Jerusalem and the Pope's desperation

EXAGGERATED OPTIMISM

Last week, while US President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel, Pope Francis made a desperate plea ("un llamado desesperado") to respect the status quo of Jerusalem and to show good sense and prudence: *"I cannot hide my deep concern about the situation that has been created in recent days [around Jerusalem]. I make a desperate plea to everyone to commit themselves to respecting the status quo of the city, in conformity with the pertinent resolutions of the United Nations."*

When Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was elected as the Pope, I was really thrilled. Not only because a compatriot had been chosen for such an important position, but more than anything else because I had heard from my rabbinical colleagues in Argentina that Cardinal Bergoglio really understood the injustices that Israel suffers at the international level. And what Israel most needed -and still needs- is world leaders willing to defend Israel against international hypocrisy. But time -or the new highest position of Cardinal Bergoglio- demonstrated the naivety of my exaggerated optimism.

MORE (AND MUCH MORE!) OF THE SAME

On May 15, 2015, Pope Francis did what no other Pope had done until that moment. He officially recognized a "Palestinian State". On that occasion, he did not hesitate to deviate from the *status quo*, since there was no –and still does not exist– Palestinian State recognized by the United Nations. But this is not the whole story. The worst thing the Pope did when he recognized Palestine was what he did NOT do. Pope Francis asked NOTHING from the Palestinians in exchange for his recognition of the new state! Absolutely nothing. And what could the Pope have asked of the Palestinians in exchange for his recognition? If the intention of the Pope had been to advance the peace process, and the creation of two states, one

Jewish and one Palestinian, the Pope should have conditioned his recognition of the Palestinian State to the Palestinian's recognition of the right of the Jewish people to have their own state in Israel. Because to this day, the biggest problem for peace negotiations is not the settlements in Judea or Samaria or the status of Jerusalem. The number 1 impediment for peace in the Middle East is that while the main political leaders of Israel are explicitly willing to accept the eventual existence of a Palestinian State, the Palestinians are NOT willing to recognize the legitimacy of a Jewish State, however small it may be (see this). Why the Pope did not do this, and granted his recognition to the Palestinians (and called Mahmud Abbas "an angel of peace"!!!) in exchange for NOTHING , instead of helping to advance the peace process, escapes any positive thinking that I can conceive …

UNESCO Vs. YERUSHALAYIM

Let's talk now about Yerushalayim (Jerusalem). The Pope made a "desperate plea" in anticipation to the announcement of Donald Trump recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. A few months ago, in October of this year, UNESCO, a body that belongs to the United Nations, issued a new resolution announcing that the area of □□the Bet haMiqdash, the great Temple of Jerusalem, should be called "Haram al-Sharif," indicating that Israel is illegally occupying Jerusalem; denying any historical relationship between Jerusalem and the Jewish people and declaring that Jerusalem is essentially Muslim (see this). No one better than the Pope to deny these cynical historical lies. The Pope knows that the story of the first apostles developed around the Bet haMiqdash. And that the Bet HaMiqdash is mentioned countless times in the New Testament. There is no world leader with more authority than the Pope to correct this historical mistake, and make a "plea", even a small plea, to the United Nations and UNESCO to amend this mistake, for the sake of peace, justice and truth.

A DESPERATE CALL FOR HELP!

Representing the Keneset, Israel's Parliament, Yuli Edelstein asked the pope in a letter to "use his offices to prevent the UN from making statements of this kind." This resolution,

Edelstein said, is an assault on history, and It is deeply offensive to Judaism and Christianity!. The denial of the historicity of the two Temples of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, as recounted in both the Old and New Testaments, is immoral and a terrible lie of the international community, in their efforts to erase the millennial link between Judaism and its holiest sites in Jerusalem. It is a blatant attempt to rewrite history. Edelstein said that the time has come for the Vatican to promote a resolution that reaffirms Jerusalem as the holy city where *"the two Temples stood [for a total of 1000 years! YB] and from which the word of God was promulgated to humanity through His prophets. "* None of this evoke a desperate plea from the Vatican. The Pope did NOTHING and said NOTHING.

JUSTIFIED DESPERATE PLEAS

For some strange reason the Vatican's "desperate plea" was heard *only* when attempting to prevent some recognition in favor of the State of Israel.

I believe that in general passionate calls from the supreme leader of Christianity should be reserved not for issues of "recognition" but for situations where people die or are persecuted, and nobody else does anything about it. In the Middle East, for example, there are many really *desperate* situations that would benefit so much from a *desperate* and passionate plea from the Pope.

Some examples.

1.The regime of President Hafez Assad, with the help of Hezbollah and Iran, has already killed more than 600,000 civilians in the last 10 years. How many desperate pleas the world heard from the Vatican denouncing these atrocities?

2. The situation of Christian minorities in major Palestinian cities is desperate. Places that are holy and extremely important for Christianity, such as Betlehem, or even Gaza. 5,000 Christians lived in Gaza 10 years ago, and since Hamas ascended to the government there are less than 1,000 Christians, who live persecuted and in a state of despair .

3. The most disturbing matter in the Middle East for Christianity, I believe, is that Christians are being systematically eradicated by Islamist regimes in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Yemen, and Lebanon (see here). But the Vatican does not seem to be doing many desperate efforts to address these issues

It is unfortunately sad, and inexplicable, that when Israel is permanently condemned and humiliated in international forums, the Vatican makes a vow of silence. But when for the first time in decades a country recognizes out loud the legitimacy of a Jewish Jerusalem, the Pope calls in despair.