

**The Greens and Hobby Lobby
Anti-Israel-Movie and Bethlehem Bible College**

The End of Evangelical Support for Israel?, David Brog, Middle East Quarterly, Spring 2014

A mere decade ago, Christian Zionism was seen as an emerging force in American politics. As if out of nowhere, a block of fifty to one hundred million friends of Israel were poised to enter the national debate and safeguard the U.S.-Israel relationship for generations to come. Evangelical love for Israel appeared so solid that the only debate within the Jewish community was whether or not to "accept" it.

How quickly things change. The days of taking evangelical support for Israel for granted are over. As they are increasingly confronted with an evangelical-friendly, anti-Israel narrative, more and more of these Christians are turning against the Jewish state.[1]

There is troubling precedent for such an about-face. At one time—prior to the 1967 war—the mainline Protestant denominations were among Israel's most reliable American supporters. Israel's opponents, therefore, targeted these denominations with mainline-friendly, anti-Israel messages. There are still many mainline Protestants who support Israel today. But to the extent the mainline denominations act corporately in connection with the Jewish state, it is to divest from it. And it is from Israel—not Iran—that they seek to divest.

In a similar fashion, Palestinian Christians and their American sympathizers are successfully promoting a narrative aimed at reaching the rising generation of evangelicals and turning them against Israel. As a result, more leaders of this generation are moving toward neutrality in the conflict while others are becoming outspoken critics of Israel. Questioning Christian support for the Jewish state is fast becoming a key way for the millennials to demonstrate their Christian compassion and political independence. In short, this population is in play.

There is nothing new about the efforts to drive a wedge between America's evangelicals and Israel. Many in the anti-Israel camp have been working for years to do exactly that. Anti-Israel Palestinian Christians such as Sami Awad and Naim Ateek have traveled the country telling American Christians how their "brothers and sisters in Christ" are being oppressed by Israel's Jews. Left-leaning evangelicals such as Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo, and Serge Duss have echoed this narrative in their corner of the Christian world. Duss's sons, Brian and Matt, have worked diligently to mainstream their father's views within the fields of Christian philanthropy and Democratic Party policy-making, respectively.

Until the past couple of years, however, there was little reason to believe that these individuals were influencing Christians beyond their own narrow circles. Almost every significant evangelical leader who took a position on the issue came out squarely behind the Jewish state. A center-right evangelical world simply was not taking its political cues from these stalwarts of the left.

This situation is changing dramatically. With every passing month, more evidence is emerging that these anti-Israel Christians are succeeding in reaching beyond the evangelical left and are influencing the mainstream. In particular, they are penetrating the evangelical world at its soft underbelly: the millennial generation. These young believers (roughly ages 18 to 30) are rebelling against what they perceive as the excessive biblical literalism and political conservatism of their parents. As they strive with a renewed vigor to imitate Jesus' stand with the oppressed and downtrodden, they want to decide for themselves which party is being oppressed in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Whoever first defines the conflict for these young people will win lifelong allies...

The year 2010 was one of dramatic escalation in the efforts to drive a wedge between American evangelicals and Israel using the medium of film. In the span of that one year, no less than three major documentaries were released attacking Christian support for Israel. These were hardly the first anti-Israel movies to be produced. What made these films special was that they were focused on discrediting Christian support for Israel. While First Run Features' *Waiting for Armageddon* was produced and directed by a team of secular documentarians, two other films—*With God on Our Side* (Rooftop Productions, 2010) and *Little Town of Bethlehem* (EthnoGraphic Media, 2010)—were made by Christians specifically for Christians. *With God on Our Side* was produced by Porter Speakman, a former Youth with a Mission[2] (YWAM) activist while *Little Town of Bethlehem* was funded and produced by Mart Green, chairman of the board of trustees of Oral Roberts University and heir to the Hobby Lobby arts and crafts stores fortune.

These two Christian-made films are masterpieces of deception.

Of Campuses and Conferences

The effort to delegitimize Israel on America's college campuses has quickly progressed from news item to cliché. The annual Israel apartheid weeks and the repeated divestment campaigns targeting everything from university pension funds to cafeteria humus have become all too familiar. But what many observers do not realize is that the effort to demonize Israel is also being waged on America's Christian campuses.

Perhaps the most troubling example comes from *Wheaton College* in Illinois, commonly referred to as the "evangelical Harvard." Some of the most prominent church leaders in America have graduated from Wheaton, including the Rev. Billy Graham, Sen. Dan Coats (Republican, Indiana), and George W. Bush's former speechwriter Michael Gerson.

Wheaton is also the home of Gary Burge, one of America's most prominent anti-Israel evangelicals. Burge travels the country and the world accusing the Jewish state of the worst of crimes and engaging in a mockery of Judaism that borders on anti-Semitism.[5] When Christians United for Israel (CUFI) announced plans to hold an event at Wheaton in January 2009, Burge went on the offensive. CUFI's student members came under such intense pressure that they moved their event off-campus: There would be no pro-Israel event at the evangelical Harvard.

Another of America's leading Christian schools, **Oral Roberts University (ORU)**, has deep conservative Christian roots. Oral Roberts himself was a Pentecostal televangelist and a strong friend of Israel. Some of the leading preachers in America graduated from ORU, and its board of trustees has included pro-Israel Christians such as pastors John Hagee and Kenneth Copeland and Bishop Keith Butler.

But things may be changing at ORU. **The current chair of ORU's board of trustees is the aforementioned Mart Green. He is reported to have "saved" ORU with a \$70 million cash infusion. In January 2013, ORU's board of trustees elected Billy Wilson as the university's new president; a few months later, Wilson was named as a speaker for 2014 at the leading anti-Israel Christian conference, "Christ at the Checkpoint."**

Bethel University in Minnesota provides a further example. While this school lacks the national reputation of Wheaton or ORU, it is likely more representative of the direction that America's Christian colleges are taking....

Since its founding in 1979, Bethlehem Bible College in the West Bank has been a leading source of the anti-Israel Christian narrative. In 2010, it launched a biennial conference called "Christ at the Checkpoint." The name of the conference along with a photo of the Israel security fence that forms its logo invoke the increasingly popular meme that Jesus was a Palestinian who would be suffering under Israeli occupation today much as he suffered under Roman occupation millennia ago.

In 2010, the conference brought 250 Christian leaders and activists to Bethlehem; in 2012, that number was more than 600 including such mainstream evangelical leaders as mega-church pastor Joel Hunter and Lynne Hybels, wife of mega-church pastor Bill Hybels, who has since become a key evangelical critic of Israel.

The days when one had to travel to Bethlehem to hear such anti-Israel voices are now over. **The anti-Israel narrative of "Christ at the Checkpoint" is now being shared at major Christian conferences in the United States including those organized by Empowered21 and Catalyst.**

Empowered21, the preeminent gathering of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians, provides a troubling example of this trend.[8] Its leadership is a who's who of Pentecostal and Charismatic luminaries from around the world, including many longstanding friends of Israel. However, **the leading critic of Israel among these leaders, Mart Green, appears to be playing an outsized role in setting the conference's agenda: Its 2012 conference in Virginia included a talk by Sami Awad and a screening of Green's film, Little Town of Bethlehem.**

Empowered21 has announced that it will hold its 2015 global congress in Jerusalem. Given the conference's connections to **Sami Awad and Mart Green**, there is some skepticism whether the choice of location was intended as a sign of solidarity with the Jewish state. Only time will tell if the organization's leadership will permit the conference to become a one-sided Israel bashing fest.

Troubling developments are also taking place at the annual Catalyst conference. First launched in 1999, Catalyst has quickly grown into the largest gathering of young evangelical leaders in America with more than 100,000 leaders having made the annual trek to Atlanta to participate in this conference since its inception. Additional Catalyst events are now being held in Florida, Texas, and California.

In the past, Catalyst studiously avoided discussions of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 2012, however, **Lynne Hybels** was invited to address "Peacemaking in Israel/Palestine." No one was asked to provide a pro-Israel perspective. As journalist Jim Fletcher observed after attending Catalyst 2012:

In dozens of random conversations, I noted that Millenials ... expressed solidarity with the Palestinians and annoyance with Israel. This is a seismic shift in the American church and a serious threat to Israel's one traditional area of support.[9]

In addition to speaking at major conferences, anti-Israel speakers such as Burge, Awad, Hybels, and **Steven Sizer** tour churches across the country. The flyer for a September 2013 evening with Burge provides a sense of the climate at these events.[10] Entitled "Christian Zionism: A Problem with a Solution," the flyer includes a string of three lies that form the core of the new Christian anti-Zionism:

Zionists in Israel have created a state that wants racial purity. Many Zionists want native-born Christians to leave Israel. Christian Zionists in America support Israel because they believe this will accelerate the second coming of Christ.

Trips to "Israel/Palestine"

A growing number of organizations are bringing an increasing number of Christian leaders, influencers, and students to visit "Israel/Palestine." These trips are well marketed and seek out mainstream evangelicals by claiming to be both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian—or simply "pro-people"—but never anti-Israel. Yet these trips tend to focus on Palestinian suffering and to blame Israel alone for this suffering.

The **Telos Group**, founded in 2009 and funded by George Soros,[11] is typical of these new organizations. Run by a savvy team professing a moderate agenda, Telos promotes itself as "a leading organization of America's emerging pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, pro-American, pro-peace movement." [12] Their tours take visitors to both Israel and the Palestinian Authority where they meet with both Israelis and Palestinians. What could be more evenhanded?

Yet these tours are carefully calibrated to teach their participants that Israeli policy is the source of Israeli and Arab suffering and the only real barrier to peace. The Palestinian speakers include extreme critics of Israel such as Mitri Raheb and Archbishop Elias Chacour (both featured prominently in *The Stones Cry Out*). The Israeli speakers, while not as extreme, are stalwarts of the far Left who likewise blame Israel for the region's problems. A brief visit with an Israeli right-winger—usually a settler—does more to confirm this one-sided narrative than challenge it. Telos organizes approximately fifteen of these trips every year.[13]

Another recent arrival on the scene is the Global Immersion Project. Founded in 2011, the project seeks to "cultivate everyday peacemakers through immersion in global conflict." [14] But thus far, the only conflict they study is that between Israel and the Palestinians, and the only trips they make are to "Israel/Palestine." In 2014, they have two "learning labs" scheduled in the Holy Land.

These newcomers have joined an old stalwart of the movement, the **Holy Land Trust**. Founded in 1998 by Palestinian Christian activist **Sami Awad**, the organization claims to promote nonviolent solutions to the conflict with Israel. However, Awad has stated quite clearly on his blog that nonviolence is "not a substitute for the armed struggle. This is not a method for normalization with the occupation. Our goal is to revive the popular resistance until every person is involved in dismantling the occupation." [15] **The Holy Land Trust promotes a strongly biased version of history in which Israel alone is to blame for the absence of peace.** It shares this message to those who visit on their various service projects, olive harvesting initiative, and "Palestine Summer Encounter." [16]....

Anti-Israel Christians are on a roll. While small in number, these activists seem to have extensive funds. They are taking far more Christian leaders and influencers to Israel and the Palestinian Authority than the pro-Israel side. Through these newly-minted allies, they are reaching an ever expanding network of evangelicals in the United States.

The threat is not that these activists will turn the majority of American evangelicals into Israel haters. They do not have to. The real danger is that they will teach their fellow evangelicals a moral relativism that will neutralize them. The day that Israel is seen as the moral equivalent of Hamas is the day that the evangelical community—and by extension the political leaders it helps elect—will cease providing the Jewish state any meaningful support.

Those who reject such facile moral equivalence must take this threat seriously. They cannot let the evangelical community go the way of the mainstream Protestant leadership. They must not forget that big lies must be confronted early and often. And they dare not ignore the fact that Israel's enemies are telling very big lies to some very influential Christians—and telling them quite well.

<http://www.meforum.org/3769/israel-evangelical-support>

The Sad Rise of Anti-Semitism Within the Church, Stacy Lynn Harp, June 30, 201, Bible News Radio

Laurie Cardoza-Moore who is the Founder and President of Proclaiming Justice to the Nations. PJTN is a Christian pro-Israel organization that is dedicated to using the media to educate Christians concerning their biblical responsibility to support Israel and the Jewish brethren.

... **popular leaders like Mart Green, President of Hobby Lobby is funding conferences and movies that are anti-Israel. From the Proclaiming Justice to the Nations website we read:**

A leading evangelical businessman has financed a controversial Middle East documentary that has been called “unfair and dishonest” by supporters of Israel.

“Little Town of Bethlehem” purports to present the Palestinian perspective for American audiences.

Mart Green, founder and CEO of Mardel Christian and Educational Supply and an heir to the Hobby Lobby retail empire, is the financial backing behind the Bethlehem film. It’s directed by Jim Hanon of EthnoGraphic Media Films, which is also financed by Green and headquartered at the huge Hobby Lobby complex in Oklahoma City.

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/biblenewsradio/the-sad-rise-of-anti-semitism-within-the-church/>

Empowered 21 and Christians Who Promote Anti-Israel Propaganda, Tricia Miller, Breaking Israel News, July 9, 2015

Empowered 21 (E21), a worldwide Christian organization based in Tulsa, OK and the sponsor of a Global Congress in Jerusalem in May 2015, may be endangering its credibility, and the credibility of the Christian faith it seeks to propagate, because of its relationship with Palestinian Christians who promote a fallacious anti-Israel narrative.

This global entity, which intends to “shape the future of the Spirit-empowered movement” and evangelize every person on earth by 2033, claims to represent 640,000,000 evangelical and pentecostal Christians. Therefore, the potential fallout from an alliance with those who spread dishonest propaganda against Israel is significant.

At the recent conference, E21 co-chair Billy Wilson and others repeatedly emphasized the necessity of Christian unity for the purpose of “world evangelization in our generation.” The problem with this call to unity stems from E21’s unreflective support for, and involvement with, Palestinian Christian leaders who promote a narrative rooted in demonization of Jews, delegitimization of Israel, and erroneous theology.

This relationship is demonstrated in part, through the inclusion of Jack Sara, president of Bethlehem Bible College, as one of the leaders in E21’s Global Congress. Sara was scheduled to participate in a breakout session that addressed the subject of networks of ministries and churches. He was also a member of the committee, “Exploring the Land of Pentecost,” which was responsible for educating attendees about places they would tour.

Jack Sara’s participation is particularly troubling because Bethlehem Bible College (BBC) and the Christ at the Checkpoint (CaTC) conferences it sponsors are some of the primary promoters of virulent anti-Jewish/anti-Israel propaganda. The logo for Christ at the Checkpoint depicts a church behind the security barrier built by Israel, and the theme of last year’s meeting was “Theology in the Service of Peace and Justice.”

Through their imagery and content, these conferences present a one-sided narrative that perpetuates the two millennia-old Christian doctrine that Jews are an obstacle to God’s purposes.

As a result, Jews are demonized, the Jewish state is delegitimized, and Christians are encouraged to accept the message in the name of peace and justice.

This narrative is rooted in a customized replacement theology and a Palestinian version of liberation theology. Traditional replacement theology says that God no longer has any purpose for Israel or the Jews and that God's work on earth is now being done through Christians and the Church. This teaching promotes contempt for Jews, and has provided justification for two millennia of anti-Semitic violence.

Palestinian replacement theology rewrites history by claiming that Jesus and the first Christians were all Palestinians, and that the Palestinians – not the Jews – are the indigenous people in the land. This assertion means that the Palestinian people are the rightful owners of the land, which serves their political agenda very nicely by delegitimizing the existence of the Jewish State.

Palestinian liberation theology depicts Palestinians as victims who need to be liberated from Israeli occupation. This narrative is particularly appealing to an evangelical audience susceptible to a message emphasizing the need for peace and justice, but has no understanding of the historical or political context of current events necessary to counter the lies and distortions supported by this theology....

E21's collaboration with local Christians was further evidenced through the scheduling of a service in Manger Square in Bethlehem, before it was cancelled with one days notice due to "significant political and religious pressure," In response to this unexpected development, E21 co-chair Wilson "spent the afternoon in Manger Square trying to find a way to further support our Christian brothers in there, including considering the possibility of other alternative venues."

Wilson's intent to "support our Christian brothers in there" by scheduling a service in Bethlehem, and the involvement of the president of BBC in the leadership of E21 are consistent with the conference's emphasis on the importance of Christian unity. This would be an ideal goal in an ideal world. However, in this case, E21's cooperation with Palestinian Christian organizations that have a track record of anti-Israel activism may provide a venue through which their false narrative is promoted to a global audience.

In light of this threat, the leadership of Empowered 21 needs to reconsider how they define their stand in "unity" with those who promote anti-Israel propaganda based on erroneous theology, demonization of Jews, and delegitimization of Israel.

Otherwise, the credibility of this global movement and the Christian faith it seeks to propagate will be compromised, and its intent to "shape the future of the Spirit-empowered movement" will be an issue of great concern.

<http://www.breakingisraelnews.com/44901/empowered-21-and-christians-who-promote-anti-israel-propaganda-opinion/#QTXJi69DjhfsPGR.97>

Empowered 21 Threatens Jewish-Christian Relations, The Times of Israel, Tricia Miller, July 21, 2015,

Empowered 21 (E21), a worldwide Christian organization based in Tulsa, OK, is threatening Jewish-Christian relations as a result of its seemingly unreflective alliance with Palestinian Christians who propagate a narrative rooted in demonization of Jews and the Jewish State.

At its Global Congress in Jerusalem in May 2015, co-chair Billy Wilson and others placed a significant amount of emphasis on the necessity of Christian unity for the purpose of “world evangelization in our generation.” This unqualified call to unity is cause for significant concern because it presumably included an expectation of solidarity with conference participants who are leaders in Palestinian Christian organizations such as Bethlehem Bible College (BBC) and Christ at the Checkpoint (CaTC) conferences – both of which are primary promoters of virulent anti-Jewish/anti-Israel propaganda.

The relationship between E21 and those who promote such pernicious dogma is demonstrated in part, through the inclusion of Jack Sara, president of Bethlehem Bible College, as one of the leaders in this year’s Global Congress. Sara was scheduled to participate in a breakout session that addressed the subject of networks of ministries and churches. He was also a member of the committee, “Exploring the Land of Pentecost,” which was responsible for educating attendees about places they would tour.

Jack Sara’s participation is particularly troubling because he is president of Bethlehem Bible College, which sponsors the biannual Christ at the Checkpoint conferences in Bethlehem....

Most recently, Christ at the Checkpoint took this demonization to a new low through the posting of a video on YouTube on March 26, 2015. The video was produced to promote a CaTC Young Adult conference in July 2015.

In this video, images of ISIS captives about to be beheaded are juxtapositioned with images of the security barrier Israel built to protect its citizens from suicide bombers.

Images of the Jordanian pilot about to be burned alive in a cage are juxtapositioned with scenes of people going through a checkpoint.

And images of the ISIS flag are juxtapositioned with those of the Israeli flag.

The obvious implication is that the security measures Israel has been forced to take in response to Palestinian suicide bombers is equivalent to what ISIS is doing to people as it seeks to forcibly establish a caliphate ruled by an extreme form of Islamic law.

Empowered 21’s unqualified expectation that attendees at the Global Congress stand in unity with those who proliferate material that perpetuates the demonization of Jews and the State of Israel is both alarming and destructive....

Institutions such as the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ) have painstakingly built bridges with the Jewish community within Israel and abroad ever since its founding in

1980. Over the past thirty-five years, the ICEJ had earned a solid reputation for its work within Israel and its education of Christians worldwide concerning a biblical understanding of Israel.

But, the foundations for Jewish-Christian relations laid by organizations such as the ICEJ are in danger of being undone through Empowered 21's incautious alliance with Palestinian Christian leaders and their institutions who are complicit in the demonization of Jews and the Jewish State.

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/empowered-21-threatens-jewish-christian-relations/>

Where are Empowered21 and Oral Roberts University Headed in Relation to Israel?,
Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA), Tricia Miller, Ph.D.,
August 10, 2015

The future stance of Empowered21 (E21) and Oral Roberts University (ORU) towards Israel is uncertain due to the relationship between these two organizations and ORU mega-donor Mart Green. As a result of the \$250 million he has contributed since 2008, Green has an inordinate amount of leverage over the perspective of ORU and E21, which is headquartered on the campus of the Christian college in Tulsa, OK.

Green's extensive involvement in both of these organizations in relation to their eventual viewpoint towards Israel is cause for concern because he financed the production of the 2010 anti-Israel documentary, "Little Town of Bethlehem." This film presents a one-sided and fallacious Palestinian narrative that portrays Israel as a brutal occupier, while ignoring the existential threats facing the state of Israel.

The absence of any public evidence that indicates Green has changed his beliefs in respect to the Jewish State since the production of the documentary raises the question of just how much he will prejudice the final position ORU and E21 take concerning Israel.

The Relationship between E21, ORU and **Mart Green**

Empowered21 is a relatively new Christian organization that claims to represent 640,000,000 evangelical and pentecostal Christians around the globe. Since these Christians constitute the part of Christendom that has historically supported Israel's right to exist and defend itself, the stand this movement takes in relation to Israel will have a significant impact on Christian support for Israel worldwide.

This global movement is the result of an initiative launched in 2008 by the Board of Trustees of Oral Roberts University when the newly formed board, under the leadership of Mardel founder Mart Green, "began work on clarifying the mission of the university for 21st century ministry."

ORU was founded by Oral Roberts, a Pentecostal Methodist evangelist who was a strong supporter of the State of Israel. Before Mart Green formed the new Board of Trustees in 2008, the Board had included pro-Israel activists such as Pastor John Hagee, the founder of the two million strong grassroots movement, Christians United for Israel.

Green became the chairman of the new board in 2008 in “return for the donation” of \$70 million intended to save the evangelical Christian school from a financial crisis that included tens of millions of dollars of debt. Mart stepped down as chairman in April 2014 but remains a member of the board, and his father David, CEO/Founder of the Hobby Lobby retail chain, is a member of ORU's Board of Reference.

Mart Green and the ORU Board of Trustees asked The International Center for Spiritual Renewal in Cleveland TN, then under the leadership of Dr. William “Billy” Wilson, to facilitate the 2008 initiative that inaugurated the Empowered21 movement. At the time, Wilson was also the vice-chair of the ORU Board of Trustees.

On January 31, 2013, this same Board of Trustees elected Billy Wilson as the fourth president of the university. When Wilson assumed the position of president of ORU on July 1, 2013, the E21 initiative went to ORU with him. Consequently, the vision for E21 – initiated by Green in 2008 – has become an integral, if not primary, part of the mission of ORU, and Wilson is both president of ORU and chairman of E21, all as a result of the financial clout of Mart Green.

Concern over how Green's view of Israel could prejudice the future position ORU and E21 take concerning the Jewish State is heightened by the fact that a few months after Wilson was elected as the new president of ORU, he accepted an invitation to speak at the 2014 anti-Israel "Christ at the Checkpoint" (CaTC) conference sponsored by Bethlehem Bible College (BBC) in Bethlehem, a prominent purveyor of anti-Israel propaganda.

BBC and the biannual conferences it hosts promote a Palestinian version of replacement theology that not only teaches that Christians have replaced Jews in the purposes of God, but rewrites the Bible by making the false historical claim that the Palestinians – not the Jews – are the indigenous people of the land. The logical outworking of this theology is the identification of Jesus as a Palestinian, which is in direct contradiction to the Scriptures these Christians claim to believe.

This erroneous conclusion means that the Palestinian people are the rightful owners of the land, which serves their political agenda very nicely by delegitimizing the existence of the Jewish State. It also works hand-in-hand with Palestinian liberation theology, which depicts Palestinians as victims who need to be liberated from Israeli occupation.

When he spoke in Bethlehem in 2014, Wilson stated that he did not share the Christian Palestinians' belief in replacement theology. However, he did not refute their liberation theology.

Wilson's involvement in the conference gave the Palestinian movement increased credibility in the evangelical world, and it was a portend of things to come. In May 2015, Jack Sara, the president of Bethlehem Bible College, was an invited participant in E21's Global Congress, which was held in Jerusalem and co-chaired by Wilson.

Throughout the conference in Jerusalem, there was a concerted emphasis on the importance of Christian unity and the need to stand with Palestinian Christians. This suggests that E21 and ORU may become aligned with the Palestinian anti-Jewish, anti-Israel narrative, which is

nothing more than a new form of Christian anti-Semitism tailor-made for an evangelical audience.

Mart Green and the “Little Town of Bethlehem”

The potential alignment of E21 and ORU with the erroneous Palestinian narrative becomes even more troubling in light of Mart Green's involvement with anti-Israel activists featured in the 2010 documentary he funded, titled “Little Town of Bethlehem.” The film pretends to provide multiple viewpoints of the Arab-Israeli conflict through the testimony of a Christian, a Muslim and a Jew. But in reality, the film offers a single narrative of Palestinian victimization and Israeli violence that is nothing more than a combination of “anti-Israel activism with a theological backdrop.”

“Little Town of Bethlehem” was produced by EthnoGraphic Media (EGM), which is financed by Green and headquartered in the Green family's Hobby Lobby complex in Oklahoma City, OK. According to its LinkIn profile, EGM is “a revolutionary film and new media group exploring the critical issues of our time... We strive to be catalysts – entry points to social change – through film and grassroots programs.”

Its Facebook “About” page identifies EGM as a nonprofit organization whose “purpose is to serve by sharing true stories that take on the most difficult subjects...and we do not flinch when it comes to presenting raw subject matter or raising difficult questions.” The conflict in the Holy Land is one of the questions mentioned, and in relation to this subject, EGM asks, “Will a nonviolent movement bring lasting peace?”

Mart Green's answer to this question is found in his production of the “Little Town of Bethlehem,” which was advised and assisted by the Holy Land Trust, a Palestinian organization that supports boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, conducts politicized tours that target evangelical leaders with its anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian propaganda, and is a co-sponsor of the biannual Christ at the Checkpoint conference.

The documentary presents the personal experiences of three men: Sami Awad, an evangelical Christian leader; Ahmad Al'Azzeh, a Muslim; and Yonatan Shapira, a former Israel Defense Forces pilot. While the involvement of these three presumably provides a Christian, Muslim and Jewish perspective, all three of them tell the same story – that Palestinians are innocent victims of an oppressive Israeli occupation, much like the Roman occupation in the time of Jesus.

Sami Awad is the founder and executive director of the Holy Land Trust (HLT), and is also the son of Bishara Awad, the founder of Bethlehem Bible College. The HLT website states:

Holy Land Trust exists to lead in creating an environment that fosters understanding, healing, transformation, and empowerment of individuals and communities, locally and globally, to address core challenges that are preventing the achievement of a true and just peace in the Holy Land.

However, HLT supports the anti-Israel boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (BDS), which according to the Simon Wiesenthal Center, seeks to destroy Israel by demonizing the Jewish State as a 21st Century Apartheid regime. This is not an action that promotes “the achievement of a true and just peace in the Holy Land.”

Speaking at the National Leadership Conference for the Vineyard Church in 2009, Awad stated, “We've actually done training in non-violence for Hamas leaders and other militant groups as well.” Since Hamas makes it clear in its charter that it intends “to fight the Jews and kill them” and replace Israel with an Islamic state, the only thing Awad's so-called “training” in non-violence does is give Hamas some unwarranted credibility.

Ahmad Al'Azzeh, the Muslim featured in the film, has served as an activities coordinator for HLT and is the field coordinator for “Musicians without Borders,” which works in cooperation with HLT. Al'Azzeh is an advocate of a one-state solution, which means the establishment of a Palestinian state through the destruction of the Jewish state.

Al'Azzeh may think a one-state solution will bring about a true and just peace for Palestinians, but the destruction of Israel will most certainly not result in peace or justice for any of its citizens, Jew and non-Jew alike.

Yonatan Shapira is a former Israeli air force pilot turned anti-Israel activist. He is involved in “Breaking the Silence,” an organization that claims to collect the testimonies of disenchanted soldiers who served during the Second Intifada. However, the charges of “war crimes” against Israel are all based on “anonymous and unverifiable hearsay ‘testimonies.’”

Shapira is also involved in the BDS movement, and participated in the “Free Gaza” flotilla in 2010 and another flotilla attempt in 2011. These are not the activities of a person who is working towards peace with an existent Jewish State. Rather, as this picture demonstrates, they are the activities of someone who is working for a Palestinian state, which as Mahmoud Abbas declared on July 29, 2013, will be Judenrein.

Sami Awad and the Holy Land Trust support the BDS movement and offer training for Hamas, whose reason d'etre is to kill the Jews and replace Israel with an Islamic state.

Ahmad Al'Azzeh works with the HLT and advocates for a one-state solution, which also means the destruction of the Jewish State.

Yonatan Shapiro is involved in an organization that demonizes Israel through unverifiable means, supports BDS, and participates in anti-Israel flotillas.

These are the only testimonies presented in the one-sided, anti-Israel documentary financed by Mart Green.

In light of the fact that “Little Town of Bethlehem” is still advertised on EGM's Facebook page, and in the absence of any public statement from Green that indicates his perspective concerning

Israel has changed since the production of the documentary, one has to wonder just how much his negative view of Israel will prejudice the future stance of ORU and E21 towards Israel.

If the involvement of Sami Awad and the screening of “Little Town of Bethlehem” at Empowered21's “Converge21 USA” conference at Regent University in Virginia in 2012, and the inclusion of Jack Sara in Empowered21's Global Congress in Jerusalem in 2015 are any indication, the final position of E21 and ORU will not be good for Israel.

http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_print=1&x_context=7&x_issue=51&x_article=3077

CAMERA Waiting for Response to Letter to Mart Green About Little Town of Bethlehem, Snapshots, A CAMERA Blog, June 10, 2016

CAMERA is waiting for a response to a letter sent to Mart Green, producer of the 2010 movie Little Town of Bethlehem.

On June 1, 2016, CAMERA sent a letter to Mart Green who currently serves as Chief Strategy Officer for Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.

Copies of the letter were also sent to Mart Green's father David Green, CEO of Hobby Lobby and Mart Green's brother, Steve Green, who serves as President of the company, which has 700 stores throughout the United States.

Another copy of the letter was sent to Jim Hanon, the movie's director.

In the letter, CAMERA asks Mart Green to embark on a campaign to unwind the damage done to Israel's reputation (and to the reputation of American Jews who support the Jewish state) by the misinformation broadcast in the movie.

“The movie's propagandistic treatment of the Arab-Israeli conflict incited hostility and unwarranted contempt toward Israel and its Jewish supporters in the minds of thousands of viewers,” the letter stated.

CAMERA asked Mart Green to publish and distribute a fact sheet that would be sent to officials at the 400 venues where the movie was shown. CAMERA also asked that Mart Green issue a press release drawing attention to his efforts to correct the record.

Accompanying the letter was a 20-page analysis of the factual misstatements and misinformation broadcast in the movie. Some, but not all of CAMERA's complaints about the movie can be seen in this article published in November 2015.

One problem described in the letter (but not the article) is how the movie misleads its viewers by passing off footage of an Australian jet as an Israeli fighter plane.

At various points throughout the film, LTOB shows footage of a jet fighter doing aerial maneuvers while Yonatan Shapira, who is featured at length in the film, speaks about serving in Israel's air force. Viewers are led to believe that the plane in being shown is an Israeli fighter jet.

It is not.

A close examination of the footage in question reveals that the plane in question has the name of an Australian fighter pilot whose name and rank and story can be readily found on the Internet. (A screenshot of the stenciling on the fuselage, with the pilot's name can be clearly seen in the image at the top of this entry).

This information can only be obtained by looking at the film on a frame-by-frame basis, as CAMERA has done. Viewers who see the film in a public setting simply will not be able to do this.

This is only one of the many problems in the list sent to Mart Green.

In the letter, CAMERA also asked Mart Green if the Green family was involved in the production of another anti-Israel film, *With God on Our Side* produced by Porter Speakman, Jr. Despite repeated requests for information about the funders of this film, Speakman has not revealed their identities. "Individuals and organizations who felt it was an important topic to address donated toward this project," Speakman wrote in an email to CAMERA in July 2012.

Earlier today, CAMERA contacted LTOB's director Jim Hanon and asked if he would be issuing a public statement in response to the letter. (No.)

While speaking with CAMERA, Hanon said that he produced *Little Town of Bethlehem* to allow people with a particular perspective a chance to tell their stories. He "was not offering it up as a historical document," Hanon said.

When told that he was not merely offering up different perspectives, but misinformation about the Arab-Israeli conflict, Hanon stated that the sources in the film would consider the information presented in the letter to the Greens as misinformation and that giving them a chance to tell their story in a public forum "is not harmful."

Watch this space for more information.

http://blog.camera.org/archives/2016/06/camera_waiting_for_response_to.html

See also http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=118&x_article=3171

Will Mart Green Make Amends for Little Town of Bethlehem?, The Times of Israel, Dexter Van Zile, June 10, 2016

Mart Green, the chief strategy officer at Hobby Lobby, a chain of 700 hobby and craft stores located in the United States, is facing a challenge similar to the one confronting the protagonist in a Hasidic story known as “A Sack Full of Feathers.”

In the story, a Jew in Eastern Europe who loves to tell (and embellish) stories about the people in his village is summoned to speak to his rabbi who tells him that through his irresponsible story telling, he has ruined the reputation of a fellow Jew, a businessman.

The storyteller is appalled at what he has done and asks what steps he must take to make amends. He promises to do anything the rabbi tells him. The rabbi tells him to go get a feather pillow, which he does. Upon his return the rabbi tells him to rip open the pillow and scatter the feathers into the air, which he does.

After the feathers are blown about, the rabbi then turns to the storyteller and tells him to gather up every last one of the feathers and stuff them back into the pillow. The storyteller looks at the rabbi in disbelief and complains that it is an impossible task. The feathers are all over the place. There is simply no way he’ll be able to retrieve all of them.

“That’s exactly the point,” the rabbi says. “The damage can’t be undone.” The rabbi then tells the storyteller he must apologize to the person whose reputation he harmed and also speak to all of the people he spoke to in the course of his story telling. The rabbi also told him to study the Torah and with a particular emphasis on the writings about lashon hara or “evil tongue.” The storyteller did as he was told and according to the story, underwent a change in how he dealt with people.

Mart Green is now confronted with a similar scenario. He has been asked to retrieve the feathers of lashon hara that were released from the pillow and broadcast into the world by his decision to finance and distribute Little Town of Bethlehem, a so-called documentary that egregiously misinforms its audiences about the Arab-Israeli conflict.

One of the most egregious problems with Little Town of Bethlehem, which was shown in at least 400 public venues in North America, Europe and the Middle East, is that it posits an equivalence between Palestinian violence and the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s.

It does this in a number of ways, most notably by juxtaposing footage of the protesters being attacked by Bull Connor’s police with images of Palestinians fighting with Israeli soldiers, presumably in the West Bank. To drive the point home, the movie quotes Sami Awad, founder of Holy Land Trust, who asserts “The First Intifada was a lot like the civil rights movement in the U.S.”

Awad’s assertion that the First Intifada was “a lot like” the non-violent civil rights movement in the U.S. ignores one obvious fact: Despite the of-repeated assertion that the First Intifada was a “non-violent” uprising, it was no such thing. Between 1987 and 1992, thousands of firebombs were thrown at Israelis by Palestinian terrorists. Dozens of Israelis were killed by these and other acts of violence during this time.

Moreover, hundreds of Palestinians suspected of collaborating were killed by their fellow Palestinians. The effort to root out suspected collaborators provided a cover for widespread score-settling murders in Palestinian society. This internecine violence is one of the reasons why Palestinian leaders worked to bring the First Intifada to an end.

There were no comparable acts of violence perpetrated by the civil rights movement led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr..

To compare the self-disciplined, moral and non-violent civil rights movement in the United States with the First Intifada is an insult to the memory of MLK and to the African American community in the United States.

There's a lot more that's wrong with the movie. For example, the movie portrays Jewish and Arab relations prior to Israel's creation as good and free of racism or hostility. This is simply false. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al Husseini, the leading figure of Palestinian nationalism, regularly incited against Jews and this incitement resulted in the deaths of dozens of Israelis in a number of attacks, most notably the riots of 1929 and 1936.

Shockingly enough, the movie, directed by former advertising executive Jim Hanon, makes no mention of the Mufti's role in broadcasting Nazi anti-Semitism into the Middle East during World War II. It's one of the drivers of the conflict till this day. How can a movie ostensibly devoted to peacemaking ignore problems like this?

Moreover, there is no reference in the movie to the vicious antisemitic incitement broadcast on Hamas- and PA-controlled television stations on a regular basis. The movie also portrays Israeli voters as monsters who do not want peace because they elected the "fanatical" Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister. Israeli voters did this, according to a source in the movie, because they did not want peace. In reality, it's not that they didn't want peace; they wanted security.

At one point in the film, it shows a group of Palestinian men confronting and trying to provoke Israeli soldiers. It's presented as part of a strategy of "peacemaking" but in reality, it is a contrived spectacle that makes the Israelis look like monsters to audiences in the West, as the Grinch Who Stole Christmas.

In sum, Little Town of Bethlehem portrays the conflict as almost all Israel's fault and the Palestinians are helpless and innocent victims. Not only does this demonize Israel, it harms the reputation of Israel's supporters in the United States, many of whom are Jews. By portraying Israel as the warlike nation that will not make peace with the Palestinians (whose violent acts are whitewashed), Little Town of Bethlehem portray supporters of the Jewish state as morally misguided people who are indifferent to the suffering caused by the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Propaganda like this has had a real impact on American Jews, particularly on college campuses where they have been regularly assaulted and harassed on an increasingly regular basis over the past few years. Mart Green may have thought he was promoting peace when he produced Little Town of Bethlehem, but in fact, his movie promoted baseless hatred toward Israel and its Jewish

supporters in the United States. People who believe what this movie says about Israel will think that there is something seriously wrong with the people who support the Jewish state.

In an effort to convince Mart Green to make amends, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) sent a letter asking him to “unwind the damage” caused by the movie he produced.

In effect, CAMERA asked Green to gather up the feathers he and his director, Jim Hanon, threw into the wind back in 2010 when they produced and distributed this movie. Along with this letter, CAMERA provided a list of the problems in the movie by CAMERA. (Both the letter and the list of problems with the movie can be seen here.)

In the letter, CAMERA asks if Green produced *With God on Our Side*, another movie that demonized Israel and which came out at about the same time as *Little Town of Bethlehem*. The director of this film, Porter Speakman, Jr., has never revealed the names of the people who footed the bill for this film. “Individuals and organizations who felt it was an important topic to address donated toward this project,” Speakman wrote in an email to CAMERA in July 2012.

Until somebody fesses up for producing this film, the world will never know who paid Speakman to defame the Jewish state in a manner that would make Hamas and Hezbollah happy.

Green might not be able to do undo all of the damage caused by *Little Town of Bethlehem*, but his efforts will go a long way toward demonstrating that the Green family — which owns the Hobby Lobby, Mardel, a chain of Christian bookstores, and which is a primary supporter of Oral Roberts University, the Empowered21 Movement, and the Museum of the Bible — understands that with great power comes great responsibility.

Hopefully, Mart Green has learned that making and distributing documentaries is not like selling other types of merchandise that can be put on a shelf in a craft shop. If there is something wrong with the product on the shelf, it can be returned for a refund.

In 2006, Hobby Lobby recalled 2.3 million Christmas light sets that posed a fire and electric shock hazard to consumers. Earlier this year, the company recalled more than 12,000 pacifier holders and 14,000 stuffed rattles, both of which presented a choking hazard to children.

Recalling binky holders and stuffed rattles is an easy task compared to the challenge facing Mart Green. How does one undo the damage done by dishonest propaganda?

How does one recall a bad idea?

Mart Green had an opportunity to make a truthful movie about the Arab-Israeli conflict, but sadly, he didn't. Now, he has a chance to demonstrate he has learned his lesson by at least trying to stuff some of the feathers back into the pillow.

Will he?

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/will-mart-green-make-amends-for-little-town-of-bethlehem/>