

Prince Charles in Bethlehem: “It breaks my heart” to see Palestinian suffering

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Prince Charles was recently in Israel, along with many world leaders, for the observance of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. He visited the President’s Residence, where he told President Reuven Rivlin that “For me, this [visit] is a very significant experience. Many of my teachers at school were Holocaust survivors, and we are all deeply committed to combating antisemitism.” He went to the Israel Museum, and saw the Dead Sea Scrolls and other artifacts that provided irrefutable evidence for the thousands of years of Jewish history made in the Land of Israel. He went to Yad Vashem for the main ceremony. He was, of course – how could he not be? – deeply moved. He proclaimed his sympathy for the

past sufferings of the Jews. And he meant it.

Later, at a reception at the British ambassador's residence in Ramat Gan, the Prince expressed his admiration for the Start-Up Nation's remarkable display of ingenuity and creativity. After meeting the people behind technological projects, he [said](#): "It seems to me like Israeli genius is maintaining the entire structure of the NHS, along with a great deal of other technology," and he spoke of "riveting developments and ingenious inventions." That's quite something: stating that the entire structure of Britain's National Health Service is being maintained by "Israeli genius." Israel's unstoppable inventiveness is now resulting not just in patents and profits and worldwide wonderment, but also in political benefits.

Prof. Hossam Haick of the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology presented the Sniff Phone, an electronic nose that can detect diseases from exhaled breath, to the crown prince. Hayah received a UK-Israel bilateral scientific research excellence grant. Prof. Tal Dvir of Tel Aviv University showed the prince his work on 3D printed hearts.

Prince Charles was also presented with sustainability projects: HomeBiogas, a device to produce natural gas from home waste, and Watergen filtration system, which draw waters from humidity in the air.

So far, so good.

But then there was [this](#):

A speech by the heir to the UK throne, urging 'freedom, justice, equality,' was described by a TV station as 'biggest show of support ever' for the Palestinians by a member of the royal family.

Britain's Prince Charles said on Friday that he was heartbroken to witness the "suffering" and "hardship" endured

by the Palestinians.

The remarks by the heir to the British throne, who was visiting the West Bank town of Bethlehem, were described by Britain's Sky News TV as constituting "the biggest show of support that a member of the Royal family ever has [expressed] for the Palestinians."

Visiting the town revered by Christians as the birthplace of Jesus, Charles said: "It breaks my heart therefore that we should continue to see so much suffering and division. No one arriving in Bethlehem today could miss the signs of continued hardship, and the situation you face."

It breaks Prince Charles's heart to see – in Bethlehem – “so much suffering and division.” That statement demands discussion. There has certainly been “suffering and division” in Bethlehem – it's the “suffering” of Bethlehem's Christians. And there is “division” in Bethlehem, between the town's Muslims and its Christians. In 1950, 86% of the population of Bethlehem was Christian; now it has plummeted to below 10%. Why should this have happened? Prince Charles undoubtedly does not know how that Christian town turned into a Muslim one. So let's explain it to him.

As Muslim numbers grew, and Muslims became more aggressive, the Christians in Bethlehem suffered. They felt keenly that they were being inexorably replaced by those who despised them. There were more mosques. There were more shops owned by Muslims who were happy to sell Christian themed souvenirs to tourists. In the schools, as the student population became more Muslim, the subjects taught reflected that fact: less attention to Christian history, much more to Muslim history. There were often clashes between Muslims and Christians: who was hogging the best spaces in the open markets, who was badmouthing whom to tourists, who received preferential treatment from the municipality – it all contributed to bad

blood and to the decisions of so many Christians to leave their native town of Bethlehem.

Israel had nothing to do with that "suffering" of Bethlehem's Christians, and as a matter of fact, it was only when Bethlehem was governed by the Israelis, after the Six-Day War, that the outflow of Christians noticeably decreased. But ever since Bethlehem came under the rule of the Palestinian Authority, Christians have again been leaving Bethlehem. The same phenomenon could be seen in Gaza, where there were 5,000 Christians when Israel pulled out in 2005; now there are fewer than 1,000.

Muslims in Bethlehem have made life difficult and unpleasant for the Christians who remain. It is hard for them to conduct normal and secure lives living, as they do, in a Muslim sea. The Christians have to worry about angering the Muslim majority; they mustn't say or do the wrong thing lest thin-skinned Muslims, quick to anger, take offense. Christians in Bethlehem need to show that they know their place. And the Palestinian Authority makes it hard for the Christians to conduct their business without interference. A Christian souvenir shop or restaurant might want to expand, but a Muslim competitor can put the kibosh on all such projects. A muezzin's wail, the azan electronically amplified, can make it hard for Christians to stay sleep before dawn or fall asleep after dusk. It can drown out the sound of church bells. When 9 out of 10 residents are Muslim, Christians are not wrong to feel uneasy in Bethlehem.

Of course the PA makes life difficult for Muslims, too. There is massive corruption; Mahmoud Abbas and his two sons are worth \$400 million, while lesser leaders, like Saeb Erekat, have helped themselves only to millions. This corruption is cause, too, for Palestinian "suffering," for ordinary Palestinians have to endure the spectacle of the lavish villas and lifestyles of those who rule over them, while they must scramble to survive. No wonder that 2/3 of the Palestinians

say they want Mahmoud Abbas to quit. But he won't. The grasping Mahmoud Abbas is in the 15th year of his four-year term. He needs to make more money before he retires; Arafat made off with billions; why shouldn't Mahmoud Abbas have the same opportunities? But what does credulous and ignorant Prince Charles know about any of this? If there is "suffering" and "hardship" in Bethlehem, it should be laid squarely at the door of the Palestinian Authority. Israel is no longer in charge, and cannot be blamed either for the mistreatment of Christian by Muslim Arabs, or for the corruption and mismanagement both of the local government and of the Palestinian Authority.

Speaking at Casa Nova, a Franciscan pilgrim house near the Church of the Nativity, Charles went on: "And I can only join you, and all communities, in your prayers for a just and lasting peace. We must pursue this cause with faith and determination, striving to heal the wounds which have caused such pain."

Charles says he wants to "pursue this cause of a just and lasting peace...striving to heal the wounds which have caused such pain." What exactly are those "wounds" that need to be healed? Does he know that there is no way to establish a permanent peace between Muslims and Unbelievers, because of the more than 100 verses in the Qur'an that command Muslims to engage in violent Jihad against Unbelievers? How does Prince Charles propose to do away with those verses that instruct Muslims to fight, to kill, to smite at the necks of, to strike terror in the hearts of, the Infidels? The Qur'an is immutable and uncreated; it cannot be changed. And how would Charles attempt to deal with the Qur'anic verses that tell Muslims that they are the "best of peoples" and that non-Muslims are "the most vile of created beings"? I suspect that Prince Charles has no idea what's in the Qur'an. Or he may have been shown the abridged version of 5:32, which seems to denounce killing instead of what it really does, which is to describe

when killing is permissible, and 2:256 (“There is no compulsion in religion”). Perhaps, when he returns to Clarence House, he can take time from his busy schedule of handshaking and ribbon-cutting, and read the Qur’an. If he really manages to take it in, to not read but comprehend, the resulting revelation would do him, and his country, good.

He added: “It is my dearest wish that the future will bring freedom, justice and equality to all Palestinians, enabling you to thrive and to prosper.”

In what Muslim country, of the 57 members of the O.I.C, is there “freedom, justice, and equality” for everyone? There is no such Muslim country. And neither Hamas that rules in Gaza, nor the Palestinian Authority that rules in the West Bank – offers that “freedom, justice, and equality” for the Palestinians which is Prince Charles’ “dearest wish.”

Later, after he held talks with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, the official PA news agency WAFA said Abbas told the prince he was grateful to the UK “for accepting the two-state solution and rejecting the US-led ‘deal of the century’.”

Prince Charles did not “accept the two-state solution.” He said nothing about it. Nor did Charles reject the American “deal of the century.” He said nothing about it. But that doesn’t matter to Mahmoud Abbas. President Abbas was doing what he so often does: putting words in the mouth of an interlocutor, knowing full well when that other person will not deny the false attribution, but pass over it in dignified silence.

US President Donald Trump said Thursday he would unveil his Israeli-Palestinian peace plan within days. The PA has preemptively rejected it. The UK has not taken an official position on it.

Sky quoted officials representing the prince as saying he was trying to remain "neutral" in the course of his trip – his first official visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories.

If Charles was trying to remain "neutral," he wasn't trying very hard. He seems to have been deeply affected by his meetings with the "Palestinians," who no doubt had been thoroughly coached in how they were to wear their "suffering" on their sleeves. Some may even have been schooled to tell the Prince their own sad stories, carefully rehearsed, of what they had endured at the hands of the malevolent Israelis. Prince Charles may well have been taken in, but it is never too late to set him straight.

Prince Charles was in Israel to take part in the observance of the 75th anniversary since the liberation of Auschwitz. He went to the President's House, to be greeted by President Reuven Rivlin. He visited the Israel Museum, where he saw the Dead Sea Scrolls and other visible evidence of the Jews' connection, over more than 2000 years, to the Land of Israel.

During his visit to Bethlehem, the prince visited the Church of the Nativity, where he attended an unprecedented Ecumenical Service marking what his official residence, Clarence House, tweeted was the "first time that the three Christian churches have collectively held a service to celebrate the contribution of Christian communities across the Holy Land and wider Middle East."

Has Prince Charles forgotten how Palestinian terrorists, from Hamas, Fatah, and Islamic Jihad, took over the Church of the Nativity in 2002, bringing guns and explosives with them, and firing on the Israelis from inside the church, knowing that the Israelis, unlike themselves, would demonstrate their respect for the sanctity of the place and not enter?

As for “celebrating the contribution of Christian communities” in the Holy Land and “the wider Middle East,” Prince Charles could help the dwindling Christian communities by raising his voice in protest at their mistreatment, from the killings of Assyrians and Chaldeans in Iraq to the bombing of Coptic Churches in Egypt. He might also try to discover, even perhaps ask aloud of his “Palestinian” hosts, why it is that the percentage of Christians in Bethlehem has steadily declined, from 86% in 1950 to less than 10% today, and further, why did the percentage not decrease during the years when Israel controlled Bethlehem. He could also ask why there were 5,000 Christians in Gaza when the Israelis pulled out in 2005, and fewer than 1,000 in the Strip today.

He also met with local storekeepers and iconographers, visited the Mosque of Omar, held a reception at which he met with “guests including people who work with Palestinian refugees and Palestinian Christians,” Clarence House said.

This is the first time that the three Christian churches have collectively held a service to celebrate the contribution of Christian communities across the Holy Land and wider Middle East.

According to Wafa, Abbas, hosting the prince later in the day, thanked the UK “for its assistance to the Palestinian people in building state institutions, as well as its assistance to the UNRWA, and for accepting the two-state solution and rejecting the US-led “deal of the century.”

The U.K. has in the past accepted the “two-state solution,” but that was before Boris Johnson became Prime Minister. Johnson has been described as the most pro-Israel prime minister in British history, and his cabinet the most pro-Israel as well, with Sajid Javid (Chancellor of the Exchequer), Dominic Raab (Foreign Secretary), and Priti Patel (Home Secretary). It is possible that, following the American

“deal of the century,” the U.K. may rethink its support for a “two-state solution,” a meretricious phrase that assumes what must be proven – that “two states” are indeed a “solution.” Those who recognize that the Jihad against Israel has no end until the Jewish state disappears understand that any “solution” that weakens Israeli deterrence will whet, not sate, Arab Muslim appetites for more.

As for Abbas’ thanking the U.K. for “rejecting the US-led ‘deal of the century,’” the U.K. had not done so, and could not have done so, since that “deal” had not yet been made public at the time Abbas spoke.

When Mahmoud Abbas refers to the U.K.’s help in building “state institutions” for the Palestinians, what can he have had in mind? It couldn’t have been “democratic” institutions, for the PA is run by a despot who is serving the fifteenth year of a four-year presidential term, and who has, with his sons, amassed a \$400 million fortune. The U.K. did not help build an independent judiciary, for there is none in the Palestinian Authority. The U.K. could not have helped build a strong parliamentary democracy, because the Palestine Legislative Council (the Parliament) has been defunct for over 12 years. Finally, the U.K. can’t have helped put in place strong human-rights guarantees, because there are none in the PA – no guaranteed freedom of speech, no right of assembly, no free exercise of religion, no equality between the sexes – in the police state run for the benefit of Mahmoud Abbas, his family, and his collaborators.

“Our hope in the near future,” Wafa further quoted Abbas saying, “is that Britain recognizes the State of Palestine, because we’ve heard that the British Parliament recommended this to the government. So we hope that this will happen.”

Hope away, Mahmoud Abbas. There will be no British recognition of the State of Palestine, one suspects, as long as Boris

Johnson is P.M., and his cabinet continues to include Sajid Javid, Dominic Raab, and Priti Patel.

Wafa said Prince Charles praised "the historical Palestinian-British relations and said he looks forward to achieving a just peace in the region."

Prince Charles should be reminded that there is little to praise, and much to criticize, about those "historical Palestinian-British relations," and what they meant for the Jews of Mandatory Palestine and in Europe, too. When Arabs were murdering defenseless Jews in Jerusalem in 1920, and the Jewish leader Vladimir Jabotinsky tried to organize a defense force for the Jews, the British did not punish the Arab killers, but sentenced Jabotinsky to 15 years in jail (an international outcry followed, leading to Jabotinsky's release).

In another infamous chapter of "Palestinian (Arab)-British relations," the British closed off to Jewish immigration 77% of the territory originally to have been assigned, according to the Mandate for Palestine, to the future Jewish state, and handed all of Palestine east of the Jordan River over to the Hashemite Emir Abdullah, to form his newly-created Emirate of Transjordan.

In 1929, when the Arabs conducted a pogrom against the Jews in Hebron, the second holiest city in Judaism, the British had received advance notice of the Arab plans, but sent no additional police or troops to protect the Jews. There was exactly one British policeman, Raymond Cafferata, who commanded a force of 18 mounted police and 15 on foot in Hebron. All but one were Arabs, and later, during the pogrom, some of those Arab policemen joined in the killing. It was a horrible business; babies were decapitated; women raped and disemboweled; in the end, no Jews were left in Hebron. Had the British cared, they could easily have sent reinforcements and

prevented the whole thing.

During the Arab Revolt, that lasted from 1936 to 1939, the British took little interest in helping the Jews defend themselves against Arab attacks. There was one British officer, Captain Orde Wingate, a Christian Zionist and deeply sympathetic to the Jews. He helped organize and train Jews to take the fight to the enemy. He founded the Special Night Squads of Jewish fighters who went on the offensive against marauding Arabs. However, his deepening political involvement with the Zionist cause and an incident where he spoke publicly in favor of the formation of a Jewish state while he was on leave in Britain caused his superiors in Palestine to remove him from command. He was so deeply associated with political causes in Palestine – i.e., his support for Zionism – that they considered him compromised as an intelligence officer in the country. He was too much on the side of the Jews for their taste, and in May 1939, he was transferred to Britain. He later helped the Ethiopians resist Mussolini's forces, and then, during the Second World War, Wingate was sent to Burma, where he organized the Chindits, a guerrilla force that harried the Japanese. Wingate died in a plane crash in Burma, and is buried, along with the American servicemen, who died with him at Arlington National Cemetery. He is considered the father of the IDF. Among the British military and civilian authorities in Mandatory Palestine, Wingate stood out as the lone pro-Jewish exception.

In 1939, the British government adopted a White Paper that limited Jewish immigration into Mandatory Palestine to 15,000 a year, for five years, after which any Jewish immigration would be subject to an Arab veto, which in practice meant an end to such immigration. At a time of maximum peril for Europe's Jews, the British government, to placate the Arabs, limited Jewish immigration to 15,000 a year through the entire war, and blocked Jews from entering Palestine. Perhaps as many as a million Jews, it has been suggested, might have been

saved – the warm-water ports of Romania stayed open all through the war – had the British fulfilled their own solemn responsibilities under the Mandate for Palestine, to “facilitate Jewish immigration” and to encourage “close Jewish settlement on the land.”

After World War II, when surviving Jews in D.P. camps in Europe were trying to reach Palestine, British ships turned back these desperate people. The most famous example of this was the Exodus, a ship carrying 4,500 Jewish refugees from D.P. camps in Europe to Palestine in 1947. The British kept the ship from unloading passengers in Palestine, and instead the ship, with its desperate human cargo, was forced to return to Europe, and the Jews on board were sent back to D.P. camps in Germany.

One final example of British “even-handedness.” While the British, and the Americans placed an embargo on arms to both Arabs and Jews inside Palestine itself during the 1947-1949 hostilities, the British had previously armed Egyptian and Iraqi forces, and the British both armed and trained the Arab Legion of Jordan which, under the command of Sir John Glubb (“Glubb Pasha”), proved to be the best fighting force on the Arab side during the 1948-49 war, responsible for seizing, and holding, the West Bank.

Prince Charles should, in his library at Clarence House, study the history of how the British discharged their responsibilities when they held the Mandate for Palestine. He could start by reading the Mandate’s provisions, and studying its maps. He could look into how the Emirate of Transjordan was created by the British, who closed off all of Eastern Palestine to Jewish immigration, and instead handed over that territory to the Hashemite Abdullah, in order to create a state for him to rule. He could investigate how the British during the Mandate period treated the Jews, both those living in Palestine, and those who were prevented from finding refuge in Palestine from the Nazis. It might have a salutary effect,

making Prince Charles more aware of what the Jews of Palestine endured because of British perfidy, and possibly, make him less quick to embrace the “Palestinians” whose supposed “suffering” so concerns him. If he engages in such study, he will discover that the suffering and betrayals endured by the Jews of Mandatory Palestine at the hands of the British were of a different order altogether.

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