

Reflection on Recent Attacks on Religious Buildings

Remember the idealistic hopes that the new millennium would be the beginning for a world without hatred and conflict? The journey to peace and good will must continue and we look for signs of encouragement!

From April 30—May 4, 2001 the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (CRRJ) met with the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) in New York City. In the context of threats to holy places in the Middle East and the destruction of two gigantic statues of the Buddha in Afghanistan there was a joint statement "*Protecting Religious Freedom and Holy Sites.*" This text concludes in a spirit of hope: "We stand together as representatives of the Catholic and Jewish communities of faith in calling on men and women of all faiths to honor religious liberty and to treat the holy places of others with respect. We call on all people to reject attacks on religious liberty and violence against holy places as legitimate forms of political expression. We look forward, prayerfully, to the time when all people shall enjoy the right to lead their religious lives unmolested and in peace. We long for the time when the holy places and all religious traditions will be secure and when all people treat one another's holy places with respect." (*Information Service of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* No. 108 p. 171)

This appeal has not been heard or has been rejected in several areas of our world. We are shocked to learn of attacks, not only on sacred sites of the world's religions but also on the faithful at worship. The destruction of churches in parts of Nigeria, even on Christmas Day 2011, was carried out at great cost of human life and many injuries. Vicious attacks on Shi'ite mosques and shrines in Iraq have taken place on feast days as well. For several decades synagogues in many lands have needed protection and surveillance because of devastating threats. The milk of human kindness does not reach people who have no respect for the human life of those who differ from them.

We should recall that the God of Israel reveals that two earthly realities are in the heavenly model; the tabernacle/Temple (Ex 25:40; 26:30) and the human person (Gen 1:26-28). Any attack on either is especially vicious and reprehensible. Recently in Highland Park, Maywood, Paramus and Hackensack, New Jersey, anti-Jewish bigotry has been manifested in cowardly attacks on property, but defacing of Jewish or other religious institutions is a cause for serious concern.

Then in the early morning of January 11th unknown persons attacked the Rutherford Congregation Beth-El synagogue and home of Rabbi Nasson Schuman. Fortunately, the family's quick response kept this murderous attack from succeeding. Only the rapid apprehension of the evildoers will bring a sense of relative security to New Jersey Jewish communities again.

Religious freedom, right to life and respect for all places of worship are related and must be taught in home and school. If hateful acts were done by young people, we acknowledge the serious challenge to parents and educators in this state!

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