

Christian peacemakers' creepy crush

There it is: A woman who expresses a desire for peace, speaks in the same breath of how honored she is to be a guest of a family that has incited hostility and violence against Israelis for years.

by Dexter Van Zile



Palestinian teen Ahed Tamimi

Christian peacemakers are supposed to promote nonviolence, but when they come into the presence of Palestinians who say hateful things against Israel and promote acts of violence against its citizens, some of these folks get really excited in an unwholesome sort of way. It's creepy.

They are not as bad as the teenagers who screamed in adoration

at the Beatles and the Rolling Stones during the British invasion in the 1960s, but they're bad enough. They're more like rock critic Jon Landau, who after attending a Springsteen concert in 1974 wrote, "I saw rock and roll future and its name is Bruce Springsteen."

Longtime Sabeel activist Don Wagner had his Springsteen moment after meeting Yasser Arafat at the White House in 1992. In a 1993 book he co-wrote with Dan O'Neill, a co-founder of the Christian charity Mercy Corps, Wagner wrote, "Yasser Arafat is, without a doubt, the most intriguing personality in the Middle East," and that "Both Dan and I have met Arafat and consider him a charismatic leader who is solely devoted to establishing a state for the Palestinians." "Intriguing" and "charismatic"? That's the type of stuff you'd see written in the pages of Tiger Beat back in the day. Like I said, creepy.

Similar fawning was displayed at the recent Christ at the Checkpoint Conference organized earlier this year by Bethlehem Bible College. On May 29, 2018, the second day of the conference, organizers affiliated brought three busloads of Christian peace activists from Europe and North America to the home of Bassem Tamimi in Nabi Saleh, an Arab village near Ramallah. The goal was to expose Christians about "nonviolent resistance in the village."

The most prominent member of the Tamimi family, Ahed, is currently in prison for slapping an Israeli soldier. In a YouTube video produced around the time of her arrest, Ahed called on Palestinians to engage in stabbing and "martyrdom operations" (aka suicide attacks) and stone-throwing against Israelis.

According to Petra Marquardt-Bigman, Ahed's mother Nariman posted a graphic that told potential attackers where to target their knives for the most damaging and lethal effect during the "Stabbing Intifada" in 2015. She has also expressed support for the Sbarro Massacre perpetrated by her husband's

cousin Ahlan Tamimi in August 2001. (So much for the Tamimis' commitment to "nonviolent resistance.")

The activists are pretty excited to be visiting the Tamimis, even if they can't meet their jailed hero, Ahed. They are still able to meet her younger cousin who goes by the name "Jana Jihad." And they also get a chance to hear the Tamimi patriarch, Bassem, talk about what it is like to live in Nabi Saleh. Bassem is a veteran polemicist. At an event in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in October 2015, Tamimi spoke of how Zionists "bully" the media in the United States and accused Israel of using the Holocaust as an excuse for its actions.

"They become sick," he said. "They can't feel the Palestinian suffering because of the Holocaust. They can't recognize they're terrorists against the Palestinians because it's less than Hitler. The Israelis kill the Palestinians with 22-millimeter bullets but do not put them into ovens," he said. "For that they are different."

Standing on his porch before an audience of about 200 Christian groupies, Tamimi talks about the suffering he and his family have endured as a result of the conflict. "I have been in jail nine times if my life," he says. "My cousin, five times. My wife, five times."

He recounts a long list of relatives who have been injured or killed in their confrontations with Israeli soldiers and speaks of being tortured by the Israelis in 1993 and paralyzed for 14 days as a result. He says the day he was released his sister was killed by an Israeli. "They killed my brother-in-law in front of the family in 2012," he says. Predictably, Tamimi does not mention the role his cousin Ahlan played in the Sbarro Massacre of 2001, which killed 15 civilians and injured 130 people.

After Tamimi is through speaking, Janna Jihad is given a chance to speak and she, like Bassem, tells a story of

suffering. Billed as the “youngest journalist in the world,” Little Miss Jihad laments that Palestinian children as young as 12 are arrested and interrogated by Israeli soldiers. No mention is made of the Israelis who have been killed by Palestinian rock-throwers.

Sami Awad from the Holy Land Trust opens it up for questions. I raise my hand and I get called on first. “I heard some stories about some terrible suffering,” I said. “I guess my question is, ‘How much of that suffering could have been avoided if Arafat had said yes to the Clinton Parameters?’” It’s a fair question. If Arafat had accepted the plan put forth by President Bill Clinton, the Palestinians would have achieved statehood and brought an end to a war that caused the suffering he described. Instead, he said no and thousands of people have died as a result.

Tamimi pauses before answering. Eventually, he finds his footing. “Why we must accept to have less land than we deserve? Why we must forget our land and our homeland and our rights. Why all the time all the world wants the Palestinians to change their agenda to be acceptable in the Israeli society and the Israeli government. Why all the pressure come on the Palestinians. Why you want to victimize more the Palestinians?”

And on Tamimi goes complaining about settlement growth in the West Bank, the collapse of the Oslo process and the expectation that the Palestinians are forced to accept a state on 22% of what they had been originally offered under the UN Partition plan (which Arab leaders rejected). “This is the normal issue,” he says.

In response to his rant, the audience rewards Tamimi’s truculence with applause. Someone else, an elderly man with an English accent, asks a question. “We’re all on the same side here,” he declares before asking if the people in the audience can sign a petition. Tamimi had just made it clear that he was

ready for another round of conflict, and yet here was one of his groupies responding to him like he was George Harrison singing "My Sweet Lord."

And on it goes. Later a woman raises her hand and declares, "I don't have a question as much as I want to tell you how honored I am to be here with your family. I thank you for your story." She says that as an American her heart is heavy and that as a Christian she prays for peace for Palestinians "because God is greater than any of these political establishments and so I just wanted to thank you and I'm honored to be with you today."

There it is: A woman who expresses a desire for peace, speaks in the same breath of how honored she is to be a guest of a family that has incited hostility and violence against Israelis for years.

These people are not peacemakers. They are creepy and sad groupies who reward grievance-mongering Palestinian extremists with perverse and undeserved adulation that only gives fuel to the fire of hostility in the Holy Land.

First published in the