

PERCEIVING ISRAEL'S CRISIS: How Should Jewish Believers Address the Palestinian Issue?

The recent and sudden deportation of some 400 Palestinian fundamentalists and suspected terrorists has provoked worldwide consternation over the moral rectitude of Israeli actions prompted by increasing desperation. Civil rights lawyers in Israel, learning of the deportation without due process, petitioned the Supreme Court unsuccessfully who allowed the deportation to continue its legality to be determined later.

The action, denounced by the UN as a violation of the Geneva Convention, brings to many of Israel's supporters that ache that stems from the desire to identify with the nation in its increasing perplexities coupled with the concern for the nation's character and stated intention of demonstrating the uniqueness of a Jewish state. These contradictions will prove to be an increasingly cruel paradox and one without remedy seeing the intractable and implacable bitterness of Israel's enemies bent upon her destruction.

An increasingly disturbing note morally, is struck by Ariel Sharon in an article published by the Jerusalem Post (December 14, 1993), entitled "It's Possible to Stop Terrorism". In it, having assured the reader that "terrorist success is not a heavenly decree", he enjoins the government to "declare all out war on the terrorists, and uproot them utterly". Evidently, the Labor Government after the Six Day War had set as a clear objective "the physical extinction of the terrorist organizations" which he now calls for as the necessary condition for "stability". This "uprooting" is an IDF "mission" a "job" in which the hands of men and officers should not be tied "in the morass of detailed orders" that would impede "operational considerations".

More candidly, Yosef Ben-Aharon, former director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, writing in the same issue and omitting the word 'terrorist' identifies the problem as "the Palestinians [who] are responsible for the continuation of violence to an extent that cannot be tolerated by Israel..." He calls for "such measures as expulsion, administrative detention and drastic curtailment of freedom of movement of the Arab inhabitants of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District." In his opinion, this last "murder represents a quantum leap in Arab terror...an act of war".

In the Editorial Comment of the same issue, the writer laments the difficulties imposed by being a democratic society [which] "are not built for such cold-blooded, ruthless uses of the law. Yet it is unthinkable that democracies should remain utterly defenseless...[though] Israel in particular must find a solution". Sounding the sentiments in the article previously cited, we are called to realize that "there is a state of war in the country [and that] no democracy can win in a war by adhering to rules which can only prevail in peace". In the following day's editorial comment (December 16, 1993) we are reminded that "in response to Arab enormities natural survival instincts overcome twisted values and sickly guilt complexes". More ominously, "It is an ugly war, in which the preservation of human rights must, as it does in every war, take a back seat to matters of survival. Rabin may have to introduce laws which will make expulsions easier, and which will stipulate that appeals can only be lodged after the expulsion". Furthermore, "The imperatives of war also include complete control over the conduct of Israelis in relation to the situation...it is unthinkable that at times like these the police should worry about Israeli trouble-makers...Members of organizations known for fomenting trouble should be promptly arrested and kept behind bars".

Some evident questions raised by these statements might be *How are terrorists to be identified? Who in the general Arab population holds views different from them? Are all to be expelled? Should Israeli society be successful in meeting its threats to itself in this way, what will the character of that society become in the process? What has it already become? Are its effects reversible? If what is called 'terrorism' is more rightly the cry and protest of an entire people, what kind of 'final solution' might it require seeing that every present violent response engenders more of its kind? Is not the unarticulated lament of Israel already that the Arabs are our 'unglück' (misfortune)?*

For myself, the text of Ez. 37 offers a construct for understanding Israel's predicament that saves one from untenable defense of morally indefensible conduct or condemnation of the same. If only a resurrected nation can qualify to bless all the families of the earth and become the locus and disseminators of a Davidic Theocratic Kingdom, then clearly there must be a death that precedes it. I believe Israel's present and worsening condition is the divine strategy toward that end. A view that expects progressive improvement or amelioration of Israel's condition, in my opinion, insufficiently reckons on the depth of not only Israel's, but man's intransigence, and falsely hopes for what is essentially a humanist rather than a Biblical expectation.

Israel's destiny is unquestionably real--but it is not to be realized as her own achievement but lies rather and exclusively with God's faithfulness and power. Therefore, this fulfillment waits upon a final exhaustion of any human capability (for which we Jews are characteristically notorious) revealing to Israel its God in the way that He must be known by her as the One who raises the dead. Any knowledge less than this removes restored Israel's capacity to bless the nations who have known her in her previous and threatening posture and probably have themselves contributed to the death from which she is now visibly raised by God.

How wrong then to condemn her for the very thing she is called to demonstrate. Israel remains His witness people in her apostasy--all the more when He restores her exclusively on the basis of His mercy.-- i.e., what He is in Himself! The issue of Israel's redemption, we need to be reminded, is the issue of God; it is as this God that Israel must make Him known to the nations. It is as the recipient of His undeserved grace and mercy that Israel becomes most powerfully witness to Him (Ro. 9:16). That the Church has any other expectation of a 'progressive' fulfillment speaks volumes about its own condition and expectation for itself! The Church that should have known better, would be less critical of Israel if it understood about itself that God does not receive us for any worthiness on our own part. How much of her coming or present disappointment is predicated upon a false premise of an idealized Israel--the projection of her own vain hopes--contrary to the whole tenor of the Gospel?

The Church must see itself in its own redeemed fallenness as the 'son of man' that is subject to all the error and pride of sinful mankind (which includes Israel) that it might prophetically call Israel to life again out of its own resurrection experience when only the power of God breaking into history can save it. Like the resurrection of Jesus, it will require a faith where the atheist thinks it should end. We need then to respect the death by suffering to which Israel is now being needfully brought. There is a judgment here as well as a mystery made necessary by the depth and stubbornness human pride convinced of its own intrinsic goodness and capability.

It may be that the segment of the Church that has idealized present Israel and so much desires her success has shrunk from considering an apocalyptic of death and resurrection so unwelcomed by herself. Nevertheless, in the genius of God, our mandate and requirement to be to Israel a 'son of man' company that can raise her on the basis of our own resurrection faith and prophetic stature compels us to a transcendent ground we would not have otherwise chosen. by which we become ourselves transformed! So then, the issue of Israel becomes the issue of the Church--the issue of its last days making! Is it not this that Paul apostolically celebrates in his "O the depth of the riches" in his conclusion of the Mystery of Israel in Romans 9-11?