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CONFIDENTIAL

**ARAB PROPAGANDA IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES
- A Summary of Findings -**

**AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES**

**Prepared by the Interreligious Affairs Department
American Jewish Committee**



May 1969

Arab propagandists have launched an intensive campaign to bring about what one Arab Christian religious leader calls a "Copernican mental change" in church sympathies toward Israel, and have made substantial headway, especially among certain American Protestant institutional leaders, it was revealed by a study just completed here.

The study, entitled "Arab Influences on the Christian Clergy," which was conducted by the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, also discloses the following conclusions:

- . Arab propagandists and a number of their supporters are employing theological anti-Semitism as well as anti-Zionism in their political struggle against the Jews of Israel. The anti-Semitic materials quoted in the study range from sophisticated theological arguments to the revival of both crude medieval ritual blood libel charges and Nazi propaganda against the Jews.

- . Arab Christians, some under pressure from Arab governments, are using their influence to help undermine Western Christian support for the Jewish State.

- . American Protestant and Orthodox clergymen, operating out of Beirut, Lebanon, and in New York City, have distributed a "master strategy plan" to Christian leaders and seminarians throughout the United States for the purpose of countering Christian popular support of Israel. The 19-point strategy includes an appeal to Christian leaders to "seek cooperation with existing pro-Arab groups in the United States," and a call to "organize boycotts of tours to the Holy Land."

- . A series of pro-Arab organizations have been set up since June 1967 on both national and grass-roots levels, mainly by Protestant clergymen, "to bring the Arab situation to the attention of Congress" and to sway American public opinion through letters-to-the-editor campaigns and the distribution of pro-Arab literature and films. Several officials connected with such groups as the Americans for Middle East Understanding, Americans for Justice in the Middle East, and the American Friends of the Middle East have sent telegrams to the White House and the State Department urging that the United States reverse its commitment to sell Israel 50 Phantom jets.

The Arab propaganda campaign, according to the study, has been stepped by dramatically since the six-day war of June 1967, and now constitutes "a comprehensive, systematic, and well-financed strategy

which makes earlier Arab approaches to the churches appear to be amateur by contrast with the present effort." An estimated ten million dollars, according to Frank Gervasi, an authority on Middle East affairs, have been spent by Arab League states for propaganda purposes in the United States since June 1967 among church groups, as well as among university student and faculty groups, black extremists, mass media, and in other areas.

As an indication of the size of the effort, a report in the Lebanese newspaper Al Hayat states that Metropolitan Philip Saliba, Archbishop of the Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of New York and North America, visited Beirut in June 1968 and urged Arab nations to double their contributions for propaganda to "not less than 20 million dollars to establish information centers in the United States."

The "Copernican mental change" which the Arabs hope to bring about in church thinking on Israel was described by Gabriel Habib, a Lebanese Orthodox leader, in an interview reprinted in the December 19, 1968 issue of the Ecumenical Press Service. In it, Mr. Habib, Middle East Secretary for World Student Christian Federation and Youth Department of the World Council of Churches, called for an end to "the scandalous association of Christianity and Israel, since the state of Israel is considered a new form of Western aggression or a crusade against the Arabs and Islam." The World Council of Churches is an ecumenical federation of 235 Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox denominations throughout the world. Additional pressure has been brought to bear on the World Council to lead an anti-Israel effort by Arab Christian church leaders in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. In a June 27, 1967, letter to the World Council from Beirut, seven Arab Christian patriarchs and clergymen declared that "the State of Israel was unjustly created and should cease to exist as a racial state...Our people do not want to kill Jews but do want the cessation of the racial state of Israel...The continuing presence of Israel in the Middle East should be an affront to the conscience of the Christian West."

In a cable to the Geneva headquarters of the World Council June 19, 1967, the seven Arab Christian leaders called on the Council "to represent to the nations and to the general public" its condemnation "of Israeli aggression on the Arab countries."

The signatories of the letter and the cable were: the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East Greek Orthodox Church, Theodosius VI; the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East Syrian Orthodox Church, Mar Ignatios Yacoub III; and Khoren I Catholicos of Cilicia Armenian

Orthodox Church; Dr. Farid Awdeh, National Evangelical Church of Beirut; Rev. Hovhannes Aharonian, Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches; Rev. Ibrahim Dagher, National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon; and Rev. Samir Kafity, Episcopal Vicar Diocese of the Episcopal Church in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

In response to these appeals, the World Council sent Father Paul Verghese, Associate General Secretary and Bishop-Elect of the Syrian Orthodox Church of India, to meet with Christian leaders in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Egypt. Father Verghese described the purpose of his mission in these words: "to express solidarity" with the Arabs; "to ascertain on the spot...the needs of the suffering people"; and "to understand and interpret to the General Secretary (of the World Council)...the convictions and feelings of people in the Arab countries."

As part of the effort to sway the views of Roman Catholics on Israel, the head of the Egyptian Coptic Church, Patriarch Kyrillos VI has announced plans to visit Pope Paul this spring, according to Cairo's semi-official daily, Al Ahram. The Egyptian paper said that the purpose of the Patriarch's meeting with the Pope is "to discuss the adoption of a unified and positive stand in support of the Arab cause in general and the liberation of Jerusalem in particular." The Patriarch has long been known for his anti-Jewish views, publicly expressed at the time of Vatican Council II when he declared that "the Coptic Church proclaims the Jews' responsibility throughout the ages for crucifying Christ."

The AJC report indicated that mounting pressure by Arab governments on Christian institutions in Arab countries is a significant factor in the actions of Arab Christian leaders hostile to Israel and the Jewish people. As an example of such pressure, as reported by the Ecumenical Press Service on April 11, 1968, the education ministers of the Arab League decided at a conference in Kuwait to close all Christian schools in countries belonging to the Arab League. The action, taken on the recommendation of the Syrian government, was justified on the basis that the religious communities were in opposition to Arab culture and were guilty of proselytism.

The ecumenical bulletin reported that "this measure affects primarily schools in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan" since all schools in Saudi Arabia are state schools and Syria had closed all Christian schools last year.

Syria has also expelled the Roman Catholic congregation of priests

and brothers called the Little Brothers of Jesus. Observers believe that this may be the beginning of the expulsion of all foreign clergy from Syria. In Iraq, the National Council of the Revolutionary Command announced (9/13/68) plans for the nationalization of Al-Hikma University in Baghdad which is conducted by the Jesuits of New England.

Indications of the impact of the efforts to influence a pro-Arab policy among major U.S. Protestant church institutions and leaders are reflected in a number of recent developments:

In September 1968, the General Board of the National Council of Churches, meeting in Houston, Texas, received a report on the "refugee situation in the Middle East." The survey, conducted by Rev. Edwin M. Luidens, general secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, the Rev. Raymond E. Maxwell, of the Episcopal Church, and the Rev. Rodney A. Sundberg, of the United Presbyterian Church, dealt only with the situation of the Arab refugees and made no reference to 500,000 Jews who were refugees from Arab countries.

In seeking to explain the "convictions of Christian people there," the report stated: "Western nations out of a sense of guilt for the persecution of Jews in Europe created the State of Israel and thus contributed toward the persecution of Arabs.

"For 20 years Israel has been permitted to ignore the resolutions of the United Nations aimed at justice for dispossessed Arabs, and thus has been enabled to enlarge and consolidate her position."

According to a Religious News Service report, "there was strongly worded opposition to the survey from some who held it was unbalanced in favor of the Arab position." The refugee report, however, was published in Approach, an official journal of the National Council of Churches and the United Presbyterian Church, under the title, "Do Churches Betray Mid-East Christians?" No mention was made of the opposition to the report during the floor debate. A reprint of the pro-Arab report was made by the Middle East and Europe Department of the Division of Overseas Ministries of the National Council of Churches, and was sent to the 33-member denominations of the Council.

The Church Center at the United Nations, an ecumenical and interdenominational Protestant center, has been recommending the Arab propagandist, M. T. Mehdi, to church agencies and parish churches for their study programs on the Middle East as "a voice (the Church Center) staff had come to respect."

Dr. Mehdi, secretary general of the Action Committee on American-Arab Relations, was twice deported by the U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service as a professional agitator.

Commenting on Mr. Mehdi's application for permanent residency in the U. S., P. S. Esterdy, district director of the U. S. Immigration Service, told the New York Times, (Feb. 10, 1969), "since he has been such an agitator, the question comes if, as a matter of discretion, residency should be granted. Should this kind of man, --a foreigner agitating and creating trouble between brother and brother here--be made a resident of this country?"

One of the Protestant colleges which received the recommendation of Mehdi as a speaker from the Church Center at the U. N. was the Methodist-affiliated Iowa Wesleyan College. The college president, Dr. Franklin H. Littell, observed, "if they can respect Mehdi they should have been more respectful toward Sturmer and Bormann!"

Following the Israeli attack on the Beirut airport, the National Council of Churches sent telegrams on Dec. 31, 1968, to President Johnson and to UN Ambassador J. Russell Wiggins expressing gratitude "for your firm stand in the Security Council...in condemning the Israeli attack on the Beirut Airport, your call to break the pattern of violence and your plea for a meaningful arms agreement in the area." The telegram to President Johnson also added: "We are grateful ... for Mr. Rostow's condemnation of the attack on 'a civil international airport' in a country which has been striving for moderation in the Middle East." The telegrams made no reference to the attack by Arab commandos on an El Al plane at Athens airport, which had preceded the Beirut incident.

[On May 2, 1969, the General Board of the National Council adopted a resolution that represented a significant effort to avoid polarization between pro-Arab or pro-Israel positions, and to focus on human need in the area.]

The crudest example of anti-Semitic literature that has been distributed through Arab information channels in the United States is that of a leaflet headlined, The Secret of the Blood Practices Israel is Enjoined to Observe. Written by Ibrahim Saada and reprinted from the June 21, 1967 edition of a popular Egyptian illustrated weekly, the article revives the medieval ritual murder legend, and the more recent Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Following are excerpts from the leaflet: "Some of the rituals rabbis perform with Christian blood...(include) the kidnapping of children in Syria and Lebanon for the purpose of sucking their

blood on the Jewish Passover...The author notes that "the Jews believe that if they do not mix Christian blood with their unleavened bread at Passover the bread will not hold together."

The article is illustrated with a cartoon, reminiscent of Nazi propaganda journals, showing a hook-nosed, bearded Jew collecting the blood of an Arab child whom he has crucified with lancets.

The writer goes on to quote The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the 19th century forgery which alleged a Jewish world conspiracy. He concludes that "every Jew hopes for the collapse of all other religions so that Judaism shall reign supreme...The leaders of Zion are planning to annihilate Christianity and Islam all over the world."

The leaflet was given to the American Jewish Committee by Christian and Jewish professors on several university campuses who had received them from Arab students inquiring whether Jews continue to follow these practices today.

Buttressing the Arab propaganda effort, the American Jewish Committee study shows, are the efforts of many former Nazis who settled in Egypt, Syria and other Near Eastern Countries after World War II and who now help prepare anti-Israel and anti-Semitic materials. The report quotes Simon Wiesenthal, Director of the Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna, as saying that these ex-Nazis are hoping to continue "the extermination of the Jews that they had to interrupt more than 20 years ago," and now "have the assistance of the Arab governments."

The American Jewish Committee report shows that theological anti-Judaism, regarded by scholars as the basis for secular anti-Semitism, is to be found in documents issued by Arab Christians or by American Christians serving as missionaries and pastors in Arab countries that deal with the religious relationship of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. As an example of "theological anti-Judaism" the report quotes an article entitled, "Is the Old Testament Zionist?" by Dr. William Holladay, professor of Old Testament at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. In it, Dr. Holladay declares, "We who are Christian must take seriously the New Testament affirmation that it is the church, we ourselves, who are the true Israel...we are it, the Israel of God. We have said that (modern) Israel is not in theological continuity with (ancient) Israel in the sense that it is the community charged to continue to be attentive to the voice of the God of judgment and grace who can be met in the Old Testament."

Dr. Holladay's article was reprinted in the Middle East Newsletter, June-July 1968 issue, published by the Americans for Justice in the Middle East.

Similar views were expressed by a group of 66 American missionaries, pastors, and other professional church-related personnel living in Lebanon who sent an "Open Letter to the Christians of the West" in the spring of 1968. Their letter, which was reprinted in four Christian journals in this country and abroad, (Christian Century, Monday Morning, Middle East Newsletter, and Al Montada) states that "the church is the new 'Israel of God' and asserts, 'we must challenge the assumption that the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem, and indeed of large portions of Palestine, represents the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.'" They conclude their appeal with a call to Western Christians "to exert specific political and economic pressures on Israel because of her continued defiance of the resolution of the United Nations."

Father Jean Corbon, a Greek Orthodox priest of Beirut, makes the same theological point in a memorandum of June 17, 1967, to the World Council of Churches:

"God's main object in selecting the Jews as His chosen people was to serve the salvation of mankind and not for them to install themselves as a separate secular nation...It has become public knowledge that the Jews have already deviated from the call assigned to them, thus turning to narrow exclusivity their originally universal call.

"From the Christian point of view, the establishment of Israel as an exclusive state directly violates God's plan concerning the Jews and all mankind."

Commenting on these views, the AJC study notes that "This body of theological writings emanating from Arab centers constitutes a serious regression, a form of theological air pollution, in the present climate of Jewish-Christian relations. There is simply no echo of the new 'theology of Israel' which advanced Catholic and Protestant theologians have been formulating during the past decade." The new theology of Israel is reflected in the writings of such authorities as Father Cornelius Rijk of Rome, director of the Vatican Secretariat of Catholic-Jewish Relations, who has declared, "In our time Christian theology has gained a new religious understanding of the people of Israel through the realization that God continues to be with his people and that the revelation of the Old Testament is now complete as far as the Jewish people are concerned, even though they have not recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah."

These documents containing theological anti-Judaism have been distributed widely among Christian leaders in the United States as part of a packet sent by the Rev. James E. Pierce, a Presbyterian minister who served in Lebanon. In a letter sent to American clergymen on July 10, 1967, Rev. Pierce stated that "the Arab position in general has not been fully clarified," and he urges churchmen "to bring the cutting edge of the Gospel and theological reflection to bear on political Zionism."

Rev. Pierce, who served as associate director of the University Christian Center, representing 15 sponsoring groups, in Beirut and then as president of the Americans for Justice in the Middle East, is now serving as minister of the University Heights Presbyterian Church in the Bronx.

The American Jewish Committee report notes that another American clergyman who has been actively involved in promoting pro-Arab sentiment among Christian church leaders is the Rev. Richard E. Ittner, pastor of the Arlington Avenue Presbyterian Church, Arlington Ave. and Elton St., Brooklyn, New York.

Rev. Ittner represented the University Christian Movement, an ecumenical body of young Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians, at an International Seminar on Justice and Peace in the Near East, held May 10-17, 1966, in Beirut, Lebanon, and Amman, Jordan. The conference which was organized by Christian students in Lebanon under the sponsorship of the World Student Christian Federation, was attended by some forty delegates from Christian organizations in the United States and Europe, and Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian, Jordanian, and Palestinian representatives.

The seminar adopted a 10-point declaration which is hostile to Israel and hails the Al Fatah as a "liberation movement."

Following the seminar, which included a meeting with Al Fatah "resistance fighters," Rev. Ittner prepared a report containing a "master strategy" to help solve the Israel-Arab conflict, and has included the 10-point declaration in a mailing to Christian clergy, seminarians, and university students. The plan, as published by the University Christian Movement in the United States and in Al Montada a Christian news bulletin, published by the Documentation Center of the Ecumenical Secretariat for Youth and Students in the Middle East in Beirut, contains the following among its 19 proposals for action:

. Help disseminate statements of Lebanese missionaries to churches and newspapers.

- . Check for biased reporting and pressure media for more objective analysis.
- . Seek to encourage a TV "White Paper" on the refugee situation.
- . Encourage work and dialogue with the American Council for Judaism (an anti-Zionist group).
- . Attempt to get information into Approach (the United Presbyterian publication, and for a time, the weekly of the National Council of Churches).
- . Meet with the National Council of Churches Near East Committee.
- . Meet with Congressmen, State Department and UN representatives to discuss conflict.
- . Sponsor Arab discussions with Arab student leadership in U.S.
- . Organize letter writing campaign for quick response to crises.
- . Seek to introduce Middle East issues into the 1968 Presidential campaign.
- . Organize boycotts of tours to the Holy Land during the crisis.
- . Show refugee films available through the UN and Jordanian Information Service.

The AJC study lists the names of national and local grass-roots groups that have recently been created to promote the Arab cause. These include groups in San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas, New York, Washington, D.C., Boston, Boulder, Colorado and New Haven, Conn. An example of the grass-roots groups is The American Committee for Justice in the Middle East of Boulder, Colorado. Mrs. Louise Hicks, its head, describes her group's purpose as that of "distributing pro-Arab materials, writing letters to Congressmen and newspaper editors, and building a library of 'dependable' publications on the Middle East."

The study also documents the pro-Arab programs that have been developed in Christian seminaries, and cites Christian journals and films that have been employed to bring about "the Copernican mental change."

The study was compiled by Rabbi A. James Rudin, assistant director of the Interreligious Affairs Department of The American Jewish Committee.

In an introduction to the study, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, national director of interreligious affairs of the American Jewish Committee, comments: "The exposure of this material at this time is intended to alert responsible Christian leaders who lead national institutions as well as their constituency in the communities around the country to the precise nature of the Arab campaign to which they are being subjected. It is also intended to alert and to inform the Jewish community so that it might consider what appropriate steps need to be taken in order to counteract effectively this propaganda and program of defamation.

It is to be hoped that responsible Christians and Jews, concerned about preserving what gains have been made in recent years in Jewish-Christian solidarity, will use this information as the basis of their discussions in the numerous institutes, seminars, and dialogues that continue to take place in various parts of this nation. Out of the discussion ought to come a joint resolution and strategy to confront this problem, and to build a shared approach to bring reconciliation between Arabs and Israelis in the Middle East, rather than to allow the polarization to continue along the lines that this propaganda makes certain."

