ARE ARABS LEAVING ISLAM?

ICEJ SPONSORED
ALIYAH YOUTH CAMP
Dear Friends,

The Scriptures are clear: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14). Many believers throughout the Muslim world are praying for their nations in just this way. We should join them in faith for God to do amazing things in return.

“If My people who are called by My name ...” The answer for national problems lies within the people of God. We saw an example of this truth a few weeks ago when we prayed here in Jerusalem with Pastor Lee, senior pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea. I was touched to see his leadership team’s unwavering faith that God will heal and unite their nation.

This is also true for your nation’s attitude toward Israel. If we earnestly seek Him, the Lord promises to heal our nation. I encourage you today not to complain about the state of your country, but rather to start seeking the Lord in prayer. I have seen with my own eyes the changes prayer has brought forth in other countries, and I know He can do the same in your nation. We serve a prayer-answering God, and nothing is too difficult for Him.

I hope you will find this month's Word From Jerusalem magazine to be inspiring and informative.

Thank you again for your support and prayers. May the Lord bless you richly out of Zion!

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Dr Jürgen Bühler
ICEJ President

FROM THE
PRESIDENT'S DESK

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COVER PHOTO:
ICEJ sponsored Aliyah youth camp in Finland

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Are Arabs Leaving Islam?

DAVID PARSONS, VP AND SENIOR INTERNATIONAL SPOKESMAN

It was an eye-catching headline! “Arab World Turning Its Back on Religion,” claimed the title of a recent article in *The Guardian*. Very interesting and certainly worth a closer look.
It turns out that in a recent BBC News Arabic survey of 25,000 people across 10 Middle East countries and the Palestinian territories, trust in religious leaders is plummeting, including in radical Islamist movements such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Meanwhile, there is a discernible rise in the proportion of people describing themselves as “not religious”—from 11% from 2012 to 2014 to 18% this year.

Now this is welcome news, especially for Christians who stand with Israel and view Islamic ideologies as a major impediment to peace and normalcy in the region. And the figures do seem credible, as the growing number of young Arabs who identify as “non-religious” mirrors the secularization trend among millennials in the traditionally Christian West. While a 7% increase over the past half-decade might not seem that large, in context we are dealing here with those living in the heart of the Muslim world, where custom has long held that leaving the Islamic faith is a sin punishable by death. So the real number of Arab-Muslim apostates is likely even higher.

Yet several reputable polling firms (Pew Research Center, Barna Group) have been gauging the long-term trends worldwide. They are forecasting that the secular, non-religious segments of societies worldwide will actually lose ground to the religious camps in coming decades and that Islam will remain the fastest growing religion in the world. This is largely due to the higher birth rates among families that belong to the world’s major religions—most notably Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism—as well as a projected increase in conversions to Islam.

So what are we to make of all this? Are a significant number of Muslims in Arab nations leaving Islam? Or is Islam still the world’s fastest growing religion and destined to be the dominant faith of the future?

The answer to these questions is complex and elusive, as demographic studies of this nature are an inexact science—the data is incomplete, the methodologies are often flawed, and the trends are fluid. But here are some of the main factors to watch going forward.

**Dropping Birth Rates**

Birth rates among Muslims have been dropping significantly in recent decades. Islam is growing faster than any other religion, according to the Pew studies, and by 2070 it will overtake Christianity as the world’s most prevalent religion. Yet much of this projected growth for Islam is based on birth rates that are not sustainable. The current fertility rate among Muslims is 3.1 children per woman, compared to 2.7 among Christians, but that gap is closing every year.

Many converts to Islam in the West leave the faith after a few years. It is quite easy to become a Muslim. All one has to do is recite the *shahada* (testimony of faith) three times before Muslim witnesses: “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.” But once you have to start rising well before dawn to pray the requisite five times each day or are required to observe *sharia* law by holding infidels in contempt, Islam is not so easy or attractive.

According to a Pew assessment in 2011, the number of people who become Muslims through conversion seems to be roughly equal to the number of Muslims who leave the faith. Meantime, sociologist Dr. Ilyas Ba-Yunus, a Pakistani-born American Muslim, concluded that 75% of new Muslim converts in the United States leave Islam within a few years.

**Code of Silence**

There is a code of silence among Muslims who fall away from the faith. Once born a Muslim, it has always been a frightful prospect to ever leave the faith, due to the mortal threats against apostates sourced to the Koran itself. The eminent Sunni preacher Sheikh Yusuf al-Qarqdawi once said on Al-Jazeera that the application of the death penalty for those who leave Islam is a necessity, since “If they had gotten rid of the apostasy punishment, Islam wouldn’t exist today.”

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Disillusionment with Islam
There is growing disillusionment with Islam, and many Muslims are looking for something else. The sight of 20 Egyptian Coptic Christians being beheaded by ISIS militants on a beach in Libya in 2015 was repulsive, even to many Muslims. Such atrocities are having a double impact: First, it is turning Muslims off to their own faith, and second, Christians refusing to renounce their faith in the face of certain death is a powerful draw.

Besides the barbarism of Muslim extremists, political Islam is also losing its shine. The recent municipal election results in Istanbul show that the Turkish public, for instance, has soured on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s draconian efforts to forge a “pious generation” in his country. And throughout the Muslim world, there is much to indicate that the vast majority of those identified with Islam today are cultural Muslims, rather than fundamentalists or strictly devout Muslims, just as much of the native populations of Europe today are rightly considered nominal Christians.

Christianity Growing
Christianity is growing by leaps and bounds in the Global South. Based on extensive research, Penn State professor Philip Jenkins has documented the boom in Christianity in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, where the faith is experiencing a dynamism and fervency in missions that runs counter to the liberal, secular trends in Europe and North America—once the bastions of the faith. The fastest growing stream of Christianity is Evangelicalism, which now has an estimated 700 million adherents. Nigeria has far more practicing Anglicans than England. The Philippines has more baptisms per year than France, Italy, Poland, and Spain combined. By 2025, two-thirds of all Christians are expected to live in the Global South.

China and India, the world’s two most populous nations, are both experiencing incredible growth in their respective Christian communities. China may now have as many as 130 million born-again believers, while India has at least 100 million and rising. Churches are growing rapidly—even in Arab and Muslim countries, with Iran leading the way as the country with the highest rate of church growth, despite the ayatollahs’ attempts to suppress it.

Conclusion
The respected refusenik Natan Sharansky divides the world into free versus fear societies. He challenged the Soviet Communist system, which relied on intimidating people into submission through fear that even your own children would report you to the authorities. But that fear was finally broken, and while Communism has not disappeared from the earth, it no longer has half the world in its iron grip.

Islam, which means “submission,” operates in much the same way. Yet there are hopeful signs that its grip of fear over the Arab and Muslim world is waning. The fact that more Arab youths are not afraid to tell pollsters they are losing their religion is proof that Islam’s hold on the younger generation is slipping in the very cradle of its inception.

Living Fully for the Fulfillment of Isaiah 19
By Tom Craig

What do current events in the Middle East have to do with the kingdom of God—and why should believers care? Understanding the prophetic vision of Isaiah 19 brings sense to the seemingly nonsensical conflicts plaguing that vital region of the world. The Lord is preparing to propel Egypt onto a turbulent course of divine confrontation and spiritual breakthrough, leading to the entire nation of surviving Egyptians becoming worshippers of the Lord—and joining with the other nations of the Middle East, including Israel, to become “a blessing in the midst of the earth” (Isaiah 19:24).

Order your copy today from our online store at: www.icej.store
Recently, an ICEJ leadership delegation visited Egypt and found some truly amazing prophetic developments there. God is doing an awesome work in the hearts of Egyptian believers to draw them to the Lord’s purposes for Israel in this day. They are catching on to the vision of Isaiah 19 for Arab-Jewish reconciliation, while also being drawn by the call of Zechariah 14:16–18 to come to Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles.

Thus, the Christian Embassy is expecting as many as 40 Egyptian pilgrims to come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles 2019. This is a historic year as Israel and Egypt mark 40 years of the peace treaty between their nations. It also holds great prophetic significance, as the Isaiah 19 highway is beginning to take shape and the invitation of Zechariah 14 resonates as never before for Egypt to come up to Jerusalem to “keep the Feast of Tabernacles!”

Please give your best gift today to the Isaiah 19 Fund.

DONATE ONLINE AT: www.icejusa.org/isaiah-19-fund
In recent months, there have been major headlines warning of a mass exodus of Jews from the United Kingdom due to rising anti-Semitism there. Germany’s Jewish community is also said to be wary of anti-Semitic elements gaining wider acceptance in their nation. But France remains the country in Western Europe facing the greatest physical threats to its Jewish community and the highest number of Jews fleeing to Israel and other locations.

France still has the fourth largest Jewish community in the world, and over the past decade, many of them have been moving to Israel. This exodus hit a peak of over 7,000 immigrants to Israel in 2015 and has diminished somewhat, but the Jewish Agency still expects 2,700 French Jews to make Aliyah to Israel this year. The Christian Embassy has been asked to help fund flights for those needing assistance with their journey home to Israel, which costs $440 per person.

“The Jewish Agency has informed us that olim (new immigrants) from France are coming on regularly scheduled flights almost daily, one family at a time as soon as they are ready,” said ICEJ’s Aliyah Director Howard Flower. “We believe another large wave of Aliyah from France and Western Europe could be imminent due to rising concerns about anti-Semitism and the unsettled political and economic situation.”

Please help us sponsor flights for needy French Jewish families seeking to rejoin the Jewish nation in their ancient homeland. Your donation will make a huge difference in their future.

Give to the ICEJ’s Aliyah fund today! Go to: www.icejusa.org/aliyah

By Aaron Hecht

ICEJ PREPARES FOR SURGE IN FRENCH ALIYAH

Many Jewish families still living in the former Soviet republics are interested in making Aliyah to Israel but need help in finding out how the process works. Long before a Jewish person ever boards a plane headed for Tel Aviv, a long list of paperwork must be filed to satisfy the requirements of both their home country and Israel. This takes time! Plus, most potential immigrants must take Hebrew language classes and job training courses to be better prepared to live and work in Israel.

The ICEJ is helping meet these needs by sponsoring Aliyah seminars in a number of East European and Central Asian countries, including Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Baltic States. These are areas where recent geopolitical events and economic factors have resulted in a major surge in Aliyah. Last year, Russian-speaking immigrants accounted for 64% of the worldwide Aliyah to Israel.

In Ukraine, the seminars are held away from the fighting in the East, so families can have a peaceful, relaxed atmosphere to prepare for the move to a new country. The Ukrainian conflict triggered a regional economic recession, which increased Aliyah from Russia and Belarus as well. The ICEJ also has organized Aliyah seminars in Finland for Jews from Northwest Russia and in Latvia for Jewish families from Belarus, considered the last dictatorship in Europe. Both Finland and Latvia provide secure locations with an atmosphere of freedom.

The Christian Embassy has teamed up with the Jewish Agency to facilitate this latest wave of Aliyah in new and innovative ways, according to ICEJ Aliyah Director Howard Flower, such as the new fast-track weekend Aliyah seminars. These provide comprehensive pre-Aliyah programs aimed to alleviate concerns, answer questions, and educate participants using trained Aliyah counselors. Most attendees are young family members who move to Israel ahead of their parents and must be ready to live alone there until the rest of the family arrives.

Weekend Aliyah seminars are effective tools to prepare Jewish people for the most significant journey of their lives. During the three-day seminars, the focus is on real life lessons about Israel, such as the economy, job market, the education and health systems, absorption programs, and much more. At these seminars, participants receive personal attention from Aliyah representatives, most notably Israelis themselves. Each individual’s needs are addressed to ensure everyone receives the information and advice they need for a successful Aliyah.

Right now, the ICEJ is planning at least seven more Aliyah seminars in 2020, including in Berlin, Munich, Alma Ata (Kazakhstan), and Russia, along with Helsinki, Kiev, and the Baltic states. Please help us meet the needs of future Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet republics. Partner with the ICEJ in sponsoring weekend Aliyah seminars that will set Jewish families on a completely new course in life back in the land of their forefathers. The average cost per person, including meals and accommodations, is $150.

Please make a generous donation today, even by sponsoring an entire Jewish family. Give online at: www.icejusa.org/aliyah
In June, several ICEJ staff members were on hand at Ben Gurion Airport to welcome the latest group of Ethiopian Jews as they arrived in Israel on flights sponsored by the ICEJ. This flight brought the number of Ethiopian Jews the ICEJ has assisted in making Aliyah to Israel in 2019 to 634.

The ICEJ also gave an extra $50,000 to fund efforts to sustain the Jewish communities still in Ethiopia until their immigration to Israel can be arranged, as many need basic food and medical supplies. In addition to answering this call for emergency funds, we have been providing assistance to help with the absorption of hundreds of other Ethiopian newcomers, including housing costs, Hebrew language courses (ulpan), and job training. So the Christian Embassy is fully engaged in the historic return of the ancient Ethiopian Jewish community to Israel.

Often referred to as the Falash Mura back in Ethiopia, this religious-ethnic group has a long and unique history. The Ethiopian Jewish community may date back to the time of Moses, who married an Ethiopian woman (Numbers 12:1). But the chief rabbinate had to recognize their community as Bnei Israel, or “Sons of Israel,”—meaning they were descended from one of the twelve tribes—before they could come into Israel under the Law of Entry.

Since that ruling, tens of thousands of Ethiopian Jews have come home to Israel, many in emergency airlifts. But approximately 9,000 were refused entry due to qualification issues, even though they had long since left their farms and villages behind and were waiting in transit camps to come to Israel. After strong protests from Ethiopian relatives in Israel, the Israeli government decided in 2015, as a humanitarian gesture, to allow this last remnant of the Falash Mura to come home for family reunification.

Though we have brought around 2,000 to Israel, some 7,000 still remain in transit camps in Addis Ababa and Gondar, living under difficult conditions—hence the ICEJ’s special contribution toward food and shelter as they await Aliyah.

The ICEJ has been asked to assist other suffering Jewish communities needing food and supplies while awaiting their departure for Israel. Your donation to the ICEJ’s Aliyah fund will help us respond to these Aliyah difficulties. Christian assistance in these types of emergencies has a profound impact on families and whole communities. They are greatly comforted knowing Christians around the world care about them.

Give today to the ICEJ’s Aliyah fund!
Send your gift online at: www.icejusa.org/aliyah
Dear Howard,

Thank you for your friendship, partnership, and the opportunity to promote the first ICEJ-JAFI “Israel Summer Youth Festival” in Finland. It was a great experience!

The first time is always a challenge, [but] thanks to your openness, your immediate response to all of our requests and questions, and quickly handling the obstacles that arose, we made it!

The combination of a train to cross the border and a bus to reach Karmel Kotti was so important as it eased our travel experience. Everything went so smooth and fast, and we traveled in safety.

We were warmly welcomed and felt immediately at home. The hosts were kind, friendly, and thoughtful. [Even] without knowing the language, they had full understanding of each one’s needs. It was so important to the children and the team.

The beautiful green site, fresh air near the lake, amazingly healthy and tasty food, great weather, and especially [the] Karmel Kotti team made this experience meaningful and unforgettable.

This collaboration means a lot to us at The Jewish Agency for Israel. It is so important to furthering our work, especially the freedom and openness that encouraged discussion on many topics and issues, such as our Jewish identity, Aliyah, Israel, and our youth programs like Naale and Sela.

We are looking forward to increasing our partnership, and friendship, in pursuit of our mutual goals.

Personally I’m so grateful to have such friends and partners.

Best Regards,
Orit Svetlana Zuaretz

“In Finland Karmel Kotti camp I discovered important, new topics for me, met many different, but incredibly interesting people with shining eyes, in freedom atmosphere. We learned a lot about Israel, Jewish history and tradition.”

Mary, 16 years old
Participant from Saint Petersburg, Russia
Earlier this year, Luda and ICEJ Homecare Director Corrie van Maanen met for a special celebration. Not many who are wheelchair-bound with deteriorating health and without family would find anything to celebrate. However, this was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Luda’s Aliyah from Ukraine. Together with her father, who has since passed away, she came to Israel with hopes of finding better treatment for her health condition, which had put an end to her university degree and dreams of a career. Corrie and Luda were also celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of a warm connection to the ICEJ, including a quarter century of faithfully attending Israeli Guest Night during the Feast.

Two weeks after arriving in Israel and in need of special assistance, Luda heard about ICEJ’s Homecare program. The support she received continues to this day, as does her friendship with Corrie: “Through knowing Corrie and ICEJ, the whole world is in my hands,” Luda recently stated, referring to the many Christians who have helped or visited her from all over the world. A bright smile on Luda’s face may mask her tears, but all who meet her are endeared by her friendly nature.

Luda is thankful she came home to Israel. She overcame the challenges of a new language and a different culture, and today she participates in Israeli society. Throughout her 25 years here in the land, Homecare’s help and friendship were vital to giving hope and emotional healing to this often-overwhelmed immigrant. Therefore, it was with joy that coffee and cake, memories and stories, were shared to celebrate a wonderful relationship. ☺️
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*ICEJ will award scholarships based upon pastor qualifications.

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www.icejusa.org/tours
The ICEJ is now in the eighth year of our Isaiah 62 Prayer Initiative, and we are thrilled to report that thousands of churches, prayer groups, and individual intercessors from around the world have been joining us every month to pray for Israel according to the command of Isaiah 62:

I have set watchmen on your walls O Jerusalem; They shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the Lord do not keep silent, And give Him no rest till He establishes And He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. — (Isaiah 62:6–7)

The faithful participation of the global body of Christ in this unique prayer campaign has been encouraging for our ministry. For instance, ICEJ USA National Director Dr. Susan Michael reports Isaiah 62 prayer groups are standing with us in all 50 States. Gottfried Bühler, our national director in Germany, also has been able to establish Isaiah 62 prayer groups in 100 German cities. Indeed, from Jerusalem to the islands of the Pacific, from the equator to the Arctic Circle, precious saints are collectively lifting Israel, the Middle East, the nations, and our ministry in coordinated, focused, and effectual prayer. And we truly sense this covering of prayer support here in Jerusalem when our staff members gather to pray every Wednesday.

We recently invited some of these Isaiah 62 prayer groups to send us photos of their prayer times together. Below is a sampling from a variety of places. We invite you to join this global prayer movement by using our monthly prayer points whenever you pray corporately or individually. Also, if possible, join with us in prayer on the first Wednesday of every month as intercession resounds around the globe throughout the day.

THE COMFORTS OF A FURRY FRIEND
ICEJ ASSISTS BEIT SINGER PETTING ZOO
BY KAYLA MUCHNIK

Walking through the gate of Beit Singer (“Home of the Child”), you may not initially guess the youth at Kfar Yehezkael are in great need of love and healing. Boys play soccer in the courtyard while other kids play music and dance on a stage in a nearby playroom, casting an impression of life and joy.

However, for these children, “home” has been anything but a safe and welcoming place. They were removed from their families by court order to protect them from ongoing neglect, abuse, and violence. Upon arrival, the children are welcomed to their new home by a house parent, professional counselors, and teachers dedicated to helping them grow and develop properly. Part of the therapeutic program means having fun. Some activities include horseback riding, karate, theater, electronics, physical exercise, music, enjoying the petting zoo, and more.

The petting zoo at Beit Singer is a particularly beneficial asset for many of the children. Through taking care of the animals, the children learn how to love, trust, and nurture. Conversations with the children on these topics help them find answers and comfort for their own traumatic upbringing.

Yet, over time the animal pens have become worn and unstable. Thus, the ICEJ is enabling the home to renovate and provide a safer, cleaner area for the children to interact with the therapeutic animals. Thank you for your donations, which will bring comfort through furry animal friends to some of Israel’s most vulnerable children.

Help the ICEJ renovate the petting zoo area with clean, sturdy cages to safely house the therapeutic animals.

www.icejusa.org/aid

ICEJ SUPPORTING DAY CARE IN SAMARIA
BY YUDIT SETZ

Tucked away in the ultra-Orthodox community of Immanuel in Samaria, you will find a special day care center for children three months to three years old. Immanuel Day Care Center was built 40 years ago in response to a dire financial crisis that caused great poverty among this strictly observant community, including their many children. The ICEJ heard about this nursery project back then and sought to help, and to our amazement, this highly religious “settlement” has been openly receiving our support and love for many years. A wonderful friendship of respect and appreciation has grown over the 19 years the ICEJ has partnered with the center.

“We helped where they could not help themselves, with food, clothing, and care,” explained Yossi, director of the Immanuel Day Care Center. “God has sent us messengers in the form of the ICEJ, which has helped keep our head above water over the years. When I see you here today, it touches me anew.”

In May, we were able to bring a group from ICEJ Finland to see this center that provides care, meals, and love for 70 children from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., every day. They send each of the children home with sandwiches and fruit as a small way to help their community.

Much help is still needed to keep the center running, such as playground equipment, a new fence, toys, new chairs, and the overall running of the facility. Join us in support and love today.

Make a donation to ICEJ AID at: www.icejusa.org/aid
**FIELDS OF FIRE**

By Kayla Muchnik

As the summer dry season arrived, terrorists in Gaza started launching incendiary kites and balloons over Israel’s border again, causing fields and agricultural lands to go up in flames. ICEJ AID continues to work closely with local Israeli community leaders and security chiefs along the Gaza border to provide essential firefighting equipment, including newly-designed all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). These ATVs are fully equipped with a water tank, pump, hose, and other fire extinguishing tools, and can reach even the remotest parts of fields and orchards quickly. This mobility and speed is essential, because if they can reach the fire within the first 10 to 15 minutes, there is a greater likelihood that the flames can be doused before they spread out of control. The generosity of our donors has allowed us to provide five ATVs to date, together with 17 all-terrain firefighting wagons. These newest ATVs, dispersed among the four regional councils near the Gaza border, were immediately put into action.

During the ICEJ’s International Leaders Conference in mid-May, a group of 50 ICEJ global leaders and Jerusalem staff saw firsthand the battle these Israeli communities face every day. On a tour to the region, they visited a farmer’s wheat field that had burned the day before. Only a few hundred meters from the Gaza border, the ICEJ delegation stood on the burnt crops covered in black ash listening as Rafi Babian, the security chief for the Sadot Negev Region, passionately expressed his gratitude to the ICEJ for donating an ATV that already has helped them fight several similar fires. Then, in a beautiful moment of solidarity, he led our group of Christians in a prayer for his land and blessed us for supporting them in this time of crisis.

Israel needs your support!
www.icejusa.org/crisis

**RENOVATING HOMES AND HEARTS**

By Kayla Muchnik

Whether young Jewish immigrant children who have made Aliyah on their own ahead of their parents or young people from at-risk backgrounds, Kfar Galim provides an open home. Located in the northern Hof Carmel Region, this youth village serves as a regional high school, agricultural training center, and educational dormitory/boarding school for over 1,000 students. Of these, about 250 students live on site in dorms. Dedicated youth village staff equips students with leadership skills, a strong work ethic, and love for their land, while also encouraging them to live in peace with their neighbors.

Many youth villages throughout Israel face budget shortages, especially for renovations or infrastructure upgrades. Thus, they are constantly seeking outside financial help for these needs. Shifts in the earth had damaged the seventh- and eighth-grade students’ housing dorms at Kfar Galim. Other urgent repairs included fixing a persistent mold problem. ICEJ AID saw an opportunity to substantially improve the youths’ standard of living, and so jumped at the chance to help.

“It was very moving to see the kids coming back from Passover vacation and enter into the building shouting with joy,” shared Danny Gildin, the general director of the village. “I think the renovation is very pretty, comfortable, and it surely makes all the difference to enter the rooms,” one student said enthusiastically.

Another added: “It is like a home now. It is much more comfortable to live in a room that is welcoming. The new bathrooms and floors are amazing. Thanks a lot.”

Help ICEJ renovate Kfar Galim dormitories, which house new Jewish immigrants and Israeli at-risk youths.
www.icejusa.org/aid

A Swiss Christian couple recently donated several ATV’s through the ICEJ to help Israeli communities fight fires ignited by terrorists in nearby Gaza.

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Have you thought that playing tennis could endanger your life? Well, we discovered it can, while we visited a branch of Israel Tennis Centers (ITC), which have been teaching and training children in life skills through the sport of tennis for almost 30 years! ICEJ Germany recently donated a bomb shelter to the ITC facility in Ofakim, a community not far from the Gaza border. At the beginning of May, a Kassam rocket launched from Gaza landed just 50 meters from the tennis center. Thankfully, several children taking tennis lessons were able to seek refuge in the ICEJ-provided bomb shelter before the rocket exploded. Your donations are saving lives!

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The Palestinian Jesus Myth

By David Parsons, ICEJ Vice President & Senior Spokesman

When Linda Sarsour tweeted recently that Jesus was a Palestinian, some might have thought it was an innocent mistake. But given this same canard has stirred similar backlashes over recent months thanks to US Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minnesota) and others, chances are Sarsour knew just how mischievous her actions were. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s son, Yair, certainly thought so.

Indeed, there is nothing innocent about the “Palestinian Jesus.” It has ignoble origins, mean-spirited motivations, and fraudulent ends.

The Origins

The fabrication of a Palestinian Jesus has been a core part of the lexicon of Palestinian nationalism since at least the 1960s, as evidenced by news archive photos of a press conference held by PLO chief Yasser Arafat in Amman in June 1970. Over his shoulder hangs a poster of a gaunt, near-naked Palestinian nailed to a Star of David. The message is clear: the Palestinians are suffering at the hands of the Jews, just like Jesus did.

The Palestinians borrowed this hateful equation from several unseemly sources. First, it draws on classic Christian anti-Semitic motifs imported from Europe to the Middle East in modern times by church clerics and others. Islam has its own embedded anti-Semitic slurs, but the first blood libel against the Jews in the region came courtesy of Italian clergymen serving in Damascus in 1840. Even among British Mandate authorities stationed in Jerusalem in the 1930s, it was a commonly heard refrain that “the Jews killed Jesus . . . and they would do it again.”

Nazi propagandists also exported their anti-Semitic imagery and ideology into the Middle East, both before the war and after, when many received refuge in Cairo and Damascus. Some of the vilest anti-Semitic Nazi cartoons, especially those using the symbol of the cross, have been copied like stencils by Arab cartoonists for decades. The Palestinian Jesus is also modeled on the Nazi fiction of an Aryan Jesus: that the pure, noble Christ could never have sprung from the corrupt, evil Jews but was of Roman or Germanic ancestry.

A third source is the liberation theology that flourished in Latin America in the last century. As Marxist elements started stirring revolutions throughout the region, many local Catholic priests began supporting the cause by portraying Christ as a revolutionary who fought Roman oppression. Although the Vatican would eventually warn that their Scriptures were being wrongly used to justify violence against oppressors, the tenants of liberation theology were readily adopted by radical black activists in the United States (e.g., Rev. Jeremiah Wright), the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa (Bishop Desmond Tutu), and the Palestinian nationalist camp.

Finally, Islamic culture has always had a penchant for openly tampering with the historic figure of Jesus. As Jerusalem Post op-ed editor Seth J. Frantzman rightly noted earlier this week, Islam acknowledges the links between Jesus and the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as the lawgiver Moses, kings David and Solomon, and even the tribes of Israel. But Islam also completely warps his identity in many other ways that are irreconcilable with the Bible, especially the New Testament. For instance, the Jesus of the Koran was born to Mary, but she just happens to also be Miriam, the sister of Moses. He is considered a Muslim prophet, but his claim to be the Son of God is flatly denied. In addition, the Muslim Jesus was never really crucified but ascended to heaven from where He will return one day to eradicate Christianity and proclaim Islam as the true religion.

Trivializing the Crucifixion of Jesus

Thus, we find in the Palestinian Jesus a toxic melding of a Marxist guerrilla and Aryan hero, along with heavy doses of Christian and Islamic anti-Semitism and supersessionism. The result has been a morbid competition among Palestinian leaders and elites as to who can come up with the sharpest quip, the cleverest analogy, the most creative metaphor equating the contemporary Palestinian plight with the sufferings of Christ.

At a news conference at the United Nations in 1983, Arafat called Jesus “the first Palestinian fedayee [militiaman] who carried his sword.” When Arafat triumphantly took control of Bethlehem in December 1995, he told a throng gathered in Manger Square that he was there to liberate “the birthplace of our Lord the Messiah . . . the city of the Palestinian Jesus!” During a visit to the Vatican a few years later,
Arafat even greeted Pope John Paul II as “the successor of Peter, the first Palestinian pope.”

Arafat’s successor, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, has described Jesus as “a Palestinian messenger of love, justice, and peace.” Prominent PA official Saeb Erekat has referred to Jesus as the “first Palestinian shahid [martyr].” His colleague Jibril Rajoub once exclaimed: “The greatest Palestinian in history since Jesus is Yasser Arafat.”

But the real masters at gilding the Palestinian Jesus are Palestinian Christians. Even though they should know better, it seems they have lived so long within a dominant Muslim culture that they too find it acceptable to tamper with the historic identity of Jesus.

Anglican priest Naim Ateek, founder of the Sabeel Palestinian Liberation Theology Center, delivered an Easter message in 2001 lamenting: “It seems to many of us that Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him . . . Palestine has become one huge Golgotha. The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily.”

Sami Awad, a sponsor of the biannual Christ at the Checkpoint conference, once gave a Christmas message where he likened Israeli troops searching for terrorists in Bethlehem with “Herod’s soldiers” who slaughtered the infants of the town two millennia ago.

But it was Edward Said, the tenured Columbia professor and Arafat speechwriter, who first popularized the Palestinian Jesus and then perfected it in poetic cadence. In his 1988 BBC documentary film My Beautiful Old House, the late Said spoke of the Palestinians having to endure “this endless Calvary . . . this constant crucifixion.”

A Devious Lie
So to be sure, there is nothing innocent about the Palestinian Jesus. It is a viscous double-edged sword in that it: 1) seeks to rob Jesus of his Jewish heritage as part of the Palestinian disinformation campaign to sever the Jewish link to the Jews’ ancestral homeland, especially in the eyes of the Christian West, and 2) aims to stir up hostility toward the Jewish people by exploiting classic Christian anti-Semitic motifs, most notably that the collective Jews of Israel are still crucifying the real people of Jesus in the land—the Palestinians.

The Jewish Jesus
This falsehood is extra devious in that most Palestinians know the Jewish people are reticent to claim Jesus as one of their own, due to all the Christian atrocities committed against them in his name. Yet if there is one positive coming out of this latest tussle over the Palestinian Jesus, it is that more and more Jews are beginning to reclaim Jesus as a son of Israel.

This modern-day trend started with Jewish scholars such as Martin Buber, who always spoke of Jesus as his “elder brother,” and Prof. David Flusser, who viewed him as his favorite “rabbi.” Now we can add the son of Israel’s prime minister to that list.

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