



Christmas perverted

Western governments fund religious incitement as a political weapon against Israel

THIS CHRISTMAS, political warfare against Israel once again took on a religious dimension.

The assault, led by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), well-known charities and church groups, exploited heightened religious emotions during the holiday season to foment hatred against the Jewish state. In some instances, the rhetoric reflects anti-Semitic religious teachings such as comparing Israel to tyrannical 1st century Romans, portraying Israel as a modern day “Herod” persecuting Palestinian children and referring to Judaism’s “tribal god of retaliation.”

These attacks are made possible by the extensive governmental funding the NGOs receive from the EU, UK, Ireland, Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands and Spain, as well as from countries as friendly to Israel like the US and Canada.

The role of theology in fomenting anti-Jewish emotions has deep and lethal roots, dating back millennia. After the Holocaust, Christian theologians undertook a comprehensive reconsideration of Christianity’s attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. This led to the renunciation by major churches of teachings that incited anti-Jewish violence over the centuries.

But old traditions die hard.

Take Kairos Palestine, a campaign to promote the 2009 “Kairos Palestine Document,” drafted by a small group of Palestinian Christian clergy. It calls for BDS (boycotts, divestment and sanctions) against Israel and denies the Jewish religious and historical connection to any part of modern day Israel. It refers to Palestinian terrorism as “legal resistance” and denies the legitimacy of Judaism, by arguing that it was superseded by Jesus and Christianity.

No surprise, then, that this year Kairos Palestine released a 60-page “Christmas Alert,” containing an overtly anti-Semitic reference to “the Jewish lobby” that “intimidates us, cripples us and lulls us into a roaring silence, blocking our conscience into passive inaction.”

The “Christmas Alert” contains articles from anti-Israel NGOs such as Society of St. Yves (funded by Germany, Norway and the Netherlands), and Defense for Children International – Palestine Section (funded by the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain and the EU).

The World Council of Churches, representing some 350 churches in 110 countries, also contributed to this document. The WCC actively and enthusiastically promotes Kairos Palestine and runs three major projects promoting Israel’s delegitimization: the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum and the Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre. Some of the WCC’s funding comes from Norway, Germany, UK, Denmark and Finland.

A particularly odious example of festive season Israel-bashing comes from Wi’am, a Palestinian NGO funded by the US and Sweden. Wi’am issued a Christmas message describing Israel as a “tyranny” comparable to Rome and referring to Judaism’s “tribal god of retaliation.” In so doing, Wi’am echoes ancient teachings of con-



JON NAZCA / REUTERS

A man dressed as the tyrannical King Herod takes part in a reenactment of the nativity scene, in Arcos de la Frontera, near Cadiz, Spain, December 20

tempt for Jews.

The UK-based Amos Trust’s annual “Bethlehem Pack” promotes theologically-based advocacy against Israel such as, “Being a Jew living in Nazareth, Jesus would not be allowed by his own leadership to enter Bethlehem.” Ironically, if Jesus of Nazareth of modern day Israel went to Bethlehem, the Amos Trust and other NGOs would condemn him for being a “Jewish settler.”

Indoctrinating Sunday school children is also included in Amos Trust’s program. The “Bethlehem Pack would have them make a “replica of a house” and a piece of paper “representing a demolition order,” then act out the roles of “Palestinians who own the house; Israeli soldiers (to knock down the house); UK volunteers (a larger group) to rebuild the house.”

Christmas cards, products and events are also part of the broader campaign. UK-based War on Want’s Christmas card depicts the “Three Wise Men” digging under the security barrier to enter Bethlehem. Repeating this theme is the Bethlehem Bible College’s “Nativity set with separation wall.”

Let’s call this exploitation of the Christmas season what it is – religious incitement. Using theology to promote an anti-Israel political message cannot be seen any other way. Christian anti-Semitism – which has proven deadly to Jews in centuries past – is being revitalized as a political weapon against Israel. That this is funded by Western governments is a moral disgrace that must be brought to an immediate end. ■

Yitzhak Santis is Chief Programs Officer at the Jerusalem-based research institute NGO Monitor. Its report, ‘Come All Ye Haters: NGO Exploitation of Religious Themes to Demonize Israel,’ is available at www.ngo-monitor.org