God's love to sustain those undergoing trials. "Sumud," steadfastness, is one of the most cherished Palestinian virtues. "We have to hang on. It is the right thing to do," said Hanin, whose husband has been in detention for the last seven years. When Luna asked Manal, wife of a prisoner sentenced to 12 years, why she had not asked for a divorce, Manal replied, "I can't abandon him. He needs me." Nader commented: "This unselfish, self-sacrificing love mirrored God's love."

We should bear in mind that transformation is a state of being rather than an action done during a seven-month project. It is a spiritual pilgrimage. The presence and intensity of transformation vary among participants. The evaluation below is based on my observations of conversations and actions, during and after the project. Measurement is difficult, and can be arbitrary especially because Palestinians, and people generally, may not wish to discuss experiences of conversion. What can be seen are people's emotional and motivational responses, cognitive shifts, and changes in communities and surrounding social structures. In this section I will apply Donald Kirkpatrick's taxonomy

of learning to categorize conditions before, during, and after the project in terms of Kirkpatrick's four levels: reaction, learning, behavior, and results.

Signs of Transformation: Liberations

The goal of transformation is to achieve wholeness of a leader's mind, spirit, and body with his or her context. Leaders, communities, and societies are transformed when they become who they are meant to be – partners with God to achieve his aspiration. The following assessment of the immersion project is based on participants' post-immersion reflections and our final evaluation sessions. It incorporates pre-project feelings, perceptions, conditions, situations, convictions, and acts of ministry and compares them with post-immersion behavioral, cognitive, and practical approaches. Evaluation is in a "from/toward" framework, from leadership-as-it-is toward leadership-as-intended-by-God, and from context-as-it-is toward context-desired-by-God.

From Denominational Disagreement toward Harmony and Cooperation

Sojourners belonged to different Christian traditions: Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal, and Baptist. The ecumenical ethos in Ramallah is not characterized by willingness to embrace, affirm or celebrate a different other. Our immersion experience transformed denominationalism into eagerness for collaboration and mutuality.

Excitement about the immersion project, harmony among Sojourners as to goals, and the accord that developed during and after the project show changes in perception, behavior, and application in terms of desire for continued collaboration to help our city. In the words of the mayor of Ramallah, "We have experienced unprecedented connectivity among the clergy of Ramallah. The city is grateful to have devoted clergy

who help all of us understand that we are one, and that we work for the common good of all people of Ramallah." The project united us for action against a common enemy – injustice particularly against the least among us. "Encountering injustice reminded me that we are all anchored into one context facing the same challenges," said Imad.

Sojourning together presented a strong witness to the Christian faith. People looked with wonder at clergy of different traditions walking the streets of Ramallah together, planning ecumenical services or solidarity campaigns, visiting released prisoners or local election headquarters. We experienced, and I believe we conveyed, a sense of joy, gratitude, and peace when we met to discuss challenges, plan services or social activities, or share a meal. Change manifested in the friendships that developed, "outdoing one another in showing honor" (cf. Rom 12:10). We stopped worrying about who was in charge: when news reporters contacted one of us for an interview, it became our custom to refer them to a colleague. Leaders who formerly felt some rivalry became partners in ministry. Aspirations for personal honor, privilege, and success were put aside for the sake of our communal mission of transformation. Ibrahim explained that "notwithstanding our differences, I believe I am closer to you than to my denominational colleagues." We became aware of one another's talents as well as weaknesses. After the project ended, I continued to receive calls from Ibrahim, seeking advice about parish decisions, from Imad, asking me to join a meeting to resolve conflict among his parishioners, and from Nader, to discuss collaboration at Christmas and Easter. Sharing Christ's life and mission, St. Paul asserts, is to "be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil 2:2). To imitate Christ requires "nothing

from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phil 2:3-4).

The immersion project reinforced mutual concerns. Friendship helped us initiate joint ministries. Since 2015, the Lutheran and Episcopal communities in Ramallah have join together during Holy Week. Our Christmas and Easter Sunday School programs are held together; both communities say they appreciate this.

The Lenten ecumenical arrangement is now a landmark in Ramallah, recognized also in surrounding communities. Since, 2015, all churches in Ramallah have come together every Tuesday during Lent for a combined service, moving from one church to another each week. All clergy participate, and our communities celebrate the joy of fellowship. After services, worshipers share a Lenten agape meal prepared by the hosting congregation. In 2017, we invited members of the board for *Kairos Palestine* to one of our services to help communities learn about the movement and its manifesto. Archbishop Michel Sabbah told me after the service, "this is a time of joy for the people of Ramallah to join in worship. I am moved by your ecumenical activities." These moments were flow moments; they brought us out of ourselves and stretched our capacity to move beyond our singularity into the common good.

Collegiality among the clergy in the Sojourners group spilled over into the Ramallah Clergy Council. As other members of the Clergy Council watched us engaging in our social context, they opted to join in. Even though the Orthodox Patriarch has forbidden his clergy to be involved in interdenominational efforts, when I planned an ecumenical solidarity service for Palestinian prisoners on mass hunger strike the Orthodox priest agreed to preach at an episcopal service, and that was unprecedented.

The immersion project helped us reclaim our faith in the Kingdom of God, which includes everyone. Transformation as a shared exertion enriches the experience and reduces exhaustion. “We came to appreciate each other so much more than before,” said Nader. “This project helped me realize what we had neglected: our mutual interest in the Gospel of Christ,” I added. Imad said, “Unity and team ministry can achieve much more for our society than individual ministry.” “I have learned how much we need each other and how much Palestinians can achieve if they come together for mutual interest rather than find reasons for separation and division,” added Luna. Transformation of societies starts when communities walk together to meet God in and through the other. As a group, Sojourners discovered much about our context and also about ourselves: our different traditions, our convictions, our ministries, our interests, our plans, our hopes. As we exchanged perspectives, we learned how much we cherished our diversity. Meeting partners on the road brings about transformation of leaders pursuing change in our world.

This project revealed that harmony among different denominations is possible when leaders sojourn together for a common cause. When Sojourners embarked journeys to encounter victims of injustice, we also encountered one another, and Christ in the other. Edward Chambers asserts that “the purpose of a systematic, disciplined, organized process of relational meetings is a public relationship – one built on mutual self-interest, respect, and power, that eventually leads to joint action” (Chambers 2009, 19).

From Parish toward Kingdom

The immersion project encouraged transformation of our ministry settings. Prior to the establishment of the project, each participant was quite institution-oriented. During and after the immersion project, we noticed an increasing ability to carry out parochial

obligations and at the same time undertake community and societal commitments. The project introduced us to people who were not defined by denomination. We felt no need to ask whether victims had religious affiliation. A victim was simply a victim. Our focus shifted from individual, parish, community, and church to the Kingdom of God. We did not initially plan to include Muslim victims in our immersions, nor did we envision taking the risk of trying to meet Jewish families. When Luna offered to introduce us to a Muslim prisoner's wife, we did not ask whether we should meet her, but rather whether she would be willing to meet us. We cherished her stories, faith, persistence, and sacrificial love. At the beginning of our project, joining with Israeli counterparts seemed out of the question, as we feared backlash from our community. But speaking with Rabbis at the Leo Baeck Educational Center in Haifa and learning about Israeli victims toward the end of our project was stunningly transformative. People on both sides are victims of institutional oppression. Israeli citizens have suffered too, and unfortunately these victims were not previously present in our consciousness or ministries. During the wildfire crisis in Haifa, Israel, where our Jewish Israeli partners in the "Schools for Salam-Shalom project" live, I called to ask about Yonathan, his family and community. On that day, Palestinian members also called me to ask about our partners in Haifa.

Immersion in a context of injustice helps leaders develop sensitivity to injustice everywhere. After we met Ramus, learned about his life in Gaza, and heard of his difficulties after leaving, we became more responsive to the plight of Christians in Gaza. We discussed the possibility of a visit to Gaza, paid attention to news, and tried to increase our interactions with Gazans displaced in the West Bank. Now, when I meet Christians from Gaza, they wonder how I know their particularities.

Stories of pain and violence around the world drew our interest, and we remembered new victims in our prayers. We planned and led solidarity services for Coptic workers killed in Libya by ISIS. Transformation and justice consciousness helps everyone focus on injustice as a common threat to humanity, one that requires a joint-mission toward the common good.

From Acceptance toward Innovation

One of the characteristics of Palestinians is their ability to endure oppression. Palestinians have survived war, relocation, uprisings, imprisonment, and closures. The survival instinct has taught them how to maneuver. The church in the Occupied Territories also has learned to accommodate itself to conflict and restriction. The survival instinct has had a positive impact on the life and ministry of the church, but also negative implications for transformation and justice, and for the future of the Christian community in the Holy Land. Accommodating to unjust restrictions can reduce the impact of pressure for social change. Accepting the status quo eliminates the imperative to challenge it. Adapting to unjust structures prevents efforts to address root causes of conflict and hampers change.

As we drove back from the checkpoint, I said to Imad and Nader: “Do you want to do it again?” Both replied, “Why not?” “It would be a good idea to go once a week, or every other week,” I said. “Why not starting a kind of a chaplaincy at the checkpoint? With time these workers will get to know about our work, and we will get to know more about them. Relationships could develop and the checkpoint could be an opportunity for ministry.” I elaborated. Well, the idea might have sounded irrational, but it reflected the impact of the immersion experience and a desire to initiate a response. That too might

strike some as accommodation, since I merely proposed to accompany victims without attempting to change conditions of victimhood. Transformative leadership does provide services to the poor and oppressed, but it also needs to search for opportunities to dismantle oppressive arrangements.

Resistance is an antidote to avoidance and accommodation. The question for transformative leadership is not whether resistance is right or wrong. Resisting evil and oppression is always moral. The question becomes what kind of resistance is sensible. We remain unanimous that violent resistance is destructive. Non-violent resistant was practiced by Gandhi to fight British colonialism and by King to fight segregation. These movements managed to mobilize people for liberation.

From Control toward Vulnerability

One of the effects of the immersion project was its ability to transform a desire for control and perfection into vulnerability. "The most challenging aspect of the immersion project for me was that I did not know what to anticipate. Being at the solidarity tent and knowing that we would suffer backlash made me feel vulnerable," I shared. Like victims, leaders become vulnerable through the immersion process. This leads to learning to trust God. Faith on the road requires belief in God's providence and protection.

From Indifference toward Attentiveness

Sojourners showed interest in the project from the beginning and eagerness to continue it. Participants kept asking what would come next. They talked and reflected about immersion cases even outside reflection sessions. Encountering a victim of oppression also established memories and reference points. Sojourners brought up

previous encounters every time a new case arose. Previous encounters stayed in our minds for relatively long periods of time. Stories we heard found their way into our ministries. The story of the prisoner's wife animated Bible study groups and sermons, as well as social gatherings. We told the story again and again in different settings.

The immersion experience also awakened memories of theological training and a desire to learn. Imad mentioned that he had felt prompted to reread Bonhoeffer, posting excerpts on social media. We contacted academic and nongovernmental organizations to gather information on victims. We used their reports to put the abuses about which we were hearing in context. The immersion project created opportunities for cooperation with civil society. Al Haq, the human rights law organization based in Ramallah, became a partner in our advocacy efforts. Whenever international groups visit St. Andrew's, I ask Al Haq to send someone to talk about their work. Immersion is not something that one does and then forgets about – the experiences one has stay in the memory and generate a desire to undertake research. I frequently refer to the websites of organizations such as B'Tselem, and suggest that others refer to them also. Immersion is about learning, and learning leads to transformation.

From Self-centeredness toward Otherness

"Immersion helped us step beyond our selves and interests and reach out for others," said Ibrahim. "It made me become attentive to others who share the experiences and conditions of people we met," said Nader. We all became more attentive to the needs of our communities even as we took on new activities. St. Peter's, Birzeit is constructing a home for senior citizens. In 2016, the diocese decided to change the purpose of the project and build a mixed-use structure that would contain student dormitories and

commercial space, on grounds that this would generate money. I felt compelled to intervene. “There are many dorms in Birzeit that serve students, but there is no elderly home serving that population. The goal is not to earn money but to care for the vulnerable, and international support is available,” I argued. Based on the earlier immersion experience, I was able to tell the story of the elderly in our community, and make clear that this group was essentially abandoned and needed help. My familiarity through the immersion project increased the effectiveness of my argument.

From Linear Thinking toward Systematic Thinking

Immersion helped us see that injustice is a system of interlocking forces rather than a case of linear causality. The Palestinian context includes Israeli occupation, but also the Palestinian Authority, which has failed to maintain unity and mutuality. In addition to these forces are the various cultural, social, and religious factors in play in the lives of victims as well as leaders. Job opportunities, for example, are influenced by movement restrictions and the ability to obtain work permits. These depend on age and marital status. “I got married because they would not give work permits to single workers,” said one person at a checkpoint. Working in Israel is three times as lucrative as working in the West Bank. But work anywhere in the region is hard to find, with the exception of laboring positions in settlements. “I have no choice but to work in a settlement even though it is built on Palestinian land. I have a family to support,” a worker told us. The immersion experience helped us see systematic structures of our context, where many factors impinge on choice. The immersion experience helped us not only recognize the complex system we live in but also sympathize with everyone rather than single some out for blame. “I found that I was no longer critical of Palestinian

workers employed in the settlements," Nader said. "I became sympathetic toward young people electing to emigrate. I used to think they were lazy and unpatriotic," I confessed.

From Obliviousness toward Awareness

Knowing a context of injustice requires direct contact with victims and openness to learning. Sojourners reported that looking at circumstances from the perspective of the oppressed was transformative in addition to informative. "We not only become aware of victims but also familiar with victims' entire stories," said Abla. "I have noticed that advocacy is more effective as I learn more real-life stories, history and law," said Ibrahim; "I can describe the circumstances that the elderly face with confidence, because I know the forces that result in their being left behind." Luna commented that "When I speak about victims, I tell people what we did and how we conducted research to understand their situations better." Nader pointed out that "When I speak to people about restrictions imposed on victims, I feel competent in my grasp of history, living stories, and examples." The immersion project moved us from one step to the next, impelling us to be mindful of our context as we advocated the cause of victims.

From Theory toward Praxis

The three clergy participants, Ibrahim, Imad, and I, became aware that during our theological training, we had had very little involvement with the context of the West Bank, where we are serving today. Imad and I studied in Lebanon, and our field training was limited to participating in Sunday worship. Opportunities to apply the theologies and theories we were learning were very limited. Ibrahim studied at a Catholic boarding seminary in Beit Jala, and his practical field training was to support youth activities in the

summer. Most Orthodox clergy in our context have very little training at seminaries. A few have managed to receive theological training in Greece. Lutheran and Episcopal clergy tend to study in Lebanon, Europe, the United States or Australia. Applying theories and theologies learned in the West to circumstances in Palestine does not encourage development of contextual theology or ministry, we agreed.

The immersion experience helped us understand that context is at the very core of our theology and ministerial praxis. Theologies of liberation emphasize the importance of reflection on praxis for theological construction. In *A Theology of Liberation: History Politics, and Salvation,* Gustavo Gutiérrez speaks of *orthopraxis* as a primary element for constructing a theology of liberation. Gutiérrez writes:

> The intention, however, is not to deny the meaning of orthodoxy, understood as a proclamation of and reflection on statements considered to be true, Rather, the goal is to balance and even to reject the primacy and almost exclusiveness which doctrine has enjoyed in Christian life and above all to modify the emphasis, often obsessive, upon the attainment of an orthodoxy which is often nothing more than fidelity to obsolete tradition or a debatable interpretation. In a more positive vein, the intention is to recognize the work and importance of concrete behavior, of deeds, or action, of praxis in the Christian life. 'And this, it seems to me, has been the greatest transformation which has taken place in the Christian conception of existence.'"(Gutiérrez 1974, 10)

Sojourners, reflecting on our praxis through immersion, have come to new understandings of theology. Like the Syrophoenician woman, Manal, the prisoner's wife, was a victim of both oppression and indifference. When we suggested inviting Manal to join the footwashing rite, we knew that our encounter with her was the impetus that led to that invitation. Reflecting on our praxis in light of Jesus' inclusive love changed our theology. Jesus would have washed Manal's feet.

From Leadership toward Community

The immersion project seemed to create and nurture a consciousness of sharing and activism. Sojourners showed interest in taking action to effect change. We did our homework of research. We shared our experiences with our parishes through sermons, bible study, and school assemblies. We engaged in political marches and assemblies, and called for solidarity with refugees and deportees. At school assemblies, I encouraged students to start thinking about alternatives in addressing social problems. We discussed topics like women's rights, fasting for social change, caring for the poor, protecting the environment, and the common good. Many topics matched those under discussion among Sojourners. This itself was a sign of engagement. St. Andrew's Women's Guild organized visits to seniors, and also to children's hospitals and orphanages, in addition to funding drives during Christmas and Lent, with proceeds going to institutions visited.

Parishioners at my church observed changes in sermon topics as my immersion deepened. They said they appreciated my willingness to address social issues. Topics like participating in city council elections, women's ordination, and ethical shopping seemed to inspire them. Some shared reflections on Facebook. Marwan Durzi posted:

> The Christmas service in Ramallah, Palestine was a very special one and I'd like to share the theme of the sermon. Rev. Fadi talked about Christmas as transformation from religious internment, seclusion, and self-glory toward sharing life with others. Incarnation is God's transformation from divinity toward full humanity. It incorporates reaching out for the world and fixing it not by human desire but by God's love. Christmas moves us into the world with a message of salvation, love, and peace. Christmas should not confine us to our personal lives, families, communities, or religions, but move us toward the other. To celebrate Christmas is to imitate Christ's self-emptying love in reaching for the

> other. It means moving into a new era of giving, love, and praxis, rather than focus on self, family, denomination, or religion.[29]

Our immersion experiences provoked a sense of urgency to act on different levels. Action incorporated whole communities. Sojourners organized and led vigils for Egyptian workers killed by extremists. “I used to consider campaigns and marches as irresponsible acts that have no impact, or that incite violence. Now I have learned that we can organize campaigns ourselves and plan them according to our non-violent creed,” said one Sojourner. During the mass Palestinian prisoners’ hunger strike, we organized an ecumenical service and invited prisoners’ family members, including Muslims. For the community, this act of solidarity was transforming. People were encouraged to light a candle for a prisoner, someone whom they did not know. The service was moving; some worshipers cried as they lit candles. “We can no longer refuse to organize protests out of fear that violence may ensue,” Imad said. “This vigil service for prisoners is our participation in their suffering. It sends a message that we will not forget those behind prison walls, even if we have not met them. This is first and foremost an expression of faith. Our faith calls us to visit prisoners, and when the system does not permit it, we stand with them and with their families in our prayers and advocacy.”

From Task-oriented toward Consciousness-oriented

The foundation of any immersion project is the relational aspect of its mission. Sojourning is about building relationships rather than accomplishing tasks. Some victims we encountered became integral participants in our missions, and we remain in touch with them. Edward T. Chambers compares a task-oriented mission to a relational one. He

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[29] The post is translated from the Arabic.

notes that “a task-oriented approach often ignores or misses or minimizes the power of relationships,” whereas a relational approach “is more powerful, for it will eventually accomplish task” (Chambers 2009, 12). A relational approach to accomplishing a mission is concerned with the people involved in a particular task and the manner in which their joint action is carried out. The relation-oriented leader is interested in how institutions change and how societies are transformed.

From Teaching toward Learning

Immersion is about opening one’s eyes, mind, and heart to new realities. Learning began as Sojourners met to discuss context, identity, and mission. It took on new meaning as we stepped into the context of victims. It was reinforced as we listened to voices of victims and other leaders. It was supported by research and inquiry. And it was maintained by advocacy.

“I have come to appreciate being a student again rather than being a teacher. In fact, one cannot be teacher without becoming a life-long student,” I told the group. “We started to appreciate listening to others and learning,” said Imad. He explained, “The common understanding among religious leaders is that they are supposed to speak, explain, teach, and preach. Palestinian culture reinforces this characteristic of leadership.” The majority of lay Palestinian Christians are religiously unschooled. Reading is not a major component of Arab culture. Although education is very much valued among Palestinians, a diploma is a license to work. “Very few clergy pursue further education or further personal development,” explained Ibrahim.

Immersion prompted us to become students again. Learning is not only informative, it transforms perceptions and behavior. When leaders stop learning, they

stop growing and stop being relevant to the contexts in which they serve. Learning about our context helped us understand and advocate more effectively. When a group of Americans visited St. Andrew's after the formal immersion project ended, I noticed that I presented the cases of victims more clearly than I had previously. I now know much more about martial law, about movement restrictions, about the Christian community in Gaza, and about prisoners and their families. Advocating for justice requires becoming students in the school of context. One cannot advocate what one does not know.

From Persuasive Evangelism toward Voluntarily Evangelism

St. Andrew's welcomed five new families in 2016, an unusual and unplanned development. Nader and his family were among the new regular attendees at St. Andrew's. Nader's sister-in-law and her family also began to attend. Other in-laws appeared at services. When I inquired about their attendance, Nader explained that he had shared our project with them, and thought they would enjoy sermons "that speak about concrete aspects of life." The Amin family, originally from Galilee, appeared at services at St. Andrews. After a couple of Sundays, I asked them how they knew about us. Amin explained that when they arrived in Ramallah, they asked Luna about a church and she suggested St. Andrews. Abla is an Episcopalian, but not an active church-goer. During and after the project, she became very engaged, especially when we held services at the homes of elderly parishioners. It was at Abla's behest that we decided to relocate Sunday services during Lent to homes for the elderly, to ensure that everyone felt integrated.

Two individuals started coming to Sunday services. When I asked them who they were and what brought them to St. Andrew's, they said they were Muslims who felt interested in learning more about Christian worship. This is very uncommon in

Palestinian culture, and might represent an ulterior motive. I asked: "How did you learn about St. Andrew's?" One said that Manal had suggested he visit, and the other said the he had been referred by Al Haq, the institution in Ramallah.

The immersion project did not seek to evangelize, in the traditional sense of the word. But newcomers appeared. Jesus did not go out trying to evangelize people. People were attracted to him and to his teachings after they learned about him from others. He immersed in his context and formed bonds to the weak, marginalized, oppressed, and outcasts. People were drawn to him because he was among them, enacting love and care.

From Stagnant Faith toward Flowing Grace

God is a "movement" God, wandering with his people. Movement implies encountering newness and freshness. "Immersion was a new experience with new discoveries and encounters," said Luna. "It was a learning experience. It helped me see beyond my awareness, even expectations," added Ibrahim. I added that I had found the experience "a new terrain of grace. It helped me understand God's marvelous work in the life and experience of those left alone at the side of the road." Imad commented: "I have come to a new understanding that God's love and grace embrace all people, even non-Christians, which for me was unimaginable. The faith and self-sacrificial love I encountered in Manal's story and her willingness to familiarize herself with a Christian foot-washing ritual made me marvel at God's love of all."

Faith can stagnate, particularly in minority communities where it is practiced chiefly inside church and institutional premises. Immersion helps transform stagnation into an ever-evolving set of beliefs and practices. Faith is a pilgrimage to new terrain and discovery, and to deeper understanding. The flowing grace that pilgrims experience

echoes a “Lake Tiberius spirituality” rather than a “Dead Sea spirituality,” a metaphor that Palestinians cherish. Lake Tiberius is fed by an ever-flowing spring of fresh water, eventually flowing into the Jordan River. Aquatic animals live and grow in Lake Tiberius, and thus it symbolizes faith passed on to others. In contrast, the Dead Sea represents stagnant spirituality. It receives waters from the River Jordan, but nothing flows out of it. There is no life in the Dead Sea. Whether leaders are like Lake Tiberius or the Dead Sea depends on their openness to God’s grace, and their willingness to be channels of grace to others. Immersion is a channel where grace is reciprocally shared.

From Despair to Hope

Many Christian leaders in Palestine feel hopeless about prospects for political change. Many believe that the future of Christianity in the Holy Land is gloomy. I used to be one of them. Immersion strengthened our hope in God’s promises. What surprised us most was victims’ faith in God despite suffering. Victims expressed desire for conditions to change, but most importantly they expressed the conviction that faith became stronger when challenged. Their faith in God’s abundant love made us rethink our hopelessness. “Their faith in God and hope that he will change their conditions made me feel shy in front of them,” said Nader. “I thought we wanted to encounter victims to encourage them; in fact, I was encouraged by their faith and steadfastness,” said Ibrahim. I believe that victims are great witnesses to God’s love and care. They embody the words of St. Paul: “…My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness…for whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Immersion broadened our hope in God’s work in our context. The steadfastness and faith of victims helped us understand that God is at work and has never abandoned

his community. Religious leaders may lose hope in a better and just future, but immersion helps them restore hope in the future of Christianity in the Holy Land.

From Avoidance to Confrontation

Avoiding conflict jeopardizes personal growth. The immersion project helped me to confront challenges and to state my beliefs and values even in the face of hierarchical opposition. I have become direct in explaining my positions. I am now able to approach religious and political leaders and defend my values. To argue with the Palestinian President about the right message at Christmas was audacious.

The immersion project appears to have created and nurtured daring decision-making. Sojourners showed interest in change and action. Our overall attitude was oriented to what should be done rather than what should be discussed. We felt emboldened to challenge injustice in a public manner. Our participation in protests represented an explicit change in behavior for all of us. Forces of restriction appear to retreat as a result of our determination to change society. I welcomed women clergy to preside in worship services in a context that is still not supportive for the ordination of women. I stopped using my VIP card to cross the border to Jordan. Now I find ways to make the slower route meaningful because I spend it with others. At St. Andrew’s and St. Peter’s, I stopped wearing a chasuble, because I felt that it symbolized power. I have come to value, and to want to project, simplicity. Confrontation requires confronting self and privileges. One must replace self-satisfaction with authenticity.

Mapping the Future: Visions and Missions

The project did not end with its completion but compelled us to think of ways to keep the process going. The privilege of encountering those who have found ways to overcome injustice left us sympathetic and deeply changed. The experience of immersion does something to those immersed: it changes them from within. It opens their eyes to see things in a new perspective, to realize new realities and to open up to new possibilities.

As we became more effective and more engaged in public life, we asked: "OK, now what? What should we do next? How can we help more?" Ibrahim said: "This experience taught me that transformation and justice should be priorities in my ministry. I need to work with my community to create and nurture engagement with victims of injustice." Nader added: "We need to start with our children and youth groups and teach them how faith is practiced not only in churches but in schools and neighborhoods." Luna offered: "We need to continue what we started. I do not think it should end here." Sojourners said that they wanted to continue doing things together. "We accomplished more as a group than we could have individually," Abla added.

Sojourners agreed that our perceptions had shifted, and that we had become more attentive to the causes of victims of injustice. After the evaluation session, Sojourners suggested and committed to several follow-on projects:

- Our "Leadership for Transformation and Justice Website" is a dynamic cyberspace that will share our work thus far and present future initiatives. Its mission encompasses providing resources and advice to Palestinian leaders so that they will become more effective in their settings. The website will be the publication home for other projects.

- “Theologians for Soulful and Societal Transformation” is an immersion project aimed at raising awareness among local and international religious leaders of the plight of Palestinians. The project seeks to bring ten theologians or seminarians a year, including internationals, Palestinians, and Israelis, for two-week immersion projects in Israeli-Palestine. Theologians will sojourn free of charge in the Palestinian context, accompanying, listening, inquiring, and advocating the causes of victims. At the end of the program, each participant will write a chapter in his or her area of expertise. The chapters will be collected and published.
- “Transformation and Justice Consciousness” is a project to raise transformation and justice awareness in our community. Ibrahim, Imad, and I have committed to observe, study, and record our interventions with community members on video, and to post subtitled editions on the LTJ website and social media.
- “Schools for Salam/Shalom” is a project that started during our immersion project after our visit to the Leo Baeck Education Center in Haifa. We will develop the initiative to include interreligious engagement and activism.
- “Stories from the Holy Land” is a project to record stories like those we heard from victims. I suggested the idea to Abla, an English instructor. I proposed that she collects stories from our context and attempt to have them published.
- The “Teacher Worship Program” helps teachers promote the concepts of neighborliness, gender equality, human rights, environmental justice, workers’ rights, common good, etc., among students. The program consists of a monthly workshop, where 25-30 teachers from different schools will be invited to

participate in a one-day workshop. The program will be coordinated with the Palestinian Ministry of Education and heads of schools in Ramallah.

Signs of Transformation: Limitations

Sojourners encountered various forces that complicated our efforts to bring about spiritual and societal transformation. The limitations we faced proved that there is more work to be done, and more risk to be faced. Our challenges are detailed in the following sections.

The Spirit is Willing, but the Flesh is Weak

Throughout our sojourn, we acknowledged that the process of transforming ourselves and our society would not be easy. Aspiration sometimes led us to dead ends: for example, there was no way to visit political prisoners, it was difficult to connect with Jewish faith leaders, the status quo governed our ecumenical relationships, etc. “Change is not easy” said Nader. “Sometimes I feel hopeless in front of questions young people ask, or in front of a parishioner whose son is a detainee,” said Ibrahim. “I have people coming into my office seeking financial support, and it hurts when I do not have the means,” I added. “People are tired and hopeless and have no power to engage in change,” added Abla. Sojourners agreed that injustices inflicted on Palestinian victims are manifold. We also agreed that forces of inertia are strong. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak. “We are also human beings, and it is OK to be weak,” I countered. We agreed that we all had our own flaws. In recognizing our weakness, we open a door to the Holy Spirit to act. Vulnerability is a sign of liberation, not limitation.

Sojourners agreed that even when religious leaders have the desire to engage in transformation, lack of vision may hold them back. Almost everyone we spoke to told us: "Yes, we need change." But they were hard-pressed to explain how, when and where. We discovered that there was little common strategy for how to address contextual injustices. "Individual endeavors are important, but considering the challenges our communities face, there is much need for joint strategy," we concluded. Competent leaders need to develop frameworks to challenge inertia, restriction, and distraction.

Self-Regard versus Justice Consciousness

Sojourners agreed that one of the forces hampering change in the Palestinian context was interest in private betterment at the expense of the public good. Sojourners reflected on the reasons for which Palestinians do not seem to be interested in the public good. We came up with five explanations. First, the Palestinian Authority has attempted to establish a capitalist system through encouraging people to take out bank loans. Many are in debt and preoccupied with getting out of it. Second, corruption in the governing body of the Palestinian Authority has become pervasive. People have lost faith in leadership. The gap between rich and poor is wide and seems to be growing. Those who benefit from the current system oppose political or economic change that would encourage transparency, justice, freedom, equality, and rule of law. Third, lack of an internationally-supported peace process has further discouraged any appetite to challenge the status quo. People look for ways to survive within the system and to accommodate it. Victims often recounted stories of those who were attacked, pushed aside, or harassed for challenging the system. Fourth, the ineffectiveness of the church institution in advocating for victims and struggling for change has caused many to cease expecting religion to play

a significant role in social betterment. During our project, people referred to religious leaders' preoccupations with their own or families and interests. Reports of diocese leaders selling church property to Israeli entrepreneurs intent on building settlements made people angry and distrustful of the will of the church to take on forces of oppression. People frequently referred to cases where revenue from holy sites had been transferred abroad into personal bank accounts. Unfortunately, investigations affirmed some of these stories. Fifth, the rise of radical Islam in the last decade and terrorist attacks on Christians in the Middle East have made many doubt that they belong in the region, or that trying to engage will bring results. As one member of the clergy said: "The church is like a ship sailing through a storm: it has no compass, the captain is asleep, and the crew won't awaken him because they are afraid of being called 'those of little faith'; what is worse is that the crew is so busy with quarrels about who among them is greatest that they do not notice that passengers are jumping overboard."

Sojourners sensed that our parishioners were inwardly-focused rather than oriented toward external action. "It was not easy to inspire our communities or attract people to join in solidarity activities with victims," we agreed. Private interest overrules the common good and threatens the ability to enact social transformation. "Leaders benefit from the status quo, and church institutions prefer accommodating the system rather than trying to dismantle it," I heard frequently. As Imad put it: "As long as religious leaders drive diplomatic cars, use VIP cards, and accept being treated differently by the oppressor, they will turn a blind eye to others' suffering. Those who receive means of support from a system are unlikely to challenge it. The private good jeopardizes the common good."

We observed that no dioceses had functioning peace and justice commissions. We had diocesan committees for education, youth, women, judicial matters, and pilgrimages. It embarrassed us that dioceses in the West often have commissions on Israel/Palestine, whereas only one among 13 recognized denominations in our region has such a body, and according to a member, it is riven by internal conflict. We have also observed that justice for most Palestinian religious leaders means the end of the occupation, but they are not attuned to the need for justice for women, people with disabilities, workers, the poor, or homosexuals. Environmental consciousness is nascent. Sojourners agreed that concepts of justice need to expand to include gender equality, equal opportunity, freedom of speech, religious liberty, anti-discrimination, and care for the environment. We agreed that pervasive individualism stands in the way.

Parish and Denomination Preoccupation

Religious leaders are of necessity parish-oriented, limiting their ministries almost exclusively to parish life and programs. Sociopolitical engagement has not traditionally been encouraged among religious leaders in the Middle East. When John Wesley said, “The world is my parish,” he recognized that the Christian faith and mission are public, and that religious leaders are called to be active in the social order. A parochial approach keeps parish communities separate from broader social life. Even after we engaged in the immersion project and experienced changes in our attitudes, we still felt tension between the need to manage our parishes and the imperative to act in a wider sphere. Sojourners came to believe that hiring youth ministers, developing women leaders, and engaging clerical staff would be rational moves from the standpoint of ministry, if means could be found to finance them.

In a multi-cultural system where oppression is rife, leaders have significant responsibilities toward the public: to share a moral approach where immorality has won out, to advocate peace where conflict is tearing communities apart, to bring hope where that is only a dream, to empower the weak, and heal the sick. Christian leadership is called to be a transforming power bringing alternatives to injustice. To be communal by no means undermines our parish roles. On the contrary, to step into the public domain is to recognize that the parish is part of a larger system, not an island. Lawrence Adams maintains that a "public life will have to be embodied – lived out in demonstrable community, not only proclaimed or taught. These concepts must be spread by real people really living them" (Adams 2002, 165).

"The Church is an Outdated, Irrelevant Institution!"

One of the repeated claims we heard and reflected upon among ourselves was that the church has no relevance for youth or young families, who see it as unable to meet the needs of ever-changing society. Questions about the value of traditional religious doctrines and practices were particularly prevalent among churches in Palestine. Sojourners concluded that outdated paradigms of leadership were indeed impediments to societal transformation. In developing our theologies, traditions, liturgies, and programs, we took heart from Lawrence Adams, who wrote in *Going Public: Christian Responsibility in a Divided America,* that "terms that in the past conveyed specific meanings – including public good, leadership, justice, and responsibility – can no longer be assumed to have that effect" (Adams 2002, 164-165). The Christian message needs to be relevant to all times and all places. God moves into a real world to meet his community in its particular time and space. An ever-changing world requires ever-

transforming faith, ever-evolving doctrine, and ever-developing leadership. But as one young parishioner reflected, “The church continues to reside in the past, whereas communities and societies have moved forward.” Constitutions and laws need to be changed periodically, and so do liturgical rites, in order to maintain the relevance of Christian faith and effectiveness of Christian leaders.

Centralized Hierarchy

When institutional hierarchy becomes overly centralized, it limits growth and creativity. The church institution in the Palestinian context is immensely hierarchal. Senior leaders maintain firm control in ways that sometimes restrict development, freedom and innovation. In the Orthodox Church, for example, the Patriarch determines all matters concerning relationships, structure, and church polity. He appoints advisory councils that determine church mattes. In the Episcopal Church, the Bishop functions as the head of the Diocesan Council and administrative body. The Bishop heads every committee, including the patronage committee, standing committee, property committee, and all institutional boards. Checks and balances are lacking. If the Bishop is busy, boards and committees do not function. The electoral process is democratized to serve the intentions of senior church leaders. For example, during Episcopal Church conventions, committees are chosen by voting on pieces of paper on which names of pre-selected delegates are printed. Anyone whose name is not already on a list cannot be elected. When I objected on grounds that the process limited diversity, I was told that “consent is democratic.” In the Catholic Church, archbishops and bishops are appointed by Rome; thus the community has no say in choosing its leadership. In the Orthodox Church, the Patriarch appoints a “Holy Council” of those who support his ecclesiastical approach.

"Any bishop or priest who does not conform will be removed from the council," an Orthodox priest told us. In the Melkite Church, the Patriarch is elected by a Catholic Synod and endorsed by Rome.

When power serves hierarchy, it can result in an arrangement that benefits longstanding leaders and the status quo. Parish priests act according to the wishes of their senior leaders. If they do not conform, punitive measures may be taken. "When I welcomed women clergy to stand at the altar, I received a call from my bishop asking me not to do it again," said Imad. When Ibrahim conducted a questionnaire at his parish, his bishop called to inquire about his motives.

Excess hierarchical control prevents new leaders from emerging. A shift in institutional polity toward effective community development is necessary to carry out missions of transformation. Expanded community involvement in leadership uncovers community resources and sharpens identity and mission. Centrality produces followers rather than leaders. "Disinstitutionalization" of the church, where leaders override institutional goals, continues to set back prospects for change. To deinstitutionalize the church and put leaders first prevents communities from growing. The gospel teaches us that every person has been given gifts; every person can contribute to the well-being of the whole and to the effectiveness of mission. Effective institutions are an expression of the capacities of individuals and groups who come together and take on new tasks.

We also agreed that in our context, the concept of "chair-ization" is prevalent, where leaders often aspire to hold static chairs or positions. Sojourners came to understand that leadership for transformation is not a job; it is a calling, a mission to transform the world. When leadership substitutes itself for the institution and become

solo imperium, it become destructive to the vision and mission of the institution and the communities making up the institution. "Leadership becomes ineffective whenever a position becomes an end rather than a beginning or a means," said Nader. To aspire to leadership entails hard work toward personal growth in the service of a more effective mission for a better world.

Fear and Anxiety

Fear and anxiety are huge impediments to missions of transformation. Fear for one's own or one's family's safety is a legitimate concern so long as it does not paralyze leaders or prevent them from accompaniment, listening, inquiry, immersion or advocacy. Sojourners experienced fear and anxiety during several immersion experiences. The most noteworthy was when we chose to stand in solidarity with a Palestinian political party activist threatened with deportation. We feared backlash from the Israeli authorities. We knew many stories of those who had stood with Palestinians activists only to suffer consequences. Even though Palestinians are Semites, they fear the charge of antisemitism as a result of criticizing unjust measures imposed by the Israeli occupation.

Fear can hamper engagement, but when confronted it brings transformative force. Fear of backlash is real. Anglican Bishop Eliah Khoury was arrested, imprisoned, and deported for political activism against the occupation. Melkite Bishop of Jerusalem Hilarion Capucci was arrested, imprisoned, and deported because of his support for Palestinian resistant movement. Bishop Riah Abu El Assal was banned from travel for several years. Fr. Musalem was hassled for criticizing the Palestinian Authority. Fear and anxiety may mean not speaking truth, thus maintaining injustice. Church leaders who criticize the dominant political party can be labeled unpatriotic. Sojourners discussed how

difficult it is to critique Palestinian officials or religious leaders for their failure to stand up for the weak, oppressed, and marginalized.

Fear of repercussion holds back some easily-recognized leaders whose ability to conduct their church activities depends on systemic approval. Patriarchs and bishops have generally opted to avoid direct criticism of Israel. Most have not, for example, endorsed the *Kairos Palestine* document nor have they chosen to identify with or support groups that work for justice. During a hunger strike, Ibrahim approached his Bishop and asked if he would send letter to diocesan clergy to offer prayers for Palestinian prisoners. The Bishop responded: “We try to stay neutral.” Ibrahim made clear that what he sought was just a prayer. The Bishop said, “Maybe I will phone some clergy, but writing is not a good idea.” “The Bishop neither wrote nor called,” said Ibrahim.

Sojourners determined that although fear can hamper engagement, when confronted, it brings transformative force. In a context pervaded by fear and anxiety, leaders should maintain a calm, assured presence in order to bring change. Fear makes people irrational, defensive and dysfunctional. Anxiety leads them into zones of retreat. “Fear not” is one of God’s most repeated commands in the Bible. Leaders need to expose fear, confront opposition, and faithfully speak truth to power.

Fear is a healthy reaction to threats to survival. Fear pushes us toward action and assistance. Holy fear is a kind of fear that invites us to anticipate a vision for ourselves, our communities and our society. It helps leaders recognize that God has chosen us for unique missions. Sacred fear humbles us so that we will listen and recognize the need to defend those who cannot defend themselves. It keeps us engaged with others and compels us to be present, listen, ask and re-ask questions. It allows us to engage in self-care, to get

away and recharge, to contemplate life in light of God's word, and to search for allies and supporters. Justice requires carrying the cross on a narrow path. Such a mission demands a community to support, uphold, and back its members with love and care.

Lack of Justice Consciousness

A fundamental reality that limited the effectiveness of our work was lack of transformation and justice consciousness among clergy and communities. Clergy's main concern is pastoring their communities. The Social Gospel is an abstraction for many religious leaders and lay people. Liberation theology is viewed with suspicion due to supposed links to Marxism. Few clergy or laity are concerned about socioeconomic or environmental justice. Sojourners agreed that there was a need to create, nurture and develop broad-based justice consciousness within our communities. Leaders should remind themselves that the Lord calls on us "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mi 6:8).

The task of religious leadership is to serve communities of faith and transform society. This requires providing communities with the necessary skills and guidance to serve God's aspiration. Faith communities in turn engage in transforming societies for the greater mission – the common good.

Religious leaders should always be discerning companions for their communities. Faith leaders strengthen community missions by fostering new relations with society at large. They serve society by speaking and enacting the truth. In times of crises, religious leaders should promote openness, respect, and celebration of human difference. They should heal the wounded, console the oppressed, and challenge those who threaten peace.

Psychological Exhaustion

Another impediment to our mission of transformation was psychological exhaustion. Being immersed in a context of injustice, accompanying victims, listening to painful stories, and expecting opposition are painful experiences. To live in a context where every day brings a story of death, incarceration, restriction, and fear is spiritually draining. Leaders who work in conflict zones are under psychological stress. Many develop anxiety.

Some members of our group reported that their experiences left them “devastated for some time.” Luna said: “I could not stop thinking about the things we had seen. I can recall the feeling to this day.” “There were times after particular immersion experiences when I felt I needed to quit. I am not good at witnessing others’ pain, especially that of women and children. It is soul-wearing,” said Abla. “To sit in a solidarity tent with prisoners’ families, listen to their stories, and experience their pain touched my heart, and it aches,” said Nader. “Every time we met with victims, I thought about what my reaction would be if I were in their shoes.” Luna added: “When I visited Ramus and his family, I remembered how we had left Lebanon during the war and how after some time in Jerusalem we were deported to Ramallah. I saw myself in their story. It was a hard time.”

Transformers need to develop a life of prayer and connect with a supporting community. Much of our anxiety subsided as we shared our pain in prayer. Sojourning in a context where injustice prevails on many levels, and where church institutions have by and large decided to “be balanced,” brings about dependence on one’s community and friends. Sojourners agreed that the support fellow pilgrims gave to one another kept them going during tough times.

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Chapter Eight: A Transformation and Justice Consciousness

In the movie "Braveheart," William Wallace tells a group of Scottish clan leaders: "There's a difference between us. You think the people of this country exist to provide you with position. I think your position exists to provide those people with freedom" (Gibson, 1995). A justice and freedom consciousness lies at the heart of transformation. The absence of such consciousness among leaders and communities spawns individualism, self-centeredness, and reluctance to address communal, social, political, economic, and environmental concerns.

Transformation is a state of being. Likewise, justice and freedom. A ministry of transformation transcends performing good deeds. In this concluding chapter, I argue that in order to challenge injustice and inertia, leadership needs to refuses to accept the dominant culture of violence, oppression, and indifference. This, I posit, requires revisiting fundamental Christian categories, nurturing a transformation consciousness, and reclaiming the prophetic-servant leadership paradigm.

Revisiting Fundamental Christian Categories

For an effective mission of transformation, Christian leadership and communities need to recapture their identity and mission within fundamental Christian categories: creatureliness, *imago dei*, Kingdom of God, and common good.

Creatureliness

Since justice is an intrinsic attribute of the divine Creator, and since human justice derives from all creatures' common origins in divine generosity, anthropology is at the heart of understanding human identity, conditions, and relatedness. Theological anthropology facilitates discovery of who humans are in relation to God, fellow humans, and creation at large. Among other anthropological categories, creatureliness inspires human understanding and action to recommit to a vision of how God intended his world to be – a unity of diversity, and all of it good. The concept of creatureliness is fundamental to missions of engagement, transformation, and justice.

Creatureliness posits that human beings are interrelated and that they exist in solidarity with one another, sharing finitude, mortality and dependence. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." (Gn 1:31). This is God's own description of *homo sapiens* and the rest of creation. Humans, whether Jews, Christians, Muslims, Israelis, Palestinians, whites, blacks, men, women, etc., are good creatures freely created by one Creator. Racism, sexism, supremacy, oppression, and inequality are not good: God did not intend them, and God seeks to transform them.

Creatureliness presupposes that human beings are all equal creatures existing in mutual solidarity. What affects my neighbor affects me, what discriminates against black discriminate against white, what oppresses Palestinians oppresses Israelis, because all share in the freedom and limitations of creatureliness. The "not my business," "doesn't affect me," "too far away," and/or "I don't care," approach departs from creatureliness. The creation account tells us that human failure was not an act of disobedience, but rather

a denunciation and repudiation of creatureliness: "Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God." (Gn 3:5)

All creatures are called to treat one another as they treat themselves. Hence, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:31) should be understood as the commonality of shared creatureliness. In his speech in 2004 in Chicago, Barack Obama affirmed that what makes a nation great is not the height of its skyscrapers, or the power of its military, or the size of its economy, but the simple truth that "all men are created equal…that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Obama continues:

> If there's a child on the south side of Chicago who can't read, that matters to me, even if it's not my child. If there's a senior citizen somewhere who can't pay for her prescription and has to choose between medicine and the rent, that makes my life poorer, even if it's not my grandmother. If there's an Arab American family being rounded up without benefit of an attorney or due process, that threatens my civil liberties. It's that fundamental belief I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper that makes this country work. (Obama 2004)

When Israelis and Palestinians relate as equal, finite creatures, they are able to foresee and construct a just future where they live together and celebrate each other. When white Americans interrelate with African Americans on the basis of creatureliness, they establish a shared commitment to equality. When the one per cent sees the 99 per cent not as lesser beings but as equal partners in existence, then disparity is transformed into egalitarianism and individualism into care for the underprivileged.

Creatureliness prompts leadership to challenge division, individualism, and indifference. From his Birmingham prison cell Martin Luther King Jr. wrote:

> I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again

> can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial, 'outside agitator' idea. (King and Washington 1992, 85)

Individualism and self-centeredness can no longer dominate when a consciousness of creatureliness is nurtured and sustained in individuals, communities, and societies. "Am I my brother's keeper?" is answered as "Yes, I am my brother's keeper and defender."

The Image of God

In a capitalistic system, "self" is all-important, because capitalism defines people as isolated consumers, each making his or her own choices, without accountability to one other. In a society oriented toward self-sufficiency, community and connection may be hard to achieve. Even in the context of religion, supposedly the most relational and communal category of human endeavors, a private, personal experience with God is cherished. Humanity needs to recaptures its communal, relational nature.

The concept of *imago dei* is at the heart of human existence and action. I maintain that to be created in the image and likeness of God is to be relational: to inter-be and to inter-act with all those who share God's likeness and to protect interconnectedness.

A theological understanding of the relational existence of humankind is offered by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and refined by Karl Barth. Responding to discontent in Germany – at a time of confusion, anxiety, and hopelessness – Bonhoeffer argued that human existence as male and female is relational, and that existence in the form of relationships may be described as reflecting God's image, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27).

In *Creation and Fall*, Bonhoeffer gave *imago dei* sociality as its central meaning. He attached freedom to relationality. Freedom is not a quality, ability, capacity, attribute,

or possession, but a relation: being free means being free for the other. According to Bonhoeffer, it is freedom for the other that constitutes the way in which humans on earth are like God in Heaven. This understanding of *analogia relationis* means that humans are placed in relationship, free for the other. Reflecting on freedom as relational, Dorothee Sölle uses Sigmund Freud's definition of a sane person "as one who is able to work and to love" (Sölle and Cloyes 1984, 2).

In his article "Theological Anthropology and the Human Genome Project," Theodore Jennings Jr. notes that the *imago dei* element of theological anthropology has been mistakenly interpreted as separating human beings from other life forms. Jennings writes: "Some may seek in the genome the basis for rationality or linguistic ability or consciousness or free will or what have you, all qualities that have at some point been offered as candidates for the content of the image of God" (Jennings 2003, 109). Reflecting on the work of Gregory of Nyssa, who "rejects the notion that the divine is to be identified with unilateral power or domination and so sees in cooperative responsibility the concrete sign of his image," (Jennings 2003, 110), Jennings argues that Gregory "realizes that it is precisely as creature that the human is called to be the image of God," a category "which relates us to other species as that in which the divine image is to be discerned" (Jennings 2003, 109). Moreover, Jennings notes that in more recent theology, Karl Barth "has seen in such relational ideas as co-humanity the locus for reflection on the divine image" (Jennings 2003, 110).

Christians believe in a triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God in Godself is relational. In *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*,

Daniel L. Migliore expands traditional interpretations of trinity, offering three additional interpretive statements:

- "*The eternal life of God is personal life in relationship.*" "In God's own eternal being," asserts Migliore, "there is movement, life, personal relationships, and the giving and receiving of love" (Migliore 1991, 67-68).
- "*God exists in community.*" "Confessing of the triune God," maintains Migliore, "radically calls in question all totalitarianisms that deny the freedom and rights of all people and resist all idolatrous individualism that subverts the common welfare" (Migliore 1991, 69-70).
- "*The life of God is essentially self-giving love.*" "It is this compassionate journey of God into the far country of human brokenness and misery," asserts Migliore, "that prompts the revolution in the understanding of God." Trinity is revealed in God's liberating love in the cross of Christ. It is "the eternal source and energy of human friendship, compassion, sacrificial love, and inclusive community" (Migliore 1991, 70-71).

The *imago dei* provokes gratitude rather than supremacy or domination. It helps shift human understanding from individualism toward a culture where all humans are cherished and protected. To recognize the image of God in the other necessitates caring about the wholeness of the universe and treating people as we want to be treated. Relational consciousness offers hope for humankind. When relationships exist, they bring hope for the world. When relationships are in line with what God intends for the world, they break down division and separation. The *imago dei* connects humans with God, with the other, and with those left behind. It transcends anthropocentrism, self-centeredness,

and supremacy. In the *imago dei*, racism, sexism, and intolerance are transformed into equality, neighborliness, and the common good.

The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is an aroused *kairos* mindfulness that prepares the way for an alternative consciousness, one that replaces unjust structures and transforms souls and societies. Scholars are almost unanimous that the Kingdom of God is central to the life and teachings of Jesus. The Gospels introduce Jesus' mission: "after John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news'" (Mk 1:14-15).

The concept itself has taken a variety of forms in the course of Christian history and theology. Throughout this thesis, I have maintained that the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom of God is inseparable from the historical context of a God who entered history to redeem creation, and who continues to accompany his followers in their mission to transform humanity according to his plan. The historical dimension of the Kingdom of God is the very context of human society. The relational dimension of the Kingdom has a dual-faceted identify: God's relation to history, and humanity's relation to God. This relationality invites humans to engagement and transformation.

Notwithstanding historical variation in the concept of the Kingdom of God and its relationship with the Church, almost all scholars today believe that the Church can neither be nor produce the Kingdom. The Church is the people of the Kingdom but not the Kingdom *per se*. The Church is called to live in and witness to the Kingdom, not await the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom. George Ladd asserts:

> The mission of Jesus brought not a new teaching but a new event. It brought to people an actual foretaste of the eschatological salvation. Jesus did not promise the forgiveness of sins; he bestowed it. He did not simply assure people of the future fellowship of the Kingdom; he invited them into fellowship with himself as the bearer of the Kingdom. He did not merely promise them vindication in the day of Judgment; he bestowed upon them the status of a present righteousness. He not only taught an eschatological deliverance from physical evil; he went about demonstrating the redeeming power of the Kingdom, delivering people from sickness and even death (Ladd 1993, 78).

Hence the *basileia tou theou* belongs to God; it is about God and his rule. The name itself requires that every aspect of the Kingdom be derived from the character and actions of God. Jesus' understanding of God's Kingdom reflects the reality that God is no longer waiting for sinners, but actively seeking them out. God has taken the initiative.

The Social Gospel movement not only criticized the economic exploitation of the industrial revolution, but also pointed out inconsistencies in church theology and mission toward the exploited. The movement saw the Kingdom as a prophetic force increasing the relevance of the Church to the world. For Rauschenbusch, "the Kingdom of God is humanity organized according to the will of God" (Hodgson and King 1995, 319).

Liberation theologies have been guided by both political theology and the theology of hope. Liberation theology commences by examining the existing world context, not biblical or theological truths – these are applied at a later stage. "Theology" defined by Gustavo Gutierrez, "is critical reflection on historical praxis. Truth emerges in language that reflects a community's engagement in the liberating transformation of the world. In such liberating praxis we can find clues to what God is doing in the world" (Eraaten 1983, 292). Liberation theologians believe that the Kingdom is to be understood not only as an eschatological entity but in relation to living history. This is Jesus' alternative Kingdom of God, realized in his inter-being and inter-acting to establish a

world as intended by God. His mission is directed toward those left behind in oppressive structures: the poor, the disinherited, and the marginalized.

The Kingdom of God compels leaders to focus on the urgency of a radical change. In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman argues that the biblical message of restoration through God's love incarnated in Christ is a transforming message in today's struggle with racism, oppression, and poverty. He challenges faith communities to rediscover the liberating message of Christ's love for the poor and the oppressed, whom he calls those who stand "with their back against the wall" (Thurman 1996, 1).

When Jesus went to the Sea of Galilee to gather disciples, he was initiating a crusade among those who would see the difference between the tyranny of the Roman occupiers and the Kingdom of God. His program "included healing, eating and drinking with friends and with those who have been excluded, and enacting a new understanding of community based on mutuality and peace, not violence and greed" (Thistlethwaite 2013, 40). Jesus could not wait for the Kingdom of God to challenge social injustice, and neither should Christians today. The Kingdom of God and its mission of transformation bring us back to the first creation, to the saving acts of God, to the physical incarnation of God in the person and ministry of Jesus, to the first disciples who accepted the call to be transformers, and to the first Christian communities who set out to change the world.

Common Good

Defining and pursuing the common good is imperative today. Reflecting on the Palestinian context, Sojourners have noticed how Palestinians have been contaminated with individualism. Palestinian culture has changed in the last forty years. The tribe, the extended family, and the community have decreased in importance. The neighborhood

has changed, village life has altered, and the sense of group identity has declined. The loss of a sense of the common good can have dire consequences for any group, but the effect is even more drastic on an oppressed community. The old political tactic, “divide and conquer,” continues to shatter nations and communities not only through military force but also through individualism, materialism, and consumerism.

The loss of commitment to the common good is a critical problem for humanity. In *Journey to the Common Good,* Walter Brueggemann asserts that the crisis of our world today is lack of a sense of the common good to sustain community and bind all in solidarity. Brueggemann states,

> We face a crisis about the common good because there are powerful forces at work among us to resist the common good, to violate community solidarity, and to deny a common destiny. Mature people, at their best, are people who are committed to the common good that reaches beyond private interest, transcends sectarian commitments, and offers human solidarity. (Brueggemann 2010, 1)

Brueggemann makes clear that the journey to the common good through Scripture is not easy or obvious: the text is “permeated with impediments to the common good, including the pervasive influence of patriarchy, ethnicity, race, sect, and party, not even to mention the layers of human and divine anger that pervade its pages”(Brueggemann 2010, 1). Nevertheless, he believes that Scriptures “may impinge upon the faith and life and practice of the church as we journey together towards the common good that God wills for the world” (Brueggemann 2010, ix). This is possible through a task of interpretation that requires “venturesome imagination that is always risky,” but at the same time that is necessary to “summon and engage and reassure the church to live faithfully amid hegemonic ideologies that suck the life out of our socioeconomic neighborhoods” (Brueggemann 2010, ix).

The relationship between power and the common good is intimate. Brueggemann posits that ancient Pharaoh is the paradigmatic enemy of the common good, who embodies "a complex monopoly that, along with the wealth it produces, also produces anxiety that affects every dimension of the system" (Brueggemann 2010, 3). Power uses its location and capabilities to maintain control and domination, thus threatening the common good. In order to alter domination and oppression, God called Moses, "a human agent who can act and dream outside imperial reality" (Brueggemann 2010, 12). A leader must be daring enough to disengage from an imperial system, with all its advantages, risks, and consequences. A leader who is willing to endure the complaints of a disengaged community must walk into a wilderness – a milieu of alienation and danger but also of liberation. The journey to the common good entails separation and suffering.

A culture that strives for the common good encourages missions of transformation. These cannot be achieved by individualistic work; they require corporate effort. Archbishop Desmond Tutu recognized the power of universal advocacy to end apartheid South Africa. Tutu said: "You must believe that this spectacular victory [over apartheid] would have been totally, totally impossible had it not been that we were supported so remarkably by the international community" (Ury 2000, 18). William Ury affirms the importance of the universal community in advocating justice in the case of South Africa. Ury writes:

> The outside world strongly opposed the institutionalized racism of the apartheid regime. Governments imposed economic sanctions. Sports federations ostracized South African teams. The United Nations provided political and economic support to Mandela's African National Congress. Intergovernmental organizations dispatched groups of eminent statesmen to mediate. Churches mobilized the public conscience and university students carried out protests. Under intense pressure, universities and corporations in the United States made decisions to stop investing in South

> Africa. From ordinary citizens to governments, outsider third parties came together to support a democratic community." (Ury 2000, 18-19).

Reflecting on a proper message for church leaders in "deadly social context that's marked by consumerism and militarism and the loss of the common good," Walter Brueggemann urges leadership to "imagine alternative forms of life that are not defined by those corrosive pressures...that…causes us to be very afraid, to regard other people as competitors, or as threats, or as rivals" (Graves 2016).

The gospel of the in-breaking of the divine reign is about a divine alternative – one that calls for transforming the dominating corrosive system of privatization into neighborliness. Neighborliness is the antidote for homophobia, xenophobia, self-protection and self-sufficiency. It calls humans to solidarity, to sharing, and to living beyond themselves. When community leaders care only for their own welfare, mobility, safety, and family, they cannot create or nurture a consciousness of what the common good entails. Neighborliness encourages people to cherish the good in themselves and celebrate the good in others. It impels people to share resources, move together, and sustain a common purpose aimed at mutual benefit.

Transformation and Justice Consciousness

A transformation and justice consciousness encompasses a *kairos* consciousness, which confronts crises. It is a holistic consciousness, which addresses root causes of injustice rather than "ambulance services" or quick-fixes. It is an urgent commitment to God's aspirations. It is conversionist, seeking to convert a culture of self-centeredness and corruption into compassion and neighborliness. A transformation and justice consciousness is pluralistic, engaging all people of good faith toward the common good.

A *Kairos* Consciousness

Kairos is one of two Greek words used to refer to time. Unlike *chronos,* which refers to the sequence of hours, minutes, days, and years, *kairos* refers to "'the right time,' the moment rich in content and significance," as defined by Paul Tillich (Hodgson and King 1995, 341). In Christian theology, *kairos* has been used to describe the moment of God's interference in history. For Paul Tillich, the biblical concept of *kairos* came at "that moment in time when the eternal breaks into history, as a summons to his contemporaries in Germany of the 1930s to rise to the challenge of that special moment of destiny in history" (Hodgson and King 1995, 341). In Tillich's view, time for those who are "conscious of an ongoing creative life is laden with tensions, possibilities, and impossibilities, it is qualitative and full of significance" (Hodgson and King 1995, 342). Tillich suggests that because there is a permanent crisis under way, *kairos* is always given, and Christ came at the right *kairos*. A crisis leads to a cry for justice and initiates God's *kairos*.

The word *kairos* has generated much theological, political and ecumenical discussion after the publication of the first *Kairos Document* in response to the apartheid system in South Africa. Since then, a *kairos* consciousness, writes Allan Boesak, has launched the "remnants of the prophetic movements in the churches worldwide to their prophetic tradition and reawakens the sense of *kairos* in communities where the prophetic voice has long been silent" (Boesak 2015, 1).

A *kairos* consciousness reads the signs of the times and raises questions about the church's voice in the midst of crises. In a *chronos* where colonialism, slavery, economic

exploitation, racism, institutional violence, xenophobia, and degradation of the earth are rampant, a *kairo*s consciousness is needed. Boseak argues that:

> The manifestation of global apartheid, like South African apartheid 30 years ago, constitutes a life-and-death crisis for God's most vulnerable and defenseless children…This crisis, in turn, constitutes a *kairos*, a moment of discernment, conversion, and commitment, a challenge to people of faith from God and from the suffering people. (Boesak 2015, 3)

In response to the Palestinian crisis, an ecumenical group of leaders came together to reflect on the grave situation in their context. In times when suffering and violence are increasing, indifference on the part of the international community and church institutions is the norm, and theology is crippled by political control and biblical misinterpretations, these leaders envisioned a prophetic response: *Kairos Palestine*. As "a moment of truth," the document called for action in the face of occupation, violence, and neglect. It called upon the Israeli government and society to end the occupation. It called upon the international community and especially the church to reclaim its prophetic voice with regard to the Palestinian crisis. It called upon the local church to stand with the poor and oppressed, and to transform its theology to effectively address the ongoing crisis. Although *Kairos Palestine* received international sympathy and recognition, the document provoked criticism from the Israeli government and radical Israeli groups, which prompted many churches around the world to repudiate or ignore it. Many Palestinian archbishops and bishops who endorsed the document at its outset retreated in the face of criticism. *Kairos* consciousness is about understanding a crisis, constructing a vision, and determining appropriate action. "In order to create change," assert Salvatierra and Heltzel, "we have to move from identification of our common dream to a strategic focus on immediate issues with clear objectives" (Salvatierra and Heltzel 2014, 65).

The moment of *kairos* is one of awe and truth, leading to inner change and societal transformation. For example, *kairos* was that moment after Sojourners left the prisoners' wife, having rediscovered the mission of liberation. It was that time we felt God at work as we embraced a family from Gaza. It was the moment when we decided not to comply with the President's request and the communities' demands, but to side with the grieving and heartbroken and not to light the Christmas tree. These are moments of truth on the part of people carrying out missions to change themselves and conditions.

A *kairos* moment is a moment that reveals truth in a culture dominated by falsehood. It criticizes state theology, church theology, and cultural ideology and provides an alternative: a prophetic-servant theology. In Jesus' time, the lies that predominated concerned Caesar's kingdom, religious accommodation, social fatigue, and spiritual exhaustion. Jesus' *kairos* consciousness was an alternative to the dominant culture. He proclaimed and enacted the Kingdom of God, not Caesar's kingdom. He practiced religious and ritual transformation, not accommodation. He championed economic equality, social empowerment, and spiritual regeneration. Salvatierra and Heltzel state: "A *kairos* issue reveals the deeply held lies that justify a pattern of injustice and opens up the space for God's truth to combat those lies directly (Salvatierra and Heltzel 2014, 66). "The Church's complicity," maintain Salvatierra and Heltzel, "manifests in its repetition of societal lies or its silence in the face of them," which has been "more painful and destructive for the oppressed" (Salvatierra and Heltzel 2014, 69).

Theologians of crisis criticized the German National Church's collaboration with the Nazi Party. Both the church and the German national culture underwent crises because of their blindness to and collaboration with legitimized violence. In subsequent

decades, the church had to encounter ethical failure in terms of collaboration with dictatorships in Latin America. In countries including Iraq, Egypt, and Syria, the church has remained silent or even supportive of hegemonic regimes, largely out of fear for its existence. A *kairos* consciousness identifies lies that excuse injustice and confronts their reasoning. It insists on framing alternatives for peace, justice and equality.

A Holistic Consciousness

Transformation and justice consciousness is holistic, permeating life. An ambulance plays a vital role in saving people's lives. But it has no effect without an equipped professional medical team to receive patients, a medical destination, and a health system that functions beyond incidents and accidents and promotes healthy life styles and responsible society. Ministry is often called upon to provide short-term "ambulance" succoring in the course of natural disasters, refugee crises, or trauma. Such tasks are less challenging than working to nurture and maintain a culture of transformation and justice.

Liberation theologies emphasize that God in Christ enters into solidarity with humanity, with a special *esprit de corps* with the poor, the oppressed, the neglected, and the marginalized. Jesus' mission is integrated into human nature and human conditions. Jesus blessed the poor, dined with sinners and outcasts, accepted those unjustly excluded, befriended women, and consorted with ordinary disciples. He challenged exploitation and oppression, collided with self-satisfied guardians of the law, restored prophetic criticism, and preached a message of liberty.

For liberation theology, sin is both personal and political, as is salvation. Jesus proclaimed forgiveness to sinful individuals and came up against a sinful structure.

Christians follow Jesus' example in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, in prophesizing against social injustices, and in advocating liberation from oppression.

Howard Thurman argues that Christianity's deepest mission requires linking individual and societal conversion. The "inward center" is the "crucial arena where the issues would determine the destiny of his people" (Thurman 1996, 11). Inaugurating the path toward liberating spirituality, Thurman argues that life under persecution offers no justification for avoiding courageous, imaginative action. He challenges the marginalized to refuse to cede in resisting fear, hypocrisy, and hatred. Thurman criticizes those followers of Jesus who do not pay attention to the suffering of the homeless, the poor, the abused, the alienated, and the deprived. He asserts that the faith community should work on an alternative consciousness that helps the disinherited. He calls for a transformed generation of pioneers to take on the challenge of confrontation, re-creation, and healing for themselves, for nations, and for the world.

Through sharing immersion experiences with their communities, Sojourners have witnessed stirrings of transformation in community life and strengthened commitment toward the underprivileged and oppressed. St. Andrew's Women's Guild in Ramallah has nurtured mindfulness toward the least among us. Unlike in previous years, when activities focused on the community, the last 18 months have witnessed an abundance of outreach programs directed toward the elderly, orphans, the mentally, physically challenged, and the needy in the larger community. St. Andrew's organized a Christmas bazaar and raised $865 for a home for the elderly run by the St. Teresa nuns in Nablus. It carried out a Lenten project for needy families in Ramallah. It arranged a Christmas carol party and gifts for the elderly in Ramallah. Staff visited an orphanage in Bethlehem and

reported their visit to the community, raising $815 for the inhabitants. This might be a small amount of money, but for a community sustained by donations, it represents an act of solidarity. A holistic consciousness calls believers to a moment of possibility that addresses spiritual, social, economic, and political crises. The ultimate question is how to make a difference in the lives and situations of the least among us.

An Urgency Consciousness

Justice is an urgent commitment. Deciding that something can be postponed for the next generation to fix is not a just action. Justice is not "I am not affected; therefore, it is not urgent." Injustice affects all of us. Injustice inflicted on people in Africa affects those living in Europe. The wars in Iraq and Syria have brought dire regional and global consequences. The refugee crisis in the Middle East in the last five years is a good example of how consequences have spread to many countries. Terrorism has no borders. The interdependency of world communities is clear. A commitment to justice cannot be delayed. Conflicts must be resolved, poverty challenged, and oppression and war ended. Unless humanity understands the urgency of justice and peace, the world will continue to face upheavals, and victims will continue to suffer. The theory of intersectionality argues that different forms of injustice intersect, as do places where injustice is perpetrated.

The church needs to accept the need for urgency in commitment to justice; leadership needs to construct strategic plans and execute them. Christianity in the Palestinian Occupied Territories has been declining. It has vanished from many villages in the last fifty years. Many anticipate the disappearance of Christian communities from the Holy Land within three decades. Excruciatingly, there has not been any effective theological discourse or strategic planning to confront this catastrophe. The pervasive

attitudes are “not in our time,” “nothing can be done,” and “not true.” Christianity is disappearing from Iraq and declining from Syria. Meanwhile, the environmental crisis continues to endanger many species and threaten the planet that all creation calls home.

An urgent consciousness moves “past indecision to action” (King and Washington 1992, 151). It is the antidote to “too late.” Advocating peace and justice in Vietnam, Martin Luther King Jr. urged leaders to find ways to speak to the world. “If we do not act,” King asserts, “we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight” (King and Washington 1992, 151).

The urgency of transformation and justice emerges from understanding God’s aspiration. God does not will his community to suffer oppression and violence. He wishes that oppression will cease and violence end. His purpose is salvation and freedom.

In *“Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks*, Walter Brueggemann asserts that the prophetic practice must be an urgent engagement for the Church. Social, economic, political, and religious realities point to dire consequences, and thus require attention not only for the sake of the vulnerable but also for the Church’s relevance. Brueggemann explains:

> The terms – justice, righteousness, steadfast love – all concern the neighborliness, and the tone is one of urgency! So it is in the prophetic witness against the ideology of exceptionalism. The prophets insist that there is an alternative that pertains to concrete socio-economic practice that must be undertaken just in the nick of time. (Brueggemann 2014, 39)

A Consciousness of God’s Aspiration

Reflecting on their mission, religious leaders pose the questions: What is God’s aspiration? Related to this are personal questions: Are the leadership’s desires and

ministry reflective of God's aspiration? Does leadership crave power and lordship or servanthood and humility? The Bible is full of narratives about cravings for power and ownership, which lead to rebellion and sin. Adam and Eve rebelled against God and God's project for creation, pursuing a personal agenda. Cain murdered his brother Abel in rebellion against God's aspiration for companionship neighborliness. Cain pursued individualism in the city he "created" and ruled, rather than accepting the lordship of the Creator. Scriptures tells us that human cravings are rife, as in the example of the tower of Babel, where creatures yearn to be creators and mortals crave immortality. The consequences of departing from God's aspiration are destructive.

Humans reject creatureliness and aspire to *creatorliness* to balance its dependency and mortality. Reinhold Niebuhr explains that human will-to-power is the source of pride and basis for sin and injustice. In *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Niebuhr writes:

> Man [sic] is insecure and involved in natural contingency; he seeks to overcome his insecurity by will-to-power which overreaches the limits of human creatureliness. Man [sic] is ignorant and involved in the limitations of a finite mind; but he pretends that he is not limited. He assumes that he can gradually transcend finite limitations until his mind becomes identical with universal mind… Man [sic] pride and will-to-power disturbs the harmony of creation. The bible defines sin in both religious and moral terms. The religious dimension of sin is injustice. The ego which falsely makes itself the center of existence in its pride and will-to-power inevitably subordinates other life to its will and thus does injustice to other life.(Niebuhr 1964, 178-179)

The aspiration of God for humanity is exemplified in God's inquiries, "Where is your brother?" An example of human will-to-power, ownership, and lordship produces destruction and blood: "What have you done?" Humanity's "crying out to me from the ground" prompted God to intervene on behalf of those who beseech him (Gn. 4:9-10). Leadership functions between two extremes: God's aspiration and human will-to-power.

The latter is a "city" trajectory and the former a prophetic one. The latter can be efficaciously transforming whereas the former effectively destructive.

The city trajectory leads to insecurity, anxiety, and self-centeredness. Its characteristics are power, control, individualization, and privatization. Cain's path competes against God's aspiration – annihilation of brother and sister and building one's own city rather than God's Kingdom. Power, ownership, and personal glory lead to fratricide – elimination of companionship and community for the sake of control. Such leadership results in hegemony, dictatorship, supremacy, and corruption.

In *The Meaning of the City*, Jacques Ellul maintains that the city represents the absolute work of humans – and as such, symbolizes humans' ultimate refusal of God's Kingdom. The city denotes the rebellious human heart in opposition to the possibility of companionship as envisioned by God. Ellul argues that biblical narratives call for human transformation and liberation through a life of communion, by which the city is transformed. For Ellul, the history of the city from Cain to the present reveals a human tendency to domination (Ellul and Pardee 2011, 4-5).

The city trajectory is one that seeks a leader's satisfaction rather than God's aspiration. Some leaders care much about building a "name" or crafting a "legacy" that will last for eternity; thus, they crave to inscribe their names on buildings. The Diocese of Jerusalem had to go to court to redeem one of its institutions after the school was privatized by a bishop who changed its name from Christ School to Bishop Riah Abu El Assal Educational Campus. Building a city is different from building a community.

What is the alternative to the city trajectory? Ellul argues that the city of God emerges through Jesus Christ, who provides an alternative to the dominating

consciousness of insecurity, anxiety, and will-to power. The alternative resides in the community of faith that comes under the kingship of God, and that willingly attends to the needs of "the least of these." (Mt 25:42-45)

A Conversion Consciousness

Leaders are commissioned to change the world-as-it-is. They need to wield capacity to speak truth and to evoke change. The mission of prophetic advocacy introduces an alternative paradigm faithful to God's aspiration. Such a paradigm aims at dismantling the dominant consciousness and energizing communities for change.

A conversion consciousness aims to bring in alternative realities of hope by changing the unjust realities of the world. It provides the possibility of transformation. It creates, nurtures, and advocates an alternative to the dominant culture, and it empowers communities to engage with hope and faith. Jesus' solidarity with outcasts constitutes a radical form of social criticism. Jesus does not accept anything that hurts people as being normal or natural, but declares injustice to go against God's purpose. Jesus' compassion toward the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized should be understood as a public criticism not only of political and economic realities but also of religious structures that attempt to accommodate the prevailing social system.

In *Christ and Culture,* Richard Niebuhr crafts different models according to which the Church can relate to culture. The *Christ Transforming Culture* model posits a Redeemer who came to transform this world's culture into God's "culture." He does so by "living with men [sic] in great humility, enduring death for their sake, and rising again from the grave in a demonstration of God's grace" (Niebuhr 1951, 191). Christ called his community to live fully in a culture under God's sovereign rule, with a positive and

hopeful attitude. The followers of Christ are conversionists for Niebuhr. They are creatures, working in a created world, and living under the rule of Christ by creative power and by order of the divine Word. "The Word that became flesh and dwelt among us, the Son who does the work of the Father in the world of creation," states Niebuhr, "has entered into a human culture that has never been without his ordering action" (Niebuhr 1951, 193). In the view of conversionists, the world is not bad but corrupt: "It is perverted good, not evil; or it is evil as perversion, and not as badness of being. The problem of culture is therefore the problem of its conversion, not of its replacement by a new creation; though the conversion is so radical that it amounts to a kind of rebirth" (Niebuhr 1951, 194). History, for conversionists, is the story of God's mighty deeds and of human rejoinders to them. Thus, for the conversionist, the "now" is what matters, not any eschatological future. *Chronos* is determined by the *kairos* of discernment, commitment, and action in the power of God for the sake of transforming the corrupt world into God's world. "Eternal life is a quality of existence in the here and now," and what really matters is "a divine possibility of a present renewal" (Niebuhr 1951, 195).

For Niebuhr, sin is the human desire to be God to oneself, making the self the center of everything in life, whether self refers to individuals, communities, or cultures. Transformation is conversion from self-centeredness toward God-centeredness. In this sense, the Kingdom is both "actuality and possibility," through a divine mission into the very particularities of human existence and action. Niebuhr writes:

> The Kingdom of God is transformed culture, because it is the first of all the conversions of the human spirit from faithlessness and self-service to the knowledge and service of God. This kingdom is real, for if God did not rule nothing would exist; and if He had not heard the prayer for the coming of the kingdom, the world of mankind [sic] would long ago have become a den of robbers. Every moment and period is an eschatological

> present, for in every moment men [sic] are dealing with God. (Niebuhr 1951, 228-229)

Transformation is the aspiration of God for his world. He seeks the world-as-it-is and calls it into being through transformation of souls and societies. Leaders are called to convert the current corrupt structures of the world into the aspiration of God.

A Pluralistic Consciousness

A transformation and justice consciousness by nature is oriented toward interconnection. It seeks out human difference as invaluable, and draws in others who share a common home called Earth and who want to join in transforming the world-as-it-is into a world intended-by-God. It never delights in private glory, denominational strength, or even national ideals, visions, or ideologies. It nurtures communities and societies that value change in self as well as in public relations. Pluralism, therefore, is a foundation on which to build common missions.

Transformation and justice consciousness advocates mutuality, pluralism, and the common good. In *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*, Miroslav Volf challenges totalitarian religion, which forces its absolute truth on other truths; he also opposes the absence of religion from the public square, which he believes reduces freedom and democracy. Volf argues for pluralism as a political project that embraces all religious and entities favoring healthy society. Volf explains: “When religion leaves the public square – or is driven from it – the public square does not remain empty. Instead it becomes filled with a diffuse phenomenon called secularism” (Volf 2011, 124). Whether through exclusivity, totalitarianism, or secularism, the dominant cultural trend today is toward homogeneity, which negates otherness. Transformation

recognizes the other as a partner in advocating compassion and reform of unjust social, political, and economic structures. In a society with multiple groups, transformation and justice consciousness calls on diverse entities to seek shared aims.

Since injustice affects everyone, a justice consciousness advocates joint missions for transformation and justice, whatever the commonalities and differences among members of our diverse society. The goal becomes pursuing a shared mission. When wildfires broke out in many parts of Israel in 2016, Palestinians sent firefighting teams. The crisis brought Israelis and Palestinians together. In a country divided by occupation, walls, military barricades, and animosity, and in an area where no Palestinian vehicles or personnel are allowed without permits, Israel accepted an offer of help from the Palestinian Authority. "Fire doesn't distinguish between Jews and Arabs," stated Ayman Odeh, Member of the Israel Knesset. Conflicts, disagreement, and differences should not interfere with saving lives and property. "'During disasters, we must put politics to the side, because disasters bring us together; they do not pull us apart…I believe that joint work can be the start of understanding the other and his needs,'" said Nael Azzah, Palestinian Authority Civil Defense Spokesperson. (Rasgon 2016)

A pluralistic consciousness helps leaders and communities recognize and cherish both differences and commonalities but also focus on the common good. Volf writes:

> In relations between religions, both differences and commonalities count. If we see only differences, we will empower those who sow hatred rather than peace, and who promoted conflict rather than cooperation. If we see only commonalities, we will either have to conform ourselves to others or they will have to conform to us; most likely, we will distort and dishonor both others and ourselves. Only when we see and respect both – undeniable differences that give commonalities a peculiar character and commonalities that bind them together – will we be able to honor each and promote the viable coexistence of all. (Volf 2011, 140)

A culture of respecting and honoring differences and commonalties is a culture of loving one's neighbor as one would love oneself. Volf calls this a "pleasure of love" culture, pointing out that it is common to all religions. Its ethos is "in everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Mt 7:12a). This moral principle transcends differences among individuals, communities, and nations. Volf advocates replacing the clash of civilization with "a vision of cooperation of those who are clearly different and yet have much in common" (Volf 2011, 141). He proposes, "Pluralism as a political project," a missional project toward recognizing the other as a partner in a culture that transcends personal, communal, and national pleasure.

In his book, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*, Willis Jenkins describes an approach he terms pragmatic pluralism as able to elevate the engagement of Christianity in social, economic, and environmental justice. He writes: "Christian ethics should work from problems rather than worldviews because problems mediate theologically charged demands, thus driving the inventiveness of communities seeking to open practices of faith through their responses" (Jenkins 2013, 95). Such an approach calls for cooperation within Christian communities and with other faith communities to fight injustice. Pragmatic pluralism recognizes the goodness of the other and the richness that the other can contribute to the wellbeing of God's creation.

In *Shalom/Salam/Peace: A Liberation Theology of Hope,* Constance Hammond envisions the necessity of an "all-encompassing theology of liberation within the Abrahamic community." Reflecting on the Israel/Palestinian conflict, Hammond writes:

> After all, these great religions have at their core the same statements of liberation – of peace – of compassion – of justice. The fragment of Jesus' people remaining in Israel/Palestine can be the beginning of a new union of faith within the larger, international Christian community itself, and

> within the sisterhood and brotherhood of Abrahamic relational religions, remodeled or broadened to encompass the diverse theologies of the three Abrahamic faiths. This kind of union could bring an opportunity and an offering of independent yet equal bonding that would allow each to operate out of its own faith stance in step with one another, yet separate from one another in a cooperative and compatible rather than a combative way. (Hammond 2008, 112)

Achieving transformation and justice is a communal endeavor. Justice is the ultimate need for all, and therefore, all God's people are called to join in transforming the social order.

A Prophetic-Servant Leadership Paradigm

Finally, a transformation and justice consciousness is grounded on a prophetic-servant leadership paradigm that serves the community and the world. A prophetic-servant leader tries to walk in the footsteps of the One "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-8). The prophetic-servant leadership model offers Jesus as a leadership paradigm, a servant and prophet who obediently, sacrificially, and prophetically embodied God's aspiration through his life, ministry, suffering, death and resurrection.

The prophetic-servant paradigm emphasizes the role of the leader as a servant in the prophetic tradition. Prophets are not only those who pronounce judgment, but also those who counteract false ideologies and attitudes and provide alternatives. The task of prophetic-servant leaders transcends sustaining communities into developing pragmatic "strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable" (Osmer 2008, 176).

How can leaders become servants and prophets to a community facing injustice in a particular time and place?

The goal of prophetic-servant leadership is to engage in a practice that evokes the congregation's consciousness and influences culture. A prophetic practice, I maintain, is one that counteracts false principles. Jesus' washing the disciples' feet is an act of a prophetic-servant. In a context where slaves wash the feet of their masters, Jesus' foot-washing practice counteracts this dominating belief. In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus performed a service and at the same time transformed an exploitive master-slave culture. Prophetic-servant leadership is one of unending love, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1b). It is one of radical humility and action: "Knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands...[he] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with the towel that was tied around him" (Jn 13:3). It is a practice of discipleship: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me" (Jn 13:8b). Jesus explains that washing was an act of reciprocal brotherhood, and that each disciple should act for another. Jesus said:

> Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (Jn 13:12b-15)

Jesus offered an alternative to the false perceptions of his time. Foot-washing today needs to transcend ritualism. "The Church, in its prophetic practice," asserts Brueggemann, "has important work to do; that work… is indispensable for the future viability of our society. It is, moreover, work that is likely to remain undone until it is undertaken by a faithful, courageous, emancipated Church" (Brueggemann 2014, 15).

On Holy Thursday, 2016, Pope Francis washed the feet of eleven refugees: four Nigerian Catholics, three Christians from Eritrea, three Muslims from Syria, Pakistan, and Mali, and one Indian Hindu. As he knelt before the migrants, he sent a message to individuals, communities, and nations that fear of refugees should not dominate society. The venue where the event took place was indicative: a center for asylum seekers outside Rome. The timing was indicative: anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiment was high in Europe in the wake of terrorist attacks in France and Belgium. Francis' homily was indicative: "All of us together, Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, Copts, Evangelicals brothers and sisters – Children of the same God – we want to live in peace" (Izadi 2016). In a world where voices against refugees have reached a chorus, Pope Francis' act of service was prophetic: it challenged individual, social, and cultural prejudice.

The foot-washing ritual became a servant-prophetic act in the face of bigotry and Islamophobia. Francis embraced strangers – those marginalized and rejected by false ideologies. In the face of the global refugee crisis, Francis perceived a *kairos* moment, terming migration a "structural reality" and calling on individuals, communities, and nations to welcome migrants. He said, "Migrants are our brothers and sisters in search of a better life, far away from poverty, hunger, exploitation and the unjust distribution of the planets' resources which are meant to be equitably shared by all" (Izadi 2016).

In August 2016, Pope Francis initiated an *agape* meal ritual: eating and drinking with outcasts. He invited 21 Syrian refugees to have lunch with him at the Casa Santa Marta. Francis "presented the children with toys and gifts and the children gathered around the pope to give him a collection of their drawings" (Brochhous 2016). Francis' servant-prophetic actions send messages to Christians and to all people of good will.

Like the ancient prophets who criticized individuals, communities, religious institutions, and kings' infidelity, servant-prophetic leaders call on us to be faithful to the word of God. Prophetic-servant leaders draw on Jesus' life to critique popular ideologies that exert control in a particular time and place. Osmer writes:

> Prophetic discernment is the task of listening to this Word and interpreting it in ways that address particular social conditions, events, and decisions before congregations today. Such discernment is a matter of divine disclosure and theological interpretation in the face of popular or official theologies that may be leading the world towards disaster. (Osmer 2008, 135)

The servant of God serves God's aspiration. The prophet of God defends God's aspiration. The prophetic-servant mission addresses socioeconomic and political realities and crises in the church. It points out indifference toward suffering. It challenges ideas that do not comport with reality, making clear that these lead to crisis.

A prophetic-servant paradigm is best described as a counter paradigm, one that does not accept ungodly structures. The prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures criticized evil ways and incompetence. In *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile*, Walter Brueggemann describes Jeremiah as "designed for conflict," a quality of ministry assigned by God to those who are 'over-against' (Brueggemann 1986, 12). Jeremiah participates in the "against-ness" of God. God said to Jeremiah:

> But you, gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them. And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you. (Jer 1:17-19)

The servant-prophetic paradigm acknowledges that "againstness" foresees confrontation and resistance. Resistance is a healthy sign for those operating within the paradigm.

"Thus in his very call," explains Brueggemann, "Jeremiah is designed by God for conflict. That is his vocation and the sure shape of his call" (Brueggemann 1986, 12).

The prophetic-servant leader does not enable the system to hinder transformation, even if that system is the church itself. When the church becomes merely the echo and facilitator of the status quo, and when it uses the Bible to prove false ideologies and legitimize harmful practices, it becomes a force against liberation. The task of prophetic-savant is to bring into being a community willing to do different things in different ways and to design and carry out strategies for desirable change. Richard Osmer calls this approach "the pragmatic task of leading change." Those who embrace it "face not only the external challenge of a changing social context, but also the internal challenges of helping their congregations rework their identity and mission" (Osmer 2008, 176).

A prophetic-servant leadership must first gain a solid understanding of a given crisis. Next, the leader should instill a sense of urgency among community members. The leader then helps the community organize its response by adopting a compelling and achievable vision. By walking the talk, the leader empowers others to shape and enact community strategies that provide alternatives. Such alternatives guide communities to achieve soulful and societal change.

God introduced a prophetic servant committed to God's aspiration. Jesus Christ is the alternative paradigm for his context. He represents God's nature and mission, one of humility, compassion, service and self-sacrificial love. In response to the disciplines' request that they be honored with status and authority, Jesus explains that leadership is not about glory but about servanthood. He said:

> You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is

> not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mk 42-45)

Superiority, supremacy, hierarchy, and self-centeredness do not reflect God's aspiration. These characteristics typify the paradigm of the dominating oppressive system. Jesus's personification of God's aspiration follows the prophetic-servant leadership paradigm. Jesus washed his disciples' feet, teaching them to follow his example.

When leadership looks beyond itself and its parochial institutions, it will find God at work. Jesus affirms that God does not reside solely in shrines and temples. The scope of spirit and truth surpasses space and time (cf. 4:24). Leadership needs to engage in the world *not only* to bring God to the world, *but most importantly* to meet God in the world. Transformation means joining God's mission in the world and encountering an ever-liberating God in the very situation of oppression and of joy. Joerg Rieger affirms:

> An understanding that God is at work not just in particular faith communities but also in the world at large could make a tremendous difference in our churches today. It would break open the narcissism that so often keep us tied not only to our church buildings and pews, but also to our own ideas and our own ways of life. Such church, even if they seem to flourish for a time, are ultimately doom because they miss the God who is on the move in the world. Adding a little outreach is not enough either, as self-centered churches that engage in outreach ministries often assume their task is to take a God who is primarily housed in their sanctuaries out into the world. What these churches miss is the opportunity to meet God at work in the world and in creation. (Rieger 2015, 21)

Christian faith empowers transformation beyond individual and parochial contexts. The Bible repeatedly calls the faithful to go forth and make the world a better place.

John Cobb argues that the world becomes as-intended-by God when humans engage in what he describes as creative transformation, mirroring Christ's novelty and presence. Cobb explains:

> Creative transformation is the essence of growth, and growth is the essence of life. Growth is not achieved by merely adding together elements in the given world in different combinations. It requires the transformation of those elements through the introduction of novelty. It alters their nature and meaning without suppressing or destroying them. The source of the novelty is the Logos, whose incarnation is Christ. Where Christ is effectively present, there is creative transformation. (Cobb and Griffin 1976, 100)

God is active in the world, working to create new things. God presses humans to show creative-responsive love toward self, neighbors, and all of creation.

God's love encourages us to move beyond past patterns toward greater love, life, and freedom. God provides means for us to heal ourselves and free the world from the bondage of sin and evil. God continues to anoint agents for transformation: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Lk 10:2). God meets us on the road, broadens our understanding, and presents us with choices that will allow us to embody new and demanding possibilities.

Conclusion

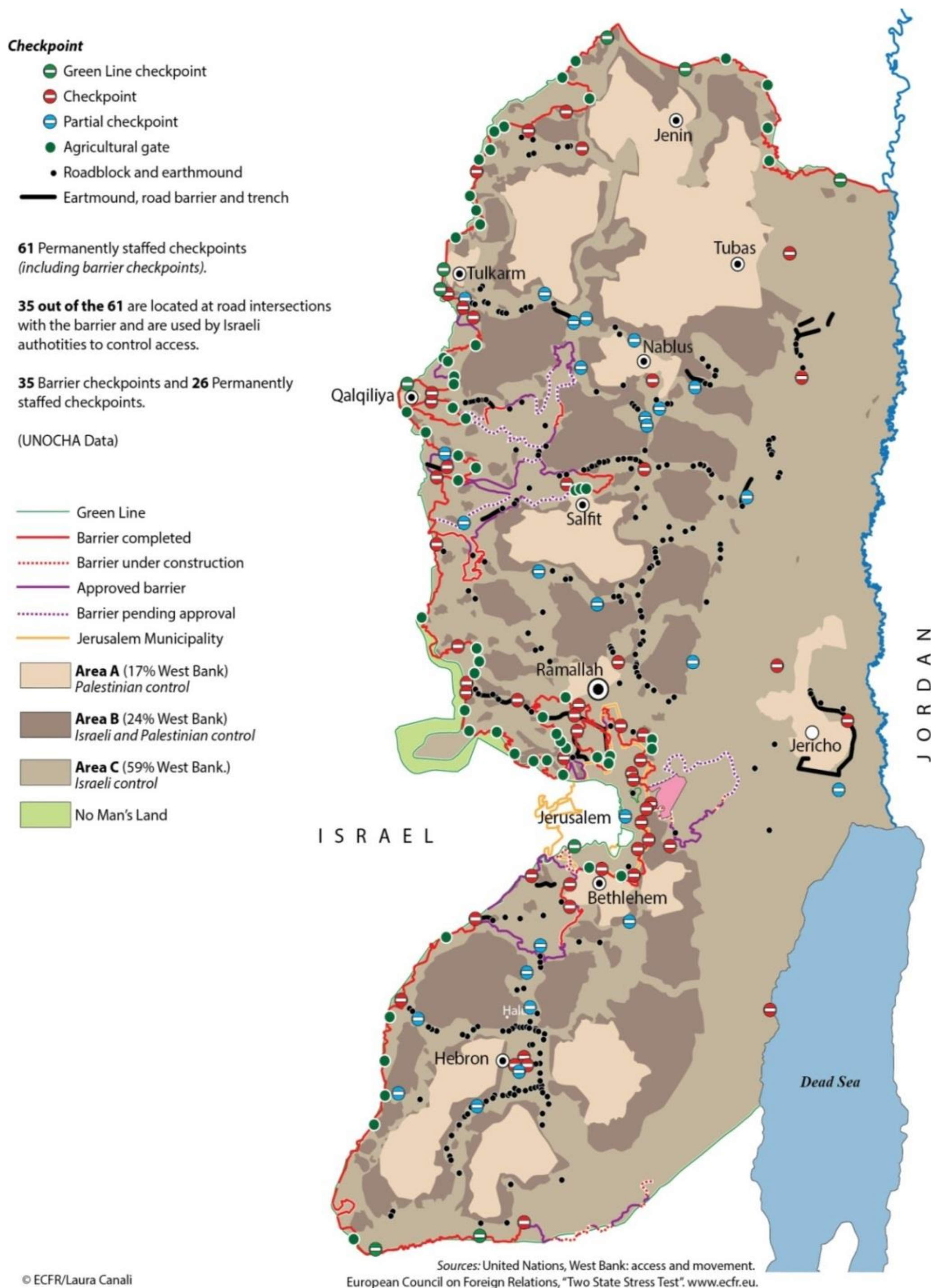
Justice is an intrinsic characteristic of the Divine, another name for God. Human justice shares a common origin with divine justice. Being in and relating to God, humans represent God's nature and mission in a broken world.

A transformation and justice consciousness calls leaders and communities to recognize crises and to embrace *kairos* moments for liberation. God continues to observe the misery of his people and to hear their cries. He continues to commission leaders to dismantle cultures of violence, hatred, inequality, and indifference in favor of peace, love, and neighbourliness. A transformation and justice ministry requires acting urgently

to create, nurture, and sustain a new consciousness. Christians are called to be agents of societal transformation and co-creators of a just and merciful order. Transformation is a way of life, a spiritual practice that sees creation in the heart of God. It moves leadership out of itself, as the spirit wishes, into anxious communities, fragmented societies, and groaning creation. Spiritual and societal transformation is the ultimate task of Christian leadership, whose role in transforming consciousness ultimately transforms the world.

Appendix: Maps

West Bank: Access and Movement



West Bank: Separation Wall

West Bank Wall - Map 2006

West Bank Area Percentages After the Wall

Areas West of the Wall 9.5%
Settlement Bloc Areas behind the Wall 8.0%
Jordan Valley 28.5%
Remaining Palestinian Areas East of the Wall 54%

Percentages of Palestinian West Bank Population Directly Affected by the Wall

Population Isolated Outside the Walled Areas 10.2%
Population Separated from Cultivated Land by the Wall 8.9%
Population Separated from Cultivated Land by Wall Sections Around the Ariel Settlement Bloc 3.1%

Settlers in OPT 2005
247,100 Settlers in West Bank
190,000 Settlers in East Jerusalem

Land Control in East Jerusalem

34.0% expropriated for "public use"
9.0% designated for settlement expansion
44.0% 'Green Areas'
13.0% left for Arab nighborhoods

Jordan Valley	250,000 dunums
Israel controls	200,000 dunums
Palestinians control	50,000 dunums

85% water controled by Israel
3,500 - 4,000 Jordan Valley settlers

Septemper 2005
End of the settlers occupation of the Gaza strip, redeployment of the Israeli army

15th June 2007
Hamas's take over of the Gaza strip

Map : © Jan de Jong

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