

Yael Eckstein: ‘Jewish-Christian relations are mainstream nowadays thanks to the effort and sacrifice of people like my father’

How did an Orthodox Jewish family create a \$200 million-a-year humanitarian relief organization, primarily funded by Christians, to bless Israel’s poor and victims of terror?

Yael Eckstein, the president and CEO of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (IFCJ) stated that her father recognized the importance and benefits of building strong relations between Christians and Jews long before it became mainstream or trendy.

In an interview with Joel Rosenberg, ALL ISRAEL NEWS editor-in-chief and host of THE ROSENBERG REPORT on TBN, Eckstein described her late father, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, as a “man sent by God on a mission to change history.”

It all began in 1983, she recounted, “when my father was sent from New York to Chicago to gather support against the Nazi march...that was going to take place in Skokie. Naturally, he went to the Jewish community, and he realized that even though Chicago has a relatively big Jewish community – they’re not going to make a difference here as far as stopping this march. And that’s when the local Christian community came and said, ‘We stand with you against this.’”

“It was then that my father realized that God called him for such a mission at a time as this,” Eckstein explained. “He started what was just a bridge-building organization with no financial, fundraising goal or objective. He would have

roundtables where Christians and Jews would discuss Jewish-Christian relations, but no Jewish person would show up. So, it was him and a lot of Christians.”

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According to his daughter, Rabbi Eckstein paid a painful personal price for his endeavor and faced an ultimatum.

“The Jewish community said, ‘We don’t approve of this. We’re taking you to the Jewish court to get you to stop that. Either you stop working with Christians, or you’re not part of the Jewish community,’” she told Rosenberg.

Rabbi Eckstein ignored the threats and pursued his vision of establishing a solid partnership between Christians and Jews, Yael explained. He posed crucial questions to himself and his community: Will we be stuck in this darkness forever? Will we be a self-inflicting community remaining in a never-ending conflict? Will we open our hearts or stay alone?

“Maybe God doesn’t want us to be alone,” Yael continued, describing her father’s thoughts. “Maybe everything that we’ve learned about the corruption of the Christian church has changed. Maybe these are people who are actually studying the words of God and listening.”

Today, Yael Eckstein leads the largest philanthropic, private, humanitarian organization in Israel, built upon this relationship.

Rosenberg suggested that the shift towards understanding and cooperation between the two faiths has been gradual and mutual. He also noted that after the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago and the rise of Evangelicalism over the past 150 years, Christians began to realize the Jewishness of Jesus. For example, the New Testament begins with the Jewish genealogy of Jesus. The Gospels make clear that all the

apostles were Jewish. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and spoke of His love and compassion for “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Rosenberg thus explained to Eckstein that huge changes in Christian thinking occurred when pastors began teaching that God really loves the Jewish people and has a hopeful plan for Israel’s future.

“This is not just ‘God loves the Jewish people,’” Rosenberg pointed out. “He is with the Jewish people. Something is happening that has not happened for 1,900 years. So, there has been a sea of change. But most of it, I would say, takes us back to the actual teachings of the New Testament. It’s not like Christians have changed their teaching. They’ve realized that Christian teaching is deeply loving and focused on God’s heart for Jewish people.”

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Eckstein agreed, saying: “The Jewish community has preserved the life of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus through 2,000 years of exile. When the Christian teachings were lost, the Jewish community still preserved that suffering.”

“In many ways, the Christian community needs the Jewish community. That’s where so much of these rich teachings are coming from, that they could understand their Christianity in a deeper way. And if it wasn’t clear before October 7th, it is definitely clear now,” she added.

As an Orthodox Jew who observes Shabbat, Eckstein only received news of the Hamas invasion of Israel’s southern communities and the subsequent atrocities after a delay. She was at the synagogue preparing to celebrate the Simchat Torah holiday when the horrific invasion and terror attack began to unfold on the morning of Oct. 7.

“I walked [into the] synagogue and my friend, Inbal, came to

me, and she realized, I guess, from my happy face that I didn't know," she said.

Then, she learned what had happened.

"I've never felt this way before. My body collapsed, and I was crying. It reminds me of like, when I found out my father suddenly died," Eckstein shared with Rosenberg.

"I was watching the terrorists invade cities where the fellowship has operated for over 20 years. And in places like Sarhan Negev, where the bulletproof vehicles that we donated just a few months before October 7th were literally saving lives. And seeing people hiding in the shelters that the fellowship has placed, and seeing the terrorists shoot at those shelters that were donated with love from Christians in America."

Especially in light of recent events, Eckstein's message to Christians and Jews is clear: "What God is looking for in messengers is to see the good, not to see the bad. To see the unity, not to see the separation."

Watch the full interview with Yael Eckstein on **TBN's website**.

THE ROSENBERG REPORT airs Thursday nights at 9 p.m. EST and Saturday nights at 9:30 p.m. EST – on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), the most-watched Christian television network in the United States.

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