

# Listening & Learning:

**Dialogue between Christians and Jews  
on issues relating to Israel Palestine**



# Contents

## Opening reflections

- 4 **Preface** *The Rt Revd Dr Michael Ipgrave OBE*
- 5 **Introduction** *Elizabeth Harris-Sawczenko*
- 6 **'Listening and Learning' in relation to Israel Palestine** *Rob Thompson*
- 7 **Christian-Jewish relations in Israel** *Rabbi David Rosen*
- 10 **What is the significance of the Holy Land for Christians?**  
*The Revd Canon Anthony Ball*
- 12 **What is the significance of the Land of Israel for Jews?** *Rabbi David Mason*
- 14 **Palestinian Christian Identity** *The Revd Dr Yazid Said*
- 16 **Zionist Jewish Identity** *Yossi Klein Halevi*

## What is it like to visit Israel Palestine with someone of another faith?

- 19 *Siriol Davies*
- 21 *The Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills*
- 23 *Rabbi Alex Goldberg*
- 24 *Rabbi David Mitchell*

## Side by Side reflections from the UK

- 27 **What does Zionism mean to me?** *The Revd Patrick Moriarty and Shelley Marsh*
- 31 **Victimhood** *Robin Moss and The Very Revd Adrian Dorber*
- 35 **The Balfour Declaration** *The Revd Peter Colwell and Judith Flacks*
- 39 **The Kairos Document** *Phil Rosenberg and Kat Brealey*
- 43 **Gaza** *Tim Livesey and Rabbi Joel Levy*
- 47 **Jerusalem** *Rabbi David Mason and the Revd Jessica Foster*
- 51 **Settlements** *Mirella Yandoli and Ashley Perry*
- 55 **Security** *Elizabeth Harris Sawczenko and Marigold Bentley*

## Further information

- 59 **Who are the Christians communities of the Holy Land?** *Hana Bendcowsky*
- 62 **Who are the Jewish communities of Israel?** *Michael Wegier*
- 65 **Who are the Christian communities in the West Bank and Gaza?**  
*The Revd Canon Richard Sewell and the Very Revd Hosam Naoum*

## Further resources

- 67 **History, Israeli Identity, Palestinian Identity, Peace Negotiations, Declaration of Independence, Settlements, Nation State Law, Bilateral Organisations.**

## Endorsements

- 68 **Our partners in dialogue respond to the resource**

*The views expressed in these pages are those of the writers themselves*

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*Pictured on the front cover: artwork by schoolchildren at the Hand in Hand School, Jerusalem.*



## Preface

**The Rt Revd Dr Michael Ipgrave OBE**

*Bishop of Lichfield and Chair of the  
Council of Christians and Jews*

**'Ten measures of beauty God gave to the world:** nine to Jerusalem, and one to the rest', the Talmud claims. Later tradition has added to this the balancing claim: 'Ten measures of sorrow God gave to the world: nine to Jerusalem and one to the rest'. And the paradox which is true of the Holy City is true also of the Holy Land: Israel Palestine is, for both Jews and Christians, charged with meaning, contradiction, struggle, hope and puzzlement, more than any other part of the world.

Of course, this is true first and foremost for those who live there, and this thoughtful and wide-ranging resource rightly includes reflections from Israel Palestine itself. But the significance of this land reaches into Christian and Jewish communities around the world, and is embedded to a particular depth in the United Kingdom, which has played such an ambivalent yet formative role in the current realities of this part of the Middle East; so there are reflections from this country too.

Reading through these, it is very clear that any attempt to harmonise different narratives, to combine different perspectives, which are held with such passion and conviction is doomed to failure. Rather than an overarching theory which explains everything, or a comprehensive programme which will solve everything, what is offered here is a space within which people can listen attentively to one another, and learn deeply from one another. This is the dialogical model which has underpinned the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ)'s

carefully organised study tours to Israel Palestine, which bring together British Jews and Christians across a wide spectrum to visit Israeli and Palestinian people and places across an even wider spectrum. These tours have often proved very powerful for participants in opening them up to the complexity of the situation, and in opening their eyes, ears, and hearts to the views, stories, and aspirations of the other. For those who are able to join in such programmes, the results can be transformative.

This resource is offered as a preparation and a foretaste for Jews and Christians from this country who would want to explore such learning. It is also in itself a roadmap for a kind of virtual pilgrimage to explore this holy land in all its beauty and sorrow, its struggle and its hope. It does not ignore the political realities of Israel / Palestine; indeed it charts these with clarity. But it calls us to go beyond simply reacting to the incessant headlines of claim, counter-claim, and conflict, in search of a deeper vision, in which we have to make a personal investment. As the late, great Donald Nicholl put it three decades ago:

'If your immediate spontaneous reaction – if the movement of your heart – upon hearing of some tragedy is an ideological one rather than a human one, then your heart has become corrupted and you should leave straight away and go on pilgrimage.'<sup>1</sup>

Or as the Psalmist put it maybe three millennia ago:

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.*

<sup>1</sup> Donald Nicholl, *The Testing of Hearts: A Pilgrim's Journal* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), p. 31

## Introduction

**Elizabeth Harris-Sawczenko**

*Director, the Council of Christians and Jews*



**Dialogue between Christian and Jews** is at the heart of the work of the Council of Christians and Jews. One of the most relevant and important areas that CCJ provides opportunities for dialogue and education is in relation to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Five years ago CCJ decided to embark on a programme of activities that would provide a dedicated space for Christian and Jewish leaders to engage on this most complex of contemporary issues.

The Holy Land is so dear to both our communities, theologically, historically and in a myriad of other ways. In these pages you will learn more about why Christians and Jews care so passionately about this issue and the people who live in the region and how we can convey that passion in a meaningful way to one another without negating or dismissing the 'other'.

Too often, conflict in the Middle East causes further conflict and tensions between our communities back here in the UK. Through CCJ's annual study tours for Jewish and Christian leaders and a wider group of leaders who meet in dialogue back in the UK around key issues outlined in this resource, we have established a model of 'listening and learning' from one other, acknowledging that in any conflict there is always more than one narrative that needs to be heard in order to build better communication between communities. This resource illustrates their reflections side by side, from different perspectives.

Thanks to a grant from the Methodist

Church, CCJ is now working to pass on this model of dialogue to a wider constituency. This includes a short film that can be shared to encourage dialogue; additional events and dialogue sessions, both for alumni of the study tours and for their communities back in the UK; and this written resource.

We hope these introductions to complex topics will serve as a guide to introducing your own local dialogue sessions. Also included are contributions from Jews and Christians living in the region, reflecting on the situation, their identities, and their thoughts for the future. The resource is not designed to make the reader an expert on every aspect of the conflict but rather to reflect the aforementioned discussions. A lot of the depth of feeling and the personal perspective comes through these pages. It is meant to be a spring board and opening between Christians and Jews considering dialogue, not an end in itself.

This resource will be distributed through a wide range of Christian and Jewish denominations and stakeholders and will therefore, we hope, be able to have a real and lasting impact on Jewish and Christian conversations around Israel/Palestine through encouraging rather than shying away from this topic.

We are most grateful to all the contributors both from the UK and elsewhere. We thank you for your honesty and openness and for trusting us on this journey together to better understanding of one another's narratives.



## ‘Listening & Learning’: a model of dialogue in the context of Israel Palestine

**Rob Thompson**

*Senior Programme Manager, the Council of Christians and Jews*

**H**enri Nouwen, the Catholic theologian, once said: ‘Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond’.<sup>1</sup>

In contemporary discourse the art of listening can often feel in short supply. In the age of the soundbite, conversation can become a competition between narratives, an attempt to shout louder, or a debate with winners and losers.

But in the context of how issues relating to Israel Palestine are approached in the UK, the soundbite debate can create a context where disagreement over conflict between Israelis and Palestinians causes further conflict between people here in the UK.

Instead, the art of listening, as reflected on by Henri Nouwen, is essential.

CCJ’s model of dialogue around Israel Palestine is founded on the idea of ‘listening and learning’. In our study tours we enable a group from different backgrounds and with different perspectives to travel together: they encounter different stories from a range of different people who call the land home. In doing so they occupy a space where diversity of opinion is heard.

Back home in the UK, these travellers continue to meet. They discuss complex and difficult issues together by maintaining that space for listening.

None of this is a competitive debate, where one side tries to outdo the other’s argument, and one emerges having

disproved the other. It rests on an acknowledgement that there are myriad narratives in the context of Israel Palestine and no one perspective has a monopoly on truth.

There are, of course, boundaries to such conversations. We hear one another’s perspective but offensive language—antisemitism, stereotypes, and other prejudices which demonise or denigrate the other—have no place in meaningful dialogue.

Listening goes both ways. Someone listens whilst another speaks. But when one truly listens to another, one realises the imperative to listen to the words one chooses oneself. So the speaker can also commit to listening to themselves. In this way, listening is not passive but can radically alter the way the narrative is formed: to allow the space for the other’s narrative to be—if not accepted—at least accommodated and heard into the future.

As Nouwen himself implied, dialogue does not mean taking it in turns to say one’s bit. Listening and learning requires a willingness to hear, to reflect, to change, and to travel forwards together. It is hoped that the model of ‘listening and learning’, which CCJ has seen flourish in its study tours, can encourage meaningful dialogue to characterise all our conversations around Israel Palestine. In this resource we demonstrate how.

1 ‘Listening as Spiritual Hospitality’ [henrinouwen.org/meditation/listening-spiritual-hospitality/](http://henrinouwen.org/meditation/listening-spiritual-hospitality/) accessed 25 July 2019

## Christian/Jewish Relations in Israel

**Rabbi David Rosen KSG CBE** is the American Jewish Committee’s Jerusalem based International Director of Interreligious Affairs. He is a member of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel’s Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and is Honorary President of the International Council of Christians and Jews

**Illustration  
by Rabbi Alex  
Goldberg,  
study tour  
participant**



**T**he makeup of the Christian presence in Israel has changed in recent decades due both to the presence of a significant minority of Christians among the immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and the tens of thousands of Christian foreign workers in the country. Nevertheless, the historic Christian presence in the Holy Land is Arab and currently numbers a little more than 130,000 of the approximately 1.8 million Arab Israeli citizens.

Christian Arab Israelis are a particularly successful religious minority in many respects. Their socio-economic and educational standards are well above average; their schools regularly produce some of the highest grades in annual matriculation examinations; many of them have been politically prominent; and they have been able to derive much benefit from the democratic system of which they are an integral part.

However, despite the small size of the



State of Israel, very often people choose to live in voluntary segregation among like-minded communities of shared values and lifestyle. Both villages and city neighborhoods often reflect the common origins and religious orientations and behavior (or lack thereof) of their residents.

Furthermore, the fact that the national educational system designates schools to serve specific neighborhoods, means that as a rule children attend schools where pupils are of similar background and religious (or irreligious) identity.

Often it is only when being enlisted into the army that young people encounter those of significantly different backgrounds. But as the vast majority of Arabs do not serve in the IDF, most Israelis do not have the opportunity as a matter of course for any kind of interreligious encounters.

Thus even though the State of Israel grants official recognition to ten Christian denominations, guarantees their religious freedom, and has ministerial departments to care for their needs and interests; most Israeli Jews have never met an Israeli Christian.

And even when Jewish Israelis travel abroad, they tend to meet non-Jews as such - not as modern Christians. Accordingly the perception of Christians among many if not most Israeli Jews are still influenced by negative historical memories and there has been a lack of awareness of the significant changes in the Christian world as a whole in relation to Jews and Judaism.

This has begun to change in recent decades for a number of reasons, not least of all due to the demographic factors already mentioned. One of the most notable events in this regard was the visit of the late Pope John Paul II in the year 2000 following the establishment of full bilateral relations



**Members of CCJ's study tour visit St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem with its Dean Hosam Naoum**

between Israel, and the Holy See six years earlier. For Israelis to see the Pope at Yad Vashem (the Holocaust memorial centre) in tearful solidarity with Jewish suffering, and to see him at the Kotel (the Western Wall), showing respect for Jewish tradition and placing there the text that he had composed for a liturgy of forgiveness that he had held two weeks earlier here at St. Peter's, asking Divine forgiveness for sins committed against the Jews down the ages, had a profound impact.

In addition, the visit led to the remarkable new avenue for dialogue and understanding in the form of the bilateral commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry, and a similar bilateral commission was subsequently also established with the Anglican Church.

John Paul II's two successors followed in his footsteps, visiting the Holy Land and reaffirming their commitment to advancing Jewish-Christian relations. In addition an increased Evangelical Christian interest in the life of the State of Israel, even though not without some problematic theological and political aspects, has nevertheless made

Israeli Jews more aware of positive Christian engagement with the Jewish People.

However the challenge, neglected by the State, of overcoming the overwhelming ignorance within Israeli society about Christianity generally and about the local Christian communities in particular, has been taken up by many NGOs. There are more than two hundred Israeli organizations promoting Arab-Jewish understanding and cooperation generally, and there are dozens of bodies promoting interreligious encounter, dialogue, and studies. The Christian presence in the interfaith arena in particular has been very significant. This

***Often it is only when being enlisted into the army that young people encounter those of significantly different backgrounds. But as the vast majority of Arabs do not serve in the IDF, most Israelis do not have the opportunity as a matter of course for any kind of interreligious encounters.***

has substantially been due to the presence of Christian institutions and their clergy, scholars, international representatives of churches and so on, who contribute disproportionately to these efforts especially in the field of scholarship.

Jewish initiatives in Israel to advance relations with Christianity range from small scholarly gatherings such as the Jerusalem Rainbow Group (the pioneer of Jewish-Christian encounter in Israel) to the work of the Rosing Center (formerly the Jerusalem Centre for Jewish Christian Relations) founded by the late Daniel Rosing who served for many years as the Director of the Department for Christian Communities in the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This organization was set up to advance relations in particular with the indigenous Arab Christian communities, is led today by Dr. Sarah Bernstein and reaches many thousands through schools and other frameworks across the country advancing not only Jewish-Christian relations but also understanding and engagement across the multi-religious spectrum in Israel.

The political context inevitably impacts profoundly on the Christian communities. Those in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are part and parcel of a Palestinian society struggling for its own self-determination in which Israel is seen as an opponent. But Christians in Israel are citizens of the country who have an interest in being accepted and understood by the Jewish polity as a whole. Naturally this leads to very different political perspectives. But regardless of whether in Palestinian or Israeli society, the engagement with Christians offers important opportunities for both Muslim and Jewish societies to gain a greater appreciation of the religious diversity and history of the land as a whole.

# What is the significance of the Holy Land for Christians?

**The Revd Canon Anthony Ball**

*Canon Steward of Westminster Abbey and Chair of Embrace the Middle East*

At one level there is an easy answer to the question of the Holy Land's significance for Christians: it is the particular place where, at a particular time, God became incarnate as Jesus, lived a human life, and conquered death through his resurrection and ascension. If Christianity is first an encounter with Jesus rather than an idea, then the Holy Land is a place where Christians can touch the eternal and feel closer God's involvement in human history, and thus God's connection with each of our stories.

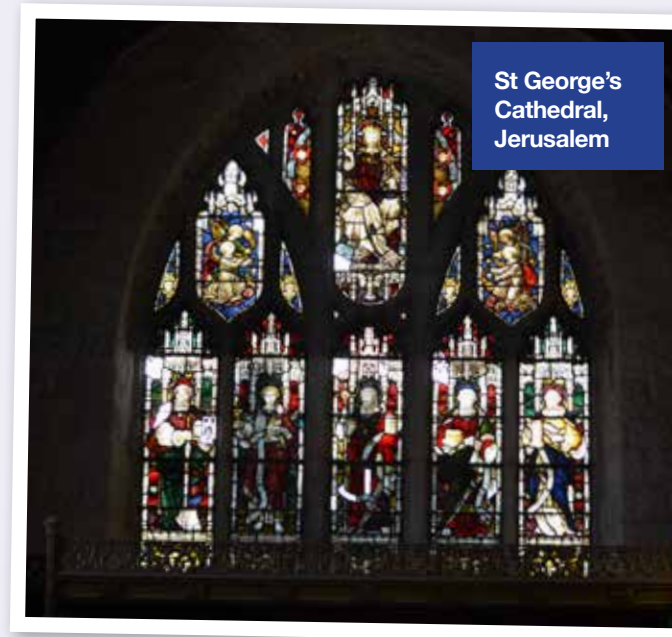
My own sense of the Holy Land's significance is informed by this idea of pilgrimage and encounter, experienced as a visiting Westerner. That will probably resonate with most Christians who use these resources, but the question posed invites a broader understanding. What is its significance for those who will never visit the Holy Land? What of those who, rather than visit, live there - either ex-patriates or indigenous Christians? What is the significance for a Christian commitment to social justice of contemporary regional political issues? Space precludes exploring such dimensions to the question, but cannot diminish their importance.

On the day of Jesus' Ascension, forty days after his resurrection at Easter, he commissioned his disciples to take his message 'to the ends of the earth'. The earliest recorded Council of the Church was

to resolve a dispute about requirements placed on Gentile believers. Since Christianity's inception there have always been faithful living outside the Holy Land and there was, and is, no requirement for Christians to return to the place(s) of Jesus' ministry. Pilgrimage has always been a matter of devotion, a rich experience in which the outward/physical journey is accompanied by an inner/spiritual one.

In the fourth century after Jesus' death Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, visited the Holy Land and identified a number of sites where events recorded in the Bible took place and where Jesus was believed to have been active. Churches and other buildings were erected on the sites to promote devotion and accommodate the practice of pilgrimage. An early account of such a journey, about 50 years after Helena's "discoveries", is by a Spanish nun Egeria. Her diary provides considerable detail about how the local Christian community celebrated and recalled key moments in Jesus' life - many of

***If God is everywhere and in all, it could be argued that pilgrimage makes no sense; that it is simply a hang-over from the medieval belief that the relics of saints bring them closer and make prayer more efficacious.***



St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem

which find parallels in modern liturgies. What was (is?) done by the Christian community in Jerusalem influences the shape of practice elsewhere.

If God is everywhere and in all, it could be argued that pilgrimage makes no sense; that it is simply a hang-over from the medieval belief that the relics of saints bring them closer and make prayer more efficacious. Yet today we see a revitalised interest in pilgrimage and its traditional linkage to repentance and, therefore, renewal. Rome (SS Peter and Paul), Santiago de Compostella (St James) and Canterbury (St Thomas Becket) were hugely popular destinations, especially once access to Jerusalem became difficult following Muslim conquest. Yet, whilst some sites were lost (cf. the recent (re-)discovery of the baptism site on the east bank of where the River Jordan once flowed) and numbers waned at times, Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land has continued throughout the centuries. For those who could not make it, the intriguing practice of measuring the holy sites allowed

for imaginative recreations such as, in England, the Holy House at Walsingham (reproducing the site of the Annunciation in Nazareth) or Westminster Abbey's Jerusalem Chamber, Jericho Parlour and Samaria.

Whatever the theological rationale or historical accuracy of the connections (or absence of it), the lived experience of pilgrims is that encounter with the places of Jesus' life is a significant moment - even the sceptical are seen queuing to touch the very stones. Pilgrims who make time to encounter the "living stones" (the

local Christian communities) have an even richer and often transformational experience. Even for Christians who will never undertake a pilgrimage, there is still a sense that it is important that the sites are available to fellow believers. The international outcry when the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was closed by the Heads of the Church in Jerusalem witnesses to that sense of connection - a sign of the significance of the Holy Land in Christian cultural memory.

The words of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, at a conference about pilgrimage to the Holy Land offer a suitable conclusion: "Jerusalem for the testing of hearts" says the old rabbinical saying, and I think those of us who know Jerusalem a bit will know a little of how that feels when you go there. It's still the place where you are tested in your compassion, your understanding, your patience, your faith, your trust, that in spite of all that confused history, what happened there really was the pivot on which everything turns and is.'

# What is the significance of the Land of Israel for Jews?

**Rabbi David Mason**

*Rabbi of Muswell Hill United Synagogue and Joint Honorary Secretary of the Council of Christians and Jews*

There is a famous adage that if you have two Jews, you get three opinions. And with our relationship to the Land of Israel, the adage holds true. To be sure, there is general agreement about the source of the special category of Israel for the Jewish people. There is an awareness that its roots are Biblical and that ancient Jewish narratives were played out across its varied geographical vistas. But today, Jewish people may not agree what the nature of their relationship is.

I am not sure that it was always so, however. The main reason for disagreements today, is the success of Zionism—that nineteenth century Jewish movement—to bring sovereignty and self determination back to the Jewish people in Israel. Before that, and before the growth of Reformed communities of Jews in Europe in the late 1700s and onwards, the Land of Israel was a place that was yearned for by most. Jews prayed towards it three times a day. They would cry and fast on the 9th day of the month of Av to remember the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the eventual dispersal of the Jewish people from its environs and from Judea. Most famous is the Spanish poet Judah HeLevi of the 12th century who started his poem Zion with the words 'Zion, do you not ask after the welfare of your captive ones'. Exile was prison. Redemption and return to Israel would be hailed as freedom. Legend

has it that Yehuda HaLevi died on his arrival in Jerusalem after a long journey there.

But in many ways, Zionism added a secular dimension to the holiness of the land. It considered the downtrodden position of the Jews in Russia. It believed that the ability to create and innovate economically and politically was in front of the Jewish people, if they built their new state. It wanted to bring the idea of nation state sovereignty to the Jewish people – and where better than in its ancient land. And so political Zionism, the Zionism of Theodor Herzl was not religious at base. It drew on the ancient relevance of the Land of Israel to the Jewish people, but it did not deal with it in religious terms.

So, for Jews today, living many decades after both the Holocaust and the birth of the modern State of Israel, the relationships to the land are many.

Many religious Jews attached great Providential significance to the return of Jewish masses to the Land of Israel. We can use the term Religious Zionists to understand them. They related directly and clearly to the holiness of the land, and so yearned to visit all its Jewish holy sites. But they went one step further than simply pilgrimage. They drew on Jewish Law that it was now an obligation to live and settle the land. This was even more understood to be an obligation as the modern return was framed in a redemptive and eschatological manner. These religious



place of pilgrimage; rather as a place that they can call home as a Jewish person. Israel is also looked upon as a place of potential refuge from feared persecution. I remember well the elation that came from Jews outside and inside Israel at the bringing of large numbers of Ethiopian, Yemenite, Iraqi and other communities to the homeland.

It would be worth adding another category of Jewish connection to the Land, which is through Jewish culture and history. This connection has its roots in what we call 'Cultural Zionism' and was

rooted in the writings of Asher Ginsburg, or his pen name Achad Ha-Am. Ginsburg wanted the Jewish return to be a cultural one building cultural institutions across the land. Israel's first President Chaim Weizman was a pupil of this school, and the building of the Hebrew University was its realisation. It was less interested in politics, more interested in Jewish knowledge. Of course, there are several excellent Universities across Israel, and there is also a cherishing and valuing of development in so many areas of knowledge, supported by donations in Israel and from the Jewish diaspora.

In conclusion, we must say that the Jewish people have a strong and profound connection to the 'Holy Land' and a connection that is a result of the combination of our history as a religion, and our history as a people that has often suffered. Jewish people say regularly in Synagogue verse 'For out of Zion shall go forth the word of the Law'. Not only does this emphasise the centrality of Torah to the Jewish people, but the yearning that the Law of justice and mercy will be spread beyond its boundaries. That can be our prayer for our continued connection with the Land of Israel.

Zionists are not a small minority, and they will generally think of the Land of Israel as indivisible in terms of sovereignty. They will also relate to the State of Israel through the lens of the Biblical Land of Israel which of course has and may well in the future lead to conflict between groups of more extreme religious Zionists and the government of Israel.

On the other hand, for many less religious Jews, especially many living in the Diaspora, the relationship to the Land of Israel is filtered through the connection to the State of Israel. The State may in fact be considered more 'holy' given what it has contributed to Jewish stability since the catastrophe of the Holocaust. A prime and famous example of this is after the Six Day War in 1967. After Israel's victory and resultant conquest of what became known as the 'West Bank' from Jordan, the United Nations demanded Israel's withdrawal. In a speech at the United Nations, Israel's Ambassador Abba Eban described the pre 1967 border Israel was being asked to withdraw to as the 'Auschwitz lines'. So, for large numbers of Jews, the existence of Israel brings comfort and stability in a world which again has seen rising antisemitism. Many of these Jews may not look at Israel as a



# Palestinian Christian Identity

**The Revd Dr Yazid Said**

*Lecturer in Islam, Liverpool Hope University*

It is often forgotten, especially in the West, that Christianity is one of the exotic Eastern religions. One of the saddest assumptions among some Westerners is that Christianity is wedded to Western culture. That is not so. In its origins and development from the Holy Land, Christianity appears to be strange to the world of the Capitalist West as much as it is strange to the Far East. Palestinian Christianity today in the Holy Land is the inheritor of that history and witness in the place where it all started. This is not because one can prove genetic lineage all the way back to the first century. Rather, it's because there has not been a period when the Church did not exist in Jerusalem since its inception in the province that has traditionally been referred to as Palestine since Roman days.

Therefore, when referring to Palestinian Christianity today, we need to remember that this is not a modern phenomenon; it refers to the ancient Christian communities in Palestine via the various ethnic and political structures that have passed through the centuries. Today, Palestinian Christians are Arabic speaking and they live in the occupied Palestinian territories (Gaza and the West Bank) and integrated within the Palestinian society in the modern state of Israel. In Israel, the majority of this population lives in Galilee, in Haifa and the surrounding villages and in the towns of Jaffa, Ramallah and Lydda. They number around 120,000 to 130,000 citizens. In the occupied Palestinian territories, they are mainly in Bethlehem and its surrounding

suburbs, East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus and few remaining ancient Christian villages scattered in the West Bank. There is also a small remnant of Christian presence in Gaza city. Altogether, they number between 40,000 to 50,000, including the small 2,000-3,000 residents of Gaza.

The history of Christianity in the Holy Land is tied up with the political history of the land. After the Crusades, a strong Roman Catholic presence developed in addition to the various ancient Orthodox communities. In the nineteenth century, with Western political interests in Palestine, various Protestant churches emerged. One cannot deny that Protestant and particularly Anglican ecclesiastical developments in the Middle East were part of the history of British imperial interests, a history meticulously documented by a Palestinian civil servant in Mandate Palestine, A. L. Tibawi, under the title *British Interests in the Middle East, 1800–1901*. Today, all the main churches maintain their administrative headquarters in East Jerusalem and have jurisdiction over the faithful in Israel and Palestine, some stretching beyond the Holy

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***The history of Christianity in the Holy Land is tied up with the political history of the land. After the Crusades, a strong Roman Catholic presence developed in addition to the various ancient Orthodox communities.***



**Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem**

Land. Therefore, Palestinian Christians in Israel have communal relations with other coreligionists in Palestine and Jordan.

Relating to the Christians in the Holy Land today matters for a couple of reasons. First, they are a powerful reminder that the Arab identity and the Muslim identity have not been the same thing. It is very important that Israeli society as well as Muslim societies and Arab societies show signs of healthy pluralism. Second, a major issue facing the Palestinian Christian population for some time now is emigration from their homeland. This trend, which began in the nineteenth century, is one of the gravest threats to the Christian communities in the Middle East today. Christians have historically played a very galvanizing role in the Land and the region. Today, they provide some of the best educational and health services to the wider population. Their absence would make the wider society much poorer than it is today.

For Christian believers, the connections of Christians now with the founding events two thousand years ago is a vital part of the Christian faith. As Rowan Williams once put it:

“Christians are answerable to the founding events of the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus. In that perspective the continuity of Christian presence and worship in these places is not a small thing. It's a kind of Gnosticism, a kind of cutting loose from history, if the presence of Christians in the Land of Jesus does not matter to the wider Christian world”.

That is important for others too. As it provides the theological justification for being interested in what happens in the Holy Land in general and for Christian communities in particular. It is also part of what gives everyone the challenge and the opportunity of interfaith encounter. If Christianity is, as many have noted, an historical religion, there is no way in which we can avoid coming to terms with our relations to Judaism and Islam. We are bound up with that, as some called it, family quarrel, between parts of the Abrahamic traditions. We cannot cut loose from that despite all the temptations to do so over the centuries. This encounter would be much weaker without the ancient Palestinian Christian presence in the Holy Land today.



# Zionist Jewish Identity

## ‘Need and Longing’

Yossi Klein Halevi

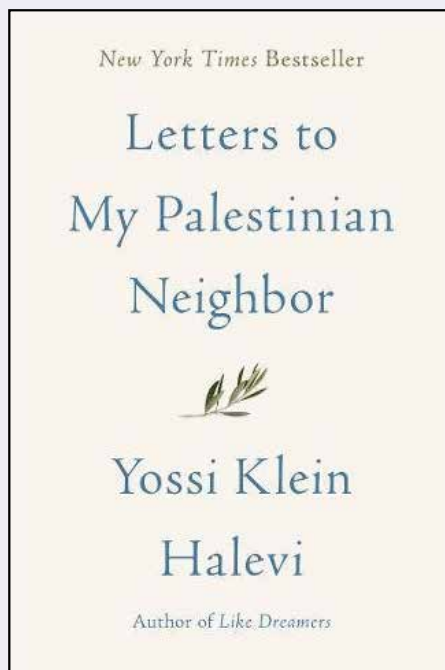
(excerpted from *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*, published by HarperCollins, 2019)

Exile presented Judaism with its greatest crisis. Biblical Judaism was centred on the land of Israel and the Temple. But what to do now that a majority of Jews had been uprooted from the land and the Temple destroyed?

Gradually Jews realized that, unlike their sojourn in Babylon, this time the exile would be open-ended, with no conclusion in sight. The Jews responded in a paradoxical way. They saw exile as God's punishment for their sins, and so they surrendered to their fate for as long as God decreed. Yet they refused to accept the exile as permanent. They actively nurtured the hope, the faith—the astonishing certainty—that one day the prison sentence of exile would end and God would retrieve them from the most remote corners of the earth, as our prophets had predicted.

In the prolonged interim between destruction and redemption, the Jews maintained their dual strategy of accepting exile as a fact and rejecting it as permanent.

Throughout their wanderings, Jews carried with them the land of Israel, its seasonal rhythms, its stories and prophecies. Most of all, they preserved the land in prayer. Jewish prayer became suffused with the longing for the land. As a boy, growing up in a religious home in Brooklyn, I prayed in the winter months



**Many Ethiopian Jews never even heard of the Holocaust until they got to Israel. Half of Israel's Jews come from the Arab world, where, for the most part, the Nazis didn't reach.**

for rain and in the summer months for dew—regardless of the weather outside my window, following the natural rhythm of a distant land. In morning and evening prayers, in grace after meals, I invoked Zion. Before I'd even known the land of Israel as actual place, I knew it as inherited memory.

Perhaps the most powerful expressions of longing for return were contained in the prayer poems of the Jews of Muslim lands. "I will ask my God to redeem the prisoners," Jews sang in Yemen, referring to themselves, exiles from Zion.

In their radically diverse exiles, Jews nurtured rituals of longing—like the holiday of Ethiopian Jews, known as the Sigd. Once a year, in late autumn, thousands of Jews from villages in remote Gondar province would trek up a mountain. Dressed in white, fasting, they turned north toward Zion and prayed for return.

I think of Ethiopian Jews whenever I hear a Middle Eastern leader say that the only reason Israel exists is the Holocaust, that the Palestinians have paid the price for Western guilt. Many Ethiopian Jews never even heard of the Holocaust until they got to Israel. Half of Israel's Jews come from the Arab world, where, for the most part, the Nazis didn't reach.

Israel exists because it never stopped existing, even if only in prayer. Israel was restored by the cumulative power of Jewish longing. But attachment to the land wasn't confined to longing. Throughout the centuries, Jews from east and west came to live and be buried in the land.

The impetus for creating a political expression of the longing for return—restoring the Jewish relationship to Zion from time back into space—was dire need. In nineteenth-century Russia, millions of

Jews were threatened by regime-instigated pogroms. Many Russian Jews were fleeing their homes and heading west.

Still, however desperate the situation, antisemitism and the need for refuge didn't define the essence of Zionism. Need gave Zionism its urgency, but longing gave Zionism its spiritual substance.

Zionism was the meeting point between need and longing.

And when need and longing collided—as they did at a crucial moment in early Zionist history—longing won.

In 1903, the leader of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, had exhausted his options. Herzl was desperate. The mob violence against Russian Jews was intensifying. Herzl intuited that some unimagined catastrophe, far worse than pogroms, awaited the Jews of Europe.

Then, the British approached him with an offer to settle territory in East Africa. They hoped to get loyal colonists out of Herzl's desire to create a Jewish homeland.

Herzl knew there would be opposition among Zionists to what became known as the Uganda Plan, but the Zionist movement, he believed, was pragmatic. If Zion was unattainable, he hoped his fellow activists would accept the possible.

Herzl brought the plan before the Zionist Congress. With a map of East Africa hanging behind the podium, he addressed the delegates. Nothing would replace Zion in our hearts, he said. But he urged them to consider the dangers Jews faced, especially in Russia. Need before longing.

He was greeted by cries of anguish. The most vehement opposition came from the young delegates representing Jewish communities in Russia. The very Jews Herzl was trying to save.

## Reflection: CCJ Study Tour Year One

**Siriol Davies**

*Interfaith Adviser, Diocese of Southwark*

A young Russian woman rushed to the podium and ripped the map of Africa off the wall.

In his closing speech to the Congress, Herzl raised his right hand and repeated the words of the Psalms:

“If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither.”

Had the Uganda Plan prevailed, Zionism would have become a frankly colonialist movement. A tragic colonialism, impelled not by greed or glory but existential need. But by insisting on Zion— against all odds, no matter the consequences— Zionism affirmed its legitimacy as a movement of repatriation, restoring a native people home.

Precisely because Zionism is such a unique phenomenon, it is tempting to fit it into other categories, like nineteenth-century European nationalism. From there it is a small step to defining Zionism as a colonialist movement.

Zionism was of course strongly influenced by European nationalism. But that was only the form that a two-thousand-year dream of return assumed. And though launched in the West, Zionism reached its culmination in the East. When the state of Israel was established, whole Jewish communities in the Middle East moved to Zion.

***A majority of Israelis today are descended from Jews who left one part of the Middle East to resettle in another. Tell them that Zionism is a European colonialist movement and they simply won't understand what you're talking about.***

The first community to answer the call were the Jews of Yemen. Throughout 1949, an ancient community of over 40,000 was flown home in Israel's first airlift.

Then, in 1951, came the turn of the ancient Jewish community of Iraq. Over a hundred thousand Iraqi Jews— virtually the entire community— were flown to Israel, the largest airlift in history.

And then came the Jews of North Africa. And Egypt. And Syria. And Lebanon. One ancient Jewish community after another emptying into the state of Israel.

A majority of Israelis today are descended from Jews who left one part of the Middle East to resettle in another. Tell them that Zionism is a European colonialist movement and they simply won't understand what you're talking about.

Is it possible, as anti- Zionists insist, to separate Zionism from Judaism?

The answer depends on what one means by Zionism. If it refers to the political movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century, then certainly, there are forms of Judaism that are independent of Zionism. In the era before the establishment of Israel, Jews vehemently debated the wisdom of the Zionist program. Marxist Jews rejected Zionism as a diversion from the anticipated world revolution. Ultra-Orthodox Jews rejected Zionism as a secularizing movement, while some insisted that only the messiah could bring the Jews home.

But if by “Zionism” one means the Jewish attachment to the land of Israel and the dream of renewing Jewish sovereignty in our place of origin, then there is no Judaism without Zionism. Judaism isn't only a set of rituals and rules but a vision linked to a place.



**M**y first visit to the Holy Land was with the CCJ study trip to Israel Palestine in 2016. Our group of sixteen was half Jewish and half Christian. For me, the only participant who had never previously visited Israel/Palestine, it was an intensely educational experience.

Hana Bendcowsky from the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations made it clear that identity is no simple matter when there is no separation between state and religion. You could have a child with Filipino heritage who speaks Hebrew, goes to Jewish school, is culturally Jewish, and attends Church. As well as the possibilities for

mixed identity she also shared something of the separateness of Arab and Jewish lives. Negative attitudes are able to grow without challenge in a context of minimal encounter, different narratives, different languages, different education systems.

The intention of the trip was to listen to both Israeli and Palestinian narratives and in three days we met with people working at many different levels - from powerful political roles to grass roots activists. At the political level we met representatives of the Israeli government as well as travelling to Ramallah to visit the Palestinian Authority. I could feel the apprehension in Jewish members of our

group as they put on baseball caps to cover their kippot as we crossed the border.

In the West Bank we visited both a Jewish settlement and a nearby Arab Christian rural community living under occupation. For our mixed group from Britain it felt a mixture of shocking, uncomfortable and unforgettable to be in the West Bank and to hear the different life experiences of these two neighbouring communities who would never be in the same room together themselves. So our bus fell silent at times. Experiences like this meant that when we met people working for change who seemed to hold hope for a peaceful future we listened hard.

In Manger Street, Bethlehem, a young Arab youth worker from the Holy Land Trust told his powerful story of transformation. Out of an adolescence marked by anger and violence he found a path to a very different understanding of the conflict that had defined his life. Helped by the strong coffee we were given when we arrived I sat and listened hard to the vision of healing and transformation which the Holy Land Trust are committed to and to his personal story of change. I began to believe in the need for grass roots healing from trauma as a pathway to a wider peace.

**The theme of healing was heard again at the micro-level of a hospital ward: unusual friendships between Jewish and Arab families who meet in the kidney dialysis unit where their children need treatment.**

The theme of healing was heard again at the micro-level of a hospital ward: unusual friendships between Jewish and Arab families who meet in the kidney dialysis unit where their children need treatment. People who would normally never meet form bonds of friendship during their regular visits to the unit over a long period of time. The children grow up together and the parents find they learn from each other.

So there we were, this equal number of Christian and Jewish leaders, travelling from a country with a dominant Christian culture, from a continent with a history of Jewish persecution, to a small Middle Eastern country with a Jewish majority, where we listened to different narratives. It wasn't just the guest speakers that we were listening to because as we travelled we talked together – in twos and threes on the bus, in cafes, over breakfast, in the daily group reflection. It was a conversation that held huge difference. Tension, disagreement, surprise, challenge, shock, and silence, as well as inspiration, were all present at different times. My ears had never heard such a range of thoughts and reflections and political viewpoints on Israel/Palestine compressed into such a short time period.

Back in the UK I started to reassess my understanding of majority and minority voices and to become more persistent in seeking out narratives that are not being widely told or listened to. I went home with a greater appreciation of British Jewish Identity and in particular a glimpse of how key the relationship to Israel is to that identity.

I can no longer take part in a conversation about Israel Palestine without checking: 'Whose voice is included in this conversation? Whose voice is missing?'

## Reflection: CCJ Study Tour Year Two

**The Revd Bonnie Evans-Hills**

*Coordinator for the UK Coalition for the UN's Prevention of Genocide Plan of Action for Religious Leaders*

**Y**ears ago, I used to provide support to a university chaplaincy.

There were a number of students from Israel, studying alongside a number of students from Arab countries, and in a part of the country where there were a number of what would now be considered 'far left' groups. Several themed weeks had been held on campus by student groups: Islam Awareness, Palestine Awareness, etc. Eventually an opening came for an Israel Awareness Week. Those of us from the chaplaincy took turns attending the various events, and I went to one that purported to show a film about how Palestinian youths were radicalised into violence. It was a quite sad and obvious piece of propaganda, and I recognised footage from other news stories in the Middle East that had nothing to do with Israel-Palestine. But that's not the point. What mattered was what happened afterward. Because this was taking place in an academic institution, participants at the event, Israeli, Arab, and a few other interested and rather perplexed students from the UK, had to behave in a reasonable manner. There was time for discussion afterward. And I remember watching as these students encountered the



**Study tour participants at St George's Cathedral**

stories of those from the opposite side of the conflict – probably for the first time. They had simply not had the opportunity, or inclination, to do so previously. It occurred to me, this was an important role for chaplaincies in universities which attracted an international student body – that they would have to encounter and share space with those who might traditionally be their nemesis back home. The changes exhibited on the faces of the students as they listened to and heard the stories of the other was profound. It may not have changed them for life, it may not have made a big difference to them when they went home. We have no way of knowing. But it made a change for that moment – and if it only ever lasts a moment, it is still momentous.

My travels in what are considered holy



lands have always been in the company of people whose faith differs from my own in name. And for me it is important to make that distinction. What is faith? Particularly when we are speaking of faith in God? It is possible to have faith in one another, as friends, as family, as humanity – and even in enemies. It is possible to have faith that eventually, whatever the circumstances, things will eventually be alright – even if they aren't alright for you. To have faith that events have a purpose, about which we may have no understanding. And faith in God, a God of love, who created us that we may know one another, that we may know the purpose of our lives, and that we may love the God who made us – this has many manifestations, many names, many ways of interpreting, but it is nevertheless faith. I often get questioned whether I don't believe in the distinctiveness of my own tradition, the distinctiveness of Jesus. Of course I do. But that doesn't mean that there is nothing distinctive about the traditions others of faith adhere to. For each of them it gives meaning to life. And it is that distinctiveness that challenges our own perceptions of what God is about – challenges what makes for faith. It is certainly that is the death of faith.

When asked about 'what it is like to travel to the Holy Land with people of another faith' – for me it is about travelling alongside those whose chosen tradition is different, distinctive from my own, but each of us holds a faith that goads us to seek out companions on the road.

***My travels in what are considered holy lands have always been in the company of people whose faith differs from my own in name.***

Several questions come up when thinking about this. In a place like the Holy Land, three dominating religions have collided for centuries. We hear stories of times when people lived side by side in peace, and then a single spark has led to conflagration. Our experience of visiting this land meant some of our group were literally taking their lives into their hands. Having been advised to not enter certain areas – they went anyway. The guts that takes must be respected. I once heard the story of two religious leaders in the Northern Ireland Troubles who worked hard to bring about peace – one a Roman Catholic priest, and one a protestant pastor. They stated as hard as it was to reach a hand across the divide, the hardest bit was turning back to their own communities – some of whom viewed them as traitors for reaching out to the enemy. And that is what was going on with some of our travels. I sat with companions on the journey as they listened respectfully to the voices of those that many in their own communities would have considered the enemy. Even when there was disagreement, their willingness to listen and understand brought about a change in everyone present. The changes that take place on such journeys are never easy. They don't mean our positions shift in any way that would be considered significant on the surface – but is profound at the level of the soul. And that is to see the enemy as a fellow human being, with desires for life and flourishing, family and communities living in peace. How that peace is worked out remains problematic – and always will be. Peace and humanity is something that needs to be constantly worked at. The moment we believe we have achieved it, is the moment we lose it. It takes effort to Love, and a choice to keep on loving through the tough times.

## Reflection: CCJ Study Tour Year Three

**Rabbi Alex Goldberg**

*Jewish Chaplain, University of Surrey*

Like many Jews around the world, stepping off the plane at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv gives me a strong sense of a spiritual home coming. My previous trips to Israel have been to study, to meet family, to tour the sites or to simply go on holiday. Whether it has been praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City or a walk down a hustling and bustling Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv my experience has been one of a Jewish visitor, even a rabbinic visitor coming to Israel, the land of milk and honey.

The CCJ study tour with senior representatives from both UK churches and Jewish communal organisations allowed me to see the Holy Land through the eyes of others. For me, this is what intercultural and interfaith dialogue is all about. It allows you to walk down familiar paths in the shoes of others or explain your own worldview through the questioning other: the constant question as to why I held a particular view helps to refine it. In addition, this visit gave me the opportunity to walk down streets that I had not visited, at least not in recent years. Our visit included the opportunity to meet people from religious, social and political organisations in both Bethlehem and Ramallah, places that I had not personally visited since the Second Intifada.

The CCJ study tour enabled us to hear the multiple narrative of those living between the Mediterranean Sea and the



Study tour participants

Jordan River: those residing in the complex web of communities situated in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. It is not every week that you hear divergent and differing narratives on the Middle East: from Israeli settlers to peaceniks; Palestinians from a full-range of political backgrounds, both inside the Palestinian Government and those fundamentally opposed to it; from senior Christian and Jewish clergy; representatives of the Israeli Government, IDF, opposition leaders and activists.

It was not always easy to listen to narratives or the responses to those narratives but listen we must: if we are sincere on mapping out a common future: a future between communities either in Israel, Palestine and the wider Arab World or between communities here in Britain with diverging views on the conflict then we need to at least hear the story of the other. Only then can we forge a common narrative together: and dare to dream the dream of resolving those tensions and forging a common future side-by-side.

# Reflection: CCJ Study Tour Year Four

**Rabbi David Mitchell**

*Rabbi, West London Synagogue*

**O**n our return from the CCJ Study Tour to Israel Palestine, I was asked to share my experiences with my congregation. I asked them what they would prefer to hear first, the good news or the bad news. Unfortunately, we all know that bad news sells better than good news. Bad news is the lifeblood of every newspaper and news channel. People jump on bad news. I must admit that going on this interfaith trip, I was worried that I would only uncover bad news. But I was wrong, for I had news and good news.

## Unsurprisingly, the congregation chose to hear the bad news first!

**Bad news:** The peace process is dead. Since the collapse of Oslo and the start of the Second Intifada in the year 2000, the Israeli Left has been in terminal decline; today they hold fewer than 6 seats in the Knesset. At the same time, the Palestinian Authority is in a vulnerable position. In short, the PA is not able to see Israel as a partner for peace, likewise, Israel does not see the PA as willing to play ball, not least because of the recent years of violent resistance against the occupation. Shalom Achshav - Peace Now, feels much close to Peace Never!

**Good news:** In a broken peace process, neither side is winning. The situation for ordinary Palestinians is a miserable one. The situation for most Israelis is a mixture

of denial, as they live their lives behind the protection of security walls, alongside despair as the world condemns their disproportional strength. Yet things are changing, for many have not given up hope.

**More bad news:** On the second day of our tour we visited both an Israeli settlement and a Palestinian Refugee Camp. We asked questions. In a settlement I asked a resident what he would say to those in the Jewish world who call the settlements a Chillul Hashem, a desecration of God's name, thereby bringing Israel and the Jewish people into shameful disrepute. He brushed me off with a religious definition of a Chillul Hashem, showing no recognition for the political disaster being caused by the settler movement. Likewise, having visited the claustrophobic concrete jungle of a 50-year-old refugee camp in Bethlehem, we found ourselves sitting a few hundred metres away in the marble-clad, spacious

*Whilst the political motivation for sharing water may not always exist, the potential is there to avoid a war over water. Moreover, there are many on both sides of the conflict who are capable of sharing support.*



Study tour participants at St George's Cathedral

municipal offices. I mentioned the stark contrast and asked our speaker whether there was a way to help the wealth trickle down – his disappointing response was that UNRWA is responsible for the refugees, not the Municipality of Bethlehem. Clearly, the existence of the refugee camp serves a political purpose which eclipses the need for humanitarian relief. The message was loud and clear, both the settler and the politician want to perpetuate the broken status quo.

**But there's good news:** Both the settlement and the refugee camp were in areas of limited water. Israel's development of desalination technology means that there is not a single place in the country where they have to go without water. Whilst the political motivation for sharing water may not always exist, the potential is there to avoid a war over water. Moreover, there are many on both sides of the conflict who are capable of sharing support. We met a small charity

called Roots where settlers and Palestinian refugees come together to learn about the other, to dialogue and to build a working farm. It is humbling to see how traditional enemies can co-exist on the micro level. At the Roots farm I kept thinking of the well-known passage from the prophet Isaiah (2:4) of beating swords into ploughshares and spears in pruning hooks. If only.

**Last bit of bad news:** Cynicism is rife, and people have lost their hope. The relentless heat and the relentless heated atmosphere are grinding people down. The graffiti on the separation wall says it all: 'Nightmare', 'Monster', 'Cancer', 'Jihad!'

**Last bit of good news:** There are hundreds of on-the-ground projects which are building a new society at the grassroots. We visited a coexistence school in Jerusalem called Hand in Hand. 50% of students are Israeli Jews and 50% Israeli





Representatives of the Abraham Initiatives, a shared society organisation working to promote the rights of Arab citizens of Israel

Arabs. Classes are bilingual, always with two teachers, a Jew and an Arab. Difficult issues are not avoided, but tackled head-on through dialogue. The palpable buzz of friendship is everywhere, from the artwork, to the educational environment. And yet, we were shown a room that, one terrible night, had been attacked by a group of young Jewish extremists. They had broken into the school, piled up some bilingual Hebrew-Arabic textbooks and set them on fire – graffitiing on the wall: ‘There is no co-existence with cancer’. Fortunately, the fire was extinguished, but not before the room was a burnt-out shell. The next morning, hundreds of students, their families, other pupils from Hand in Hand schools across Israel, and dozens of neighbours, came together outside the school to sing songs of peace and to prove that hope will always trump hate.

**So there we have the good news and the bad news.**

**In Judaism we have a blessing for hearing good news:**

Barukh Atah Hashem, Elokeinu Melech HaOlam, Hatov V’ha-mei-tiv. Blessed are

You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe, who is good and does good.

**Likewise, our faith provides us with a blessing for hearing bad news:**

Barukh Atah Hashem, Elokeinu Melech HaOlam, Dayan HaEmet. Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe, the Judge of truth.

We who live with this awareness of the good and the bad—of the hopeful and the depressing, of the dual narratives, of the injustice and pain on both sides, of the mutual anger, of the welling hope, of the struggle to seek the truth—must try to hold both of these blessings in our hands and in our hearts, so that we are always engaged in a dialogue, not a monologue.

*We visited a coexistence school in Jerusalem called Hand in Hand. 50% of students are Israeli Jews and 50% Israeli Arabs. Classes are bilingual, always with two teachers, a Jew and an Arab.*

# What does Zionism mean to me?

**The Revd Patrick Moriarty**

*Headteacher of JCoSS and Joint Honorary Secretary of CCJ*

**T**he answer to this question depends on a previous one: ‘What does Zionism mean?’ It is perhaps the most misunderstood and most contentious term in Jewish/Christian dialogue – inspiring joy and delight for some, but deployed by others as a term of abuse. When I was first appointed – as a card-carrying Christian – at the Jewish school (JCoSS) where I am now Headteacher, Zionism was the only aspect of the school’s stated ethos that I approached with nervousness.

Would everyone be a flag-waving nationalist, cheering on the Israeli Government no matter what? Would I have

to stare, embarrassed, at my feet, while partisan politics (or worse) was presumed to be shared by everyone? Would my default Christian instincts, to be suspicious of nationalism and to side with the less powerful, conflict with my professional duty to support the ethos of the school? The answer to all those questions was an emphatic ‘No’ – and, as a bonus, those default Christian instincts have been refreshed and re-examined too.

I remember the precise occasion when my nervousness evaporated. Sitting in a Jerusalem café, on a whirlwind visit to possible partner schools 9 months before



A street in Jerusalem



JCoSS opened, I listened in as my new colleagues discussed what our school's self-declared Zionism might look like as we grew. A lively dialogue (two Jews, three opinions...) in the warmth and hospitality of the country, and in the context of education, it was an ideal setting to contemplate what Zionism means.

First, because of the location: it's only when you've been to Israel that you can really understand what all the fuss is about. It's not just the natural beauty of the country, its history and profound religious significance for three faiths, or even its atmosphere and culture. It's also something about Israel as a nation – forged in extreme circumstances, defended and extended in challenging ways, its energy as young and nimble as its roots are ancient and deep. The result is a maddening, glorious, vibrant pluralism of peoples, opinions and passions: it's a place that inspires strong emotion.

Second, because of the dialogue: Zionism is not a set of tenets or political dogmas, it's a conversation (and rarely a polite one) based in love and struggle and with no easy answers. 'Israel' means 'wrestling with God', and Zionism – like Judaism – always has at its heart devotion and debate, angst and yearning. When we appear most Zionist at JCoSS – celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israel's Independence Day) for instance – along with the flag waving goes an exploration of the Palestinian experience, as well as the whole spectrum of ways in which Jews love (and sometimes are profoundly troubled by) Israel. That conversation really matters.

Thirdly, because this was an educational trip, our café stop was very much a learning experience. Zionism, I saw, absolutely does not mean uncritical support for indefensible actions; 'not "my country, right or wrong", but "my country, when it rights its wrongs";

one colleague said; the line between the good guys and the bad guys, said another, can't be drawn with Israelis on one side and Palestinians on the other – it weaves through both, and for that matter through the hearts of individuals. Are there shocking inequalities? Yes. Are there unacceptable prejudices? Yes, on both sides. Is God a conscript, truth a casualty? Of course – on all sides and well beyond the disputed borders of this small strip of land. Are there straightforward solutions? None.

So what does Zionism mean? At its root, the simple belief that the nation of Israel has the right to exist, and the Jewish people have the right to a homeland. If we grant that to the United States and the American people – for all the reservations one might have about origins, displaced peoples, inequalities, and the actions of the current government – then to deny it to Israel looks like indefensible prejudice.

And what does it mean to me? Marvelling at the human achievement, wailing at the human intransigence; laughing at the chutzpah, dancing with the traditions; weeping for the bloodshed, praying for the peace of Jerusalem, and always loving this crazy, beautiful land, both for itself and for the crazy, beautiful ideas and peoples it has cradled.

***it's only when you've been to Israel that you can really understand what all the fuss is about. It's not just the natural beauty of the country, its history and profound religious significance for three faiths, or even its atmosphere and culture.***

## What does Zionism mean to me?

**Shelley Marsh**

*Executive Director, Reshet: the network for Jewish youth provision*



I want to share my thoughts on Zionism through some of the song lyrics that have impacted on me, as an Israeli and British Jew. The words of HaTikva, Israel's national anthem, particularly resonated with me. Written in 1886 by Naphtali Herz Imber the song explores Zionism as longing, a hope of being a free people in our land, a vision aligned with my understanding of Zionism, that the Jewish people should have a nation state but one which is a place of equality and cooperation with those surrounding neighbours, as was clearly expressed in Israel's 1948 Declaration of Independence:

*We appeal ... to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and*

*due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions.*

*We extend our hand to all neighbouring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East.*

The State of Israel was established with a desire to advance the lives of all who live in the Middle East. That desire is perhaps even more important to remember today than it was when it was written.

In 1991, the Israeli Eurovision entry sang: "Kan noladiti" I was born here...my home



The Hand in Hand School, Jerusalem

ever be as funny in Hebrew as I thought I was in English... I tried out new phrases and at some stage, I began dreaming in

is here... I have no other place in the world.”

The concept of the Jewish people needing their own homeland, with no other place to permanently settle is not new. It reflects Imber's hope of 2,000 years and the 1991 song adds in the lyrics which denote Israel as a place where everyone is welcome:

‘we'll say “Ahalan” to whoever comes’

“Ahalan wa Sahlan” in Arabic literally means “welcome”, an expression of peace and welcome to Arab neighbours.

In 1995, Choref 73 (Winter 73) was released in Israel. It is a song written about the Yom Kippur War and shares the sadness of that longed for peace that has not yet been established. It is a song of the young, sung to the previous generation:

‘You promised a dove... you promised peace. When we were young you said promises need to be kept...’

For me, both songs share a strong connection to Zionism, expressing a desire for peace and justice, raising some of the questions that have not been resolved and which remain challenging to answer.

One of the most complex things we ever learn as humans is language. In my 20s I began to learn Hebrew and felt like a young child living in Israel, trying to express myself through new words, wondering if I would

Hebrew too. Peace activist and singer David Broza sings about his dream of a peaceful Israel in his song ‘Yihyeh Tov’ (All will be good):

*I have forgotten the way but I am still here...  
And all will be good, yes, all will be good,  
though I sometimes break down...  
We will yet learn to live together...  
Between the groves of olive trees children  
will live without fear, without borders, without  
bomb-shelters...*

*On graves grass will grow, for peace and  
love,  
One hundred years of war but we have not  
lost hope...*

The language of peace is difficult to learn because we must let go of bias, discomfort and judgement of and anger at the other. Even though we are familiar with some ideas conceptually, we need new ways to explore the language of peace, we need to fathom new ways of moulding it, playing with it, until it becomes part of who we are. The lyrics of David Broza's song, often maligned as clichéd, express the deep desire for hope. While it is not easy to remain hopeful that there will be peace in Israel, we must strive to learn and speak the language of hope.

## Victimhood in the Context of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

**Robin Moss,**

*Director of Strategy of UJIA, the UK Jewish community's largest Israel charity, and a member of the Board of National Officers of Liberal Judaism. He is writing in a personal capacity.*

Look at this photo. I've picked it, relatively at random, but it is representative of an important genre that defines one image of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, at least as it is perceived by many people here in the UK. The blindfolded, unarmed Palestinian youth being arrested and led away by the heavily-armed, faceless IDF soldiers. When you look at this photo, who do you see as the victim or victims? And who are the aggressor or aggressors?

Of course, Jews in the UK, and Israelis, will have a range of views. Some would say the Palestinian is the victim and the soldiers are the aggressors. Some might say they are all victims. Perhaps some might say that none are victims or aggressors – that this framing is entirely wrong. But there is a substantial, mainstream perspective amongst some Israeli Jews that would be quite clear. There is only one person in this photo who is certainly not a victim, and that is the Palestinian youth. I want to explain – not necessarily agree with, or justify or even argue for, but explain – why they feel this way.

Victimhood runs deep within some currents of Jewish thought. The Tanakh



tells the story of many nations attempting to destroy the Israelites. The first archaeological record of the Jewish people, the so-called Merneptah Stele, dated to c 1200 BCE, famously records how the Egyptians had destroyed the seed of Israel (more fool them!). A veritable “who's-who” of history's empires have risen and fallen, ruling over and sometimes (not always, for sure, but far too often) subjugating or persecuting the Jews. Be it the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Romans, various Christian and Muslim empires and most recently the British

under the Mandate, foreign rule has usually meant bad news for the Jews.

Of course, the greatest and most terrible of these catastrophes happened within living memory. The Holocaust, which today is synonymous around the globe with moral depravity, also cemented for many Jews an age-old lesson: if someone says they want to kill Jews, take them seriously.

Zionism in its modern form combined two fundamental analyses of the world. The first, the optimism of Zionism, called for Jewish national self-determination in order to unleash and enrich the Jewish soul. Only through the Jewish People having self-empowerment in the Land of Israel would Judaism once again be complete. The second, the pessimism of Zionism, saw the potential for great destruction if the Jewish People did not have control of their own destiny. Powerlessness would spell disaster, and therefore only statehood would ensure survival.

On both counts, the Zionists were proven right. Israel has been a major catalyst of Jewish life and learning in its myriad forms. And before Israel, there was the Holocaust whereas since, there has been no major massacre of Jews – and if this was ever a real possibility, Israel has the power to do something about it.

So for the typical Jewish Israeli, Israel is the *miklat* (shelter) where Jewish life can finally be normalised – away from harm, away from threat, away from being at the whims of the other nations. And yet, from the typical Jewish Israeli perspective, threat is all around. In Syria, Isis. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood. In Lebanon, Hezbollah. In Gaza, Hamas. When Israel has attempted peace negotiations, such as at Camp David in 2000, they have resulted

in a wave of suicide bombings. When Israel has unilaterally pulled out its soldiers, such as from Lebanon in 2000, it allowed Hezbollah to entrench and point (and fire) rockets and mortars at Israeli civilians. In Gaza, Israel pulled out its soldiers and settlers in 2005 – no occupation and no Jewish presence. And yet, far from quiet, Israel instead receives a periodic, deadly rain from the sky. Do not underestimate what this continuous feeling of threat and fear does to a people's psyche – and for Israelis, this has been their day-to-day reality for decades.

The sad truth, from many Israelis' perspective, is that without the IDF, and without its proactive and reactive security operations, there wouldn't be an Israel for much longer. For Israelis, paradoxically, they are strong but they are vulnerable. And they would suffer existential calamity if they give up that strength. It is not so much that Israelis do not care about or hate Palestinians; many are profoundly concerned by Israeli control over millions of Palestinians in the West Bank. But given a choice between moral discomfort and fear of annihilation, many Jewish Israelis choose the former. Not because they want to be the aggressors but precisely the opposite – because they feel themselves to be the victims.

***Zionism in its modern form combined two fundamental analyses of the world.***

***The first, the optimism of Zionism, called for Jewish national self-determination in order to unleash and enrich the Jewish soul.***

## Victimhood in the Context of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Very Revd Adrian Dorber

*Dean of Lichfield*

**Pilgrimage in the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem**



notwithstanding the increasing annexation of Palestinian territory by Israeli settlement policy. Despite Israel's overwhelming military and economic advantages, the absence of an internationally-brokered dialogue with the Palestinians creates a cycle of ever-growing suspicion, tension over land rights, and fears about security. Violence suppurates whilst no path to peace is pursued. The current situation creates short to medium term winners and losers, but unless there is the will to be reconciled, however much certain problems are ameliorated, the future looks grim; doubly so because the failure to talk of, or even imagine, peace looks like a collective moral failure.

Modern Israel was born out of the experience of oppression. The Zionist project was to create a place of safety and flourishing after the racial pogroms of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, supremely so after the genocidal terror of the Nazi era. The world understood, in part, the colossal suffering of the Jewish people, the innocence of their victimhood. As a gentile, I cannot experience Yad Vashem without a sense of shame and penitence for the perversions of Christianity that have heaped blame and death on Jewish people. I have a duty to understand and to stand alongside victims of hatred and the paranoid fear of difference. It is also to recognise that only victims have the right to forgive, and that there are deep historical wounds that require

Visiting Israel and Palestine outside the bubble of mass tourism (which I'm afraid includes many Christian pilgrimage itineraries) is to become immediately aware of two competing narratives of victimhood: Israeli and Palestinian, Jewish and Arab. The narratives are currently without hope of resolution.

The prospects for peace based on a two-state solution look ever more distant and the idea of a unitary state (which has its advocates) fails most people's reality checks. Although the green line dividing Israel from the occupied territories now seldom features in official Israeli discourse, it still matters intensely to Palestinians,



***It is perhaps the role of religious believers to know the paradoxes, twists and turns of the narrative, and the agony of all the people of Israel and Palestine. Who can 'out-victim' who is not going to win any side a stable and just peace, but reconciliation can never be based on anything less than mutually-acknowledged truth.***

immense resources of patient understanding before healing and resolution can take place.

Palestinians also understand the founding of the state of Israel through a deep sense of personal and collective trauma. The hermeneutic of suspicion allows no settled historical narrative. The narratives as they are currently recorded have a symbiotic relationship: they match pain for pain. Palestinian suffering, represented by the occupation of the West Bank and the military control of Gaza, the population exodus since 1948, the separation wall, and the daily humiliations at checkpoints, is seen by Muslims and the Palestinian diaspora across the world (which includes a large Christian element) as a fundamental injustice that requires correction and resolution. Palestinians in this perspective are seen as the victims of Israeli policies.

It is perhaps the role of religious believers to know the paradoxes, twists and turns of the narrative, and the agony of all the people of Israel and Palestine. Who can 'out-victim' who is not going to win any side a stable and just peace, but reconciliation can never be based on anything less than mutually-acknowledged truth.

What resources have Jews and Christians, in dialogue, to bring to this conflicted story of victimhood? First, a belief in the unyielding and inexhaustible love of God and the perpetual belief that there is a future for us all, despite the reality of our sin and that mercy is the mark of all righteousness.

Second, to remember the mystics who have seen even in the darkest hell and dereliction a love that cannot be killed by pain. Job on his ash heap, Jesus on the cross: both deny the last word to sin and evil. To love God is to deny that any human being is totally unforgiveable. We do not see how that can be from our side, but our scriptures remind us of grace springing from loss and apparent hopelessness, and that divine justice frequently subverts our impoverished view of our rights and injuries. Of course, if being a victim is the only story we know, it is also the only one that allows us to contain our pain and trauma without creating a total collapse of our sense of self. For any who have undergone the long and confusing journey in therapy towards a sense of self and freedom that is a liberation from past hurts and determined roles, exchanging victimhood for personal authority and autonomy is a tough call but ultimately the only real one.

Only victims can forgive, it is said. Perhaps we all need to pray, think, yearn, and work for the circumstances when the people of the competing narratives of victimhood can have the space and opportunity to listen to one another with respectful understanding and, shedding understandable anxiety, begin together to imagine the conditions that allows each to thrive.

*'They shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'* (Micah 4:4)

## Reflecting on the Balfour Declaration

**The Revd Peter Colwell**

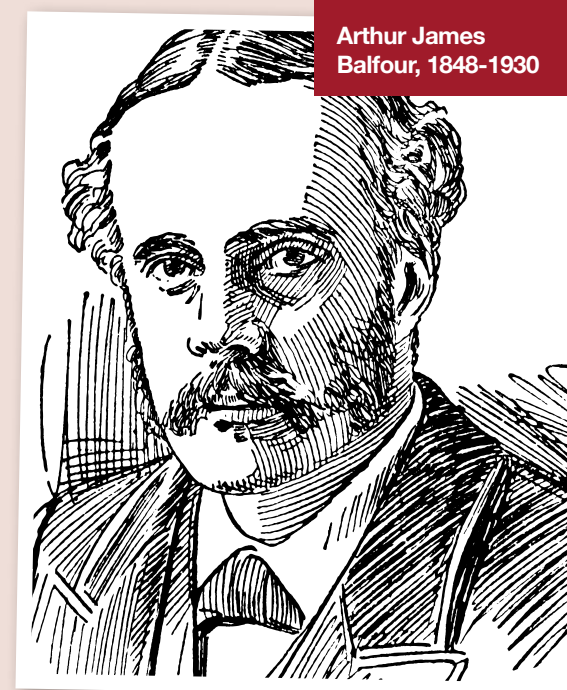
*Deputy General Secretary, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland*

**T**he Balfour Declaration of 1917 expressed a positive sentiment towards creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine 'without prejudice to the civic and religious rights of the existing population'.

These familiar words are however usually read from the standpoint of what we know today about the present situation in Israel and Palestine. However if we try to position ourselves at the point in history, we might well view the Declaration through different eyes.

From the outset it is worth noting that Balfour goes to the very heart of a dialogical crisis between Judaism and Christianity: for most Jews (and many Christians) this anniversary was a moment of celebration, whilst for many Christians, especially Palestinian, it was a moment of lament. The Declaration symbolizes the liberation of people who had been without a permanent home, yet also is seen as the beginning of the denial of self-determination of another. So Balfour brings us face to face with contested history and how it relates to the ever elusive two state solution, and to matters of identity within the Jewish-Christian encounter.

However, both the celebration and



**Arthur James Balfour, 1848-1930**

lamenting narratives (as we might call them) are prone to a reading of history backwards. In other words starting with the present political realities and reading the history in light of current events. The problem with this approach, apart from it being a poor historical methodology, is that it does not move relationships forward nor does it take us closer to conflict resolution. It also leads us towards drawing conclusions about the reasons and intentions for Balfour that may

or may not have been in the minds of the protagonists of the time.

So here are a number of brief observations about the Balfour Declaration. The first is the background to it both in terms of its theological antecedents and its foreign policy function which are inter-related at various points. It is often pointed out that Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930) had sympathy with Christian Zionism, whose belief in restorationism would hasten the second coming of Christ. Meanwhile The Balfour Declaration arose out of a context of growing interest in the Near East by the competing European powers, particularly Britain, France, Prussia and Russia, the principle cause of the Crimean War. Meanwhile Britain and Prussia jointly established a Bishopric in Jerusalem. This is why there is a Lutheran and Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, and one of the contributory factors in leading Anglo-Catholics to depart the Church of England for the Roman Catholic Church.

From the 1840s a movement aimed at the 'restoration of the Jews', led by Lord Shaftesbury, gained momentum in Britain. However, the restoration movement was motivated by political interests as well as theological conviction. The Balfour Declaration that was, to some extent, the realization of the restoration movement, has cast a shadow over the politics of the region ever since, for whilst it spoke of not prejudicing the civic and religious rights of the indigenous population, Balfour himself in 1919 spoke of Zionism having more importance than the 'desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit the ancient land'.

The historian Gudrun Krämer points out that the Balfour Declaration introduces a term hitherto unknown in political discourse:

'homeland'. What would 'creating a homeland in Palestine' actually mean in practice? In light of what we know about British foreign policy of the time we can be fairly certain it did not mean the creation of an independent Jewish State, and numerous comments from the time, including Lloyd-George and Churchill, would seem to confirm this. Nevertheless it would come to mean this, especially as the idea of a Jewish State began to gain momentum during the British Mandate period.

So restorationism and ultimately the Balfour Declaration are intertwined with a range of issues of which Christians and Jews wrestle with today, including intra-ecumenical Christian matters, Christian Zionism, the impact of colonial history, the nature of contemporary Judaism, and how it relates to global Christianity.

The Balfour Declaration is not merely historical but is contemporary in terms of its impact. This is not only the case for the current conflict in the region but also in respect of Jewish-Christian relations at the present time. It is a reminder that Jewish-Christian dialogue is conducted in a contemporary context where geo-political concerns frequently overlap with questions of religion and identity.

***From the 1840s a movement aimed at the 'restoration of the Jews', led by Lord Shaftesbury, gained momentum in Britain. However, the restoration movement was motivated by political interests as well as theological conviction.***

## Reflecting on the Balfour Declaration

**Judith Flacks-Leigh**

*was previously Head of Communications and Campaigns at the Jewish Leadership Council. She writes here in a personal capacity.*



**Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour with British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, Paris, July 1917**

**O**n the 2nd November 2017, the British Jewish community celebrated the centenary of the Balfour Declaration. The British government joined the community in these celebrations, stating on a number of occasions that they would be marking the centenary of the Declaration with pride.

To a large part of the British, and indeed, international Jewish community, the Balfour Declaration is seen as the 'birth certificate' of the State of Israel. Following centuries of persecution against Jews in Europe and a deep religious belief in the need and right for

a Jewish homeland, the Balfour Declaration was seen as the official beginning of the process towards Israel becoming a nation state, recognised by other powerful western nations. With all of the complexities that Israel carries with it today, it is for most Jews around the world, a homeland. The process of that homeland becoming politically recognised began with the issuing of the Balfour Declaration by the British government in 1917.

The UK Jewish community decided to mark this anniversary by doing something that had not been done before on such a large scale. The Jewish Leadership Council

**The move in 2017 to celebrate this “birth certificate” of Israel was broadly welcomed across all denominations of British Jewry.**

formed and led a steering committee of 23 British Jewish and pro-Israel organisations, who would meet and contact each other regularly to coordinate a series of Balfour related activities, talks, educational resources, events and celebrations.

The Balfour Centenary Lecture with Professor Simon Schama, was highlighted as the public keynote event followed by a dinner with Prime Minister Theresa May, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu and many other dignitaries. There were well over 100 other events planned in synagogues, community centres and other central locations all over the country planned to mark the centenary. The Jewish community also commissioned a Balfour 100 website ([www.balfour100.com](http://www.balfour100.com)) which is a vast educational resource with the aim of being able to be used for years to come, with downloadable programmes and easy to access information about the history of the Balfour Declaration.

The move in 2017 to celebrate this “birth certificate” of Israel was broadly welcomed across all denominations of British Jewry. This coming together is symbolic of how much Israel still means to British Jews today.

Even with all of these celebrations, the Jewish community recognised that the Balfour Declaration was not without its controversies. At the time of drafting the Declaration, the government recognised that this was a controversial step and took great care to ensure that the Declaration

had acceptable wording to the Jewish community, at least, sending drafts to Jewish leaders, both Zionists and non-Zionists

We must also remember that one of the most pivotal contextual points of the Declaration was the worsening humanitarian crisis for Eastern European Jewry. Russian Jews were subjected to mass expulsions from their homes and commonly faced pogroms. Within three years over 100,000 Jews were murdered in Ukraine by counter-revolutionary forces and community institutions and places of worship were demolished. Years of persecution and the creation of an ever-worsening refugee crisis was in urgent need of attention and resolution. World Jewry was growing desperate in its historic longing for a homeland safe from persecution, and in that vein, were all too glad to receive the Balfour Declaration.

During the Balfour Centenary Lecture, Simon Schama said: ‘Israel’s six million are the ultimate retort to the number that Adolf Hitler exterminated. The life of Israel is Hitler’s failure’. This poignant remark serves as a stark reminder as to why Israel, and by default, Israel’s birth certificate, means so much to Jewish communities around the world. Israel’s significance to majority of world Jewry is not only a right to self-determination, but it is a statement of defiance in the face of years of persecution.

The UK Jewish community decisively came together on an unprecedented scale to celebrate 100 years on from that historic moment in Zionist history, and the decision by Britain in 1917 to take the first step in recognising Palestine as a homeland for the Jewish people. Even as we celebrate, we must not forget that there are still many steps to be taken to guarantee a lasting peaceful resolution between Israelis and Palestinians.

## A Reflection on Kairos Palestine

**Philip Rosenberg**

*Director of Public Affairs, The Board of Deputies of British Jews*

**T**he Kairos Palestine (KP) document seeks to raise awareness of the situation of Palestinian Christians.

It is hard not to be sympathetic to the plight of Palestinian Christians. While Israel has one of the Middle East’s only stable Christian populations, Christians in the Palestinian Territories find themselves caught between Israel’s security infrastructure on the one hand, and Islamist attacks on Christian churches, homes and bookshops on the other. This situation has earned the Palestinian Territories a place on the annual Open Doors’ World Watch List.

However, the KP document itself has some highly problematic material that should not go unchallenged. This includes a permissive attitude to Palestinian terrorism as a driver of the ongoing conflict, and the promotion of some very counterproductive theological and political perspectives. The KP document’s treatment of Zionism as a monolithic caricature certainly bears no resemblance to the nuanced and complex ways in which Jews understand it, and led in 2010 to the Board of Deputies releasing a publication which sought to explain Jewish Zionism to Christians.



**Lutheran Church in Beit Jala, West Bank**

### Selectively Theologising the Conflict

The KP document exhibits a selective attitude to the harmful effects of bad theology. While the KP document criticises the way that religious dogma has been misused by the extreme fringes of religious Zionism, it fails to criticise how theology has been misused in the Palestinian national cause. For example, there is no mention of the overtly antisemitic Hamas Covenant, couched in religious language, or the



theological underpinnings of terrorist groups like Islamic Jihad.

The document is possibly itself guilty of misusing Christian theology as well. The deicide charge of Jews as 'Christ-killers', is a prominent theme in historical Christian antisemitism. Through the combined use of "thorns" and "blood", the document has the effect of linking the Palestinian situation to that of the crucified Jesus. One of the KP document's authors, Naim Ateek, has faced severe criticism for his past use of such images, seemingly depicting the Jewish State of Israel as crucifying the Palestinians. Furthermore, in using terms like "dead letter", KP echoes the discredited theology of supersessionism. Supersessionism, the belief that Christianity's new covenant replaces – or supersedes – G-d's promises to His people Israel, has been the basis of Christian antisemitism and even violent persecution of Jews.

#### **A Permissive Attitude to Terrorism and Extremism**

It is striking that while KP is explicit in endorsing non-violent forms of protest, it is never equally explicit in condemning violence by Palestinians. It takes what might be viewed as a permissive attitude to terrorism perpetrated against Israeli civilians, expressing 'respect and [...] high esteem for all those who have given their life for our nation.' The document further engages in apologetics for terrorist attacks against civilians, even putting the word "terrorism" in quotation marks. KP explicitly challenges Israel's right to exist as the world's only Jewish state, never making it clear whether it regards the term 'occupation' as referring only to Israel beyond its 1967 borders, or to everything from the Jordan River to the

Mediterranean Sea, and so whether Israel has a right to exist in any form.

#### **BDS as Loving Resistance?**

Rifat Odeh Kassis, KP coordinator, describes the document's call for Boycotts Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel as a form of 'loving resistance.' However, it seems impossible for a divisive tactic like BDS, which indiscriminately targets an entire nation regardless of individual's views, as in any way 'loving'. A truly loving response must involve recognising and appreciating the 'other', not marginalising and denigrating, or indeed wilfully misunderstanding, him or her.

#### **Towards a Common Endeavour**

There are, however, positive elements of the KP document as it does raise awareness of the concerns of the Christian communities in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, which have so far received little attention. KP does urge people of all religions and all ethnicities to come together and find points of common ground, and it emphasises the importance of education in reconciliation. These latter features are points of common ground and common assent, which would be a better means of engagement than BDS or stigmatisation of one party to the conflict and a whitewash of the actions of the other. Ultimately, as UK faith communities we should be seeking to export peace, not import conflict.

***It is striking that while KP is explicit in endorsing non-violent forms of protest, it is never equally explicit in condemning violence by Palestinians.***

## **A reflection on the Kairos Document**

**Kat Brealey**

*At the time of writing: National Programme Coordinator for Presence & Engagement, Church of England*

In Ancient Greek, there are two words for time. Chronos refers to a specific point in a linear timeline, while kairos denotes a moment ripe for action. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus announces 'the time (kairos) has come; the kingdom of God is near' – declaring this as the appointed time when God will act. In 2009, a group of Christian Palestinians identified with this notion of kairos and felt the time was right to put out a call to people around the world to act for peace and justice, by seeking a nonviolent end to the Israeli occupation.

Here I want to explore the context of the Kairos Document (KD), rather than its content – partly because many of the issues it raises are addressed elsewhere in this resource. More importantly though, it is the context which makes the KD important for many Christians who are interested in Israel Palestine – arguably its primary audience – and shapes how they read it. These reflections are intended to situate the KD, particularly for those who are not in that demographic and find it problematic. By the end, my hope is not that you will have



**In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Old City of Jerusalem**

changed your view on what the KD says, but that you will understand why Christians bring to the table.

There have in fact been a number of kairos documents – the first written in 1985 in South Africa. They are all expressions of liberation theology, which originated with Roman Catholic theologians in 1960s Latin America. This movement is underpinned by two statements – God loves everyone equally, and God loves the poor preferentially. At first these might sound contradictory, but in fact if we understand God to be loving, God cannot be neutral. In our unjust world, if God is not on the side of the poor, God is by default on the side of those who benefit from their poverty.



When liberation theologians talk about 'the poor', they mean not just those in material poverty but people who are oppressed and dispossessed, lacking agency and self-determination. As such, liberation theology resonates with the concerns of Palestinian Christians. Liberation theology sees sin and salvation in structural rather than personal terms – which is why the KD defines the Israeli occupation as a sin. This and other claims may seem unnecessarily political for a faith-based document, but a central tenet of liberation theology is that the practical struggle against political and economic oppression is the Church's sacred duty.

Those of us who are not poor are called to be committed to the poor; not because they need our help but because that is where we find God. That's why the KD is important for Christians. In it we hear the voices of the poor, and through them the voice of Jesus Christ. Often this is an uncomfortable experience, as we hear how Palestinian Christians feel abandoned by fellow Christians.

Unsurprisingly, liberation theology is not universally popular. Critics have condemned its use of Marxist analysis, given the violence committed by communist regimes. It can

also tend to romanticise the poor, and obscure the eternal dimension of the Christian message by focussing on the here and now. Contemporary theologian Miroslav Volf suggests liberation is problematic as an ultimate goal, as it confines people to the categories of oppressed and oppressor. While recognising the value of seeking liberation, he proposes inserting this into a broader framework of reconciliation.

Returning to our current context, there is an asymmetry in our conversations about Israel Palestine in this country. Many British Jewish people have relatives living in Israel, or have spent significant time there and so are able to communicate the Israeli Jewish perspective. The Christian connection to Israel Palestine is different. Not all have visited, and those who have can't speak for Palestinians, not least because of the colonial overtones. As such, we need to bring their voices into the conversation with us, and the KD is a way of doing this.

Although the conflict in Israel Palestine can seem never ending, it is actually time-limited. If the current trajectory continues, life there will become untenable for Christians and for Palestinians more generally. The KD reminds me that while it is imperative that Christian and Jews in the UK talk about Israel Palestine, we must never reduce it simply to a topic of discussion.

***Those of us who are not poor are called to be committed to the poor; not because they need our help but because that is where we find God. That's why the KD is important for Christians.***

## A reflection on Gaza

**Tim Livesey**

*Chief Executive, Embrace the Middle East*



**Shoppers in a street in Gaza city**

Out of sight, out of mind: a familiar phrase, not usually laden with moral, let alone political, judgement. But we are talking about Gaza.

Which is a good thing and, in the context, rather unusual. Thanks go to CCJ for inviting Christians like me, along with Jewish colleagues, to travel together to Israel and Palestine; and then for inviting us to further develop, and test, the trust between us to discuss the hard issues which tend not to feature in inter faith dialogues. Which is how we came to be talking about Gaza.

I was asked to give a picture of what Gaza is like, as one who has visited a number of times. Rabbi Joel was asked to talk about

how Israelis view Gaza. Once we had both spoken it was not entirely clear how to take the discussion forward. But it was a beginning.

Out of sight, out of mind was the starting point for what I wanted to share. Curiously, it was also key to what Rabbi Joel shared, but for different reasons. Israelis, he said, wanted Gaza – the 'problem' of Gaza – to be dealt with: precisely so that, to the greatest extent possible, it could be put out of mind, and kept out of sight. Not entirely possible as we know; the 'problem' may be contained but it refuses to go away.

I tried to explain why Gaza appearing to be so out of sight and mind here, there and

practically everywhere, was so troubling. Nearly two million people are trapped behind a security fence, across a no man's land, bordered by another security wall, topped with gun turrets and observation posts. Nothing gets into this narrow strip of land, roughly the equivalent of a one to two mile corridor from Westminster to Harlow, without permission from the government of Israel or the government of Egypt. And no-one can get in or out without permission from Hamas on the one hand, and the Israeli or the Egyptian authorities on the other. It is not exactly a busy border. There is no exit by sea and, of course, no airport. It is, in effect, an open air prison. That may sound like emotive language; believe me it isn't.

I am one of the lucky ones to be given visiting rights from time to time. I pass through the checkpoint, down the mile long enclosed metal fence tunnel (across no man's land) to the Hamas immigration point, and I'm in. Not dissimilar to the experience, if you have ever had it, of visiting a prison. You exit by reversing the sequence. Every item you carry out is likely to be triple x rayed (and possibly confiscated) and you get to explain who you have met, what you have done and so on. The hire car is parked on the Israeli side. Visit over, you

***But Gaza isn't a prison. It's a quasi-country with a small, but not insignificant, population: men, women, children, aunts, uncles, doctors, nurses, garage mechanics. A community of human beings with feelings, aspirations, hopes, fears. Yes, very like you and me.***

turn the ignition and drive away.

But Gaza isn't a prison. It's a quasi-country with a small, but not insignificant, population: men, women, children, aunts, uncles, doctors, nurses, garage mechanics. A community of human beings with feelings, aspirations, hopes, fears. Yes, very like you and me. Of course like you and me. No difference really. Well...

....a few differences. Electricity for a few hours a day, for example, at entirely unpredictable times. If you want to put the washing machine on, and the electricity comes on at 3am, you have a simple choice. If you are a wheel chair user on the seventh floor of your apartment block - tough. You get to use the lift as and when the electricity is on. How can you be sure you can return to your apartment? You can't. Unemployment is one of the highest in the world and 80% of the population is dependent on aid. There is no potable ground water.

For 18-20 hours per day no electricity means: no sewage treatment. Luckily there's the Mediterranean into which to pump the waste from nearly two million people. Just don't eat the prawns and expect to enjoy the drive back to Jerusalem.

Malnutrition is the norm. Gaza is not a good place to have any kind of chronic medical condition. And it's not a good place to march for your rights. Freedom is not an experience Gazans enjoy.

Out of sight, out of mind. Why? Is it because we have failed to pay attention, because we simply don't care very much; or have we made a deliberate choice to hand the "problem" to someone else (e.g. the IDF) to deal with?

Either way the question remains: is this right? Is this the way to treat human beings?

We do need to discuss that.

## A reflection on Gaza

**Rabbi Joel Levy**

*Director, the Conservative Yeshiva, Jerusalem*

would like to make a few broad-brush observations about how people in Israel see their world and how this influences their perspective on the situation in Gaza. I do this not in a spirit of censure but merely as a crude attempt to understand why my compatriots think the way they think, and do the things they do.

**Firstly**, Jews have a deep cultural memory of being hurt. In general the Jewish people has learned over centuries in Christendom and the Arab world that when people say they hate us and want to kill us, we should probably take them seriously. We have been traumatised by our history and we are extremely sensitive to hints that those dark times are returning. The State of Israel is viewed as a bulwark against the murderous hatred of the world.

**Secondly**, Dr Alex Sinclair has helpfully observed that there are two conflicts between Israel and the Arab world. I imagine that readers in the UK primarily see one and most Israelis primarily see the other. Both feel like zero sum conflicts against implacable foes and both involve a deep power imbalance: a David and Goliath struggle. Conflict 1 is between Israel and the Palestinians and Israel is Goliath. Conflict 2 is between Israel and the Arab world and Israel is David. There are twenty two Arab countries with a population of over 400 million extending over an area of 5 million square miles. There are 1.8 billion Muslims in the world. The 7 million Israeli

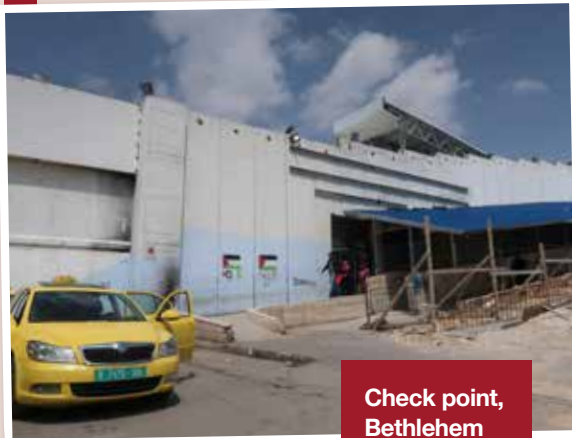


**Israeli Soldiers, Old City, Jerusalem**

Jews constitute 1.5% of the Arab world and Israel's 8,000 square miles constitutes 0.15% of the land mass of this region. In the context of the second conflict, Israelis feel existentially threatened all the time. They assume that, if for a millisecond there was no army to protect them, they and their families would immediately be killed by hate-filled foes. Armed Arabs running towards the Gaza border are viewed by most Israelis as a manifestation of conflict 2 not conflict 1! This leads to a huge dissonance between how most Israelis see the conflict with the Palestinians and how it might be seen from the UK. As such Gaza evokes existential fear in Israel.

**Thirdly**, after the Second World War the creation of codes of internationally accepted human rights tried to prevent a situation where the coercive apparatus of a state would once again be used to





**Check point, Bethlehem**

oppress its citizens or to favour one ethnic or religious group over another. That is not how the power of the state is used in the Middle-East. Hundreds of thousands have been killed in Syria; minorities have been wiped out, oppressed, and offered no protection across the Arab world. The world in general is tipping away from the notion that the primary role of the state is to seek to preserve the human rights of its citizens; it is becoming more normal to accept that the coercive apparatus of the state may be used to promote and elevate a particular ethnic group or identity. In the Middle East that was always the case. Israelis are wont to quip that Israel is located in the Middle-East not Scandinavia. Our neighbourhood can be brutal, undemocratic, seared by poverty, religious extremism, raw tribalism, and unrestrained particularism. Most Israelis assume that when the eyes of the Christian world turn specifically towards Israel with censure, that that moral disapproval actually constitutes an expression of long-held hatred.

**Finally**, most Israelis now feel that we have learned from our withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza that withdrawal does not produce peace. Many expected that the excruciating withdrawal of Israeli settlements from the Gaza strip in the disengagement plan of 2005 and from The Lebanon in 2000 would

result in peaceful co-existence, the end of territorial claims and the flourishing of economic ties. Land for peace is seen as essentially flawed if your opponents are engaged in a zero sum conflict with you. Attempts to create economic cooperation areas have repeatedly resulted in security breaches and murders. In a zero sum conflict you need Churchillian grit and determination in order to prevail, not compassionate empathy towards your enemy. In a zero sum conflict, the feeling

is that deeply hostile areas like Gaza need to be actively restrained, limited, and repressed. Within the limits of humanitarian relief no means should be offered for our enemies to gain more power to hurt us.

For her citizens, Israel is trying to create a normal, economically advanced, Western-style democracy in the middle of a cauldron of poverty and hostility. I live in what looks like a peaceful leafy bourgeois suburb. I also live less than a kilometre from a security wall separating that suburb from an area that is very different to mine. Most Israelis do not look or see over that wall. This blindness is essential for maintaining the suburb. It is extremely difficult for most Israelis to respond empathetically to the suffering of the Palestinians, who they perceive, broadly speaking, as their enemies for the reasons outlined above.

I assure you that all of the above is more disturbing for me than it is for you! I believe that a deep religious response to all of the above involves far more than writing policies or virtue signalling. It demands unprejudiced empathetic comprehension, reckless prophetic visioning, deep moral clarity, and steadfast commitment to long-term goals in an attempt to shift the generations' long psycho-spiritual underpinnings of Israel Palestine.

# Jerusalem

**Rabbi David Mason**

*Rabbi, Muswell Hill United Synagogue and Joint Honorary Secretary of the Council of Christians and Jews*

**W**hy is the issue of Jerusalem so difficult to solve in any possible and potential agreement

between Israel and the Palestinian Authority? The following poem by the late and great Israeli poet and writer Yehuda Amichai may shed some light on this problem: In his poem Jerusalem he writes:

*Why is Jerusalem always in twos, one of Above  
And the other Below  
And I want to live in a Jerusalem of the middle  
Without turning my head above and without  
Wounding my legs below.  
And why is Jerusalem in the language of  
pairs, like hands*

*And legs,  
I only want to be in one Jerusalem  
Because I am only one, there are no more.*

Jerusalem is a place of spiritual wonderment and ecstasy. And yet, Jerusalem is a place that has seen much conflict in past ages and in the modern age of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel.

In fact, the idea of two Jerusalems—one supernal and one earthly—is not new and not Amichai's original idea. It comes from the Talmud which refers to a Higher and Lower Jerusalem and then states as if speaking for God:

*'I will not enter the Jerusalem above, until I have entered the Jerusalem below'*



**Participants visit the City of David archaeological site**

Now the Talmud has no problem with this dual understanding of Jerusalem. What it does wonder about is where we learn about the concept of a 'lower Jerusalem'. To this we are quoted a verse in Psalm 122: 'The built up city is like a city that is united together'. And for many politicians and indeed Israeli citizens, this verse is marshalled to support the idea of a united Jerusalem, East and West. This surely is what the Psalmist meant when he described Jerusalem as 'united together'.

There is of course more to this verse and this idea. But the idea being put forward by the Talmud, and developed by Amichai is key to understanding the place Jerusalem plays in the conflict. For Jewish people, Jerusalem is not solely a place of local government, a regular city. It is not just a place of historic importance. It is rather a place of holiness and holds a deeply special part in the hearts of so many Jewish people. Of course it is not only built on holiness. It has to function as other cities do. But these two Jerusalems, the one of holiness and the one of secularity, find it extremely difficult to be separate from one another. And so any attempt to solve the issue of Jerusalem, which of course holds a special place for other religions, must take that into account.

The duality of Jerusalem is so important to understand, and yet as Amichai hints to, it is part of the conflict. We cannot create a 'middle' Jerusalem; rather we are left with



Participants overlooking Silwan village, Jerusalem

the one to which we look up; and the one whose feet are on the earth.

There is a difficult and complicated corollary to all this. Many Jewish people understand that a relationship to Jerusalem, as part of a Jewish state, requires sovereignty over Jerusalem. David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, agreed to Jerusalem being an international city with a heavy heart. The victory of the 1967 Six Day War and the resultant conquest of larger parts of Jerusalem was heralded with joy across Israel. And so the closer one is to the Old City of Jerusalem or even what is named the 'Holy Basin', sharing becomes nearly impossible for many who hold it to be so special. In some ways, conflict resolution has to consider the importance of the holy. It has to come up with ways that we can share what is holy, a multiple sense of sovereignty that allows all access to places of specific religious importance. Jewish people of all levels of engagement with the religion look at Jerusalem as a unifying factor of our people. Our prayer is that it can be a beacon of unity for humanity as well.

## Jerusalem: Whose is it?

**The Revd Jessica Foster**

*Tutor in the Centre for Ministerial Formation,  
The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham*



Western Wall, Jerusalem

'Jerusalem is ours' – this is the wi-fi code at a bookshop in East Jerusalem where I often stop for tea and cake. It was the place we chose to recover after a fraught and stressful day. We were a group of Jews, Muslims, and Christians from Birmingham, visiting the Holy Lands together in order to learn about peace, experience each other's holy sites and hear one another's stories.

Ruth, one of the Jewish members of the group, had had a tough day. As I told her the password for the wi-fi she shrugged and grinned in a slightly resigned manner. We understood somehow that the three possessive words, Jerusalem is ours,

expressed hope rather than violence, aspiration rather than destructiveness and captured the spirit of sumud, steadfast resistance, also displayed in the books and other materials for sale.

I am always wary of exporting the conflict so it has taken me a while to answer this potentially divisive question. I fear the question almost asks for a proxy conflict with the British Jewish voice answering for the Israelis and the Christian representing Palestinians. I am also reluctant to state forthright opinions given I have barely spent a fortnight of my life in Jerusalem and have always been a visitor. Each time I have visited I have learnt something new which



reminds me how little I know and how unimportant my opinion is.

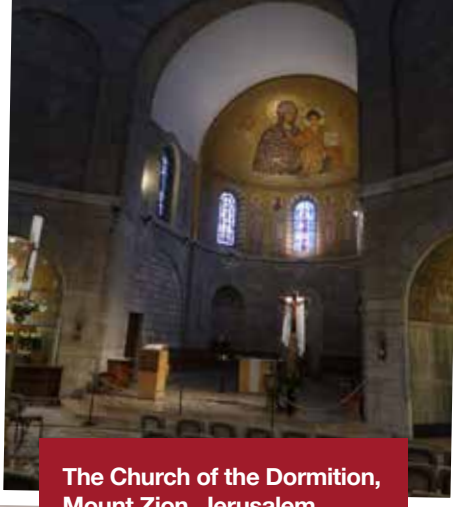
On a recent visit to the Holy Lands, I asked a few people, Israelis and Palestinians, whose Jerusalem they thought it was. No one replied 'Jerusalem is ours'. In fact, everyone replied that Jerusalem belongs to God. Most people felt that all places belong to God and countries, cities, villages and nature does not belong to anyone – we belong to them quite possibly.

That's certainly how I feel about my home city of Birmingham. But Jerusalem is not Birmingham or even London. It's an iconic city and unique in many ways. It's one of the few places that is holy to more than one faith and for Christians it is a symbol of heaven, the bride of God, God's dwelling place, the place where there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more mourning, no more death.

For me, over the last few years, the phrase, 'on earth as it is in heaven' is the phrase from the prayer we call the Lord's prayer that has resonated with me most deeply. It guides my activity, my hopes, my dreams and my theology. In the writings I have read from some of the Palestinian Christian theologians I see the dream that Jerusalem could be now what it will be when heaven touches earth.

I also see this dream articulated in different ways by friends on both 'sides' of

***It may seem a pipe dream and naïve optimism. But throughout history Jerusalem has welcomed and embraced those who have visited and dwelt there.***



**The Church of the Dormition, Mount Zion, Jerusalem**

this conversation. Jerusalem belongs to God and people of the three Abrahamic faiths feel deeply that they belong to Jerusalem. Some feel it because they live there, some feel it because they have lived there, some feel it because their scriptures tell them they should live and pray there. From the days of high priest and king Melchizedek, politics and religion have been intertwined in Jerusalem. I think somehow the politics will have to reflect the religious truth of this holy city and the shared holiness that makes it unique – so rather than being a city for one faith, or a divided city, Jerusalem can be a city which looks like heaven on earth, a place of freedom, love, justice and joy, a place that is genuinely shared in a deep and trusting sense.

It may seem a pipe dream and naïve optimism. But throughout history Jerusalem has welcomed and embraced those who have visited and dwelt there. Jerusalem has at least three children – and, in the words of Isaiah: 'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?' How it is shared I would not venture to suggest. That it must be shared, I have no doubt.

## Settlements

**Ashley Perry**  
*Resident of Efrat*



**Listening to the perspectives of Israeli settlers and local Palestinians at Roots**

**F**ifteen years ago on Jerusalem Day, which commemorates and celebrates the almost miraculous liberation of Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria in 1967, I asked one of the most important questions of my life. Thankfully, my now wife and mother of our five children said yes to my marriage proposal in the shadow of the Temple Mount, the repository and focus of Jewish life and civilization for millennia.

The next most important question that would now be discussed as an engaged couple was where we would live and raise a family.

We had many options and discussions about different communities around Israel, but eventually settled on Efrat, primarily for professional, communal and quality of

life reasons.

Growing up in a strongly dovish family, where many of my siblings still regularly vote Meretz, one of the most Left-wing parties in Israeli politics, the idea that I would live over the Green Line would have been anathema.

However, my position on the conflict and its resolution has evolved significantly over the years.

I still believe strongly in coexistence and am not adamantly against Palestinian self-determination. I would leave my home tomorrow if it was found that it was either built on the private property of someone else or was really a genuine impediment to peace.

Nevertheless, the more I studied the roots and history of the conflict the more I arrived at the eminently logical conclusion that I



# Settlements

Mirella Yandoli

Interfaith Adviser to the Church of Scotland



Illustration of meeting with Mayor of Efrat by Rabbi Alex Goldberg

One of the deepest fault lines in the effort to establish peace between Israel and Palestine has been the expansion and normalisation of Israeli settlements. These so called 'facts on the ground' directly challenge the viability of a Palestinian state as those living in the West Bank find their land turning into an archipelago, cut off by check points and road blocks and hills dominated with the white houses and gated illegal settlements. There are now more than half a million settlers living on land which has either been physically seized or declared 'state land'. They live as Israeli citizens while their neighbours answer to military law as an occupied people. They are served by different roads and the inequality and injustice is barefaced. Settlements are just one way that the Israeli government has chipped away at Palestinian space and established an alternative reality to the one laid out in the Oslo agreements, which envisioned self-determination for Palestinians. Despite the breach of international law that the settlements represent, their existence has shifted the way peace is talked about as the safety and future of half a million people has to be considered in any negotiation going forward. It has made land exchange more and more difficult. It is also hard to even notice you are going to a settlement (depending on which one you visit) given the way the infrastructure smoothly serves them, so Israelis are often blind to the problems they pose for a long term peace.

They are seen as neighbourhoods in Jerusalem, cheaper than others or with a better school. In this way they are becoming embedded in the minds of many Israelis, and thus evading political scrutiny.

The Church of Scotland's engagement with settlements comes through its physical presence in Israel. It runs a school, hotel, guest house and two parishes. One Church is in Tiberias with Rev Kate McDonald as its minister and one in Jerusalem run by Rev Dr John McCulloch. We also have over 30 partners across Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. The partners can be other churches or organisations we support financially or promote the work of. The majority of these are Christian but many are run by Israeli Jews or Palestinian Muslims. The nature of working in such a complex space is beautifully outlined in Rev McCulloch's partner letter on Holocaust Memorial day:

have a legal, moral and historic right to live on my indigenous and ancestral homeland. There has been no other nation or people in the annals of history that have returned to the exact location that their ancestors lived, despite almost two millennia of conquest and occupation by foreign forces.

I know that my international legal rights have a League of Nations and United Nations Resolution, and the internationally recognized laws of indigeneity to buttress them. I know that an indigenous people returning to their ancestral and aboriginal land and reconstituting their historic sovereignty is a deeply progressive and enlightened cause.

Furthermore, my family tradition was that our ancient and biblical family name of Peretz denoted that our roots are deeply intertwined in the soil of Judea. No amount of oppression, whether under Christianity or Islam, could dampen our longing for this part of the world. I know that my ancestors would be smiling at the thought that despite their suffering, anguish and longing, one of their descendants had finally returned home.

Despite all this, I am an advocate and dreamer of peace and coexistence. It is certainly no coincidence for me that I live in a town whose residents seek good neighbourly ties with the nearby Arab villages and towns. I am deeply proud of the fact that we welcome our Arab neighbours for our festivities and desire a life where we assist each other.

I have family and friends who travel to the local Arab villages and treat their ill pro bono, who raise money for their ophthalmic surgeries when there is a need and provide employment for those who seek it.

In short, I believe that this is where peace is built, and this is where it is most ignored.

It is those Israelis who live beyond the

Green Line who live, travel, shop and eat together with their Arab neighbours, in mutual respect and understanding, who can become the backbone of a more peaceful, prosperous and secure region in the future.

In fact, it was at a conference dedicated to peace soon after I first made Aliyah where I witnessed this reality which confounded by preconceptions about settlers, the religious and the Right-wing. I saw the condescension and aloofness by many parts of the representatives of the Left-wing in Israel both towards the Arabs and the settlers, whereas they enjoyed jokes and good-natured debate throughout.

It was then that I realised that there is no hate between the Arabs and the settlers, some minorities notwithstanding, but a commitment each to their own history and rights, but a respect and understanding that underpins this relationship.

I have seen and now live in a place that is unrecognisable from the false caricaturisation that I read about daily in the international and social media. I see a community that is proud of its history, lives on a territory whose every inch teems with a rich Jewish past and civilization, and seeks to take its place as an ahistoric revenant on its indigenous and ancestral homeland, even while respecting and living alongside those whose ancestors came with conquering, colonizing, and occupying armies.

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**my family tradition was that our ancient and biblical family name of Peretz denoted that our roots are deeply intertwined in the soil of Judea.**

'Being a minister in the Church of Scotland here means that you are invited into many different spheres. There are times when I speak with politicians and Church Patriarchs, other times I am in Gaza with those who have lost everything in the conflict, other times I speak with IDF soldiers and Israeli settlers; other times with rabbis and disposed Bedouins. Behind each story is a human being, made in the image of God. Encountering individuals from every corner of this tragic and intractable conflict, is both a huge privilege and responsibility. But the biggest responsibility is to never dehumanise the other, but to always hear and listen to their story; not in terms of justifying or normalising the tragedy here; but to recognise our common humanity, and to strive for an end to injustice and to the systems that perpetuate it; both here in this land and across our divided and unjust world.'

In 2016 I travelled to Israel and the West Bank in order to research a report for the Church of Scotland. We visited many of our partners but the one which stood out in my memory and subsequent report, whose work and existence is routinely threatened by the strategic expansion of nearby settlements, is the Tent of Nations. This partner is a

Efrat, Gush Etzion, Israel



### ***The Church of Scotland's engagement with settlements comes through its physical presence in Israel. It runs a school, hotel, guest house and two parishes.***

family run farm with summer and women's empowerment programmes. Despite having papers that clearly prove the family's ownership, the farm remains vulnerable due to its strategic location on a hill top between several expanding settlements. The IDF has blocked road access and bulldozed hundreds of trees in 2014. Settlers have also repeatedly used intimidation tactics of damaging water tanks and uprooting trees.

Their motto, 'we refuse to be enemies', is often one that is referred to by Church members who visit or write blogs. It reflects their ethos of simultaneously fighting to stay viable in Israeli courts but also concentrating their efforts on the farm's positive outreach. They refuse to let their legal battle rule their identity and distort their treatment of others. This is much easier for them given their extant paperwork and international connections which has fundraised hundreds and thousands of shekels to pay their legal

fees. Most Palestinians don't have this and many lay vulnerable to the ambition of the strategic takeover of land for settlements. However a refusal to be enemies and my colleague Rev McCulloch's understanding of his universal service and refusal to dehumanise, points to the only attitude I've heard that suits everyone. How that manifests itself into restorative policy for those in charge cannot be answered here but any policy needs to prioritise this humanitarian principal at long last.

## **Security**

**Elizabeth Harris Sawczenko**

*Director, the Council of Christians and Jews*

I arrived in Israel just prior to the first Intifada. During these early years I had experiences that were very difficult and that I wasn't mentally prepared for. One day I turned up just moments late to catch a bus at my regular bus stop, only to find that a young Jewish woman had been stabbed to death by a Palestinian from the neighbouring Arab village.

I was still living in the same neighbourhood when Baruch Goldstein, a Jewish terrorist from Kiryat Arba, entered a Mosque and slaughtered innocent Palestinians while at prayer. That was while the Oslo Accords were still hanging together by a fine thread. I can still see the convoy of cars driving through my neighbourhood in Jerusalem from the adjacent Arab village with black flags flying in solidarity with the victims of the attack.

After both incidents I felt heavy with sadness but also very fearful for my personal security.

Why do I recall both these memories? Because in order to achieve peace in a region, shaped by generations of conflict and mistrust, both peoples need to feel secure in going about their daily lives. They need that reassurance. But as it is now, the child living in Sderot anxiously anticipates the siren at night warning of incoming rockets and again wets its bed, and the child living in Gaza fears the retaliating dawn raid of the Israeli airforce and the certain carnage that will ensue. There are layers of trauma and fear that cannot simply be dismissed and both sides are responsible for this endless cycle of violence.



**Security at the Holy Sepulchre, Old City Jerusalem during Easter**

And yet having said all this, I also remember clearly the day the Oslo Accords were signed. Like many others, I believed it was really the beginning of peace. I hold on to that exhilarating moment of hope. I actually remember people getting out of their cars in the middle of a traffic jam in Jerusalem and openly weeping and hugging one another.

I was a Programme Director then at an educational organisation and was invited to take part in a ground-breaking 'People to People' initiative with Palestinian and Israeli educators as part of the implementation of the Oslo Accords.

One Friday morning in the mid-90s, I found myself on a bus travelling for the first time into the Palestinian Authority. It was a crossing of physical and mental boundaries. And yes, I was very fearful and I felt that I had given myself up to fate as I entered an area with no Israeli security for the first time. Yet when our

bus stopped in the main square of Ramallah, a line of enthusiastic Palestinians was there to greet us. Overcoming that fear was a powerful experience for me, a life-changing one in fact, that impacted on my future personal and professional choices. It reminded me that people have the ability to find their common humanity – given the chance—and I still believe that when Palestinians and Israelis are given that chance, they can be quite brave in reaching out to one another despite generations of conflict.

But hope turned again to fear with the outbreak of the second Intifada. I had just been appointed a Director at an organisation that works to safeguard civil and human rights in Israel and by extension, Palestine. I worked in a multi-national team where I was challenged everyday by my colleagues and the world beyond our office walls. But the truth is, despite our lofty ideals and speaking out against the violence on both sides, we were all fearful for our personal security, Palestinians and Israelis alike. Every day there was an explosion in Jerusalem. Self-preservation kicked in. Normal life had virtually come to a standstill. People were fearful of leaving their homes even to do necessary errands, such as the supermarket run, or take a bus and it is in this context that the wall or security barrier was built.

But I also remember moments of hope during those difficult years. One of my Palestinian colleagues who lived in Beit Jala had her home demolished by rocket fire from Palestinians. She moved to Bethlehem in the middle of the chaos and spent most of her time in a basement to be safe from constant clashes between Palestinian and Israeli troops. Despite our many differences, every day of that Intifada I called to make sure she was safe. It was a small gesture but even

small gestures are actually large gestures in time of conflict.

And then one beautiful summer evening at the height of the second Intifada, I heard a loud explosion and felt my apartment tremor. I knew immediately what it was: the café adjacent to my home in Jerusalem had been bombed. Prof David Appelbaum, Head of ER at the Sharei Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem, was murdered together with his beloved daughter, in that most precious of moments between a father and daughter, the night before her wedding. I vividly remember the silence after the explosion and then wild screaming and crying, body parts, and people running in every direction. I wasn't sure if I had reached the end of the world. I stayed in my apartment for two days huddled under my duvet.

And yet, with all of that, it was my Palestinian colleague, hiding in the basement in Bethlehem, who was the first person to call and check I was alive.

So I do very much believe that human contact and relationships are essential to overcoming fear and mistrust and the building blocks to a resolution of the conflict; but I also know that walls will only come down when people feel that their personal security is ensured. I'm not sure how you get to that point without knowing one another so I continue in my personal and professional life to go into Palestine, to meet and reach out to people from different perspectives, even where this challenges my own deeply held beliefs. There is no doubt that the barrier has and continues to cause immense suffering to the daily lives of Palestinians and that it has further dehumanised each from the other, but I am equally aware that in times of conflict security is a very basic need. So I don't really have answers. Only more questions.

## Security

**Marigold Bentley**

*Head of Peace Programmes and Faith Relations, Quakers in Britain*



**N**o one can look at the wall which snakes its way along modern Israel and into the West Bank, without wanting to weep. It represents failure of human relations at every possible level. There was a time in living memory in which it was possible to walk across from the West Bank to Jerusalem, East to West, without having the journey broken at all by anyone. I know this because I used to do it.

In reality the wall has taken huge chunks of disputed territory from the West Bank and placed them on the Israeli side. It has

further impoverished Palestinian farmers, separating them from their farmland and forcing them to queue and apply for permits to access land which previously they could walk to unhindered. It has separated Palestinian communities from one another, preventing them from visiting family and neighbours. It has devastated hard-pressed Palestinian businesses. It has cut off light and views for many, creating areas which feel like open-air prisons. It has heralded a new form of misery for people who were already beleaguered.



Why would anyone do such a thing – build such a blight across a beautiful land and be so obviously cruel to so many as a result?

The terrible answer is that the wall is a reaction of fear and entrenched mistrust. The Israelis fear the Palestinians. Fear generates an energy and a rationale which, like the wall, is very hard to dismantle. In the case of the wall, the attempt at security for the Israelis is at the expense of the Palestinians.

Many say that the duty of a state is to keep its citizens safe. But true, permanent security doesn't come from guns, soldiers, barbed wire and walls. It doesn't come from continually struggling to keep your enemies out. Rather, true safety emerges when a people have no enemies, when they live in peace with others and enemies become friends.

Security is a shared freedom from fear and want, and the freedom to live in dignity. It needs to be understood as a common right, not to be gained for one group of people at others' expense – which is what the wall does. True security rests on solidarity rather than dominance – in standing with others, not over them.

All human beings need stability in which to raise our children, live our lives fully and conduct our affairs free from the fear of hunger and sickness with the secure prospect of education and democracy. True flourishing lives are good for security.

So how to create security in Israel and Palestine? To be at peace with our neighbours, we have to know them, but the wall works against this. It furthers resentment, anger and fury from Palestinians, the international community and Israeli peace activists. Evidence

shows that violent social relationships are a breeding ground for continuing violence: how can we get out of this trap? If Israelis cannot get to know their neighbours, the Palestinians, how can peace be built and developed? Peace is about relationships. Relationships come from knowing one another and learning to trust. Who gains from the wall? What can we do to build trust and dismantle the wall?

A commitment to the common good must guide us all, recognising that security is a shared responsibility that needs to be negotiated democratically.

Creating security takes patient practice. Security grows or withers according to how inclusive it is. It cannot be coerced into being. The challenges of it belong to us all and cannot be left to military elites. Could this vision be applied in Israel and Palestine?

People the world over do need security, but it is not gained by walls, barbed wire, threats, guns and bombs. These things create misery mistrust and bitterness. What we do need is confidence to work out a positive, peaceful way forward; we must remind ourselves that the Berlin Wall was dismantled piece by piece by German people from East and West in 1989 and a united Germany emerged. So it is for the peoples of Israel, Palestine, and the region to take the wall down and build peace and true security together.

***Creating security takes patient practice. Security grows or withers according to how inclusive it is. It cannot be coerced into being.***

## Who are the Christian communities in Israel?

**Hana Bendcowsky**

*Program Director for the Jerusalem Centre for Christian-Jewish Relations*

The Christian communities in the Holy Land constitute a microcosm of the Christian world, with rich and diverse linguistic, liturgical, cultural and theological divisions that characterize Christianity in the Holy Land from the early days. Trying to identify the different communities we should relate to two aspects: denominational and cultural/national.

### Denominations

The communities can be divided into four different main categories: the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, Oriental Churches, and the Protestant communities.

The Eastern Orthodox Church is a family of fourteen Autocephalic (self-headed) churches who are in full sacramental and canonical communion with each other, whilst independent in internal administration (including Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, etc.). Each church is led by Patriarchs, bishops, and local synods. The Jerusalem Patriarchate is one of the first ancient patriarchates, and the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem represents the different Eastern Orthodox churches in the Holy Places and considered the Taphos Philikes ('custodian of the Tomb' in



**Russian Orthodox Church, Old City Jerusalem, Easter**

Greek). While the Patriarch, the majority of the bishops, and many of the priests are from Greek ethnic origin, and spent most of their lives in the Holy Land, the laymen and laywomen are Arabs who are led by married parish Arab priests.

The Oriental Orthodox Church is a designation for ancient churches that follow pre-Chalcedonian theology, and all of them have a long history in the Holy Land.

The Coptic Church in Egypt is headed by the Pope of the Coptic Church in Alexandria, one of the main Christian centres since the early days, it was the home of prominent theologians and the cradle of the monastic movement. The clergy came to Jerusalem to serve in the holy places, while the lay Copts came here mainly during the last two centuries. Although their spoken language is Arabic, in their prayer they preserve certain parts of the Coptic (Arabization of the Greek name 'Egypt') language which originated from the ancient Egyptian language of their ancestors.

Armenian people are proud of being the first people who accepted Christianity when it was still a persecuted religion in 301. The community is spread in the diaspora and in the motherland, Armenia, and most of them adhere to the Armenian Apostolic Church. The community in the Holy Land goes back to the fourth and fifth centuries when clergy, monks, priests, and pilgrims established permanent houses. After the Armenian Genocide in East Turkey, a few thousand refugees and survivors settled in the land and their descendants live today in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Jaffa.

The church in the Roman province of Syria is called the Syriac Church, led by the Patriarch in Antioch who resides in Damascus. The Church preserves its Aramaic language that was in use by Jews and Christians and others in the region before it was replaced by Arabic in the seventh century. The small community includes clergy and laypeople, some who

came after the Genocide in Turkey.

The Ethiopian Church, the only African ancient church, has a small representation in the Holy Land but it is the largest of the Oriental churches. In the Holy Land it has a few monasteries that preserve, like in other Ethiopians churches, unique traditions, including special holidays and rituals, in Amharic and the ancient language of the scriptures and liturgy, Geez.

The Catholic Church is represented by several communities in the Holy Land. The Latin Church uses the Latin Rite represented by the Franciscan brothers since the fourteenth century, a Latin Archbishop-Patriarch, one hundred different religious communities of brothers and sisters, and a diplomatic delegation from the Vatican State. The majority of the Catholics in the Holy Land do not follow the Latin rite in their liturgy and tradition but belong to the Eastern Catholic Churches who are under the jurisdiction of the Pope but maintain their own liturgical discipline, headed by a patriarch. The five Eastern Catholic churches in the Holy Land are Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Armenian Catholic, Syriac Catholic, and Chaldean. Their rituals and customs are closer to the Eastern Orthodox or the Oriental Churches respectively. The Greek Catholic Melkite church is the largest in Israel with a few tens of thousands of people.

***The communities can be divided into four different main categories: the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, Oriental Churches, and the Protestant communities.***



**Holy Lavra of Saint Sabbas, Mar Saba. Greek Orthodox Christian monastery**

Protestants are the most recent arrivals among the churches in the Holy Land as they officially have been present here since the nineteenth century. Their activities left an impact on the land as they contributed many institutions for the welfare of the population and encouraged others to follow and help to develop their services in the land. The Episcopalian Church of the Holy Land and Jerusalem and the Lutheran Church both have Palestinian Bishops, the Baptist Church has communities around the country. Presbyterians, Seventh Day Adventists, and others hold centres around the country along with new Pentecostals, and Evangelical groups.

Messianic Jewish communities are independent groups who identify themselves as Jews who follow their family heritage being part of the Jewish People and do not

see any contradiction between believing in Jesus as their saviour and being Jews.

### **Culture and National Background**

In most of the Churches around the Holy Land, the spoken language of the community is Arabic, even if the liturgies are different. Most of the Arab Christian Palestinians and Palestinian-Israelis (Israeli citizens who affiliate with the Palestinian nationality) consider themselves descendants of the early Christians who were Arabized but maintained their identity and presence in the Holy Land. They are the 'Living Stones', who 'are being built up as a spiritual house' in the land of many holy stones.

The Holy Land is also the home of clergy who pray in different languages coming from diverse cultures.

In Israel, in the last thirty years, we have witnessed new Christian communities who are not Arabs and are more integrated into the Jewish Israeli society: immigrants who came from the former Soviet Union countries and received their citizenship based on their Jewish family connection. They practice Christianity and attend Orthodox or other churches. There are tens of thousands of migrant workers from the Philippines, India, and Sri Lanka who are devoted Catholics and work in Jewish houses. Thousands of asylum seekers, mainly from Eritrea who escaped the country to find temporary shelter in Israel, are all Christians who mostly belong to the Eritrean Church (Oriental Church). These temporary or non-registered Christians integrate into the Hebrew-speaking majority in Israel and send their children to public schools in Hebrew where they receive Jewish education.



# Who are the Jewish communities in the State of Israel?

**Michael Wegier**

*Jewish Education Consultant*



**Ethiopian Jewish community in Old City, Jerusalem for Passover**

There are about nine million Israelis, of which 74% are Jews, making it the largest Jewish community in the world. There are different ways that we have historically thought about understanding the different types of Jewish communities in Israel. However, the most important point is that “religious” definitions are of limited use. Judaism in Israel is understood by many Israelis as a national/ethnic identity as well as, or instead of, a religious one.

This can paint a confusing picture to the outsider, as a secular/atheist Israeli may well fast on Yom Kippur, circumcise their son, get married by a Rabbi, and attend a Passover Seder. Furthermore, while Reform and Conservative Judaism have made some inroads in Israel, their influence is limited due to Israel’s political culture and to the sense that it is an “American import”. So clearly some unpacking needs to be done! There have been two principle ways that

Israelis have been sub-divided. These remain useful but should be treated with caution.

Firstly, ethnic origin has historically been very significant. Israel is a country of immigrants. While over 70% of Israeli Jews are native born, this figure was much higher in previous decades. Jews from Russia, Morocco, Poland, Iran, Romania, Ethiopia, and elsewhere have prominent roles in Israeli society and it is a matter of pride, humour, and rivalry to declare one’s “community”.

At the risk of over-generalising, the immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe who built the State largely reflected secular Zionist values and wanted to develop a new “Hebrew” Jew. The immigrants who came from North Africa in the 1950s were usually more traditional Jews who found this new secular culture quite bewildering. This issue sometimes spills over into real tensions such as this year with Ethiopian Israelis, and in earlier generations with Moroccan ones. As young people increasingly marry across communities, the highlighting of this ethnic distinction is in decline but it is still significant.

The approximately one million new immigrants who arrived to Israel from the (former) Soviet Union starting in 1990 included within them a significant number of people (approximately 25%) who either

identify as Jews but are not recognised as such by the Orthodox Rabbinate or else are non-Jewish members of wider Jewish families. On a sociological level, this community is mostly being absorbed into secular Israeli Jewish life but a small percentage choose to identify as Christians. There are ongoing efforts, usually during army service, to allow those who wish to convert to Judaism to avoid future status problems around marriage.

A second useful (but also incomplete) lens to understand Israel’s Jewish communities is to apply the category used to divide the education system into each of the three streams that parents choose for their children. A fourth stream serves Arab citizens.

● **Secular:** The largest number of Israeli Jews choose this system. Secular Israelis do not look to Jewish law to define their identity and see their “Israeliness” as a core dimension of being Jewish. Tel Aviv is often called the Capital of Secular Israel but there are secular Jews everywhere. Secular Jews will choose which traditional Jewish practices to follow or reject and this community includes people who are quite traditional in their practice as well as those who are totally “universalist” and reject tradition completely. Secular here might mean atheist and it might not. Whilst this is the largest group, its hegemony is being increasingly challenged. It tends to be more liberal in its political outlook but includes people with right wing views as well.

● **National-Religious:** Known in the UK as Modern Orthodox, these communities combine commitment to Jewish law and practice as well as living in the “Modern”

**Israel is a country of immigrants. While over 70% of Israeli Jews are native born, this figure was much higher in previous decades. Jews from Russia, Morocco, Poland, Iran, Romania, Ethiopia, and elsewhere have prominent roles in Israeli society**





**Barmitzvah celebration  
in Jewish quarter Old  
City, Jerusalem**

world. This group's leadership was very prominent is the Settlement Movement in the territories taken by Israel in the Six Day War. Jerusalem and the territories are a stronghold and focal point for this community but they live throughout Israel. Increasingly their young people are filling important roles in the IDF. They are a strong group but many young people are leaving, causing internal soul-searching. Gender issues are becoming increasingly important. There is also an emerging category of Zionist Haredi Jews combining their nationalism with ultra-Orthodoxy.

- **Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox):** A collection of different communities, identified by their distinctive dress who trace their ideological origins to eighteenth and nineteenth century Eastern Europe. They see themselves as the only authentic representatives of Judaism. They adhere to a strict interpretation of Jewish law and are ambivalent about the benefits of modernity. In recent years, due to economic need and a process of

"Israelification" they are inching towards greater integration into broader society. The largest communities are in Jerusalem and Bnai Brak (near Tel Aviv), with smaller communities throughout the country.

My own position, as one of 35,000 British Jews to have emigrated to Israel, is as a Masorti (Conservative) Jew. I am acutely aware of my minority status, belonging neither to the Secular nor the National Religious group. Fortunately, in recent years, several schools have opened allowing secular and religious students to study together. My own children greatly benefitted from this system, as have many children of Western immigrants together with kids of longer-term Israeli families.

A big challenge for Israeli society, as noted by President Rivlin, is that Israelis who go through each of these streams rarely interact with Israelis from the other "tribes" as he calls them. There are now many initiatives in Israel to create opportunities for Israelis from all the tribes to meet and learn from each other.

## Who are the Christian communities in the West Bank and Gaza?

**The Revd Canon Richard Sewell**

*Dean St George's College, Jerusalem*

**The Very Reverend Dr Hosam Naoum**

*Dean of St. George's Cathedral, Jerusalem*

The indigenous Christians of the Holy Land are mainly of Arab-Palestinian origin. They see themselves in unbroken continuity with the first Christians who followed Jesus Christ, and with the early Church established in the towns and villages of the region in the first century of the Common Era. There has never been a time since then that Christians have not been present in these lands and their existence here has never been under greater threat.

In the West Bank, there are about 60,000 Christians out of a population of 4.5 million. The majority live in and around Bethlehem area. They are in large part dependent on pilgrim and tourism business both in terms of hotels and restaurants but also the olive wood souvenir trade. Olive trees grow in abundance and this is sustainably farmed and then through skilled trades turned into religious and other souvenir items which bring much needed income for otherwise disadvantaged families. There is one village which is entirely Christian which is Taybeh, situated near Ramallah and it has a total population of 1500. It has become famous locally as one of very few beer breweries in the West Bank. It is proving to be a very successful business providing a good source of employment for the people of

Taybeh. This year sees the 25th anniversary of the founding of the brewery and their popular beers can be found all over Israel and the Palestinian Territories and is popular with international visitors as well as locals.

The Gaza Strip has about 1,500 Christians out of a total population of 1.9 million. These are mainly of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic (Latin) branches of the church. The Christian communities in the entire Holy Land count less than 2% of the whole population. However, the presence of the Christian Church in the Holy Land is far more visible than these small numbers or percentages. The different churches run many institutions that serve the community at large. There are hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation centres, schools, guesthouses, and more. These institutions are embedded in the Christian faith focusing on teaching, healing and reconciliation and serve everyone regardless of religion or ethnicity.

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*In the Holy Land, Christians experience different types of disadvantage and discrimination depending on precisely where they live*



Scout parade in  
Taybeh, West Bank

An example of such an institution is the Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City which is run by the Anglican/Episcopal Church. Despite their being no Anglicans in Gaza, this hospital is a vital part of that denomination's service in the community. In recent times, as Gaza has become a place of such intense poverty and suffering, institutions such as this and many other Christian run organisations become a vital part of the infra structure of support. Al Ahli Hospital has 80 beds, serves 400 in patients and 3500 outpatients and undertakes 300 surgeries per year. This simply illustrates the way in which churches whilst small in number contribute to the welfare of the whole community. Thus, bare numbers of adherents is insufficient to describe the presence of a religious community.

In the Holy Land, Christians experience different types of disadvantage and discrimination depending on precisely where they live:

For Christians who have Israeli citizenship, they have the protection under the law but

they still routinely feel the effect of prejudice and discrimination as a minority group seen by some as unwelcome in the nation.

Christians who are Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem have multiple restrictions on their right to travel and work. They are denied numerous opportunities which citizens should expect, which makes life for them extremely difficult and in some senses intolerable. But also as Christians, as a minority religious group, they are often discriminated against by the wider community of Arabs. The degree to which all of this is felt as an unbearable pain is testified to by the number of Palestinian Christians who have left the country to look for opportunities in other parts of the world. It leaves the Christian community in these lands in a very precarious position wondering about the long term viability of their people whose faith originated in the towns and cities, hills and valleys of this beautiful but deeply troubled land. It is a situation which should disturb all thoughtful and caring people of all faiths and none.

## Further resources

This list of resources is designed to help you to reflect further on issues relating to Israel Palestine. It is by no means an exhaustive list.

### History

**Ian Black**, *Enemies and Neighbours: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel 1917-2017* (2017)

**Rashid Khalidi**, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (2007)

**Eyal Naveh and Sami Adwan et al (eds.)**, *Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine* (2012)

**Tom Segev**, *One Palestine Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (1999)

### Israeli Identity

**Amos Oz**, *In The Land of Israel* (1983)

**Shlomo Avineri**, *The Making of Modern Zionism* (2017)

**Yossi Klein Halevi**, *Letters to my Palestinian Neighbour* (2018)

**Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**, *Future Tense: A Vision for Jews and Judaism in the Global Culture* (2009) - especially Chapters 7-8 on Israel and Zionism

### Palestinian Identity

**Izzeldin Abuelaish**, *I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor's Journey on the Road to Peace and Human Dignity* (2012)

**Elias Chacour**, *Blood Brothers* (1984)

**Edward W. Said**, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (2000)

**Salim Tamari**, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (2008)

### Peace negotiations

Timeline and key documents of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations: [bit.ly/2OEHVjV3](http://bit.ly/2OEHVjV3)

### Declaration of independence

The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel: [bit.ly/2V2pdzp](http://bit.ly/2V2pdzp)

### Settlements

Ir Amim/City of Peoples: [ir-amim.org.il/en](http://ir-amim.org.il/en)  
Interactive New York Times piece on the expansion of settlements: [nyti.ms/2koTrcG](http://nyti.ms/2koTrcG)

### Nation State Law

Basic principles of the Nation State Law: [bit.ly/33i1Ceb](http://bit.ly/33i1Ceb)

### Bilateral organisations

**The Abraham Initiatives:** [abrahaminitiatives.org](http://abrahaminitiatives.org)

**The Hand in Hand Schools:** [handinhandk12.org](http://handinhandk12.org)

**Women Wage Peace:** [womenwagepeace.org.il/en](http://womenwagepeace.org.il/en)

**Roots:** [friendsofroots.net](http://friendsofroots.net)

# Endorsements

This rich resource is typical of the depth with which the CCJ endeavours to bring Jews and Christians together. The broad range of authors celebrate the centrality of Israel and Palestine to both faiths. They explore the importance of the holy land to the identity not only of the Jews and Christians who live there, but to members of the faiths worldwide. The centrality of Zionism is acknowledged as integral to the Jewish dream. The history and importance of the local Christian populations is affirmed. At the heart of the resource is the assertion of the validity of multiple, contrasting, and at times painfully conflicting narratives, both between and within the faith groups. Without ignoring the tensions and fears rife in the region, these testaments offer hope that we can achieve deeper responses than instantly taking sides and can hold multiple sympathies in our hearts as we pray for the peace of all who live in Israel and Palestine.

**Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg,**  
*Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism*

One of the main concerns of CCJ is to facilitate dialogue between people who have very different perspectives on all the issues relating to Israel Palestine. Their study tours to the Holy Land are a key focus for that. This resource—with very frank and open contributions from a good range of people—gives us an idea of the kinds of conversation that need to take place if there is to be real change and reconciliation.

**Archbishop Kevin McDonald,**  
*Archbishop Emeritus of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark*

The Council of Christians and Jews is to be commended for its continual efforts to bring our communities together and to find constructive ways of talking through issues of controversy include the tragic, ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Dialogue is crucial if we are to export peace, rather than import conflict.

**Marie van der Zyl** *President,*  
*Board of Deputies of British Jews*

What impresses me about this resource is not that it is comprehensive, or complete – how could it be – but that it is authentic, brave, sincere: personal reflections from people who are prepared to make themselves vulnerable, including to disagreement or disparagement. It is full of insight and compassion. If you approach it with the same openness of mind it will surely move you, including to question some cherished assumptions.

**Tim Livesy** *Chief Executive,*  
*Embrace the Middle East*

This resource which models and encourages attentive listening to those with whom we might disagree is of great value in a society in which opinions are often polarised. The Council of Christians and Jews has offered a space in which we can learn from one another, and a collection of reflections which are a welcome addition to those which have been and will be contributed by people from many places and a variety of experience.

**The Revd Ruth Gee,** *Assistant Secretary*  
*of the Methodist Conference and*  
*Connexional Ecumenical Officer*

At a time when it often appears as if our society has lost its ability to listen to and exchange differing views in a polite fashion, the Council of Christians and Jews' 'Israel/Palestine Resource' is a welcome and refreshing offering to an issue of central importance to Jews, Christians and others and a matter of political and religious controversy. The contributors, who have learnt and travelled in the region together, write in the spirit of the Babylonian Talmudic sentiment (Eruvim 13b): 'The opinions of both (disputing parties) are the words of the living God'.

**Rabbi Danny Rich,** *Senior Rabbi and*  
*Chief Executive of Liberal Judaism*

As a participant on the first CCJ joint Jewish-Christian study trip, I can honestly say it was one of the most impactful and challenging visits I have made to Israel and the West Bank. But even more than the trip, the periodic dialogue sessions we have engaged in, behind closed doors and with open hearts and an inquisitive spirits, since have been powerful and transformative. The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is, for better or for worse, today a major feature of Jewish-Christian relations here in the UK, and CCJ's pioneering work with leaders from both communities is more important than ever. This publication – with its multiple voices, nuances, uncertainties and most importantly honest candour – gives some flavour of both the substance of our discussions and the vital necessity of their continuation.

**Robin Moss,** *Director of Strategy,*  
*United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA)*

CCJ have done a service to the UK church and Jewish communities by gathering together voices from different perspectives, and voices of considerable passion and understanding, that we may begin to hear each other better on the subject of Israel Palestine. This material is honest and real, with all of life's rough edges. The reality represented in this resource constitutes a genuine dialogue, because in the diversity of what is shared and held together, we are bound towards improved understanding. Dare I venture that improved understanding may mean that Christians and Jews can be genuinely hopeful on this subject which too often tends to despair?

**The Revd Dr Richard Sudworth,**  
*Interreligious Affairs Adviser to the*  
*Archbishop of Canterbury*

There are a number of flourishing interfaith initiatives and dialogues around the UK today. A number of people have recently raised concerns that Jewish-Christian dialogue is facing greater challenges as a result of the ongoing intractable conflict in the Holy Land. The work of CCJ on Israel/Palestine with this resource provides an important reminder of the urgency of Jewish-Christian relations today and the need to continue to open up the discussion about Israel/Palestine with honest theological debates. This should help pave the way for Christians and Jews today to belong together as they argue intelligently to help establish genuine reconciliation in the Holy Land today.

**The Revd Dr Yazid Said,**  
*Lecturer in Islam, Liverpool Hope University*



This is an invaluable resource crafted by an organisation with deep and nuanced understanding of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The diverse voices captured here reflect the vital and ongoing work of the CCJ in fostering complex and necessary dialogues between Christian and Jewish leaders.

**Rabbi Robyn Ashworth-Steen,**

*Associate Rabbi, Manchester Reform Synagogue*

This is an outstanding resource produced by CCJ which will be of immense value to groups and individuals who want to get beneath the surface of the realities of Palestine and Israel. The articles in this booklet are profound and often challenging with conflicting views sitting alongside one another in a way that will sometimes unsettle readers. It will enable a more informed engagement with the complexities of this land and its peoples. I

enthusiastically commend it to everyone interested to learn more about these issues.

**The Revd Canon Richard Sewell,**

*Dean, St George's College, Jerusalem*

The beauty of this Israel Palestine resource is that there are likely to be an equal number of contributions which may make for comforting reading and as many which may be challenging. This resource shares perspectives and reflections on key issues as well as imparting personal, spiritual and emotional insights into the land and its people.

**Shelley Marsh,** *Executive Director, Reshet: the network for Jewish youth provision*

This outstanding resource both encourages and enables reflective, responsive and meaningful conversations about the subject of Israel-Palestine, which so often generates unease and tension between Jews and Christians, amongst many other religious groups. Its purpose is to make space for constructive dialogue, within which narratives do not compete with one another, but exist side by side: true, complex, painful and hopeful. The eclectic contributions contained within this resource will, no doubt, spark an astonishing array of conversations. It is my hope that these dialogue-discussions will engender a commitment to further interfaith conversations and most importantly that they will serve as templates of how to navigate the uncertain terrain of conflict resolution and peace building.

**Dr Lindsay Simmonds,**

*Lecturer, London School of Jewish Studies*

CCJ have produced a resource which does not shy away from contentious issues.

Frequently, the contributions contained in it offer diametrically opposing views about this holiest of lands which is so 'competitively loved'. It allows the reader to engage with positions they will embrace, alongside ones which they may find utterly challenging. Being presented with an alternative narrative can feel uncomfortable, but it is the first step to the dialogue which CCJ are to be commended for facilitating.

**The Revd Philip Brooks,**

*Secretary for Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations, The United Reformed Church*

Sardonically, yet incisively, a character in Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* observes that the Truth is "rarely pure and never simple". Nowhere is this more the case than Israel-Palestine, where narratives collide and interpretations diverge. Drawing on a series of shared Jewish and Christian Study tours of the Land, this Resource illustrates this reality profoundly. Readers will be surprised, challenged and quite possibly shocked by what they read, but they will also be given insights into truth as viewed from others' perspectives and so equipped and enriched to engage ever more hopefully and realistically in the discovery of the way that leads to peace.

**The Rt Revd Humphrey Southern,**

*Principal, Ripon College, Cuddesdon*

Having been lucky enough to have participated in one of CCJ's study visits to the Holy Land I have some understanding of the complexity of the violent conflict that endures there – a conflict that has so much resonance for communities here in the UK. This resource is an accessible must read for those wanting and needing to understand the multiple narratives and perspectives that ebb, flow and collide amongst the people and peoples struggling for peace, justice and coexistence in Israel Palestine.


**Phil Champain,** *Director,*

*Faith and Belief Forum*

Some may be shocked by voices included in this new CCJ resource, but each contributor speaks not only from their own particular viewpoint but from the heart. There is no easy answer to the Israel Palestine conflict. But becoming more aware of what lies behind these strongly held views is crucial; it deepens our understanding of this highly emotive and often misunderstood and misrepresented topic.

**Catriona Robertson,**

*Director, Christian Muslim Forum.*

 **The Methodist Church**

*This resource is supported by a grant from the Methodist Church.*



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