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SHABBAT SHALOM!

TEACHING ZIONISM ON CAMPUS, RABBI HARTMAN APPRECIATED, “ARAB SPRING” CHRISTIANS: PILLORIED, PERSECUTED AND FORGOTTEN

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Hartman: King of No-man’s Land: [Amotz Asa-El, *Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 11, 2013](#)—Having contrasted between two schools of Jewish thought, the medieval one which said God can take no human form, and an earlier one that said God could possess “an emotional interior,” David Hartman took sides. The earlier school, he explained, allowed him “to cite God’s shift from being a figure of complete and total authority to a figure who works in concert with human beings.”

Yemen's Forgotten Christians: [Raymond Ibrahim, *Gatestone Institute*, Jan. 29, 2013](#)—When one thinks of Yemen—the impoverished Arab country that begat Osama bin Laden, and is cushioned between Saudi Arabia and Somalia, two of the absolute most radical Muslim nations—one seldom thinks of Christians, primarily because they are practically nonexistent in such an inhospitable environment. Most tallies, in fact, suggest that Yemen's entire non-Muslim population is less than one percent.

Egypt’s ‘Christian Winter’: [Brian C. Stiller, *National Post*, Feb 11, 2013](#)—Sectarian domination was not what Egyptian protesters and self-described revolutionaries had in mind when they drove President Hosni Mubarak from office during Egypt’s Arab Spring in 2011. But to underestimate religious sectarianism in the Middle East is to misunderstand one of its core realities.

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IN CANADA, TEACHING ZIONISM, ONE STUDENT AT A TIME

Alexandra Markus

[*Israel Campus Beat*, February 11, 2013](#)

Five years ago, Concordia University professor Frederick Krantz noticed a lack of preparedness among Jewish students when faced with the growing anti-Zionist fervor he witnessed on his campus. “Zionism was becoming a negative term and we at the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research (CIJR) wanted to do something about it,” he said, “so we started the Student Israel Advocacy Program (SIAP), a year-long seminar with college faculty for the public, to give them facts and data about Jewish and Zionist history, the Arab-Israel conflict and the rise in propaganda.”

Krantz, a professor of liberal arts and humanities who completed his PhD at Yeshiva University on the history of anti-Semitism, is the director of CIJR, a 25-year-old organization that is connected with the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. The SIAP is one of its many outreach projects.

“Frequently, Jewish students, even those who went to Jewish schools, don’t know much history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, so when they are confronted with highly propagandistic Arab students, professors and speakers, they are not prepared,” Krantz noted. SIAP aims to change that by building upon participants’ knowledge of Jewish and Middle East history, their rhetorical skills and their ability to debate and organize on campus, through seminars and workshops. The program stresses the importance of mutual support among Israel supporters.

“Our overarching goal is to provide students with the truth about the history of the conflict, facts that allow them to dispute the assertions which are made on campus,” Krantz said, adding, “we try to not only teach these skills, but provide participants with the psychological confidence to put them to good use.”

Faculty from three of Montreal’s four universities work together to lead seven workshops each year. Enrolment in the program largely consists of college and university students, but a small contingent of older participants also enrolls each year. Generally, 15-20 people complete the program annually. Krantz estimated that approximately 40% of program participants are non-Jewish: “Some of these non-Jewish kids become the most sincerely committed Zionists in the groups we have educated over the years, which has been very satisfying for us,” he said.

Laura Ariza Pena Corea, 24, who studies public policy at Concordia University and is not Jewish, completed the program two years ago. She hails from Colombia, a predominantly Catholic country with a small Jewish population. “When I came here, I made some Jewish friends and expressed an interest in learning more about the history and culture, so I was referred to the program,” she explained.

Krantz emphasized that the program aims to impart facts rather than opinions, giving participants enough background and history to make informed decisions as to their views on issues related to the conflict. Ariza agreed, saying, “I’m more informed, so when I hear people talk about it, I know the two sides of the coin.”

Several participants have gone on to be successful pro-Israel advocates. Hillel Neuer, who heads *UNWatch* in Geneva, is an alumnus. The program’s remarkable success has pushed it to think bigger. “We’re being imitated now,” Krantz said with satisfaction. “People want to do something similar in Toronto at York University and in Winnipeg at the University of Manitoba.”

In the meantime, graduates of the program continue to make positive change in their communities, armed with a new determination to combat ignorance. “A lot of people are brainwashed for such a long time,” Ariza said. “They don’t really know the story.... This program exposed me to a whole new perspective.”

(Please Note: Professor Krantz obtained his Ph.D. from Cornell University and did his post-graduate work at Yeshiva University – Ed.)

HARTMAN: KING OF NO-MAN'S LAND

Amotz Asa-El

[Jerusalem Post](#), Feb. 11, 2013

Having contrasted between two schools of Jewish thought, the medieval one which said God can take no human form, and an earlier one that said God could possess “an emotional interior,” David Hartman took sides. The earlier school, he explained, allowed him “to cite God’s shift from being a figure of complete and total authority to a figure who works in concert with human beings.”

The philosophical debate notwithstanding, Hartman himself personified the theologian who shuns total authority and seeks concert with human beings. In the Israel of 1971, where he arrived after having already been an established rabbi in Canada, this theology was a novelty. In a society firmly divided between observance and secularism, with very little sprawling – let alone flourishing – between them, Hartman was a relentless builder of pathways, bridges and tunnels between both ends of this no man’s land.

A disciple of modern Orthodox sage Joseph B. Soloveitchik who lent religious meaning to Israel’s establishment, and an admirer of Conservative thinker Abraham J. Heschel and his quest for “a passionate engagement with God,” Hartman was difficult to classify within the established denominations of Judaism.

Cynics questioned his claim to Orthodoxy, but in fact his challenge to Orthodoxy was neither Reform’s nor Conservatism’s to Judaism. If anything, it was reminiscent of early Protestantism’s to Catholicism, as Hartman’s celebration of a Jew’s “covenantal” relationship to God encouraged seeking personal paths to divinity, rather than intermediaries, whether of religion’s charismatic or intellectual modes.

Unwilling to accept the religious dichotomies on which Israel was founded, particularly the implicit assumption that Judaism was the exclusive business of the observant, Hartman suspended bridges between observant and secular Israelis, between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews, and between Jews and non-Jews, in addition to upholding the bridge on which he was born and raised, the one that hangs between Jerusalem and Babel.

That is why in the institute which he founded and his son Donniel now heads, one can see scholars from varied faiths poring jointly over a chapter in Psalms and a verse in Isaiah, and rabbis of different denominations matter-of-factly discussing a page in the Talmud or a clause in Maimonides’s Guide for the Perplexed, while on another corner of campus IDF colonels explore with professors of Jewish thought the boundaries of battlefield morality, and several rooms away from them other scholars are writing textbooks on Judaism for secular schools. There is no such place in all of Israel, and actually also no such place beyond it.

Even so, the Israel that David Hartman leaves today is closer to his spirit than the one where he landed 42 years ago. Today’s Israel is one where secularists in Tel Aviv flock to all-night Judaic studies on Shavuot, while in Jerusalem, Orthodox women increasingly assume liturgical roles that once were exclusive to males.

Today’s Israel is one where the secular son of a famous secularist crusader arrives for his own stint in politics flanked by two rabbis, one modern Orthodox and the other ultra-Orthodox, while the leader of an Orthodox party publicly shakes women’s hands and makes no secret of having once abandoned observance for several years.

Increasingly, secular-born Israelis seek paths to their heritage while religious-born ones seek critical religion, just like Israelis raised on overly Talmudic Judaism seek its more emotional versions, and vice versa. Surely it is early to judge the extent to which this Zeitgeist of experimentation, exploration, tolerance and cross fertilization is David Hartman's inspiration. There can be no arguing, however, that it is molded in his image.

The writer is a fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

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YEMEN'S FORGOTTEN CHRISTIANS

Raymond Ibrahim

[Gatestone Institute](#), Jan. 29, 2013

When one thinks of Yemen—the impoverished Arab country that begat Osama bin Laden, and is cushioned between Saudi Arabia and Somalia, two of the absolute most radical Muslim nations—one seldom thinks of Christians, primarily because they are practically nonexistent in such an inhospitable environment. Most tallies, in fact, suggest that Yemen's entire non-Muslim population is less than one percent.

A new Arabic report, however, discusses the existence of Christians in Yemen, and their plight—one that should be familiar by now, given the situation wherever Christian minorities live under Muslim majorities. Unofficial statistics suggest that there are some 2,500 indigenous Christians in the nation, practicing their faith underground even as hostile tribes surround them. According to human rights activist, Abdul Razzaq al-Azazi, "Christians in Yemen cannot practice their religion nor can they go to church freely. Society would work on having them enter Islam."

He added that, as in most Muslim countries, "the government does not permit the establishment of buildings or worship places without prior permission," pointing out that Roman Catholic officials, for example, are currently awaiting a decision from the government on whether they will be allowed to construct a building and be officially recognized by the government in Sana.

A convert to Christianity from Islam—an apostate from Islam whose life is forfeit and who naturally prefers to remain anonymous, going by the pseudonym, "Ibn Yemen" (Son of Yemen)—expressed his fear of increased pressure on Christians, especially since the "Islamists now represent the dominant political faction, following the Arab Spring and the protests that brought the fall of President Ali Abdullah Saleh." He added that even though the old regime "was not Islamist, Christians were still subjected to persecution and scrutiny by the police apparatus under that regime. Authorities did not allow us to practice our religion openly or allow us to build a private church, all because of Islam's apostasy law. What do you think it will be like now that the Islamists are in power?"

Accordingly, and as another Christian interviewed in Yemen indicated, Christians pray underground in the members' houses on a rotational basis—as in the days of Roman persecution of Christians, when the Christians worshipped underground in catacombs. Along with Yemen's indigenous Christians, there are also between 15,000 and 25,000 non-native Christians living in Yemen, mostly refugees from Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, where the persecution of Christians is often even worse than in Yemen, especially Somalia, where Al-Shabaab ("the Youth") behead Muslim apostates to Christianity on a regular basis. Such Christian refugees from Africa often change their names to Muslim names to avoid harassment in Yemeni society.

Some Christian organizations and institutions do exist, mostly foreign ones, including the American Baptist Mission, which runs Jibla Hospital and a Church which provides services to orphans, the poor, and imprisoned women. These organizations work primarily to serve the community, not to facilitate

Christian worship. Another study confirmed the previous existence of five churches in the southern city of Aden, three of which were Roman Catholic, one Anglican, and the fifth of unidentified affiliation: three of those five churches, which were built during the British occupation of southern Yemen, were neglected and left to crumble; the fourth became the property of the government; and the fifth was turned into a health facility.

The story of Yemen's Christians seems like a microcosm of the story of the Middle East's Christians in how it conforms to the current pattern of oppression for Christians under Islam: things were better for Christians—for religious freedom in general—in earlier eras under Western influence. As the Muslim world, which for a while was Western-looking, continues turning East, to Islam, and as the demands of Sharia Law [The Way] return, so does hostility to non-Muslim worship and apostates—as the "Arab Spring" has brought about wherever Islamists have come to power.

Raymond Ibrahim is a Shillman Fellow at the David Horowitz Freedom Center and an Associate Fellow at the Middle East Forum.

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EGYPT'S 'CHRISTIAN WINTER'

Brian C. Stiller,

[National Post](#), Feb 11, 2013

Sectarian domination was not what Egyptian protesters and self-described revolutionaries had in mind when they drove President Hosni Mubarak from office during Egypt's Arab Spring in 2011. But to underestimate religious sectarianism in the Middle East is to misunderstand one of its core realities. After forcing out Mubarak and electing Mohamed Morsi last June, revolutionaries are back on the streets, this time with cries of "Leave, leave, Morsi."

As I walked toward the presidential palace in Cairo after Friday prayers, now the centre of protest, I passed families, with children in tow, seemingly not wanting to miss the historic showdown between the power of the mob and police. Soon the festival-like atmosphere turned into Molotov tossing, police in riot gear lobbing tear gas, and in the end, a man shot in the head by the police.

Many factors have converged to create this ongoing backlash. The economy is in tatters: 25% of Egyptians live on \$1 a day, while another 25% make \$2 a day. There are 45 million Egyptians under 30, and 90% of them are unemployed., providing an ideal breeding ground for unrest and protest. European powers are reluctant to provide financial aid until the social unrest abates.

And yet, looming in the background of every public debate, is religion. The U.S. recently, and European powers historically, have to their discredit blinded their eyes to the fundamental nature of the Middle East. The pressure between the Islamic majority and the Christian minority, but long-established, other faiths is reaching a boiling point.

The Coptic Orthodox were in Egypt long before Islam arrived. Once one of the central branches of Christianity, today, the Coptic Church, along with evangelical Protestants, constitutes 15% of Egypt's population. Yet it has been this group, especially the Coptic Orthodox, that have felt the heavy hand of Mubarak's police (or their absence) when attacked by extremists. People have been fired or denied educations, or even harassed and killed, on the basis of their Christian faith, which they are required to declare on official government documents.

Christians and Muslim moderates had high hopes after Mubarak was ousted. They hoped for a modern, progressive Egypt. It hasn't happened. Morsi stacked the committee to write the constitution with Muslim Brotherhood members and Salafists (fundamentalists) and rushed the draft to a referendum.

Christians and moderates were dismayed to see the lack of meaningful protections of religious freedom. But the constitution passed.

I asked Dr. Sameh Maurice, minister of Al-Dubara Church next to Tahrir Square, where the revolution might lead and what Christians expected from the future. During the revolution he had opened his church as field hospital and centre for dialogue between moderate Muslims and Christians. He has since become a leader in Egypt's Christian community.

He offered two possible scenarios. The first, of course, is that moderate forces win out and that Egypt's religious minorities are allowed to live in peace. But the other seems more likely. "Many Christians in the rural area today are being persecuted," Dr. Maurice told me. "Homes and fields and shops are being taken. In cities it is not that bad. But outside of them, Islamists take by violence and guns and the government does not protect Christians. If the Islamists take over fully, we expect persecution to move into the cities. The economy will collapse, people will starve."

"If that comes, the church will go underground and be oppressed. If the [moderates prevail], we will bring truth and love to the people of Egypt. But we are working to prepare ourselves for either scenario." Indeed. The Arab Spring has become a Christian Winter. Egypt faces an exodus of its Christian population similar to those that have already been seen in other Middle Eastern states in the grips of Islamist governments. This will be tragic for Egypt. Not only do Christians control almost a third of business, they are well educated, trained as professionals. They contribute greatly to Egypt's economic and social well-being.

It will be a tragedy if Egypt's Christians are forced to flee after 1,300 years of largely successful co-existence with their Muslim neighbours. And it will be a tragedy felt even by those who would drive them from their homes.

Brian C. Stiller is global ambassador for the World Evangelical Alliance.

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ON TOPIC

[A Day in the Tortured Life of Christians in the Middle East:](#) Theodore Shoebat, *Front Page Magazine*, Feb. 13, 2013—Twenty churches have been destroyed, abandoned, or damaged, and one hundred Christians have been murdered, in Syria. This is only going to get more and more severe as Islamic fundamentalism continuously conquers the Middle East.

[Christians - The Forgotten Victims of the Arab Spring:](#) Ghaffar Hussain, *The Commentator*, Dec. 12, 2012—The world is increasingly realizing that the Arab Spring also has a dark under-belly. As well as ushering in nascent and fragile democracies, popular uprisings in the MENA (Middle East, Europe, North Africa) region have unleashed previously suppressed reactionary forces.

[Muslim Persecution of Christians: December, 2012:](#) Raymond Ibrahim, *Gatestone Institute*, February 6, 2013—As usual, the month of Christmas saw an uptick in Christian persecution under Islam, in a variety of forms, from insults to murders.

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