

WORLD-STORY, LAND-STORY, PEOPLE-STORY, SELF-STORY

OCCASION: A yesterday conversation with a Christianity-hater who in a letter to the editor had attacked my land-story (in this here CCT letter, 6.6.97) in a diatribe (here, CCT 10 days later) sparked, he said on the phone, from having just completed Netanyahu's latest book (which says the Jews' claim to Palestine has better documentation than the Arab Palestinians' claim).

While reason is rare, a reason is as common as dirt & indeed often is dirt, dirty.

1 Almost always the OpEd editor of the CAPE COD TIMES publishes at least one letter against my letter & is sometimes (as in this instance) hardput to find an intelligible counterpoint to my point. Customarily, I seize upon my opponent as an evangelistic opportunity & get on the horn (the telephone, being audio, being superior to fax & e-mail & the PO).

2 Thought you might like to listen in on one of these encounters, so here goes on this one (I being "E," my opponent "H"):

E: "Mr. H...?" H: "Yes." E: "I'm Willis Elliott & am puzzled as to the point of your letter. Could you put it in one sentence?" H: "You say Palestine belongs to the Arabs, & I say to the Jews." E: "My letter says the land belongs to God & the rights of this Ultimate Owner relativize any human land-claims. I said 'a new start' might be made if the rivals were to humble themselves together before this fundamental fact."

H: "Jews & Arabs will never talk, least of all on religion!" E: "But they are. And Christians, the third party in the religions of the West, are increasingly in on & promotive of the conversation."

H: "Christians! I hate Christianity! It's mere myth as the basis of power!"

3 When I asked "How did you acquire your hatred of my religion?" he thumbnailed his religious story (the "self-story" of this Thinksheet's title): (1) dropped out of Congregational Sunday School "as soon as I could"; (2) tried the Presbyterians -- "but they were divided into many groups & are mainly interested in using religion for political purposes"; (3) took instruction in Judaism & went all the way through finished reading Israel's Netanyahu's latest book (as noted in this Thinksheet's 1st ¶); not going regularly to synagogue.

All land claims political, ephemeral

"And if you dig a little deeper, you come to old dead Canaanites."

Forty years ago, that was my response to the wife of the governor of the Port of Tel Aviv, Israel, as my wife and I were having dinner with them on the porch of their penthouse.

She, in archeological ecstasy, had just said, "If you dig down anywhere in Palestine, you come to our Jewish ancestors!"

I must object to today's letter titled "Arab claim to land is false" (May 23). More than a dozen centuries ago, Muslim Arabs laid claim to Palestine, canceling — according to the Qur'an — any other land claim.

Around the globe, land claims have piled up through the centuries like sedimentary strata. Who owns what depends on the politics of the diggers and how far

down they dig.

Throughout history, land disputes have been solved primarily by military action, secondarily by diplomacy. Beginning in 1948, Arabs have tried to "drive Israel into the sea" and have failed. And the old land-claim diplomatic efforts have come to little or nothing.

The religions of the West — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — teach that there is only one God, the Lord of heaven and earth. Psalm 24:1 puts the conviction this way: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it; the world, and those who live in it." Diplomacy based on the claims of the "Ultimate Owner" just might get somewhere. At least it would be a new start.

WILLIS ELLIOTT
Craigville

Israel's borders set by 'force and diplomacy'

In Willis Elliott's objection to the letter "Arab claim to land is false," (June 6), he makes the following points:

■ Muslim Arabs laid claims to Palestine canceling all other land claims.

■ Land claims have piled up through the centuries like sedimentary strata.

■ Land disputes have been solved primarily by armed conflict, secondarily by diplomacy.

I would refer Mr. Elliott to the historical documentation of modern and ancient times that deal specifically with the land in dispute rather than rely on "religious" myth, either Christian or pagan.

The word "palestinian" was politically contrived to give false identity to the Arab who lives in

Palestine and somehow has more right to be there than the Jew in Palestine. The Koran laying claim to Palestine has as much force in international law as the Biblical assertion that God is the "Ultimate Owner."

Never let it be said that the United States would back a true democracy rather than another right wing dictatorship.

The final question to Mr. Elliott is why the Arab in Palestine faces Mecca at sunset and why the Jew is content to be in Palestine and/or Israel?

The boundaries of Israel have been established by force and by diplomacy. The forces of oil money continually erode that which has been established.

DON C. HAYWARD
Monument Beach

adult bar mitzvah; (4) admitted that he'd just finished reading Israel's Netanyahu's latest book (as noted in this Thinksheet's 1st

4 Does his religion self-story reveal *why* his venom against Christianity? A few clues: (1) It's the only religion he ever couldn't "drop out of" (so, adolescent rebellion [but why on religion? needs exploring]); (2) a Christian stream he explored, viz. Presbyterianism, proved to have tributaries (as do all cultural streams!) & political concerns (don't all, even if only negative?); (3) quitting Christianity for the childish-idealistic reason that he found Presbyterianism to be infested with human beings, he carried his empty religion receptacle into Judaism, which poured into him its people-story, including antichristianity (including denial of Jesus' incarnation, resurrection, & return). (Soft-headed unrealist rhetoricians sound as if it were possible, which it plainly is not, that Jewish self-definition not include an antichristian element & Christian self-definition not include an antijewish element [not "antisemitic," a term concocted in 1879 not by a Christian but by an atheist anarchist]).....*Disturbing aside for me, who am proJewish except for the points at which Judaism is antichristian:* World-stories ("myths" in the technical sense: a myth or or mythic constellation is a [sub]culture's narrative center whose circumference excludes nothing, so the myth is polyhermeneutic [able to make centering sense of everything]) are **mutually exclusive**. When I said to H., "My experience of Christianity is as positive as yours is negative," he said "How could you believe those myths?" E: "God came among us as Jesus & we killed him & he didn't stay dead: within himself he conquered evil in living & death in dying, & so became for all who will trust in him the Savior from evil & death & the Lord of life & the life beyond. That is my myth; what is yours?" H: "I see how your myth makes sense for you, but I don't believe in myths." (I'll not detail here my helping him distinguish between sense-1 myth, viz. world-story, & sense-2 myth, viz. the "nonsense" your world-myth makes in its war ("myth-o-machy") with my myth, which makes "sense." Interreligious dialog should begin with the human mind's structural inability to transcend mythomachy (including myth-o-clasm, efforts to crush others' myths, as Jews need a countermyth to Jesus' empty tomb [Mt.18.11-15 is one such counterstory]). At the mud-fight level, myths smear each other. Right now in the USA, Jews are more free to smear Christianity than Christians to smear Judaism; & some Christians, esp. in light of Holocaust, participate in the smearing of Christianity (& some Christian scholars even use historicistic fancies to do so: in PBS' '98 "From Jesus to Christ," ex-RCC priest Jn. Dominic Crossan says flatly "Mark invented the empty tomb").

5 All of the above was ground-clearing for dealing with H's presenting case, viz. land-story. He's pro-Israeli (as I am, he was surprised to learn), & the editor well-titled his letter--but poorly titled mine: my point wasn't that land claims are "ephemeral" but that they are relative (not absolute) as qualified both by the patronal paradigm ("The earth is the LORD's") & by time (land-claims stratigraphy). The conversation continued in this vein:

6 E: "You seem to set out to make three points against my letter, yet now you say you agree with me on all but the first, which now you admit you misunderstood. Where does that leave the rest of your letter, which hangs on your first point?" H: "I was trying to legitimize Israel's land claim, on the basis of Netanyahu's presenting 'historical documentation of modern and ancient times' against the Arab's undocumented-nomadic claims." E: "But we have solid political-documentary evidence that Palestine belongs not to the Jews but to Egypt." He hadn't heard of the Tell el Amarna archive, & responded thus: "Well, but I'm talking about land-claimants *to-day*." E: "Why then did you mention 'historical' documentation?" H: "Well, because Netanyahu's book does." E: "Back to my point about the Canaanites. Wasn't it naive of you to buy that Israeli's spin on Palestine's present land-struggle?" He conceded the point. He was gullible to N.'s propaganda because it confirmed his view, & it's rare for a human being to think critically about anyone/anything confirmative of one's own position.

7 H's proJewish, antiArab stance is blatant. Myth is "Christian or pagan," not also Jewish. He smears Palestinian Arabs for facing Mecca to pray (as making them supposedly bad Palestinians): are Am. Orthodox Jews unAmerican when they pray facing Jerusalem? He tries to neutralize sacred scriptures (including Ps.24.1) by stating an obvious fact, that they have no "force in international law."