

What Needs To Be Said To "Churches Together" About Its Lenten Readings

The letter below was sent to me with the implied request that I post it here. Of course I am glad to comply.

Dear All

A few weeks ago I came across these Lenten Readings and raised my concern with various pro Israel groups in the UK and Ireland. The brilliant Steven Jaffe wrote up this excellent letter writing campaign.

*Can I please ask that you **DO** send a quick email, there are some points below to raise. Your email could be the one that persuades Churches Together to change their biased anti Israel Lenten Readings.*

[*Letter writing campaign: Churches Together Lenten Readings*](#)

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland have produced a series of readings for the run-up to Easter (bob.fyffe@ctbi.org.uk).

Here are some points to consider highlighting:

- The reading about Israel nowhere refers to it as a democratic state, omits the fact that Israel allows freedom of worship for all, or that it is one of few countries in the region where its Christian community is growing (annual growth rate of 1.2%, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012).
- Instead Israel's treatment of Christians is presented in the following terms: inequalities, discrimination, vandalism, desecration and deprivation. Whilst there are issues of discrimination against minorities in Israeli society, it must be highlighted that the Arab Christian community in Israel out performs all faiths in key educational markers, such as high school students who earn their diploma (64%, compared to 59% for Jewish Israelis and 48% for Muslim Israelis), and are very well represented in universities and the medical profession.
- In contrast, the readings on Syria, Egypt and the Palestinian Territories, do not focus on Islamist radicalism, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas or IS (the Islamic State). Brave Christians from the West Bank are speaking out about persecution at the hands of the PA and Islamic extremists – but their story is ignored by the CBTI readings, and they are therefore left tragically to stand alone.
- In Egypt the burning of over 80 churches and the murder of scores of Christians by car bombs, sectarian rioting and assassination is passed over in one sentence.
- Israel is criticised for its security barrier, checkpoints and other restrictions. Nowhere is the justification put that these are unfortunately required to preserve life, Jewish and Arab, from violent attacks – such as the recent synagogue murders in Jerusalem and mass stabbings on a Tel Aviv bus.
- Israel's law of return, enabling Jews to emigrate to Israel, is viewed in a negative light – with no reference to Jews fleeing persecution. It is suggested that "olim" without family in Israel have no connection to the land.
- The concern is not just about preparing Christians for Easter by a hostile and insensitive reading about Israel and the Jewish community. Christians should also be concerned about the crass politicisation of their own Bible. The final reading describes Mary, the mother of Jesus, as "a young Palestinian Jewish girl". The New Testament never describes the land as Palestine or its people as Palestinian. The land was designated Palestine by the Roman rulers a century later

Shalom agus *Slán*