

Scenario of war : Peace is put to the test

When the young St. Francis knelt in his prayer in the derelict church of San Damiano in Assisi, around 1206, the wide-eyed figure of Christ on the cross asked him to restore it. Why not ?

But to St. Francis the restored church is not only a place for prayer. It is also a place to make peace. Peace with ~~the~~ oneself, and peace with ~~the~~ others. To make peace with one ~~h~~ self is to realize that you are nothing without the other. And that the other is different, or he or she will not be other.

Differences might go too far, to the extremes of enmity. This explains to my understanding, Jesus saying : " Love your enemies".

By love I understand, make peace with them. Because peace is the real manifestation of love between peoples, nations and individuals.

To my knowledge the Old Testament is called 36 times to " love the stranger, love your neighbor as your self

That is why peace is sacred, not war. St. Francis realized this deep conviction and went from restoring San Damiano's in Assisi, all the way, to the Middle East, where I come from. There he joined the Crusades, not to make ~~h~~ war but to make peace.

His historical brave initiative is well known. It explains how to translate love of the enemy into peace with the enemy. He left the Christian military camp near Dumiat-Egypt, and crossed the fire line, to the other side, to the Muslim enemies, with honest determination to make peace with them .

St. Francis was armoured with two secret weapons that he himself didn't realize at that time how important they were. The first was his clergy dress. The second was the Holy Bible. Islam praises highly (in the Holy Koran) priests and clergy by name, and describes Christians as nearest to the believers the Muslims. Islam also describes in the Koran ~~also~~ the Bible as a revelation from God. And says :” there is light and guidance in the Bible”. With these two weapons St. Francis found his way easily to the Muslim King at that time Al-Kamel. He was well received and had for^a/few days long discussions with Muslim scholars about peace and mutual understanding and respect, and about what, we term today, conviavity and living together.

At that time St. Francis was lucky to meet with a Muslim King who believes and who understands Islam well. But if St. Francis is back today and tries again his mission of peace, he'll find that Islam is hijacked, misinterpreted and misused. He'll be hijacked himself like many other clergies from the Middle East and from outside who were hijacked and killed in cold blood. St. Francis will be shocked to see that churches and monasteries that Prophet Muhammad asked his Muslim followers to respect, protect, defend, and even to help and finance, are destroyed in his name. that is why Muslims of Lebanon (Sunnite-Shiite, Alawaite and Druze) announced collectively that these crimes are against Islam

itself ; They also declared that any harm to a Christian, is a harm to Muslims. And that any attack on any church is an attack on all mosques. They didn't decide this out of national or human considerations only, but out of Islamic religious beliefs as stated in both the Holy Koran and the teachings of the Prophet.

Based on these principles, war against Christians in part of the Middle East is a war against Islam itself. Muslims of different confessions are victimized too by the same dark powers which gave itself the authority to speak in the name of a religion of peace they disfigured to look like a religion of war.

Those who committed the brutal massacres against the Izidies, Christians and Muslims in northern Iraq, used the same logic of John Winthrop in 1630, who justified violence against native Americans by saying :” God hath cleared our title to this place”. He also believed (like ISIS of today) that “America is God’s chosen instrument for the redemption of the world”. Winthrop considered America the “City on a Hill”. That’s exactly what ISIS believes today about the role of the self-appointed Khalifa, and the self-proclaimed the Islamic state.

Less than a decade ago the speaker of the House in the USA Gingrich said :” I believe that God put this land between the two great oceans to be found by special people”. The leaders of ISIS today use the same logic when describing the Middle East.

As a matter of fact fights over history are really all about laying claim to the future.

It might look like a sunny optimism to say that this Tsunami of religious hallucination accompanied with terror, will pass and will vanish away sooner or later. But the other alternative is to surrender and to accept the current destructive defacto. The truth is that as Christians and Muslims faced together the many challenges of the present and miseries of the past, they ^{also} have to face the new challenges together ~~also~~. They faced together in the modern age, western imperialism and turkishinism; They faced together in the Middle ages, the Crusades and the Mamluks, and before that the Tatars brutal invasions. And they survived. What is happening now is not exceptionally different. The current war against human values in the name of religion, is a war against religion and against Muslims and Christians alike. This is a Rubicon they have to cross together. Their destiny is to face it together armoured with their two most powerful weapons, that were used by St. Francis :
Love as advocated by Christianity, and justice as advocated by Islam.

It is with love and justice that peace can prevail.

Mohammd Sammak

msammak@almustaqbal.com.lb