

Jerusalem: "A Burdensome Stone"

"And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all peoples; all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it."

How ironic that the "City of Peace" is the center of bitter world controversy! Not only is East Jerusalem contended between Israel and the Arab world, but world political and religious leaders also join in the fray. Christian leaders continue to ignore this warning of the Lord by the Prophet. What should be the "Christian attitude" now toward Jerusalem?

In March President Bush-an avowed born-again Christian-berated Israel for building Jewish "settlements" in East Jerusalem because, he claimed, the status of East Jerusalem is negotiable in Israeli-Arab peace talks. This statement was a startling change of U.S. policy-which many felt was the real reason for the collapse of Israel's coalition government. Jerusalem's Mayor Teddy Kollek, a solid moderate, observed that Bush's comment resulted in an increase of violence in East Jerusalem.

In April when a group of Jewish families moved into the so-called Christian Quarter of Jerusalem, some Jewish leaders questioned the wisdom of the timing. But the media and church leaders whipped up world opinion into a hysteria. THE NEW YORK TIMES called the building subtlet by these Jewish families an "occupied Greek Orthodox Church." The WASHINGTON POST spoke of it as "the Greek Orthodox Church complex." But the following quote from a letter President Chaim Herzog of Israel wrote to the U.S. Greek Orthodox Primate (JERUSALEM POST, May 26, 1990) clarifies the issues:

"I do not propose to go into the rights or wrongs of the action taken by those claiming a right to residence in the building, following the payment of a considerable amount of money. . . I am, however, very disturbed by the behavior of the Greek Orthodox Church on this issue. It is extremely alarming. . .to note the manner in which the neglected, abandoned, misused hospice, suddenly becomes a Holy Site.

"I must say that the sight of a priest in clerical garments standing on a ladder, ripping down a Star of David from a Jewish residence, cheered by an enraged mob, is a horrible reminder of what our people lived through in history. . . .

". . .the building was described as being a few meters away from the [Church of the] Holy Sepulchre. Any visitor to the site, with its enclosed streets, will confirm that this assertion is false."

In an interview with Jordan television, Patriarch Disdoras, head of the Greek Orthodox patriarchate in Jerusalem, described Jerusalem as being "under conquest." During a visit to Greece he charged that this incident was part of an attempt by Israel to take over the Christian Quarter of Old Jerusalem.

Of course, the Vatican entered the controversy. THE NEW YORK TIMES reported that Pope John Paul II, in an audience which included senior officials from Arab countries and a representative of the PLO, "expressed 'profound concern.'" Cardinal O'Connor, however, reflected the hysteria of the Roman Catholic church over the Jerusalem issue. In an article appearing in the CATHOLIC NEW YORK, he called the move "obscene" and the Israeli government's role in the incident as "reprehensible." He characterized the move of 25 parents and 100 children and infants into the hospice as an invasion by armed men-part of "a conspiracy to grab land all over Israel currently occupied by Christians. . . [and] a design to make it virtually impossible for Christians to function anywhere in the land."

To put this controversial incident in balanced perspective, it must be noted that Jews formerly lived in this area until they were violently expelled by Arab attack in 1936. In fact, it was during the same period of the British Mandate that the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem was drastically reduced. (Later the reduced segment of the Jewish Quarter-including its many Synagogues-was destroyed during the Jordanian occupation of 1948-1967.) Where was the Christian outcry then? Why is there Christian silence when Jews are abused?

While the hospice is owned by the Greek Orthodox Church, the building was never used for religious purposes. Furthermore, the building was leased to an Arab and the ground floor was occupied by Moslem stores. Because the Christian Quarter is actually two-thirds Moslem, a Mosque nearby serves this active Moslem population. . . .

As Christian and Moslem leaders gathered in the Greek Orthodox Patriarch's offices, masked intifada youths began waving PLO flags chanting anti-Jewish slogans. The PLO flag was then placed at the top of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. (Who then actually desecrated a Christian holy site?)

Why are Catholics opposed to Jews living in the Christian Quarter yet are gladly living together with Arabs? Why is the Vatican so opposed to Israel possessing Old Jerusalem while insisting on Jerusalem's internationalization?

When the world community was finally ready to grant Israel statehood in 1947, the specter of the Vatican loomed over the United Nations. Since Israel's rebirth the Vatican has never recognized it as a nation. New York's Cardinal Spellman, used all the powers of his office to keep Jerusalem out of Israeli control. Telegraphing the Papal nuncios (ambassadors) in South American countries, he demanded that they urge those governments to take an uncompromising stand at the U.N. for Jerusalem's internationalization.

The Vatican's apparent reason is that all three faiths will have free access to their holy places. However, from 1948 to 1967, Jordan desecrated Jewish holy places and destroyed synagogues while completely denying Jewish access to East Jerusalem. In all those years the Vatican never raised a cry for internationalization. Since acquiring Old Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has guaranteed and preserved for all (Christians and Moslems as well) free

access to their respective holy places. Yet the Vatican is presently insisting on internationalization to provide a right that these three religions already enjoy. Obviously, a more fundamental reason for Vatican opposition to Israel's possession of Old Jerusalem prevails.

The Roman Catholic Church maintains Israel's right to be the Kingdom of God ended forever with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Roman Legion in 70 C.E. Growing to world prominence, the Roman Catholic Church claimed to be the rightful heir of the Kingdom of God with Rome as the "New Jerusalem." But this claim of Rome to be the "eternal city," was deflated when in 1967 Jerusalem, "the eternal city," became Israel's capital.

Why does the Vatican act like a major world power-exchanging ambassadors with other nations, etc.? No other Christian church claims this prestige.

The only excuse the Vatican has to act as a world power is the claim that it is both the spiritual and temporal Kingdom of God, the "New Jerusalem." Israel's repossession of the capital of its ancient kingdom is a galling challenge to Rome—a challenge which Rome seems compelled to remove. When Jerusalem is "internationalized," the Vatican plans to dominate its supervision and thereby cement its claim to be the Kingdom of God on earth. The Vatican will not rest until Jerusalem is wrested from Israel.

Other world powers, including the United States, insist that Jerusalem is "negotiable" in any Israeli-Arab peace talks. Jerusalem is not negotiable. Remember Zechariah's prophecy—all who contend in the Jerusalem issue will be sorely hurt. National and religious leaders had better heed this warning.

Christian leaders who misrepresent Israel or Jews in issues such as this hospice rental incident may be betraying latent anti-Semitic attitudes ingrained in their organization. In any case, such leaders are certainly sowing seeds of bitter feelings of anti-Semitism. Christians should not be trapped by media hysteria, but should rationally consider the Scriptural and historical perspective

Jerusalem, indeed, will be internationalized! But it will belong to the Jew forever. People from all over the world will come to Jerusalem to worship, but it will be to enquire about the God of the Jews and to praise His holy Name.

"Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." Zechariah 8:22, 23 (See also Isaiah 2:2,3; 60:10-12; 66:18-22)

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up

to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Isaiah 2:2,3

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