

Religious Intolerance in...Israel?

Hi folks,

We were walking in Nazareth yesterday with some friends from a nearby kibbutz, and I saw the following display of religious sentiment (see the photos), which really shocked me. I couldn't believe my eyes. What do you think would happen in the US in a similar situation?

1. The first photo shows a huge sign displayed near the entrance to one of the holiest churches in the whole of Christendom (Church of the Annunciation), so that all the Christian pilgrims and worshippers would see it clearly ("And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers" -- Holy Quran).

The Christian Arab caretaker (in the Synagogue Church, where Jesus supposedly worshipped back in his day) complained about the sign. Our friends told us that the little mosque next to the sign was built when the city wanted to convert the adjacent parcel of real estate into a parking lot some years ago (in 2000?). The Islamists rebelled, insisting that it was some holy Muslim site, demanding to build a big mosque there. This led to riots and a large influx of Muslims from the West Bank to "protect" the site.

So, in the end, the "compromise" with the city was that a small mosque would be built and the remaining part of the lot would be converted into pedestrian area. Except I doubt that the offensive sign (or the Palestinian flags) were ever bargained for ... Incidentally, I also found this photo on the web, which is even more revealing, as it shows the full flag (of the Islamic Movement?). Somebody also described it here. Does this constitute protected free speech according to Israeli law?

2. The second photo shows an enlarged detail of the first one -- two Palestinian flags on the loudspeaker pole next to the flag.

3. In the third photo, the sign on a building facing one of the major streets of the city states "Islamic Movement -- Political Department."

I asked an Israeli lawyer friend of mine about the bigoted religious sign in the first picture: Was it protected by free speech according to the laws of Israel, or could it be construed as "hate speech"? What about the Palestinian flag -- is that allowed as per the current legislation? I did not even bother asking about the Islamic Movement, which for some weird reason has not been outlawed yet. Here was his reply:

"In practice - PLO flags are not banned, because they also represent PNA (the autonomy), so there is decision of Supreme Court saying that it is OK. Regarding the sign - as long as it is by Muslims and not against them, the court will tolerate it. Furthermore, it is clearly free speech about religion on religious property. It is not against any particular religion, but it glorifies Islam."

It would be interesting to come up with some statements -- even if remotely similar -- from within Jewish and Christian canonical texts and to post them nearby, just to see what the reaction would be. Double standards? Ugh ...

I guess democracy IS a suicide pact, after all ...

Seva





