

Seasonal Illwill

Michael Kuttner

Every year as Christmas approaches the media can be guaranteed to trot out a negative news item, opinion piece or article about how Israel is responsible for trying to destroy the festive spirit. This past Christmas was no exception and true to form several papers carried news from Bethlehem which managed to convey the usual message of negativity. Apart from the expected distortions concerning the security barrier, which effectively prevents Palestinian Arab terrorists from carrying out terror attacks against Israeli civilians, the story which most certainly must take first prize for unbalanced reporting was the one bewailing the difficulties allegedly encountered by tourists & pilgrims wishing to visit Bethlehem.

Any reader of newspapers, unenlightened by the real facts and relying totally on the local media, would have surmised that the evil Israelis (Jews of course) were guilty of depriving Christian pilgrims, access to this Palestinian Authority controlled city at a time of religious celebration. The "piece de resistance" was the bold assertion by an Arab spokesperson that if Joseph, Mary & baby Jesus were to have tried entering Bethlehem in 2011 they would have been stopped at the security checkpoint on the border, interrogated and refused permission to proceed. That accusation alone conveys a clear message designed to demonise Israel and its Jewish citizens. The fact that newspapers chose to print this rubbish, without any balancing opinions, speaks volumes about how the drip feed of poison contributes to the ongoing campaign of distortion and delegitimisation of the Jewish State.

New Zealand does not share any land borders with a foreign country. Despite this, every person entering or leaving NZ territory must go through passport control and security at their point of entry or departure. This is normal procedure, so why do the media make a frantic fuss over Israel doing the same when individuals wish to enter or leave the Palestinian Authority? New Zealand is not directly targeted by terrorists and despite this the authorities still deem it important to conduct these security checks. Israel, which is a prime target for terrorists and whose legitimacy is denied by almost the entire Moslem world, has therefore even more reason to take precautions. None of this background information is of course mentioned or explained.

The Mayor of Bethlehem and other Palestinian Arab spokespersons were reported complaining that Christian pilgrims, intimidated by the security checks and other alleged Israeli measures, were deterred from visiting the city. Unreported or at least skimmed over without any in depth analysis was the fact that this past Christmas witnessed a record 100,000 tourists visiting Bethlehem. This is hardly proof of Israeli efforts to stifle pilgrimage to the birthplace of Jesus. Also glossed over during this festive season was the stark reality that the numbers of Christians residing in Moslem countries of the Middle East continues to decline. The reason is simple. Ongoing intolerance is the main motivation for Christian flight, together with economic deprivation and the collapse of civic rights. Only in Israel has the number of Christians shown an increase. As these facts however, do not fit in with prevailing prejudices, the media remains "mum".

This brings me back to the punch line of this season's ill will campaign against Israel. The assertion that if Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus were to try and enter Bethlehem today, they would have been denied permission by those evil Israelis is a blatant piece of anti Jewish incitement, reminiscent of Middle Ages accusations against Jews & Judaism. The fact that this rubbish is published without editors making even the slightest effort to verify its veracity or worrying about its poisonous implications, speaks volumes. The untarnished truth, unpublished and ignored, is that if Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, being devout Jews living in Judea (the misnamed West Bank), had indeed tried to enter Palestinian Arab controlled Bethlehem today, they would have put themselves in great danger of being attacked by a populace indoctrinated into believing that Jews are the root of all evil. The sad reality we face is that after years of hate education against Jews, Jesus and his family would have been the targets of demonisation, delegitimisation and physical violence. That is the reason they would not be able to enter Bethlehem or any other Palestinian Arab controlled territory.

Once you realise this stark truth, you begin to understand the real extent of the problem facing those who strive to bring peace on earth and goodwill to all people. The media prefer to ignore these inconvenient facts and by doing so they contribute to the continuing campaign of disinformation and unbalanced reporting against the Jewish State.

P.S.

Another contribution to this past season's media ill will against Israel was a tendentious item about donkey abuse in the Holy Land. Watch this space for an explanation of how such an innocent sounding subject can be turned into yet another Israel bashing exercise.

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