

Church of Scotland report challenging Jews' "divine right" to Palestinian homeland unchanged

Impertinent complaints politely sidestepped

By [Stuart Littlewood](#)

The Church of Scotland's revised report, [The Inheritance of Abraham? A Report on the "Promised Land"](#), has now been released ahead of their Assembly.

The Church felt obliged to change some of it after Jewish leaders sought to interfere, one complaining that it was "an outrage to everything that interfaith dialogue stands for... and closes the door on meaningful dialogue". Another said: "It reads like an Inquisition-era polemic against Jews and Judaism."

The Israeli ambassador moaned that it belittled the deeply held Jewish attachment to the land of Israel in a way which was "truly hurtful".

So do the changes amount to a caving-in to Zionist meddlers?

Cool under fire

I soon gave up comparing the two versions word for word to spot the difference. The press release gives no clues either. In it, Convener Sally Foster-Fulton simply says:

We believe that this new version has paid attention to the concern some of the language of the previous version caused amongst the Jewish community whilst holding true to our concerns about the injustices being perpetrated because of policies of the government of Israel against the Palestinian people that we wanted to highlight. The views of this report are consistent with the views held by the Church of Scotland over many years.

Cool under fire, this lady.

The report's key conclusion remains that "the Church of Scotland does not agree with a premise that scripture offers any peoples a divine right to territory". At least they stand firm on that.

Points of contention

They also recap on what they already believe, and here's where disagreements might flare up. For example:

- ***"Israel is a recognized state and has the right to exist in peace and security."***

Yet Israel's right to exist seems somehow inconsistent with the Church's statement that scripture does not bestow a divine right to someone else's land. Even if the Church believes that the UN's 1947 Partition Plan was morally and legally right, what does it say to the Jewish terror groups that were driving Palestinians from their homes before the ink was dry and before the state of Israel was declared? What about the hundreds of towns and villages not even allocated to the Jewish state in the UN plan but erased by Israel in order to implant itself. What about the systematic ethnic cleansing and the criminal occupation of additional Arab territories in the 1967 war? Perhaps the Church should remain silent on the "right to exist" question, at least until Israel declares its internationally recognized boundaries and halts its illegal expansion.

- ***"There should be a Palestinian state, recognized by the United Nations, that should have the right to exist in peace and security."***

Israel doesn't recognize the Palestinians' right to a state.

- **“We condemn racism and religious hatred.”**

The Jewish state is a racist entity.

- **“We are especially concerned at the recent actions of the government of Israel in its support for settlements, for the construction of the security barrier or ‘the wall’ within occupied territory, for the blockade of Gaza and for the anti-boycott law.”**

“Recent” actions? Israel has been building illegal settlements since 1967. Gaza has been blockaded since 2006. The West Bank has lived under permanent blockade for decades.

- **“We assert our sincere belief that to be critical of the policies of the Israeli government is a legitimate part of our witness and we strongly reject accusations of anti-Semitic bias. We regularly engage with and critique policies of all governments, where we deem them to be contrary to our understanding of God’s wish for humanity.”**

Well said.

Central to the Church’s discussion is this excellent passage:

To Christians in the 21st century, promises about the land of Israel shouldn’t be intended to be taken literally, or as applying to a defined geographical territory; the “promised land” in the Bible is not a place, so much as a metaphor of how things ought to be among the people of God. This “promised land” can be found or built anywhere.

The report’s key conclusions appear the same as before. Christians should not be supporting any claims by any people to an exclusive or even privileged divine right to possess particular territory. It is a misuse of the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) and the New Testament to use it as a topographic guide to settle contemporary conflicts over land.

Regarding Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, the Church remains committed to the following principles (previously set out and agreed by the General Assembly):

That the current situation is characterised by an inequality in power, therefore reconciliation can only be possible if the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the blockade of Gaza, are ended.

The Church of Scotland condemns violence, terrorism and intimidation no matter the perpetrator.

The Church of Scotland affirms the right of Israelis and Palestinians to live within secure and fixed boundaries in states of their own.

The Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank are illegal under international law.

The Church of Scotland should do nothing to promote the viability of the illegal settlements on Palestinian land.

That human rights of all peoples should be respected, and this should include the right of return and/or compensation for Palestinian refugees.

That negotiations between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority about peace with justice must resume at the earliest opportunity and the Church of Scotland should continue

to put political pressure on all parties to commence such negotiations, and asking all parties to recognize the inequality in power which characterizes this situation.

That there are safe rights of access to the sacred sites for the main religions in the area.

This stance seems pretty robust to me, and the Church's support for refugees' right of return is very welcome.

However it also raises questions. Why, having already emphasized that the crisis in the Holy Land is characterized by "an inequality of power", call for the two sides to be thrown together again in fruitless negotiations? Negotiate what? Freedom? Is that negotiable? The return of stolen lands and property? Is that negotiable? These matters are already decided by international and humanitarian law and numerous UN resolutions waiting to be enforced. How can the Church approve so-called "negotiations" while one party is still under illegal occupation with a gun to his head? What justice is likely to come out of that?

The Church does urge the UK government and the European Union "to do all that is within their power to ensure that international law is upheld", but that surely must come first, rather than relying on discredited talks.

The report going in front of the Church's Assembly appears unchanged in substance and has cleverly sidestepped objections. The only caving-in, so far, has been the senior clergy's agreement to listen to the Zionists' impertinent demands in the first place.

I can only wish the Assembly an enjoyable week ahead and, on this issue, firm judgement.