

Thou Shalt Not Kill Whom?

by John Hartung (Palestine Times, December 1997)

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Zionism comes from the bowels of the Bible. In a display of chutzpah even more galling than the Balfour Declaration, the first Zionists invented a god who commanded them to commit genocide. After declaring that their god gave them land which had belonged to other people for hundreds of years, the spiritual ancestors of today's Jews and Christians embarked upon a campaign of mass murder:

In the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded (Deuteronomy 20:16-17).

The Jebusites were the people of Jerusalem, and like the other nations that were slated for destruction, they had no quarrel with the Israelites. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that The People Of The Book were bent on genocide according to the modern definition of the word:

They should be utterly destroyed and should receive no mercy but be exterminated, as the Lord commanded Moses . . . Utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling (Joshua 11:20 . . . First Samuel 15:3).

Indeed, this was to be a Holocaust:

You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear. The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath; and fire will consume them. You will destroy their offspring from the earth, and their children from among the sons of men (Psalms 21:9-10; for additional examples of the commandment to kill people of other religions, and boasts of having done so, see: Numbers 21:2-3; 21:34-35; 24:8; 24:19-20; Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:2-6; 3:21; 7:1-2; 7:16; 7:23-24; 9:3; 11:24-25; 31:3-5; 33:27; Joshua 2:10; 6:21; 8:2; 8:24-26; 10:1; 10:28; 10:35; 10:37; 10:39-40; 11:11-14; 11:21; Judges 1:17; 3:29; First Samuel 15:8; 15:15; 15:18; 15:20; First Chronicles 4:41).

And as explained by Maimonides, Judaism's most respected scholar of the Bible, this Holocaust was a mandatory commandment from the god of Jacob, the patriarch whose name was changed to Israel:

It is a positive commandment to destroy the seven nations, as it is said: "Thou shalt utterly destroy them." If one does not put to death any of them that falls into one's power, one transgresses a negative commandment, as it is said: "Thou shalt save alive nothing that breathes" (Maimonides' Book of Judges, 5:4, circa. 1195).

But the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule also come from the Bible. The most famous of the Ten Commandments is "Thou shalt not kill," and the Golden Rule says "Love thy neighbor as thy self." How can this be? In order to understand the heart of Zionism, this apparent contradiction must be understood in its original context. Consider three translations of Leviticus 19:18 -- the biblical verse from which the Golden Rule has been extracted:

- Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. [King James Version of the Bible, and the first Jewish Publication Society translation]
- You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. [Revised Standard Version]
- You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself. [TANAKH, most recent Jewish Publication Society translation]

In context, "neighbor" meant "the children of thy people," "the sons of your own people," "your countrymen" -- in other words, fellow Israelites. Keep this definition of "neighbor" in mind as we consider the proto-legal portion of The Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:17-21):

Thou shalt not kill.
Neither shalt thou commit adultery.
Neither shalt thou steal.

Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour.
Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall
not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his
maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

-- and remember that there was no punctuation in the original. That is, the scrolls from which these words were translated have no periods, no commas, and no first-word capitalization. Decisions about where sentences and paragraphs begin and end are supplied by the translator. Accordingly, instead of being written as five separate paragraphs of one sentence each, Deuteronomy 5:17-21 could be legitimately translated:

Thou shalt not kill, neither shalt thou commit adultery,
neither shalt thou steal, neither shalt thou bear false witness
against thy neighbour. Neither shall you covet your neighbor's
wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his
manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that
is your neighbor's.

Here the question 'Thou shalt not kill who?' is answered: 'Thou shalt not kill thy neighbor . . . the children of thy people . . . the sons of your own people . . . your countrymen . . . fellow Israelis . . . fellow Jews. How unconventional is this interpretation? Not very. The rabbis of The Talmud, Judaism's most respected explication of the Bible, determined that an Israelite was not liable for murder unless he intentionally killed a fellow Israelite. Maimonides put it like this (Book of Torts 5:1:1 . . . 5:2:11):

If one slays a single Israelite, he transgresses a negative commandment, for Scripture says, Thou Shalt not murder. If one murders willfully in the presence of witnesses, he is put to death by the sword . . . Needless to say, one is not put to death if he kills a heathen.

This understanding of "Thou shalt not kill" allows us to see why the first Commander-and-Chief of the Israeli Defense Forces was not guilty of hypocrisy. According to the Bible, Joshua initiated the most successful campaign of genocide in world history -- a campaign in which over 400 named cities were "utterly destroyed." The first city to fall was Jericho, where every man, woman and child was "put to the sword" because they were not People of The Book. The second city to fall was much smaller, only 12,000 people, but Joshua took

30,000 soldiers to massacre Ai. After a long day of killing he gathered his troops and carved the Ten Commandments in stone -- including "Thou shalt not kill" (Joshua 8:24-25, 30-32):

When Israel had finished slaughtering all the inhabitants of Ai . . . and all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword . . . all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand, all the people of Ai. . . then Joshua built an altar and they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord . . . And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses.

Joshua was not a hypocrite because there is no conflict inherent to not killing "the children of thy people," while killing other people's children with enthusiasm. In fact, Joshua was greatly dismayed about his conquest of Ai because unlike Jericho, where he did not lose a single soldier, Joshua lost 3 Israelites for every thousand people killed at Ai. Today's Zionists are more pleased by such kill ratios:

According to figures provided by Minister of the Interior Yosef Burg, in 1980 ten Jews were killed by terrorists and in 1981 eight. In contrast, we have killed about a thousand terrorists in 1982, and caused the loss of life of thousands of inhabitants of an enemy country. If so, it results that for every 6-8 Jews sacrificed, we kill in return thousands of Gentiles. This is, undoubtedly, a spectacular situation, an uncommon success of Zionism." (Aluf Hareven, former head of the Van Leer Institute, on Israel's invasion of Lebanon, from Migvan, October/November, 1982)

A proper understanding of "the law of Moses" even makes it possible to comprehend current interpretations of Israeli law (New York Newsday 10/15/91, p 14):

An Israeli Justice Ministry official suggested in a letter that a Palestinian benefitted when Israeli soldiers killed his wife. The letter was written by Pliya Albeck, chief of the civil department at the attorney general's office, legislator Yossi Sarid said. Israeli radio said the Palestinian woman, Safiyah Suleiman Gargour, 63, was beaten and then shot to death by soldiers in May, 1990 while working in her garden in Khan Yunis in the occupied Gaza Strip.

“You should claim that the plaintiff has only benefitted from the death of the deceased (his wife). He has benefitted, because during her life, he had to provide for her, and now he does not have to do so.”

So it is that from a Zionist perspective, when the brains of seven-year-old Ali Jawarish came “oozing from a hole in his forehead where he had been shot at close range by an Israeli soldier firing on fleeing young stone-throwers,” it was not wrong. It did not disrupt “the grand opening of a new fortified complex encasing Rachel’s Tomb.” It did not dampen “The festivities, attended by hundreds of strictly Orthodox Jews, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Israel’s two Chief Rabbis.” It did not violate any of the Ten Commandments while “Women in kerchiefs and long dresses and men in black coats and hats lighted memorial candles and swayed over prayer-books in separate prayer sections,” and “Followers of a Hasidic sect hawked religious books and danced to religious music blaring from loudspeakers” while Yitzhak Mordechai told the crowd “We have come to this place and we will never leave it, until the coming of the redeemer” (New York Times, November 12, 1997).

No, to Zionists the killing of Ali Jawarish was not wrong. To Zionists the family of Ali Jawarish has only benefitted, because during Ali’s life, they had to provide for him, and now they do not have to do so. For more secular Jewish and Christian Zionists, the killing of Ali Jawarish was not wrong because it was just one more unfortunate incident in the natural unfolding of history . . . it was just another day. But for religious Zionists, the killing a Ali Jawarish was not wrong because he was a heathen.

Indeed, for religious Zionists, this killing was more than the natural unfolding of history. It was supernatural. According to the most vicious and long-lived delusion that has ever plagued the human capacity for fantasy, according to Zionism, this oozing of a seven-year-old’s blood and brains was the will of god.

Who are these people . . . these Zionists? In fact, although most Jews are Zionists, most Zionists are Christians. Remember that Christianity is a form of Judaism. Christians worship the god of the Jews and an individual Jew who they believe to be that god’s son. They believe that the Israelites were right to kill the people of Jericho, Ai, Jerusalem and all the other cities in the land that became Israel. More important, they believe that today’s Jews have a god-given

right to Palestine. Most important, although Christian Zionism is relatively dilute, there are hundreds of millions of Christian Zionists.

How can Palestinians defend themselves against so many religious fantasies lurking in the hearts of so many people? The key insight, I think, is that a fundamental sense of justice also lives in the vast majority of those hearts. At one end of the spectrum, that sense of justice is overwhelmed by allegiance to the god of genocide, but at the other end of the spectrum, that sense of justice can be caused to overwhelm a dimly perceived identification with Zionist perversions of justice.

Of what use is that insight? It leads to the realization that an appeal to the sense of justice that lives within the most just hearts could have a profound effect. Those hearts could, in turn, have a profound effect on hearts of moderate Zionists, and those hearts could have a profound effect on more ardent Zionists, and so on down the line until only the Zealots would be left. Fortunately, the Jabotinskys, Meir Kahanes, Baruch Goldsteins, Yigal Amirs and Netanyahus of this world are such a small minority that they could be overwhelmed by better people's sense of justice.

How could a chain reaction of justice be initiated? Here the key is to propose a just solution -- a solution that will appeal the first link in the chain. Again, I urge Palestinians to propose a new nation -- a final settlement in which Israel, without the Golan Heights, joins the West Bank and Gaza. This new country should not be called Israel and it should not be called Palestine. Any other name would be acceptable, but I suggest New Canaan.

All current inhabitants of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza would be citizens of New Canaan, and no citizen would be discriminated against, or receive privileges, on the basis of religion. People residing outside of New Canaan who were born in Israel or whose parents were born in Israel, the West Bank or Gaza could immigrate to New Canaan with their family and receive automatic citizenship. Otherwise, immigration policy should be determined by a democratically elected government in any manner that would not discriminate by religious affiliation.

Because the United States has been critically responsible for creating the circumstances which require such a major solution, America should guarantee the security of New Canaan's international borders for fifteen years subsequent to its creation and grant expedited U.S. citizenship to any former Israeli citizen

of New Canaan who wishes to immigrate to the United States.

Boys throw stones because they do not know a better way to fight for justice. Zealots kill them and they would gladly kill every non-Jew who lives in any land that they believe their god gave them “for an inheritance.” For the sake of the boys who throw stones, for the sake of their courage, and for the sake of their objective, let us find a better way to fight for justice.

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