

שומרי משפט-רבנים למען זכויות האדם

RABBIS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

حاکمین من اجل حقوق الانسان

8th of Av, 5744
July 26th, 2004

Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick
The Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church
Office of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)
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"Bless us, our Father, all of us as one, with the light of your countenance, for by the light of your countenance you have given us, Lord our God, a Torah of life and the love of goodness, righteousness, blessing, compassion, life, and peace." (Siddur: The Jewish Prayer Book)

Bad Waters: An Open Letter to the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Shalom, Shalom, to the near and to the far,

Rabbis for Human Rights is the organization of Israeli rabbis from every Jewish denomination devoted to the furtherance of Human Rights and the strengthening of Israeli society in the knowledge that all human beings are created in the image of God. Our agenda includes domestic issues of poverty, equal treatment of women and minorities as well as our extensive work on the human rights of Palestinians. As close observers of our region, you know the strong principled stand we take regarding the human rights of our Palestinian neighbors as well as those of the Jewish residents of this Land.

We write to convey our dismay at the steps you took at your recent convention in regard to the Jewish People and the terrible conflict in this Land. A notable lack of empathy characterizes these resolutions. They give evidence of great difficulty in truly hearing what Jewish voices have to say. The human rights of Jews to respectful, equal treatment should be dear to the hearts of all who call upon the Name of the Creator. In your recent decision on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and in your decision to refrain from suspending your "funding of any additional proposals for 'Messianic Judaism'" you violate those rights.

Missionary Activity

Missionary activity directed at the Jews is a statement of utter disrespect for our *brit*, our covenantal relationship with God. Freedom

of speech requires us to support your right to express your religious views, but it does not give you the moral right to attempt to entice Jews to abrogate their *brit* in favor of Christianity, especially by marketing a false form of “Judaism” that you label “messianic.”

Jewish Sin as the “Root of Evil”

Your resolution purporting to support the Geneva Understandings declares without reservation that the “occupation ... has proven to be at the root of evil acts committed against innocent people on both sides of the conflict.”

Like you we hate the Occupation, condemn it and work for its speedy end in a peace accord. However, the Occupation cannot be used to excuse the re-awakening of demons. We are appalled that you conceptualize this Occupation in the same one-sided terms that have been applied for so long by Christian Churches to the real or perceived sins of Jews. Your simplistic declaration is inaccurate and inadequate to explain the situation in all its tragic moral complexity. It is not just that your resolution ignores the homicidal ideologies that have so sadly taken hold among some of our Palestinian neighbors. Nor is the problem just that it averts its eyes from the attempts to destroy our country that transcend the Occupation and precede it by decades. Its deepest flaw lies in the ramifications of the highly charged language you employ. Particularly insensitive to history and appalling in its potential consequences is the allegation that the Occupation is somehow “at the root of evil acts committed.” This is a restatement of the paradigmatic allegation that Jewish sins are somehow especially significant, especially “at the root of evil.”

You passed a resolution directed as a “call ... on the Israeli government,” describing the Occupation in a way that profoundly places Israeli sin alone at the heart of the situation. While we recognize that you deplore terror against Israelis, you direct not one word of criticism to the government of the Palestinian Authority despite its manifest multitude of profound sins against God and the Human Rights of Palestinians and Jews. You ignore the incontrovertible fact that this catastrophe is the product of many causes and that there is guilt enough to share between all parties. People of conscience must act in awareness that the singling out, magnifying and sanctifying of Jewish sins has always been at the core of the terrible evil that we know as anti-Semitism. Failing in this awareness, you cross a line that people of good conscience dare not cross.

Divestiture is a Call for Discrimination Against Jews

The same is true of your call to divest of multinational corporations operating in Israel. Even if it is your intention to be “selective” in your divestiture, the result is a descent into discriminatory behavior against Jews and their State. Based upon your one-sided view of the Occupation, your call for divesting from businesses that interact economically with the Jewish State creates a form of collective economic punishment for nearly half of the Jews of the world who live in Israel as well as for the Arab citizens of our country. Moreover, the experience of many decades of Arab boycott against Israel teaches us that if your resolution is realized, it cannot but create discrimination against Jews as Jews, the world over. This is an act that resonates with examples of discrimination against Jews that we thought we left where they belong, in the trash bin of history.

Peace and Justice

It was incongruous to read this proposal of divestiture in a resolution that claimed to champion the Geneva Understandings. At the heart of the Geneva Initiative lies the hope of attaining peace and justice in the Land through mutual respectful recognition between Palestinians and Jews. This hope cannot be credibly supported by a group of people who pass resolutions that support missionary activity directed at Jews, revive discredited rhetoric in regard to Jewish sin, and promote collective economic punishment and discrimination against Jews.

Sages, Watch Your Words

We welcome further dialogue with you on these issues. It is because we are like you, a group of religious people dedicated to furthering the recognition that human rights flow from the creation of all human beings in the image of God, and because the credibility of Rabbis for Human Rights has been earned in hard work over many years protecting the human rights of both our Jewish and our Palestinian neighbors, particularly in the olive groves and at demonstrations in the Occupied Territories, that we urge you to hear our words, to repent of these decisions and to rethink your relationship with the Jewish People and their State.

We conclude with the words of a great scholar and rabbi, recorded in the section of the Talmud known as “Ethics of the Fathers.” *Avtalyon said, “Sages, watch your words, lest you be punished by exile to a place of bad waters, and lest your students, who follow after you, drink*

and die and, as a result, cause the name of Heaven to be profaned."
{Pirkei Avot 1:11}

Shalom,

Rabbis for Human Rights

אשרי שומרי משפט עושה צדקה בכל-עת (תהלים קו, ג)
Happy are those who act justly, who do right at all times (Ps. 106:3)

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