

**THE DIOGENES REPORT**  
**The Wit, Wisdom & Wituperation of Emanuel L. Strunin**  
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**INERTIA IN THE OVAL OFFICE**

The high level of inertia that marks George W. Bush's first 100 days as President may have been inherited directly from Ronald Reagan as some Washington observers think. To take the history of the malady further back, I have traced its Republican genetic roots back, at least, to Calvin Coolidge. This is what Walter Lippmann wrote about "Silent Cal" (I wonder if he was silent in Spanish, as well as in English?): "Mr. Coolidge's genius for inactivity is developed to a very high point. It is a grim, determined, alert inactivity, which keeps Mr. Coolidge occupied constantly. Nobody has ever worked harder at inactivity, with such force of character, with such unremitting attention to detail, with such conscientious devotion to the task. Inactivity is a political philosophy and a party program with Mr. Coolidge."

David Broder or Calvin Trillin or Maureen Dowd could not have said it better about George II. But Dorothy Parker outdid Lippmann on Coolidge. Her reaction when being told that Coolidge was dead was, "How do they know?"

**LESSONS IN MOSLEM/ARAB HOSPITALITY**

The Moslems, particularly the Arabs, are always trumpeting their hospitality to strangers. Perhaps they are hospitable to strangers because they certainly are not hospitable to their bretheren. A New York Times story from Pakistan throws some light on the level of Moslem largesse. In a camp just outside of Peshwar, 80,000 refugees from drought-ridden, war-torn Afghanistan live in this place of "epic wretchedness".

The refugees cry out, "Where are the Muslims?" "We're Muslims; they're Muslims. Why don't they take care of us?" There was help for the refugees as long as the UN footed the bill, but when the UN cut back, help ceased. As for the argument that Pakistan is a poor country, I say they are not too poor to run an atomic bomb development program and to support an ongoing war against India in Kashmir. As for the UN's lack of funds to help the refugees, both the UN and its European members find sufficient funds to bloat the Swiss bank accounts of Arafat and his cohorts in the Palestinian Authority.

I think that "Moslem/Arab hospitality" falls into the same category as "the check is in the mail." And if more evidence is required, remember how the Egyptians kept their fellow Arabs in the refugee camps in Gaza; how the Jordanians kept their fellow Arabs in the refugee camps on the "west bank"; and how the Lebanese segregated the "Palestinian" Arabs in refugee camps. None of these hospitable Arab nations allowed their brethren to

integrate into their countries. And, of course, there is the more recent example of the Kuwaiti Arabs expelling the "Palestinian" Arabs from Kuwait.

On the other hand, look at what the Jews in Israel did for their brethren who were driven from the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa, in addition to those who were forced to leave Europe. There were problems and missteps, but they were welcomed and integrated into the country at no small cost.

## **LOOKING ECUMENISM IN THE EYE WITHOUT BLINKING**

(Except for changing the title of the following piece, I have kept it in its original form. It provides a view of Christian and Jewish theologies that are not known to most adherents of each of these religions.)

by Robert Jesurum

Lent, Good Friday and Easter have come and gone, but not without unpleasant headlines. One of the headliners, an athlete, Charlie Ward, made controversial news by saying that the Jews killed Jesus, that "They had his blood on their hands."

We live in an ecumenical age, when everyone, including Jews, in spite of the slogan, "Never Again," is trying to forget the crime of the Holocaust. We look at such comments as examples of bigotry, as aberrations, unrepresentative of mainstream values. And according to the New York Times, an apologetic Charlie Ward is receiving counseling from a rabbi. Charlie Ward is learning to be ecumenical and politically correct, but is he learning the truth about his own religion or even about Judaism?

Like most Christians, he can read, and in spite of what he is now being taught, the New Testament, the founding document and immutable Constitution of Christianity, has an anti-Semitic blood libel at its core. We Jews are happy to live in a society of great tolerance. But in spite of well-meaning attempts to whitewash Scripture, the New Testament is not going to disappear, and to say that we do not feel at ease with Christianity would be an understatement.

My parents fled Europe as World War II was breaking out, and they were traumatized by the extent of the slaughter. Ironically, like many other non-observant Jews who had found safety in the United States, they wanted to spare their children the burden of Jewish history (as if Christians do not share it), and they raised us as Protestants, true Americans. I was sent to a Presbyterian Church, and it took me a long time to resolve the contradictions of my upbringing. But thanks to my parent's confusion, I ended up as a Jew with an "insider's" understanding of the opposition.

We read all the time about the Christian dilemma with Jews. What about the Jewish dilemma with Christianity, a subject which even Jews are loath to speak about or even contemplate?

The central tenet common to all Christians is that Jesus died as a sacrificial lamb in a final atonement for man's sins, and that what is required of mankind is salvation through acceptance and belief in that divine sacrifice. The Jews, "left behind" by the New Testament, have never accepted either the sacrifice or the divinity of Jesus. We Jews today are living witness to this original and continued refusal to accept Christian salvation. Why are we so stubborn? Why are we still left alive today, as a flesh and blood testament to any doubts Christians themselves may harbor? Are we agents of Satan?

These questions are not frivolous. Until very recently, rabbis were often challenged to debate Christian theologians on these very issues. During such a debate, the local Jewish community would be held hostage to a terrible revenge if the rabbi either lost the debate, proving the superiority of Christianity, or won the debate, shaming his rival. Winning or losing were both a loss, that would enflame the enemy. The best the rabbi could hope to accomplish was a stalemate under which the theologian might leave him and his community alone. The deeply ingrained training was to find intellectually dishonest ways to avoid the issue.

When I was a freshman at M.I.T., as part of the core humanities curriculum, we had to read "Memoirs of the Crusades," by De Joinville. It is a paean to the sainthood of Louis the First of France. As a positive example of the goodness of Louis, De Joinville describes Louis witnessing such a debate. Instead of tolerating the rabbi's words, Louis immediately skewered him with his sword, earning the praise of his biographer for this courageous act to defeat evil. At a secular school like M.I.T., not only was I required to read such scurrilous literature, but in order to earn a good grade in the course, I was required to praise the book in a final term paper as an exciting example of the beginnings of the awakening of Europe from the Dark Ages. I did as instructed and was rewarded for my dishonest writing with an A. A close friend of mine felt he had to tell the truth and received an F for his efforts.

Jews have been trained to never criticize Christian doctrine even if it kills us. Just as Christian theologians must ignore their scripture in order to be tolerant of Jews, rabbis must ignore Christian rituals in order not to condemn Christianity as a pagan relic. Jews must recite prayers basic to our liturgy without thinking about the Christian churches surrounding us. The differences between the religions and their worldviews are irreconcilable, and ecumenism, while a worthwhile goal, remains a lie. Occasionally some naïve person, usually perceived of as a bigot, shouts out the equivalent of, "The emperor has no clothes."

A Christian may notice that his Bible recounts how the Jews killed Jesus, or that if acceptance of Jesus as Savior is necessary to achieve salvation, the Jews may well be damned. A Jew may notice the strong pagan elements of Christian doctrine, as do many Christians, themselves. The Protestant Reformation vandalized many beautiful Catholic churches in an effort to destroy graven images, the kind of destruction which now shocks the whole world when the Taliban behave the same way.

I am somewhat of a pariah in my Jewish community of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, for having openly criticized Christian dogma within my own congregation. Even though I had done this while describing my parent's escape from Nazi Europe and the lie of my upbringing, ironically, I was called a bigot and tantamount to being a Nazi by my own community. That is how frightened Jews are to confront this issue, such a short time after the Holocaust, such a long time after the crucifixion.

So, what are these differences, why do we Jews refuse to accept the message of Jesus? In fact, if one is speaking of loving your neighbor, we accepted that message long before the time of Jesus. "Love thy neighbor" is one of the messages of the Old Testament prophets. The Jewish golden rule is attributed to Rabbi Hillel, somewhat of a contemporary with Jesus. But there is an important difference. The Jewish golden rule is stated in the negative, "Do not do to others what you would not want done to you." And what a world of difference there is right there, the difference between the very Jewish "live and let live" and the Christian inquisitions, forced conversions and auto-da-fes.

But to understand the real differences between the religions requires going back to their covenants. God's covenant with Abraham required the sons of Abraham to circumcise their sons at eight days as a blood sacrifice to replace the then common practice of human sacrifice amongst the pagans. It is the only spilling of human blood in Jewish ritual, symbolic or otherwise, and it is an affirmation of life. By removing a useless piece of foreskin, the child is left scarred and

imperfect at the earliest possible age, rendering him unfit for temple sacrifice which required unblemished animals. The repeated prayer at the circumcision is, "In your blood, you shall live."

The central event in Abraham's life was the refusal by the God of Abraham of his attempted sacrifice of Isaac. The story of Abraham and Isaac is usually seen as a test of Abraham's faith which it certainly was. Abraham proved that he was willing to sacrifice his son if that was what his God had asked. But Abraham was not the only one being tested in the story. God kept the promise of his covenant with Abraham, refused the human sacrifice. The God of the Jewish Bible had never before accepted such a sacrifice and presumably never would.

Surrounded by religions in which human sacrifice was the norm, even into Greek times, Jews were the only society that totally forbade it. The very word cannibal probably derives from Kahan-Baal, or priest of Baal, because as with animal sacrifices, part of the ceremony involved eating the flesh of the sacrificial victim. When the Old Testament rails against pagan practices, it is not over some abstract principle. It is over real evil.

For a Jew, it would be out of character for the God of Abraham, who refused the sacrifice of Isaac for all time, to sacrifice his own son. It does not make sense. Nor does the sacrifice of a God who is going to rise again present much of a sacrifice or much more than a paradox.

The God of Moses gives the Jews as His first command, "I am the Lord your God . You shall have no other gods before me." Jews are commanded to monotheism, cannot accept the divinity of a "son of God." So, here we are today, still stubbornly obeying the first command. Our most fundamental prayer is, "Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One [not three-in-one]." First and foremost, Judaism is monotheistic. The Jewish God is beyond human comprehension or definition. Pagan gods were graven images or like the Greek Gods, superhuman.

Christianity seems to be an attempt to synthesize those old enemies, Judaism and Paganism. Baal worshippers sacrificed their children, and the Greeks had the sacrifice of the year king. A symbolic sacrifice by and of the Jewish God would put a final end to such primitive practices.

In the process, ineffable Jehovah became a pagan God, emulating Zeus by traveling to earth to impregnate a young maiden. The resultant demi-God, Jesus, a sort of Hercules, the King of the Jews, was born to serve as the sacrifice to put an end to all sacrifice.

Christianity was astoundingly successful. The pagan Roman Empire became Christian, but to the Jews of that time, they were still pagans. The Jews were left behind as the old and future enemy, and the Romans had left them without a homeland from which to defend themselves. The Diaspora began, and Jews were from then on to live at the mercy of the Christians. That we are still alive is a testament to many fine Christians throughout this history, but it is a sorry and bloody history, and we survivors are always a remnant.

Now, what in Christian ritual can possibly be offensive to Jews? First, there is the crucifixion, the human sacrifice. In the Gospel narration, not only do Jews cry out for the death of Jesus, but Jesus, the sacrificial victim, is crowned as the King of the Jews by the Romans. They have us coming and going. We are at once the victimizer and the sacrificial victim. If one needs a scapegoat, someone who deserves to die and someone whose death is purifying, one need look no further than the Jew. This even has an effect in the American criminal justice system. How many traitors spying on behalf of the Soviet Union were ever executed? Just the Rosenbergs.

Then there is the central ritual of Christianity. At all Jewish feasts, God is blessed first with the fruit of the vine, wine, and then with a blessing over bread. Christianity transformed those blessings into a feast commemorating salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus. Bread symbolizes the body of Jesus; wine, his blood. Catholics and Protestants have killed each other arguing whether they are consuming the actual body and blood or whether it is just symbolic. The Catholic Mass or Protestant Communion is such a basic ritual that Christians don't even think about the symbolism. But it embodies nothing less than the eating of the sacrificial victim, Kahan-

Baalism, except in this case they are also eating their God. Cannibals believe that they are acquiring the attributes of their food. In this case, some Godliness is being acquired from the Host.

Pointing this out to my Jewish community is what really got me into trouble. No matter how many times they had seen the Mass enacted in movies, they could not imagine such symbolism and thought that I was maligning Christianity. When I told them to ask a Christian friend about it, they returned even more shocked, and they were even more angry with me for having noticed it.

The symbol of the Christian Mass is beyond anything most Jews can handle. And ironically, it is these symbolically bloody Christians who in turn have accused Jews in blood libels of killing Christian children to furnish the blood to bake Passover matzos. Or maybe it isn't irony, but flows naturally out of the Christian symbols.

The physical danger to Jews caused by Christian ritual is by no means ancient history. When my wife was growing up on the lower East Side of Manhattan, Christmas and Easter were days of fear and hiding for Jews. After the Mass, after hearing about the birth or the death and resurrection of their Prince of Peace, hooligans would come out of the churches looking for Christ-killers to punish.

Judaism has dangerous conflicts with both its descendants, Christianity and Islam. But whatever Jews may think about Moslems, they never considered them to be pagans. There was never the requirement to sacrifice one's life rather than accept a forced conversion to Islam. But under no circumstances was a Jew allowed to convert to Christianity. This gives the lie to those modern rabbis who tell their congregations that Christianity is a true descendant acceptable to the God of Judaism. They are lying about fundamentals just as are their ecumenical Christian counterparts when they deny the content of the Gospels.

There are two Jewish prayers which exemplify the conflict with pagans and which explain why, aside from fear, Jews do not like to think about what the Christian religion contains. The first prayer is the Alenu which is the climax of every service. The prayer starts by thanking God for our being Jewish. "It is our duty to praise the Master of all, to exalt the Creator of the universe, who has not made us like the nations of the world and has not placed us like the families of the earth; who has not designed our destiny to be like theirs, nor our lot to be like that of all their multitude." After further praise, the prayer continues, "We hope therefore, Lord our God, soon to behold thy majestic glory, when the abominations shall be removed from the earth, and the false gods exterminated; when the world shall be perfected under the reign of the Almighty, and all mankind will call upon thy name, and all the wicked of the earth be turned to thee.

The medieval version of the Alenu had another sentence which was removed because it offended Christians: "For they bow to nonsense and emptiness, and they pray to a god who cannot save.

In the Passover Seder, we say, "In each and every generation they rise up against us to destroy us. And The Holy One, blessed be He, rescues us from their hands." Some time afterwards, we open the outside door for Prophet Elijah to share a cup of wine. While the entire Seder is supposed to be recited in a reclining position, for this vitriolic prayer with Elijah we stand up. "Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations that know Thee not, and upon the kingdoms that call not upon Thy name; for they have consumed Jacob and laid waste his habitation. Pour out Thy rage upon them and let Thy fury overtake them. Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of the Eternal."

Elijah is our most vindictive prophet, the one who slew the priests of Baal. According to the Old Testament, he never died, but ascended directly to heaven in a flaming chariot. He is supposed to be still around today, but I have never seen his cup consumed. Maybe, I do not recite the prayer with enough conviction, and I certainly do not pour him my best wine. But if there is to be one, Elijah gets my vote to be the anti-Christ.

While I feel strongly about and against the Christian rituals I described, I do not deny that Christianity has many positive elements. While the sacrifice itself may be abhorrent, the example of goodness and willingness to sacrifice set by Jesus is central to the religion and inspires many Christians to acts of unbelievable goodness. It is inconceivable to me the courage it took for countless Christians to defy the Nazis and rescue Jews at great risk to themselves and their families

It is important that Jews and Christians of good will find ways to bury our past animosity. But being dishonest about the nature of our own religions and their irreconcilable covenants is not a good start. Jews and Christians do not pray to the same God. We should recognize that while we seek ways to work together in our imperfect world. We can cooperate and compete while we obey the one command central to both religions, to love our neighbor. We will have to leave the differences to be resolved by a higher authority.

## **HEADLINES AND COMMENTS**

Current headlines from the world press plus comments from Diogenes

### **"GREAT TRAIN ROBBER" HEADS HOME TO JAIL**

Back to England he goes after 30 years, he couldn't stand the competition from Brazil's thieving politicians and businessmen.

### **GERMANS ARE TIRED OF BEING CONFRONTED WITH THE NAZI PAST**

A Der Spiegel survey finds that 45% of Germans are tired of hearing about their Nazi past. How easily today's Germans tire. They were always so indefatigable in carrying out that past.

### **SPACE TOURIST BACK FROM "PARADISE", LANDS ON STEPPES**

One vast steppes for the tourism business.

## **QUOTES I LIKE**

In war, indeed, there can be no substitute for victory.

Douglas MacArthur

It is not true that suffering ennoble the character; happiness does that sometimes, but suffering, for the most part, makes men petty and vindictive.

W. Somerset Maugham

Every time I paint a portrait I lose a friend.

John Singer Sargent

I hate victims who respect their executioners.

John Paul Sartre

**Comments appreciated (love the report or hate it, no apathy, please)  
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