

Which Israel will be Greeting the Pope?

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Is it the official diplomatic fanfare and PR machine parading Israel's religious "tourism," or the unofficial welcome decorating Palestinian churches in Jerusalem with slogans like "Jesus is garbage" and "Mary is a cow"?

Would it be the apartheid highways and byways dedicated exclusively to Israelis, or the high separation wall cordoning original Christian and Muslim Palestinians inside the city that cuddled and protected the baby more than 2000 years ago?

It is highly unlikely Pope Francis, like other Christian tourists, would face the same military barriers that recently blocked the descendents of the first Christians and Western diplomats from performing religious services at the Church in Jerusalem. 

Robert Serry along with several European diplomats and hundreds of Palestinian Christians were almost "crushed" against an Israeli military barricade on their way to attend last month's Easter services. When Serry identified himself as UN Secretary General's special envoy to the Middle East and demanded immediate access, an Israeli officer responded: "So what?" adding, "we have orders to that effect."

It is indisputable that Israel has done a good job opening religious Christian sites for Christian "tourists." Undoubtedly it would have done the same for Muslims too, if that made economic sense. For the "Jewish" state of Israel, the "other" religious sites are archaeological "tourist" attractions belonging to prehistoric peoples. Just like the pyramids: Structures built by the long gone pharaohs.

The Pope's visit comes 66 years since approximately 800,000 were ethnically cleansed from their homes and more than 500 towns and villages were obliterated and wiped off the map. Zionist terrorist groups did not discriminate in 1948 between Christians and Muslims to achieve David Ben-Gurion's vision of "a state with at least 80 per cent Jews."

Up until then Christians represented 10pc of the population. Today, their number has dwindled to the low one digit. Keeping at the same rate, the original Christians will cease to exist in the land that gave birth to Christianity.

Ironically, Israel continues to court doom's day international Christian tourists, while stifling the resolute few original Christians by expropriating their land? As they did for the town of Beit Jala to build the "Jewish only" colony of Gilo.



The “**Hebrew neo-Nazis**” - quoting Israeli writer **Amos Oz** - are welcoming the Pope with a smashed cross at Tabga church near Lake Tiberias and threatening the life of Catholic bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo if he doesn’t evacuate “land of Israel.”

The anti-Arab Jewish hooligans are able vandalise Christian and Muslim sites with impunity because Israel “doesn’t want” to end it, according to former Shin Bet boss Carmi Gillon. Acts deeply rooted in a twisted religious teaching that “Gentiles are outside the protection of the law.”

These hate crimes are not being carried out by merely outlawed fanatics. About two years ago elected Israeli Knesset member Michael Ben-Ari tore the Bible in the middle of the Knesset. He insolently dumped it in what he described as the “garbage can of history.”

The Pope’s planned visit to the Cenacle, site of the Last Supper - Israel has restricted Christian prayers since 1948 - has been met with protests. Last week Yitzhak Batzon who opposed the visit told AFP “When ‘the crusaders’ come here making the sign of the cross and all kinds of rituals, this place will become idolatrous for us, and we will not have the right to pray there any more”.

This is the real Israel which Pope Francis and Western Christians need to discover. The heirs of yesteryears King Herod are today’s tormentors of the unwavering 2000-year-old guards of the Church. The Pope should challenge Israel to allow Palestinian Christians to go back to their original homes, abandoned churches, and end all restriction on religious freedom.

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