

Pope Francis Continues to Avoid That Elephant in the Room

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Pope Francis recently condemned antisemitism twice in the strongest possible terms. He did so first in departing from prepared remarks at one of his weekly Papal audiences in Rome. The Pope said:

"I would like to make a separate note. The Jewish people have suffered so much in history; they have been chased away, they too have been persecuted."

"In the last century we saw so many brutalities against the Jewish people, and we were all convinced that this was over. But today the habit of persecuting the Jews, brothers and sisters, is here reborn. This is neither human nor

Christian.”

He continued: “The Jews are our brothers and should not be persecuted, understand?”

On a second occasion, Pope Francis said on November 13 that politicians who rage against homosexuals, gypsies and Jews remind him of Hitler.

“It is not coincidental that at times there is a resurgence of symbols typical of Nazism,” Francis said in an address to participants of an international conference on criminal law.

“And I must confess to you that when I hear a speech (by) someone responsible for order or for a government, I think of speeches by Hitler in 1934, 1936,” he said, departing from his prepared address.

“With the persecution of Jews, gypsies, and people with homosexual tendencies, today these actions are typical (and) represent ‘par excellence’ a culture of waste and hate. That is what was done in those days and today it is happening again.”

“During the 1933-45 Nazi regime in Germany, six million Jews were killed and homosexuals and gypsies were among those sent to extermination camps.

Pope Francis did not name any politicians or countries as the targets of his criticism.

In May, Brunei’s Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah [a Muslim] extended a moratorium on the death penalty to incoming legislation prohibiting gay sex , seeking to temper a global backlash led by celebrities such as George Clooney and Elton John.

The United Nations had warned Brunei it would be violating human rights by implementing Islamic laws that would allow death by stoning for adultery and homosexuality.

In July, a European Union study said young Jewish Europeans experience more anti-Semitism than their parents, with a rise in abuse coming in emails, text messages and social media postings.

Pope Francis knows that antisemitism is on a steep increase in Europe, as reflected in the opinions of Jews themselves, 80% of whom believe, according to opinion polls, that Jew-hatred has suddenly increased on the Internet, while 70% of Jews in Europe believe antisemitism is on the rise in public as well. In a poll limited to the U.K., fully one-half of British Jews felt insecure enough to claim if Jeremy Corbyn was elected as Prime Minister on December 12, they would seriously consider leaving Great Britain. Now they need not be concerned about that, at least, for now.

But while the Pope's outrage is welcome, he continues to avoid the elephant in the room, which is Muslim antisemitism. Is it because he truly remains blind to it or is it because he is afraid to name it, for fear of antagonizing the tens of millions of Muslims in Europe who are the main carriers of the current antisemitism? Islamic texts and teachings that inculcate hatred for Jews are not hard to locate. Consider this list of Qur'anic verses, compiled by Robert Spencer, that describes the Jews as malevolent in every respect, and inveterate in their hatred of Muslims and of Islam:

The Qur'an depicts the Jews as inveterately evil and bent on destroying the wellbeing of the Muslims. They are the strongest of all people in enmity toward the Muslims (5:82); as fabricating things and falsely ascribing them to Allah (2:79; 3:75, 3:181); claiming that Allah's power is limited (5:64); loving to listen to lies (5:41); disobeying Allah and never observing his commands (5:13); disputing and quarreling (2:247); hiding the truth and misleading people (3:78); staging rebellion against the prophets and rejecting their guidance (2:55); being hypocritical (2:14, 2:44); giving

preference to their own interests over the teachings of Muhammad (2:87); wishing evil for people and trying to mislead them (2:109); feeling pain when others are happy or fortunate (3:120); being arrogant about their being Allah's beloved people (5:18); devouring people's wealth by subterfuge (4:161); slandering the true religion and being cursed by Allah (4:46); killing the prophets (2:61); being merciless and heartless (2:74); never keeping their promises or fulfilling their words (2:100); being unrestrained in committing sins (5:79); being cowardly (59:13-14); being miserly (4:53); being transformed into apes and pigs for breaking the Sabbath (2:63-65; 5:59-60; 7:166); and more.

The Pope knows, too, that every one of the Jews killed in Europe in recent years has been murdered by Muslims. He could mention that "in France alone, we have seen a dozen Jews murdered: four Jews in a kosher supermarket, a rabbi murdered, along with three little children, two of them his, outside a Jewish school, a young Jewish man kidnapped, tortured for three weeks, then left to die, two elderly Jewish ladies, one of them a Holocaust survivor, murdered by young men, neighbors. We see, too, that Jews across Europe, in Paris and Marseille, in Brussels and Amsterdam and London and Malmo, and in many other places throughout the Continent, have been set upon in the streets and beaten, purely for being Jews. We know who is attacking them, and in some cases killing them. This phenomenon needs to be pondered.'" If he still can't bring himself to mention Islam by name, others can do that for him.

When the Pope decried the increase in attacks on homosexuals as well, can he really be unaware that this increase primarily reflects the view in Islam of homosexuality and homosexuals, who are punished severely in many Muslim countries? Homosexuality is illegal and punishable by imprisonment in Kuwait, Egypt, Oman, and Syria; it is punishable by death in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Qatar. In Yemen and the Palestinian territories, the punishment can be either death or

imprisonment, depending on the exact nature of the act committed.

The Pope said nothing about the hatred and punishment of homosexuals in Islamic lands. If by withholding comment he hopes to work “behind the scenes” to ameliorate the situation of homosexuals, that policy shows no signs of working. Only a firm denunciation of such views and practices is likely to have an effect. The last Muslim Arab states to formally give up slavery did so only after a highly public campaign was conducted in the West against the practice, while years of Western states trying “behind the scenes” to persuade them to end slavery had had no effect.

The Pope could, without naming particular countries, publicly deplore – perhaps at one of those international gatherings at the Vatican held to discuss morality, or at one of his weekly Papal audiences – “those countries that punish homosexuals, some quite severely, even by executing them, must themselves be denounced.” And he could also note that “I am also disturbed that many of the states where antisemitism appears most prevalent are also places where anti-homosexual laws are most severe.” He need not name-and-shame; his targets will have been clear.

He could also suggest that “we Catholics took a long time, but we finally came, as recognized in Vatican II, to fully appreciate our Jewish brothers, and to remove, as a consequence, disturbing parts of the liturgy. I allow myself to believe that other faiths, too, might find the need to confront their own legacy of antisemitism.” The hint will be there; it’s up to Muslims to take it. And a similar suggestion – to put aside homophobia, which is also encouraged in Europe by its burgeoning Muslim population – could be made by the Pope, again without specifying that Muslims are the main persecutors of homosexuals today, inflicting violence upon them and, in many of their own countries, imprisoning or executing them. He need only say something about how glad he

is that adherents of “authentic Islam” – he has many times claimed to know what that “authentic” Islam must be – have nothing to do with the “antisemitism” of those who “only claim to be Muslims.”

Pope Francis could continue with what he has been content to do so far: that is, to denounce antisemitism and anti-homosexual attitudes, even as he still insists on defending to the hilt Islam and Muslims, the chief carriers today of both. The incoherence of this becomes ever more obvious to many of us; eventually, Pope Francis may feel the need to study Islam – a task he has been avoiding for fear of what he might find out – and then to usefully correct himself, by discussing the view of Jews and homosexuals in Islam with as much candor as he can muster. Let us hope that he may surprise us yet.

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