

## **Archbishop Bonny: "Jewish friends, I can no longer remain silent."**

<https://www.cathobel.be/2023/11/dans-les-medias-flamands-mgr-bonny-ecrit-amis-juifs-je-ne-peux-plus-rester-silencieux/>

Published on November 9, 2023 by the editors – revised on November 9, 2023 - 5 minutes [unofficial translation]

**The bishop of Antwerp, who "lives in the Flemish city with the largest Jewish community in the country," publishes an open letter about the situation in Gaza. He reminds us that: "Israel has the right to exist and to defend oneself, no one will doubt that. But Palestinians also have a right to exist and to defend themselves." Archbishop Bonny expresses himself above all as a Christian, drawing on the story of our religion.**

I rarely, if ever, think of Pope Pius XII (1876-1958). Except in the last few days and weeks, since the violence of Hamas on October 7 and the bombing in Gaza. Beginning in the 1960s he is said to have remained neutral for too long. He would not react forcefully enough against powerful Germany. This earned him the nickname "Nazi Pope" in some circles.

### **Where does the guilty silence begin and end?**

From the past to the present, there is only one small step. In this morning's paper, I read that 4,000 children have already died in Gaza, about 400 every day. "Gaza has become a graveyard for children," said UNICEF spokesman James Elder. And for everyone, it's hell. »

The West reacts with confusion and contradiction. Many take a "neutral" stance.

Meanwhile, the major military powers are supporting the Israeli army. Because "everything is very complex!" Or: "We must support a Western democracy like Israel!" Why am I sitting here as a bishop and being silent? Who or what should I hold back from? »

### **The ideal alibi**

I live in the Flemish city with the largest Jewish community in the country. I've got good acquaintances in the Jewish community. I am a member of the Consultative Body of Christians and Jews of Belgium (OCJB). Should I speak or be silent, and for whom? Who will be my friend or enemy when I speak? It is indeed a complex story. Israel has the right to exist and to defend itself. No one will doubt that. But Palestinians also have the right to exist and defend themselves.

Unfortunately, all efforts to achieve a two-state solution have been systematically and strategically boycotted. Until a predictable explosion provides the ideal alibi.

The explosion occurred. The final offensive seems to have begun. No one now believes in peaceful coexistence in the former Mandate Territory of Palestine. Children must die. Young people have to depart. The rest will become radicalized (what else would they do?). And after Gaza, the West Bank will follow. Where are human rights and international law?

As a bishop, I want to limit myself to my domain, that of faith. Christians and Jews share much of the same sacred writings, the books we call the Old Testament. But in our interpretation of these writings, we are by no means on the same path since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This difference is not about accessories, but about the heart of the problem: the fact that God's love and God's salvation are no longer tied to a specific country, race, or culture. At the heart of Christianity is the universality of salvation. All the rights and duties associated with the Christian faith have universal significance. They transcend any private interest, even any private religious interest.

## **Religion, Blood, and Violence**

Therefore, according to Christian opinion, there is no word of God in the Old Testament that, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, can legitimize a violent recapture or a military expansion of the so-called "biblical country." The God of Israel is the Father of all peoples, as Genesis says.

It is infuriating that some Israeli political and military leaders abuse biblical themes to legitimize their murderous actions.

They damage the image of their religion and all the religions of the world. They pervert the meaning of the most beautiful biblical expressions such as those of the Election, the Covenant, the Promise, the Exodus, the Promised Land or the Jerusalem of the end of life. They enhance the impression that religion is linked to blood, land and violence.

Certainly, I say this as a Christian. And as a Christian, I must also treat our past with caution. But in speaking in this way, I am compelled by the essential difference – and therefore by the very message – for which Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross. Already at that time: a 33-year-old Jew from Palestine.

(Archbishop Bonny, published on Kerknet)