

Israeli Minister in Letter to Pope: 'Jesus lived and died as a Jew'

Following several instances in recent months where Pope Francis appeared to endorse Palestinian narratives, Amichai Chikli, Israel's Minister for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, issued a strongly worded protest letter to the Pope

Chikli began his letter: "H.H. Pope Francis, Shalom. It is a well-known fact that Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem, as described in Chapter 2 of the Gospel according to Matthew: 'Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king.'"

The minister's first argument referenced a nativity scene featuring the baby Jesus lying in a manger draped with a Palestinian keffiyeh that was showcased in St. Peter's Square in Rome, Italy. After significant backlash, the Vatican chose to remove the display shortly later.

"It is a well-known fact that Jesus was born to a Jewish mother, lived as a Jew, and died as a Jew," Chikli continued. "It is also a well-known fact that the term 'Jew' originates from Judah, the fourth son of Leah, from whom the Tribe of Judah descended."

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"It is a well-known fact that there were those who sought to eradicate the connection between the Jews and Judah; one of the most prominent of these was Emperor Hadrian," Chikli wrote, before recapitulating the events of the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132 C.E.

“Hadrian was not satisfied with the physical destruction of the Jewish settlement; he anticipated the future, to the day when the Jews would seek to return to Judea. Therefore, he renamed the province of Judea to ‘Syria Palaestina,’ after the Philistines, the arch-enemy of Israel.”

“Two weeks ago, you took part in a display that echoes the Palestinian narrative, portraying Jesus as a Palestinian Arab. There is no other way to understand the decision to present his image in a cradle, wrapped in a keffiyeh. Had this been a one-time matter, I would not have written,” Chikli emphasized, before turning to the second event that prompted him to write the letter.

In excerpts from a book released on Nov. 19, the Italian Daily “La Stampa” cited the Catholic Pope saying, “It should be carefully investigated to determine whether it fits the technical definition of genocide,” while talking about the Gaza War. Pope Francis later said the comments were taken out of context.

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Nevertheless, Chikli charged: “You echoed the new blood libel, insinuating that the State of Israel ‘might be’ committing genocide in Gaza. You mentioned that allegations of genocide in Gaza should be carefully investigated.”

“As a nation that lost six million of its sons and daughters in the Holocaust, we are especially sensitive to the trivialization of the term ‘genocide’ – a trivialization that is dangerously close to Holocaust denial. One of the main proponents of this new blood libel against Israel is the human rights organization Amnesty, which opened its report with the distressing claim that Israel launched an unprovoked attack on the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023,” the minister wrote.

“Next year, we will celebrate a significant milestone in the relationship between the Jewish people and Christianity: the 60th anniversary of the Nostra Aetate Declaration from the Second Vatican Council. We know you are a close friend of the Jewish people; Just this past year, you met with families of hostages, injured soldiers, rabbis, and Jewish leaders from around the world.”

In conclusion, Chikli wrote: “Your guidance, actions, and leadership have tremendous influence worldwide. This is why I kindly ask you to clarify your position regarding the new accusation of genocide against the Jewish state. Truth and God are one.”

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