

## MARK BRAVERMAN

### **WORKSHOP: TOWARD A POST-NAKBA THEOLOGY: THE URGENT ROLE FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES TO BRING ABOUT PEACE BASED ON JUSTICE (2014)<sup>1</sup>**

#### **COMMENTARY**

##### ***Braverman's "transformation"***

*Zionism both  
"hijacked" and is  
"killing" Judaism*

#### **QUOTATIONS**

My transformation from a Jew born in the United States in 1948, which means perforce growing up as a Zionist. My transformation from someone who accepted, bought and endorsed the Zionist narrative to someone who feels that unless we can overcome **Zionism, which has hijacked Judaism and is killing Judaism**. That transformation came about as I witnessed the occupation for the first time as a middle-aged man... My real concern is for the Jewish people who are living under those circumstances. It was seeing my Jewish cousins and nephews and nieces at those checkpoints doing what they had been taught to do to those other human beings. Seeing the look in their eyes and what's happening to their souls.

##### ***Israelis as "ugly racists"***

**Israelis don't know the Palestinian people. They are filled of all kinds of ugly racist crazy ideas about who these people who are their brothers and sisters, are.** It's a tragedy that I feel very, very deeply, for myself and for my people.

##### ***The role of faith in peacemaking***

So we are here to talk about theology! We really want to talk about theology because, as it's been said before this is not a religious struggle. This is a struggle about human beings, about water and about land and about human rights. It is, however, very, very much an issue about faith because what people believe is important. And how people understand their faith and what their faith requires of them is important. And politics have failed to bring about peace, you know we've been talking about the peace process and I'll come back at the end to that because we've been talking about what we need to be doing politically.

##### ***Grassroots movement inspired by Hebrew prophets and Jesus***

*Implies Israel is  
akin to South  
Africa, Jim Crow*

The process that will bring peace is much, much more like the process that brought about the end of Jim Crow in America and that brought down the Apartheid system in South Africa. It's about a grassroots movement. And the voices that will bring about peace will not be Obama, or Mitchell, or Netanyahu, or Abbas or the politicians. It will be voices like Amos, and Isaiah, and Hosea and Jesus of Nazareth.

##### ***The real problem is the interfaith dialogue***

People, these are prophetic times and they are urgent times. The talk this morning [by Mads Gilbert] reminded me once again about how urgent this is, and how we don't have time. We need to remember Martin Luther King... (Letter from a Birmingham Jail): 'I am much, much more worried about the

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<sup>1</sup> Braverman gave this workshop twice, once during the Friday afternoon program, and the other on Saturday morning. This is a transcript of an audio recording taken of the Saturday session.

white liberals than about the Ku Klux Klan.'

We have to understand how the religious extremists, especially in the case of Israel, it's the tail wagging the dog, and we have to be concerned about religious extremists here in the United States that have significant political and economic power, but it can distract us from the Zionism and the exceptionalism that is hiding in plain sight in the mainstream. That's where the grassroots is going to come from, the movement that's going to come, that's going to change the political wind and make a difference as to what kind of political settlement is going to happen.

**Interfaith Dialogue is a "trap"**

What I want to talk about today is one missing piece to that, What is the major barrier to that movement growing here in the US and I really want to issue a call to the Church. And I want to talk about what has happened here in this country in particular since the Second World War and why we have to get beyond what has come to be called interfaith dialogue, because I believe interfaith dialogue has really become a trap, and we need to be liberated from that.

**The problem's source diagnosed: "rabbinic Judaism" and "Zionism"**

So as I said I was born in 1948, if you're a Jewish kid born in 1948 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania you were raised in a potent combination of rabbinic Judaism and political Zionism. We prayed to the State of Israel three times a day – the first flowering of our redemption. We're not talking about Zion, not talking about Jerusalem, but the State of Israel. I was told that I had been blessed that I was born at a time when my people had been redeemed from the suffering of millennia. And it was a tale of heroism, it was a tale of bravery. And that's the narrative, the Zionist narrative.

*Doors to synagogues are closed to him.*

I came back (from Israel) and had made several discoveries. One was that the doors of the synagogues were closed to me. Now I understand things have started to change, especially here in the Bay Area, here and there little points of light. But I want to caution us not to take this as the beginning of the Jewish community in this country is turning around, it's not going to happen. It's not going to happen that fast.

*But, doors to churches are 'flung open' to him*

But then I had another experience. The doors to the churches were flung open, it was wonderful, that there was this hunger for a message from a Jew that it's okay to criticize the State of Israel and to raise questions about human rights and to be for justice and it's not antisemitic.

**On Christianity being more mature than Judaism**

I'm preaching at this church, I'm preaching, and I know how to do this, it's just like synagogue except you got a lectionary that is so much better than just the Five Books of Moses and a selection from the Prophets

**Interfaith dialogue is a "real estate deal"**

My first introduction to this Christian problem with the cause for justice in historic Palestine, for all the people who are there who are the victims of this horror. And I would find it everywhere, and it's really a big problem. What happened? Sixty-five years ago Christians stood before the ovens and said

“what have we done?” and what ensued was the project to revise Christian theology which had said up to then that ‘the Jews killed God, they are damned, they are doomed to wander the earth, and suffer and we are the New Israel. We are up and they are down.’

So now you take a look at the new Christian theology, it is ‘the Jews are blessed, the original covenant,’ which we as heard this morning is clearly centered on the Land, it’s a real estate deal, is in force. The Jews get the Land. In fact that’s what happened, this is the new deal, ‘you killed our Lord, so we killed you, we’re really sorry, so now you can have the Land.’

**Advocating  
supersessionism:**

*‘Tribal,’ ‘exclusivist’  
Judaism: the root  
cause of no peace  
in the Middle East*

Christianity came to take Judaism, what was wonderful and revolutionary about Judaism – you know monotheism, one God, ethical monotheism – pull it out of its tribal framework and make it universal. It’s obvious, that is where Judaism was supposed to go... the Jews said “thanks very much, we’re going to stay with what we have, we’re the Chosen People, we’re the Elect, thank you, thank you.” Christianity went on to do its own thing and then got into its own trouble with empire...

*Temple needed to  
be destroyed*

But you know, Jesus stood in front of the Temple, I think it’s in Luke, and said, ‘In three days the stones are going to come down. Nothing will be left.’ Of course, the disciples didn’t understand what he was talking about. He was saying this, we need to reform our religion. He was speaking truth to power. It’s for everyone and it’s not about a place, not about a land.

*Jewish theology is  
a “disaster.”*

This is where Judaism was supposed to go. But, instead, what has happened is this sense of isolationism, this sense of election and exclusivism has been incubated for 2,000 years and we see the result today in the State of Israel. My people, the Jewish people, need to grow out of this. It doesn’t work, it’s a disaster and we need to join with Christians who also need to understand that it’s a disaster and it is not Christian to support political Zionism.

*“It is not Christian”  
to support Israel*

**Christians are caving in to  
Jewish ‘pressure’**

What we have instead is a situation where if a denomination or a pastor is faced with the decision to do the right thing or disrupt the relationship that’s been built up with the rabbi down the street, or face the pressure of the local Jewish Federation, in most cases they will preserve the relationship and give in to the pressure.

**Acting as an enabler for  
anti-Israel activists in  
Christian denominations**

I was with the Methodists at their convention, and they were talking about the divestment initiative... They knew that the Wiesenthal Center was going to turn up and speak from the floor, so they go to a couple of us to come and also speak on the floor. I got up there with other JVP people and said, “Look, I’m here to tell you that if you really want to love the Jewish people, please don’t do this (give in to SWC pressure) if you really want to love us. And, it’s not antisemitic, I’m here to tell you – and I pray that someday you will acknowledge that it was a Jew that gave you permission to be a good Christian, but that isn’t the reality right now (lots of laughter in audience).

**Israel lobby: a 'vast complex'**

*Jews use antisemitism to silence Christians on Palestine*

And then, I think it was Rabbi Cooper, the head of the Wiesenthal Center which is one of, is part of the Israel Lobby, a vast complex of lots of organizations, as you know it's just not AIPAC. And, he got up and he was brilliant, absolutely brilliant, he knew just what to do. He said about twenty words, or less. He said, "I know you are being told that this resolution is not antisemitic, but I'll tell you, it feels that way." And, he sat down. All he had to do was lift his little finger, all he had to do. So its powerful!

**Christian-Jewish relations threatened by Israel**

Its powerful also because, look, Christians have been working on an individual basis, in families, in work relationships, on denominational levels, on national levels as well. For 65 years been building bridges and its blood and sweat to do that. And now, it is threatened to be blown up; these relationships are at risk. And, ah, sorry that's true.

**Israel is a "rogue state"**

The whole project of building those bridges and reconciliation was pretty much a good thing, but it didn't figure on the State of Israel, it didn't figure on a rogue state that is responsible for the longest running violation of human rights, you know, in modern history; unless you want to consider poverty written large. It didn't figure on Gaza. It just didn't figure on that, so it's a tough situation.

**Exclude "the Jews" from interfaith projects on "Palestine" and cancel interfaith dialogues**

And my message is... what interfaith says is 'you can go ahead and you can have programs about justice for Palestine; you can do all of that, but you really have to bring the Jews in, they have to be part of the project. They have to agree, they have to be on board. And my message is, no they don't. What we need is not interfaith dialogue, but community. Who are the people who are on board, some of them are Jewish, some of them are Muslim, some are Christian.

**Jews are isolationist paranoids with psychological issues**

Don't wait for us, we have our own work to do , which is somehow try to figure out how to get over the exceptionalism, isolationism and the paranoia and the sense of being special and apart. We have to get over that, I don't know how it's going to happen, I don't know when it's going to happen. It feels as big as a Reformation. And the psychological issues involved in there are deep. We're in big trouble.