

An open letter to L4

Ruth Padilla DeBorst

12.30 pm, September 25

The Lausanne Program Team asked me to talk in Seoul about a theme that is central to God's character, to the Good News, and to the calling of God's people in the world. I was given 15 minutes to speak about justice. Perhaps, I should never have accepted the invitation! There are so many expressions of injustice in our world, how could anyone thoroughly and responsibly tackle such a deep and broad ranging theme and the complicated scenarios related to it from a biblical and theological standpoint in only 15 minutes?

In light of concerns raised, I am here ratifying a few points and clarifying two others.

Seeking justice is a marker of God's people and this requires mourning the pain, naming wrongs, repenting for our complicity, and acting in accordance with God's character through the work of the Holy Spirit.

God hears the cries of all who suffer injustice. And echoing with God's compassionate heart, we weep with the poor and marginalized. We weep with the victims of racism, discrimination and abuse of all sorts. We weep with the millions displaced by climate change. We weep with the earth itself and with the disappearing species. We weep with all who suffer war the world round. Their pain is our pain.

We are sent into the world in all its messiness as Jesus was. We do not shy away from reality in spite of its complexity. Instead, we name what we see, recognizing that our perspective is marked by our experience and context, that others have different views, that we can only gain a fuller picture by listening humbly to one another and that, at the same time, we are to actively seek justice, echoing with God's heart to make all things right.

In that vein, in my talk on justice I stated that

“what makes God's people such are not superficial expressions of religious piety, ‘Christianese’ jargon, worship jingles, or colonialist theologies that justify and finance oppression under the guise of some dispensational eschatology.

This is not in any way a blanket dismissal of dispensational theology and, even less, of sisters and brothers who subscribe to that stance. For the pain my statement might have caused, I am sorry. What I am naming is the troubling theological rationale sustained by some people to perpetrate injustice against certain other people.

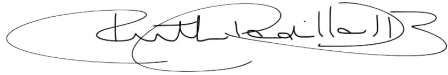
A second clarification has to do with the following statement.

“There is no room for indifference toward all who are suffering the scourge of war and violence the world round, the uprooted and beleaguered people of Gaza, the hostages held by both Israel and Hamas and their families, the threatened Palestinians in their own territories, all who are mourning the loss of loved ones. Their pain is our pain if we are God's people.”

Although I did refer to “all who are suffering” and “all who are mourning,” the world round, why would I zero in on Gaza and Palestinians? Why explicitly name only them? I am convinced that this is a current justice issue in relation to which we, as Christians, have a particular

responsibility. Let me explain. Truly, the Hamas attack almost a year ago was abhorrent and absolutely reprehensible, and truly people who live in Israel, Jewish, Palestinian and others are being threatened as I write. Their pain is our pain. At the same time, the long standing suffering of Palestinians has been compounded by the attacks on Gaza since October 7 where over 40,000 people have been killed, many of them, children. Additionally, settler attacks have only increased in the West Bank. Their pain is our pain -or it should be. However, far too many evangelicals around the world a-critically “stand with Israel,” and remain oblivious to the suffering Palestinians. This injustice must be named.

It is my prayer that, as the Dr Anne Zaki so clearly challenged us, we might courageously raise our voices and not be silenced and that we might humbly engage in respectful conversation in the midst of our differences so that, together, we might declare and display Christ in a broken world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ruth Bell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "R" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.