April 8th saw the leadership of the Christian Embassy take part in a dedication of the new home for Holocaust survivors in Haifa. The ceremony was attended by an ICEJ delegation headed by our International Director, Dr. Jürgen Bühler, along with Israeli dignitaries, local survivors, their relatives and friends. The gathering was hosted by our partner in this exciting project, Shimon Sabag of the local Israeli non-profit, Yad Ezer L’Haver (Helping Hands to Friends).

In just a very short time, the ICEJ has been able to raise the funds to purchase and renovate a four story building in Haifa that will serve as an assisted-living facility for more than 80 Holocaust survivors. The dedication marked the completion and opening of the community center and kitchen on the ground floor, where over 100 survivors in the area will be fed each day.

The ceremony was attended by Kadima chairwoman Tzipi Livni, leader of the largest political party in the Knesset, Haifa Mayor Yona Yahav, the German Ambassador to Israel, Dr. Harald Kindermann and Knesset Member Eitan Cabal. Israel's Chief Rabbi, Yona Metzger, meanwhile, was there to affix the ceremonial mezuzah on the front door.

Amb. Kindermann noted that his country was “engaged with Holocaust survivors so that they can end the autumn of their life in dignity – a dignity which the Nazis tried to destroy. We hope their latter years will be better than their former years... We can start a new chapter. But we know our nation carries a great weight of responsibility.”

The event drew a variety of media as well, especially from the Israeli and German press. In fact, every major newspaper and television channel in Israel has covered the story in recent weeks, as well as the main television and print media in Germany. Many were drawn by the added feature that skilled German workers from Saxony had given up their vacation time to volunteer in renovating the building. These workers felt they had been allowed to help heal the wounds which their country had inflicted on the survivors and their families.

As the driving force behind the project, the media also took great interest in Jürgen’s personal story as the son of a former member of the Wehrmacht during World War Two.

>> CONTINUED ON PAGE 7
The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem was founded in 1980 as an act of comfort and solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people in their claim to Jerusalem.

Today, the Christian Embassy stands at the forefront of a growing mainstream movement of Christians worldwide who share a love and concern for Israel and an understanding of the biblical significance of the modern ingathering of Jews to the land of their forefathers.

From our headquarters in Jerusalem and through our branches and representatives in over 80 nations, we seek to challenge the Church to take up its scriptural responsibilities towards the Jewish people, to remind Israel of the wonderful promises made to her in the Bible, and to be a source of practical assistance to all the people of the Land of Israel.

The ICEJ’s United States Branch is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with offices in Washington, D.C. and in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. We are a non-denominational faith ministry supported by the voluntary contributions of our members and friends.

We invite you to join with us as we minister to Israel and the Jewish people worldwide by using the enclosed response card to make your donation to the ongoing work and witness of the ICEJ.

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Behind the Battering

The White House agenda that’s undermining US-Israel ties

By David Parsons

After one year in office, it seemed US President Barack Obama had learned some lessons in conducting foreign policy and was ready to back off his heavy handed tactics in dealing with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It had become all too obvious that Obama had blundered by hammering away at Israel on settlements, while giving the Palestinians a free pass.

Thus, US Vice President Joe Biden paid a solidarity visit to Jerusalem in March to reassure Israeli leaders on Washington’s balanced approach to peacemaking with the Palestinians. But then the Obama administration deliberately ratcheted up the pressure over the issue of Jewish construction in east Jerusalem and relations soured again.

It has been manifestly unfair for the US administration to treat its closest democratic ally in the region and arguably the world in this manner. Obama has gone so far as to question Israel’s desire for peace, even while Palestinian Authority leaders are avoiding peace talks like the plague. When Netanyahu came into office last spring, PA officials from Mahmoud Abbas down unanimously said they would not talk to him “in a thousand years.” All their subsequent preconditions to talks are merely pretexts, often conveniently supplied by Washington, which has yet to hold them accountable for their intransigence.

Besides being unfair, the Obama administration has also been dishonest in its dealings with Israel. Early on, for instance, Netanyahu reminded the new Administration of the letter delivered in April 2004 by former US President George W. Bush to then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon containing key American commitments to Israel regarding the Palestinian track. But US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton brushed the letter aside as no longer binding, even though as a US Senator she had voted for a joint congressional resolution which endorsed the Bush letter as official US policy.

Another clear example of the dishonesty can be seen when Clinton went before the annual AIPAC policy conference in March and rapped Hamas for its incitement against Israel. Yet her comments on the incitement issue had actually been prompted by the Israeli government specifically complaining to the US State Department that PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas and prime minister Salaam Fayyad were honouring PLO terrorist Dalal Mughrabi, the leader of the notorious “Coastal Road Massacre” in 1978. Clinton is now trying to correct the record by finally confronting the PA about its own incitement, but only after being caught in an embarrassing fib.

All this has left many wondering what exactly is Obama up to with his heavy pressure on Netanyahu while coddling the Palestinians. Besides courting favour with the wider Arab/Islamic world, one commentator close to Obama recently chalked up the festering quarrel over Jewish housing in east Jerusalem to the White House wanting to bring the more dovish Opposition leader Tzipi Livni of Kadima into the coalition. That may be a welcome outcome of the arm-twisting, but the ultimate goal is two-fold.

First, the Obama administration is sending a message of “no adventurism on Iran.” By making Netanyahu sweat over a manufactured issue like the Ramat Shlomo housing approvals, Obama is signalling that Netanyahu is being kept on a short leash, meaning any unilateral Israeli actions regarding Iran will not be tolerated. If the Netanyahu government deems it necessary to pre-empt the growing threat of Tehran’s renegade nuclear program, no one should expect America to have its back in trying to manage the global fallout from such actions.

Secondly, the Administration is unnecessarily battering Netanyahu in a bid to soften his opposition to a Palestinian state, which they hope to declare within Obama’s first term in office. White House chief-of-staff Rahm Emanuel said as much to an American Jewish leader last year, according to the Hebrew daily Yediot Aharonot, and I don’t think it was a slip of the tongue.

In this regard, Obama and his team have misread the Israeli public. Obama believes Netanyahu does not truly represent the views of most Israelis, but he does. They have been conditioned by years of violence, terror and foreign pressure into being ready to give up the West Bank for peace. Yet they remain highly sceptical that there is a peace partner on the Palestinian side who can and will keep their end of the bargain. Obama will make an even bigger blunder if he persists in thinking the Palestinians are currently ready for a state that would live at peace with Israel.

David Parsons serves as ICEJ Media Director and lives with his family in Jerusalem
At the very heart of his epistle to the Church in Rome, the Apostle Paul devotes three entire chapters to the relationship between Israel and Gentile Christians. Yet his teachings on Israel go well beyond chapters 9 to 11, and can be found throughout the Book of Romans.

In chapter 1, verse 16, Paul immediately proclaims that the gospel is “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” In chapter 2, he addresses the issue of Jewish identity and the benefit of circumcision. Then in chapter 3, Paul twice poses the question whether there is any advantage left in being Jewish, which he answers in the affirmative. And so forth...

Israel is therefore a theme which resonates throughout his message to the Roman believers, more so than any of his other letters to the churches of Asia Minor. This raises the question: Why did Paul write more on this subject to the Roman church? The reason can be found in an often overlooked passage: “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 16:3)

The Expulsion from Rome

Priscilla and Aquila had been co-workers with Paul for a number of years. In the Book of Acts, we meet this devout couple for the first time when Paul arrives in the Greek city of Corinth.

“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome).” (Acts 18:1-2)

The couple helped Paul to establish the church in Corinth and moved on with him to Ephesus, where they remained active in church planting alongside Paul. Like him, they were followers of Jesus of Jewish descent. In Acts, we learn that they were forced to leave Rome because the Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome.

The Roman historian Suetonius confirms this event while the early church historian Orosius gives the date as the year 49 AD. Suetonius explains the expulsion came about because of the “disturbances and riots among the Jews at the instigation of Chrestus.” Most church historians today agree that this refers to Christ. Apparently, there was an internal dispute among the Jews of Rome over the Messianic claims of Jesus, as had happened in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), Antioch (Acts 15:50); Iconium (Act 14:1-7), Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17), and elsewhere. But Claudius had little tolerance for their debate and expelled all the Jews.

This included Priscilla and Aquila, who fled to Corinth where they met up with Paul. For several years, they joined his ministry team, moving with him to Ephesus. But when a new emperor arose in Rome named Nero, he allowed the Jews to return in 54 AD. Priscilla and Aquila also returned, which is why Paul greets them at the end of his letter.
Hundreds Helped at Passover

ICEJ AID Project Update

Israel has seen steady economic growth over the past decade and was one of the first economies in the Western world to recover from the market meltdown of late 2008. Yet it remains a country of sharp contrasts, as a quarter of Israeli families with children live below the poverty line, including one-third of all Israeli children.

So when the Passover season rolls around each year, not everyone is able to celebrate the freedom it represents. During Passach this year, the ICEJ was able to provide timely assistance to needy families wanting to mark the holiday with dignity. ICEJ AID workers teamed up with government social workers and local charities to fulfill the large number of requests for food which came in, thanks to our generous donors who responded to our 2010 Passover Appeal.

For instance, ICEJ staff helped the prestigious Women’s Zionist Organization pack and distribute more than 200 food baskets to local residents in Karmiel. Dozens of new immigrant families from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia also gratefully received similar Passover packages.

In addition, we sponsored Passover Seder meals for the mentally ill in Jerusalem and delivered holiday food baskets to needy families in Ma’ale Adumim, Jerusalem and Dimona, Ashkelon and Kiryat Gat. Among the recipients were the disabled Israelis and underprivileged Ethiopian Jews.

Finally, the ICEJ had the privilege of blessing nearly 100 Holocaust survivors across the country with holiday food baskets and Seder meals.

In every case, ICEJ AID made certain that each person receiving assistance knew it came from concerned Christians.

So thank you again for your love and care for the Jewish people at this special time of year!

The First Gentile Church

The expulsion of Jews from Rome is therefore of central importance in understanding Paul’s message to the church there. The church in Rome had existed long before Paul ever arrived. Like other churches in those early decades, many congregants and undoubtedly most of the teachers were Jewish. They were the most versed in the Scriptures, which at that time consisted of only the Old Testament. Thus when Claudius expelled the Jews, this meant the church in Rome was probably the first one entirely made up of Gentiles. This must have presented a great challenge. All the teachers and elders who had instructed them every Sabbath were gone!

Yet the Holy Spirit was also with them and the Gentile believers managed to keep the church in Rome intact and growing on their own for a season. This likely brought a new sense of confidence, as they discovered the church could still operate without the Jews.

Tensions with the Return to Rome

But then Jews were allowed to return, and no doubt tensions arose. Priscilla and Aquila were among those who came back, where they probably encountered a changed attitude towards them. The historic context strongly suggests that Paul wrote to the church in Rome to set things in order and resolve the tensions between the new Gentile leadership and the returning Jewish congregants.

For instance, we see Paul firmly admonishing the Gentiles not to forget their spiritual roots are in Judaism. Even in his initial greeting, he reminds them that Jesus “was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.” But in chapter 2, he also advises the returning Jews to lead through example more than words. And in chapter 14, he addresses questions regarding Jewish dietary laws which seem to have surfaced.

Still, the main thrust of the letter is directed towards Gentile believers and their need to respect the Jewish roots of their faith. Paul stressed that the oracles, covenants and redemptive purpose of God began centuries earlier with the Jewish people. In addition, he made clear that the Messiah was not a Roman but descended from King David’s royal lineage.

The Roman church found itself in a conflict between Jew and Gentile from which it may never have recovered. Eventually, we find Priscilla and Aquila back in Ephesus, where Paul greets them again in 2 Timothy 4:19. Meanwhile, several decades later, the church at Rome became the breeding ground for Replacement theology, as one of the greatest heretics of the early Church – Marcion – arose from the ranks of the church in Rome.

He taught there from 137 until 144 AD, and maintained that the God of the Old Testament was one of vengeance and wrath, whereas the God of the New Testament was a different Deity, one of love and mercy. And even some of the books of the New Testament were too “Jewish” for him. Marcion was finally expelled from the church, but would end up taking large numbers of Gentile Christians with him. The impact of his erroneous doctrines – based on a rejection of Jews because they largely rejected Jesus – is still felt to this day.

Dr Jürgen Bühler serves as ICEJ International Director in Jerusalem
In recent months the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem has partnered with a group of German Christians called the Saxonian Friends of Israel to undertake several renovation projects in Israel. Besides the home for Holocaust survivors in Haifa, another key project was refurbishing the Keren Or Youth Center in Sderot, the town near the Gaza border ravaged by thousands of Kassam rocket strikes over the past decade.

In March, the skilled German workers spent three weeks making various repairs, retiling floors and walls, and rewiring the entire center. The electrical repairs were especially needed as power in the building had not worked properly for nearly 20 years. Each day, local Israeli youths involved with the center worked side-by-side with the German volunteers, learning skills, eating meals together, and building friendships.

“For 18 years, we struggled with electricity! And now, for the first time ever, everything works!” said Edward, the cook and youth leader at Keren Or.

Edward explained that the outside of the youth center was always dark at night, while inside power in the whole building would often fail when he used the stove and microwave to cook. But now it is all fixed and the German volunteers even installed a water heater in the kitchen so dishes can be washed with warm water.

“They have made a dream come true for me!” enthused Edward.

Edward added that many of the young people at the center have been traumatised by years of incessant rocket attacks from Gaza and they are often nervous when they hear noises. “So that’s also been a wonderful thing, to have people of flesh and blood come here, stand with us, hug us, and help to make our lives better. That’s made the biggest impact,” he said.

Michael Sawitzki the founder of Saxonian Friends of Israel, said his volunteers have all agreed to donate two weeks of their holiday time to come and work in Israel. “I just saw that everyone has different talents and I had this idea about organising a trip for skilled labourers from German to come to Israel to help with work projects. We’ve been doing it for several years now in partnership with the Christian Embassy,” he noted.

Michael said their motivation comes from Genesis 12:3, to “bless Israel so we can go back to Germany with this blessing as well.”

Vikki, an 11th grader, is very thankful for the Saxonian Friends, as well as for the ICEJ’s assistance to the Keren Or youth center in recent years. This has included initial funding to add another floor to the facility and make the entire building bomb-proof as well as sponsorship for weekend youth retreats when the town was under rocket attack.

“This is our home, our second home; we often spend more time here than our family home,” said Vikki. “The rockets brought so much tension, I would panic. But it’s really wonderful that we will now have a ‘safe’ place to do homework, learn computers, play and eat.”

“I was astonished at this wonderful project,” said Yigal Levy, the head social worker for Sderot and founder of Keren Or. “I thank God that He gave me the opportunity to give this project to our kids and to have them work with German volunteers like this. To see them working, speaking, hugging, and laughing together – I just could not imagine it until now.”

Taylor Innes is a staff writer with the ICEJ News team in Jerusalem
His father Albert Bühler had been selected to serve in the Waffen SS, but fled to another recruitment center because he “didn’t want to be a part of that.” Forced to serve on the Eastern front, he was captured by the Soviet army and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp. He spent four-and-a-half years in hard labour and was one of only a handful of survivors at the camp, thanks to Jews. A Jewish doctor had inexplicably singled him out for special medical treatment and nourishing rations, while a Jewish farming family allowed him to take food from their fields when the guards weren’t watching.

“My father always told us that story and said we should always remember this and be thankful to the Jewish people,” Bühler recalled. “At a time when Jews had every reason to hate German soldiers, they decided to help this poor fellow and save his life without knowing anything about him. Without these two people, I wouldn’t be here today.”

“We cannot bring back the countless victims of the Nazi genocide against the Jews of Europe, but we can bring some comfort and relief to those still with us who suffered greatly in that dark time and even to this day,” Jürgen concluded.

Indeed, the home for Holocaust survivors in Haifa has become so much more than just transforming a building. It is about transforming the lives of the survivors and their relationship with the German Christians who are aiding them.

The final opening of the entire assisted-living facility is expected to take place later this Spring but until then, the ICEJ is still raising funds to complete the renovations, provide furnishings, install a new elevator, and help with initial operating expenses. So there is still time to get involved in this incredible venture if you have not done so already. Naturally, for those who have given we extend our most sincere thanks for helping make this facility possible in such a short time.

Jan Morrison is a staff writer with the ICEJ News team in Jerusalem.

Support the Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors:
www.icejusa.org/HaifaHome
2010 Spring Teaching Conference

May 21-23, Murfreesboro TN

Join us for the ICEJ 2010 Spring Teaching Conference, featuring three days of rich Bible teaching and inspirational testimony in Murfreesboro TN.

Guest speakers include Nonie Darwish author of Now They Call Me Infidel, founder of Arabs for Israel and director of Former Muslims United, ICEJ Executive Director, Malcolm Hedding from Jerusalem and conference host, Allen Jackson, senior pastor of World Outreach Church in Murfreesboro TN.

Conference opens 7pm Friday May 21st and closes noon Sunday May 23rd. Registration $20. For more details call (615) 895-9830.

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