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Praying for Peace in Palestine

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Introduction

In December 2009, all the church leaders in Jerusalem signed and issued together a statement entitled “Palestine Kairos Document.” This document is named after the “South Africa Kairos Document” issued in 1985, which played an important role in abolishing apartheid in that country. Kairos is a Greek word that can be translated as a “new time” or “a right time for a crucial action.” The “Palestine Kairos Document” calls attention to the plight Palestinians are suffering, calls for the abolition of apartheid against Palestinians by the state of Israel, hopes for the arrival of a new, peaceful age and asks for cooperation to achieve that goal.²

One of the themes of the document is that the suffering of the Palestinians is caused in part by a certain interpretation of the Bible by some theologians. The document calls for rectifying this interpretation, which justifies Israel’s violent occupation, with the argument that the occupation is based on what is written in the Bible and on history. This paper is a response to this appeal for rectification. Although my research is far from sufficient, I believe that a Christian living in this moment of Palestinian history has a responsibility to respond without delay, even if that response is limited by the bounds of their own restricted knowledge.

I will focus on two questions. One of them is: did the Jews murder Jesus? The other is: how do we understand the notion of the Promised Land given by God? The establishment of the current Israeli state in the 20th century cannot be separated from anti-Semitism in the Christian world and the holocaust, both of which are based on an interpretation of the Bible which argues that the Jews are responsible for the murder of Jesus. Behind the justification of Israel’s occupation of Palestine is an interpretation of the Bible which holds that Palestine is the Promised Land given by God to the Jews. I am not going to provide a comprehensive argument on these questions. Instead, I would like to present an argument that will help encourage further studies, discussions and reflections.³

Before starting to interpret the biblical texts related to the two questions, for the sake of clarification, I would like to briefly restate the basic attitude held by various theologies of liberation in their approach to and interpretation of the Bible.

The Bible is a collection of testimonies of faith compiled by people who lived in a specific period of history. Since they were produced by humans, they include imperfections. Therefore they must not be regarded as identical with “the word of God.” The Bible tells, not historically but symbolically, messages handed down by communities in an ancient world with an oral culture. In addition, it is written and edited almost exclusively from the viewpoint of members of the male elite.

In other words, what is written in the Bible is what was perceived as the will of God by members of the elite, who had the power to leave their “voices” in the canon, to which the community of faith accorded authority. Thus, what is written in the Bible does not directly show the will of God. In addition, the community of faith in those days did not necessarily interpret the will of God as the writers of the Bible did.

Therefore, as we read the Bible, we utilize the hermeneutics of suspicion so that we can hear the voices of ordinary people who formed an overwhelming majority in the community of faith - those who were illiterate, did not have power, and were forced into becoming a silent majority. In doing so, we will reflect upon the question of how we should understand the will of God.⁴

1. “Did the Jews kill Jesus?”

A. Passion Narratives of the Gospels

Various problems are behind anti-Semitism, which is still rampant in the Christian world. At its root is the perception that the Jews killed Jesus. This originated from a certain interpretation of the Passion Narratives of the Gospels.

The Christian Testament (the New Testament) has four Gospels and all of them contain Passion Narratives (Mk14:43-15.41/Mt26:47-27:56/Lk22:47-23.49/Jn18:1-19:30). These are narratives about how Jesus was arrested, experienced suffering, and was murdered on the cross. In these narratives, one of his disciples handed him over to the authorities of the Roman Empire. His name was Judas, as if to symbolize the whole of the Jewish people. Although people of power in the Roman Empire put Jesus to trial, they did not find him to be a criminal deserving a death sentence and tried to release him. In contrast with the magnanimous attitude of the Roman Empire, Jews exhibited hostility toward Jesus. That is, the Jewish judicial assembly found him guilty and a crowd of Jews shouted for the authorities of the Roman Empire to execute him. This description created an impression that the Jews sold Jesus out to the Roman authorities, drove him to his death, and were thus responsible for his murder.

But the Passion Narratives are intended to symbolically express self-critical messages that the communities of faith of 1st century Jews wanted to hand down to future generations. Here let us turn our attention to the historical context of the Passion Narratives.

B. The tradition of “laments” in Jewish communities

Jesus, who was born in Nazareth in Galilee at the beginning of the 1st century, and the people who took part in missionary activities with him, were all Jews. In those days, the Jews were living under the colonial rule of the powerful Roman Empire. The conditions of the Roman Empire at that time are often expressed symbolically by the term *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace).

What those conditions are depends on from which position one looks in the colossal pyramid-like social formation. Certainly, there were no big wars. However, while the privileged class, which represented only a tiny portion of the society, possessed massive power and wealth, one-third of the population were enslaved while an overwhelming number of people struggled with heavy taxes, debts and poverty. Such was the society of the Roman Empire.

In this kind of world, a number of “*basileia*” (reign of God) movements were emerging from among the Jews which sought a world in which God would reign with grace and justice. Jesus was born and raised in Galilee, and was one of the leaders of such a *basileia* movement. This Jesus was murdered in cold blood by the authorities of the Roman Empire.⁵

The Passion Narratives were intended to convey this dreadful and humiliating event from generation to generation within the faith communities. These narratives had a faith-based attitude that self-critically examined the communities’ own responsibility for the great wretchedness they had encountered.

One example of traditions that carried such an attitude is the tradition of “*laments*,” a tradition of mourning the death of a person (e.g. Jeremiah 9:16-21, 31:15). Peoples in the Mediterranean coastal regions, including the Jews, had a communal tradition in which people sang “*laments*” in funerals, with “*wo/men*” playing a central role.⁶

In “*laments*,” women first called out to God, described their plight by recounting what had happened, remembered the dead, sympathized with the pain the dead had experienced, scoffed at the enemy, denounced their men who did not help, and prayed for bereaved family members. Therefore we can imagine that a similar thing happened when Jesus died. We can imagine that behind the Passion Narratives was the traditional way of mourning and describing death, with emphasis on accusations against members belonging to the same community.⁷

The Passion Narratives clearly show that Jesus was executed by the Roman authorities on the cross, a method used by the Roman Empire to execute political criminals. But the accusation, that there was a failure to prevent the violent murder of Jesus by the Roman colonial power, is a narrative hurled at “*us*” or members of the Jewish community, that is “*the Jews*.” This is a narrative of self-criticism in the context of the Jewish community in which (1) Jesus was a Jew, (2) all of those who did not help, but rather betrayed and deserted him, were also Jews.⁸

C. Descriptions in the Gospels and changes in interpretations

In the last half of the first century, various narratives about Jesus, that had been handed down by common Jewish people, were written down and edited from the viewpoint of elite literate men.

Therefore the narratives, which later formed the Gospels, came to absorb the social and political influences of that period. Around that time, the Jews were being persecuted by the Roman powers. In this oppressive situation, small Jewish communities were experiencing various difficulties, each

having different views and opinions concerning the will of God and the question of who the Messiah was (Christ or the leader sent by God) leading to clashes amongst them.

There existed various partisan groups in Jewish communities. One of them was a group called the Christians. Members of this group were engaged in missionary activities proclaiming that none other than Jesus, who was murdered as a criminal by the Roman authorities, was the Christ (Because of this, people started to call them Christians).

Therefore, in the last half of the first century, when the Gospels were written, Christians were a faction within a diversified Judaism. Judaism itself was a small religion among various religions that existed in the Greco-Roman world (from the 1st to the 3rd century). In this situation, various factions within Judaism, including Christians, were engaged in what can be seen as being like quarrels among siblings, over such issues as how to view God, how to view the Messiah and how to survive under Roman colonial rule.⁹

The Gospels were written in this historical situation. The Gospel writers were not free from the desire to escape oppression and persecution, or the wish to be regarded as good citizens. So while they were soft in writing about the accountability of the Roman authorities for the death of Jesus, their accusation against members of the Jewish communities who were in conflict with the Christians became fierce. Narratives written and edited in this way formed the Gospels, including the Passion Narratives.

In the second century, Christians gradually came to take different paths from the followers of Judaism who under the guidance of rabbis began to develop Rabbinical Judaism. Thus Christianity became an independent religion. This led to an increase in the number of Christians who had no background in the religion of Israel. It was difficult for them to understand the background of the strongly self-critical traditional laments. Thus, it seems that these communities gradually came to adopt the interpretation that it was the Jews who were actually responsible for the cruel death of Jesus.

Later, in the fourth century, a much greater change took place. Christianity, which had been fiercely persecuted by the Roman Empire, became the state religion. Although there were many different currents in Christianity, only a current that conformed with the ethos of the Roman Empire would be able to attain authority as the empire's state religion. In other words, a process began in which "heterodox" currents that did not conform to "orthodox" Christianity¹⁰ were thoroughly excluded.

Those teachings of Christianity which enjoyed the backing of the state were strongly affected by the imperialistic influences of Western Europe. The execution of Jesus Christ by the Roman authorities receded into the background. The narratives that stressed the faith-related self-responsibility of the Jewish communities came to be interpreted as descriptive of the historical events. Thus, an impression that it was the Jews who had killed Jesus came to the foreground.

As time went on, teachings based on this biblical interpretation were theologically systematized and various theological meanings were attached to the word "Christ." This increased the weight of the term "Christ-killer" to the point of being equated with "God-killer."

In accordance with this, various forms of art such as stories, dramas, music, painting and sculpture inflamed these negative emotions. Presumably, anti-Semitic sentiment, based on antipathy to "the Jews who killed Christ," spread around the Christian cultural sphere of Western Europe.

But it is not the Jews historically or biblically who murdered Jesus. The understanding of the Jews as “the killers of Christ” and the anti-Semitism which ensued are based on interpretations by the later Christian churches, which were ignorant of the tradition of “laments” in ancient Jewish communities.

The contemporary Christian world, which has experienced the tragedy of the Holocaust, has the ethical responsibility to remember this history and to make every effort to prevent its repetition.

II. The Promised Land given by God to the Jews?

Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan... Yahweh said to Abram ..., “Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants for ever” (Genesis 13:12-15).¹¹

Today’s Palestine was called Canaan in ancient times. Quite a few people see Canaan as the Promised Land which God promised to give to the Jews in the Bible. Therefore let us survey and examine stories in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) related to the Promised Land.

A. Narratives in the Hebrew Bible

According to narratives of the Hebrew Bible that start with the creation myth, from the first couple Adam and Eve, a third son was born, named Seth (Gen 4:25). From a descendant of Seth, Noah was born (Gen 5:29). Descendants of Noah’s sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, increased in number and became the “people of the whole world” (Gen 9:18-19). Then there was the story of the Tower of Babel and of the people being scattered “over the face of all the earth” (Gen 11:1-9). Among them was a man called Canaan, who was the son of Ham, and from whom were born Canaan’s various tribes (Gen 9:18-27).

From a descendant of Shem was born Abram (=Abraham; Gen 17:5), who received the blessing from God that he would be given many descendants and much land. It was Abram who journeyed to, and began to live in Canaan (Gen 12:1-7).

An understanding was born out of these narratives that Canaan was the Promised Land, promised to Abraham and his descendants. So, who are the descendants of Abraham? Let us continue to read the biblical narratives with this question in mind.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Abraham and his descendants came to settle in Egypt because of famine. This happened in the period of Jacob’s children. This means that, in that period, it is likely that the descendants of Abraham, who were Semitic (roughly speaking, Jews and Arabs), were already intermarrying with, at least, the Hamitic people (roughly speaking, Canaanites and Africans).¹²

In Genesis, the following expressions appear time and again: God said or swore to Abraham that the land would be given to his descendants (Gen 12:1-7; 13:12-17; 15:4-7, 18-21; 17:2-8). The same words were spoken to Abraham’s son Isaac (Gen 26:3), and Isaac’s son Jacob (Gen 28:13-15). Jacob’s son Joseph received confirmation about those words, and said to his brothers, “God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which God swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to

Jacob” (Gen 50:24). After these, his dying words, Genesis ends.

The expression the Promised Land is widely used in Bible dictionaries, theological dictionaries and commentaries. But this phrase never appears in the Hebrew Bible.¹³ Expressions used in the Hebrew Bible are “said,” “swore,” “oath,” and “covenant.”

“Covenant” or “treaty” as widely used in the ancient Middle East is different from the “promise” that we usually think of and is not based on agreement between equal parties. In their covenant or treaty, a suzerain (overlord) in a superior position unilaterally sets down conditions to a vassal (subject), demands obedience, and decides on punishment for violations. Covenants in the Hebrew Bible reflect this ancient concept of suzerainty treaty (e.g. Lev 25:42, 55).¹⁴

What I have shown means that narrators and editors of narratives in the Hebrew Bible understood how God relates to humans on the basis of their concepts of the world they lived in. This clearly shows that the Bible was written by people who lived in a particular historical situation, and therefore reflects the perception of God held by people living in that particular period.

Moreover the God, as remembered and described in these narratives of the Hebrew Bible, is the God who explains matters of communal importance only to “sons” of patriarchs. Is it that God did not tell or swear anything to “daughters”? We should not regard the covenant relationship between God and humans as described in the Bible as the only way God chose to make true relationships with humans. We should deepen our understanding of the relationship between God and humans by looking back at history as well as by referring to our own experiences.

Genesis is followed by the Exodus. The people who went to Egypt with Jacob (=Israel; Gen 32:29) were referred to by such expressions as “the sons of Israel” (e.g. Ex 1:1), “the people of Israel” (e.g. Ex 1:9, 11, 13; 2:23, 25) and “the Hebrews” (e.g. Ex 1:15, 19; 6:7, 11, 13). This book begins the narrative that describes their exodus from that place, where they had become enslaved.

According to the Bible, these people later wandered in the desert, conquered Canaan and settled there. In their journey to Canaan, words frequently crop up that make them remember that God will give them the land which God swore to their ancestors to give (e.g. Ex 6:8; 33:1; Lev 25:38; Deut 6:3; 26:15; Josh 1:2). Thus bloody wars of invasion, in which these people massacred native inhabitants one after another in order to settle in their land, are narrated as commanded by God (e.g. Num 21:3; Deut 2:34-35; 3:6-7; 7:1-2). This means that those who wrote or edited the Bible had an understanding that this is what God had commanded them to do. I would like to repeat here that this does not necessarily mean that God commanded exactly as the Bible narrated.

The Bible, however, includes other aspects that are different from descriptions that tell of an inclination toward the annihilation of native residents. There are lists of areas the people of Israel could not conquer (e.g. Josh 13:1-6, Judg 1:19), and lists of areas which they did not conquer, and where they co-existed with the native inhabitants (e.g. Judg 1:25-33). It is also described that after the people of Israel entered the land of Canaan, they co-existed with people from various ethnic backgrounds, married them and had families with them (e.g. Judg 3:5-6).¹⁵

The Bible attributes the cause of the Israelites’ failure to conquer Canaan to their sin. It also says that their active practices of multi-ethnic co-habitation are due to their sin, and criticizes these acts as

inviting the wrath of God.

Yet does this criticism really reflect the true will of God? What would the Bible look like if those who wrote and edited it were not male members of the elite but were poor ordinary people? What kinds of acts would they have criticized as something that invites the wrath of God? Didn't the faith community have any understanding of a God who would bless those who did not conquer, but who lived together with other ethnic groups, a God whose wrath fell upon the wholesale genocide that left no children or elderly people alive?

In any case, according to the narratives, those who recognized themselves as "children of Israel" or "Israelites" eventually mixed with the people living in Canaan, without annihilating the various ethnic groups of the land.

If we look back at narratives of the Bible, it becomes clear that the "descendants of Abraham" mixed with Jews, Arabs, Canaanites, and Africans, and that the people born of this mixing, the "children of Israel" or "Hebrews," then mixed with the Canaanites after the Exodus and lived in the Promised Land.

We have roughly traced the biblical narratives behind the understanding of the Promised Land given to the Jews. Next, let us critically examine the historical situation that lies behind these narratives.

B. What has been understood through recent Biblical Studies

I would first like to point out that history and archeology have no proof at all of what are seen as the fundamental events of Israel; the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan.

Does this mean that the related narratives in the Bible are all myth or fiction? What kind of history lies behind the Exodus? I will chronologically and briefly trace them as they are understood at this point.

It is understood that the narrative of Abraham in the Bible is about persons or tribes that existed around the 20th century BCE (Before Common Era). It has been confirmed that people called Apiru or Habiru, which is believed to be the etymological origin of the word Hebrew, lived in the vast areas of Egypt and Canaan from the 19th to the 10th century BCE.

It is thought that the etymological origin of Apiru/Habiru meant "crossing over (borders)." People called by that name were not a particular ethnic group but a group of people living at the bottom of society and outside the purview of citizenship of city-states. When war occurred, they worked as mercenaries for any side. It seems that on the whole, Apiru/Habiru gradually came to be called 'Ivri= Hebrew.

In the Bible, Hebrew was not a word people used to call themselves but a word people used to call other people (e.g. Gen chapters 37 to 50, Ex chapters 1 to 15, and 1Sam chapter 14).¹⁶

On the other hand, the place name Canaan appears as part of Egypt's territories in documents dating back to between the 15th and 14th century BCE. An inscription on a stone monument says that there was a group called Israel in mountainous areas in Canaan toward the end of 13th century BCE and that Egypt annihilated this group.¹⁷

It is estimated that the Exodus as described in the Bible took place toward the end of the 13th century BCE. This estimate is based on descriptions of the Hebrew people's labor and lives found in the Bible's narrative of Exodus. However, the Egyptian state records around that time include no

such descriptions at all.¹⁸ What came to be known through archeological and other studies is as follows.

Around the 12th Century BCE, the population in mountainous areas of Canaan suddenly increased. It is thought that they had various ethnic backgrounds but were united by the Yahweh religion or faith in a god called Yahweh. From the 12th to the 11th century BCE, parts of towns in Canaan gradually surrendered (presumably to a group that was involved later in the establishment of David's kingdom). In the 10th century BCE, while Egyptian rule over Canaan ended, something like a small state appeared in Judah, a plain region of Canaan.

Dating back to the first half of the 9th century BCE, an inscription on a stone monument with the phrase "the house of David, the king of Israel" was found in the Israeli region of Canaan. This seems to be evidence that David's kingdom historically existed. The kingdom was so small and humble that it is safe to say that the biblical stories that tell about a palace containing many consorts and other things are fantastic stories. Presumably, people living in various parts of Canaan were speaking variants of the Hebrew language.¹⁹

What is reasoned from the above is as follows. Indigenous people were living in Canaan from ancient times and most of them were peasant farmers. From the end of the 13th century BCE to around the 11th century BCE, a movement gradually developed among those peasant farmers to liberate themselves from Egyptian rule and the movement was joined by people who, for various reasons, had migrated there from their native places.²⁰

That is, Canaanite peasant farmers who tried to liberate themselves from Egyptian rule, joined by people from various ethnic backgrounds, moved to mountainous areas of Canaan, where few people were living, and built new villages there, leading hard lives as settlers. Basically they were not an ethnic group but a religious group united by faith in the god, Yahweh. Later, in the 10th century BCE, they established a small kingdom in a plain region of Canaan, and later again built a state that came to be known as the united Israeli state.²¹

In other words, it is thought that the people, who came to live in the mountainous areas of Canaan to escape from and liberate themselves from Egyptian rule and later built the Israeli kingdom in Canaan, consisted for the most part of farmers who had been living in Canaan from the beginning, joined by various ethnic groups, which included people who had moved from the Nilotic region.

At the center of the biblical narratives of the Exodus is a symbolic message that people suffering as slaves under Egyptian rule, asked God for help and liberated themselves. Then, after enduring the harsh conditions of life in the "desert," that people, with its various backgrounds, formed a community based on faith in the god called Yahweh and were led to a fruitful land to live happy lives.²²

It can be understood that this message was commonly held by all the people with their various ethnic backgrounds who came to live in the mountainous areas of Canaan or all the people who were called "Hebrews." It also can be understood that the people who called themselves "children of Abraham" or "Israelites" were in reality people who were born through the mixing of various ethnic backgrounds and who for the most part were farmers who had lived in Canaan from the start.

C. What happened to the Jews in the Promised Land?

The unified kingdom of Israel did not last long. After splitting into the northern and southern kingdoms (922 BCE- 721 BCE), northern Israel was conquered by Assyria in the 8th century BCE (735BCE/ 721BCE), and southern Judah was conquered by the Neo-Babylonian Kingdom in the 6th century BCE (587BCE/586BCE), followed by an event called the Babylonian captivity (587BCE/539BCE).²³

Under traditional interpretation based on narratives in the bible, it was thought that at that time, southern Judah was completely destroyed and that all the residents of Judah, or Jews, were taken to Babylon as captives (2 Chr36: 17-20). But it has come to be known that many areas were not destroyed despite the war, and that those who were taken to Babylon as captives were limited to members of the Jewish elite who were quite small in number. The majority of ordinary Jews remained on their land. Most of them were poor peasant farmers and they continued their lives as farmers.

The Babylon captivity ended after about 50 years when King Cyrus of Persia, who conquered the Neo-Babylonian Empire, permitted Jews who had become captives, and their descendants, to return to their homeland. On the basis of narratives in the bible, the church has understood the event in this way: the Jews who had been in captivity were all overwhelmed with joy, thanked God, returned to their homeland or the Promised Land, rebuilt the Jerusalem Temple, and reconstructed the Jewish community based on their monotheistic faith in Yahweh.

But what actually happened is that only a few of the captives (and their descendants) returned to their homeland and that most of them continued to live in Babylonia. One of the likely reasons for this is that members of the Jewish elite who had been taken to Babylonia, formed a Jewish community (Diaspora) in their new land far away from their native land and became prosperous. They wrote and redacted the Hebrew Bible, and shaped Judaism as a monotheistic faith (Deut28:64). The Jewish community actively carried out missionary work and led many people to convert to Judaism or to become Jews. Thus the Jewish community in the Diaspora expanded.²⁴

When we look at this history, one question arises. Did members of the Jewish community equate God's Promised Land (or the Land of Milk and Honey) with the geological Land of Canaan/Palestine? Rather, shouldn't we understand that when the Jewish community came to flourish in a place where its members came to live anew as a community having autonomous faith, the place became the Land of Milk and Honey to which God had led them? If this is the case, it is conceivable that most of the people, who were captured and forced to leave their native land, chose not to return there, deciding instead to continue to live in the place where they were currently flourishing.

Therefore, those who returned to the Promised Land from the land of captivity were only a small portion of the whole Jewish community. That is to say a small portion within the small portion. Nevertheless, these few people ignored the existence of an overwhelmingly large number of farmers who had continued to live in their native land, and regarded the land as desolate (2 Chr 36:21). They insisted by the name of God that only they, the "people in captivity," were authentic Israelites and entitled to ownership of the land. As a result, conflict arose between them and those who had been continuously living on the land.

These events are referred to in fragmentary ways in narratives in the Hebrew Bible, with those who had continued to live in the land contemptuously called "people of the land" (e.g. Jer 44:21 and Hag 2:4). Nevertheless, many of the "people in captivity" (or Holy People or True Israelites) increasingly

mingled with the “people of the land,” although the Hebrew Bible describes this development in a disparaging manner (e.g. Ezra 9:1-4).²⁵

In the 4th century BCE (326 BCE), Persia was conquered by Macedonia, and in the 3rd century BCE Hellenistic culture began to grow in the Mediterranean world. Hellenistic culture was a fusion of the cultures of various peoples with the culture of the Greeks (Hellen). It helped to expand the exchanges of both merchants and religions. Jewish communities and their religion came to be strongly influenced by Hellenistic culture, which was spreading through the whole Mediterranean world. In the 1st century BCE, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (LXX) was compiled. A primary factor behind the translation seems to be the situation in which the number of converts from other religions to Judaism had increased, thus leading to an increase in the number of Jews who knew neither the Hebrew nor the Aramaic language.²⁶

In the 1st century CE (Common Era), the Roman Empire came to place the wide expanse of the Mediterranean world under its control. The Jewish rebellion against Roman rule led to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE. In the 2nd century, the Roman Empire suppressed the Jewish Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135).²⁷ This event occasioned people called Christians forming their own groups independent of Jewish communities. Thus, in a sense the religion of Israel was divided into two religions. One is what came to be called (Rabbinic) Judaism, and the other a religion called Christianity.

From the 2nd to the 3rd century, Jewish communities spread and expanded, entering what is called a golden age. Responsibility for this seems to fall to many Jews leaving their native places, moving to diverse places, and becoming active in missionary activities wherever they settled.

The expansion of Jewish communities appears to have been especially characterized by the increase of women converts. The main reasons for women's conversions are thought to be the sexual ethic in Judaism, characterized by equality between the spouses, as well as the exemption of women from the duty of circumcision, which removed a psychological barrier for their conversion.²⁸

The word “Jews” became a word to refer to believers of Judaism, rendering of less importance any differences in ethnic background and place of residence. Around this period, the Roman Empire came to call the land of Judea “Palestine” (deriving from the word “Philistine”). In resistance to this, the Jews called it the land of Israel (Eretz Israel; 1Sam13:9).²⁹

In the late 4th century, the situation completely changed when Christianity was established as the state religion of the huge Roman Empire. On the one hand, non-mainstream Christian groups were fiercely persecuted and suppressed. On the other hand, Judaism became unable to continue its missionary activities and the Jews had to adopt the strategy of maintaining their identity through a particular life style.

Thus the Jews came to understand that the world would be dominated by suffering until the time of liberation, which would be realized by the arrival of a true messiah. As a result, the former understanding of “leaving the homeland” as the “loss” of the Promised Land, was significantly changed, and came to be interpreted in a spiritual rather than a geographical way as a state of being “outside of redemption.” Similarly, the “return to the homeland” came to be understood as that time when the Jews would, through the grace of God, enter into the “inside of redemption.”³⁰

In the 7th century, Arabs, who were Muslim, conquered Palestine. It is said that when that happened, Jews, who had faced severe persecution under the rule of the Christian Byzantine Empire (the Eastern Roman Empire), heartily welcomed their arrival. Later many Jews converted to Islam. This was not however due to coercion by Muslims. Muslims recognized Jews and Christians as being People of the Scripture, just as they were. So, they practiced a liberalism that guaranteed the rights of religious expression to Jews and Christians. It is also thought that the attractiveness of the privilege of tax exemption given to Muslims, and Islam as a religion that believes in God, revealed through the same scripture, lowered the psychological barrier for Jews to convert to Islam.³¹

After this, Muslims, Jews and Christians came to co-exist in Palestine, even though there was discrimination and conflict there. Thus, up to the 20th century, Palestine was a liberal, open-minded state, in which people of three different religions with diversified ethnic backgrounds coexisted or sought to secure better coexistence.

Through our application of various academic findings and Hermeneutics of Suspicion to reading the biblical narratives, and our examination of the history behind them, what do we find about the history and stories of the biblical people?

I would like to conclude that the descendants of Abraham, the Hebrews, the Israelites and the Jews, who appear in the Bible, are not limited to one single ethnic group, and that people who lived as Muslims, Jews, and Christians in Canaan or the Palestine are all the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, I would assume that God's will - which has been understood as the will to lead people through history to live happy lives in lands where milk and honey flow - lies in diverse people coexisting with each other by overcoming differences in their religions and ethnic backgrounds and by respecting each other's autonomy.

III. Praying for Peace in Palestine

The 20th century saw the tragedy of the large-scale massacre of Jews by Nazism - the event known as the Holocaust (Shoah). It is thought that behind this event were various political and economic motives and power relations. It cannot be denied, however, that in order to obtain wide support from the populace, Nazism took advantage of the anti-Semitic sentiment prevalent in Christendom. Having faced the experience of the Holocaust - a great tragedy in history - the Christian world came to feel a moral debt toward the Jews.

After the Holocaust, some Zionists insisted on building Israel in Palestine, (which includes Zion, the holy place of Jerusalem) as a mother country for the Jews. It is thought that the Christian world in the West accepted and supported the establishment of Israel as a means of atoning for the Holocaust.

Of course, various political and economic motives and power relations were involved behind the move. It can be said that religious sentiment in the Christian world in the West was utilized again. This time, the sentiment utilized was the wish for atonement for the mistake of anti-Semitism - in direct contrast to the sentiment at the time of the Holocaust.

In later years, the feeling of guilt regarding Christian anti-Semitic sentiment and the prejudice against the Muslim world, led the Christian world to support Israel. The Christian world even gave large

amounts of funds in aid to Israel. This pro-Israel attitude in the West has helped amplify the Israeli armed forces' violence and deepened the sufferings of the many people who had co-existed in Palestine.³²

The prolongation of human rights violations by the Israeli state finally started to give rise to criticism from the Christian world in the last years of the 20th century. While this development itself is welcome, it also carries the danger of rekindling anti-Semitic feelings.

This is because many people regard the Israeli state and the Jews themselves as identical, despite the historical reality that many Jews in the world have from the beginning opposed and criticized the establishment of the Israeli state and its behavior. In addition, the post-Holocaust feeling of guilt towards Jews that exists in the Christian world is not yet free from a deep-rooted, groundless, unreasonable anti-Semitic sentiment, characterized by an idea that we must accept the Jews even if they were responsible for the murder of Christ. There is a danger that this negative feeling could be revived at any time.³³

What should we do and what can we do to create peace in Palestine? I believe that there are many things we as citizens of the world should and can do. At the same time, I think that the Christian communities, which have the bible as their canon (holy scripture), are responsible for interpretation of the bible. That is, we have the responsibility to self-critically examine our biblical interpretations and understandings of God, and relativize them. This should be the way to nurture mature communities of faith that will have the ability and determination to prevent our religion from being conveniently used in political and economic power struggles.

The examination I have carried out so far in this writing seems to shed a new light on the "Word of God" in the biblical text I quoted at the outset of this paper (Gen 13:12-15). It has shown that the Promised Land is not a geographical one but refers to a land where people can live autonomously and happily, and means that such a land will be given to "you and your descendants," that is, "peoples of the world." Isn't this the way the peoples of the world should live according to the will of God?

What I would like to stress is that the land where people are living was not given to them for their monopolization. Rather, the land was "given" or "entrusted" to them by God so that the peoples of the world will live happily together. Communities of faith, I believe, have the ethical responsibility to critically learn from history, and put into action what we have learned in our contemporary world. Regarding peace in Palestine, people who belong to communities of Christian faith have the responsibility to end anti-Semitism immediately and definitely. At the same time, we should also firmly declare a critical view that neither biblical narratives about the Promised Land nor the history of people who appear in the biblical narratives provide grounds to justify violence against residents in Palestine.

We should learn from the history of God and the people of the Bible that we should not aim to build an ethnocentric nation but to build a global community in which peoples live together, respecting different ways of life, and thus walk the path that leads to world peace.³⁴

Endnotes

1 This paper was originally prepared for the regular seminar of the Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan in March, 2011, and published in the center's Japanese newsletter No. 68 (April, 2011).

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2 The Consultative Councils of the Episcopal Diocese of Tokyo and the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, *Kairos Palestine 2009: A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering*.

3 Concerning Holocaust, Zionism, Anti-Zionism and the State of Israeli, there are various understandings and positions due to both religious and political views. But it cannot be denied that behind the tragic history related to these matters is anti-Semitism in the regions where Christian culture is strong. I am going to talk focusing on its roots - why it was produced and from where it came. With regard to Zionism and Anti-Zionism, see Sand, Shlomo, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (pp. 274-278 in Japanese).

4 Concerning the authority of the Bible, "the Word of God," "historical imagination," and the "hermeneutics of suspicion," see Yamaguchi, Satoko, *A New Bible Study* (in Japanese), pp.18-42, 72-75, 85-87, 181-184. Yamaguchi, Satoko, *Mary and Martha: Women in the World of Jesus*, pp.15-20, 30-35, 168.

5 On the life of Jews in the 1st century and Jesus' death through execution: Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, pp.37-60. *A New Bible Study*, pp.104-107, 135-141.

6 About "woman" and "women." I use these words to mean "wo/man" and "wo/men" (following the usage of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza), that is, to mean not only biological women but also to represent those who have been treated as "others" in patriarchal society. Although I do not repeat these expressions every time because it is troublesome, please note that I use woman and women with this meaning in mind.

7 In the ancient Mediterranean world, it was a prevalent and long-standing tradition for women to play important roles in funerals. Anointing the body with oil was part of that tradition (Mk 14:8; Mt 26:12; Jn 12:7) as was the singing of "lament."

The singing of lament was a communal practice which mainly women took on themselves. It seems that this practice was related to the profession of "keening women," who cried out during a funeral while strongly beating their chests. But singing lament was not limited to professional keening women. Any persons close to the dead were able to sing those songs. Also visiting a tomb on the third day after someone's death was a tradition connected with women. The Gospels tell that Mary Magdalene and other women visited the tomb of Jesus on the third day after his death (Mk 16:1-8; Mt 28:1-10; Lk 23:55-24:12; Jn 20:1-18). That the expression "he was raised on the third day" (1 Corinthians 15:4) remains, even in traditions centered on men, shows that behind this expression were women and the oral traditions borne by them. See Corley, Kathleen E. *Women and the Historical Jesus*, pp.107-139. Yamaguchi, Satoko. *Mary and Martha*, pp.168-173, 187-189.

The expression in passive that Jesus "was raised (from among the dead)" means that "God raised Jesus." In contrast with the belief that anyone who has died by being hung on a tree is under God's curse (Deuteronomy 21:22-23), that expression contains a connotation that God has approved of the way Jesus lived, by raising him from the dead into new life. Unfortunately the Japanese bibles have translated the passive form - that Jesus "was raised" into an active form that Jesus "resurrected" (as if with his own power). This has changed the original meaning. See Yamaguchi. *A New Bible Study*, pp.143-145.

8 Jesus was born in Galilee. It seems that the "Jews" of those days treated people differently or discriminated against people depending on where they were from - Judea, Galilee, Samaria, etc. Despite this, those who were living under the colonial rule of the Roman Empire regarded themselves as members of the "Jewish community." In this sense, Jesus was born and raised as a Jew, believed in God as a Jew, and died as a Jew. Jesus was a member of the Jewish community through and through. "The Passion Narrative" is based on the Jewish community's interpretation of Jesus' death and on the traditional singing of lament. I am going to deal with "the Jews" in detail in the next section.

9 With regard to the quarrels among the Jewish siblings, see Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, pp.198-205.

10 Yamaguchi, *A New Bible Study*, pp.159-167; cf. *Mary and Martha*, pp.205-223.

11 As to "Yahweh," the name of God: Yamaguchi, *A New Bible Study*, pp.88-90; *Mary and Martha*, pp.87-89.

12 According to the Hebrew Bible, the descendants of Shem are generally peoples of Semitic language-speaking areas (Jews and Arabs), the descendants of Ham are by and large peoples living in areas from Palestine to Africa (roughly

“black people” of Africa according to common understanding), and the descendants of Japheth are mainly peoples of Indo-European language-speaking areas (roughly “white people” according to common understanding) although what is said here is not so definitive. To those who wrote or edited the Hebrew Bible, these peoples probably represented the “peoples of the whole world.” Asian peoples who live outside the Middle East are not included. This clearly shows that “what God said” in the Hebrew Bible is not “what God said” but “what the writers and editors of the Hebrew Bible thought God said.”

“Ethnic group” refers to a group of people who are living in a specific area and who have developed a common culture – a spoken language, a life habit, a way of life, etc. which are seen in daily life. But “ethnic group” and words of the same category have not been used with clear definitions. Instead they have been used with various meanings throughout the passage of time. See Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*, pp.14-15, 61-65. In my article, I will use the phrase “ethnic group” with this ambiguity in mind.

13 This has been pointed out by TomioTakayanagi during a private conversation with me.

14 Gottwald, Norman K., *The Hebrew Bible*, pp. 202-205. Ceresco, Anthony, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp.80-84. Green, Edward L., “Exodus.” Setel, Drorah O’ Donnell. “Exodus.”

15 Although the Hebrew Bible includes exclusive and nationalistic orders from God (Deut 7:3, etc.), the reality is that people, knowingly or unknowingly, ignored such orders on many occasions. Although, in the first place, leading characters in narratives of the Hebrew Bible supposedly talked a lot with God, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, David and Solomon all alike had “non-Jewish” partners.

16 The ‘ivri = Hebrews were regarded as the group of apiru/habiru (1Sam4:11, 21). Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, pp. 172-173. Ceresco, *Introduction*, pp.93-95. Lemche, Niels Peter, “Habiru, Hapiru” ; “History of Israel.” That Jonah calls himself a “Hebrew” before God is the only exception in the Hebrew Bible in which a person calls oneself a Hebrew (Jon 1:9).

17 For Canaan, see the Mari Tablets of the 15th century BCE and the Amarna Tablets of the 14th century BCE, which includes the word “habiru.” For Israel, see the Merneptah Stele of the 13 century BCE (1230 BCE). Ceresco, *Introduction*, pp. 74-75; 92-95. Schmits, Philip C., “Canaan.” McCarter, Kyle P., “Israel.” Lemcha, “History of Israel.” Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*, pp.188-192.

“The land of Canaan” is referred to by the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (the Torah) with various expressions, like “the land of Canaan,” “the land of the Amorites,” and “the land of the Hebrews,” and the boundary of its area changed from time to time. Since it is said that “Israel” can be interpreted many ways – “Struggle with God,” “God fights,” “God builds,” and “God rules” – we cannot rule out the possibility that completely different people used this word. But if there were people of “Israel,” even in a small number, who survived in the mountainous area of Canaan toward the end of the 13th century BCE, having escaped from the danger of “annihilation” by Egypt, it seems to me that the possibility cannot be ruled out that all of the people who moved to that place in the 12th century BCE called themselves “Israel.”

18 Egypt kept detailed records of the state and even recorded invasions by shepherds of nomadic people into its land. But it made no reference to nor hinted at “Israel” mentioned in the Biblical narratives. In fact, even the location of Mount Sinai has not been discovered. (Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*. p.188) This means that there are not any records at all deserving academic research concerning such things as the negotiations between Moses and the Pharaoh and the Exodus of the Hebrew people. Nevertheless, while staying in the United States, I read an academic article that said that there exists a record showing that there were a series of escapes by a small number of slaves, although not a large-scale exodus, and because of that at one time, Egypt sent 80 chariots to chase runaway slaves. (Unfortunately the source of the information was unclear.) But I think that this possibility is conceivable since it is understood that the Sea of Reeds event and the “Song of the Sea” (Ex15:19-21) are traditions based on a historical event. Concerning the “Song of the Sea” (Song of Victory), see Yamaguchi, *A New Bible Study*, pp.66-68.

19 Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 302-304; 320-321. Ceresco, *Introduction*, pp. 89-97. Dever, William G., “History of Israel” ; “Archaeology of Palestine.” McCarter, Kyle P., “Conquest of Canaan.” Tucker, Gene M., “Joshua.” Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*, pp.190-192. Yamaguchi, *A New Bible Study*, pp.185-187.

20 “Canaanites” came to mean “merchants” (Zech 14:21), but an overwhelming majority of the Canaanites were farmers. On this: Good, Robert M., “Canaan.”

The Hebrew Bible contains quite a few narratives that lead readers to imagine that a variety of people left their homelands and moved to other places due to famines and wars. According to Exodus, Moses becomes the group’s leader, a people called Hebrews escape from Egypt and reach Canaan at the end of their journey. But the fact is that Canaan was under the rule of Egypt. Therefore this journey was not an escape from Egypt but was an escape from one place to another inside the territories of Egypt. Concerning this, see Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*, p.

188.

Then what was this “escape” from? I believe that it can be understood as symbolizing the series of hardships involved in the “escape” from the conditions of slavery. In Japanese, Exodus is translated as “Narrative of the Exodus from Egypt.” In Hebrew, the book is called Shumot, which is a plural form of “name.”

21 The Kingdom of David (1000 BCE-962 BCE) and the Kingdom of Solomon (962 BCE-922 BCE). Many place names that appear in the narratives on the conquest of Canaan came to exist in the periods of these kingdoms, much later than in the 13th to 12th centuries BCE – the periods in which the events told by the Exodus are supposed to have taken place. There seems to be the possibility that the process of the kingdoms’ establishment and expansion was partly projected back into the narratives on the conquest of Canaan.

It is thought that the narratives about patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the historical narratives contained in the Exodus and Joshua were written and edited in periods several centuries after the periods in which these narratives were set and probably much later than the time of the kingdoms’ establishment, that is, in the 8th to 6th century BCE, especially in the 6th century BCE, after the Babylonian captivity. It is even thought that the final editing of these narratives took place even later, that is, in the Persian period of the 6th to 4th century BCE, and in the Hellenistic period of the 3rd century BCE and later.

Even if fragments of narratives dating back to ancient times are included in the narratives about the patriarchs, biblical studies give a negative answer to the question of whether “the period of patriarchs” historically existed. This leads to a view that editing aimed at treating ancestors as heroes or idealizing them was carried out from the viewpoint of the male elite who lived many centuries after the periods in which the historical narratives are set. Furthermore, even if the Ten Commandments and other rules and laws include fragments of traditions from ancient times, it is understood that they as a whole were edited much later and were presented as rules and laws that had been observed since the ancient periods of ancestors (and in addition, as orders from God) and that they thus had the effect of giving authority to matters designed to govern the community. Lemche, “History of Israel.” McCarter, “Conquest of Canaan.” Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*, pp.188-189.

22 According to the biblical stories, the first generation who took part in the Exodus died without being able to enter the Land of Milk and Honey. It is written that they died because of “disbelief.” But I wonder if this was really the case. It was impossible to attain in a short period of time the goal of a struggle to achieve liberation from the powerful rule of the Egyptian empire. Isn’t it that even if the first generation could not accomplish the goal during their time, they trod a path toward liberation praying that people of following generations would live a happy life? I imagine that even if there were times in which they grumbled, God did not discard them because of their “disbelief” but rather suffered through being with them.

23 The independent country of the Jews disappeared because of this. An exception was the Hasmonean Dynasty which attained independence for a short period of time in the 2nd century BCE (c.140 BCE-37 BCE). Ironically this promoted Hellenization of the land. For example, Queen Salome Alexandra (76 BCE-67 BCE) was depicted in the Hellenistic image of the female deity Isis in a coin. Yamaguchi. *Martha and Mary*, p.85. See also, Masahiro Yamaguchi, *An Easy-to-Understand Introduction for the New Testament* (in Japanese).

24 In a time of regular outbreaks of war, many Jews were forced repeatedly to migrate. This resulted in the formation of Jewish communities in various parts of the world. This is because, whether living in Canaan or living as diaspora, people of these communities mingled with people with different ethnic backgrounds and even married them, actively carried out missionary activities, and increased the number of people who chose to become Jews or believers of Judaism. This phenomenon is reflected in Esther of the Hebrew Bible, which is narrated as an event of the Persian period. Esther 8:17 says, “Furthermore, many of the peoples of the country professed to be Jews.”

Also the Jews appear to have converted slaves to Judaism. This also led people with a variety of ethnic backgrounds to become “Jews.” Consequently, in their history spanning more than 2500 years, the development of Jewish communities was based on religious identity, not on being of a specific ethnic group. What happened is that even when there were chances to return to Canaan (Palestine), Jew chose to continue to live in places they had settled and prospered in the condition of the diaspora. Carroll, Robert P., “History of Israel.” Stern, Patric A. “Dispersion, Diaspora.” Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*, pp.224-225, 238-242. Rabkin, Yakov M. *Au nom de la Torah*, p.80.

25 Carrol, “History of Israel.” Stern, “Dispersion, Diaspora.” Ackroyd, Peter R., “Exile.” It is said that even within the Hebrew Bible, “the people of the Land” (Am ha’ aretz) refers to different kinds of people depending on the periods for which the phrase is used. The usage prior to the Babylonian captivity generally referred to the whole people (Hag 2:4, Dan 9:6, Ezra 2:2; 7:27; 12:19, 22:19, 29; 33:2; 39:13; 45:16; 45:22; 46:3, 9. Neh 7:7). But after the captivity, the usage underwent a great change. When used concerning “the people of the Land” in conflict with people who had returned,

the singular form of the phrase retained the original meaning, the plural form gradually came to have a derogatory nuance (Ezra 9:1, 2; 10:2, 11. Neh 10:20-31). Healey, Joseph P., "Am Ha' arez."

26 Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*, p.248. Since Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and other languages were used in epitaphs of Jewish families in the 1st century Palestine, we can imagine that the believers of Judaism/the Jews had a considerable degree of ethnic diversity. Strange, James F., "Archaeology of Palestine." Puech, Emile, "Palestinian Funerary Inscriptions."

27 In any events, the Roman Empire did not "banish" Jews. This is because it would cause reductions in tax revenues. The general impression of biblical narratives has given rise to a view that "banishment" and "repatriation" symbolized the "fate" and "hope" that recurred throughout the history of the Jews. But the fact is that Jews in diaspora increased not because they faced "banishment" but because they wanted to "leave their homeland" for the reason of various difficult situations and furthermore, wanted to settle in the places they had moved to, instead of returning to their homeland. Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*, pp. 205-208. As to the Jewish resistance movements against the Roman Empire, see Yamaguchi, Masahiro, *The Dawn of Jesus' Birth* (in Japanese).

28 Christianity has created an image that Judaism was highly patriarchal and characterized by strong discrimination against women. It is necessary to realize that this was a prejudice born out of Christianity's apologetic polemics. See Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, pp. 95-99.

29 Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*. pp. 255-272.

30 Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*. pp. 209-212. Rabkin, Yakov M. *Au nom de la Torah*. pp. 30,139.

31 Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*. pp. 274-278.

32 Zionism is said to have its origin in Eastern Europe in the latter half of the 19th century and developed exclusivist nationalism based on especially exclusivist biblical texts of mythological history. In this movement Jews who escaped from Russia in the 20th century play a central role. It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that their Jewish nationalism is mixed with the ethnocentrism of European Whites, which regards White (Philistine/European) Jews = Ashkenazi Jews as "true Jews." (Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*. pp. 200, 378-399). Yakov Rabkin says that today's Israeli state is not a "Jewish state" but a "Zionist state" and that equating the Israeli State with "Jews" is an extremely dangerous misperception. (Rabkin, Yakov M. *Au nom de la Torah*. pp.9-22, 232).

The state of Israel says in the declaration of its establishment that it will be a democratic nation: "It will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture." In reality, however, Israel has defended only the privileges of people whom the state power regards as "Jews" and grossly violated the rights of and inflicted violence on Palestinians who are actually living in Palestine and paying taxes.

It is said that "non-Jews" living in Palestine continue to suffer from lives full of human rights violations beyond description, and that since this situation has lasted for more than 60 years, the problems have become more and more complex and it is becoming difficult for these people to have a bright prospect for the future - making people around the world feel pangs in their hearts. (Rabkin, Yakov M. *Au nom de la Torah*. p. 292. Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*. p. 375, etc.)

Rabkin laments that because the state of Israel in the first place has an attitude of dichotomy characterized by the question of "Are you our friend or enemy?," it is impossible to set the stage for a dialogue. (Rabkin, Yakov M. *Au nom de la Torah*. p.44). In connection with this, Joshua includes words which I find interesting. When Joshua saw a man whom he did not know, he asked, "Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?" (Joshua 5:13) The man, who was a messenger of God, replied, "Neither" (Josh 5:14), and thus rejected a dichotomous way of seeing things. This seems to serve as an important challenge to a dichotomous thinking of "Either/Or," which is widely seen even today.

We are able to get information on the Palestinian situation through various media outlets. Here let me introduce an Internet site that offers information in Japanese from various viewpoints different from those of the established mass media. It is TUP (Translators United for Peace). One can register with the site free of charge. The site provides information translated from various language sources on a wide range of issues not limited to Palestine.

33 Some time ago, the American movie "Passion" became a big hit. It appeared to be aiming to appeal to audience by showing the physical agony of Jesus Christ's passion in a highly realistic manner. However, according to U.S. statistics, it whipped up anti-Semitic sentiment, giving theatre goers the message that, "It was the Jews who had brought such an agonizing death to Christ."

34 The Women in Black movement started in 1988 in Jerusalem when women of Jewish faith clad in black clothes, stood quietly together in protest against the Israel Defense Forces' violation of human rights and use of violence. This movement crossed religious and ethnic boundaries and spread, embracing women of Jewish, Christian and Islamic faith,

as a resistance movement that opposes war, nationalism and violence and seeks for peace. It came to form loose international networks encompassing many parts of the world. Japanese women started taking part in the movement in 2001. It appears that at present, citizens' non-violent resistance movements are developing in various forms, overcoming gender, ethnic and religious differences. I hope that people around the world will open a path toward world peace by proactively doing what they can and taking part in what they can, and fostering solidarity with other people.

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