

Livingstone's Anti-Israel Heart

By Hillel Halkin

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“He has let us down,” wrote Henry Grunwald, president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, in the March 2 *Guardian* in reference to London’s mayor, Ken Livingstone’s most anti-Jewish and anti-Israel diatribes. “He has let his office down. Oliver Finegold [the Jewish reporter Mr. Livingstone insulted] deserves an apology, the Jewish community deserves an apology and most of all, London deserves an apology. Then we can all move on.”

Can we really?

“Moving on” has become the British mantra for the Livingstone affair. Mr. Grunwald was only echoing Tony Blair, who remarked, soon after London’s mayor accused Mr. Finegold last month of being “like a concentration camp guard” for badgering him with journalistic questions: “Let’s just apologize and move on - that’s the sensible thing.”

Mr. Livingstone, for one, has taken Mr. Blair’s advice. He has indeed moved on - from Oliver Finegold to Ariel Sharon, whom he called last Friday, replying to Mr. Grunwald in the *Guardian*, a “war criminal who should be in prison,” and from Ariel Sharon to Israel as a whole, a state established and maintained, he wrote in the same article, “by systematic violence and terror.”

Israel’s foreign ministry seems to be for “moving on,” too. The mayor’s latest comments, said ministry spokesman Mark Regev, “aren’t even worthy of an Israeli response.” And Zvi Heifetz, Israel’s ambassador to England, declared: “Israel has nothing to do with the issue at hand, which remains the mayor’s outrageous remark comparing a British journalist to a Nazi war criminal.”

Pardon me, gentlemen, but you’re all talking nonsense. Mr. Livingstone’s comparison of a Jewish journalist to a Nazi war criminal has everything to do with Israel, and what’s needed is not an apology. It’s some hard thinking about how anti-Israelism is the new and dangerous anti-Semitism of our times and is feeding off some of

the deepest and most potent myths of Christian and European history. Mr. Livingstone is not just the kooky mayor of London. He is illustrative of a mind-set that has long ceased to be the exclusive property of kooks and is more and more found in “respectable” European circles, of which he is in this respect representative.

Let’s start with an obvious question that no one has bothered to ask. Why on earth would anyone, much less the mayor of London, compare a journalist, no matter how pestered he feels by him, to a Nazi concentration camp guard? Where is there the slightest point of connection or resemblance between these two things?

There is indeed only one point of connection. The journalist in question was a Jew; millions of Jews were killed in the Nazi death camps; and embedded deep in Mr. Livingstone’s mind is the belief that the Jews he doesn’t like are the equivalent of the Nazis who killed Jews. He can deny it all he likes, but there is no other possible explanation of such a bizarre analogy.

It’s not just Mr. Livingstone, of course. When Nobel Prize-winning Portuguese author Jose Saramago compares Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians to the Germans’ behavior in Auschwitz, or well-known South African novelist Breyten Breytenbach says Israelis are behaving like a *Herrenvolk*, the same analogy is being invoked. In fact, it’s a so frequently seen feature of anti-Israel discourse these days that it’s become a cliché: The Israelis are the Nazis of our times.

Yet where does this cliché come from? To observe, quite correctly, that it serves to alleviate Europe’s guilt over the Holocaust by depicting Jews as no better than their murderers is only part of the answer, since the Saramagos, Breytenbachs, and Livingstones have no reason to feel personally guilty for the Holocaust. One has to go deeper than that.

One has to go, indeed, to the very roots of Christianity. Jesus, a Jew in every fiber of his being, was killed by the Roman rulers of Palestine. What did a Christianized Roman

Empire do with that fact? It turned Jesus’s murderers into his own people, forever accursed on account of it. Such a people deserved the worst, even annihilation.

This is the deepest, most instinctive of Christian “moves” in regard to the Jewish people. And it is the one that we now see being repeated, generally without any awareness on the repeaters’ part of what they are doing, in regard to Israel. Mr. Livingstone is no doubt being sincere when he calls the Holocaust “the greatest racist crime of the 20th century” and Nazism “the greatest evil in history,” just as he is sincere when he thinks of today’s Israelis and Jews as Nazis. Why shouldn’t he be? It’s what Christianity has done for 2,000 years, and Mr. Livingstone, like Mr. Breytenbach and Mr. Saramago, was raised, if not in a church-going Christian family, then certainly in a Christian world.

One cannot “move on” from this point until one first recognizes its existence. Not, perish the thought, that the mayor of London would like to see another Holocaust; but neither, one can assume, does it excessively worry him that, for example, the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has repeatedly called for Israel’s destruction, is now in the process of arming itself with nuclear weapons. After all, if the Jews of Israel are latter-day Nazis, they, too, deserve the worst. The more Livingstones, Breytenbachs, and Saramagos there are, the more the worst may one day become possible again.

No, what is demanded of someone like Mr. Livingstone is not an apology. The apologies of men like him are meaningless unless accompanied by the soul-searching that might enable them to understand their own hidden thought processes. Perhaps, consciously, London’s mayor is really not an anti-Semite. Unconsciously, he is a violent one, in the best Christian tradition. The last thing we should want is to get an apology from him and “move on.” ▲