

Jesus is the Temple: A Christian *Apologia* to Sustain Middle East Democracies

By Matthew Tsakanikas

Stopping War in Jerusalem

It was about this time last year that the *Jerusalem Post* on-line edition reported a story that drew very little attention in the standard Western press and yet it could be the cause of endless conflicts for Westerners who disagree with the goals of many Jewish Zionists. In an article entitled, "J'lem posters call for 3rd Temple" by Abe Selig (29/03/2010), the *Jerusalem Post* reported that 200 buses in Jerusalem were driving through Arab neighborhoods advertising on their sides a 3rd Jewish Temple rebuilt where the current Muslim Dome of the Rock shrine stands on the Temple Mount. In Hebrew, the phrase next to the image on the buses called for the Jewish Temple (that was destroyed in 70 A.D.) to be rebuilt speedily. [www.jpost.com/LandedPages/PrintArticle.aspx?id=172008]

If you are having trouble understanding the significance of the advertising campaign, the Jewish Israeli rabbi and activists who sponsored these advertisements, and which the Israeli government seemingly permitted, spelled it out at the end of the article: "If such a basic point is going to piss [Muslims] off, then we mine [sic] as well say what we truly believe and what we pray for three times a day. That is to rebuild the holy temple on top of the Temple Mount, and tomorrow – not to wait any longer." A few paragraphs earlier they had made their politics very clear: "We're representing the truth in front of everyone, and saying what every Jew believes, that the Third Temple needs to be built immediately on the Temple Mount and that the mosque should not be there."

Thankfully there are Israeli Jews who disagree with this kind of Zionism and maybe the peace of the world rests with them. The activists did not speak for them. For these Israelis, a homeland did not mean having to remove Muslim mosques or shrines or rebuild a third Temple on the Mount or seek to incite a billion Muslims to Jihad. Nevertheless, what is particularly disturbing about the incendiary advertisements on the buses (purposefully targeting Arab neighborhoods) is that they did not care about the ramifications upon Americans or NATO. While America and NATO are fighting multiple wars in the Middle-East, our alleged "allies" in Israel are inciting Muslims to believe that we support such foolishness, the "loss" of Islamic shrines in favor of a Third Temple. With friends like this, who needs enemies?

In the face of so much silence from Christians in America, one begins to wonder if Christians have apostatized and decided to throw Jesus under the same buses. Christians are supposed to believe Jesus is the true Temple which was raised before the last one was destroyed in 70 A.D.. Jesus was clear: "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will rebuild it." Since Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the Law and Prophets, the Levitical priesthood and Temple became obsolete, replaced by the long foretold priesthood of Melchizedek. Now through bread and wine, transformed by the New Covenant in the true Son of David (Psalm 110), the Kingdom of God comes down to earth by the Holy Spirit and gives all men access to God. Christian support for a third Jewish Temple on the Mount would be apostasy. In fact, it was Julian the Apostate who last tried to build one there on the Mount about 360 A.D.

Zionism is by nature a religious question

A Christian reflection on Jewish Zionism is by no means an easy task as any discussion carries the great 'baggage' of the history of abuses towards non-Christians by those nominally Christian, particularly multiple failures to prevent abuses against innocent minorities by State powers. Neither is Jewish or Islamic history without such baggage. Nevertheless the issue of Jewish Zionism requires the Christian witness of speaking the truth in love despite the vast amount of Christian failings to live-out our call to love and to justice.

That being said, I can only imagine a devout Jew (and not all Jews are Zionists) reading the above paragraph: "Please spare us any more speaking truth in love. Where was your truth and love when six million of my relatives were being tortured and gassed to death in WWII?" The Jewish people of Europe paid a horrible price with over 6 million innocent Jewish men, women, and children targeted for torture and gassed in a hideous machine of genocide and death as many Christians fearfully stood by in silence as the godless Nazis preyed upon anti-Semitic propaganda. Nor are Christians forgetful of the pogroms in Russia, the Jewish ghettos of Christendom, or today's Islamic homicide bombers constantly threatening murder against Jews, Christians, and Muslims who do not share their radicalism.

Is it really appropriate to speak against Zionism, a return and reclaiming of the land God promised Abraham and Moses for the descendants of Israel, when there is such a history of suffering and when there is a resurgence of anti-Semitism throughout the world today? Is not questioning Zionism itself a form of anti-Semitism? But, if divine revelations to Moses and Abraham are to be used to support Zionism, then it makes the issue a religious question, and other religions have a right to be heard. How strange it would be in today's world if one religion had the right to silence another.

If appeals are made to Moses for rights on the land, then does not that mean that the purposes for which God gave Moses the land...including the designated Temple, worship and rituals would necessarily be attached to the claim for the Land? Otherwise, why appeal to God and Moses if one does not want what comes attached with having the Land? The promise of the Land and the Law of Moses are inseparable if the today's Zionists do not accept that God made covenants with other prophets after Moses. Most media today avoids the debate and question: what if the Law of Moses was only a temporary stage in God's plan for humanity? That it was a temporary plan is what the Jews who founded Christianity believed and they have as much right to be heard as Zionists. Not all Christians were silent during Hitler's intimidation and many paid with their lives. The chief rabbi of Rome after WWII even converted to Christianity in part because the Roman Christians did so much to hide and protect Jews under the direction of Pope Pius XII. The historical record must be set straight.

The attack on Archbishop Bystros and telling the truth about history

After seeing how the Catholic Archbishop, Cyril Bystros, was mistreated (more details later) in the press by representatives of Israel for statements during the October 2010 Synod of Bishops for the Middle East, statements based on Christian doctrine, it should be clarified that some forms of today's anti-Zionism are not anti-Semitic. Disagreeing with Jewish Zionists is not anti-Semitism because Zionism is a

religious question. It should be argued that to demand Christians adhere to Jewish Zionism is actually a form of anti-Christian bigotry and a denial of freedom of religion for Christians. It is understood that “Never Again” will the Jews allow a Hitler to arise or a ghetto mentality to be accepted; yet this does not in itself justify exclusive claims to a land that belonged to others from 70 A.D. to 1948...especially if the intent is to rebuild the last Temple on the Temple Mount as last year’s buses advertised.

If Jerusalem belongs only to the Jews by divine right, there is a lot of explaining to do for why God permitted others to rule it since 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. That’s 1,900 years without the Temple and the same amount of time under the control of other peoples. Jerusalem was only without the Temple on the Temple Mount for 70 years when the Babylonians destroyed it in 586 B.C. Why is it now without a temple for implementation of Moses’ Law for 1,900 years? And do they really intend to restore animal sacrifice? If not, who gave the right to change Moses’ laws?

The Romans destroyed the Second Temple in 70 A.D. on the same day as the Babylonians destroyed the first Temple in 586 B.C. The Jews even commemorate *Tisha B’Av* to mourn the date (the 10th of the Jewish calendar month of Av). Christians believe the Temple was replaced before it was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the true Temple God always intended...the transfigured and resurrected body of Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Messiah of Moses and the Prophets. Nevertheless, through *Tisha B’Av*, perhaps God is not only asking Jews, but also Christians and Muslims to admit their sins and failings in the wars of religion that have plagued the divided family known as humanity? All our leaders have sought personal gain instead of God’s glory; all have sinned. Only Jesus showed that the true way to reform was self-sacrificial love, not sacrificing others.

Certainly Christians empathize with the pain and suffering of our Jewish brothers even if we speak against what we hold to be false religious claims and speak of how history witnesses against these claims. Nevertheless, we still recognize that from Israel and Judah came the covenants and promises that even made Christian joy possible and so we honor the Jews. From Judah (Jews) came the Messiah who now brings us to sing Israel’s Psalms and meditate upon their fathers and prophets as our own. Yet, again, how could we be Christians and at the same time not witness to our core belief on how Jesus the Messiah fulfilled and transformed the promises and covenants? Failure of witness would be a betrayal of Christ and we must not be ashamed of his doctrines lest he grow ashamed of us (cf. Matthew 10:33). Nor do we hold “the Jews” accountable for Christ’s crucifixion. There has been corrupt Christian leadership that has many times betrayed Christ as well. The sins of all men led to Christ’s death (cf. Heb 6:6).

However, even if Christians in America cannot support the Zionism of our Jewish brothers on religious grounds, their aspirations to reclaim the Temple Mount for a third temple, we can stand together on our shared heritage of Moses and the prophets and the other great gift the Jews gave to the West which made modern democracies possible...knowledge of God as “Father” and God’s desire that we become his sons. *Israel’s belief in the human dignity of all innocent men, regardless of religion, is the grounds for Western support of Israel.* (Obviously their beliefs are challenged by relentless assaults of Islamic

radicals.) Thus, developing true grounds in law for why everyone has human rights and dignity is key to ending religious violence. We must learn to defend all men's rights and not just what is good for the Jew or Muslim if we are to obtain peace. Violation by anyone of inalienable rights is unacceptable. Nor does this article pretend that Palestinian land grievances have no merits...they do, *but now the only just political solution is equal rights for everyone in the Middle East if we are to end unjust settlements.*

Only God's fatherhood makes democracies sustainable

The Judeo-Christian view, which influenced the principles of "inalienable rights," witnessed to the truth that man was made in God's image and likeness, that every man possessed it and could not lose it regardless of his religion. The principle went through many developments, its original meaning lost in Adam's sin, but reclaimed in salvation's history. It ultimately enabled religious freedom and protection of human rights for modern democracies. It allowed that God was called Father and so humans (being in His image) were capable of a love that reflects (imaged) the value of a loving father to his children. This capacity for love, which came from our Father as a sharing in his image, is the source of human dignity and inalienable rights. This capacity to develop more in God's likeness, this freedom for growth in love established our accountability as free beings. This image, which God wishes to develop in every human, needs freedom. God's image in man is a necessary principle to protecting human dignity and the reason for freedom.

Islam rejects knowing God as "Father". It will only allow for the impersonal relationship with God as Creator. While it is true that God is our Creator, devoid of fatherly love towards us, the relationship necessarily is limited to a "Master to slave" relationship; one which can not communicate God's dignity to men or allow inalienable rights. A slave needs no freedom for development. He need only obey even if he secretly disagrees or does not understand the plan. A slave's reward is then something other than participation in the Master. Man has no intrinsic value in such an Islamic view of God as only Master, and God's will can seem arbitrary and without reason if man bears no reflection of Him or no destiny to share in God's nature. Such a minimal vision of who God is or why he created us leads men to have an impoverished view of God's creatures and so men think they can treat other men as unwilling slaves since they perceive God as doing the same.

Islam is correct that because God made us, we are creatures and therefore slaves. Just because God created us, does not automatically make us family with God. Something more is needed than just a Creator to creature relationship. The distance between God and creatures is too great for humans to be actual family without God's continued initiative. A covenant is needed. God's greatness does not prevent a family relationship. Because God is great, he can adopt creatures who are slaves by nature and make them members of his family through a covenant (cf. Jn 1:12). God never intended that we should only be slaves. God created us with reason. He made us in order that he could initiate us into divine life if we make divine life our own through free cooperation with Him. Because we are created with intelligence, we are meant to become more than mere creatures. We are meant to become sharers in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet 1:4). God can unite the will of his slaves with his own will if they will love what God loves. This share in God's love makes men more like God and makes men family.

As this article will continue to develop later, believing Christians cannot accept that Jerusalem only belongs to the Jews if the other inhabitants of the land will respect also the human dignity of all. Protecting the State of Israel today must be based on America's and Europe's desire to protect authentic freedoms in existing democracies, not upon misguided Jewish Zionist claims to land based on God's former promises to Abraham and Moses...which are now realized in Jesus the Messiah. Contrary to many Americans and Europeans, assertion of secular values apart from recognition that rights come from God is not synonymous with protecting authentic freedoms. Atheistic secularism can not ground intrinsic rights. It would be far wiser for all concerned (Jew, Christian, and Muslim) to work to establish human rights based minimally on the truth that God endowed every human with dignity and rights because they are made in God's image and likeness, regardless of the person's religion or list of prophets. As Islam embraces Moses and Jesus, Islam can be open to God's image in man which both Moses and Jesus taught and which Jews and Christians already agree upon...and so can co-exist peacefully within democracies.

How Muslims Could Aid Sustainable Democracies

Muslims could aid this process of sustainable democracies and freedom by understanding what Christians actually mean by saying "God has a Son"...that this is a reference to God's *Logos* (cf. John 1:1) and this did not require a consort in any way. Thus, the Qur'an is correct that God has no consort, and Christians agree. When the Qur'an teaches that God neither begets nor is begotten, *this is correct in its rejection of carnal begetting*. Christians believe that the one we call God's Son is God's *Logos*. We understand *Logos* to mean: *God's image of himself which he holds in his mind* (God's wisdom and knowledge = the Greek word *Logos*, which English translates as "Word").

To deny God's *Logos* would be to deny that God is "All-Knowing" and yet the Qur'an teaches that "All Knowing" is one of God's 99 names. Because God is "All-Knowing", God knows himself and knows this image he has of himself as His *Logos*. His *Logos* has been generated from all eternity as fire necessarily generates light and needs no consort to generate light. So God is called "Father" by Christians in order to express that the *Logos* is God's true image of God; the exact same nature of the Father, since a son is the same nature as his father. If the *Logos* were not the exact same nature, then God would not be "All-Knowing" because God would not know himself. When a man pretends understanding God should be simple, we might question if he takes away God's majesty and forbids God of the name "Majestic". Either God is "All-Knowing" and "Majestic" or God only has 97 names. Since God has 99 names in the Qur'an, there is room for understanding better the way Christians think.

Intelligent "knowing" begets *logos*. We believe this light which comes from God as light comes from fire, the eternal *Logos*, received human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary and was named Jesus at his birth into our world. The *Logos*, not the Father, became human. This was accomplished in the Holy Spirit, without a consort, without carnal knowledge of any kind, to give the world a new Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:45). The first Adam was also taken from the earth without need of a consort and solely by God's power just as Jesus was taken from Mary. The earth was not God's consort and neither was the Virgin Mary.

As the “new Adam”, Jesus came to reunite the divided race of mankind which continued to splinter after the sin of the first Adam. Because Jesus is the *Logos* in human form, this explains why he was born of an ever-virgin, could work miracles and ascend to heaven permanently. It explains how he can share the Holy Spirit with humans today. If Islam could find a way to accept an understanding of God as “Father” according to generation of his *Logos*, the self-image God has always had within himself, God’s inner Word, this may aid understanding of God’s love for every human because God made us through this eternal image whom he has always loved. The law of God is in our hearts and gives us dignity because we partake of the eternal *Logos* through whom we were made according to love. Now the eternal *Logos* has become human to call us back to the fullness of life. Human dignity and rights do not come from external arbitrary decrees to slaves which a ruler can give or take, it comes from God in the act of creating us and then calling us to adoption. God calls every human, so every human has dignity.

Against Jerusalem exclusively for the Jews

In October 2010, the Greek Melkite Catholic Archbishop for most of the United States, Cyril Salim Bustros, addressed a journalist’s question at the end of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East. Newsmax presented his statements:

“The Holy Scriptures cannot be used to justify the return of Jews to Israel and the displacement of the Palestinians, to justify the occupation by Israel of Palestinian lands.” He added that Christians “cannot speak of the 'promised land' as an exclusive right for a privileged Jewish people” as this promise “was nullified by Christ.”

“There is no longer a chosen people,” Bustros continued. “All men and women of all countries have become the chosen people.” <http://www.newsmax.com/EdwardPentin/catholic-vatican-Cyril-Salim/2010/10/26/id/374961>

According to the same 26 October 2010 Newsmax article by Edward Pentin, Rabbi David Rosen of the American Jewish Committee and Israel’s Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon wanted the Vatican to repudiate Archbishop Bustros’ statements. In an interview with Newsmax.com, Rosen called upon the Vatican to reprimand Bustros and reiterate its official position on the Jewish people as he perceived it in the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*; a position Rosen seemed to think went against Bustros.

Rosen and Ayalon went too far in their complaint because it involved an implicit form of rejection of Christ and Christian doctrine. What they witnessed was not just Arab nationalist sentiment expressed by Catholic bishops of Arab ancestry. They witnessed implicitly a reaffirmation of the Church’s founding belief that the Church is the new Israel with Jesus at the center as the Holy of Holies. While others may be confused on this, the Arab Christian bishops were not. They proclaimed Jesus the True Temple. Christians believe that through Christian baptism all can gain entrance to God’s true Temple, which is life in the Holy Spirit, and that Christian baptism is available to all who sincerely ask. The priesthood God originally intended for Israel before the apostasy with the Golden Calf at Sinai is now realized in Jesus’ new covenant; a priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek (cf Psalm 110; Luke 22:19-22).

Reasons for Vatican Silence

Rosen and Ayalon's interpretation of *Nostra Aetate* clearly leads them to believe falsely that the Catholic Church teaches that Jesus the Messiah was not the ultimate purpose of the covenants and not necessary for their salvation. Thus, they believed that God's former covenants and promises were not realized in Jesus in a manner that definitively transformed them. They seem to believe that God's promises to Abraham and Moses exist as an end in themselves for the physical land solely under Jewish control. Despite the sin at Sinai with the Golden Calf with Aaron (Book of Exodus), Rosen seems to interpret that the Jews should not have expected a future covenant that transformed the promises into what was always intended..that God dwell in man as in a temple and not only in Jerusalem or a tent or buildings of bricks. Along with the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-33), Christians always believed God meant to restore the priesthood to everyone (cf Ex 19:6; 1 Pet 2:5); that the Levitical priesthood was a temporary arrangement for a people not yet ready for God's original plan that all enter the Holy of Holies.

Silence can be misinterpreted as consent, but one would go too far in saying that the Vatican - by allowing Rosen and Ayalon's errors to go publically unchallenged – thereby shoulders some of the responsibility for affirming Jewish Zionists in their errors and failing to witness to the Gospel. So, why is the Vatican so slow to clearly affirm that Jesus is necessary for the salvation even of Jewish Zionists? Why so slow to reaffirm that Jesus is the only bridge for God's adoption of humans and that the exchange of humanity sharing in divinity (salvation) occurs through the only man who is God by nature (the Messiah)? Rosen and Ayalon had merit because the document seemed open to misinterpretation.

Nevertheless, the Vatican already answered similar questions in the year 2000 concerning *Nostra Aetate* when it released the document *Dominus Iesus* to give clarification: "It must therefore be *firmly believed* as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God... Hence, those solutions that propose a salvific action of God beyond the unique mediation of Christ would be contrary to Christian and Catholic faith" (#14); and, "It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's centre and goal: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (*Rev 22:13*)" (#15). A direct Vatican answer to the media today would lack all the necessary context because the sound-bites and limited quotes would exclude the context after the edits. *Dominus Iesus* is already the Vatican's answer since it was written as a follow-up to *Nostra Aetate* (see: #2 & #3).

Proclaim the Truth, Jesus is the Temple, Catholics possess the mystical Zion

Witness to Jesus is always the best start and no one has to wait for Vatican press releases since the laity can continue to speak the truth in love without depending on the press. Catholics believe Jesus is the true Temple promised to Israel! It is just that simple. Now that he is resurrected from the dead in a transfigured body and has become a life-giving spirit (cf. 1 Cor 15:45), there is no need for the land next to the Mediterranean to be maintained exclusively by Jews as a preparation for the Messiah. He has already come and does not need Bethlehem for another census count. The State of Israel was re-

established by U.N. mandate only 60 years ago, so it is a political issue to be settled by the U.N. and not by appeals to Moses. All should abide by the U.N. mandates.

Since the time of Christ, every concerned group should have already learned the lessons of history that wars in God's name in the "Promised Land" are now fruitless. The land must be shared under just laws for all the children of Abraham, physical and spiritual. The real fight must be not for land, but to share the land with authentic human rights and protection of life for every human...a city of peace which God expects to learn the lessons of history. Isn't that the etymological meaning of "Jerusalem"... "City of Peace"? If Islam will not recognize the human dignity of every individual regardless of his religion, then it does not qualify as a religion of peace today. If Israel tolerates calls for immediate rebuilding of the Temple, is it really a fit modern democracy to have sole-custody of Jerusalem? Could a Christian remain Pro-Israel if the radicalism that produced the bus advertisements continues?

God originally gave Jerusalem to Israel 3,000 years ago that they might have God's dwelling presence through the Temple in Jerusalem as a light to the nations and in preparation for the Messiah and Savior of the World. Now that the true temple has come, Jesus, the true Son of David, the promises are fulfilled. The land which was only a preparation, a temporary part of the plan for the advent of the Messiah, is no longer necessary to be held by only the Jewish people. The priesthood of Melchizedek has permanently replaced the former Levitical sacrifices. Now under the appearance of bread and wine (Melchizedek's original offering), Christ offers to men and women of every race the promise of adoption as God's children; the promise of entrance to Our Father's Kingdom. Every Christian altar, overseen by those with apostolic succession, has mystically become Mount Zion.

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