

Unethical Divestment

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With the growing popularity of “ethical investment” policies in the financial dealings of the great and the good, it was only a matter of time before we witnessed the birth of its evil twin – unethical divestment. In recent months, the major target of this sinister practice has been the State of Israel.

A few weeks ago, the Presbyterian Church USA threatened to divest its stock in four companies providing helicopters, cell phones and other “controversial” items to Israel. Similar measures had already been proposed by the Episcopal Church USA, the United Church of Christ and two regions of the United Methodist Church, as well as the World Council of Churches. Meanwhile the Church of England (many of whose members espouse anti-Semitic “replacement theology”) could hardly wait to adopt this latest expression of bigotry masquerading as political correctness.

In promulgating these self-righteous decrees, the “liberal” churches deliberately ignore six decades of Arab violence and fanaticism aimed at the destruction of Israel, including crimes against peace (armed aggression, economic blockade), crimes against humanity (massacres of civilians in schools, synagogues, planes, airports, buses and restaurants) and Nazi-style antisemitic incitement (openly genocidal pronouncements from political and religious leaders in Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian Authority and other medieval tyrannies in the Middle East). Worse still, by contributing to the isolation and demonization of the Jewish state, they consciously further the interests of those who organize, sponsor and finance the current campaign of terrorist atrocities against the Israeli people.

The advocates of divestment are well aware of the value of American Jewish timidity in legitimizing their conduct. At the same time, they are extremely anxious to seize the moral high ground from their Jewish victims. Late last year, for example, a number of “liberal” Protestant groups actually had the effrontery to invite Jewish organizations “to explain why they find economic sanctions against Israel objectionable” – and Jewish leaders, instead of declaring that they would not be summoned as shamefaced defendants in an ideological show-trial of their own people, saw fit to provide a detailed written response (*Forward*, December 3, 2004).

Similarly, when the United Church of Christ passed its veiled divestment resolution in July, its spokesman hastened to emphasize that the Church remained “committed to interreligious dialogue” and “has affirmed its relationship with the Jewish community in condemning anti-Semitism in all its forms.” The UCC would like nothing better than a certificate of political kashrut from Jewish leaders, even as it singles out the world’s only Jewish country for vilification and

pariah status.

In response to this malevolent campaign, American Jewish organizations have accused the divestment promoters of employing a bigoted double-standard against the Jewish state. But if they truly believe what they say, then they must draw the logical conclusion and treat these institutions just as they would treat any other hate group – the Ku Klux Klan, for example. That means announcing that there will be no meetings, no interfaith dialogue, no joint political statements or campaigns, no joint “fact-finding” trips to Israel – generally no cooperation or recognition of any kind, until the divestment motions are repudiated and a public apology issued.

But this should be only the beginning. Since the enemies of Israel intend to punish certain companies for standing by the Jewish state while its citizens are in peril, friends of Israel should make it clear that they will reward these companies for the same reason. American Jewish institutions should announce that their own investment portfolios will buy stock in any companies from which the “liberal” churches divest, and that they will recommend these companies’ products to their members. And they should lobby Congress to include divestment campaigns in the legislation banning compliance with the Arab boycott of Israel.

Initially, some progress was made along these lines. The American Jewish Committee indicated that it had no interest in further “dialogue” with the Presbyterian Church USA, while the American Jewish Congress proposed to buy shares in companies targeted for divestment (*The Jewish Week*, April 1, 2005). But by September, Jewish organizations had already caved in, eagerly hosting a delegation from eight “liberal” denominations on a mindless “fact-finding” visit to Israel – as if the reality of the murderous Arab war against the Jews were an esoteric mystery that could only be deciphered on the scene of the crime.

If American Jewish leaders truly care about their Israeli brothers and sisters who are being bombed, shot, knifed, incinerated and massacred, then they cannot be content with ritual denunciations of the boycotters and divestors. There can be no policy of “business as usual” with those who practice economic discrimination against any Jewish community. Friends of Israel should ostracize the purveyors of bigotry. And they should persevere until they have secured not only an end to the divestment campaign, but an appropriate display of contrition from its instigators and accomplices.

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