

# DEPARTING “DISCIPLES”

John 6:22-71

## I. JESUS’ DISCOURSE re BREAD AFFIRMS HIS DIVINITY

- A. Immediate background: feeding 5,000 & crowd’s interest in his miraculous powers (i.e. feeding them!); walking on water another “sign”
- B. Larger context: importance of manna in Jewish history & tradition
  - 1. Moses prays & “bread which the Lord” gave appeared (Ex 16:15) & sustained them 40 years
  - 2. Devout Jews expected the Messiah to establish an earthly Paradise (replete with manna/bread free for the taking)
  - 3. Hebrews 9:4 refers to “golden pot of manna behind the veil of the Tabernacle in Holy of Holies
- C. Jesus, at length, emphasizes importance of spiritual, not material, realities, shifting hearers’ attention from material bread (the “staff of life”) for the body to spiritual bread for the soul
- D. Jesus declares: ‘I am the bread of life’ (v. 48)
  - 1. Thus: believers need to eat bread (His Flesh) and drink blood (His Blood)
  - 2. By eating & drinking absorb into one’s being His Being

## II. JESUS’ GOD/man REVELATION REJECTED BY “SOME . . . WHO DO NOT BELIEVE” (v. 64), and “WENT BACK AND WALKED WITH HIM NO MORE” (v. 66)

- A. Underlying reasons for “murmuring” (cf. children of Israel “murmuring” in wilderness)
  - 1. Seeking material benefits, oblivious to spiritual realities, denying “the flesh profits nothing”
  - 2. Denying Jesus’ True Nature & Messianic claims
    - a. Pointing to Joseph & Mary, critics assert Jesus purely human
    - b. Turning away from His “hard sayings” appeals to slothful, lazy disinterest in “first things”
      - 1. While genuine intellectual difficulties (i.e. problem of pain; world religions; philosophical and scientific questions) exist, few critics actually do the hard work (reading, thinking) capable of resolving them
      - 2. Underlying moral obstacles frequently root of disbelief
- B. “. . . no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (v. 65)
  - 1. Predestinarian aspect: God’s mysterious grace (prevenient, converting, etc.)
  - 2. Volitional aspect: persons cooperating, responding to divine call
- C. Judas Iscariot exemplar of apostasy (clear to Jesus before actual betrayal, v. 70)
- D. Jesus’ brothers disbelieve (Jn 7:1-9), though James the Just later believed
- E. Historical litany of apostasy: “lapsed” during Roman persecutions; Julian the Apostate; Islamic conquests, persecutions, Dhimmitude & extinction; Enlightenment “*philosophes*,” Joshua Harris

## III. EUCHARISTIC IMPLICATIONS

- A. “It is one of the supreme ironies of Christian history, evident already in the New Testament (I Cor. 11:17-34), that the Eucharist, intended to foster the unity of the church, has been a source of disunity and contention.” “Augustine’s designation of the sacraments as a ‘visible word’ expresses the idea, shared by Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants, that the Eucharist communicates the same gospel that comes through the written and spoken forms of revelation” (Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Melody of Theology*, p. 78).
- B. Various versions upholding “Real Presence” in elements themselves
  - 1. Roman Catholic: transubstantiation—priest’s words precipitate miraculous conversion
  - 2. Eastern Orthodoxy: *metousiosis* (changed nature) occurs via invocation & act (*epiklesis*) of Holy Spirit; (N.B.: Orthodoxy’s distinctive use of leavened bread and intinction)
  - 3. Lutheran: consubstantiation—Christ “in, with, and under” the elements; recipient’s faith needed
  - 4. Anglican: akin to Catholic view re Real Presence without embracing transubstantiation
- C. More radical views re “memorial,” purely symbolic, spiritual nature
  - 1. Ulrich Zwingli: merely memorial (evoking permanent controversy with Luther & Lutherans)
  - 2. John Calvin: following but modifying Zwingli—“real but spiritual presence” of the living Christ in the sacramental action, not the bread and wine
  - 3. Free Church (most Anabaptist) bodies refer to “ordinances” which are merely faith expressions
- D. Society of Friends entirely eliminated Eucharist (as well as any other sacraments)

## THE DECLINE OF EASTERN CHRISTIANITY UNDER ISLAM

Bat Ye'or, an Egyptian-born scholar living in France, recounts what Christians suffered under Muslim rule in *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude*. In an enlightening foreword to the book, Jacques Ellul notes that there exists in the West a "current of favorable predispositions to Islam," notably evident in the many euphemistic discussions of *jihad*. By setting forth the historical facts, Bat Ye'or dares to contradict the prevailing assumptions regarding Islam. "Historians," Bat Ye'or says, "professionally or economically connected to the Arab-Muslim world, published historical interpretations relating to the *dhimmis*, which were either tendentious or combined with facts with apologetics and fantasy. After World War II, the predominance of a left-wing intelligentsia and the emergence of Arab regimes which were 'socialist' or allied to Moscow consolidated an Arabophile revolutionary internationalism" that remains strong in much of the contemporary world (pp. 212-213).

*Jihad*, in fact, helps constitute Islam, Ellul says, for it is a sacred duty for the faithful. Indeed "it is Islam's normal path to expansion." Unlike the "spiritual" combat imagined by some pro-Islamic writers, *jihad* advocates "a real military war of conquest" followed by an iron-handed "*dhimmitude*," the reduction of conquered peoples to Islamic law (p. 19). Muslims divide the world into two—and only two—realms: the "domain of Islam" and "the domain of war" (p. 19). At times, strategy dictates tactical concessions and "peaceful" interludes. But ultimately, Muslims are committed to conquer and control as much of the globe as possible. Ellul stresses this "because there is so much talk nowadays of the tolerance and fundamental pacifism of Islam that it is necessary to recall its nature, which is fundamentally warlike!" (p. 20). Writing presciently, in 1991, Ellul declared: "Hostage-taking, terrorism, the destruction of Lebanese Christianity, the weakening of the Eastern Churches (not to mention the wish to destroy Israel) . . . all this recalls precisely the resurgence of the traditional policy of Islam" (p. 21).

Turning from Ellul's remarks to Bat Ye'or's treatise, we enter into a carefully crafted description of what happened to non-Muslim peoples under the yoke of Islam in the Mediterranean basin, Turkey, Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Iran, a subject heretofore distinguished by a paucity of reliable studies. She meticulously defines *jihad*, noting that it may be waged through both overt war and more covert means: "proselytism, propaganda, and corruption" (p. 40). Whatever means necessary for Muslims to conquer and control lands and non-Muslim peoples find justification as *jihad*. Thus motivated, Muslims established an enormous empire by the time of Charlemagne (ca. 800 A.D.), though in truth Muslim warriors were often brutal and booty-hungry pillagers, driven more by greed than holy zeal.

So too, when Muslims ruled a region, reducing all non-Muslims to *dhimmitude*, they exploited and oppressed (especially through onerous, discriminatory taxation) their subjects. Forcibly occupying highly-civilized realms such as Egypt, Muslim rulers slowly and surely reduced them to wastelands, economically and culturally depressed shadows of ancient glory. Everywhere the Muslims went, there resulted "the agricultural decline, the abandonment of villages and fields, and the gradual desertification of provinces—densely populated and fertile during the pre-Islamic period" (p. 102). All the land under Muslim rule was "administered by Islamic law for the benefit of Muslims and their descendants" (p. 70). More systematically and thoroughly than Europeans appropriating American Indian lands, the Muslims impoverished conquered peoples. Even the much-vaunted "Islamic civilization" was derived, sucked out of dying corpses, not created. "Islamic literature, science, art, philosophy, and jurisprudence," Bat Ye'or says, "were born and developed not in Arabia, within an exclusively Arab and Muslim population, but in the midst of conquered peoples, feeding off their vigor and on the dying, bloodless body of *dhimmitude*" (p. 128).

*Theoretically*, Jews and Christians had religious freedom, but in fact "at no period in history was it respected" (p. 88). *Theoretically*, conversions to Islam were to be voluntary. In fact, massacres, torture, slavery and intimidation punctuated the process. In Spain, two centuries after occupation, "in 891 Seville and its surrounding areas were drenched in blood by the massacre of thousands of Spaniards—Christian and *muwallads*. At Granada in 1066, the whole Jewish community, numbering about three thousand, was annihilated" (p. 89). To understand the much-maligned Christian Crusades, one must see them as defensive, just wars designed to relieve the suffering of oppressed and enslaved believers. Centuries later, the 1915 "the genocide of the Armenians was a combination of massacres, deportations, and enslavement. In the central regions of Armenia, the male population over the age of twelve was wiped out en masse: shot, drowned, thrown over precipices, or subjected to other forms of torture and execution" (p. 196).

In short, Bat Ye'or says, "irrefutable historical and archaeological sources confirm" that the "process of Islamization" in conquered lands, "was perhaps the greatest plundering enterprise in history" (p. 101). Reading this book certainly sobers one! She supports her presentation with extensive footnotes and 175 pages of illustrative documents and finds little admirable in Islamic rule. The weight of the evidence, the factual refutation of Arabophile histories, persuades one that the terrorists operating in the world today are hardly an aberration of Islam!