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# THE FORUM

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### Holiday Pops & Christmas Joy

The Rev. Peter J. Miano

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I go to Symphony Hall in Boston for the annual Holiday Pops concert as often as I can, as part of my holiday celebration and preparation. The Pops is the *lite* version of the Boston Symphony Orchestra performing holiday classics and there is nothing quite like it to help make the season feel festive, cheery and gay. Santa Claus always shows up. There is always a sing-along. The entire adult audience, thirsty for an excuse, indulges in sheer glee.

A couple of years ago, though, it so happened that on the day of the concert, a disturbed young man brought tragedy and horror to his community and shock to our nation when he entered an elementary school in Newtown, Conn. and killed 20 children and six teachers before turning his

weapons on himself. All of a sudden, the frivolity of the Holiday Pops seemed not only strangely incongruous, but somehow perverse, too. Who can celebrate in such circumstances? But there I was at show time along with my elegant date and a concert hall full of other ambivalent revelers. Still, anticipation was tempered with deep sorrow. Excitement was garnished with shock. Joy seemed unthinkable or at least inappropriate.

Before the orchestra filed onto the stage, even before the curtain was drawn, Keith Lockhart, the conductor, walked on stage. The hall utterly dark, except for the spotlight that illuminated him alone. Naming the horror that had broken that day and the ambivalence we all felt, he opened a Bible he had brought and read these words:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.  
John 1:1, 5

So often, the beauty and joy of life is mocked by tragedy, sorrow and loss. Advent and even Christmas itself are not immune to life's inevitable, yet unpredictable and various assaults on our frantic efforts to deny life's sorrows. This year, no less than that Advent night three years ago, preparation for Christmas is framed amidst the myriad tragedies of human life. I wonder what joy there is this season for Christians in Beirut or Paris or Colorado Springs or San Bernardino who lost loved ones to violence.

In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*,

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### As If the Other Mattered

Dr. Thomas Phillips

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As I sit to write this column, I am preparing to lead a fresh SBS pilgrimage to Israel/Palestine in a few days. I've done this before. I took my first trip SBS trip to Israel, Palestine and Jordan in January 2000 (anyone remember the Y2K scare?). I have gone back often since then. Every single journey—to Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Greece—has produced new adventures, insights and friendships. I love the lands of the Bible! I have learned much; I have much left to learn. But let me share the one thing that I have learned above all else: *Pilgrimage is not tourism.* Bethlehem is not Six Flags over Jesus; having lunch in Jericho is not like driving through McDonalds; and the graffiti on that damn wall is not what makes the wall ugly.

Back in 2000, before my passport had any Middle Eastern stamps in it, I was already a college professor with a Ph.D. in New Testament and publications in the field. I knew the content of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, the ancient history and geography of the holy lands, and cultural traditions from which Christianity arose. But I knew nothing—and cared little—about the contemporary lands of the Bible.

Together, Peter Miano and I planned that trip to the Holy Land back in the fall of 1999. Peter encouraged me to visit Palestinian refugee camps. I was uninterested; I wanted to visit "Biblical sites." Peter coaxed me to include interfaith peace-making organizations on my itinerary. I was dismissive; I wanted nothing to do with "modern politics." Peter urged me to allow Israeli and Palestinian speakers to

address our groups in evening forums. I reluctantly agreed—as long as that would not interrupt our sight-seeing.

So, my 22 students and I set out for the holy lands on January 1, 2000. We had three evening forums in our Bethlehem hotel, one Palestinian and two Israelis. We had no idea what would come out of those conversations. One speaker, Jack, an Israeli settler from just a few miles away in Occupied Palestine, explained how God had given this land to the Jews and that all non-Jews should be immediately expelled. One student asked Jack what he would do with people who refused to leave. Jack said, "Shoot them." The student was shocked and said, "What do you mean?" Jack responded, "Line them up against a wall and shoot them, then reload and shoot until no one moves."

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## Thankfulness

Ms. Karen Thornton

The holidays are fast approaching and being thankful for God's blessings during this time is on our minds and hearts. As many of you know, my husband and I just returned from our second trip to the Holy Land. It was a trip of a different nature. We were privileged to travel with a small group of clergy from all over the USA with the leader, Rev. Peter Miano from The Society for Biblical Studies out of Massachusetts. This was an eye and heart opening experience for us.

First of all, we were not fearful and we were not in danger. To the best of my ability and leading of the Holy Spirit in truth, I am going to share with you some of our adventures in weeks to come. The question asked about fear and asking if we had a death wish, sadly to say, comes from the media telling you of a killing and war-like atmosphere present in the area. This is not truth. If I could share with you individually and know where you live, I could ask, are you afraid to go to Ferguson? New York? Los Angeles? Paris? Your level of fear depends on your evaluation of your destination. On 9/11, terrorists were able to kill many people, causing a national concern of security. The crime rate in some major US cities is greater than the danger of visiting the Holy Land. Would you go out into your own city, even your neighborhood at night? So what do you consider a dangerous environment? How does it become newsworthy? Well, how violent is it? Was it a child? Was it rape, torture or murder? What else is there to write about that causes more of a stir or captures a reader's attention than violence? Did you know there are websites that will give you a crime rate, right down to the neighborhood? Not only the rate, but a percentage of the chance of you becoming a victim. Before you travel in the US or out of the US, check the crime rate, check for safety. Then rate your fear level. How many times did you see the same bus burning in a news clip? or the same block showing action and chaos? Do you think that the news

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## The Magic Window

Dr. Mohammed Chtatou

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, the United States of America celebrates its Independence Day with much pride and joy. Morocco, on the other hand, celebrates over two centuries of uninterrupted good relations of friendship and beneficial exchange in total respect with the U.S. Morocco recognized within hours the independence of the U.S. and extended protection to its vessels from the pirates of the Barbary Coast. Today, the U.S. considers Morocco not only as a friend but most importantly as an ally, an important political player in the unstable Arab World and a model for Islam in the Muslim World which is torn apart by radicalism and violence. Both countries have embarked on strategic cooperation that will hopefully perpetuate understanding and goodwill between the two countries in the centuries to come.

Since the agreement between Morocco and the United States to begin Peace Corps activity in Morocco in 1961, about three thousand Volunteers have served there to undertake with its people the search for mutual understanding and peace and to work along with Moroccans to achieve economic and social development in the areas of education, agriculture/rural development/food, renewable energy, health, small business development, wildlife, social services, environmental education, etc.

Yet, in spite of centuries of friendship, understanding and peace between Moroccans and Americans, the distance, cultural differences, ignorance of each other and lack of interest combined together have created the ideal environment for stereotyping. To slip into a stereotype is an extremely easy step to undertake, but to slip out of one takes a bit of goodwill and willingness to acquire knowledge about the other and to get to know him better without bias and prejudice.

Moroccans have cultivated the following stereotypes about Americans as the result of many factors such as the mass-media (radio, television and the cinema mainly) as well as travelers' exaggerated accounts:

- All Americans with no exception are rich. This idea has in recent years been consolidated by such popular TV series

as "Dallas," "Dynasty," etc.

- The streets of America are real battlefields where people get killed "like flies" especially in such cities as New York, Chicago, Miami and Los Angeles.
- All American women are beautiful, tall and have blond hair and blue eyes.
- All Americans are self-centred and have no sense of sharing.
- Americans have no sense of family and no respect for old age.

Americans harbour the following stereotypes about Moroccans:

- All Moroccans wear robes, turbans, veils and layers of clothes.
- All Moroccan women are sensual, exotic, conservative, untouchable, vain and playful.
- Moroccan men are egotistical, macho, chauvinistic, exotic, ruthless and scheming, strict, restrictive and extremist, corrupt, conservative, backwards and reactionary, tribal and old-fashioned.
- People either live in Kasbahs or in tents in deserts among palm-trees and camels.

The Peace Corps Act, as established by Congress on September 21, 1961, states that the broad purpose is to "promote world peace and friendship" and that its three specific goals are:

- To help the people of interested countries and areas in meeting their needs for trained people
- To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the people served
- To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans

To achieve good cultural interaction in a given environment, many people believe today that certain knowledge of the language is sufficient to that effect. Experience has shown that they are wrong. Good cross-cultural communication is achieved

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## The Two State Illusion

Dr. Mark Braverman

On October 16 *The Christian Century* published my review of Rashid Khalidi's *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*. The fact that the *Century* reviewed Khalidi's book is an indication of the media's increasing willingness to present viewpoints that challenge the very basis of Israel as a Jewish ethnic nationalist entity. This shift reflects the reality that once you address present-day violations of Palestinian rights, you see that the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was the continuation of the program of ethnic cleansing that began in 1948 and continues to this day with the annexation and carving up of the West Bank and the inhuman siege of Gaza. You begin to understand that the dispossession of the Palestinians was the inevitable outcome of the project to set up a state for the benefit of one people. It is also becoming frighteningly clear that oppression and frankly racist policies on the part of Israel are not limited to occupied areas, but to the territory within the de facto borders of the State of Israel prior to the 1967 war.

A recently released documentary demonstrates this with horrifying vividness. Ali Abunimah, Palestinian writer, activist and publisher of the *Electronic Intifada*, has reported on a video entitled *Israel's New Racism: The Persecution of African Migrants in the Holy Land*, produced by Max Blumenthal and David Sheen, a piece solicited — and then rejected — by the *New York Times*. According to Blumenthal, it has since gone viral on YouTube, with close to one million views. The ten minute piece documents vicious, racist attacks on African residents of Israel incited by prominent demagogues and several members of the Israeli Parliament. The piece presents

**...the dispossession of the Palestinians was the inevitable outcome of the project to set up a state for the benefit of one people...**

voices, not only shrieking in public demonstrations but speaking calmly in office interviews, proclaiming that Israel is the land of the Jews and that non-Jews (especially those with black skin) are not welcome. The video is shocking — but it is not surprising. From our twentieth-century perspective, we understand all too well that ethnic nationalism breeds racism — that it is racism — and that oppression and violence — the bloody as well as the structural, state-sponsored kind — is the inevitable result. In his recently published *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*, Blumenthal documents Israel's escalating move to the political right, into what many would describe as fascism. The problem,

as I pointed out in my 2011 blog post about Peter Beinart and his brand of "progressive Zionism," (a piece accepted and then rejected by *The Nation*), is not the occupation, nor is it the religiously-based racism of fundamentalist Jewish settler-colonists — the problem is a state founded on an ethnic nationalist ideology. "The late and deeply mourned Tony Judt," I wrote then, "got it exactly right in his NYRB piece back in 2003: 'The problem with Israel [is that]...it has imported a characteristically late-nineteenth-century separatist project into a world that has moved on, a world of individual rights, open frontiers, and international law. The very idea of a 'Jewish state'—a state in which Jews and the Jewish religion have exclusive privileges from which non-Jewish citizens are forever excluded—is rooted in another time and place.'"

For over half a century, much of the world, with the U.S. in the lead, has accepted and supported this anachronistic and, by Judt's definition, illegitimate political entity. A central point of Khalidi's

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## Christmas in Bethlehem

Ms. Karen Thornton

One of Bethlehem's biggest days of the year — for Christians, it is the cradle of Christianity. When Pope Francis visited in 2014, he stated: "Do not be afraid or ashamed of your faith. Faith comes at a time when Christianity is under threat in the Middle East like never before".

We could talk about how the Islamic State has pushed some of the world's oldest Christian communities out of their home in northern Iraq. The choice was convert to Islam, or die. Manger Square next to the Church of the Nativity is celebrated as the birthplace of Jesus. But right now this area (West Bank) is separated by a wall separating Bethlehem from Jerusalem. Israel claims it is necessary to prevent attacks by militants. Where does justice come from and how will this be solved? We pray. Pope Francis stated: "I hope next year (2015) there will be no separation wall and I hope we will have bridges of peace instead". We pray.

The Minister of Tourism stated "Our message this Christmas (2014) is a message of peace like every year, but what we added this year is; all we want from Christmas is justice. Justice for our people, our case and the right to live like other people in the world in our independent state without occupation". In 2014 there were over 20,000 families displaced by the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and it goes on. This conflict is not just in Israel. Christians all over the world are being displaced by the challenge to convert to Islam or die.

I pray you know whom you believe in and you are faithful to that commitment. The song "I Know Whom I Have Believed". Not necessarily a Christmas hymn or song you will hear playing during the holiday season, but that is Christmas. "How believing in His Word wrought peace within my heart; Revealing Jesus through the Word, But I know whom I have believed, which I've committed unto Him against that day." If you don't know, it isn't too late.

During our time in Jerusalem

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The Society for Biblical Studies is a non-profit (IRC 501c3) organization. Our mission is to reform biblical scholarship by making it accessible, relevant and useful to the broader Church; to redeem the tradition of pilgrimage from commercial tourism; and to renew the mission of the church.

We seek the renewal of a vigorous biblical faith. We design and deliver journeys of contextual study of the Bible in the lands of the Bible. We are ecumenical, interfaith and inclusive. We invite you to participate in a ministry of reconciliation, to reach out across geographical, religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. We are dedicated to socially responsible travel.

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## Holiday Pops, cont'd

*(Continued from page 1)*

Linus struggles with anxiety as he anticipates opening night of the pageant. He struggles not just to memorize, but to repeat the verse at the heart of the Christmas story: "For behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which will be to all people; for unto you this day is born in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord." We don't learn what circumstances Linus finds himself in when he is stumbling over his lines. But we know that Advent and Christmastide are seasons of contrasts and ambivalence that evoke not only nostalgic feelings of past celebrations and warm memories of family reunions, but also feelings of sadness, loneliness and isolation. Joy is often tempered by loss. Family gatherings can be marred by lingering resentments and unresolved grievances. Celebration is too often encumbered by fear and uncertainty. Despite the carolers singing of peace on earth and the heartfelt exchanges of good will to all people, Christmas is rarely a season of unmitigated joy. It can also be a season when sorrow is most deeply felt and feelings of loss are intensified and loneliness is magnified. For some, Christmas is one of the hardest times of the year to feel joyful. To others, joyousness may seem like a sentimental impossibility. For all, news of shocking violence and reports of human suffering is never too far from our conscious awareness.

Then again, in what circumstances did those caroling angels find the shepherds? And what do we make of the darkness in which the light shines? Surely, our celebration is not meant to blot out our recollection of the Jesus' birth circumstances. The Gospel narratives make pointed reference to the newborn savior's vulnerability to the power of evil. It begins in Luke with the story of a family forced to migrate by a distant ruler's edict. In Matthew, the infant Jesus is persecuted by a wicked king. His family must flee into Egypt to escape arbitrary political tyranny. Refugees. Immigrants. Political instability. Ruthlessness. These are the background of the Christmas narrative. For Joseph and his wife, not even family provided sanctuary.

Sounds like our world, doesn't it? Not even Holy Scripture, to which we turn each Christmas, allows us to avoid or ignore the darker realities of human life. Its message of great joy and comfort for all people does not occur in a sentimental vacuum, but rather in the context of persecution, fear, and uncertainty.

Joy, in the biblical sense, is not some superficial exhortation to be "happy" in the face of great sorrow. Rather, it is the inward assurance that in spite of our life's circumstances, God is with us. The light shines in the darkness. Jesus is born amidst danger and persecution. The angels appeared to the marginalized and untouchable shepherds in the midst of a nighttime of fear and uncertainty. Joy is the awareness that God is with us and for us in spite of our circumstances, regardless of who we are, where we are or how we are.

A long time ago, a parishioner of mine died just before Christmas. He was a young man. His death was sudden. He left a wife and two young kids. I had more than a little trepidation as I approached their home to visit with his bereaved wife. Platitudes and Bible quotations are just not enough under those kind of circumstances and I wondered what else I could offer. I mentioned in passing how nicely her home was decorated. She replied, "You know, some people say to me, 'This first Christmas without your husband will be hard for you.' Probably it will be. But without Christmas, grieving would be unbearable." I learned a lot about theology that day.

Christmas in its deepest and truest expression occurs in all circumstances. It is where love is more important than superficial happiness and where God's presence is more tangible than the things we find under the Christmas tree. Christmas is the celebration of the presence of God in our lives even when there is fear and hardship, even when we feel alone, even when we feel forgotten or when we can't seem to find our way. Christmas is God's assurance that we are loved with a love from which we cannot be separated. That is all. Yet, that is what we

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# The Two State Illusion, cont'd.

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book is how language has been used to deny the reality of a State of Israel that, by virtue of its founding principle of a Jewish homeland in historic Palestine has never been willing to share the territory. Khalidi describes the history of U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as “a carefully constructed realm of obscurity, a realm in which the misuse of language has thoroughly corrupted both political thought and action.” He documents how U.S. policy since the 1970s has embraced that denial by sponsoring a “peace process” that has advanced Israel’s expansionism, demonstrating how, I wrote, “language functions to obscure the reality of a colonial settler project that has resulted in the dispossession of the indigenous Palestinians... language used to maintain the destructive illusion of a process of negotiation between equal parties, rather than the reality of a powerless, stateless, occupied people at the mercy of a highly militarized state supported by the world’s only superpower.” Despite the futility of this approach to peacemaking, Khalidi points out, our government has pursued it doggedly, bowing to domestic political pressures and to Israeli stubbornness and persistence.

But things are changing. For an increasing number of Americans, the realization is dawning that the story they have been told is a distortion and that our government’s policies are bad, not only for the Palestinians, but for the citizens of Israel. Mainstream journalism, which, like politics, responds to the wind of public opinion, is reflecting this shift. Ian Lustick’s September 14 New York Times opinion piece *Two State Illusion* represents a sea change in New York Times editorial policy with respect to Israel. Lustick’s piece was followed closely by Yousef Munayyer’s *Thinking Outside the Two State Box* in the *New Yorker’s* online edition. “The reality now,” wrote Munayyer, “is that there is a single state. The problem is that it takes an apartheid form.” Rather than solving the problem that it was intended to solve, which is security and freedom from fear for Jews, Israeli policy has condemned the Jewish citizens of the State of Israel to

continuing conflict. “It’s time” Munayyer writes, “to start thinking outside the Zionist box and look for solutions that secure the human rights and equality of all involved, not just the political demands of the stronger party.”

On a recent panel, which they shared with Jeremy Ben Ami of J Street Lustick and Munayyer spell out the political danger of clinging to the possibility that negotiations can bring about a fair and sustainable two state solution. The addresses by Lustick and Munayyer are riveting — and an excellent adjunct to Khalidi’s book. A key point made by both of them is that the implausibility of a fair partition at this point not only makes the negotiations pointless, but worse, perpetuates the conditions that make two states impossible, playing into Israel’s hands even more effectively than handing them the entire territory on a silver platter. In contrast, Ben Ami’s words give us a good look at the arguments that must be mustered to hold on to the “two-state illusion.” It is pretty much the brand of “progressive Zionism” that Peter Beinart has been offering up to preserve the Zionist dream: nothing is impossible if we wish for it hard enough and believe in it deeply enough. Commitment to the idea of Jewish nationalist homeland trumps reality, and certainly any commitment to equality for Palestinians, despite the language to the contrary — duly served up by those committed to saving Zionism — about full commitment to a state of their own for Palestinians.

Recently, Beinart, in his blog *Open Zion*, has adopted a strategy similar to that demonstrated by J Street in its recent annual conferences: broaden the tent to competing points of view, in particular to those advocating some version of Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS). In her recent piece in *Open Zion*, *If You Want Two States, Support BDS*, Kathleen Peratis freely admits that her commitment to two states has her standing “on very narrow ground... that the current peace process is at best a Hail Mary.” “Sad Zionists,” is how she describes herself and those who cling to “our liberal Zionist dreams.” My question to Peratis is this: how sad are you willing to be? Are you willing to tolerate

the sadness of letting go of the concept that an ethnic nationalist entity, a concept carried over from the late nineteenth century, is the answer to anti-Semitism? Are you willing to mourn the understandable mistake of political Zionism as the solution to our historic suffering, a forgivable (if and when we acknowledge the mistake) but all the same catastrophic wrong turn? Are we willing to be sad enough? And having tolerated that sadness, are we then able to contemplate, as I wrote in my critique of Beinart, that “the end of Zionism will not be the disaster that so many Jews — and some Christians — fear. Rather, it will open the Jewish people to a future where the Other is embraced, rather than back to a past in which armies are mustered, walls are built, and enemies, real and imagined, are vilified and attacked. ‘Saving’ Zionism by trying to make it into something it is not takes us in precisely the wrong direction.”

Like other progressive Zionists, Peratis sees commitment to political Zionism as integral to Jewish identity. What I find most unsettling, however, is not Peratis’ sentimental clinging to the “liberal Zionist dream” or the even more dangerous notion that “Fortress Israel,” as Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has characterized the state, keeps Jews safe (indeed, it makes not only Jews, but the entire world less safe). As the title of her piece makes very clear, Peratis wants to say yes to (what she calls) BDS because *it will help the two state solution*. Here is what Peratis does not get: *BDS is a Palestinian project*. It is a call from Palestinian civil society, endorsed at the time of its inauguration in 2005 by 108 Palestinian political parties, unions, associations, coalitions and organizations representing Palestinian refugees, Palestinians under occupation and Palestinian citizens of Israel. *The goal of BDS is Palestinian human rights, not the preservation of the Zionist project*. If we, as Jews, choose to support BDS, it has to be as world citizens (and if we are Americans, then in particular U.S. citizens) joining a global, universal human rights movement, a movement to say “No” to apartheid in our time. What hubris — what *chutzpah* — to attempt to co-opt the Palestinian call for

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# The Magic Window, cont'd.

*(Continued from page 2)*

only if verbal language is supplemented by non-verbal language which Edward T. Hall quite rightly calls the “silent language.”

*“Of equal importance is an introduction to the non-verbal language which exists in every country of the world and among the various groups within each country. Most Americans are only dimly aware of this silent language even though they use it every day. They are not conscious of the elaborate patterning of behavior which prescribes our handling of time, our spatial relationships, our attitudes toward work, play, and learning. In addition to what we say with our verbal language we are constantly communicating our real feelings in our silent language – the language of behavior. Sometimes this is correctly interpreted by other nationalities, but more often it is not.”*

The story I am about to narrate is real and unique. It takes place in Sefrou, a small city with about hundred thousand people, situated at the foot of the Middle Atlas Mountains about thirty kilometres south of the city of Fes. The story happened in the early seventies of the last century. It involves a sixty-year old illiterate Berber man, who keeps a shop, and a twenty-three-year old English teacher Volunteer who shopped there. The old Berber man and the young Peace Corps Volunteer liked each other from the very first moment they met. In the beginning, while the ice was not totally broken, their discussions centred on family, relatives and other insignificant issues. Both of them knew that this was not what they wanted to talk about but it was a necessary preliminary phase, a kind of warm-up for the real thing. Suddenly, one day, while they were sipping tea at the entrance to the shop, the old Berber man cleared his voice and said in a solemn way. “Son, you know my wife died years ago and all my sons and daughters have married and left. If it were not for your friendship I would feel very lonely though I have family and relatives. The truth is I am not on the same wavelength with them as I am with you. I have a request. You know that I live in a house that has three rooms, and in each room there is a win-

dow. I am tired of looking through the same windows; I want you to open a new window for me.” ‘Why me?’ asked the Volunteer, “I am not a mason.” The old man went on, “You are a mason of a different kind. I want you to open a magic window onto your world for me.”

Immediately after the discussion, the young Volunteer set to work on the “window.” He wrote to his family informing them of what happened and asking them to send him slides, pictures, picture books and all items that were representative of American culture. Little by little the window was opened and the most extraordinary cross-cultural story started. The old man did not keep the “window” for himself alone. Instead he

shared it with other people. Indeed, he invited the young Volunteer to bring the “window” and go with him on a visit to his native village.

The visit was very important for both of them. For the Volunteer, it was his first assignment to the bled with people he had never met. He was apprehensive: would he be a good cultural ambassador? Would he be able to communicate with the village people in spite of his limited language abilities? The old Berber man, on the other hand, had different worries: would the Volunteer like his village and his people? Would he be comfortable with them?

After various arrangements on both sides, the two men took a souk bus to the village where they were greeted with a great show of hospitality and friendship. In the evening, after a succulent dinner of mechoui, chicken tagine and couscous and the usual tea ceremony, the Volunteer brought out his picture books, slides and maps. He and his friend, the old Berber

man, starting giving explanations and information on various aspects of the U.S. Many Volunteers later, the old Berber man and his people in the village are among the most knowledgeable people on American culture, thanks to the “Magic Window”.

Right after Moroccan independence from France, the French took it upon themselves to contribute to the development of the country they colonized for

over forty years. The cooperation package consisted of sending scores of “coopérants” to work in the fields of education, health, agriculture, etc. The majority of these “coopérants” “did not come with the mentality of development workers. Most of the “coopérants” “were snobbish, unfriendly in their attitude towards the native population, hardly

ever spoke the language and avoided all cultural exchanges. After two decades of this scheme the French were even more unpopular among the Moroccans than before Independence.

The Peace Corps scheme on the other hand soon became popular for the very same reasons that “coopérants” were not. The Volunteers were friendly and open. They spoke the language. They learned the culture and participated in it. They lived in modest accommodations, and most of all they shared their culture generously. As result, many Moroccans had their life changed one way or another. The people of Morocco and the people of the U.S. are closer today than they ever have been in their two hundred years of friendship and cooperation.

Dr. Mohamed Chtatou is a Professor at the University of Mohammed V in Rabat. He is also a political analyst with Moroccan, Saudi and British media on politics and culture in the Middle East

**...in spite of centuries of friendship between Moroccans and Americans, the distance, cultural differences, ignorance of each other and lack of interest combined together have created the ideal environment for stereotyping.**

## As If the Other Mattered, cont'd.

(Continued from page 1)

My students and I were horrified, but we assumed that Jack was a statistical outlier who was offered to us for shock value. Then we met Jeremy, a rabbi and a peace activist. Jeremy asked my students a haunting question: "What do you do when your own people behave in a way that betrays their own faith tradition, when they insist that other people do not matter?"

Finally, we met George, a young Palestinian Christian who reported that his family had lived in Bethlehem since the time of Christ. In tears, George said, "I don't hate the Israelis; I don't hate anyone, but they have to leave me a place to live." Then he pointed out the hotel window at what was then a small outpost on top of a distant hill. He said, "That's the beginning of an Israeli settlement. They are already protected by the Israeli military. That settlement will grow. Soon they will have that entire hill."

January 2000 was a very optimistic time in Palestine—at least by local standards. The Jordanians and Egyptians had established a seemingly lasting peace with Israel; the first Intifada had ended; and Pope John Paul II was about to visit Israel and Palestine. Many people believed that the Oslo Accords would soon bring about a two state solution. Still Jack's hatred, Jeremy's sense of betrayal and George's fearful anguish rendered my optimism guarded.

Although my students and I learned a great deal on that pilgrimage to the holy lands, the most important thing that I learned was that *pilgrimage is not tourism*. Pilgrimage—whether it's Jewish, Christian, Muslim, interreligious, or secular—must take the well-being of the peoples of these lands seriously. That means pilgrimage must do more than visit biblical sites. Pilgrimage must engage in modern politics and pilgrimage must heed the voices of the real people who still inhabit these lands. Apart from sincere engagement with the contemporary populations—Jews, Christians, Muslims and others—who inhabit these sacred lands, travel to the holy lands is

merely an exercise in self-indulgence. Such tourism is not pilgrimage. Its influence on spiritual development is largely regressive and its impact on the local people is almost entirely detrimental.

Although I now work in an intentionally interreligious context and I am personally deeply committed to working for peace, justice and non-violence across all faith traditions, I am a Christian. If pilgrimage is to be Christian pilgrimage, we must take the incarnation seriously. That is, Jesus of Nazareth, regardless of what else he may have been, was a real person in a real place at a real time. Jesus was not a mythical being unaffected by his world and his times. Jesus, just like you and I, was a real person who enjoyed the joys and delights of a physical existence, but who also endured the vulnerabilities and hardships of physical existence.

As a Christian, I have become convinced that visiting the holy lands without engaging the vulnerabilities and hardships of the Palestinian people is a denial of the incarnation. Visiting the holy lands without ever encountering even one local Palestinian or Israeli person in conversation is tantamount to saying that Jesus' physical existence was of no significance, that Mary's pain in childbirth was inconsequential, and that Jesus' homelessness, physical privations and tortuous death don't really matter.

So, pilgrimage is not tourism. True Pilgrimage must be conducted as if the other person *and all people* matters.

Dr. Tom Phillips is a member of the faculty of The Society for Biblical Studies. He is the author of several scholarly books on Luke & Acts, including *Paul, His Letters and Acts, 2010* and *God Heard That: 31 Prayers That the Lord Heard and I Overheard, 2010*. He is the Dean of the Library at Claremont School of

## Christmas in Bethlehem, Cont'd.

(Continued from page 3)

that thought would resonate in my spirit, I know whom I believe in. It isn't man. When you are in His Word, you are in the presence of God and you want to hear what He is saying to you through His Word. Revelation 2:11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." Think about it.

God did not create us or call us into a God given purposeful life for failure, poor in health, spirit or to just be poor. He has promised us an abundant life. Sure, life can be challenging. Sometimes Christmas brings out the most challenging of times. Conflict, don't let it happen at home, don't let it get out of control, don't let it displace you. He hears. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, your country, your family, your home. Let this Christmas be one of peace.

## Thankfulness

(Continued from page 2)

media is going to show or tell you both sides? Using words of accusation and distraught faces of gloom and doom when we who do not actually visit the country or truly understand, yet we judge.

For what am I thankful? The freedom I have to live and move and have my being in the name of Jesus Christ. I am thankful for HE has not given me the spirit of fear; but of power, love, and a sound mind.

Karen Thornton traveled to the Holy Land with The Society for Biblical Studies in October 2015. She is a resident of the Westside of the Lake of the Ozarks and a member of Opened Door Christian Fellowship in Laurie, MO.



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#### Holiday Pops, cont'd.

*(Continued from page 4)*

truly need, too. Somehow, that assurance makes all the difference in the world and for the world. Christmas 2015 will come in spite of the circumstances and thank God for that, because as sorrow-filled as our world is, how much more desperate our world would be without the inescapable presence of God with us. For too many people and in too many places, this Christmas will be marred by loss, sorrow, loneliness and the threat of meaninglessness. Joy will be hard to feel. But, then again, our world without Christmas would be unbearable. This Christmas, I hope that you are able to participate anew in the wonder of the birth of God for all of us and for all times.

“For behold I bring you tidings of great joy for all people. For unto you is born a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” Lk. 2:10-11

The Rev. Peter J. Miano is a United Methodist minister. He is the founder and Executive Director of The Society for Biblical Studies.

#### Two State Illusion, cont'd.

BDS into supporting the failing, fundamentally flawed and, in the present scenario — it must be said — racist and anti-human rights cause that is the two state solution today. Holding on to two states is holding on to the Jewish state. And holding on to the Jewish state means suffering the consequences of such a project, consequences on such horrific display in the Sheen-Blumenthal video.

Is that sad enough for you?

Dr. Mark Braverman is Executive Director of Kairos USA. He was a lecturer at the SBS National Conference in September 2015. He is the author of *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews, and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land*, 2010 and also of *A Wall in Jerusalem: Hope, Healing and the Struggle for Justice in Israel and Palestine*, 2013