

The Need to Stop Dangerous Fanatics in Israel

Sermon by Rabbi Arnold Saltzman

Israel, a country we love and admire, has seen an increase in dangerous activities in the last 20 years.

Twenty years ago we believed that we were close to an Israel-Palestinian treaty, a two state solution. Then, during the negotiations, there were horrific bus terrorist bombings in Israel. This did not deter Yizhak Rabin from moving forward: He said “ Enough is Enough” and would not give a victory to those who wished to prevent peace either in bombings or in dangerous words and threats.

A Jewish man assassinated Rabin at a peace rally, following the singing of a song for peace. The security lapse in a place like Israel, is still troubling. Yet, far more troubling is the fact that someone taught this young assassin that he had a right to kill Rabin. This rhetoric came from a rabbi who believed that you could kill someone who advocated giving up any part of the land of Israel for any reason.

Twenty years later, we see a moral decline, both in the justifications of attacks on Arabs coming from secular Jews, and from some of the Religious settlers in the West Bank.

A list of recent events include: Attacking a girl with stones for not complying with a dress code.

A woman being pushed off a bus for violating the separation of men and women.

Israeli security escorting women away from the Kotel or arresting them when they pray with a prayer shawl, or reading from a Torah. Further harassment of the women even when they are sanctioned and protected by Israeli security.

One day when they expected Women of the Wall, thousands of Orthodox women intentionally came there to prevent the other women from even coming close to the Wall.

In recent years, rabbinic groups published in the Israeli press hostile statements about the Gay Pride Parade. This year a lunatic Yeshiva student stabbed a teenage girl who died shortly after the attack.

Last summer a group of secular young men took their hatred and revenge out on a Jerusalem Palestinian teenager, kidnapped him and set him on fire, during a war with Hamas, which upped the pressure every hour on Israelis. Yet this Arab teenager had done nothing to provoke anyone.

Recently, a West Bank settler, an Orthodox zealot, firebombed a Palestinian home, killing an infant, and eventually the father of the infant died of burn wounds from that day.

Colbert King wrote a column in the Washington Post about sectarian turmoil and cited some of these actions along with others aimed at Christians by religious Jewish fanatics. I have to add fanatics, as none of the Orthodox people I know would do something like this or condone it.

ADL, spoke out against Rabbi Bentzi Gopstein, director of Lehava, who favors burning of churches and calls Christian worship 'Idol worship.' ADL has called for an apology from the rabbi.

The 1500 year old Church of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fish was victimized by arson, spray painted with 'False Idols Will be Smashed.' The prayer room and outer areas of the church were burned. Abe Foxman said we deplore such actions. Netanyahu condemned the attack.

I was having lunch with this areas ministers, rabbis and priests. I approached one of the priests, and asked if he would convey a small donation to help repair the damage. He looked at me as if he thought he had misheard what I had said. I repeated it, and I said please include the following words which I sent to him:

Dear Fr. Fecteau and Kathleen,

I was saddened to read about the fire which destroyed part of this important religious sanctuary in Israel, and very disturbed that the article suggested that it may have been the work of Israeli right wing fanatics. While we will have to wait for the results of an investigation, I wished to express both my support for your important work, and my appreciation of the good and ever improving relationship Jews and Catholics are

experiencing in our time. There may be some who think that is cause for alarm, yet I have a different thought, namely to run to do what is right.

Such an act of desecration as attacking a church in Israel is unimaginable to me. The ignorance or hostility which generated the fire at this church must be answered with gestures of support and kindness. Our religious work which we share is to build up and not to tear down, to find life and hope even in the ashes of this terrible deed.

Therefore, it is my wish to make some gesture of support, expressing our good will and love in the spirit of goodness, and good teachings which we have been given by God, and that we can reach out to each other as brother and sister, standing together against anyone who would attack a Church and its good works.

With blessings and warm regards,
Rabbi Arnold Saltzman

I wish to urge you to express your outrage. We can do that as a congregation or individually. We also need to do this through the other representatives in Israel and American officials.

Laws should be passed which make this a severe crime of religious hatred and bigotry. This is something Jews have been victimized by throughout our history. This is something that we need to speak out against and counter by supporting those who are attacked and the victims of such crimes.

‘What has been done to Israel we love?’

Colbert King missed an important point. Those attacking Christians from this radical religious right, are also attacking Jews, women’s rights, the Reform Movement in Israel and in the United States. The contract we have with government supersedes religious law.

We must not be silent, for I’m sure we’ll be next.

Support those who have been victimized, and rebuild when possible. Take action to answer these outrageous behaviors.