

Archbishop Hanna's Blood Libel

by Hugh Fitzgerald



A report about Atallah Hanna, the Archbishop of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, who accuses Israel of having poisoned him, can be found [here](#).

A Palestinian cleric who has vocally supported terrorist violence against Israelis was denounced by a prominent Jewish interfaith organization on Monday for his recent claim that he had been deliberately “poisoned” by the Israeli authorities.

Archbishop Hanna is an extreme case of the Islamochristian phenomenon, the Christian who, living in a Muslim sea, for self-protection internalizes the attitudes of the

circumambient Muslims and parrots their views. There are others like him. The most disturbing example of an Islamochristian cleric was Archbishop Hilarion Capucci, a Melkite Greek Catholic who smuggled guns and other weapons in his Mercedes (so much for his vow of poverty) to the PLO in 1974. The Israelis caught him, and sentenced him to 12 years in jail, but after intervention by the Vatican, he was released, having served only two years. Despite the Vatican's promise to Israel to prevent him from engaging in politics, Capucci returned to his anti-Israel activities. He was one of the passengers on board the Mavi Marmara, the Turkish vessel which attempted in 2010 to break the blockade of Gaza. Capucci lived to the quite unnecessary age of 94, having put Christianity largely aside, and devoted his last years to defending the Jihad by Palestinians against Israel.

Not all Christian clerics in Muslim lands are like Capucci, dutiful dhimmis who accept and echo the Muslim worldview. Some bravely face their Muslim tormentors. In Pakistan there was the Bishop of Faisalabad, John Joseph. He spoke out against the Muslim persecution not just of Christians, but of those of other faiths (Hindus, Sikhs) as well. He finally could not take the endless torment to which members of his flock were subject. Bishop Joseph committed suicide by shooting himself on May 6, 1998, in protest at the execution of a Christian on trumped-up blasphemy charges by Muslims in Pakistan.

The International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) said in a statement that there was "no evidence" that Archbishop Atallah Hanna – who heads the Sebastia Diocese of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem – had been exposed to a "chemical substance" after Israeli forces allegedly fired a tear gas canister into his church in an incident on Dec. 19.

It is not even clear that Israelis fired a tear gas canister into Archbishop Hanna's church. Presumably the IJCIC had

checked with the IDF, which has a record of telling the truth, and which would certainly have admitted firing a tear gas canister if in fact it had. The use of the word “allegedly” casts doubt on that – Hanna’s – version of events.

Furthermore, the IJCIC statement strongly criticized the World Council of Churches (WCC) for endorsing Hanna’s version of events in a message of support it issued on Jan 2.

The World Council of Churches has for decades been taking the Muslim side against Israel. They have denounced Israel on dozens of occasions, accepting Palestinian charges and refusing to listen to Israel’s version; the WCC has accused Israel of deliberately targeting civilians, and repeated unsubstantiated Palestinian charges of war crimes, such as firing on ambulances, schools, and hospitals. The WCC has sent dozens of activists from Europe to the West Bank, disguised as tourists, to collect information on the IDF. These “tourists” then return to Europe, where they deliver lectures on what they saw, or claim to have seen, in the West Bank, in speeches laced – according to those who have attended their lectures – with blatant antisemitism.

The IJCIC said it was “deeply disappointed that the World Council of Churches (WCC) has supported Archbishop Atallah Hanna’s recent baseless accusations against the State of Israel.”

For more on the WCC, and its long history of anti-Israel bias, see [here](#).

The IJCIC was “deeply disappointed” in the WCC’s supporting Archbishop Hanna’s charge that Israel had used “violence” against him – for which the WCC, like Hanna himself, had no evidence – but it could not have been surprised. The WCC has been promoting the Palestinian cause, and maligning Israel, for decades.

The statement [by the IJCIC] continued: “There is no evidence that Israel tried to poison him, as he alleges, or that there was any ‘violence’ done against him, as WCC seems to assume. In light of the disputed accounts of the source of his illness, it would have been appropriate to urge Israeli law enforcement agencies to vigorously investigate the matter and ensure full protection for all.”

Appointed to his position in 2005, Hanna has made several statements supporting Palestinian terrorism against Israel and has compared Israeli residents of the West Bank to ISIS members.

Accusing Israel of engaging in a “plot” against the Orthodox Church last June, the Archbishop stated that “our enemies have created ISIS and similar terror organizations in order to harm the Christian presence in the Arab world.”

How exactly could Israeli Jews have “created” ISIS and “similar terror organizations”? Either the ideology of ISIS accorded with Islam or it did not. Israel did not make up the Qur’anic verses which ISIS members quoted in justifying their rapes, murders, and other crimes against Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims in their “caliphate.” Could Muhammad Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi, whose tribal origins in northern Iraq are well-known – we have detailed histories of his father and grandfather – and who had spent years acquiring a Ph.D. in Islamic studies at Saddam University, conceivably have been an Israeli agent? Is there a scintilla of proof? Would an Israeli agent have blown up himself and his children, as Al-Baghdadi did in 2019? Absolutely not. When tens of thousands of Muslims from all over the world flocked to join the Islamic State, was there a hint of Israeli involvement or inveiglement? It’s all a figment of Archbishop Hanna’s perfervid imagination.

And what about Hamas and Hezbollah, two “terror organizations” that are “similar” to ISIS, that Archbishop Hanna claims were

“created” by Israel? Would the Israelis have created such groups, and allowed them to kill thousands of Israeli Jews? How plausible is that? Would Israel have fought three wars against Hamas, and one against Hezbollah, groups that – according to Hanna – were created and sustained by Israel itself? And how would the existence of Hamas and Hezbollah, Muslim terrorist groups that targeted Israeli Jews, “harm the Christian presence in the Arab world”? Atallah Hanna’s charges of an Israeli plot make no sense, are incoherent. If the Israelis wanted “to harm the Christian presence in the Arab world,” why would they not have posed as Christians and, in that guise, have killed Muslims at home or in their shops or on the street, machine-gunned students in madrasas, blown up worshippers at mosques?

After last month’s incident, Hanna claimed in an interview with Jordanian television that Israeli forces were attempting to silence him.

What happened could be an assassination attempt, or an attempt to keep me sick throughout my life,” Hanna said in the Jan. 2 interview. “I cannot be certain that Israel is behind this incident, but indications show that it is behind it.”

It “could be” an assassination attempt and “I cannot be certain” that Israel is behind it. The tentativeness is warranted. In point of fact, there was no evidence of an attempt on Hanna’s life. Israel has shown in the past – think of those half-dozen Iranian nuclear scientists who were killed in the middle of Tehran – that when it wants to assassinate someone, it almost never fails. And Archbishop Hanna’s hatred of Israel has been on display for many decades – why would Israel just now try to kill him, or to “keep [him] sick throughout his life”? Had something changed to make the Israelis decide he had to be put out of commission? Not that anyone has been able to find.

These allegations brought a robust response from the Israeli Foreign Ministry, whose spokesperson charged Hanna with promoting a classic antisemitic canard.

“The accusations are redolent of the blood libel,” said the ministry’s spokesman, Lior Haiat.

Archbishop Hanna was simply continuing his “despicable defamation campaign against Israel,” Haiat noted.

IJCIC also criticized the WCC for playing down Hanna’s extremist views.

“Archbishop Hanna is not merely ‘a strong critic’ of Israel, as the WCC stated,” the group said. “He has called for the creation of a Palestinian state ‘from the river to the sea.’ The archbishop has declared that ‘Zionism is a racist, terrorist movement,’ and referred to the Israeli government as ‘money changers in the Temple.’”

Said IJCIC: “An individual like Hanna who espouses these views should not automatically be believed when he makes accusations against Israel without evidence.”

That’s quite an understatement by the IJCIC – that someone consumed with hatred for Israel and the “racist, terrorist movement” that is Zionism “should not automatically be believed.”

Archbishop Hanna’s preposterous charge of having been poisoned by Israeli agents will continue to be disseminated throughout the Arab and Muslim world, where it will, despite a total absence of evidence, be taken seriously. But we who are neither Arab nor Muslim have no reason to believe, and every reason to doubt, his version of events. Archbishop Hanna has not been as damaging to Israel’s well-being as was the late gunrunning Bishop Hilarion Capucci, but it’s not been for want of trying. Give him time.

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