

THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Why Do Christians Fall For BDS?

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If the Church can recant 'Replacement Theology,' then those who seek a world with no Israel can repent this long-held spiritual envy of God's Chosen People

Discrimination. Social and economic isolation. Expulsion. Extermination. Jewish suffering in the common era follows an all-too-familiar pattern. It happened in medieval Europe. It happened under Hitler. With the rise of BDS, could it be that history is repeating itself?

BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) is a copycat Palestinian-spawned movement adopting methods used to overthrow apartheid South Africa. It accuses Israel of being apartheid, even though Arabs have always had the vote and sit in the Knesset, with their own political parties. It claims to support Palestinian rights, while destroying Palestinian jobs in Israeli companies forced out of the West Bank, the biblical heartland of Judea and Samaria. If Palestinians are not benefitting from BDS, then what is its real intention?

BDS calls Israel's very existence into question. In Muslim thinking, any territory conquered by Islam must always be Muslim. This is why the day of the rebirth of the State of Israel is called "the Nakba" (catastrophe) in Arabic. It is also the historic reasoning behind ISIS warriors' declared intention of reconquering Spain.

Interestingly, the BDS movement is not alone in calling Israel's very existence into question. So does the Church's "Replacement Theology."

Could it be that religion is driving both Muslim and Christian proponents of BDS?

For Christian adherents of Replacement Theology, Israel has no right to its land, having been — in their view — rejected by God and replaced by the Church.

It is deeply concerning to see how inclined many Christians are to support BDS, which is, in effect, a modern reincarnation of medieval antisemitism. The Methodist Church of Great Britain is the latest to join the BDS bandwagon.

False beliefs die hard.

"Do you think the suffering of the Jews is a result of their saying 'His blood be upon us'?"

I was having dinner in north London, when my host, a Middle Eastern Christian lawyer, posed the question to me. Sitting around the table were his teenage sons, along with members of the extended family.

Off the cuff, I replied, "If Jesus prayed, 'Father, forgive, they know not what they do,' then who am I to say they are not forgiven? Besides, according to the Bible, both Jews and Gentiles were responsible for His death." I then cited from a book by our founder Mother Basilea Schlink: "Yes, His blood did come upon His people, but for healing and reconciliation, cleansing and salvation."

Reprinted from The Times of Israel—14 September 2021

After a moment's reflection, my host nodded in approval, remarking, "Good answer."

Our lawyer friend, never one to miss an opportunity to educate his sons through debates, was not an antisemite; he was simply puzzled about the sufferings of the Jewish people. Nor was he the only one. So was the church father Augustine, who came up with the theory that the Jews were a witness people of the dire consequences of disobeying God. But, over the centuries, such theological reasonings contributed to what is known as Replacement or Supersession Theology: the Jews have no future in God's purposes, the Church has replaced them. This, in a nutshell, is the Teaching of Contempt.

The Anglican Church, along with others, now repudiates the Teaching of Contempt. It has acknowledged that antisemitic medieval church laws helped pave the way for the Holocaust. In particular, it has acknowledged the precedent set at the Oxford Synod in 1222, called the magna carta of canon law, with the imposition of the "badge of shame." This in turn fueled antisemitic sentiment, culminating in the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290. The Church of England is exploring the idea of a public act of repentance for 2022. A laudable goal.

Quoting concerns regarding historic antisemitism, the UK has decided not to attend the UN's Durban Conference anniversary event in September 2021. This is welcome news, considering that BDS was [first launched at the original Durban Conference](#).

Sadly, every flare-up in the Israel-Gaza conflict is matched by a surge in antisemitism. So [reports a charity monitoring antisemitism](#) and providing security for British Jews. For those of us who are not Jewish, I don't think we will ever understand what it is like for our Jewish neighbors to watch on the screen crowds chanting the BDS slogan: "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

In May, a convoy of cars decorated with Palestinian flags drove through a Jewish inner London suburb shouting antisemitic abuse, which was caught on video. Four men were arrested and put on bail. In recent weeks, on separate occasions, five religious Jewish males in the area of Stamford Hill, were attacked in broad daylight by the same assailant shouting "allahu akbar". A man is being held in custody on suspicion of 'racially aggravated assaults'. For the Jewish community, however, such incidents yet again underline the fragility of their existence. In the words of one Jewish witness, "I don't feel safe in my own home, and that is what terrifies me."

Similar fears have been expressed to us by Jewish friends, and, for years now, we have been involved with Holocaust survivors. Often, we are in touch with family members, many of whom suffer from stress disorders due to intergenerational trauma, a well-documented phenomenon.

If Replacement Theology lies behind historic or latent antisemitism in the UK, what lies behind Replacement Theology? Envy? Envy of Israel as God's Chosen People, with a right to the Promised Land? Envy is an ugly word. If spiritual pride is the worst kind of pride, then surely spiritual envy is the worst.

As the Jewish people approach Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, maybe this is an appropriate moment for us as Christians to consider how we need to get right with God, who calls Himself the God of Israel, and with our elder brother Israel. In 2001, I was in Jerusalem on the eve of Yom Kippur as silence fell upon a nation seeking to put right its relationship with God and others. The Jewish people take repentance seriously. Do we?