



from Garth...

When a miscarriage of justice happens to a friend

Sitting talking with a long time friend of mine this week, the Revd Dr Stephen Sizer, brought home to me the pain that both Stephen and his wife Joanna have received at the hands of an Ecclesiastical Tribunal by the Church of England, in which they investigated an accusation of antisemitism brought against Stephen by the Jewish Board of Deputies. So this newsletter is going to be a little different to my usual, because I just want to look at this in some depth.

I have known Stephen for over forty years, since he was a student. I have followed his growing passion for justice and peace in the Holy Land since those days. I am glad to say based on these many years of experience of him that Stephen is committed to International Law, the Fourth Geneva Convention, and human rights. **In my experience Stephen is a gentle but firm peacemaker who lives out the**

Biblical mandate that all are made in the image of God. I've not ever during all our years of friendship and work together witnessed anything in his words or actions that reflects antisemitism. He has worked with Jewish peace activists and Rabbis and won their respect, and also the respect of the Muslim community. He has been a significant witness to the Christian value of peacemaking, and is admired by Middle Eastern Bishops and clergy.



Revd Dr Stephen Sizer

In the Tribunal I was called as a witness. I had never been in a situation like this before and didn't know what to expect. I had been asked to write an article in

advance, but then when they questioned me in the Tribunal they never referred to what I had written at all, but simply referred to something Stephen had done some years back. This was something that had been addressed several years ago in a Conciliation Agreement chaired by the Bishop of Guildford. Jonathan Arkush, President of the Board of Deputies, and Stephen both agreed to the outcome of that, so why was it being brought up again now?

In this Tribunal Stephen's Barrister Stephen Hofmeyr KC made this crucial point: "It is significant that not one word or statement from Dr Sizer has been shown to be antisemitic. There are none." And indeed this new Ecclesiastical Tribunal had a problem - nothing antisemitic was coming up in the evidence, so they needed to go back to something already dealt with several years in the past.

Jewish voices in support of Stephen Sizer

Jewish academic Antony Lerman spoke very powerfully at Stephen's Tribunal, particularly stating that there was no case to answer over antisemitism.

He was the expert witness on antisemitism at Stephen's tribunal. His opinion demolished attempts by the prosecution to use the discredited IHRA working definition of antisemitism. **As founding editor of Antisemitism World Report, Editor of Jewish Quarterly, and a member of the Advisory Committee of the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, it is hard to understand why his voice was not listened to in the final analysis - at first he was heard, and at that point the case seemed over.**



The six months of silence

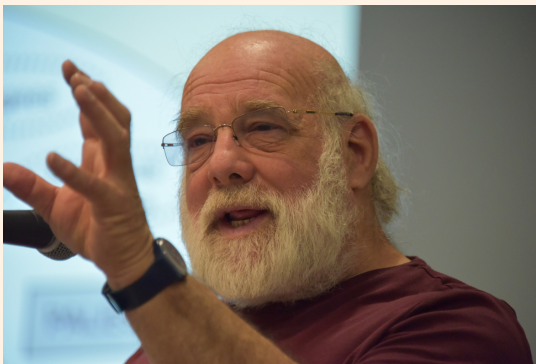
After Antony Lerman had spoken there seemed to be no case for Stephen to answer. And yet the Tribunal took 6 months to decide the outcome, keeping Stephen on edge, and then came up with their extraordinary conclusion banning him from ministry for twelve years. The words of criticism against Stephen that came from the Tribunal at that point sounded like it was a totally different Tribunal **and completely discounted**

Antony Lerman's contribution.

After hearing the result of the Tribunal Antony Lerman commented, **“This disgraceful miscarriage of justice against someone who has never uttered a word of hate against Jews will be a permanent stain against the Church of England and the Board of Jewish Deputies.”**

I have to ask what the Ecclesiastical Tribunal thought they were doing in bringing this. This Anglican Priest who has served so faithfully for years both in this country and around the world, working with Christians, Jews and Muslims on situations of justice - why was he hung out to dry?

Let's listen to **another Jewish voice** - someone I would say is a highly significant prophetic voice - and that's Jewish academic and Founder of ICAHD (Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions), **Jeff Halper**.



Dr Jeff Halper, Founder ICAHD

“The issue of Dr Sizer’s being tried by Tribunal because of his legitimate criticism of Israel is a matter that should concern us all.

“Palestine is the very crucible of Christianity, and no one in the world has stood with the besieged Christians of Palestine more than Dr Sizer. He has given voice to their distress when the Church of England has been silent.”

“As an Israeli Jew and the head of an Israeli human rights organization – ICAHD, the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions – I am appalled by the very thought of bringing anyone, let alone such a principled person as Stephen Sizer, before a religious Tribunal. What, are we back to the Medieval days of the Inquisition? I can’t speak for the Church of England, but **Jews, the British Board of Deputies, participating in a religious Tribunal?! The very thought is appalling. What has happened to us, Jews and Christians together? Are we willing to return to the dark processes of Tribunals with no legal underpinnings, no genuine evidence or testimony, conducted solely against people whose views we don’t like – besmirch and destroy people’s lives – just to prevent criticism of Israel? Is it really so easy, in the 21st Century, to persecute people for their religious and political views?**

“The charges against Dr. Sizer are untrue and trumped-up – and you all know it.”

“Let me say this as plainly as I can. I have known Dr. Sizer for over twenty years. I respect his moral position on Israel. I certainly respect his academic work on Christian Zionism, one of the most insidious and antisemitic religious doctrines in modern history and profoundly anti-Israel (Israel exists to bring on the Christian End of Days in which virtually all Jews die or become Christians). I respect Dr. Sizer’s willingness to go beyond the comforts of parish life to engage critically in an issue of central concern to us all: how to prevent Israel from becoming the next apartheid South Africa, how to prevent Jews from becoming Afrikaners, and how to liberate the Palestinian people from the yoke of occupation and apartheid – causes Christians and Jews should be engaged with rather than outdated and discredited Tribunals. And while I don’t use Dr. Sizer’s faith-based language, I have never heard him utter a word that I would consider antisemitic. To accuse or “convict” him of such is truly medieval. It is all the more outrageous if you and your Tribunal are basing your judgement on the false and tendentious position represented by the IHRA assertion that any criticism of Israel is de facto antisemitic – a position disavowed by Kenneth Stern, who drafted the IHRA paper (only intended as a “working definition”), as well as by dozens of prominent Jewish and Israeli scholars and progressive Jewish and Israeli organizations.

Not only should Stephen Sizer be “acquitted” of such ridiculous charges, he should not have been brought before a Tribunal at all. **I would have advised him to disassociate from this entire inquisitorial process completely** – and I urge you to do so as well.

In solidarity (with Stephen),
Dr Jeff Halper

The price of loyalty

However, Stephen stayed loyal to the Church of England - maybe he should have listened to Jeff and disassociated himself from the process.

What would have happened? Maybe the same outcome but none of the stress en route. The failure of the Diocese of Winchester to show support for Stephen and Joanna at all in this long stressful period is frankly shocking, and confirms Dr Jeff Halper’s suggestion to disassociate himself.

The central message arising from the tribunal is that the Church has punished Stephen with a twelve year ban - despite Antony Lerman's dismissal of the new charges and the fact that no evidence was provided to substantiate the charges in the first place. Which makes one wonder why Stephen and Joanna were put through all of this, when the Church are treating him as guilty despite their own “due process” proving otherwise.

Shocking use of dog collar!

One of the accusations made by the Tribunal was that Stephen wore a dog collar when he went to meet someone from Hezbollah. This very strange critique caused the wonderful **Bishop Riah Abu El Assal, previous Bishop of Jerusalem**, to say this:

“Had you consulted any Bishop in the Middle East you would have learnt that we insist clergy wear clerical attire at all times in public, but especially when meeting a leader of another faith community. It is also imperative they’d do so in any of the Middle East’s conflict zones such as Southern Lebanon. I would regard it as foolish and ‘conduct unbecoming’ not to do so.”



Another Jewish Voice - Tony Greenstein

Tony Greenstein is an activist and writer from an Orthodox Jewish Family - his father was Rabbi Solomon Greenstein who opposed Oswald Mosely and the British Union of Fascists at the Battle of Cable Street.

In his most recent blog he said:

“At times the tribunal descended from comedy to farce, for example when Van der Zyl (President of Board of Deputies of British Jews) became hysterical and was rebuked by the Chair for refusing to answer questions under cross-examination or when Arkush suffered a senior moment when being reminded that a Subject Access Request to the CCJ had revealed that Nick Howard, (son of Michael Howard) a Messianic (Christian) Zionist had been drafting his crib sheets when he confronted Dr Sizer’s bishop.

What on earth was the President of the Board of Deputies doing relying on crib sheets prepared by Messianic Jews (who are not even recognised as Jews in Israel)? Because they are even more Zionist than the Zionists. What would members of the BoD make of that?

And where were the prosecution witnesses? Could they not find a single person within the Jewish community who was offended by his Facebook posts or what he had written?

But embarrassing moments were shared equally between the Board of Deputies and the Church of England.

On the fourth day of the tribunal, we were convinced that the case had collapsed when the expert witness for the prosecution, Bishop Ipgrove, chair of CCJ, admitted under cross examination that he was not an expert witness and had either not read or just plain ignored the instructions given him about what to include and not include in

his definition of antisemitism.

Exasperated, at that point, the Chair turned to the only expert witness left standing, [Tony Lerman](#), and asked him to please help them out and provide a simple definition of antisemitism.

When Mr Lerman spelt out the blindingly obvious, namely that the discredited IHRA misdefinition of antisemitism (on which the entire case against Dr Sizer rested) fell at the first test of a definition, in being indefinite, it seemed clear that the complaint had collapsed.

Perhaps that is why the panel took six months to recover their composure before finally publishing their decision, which, surprise, surprise, included the entire wording of the aforementioned IHRA misdefinition. Perhaps they did so to placate the BoD (who had coerced the Archbishops to adopt it) and make the House of Bishops look less foolish for adopting the IHRA, (coincidentally within days of the complaint being lodged)."

What can we do?

The Convivencia Alliance is a coalition of Jewish, Muslim and Christian organisations supporting a just peace in Palestine. You can read more about them [here](#) and they have put together this petition in support of Stephen:

[sign this petition in support of Revd Dr Stephen Sizer](#)

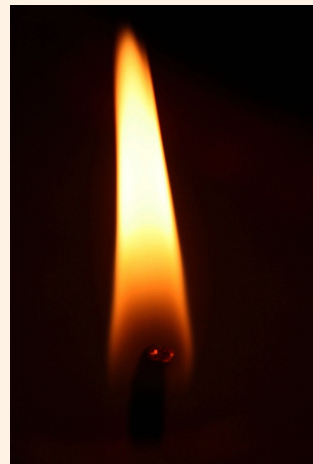
Prayer

God of love, justice, equality and peace
We pray particularly for those who speak up for
justice and work for peace.

In this time of Lent we pray for Stephen and Joanna
Who have been consigned to the wilderness
We thank you for them and for the work they have
done - bring them encouragement and peace.

And we pray for the land once known as 'holy'
And for Palestinians and Israelis as violence raises its
head once more -

May peace come, may Justice rise, and may violence



cease.

Loving God raise up for us prophets
who will speak the words we need to hear,
And increase our altruism and diminish our greed.
Raise up for us prophets who will spell out
that God has no favourite race,
nor heaven a favoured language.
Raise up prophets who will walk away from violence and take up peace.

In the name of the generous God of love and equality.

Amen

thanks to the Wild Goose Resource Group for the last section, "Raise up for us prophets..."

Guth Hewitt

Even as we are praying for Stephen and Joanna, the importance of the commitment to justice and peace in the Middle East is brought home as I write by another message from Jeff Halper about a brutal attack in the West Bank:



The town of Huwara, near Nablus in the West Bank

"Settlers have descended in a rampage on the Palestinian town of Huwara near Nablus and have set it on fire -- houses, businesses, mosques, schools, every building they could set fire to including the local fire engines so that the spreading flames cannot be contained. There are apparently many Palestinian casualties - 98 Palestinians have been treated for injuries so far - although the settlers are also attacking ambulances and the Israeli army is reported preventing the Red Cross from entering the town.

Huwara is a Palestinian town of about 6000 surrounded by the most violent Israeli settlements in the West Bank: Itamar, Tapuakh, Yitzhar, Qdumim and others. Attacks on Palestinians are commonplace and the perpetrators, well-known to the police (now under the control of Itamar Ben Gvir, a settler from Hebron who has been tried seven times for violent attacks on Palestinians), are never punished. This attack, however, is on a scale we have never seen; even Israeli TV is calling it a pogrom. It will lead, I believe, to a qualitative change in the political situation as we have known it. It is a test for the international community, and we must all demand that Israel and its settlers be held accountable."

Links to articles with more information about the Tribunal

Stephen Sizer: [Jewish, Christian and Muslim perspectives on my tribunal](#)

A letter from [Bishop Riah Abu El Assal](#)

Mondoweiss: [U.K. cleric disciplined by the Church of England on charges of antisemitism](#)

Jewish Network for Palestine & Islamic Human Rights Commission: [The Church of England's racist assumptions for punishing Reverend Dr Stephen Sizer](#)

Jewish Voice for Labour: [The Ten Year Vendetta](#)

Middle East Monitor: [Church of England bars pro-Palestine priest for 12 years over alleged anti-Semitism](#)

Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions: [ICAHD Supports Rev Stephen Sizer, Accused of Anti-Semitism](#)

Islamic Human Rights Commission: [IHRC condemns CofE decision to ban ex-vicar for offending Zionists](#)

Islamic Human Rights Commission: [Tribunal Rejects Antisemitism Allegations](#)

Jewish Network for Palestine: [Support Revd Dr Sizer](#)

Tony Greenstein: [The Reverend Stephen Sizer - Crucified by the Church of England for supporting the Palestinians](#)



