

Death of God or death of man?

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The great Russian novelist Dostoevsky wrote, saying:

"When God dies, everything becomes permissible!"

And the German philosopher Nietzsche declared shortly after, saying:

"God is dead and gone!"

Can we deny that each of them possessed insightful views?

Today, humans must either be afflicted with ignorance or blindness, so as not to realize completely objectively, that the active forces and decisive achievements in the contemporary world, whether on land, sea, or space, have absolutely forsaken, not only God, but also all religious, ethical, and even human references. Does it surprise us today that our world, in its entirety, is on the brink of an abyss, threatening the existence of our magnificent planet?

I leave it to all specialists in history, thought, religion, science, economics, politics, information technology, terrestrial, maritime, and space strategies, to search and dig for an interpretation and justification for a world so rich in what is more fragile than ever!

As an Arab Catholic priest from Syria, I see it as my duty to address the question I have chosen as the title for this approach.

Does this mean that simply returning to God is enough to achieve the salvation of humanity and our planet Earth?

It is naive to think in this way. Although I see it as the only solution or outcome... but it is necessary to remind ourselves that humanity as a whole has heard, in one way or another, the voice of God beneath every sky. However, here I specifically mention Christians, and before them our Jewish brothers, and after them our Muslim brothers. It may not be superfluous to remember in these barren times a faith, this or that of the sublime manifestations, within each of these three religions.

And let me start with our Jewish brothers, I will suffice with mentioning one incident, yes one incident, but highly symbolic, which is mentioned in chapter (21) of the first book of Kings, in the "Old Testament".

It is the story of a vineyard owned by a Jewish peasant named "Naboth," who had no descendants. The king of Samaria, named "Ahab," who ruled in the late ninth century BC, wanted to acquire this vineyard to add it to his vast lands. However, "Naboth" refused to relinquish the land to him. So, the king's wife, named "Jezebel," plotted to have him killed and encouraged the king to enjoy possessing this land, accompanied by his entourage. Then the prophet "Elijah" appeared by the command of "Jehovah", and he pronounced a shocking prophecy against the king and his entourage, informing them of his gruesome and imminent death in "Naboth's" land specifically, and the death of his wife the queen in front of their palace!

This prophecy was fulfilled shortly afterward.

To anyone who contemplates the story of the vineyard "Naboth" in light of human history, it becomes apparent that it has become a symbol as large as the entire world! However, it is also realized, and for the past (75) years in the land of Palestine, and for the past five months, but in a terribly horrific manner, in Gaza. Despite our universalization of this symbol worldwide, we must admit that it has always lacked a crucial element, namely the prophetic voices, condemning the successive and escalating crimes, increasingly horrific, throughout the Arab world.

In Christianity, explicit faith declares that God Himself became human, out of love for all humanity, past, present, and future. He chose to live in Palestine, among the poorest of the poor but filled with boundless love for all, desiring it to extend eternally, throughout the entire earth. Moreover, He repeatedly stated, in clear terms, that He is manifested in every human being, particularly in the poorest, most deprived, and marginalized... He went even further in His statements, declaring His absolute identification with this group of humans, making the treatment of them on earth the sole criterion for the eternal judgment He will pass in the hereafter, on every individual!

Nevertheless, He ended up on the cross, forgiving all his tormentors, including the Jews.

Here, I see it as not superfluous to recall some of his recommendations, as it appears evident that they have become completely absent from the perspectives of "the arrogant" and their many supporters in all religions, including, sadly, many officials in Western churches, headed by the Vatican!

Jesus said, among other things:

- "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13)

- "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." (Matthew 20:28)

- "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

- "No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money." (Matthew 6:24)

- "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

Everyone knows that the lives of the early Christians were never easy. They faced persecution first in Palestine, then throughout the entire Roman Empire, starting from Damascus, at the hands of both Roman authorities and Jews simultaneously.

Only their heroic faith testimony managed to overcome the hostility of conquering pagans, albeit without quelling the anger of the Jews. Finally, Emperor Constantine issued a general proclamation in Milan in 313 AD, recognizing the rights of Christians to practice their faith rituals, following the example of believers in other religions.

Here, it saddens me to say that this dismal history has recorded a slow, but continuous, decline of the entire Church of Christ until today, in the third temptation, which Jesus had strongly rejected in his confrontation with Satan. (Matthew 4:8-11).

Such a diagnosis might seem exaggerated. However, as a Catholic priest, I invite everyone to read a very recent book published in 1997, in three languages

simultaneously - Italian, English, and French - initiated by Pope John Paul II. It was compiled by his personal friend, the Italian journalist Luigi Accattoli, under a striking title, "When a Pope Asks Forgiveness." In this book, the Pope himself made (94) official statements, given at various celebrations worldwide... In them, the Pope sought forgiveness both from God and from humans for the terrible offenses that occurred throughout history because of the Church.

I remember the most important ones: the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, the rapid indulgence of church authorities in extravagance and arrogance... the system of slavery... the so-called "Crusades"... the Inquisition... successive genocides in the Americas following their discovery, then in Australia, the Far East, and Africa... the slave trade... the dominance of the Roman Church over political authorities and reform movements... religious wars... divisions within the Church, in both the East and the West... various forms of collusion with dictatorial regimes... and the legitimation of various forms of injustice in the world...

It became evident that Pope John Paul II, contrary to many senior officials in the Vatican, wanted, with this approach, to review the dark past of the Catholic Church in light of the Gospel imperatives, in a spirit of intellectual and humanitarian integrity.

Moreover, as an Arab priest from Syria, I see it as my duty to point out the highly suspicious behavior adopted by the entire Western Church towards the appalling tragedies that periodically and tragically engulf the entire Arab world, especially since the issuance of the famous "Balfour Declaration" in 1917, which concerns the establishment of what was called the "Jewish National Home" in Palestine, accompanied by the innocent clarification: "without prejudice to the rights of the indigenous population"...

Can anyone ignore the various disasters that followed the establishment of this alleged "Jewish National Home" since then, not only in Palestine but also throughout the entire Arab world?

In pursuit of further objectivity, I also invite reading various history books authored by Jewish, or even Israeli, writers on this matter. I recall among them:

- Dominique Vidal in his book "Israel's Original Sin", (1997).
- Israel Shahak in his book "The racism of the State of Israel", (1966).
- Gilad Atzmon in his book "The Parable of Esther", (2012).
- Ilan Halévy, in his book "Under Israel, Palestine", (1978).
- Ilan Pappé, in his book "Israel Propaganda" (2016).
- Israel Shamir in his book "Flowers of Galilee" (2004).
- Charles Enderlin, in his book "By Fire and Blood" (2008).

Furthermore, for the sake of credibility, let me hasten to mention the dates of the successive wars: 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973... And shall we forget the rush of France and Britain to establish the "Dimona Nuclear Center" in Israel between 1955-1956... And the repeated invasions of Lebanon, especially since 1982, until the war of 2006 in the south?... Then can we ignore the civil war in Lebanon (1973-1990), the programmed war between Iraq and Iran (1980-1988), Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (1990), as planned by the United States, and the subsequent U.S.-led international war on Iraq (1991-2003...)? And shall we forget the so-called revolutions in Tunisia (late 2010) and

Egypt (early 2011), and finally in Libya (2011)? All of this culminated in the famous "Arab Spring" in Syria, starting from mid-March 2011!

Throughout all these hellish wars orchestrated by the state of crime par excellence, the United States, in service to Israel, not once, not once, was there any protest against Israel, neither from the Western Church nor from responsible Western countries.

The ongoing war ignited by the Palestinian resistance in Gaza on 10/7/2023, which Israel responded to with a devastating massacre, failed to awaken the entire Western Church, led by the Vatican, from its tyrannical silence! Nevertheless, public opinion in the West, previously nearly sedated by a highly informed media, quickly began to rise. People have been pouring into major cities worldwide for months, declaring their solidarity with the Palestinians... Additionally, the International Court of Justice in The Hague has condemned Israel! Yet, the silence of the entire Western Church continues in a bewildering manner, a blatant denial of the clearest dictates of the Gospel... and the most basic human ethics!...

In any case, what emerged from Pope Francis, in terms of delayed reactions, is shrouded in absolute mystery. The events in Gaza date back to 10/7/2023, while the first statement issued by the Pope regarding Gaza was on 12/16/2023, following the killing of two Christian women in one of Gaza's churches... His second statement was issued in early January 2024, condemning what he called the "dangers of igniting anti-Semitism"!...

It grieves me, Your Holiness, to remind you that anti-Semitism was a mere invention of the Church after Constantine, and it actually led to the invasion of the entire Western society for centuries. It grieves me once again to say that this anti-Semitism did not cease until Hitler's era! So, is there anyone who dares to deny that all of this has left a deep sense of guilt and genuine remorse in the depths of the entire Western world? It also nourished, among the Jews in general - in addition to their "certainty" of their superiority over all humans by virtue of their alleged "divine choice" - a voracious hatred against Christians, and thus against humanity as a whole, a matter that has become quite clear.

But in all of this, what compels the Church to completely turn a blind eye and mouth shut to the successive crimes committed by Israel in Palestine and the Arab world for the past (75) years? Moreover, these crimes have reached the utmost horrors in Gaza, which in itself is nothing but an absolute denial of everything humane in Israelis and, indeed, a denial of everything humane in Palestinians! In this manner, does the Church seek forgiveness for itself from this millennium-long crime, called anti-Semitism?

Hasn't the time come for the Church, once and for all, to realize that it is utterly impossible to atone for a crime with a more heinous one? Isn't it incumbent upon the Church today to make a clear declaration that, had it followed the example of the crucified Jesus after Constantine, forgiving the Jews of the Roman Empire instead of issuing unjust laws against them in vain hope of converting them to Christianity, the accursed anti-Semitism would never have arisen, and the course of human history would have taken a radically different turn?...

Finally, it is time for me to attempt to uncover Islam's contribution to human civilization, under God's protection.

In the face of the phenomenon of "Islamic phobia" (Islamophobia) that has been sweeping the world, particularly the West, I see it as my duty, as a Catholic priest and an Arab in Syria, to remind of two historical truths. If overlooked, the failure of any approach to this matter is feared.

The first of these truths is modern and contains two aspects, while the second dates back to the beginning of the Islamic conquests, and during the Umayyad Caliphate, and it has accompanied it through the centuries to this day.

The first aspect of the first truth dates back to the period following World War II, where tens of thousands of Arabs from North Africa migrated to Europe, especially to France, many of whom had fought alongside French forces during the war. Various promises and hopes led them to migrate, and they mostly ended up doing roadwork and construction, tasks that Westerners looked down upon. Most of them were forced, by racist government decisions, to reside in the suburbs of major cities in France and Europe, thereby depriving them of effective integration into European societies as a whole. Gradually, they formed isolated communities, somewhat detached from the majority of the population. In many cases, their reactions were dense and violent, often hinting at dark days in the future if someone were to "use" them or challenge them!

As for the second aspect of the first truth, it is nothing but "Jihadi Islam," which was fabricated before the eyes and ears of the entire world by the United States and its many agents on the ground, with the aim of imposing "democracy, freedom, and human rights" in "rebellious" countries resisting predatory globalization.

As for the second historical truth concerning Islam, it seems to have come about, like the first, due to events rather than faith.

No one is ignorant of the fact that the early Islamic conquests spread rapidly across the land. But I fear that many do not know that the Muslim conquerors were among the most intelligent of conquerors! Especially those who entered Damascus in 635. They provided conclusive evidence of this when they entered Jerusalem in 639, conquered Egypt in 641, and particularly when they captured Cordoba in Andalusia in 711, where their rule lasted until 1492. This was because they respected what they had promised the oppressed peoples in terms of their lives, homes, work, civil administrations, and places of worship in exchange for a tax. For example, in Damascus, it was found to be less than the tax they paid to their former rulers, the Byzantine Christians!... At a time when they had absolute authority to do what conquerors were usually tempted to do. Furthermore, in Damascus, Muslims agreed with the religious authorities to perform their prayers in the Church of St. John the Baptist, which occupied the heart of the city, as they did not yet have mosques to pray in. Moreover, Muslims, in all these conquests, knew how to cooperate with local civil administrations, to the extent that they even appointed Christians or Jews to some of their most important positions.

In explicit terms, the conquests were eras of cooperation and coexistence between Muslims, Christians, and Jews, as known in Islamic societies, unlike Western

societies as a whole. I would point out to anyone who has any doubt about this to read the Jewish historians, even the Israelis. Specifically, I mention Israeli diplomat "Abba Eban" in his book "My People," published in France in 1975, French Jewish Rabbi "Josy Eisenberg" in his book "A History of the Jews," published in France in 1970, and American Jewish historian "Abram Leon Sachar" in his encyclopedic work "History of the Jews," published in France in 1973.

It seems that this policy of tolerance, adopted by Islam in most open countries from the outset, has also been practiced where Islam spread. Of course, this does not negate the occurrence of forms of violence and injustice, often caused by the intoxication of power, fluctuations in the mood of certain caliphs, or those ruling in their name, in their vast empires!

There is an important question about the source from which these early Muslim conquerors drew this spirit of tolerance and cooperation, which enabled them to create this exceptional coexistence throughout history with Christians and Jews!

Isn't this the biggest challenge our world faces today? We are faced with a fierce war planned by international Zionism and those behind it, and carried out by its predatory agents, with the aim of eliminating tolerant Islam, after it had almost eliminated Christianity in the entire West, while it is on its way - as imagined - to eliminate it in the entire Arab East, and then announces the death of God after eliminating man!

Whoever says that tomorrow is closer than expected?

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