



from Garth...

The myth of redemptive violence



Around Remembrance Sunday I was reading some articles that brought home to me the huge quantities of weapons and violence in which our country and so many other countries are involved. Places like Yemen and Gaza were on my mind. Gill and I went to our church, St Botolph's Aldgate in London, on the 11th November, and Andrew Richardson, the Chaplain, preached reminding us of "The Myth of Redemptive Violence." This phrase, from the theologian Walter Wink, is a constant challenge to the speed with which our societies rush towards violence as some sort of solution.

Andrew went on to say, "War continues to wreak its terrible havoc on human life and community... War ultimately is never about victors and vanquished, it is wholly about death and waste, the failure of relationships, of life itself made into a battlefield. It marks our failure to be properly human and children of God together, and it is sin because life and creation, the very gifts of God to us all, are taken and by bomb, bayonet, bullet or gas, so very easily destroyed."

One of the articles I read was by Alan Storkey from July 2016. It was called "**War Does Not Work, Disarmament Does**" and includes these words:

"Mutual disarmament is easier than mutual armament. Swords into ploughshares is more practical than arms races which bankrupt nations and produce catastrophes... Those who back arms are weak, because they are wrong; they can only destroy. Making peace works. Nation can speak peace unto nation and we can

learn war no more... War does not work. Industrial militarism is destroying the planet. We can move from the woe of war to worldwide disarmament and the manufacture of peace. That is our Christian calling.”

Another challenging article was by the great journalist Robert Fisk on November 19, called “**We Remember the Great War, While Palestinians Live It**” ending with these words:

“As for the Palestinians who wake up every morning today in the dust and filth of the camps of Nahr el-Bared, Ein el-Helwe or Sabra and Chatila in Lebanon, Balfour’s pen scratched his signature on this document of dispossession not in 1915, but only last night. For these refugees, still in their hovels and shacks as you read these words, the First World War never ended – not even now, today, on the hundredth anniversary of the “end” of the First World War.”

Both very important articles reminding us to remember our history and to challenge the nightmare of the arms business bombing Yemen and Gaza even as we remembered “the war to end all wars”.

At the end of our service in St.Botolph’s we said this simple prayer before the blessing to send us out at the end of our Remembrance Sunday service:

Let us commit ourselves to responsible living

And faithful service

Will you strive for all that makes for peace

We will

Will you seek to heal the wounds of war

We will

Will you work for a just future for all humanity

We will

Visit to Bethlehem

Gill and I have just had a most moving visit to Bethlehem. Local people were kind enough to put on a gathering for me, to say thank you for my work and commitment to Palestine. This was all brought together in the Walled Off Hotel – Banksy’s hotel – by Wisam Salsaa, Manager of the hotel, former tour guide, longtime friend. His wife Rasha was also there, and one of my Goddaughters, Leah. It was impressive to be with such a good group of friends and partners; right in the shadow of the huge separation wall, but here they were, all committed to beautiful ways of non-violent resistance.

Friends and partners included Zoughbi Zoughbi and Elaine from Wi’am, Elias D’eis from Holy Land Trust, and Abdelfattah Abusrour from Alrowwadd, Dr. Mitri and Najwa Raheb – Pastor of the Lutheran Christmas Church, Dr. Mazin and Jessie

Qumsiyeh - Founder of the Palestine Museum of Natural History, Jeff Halper - Israeli academic and Founder of ICAHD, Marwan Fararjeh - friend and tour guide, Rafat Shomali from Peace by Piece, Rev Danny Awad from Baraka Presbyterian Church and Dr. Bishara Awad, President Emeritus of Bethlehem Bible College.

Mitri Raheb summed up the appreciation, saying, "When I think of you, Garth, three things come to mind. The first thing is creative resistance - you use songs as a way to resist. Secondly a commitment to justice - justice for Palestine but also in so many other places that need it. The third 'C' is Christian values - because all that you do comes out of the Christian values that you believe. These values in your songs and writings are not exclusive but they are inclusive, they are human values." Mitri concluded by thanking Gill also for being such a friend to Palestine, echoing the words of many of the other speakers.

Amos' Director Chris Rose sent a very moving message for the occasion – "Your commitment to the Palestinian people through your friendship, music and writing has been and still is hugely important. Your commitment to speaking out is inspiring and has given others confidence to do the same."

The whole evening of such warmth and friendship in the shadow of the apartheid wall made me think if there is any hope today it is with people like this. These are the hardest times Palestinians have faced since 1948 – they are still there, still forgotten, still ignored, and their land is still being taken. As I sang *No Injustice Will Last Forever* that night, I was looking out the window and a patrol of the Israeli Army passed, right by the devastating apartheid wall – signs of the harsh occupation - in stark contrast to the love and steadfastness being expressed within the Walled Off Hotel. **So deep thanks to the friends who gave such a warm and meaningful evening – because of you Palestine is always in our hearts."**

Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom and Rachel's Tomb



Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom with Garth in the Walled Off Hotel

While in Bethlehem we had a message from another old friend, Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom. Years ago we used to meet up regularly, and I've quoted him several times in my books. On our last day this time we managed to link up again. He came out to Bethlehem with a Palestinian friend of his. It was great to be reminded of the warmth of his friendship, his utter rejection of oppression and violence, and his support for the Palestinian people – it was very good to be in touch again.

There's a song I'm including on tour at the moment called *Song For Miriam* which is about my first visit to Gaza, and in the chorus I quote some words of Rabbi Jeremy – he had talked to me about the soul of their nation being at stake because of what they were doing to the Palestinian community, and so the chorus of *Song for Miriam* says:

**What's this war against the children, against the women too,
What's this war against the refugees – what's it do to you?
What's it do to your soul, soldier boy, power only makes you weak,
You've become what the gun has made you,
You're the one we fear to meet, you're the terror on the street**

Talking to an Israeli soldier

While we were in Bethlehem there was a Jewish festival connected to Rachel's Tomb. Rachel's Tomb is right beside the Walled Off Hotel, but you can't get to it from the Palestinian side because it's blocked off by sections of the huge separation wall. Because it was a Jewish festival the army closed down access to Bethlehem.



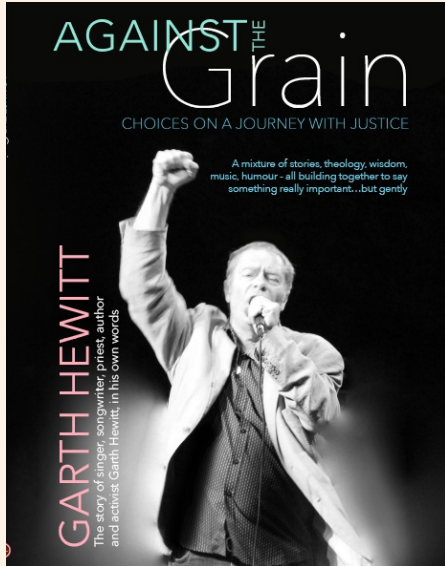
Soldiers on the streets of Bethlehem

The first historically recorded pilgrimages to Rachel's Tomb were by early Christians, and Christians talked about devotion to the shrine by local Muslims and then later also by Jews. It was seen as a place to be shared and it was held in esteem equally by Jews, Muslims and Christians.

The OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) Special Rapporteur John Dugard noted that: "Although Rachel's Tomb is a site holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians, it has effectively been closed to Muslims and Christians."

I had visited it before the separation wall was around it and wrote about that visit in my book *A Candle of Hope*. I also quote Rabbi Jeremy, "Today Rachel's Tomb has been turned into a fortress - it's a monument to our insecurity, to our inability to recognise the Palestinians would respect Jewish yearnings and worship and attachment to a holy site. If only we allow them to do that and not turn it into another act of 'this is mine' and 'I'm gonna call the shots'. My Palestinian friend Omar mentioned to me the other day that they used to call the tomb 'our mother' - that this was shorthand for the tomb. Now we could all relate to Rachel as our mother, and then we would be one step closer to understanding."

At one point as we were walking beside Wi'am Conflict Resolution Centre a gate opened in the separation wall and we were looking at the road that was the main entrance to Bethlehem a few years before, and there was Rachel's Tomb and a group of Jewish Orthodox people. **There was an army patrol in front of the gate and I chatted to one soldier and asked him who could visit Rachel's Tomb, and he said it was for Jewish people only. But as he said that I could see it in his eyes, that he had the good grace to be embarrassed.**



Against the Grain - special offer

On page 11 in my book *Against the Grain* I tell the story of how I wrote the Christmas song *Bethlehem is Calling*.

"Bethlehem is Calling is one of two songs that I wrote in the Church of the Nativity in Manger Square in Bethlehem. It was sparked off by a Christmas card I received from Bishop Riah Abu el Assal; he talked of what happened in Bethlehem at Christmas as being a "conspiracy of love" - one of those expressions that sticks in your mind, slightly mysterious, slightly unclear, and somehow it

reminded me of those words, "How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given..." Something extraordinary is happening – quietly – who brings this conspiracy? Maybe the members of the Trinity! Maybe something to do with the angels. Why a conspiracy? Because it is turning everything upside down in the name of love. Bursting through the darkness, bringing hope. Then the chorus of the song uses the imagery of the low door of the Church of the Nativity – you have to stoop to get in. Built like this years ago to stop people riding in on horseback, somehow it means one enters the birthplace of Christ in the right spirit. And what Bethlehem offers the world it offers quietly:

'Bethlehem is calling quietly – brings a gift of peace

Whisp'ring of a conspiracy of love

To a world of wars and violence – this loving call's the one to heal us

Beat the swords to ploughshares, start again.

And here it comes...'

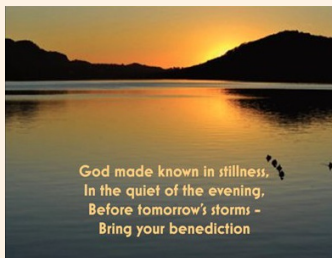
It is the quiet revolution."

This time last year we had just realised that the memoir *Against the Grain* which we had aimed to get out for Christmas wasn't quite going to make it! And so this is its first official Christmas and Isobel tells me that we're doing a special offer.

The normal price is £15 for the book, £12 for the CD, or £28 for both including postage - **if you order before 6th December we are offering them together for £25 including postage** - email isobel@garthhewitt.org, if you would like to take advantage of this offer.

Greetings cards

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, we've started doing a line in note cards, which I'm hoping people will find useful for sending, but also perhaps to sit somewhere and bring encouragement, prayer or challenge. We hope you enjoy them - we've produced six so far and have others planned. Here are some of the designs - I'll ask Isobel to put a note at the end of this newsletter about how you can get the cards.



Prayer for Advent

I love the Advent words of Oscar Romero and since this is the year in which he has been made a saint, I think it would be the correct way to finish this newsletter and I believe these words are needed more now than ever.

Advent should admonish us to discover
In each brother or sister that we greet,
In each friend whose hand we shake,
In each beggar who asks for bread,
In each worker who wants to use the right to join a union,
In each peasant who looks for work in the coffee groves,
The face of Christ.
Then it would not be possible to rob them,
To cheat them,
To deny them their rights.
They are Christ,



And whatever is done to them
Christ will take as done to him.
That is what Advent is:
Christ living among us.

Oscar Romero

Garth Hewitt

Greetings/Note cards

You can find the cards [on Garth's website, here](#) - they are available in sets of any five cards, your selection of designs - hopefully ordering is straightforward but if you have any problems, email isobel@garthhewitt.org

The cards are all blank inside for your own message.



Peace at Christmas - Christmas CD

And of course **Garth's Christmas CD is a perfect gift** - available [on the website here](#), or contact isobel@garthhewitt.org

All proceeds from the sale of Garth's books, CDs and cards support The Garth Hewitt Foundation

you can read more about [the GHF here](#)

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