

Israel/Palestine: “It’s Complicated!” ...Or Is It?

by John Spritzler

We often hear it said that the Israel/Palestine conflict is complicated. But is it really?

What makes a conflict “complicated?” Take South African apartheid, for example. White South Africans before 1992 responded to criticism of apartheid by insisting that it was a “complicated” issue. Their government said it was “anti-Christian” to oppose it. Racial equality was a noble idea, said many whites, but there were special reasons why it wasn’t a good idea in South Africa. But then, in 1992, South Africa’s President deKlerk, no doubt in response to the growing world wide boycott against apartheid, decided that apartheid needed to be abolished. He made his views known, and he held a referendum on apartheid for whites.

In 1992 the BBC reported that “*White South Africans have backed an overwhelming mandate for political reforms to end apartheid and create a power-sharing multi-racial government...In a landslide victory for change, the government swept the polls in all four provinces, and all but one of 15 referendum regions...It won 68.6% of the vote in a record turn-out, which, in some districts exceeded 96%.*”

Suddenly, apartheid wasn’t “complicated” anymore, just wrong. Today, few whites admit they ever supported it. It turns out that what had made apartheid “complicated” for white South Africans was the fact that their leaders had said it was right when, in their hearts, white people knew it was wrong. The same thing made many whites in the American South think that slavery, and later Jim Crow, was “complicated” until their leaders stopped supporting these evils.

When one’s respected leaders say one thing and one’s heart says the opposite, the natural and genuine subjective reaction is to believe that the issue is “complicated.” This doesn’t, however, mean it really is.

The conflict in Israel is no more “complicated” than was apartheid or slavery. The root of the conflict is that Israel won’t let the Palestinian refugees

return to their country, which is the 78% of Palestine now called Israel. They are refugees because in 1948 Jewish leaders (who call themselves Zionists) used military force to drive out 80% of the non-Jews (Palestinians) living in what is now the Jewish state of Israel. They did it because they believed that Israel must have a population that is at least 80% Jewish or else it won’t be a Jewish state. Israel continues to deny the refugees their right of return today. This is the root of the conflict.

Israeli historians, like Ilan Pappé (anti-Zionist) and Benny Morris (extremely pro-Zionist) have thoroughly researched the historical archives and concur that the expulsion took place. Morris says it was a good and necessary thing, and Pappé says it was ethnic cleansing, and wrong.

Jewish leaders say the expulsion of non-Jews from their country is justified because, since all gentiles are, and always will be, latently if not overtly anti-Semitic, Jews need a Jewish state to be safe.

But many Jews suspect that gentiles are no more inherently anti-Semitic than whites are inherently racist. How do such Jews respond when they hear their respected rabbis and other Jewish leaders telling them that it is necessary for Israel to deny Palestinian refugees their basic human right to return to their country, to prevent them from getting to a hospital when they are about to give birth, even to prohibit the few Palestinians who live in Israel from marrying a Jew or from living in good neighborhoods from which non-Jews are presently barred or from building houses for their families in the designated “Arab” towns? These Jews respond by saying to themselves that it is “complicated.”

What would they say, however, if tomorrow their most respected rabbis and Jewish leaders announced that Israel ought to stop denying Palestinians their rights? In short order it would be hard to find a Jew who would admit to having ever supported the denial of those rights.

Once upon a time people said that slavery was complicated. They said that apartheid in South Africa was complicated. But these things were not complicated, just wrong.