

Response to Letters Criticizing my Comments in National Catholic Register

The August 6-12, 2006 issue of *National Catholic Register* published an interview with me on the front page. The interview was entitled *Trouble in the Land they call the 'Fifth Gospel'*. I will provide a link to the article as soon as I find one.

Tim Drake called me by phone and interviewed me for the NCR paper. The interview was given only a few days into the conflict between Lebanon and Israel. The majority of the interview was on the veracity of Scripture, the importance of the Holy Land to understand the Bible and our [Footprints of God](#) series and the [pilgrimages](#) we lead to the Holy Land.

So far, I have received two letters criticizing my comments on the conflict. I stand by my words and have produced the first of the e-mails here which summarize my answers to both criticisms.

Below is the e-mail I received along with my response. The Middle East is a complicated situation – not easily to understand simply by sound bites, but I briefly respond based on my understanding of the conflict – based on our many trips to the Holy Land and also to Lebanon, our contacts with friends and associates, and a wide variety of news sources – and common sense.

The e-mail said,

Referring to your statement in the National Catholic Register which calls the Israeli operations against Lebanon legitimate, we can only conclude that you monitor only the U.S. mainstream media. Even then, you must filter out the horrible details, such as the Israeli strikes on innocent civilians or on the Lebanese Christians in northern Lebanon. How about the Israeli bombing of the U.N. observers? The frantic U. N. personnel called their Israeli liaison and pleaded for the air strikes to be called off. The Israeli folks agreed verbally, but, in actuality, they used the map coordinates of the U.N. staff to redirect the bombs until a direct hit resulted. The Israelis are out to prove a point, and it is not that they are a compassionate society.

M & C
Sterling Heights, MI

My Response,

Hello M and C:

Thanks for writing and for showing your concern for the unhappy situation in the Middle East. I appreciate your compassion but I have to differ with you on several

points. Since you wrote to criticize my words in the National Catholic Register, I feel it right that I explain the reasons I wrote as I did.

War is hell my friend -- people die and things get broken. It is unfortunate, but that is the nature of war. The Church has carefully defined a Just War, and it acknowledges that war is often the unhappy necessity for a country.

If Hezbollah rockets were dropping in your home town -- you would expect the USA to act and to act decisively. You would expect them to not only stop the rockets, but to destroy the infrastructure supporting the attacks and successfully incapacitate the terrorists, their supporters and their communications and supply routes. I think I am fair in saying this because I have asked others in your position and they tend to agree when it is brought to their front porch.

My wife and I spent time with the Lebanese Christians last year and we were marching in the streets with them waving flags to protest Syrian domination. I know Christian Lebanese people there and here, and I have great sorrow for what has happened to their country and their lives. But Lebanon is a nation with an army that has *not* controlled their own borders or the terrorists that operate unhindered within their borders. These terrorists are controlled and supplied by renegade, extremist countries.

The Hezbollah dress like civilians, hide in civilian buildings with the hopes of Israel hitting them -- so they can have a public relations bonanza that people like you fall for -- blaming Israel for indiscriminately killing civilians. Israel even warns towns to evacuate to AVOID killing civilians whereas Hezbollah shoots rockets into densely populated areas with no warning with the very INTENT of killing civilians. You did not follow the news my friend -- Hezbollah was around and maybe even IN the UN building to create the problems that were created. They play dirty and Israel has a right to smash them -- something Lebanon should have done themselves.

But Israel has done a relatively good job of avoiding the Christian areas unless they are strategic to the destruction of the Hezbollah establishment. If you were to drive through Beirut today you would find the Muslim south -- the headquarters of Hezbollah -- bombed. But if you go to the north in the Christian area it is relatively undamaged and children are swimming in the water along the coast.

If Lebanon had controlled their borders and implemented UN Resolution 1559 then this would not be happening. The weak and fractured Lebanese government (Christian, Sunni and Shiite) is ultimately to blame, as is the world community for not helping Lebanon rid itself of the destructive terrorist group Hezbollah who has admitted that they will stop at nothing short of wiping Israel from the face of the map.

How does one negotiate with a guerilla group that has the stated goal of wiping you from the map, of killing every Jew? Israel pulled out of Lebanon six years ago and I have been at that border about 10 times in those six years. This current disasters was started by Hezbollah with the kidnapping and killing of Jewish soldiers who were on the Israel side of the border and then they started a unilateral and unprovoked shelling of Israel with rockets supplied by Iran and Syria.

As to my news sources: I use many, including contact with friends and associates in the Middle East -- Jewish, Palestinian Muslims and Christians. I also know a number of Lebanese that I learn from. I wonder where you get your detailed information that "proves" Israel intentionally tried to hit the UN building. You may want to expand your resources so you don't blunder and stumble into the very things you accuse others of doing.

Is Israel a compassionate society? I have been there about forty times in the last ten years or so and would have to say they are as compassionate as one can be that is fighting daily for survival while surrounded by much larger neighbors breathing threats of annihilation. Certainly they are as compassionate as they can be, but war is war and even the US in the Second World Wars would have been considered uncompassionate by myopic and biased people.

I don't always agree with the way Israel treats the Christians and Muslims in Israel and the Palestinian areas. I do not believe that Israel is always right or always compassionate, but that has noting to do with this war. This war is a war of self defense and carefully measured to end the threat.

I am extremely sorry for innocent lives lost on both sides, but war is war and that is what happens when terrorists within one country attack another country unprovoked and refuses to release kidnapped soldiers or to stop sending rockets. If Lebanon is concerned for their country and their citizens, let them act to put an end to the war. It is simple -- return the soldiers and stop firing missiles.

I will be posting this on my blog in case anyone else is interested.

Steve Ray

The second e-mail accused me of basing my opinions *only* on American news sources and my lack of contact with Palestinians. What nonsense! He also said he would not use my DVDs again unless I proved I did in fact know and understand the Palestinian people and situation.

I responded:

Thomas:

I am now home and able to access my computer. Thanks for writing and for your concern.

You ask a lot of questions. We disagree on a number of things but I am sure we agree on much more.

You ask if my pilgrims meet Palestinians -- take a look at my Photo Album and you will see us eating dinner and celebrating Mass with Jerusalem's Palestinian Auxiliary Bishop. He is our dear friend and he stays in my home when he is in the US and calls me every day when I am in Jerusalem. Notice also my good friend who is our local Palestinian Catholic guide.

I recently had dinner with other Palestinian friends who we help support financially. They live on the Mount of Olives and are shunned, harassed by their Palestinian Muslim neighbors who scare their kids, break their windows and threaten them.

We eat most of our dinners with Palestinian families and my pilgrims meet Jews, Muslims and Christians in the Holy Land. It is my job to show them not only the land but to meet the people.

You ought to do your homework before asking accusing questions.

My DVDs are the bestselling Catholic documentaries in the country. I am sorry if you fail to use them, but that is your choice. If you fail to use such good resources for the faith it is your loss -- as I said earlier. But you said you wouldn't use them UNLESS I PROVED . . . which I think I have done.

Also, using the name "Palestine" is a bit subjective -- to do it or not to do it. Palestine is not a biblical word, unless you know that it is derived from the word *Philistine*. Pagan Rome imposed the name *Palestine* in the first century to spite and denigrate the Jews -- by naming it after their age-old enemy, the Philistines. I tend to refer to the areas as Palestinian areas, not necessarily Palestine.

You probably haven't watched my [David/Solomon](#) DVD which refers to the areas I visit as the "Palestinian areas." But, I don't fancy the term partially because there is no stable, functioning government or entity to which it can really apply. Let them stop their in-fighting, establish a legitimate government not filled with corruption and ineptitude, let them stop terrorist tactics, and form a unified government that is a worthy negotiating partner -- and maybe the name "Palestine" will begin to mean something.

By the way, I just spent a good bit of time discussing the situation with my good Lebanese friend Philippe. The Hezbollah are firing rockets from his Christian

home town right now – presumeably with the hopes that when Israel fires back they will get accused of attacking Christian communities – and you defend these unscrupulous terrorists.

I try to be objective, as those who know me know.

Hopefully we will meet some day and when we do I will embrace you as a brother in the Lord and a fellow-worker for peace and the Gospel.

God bless you and those you love and I pray with you for the peace of Jerusalem and all the Middle East.

Steve Ray

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Any comments or questions can be sent to sray@rc.net.