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silence exposes hidden  
agenda**

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# The Spectator's selective silence exposes hidden agenda

*By Shaikh Riyad Nadwi, Ph.D*

The Spectator magazine has once again published an article by Anthony Browne ('Church of Martyrs', 27 March 2005) in which he attempts to create community tension between Muslims and Christians in Britain by using spurious statistics, hearsay and fabrication. He is at pains to tell us how objective he is "...I do believe that all persecution is wrong" and "As a liberal democrat atheist, I believe all persecuted people should be helped equally, irrespective of their religion", yet in his supposedly global survey of Christians being persecuted, there is one country whose omission is conspicuous: Israel. The Christians living in Israel do not exist for the Spectator, and Mr Browne does not tell the world why the first suicide bomber in the *intifada* was a Christian. Nor does he mention the fact that the largest Christian Cathedral in Africa was built in 1970 in a Muslim country, Egypt.

According to Mr Browne, '*Across the Islamic world, Christians are systematically discriminated against and persecuted*'. He cites Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq, Egypt, Indonesia and, to conceal his anti-Muslim and pro-Israel bias, Mr Browne straddles the planet highlighting the persecution of Christians from China to Sri Lanka and from India to North Korea. He even accuses some European countries of persecuting Christians but Israel does not feature whatsoever.

At the time of the creation of the Israeli state in 1948, it is estimated that the Christians in Palestine numbered some 350,000. Almost 20 per cent of the total population at the time, they constituted a vibrant and ancient community, living in harmony with their Muslim neighbours for over a thousand years. However, the Zionist doctrine held that Palestine was 'a land without a people for a people without a land.' Of the 750,000 Palestinians that were forced from their homes in 1948, some 50,000 were Christians – 7 per cent of the total number of refugees and 15 per cent of the total number of Christians living in Palestine at the time.

In the process of 'Judaizing' Palestine, numerous convents, hospices, seminaries, and churches were either destroyed or cleared of their Christian owners and custodians. In one of the most spectacular attacks on a Christian target, on 17 May 1948, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate was shelled with about 100 mortar rounds, launched by Zionist forces from the already occupied monastery of the Benedictine Fathers on Mount Zion. The bombardment also damaged St Jacob's Convent, the Archangel's Convent, their appended churches, two elementary and seminary schools, as well as their libraries. Eight people were killed and 120 wounded.

Today it is believed that Christians in Israel and occupied Palestine number some 175,000 – just over 2 percent of the entire population – but the numbers are rapidly dwindling due to mass emigration (*Forgotten Christians*, The American Conservative, May 2004). In April 2002 the Israeli army besieged the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem for weeks and they used explosives to gain entry by

blowing up a door on one of the most revered buildings for Christians around the world. Last year Palestinian Christians in the West Bank were prevented by the Israeli authorities from their annual Easter pilgrimage because Easter coincided with the Jewish holiday of Passover. For thousands of Christians from Bethlehem, it meant another year barred from praying at Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Bethlehem Mayor, Hanna Nasser, who has presided over a city re-occupied by the Israeli army, told the ABC's Mark Willacy: "It is depressing to see Bethlehem closed for 60 days. And not a single citizen is able to get out or visit if he doesn't get a permission. And although some of them had permission, they were turned back from the military checkpoints." (13.04. 2004)

### Patrick Sookhdeo's Israeli cause?

Anthony Browne draws heavily from one Patrick Sookhdeo, Director of the Barnabas Fund, who is also very selective in tiptoeing around the persecution of Christians in Israel whilst maintaining a biased focus on Islam and Muslims worldwide. He is currently being hailed as the defender of Christians and has been called on to advise some Western governments on Islam in the post 9/11 hype. If Patrick Sookhdeo were genuinely interested in protecting Christians all around the world, as he claims is his mission, it would have put him on a collision course with the anti-Christian policies of the Israeli regime.

Astonishingly however, Patrick Sookhdeo happens to be a showpiece figure for the Israeli government! Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs journal (Christians and Israel Vol VIII, No 1 – Autumn 1999) speaks proudly of Sookhdeo's visit to Israel, which was sponsored by the Anglo-Israel Association. It is therefore not surprising when other pro-Israel activists like Melanie Phillips applaud Sookhdeo for saying: *"What disturbs me at the moment is the very deeply rooted anti-Semitism latent in Britain and the West, I simply hadn't realised how deep within the English psyche is this fear of the power and influence of the Jews"* (Melanie Phillips, The Spectator, March 22 2002). It is worth noting also that Dr Sookhdeo was initially promoted by the *Ariel Center for Policy Research* (ACPR) and his articles are published in its *Nativ* journal (e.g. *Nativ* Volume 15, Number 3 (86) 2002).

In my response to Mr Browne's previous article in July 2004, I cited the words of one Professor Paul Eidelberg from the ACPR website and, given the Spectator's recurrent zeal to create religious tension in Britain, I think it is important that Muslims and Christians in this country remain cognisant of Professor Eidelberg's contentions in his policy paper entitled 'The Clash of two Decadent Civilizations, towards an Hebraic Alternative':

*"It is in the clash between Western relativism and Islamic absolutism that we are to understand the world-historical necessity of Hebraic civilization, whose restoration awaits the establishment of a New Israel"* (<http://www.acpr.org.il>)

Charities such as Oxfam are prohibited by the Charity Commission from indulging in political advocacy because it is beyond the scope of the charity legislation. But this seems to be exactly what Patrick Sookhdeo's charities are doing.

He runs two multi-million pound charities (*Barnabas Fund*, Reg. Charity No. 1092935 which received 4.2 million pounds in 2002-2003 and *The Barnabas Fund*, Reg. Charity No. 271602 which received 2.9 million pounds in 2002). These are used as advocacy vehicles to lobby politicians for what might be the agenda of a foreign government and yet no one in the Charity Commission appears to have taken notice. There is no way of knowing what is the true source

of the funding of these organisations. Patrick Sookhdeo also runs an institution called *The Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity* (ISIC) which is publicised as the educational arm of *Barnabas Fund*. To all intents and purposes, this Institute appears to function as the British equivalent of the well known American *Middle East Media Research Institute* (MEMRI), whose function, it seems, is to cherry-pick soundbites from the Arab media, for Western consumption, in support of Israeli policy. (See Guardian Investigation by Brian Whitaker 12.08.02)

From an analysis of the publications of both institutes, it becomes clear that Muslim minority communities in the West are invariably the target. If one reads these publications carefully, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that their principal function is not to create awareness of the declared aim, which seems to be benign, but to foment anger against Muslims in the West. It should therefore come as no surprise that Patrick Sookhdeo is in the vanguard of those fighting against legislation to protect the sensibilities of Muslim minorities in the West.

We need to be alert to the presence of a small but loud network of people, spread across the world, masquerading as objective reporters, politicians, academics and missionaries. In reality however, they are advocates of an agenda that has one focus of loyalty: it is not Christian, Muslim or secular, even though most of their front line members seek cover under the humanist network.

### Evan Harris's campaign to criticise Islam

Over recent months we have witnessed an intensified spate of direct and indirect attacks on the Muslim community in Britain by this network of pro-Israel activists. Whilst hiding under the cover of the Liberal Democrats and the Secular Society, the Treasurer of the All-Party British-Israel Parliamentary Group organised and chaired a conference (on 6 December 2004) to whip up support against the government's proposed new laws on incitement to religious hatred because the pro-Israel activists believe it will hamper their plans.

Among the major participants in the conference were comedian Rowan Atkinson and one Paul Cook, the advocacy manager of Patrick Sookhdeo's Barnabas Fund, who declared that, "*There is a real danger that this law could be used by extremists [sic] to silence organisations like ourselves.*" Last month the Barnabas Fund produced a briefing pack for all British Members of Parliament warning of the dangers of the bill. Patrick Sookhdeo issued a statement saying, "*We are urging MPs to think carefully and vote against Schedule 10 of this Bill*". The result of this campaign has been that the members of the Government have begun to shy away from the bill. It is worth noting that there is no need to take further action (i.e. pass the bill) to safeguard Judaism because it is already protected by (i) the law against incitement to *racial* hatred because followers of the Jewish faith are 99.9% Jewish by race; and (ii) the charge of anti-Semitism, which remains a highly effective weapon for silencing all forms of criticism. This was recently bolstered on the international scene by the US House of Representatives in the form of the Global Anti-Semitism Review Act 2004.

### Rowan Atkinson's half-baked philosophy

Having attended the Evan Harris conference in December 2004, Mr Atkinson appeared in the House of Lords on 25 January 2005 and argued that "*to criticise people for their race is manifestly irrational but to criticise their religion, that is a*

*right... Why shouldn't you do so, if the belief of that religion or the activities perpetrated in its name deserve to be intensely disliked?"*

My question for Mr Atkinson is what would he say about the activities perpetrated in the name of race by the Hutu and Tutsi in the Rwandan massacre where religion (specifically Islam) became the source of sanctuary? Muslim Hutus and Tutsis were told by Muslim clerics that if they wanted to kill each other they would need to tear out the pages of the Quran first. The result was that Rwandan Muslim areas became safe havens for both Hutus and Tutsis. According to one report, 'Muslims now make up 14 percent of the 8.2 million people here in Africa's most Catholic nation, twice as many as before the killings began.' (Washington Post, 23 September 2003). People accepted Islam because it allowed them to rise above the political exploitation of race.

The fact is that tenets of identity such as race and religion are **both** susceptible to exploitation by contextual politics, which is deserving of the criticism it receives e.g. Nazi atrocities in the name of race. The issue at hand, however, is not merely a simplistic and static lexical distinction between two words but a complex social, psychological and, for many people, spiritual phenomenon. In essence it is about what people hold dear to their hearts. You might think, Mr Atkinson, that someone's child is 'ugly' because you do not have the heart and eyes of the child's parents. But that does not give you the right to trample all over the heart of the mother and father by demanding the freedom to challenge their fascination with their child. For millions of Muslims all around the world, God, the Prophet, the Quran and Islam are as close to their hearts as their own children. Demanding the right to trample all over their hearts in pursuit of jest and laughter is not only misguided but inhumane and cruel. You are no different, Mr Atkinson, from the comedian who devastates the heart of a mother by pointing to her child in the audience and saying "I have the right to tell you that I think your child is ugly". Racial tolerance and community cohesion require broad understanding and sophisticated appreciation for the things that people hold close to their hearts. Pseudo-philosophical arguments from a comedian should not dissuade any serious politician from supporting the bill. Mr Atkinson agrees that a right 'not to be offended, shouldn't exist' yet he maintains that the outlawing of racial discrimination is correct. Racial discrimination is not wrong merely because it is 'manifestly irrational'. Racial and religious discrimination are wrong because they target core concepts through which people perceive themselves. Identities are not just ideas floating in ether.

### Privatisation and the War on 'Error'

The strange psychological war of organised manipulation and exploitation that we are witnessing in Britain today is similar to that played out in the United States in the build up to the Iraq war, in relation to which ex-CIA analysts Kathleen and Bill Christison referred to the US Congress as being "Israeli-occupied territory". This was based on their close observation and first hand knowledge of the situation in Washington. For example, they noted that the head of Radio Liberty, which was broadcasting propaganda to Iraq, was someone called Thomas Dine, the same person who had been actively in charge of the powerful lobbying group AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) throughout most of the Reagan and Bush (senior) administrations.

If Britain is to prevent itself from also becoming "Israeli-occupied territory", we need to pay closer attention to potential conflicts of interest among civil servants, and to the dangers of privatising sensitive components in governmental mechanisms. Dodgy dossiers and inaccurate intelligence do not come out of thin

air. To protect our business interests, we are usually keen to make sure that board members do not have any conflicting interests. It is vital that the same degree of scrutiny be applied to all intelligence gathering and civil service bodies (e.g. the Office for National Statistics). It is possible that there are many more civil servants like Steve Moxon (who thought that Muslims should be 'bombed with nuclear weapons') and Harry Cummings (who described Islam as a 'black heart' and a 'black face'), waiting for an opportune moment to influence policy. We have seen how privatisation of the war in Iraq has contributed immensely to the moral degradation at the Abu Ghuraib prison (Singer, *Outsourcing War on Iraq*, Foreign Affairs, April 2005).

### The need for community cohesion

The Muslim community still remembers that while all the leaders of major faith communities in Britain voiced their opposition to the war in Iraq, the Chief Rabbi, Professor Jonathan Sacks, remained alone in his firm support of war against a Muslim country (*Chief Rabbi breaks ranks with churches on Iraq*, The Telegraph, 04 January 2003). In order to promote community cohesion in Britain, there is a need for prominent members of the Jewish community to speak up in support of this bill and declare their opposition to the repressive policies of the Israeli regime. They need to challenge the pro-Israel media that is fuelling racial and religious tension among Muslims and Christians across the Western world.

I believe Mr Browne's article in the Spectator on Sunday is part of an organised campaign, conducted in order to undermine the benefits of interfaith relations in this country. The aim is to counteract the effects of, for example, the recent Channel 4 programme (*Saladin and Richard I*), which showed the tolerance and magnanimity of Muslims towards Christians even at times of war. What the editor of the Spectator and Mr Browne fail to realise, is that the British public is not as malleable as those who live on a constant diet of Fox News propaganda for Israel. In this country, people will see their motives in both the things they say and what they choose **not** to say.

Subscribers to the Spectator need to be cognisant of the fact that their money is being used to promote a pro-Israel agenda. The continued sleight of-hand by the likes of Mr Browne attempts to foment strife among Muslims and Christians, but it cannot hide the fact that Christian communities have lived and flourished in Muslim lands for hundreds of years. The presence of Arabic speaking Christian communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is testimony to Muslim tolerance and respect for the followers of Isa (Jesus, on whom be peace). If Muslims were inherently hostile to the existence of Christians in their lands, they would not have waited 14 centuries to attack churches. The question we need to ask is: what is so different about the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

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