

Pope Francis and King Mohammed Make an “Appeal for Jerusalem”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



On his return from a recent trip to Morocco, Pope Francis was well pleased with his encounter with his Muslim “brothers and sisters.” He seemed especially pleased with the appeal he and King Mohammed VI issued together, stating to reporters that “For example, the joint appeal for Jerusalem was a step forward made not by an authority of Morocco and an authority of the Vatican, but by believing brothers who suffer seeing this City of hope: that is not yet as universal as we all desire it to be: Jews, Muslims and Christians. We all want this. And this is why we have signed this desire: it is a desire, a call to religious fraternity that is symbolized in this city that is all ours. We are all citizens of Jerusalem, all believers.”

Before returning to that historically questionable statement about Jerusalem, let's go back a bit and recall other remarks by Pope Francis. Pope Francis has said many false things about Islam. He has said that "there is no such thing as Islamic terrorism" and that "authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Quran are opposed to every form of violence." He has, in turn, been praised by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb, who thanked him for his "defense of Islam against the accusation of violence and terrorism."

Pope Francis has even obliquely justified the murders of the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists who had drawn Muhammad, saying that "it is true that you must not react violently, but although we are good friends if [an aide] says a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch, it's normal. You can't make a toy out of the religions of others. These people provoke and then (something can happen)." So the murder of a dozen helpless cartoonists is compared to a punch. There is something out of whack in this Pope's moral calculus.

When asked by a journalist about whether the 85-year-old priest who was decapitated while saying Mass was "killed in the name of Islam," Francis replied:

"I don't like to speak of Islamic violence, because every day, when I browse the newspapers, I see violence, here in Italy... this one who has murdered his girlfriend, another who has murdered the mother-in-law... and these are baptized Catholics! There are violent Catholics! If I speak of Islamic violence, I must speak of Catholic violence . . . and no, not all Muslims are violent, not all Catholics are violent. It is like a fruit salad; there's everything."

The Pope thinks that because some Catholics commit murder for purely personal reasons, this constitutes "Catholic violence." It does not. It is violence by Catholics, not committed in the name of, and not in any way because of, their Catholic faith. "Islamic violence" against Infidels, on the other hand, is

inculcated in the texts – Qur'an and Hadith – of Islam.

The Pope has said that “in pretty much every religion there is always a small group of fundamentalists. Fundamentalists. We [Catholics] have them.” These fundamentalists rely on their scriptures. But mainstream Muslims are all “fundamentalists” and what their Scriptures, the Qur'an and Hadith, tell them is quite different from what Christian “fundamentalists” find in their Bible. Christians find messages about mercy, charity, love, forgiveness. If a few Christians are violent, it is despite what the Bible tells them. Muslim “fundamentalists” – that is, mainstream Muslims – are violent not in spite of, but because of what they find in the Qur'an. For there they find more than 100 verses commanding Believers to engage in violent Jihad against non-Muslims, to “fight” and to “kill” them, to “smite at their necks,” to “strike terror” in the hearts of the Unbelievers. Given the Pope's claim that “authentic Islam” has nothing to do with violence, one would like to know if the Pope has read the Qur'an. Is it possible he has not done so, despite being so willing to make authoritative pronouncements about Islam? Or has he read the Qur'an, and not understood, or chosen to ignore, what he read? Or is he, as many have begun to suspect, when it comes to anything having to do with Islam, hopelessly idiotic?

The Pope has met the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University, Ahmed al-Tayeb, twice – in Rome and in the United Arab Emirates, calling him “a friend and dear brother.” He has publicly thanked the sheik for having “the courage and desire to affirm that faith in God unites and does not divide, draws together even in differences (and) moves away from hostility and aversion.” Does the Pope know how many terrorists have studied at Al-Azhar and were deeply affected by the Islamic education they received there while Al-Tayeb, his “friend and dear brother,” was the theological school's president? Did anyone at the Vatican think to tell the Pope about Al-Tayeb's views on Jews, quite full of “hostility and aversion,” such as in

this revealing interview on Egyptian television in 2013?

Interviewer: They [the Jews] consider everybody else to be inferior to them...

Ahmad Al-Tayeb: Extremely inferior. They even have very peculiar laws. For instance, they are allowed to practice usury with non-Jews. Some things are not allowed among Jews, but are allowed between Jews and non-Jews. They practice a terrible hierarchy, and they are not ashamed to admit it, because it is written in the Torah – with regard to killing, enslavement, and so on [of non-Jews].

Therefore, they have generated a problem not only in their relations with the Muslims, but in their relations with all other people as well, and history has been clear on this.

Interviewer: There is even great enmity between them and the Christians.

Ahmad Al-Tayeb: Of course. These practices and beliefs have made people, even non-Muslims, hate them.

And the Pope's advisers could have found more in that vein, simply by googling "Ahmed el-Tayeb" and "Jews." Pope Francis ought now to be fully informed about his "friend and dear brother," so that he may realize just how wrong he was in his fulsome endorsements of El-Tayeb, and say nothing more about the Grand Imam. Or does antisemitism not bother this Pope?

Preparing for his trip to the United Arab Emirates, the Pope delivered a video message to the people of the U.A.E.: "Al Salamu Alaikum," Arabic for "peace be with you," Pope Francis said at the beginning of his message.

"I am happy that in a few days I will be able to visit your country, a land that strives to be a model of coexistence, human brotherhood and encounter among different civilizations and cultures where many find a secure place to work and live

freely in respect for diversity,” Pope Francis said.

What “model of coexistence” and “respect for diversity” is to be found in the U.A.E.? U.A.E. natives constitute 20 percent of the population, while foreign workers and other expatriates account for the other 80 percent. At least one million of those foreign workers are Catholics. Fewer than two dozen churches have been allowed in the U.A.E., to serve between one and two million Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians. There is one tiny temple for half-a-million Hindus. Is that handful of churches and a single Hindu temple “respect for diversity”? Non-Muslims are forbidden from trying to proselytize; Muslims, however, are free to try to convert non-Muslims. Non-Muslims must not pray, or make any other display of their faith, in public. Compared to Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. is an oasis of religious freedom. Non-Muslims have houses of worship, albeit very few, where they can conduct services undisturbed. In Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, a handful of Korean nurses softly singing Christmas carols in their shared living quarters, behind closed doors, led to their immediate expulsion from the Kingdom.

The U.A.E. is not, pace Pope Francis, a “model of coexistence” and “human brotherhood.” Millions of foreign workers, especially non-Muslims, are relentlessly exploited; working conditions for manual laborers have been described as harrowing; domestic workers routinely have 14-hour days. Still, it’s not quite as bad as in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Non-Muslims have to watch what they post, and what they say. A Christian singer made a video in which she innocently pointed toward a mosque with her left hand, having no idea of the significance of the left hand in Arab culture; she was arrested for showing disrespect for Islam. Others have been hauled into court for derogatory remarks they supposedly made about Islam and Muhammad on Facebook; even getting into an argument about foreign policy can lead to such charges, and when it’s a non-Muslim’s word against that of a Muslim, in a

Muslim country, we know who wins.

There is one place in the Middle East where there is full freedom of worship for adherents of all religions, in that respect a “model of coexistence.” That country is Israel. Pope Francis visited there in May 2014. He was greeted warmly by the Israelis at Ben Gurion Airport, just before going off to visit – even before Israel proper – the “Palestinian” Authority. In between scheduled engagements, the Pope ordered his motorcade to make an unexpected stop in Bethlehem. He got out of his popemobile and made his way to a particular section of Israel’s security wall. This is an often-photographed section of the wall covered with graffiti that compare Palestinian Bethlehem to the Jewish Warsaw ghetto. Near a spot where someone had very recently sprayed “Free Palestine,” the Pope touched the wall and began to pray. Of course, a dozen video and still cameras were capturing that moment. He must have known that the videos and still photographs taken of him at that very spot, with those pro- “Palestinian” graffiti, would go all over the world, helping to promote the Palestinian cause. The Pope’s effusiveness is saved for the likes of Ahmed el-Tayeb, and the “human brotherhood” and “model of coexistence” he claims to have found in the U.A.E.

But now let’s return to that joint statement made by the Pope and King Mohammed VI on Jerusalem.

Reports about it appeared under various headlines:

Reuters: Pope, Morocco’s king, say Jerusalem must be open to all faiths

Crux: Pope Francis, Moroccan leader issue appeal for Jerusalem

Times of Israel: Pope in Morocco urges Jerusalem be protected for all religions

Al Jazeera: Pope in Morocco: Protect ‘multi-religious’ Jerusalem

TRT: Pope says Jerusalem 'common patrimony' on Morocco trip

These headlines – these “appeals” for Jerusalem, these demands that Jerusalem “be open for all faiths,” that Jerusalem “be protected for all religions” – all suggest that Jerusalem requires such a worldwide “appeal” to end its current unsatisfactory status, that Jerusalem should be “open to all faiths” as it is not now, that Jerusalem must in the future “be protected for all religions” as it is not now. These tendentious headlines already shape the readers’ response, which is to believe that Israel’s control of Jerusalem must be faulted, and needs to be corrected.

Here is the “joint appeal” on Jerusalem:

On the occasion of the visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Kingdom of Morocco, His Holiness and His Majesty King Mohammed VI, recognizing the unique and sacred character of Jerusalem / Al-Quds Acharif, and deeply concerned for its spiritual significance and its special vocation as a city of peace, join in making the following appeal:

We consider it important to preserve the Holy City of Jerusalem / Al-Quds Acharif as the common patrimony of humanity and especially the followers of the three monotheistic religions, as a place of encounter and as a symbol of peaceful coexistence, where mutual respect and dialogue can be cultivated.

To this end, the specific multi-religious character, the spiritual dimension and the particular cultural identity of Jerusalem / Al-Quds Acharif must be protected and promoted.

It is our hope, therefore, that in the Holy City, full freedom of access to the followers of the three monotheistic religions and their right to worship will be guaranteed, so that in Jerusalem / Al-Quds Acharif they may raise their prayers to God, the Creator of all, for a future of peace and

fraternity on the earth.

Can Pope Francis tell us how Israel in any way infringes on the rights of any Believer to worship as he or she wishes? Jerusalem is not just a symbol, it is an example of peaceful coexistence. Rarely, and only for security reasons, the Israelis have had to restrict access to the Temple Mount. For example, on a handful of occasions, when the Arabs on the Temple Mount hurled rocks at Jewish worshipers at the Western Wall below, the Israelis have temporarily halted access to the Temple Mount. When Arabs throw rocks at Jews who are visiting Temple Mount, the Israelis have made Temple Mount off-limits – to Jews.

Though the Temple Mount is the holiest site in Judaism, Israel has forbidden Jewish prayer on Temple Mount, in order to placate the Muslims. Jews may enter it only to visit the place, not to pray, and only at limited times. Muslims are free to pray on Temple Mount, while Christians and Jews may only visit the site as tourists. Non-Muslims are forbidden from singing, praying, or making any kind of “religious displays.” During times of political tension and fear of riots, on Fridays and some Jewish or Muslim Holy Days, entry to the Haram area is restricted to Muslim men over a certain age, which varies according to decisions taken by security officials. The restrictions do not concern Muslim women, who can enter regardless of their age. Israel clearly bends over backwards to accommodate the Muslims, a fact of which Pope Francis is no doubt unaware.

The Pope might find it useful to compare the freedom of worship in Jerusalem today with what happened in Jerusalem under Jordanian occupation. For nineteen years, from 1948 to 1967, the Western Wall was under Jordanian rule. Although the Jordanians had signed an armistice agreement in 1949 guaranteeing Jews the right to visit the Wall, not one Israeli Jew was ever permitted to do so. Monsignor John Osterreicher

reported that the Jordanians dynamited 34 of 35 synagogues in the Old City. He may have undercounted. The Israeli scholar Raphael Israeli says that far more synagogues, 58 of them, were desecrated or demolished in the Old City, part of the deliberate de-Judaization of Jerusalem. The Western Wall was transformed into an exclusively Muslim holy site associated with al-Buraq, the fabulous winged steed that Muhammad was said to have ridden up to Heaven. In the ancient Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives, 38,000 graves were systematically destroyed, and Jews were not allowed to be buried there. Some of the tombstones were used to line the floors of Jordanian army latrines. This de-judaization of the Old City was all in violation of the Israel-Jordan Armistice Agreement, Article VIII – 2, which guaranteed “free access to the Holy Places and cultural institutions and use of the cemetery on the Mount of Olives....”

Christians fared a little better, but were hardly enjoying the kind of coexistence that Pope Francis may have been led to believe. In 1952, Jordan proclaimed that Islam was to be the official religion of the territories taken in the 1948-49 war, including Jerusalem.

In 1953, Jordan restricted Christian communities from owning or purchasing land near holy sites, and in 1964, further prohibited churches from buying land in Jerusalem. Jordan sought to “Islamize” the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem.

In order to counter the influence of foreign powers, who had run the Christian schools in Jerusalem autonomously since Ottoman times, the Jordanian government in 1955 brought Christian schools under government supervision. They were allowed to use only approved textbooks and teach in Arabic. Schools were required to close on Arab national holidays and Fridays instead of Sundays. Christian holidays were no longer recognised officially, and observation of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath was restricted to Christian civil servants.

The Jordanian government did not allow Christian institutions to expand. Christian churches were prevented from funding hospitals and other social services in Jerusalem.

Some intrepid reporter should ask Pope Francis if he knows what happened to Jewish sites and Christian institutions in Jerusalem when it was under Muslim rule from 1948 to 1967. And as a follow-up question, he should be asked how he thinks the three monotheistic faiths fare today in Jerusalem, under Israeli rule. His answers, or his failure to answer, should prove instructive.

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