

# Zionism and the churches

A statement by

Kairos Palestine Solidarity Network in Germany

Brochure 4 of the series *Israel – An Apartheid System?*



*"Zionism is a false idol that has taken the idea of the promised land and turned it into a deed of sale for a militaristic ethnostate  
It is a false idol that takes our most profound biblical stories of justice and emancipation from slavery – the story of Passover itself – and turns them into brutalist weapons of colonial land theft, roadmaps for ethnic cleansing and genocide."*

Naomi Klein, Jewish philosopher and journalist

(<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/24/zionism-seder-protest-new-york-gaza-israel>)

*"Therefore, we reject any theology or ideology including Christian Zionism, Supercessionism, antisemitism or anti-Islam bias that would privilege or exclude y of grace. "*

33rd General Synod of the United Church of Christ in the USA (UCC):  
Declaration *For a just peace between Palestine and Israel*, 2021

(<https://www.globalministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/General-Synod-2021-Resolution-I-P.pdf>)

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## Series: Israel - an apartheid system?

### Materials on the ecumenical process

In this series, materials will be published to encourage congregations, groups and the public to participate in an informed way in the ecumenical process on the topic of "Israel as an apartheid system", which the 2022 Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) decided on in Karlsruhe:<sup>1</sup>

"Recently, numerous international, Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations and legal bodies have published studies and reports stating that Israel's policies and actions amount to '*apartheid*' in the international legal sense. Within this Assembly, some churches and delegates strongly support the use of this term and argue that it accurately explains the reality of the people of Palestine/Israel and the position under international law, while others find the term inappropriate, unhelpful and hurtful. We do not agree on this. *We still need to address this issue as we continue to work together on the path of justice and peace. We pray that the WCC will continue to provide safe spaces for conversation and cooperation for its member churches in the pursuit of truth and the work for just peace among all people in the region.*"

This process continues the "*process of confession*" that the Palestinian "*cry for hope*" called for and to which many churches have already responded and are responding:<sup>2</sup>

"**We call on all Christians and the churches** at congregational, denominational, national and global ecumenical levels to engage in a process of study, reflection and confession. This is about the historical and systemic disenfranchisement of the Palestinian people and the misuse of the Bible by many to justify and support this oppression. We call on churches to reflect on how their own traditions can express the sacred duty to uphold the integrity of the church and the Christian faith in relation to this issue. We cannot serve God while remaining silent on the oppression of Palestinians."

### Booklet 4

shows various forms of Jewish and Christian Zionism. The dominant ones are the ideological justification of apartheid and settler colonialism in Israel. How should the churches respond?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/seeking-justice-and-peace-for-all-in-the-middle-east>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cryforhope.org/>.

# Table of contents

	Page
Foreword	3
Preliminary remark	7
I. Religious Zionism and its supporters	9
• Zionism and rabbinical Judaism	9
• Zionism in revivalist Christianity	12
• Christian Zionists in the USA	14
II. Church and Judaism after the Second World War	21
• German domestic perspectives on Zionism	21
• The theological position of F.-W. Marquardt	22
III. Critique of the Zionist narrative	30
• New historians in Israel	30
IV. Zionism controversial in ecumenism using the example of the United Church of Christ (UCC) and German churches	32
Conclusions	35
<b>Attachments</b>	
<b>Christian Zionism and religious, political and economic fundamentalisms. A <i>Palestinian-Latin American</i> <i>Conversation</i> Final Document</b>	<b>39</b>
(Santiago de Chile, November 4 to 10, 2022)	
<b>The previous brochures in the series</b>	<b>41</b>

## Foreword

In Germany in particular, the voice of Palestinians is massively suppressed when they point out the crimes against their people committed by the state of Israel under international law. (Cf. Sarah El Bulbeisi, *Tabu, Trauma und Identität. Subjektkonstruktionen von PalästinenserInnen in Deutschland und der Schweiz, 1960-2015. Transcript 2020.*)

There is an immediate and harsh reaction in Germany when Russia wages its war against Ukraine in violation of international law in order to occupy the country. However, it is simply accepted when Israel waged such a war in 1967 and has now occupied and annexed the conquered Palestinian territories for 55 years or, like Gaza, has turned them into a large open-air prison. Yes, Germany and the USA in particular are the ones who politically support this oppression, which is enforced daily with further military and administrative means, and co-finance it with high subsidies.<sup>3</sup> The USA alone provides US\$ 3.8 billion in annual support for the occupying military and Germany, in addition to financing submarines with taxpayers' money, relieves Israel of the costs of occupation by co-financing the Palestinian Authority.

How is this possible? In Germany, criticism of the state of Israel is taboo and the voice of the Palestinians is suppressed. Various factors play a role in this. The main factor is certainly the instrumentalization of German feelings of guilt over the unique crime against humanity of the murder of 6 million Jews. Jews are identified with the state of Israel and only see it as a victim. Jews *are* also identified with Zionism, specifically with certain types of Zionism, above all militaristic Zionism. In Germany, the Central Council of Jews under its current leadership contributes significantly to this. But there is also a lack of clarity on this issue in the churches, because the Christian-Jewish dialogue has also become a "deal", in that the readmission of the Germans into the circle of civilized

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Anne Le More, *Killing with Kindness. Funding the demise of a Palestinian state*, in: *International Affairs* 81 (5.10.2005) No. 5, 981-999.

peoples of the world is payed with the price of silence on the crimes committed against the Palestinian people.<sup>4</sup>

There is also a special kind of Christian Zionism in Germany, most clearly represented by the Rhenish Regional Church, which in a 1980 synod resolution that is still valid today speaks of the founding of the state of Israel as a "sign of God's faithfulness".

We hope that by presenting the phenomenon of Zionism in a differentiated way, we can help to break down the taboo surrounding the topic of Israel and the suppression of the Palestinian voice. This is currently happening in a dramatic way in the USA - among the Jewish population, but also in the churches. It is true that there are dangerous and heretical evangelical Zionists such as John Hagee<sup>5</sup> and Yoram Hazony<sup>6</sup>, who in particular financially support the illegal settlements and the military. But leading (liberal) Zionists are turning away from these and from right-wing extremist Israel out of concern for its future and are looking for solutions for a common future for Israelis and Palestinians on the basis of equal rights for all. For example, one of the leading Zionists in the USA writes:

"We need a different struggle against antisemitism. It should pursue Jewish equality, not Jewish supremacy, and embed the cause of Jewish

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<sup>4</sup> The Jewish liberation theologian Marc Ellis has presented fundamental and illuminating analyses of this: Marc Ellis, BÜßER als Machtmenschen, in: Ulrich Duchrow, Hans G. Ulrich (eds.): Religionen für Gerechtigkeit in Palästina-Israel - jenseits von Luthers Feindbildern, Münster 2017, 128-157 (in English: <http://www.radicalizing-reformation.com/file/RR-vol-7-Eng.pdf>, p. 59-78). His reflections were edited for the churches in: Kairos Europa (ed.), Verfehlte Buße. Stimmen aus der Ökumene zum Verhältnis Deutschland-Palästina/Israel, Heidelberg: info@kairoseuropa.de, 2018. See also Marwecki, Daniel: Germany and Israel - Whitewashing and Statebuilding. London: Hurst & Co, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Founder of the lobby organization Christians United for Israel (Cufi, since 2006).

<sup>6</sup> He advised and wrote speeches for Benjamin Netanyahu and founded the *Merkaz Shalem* research and study center in Jerusalem in 1994 with financial support from the USA. Since 2019, he has been Chairman of the Edmund Burke Foundation, a right-wing conservative think tank in the Netherlands. He played a key role in the formulation of the Israeli Nation-State Law of 2018. See Charles Enderlin, Pious and Radical. How religious Zionism became state doctrine, in: Le Monde diplomatique 28 (2022) No. 09, 7.

rights in a movement for the human rights of all. In its effort to defend the indefensible in Israel, the American Jewish establishment has abandoned these principles. It's time to affirm them again."<sup>7</sup> In Germany, Omri Boehm is best known for his book "*Israel - A Utopia*".<sup>8</sup>

He takes up the Zionism of Martin Buber, who strove for a common future with the Palestinians in a binational state. In his spirit, there had been an attempt to implement a different form of Zionism. The pious Jews, who had lived in peace with the Arabs in Palestine for centuries, strictly rejected Zionism. Together with Arab leaders, they drew up a document in 1924 in which the Arabs agreed to mass Jewish immigration on the condition that they would not establish nationalist structures. When their emissary Jacob de Haan was commissioned to have this agreement ratified by the British Mandate government in London, he was murdered by an agent of the Zionist paramilitary organization Haganah shortly before his departure for London. That was the end of the attempts to put peaceful Zionism into practice.<sup>9</sup> Now that the militaristic Zionism of violent oppression is increasingly driving Palestine into a dead end, can there be a renewal of the model of a binational state, as Omri Böhm is attempting? Or will peace with justice only be possible with a democratic state with equal rights for all, as proposed by the Israeli author Jeff Halper, among others?<sup>10</sup>

A similar development to that in the Jewish communities is taking place in the churches of the USA. Several of them, most notably the United Church of Christ (UCC), the Disciples and the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) have responded to the Palestinian *Cry for Hope* with weighty resolutions, even confessions, as will be outlined below.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.almendron.com/tribuna/has-the-fight-against-antisemitism-lost-its-way/>.

<sup>8</sup> Omri Boehm, *Israel - A Utopia*, Berlin 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rabkin, Yakov M.: *In the Name of the Torah. Die jüdische Opposition gegen den Zionismus*, translated from the updated Hebrew edition by Abraham Melzer. Frankfurt am Main: Westend Verlag Fiftyfifty, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Halper, *Decolonizing Israel, Liberating Palestine. Zionism, Settler Colonialism, and the Case for One Democratic State*, London 2021.

We hope that by raising awareness of Zionism, we can also persuade many people in Germany to break the silence on the violations of international law and human rights committed against the Palestinians and to influence our government to make all future cooperation with Israel conditional on compliance with the law.

This brochure is the result of the work of the Theological Committee of the Kairos Palestine Solidarity Network. The committee would like to thank Prof. Dr. Dieter Becker for summarizing the joint work on the basis of his own research. This is now issue 4 of the new publication series "Israel - an apartheid system? Materials on the ecumenical process". Together with the first three booklets (see back cover), it forms the basis for a four-part seminar that is now being offered to congregations, districts and synods in German-speaking countries as a follow-up to the WCC Assembly.<sup>11</sup>

*Ulrich Duchrow*

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. <https://kairoseuropa.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/KPS-Einladung-vierteiliges-Seminar-2-S..pdf>



# Zionism and the churches

## Preliminary remark

Zionism was originally not religious, but socially and politically oriented. When Zionism emerged towards the end of the 19th century, most Jewish communities in Germany rejected it. Nevertheless, the conflict between Israel and Palestine today is also presented by various actors from a religious and theological perspective.

In Israel today, religious Jews tend to be on the margins of society. This does not mean that Jewish-Israeli society is secular. Rather, the complexity of the relationship between Zionism and religion is shown by the often told joke that a Jewish Israeli does not believe in the existence of God, but is convinced that God gave the land to the Jews.<sup>12</sup> The religious side of being a Jew and of Zionism can be activated above all when it seems appropriate in a particular situation. When the Old City of Jerusalem was conquered by the Israeli army in 1967, generals such as Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Dayan rushed to the front to be photographed praying at the Western Wall. Although they were known for being secular, as soon as they arrived at the Wailing Wall, these men took their kippahs out of their pockets and prayed. The victory in the 1967 Six-Day War was a turning point for Israeli society. From then on, the euphoria over the military victory made it easier to relativize the secularization of religious traditions and to use religious symbols in the political sphere as well.

Former Prime Minister Netanyahu spread the narrative that there was a religious conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In this way, he was able to deny that the Palestinians have a claim to the land that was forcibly taken from them. To reinforce this notion, Netanyahu began a series of provocations in East Jerusalem as early as 1996, particularly at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in order to portray Palestinian resistance to the

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Pappé, Ilan: *The Bible in the Service of Zionism: "We do not Believe in God, but he Nonetheless Promised us Palestine"*. In: Michael J. Sandford (ed.): *The Bible, Zionism, and Palestine*. Dunedin/New Zealand : Relegere Academic Press, 2016, pp. 7-19.

Israeli occupation as a religious problem. Under Netanyahu, the Israeli government increasingly regarded the PLO and Fatah less as enemies, but rather Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

While *orthodox* Jews today have largely come to terms with the circumstances of the Israeli state, there is an aversion to *ultra-orthodox* Jews in society. In his biography, David Ben-Gurion described ultra-Orthodox Jews as "destructive" and "degenerate". This is no coincidence, because Ben-Gurion, like many Zionists of his time, strove to build a new Jewish identity that overcame traditional stereotypes, a "muscular Judaism", as he said.

However, it must be mentioned that, in addition to what has been said so far, there was and still is a group of truly religious Zionists. *National Orthodox* Judaism developed from this group. This group regards the Zionist movement itself as a manifestation of the Messiah and the State of Israel as an instrument of religious redemption. Naftali Bennett, the previous Prime Minister, comes from this religious-nationalist environment. He was formerly chairman of the umbrella organization of the settler colonies in the West Bank (*Yesha Council*). He often refers to religious texts and said in an interview that Muslims must also recognize Jewish ownership of the land because the biblical scriptures are among the holy books of Islam. This movement has largely taken a militaristic, messianic direction and calls for the colonization of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the expansion of the borders of the state of Israel.

## **I Religious Zionism and its supporters**

### **Zionism and rabbinical Judaism**

Until the Shoah, the majority of Jews in the world were anti-Zionist.

In Germany, there was a fierce dispute within the Jewish communities about the aims and rights of the Zionist movement. There were those who said that Zionists were not real Jews because they were betraying fundamental Jewish values. Orthodox Jews as well as ultra-orthodox Jews and the Jewish movements originating from communities in Arab and Muslim countries rejected the idea of a secular state. Jewish

scholars argued that the Talmud forbade large-scale immigration to Palestine and, above all, the seizure of land by force. The return of the Jews to Palestine was reserved for the arrival of the Messiah.

The first Zionist Congress took place in Basel in 1897. This location was chosen because several large Jewish communities in Germany had petitioned to prohibit the congress from being held in Munich.<sup>13</sup> Jewish representatives formulated opposition based primarily on the Torah. They believed that this ideology contradicted the principles of Judaism. They saw no connection whatsoever between the redemption of the Jewish people and the state of Israel. For them, every Jewish community, whether in Israel or anywhere else in the world, had to be measured according to traditional criteria: Does it bring the Jews closer to the Torah and the fulfillment of the commandments or not?

In Eastern Europe, the Hasidic movement was one of the main opponents of Zionism. It emerged from rabbinical dynasties in what are now Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania.<sup>14</sup> For Rabbi Shulem Schneerson, the *rabbi of Lubavitch*, Zionists turned Jewish nationalism into a substitute for the Torah and the commandments. The idea of Jewish nationalism was against Jewish tradition. Zionists therefore seemed even more reprehensible to him than anti-religious Jewish enlighteners. The Jewish people had to bear the yoke of exile and it was only up to God to change this situation through the Messiah. Hungarian Jews from the village of Satmar were also opponents of Zionism. The *Satmar Hasidim* who survived the war later settled in New York, where their number grew to around 1,000 families.

The rejection of Zionist ideology characterized practically all currents in orthodox Judaism. Zionism meant the denial of fundamental principles of the Jewish faith and the breaking of the oath that the

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<sup>13</sup> For the following, see Yakov M. Rabkin, *Im Namen der Torah. The Jewish Opposition to Zionism*, franz. 2004, Frankfurt 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Hasidism is a renewal movement that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries and was dedicated to Jewish mysticism as well as the study of the Talmud.

Jewish people had once made to God: not to conquer the Holy Land by force.<sup>15</sup>

Zionism was also criticized by Reform Judaism. Reform Judaism sees itself as a religious movement, but Zionism was primarily a political endeavor from its inception. The reformers emphasized the special spirituality of the Jews. They endeavored to bring Jewish rites and customs into line with the norms of the modern world.<sup>16</sup> From the very beginning, Reform Judaism contradicted Theodor Herzl's idea of the eternal existence of anti-Semitism, from which the founding of a Jewish state was to be legitimized.<sup>17</sup>

For Jews living in the Arab states, the Zionist movement was initially particularly alien.<sup>18</sup> For these people, the Zionist enterprise and the State of Israel was the fulfillment of a European vision of Ashkenazi Jews, born out of the reality and dreams in which Jews of the Russian Empire and Western Europe lived. Jews in Arab countries had largely lived in harmonious and cordial neighborhood with their Muslim neighbors; they spoke the local languages such as Arabic, Persian, Pashto, etc. In their history, there had been less persecution and less violence than in the history of the Jews in Christian Europe.

Nowadays, however, there are rabbis who underpin the disregard for human rights in the context of the occupation of the West Bank and the sealing off of Gaza with biblical passages and declare it a religious duty.<sup>19</sup> These rabbis give the impression that the Jewish tradition has

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<sup>15</sup> For all their differences, these groups are grouped together under the term "*Haredim*". While some see the state of Israel as an obstacle on the path to redemption, others simply do not ascribe any religious significance to Zionism and the state of Israel.

<sup>16</sup> The program of the Reform Movement, which was adopted in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1885, rejected Jewish nationalism in every conceivable form even before modern Zionism appeared on the scene in Europe.

<sup>17</sup> In later times, at the latest after the so-called Six-Day War in 1967, the attitude of Reform Judaism towards the State of Israel became much more positive.

<sup>18</sup> The so-called *Shas movement* then emerged from this group.

<sup>19</sup> And indeed, there are cruel passages in the Bible such as the following: "When you crossed the Jordan ... the ... Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites,

always been full of xenophobia, contempt for non-Jews and the granting of human rights only to their own Jewish people. However, this does not correspond to the breadth of Jewish tradition.<sup>20</sup> There is certainly a universalist tradition of upholding human rights in Judaism. For them, killing and expulsion must not become Jewish weapons, not even in a just struggle.

### **Zionism in revivalist Christianity**

Unlike traditional Judaism, which remained at a distance from modern Zionism, the piety of the Christian revivalist movement of the 19th century showed visionary Zionist elements. The idea of a new Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth (Revelation 21) was combined with concrete ideas of the return of Christ and his appearance in the Holy Land.<sup>21</sup> In his eschatology, the neo-Lutheran revivalist theologian Chr. E. Luthardt reckoned that a time of "settlement" in Palestine would also come for Christians. However, the Christian "entitlement" to the "holy ground" would only be realized after the Jews had settled there, not before, although Christians were preferred in terms of salvation history.

The founding of colonies of craftsmen and farmers in Jerusalem and Haifa by members of the Templars, who were based in Württemberg, is related to this. A song from the revival movement's "Reichsliederbuch" also belongs in this context, which also refers to the appearance of Christ in the Holy Land and speaks of Christians going

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Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites fought against you, but I delivered them into your hands." - Joshua 24:11

<sup>20</sup> For example, given the reality of the ongoing injustice associated with Zionism, *Tzedek Chicago* Jewish Congregation recently concluded that simply calling itself "non-Zionist" is not enough. In December 2021, the board voted unanimously to recommend an amendment to the congregation's core values statement to explicitly declare that anti-Zionism should be a core value of the congregation. [https://mondoweiss.net/2022/01/why-anti-zionism-is-core-value-of-congregation-tzedek-chicago/?utm\\_source=mailpoet&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=daily-email-mailpoet](https://mondoweiss.net/2022/01/why-anti-zionism-is-core-value-of-congregation-tzedek-chicago/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=daily-email-mailpoet) .

<sup>21</sup> This horizon of thought forms the background to Selma Lagerlöf's novel "Jerusalem".

there to meet him: "Glorious, glorious, it will be one day when we enter the promised Canaan free from sin and pure. Jesus look here, I'm coming!"

In Great Britain, the *London Jews Society* in the early 19th century was initially concerned with converting Jews for Christianity.<sup>22</sup> They also considered this to be a necessary prerequisite for the return of Christ. Especially in the area of revivalist piety, however, a group of Christian leaders began to campaign for the Jewish restoration of Palestine.

The movement gained traction from the mid-19th century, when Palestine became of strategic importance to European colonial interests in the Middle East. British commercial interests of the time hoped to use Jews as subcontractors in the business of colonizing Palestine.<sup>23</sup>

In 1841, Charles Henry Churchill, British consul in Ottoman Syria, made a proposal on how the Jews in Palestine should regain a foothold and achieve autonomy in the Ottoman Empire. In his opinion, the moment was favorable for Jews to lend a hand to the "glorious work of National Regeneration". In a letter, he suggested to representatives of British Jews that they should now take matters into their own hands, as European powers would support them.<sup>24</sup> So that both Syria and Palestine would be taken under "European protection", he also motivated Jews in Syria to write a petition to the European powers, which he had pre-formulated. And because the British consul was concerned that the Jews might misunderstand this request in political terms, he affirmed that he was making this proposal purely out of religious motives.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Robert O. Smith, *More Desired than Our Own Salvation. The Roots of Christian Zionism*, Oxford 2013.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Some of Theodor Herzl's strongest supporters were Christian clergymen; they included, for example, the Reverend William Hechler, the Anglican chaplain of the British Embassy in Vienna. On this and the following, see Mitri Raheb, *The Politics of Persecution. Middle Eastern Christians in an Age of Empire*, Waco (Texas) 2021.

<sup>24</sup> The British ambassador and consul in Ottoman Syria wrote this in a letter to the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Sir Moses Montefiori.

During the Ottoman Empire, the tolerance policy of the Egyptian general Ibrahim Pasha enabled the missionary of the *London Jews Society*, John Nicolaysen, to buy land in Palestine in 1838. At the same time, a British consulate was opened in Jerusalem. There also lived Anthony Ashley, Earl of Shaftesbury, a prominent figure in the revivalist piety of the Anglican Church and a member of the House of Commons. In 1835 he wrote an article in *Quarterly Review*. In it, he called on the Jews to settle in Palestine. He praised the land as very fertile for agriculture. In this context, the Earl of Shaftesbury coined the phrase: "There is a country without a nation; a nation without a country".<sup>25</sup>

Mitri Raheb therefore rightly wrote: "It were Anglo-Saxon Christians and British Politicians who encouraged the Jews in Europe to think of their religious identity as basis for a political claim over Palestine."<sup>26</sup> In various respects, Christian Zionism preceded Jewish Zionism.

### **Christian Zionists in the USA**

In the present day, evangelicals in particular, especially in the USA, are taking a conspicuous interest in the state of Israel. The agenda of these Zionist Christians is multi-layered. The people of Israel play a key role in their world view. The Jews, they say, will realize the promises made to biblical Israel. Some of these Christians see Jews as the natural descendants of Abraham and as the direct brothers of Jesus. All Jews are expected to return to the Holy Land at the end of days to prepare it for the return of Christ. The attitude of these Christian Zionists is

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<sup>25</sup> This 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury combined the biblical language of prophecy with the imperial interests of the British Empire. "This policy may have had less to do with love for the Jews than with anti-Semitism; sending British Jews to Palestine not only served British imperial interests but could, in the unspoken hope of British politicians, solve the Jewish issue. British politicians were uneasy about the political and economic influence of British Jewry inside Britain and were frightened by waves of impoverished Eastern European Jewish migrants flooding into Britain... With shrinking space for Jews in Europe, the Zionist movement gradually adopted this particular view of history and its use of biblical prophecy to escape Europe". Quoted from Mitri Raheb, op. cit. 62.

<sup>26</sup> Mitri Raheb, *The Politics of Persecution*, op. cit.

characterized by a fundamentalist political theology, which is reflected in the following basic assumptions.

Seven basic assumptions <sup>27</sup>

1. God has made a covenant with the people of Israel that includes all Jews to this day.

God is firmly committed to his chosen people and will lead them back to their homeland after a period of dispersion. The emigration of Jews from Russia and other countries is therefore co-financed and facilitated by Christian Zionist organizations in cooperation with the Jewish Agency.

2. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 is the fulfillment of prophetic announcements.<sup>28</sup> Christian Zionists believe that the State of Israel today is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. As a continuation of biblical Israel, the state of Israel today should enjoy special privileges. Christians have a responsibility to support the State of Israel and its policies.

3. The land that God promised to the Jewish people (*Eretz Israel*) has been given to them as their property forever. Jews therefore have a divinely justified claim to this land even today. Christian Zionists are convinced that the capture of the whole of Jerusalem in 1967, together with the Sinai, the Golan Heights and the Palestinian West Bank (Greater Israel), is in accordance with God's plan. *Eretz Israel*, from the Nile to the Euphrates, belongs exclusively to the Jewish people. Therefore, the land may, indeed must, be annexed. It is allowed to dispossess the Palestinians through house demolitions and land confiscation and the Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank must be expanded and consolidated.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Munther Isaac, *Christian Zionism with Palestinian Eyes*:

<https://www.kairopalestine.ps/index.php/resources/around-the-web/christian-zionism-through-palestinian-eyes>.

<sup>28</sup> On the following, see Cora Alder and Emanuel Schäublin, *US Evangelicals, from Prophecy to Policy, Policy Perspectives 8/11*, September 2020.



4. Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, including the temple (which is to be rebuilt). Jerusalem is the centerpiece of God's plan for eternity. God will "restore, reorganize, renovate, redistribute, reinstate and redeem this city until the Holy City becomes the crowning jewel of all cities on earth."<sup>29</sup> There are voices that point out that Psalm 147:2 already says: "The Lord builds Jerusalem and brings together the dispersed of Israel."

Jerusalem is regarded as the eternal and exclusive capital of the Jews and cannot be shared with the Palestinians. For this reason, Christian Zionists from the United States are lobbying the US government to move the country's embassy to Jerusalem and thus work towards Jerusalem being recognized as the undivided capital of Israel.

Christian Zionists support the plans to rebuild the Jewish temple on the *Haram Al-Sharif* ("Temple Mount") and accept the destruction of the Islamic shrines there in return. In evangelical visions of the new Jerusalem, there is no room for Arabs and therefore no room for their mosques. In place of the current Jerusalem, a new city must be built, "pure and beautiful", without the Arab population and without the symbols of Islamic civilization.

5. From an eschatological perspective, the settlement of Jews in the Holy Land, the founding of the State of Israel (1948) and the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem (1967) are seen as the harbingers of the return of Christ. Through the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of the Kingdom of David, the Holy Land is being prepared, as it were, for the return of Christ. This theology argues that God will not be able to refrain from the expansion of the modern Israel in order to usher in the "end times". For Christian Zionists, Judaism and above all the state of Israel are instruments for bringing about eschatological events.

6. Christian Zionists are critical of the role and decisions of the UN and decisions of international law and reject peace negotiations that would require Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967. This usually means an uncritical endorsement and justification of Israel's

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<sup>29</sup> Tweet by US pastor John Hagee on May 19, 2021.

policies and can lead to Christian Zionists also endorsing proven human rights violations.

7. If Christians oppose Israel, God will turn away from them. If Christians bless Israel, God will bless them. Reference is often made to Genesis 12:1-3. The belief that the Jews remain God's chosen people leads Christian Zionists to also support Israel in a material way, to "bless" it, as they say. In order to promote their own personal well-being, prayer is combined with a blessing for Israel and the city of Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup> To further their own theological goals, these Christians in the USA support national Zionist forces in Israel with large sums of money. This happened especially after Netanyahu became prime minister. Although Israeli politicians are aware of the driving motives of these evangelicals, they take money from them. The fact that funds from Jewish communities in the USA are decreasing from year to year may play a role here.<sup>31</sup> However, this leads to Israel's racist policies being supported and justified in the media, among politicians and through solidarity trips to Israel.

## Followers

In the USA, Christian Zionist organizations claim a following of more than 50 million people. These evangelicals have around ten times more members than the Jewish communities. During Donald Trump's presidency, the already considerable influence of pro-Israeli expansion evangelicals on US policy in the Middle East has increased. US evangelicals are in their majority allied with the Israeli far right. The Israeli government is well aware of the importance that US evangelicals have for their country. While the Jewish communities in the USA are increasingly critical of the policies of the Israeli state, evangelicals have increased their ideological support in recent years.

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<sup>30</sup> According to John Hagee in the aforementioned tweet.

<sup>31</sup> The highly recommended film "Till Kingdom Come" shows the dilemma of the representatives of the settlement movement who receive money from these evangelical organizations but try to convince themselves that they have outsmarted the Christians because the colonization will be permanent and will not lead to the predicted Armageddon.

The largest pro-Israel lobby group in the US is “Christians United For Israel” (CUFI). It claims to have grown from 5 to 8 million members in 2019 alone. The group was founded in 2006 by John Hagee.<sup>32</sup> Other prominent members of the Zionist-influenced US evangelicals are Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and Hal Lindsey. In one of his sermons, Hagee declared that Hitler had done "God's work" by forcing Jews to seek refuge in the Holy Land, which was a prerequisite for the end times and the battle of Harmageddon. On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the state, John Hagee was honored by Israel as one of its most important supporters. On May 14, John Hagee said a prayer of blessing at the inauguration ceremony of the new US embassy in Jerusalem.

The "International Christian Embassy Jerusalem" (ICEJ) is another organization associated with Christian Zionism. It was founded in Jerusalem in 1980. It is currently active in around 60 countries represented by regional associations or branches. Every autumn, the ICEJ organizes a major event in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, which is supported by the Israeli state. In Germany, the news agency "Israel heute" acts as a mouthpiece for Christian Zionists. A leading figure in this context is Harald Eckert as President of "Christians on Israel's Side".<sup>33</sup>

### Criticism of this group

Among evangelicals, voices can also be heard internally, especially among the younger generation, that oppose the propagated interpretations of the Israel-Palestine issue.<sup>34</sup> They point out that in evangelical perspective, the Jews, who play an important role in the dawning of the new age, must ultimately disappear themselves. In order to be "saved", they must give up their Judaism and convert to

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<sup>32</sup> John Hagee is not only the founder of *Christians United for Israel (CUFI)*, but is also on Israel Allies' list of Israel's top fifty supporters, along with former Vice President Mike Pence and former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley.

<sup>33</sup> In this context, see also Jobst Bittner, *Die Decke des Schweigens*, Tübingen 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldiers. The Bible and the Church*, Eugene (Oregon) 2021.

Christianity. The journalist Gershom Greenberg wrote in his book "The End of Days": "The evangelical imagination is a play in five acts, in which the Jews disappear in the fourth act".<sup>35</sup>

For a responsible theological understanding, this Christian Zionism is a false doctrine, a heresy. This form of Zionism contradicts the justice and love of God, which applies to all people regardless of person or nation.<sup>36</sup> As a theological and political movement, Christian Zionists represent extreme ideological positions. This is deeply detrimental to a just peace between Palestine and Israel. This Christian Zionism propagates a worldview in which the Christian message is reduced to an ideology of empire and militarism.

Christian Zionism is probably the largest, most controversial and most destructive organized lobbying organization within the churches today. It bears a large share of responsibility for perpetuating tensions in the Middle East, justifying Israel's illegal international agenda, the repeated flare-ups of military aggression and the thwarting of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. In its extreme form, evangelical Zionism emphasizes apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living out Christ's love and justice today.

The heads of the churches in Jerusalem have repeatedly objected to Christian Zionism. In 2006, quoting an earlier statement, they wrote: "We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as a false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation."<sup>37</sup> They called on Christians in churches on all continents to pray for the

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<sup>35</sup> Gershom Greenberg, *The End of Days. Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*. Darby (Pennsylvania) 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Munther Isaac, *From land to lands, from Eden to the renewed earth. Eine christuszentrierte biblische Theologie des Gelobten Landes*, Langham (UK) 2015  
*From land to lands, from Eden to the renewed earth: a Christ-centered biblical theology of the promised land*. Carlisle/UK: Langham Monographs, 2015...

<sup>37</sup> Among the signatories were His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch, Jerusalem; Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad, Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem; Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East; and Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are suffering as victims of occupation and militarism.<sup>38</sup>

## **II Church and Judaism after the Second World War**

### **German domestic perspectives on Zionism**

After the Second World War, theology and the church in Germany had to face up to the mass murders of Jewish people during the Nazi era. The question of one's own attitude towards Judaism and one's shared responsibility for these crimes was thus inevitable. It soon became apparent that anti-Jewish tendencies were not just a peripheral aspect of church doctrine. It was recognized that such tendencies could be found in key documents of the Christian religion and that contempt for the Jewish people and polemics against their religious traditions were linked to Christian preaching from the New Testament onwards. In view of Hitler's anti-Semitism and the monstrous mass murders carried out by him and his followers, the church and theology did not see themselves as directly responsible, but they recognized that they played a part in the contempt for Jews and the hatred of everything Jewish. The National Socialists were able to exploit the theological legacy of the negation of Judaism for their own purposes and translate it into genocide on a gigantic scale.

After the Second World War, Protestant theology and the church struggled to overcome Christian anti-Judaism and to find a fundamental reorientation in theology and preaching due to the shock and dismay caused by the Shoah.<sup>39</sup> The relationship between Jews and Christians

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<sup>38</sup> The patriarchs concluded with the words: "God demands that justice be done. No lasting peace, no security and no reconciliation are possible without the foundation of justice. The demands for justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be waged carefully and persistently, but without violence."

<sup>39</sup> A rethink also began in the Catholic Church after individual theologians began to speak positively about Jews and Jewish theology. Since Vatican II, great efforts have been made to integrate the new attitude into catechisms and other media of religious education.

was correspondingly tense and brittle after the Shoah. On the Jewish side, it was pointed out more than once that Jews were by no means dependent on "faith discussions" with Christians. On the Christian side, there were various blockades determined by traditional dogmatic theology.

On the Christian side, above all there was a lack of the spirit of self-criticism that made people eager to learn. Jews were suspicious of Christian attempts at rapprochement and the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 did not initially make a clear impression on theology and the church in Germany.<sup>40</sup> In various respects, it was therefore a matter of rediscovering and refounding this relationship in the period that followed at EKD level, *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste* was founded after the Second World War as a sign of repentance. The *Societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation (Gesellschaften für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit)* also sought to take responsibility for the destruction of Jewish life carried out in the German name. They now wanted to be "witnesses for Israel - and not dialecticians against Israel."<sup>41</sup>

### **Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt's theological position**

At the level of the *German Protestant Church Congresses (Deutsche Evangelische Kirchentage)*, the Working Group *Jews and Christians* deserves special mention. At the beginning of the 1960s, Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, who later became Professor of Systematic Theology in Berlin, was one of the founders of this working group. Alongside figures such as Eberhard Bethge, Martin Stöhr, Bertold Klappert and others, he developed into a key protagonist of Jewish-

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<sup>40</sup> Reflections on the founding of the state of Israel were left to the spirits, who could then easily be elevated as enthusiasts or outsiders.

<sup>41</sup> See Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Zum christlich-jüdischen Verhältnis in Westdeutschland*, in: ders, *Verwegenheiten. Theologische Stücke aus Berlin*, Munich 1981, 268-280.

Christian dialog in Germany.<sup>42</sup> Marquardt could only imagine theology after Auschwitz in a responsibly perceived concrete contemporaneity with Jews. With his theology, he wanted to shake the church's self-confidence, which he perceived as having become triumphalist, and to prepare theology to consistently examine their teachings for the genuine connection between Judaism and Christianity. Marquardt's dogmatics makes an attempt to get by in Christian theology without the negative foil of disparaging Judaism.

Theological reflection on the significance of the founding of the state of Israel plays a prominent role in this.<sup>43</sup> In his essay "Christianity and Zionism"<sup>44</sup> from 1968, he wrote: "Christians, especially Christian theology, have so far remained silent on Zionism: if one does not want to take the retention and elaboration of old anti-Jewish stereotypes and their application to contemporary Judaism as an all too eloquent silence." He saw that until then for Christianity the only conceivable form of Judaism was exile Judaism. Zionist Judaism, which wanted to be both a people of God and a community of people, was an inherently contradictory entity for theology. In view of the revival of Judaism in Zionism, however, the traditional Christian stereotype of an ossified, dead, fleshless and spiritless Judaism could not be maintained.

Marquardt understands Zionism as a "historical process in which the Jewish people found a Jewish state in Palestine in order to become a blessed state there, a testimony to the kingdom of God".<sup>45</sup> Zionism is "that Judaism which understands itself as a people under the name 'Israel' and is fundamentally related to the land of Palestine, where Zion is located." Judaism today is once again reckoning with an earthly-

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<sup>42</sup> Marquardt undertook his first trip to Israel with students as early as 1959.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. on the following Tobias Kriener, *Landverheißung und Zionismus in der Theologie Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardts - eine Problemanzeige*, in: *Wendung nach Jerusalem. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt's Theology in Conversation*, ed. by Hanna Lehming, Joachim Liß-Walther, Matthias Loerbroks and Rien van der Vegt, Gütersloh 1999, 217-226.

<sup>44</sup> Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Christentum und Zionismus*, in: ders., *Verwegenheiten*, 165-201.

<sup>45</sup> The following quotations loc. cit. 175, 177, 182, 196, 198 f.

empirical-political reality as a people and refers to the specific, geographically concrete and unmistakable land Palestine. For Marquardt, being the people of Israel is not a natural gift, but a "revelatory mission". God wants to unite with people, heaven with earth. It is the objective reality of revelation in which the Jewish people become a people.<sup>46</sup> Marquardt interprets what happened to the people of Israel in their encounter with the land in which they lived as the "expression of a supra-historical context". The relationship to the land can therefore not be a matter of a purely historical context. In Judaism, the state is associated with an almost utopian claim. The Kingdom of God of justice and peace is in the background.

For Marquardt, Palestine is not just a refuge for the persecuted, but a *terra promissionis*. The Jews are in Palestine not by virtue of our injustice, but by virtue of a right of their own that is exercised over them. This right is a *sui generis* right and cannot be measured against any of the customary norms of international law. It is a "legal ground that can only be known by faith", but which must be witnessed. Christians are required to bear supporting witness to Israel's right to Palestine. This should be realized in the political sphere.

In his 1994 *Dogmatik*, Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt writes that Christians can no longer "repeat the thesis of God's terminated covenant with Israel". This is a "consequence of brutal historical circumstances - the Shoah and the rescue of a Jewish people from it and before it - and the new self-identification of the rescued and spared with the biblical people of Israel, which is closely linked to this." This "historical truth" requires Christians to identify the Bible anew historically with this people and its self-image, which integrally includes that relationship to the land.<sup>47</sup> The promise of land is not some distant and therefore outdated event in the history of Israel. It is still valid. The promise of land is an element of God's unbroken covenant with his people.

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<sup>46</sup> Marquardt received his doctorate in 1967 with a dissertation on the significance of Israel in Karl Barth's theology.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Was dürfen wir hoffen, wenn wir hoffen dürften*. An Eschatology, vol. 2, Gütersloh 1994, 187 - 285 and 382 - 386.



Marquardt certainly saw that the promised land was not empty after 1945. But he agrees that the conflict was also fought out in war. "All world history, including all liberation history, is the history of sacrifice ... When the history of God takes place in the medium of world history, it is also burdened with the misery that it also creates."<sup>48</sup> The Palestinians should therefore leave the country or serve Israel.<sup>49</sup> A "social right" and a "higher justice" may also have to be achieved through a "fundamental injustice".<sup>50</sup>

With regard to the previous inhabitants of the land, it was not a matter of expulsion, but of a "change of ownership". This would not render the previous owners "without rights". Although they would not be granted the "right of heirs", they would certainly be granted the "right of dependents".<sup>51</sup> Marquardt suggests a "negative theology" for Palestinians, a "theology of the other side of God".<sup>52</sup>

In the aforementioned 1968 essay, Marquardt expressed the following convictions in the form of a rhetorical question: Isn't the founding of the state of Israel the miracle of "leading home" - "albeit in the vigor of Jewish nationalism and under the pressure of persecution"? Is it not a "gift of land" - albeit in the "unjust form of land purchase and in the certainly unjust form of the taking and conquest of land?"<sup>53</sup>

Marquardt is not afraid to relate this view to a fundamental idea of Christian soteriology: After Israel has been brought home, as it were, like the prodigal son, the people are "now under the judgment of God's love, which melts the either/or (Entweder/Oder) of the law ... into the simul-simul" of the Christian doctrine of justification.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Op. cit. 275.

<sup>49</sup> As exegetical justification, he cites God's election of Isaac with the simultaneous rejection and disinheritance of Ishmael.

<sup>50</sup> Op. cit. 228.

<sup>51</sup> Op. cit. 207.

<sup>52</sup> Op. cit. 285

<sup>53</sup> Christianity and Zionism, op. cit. 200.

<sup>54</sup> Op. cit. 201.

Marquardt was deeply skeptical of the treaties of international politics.<sup>55</sup> The very right of this state to exist is still disputed not only by its immediate neighbors, but also in the UN and in the world in general. For Marquardt, the conclusion of treaties is not the yardstick for judging the behavior of nations. In the broader historical perspective, such agreements are often very relative and extremely fragile arrangements on which a fundamental assessment cannot be based.

Marquardt's interpretation of the promise of land arrives at positions that were not acceptable then and are not acceptable today.<sup>56</sup> Marquardt's reading of the Bible is fundamentalist. His claim that Ishmael was disinherited is untenable.<sup>57</sup> Ishmael is also an heir to the promises like Isaac. Ishmael is included in the covenant of circumcision even before Isaac and receives the promise of a great descendant (Gen 17 and 25). Ishmael and Isaac coexist in friendship and brotherly harmony. They bury together their father Abraham. Marquardt's thesis about the Palestinians being driven out and subjugated by force also proves to be unfounded from an exegetical perspective. For a peaceful future for the peoples of West Asia, overcoming such misinterpretations of the Bible is central.

A view that reflects realpolitik will also take into account the idea that international procedural rules limit the means of resolving this conflict. This includes the UN's decision to partition Palestine and a series of resolutions on the status of Jerusalem and the status of occupied territories.

In his presentation at the Karl Barth Conference at Leuenberg in July 1976, Marquardt took a particularly critical view of Arab Christians. He said that they accused the efforts to re-found the theological understanding of Israel of political misuse of the Bible. Under the pressure of their own minority situation, they elevated the spiritualism

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<sup>55</sup> Fr.-W. Marquardt, Was dürfen wir hoffen, wenn wir hoff dürfen? An Eschatology, vol. 3, Gütersloh 1996, 263.

<sup>56</sup> These are positions of Gush Emunim and its parliamentary representatives in Likud, the National Religious Party and Moledet.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Thomas Naumann, Ishmael. Israel's self-perception among the peoples of Abraham's descendants, Göttingen 2018.

of Eastern traditions to the point of eccentricity. The Arab Christians "with their anti-Judaism" are therefore "our primary addressee" in the process of rethinking Christian-Jewish relations.<sup>58</sup>

It was above all the study "Christians and Jews" by the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in 1975 and the "Synodal Resolution on the Renewal of the Relationship between Christians and Jews" by the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland in 1980 that reformulated Christian theology and the Church's position towards Judaism.<sup>59</sup> The Rhenish synodal resolution refers to the lasting significance of Israel in the history of salvation and calls for dialogical encounters with Jews in order to learn from Judaism.

It was thought that with the "return" of the Jewish people to the "land of promise" and the view of the "establishment of the state of Israel" to open up a "new dimension of theological work" and to gain a new insight into "God's plan for his world".<sup>60</sup> In one of the sentences that precede the synod's resolution and are intended to justify what prompts the Church to redefine its relationship to Judaism, the synod members speak of the *"insight that the continued existence of the Jewish people, its return to the land of promise and the establishment of the State of Israel are signs of God's faithfulness to his people."*

The synodal resolution of the Rhenish Church emphasizes the recognition of Christianity's co-responsibility and guilt in the Holocaust, the certainty of the lasting election of the Jewish people as God's people and the belief that God's covenant with the people of Israel has not been replaced by the emergence of the Church, but that the Church is included in this covenant.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Israel, Judaism, Zionism as Questions for the Church*, in: *Verwegenheiten. Theologische Stücke aus Berlin*, Munich 1981, 281-310.

<sup>59</sup> With its studies from 1991 and 2000, the EKD published further contributions to "clarification and reorientation" on these issues. The anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 was then an opportunity to take a critical look at the anti-Jewish legacy of the Reformation and Luther's hateful statements.

<sup>60</sup> Report of the President to the Regional Synod.

<sup>61</sup> In the Rhineland, it was decided to continue the study work in church committees, to give appropriate consideration to the topic of Christians and Jews in church

But the question is whether here - by regarding a historical event such as the founding of the state of Israel as a sign of God's "faithfulness" - we are not doing precisely what the first thesis of the Barmen Theological Declaration rejects, which states: *"We reject the false teaching that the church can and must recognize as the source of its proclamation other events and powers, figures and truths besides and in addition to this one word of God as God's revelation."*

Of course, one can say as a statement of faith that "the continued existence of the Jewish people" is a sign of God's faithfulness. However, as a statement of identity, this is not linked to a specific country or state, but to the Torah, i.e. the Pentateuch. This is also confirmed by rabbinical tradition.

There is also no problem with Martin Buber's idea, for example, of Jews settling and living in the land in peace with the Palestinian inhabitants. But it is theologically impossible to legitimize a particular state theologically as a direct action of God - quite apart from the politics of this state in present-day Israel. The prophetic warnings (e.g. 1 Sam 8) already speak against the desire "to be like the other nations and also to have a king". There are also fundamental considerations against this, such as those of a Jewish author like Micha Brumlik, who has been very critical of the Rhenish Church's decision in two publications. He speaks of a "classic piece of political theology in the sense of Carl Schmitt" and historical-philosophical speculation.<sup>62</sup> Linking the state with the faithfulness of God mixes up the people and the state. The Rhenish

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training and further education and to assume special responsibility for the Christian settlement of Nes Ammim in Israel.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Micha Brumlik, *The Establishment of the State of Israel - a Sign of God's Faithfulness? Skeptische Überlegungen*, in: *Junge Kirche* 78 (2017) No. 4, 20-23, and s.: *Israel oder: Die politische Theologie der Wiedergeburt*, in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* (2019) No. 1, 100-110.

The term New Historians was first used in 1988 in an article written by critics of this group. The fact that the researchers belonged to a generation already born in Israel and thus had not themselves been involved in the establishment of the state can be seen as an important factor in their willingness to critically examine the current narrative

Church urgently needs to correct this if it does not want to put itself on the same level as Christian Zionists.

### **III Critique of the Zionist narrative**

#### **New historians in Israel**

Since the early 1980s, historians in Israel have had access to previously unpublished British and Israeli government documents. On the basis of these documents they subjected the history of Israel and Zionism to a revision. The founding of the Israeli state in 1948 and its prehistory as well as the relationship with the Palestinians and Israel's Arab neighbors were particularly affected. This group, which included Tom Segev, Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim and Ilan Pappé are referred to as the group of New Historians.<sup>63</sup>

The core thesis of these historians is that the establishment of the state of Israel began with the expulsion of part of the Arab population. Conventional historiography had said that all Palestinians left their homes "voluntarily" during the War of Independence. The new historians, on the other hand, proved that a large proportion of the refugees were forcibly expelled and deported from their homes by Israeli militias. This began even before the founding of the state between the UN resolution of November 1947 and the founding of the state on May 15, 1948, i.e. still under the British Mandate administration. During these six months, a quarter of a million Palestinians were expelled. In total, over 530 villages, towns and cities were destroyed. The new historians also spoke of massacres of men, women and children.

They showed that the Arabs had no coordinated plan to destroy Israel. They showed that at no time did they pursue a unified line and that Israel was far superior to the Arabs in terms of military and weaponry. It also became clear that it was not the intransigence of the Arabs that had so far prevented peace, but that Israel was to blame for the deadlock in the peace process.

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The historian Ilan Pappé plays a prominent role in this group. He is now a professor at the University of Exeter in England.<sup>64</sup> Until 2007, he was a lecturer in political science at the University of Haifa.<sup>65</sup> Pappé accuses liberal Zionism of being falsely obsessed with finding a balance between the mistakes it makes and the high moral standard of presenting Israel as a civilized state. According to Pappé, there is no progressive settler colonialism, no liberal ethnic cleansing and no enlightened occupation. These are all forms of inhumanity that must be rejected in the name of humanity.

The theses of the New Historians were rejected both by Zionist historiography and by pro-Arab authors who accused them of trivialization.<sup>66</sup> It was criticized that the New Historians often placed the blame solely on the Israeli side and condemned historical figures from today's moral standpoint without paying sufficient attention to the context of the time.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was of the opinion that the works of the New Historians "should not be taught in schools". The discussion situation in Germany is characterized by the fact that the work of the New Historians is ignored. For the discourse here, too, however, it is absolutely crucial to take a fresh look at the reality at the

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<sup>64</sup> His major works include: Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951*, London 1994 ; his, *Die ethnische Säuberung Palästinas*, English 2006, Frankfurt am Main (2007) 3rd ed. 2019; his, *Die Idee Israel. Myths of Zionism*, Hamburg 2015; *ibid.*, *The Bible in the Service of Zionism: "We do not Believe in God, but he Nonetheless Promised us Palestine"*. In: Michael J. Sandford (ed.): *The Bible, Zionism, and Palestine*. Dunedin/New Zealand : Relegere Academic Press, 2016, pp. 7-19.

<sup>65</sup> Ilan Pappé had to leave this position because, as he wrote, he stood by the MA thesis of his student Teddy Katz, in which he proved the massacre that had taken place on May 23, 1948 in the peaceful Palestinian village of Tantura by Israel's Alexandroni Brigade. Hundreds of Palestinians had been buried in mass graves located under a parking lot at Dor Beach, where Israeli families walk daily today. The relatives of this brigade had been sworn to silence about their actions.

<sup>66</sup> Since around 2005, the group of New Historians has been considered to have broken up, even if most of the scholars formerly counted among it and new representatives who have joined since then continue to work with the same research approach.

beginning of the founding of the Israeli state and not to stop at the myths that have prevailed up to now.

#### **IV Zionism controversial in ecumenism using the example of the United Church of Christ (UCC) and German churches**

The publication of the findings of the new historians took place after the Christian-Jewish dialog had become firmly established in church and society in Germany. Anyone looking at it from the outside today has the impression that the "turning point" signified by the emergence of the New Israeli Historians had little or no influence on the work of these committees. We get a different impression when we look at US society and the church landscape there.

The United Church of Christ (UCC) is a close partner church of the Protestant regional churches of Baden and Westphalia, among others. In 2021, this church passed a resolution that not only incorporates the findings of the new Israeli historians, but is also to be understood as a response to the texts of the Palestinian Christian partners.<sup>67</sup> In 2009 and 2020, they addressed urgent letters to the churches of the world. In its synod statement, the UCC refers to the "Kairos Palestine Document: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Center of Palestinian Suffering" and the "Cry for Hope" with the subtitle: "Call to Decision and Action".<sup>68</sup>

In its resolution, the UCC not only rejects Christian Zionism in the abstract, but also draws the consequences by simultaneously pointing out and rejecting the consequences of this ideology in apartheid and settler colonialism. First, the declaration names the reality:

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<sup>67</sup> Published in: <https://kairoseuropa.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/KPS-Infoblatt-Schrei-nach-Hoffnung-und-Antworten.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> [https://kairoseuropa.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Kairos-Palastine\\_German-pdf](https://kairoseuropa.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Kairos-Palastine_German-pdf) and <https://kairoseuropa.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/KPS-AufrufUnterst%C3%Bctzer-Schrei-nach-Hoffnung.pdf>.

**"NOTING THAT** Israel, with the tacit or overt support of the United States government, has created conditions comparable to those that prevailed under *Jim Crow*<sup>69</sup> in the period between *Reconstruction* and the *Civil Rights Movement* in the southern United States by establishing segregation laws that enshrine the structural domination and oppression of Black people by white people. WHEREAS, Israel's measures of domination and oppression include the adoption of the 2018 Nation-State Law, the construction of the Separation Facility, the implementation of a restrictive passport system for Palestinians, the creation of Israeli-only highways through the West Bank, and the use of military detention for Palestinian children accused of offenses; and

**NOTING THAT** the General Synod and its leadership have for more than fifty years advocated negotiations for a just peace between Israel and Palestine, respecting international law, international standards of human rights, the principle of self-determination and the rights of Palestinian refugees [6] ..."

In view of these facts the declaration of the UCC changes to a confession in the style of the Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934 and says, among other things:

"2. *We affirm* that the biblical narrative from the creation story to the calling of the Israelites, the judgmental admonitions of the prophets, the incarnation of Jesus and his ministry, and the testimony of the apostles 'to the ends of the earth' ... speaks of God's blessing for 'all the families of the earth' (Gen 12:3). *That is why we reject* any theology or ideology such as Christian Zionism, the doctrine of substitution, anti-Semitism or anti-Islamic bias, which privilege or exclude a people, a "race", a culture or religion with regard to God's universal order of grace.

3. *we affirm* that all people living in Palestine and Israel are created in the image of God and that this gives them unconditional dignity and holiness. *Therefore, we reject* any laws and regulations that are used by one ethnic group, religion or political entity to

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<sup>69</sup>Translator's note: Historical term for laws that continued to discriminate against black people after the formal abolition of slavery in 1865.



secure a privileged legal position for one people at the expense of another, including Israel's system of apartheid by law and legal process."

The five German churches on the Rhine and Ruhr were quite different, attempting to defend the position of the German churches in a so-called impulse paper published before the WCC General Assembly in Karlsruhe.<sup>70</sup> They formally reject Christian Zionism:

"Neither quotations from holy scriptures nor religious traditions can legitimize disenfranchisement and discrimination or justify geopolitical claims to power at the expense of law and justice. This applies both to a biblically based claim to ownership of the land, as can be found among "Christian Zionists" or Israeli settlers, as well as to the reclamation of an exclusively Islamic country, e.g. by Hamas. We reject such positions as hostile to dialog and exacerbating conflict" (thesis 3/3).

At the same time, however, they refuse to discuss the issue of apartheid and settler colonialism, for which the prevailing Jewish and Christian Zionism represents the ideology. This is because the declaration of the five churches describes the terms apartheid, ethnic cleansing and settler colonialism as inappropriate labels. This gives the impression that the churches want to avoid dealing specifically with the realities covered by these terms.

## Conclusions

While churches such as the UCC openly address the political situation in Palestine and Israel, German churches always try to include a certain "pro-Israel" perspective of official Jewish representatives in Germany in their perception. This gives rise to one of the fundamental problems of the guiding principles. The churches present the Jewish self-image of certain German interlocutors and claim the right to explain it. In doing

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<sup>70</sup> The text and detailed critical questions from the Kairos Palestine Solidarity Network can be found at <https://kairoseuropa.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/KPS-Rueckfragen-des-Netzes-an-Leitgedanken-der-Kirchen-am-Rhein.pdf>.

so, they overlook the diversity of Jewish voices and limit Judaism to a specific form and manifestation, namely the Judaism that continues the violent form of Zionism.

In the past, large parts of rabbinical Judaism were opposed to Zionism. Indeed, the majority of Jews even saw Zionism as a danger to Judaism. These voices have not fallen silent even today. Even today, there are Jewish people who only see a way out of the current political impasse if the state of Israel is "*unlearning Zionism*" and becomes a democratic state with equal rights for all. The current national-religious-led government in Israel, however, is in line with the manifestations of a violent Zionism that goes back to the Nakba of 1947/48, the occupation since 1967, the provocation of the Second Intifada by Ariel Sharon, right up to Netanyahu's seventh government with overweight participation of the religious Zionists under Ben Gvir from the extreme right-wing tradition of Rabbi Kahane and the fascist-nationalist party of Smotrich.

In contrast, a growing movement is forming in the USA, in which the UCC has joined. In Germany, this includes initiatives such as the "Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East" and on European level, the "European Jews for a Just Peace". The people who have joined forces in this group are concerned with two things. The Palestinians should finally receive justice and the state of Israel should not destroy itself and continue to cause the greatest damage to Jews and Judaism.

If the churches in Germany do not want to unilaterally side with a violent Zionism, they should engage in a conversation with their Jewish brothers and sisters who are committed to justice and non-violence. If they are not prepared to do so, they should stop speaking of *the* one, universally valid Jewish-Israeli position in their statements.

Behind the vacillation of the position of German churches, a fundamental problem becomes clear: the majority of Germans - not only in the churches - are not at all aware that we have a double history of guilt. We have concentrated on the obvious guilt of the genocide of the Jews. In doing so, we have overlooked the fact that this genocide of the Jews also led to the Nakba, the catastrophe for the Palestinian people.

At the same time, these feelings of guilt caused people to close their eyes to the methods by which the state of Israel came into being. The research findings of the new historians from Israel are hardly ever referred to in the German churches. The caesura that this work represents for the Israeli narrative is not addressed in the German churches. They continue to work as if these insights from leading Israeli academics did not exist. The current statement by the five regional churches is based on many basic assumptions of the early days of Christian-Jewish dialog. Reference is made to seemingly abstract Jewish counterparts without seriously engaging with the disturbing voices of the Christian partner churches in the Holy Land. There is much to suggest that the necessary "dialog" with concretely identifiable Jewish partners has become a "deal" with supporters of a Zionism that relies on power, violence and conquest.<sup>71</sup>

It is time for the German churches to learn from sister churches such as the UCC and others to call on their own government and the public with renewed clarity to make cooperation with the State of Israel conditional on compliance with international law and human rights. German churches and congregations can also refer to the declaration of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, in which the WCC itself and the member churches are called upon to work intensively on the controversial issue of apartheid presented by human rights organizations and the UN.<sup>72</sup> However, the German churches should also sharpen their focus on the situation in occupied Palestine and speak out more strongly and very concretely in favor of clear measures to end the occupation and the many forms of violation of human and international law associated with it. It leaves a bland aftertaste when they persist in an attitude of supposed neutrality and

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<sup>71</sup> See Marc Ellis, *Büßer als Machtmenschen*, in: Ulrich Duchrow, Hans G. Ulrich (eds.), *Religionen für Gerechtigkeit in Palästina-Israel - jenseits von Luthers Feindbildern*, Münster 2017, 128-157 (in English: <http://www.radicalizing-reformation.com/files/RR-vol-7-Eng.pdf>, 59-78).

<sup>72</sup> The WCC declaration is printed in booklet 3 of this publication series, which is also suitable for work in church congregations, see p. 34  
[. https://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/kairos-palestine-document](https://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/kairos-palestine-document)

willingness to engage in dialog on the basis of German history and the guidelines of a "theology after the Holocaust". Only those who stand up for the Palestinians do justice to a real connection with Jewish people. Such an attitude corresponds to the "logic of love" of the Kairos document of the Palestinian churches, which states, among other things:

"It is God's country, and therefore it must be a country of reconciliation, peace and love. And that is also possible. God has placed us here as two peoples, and God also gives us the power, if only we sincerely want it, to live together and create justice and peace, to truly transform the land into God's land.

## **Der christliche Zionismus und die religiösen, politischen und wirtschaftlichen Fundamentalismen. Eine palästinensisch-lateinamerikanische Konversation. Abschlussdokument**

(Santiago de Chile, 4. bis 10. November 2022)

Vertreter aus Palästina, neun Ländern Lateinamerikas und der Karibik (Abya Yala), zwanzig Universitäten und akademische Einrichtungen aus vier Kontinenten sowie mehrere kirchliche Einrichtungen aus der ganzen Welt kamen vom 4. bis 10. November 2022 in Santiago de Chile zusammen, um an einer Konferenz zum Thema christlicher Zionismus und religiöse, politische und wirtschaftliche Fundamentalismen teilzunehmen. Führende Vertreter der indigenen Mapuche-Gemeinschaft eröffneten die Konferenz mit einer spirituellen Begrüßungszeremonie.

Die Teilnehmer erkannten an, dass der christliche Zionismus nicht mehr nur ein Phänomen des globalen Nordens ist, sondern sich zunehmend im globalen Süden ausbreitet, und zwar als Folge verschiedener Ausdrucksformen des Kolonialismus und des angelsächsischen Imperiums. Die Konferenz betrachtete den christlichen Zionismus aus einer geopolitischen Perspektive als eine christliche Lobby, die den israelischen Siedlerkolonialismus auf palästinensischem Land und Volk unterstützt und dabei biblische Texte und theologische Konstrukte als Waffe einsetzt. Christlich-zionistisches Gedankengut ist in allen lateinamerikanischen Ländern weit verbreitet und geht mit rechtsextremen politischen und theokratischen Bewegungen und Systemen der Ausgrenzung einher. Gelehrte jüdischen, christlichen und muslimischen Glaubens waren sich einig, dass sie den von Christen, Juden und Muslimen vertretenen Zionismus ablehnen und sich gegen die Gleichsetzung von Antizionismus und Antisemitismus wenden. In Anerkennung der weltweiten Apartheid bekräftigten die Teilnehmer ihre Verpflichtung, sich gegen alle Formen von Rassismus und Ausgrenzung zu wehren.

Die Präsentationen konzentrierten sich darauf, wie der israelische

Siedlerkolonialismus alle Aspekte des palästinensischen Lebens durchdringt und ein System und Gesetze der Apartheid durch die Enteignung von Land und Ressourcen, demographisches Engineering und militärische Besetzung auferlegt. Es wurde deutlich, dass der Staat Israel nicht nur die Verbreitung christlich-zionistischer Ideologien unterstützt, sondern auch zunehmend militärische Ausrüstung und Ausbildung sowie Überwachungstechnologie nach Lateinamerika und darüber hinaus exportiert.

Die Teilnehmer erörterten Strategien, um der Herausforderung des christlichen Zionismus, des Siedlerkolonialismus und der Militarisierung zu begegnen, und formulierten eine Reihe von Empfehlungen für die künftige Arbeit, darunter:

- Aufbau geopolitischer, interdisziplinärer, dekolonialer Süd-Süd-Begegnungen und interreligiöser und intersektionaler Solidaritätsbündnisse unter Einbeziehung von religiösen Führungspersonen und TheologInnen, jungen Menschen, engagierten AktivistInnen, FeministInnen, KünstlerInnen und indigenen Völkern.

- Entwicklung gemeinsamer lateinamerikanischer und palästinensischer Netzwerke und Strategien

- Den 75. Nakba-Gedenktag nutzen, um auf das andauernde Siedlerkolonialprojekt in Palästina hinzuweisen und wirksame Maßnahmen zu ergreifen. Verhängung politischer, wirtschaftlicher und kultureller Sanktionen gegen Länder, die illegale Besatzung ausüben, im Einklang mit der derzeitigen weltweiten Praxis

- Palästinensische und lateinamerikanische theologische und akademische Arbeiten in die jeweiligen Sprachen übersetzen und sie als Hilfsmittel für die Bildung von Gemeinschaften in beiden Kontexten zugänglich machen.

- Förderung eines dekolonialen und sozial verantwortlichen Tourismus nach Palästina

Die Konferenz endete mit einem kulturellen Abend im Club Palestino zu Ehren der Tatsache, dass Chile die größte palästinensische Diaspora in Lateinamerika beherbergt.

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Texts in connection with the General Assembly of the World  
Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, Hirschler Foundation,  
Otterstadt 2022



**Solidaritätsnetz Deutschland**