



**WITNESS
FOR JUSTICE**

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Moral Injury

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For some time now, I've been reckoning with an injury. [I know I'm not alone.](#)

I share today in the hope that these words resonate with you and, prayerfully, help provide permission as needed to name the same. I've found that naming these things in trusted community helps alleviate the injury and builds solidarity. I've also found that I've run out of words to talk about much else.

I am speaking of a moral injury.

I've spent the better part of two decades working to mobilize people of faith and conscience to "use our voices" on behalf of the poor and marginalized. Most of my work has been focused on Capitol Hill. Inspired by the Gospel, I preached the gospel of "just this many letters/phone calls/lobby visits" can motivate our leaders to prioritize investment in alleviating injustices in our shared national budget and policies.

I believed and practiced this gospel for so long in part because, in spite of our grotesque over-investment in militarism, enriching the rich, and other racist, capitalistic enterprises, now and then I saw and was part of the fruits of victory when enough people came together to wield our power for good. Many of you have done this work too. Sometimes those in power listened and acted accordingly!

I've lost faith in the efficacy of these



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particular tactics, in large part because what used to sometimes work clearly hasn't when it mattered most.

A moral injury: ["In traumatic or unusually stressful circumstances, people may perpetrate, fail to prevent, or witness events that contradict deeply held moral beliefs and expectations."](#)

The moral injury I am writing about here is precipitated specifically by our bipartisan, tax-funded genocide of Palestinians, which as of this writing is being accelerated into the "Final Solution" stage by our Middle East proxy state Israel: over 100 are now killed daily ["for sport"](#) (most while seeking food), with an imminent mass death event on the horizon, engineered by the intentional starvation of the remaining Palestinian population in Gaza.

Genocide, we're taught, is the crime of crimes, and the abject horrors of this current holocaust, live-streamed to the world for going on two years, are ones for which we are running out of words to adequately describe. One needs profanity to rightly name the profane, and even that has felt insufficient for a long while now. Jesus weeps, yes, but also screams at us to stop it. Christ is in the rubble, as Palestinian pastor Munther Isaac says from his congregation in Bethlehem.

Professor Sunny Singh helped [give voice to some of my own feelings](#). She says, among other things: "We are witnessing absolute moral abhorrence in real time, on devices in the palm of our hands ... This is unprecedented ... We do not know the scale and severity of the moral injury caused by bearing witness to a live-streamed genocide. One where we know the names and lives of the people being wantonly, brutally murdered daily ... This moral injury is mass, collective, and knows no borders or age groups or identities. We have no idea how it will impact us in the decades to come. But we know it will! It will also impact those who are silent and pretending they do not know, cannot see ... At some point soon we will start seeing the breakdowns, individual and collective. The cracks have already begun to emerge. Because such

extreme cognitive, emotional, psychological dissonance is impossible to maintain forever.”

[So many of us have fought to stop this genocide.](#) In our thousands, in our millions, we have used the tools we were taught can influence the powerful to manifest the will of the people. Since late October 2023, the majority will of the people has been unequivocal and overwhelming: stop the slaughter of Palestinians with our money and weapons.

A moral injury: [“\(1\). When someone does something that goes against their beliefs this is often referred to as an act of commission and when they fail to do something in line with their beliefs that is often referred to as an act of omission. Individuals may also experience betrayal from leadership, others in positions of power or peers that can result in adverse outcomes.”](#)

The moral injury I am writing about here is exacerbated by betrayal from leadership.

In spite of our fight, the genocide continues unabated. Countless letters, phone calls, in-person visits, public demonstrations, and direct actions aimed at the entirety of our elected leadership and weapons manufacturers have been ignored at best.

More often, and more alarmingly, the people’s will has been met with gaslighting about our motivations and violent, enthusiastically bipartisan state suppression.

We asked the perpetrators to stop a holocaust. They haven’t. Instead, they attacked us with fascist vigor.

[Billions of our dollars continue to be rubber-stamped for genocide, weapons manufacturers are raking in record profits as a direct result, and our government is snatching people off the street who dare to say that’s wrong.](#) This is all happening with no meaningful opposition from our nominal opposition party, because both parties are responsible for the crime. Indeed, it began with the full-throated blessing and bombs of the previous administration. This is as harrowing an injury to many of our ideas of ourselves as people and country as can be imagined, and one that I believe many of us need strength and internal permission to name out loud if we are to truly move forward into a habitable world. I

believe that most if not all of you reading this have been stricken with this injury too. And as painful as it is, there can be no reckoning with this injury, let alone an ability to act towards healing, without clearly naming its cause and symptoms. My prayer is that sharing some of this resonates, and gives you permission to name what may have felt verboten. I personally feel a need to name it (again) as clearly as possible to maintain a grip on something resembling reality:

The worst possible thing is being done in our name, the “never again” is every day, and our leaders—who on paper are supposed to work for us—are actually ignoring or fighting us to keep it going. Genocide is the most bipartisan venture in Washington. Meanwhile, more and more in the United States go hungry, houseless, and spiral into medical debt as worker protections are gutted, entire agencies designed to aid those in need are shut down, and the environment is laid waste by technology foisted on us by billionaires with stated, active contempt for earth and people (PSA: in Jesus’ name, do not intentionally use AI).

In my role as Minister for Economic Justice, I find it impossible to try and advocate for rights like a living wage, universal health care, housing for all and more without fighting to stop the genocide. It’s all intimately connected, from the money being spent for death instead of life, to re-asserting the power of the people, to questions of what rights we even have if the most fascist crime of all can be executed by everyone in power without being stopped. Also, there are no “take-backs” on a genocide and if I know anything it’s that our children and grandchildren are going to ask how or if we truly laid it on the line to stop this.

A government that fights harder to execute a holocaust against the will of its own people is not a government that will bestow our collective needs and rights. The proof has been stacking perilously high for some years. As a fellow pastor and friend kindly reminded me, manufactured consent for mass death and disabling was recently set in motion first with mass acceptance of capitalism’s racist and ableist prerogatives that we return to “normal” in regards to the pandemic. With that obedience came abandonment of so many folks and societal needs amidst the ongoing death and sickness from COVID.

All of this lays claims on us to imagine and do something differently. If we truly want this genocide to end and for Palestine to be free (and by extension, the world), then our actions must dramatically escalate until

we find the right impact points. After almost two years, the fear of God is clearly not in those with the power to immediately stop the bloodshed. Yet.

This past month, in our first all-church General Synod gathering since 2023, [the United Church of Christ overwhelmingly passed a resolution declaring the need to end this genocide](#). Statements alone do not a genocide end, we know that full well. This is a call to all of us to end it.

While it's important to name and reckon with these things, we also have so little time because the implications are clear: the tools many of us thought would work do not when it mattered most. We need new tools, new training, new solidarity economies, and we need to find, build and use them now if we haven't already started. There are also communities aplenty already doing this work nationwide, eager for more embodied solidarity. Find them!

My prayer—for self and all of you—is that each day we move forward, somehow, in ways that bridge and heal our moral and spiritual dissonance. I know this will take bold, risky action: new kinds of actions we haven't tried collectively yet. Even if many past beliefs have been shaken and uprooted, I still strongly believe we have power to take actions that matter and can stop, even now, a genocide.

“What would you do if you were alive during _____?” [We're doing it right now.](#)

The violent power of empire is never ceded without people taking real risks to seize it. As is already the case, there will invariably be real and larger costs to any meaningful action that threatens the stranglehold of genocidares who have thus far refused to budge. Be encouraged: [If enough of us take the risks, the “extraordinary” that’s necessary will soon seem ordinary.](#) The payoff is liberation! As the saying goes, “none of us are free until all of us are free.” For many of us, Jesus of Nazareth is our paramount example of this truth, and for those who claim that truth, we know there is no cost—to reputation, employment, safety, and life—that outweighs the guarantee of our seat at the banquet table of the beloved kin-dom of God on the other side. As we've seen, any action that actually pushes the needle will be dubbed “violent,” even “terrorist” (e.g. student encampments). In our faith tradition, take heart that you're in good company there as well. Every accusation by the empire is

is a confession.

Free Palestine and we'll be well on our way to free the world.

Act accordingly.

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