

IRD Article: The Methodist Child Indoctrination League
By Mark Tooley, Institute on Religion & Democracy
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Among the latest exploits of the United Methodist Women's Division is a children's book intended to instill anti-Israel themes among Methodist youngsters. Innocuously called, "From Palestine to Seattle; Becoming Neighbors and Friends," the booklet portrays Israel as an oppressor of Palestinians while omitting all mention of terrorism. It was written by Mary Davis, a former United Methodist missionary in "Palestine," where she led "study tours," whose political content no doubt was predictable.

The United Methodist Women's Division, with over \$60 million in assets, \$30 million in annual income, and nearly 700,000 members, is one of the most powerful women's groups in America. Its mostly older members, strung across over 30,000 local churches, earn money for their New York-based headquarters with bake sales, Christmas bazaars, and church suppers. Few among them realize that their donations fund causes of the radical left, including anti-Israel activism.

In the children's story, a Seattle Methodist pastor just returned from "Palestine" shares a letter from a young Arab boy in Bethlehem with his own children. The Arab boy, Tarek, has never been to McDonald's because the closest one is in Jerusalem, and travel there requires a pass by the Israelis. Naturally, the American children are disturbed. In an ongoing pen pal exchange, Tarek asks the American children why their country thinks all Palestinians are terrorists. The Americans are embarrassed. They summon up the nerve to ask Tarek why passes are needed to travel to Jerusalem.

Tarek responds that Israeli soldiers require passes, and that Palestinians without them are turned away, whether they are going to their jobs, or to hospitals. "How can people be so unfair?" the American children ask their pastor father. The father is unsure how to answer. But he helps them begin another correspondence with a little Israeli girl, who recounts that her cousin, an Israeli soldier, has been imprisoned for refusing to guard the "checkpoints" because "they were wrong and they were hurting people."

Fascinated by what they have learned about all this injustice, the American children decide to accompany a Methodist missionary to "Palestine." They see for themselves the dreaded checkpoints. "Looking up, they saw a soldier with a gun sitting in a watch tower," the book records ominously. A helpful illustration shows the van full of frightened American children surrounded by armed Israeli soldiers and lots of barbed wire. With their missionary guide and a local Presbyterian minister, the children journey on to Jerusalem, where they visit Tarek's family.

The American boy is awakened at dawn by a "strange chanting voice," but Tarek reassures him that it is only the Muslim call to prayer. Even more exciting, Tarek's friend later invites the American children to a mosque. Of course, they love it! It has "beautiful crystal lights" and wonderful carpets. The imam explains that just as the body needs food, so does the soul need "prayer breaks."

Coincidentally, the American children are in Bethlehem just in time for a “Children’s Peace March.” Hundreds of children assemble with clerics and local officials to march for “peace.” The Americans make their own sign proclaiming: “Seattle Kids for Peace.” After the march, the young demonstrators assemble at the Church of the Nativity.

The next day, the American children get ready to visit Jerusalem. Their Arab friends expect to be left behind, because they know “it is very unusual for West Bank children to cross the checkpoint into Jerusalem.” But the Presbyterian pastor surprises them with passes! He explains that Palestinians under 12 years of age can sometimes get passes. Why is this so? The concern about teen-age Palestinians is not explained, of course. Happily, the children journey together to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and eventually Nazareth. The children also attend meetings of “Together,” an Israeli “peace” group. At the tour’s end, the children pledge to reconvene in America. “Today at the Sea of Galilee, Next year in Seattle!” they excitedly proclaim, spoofing the well known Jewish promise of “next year in Jerusalem.”

“From Palestine to Seattle” is accompanied by a more detailed teacher’s guide. “How would you feel if you were not allowed to visit a certain place?” the teacher is instructed to ask the children, so as to understand how Palestinians must hurt when Israel demands travel passes. “Say that Palestinians are sometimes not allowed to go into some areas of Israel,” the teachers are instructed. “Sometimes they are kept away from going to the places where they work or are kept away from their own farmlands.” The children are never told the reasons for this purportedly outrageous restriction. The children’s Israeli friend, Miriam, tells them of her fear about a “bomb.” But the children never hear who or what might ignite such a bomb. Unlike the helpful picture of the gun-toting Israeli soldiers scaring the children, there are no illustrations of Palestinian suicide bombers blowing up children and adults.

The teacher is also urged to ask the children to remember brave people who “took a stand,” like Martin Luther King, Jr. or Rosa Parks. Queen Esther and Daniel in the Bible are also cited. They are reminded of the Israeli soldier in the story who “took a stand” by refusing to man an Israeli checkpoint. There are no similar examples cited of taking a stand against Palestinian terror or Islamist repression. Presumably that would be too complex for the children, who are instead encouraged by the teacher’s guide to gather a pile of stones. They are to be told that in “Palestine,” stones can represent the rubble left when Israelis have bulldozed Palestinian homes for having done “something” against the Israeli government. Stones can “also be the means by which a young person resists the presence of Israeli soldiers in the town.” Palestinian youth “sometimes throw stones at the soldiers.” Likewise, in ancient times, the stones could “mark a holy place,” the teacher’s guide recalls, in a helpful comparison.

Teachers are asked to tell the children how the pass system for Palestinians resembles the pass system under Apartheid South Africa. “Apartheid is similar to the pass system that exists for Palestinians,” the teacher’s guide asserts. Then the children are to sample the injustice of the pass system themselves in a game in which some children are denied juice and grapes if they don’t have the right pass. Such fun! And such learning! The teachers

are admonished: “Remind the children that when people are denied things that they believe everyone should have, they feel bad and sometimes they become angry.”

The children are asked to recreate the “Children’s Peace March,” to make placards and march in the hallway, while waving flags. There’s also a time for prayer. The children are asked to learn how Muslims pray by spreading a blanket on the floor and bowing their heads down five times as they pray for peace. “Share with children that sometimes courage is needed to resist evil,” the teacher’s guide sternly instructs.

Will future United Methodist Women’s Division books for children offer similar opportunities to “resist evil” on figurative trips to Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Iran, or Cuba? Perhaps the children could watch the Saudi religious police beat unveiled women, or visit North Korean secret prisons where dissidents are starving, or hear Iranian clerics call for liquidating the Jews, or witness Cuban secret police tear gas democracy demonstrators. Sadly, the left-wing activists at the Women’s Division New York headquarters, funded by the dollars from ten thousand church bake sales, do not have much interest in resisting those kinds of evil.

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