

Zionism is the problem



THERE'S A DIFFERENCE.

Judaism is Torah, ethics, an exaltation of the spirit. If Judaism is truly Torah, then it cannot be reduced to the confines of any particular territory, for as scripture said of Torah, its measure is greater than the Earth. *Rabbi Aaron Samuel Tamarat 1929*

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At one time the Jewish community had fierce proponents of justice in their pulpits. Then a strange thing happened. The date usually given is June 1967, the 6 Day War when Israel easily defeated the Egyptian army. Of course the Israeli government, as it usually did and continues to do, prepped the people and the docile public that this would be a fight to the finish, little Israel (always David, not Goliath) was fighting for its survival. It was never the case and was best explained by Mordecai Benton a Knessert member on April 14, 1971 "The entire story of the extermination was invented in every detail and exaggerated a posteriori to justify the annexation of new Arab territory."

General Matti Peled who was the chief of Logistical Command during the war agreed: the thesis according to which Israel was fighting for her survival was nothing but a bluff which was born and bred after the war.... Israel was never in real danger and there was no evidence that Egypt had any intention of attacking Israel".

Well Jewish pride exploded all over the world. The bigger story however was the steady erosion of Judaism in favour of rabid Zionist national values. This was also the beginning of the so-called religious Zionism, a movement which arrived just in time as political Zionism was beginning to lose its lustre and its moral steam—because the world began to finally understand that the dark underbelly was the oppression of another people, the Palestinians whose lands were stolen and were living in misery in refugee camps.

Then voila—the miracle, a gift from heaven, a divine intervention! Against all odds the little David had defeated Goliath the mighty Arab forces. Having taken most of the Palestinian home in 1948, Israel began the move to colonize the West Bank, steal the rest of the land, albeit slowly, dunam by dunam, mule by mule as the saying went. An incremental genocide was on its way. Now the Zionist dream seemingly was under a religious canopy. The messianic redemption was on its way and it would be the indigenous people who would pay.

All this was blessed by the influential rabbis in particular the Kooks pere et fils. Avraham Yitzhak Kook (d 1935) saw secular Zionism as paving the way for redemption. His son Zvi Yehuda Kook fleshed out his father's unique religio-political Zionism which birthed the Gush Emunim, the infamous settlers who tell the world that God gave us this land. For the next thirty years it would be these fanatics which would control both Labour and Likud and help drag Israel into a pariah status and worse, co-opt Torah Judaism. It must be God's will. The redemption of the

land is finally begun. Blessing oppression, depopulation and ignoring the United Nations, religious zionism began to cut the heart of Judaism.

It was a great Toronto rabbi Reuben Slonim who saw the terrible effect that the so-called miracle was having on Jewish ethics. For him the rise of the “tough Jew” had severely compromised Jewish ethics. By opting for power too many Jews were unable to see that the price paid—the displacement, then the cruel oppression and ghettoization of the Palestinian people—had wreaked havoc with the deepest values of Torah. The universal lessons of the Holocaust had not been internalized to include the suffering of others. “The Six Day War plunged Toronto’s Jews into an orgy of chauvinism from which they never recovered.”

Reuben Slonim paid a ferocious price for his principled defense of Judaism’s universal values. He lost his pulpit and became a pariah in the community. Before him Toronto had strong justice rabbis Maurice Eisendrath at Holy Blossom temple (1929 -1943) was thoroughly engaged in the issues of the time as was his successor Avraham Feinberg (1943-1961). The former took the Torah into the streets and marched with Dr.King and the latter was a leader in anti-racism, nuclear disarmament and actually met with Ho Chi Minh, so disgusted was he as a rabbi emeritus in 1966 that he led marches up Yonge Street against the war.

But now? Silence from the synagogue even after the last butchery in Gaza when over 500 children were murdered with seldom a peep. The war in Lebanon (2006) and the other Gaza turkey shoots against a defenseless people. More silence. And signs in front of shuls: time to stand up for Israel but none reading stand up for Torah.

Allan Brownfield writing in the American Council for Judaism”, Spring 1997 summed up this sad development in these words

The corruption of Judaism, as a religion of universal values, through its politicization by Zionism and by the replacement of dedication to Israel for dedication to God and the moral law, is what has alienated so many young Americans who, searching for spiritual meaning in life, have found little in the organized Jewish community.”

Having witnessed the war on Lebanon (2006) and three punishing assaults on the civilians of Gaza Brownfeld wrote in 2014, “What we are witnessing today, synagogues flying Israeli flags, programs urging American Jews to immigrate to Israel, their real homeland, is a form of idolatry, making the sovereign state of Israel the object of worship, rather than God.

These are challenging times for the synagogue when so many liberal rabbis consider themselves muzzled by congregants more Zionist than Jewish. However, the very same dynamic exists in Catholic churches today. Colonized by decades of turbocapitalism, silenced by consumer comforts and led by an episcopate more in love with charity than justice we too fit the description of Irish priest Diarmuid Omurchu:

We have come a long way from the fiery prophetic figure Jesus of Nazareth who shocked and disturbed the conventions of his day in the name of justice and liberation. Our respectability has taken a terrible toll on the authentic calling of Christian life.

We have lost sight of the deeper vision and lost heart for the passion and enthusiasm of God’s New Reign. The following of Jesus is not a respectable religion.