

THE VICAR OF KING'S CROSS CHURCH IN SYDNEY: The Australian clergyman John McKnight told the press that he intends to clarify with Israeli authorities the whereabouts of his friend and parishioner Mordecai Vanunu, who mysteriously disappeared in London on 30 September 1986 following his disclosure of Israeli nuclear secrets to the media. (MAARIV 24 OCT 86) In response to the claim of the Anglican priest who has arrived in Jerusalem to search for Vanunu, the Prime Minister's office has issued a statement denying knowledge of his whereabouts and refusing an interview to McKnight. (DAVAR 27 OCT 86)

At a press conference in Jerusalem, McKnight told of the conversion of Vanunu to Christianity in early August. "We had profound discussions about Christian religious issues and the suffering of Jesus, following which Mordecai asked to change his religion, and he was converted and admitted to our congregation," the priest said. It was subsequent to his conversion that he decided to publish the information he had about Israeli nuclear secrets, believing he had done the right thing as a Christian concerned about the nuclear danger. McKnight denied that he had influenced Vanunu to disclose the nuclear secrets, photographs of which he had been shown by Vanunu. "My concern for Vanunu is the personal concern of a pastor for his flock, to tell him that we are concerned for him, value him, and support him as a human being," he said. (DAVAR 27 OCT)

Vanunu decided to "make a commitment to Christ" in June 1986 and was baptized in August. He participated in numerous church discussion groups on how a Christian responds to modern-day problems like poverty, racism, and nuclear power. A South American journalist employed by the church for maintenance work, Oscar Guerrerro, told Vanunu he could "earn some money" by revealing details about Israel's nuclear plant. (JERUSALEM POST 27 OCT 86)

"I believe in what I am doing," Vanunu had told McKnight, after he was warned of the risk he was taking (in publishing the nuclear information). "When I saw that he was convinced that his decision was right, I gave him my blessing," McKnight stated. While denying he had any political motivation in coming to Israel, McKnight was reported to have met with "political" persons such as Hebrew University Prof. Israel Shahak, considered an extreme Leftist. (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 27 OCT)

"The not-so-naive clergyman John McKnight has left his flock in Sydney to seek one lost sheep in the Holy Land. What he fails to grasp is that a change of religion doesn't free Vanunu from his oath and obligation to keep a secret...(yet) Rev. McKnight claims that Vanunu acted like a good Christian." (Dan Margolit, HAARETZ 28 OCT 86)

At a second press conference in Jerusalem, Rev. John McKnight reaffirmed his conviction that Vanunu is in Israel, but as a pastor he had to look after the "99" in his flock and not only "the one lost sheep." He reported that he had made contact with the Vanunu family in Israel, but refused to divulge details, except to state that they had not discussed Vanunu's conversion. (DAVAR 29 OCT)

"Indeed it is hard to recall a day of shame like this one. Behold the friend — perhaps the partner — of Vanunu. the vilest of traitors that this country has known, and he confesses: 'I am "Mordy's" friend' — so he calls the brand-new apostate — and he is not arrested or interrogated about his friendship — or partnership..." (Eliyahu Amikam, YEDIOT AKHRONOT 31 OCT)

"Do you have a sense of mission?" McKnight was asked. "Not mission," he replied, "but if a member of my congregation is hurt, I'll get to him even if I have to travel 1,000 miles or more." (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 31 OCT)

Q: Would you be willing to sell state secrets, Rev. McKnight?

A: No, I myself would not do that.

McKnight insisted repeatedly that his obligation to Vanunu was "man to man, as one Christian to another." He doesn't see himself as a missionary, but does see great similarity between Judaism and Christianity. "The transfer from the one faith to the other doesn't seem to me to be unusual or an act of betrayal, but rather of completion," he states. He also told of his extensive work in setting up 60 centres in Australia for drug addicts, and of ministry to prostitutes and derelicts. (HADASHOT 31 OCT)

In a letter to the JERUSALEM POST (3 Nov 86) Grant B. Livingston (a Canadian clergyman living in Israel) urged McKnight to return to Australia "and to quit defaming Israel." He charged that "pastoral concern for Vanunu is weakened by his busybody politics." Under the heading "WHAT DOES THE AUSTRALIAN CLERIC WANT?" the YIDDISHE ZEITUNG (31 OCT 86) in a lead article expressed astonishment at Rev. McKnight's description of Vanunu's "treachery" as an act committed in the spirit of Christianity. "This is surely news for the Christian world, which for 2,000 years has yet to defend the treachery of Judas Iscariot. Nor has any Christian country defended espionage and disclosure of state secrets as a morally Christian act."

Judith Zimmerit, Vanunu's American girlfriend, in an interview given to MAARIV's New York correspondent (3 NOV 86) described "the man I love" as "embittered and angry at himself and the world." She reported his holding a membership candidate's book in the Israel Communist Party, dated 29 November 1985. "He was also interested in religious ideas and attracted to the Christian religion, and on our trips around Israel he always visited churches."

"VANUNU: THE MAN WHO CROSSED ALL THE BOUNDARIES": Born to an ultra-orthodox Sephardic family of Moroccan immigrants, Vanunu was raised in the strictest traditions of Judaism, but in his adolescence passed through a crisis of identity, gradually turning away from Judaism. During his military service he put away the remaining orthodox externals. At first inclined to an extremist form of Jewish nationalism ("Kahanism"), he moved leftward during his university days, especially when he began to find among Arab students at Beersheva University the acceptance he was denied by Jewish students who sensed his shortcomings in scholarship and personal relations. Some of his former acquaintances were of the opinion that he was struggling to overcome his social and religious past, especially in the realm of sexual inhibitions. (Aharon Dolav, MAARIV 7 NOV 86)

THE ANGLICAN CONNECTION: Vanunu's Anglican connection began in Israel through his contacts with Arab students. YAD L'AHIM, the anti-mission society, was invited to uncover the link, but by the time a connection to the Ramallah Anglican Church was uncovered, he had left Israel. (MAARIV 7 NOV) The Rev. Jihad told an Israeli reporter of the link between McKnight and local Anglicans at the press conference McKnight had called: "We are Anglican missionaries in Ramallah, and we came here to meet Rev. McKnight, our co-religionist," he said. McKnight himself admitted that heavy pressure had been exerted on him by "certain elements in the Israeli Anglican Church. They asked him to consider the special sensitivity in Israel to the subject of mission because of the religious fanaticism of certain Orthodox Jews."

McKnight categorically denied that Vanunu had had contact with the Anglican missionaries in Israel, or that these had financed his costly flight to Australia, an important Anglican centre. He also denied that the church had paid Vanunu for his conversion, but did not explain how "an intelligent educated young man" like Vanunu had converted in so brief a period without any previous interest in the subject... Meanwhile, McKnight is being hosted at St. George, the Christian Anglican Centre in Jerusalem, although he emphasizes that he has come to Israel as a private person and not as a church emissary. (EREV SHABAT 31 OCT 86)

A 50-year-old Arab Anglican cleric from Ramallah, Audi George Rantisi, joined McKnight for an interview with the daily HADASHOT, whom McKnight characterized as "my very good friend." Rantisi (who was born in Lod and moved to Ramallah with his family in 1948) was ordained following studies in the U.K. and U.S., and then returned to head the Anglican community in Ramallah. In April 1976 he was elected to the municipal council, later becoming acting mayor until 1982... He was an open supporter of the PLO. At present he manages an orphanage and is regarded as a pro-Arafat activist, and among the extreme supporters of the PLO in the territories. He also maintains ties with central figures in the (Jewish-Arab) "Progressive List for Peace." The link between the Australian and Palestinian clergymen remains for the time being obscure. (HADASHOT 31 OCT)

"The Vanunu affair isn't leaving the headlines...but if there is a special side to the affair, it isn't so much the question relating to the nuclear activity of Israel as the question of the method of operation of the missionaries in Israel, who found a way to this man, turning him away from his religion and from his senses. It is this aspect which is worth investigating at once in order to expose all those labouring in the name of "that man" (Jesus) and causing Jews to apostasize and flee their people and country." (HATSOFEH 3 NOV 86)

Avraham Verdiger (POALEI AGUDAT YISRAEL) has submitted an urgent motion for the Knesset agenda requesting a discussion of the link of the Anglican mission to the Vanunu affair. "For years we have been warning of certain mission groups operating in Israel with the permission of the authorities who engage, among other things, in espionage," he stated in his request to the Knesset Speaker. (HAARETZ 4 NOV 86) M.K. Verdiger has called on the government to consider whether the time is not ripe to change its attitude towards missionaries. (AL HAMISHMAR 5 NOV 86) M.K. Verdiger, responding to government requests, has withdrawn his motion to discuss the Anglican mission and its links to Vanunu, the atom spy who converted to Christianity and sold atom secrets to foreigners. (HATSOFEH 4 NOV 86)

BACK IN AUSTRALIA: Australian clergyman McKnight is returning home today, defeated by an official "wall of silence." A "sad and disappointed" McKnight said he had been given the cold shoulder by ministers and bureaucrats in his hunt for the former reactor technician who converted to Christianity and became a member of his Kings Cross Anglican Church in Sydney. Denying rumours that he had been paid by a political group or newspaper to play up the affair, he said, "The cost of my trip was raised by Australian Christians." (JERUSALEM POST/DAVAR 29 OCT 86)

Following his return to Australia, Rev. McKnight told Yosef Shavit of YEDIOT AKHRONOT (7 NOV 86), who is accompanying Israeli President Chaim Herzog on a state visit to Oceania, that he was in touch with Israeli lawyers, and that he had "categorically refused to take part in any demonstration led by pro-Palestinian elements (in Sidney) during the presidential visit. 'I was treated hospitably during my visit to Israel, and I am not accustomed to repay good with evil,'" he said.

"If you see Motti in Israel, tell him that we love him and are praying for him," Vanunu's close friend, a young man in his 20s from the Anglican Church where he was converted, told the AL HAMISHMAR correspondent visiting Australia with the presidential party. "I did not go to Israel to make trouble nor for media purposes, but to find out what happened to a parishioner of mine who I believe is in urgent need of moral and spiritual encouragement," McKnight, the vicar of the church, stated. (7 NOV 86) The former flatmate of Vanunu, William Kinbacher, a Roman Catholic, recalls that Vanunu's book shelf was always full of philosophical and spiritual works, and that he had a particular fondness for the existentialist philosopher Kierkegaard. (JERUSALEM POST 7 NOV)

Following the official Israeli announcement that Vanunu is being held in an Israeli security installation, Rev. McKnight told the media that he is satisfied to know that his parishioner is in Israel, but he has questions about how he returned. He is considering the possibility of another visit to Israel, but for the present he has no funds for a flight. (HAARETZ/HATSOFEH 10 NOV). Meanwhile, he has sent greetings to Vanunu through the latter's Israeli attorney, Amnon Zicroni. (HATSOFEH 12 NOV)

APOSTACY AND BETRAYAL: "Mordecai Vanunu did not attain to Christian baptism in one day. It was a long process which began in his youth when he sought to be 'liberated' from the authority of parents and the yoke of the Torah and the commandments...This is a process for which the secular Israeli street has no remedy." (Y. Matityahu, HAMODIYA 5 NOV: "The Face of a Traitor")

"When we say 'meshumad' (Translator: usually a pejorative term for "apostate"), we do not merely make a sociological determination, that so and so left Judaism and joined another religion. The "meshumad" is one who makes trouble for us...Of course, there are exceptions to the rule who have even fought for Jews, such as Chwolson in Czarist Russia or Brother Daniel the Carmelite monk; but usually the Gentiles, the missionaries, know quite well that the motives (for conversion) are not pure matters of faith..." (Dr. Israel Eldad, YEDIOT AKHRONOT 7 NOV: "All the Apostates are of Jewish Origin")

MISSIONARY DISCHARGED FROM RESERVE DUTY: "The double-duty Reservist," Ari Sorko-ram of Ramat Hasharon, who "guided" overseas volunteers to work in I.D.F. camps has been discharged from reserve duty in the wake of information supplied by the anti-mission society YAD L'AHIM to the Minister of Defence. Haim Israeli, assistant to the minister, notified YAD L'AHIM that "in the wake of information that during his reserve duty two years ago Sorko-ram had propagated his Christian faith, he was transferred from his post." (HATSOFEH/HAMODIAYA 31 OCT) Minister of Defence Y. Rabin instructed his aide to implement his decision several weeks ago when it was learned that Sorko-ram was active in promulgating his beliefs among Jewish volunteers from abroad at military bases, as well as among Israeli soldiers. It was learned that he belongs to the sect of JEWS FOR JESUS, and he has a "rich" history of missionary preaching. The Defence Department noted that no determination had been made about whether the discharge from the Reserves was temporary or permanent. (AL HAMISHMAR 2 NOV 86).

M.K. Matti Peled (PROGRESSIVE LIST FOR PEACE) has submitted a Parliamentary Query to the Ministry of Defence in the above matter: "Does the preaching of the principles of the Christian religion to I.D.F. soldiers who do not believe in them constitute a violation of military orders, and does the preaching of Judaism to non-believing Jews equally constitute a violation of such orders?" He also wished to know whether records were kept of missionary activity in the I.D.F., and if not, on what basis was it determined that Sorko-ram had engaged in missionary preaching; also, have there been other instances of

reservists or others discharged for missionary activity? (AL HAMISHMAR
3 NOV)

NEW ANTI-MISSION LEGISLATION PROPOSED: The term "mission" in the present law must be defined as "religious preaching to someone who is not a member of the same religious community, and that any group engaging in such preaching shall be registered as a mission with the Religious Affairs Ministry, and be required to indicate in all matters that it is a mission...This is a procedure carried out in the U.S.A., for example, with respect to the registration of lobbyists as "foreign agents," and it can be effective in our situation. (Rabbi Simcha Miron, 10 OCT 86 EREV SHABAT)

The Agudat Yisrael Knesset Members Yosef and Porush have consulted with Likud leaders Nissim and Sharon, at the initiative of Likud leader Y. Shamir, to discuss matters of interest to the religious parties, such as the enforcement of Sabbath laws, the mission menace, especially the Mormon centre, etc... Writing in the same paper, M.K. Shapiro noted the recommendation of the special ministerial committee on the Mormon issue to re-examine the mission laws. "It is my intention to submit a series of amendments whose aim is to increase supervision as well as prevention of the possibility of missionary activities," he wrote. (HAMODIYA 10 OCT) Meanwhile, the party has submitted a memorandum to Likud leaders on religious issues, including a demand that an inter-office committee be set up, to be headed by a representative from the Prime Minister's office with far-reaching authority to deal with missions. (HAMODIYA 15 OCT; MAARIV 16 OCT)

M.K. Verdiger has submitted a proposal for a law which would forbid all missionary preaching, ban all missionary publications, and the use of the mails for missionary purposes. (HAMODIYA 11 NOV 86)

MESSIANICS AND THE LAW OF RETURN: A married couple of "Messianic Jews" has appealed to the High Court to instruct the Ministry of Interior to grant them entry visas to Israel under the Law of Return. The ministry has refused on the grounds that they are not Jews. The petitioners, Gertrude and Paul Fodor of Hod Hasharon, claim in their petition, submitted by attorney Y. Menasha, that they are of Jewish origin, although born of Protestant parents. They presented documents from the Toronto Jewish community and from the rabbinic court attesting to their Jewishness. Fodor is a Holocaust survivor, and seven members of his family perished in the Holocaust. They claim that two years ago a similar legal argument to theirs was accepted by the High Court. Meanwhile, they had been asked to leave Israel at the expiration of their present visas in January 1987. The court has agreed to hear their petition. (MAARIV/HAMODIYA 5 NOV)

HEBREW LITURGY ENLISTED FOR...MISSIONARY PROPAGANDA: Following the brainstorm for reducing inflation, the use of the lion symbol of Tel Hai, the story about the rabbi, and more, the Messianic missionaries have "enlisted" the Hebrew New Year liturgy to prove that "that Man" (Jesus) appears in...the Hebrew Scriptures. The young missionary Yaakov Damkane responsible for the literature distribution (mainly on Haifa streets) cites the prayer recited in between the blowing of the shofar which was inserted by the (medieval) censors ("Yeshua the Prince of the Face"). In the offices of YAD L'AHIM in Haifa quantities of this tract have piled up, sent in by local residents, along with their contributions to the special fund being raised at this time. (SHEARIM OCT 86)

CHILD RETURNED TO MOTHER FROM CLERGY HOME: A six-year-old child whose divorced parents lived in Haifa suburbs was returned from the home of a Tel-Aviv clergyman to the custody of the mother, following police intervention. After the parents' divorce four years ago, custody of the child was given to the father because of the mother's illness.

Eventually the father remarried and took the child with him to Sweden with his new Christian wife, but subsequently returned the child to the custody of a childless Christian couple in Tel-Aviv.

The mother and her parents charged that this was a violation of the agreement between the divorced couple and petitioned the rabbinic court for custody of the child. The father's attorney argued that the arrangement was only temporary until he returned from Sweden, and that the mother was ill and unable to care for the child. The mother's attorney rejected the claim of incapacity and argued that for the welfare of the child it was best to be in an Israeli home. The court ruled in her favour until the matter is fully adjudicated. Armed with the ruling, the mother, her parents and attorney came to the home of the clergyman, who ejected them from his flat. The police were called and the child removed to the custody of the mother. (KOL HAIFA/YEDIOT AKHRONOT 28 SEPT 86; SEE ALSO SELECTIONS NO. 14, page 3: "Christian Foster Parents")

JESUS AT THE KINDERGARTEN: The children of the State Religious Kindergarten "Or Hashahar" were surprised at the expertise of one of their companions in matters relating to Jesus the Nazarene and his teaching, while being rather ignorant of the Sabbath. The parents of the children commented on the subject to the director asking that the child be removed. At a meeting with the director, the child's father confessed to a belief in God, but also in Jesus. The child was subsequently transferred to the regular State Kindergarten in Ramat Hasharon. (MAARIV 6 NOV 86)

SUNDRIES:

BLACK CHRISTIAN VISITORS: A delegation of Black Christian women from South Africa arrived in Israel yesterday, headed by Mary Mavso, founder of the three-year-old organization. It has 10,000 women members now, and its aim is to unite women from various Christian denominations in a common struggle against social injustice. Thirty members will tour Israel for a week and hold a special conference in Jerusalem in cooperation with the "Christian Embassy." (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 3 NOV)

JEWISH NATIONAL FUND AND GENTILES: In Britain fully half of the requests for educational material on Israel come from non-Jewish schools, the president of the U.K. Jewish National Fund, Eddie Brown, has noted. "For them, the link is religious, biblical," he explains. "They want a connection to the Holy Land." (JERUSALEM POST 3 NOV)

"NEW NATIONALITY": A new "nationality" in Israeli identity cards was recently exposed by the anti-mission activists YAD L'AHIM. The missionary sect "Jehovah Witnesses," some of whose members have deliberately changed their nationality to the name of their sect, has been recognized as a "nationality" by the Ministry of Interior. The chairman of YAD L'AHIM noted that until now, the "Witnesses" had represented themselves as Jews and in their door-to-door "spreading of the Gospel" had offered lessons in the Hebrew Bible. (HATSOFEH 13 NOV 86)

END TRANSCRIPT

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