

Cana

By Archbishop George Khodr, Orthodox Christian Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon
Several years ago when I visited Cana, my guide walked me to the graves of the victims killed by Israel in the known massacre of 1996. Their collective graves were dug next to each other testifying to the inequity and silence of the world's nations. This time I saw the pictures of the children being carried out by rescue workers of the Red Cross. I saw their tender bodies killed; it wasn't said where they were buried or if their relatives, many of whom were no doubt killed too, received their bodies. All this happened because a dry Israel has a problem with tenderness, has a problem against the presence of a thriving life in those whom it calls "gentiles".

Those who, in times of troubles, call upon Christ, like to quote Him in one or another stage of His earthly ministry. My reader should know that the Bible talks little about the childhood of Jesus; I enjoy reading the childhood passages of the Lord as it appears in Luke, who relates: "And the Child grew in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." (2: 40).

Israel prevented the children of Cana of "growing in spirit" because they were from the gentiles (goim in Hebrew); whether they lived or died didn't matter for Israel, for they are not the sons of the promise. It is enough for the children of the Jews to grow physically and spiritually and to be educated in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Al-Quds) or elsewhere and to be trained on weapons to slaughter all those who may interfere with their conquests. One loves the buds because of the longing for roses; one fears the destruction of buds for the love of their blooming. All of us weep over the buds if slashed out. Israel doesn't weep except for itself—a testimony for its god who was in the beginning of its history the god of a tribe—destroying other gods. The death of Lebanon's children is no profit to any god. These children have no advanced technologies and shall not acquire warplanes in their small country. Their sole existence is encompassed around holding faithfully to their poor land. Didn't a Hebrew poet, in days of old, sing in Iraq: "O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, Happy the one who repays you as you have served us! Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!" (Ps 137: 8-9).

After this damned war who shall teach the Jews to love the children of gentiles like they love their own? Who shall repeat unto them the words of the Nazarene: "Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19: 14).

Our great problem with those who assaulted us is not merely the peace for Lebanon, which is not known when or if it shall arrive. Their problem with themselves is the issue. The issue is this: will God inspire them one day, despite their tradition of hatred, to believe in the childhood and to treat all human beings with compassion? I don't deny any of them the right to love their children—this is from nature. And I don't deny any Jew, outside Israel or not Israelized ideologically, the right to love all children. But what if this militant nation sows the conviction: that every Arab child shall grow and shall carry within oneself the power of becoming a soldier which is to be feared and dealt with accordingly—upon the basis of "preventive" war adopted by George Bush junior? In the logic of the American neo-conservatives the preventive killing of children is very reasonable. And if preventive war required deceit as it happened with Iraq, then

the annihilation of foreign children involves hate.

We love individual Jews according to our tradition even if we don't agree among ourselves on appreciating their theology. In this context, Islam has no issue against Jews even if it had a problem with them in the days of prophet Mohamed. Generally, Jews did not enjoy greater freedom than that under Islam; we, the elderly, remember well the extreme freedom they enjoyed in Egypt and Morocco. But now, between them and us stands Cana; this problem can't be resolved easily if they don't repent openly and admit that our children and theirs are equal. Better for them was to lose the battles than to kill one child of the south. Henri Bergson said once: if I am told that I have to kill a child in order to save the earth I shall reply let the earth be devastated but spare the child.

No nation can be as militarized as the one which is destroying us and embrace any trace of kindness. It can build war factories but its heart shall remain stained and manipulated by devils. In Hebrew tradition, not only foreign children are to be maltreated, but adults too are not to be shown mercy. In Deuteronomy it is said: "When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you. Now if the city will not make peace with you, but war against you, then you shall besiege it. And when the LORD your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword. But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself... Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations. But of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them..." (20: 10-17). And in the book of Joshua: "...Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword." (6: 20-21).

A nation with such a philosophy, which was deployed in Palestine by the gang of Irgun and Stern during the British mandate, needs to be preached to in order to refute Zionism completely; otherwise good will for this nation shall continue to be condemned and mercy shall continue to be refused; all its military actions shall then continue to have Cana as its model.

The crime of Cana must be punished; there is no escape from an international committee to investigate the responsibility of Israel, because it was a massacre against human rights; shall it go unpunished, it shall then open the way for the guilty to commit more massacres whenever he wishes to. "And in punishment you shall live". Those wounded and the families of the victims must not fall prey to hatred, but must recover from hatred lest the murderers repent.

Only then, not sooner, peace shall come; but peace alone cannot heal the wounded hearts. The Lebanese, who tasted what none of the Arabs did in these later days are the last to sign a peace accord to save themselves, time after time, from the horrors of bombardments and destructions and death. How shall our country be resurrected? How shall the tragedy not be repeated? This requires from us to become a unified society with no divisions among ourselves lest any city or town receive what has befallen Cana, lest the childhood dies in our hearts. This

requires an international appreciation—an appreciation of the existence of Lebanon as a beautiful and kind nation—a nation which is not asking for anything other than to be spared the cycles of assaults. It is a catastrophe for the whole world if we become a totally destroyed country.

Israel's pride must disappear lest our country be torched. Israel won't find rest if we wept "bitterly in the night" as proclaimed Jeremiah in his Lamentations. Our children mustn't walk as captives and orphans. O Lord, lift up Your wrath from our homeland and console us with the mercies of Your Spirit, lest we're swallowed. Have mercy on us O God, the Lord of our salvation. "Young and old lie on the ground in the streets." Forbid, O Lord, the smashing of the bones of our youth and children. Your mercies, O Lord, are endless. Preserve our dignity of life because we love You. "Fear and a snare have come upon us, desolation and destruction." "The young children ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them."

Don't stop our singing, O Lord, for this is the country of joy. Do not hide Your face from Your servants in these days of distress. Do not forsake us, O Lord, and repay us all that we have lost, for we believe that You are the resurrection and life. Do not forsake us utterly in Your wrath. Come, O Lord, come and accept our beloved who were scorched in Cana, in the south, in the suburb of Beirut and the people of every devastated area; and grant us back, O Lord, our childhood; and account us worthy, by repentance towards You, to become innocents like the children of the beloved Cana.

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