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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Friends Presence in Palestine/Israel

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Sponsored by the Quaker Theological Discussion Group

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Old: <http://theo-discuss.quaker.org>

The purpose of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group is to explore the meaning and implications of our Quaker faith and religious experience through discussion and publication. This search for unity in the claim of truth upon us concerns both the content and application of our faith.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

I used to enjoy looking through a large coffee-table book that featured nineteenth-century drawings and paintings of scenes in Palestine. The views of towns, city gates, notable geographical features, travel routes, caravans, and markets of the era grew out the experiences of those privileged to travel there and the curiosity of many who could not. Overall, viewing the pictures reminded me how much things have changed in Palestine since the mid-1800s. But it also reminds me that modern Friends first came to be present in Palestine at that time and have continued to serve there ever since.

I've been intrigued enough that Eli and Sybil Jones set out traveling in ministry there that my wife and I have traveled to South China, Maine and Vassalboro Friends Meeting just east of China Lake to see what they left to visit Palestine and to return again to found a school in Ramallah.

The essays in this issue of QRT report and reflect on Friends presence in Israel/Palestine in the years since they first came. I am delighted that Max Carter accepted my invitation to collaborate in editing this issue. His long experience in and passion for Friends at work in Israel/Palestine has contributed enormously in guiding and gathering these essays.

The authors of the essays also have substantial direct experience as Friends present in Israel/Palestine. Their study and experience offer insight that most of us would not otherwise be able to have. I'm grateful to each of them for their contributions.

The next meetings of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group will be in San Antonio, Texas, on November 18, 2016. There will be two sessions, both held in the La Princessa Room at the Hilton Palacio del Rio. The first session, 4:30-6:00 p.m. will be on the topic "Hybridity and Multi-Religious Belonging among Quakers." The second session, 7:00-9:00 p.m., will feature reviews of the recent book *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought*. All are welcome to attend.

— Howard R. Macy
Editor

INTRODUCTION TO THIS ISSUE

MAX CARTER
COLLABORATING EDITOR

As time is measured in the Middle East, Quaker involvement in Palestine/Israel is quite recent. But in the context of the issues that have led to the current situation there, Friends have had a bird's-eye view of growing nationalisms, revolts, wars, refugee crises, peace negotiations, and impasse. Quakers first established a major work in the region when a school for girls was established in 1869 in Ramallah, then a tiny village in the Ottoman Empire a few miles north of Jerusalem. Contributions to this issue of QRT chronicle that work and the continuous presence of Friends in Palestine and Israel since that date.

It is an “in joke” among those familiar with the complexities of Middle East politics that those who spend a week in Palestine/Israel return to write a book. After two weeks, visitors write an article. After three weeks, they are silent. The point of the joke is that on first appearances, the issues are simple and grow more complex the longer one experiences them.

Authors of the articles in this issue, however, have spent far more than a few weeks in the Middle East - and have written volumes from their experience, grounding their work and writing both in deep and extensive exposure to the various “narratives” of the situation and in their Quaker faith and commitment. They have not remained silent, nor could they after witnessing first-hand a situation that challenges all that Quakers hold dear.

Jean Zaru, several generations of whose family have been at the center of Palestinian Quaker life, serves as clerk of the Ramallah Friends Meeting and travels widely around the world speaking from her own experience as a Palestinian woman. Her book *Occupied with Nonviolence* is required reading in a number of college and university peace studies programs.

Gordon Davies has lived and worked in Ramallah over an extended period of time as he and his wife Betsy Brinson researched and wrote the history of the Ramallah Friends Schools, *Sumoud: Voices and Images of the Ramallah Friends School*.

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Lucy Duncan and Jennifer Bing are long-time staff members of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), an organization whose own involvement in Palestine/Israel goes back to the year the modern State of Israel was established. Jennifer taught at the Ramallah Friends School in the late 1980s, experiencing the “1987 Palestinian intifada (uprising)” first-hand and subsequently dedicating her professional life to seeking a just peace in the Middle East. It should also be mentioned that Jennifer’s father and mentor, Anthony Bing, also had a long involvement in Palestine/Israel, making more than 30 trips there with academic and peace programs and authoring the book *Israeli Pacifist: The Life of Joseph Abileah*.

Maia Hallward also taught at the Ramallah Friends School (1998-2000) and has made Palestine/Israel a focus of her academic career. A professor of Middle East Politics and International Conflict Resolution, she has authored several scholarly books on Israeli and Palestinian nonviolent activism and theories of nonviolence. She has led several peacebuilding delegations to Palestine and Israel.

After college, Jessy Hampton spent two years (2013 - 2015) as a volunteer serving under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee in peace & justice programs in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Like so many other young Quakers before her, she proved true the admonition of my late great-aunt Annice Carter, who served many years at the Ramallah Friends Schools between her first trip in 1929 and last in 1979. Not this, though: As she saw me off on my flight to teach at the Friends Boys School, she said, “MAX! The Carters have a good reputation in Ramallah. Don’t ruin it!” No, this: “Max, if you stay two years in Ramallah, you will always find a way to go back.” Indeed, Jessy has returned already after her service and completed an M.A. at the London School of Economics in order to be better equipped to serve the cause of a just peace in the Middle East and elsewhere.

My own involvement in the region goes back to my alternative service at the Friends Boys School in Ramallah during the American war in Vietnam. The experience had a profound impact on the way I not only came to view the conflicts in the Middle East but how I viewed the world, religious faith, and my own Quaker witness.

The first week of my teaching in 1970, Palestinian resistance fighters hijacked planes into Egypt and Jordan. My students told me they abhorred violence, but since the world didn’t recognize Palestinians at the time, and the world’s attention seemed to be gained

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only through the use of violence, they had to utilize the same methods as other freedom fighters. It led to deep conversations about violence and nonviolence and effective means of addressing oppression.

My second week there, the Jordanian civil war “Black September” broke out, and Palestinians once again were targeted and made refugees. During my third week, Egypt’s president, Gamal Abdel Nasser died, a man viewed passionately by many Palestinians as their best hope for a united front against their suppression. It was drinking from the fountain of Middle East experience by fire hose!

Over the subsequent 46 years since that introduction, I have continued to travel and work regularly in Palestine/Israel, especially in leading annual service-learning trips to volunteer at the Ramallah Friends School and support and learn from the Israelis and Palestinians working diligently for a just peace.

This issue’s essays reflect much of what I have come to know about the region and Quaker work and witness there. I am grateful for their insights and experience and trust that readers will gain much from their perspectives.

I must offer one caveat, however. Do not expect these to be “balanced” presentations. The authors make no claims to “balance” and, indeed, would agree with Bishop Desmond Tutu that seeking “balance” or “objectivity” in a situation of oppressor and oppressed is to side with the oppressor. There is more than enough of an “apologia” for Israel’s policies and practices available. These essays offer the much harder to find witness to the experience of the nonconformist minority within Israel and the Palestinians who live under the Israeli military occupation. Their voices need to be heard.