



'Your kingdom come'

As pilgrims on the way with Jews
and Palestinian Christians

Contribution to reflection and reorientation
and study resource for discussion

Contents

Part I	4
I Introduction	5
1.1 Anchored relationships	5
1.2 Abrasive and clashing questions	5
1.3 Conflict and polarisation in an evolving context	5
1.4 Enduring the tension	5
1.5 Clarification of concepts and distinctions	5
1.6 Purpose and structure of this memorandum	6
II Reconnaissance: where do we come from?	7
2.1 Dutch churches: synod reports and study resources	7
2.2 Foreign churches: synod reports and study resources	7
III Your kingdom come ...	8
3.1 Praying for God's kingdom and reign	8
3.2 Kingdom of God in the church order	8
3.3 As pilgrims on the way	9
3.4 Three movements	9
IV Living and celebrating together with difference	10
4.1 Distinctive relationships	10
4.2 Relations with Jews and Jewish communities	10
4.3 Lessons from contemporary Jewish-Christian encounters	10
4.4 Relations with Messianic Jews	11
4.5 Ecumenical relations with Palestinian and other Christians	11
V Living with wounds	13
5.1 The wound marks of Jesus	13
5.2 Different narratives	13
5.3 The Jewish narrative of wounds	14
5.4 The Palestinian narrative of wounds	14
5.5 Call to be heard, cry for justice	15
5.6 Courage to recognise wounds	15
5.7 Looking in one's own mirror	16
VI Working together to heal life	17
6.1 Steps on the pilgrim way: God's Spirit on the move	17
6.2 Biblical perspective: turning from injustice to hope and future	17
6.3 Seeking what is healing and connecting	17
6.4 Steps	18

This English translation is for information purposes only. For the translation of Bible verses we have used the New Revised Standard Version.

The original Dutch text alone is authentic.

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Part II - More elaborate and in-depth	21
I Ongoing reflection: church orders, synod reports and study resources	22
1.1 In the Netherlands: first steps	22
From 'Fundamenten en Perspectieven van belijden' (Foundations and Perspectives of professing) 1949 tot 'Israël - volk, land en staat' (Israel - people, country and state) 1970 - Changes to the church order 1991 - IP memorandum 2008 - Meervoudig verbonden (Multi-connected) 2012	
1.2 In broader context: international	24
World Council of Churches - 'Zur Erneuerung des Verhältnisses von Christen und Juden' (To Renew the Relation between Christians and Jews) 1980 - Twelve Points of Berlin (ICCJ) 2009 - Kairos Document 2009 - 'God's Unfailing Word' 2019 - 'Israel-Palästina. Leitgedanken und erläuternde Thesen' (Israel-Palestine. Guiding Principles and Explanatory Theses) 2021 - Hope for the Future 2023	
II Theological concepts related to the encounter with Judaism	27
Permanent meaning of the covenant of God with the people of Israel - Interpretation of the Land Promise - View on the meaning of the Torah, Law and Gospel - Significance of Jesus - From mission among Jews to missio Dei, God's mission	
III Declarations about anti-semitism, terror and the situation in Israel and Palestine	29
Repudiation of Luther's anti-Jewish statements 2016 - 'From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017' - Gezamenlijke verklaring met de Rooms-Katholieke Kerk (Joint declaration with the Roman Catholic Church) 2019 - Verklaring Erkenning en Verantwoordelijkheid (Declaration Recognition and Responsibility) - Palestinian Christians on anti-Semitism: 'This is where we stand' 2022 - Moderamen: grote zorgen over situatie in Israël en Gaza (Board: great concern about situation in Israel and Gaza) 2021 - Statements of the board on and after 7 October 2023 - Statement of the general synod against anti-Semitism 2023 - Gelukwens 75 jaar staat Israël (Congratulation 75 years state Israel 2023 - 75 jaar Nakba: 'De Nakba is nog steeds onze dagelijkse realiteit' (75 years Nakba: 'The Nakba is still our daily reality') 2023- Boodschap van medeleven naar Israëlsche en Palestijnse partners (Message of compassion to Israeli and Palestinian partners) 2023 - Protestantse Kerk onderstreept belang van rechtvaardige vrede voor Joden en Palestijnen (Protestant Church underlines importance of just peace for Jews and Palestinians) 2024 - Politieke loopgraven staan oplossingen en noodhulp Palestina en Israël in de weg (Political trenches stand in the way of solutions and emergency aid Palestine and Israel) 2024	
IV Relations with Jews	32
Parting of the ways - Contemporary Judaism and partner relations - Wounds and traumas - Resilient Judaism - Relations with Messianic Jews	
V Relations with Palestinian and other Christians in Israel and Palestine	35
Partner relations - Part of the Palestinian people - Rich diversity of denominations - Resilience and pride - Other marginalised Christians - Wounds and traumas	

Part I

I Introduction

1.1 Anchored relationships

How do we as a church relate to Jews? And how to Palestinians? What is the nature of these different relationships and which questions do they raise? In this policy paper we will address these questions. We will see that both types of relationships can be traced back to the church order and deal with key confessional, ecumenical and diaconal aspects. As Protestant Church, we share in the expectation given to the people of Israel and we look forward to the coming of the kingdom of God. We are called to enter into dialogue with Jews and Jewish communities (call to unrelinquishable connectedness, art. I,7), and to maintain ecumenical relationships with other churches and therefore also with Palestinian Christians (unity, the community and the cooperation with other churches, art. XVI,1). In addition, there is the diaconal calling, in which the church fulfills her calling by dedicating herself to those who suffer and assisting them in their search for consolation and justice, in cooperation with local churches and congregations and with related authorities (art. X,2 and XVI,3).

1.2 Abrasive and clashing questions

These different relationships raise diverging theological, existential and relational questions that chafe and clash with each other. They are not posed in a vacuum, but take place in a continually changing context. They are repeatedly tested by the hard, rough and conflicting reality of every day. What is the church's relationship with the Jewish people? What church fellowship do we have with Palestinian Christians? And what does this mean with regard to questions of law and justice when it comes to Jews and Palestinians?

1.3 Conflict and polarisation in an evolving context

This policy paper does not take as its starting point the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but neither can you ignore it. The conflict and the outbreak of war in 2023 cut through everything. After October 7th, 2023, everything became even more intense. From our relations with the Jewish community in the Netherlands as well as with our partners in Israel

and Palestine, we have been able to hear what deep scars were caused by the terrorist attack by Hamas and the subsequent devastating war. Sparked by this conflict and this war, polarisation, violence, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are increasing worldwide. Urgent appeals are being made to the church from various sides. From the Jewish side, there is the demand for trust and reliability in the relationships and there is an existential cry to be able to exist, as communities, as a nation, as a state. From the side of Palestinians, including Palestinian Christians, there is the increasingly urgent cry to be heard and to be able to survive, to live, and to stand up as a church against injustice, occupation and destruction.

1.4 Enduring the tension

The church is called upon with great urgency from various sides to choose. Here (Biblical-) theological, international legal and humanitarian arguments are invoked. Out of genuine compassion for Israel (the people, the state), on the one hand, or with Palestinians and Palestinian Christians on the other, camps arise that often no longer speak each other's language. People no longer listen to each other and each other's intentions. Often, a dialogue is no longer possible. The danger is that a group in the middle will emerge that looks on in confusion and ultimately resigns itself to a sort of indifference. It is important to endure the tension of the various callings mentioned earlier. That is what this policy paper calls for and to this purpose provides study resources. Enduring the tension can result in incomprehension: that as a church you do not want to take sides, you seek the safe middle ground without becoming involved yourself, safely remaining on the sidelines. But the opposite is true: enduring the tension is a powerful choice: both for Jews and Palestinian Christians, for solidarity and the right to life. That position also affects yourself, which will become clear later in this policy paper.

1.5 Clarification of concepts and distinctions

In all of this, there is a need for clarification of concepts and distinctions. What do we mean by different designations and concepts? This

is not easy, because of the great complexity of the subjects, the heavy political emotions (also with theological notions), the existential and religious involvement, and the diverging beliefs and stances. Many terms and concepts are more complicated than they seem at first glance. Words like 'volk' (people), 'land' and 'staat' (state) seem clear, but historically they have different meanings in different periods of time. Theological concepts such as 'koninkrijk van God' (kingdom of God), 'roeping' (calling), 'verbondenheid' (connectedness, solidarity) and 'gerechtigheid' (justice) are also layered and open to multiple interpretations.

That does not mean that as a church you are toothless and cannot say anything. As a church, we stand for something; we live by certain values we will not abandon. We explore this further in this policy paper. The church's starting point lies in understanding the Scriptures. But even so, you still have to make clear what you are talking about. Added to this, it is important to make a clear distinction between Biblical, legal and psychological/emotional approaches. What does the Lord ask from us? What has been agreed upon according to international law (for example, human rights treaties)? And which emotions are at stake? These are questions that must be separated out, but can also continually intertwine. As a church, we are first and foremost guided by the Scriptures. In addition, we also refer to what is laid down in international law and in international human rights treaties.

Although in this policy paper we mainly focus on the relations with Palestinian Christians, we are aware that many of them consider themselves part of the Palestinian people. Therefore, we by no means want to drive a wedge between Christians and Muslims (and others) among the Palestinians.

When this policy paper refers to Palestine, the reference is to the Palestinian territories according to international law. Kerk in Actie started to use the name 'Palestine' in 2013, because of the self-understanding of Palestinians. When this policy paper refers to Israel, it will, where necessary, be made clear in what sense this is done: as designation for the Jewish people, Biblical Israel, the land of Israel or the State of Israel. We assume the State of Israel according to international law recognised within the Green Line. Israel's right to exist is therefore in no way up for discussion.

1.6 Purpose and structure of this policy paper

This policy paper focuses on and explores the following relations: relationships with Jews and relationships with Palestinians (including Palestinian and other Christians). We explain what these relationships are based on, what callings they relate to and what questions we face. Difficulties in the relationships are mentioned. What also applies: when the relationships are good and the loyalties clear, there can be a safe space for criticism. Ultimately, it comes down to the following questions:

- What do these relationships tell us?
- What can we do for each other?
- How do we translate this into concrete action?

This policy paper aims to reflect on complex questions and provide a reorientation in a theologically (and also politically) sensitive matter. In doing so, it wants to provide a study resource for further discussion. We also want to facilitate and further deepen this dialogue in the coming years. Convictions and opinions vary widely within and outside our church; that cannot be brought together in a single policy paper. However, we can explore what is common ground and what core notions we will not abandon.

The first part of the policy paper addresses all the important lines, questions and choices. The second part goes more in-depth and elaborates on the first part. Both parts form one whole and cannot be seen as separate from each other.

First we explore what we as a church are building on. We then take the prayer for the coming of God's kingdom as a starting point. From a Christian perspective, we are invited to set out as pilgrims, joining God's movement of peace, love and justice. We then elaborate on this in a three-part format: 'Living together and celebrating with difference', 'Living with wounds' and 'Working together to heal life'. Taken together, this refers in the first instance to the relationship between Christians (including Palestinian Christians) and Jews. This does not mean that we exclude other groups. While we focus on relations with Palestinian Christians, we cannot forget that the large majority of Palestinians in Israel and Palestine are Muslim. The role of Islam is a separate and important theme that will not be elaborated further here. It is something to pay more attention to in the coming years. We refer to previous policy papers, such as the 'Integrity and Respect: Islam Memorandum' (2011) and the follow-up memorandum from 2013.

II Explorations: where do we come from?

2.1 Dutch churches: synod reports and study resources (zie Part II, 1.1)

A lot of preliminary work has already been done by the Protestant Church, her predecessors and other churches, especially when it comes to reflection on the relationship with the people of Israel, the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, Jewish-Christian relations and the awareness of and fight against anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. We stand on the shoulders of our ancestors, although in our time we face our own challenges and callings. So we are not starting from scratch. Important choices have been made and changes made in the search for new relationships. An important change of direction in the 20th century is the one from mission to Jews to dialogue. Another is that the call to an unrelinquishable connectedness with the people of Israel is seen as so fundamental that it is named in the confessional first article of the church order. This theological reflection has resulted in numerous theological publications, synodal reports and study resources.

Broadly speaking, one can distinguish two approaches that cannot be viewed completely separated from each other. This is recurring in all kinds of reports and synod documents, both nationally and internationally. Various questions are asked.

- 1) How does the church relate to the Jewish people, to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith and to the issues of anti-Semitism? These are ecclesiastical, theological and confessional questions. This is about the identity of the church. This approach calls for a reorientation in the context of the Jewish-Christian dialogue and the encounter with living Judaism.
- 2) How does the church relate to the situation in Israel and Palestine in the current context? That is a current and urgent question. This approach calls for positioning and clear choices with regard to law and justice.

There is friction and conflict between these two approaches. Theological reflection on the ecumenical and diaconal relationship with

Palestinian Christians started much later and has not been that widely developed. We will discuss this in more detail in Part II. Here we only mention the synodal memorandum 'The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the Context of the Arab World of the Middle East. Contribution to the formation of opinions in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands' (2008), in which the calling to give shape to the unrelinquishable connectedness with the people of Israel, the ecumenical calling and the diaconal calling, are related to the Jewish and Palestinian Christian communities in the Middle East. This policy paper builds further on this. Biblical-theological, international legal and humanitarian arguments are used. Also, the term 'meervoudige verbondenheid' (multi-connectedness) is introduced.

2.2 International churches: synod reports and study resources (see Part II: 1.2)

Internationally, some other churches - Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and jointly ecumenical - also speak out about Jewish-Christian relations and everything related to it. It is a search for healing, reconciliation of disturbed relationships, recognition of anti-Semitism also in our own church and theology. Bridges are built, new paths to each other are sought. There are also important documents and statements from the Jewish side that reach out to the Christian churches. International movements, such as the International Council of Christians and Jews and others, actually practice dialogue and do not avoid painful questions. These statements increasingly address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We see churches struggling to highlight the unique bond with the Jewish people, on the one hand, and not to neglect the ecumenical relationship with Palestinian Christians, on the other. Here too, theological, legal, humanitarian and psychological arguments stand side by side. More and more attention is being paid to the stories, the suffering, the traumas and the wounds of both Jews and Palestinians. From the Palestinian side itself, the Kairos document from 2009 is, besides being a cry for justice, a reflection on theology and theological choices from the context of occupation.

III Your kingdom come ...

3.1 Praying for God's kingdom and reign

The starting point for this policy paper is the kingdom of God. God goes his unknown way: in the creation of the world, in the calling of Abraham, in the journey of the people of Israel, Moses and the prophets, Jesus and the apostles. People are called to go and follow Jesus. In the Protestant Church vision statement 'Van U is de toekomst' (The future is Yours) from 2020, mention is made of Jesus' prayer in the Lord's Prayer for the coming of the kingdom. By praying these words, we confess that we want to be involved in God's kingdom, to seek what God has in mind for us and our world, and to be willing to commit ourselves to doing his will. It sharpens our view of our responsibility for our neighbour, for creation, for our life together. Prayer comes first. As a church, we are a praying community. Prayer helps us to see the things from God's perspective. In prayer, we try to hear God's voice: it is praying by listening. It is not our beliefs or opinions that are paramount, but the realization that our lives are grounded in God, that the God of Israel has the first word and is at the beginning and the end. This is something that Jews and Christians, synagogue and church, share with each other (and, in broader circles, this also applies to other religious communities). In prayer, the longing for the coming of God's kingdom can be heard.

In the context of this policy paper, the prayer for peace for Jerusalem is significant: 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels' (Psalm 122:6,7). In the present-day context, this is about peace for all residents, Jews, Palestinians and others. The prayer for God's kingdom cannot be seen separately from the prayer for conversion. That can be a plea for conversion with regard to those who bear responsibility for the current heartbreaking situation in Israel and Palestine. It is also a prayer for our own conversion, from the realisation of our longstanding co-responsibility and guilt towards both Jews and Palestinian Christians. This includes the long history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, and the disregard for the suffering of both Jews and Palestinians. In prayer, we cannot hide behind beautiful, theologically well-formulated sentences, but we expose our own pain and failings to God. Prayer also involves taking responsibility. Praying for the coming of God's kingdom, praying

for justice and peace will have to translate into concrete action, into actual solidarity and loyalty. More attention will therefore be given to prayer, as a concrete action for congregations.

3.2 Kingdom of God in the church order

The kingdom of God is an important notion in the church order of the Protestant Church. Already in the first confessional article about the calling of church and community, it is about the theological self-understanding of the church. As expression of 'the one holy apostolic and catholic or general Christian church, the church, 'sharing in the expectation given to Israel', looks forward to the coming of God's kingdom. This is elaborated on a little later in the same first article:

'The church is called to give shape to her unrelinquishable connectedness with the people of Israel. As a Christ-confessing faith community, she seeks dialogue with Israel regarding the understanding of the Holy Scriptures, in particular regarding the coming of God's kingdom (I,7).'

It is a fundamental calling with a confessional character: it is part of the identity, the DNA of the church that she shares in the expectation, given to the people of Israel, of God's kingdom. The church does not coincide with the kingdom of God, but together with the Jewish people she looks forward to the coming of God's kingdom. These are theological and perhaps also abstract formulations that need to be made concrete. This calling precedes other callings mentioned in the church order, with the ecumenical and diaconal calling being particularly important in the context of this policy paper. All three callings have their own theological foundation, are distinguishable, but cannot be separated from or played off against each other. They actually raise two important questions: who is the church and what does the church do?

When this church order article I,7 speaks about the 'unrelinquishable connectedness with the people of Israel', this concerns the theological understanding of God's journey with Israel as the Jewish people, in past, present and future. Biblical-theological notions are included in this, such as that of God's covenant with Abraham and with the Jewish people, God's

abiding election of the people of Israel with regard to the nations. A separate question is that of the interpretation and translation of the land promise. 'The people of Israel' is primarily a theological concept, Jews themselves are more likely to speak of the Jewish people or of Judaism (broadly understood: religious, ethnic and cultural). This resonates with notions of Biblical Israel (Israelites), Judaism through the ages, and contemporary living Judaism.

What the kingdom of God stands for is a subject of discussion and living encounter, between Jews and Christians, and also between Christians themselves. The kingdom is central to Jesus' teaching, with distinct roots in the Old (First) Testament. Torah and prophets, evangelists and apostles give substance to this, but even then there is still much room for interpretation from one's own context and history. In any case, a number of key words emerge: God's faithfulness and promises, law and justice, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, God's power in present and future. With God's kingdom, all creation comes into view, all life, all people. The vision statement 'Van U is de toekomst' (The future is Yours) speaks in this context about *missio Dei*: 'Without the creative power of God's Spirit, there is no life, no church. The Spirit is the driving force behind the *missio Dei*, the work of God in this world. That is why, the church prays throughout the centuries.' (p.35)

Missio Dei does not refer exclusively to the world church. There is the thought and belief behind it that God can inspire people, in their own ways and their own traditions, in his movement in our world. God and his kingdom are already present in our world and are coming to us. Biblically, this universal movement takes shape in the calling of Abraham, in the election of Israel as a people and in the call of Jesus to be a light for all people, with and from Israel. Jews and non-Jews are called to participate in the same movement, with the Spirit as the driving force.

3.3 As pilgrims on the way

In this policy paper, we choose the term 'pilgrims onderweg' (pilgrims on the move). The first (Jewish) Christians were called pilgrims 'who belonged to the Way' (Acts 9:2). 'Being on the move' and 'the way of Jesus' are linked to the concept of pilgrimage. It refers to being on the way to and from God's future and kingdom. We are invited to be travelling as pilgrims, moving with God's Spirit, looking for signs of God's kingdom. And all this in the footsteps of the people of Israel, in the footsteps of Jesus. That is why, the

Taizé Brothers speak of 'a pilgrimage of trust'. This includes the realisation that all people form one single family and that God lives in every person. This pilgrimage is not only an inward journey (inner life), but also a journey outwards: a search for peace and reconciliation in one's own environment. The World Council of Churches, too, invites churches to follow suit. During the last General Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2023, the call was made to start a pilgrimage of 'Justice, Reconciliation and Unity': to join in celebrating life and taking concrete steps towards transforming injustice and violence. This was a follow-up to the call from the General Assembly in Busan in 2013 for a pilgrimage of 'Justice and Peace': to celebrate what God has given everyone as a gift; to meet people (and all life: all of creation) in a vulnerable position and to recognise their wounds. And to take concrete steps to combat and transform injustice and violence.

In this policy paper, we focus on this particular pilgrimage in our journey with Jews and Palestinians, including Palestinian Christians. To be clear: the terms pilgrims and pilgrimage are Christian concepts of a movement for which Jews and Muslims will choose other words.

In order to walk this pilgrimage together, we are dependent on the other's experience and perception. Are we seen as a reliable ally by Jewish and Palestinian Christian partners? Is there the feeling and conviction that the Christian heart really beats for what is going on in Jewish and Palestinian Christian communities? That is also part of being a pilgrim: realizing that you can miss a crossing, that you take a wrong path, that you do not hear or see the other person. And that, as soon as you realise that, you turn around.

3.4 Three movements

From these pilgrim perspectives, we have chosen three movements that are further elaborated on in this document: the first focusing on what is gifted, the second on what is painfully uprooting and must also be named as such, and the third on what can be transformed in a healing manner.

- Living and celebrating together with difference
- Living with wounds
- Working together to heal life

These are not logically consecutive steps in a fixed order, but movements in which the sequence can vary. With a view to the Jewish-Christian relations and the relations with Palestinians and Palestinian Christians, these movements are each given substance.

IV Living and celebrating together with difference

4.1 Distinctive relations

Our relationships with Jews and Jewish communities on the one hand and with Palestinian and other Christians on the other, are distinct relationships that must be kept distinct. They each have their own theological foundation and raise their own issues. You cannot lump them under one heading: Jewish-Christian relations and ecumenical relations. And they, in turn, are to be kept distinct from our relationships with Muslims and others. That is not a matter of more or less, but of recognising the different forms of relationships. Ultimately, it's about human relationships. We are all human beings, created in the image of God. God cares for the whole world and all life. Jewish-Christian relations and ecumenical relations always focus on the bigger picture: creation, election, reconciliation and God's kingdom. As the vision statement 'The future is Yours' says: 'as children of one Father'.

4.2 Relations with Jews and Jewish communities (see Part II: II and IV)

First, we focus on the relationships of Christians with Jewish communities. They are special and unique because of shared Scriptures, a shared history of origin and shared core values. Christians share in the expectation, given to Israel, of God's kingdom. There is the belief in the same God of Israel, although approaches are different. There is a growing realization among both Christians and Jews, that Jesus and his direct followers and later Paul are Jews who belong to the Judaism of that time. And that Jesus and Paul can only be understood in connection with the Jewish people.

From these common origins in the multicoloured Judaism of the first century, both the Rabbinic Judaism and the Christian traditions developed in an intricate, complex relationship to each other. That has become a history of rapprochement and distancing, of unimaginable suffering and pain, and of sometimes close relationships and friendship. There have been phases and periods of living together, but also of anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism, persecution and destruction.

Certain core Biblical values are shared by both traditions, although these too are commented on and interpreted differently. Such as justice and peace (shalom), individual and communal responsibility, the commission to live according to God's will, trust in God (emunah), God's kingdom (malkuth). And although there is a certain kinship, both communities often live alongside each other without truly connecting or understanding one another. In times of great tension, such as after October 7th, 2023, this comes to the surface, alongside strong solidarity. It then takes courage and perseverance to keep finding each other, with a sincere desire to understand the intentions of the other.

It is important and necessary for the church to (continue to) relate to her Jewish roots. The Christian faith is not imaginable without it being rooted in Judaism. This also means that the church continues to seek encounters with living Judaism.

A number of theological questions arise in the encounter with Judaism, including:

- the lasting significance of God's covenant with the people of Israel
- the land promise and the interpretation thereof
- the vision on the meaning of Torah, Law and Gospel
- the lasting significance of Jesus as a Jew
- the shift from mission to dialogue in Jewish-Christian relations

This will be further elaborated on in Part II. It is important to note that the encounter with Judaism also has value in itself, regardless of its significance for the Christian faith or for the self-understanding of the church. Jews are not instrumental for the church. The relationship is of intrinsic importance.

4.3 Lessons from contemporary Jewish-Christian encounters

In contemporary Jewish-Christian encounters, a lot of work has already been done and yet there is sometimes the feeling that we are still at the beginning. There are times when there is a lot of mutual contact and understanding, and times when the relationships are under strain. The situation

in Israel and Palestine can put everything under pressure, while at other moments much support can be experienced as well. Jewish-Christian encounters occur in many ways, in organized meetings, nationally and locally, during celebrations or important (memorial) moments, but also in the daily practice of living together. What connects us and what can we celebrate? What are the differences, where does friction occur? What can we learn from each other? How can we work together, for example in the fight against anti-Semitism and extreme polarization? Some of the dialogue lessons learned, which are also important in encounters with others, are:

- Jews and Christians face the challenge of reshaping the tradition in which they stand, in their own time and age, with its own questions, problems and dilemmas.
- If you allow and try to understand the other's perspective, it changes your self-understanding. Being human always involves relationships with others.
- You are first and foremost an individual Jew or Christian with your own history and background, and only then a representative of an entire tradition.
- The dialogue between Jews and Christians deals with key issues of life and can significantly influence public discourse.
- The Swedish Lutheran theologian and bishop Krister Stendahl (1921-2008) set several rules for dialogue. Such as: do not let the positive appreciation for your own faith be accompanied by a negative assessment of others. Don't get your information about someone else from those who oppose them. Show the value of your faith through your actions.
- Dialogue is always contextual. There is no single model of encounter. Dialogue takes shape in a multitude of situations and is conducted by a wide diversity of people, each from their own specific context.

4.4 Relations with Messianic Jews (see Part II: IV)

A separate and special group worth mentioning is that of the Messianic Jews or Jewish followers of Jesus. Messianic Jews often have a difficult position: Judaism often does not recognise them as Jewish, and Christian churches do not always seriously regard them as Christians. For a long time, there was also a reluctance to build relationships with them, so as not to disrupt the fragile relationship with the Jewish community in the Netherlands. There is

homework here for the Protestant Church. How do we want to relate to Messianic Jews? What could a relationship with them look like? How can the church pay attention to Jewish followers of Jesus? Their voice can play a role, whether it concerns reflection on the relationship between Israel and the church, insight into and combating anti-Semitism, or equipping congregations to encounter Israel. And apart from that, it is about meeting them in their own right.

4.5 Ecumenical relations with Palestinian and other Christians (see Part II: V)

The ecumenical relationships with fellow Christians are motivated in the church order by the idea and conviction that the Protestant Church is a form of the 'one holy apostolic and catholic or general Christian Church', and is therefore called to seek and promote unity, communion and cooperation with other churches of Jesus Christ. The church is part of the whole, which is referred to by the Biblical-theological term 'Body of Christ'. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:12: 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.' When one part suffers, the other suffers too. When one part has joy, the other shares in that joy. The vision statement of the Protestant Church 'The future is Yours' puts it this way: 'As the body of Christ, the church is a sign and instrument of the connection between God and his world. In the church, we learn to live by God's grace and are shaped as God's people with regard to our role in society.' (p.24)

In the context of this policy paper, the relations with Palestinian and other Christians in Israel and Palestine are of particular importance. The Protestant Church, through Kerk in Actie (its department for mission and diakonia), has relationships with both Jewish and Palestinian partners in Israel and Palestine. In addition, there are ecclesiastical ties of shared confession with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). These are - in addition to Kerk in Actie - also maintained by the Lutheran Synod on behalf of the Protestant Church. Through the Lutheran World Federation, the Protestant Church has pulpit and communion fellowship with the ELCJHL. There are also Palestinian Christians in the Netherlands, but the Protestant Church has so far sought little or no contact with them. There may be a task here.

The Jewish roots of the Christian faith are also of essential significance for Palestinian Christians as Christ-confessing faith communities. They too cannot deny that Jesus is a Jew, rooted in the Jewish tradition of the first century. For them too, there are theological questions surrounding God's covenant with Israel, the interpretation of the land promise, the relationship between Torah and Gospel, the meaning of Jesus and the perspective on *missio Dei*. At the same time, their specific context means that they ask different questions and have different approaches. In doing so, they ask us questions that we should relate to.

The lessons from the Jewish-Christian dialogue also apply to the internal Christian dialogue: taking the other seriously, assuming the integrity of the other, trying to understand the other from their own questions, experiences and context.

While we continually focus here on relations with Palestinian Christians, we must be careful not to drive a wedge between them and the Palestinian people. In Part II, we take a closer look at Palestinian and other marginalised Christians in Israel and Palestine.

V Living with wounds

5.1 The wounds of Jesus

Very painful wounds and traumas come to light in church relations with Jews and Jewish communities as well as with Palestinians. Wounds that also have an impact on mutual relationships. Very important in any relationship is the recognition of the pain and suffering. The other person wants to be heard and seen. The church is not a neutral outsider. The church herself is involved in or responsible for some of these deep wounds. It is therefore important that we also look in our own mirror, to explore our own wounds and our own discomfort, in order to deal with it in a good way. Recognition of the other person's wounds and self-examination go hand in hand.

As a church, we orientate ourselves on what the Bible offers. Here we mention three Biblical concepts that can help us to deal with pain and suffering with integrity, realizing that we often fail to truly understand what deeply affects the other person.

In Exodus the LORD says: 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings' (Exodus 3:7). Just before that, the ONE has announced Himself to Moses as 'the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'. It does not stop at hearing and seeing. God takes action and descends to liberate and to bring the people to a land where they can live. Hearing and seeing the misery, recognizing the deep suffering, connecting with one's ancestors, establishing relations, showing sympathy (co-suffering) and standing up for liberation are herewith important notions. God remains faithful to his people, that is the message of the Torah and Prophets.

The Christian faith centers on Jesus Christ, his path of suffering, death and resurrection. In the Gospel of John (20:24-29) it is told that Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, wants to see the wounds of the nails in Jesus' hands and feel them with his fingers in order to believe. Jesus invites him to touch his wounds. One of the interpretations of this Gospel passage is that the wounds are not wiped out, but remain visible in the body of the risen Christ and are simultaneously healed. This provides a powerful

impetus to see the wounds of others and ourselves in the light of God's healing grace.

Perhaps an even better image is what Paul writes to the Galatians: 'For I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body' (Galatians 6:17). These words may refer to his commitment to the gospel, with the result that he experienced injustice, oppression and suffering. We cannot expect Jews to recognise themselves in this image, but Palestinian Christians often do. The Biblically-inspired commitment to justice and peace might face resistance by others, and may cause suffering and injustice to the people who engage themselves. Paul teaches to bear these marks and wounds with one's head held high and not to resign oneself in the face of opposition.

5.2 Different narratives

In the past period, building on decades of contacts, relationships and partnerships from the national church, discussions have been held with partners in Israel and Palestine as well as various organizations, consultative bodies and individuals in the Netherlands. There was a lot of listening and questions were asked. It became clear how widely analyses, impressions, beliefs and perspectives differ. There are different narratives next to or opposed to each other. By narrative we mean a meaningful story: a story that describes the norms, values and beliefs of a group, culture or society, and which tells the resilience as well as the traumas and wounds. It is also about the interpretation of what has taken place in history, about property rights and therefore about very concrete and physical matters. How one sees and defines oneself and how one describes the context in which one lives, varies enormously. This applies to Jews and Palestinians, but also to us, within the church. Reality is always more complex and layered than the stories and narratives with which we see ourselves and with which we shape our identity.

In the context of Israel and Palestine, it is extremely difficult for Jews and Palestinians to adopt the perspective of the other. This shortcoming also occurs in the Dutch context: we seem to talk alongside each other about these topics, without really understanding each other. It remains a universally human as well as ecclesiastical task

and calling: learn to listen to the traumas of others and make room for your own discomfort. We can learn this, among others, from the example of the prophets, who name the pain of the people and the injustice in very concrete terms and, in so doing, dare to expose the failure of leaders. And of Jesus, who sees and lifts up people in all their vulnerability, yet can also speak boldly to leaders who oppress others. What we are looking for as a church is our own narrative, in which there is room for the wounds and traumas of others, Jews and Palestinians, as well as ourselves. In which we sincerely address the questions they ask us, and express our own role in these wounds. Then we can also make clear how we can show solidarity in concrete ways. There are plenty of pitfalls - historical, religious, theological, psychological and existential - when it comes to Jews and Palestinian Christians, and our relationships with them. Too much has happened, there are too many traumas, too many conflicting interests. This can teach the church modesty and restraint, but it does not imply that the church remains silent. The question always remains: how can we navigate this complexity without locking ourselves into fixed viewpoints, but instead listen to and learn from each other's perspectives? It is an ongoing practice to keep listening to the Word and to discern what God wants from us. Prayer plays a crucial role in this process.

5.3 The Jewish narrative of wounds (see Part II: IV)

Although there is no one Jewish story, nor one Palestinian story or one Christian story, we can identify several sore points that repeatedly emerge in one way or another during the dialogues and meetings. These are certainly also sore points in mutual relationships, for which the churches and the Christian tradition are to blame. Here we mention some distressing wounds, without trying to be exhaustive. After all, it is not up to us to determine what the wounds are; that is for those who are wounded. Moreover, new wounds can continue to be added. Which wounds are there that are still incredibly painful and that determine the relationships until now?

- The centuries-long history of anti-Judaism and anti-Jewish images in Christian traditions, theology and liturgy.
- The experience as Jews of not being valued as such, but being viewed instrumentally (that is to say, Jews fulfill a function in Christian theology).

- The centuries-old history of anti-Semitism in all societies in which Jews have lived or live.
- The ambivalent attitude of society and churches towards the Jewish community in the Second World War and the shortcomings in providing support to Jews who returned after 1945.
- Contemporary anti-Semitism, which has increased partly as a result of the polarisation stirred by the war between Israel and Hamas (from October 2023 onwards).
- Partly as a result of this war, feeling unsafe in one's own country, hiding Jewish identity signs (e.g. kippah).
- Judging or settling scores with Jews in the Netherlands and elsewhere due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- The experience of being abandoned by society and sometimes also by the churches, because Jews in the Netherlands are held responsible for the actions of the government and army of the State of Israel.
- The recent new and deep wound of October 7th, 2023, the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel, and the very deep impact on Jewish communities in Israel itself and worldwide.
- The existential threat, that many Jews experience, to their continued existence as a people, along with the fear of losing the State of Israel's right to exist.

The Jewish community cannot and does not want to be reduced to a community with traumas and wounds. It wants to be understood as a living, contemporary, resilient Judaism (broadly understood as religion, culture, people). In the synagogue and the liturgical prayers (siddur), the longing for the land and for Jerusalem plays an important role. They often see themselves as a continuation of the Biblical nation of Israel, with an inseparable bond with the land. For many, this has taken concrete form in the State of Israel.

5.4 The Palestinian narrative of wounds (see Part II: V)

The Palestinian (Christian) communities also do not want to be reduced to a history of pain and wounds. They too have resilient (church) communities, even though these are becoming smaller and smaller. Palestinian Christians and others (including many Jews) have a deep desire for a society in which all residents can live together in dignity, equality and security. There is a cry in Palestine for the right to have its own state. Which wounds are there that are

still incredibly painful to this day, and that determine the relationships to this day?

- The wound of the occupation, the deprivation, the injustice and the daily humiliations in the West Bank and being second-class citizens in Israel, referred to by many as apartheid.
- The wound caused by the loss of land to settlers, which makes the prospect of a separate Palestinian state seem increasingly distant.
- The often unconditional Christian expressions of support for the State of Israel, while ignoring the situation in which the Palestinian people find themselves.
- Being overlooked by tourists and pilgrims, and having the age-old bond with the land go unrecognized.
- Failing Palestinian leadership, corruption, increasing extremism and gun violence.
- The recent wound of the war between Israel and Hamas and the devastating consequences for Gaza, the Palestinian civilians and infrastructure, which has been described by many as genocide.
- The despair regarding the position of certain churches and the sense of abandonment, including by our Protestant Church.
- The wound of the Nakba ('the Catastrophe' of 1948), which the Palestinians experience as enduring to the present day.
- The wound of the colonial past, of Western feelings of superiority towards the Arab countries and their inhabitants (including in the church).
- The wound that the indigenous contextual Palestinian theology is barely recognised, and often dismissed as replacement theology and/or anti-Semitic.
- The existential threat of not being able to exist as Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank (Palestine).

5.5 Call to be heard, cry for justice

We hear this cry from both the Jewish and Palestinian sides. One cry cannot be compared to another, nor does one cry diminish the other. Experiences vary widely, especially after October 7th, 2023.

On the Jewish side, people often do not feel seen or recognized in the suffering caused by anti-Semitism and terrorism. That solidarity after the traumatic events of October 7th has quickly changed in public opinion, has been met with incomprehension. That Israel is condemned by

various countries, organizations or legal authorities, is often not understood. Jews in the Netherlands and elsewhere are held responsible for the actions of the government and army of the State of Israel. The latter can be seen as a form of anti-Semitism.

From the Palestinian Christian side there is a clear cry in the Kairos document, released in 2009, in which the global church was directly addressed (see Part II: 1.2). According to the Kairos document, the hour of truth has arrived. Their cry for justice, Biblically founded, must be heard. The war in Gaza and the events in the West Bank (land confiscation, settler violence) have amplified this cry. At the same time, from a Palestinian Christian perspective, there is the pain that their commitment to peace is being overshadowed by Palestinian terrorist violence. For more, see Part II.

5.6 Courage to recognise wounds

It takes courage to face the wounds of our world and see them from the perspective of the Christian faith. As a church we are called to see and acknowledge these wounds. We must also face the church's own role and own wounds. Living and celebrating together with difference is empty and meaningless if the pain and traumas cannot be named.

Wounds are related to injustice. The Biblical stories and texts expose many unjust situations. God himself is angry at injustice, and the prophets point out religious, social and political injustice. When Jesus speaks about the kingdom of God, he is also talking about how injustice can be transformed, how people can come into their rightful place before God. By concretely naming injustice, space is provided for feelings of fear, anger, disappointment and sadness. People cannot be reduced to their wounds and traumas. The body is more than the wounds. In this way, one can learn from the resilience and spirit of people in sometimes impossible situations. No matter how wounded or vulnerable, people can rise up, embrace life with strength, and stand against anything that degrades them. At the same time, the traumas continue to play a role in those who are affected, and continue to do so through generations. As a church, sensitive modesty, discernment, self-knowledge, listening skills as well as boldness and courage are appropriate here: the courage to name injustice and to stand up for those who are being beaten.

5.7 Looking in one's own mirror (zie deel II, III)

These wounds also affect ourselves. It makes us look in our own mirror. What was/is our own role? What are our own wounds? What wounds have we inflicted? This confronts us with our own inability and discomfort. Some things we should have done better, some steps we have neglected to take, sometimes we don't know how to act, sometimes we are torn between different interests and desires. And, it must also be said, sometimes we ourselves are guilty of the wounds and traumas of both Jews and Palestinians, including Palestinian Christians. It takes courage to accept our own share of the blame, to look at our own role and, where necessary, to admit and confess guilt.

In the Jewish-Christian relations it is important that the church acknowledges that

- anti-Judaism in exegesis, liturgy, dogmatic reflection and theology has contributed to an unjustified image of Jews and has therefore destroyed much in the relationships;
- the church helped prepare the fertile ground in which the seeds of anti-Semitism and hatred could grow;
- seeing Jews as objects of mission has done injustice to how Jews have understood themselves;
- the excessive embracing and cherishing of Jews (philo-Semitism) has equally not done justice to their self-understanding ('We are ordinary people and want to be left in peace');
- ignoring the pain and trauma of Jews - or down-playing it by comparing it to other suffering - undermines trust in the church as a reliable partner.

With regard to Palestinians and Palestinian Christians, it is important that the church acknowledges that

- too often the suffering of Palestinians, due to deprivation, injustice and exclusion, has been ignored;

- Palestinian and other local Christians in Israel and Palestine are hardly seen by Christian churches and by pilgrims in the Holy Land;
- there has been little or no theological reflection on the ecumenical and ecclesiastical bond that we as a church have with Palestinian Christians;
- Palestinian theological reflection has been too readily dismissed as forms of replacement theology, without seeing in which context theology is being practiced;
- a Western attitude of superiority can be adopted too quickly or can be experienced as such ('We don't want your charity, we want to be taken seriously');
- the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also touches on the question of power dynamics in past and present: the role of colonialism in the establishment of the State of Israel, colonial actions by the state/ government of Israel now.

This process of looking in the mirror touches on deep emotions and also stirs up many emotions. 'Emotion' is not a superficial word. It comes from the Latin *emovere*, which refers to movement, to being moved by something that deeply affects you. Emotions influence everything, including theology and choices that are made. Recognizing the deep emotions of others is incredibly important, as is recognizing our own deep emotions.

Looking in the mirror can make us feel uncomfortable, but we must learn to bear that discomfort and take responsibility. In short, we must engage with our own theology and history - including their excesses - and learn from them how these wounds can be healed. Moreover, we must have the courage to move beyond neutrality. This means being willing to name injustice - no matter from which side it comes. In doing so, it is important to share the concrete stories of Palestinians and Jews, stories that also make an appeal to us.

VI Working together to heal life

6.1 Steps on the pilgrim way: God's Spirit on the move

What have we done so far? After some introductory explorations (focus on relationships, enduring the tension, exploring where we come from as church, finding an orientation point in the kingdom of God, the image of pilgrimage), we have outlined in two movements what is gifted (living and celebrating together) and what is painfully uprooting (living with wounds). The third movement is about what can be beneficially transformed. What steps can and should be taken specifically? When signs of God's kingdom become visible in our world, what small contributions can we as a church make along the way (as pilgrims)?

The tendency can be to jump immediately into action mode (or refrain from doing so). On the spiritual path the pair of concepts 'active' and 'contemplative' plays a major role. Often this is played off against each other or seen as a contradiction. Wrongly so. The active and the contemplative path presuppose and reinforce each other. Martha (the energetic diaconal hand, commitment to law and justice) and Mary (praying and listening, loosely translated: ecumenically connected) belong together, both are needed. In other words: the prophetic speaking and acting of the church go hand in hand with being a praying community. The church can be powerfully present, based on an open and receptive attitude toward God's Spirit.

If we join in the healing and connecting movement of God's Spirit, injustice can be turned into hope and future, and we can continue to search for what is healing and connecting.

6.2 Biblical perspective: turning injustice into hope and future

The prophet Isaiah speaks in an impressive prophecy about righteous kings and leaders who will lead according to justice. He also outlines the opposite. All this has consequences for ordinary people and for the country. Everything falls apart if the country is not managed well.

*[So it will remain] until a spirit from on high is poured out on us,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.
Then justice will dwell in the wilderness
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
The effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.
(Isaiah 32:15-17)*

The text in Isaiah portrays the vision that the people of Israel will live in an oasis of peace, a safe dwelling place, a place of rest and peace of mind, and that the forest of the enemy will be ravaged by hail. Living in the land is connected here with the concepts of law, justice and peace. And with the Spirit of God. The creative and driving power of God's Spirit (*missio Dei*) brings about a new reality.

This Bible text can be read completely differently in diverse contexts. A Jewish reading ('this text is about us') can be different from a Christian one in the Dutch context ('we read along with the Jewish people and we can also apply this text to ourselves'). A Palestinian Christian reading can put the finger on the concepts of law and justice, and can also apply this text to the Palestinian people ('we too live in the land and the Spirit can be poured out on us too'). The Bible invites us, Jews and Christians, to discuss with each other what texts like these mean in the light of God's kingdom. Who is being referred to here? Can we apply this text to ourselves? What does law mean in the context where you live? To whom should justice be done? What does this say about our leaders? What needs to be done to create oases of peace?

This Biblical vision invites us to share stories of specific forms of injustice that people experience in their lives, whether it is the story of Tent of Nations (Area C, Westbank) in a setting of land confiscation, the story of hostages who were kidnapped on October 7th, or the stories of migrant workers in Israel.

6.3 Seeking what is healing and connecting

As this policy paper shows, this is not a conversation without obligation. By conversation, we mean encounters in different ways. It is a deeply and

sometimes painfully confrontational encounter that exposes many wounds. And which raises the question: what next? In light of the foregoing, this is about turning injustice into hope and future, about recognizing wounds as the beginning of a process of healing and connection.

'Big' words such as peace, reconciliation, hope and justice need to be translated into practice. The church needs to start moving again and continue the quest (after all, we are not starting from scratch) for what is healing and connecting. And that is not easy. Because what is healing for one person can be disturbing for another. When specific forms of injustice are pointed out that are experienced by one person, this can make the other angry. As a church we have had meaningful partner relationships in Israel and Palestine for many years. In dialogue projects we see in very concrete terms how wounds and emotions are named, how incredibly difficult and painful that is, but also how extremely important. It is important that these detailed stories are shared more often. The same applies to our relationships with Palestinian Christian partners. How do they try to give concrete form to their Christian faith, based on the values of the kingdom? What kind of stories can be shared? If you want to maintain meaningful relationships with both Jews and Palestinian Christians as a church, there will be friction and clashes, internally and externally. The choice in favour of one can be seen as a betrayal of the other, and vice versa.

6.4 Steps

This asks for the start of a longer process in the coming years, which will require courage and vulnerability. It is a process in which we will be quiet at certain moments, have to listen, have to acknowledge that we are often embarrassed and look for an answer. We let the raw reality enter, with all the discomfort that entails. We cannot hide behind nice words. With this attitude of vulnerability and boldness, space can be created for what is really important to us as church: the values of the kingdom of God. Movement is possible in that space. After all, we have embarked on a journey together as pilgrims. We don't stand still. We speak out or take action when we see injustice being done to creation. At the same time, we remain students (disciples) who always have more to learn. That is why, it remains important that we continually mirror what God has in mind for his people and for all of creation. As Jews and Christians, we need each other, as pilgrims on the way to God's kingdom of peace and justice.

Some of the steps mentioned here need to be taken in parallel, while others are ongoing. Certain steps focus on theological reflection and study, while others are more concerned with concepts like law and justice - which can also carry theological significance.

Step 1: *Praying for the peace of Jerusalem*

Prayer is part of the essence of the church. It is at the same time a gift, a task and a way of surrendering. It is both intimate and focused on broader connections. Prayer is relational. In the context of this policy paper, praying for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122) is not a simple matter. It is sensitive and makes one vulnerable. It causes embarrassment in many local congregations, or it leads to one-sided choices. Praying for the peace of Jerusalem can bring Jews and Christians together and deeply divide them, including internally. Seen from the choices in this policy paper, praying for the peace of Jerusalem concerns all her inhabitants: Jewish, Palestinian and others. Prayer is not the place for taking positions, but is focused on praise, thanksgiving and intercession, and can also express the cry for justice. More attention needs to be given to prayer.

Step 2: *Reflecting on the relationship with Judaism and standing up for Jews and the Jewish community*

Many lessons have been learned in Jewish-Christian relations in recent decades. This has influenced theology, exegesis and liturgy. We cannot turn back on certain achievements and discoveries. That does not mean that we are done with theological reflection. New theological and existential questions arise, new contexts come about. In the coming years, we want to give new impetus to reflection on questions surrounding the church's relationship with Judaism, while also examining different types of Israel theology. How did they emerge and what does this mean for the future of the church in the Netherlands, also with regard to her own identity? This dialogue cannot take place in a vacuum: theology is always linked to context. This means that we also have to look beyond borders. In practical terms: that we translate insights from international dialogue movements, such as the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), to local congregations. In all of this, we must also have the courage to look in the mirror and confront difficult questions.

It is important and also a calling of the church to stand with the Jewish community in the Netherlands, in Israel and elsewhere, and to be in solidarity with our Jewish partners in Israel and to

stand up for them, certainly in times when they are under pressure from anti-Semitic threats or attacks. The church owes this to itself, because of faith, theology, history and context. And simply because of humanity. The church must be a reliable partner. As such, you should be able to engage in critical dialogue with one another and openly ask honest questions. It is important to seek cooperation with other allies in the Netherlands, together with the Jewish community, against anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism, and growing polarization, and for a society where there is safety and space for everyone. This is, of course, a responsibility for the national church. Moreover, a new impetus will be given to translate this calling into practical study resources for local congregations in the coming years.

Step 3: Reflecting on the ecumenical relations with Palestinian Christians and standing up for Palestinians

Palestinian churches and Christians are an integral part of the Christian ecumenical movement. Their voices must also be heard in this context. We need to face what the ecumenical relationship with them means. Palestinian Christians and theologians want to be taken seriously. They want to be heard because of their own experiences and context with injustice. In addition, the Protestant Church should encourage church groups to meet with local Christian congregations when travelling to the Holy Land. Not only the dead stones of the imposing buildings and churches, but also the living stones of the (increasingly smaller) communities are worth visiting. In the coming years, more actions will be taken to better highlight the stories of Palestinian Christians in local congregations.

It is equally important and also a calling of the church to stand with Palestinians and stand up for them, certainly in times when they are under pressure and their rights are violated through deprivation, humiliation, the unlawful expropriation of land and property, and occupation. The church must also be a reliable partner for them. The contours of the kingdom of God become visible in doing justice to the victims of injustice. In this regard, the church should refrain from hiding behind ambiguous language. Open and critical dialogue must remain possible. In all of this, we must also dare to look in the mirror and confront painful questions. We aim to hold this dialogue at various levels - local churches, national platforms, and universities.

Step 4: Enduring the tension, learning to cope with polarisation

Out of genuine compassion for Israel and Jews on the one hand or Palestinian Christians and Palestinians on the other, camps emerge that often no longer speak the same language, no longer listen to one another, and between which genuine dialogue has become impossible. There is a danger that a middle group will arise, observing with confusion and eventually retreating into indifference. It is important to endure the tension of the different callings - that of giving shape to the unrelinquishable connectedness with the people of Israel, the ecumenical calling to seek communion and cooperation with Palestinian and other Christians, and the diaconal calling. Endurance is a spiritual quality that can be practiced. It is a value in and of itself. It is certainly different from 'keeping the church in the middle' in the sense of not making choices, not taking sides. The point of this policy paper is that the Protestant Church does indeed choose: in favor of relations with both Jews and Palestinian Christians. And the church takes sides with those who experience persecution and injustice, realizing that she is sometimes guilty of this herself. Enduring the tension is also an exercise in how to deal with the deep polarization surrounding this topic and to support initiatives aimed at reconciliation, encounter and understanding. Study resources will have to be developed for congregations to learn and practice this.

Step 5: Standing up for law and justice

It is part of the essence of the church to stand up for law and justice. What law and justice truly mean is not always clear, but leading are the voices of people affected by injustice and who suffer as a result of it. As a church, we first orient ourselves according to the teachings of the Bible. Additionally, human rights play a crucial role. As a church, we refer to what is laid down in international treaties and human rights (we have nothing better in interpersonal relationships). The church's first task is to listen attentively and without judgment, and to give voice to those who suffer. They might be Jews, Palestinian Christians, or others. In some situations this may include public speaking (see step 7). When dealing with questions of law and justice, we are also challenged to look in our own mirror and ask ourselves probing questions. To what extent have our theological views contributed to injustice against both Jews and Palestinians? How does theology relate to international law and human rights, and what does this mean for

our vision, statements and actions? In the coming years, various models will be developed for local congregations that can help with questions related to law and justice. In addition, the national church will continue to invest in its relations with Jewish and Palestinian Christian partners.

Step 6: *Better cooperation with and communication about our (dialogue) partners*

In recent years, it has often not been made clear to the wider church who are our (dialogue) partners at the national level and with whom we have entered into partnerships and why. This can be done much better. In Israel and Palestine, Kerk in Actie has entered into partnerships based on a diaconal, missionary and ecumenical approach. It can be explored whether the 'Kerk & Israël' (Church & Israel) department can enter into partnerships with Jewish institutions in Israel, with the focus on Jewish-Christian dialogue and the encounter with living Judaism. Partnership also

means that there is reciprocity on the basis of equality. This allows for a committed and critical dialogue in both directions. We must take to heart the questions raised by both Jewish and Palestinian Christian voices concerning recognition and justice.

Step 7: *Public speaking*

In some situations, the Protestant Church must be able to speak clearly and unequivocally. With regard to Jews and Palestinian Christians, this is the case in situations of:

- human rights violations;
- anti-Semitism and discrimination in any form;
- occupation, oppression and deprivation;
- terrorism and attacks;
- threat and insecurity.

In short, where the values of the Kingdom are at stake, where law and justice are trampled upon, where peace is further away than ever.

Part II

More elaborate
and in-depth

I Ongoing reflection: church orders, synod reports and study resources¹

How are relations with Jews and Palestinians discussed in church documents? And how is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict addressed? This chapter first examines how the Protestant Church and its predecessors have addressed this issue, followed by a look at how it is discussed internationally. It is striking that the majority of the documents are theological in design and content, and focus mainly on the Jewish roots of the Christian faith and Jewish-Christian relations. Only gradually more attention has been paid to Palestinians and Palestinian Christian theology

1.1 In the Netherlands: first steps

The Protestant Church builds on decades of reflection on the relationship with the people of Israel, the Jewish roots of the Christian faith and Jewish-Christian relations. That Judaism is more than a stepping stone to Christianity was stated by K.H. Miskotte (1894-1976) as one of the first to clearly bring this to the fore in theological reflection.² The relationship with Palestinian Christians has received much less attention, although the Old Testament scholar Th.C. Vriezen (1899-1979) already at an early stage had an eye for both Jews and Arabs, first in the mandate area of Palestine and later in the Jewish State of Israel. There are many names of pioneers in the field of Church and Israel and Jewish-Christian relations, who by the way each had their own and sometimes divergent views.³ In addition, there are various bodies, such as the *Raad voor de Verhouding van Kerk en Israël van de Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* (Council for the Relations between Church and Israel of the Dutch Reformed Church, NHK), the deputies of the *Werelddiaconaat van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (World Diaconate of the Reformed Churches in the

Netherlands, GKN) and the *Interkerkelijk Contact Israël* (Interchurch Contact Israel, ICI) and somewhat later the Council (Platform) of Christians and Jews. (OJEC). While the Council for the Relations between Church and Israel and the ICI were mainly concerned with theological reflection, the deputies focused mainly on worldwide diakonia. Through their involvement, they came to see that fundamental human rights were at stake, which led them to take a particularly critical stance toward the State of Israel in their 1981 report 'De Palestijnen en de staat Israël' (The Palestinians and the State of Israel).

Nothing comparable has been done in terms of ecumenical relations with Palestinian Christians. At the same time, Palestinian theologians such as Naim Sifan Ateek, Mitri Raheb, and later Yohanna Katanacho and Munther Isaac made their voices heard more and more clearly. They also relate in their own way to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, but from their own context they have a critical relationship with the State of Israel.

From 'Fundamenten en perspectieven van belijden' (Fundamentals and Perspectives of Confessing) 1949 to 'Israël - volk, land en staat' (Israel - People, Country and State) 1970

We limit ourselves here to synodal expressions, in which the Dutch Reformed Church in particular has taken the lead. The report 'Fundamenten en perspectieven van belijden' (1949), in preparation for the new Dutch Reformed church order, mentions the abiding place of Israel in the confession of the church. In 1949, the Dutch Reformed synod decided to establish an 'Israel Sunday', focusing on the 'place and future of the Jewish people in the way of salvation of the Kingdom of God'. Since 1950, the first Sunday in October has been Israel Sunday. The Reformed Churches followed from 1985, followed by the Lutherans in 1988. In the Dutch Reformed

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1. See also 'Het debat over de staat Israël in de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland' (The debate about the state Israel in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands) by René de Reuver and Eeuwout Klootwijk, *Kerk en Theologie*, 75.2 (2024) 207-218.
 2. *Het wezen der Joodse religie* (The essence of the Jewish religion), 1932, Edda en Thora (*Edda and Thora*), 1939. This was also a reaction to the national socialism on the rise in Germany.
 3. To mention some: K.H. Miskotte, J. Schoneveld, H. Berkhof, E. Flesseman van Leer, G.C. van Niftrik, A.A. van Ruler, O. Noordmans, A.A. Spijkerboer, K. Kroon, C.W. Mönnich, J.M. Hasselaar, S. Gerssen, J.P. Boendermaker, W. Bleij, G.H. Cohen Stuart, H. Vreekamp, S. Schoon, A. Houtman.

church order of 1951, 'the dialogue with Israel' was mentioned for the first time: the people of Israel are not included in 'the work of mission'. In 1959, the Dutch Reformed report 'Israël en de Kerk' (Israel and the Church) was published, focusing on the roots of anti-Semitism and the questions raised by the founding of the State of Israel. In the meantime, the contours of a theology after Auschwitz are emerging. How can you speak theologically after the indescribable? Which theology still has the right to speak? F.W. Marquardt, H. Berkhof, E. Flesseman-van Leer and A.A. Spijkerboer provide a theological foundation for the State of Israel. This is followed by the Dutch Reformed study resource 'Israël - volk, land en staat' of 1970, which asks 'whether the State of Israel also has a special faith dimension for Christians'. The land of Israel is seen as an essential element of God's covenant with the people of Israel. It also contains the formulation of 'connectedness with the people of Israel'. When the Dutch Reformed synod sets up a committee in 1988 to conduct further reflection on 'Israel, people, country and state', this committee fails to reach a conclusion in its 1995 report. The divergent points of view do not come together. During the consultations, Palestinian theologians such as Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb are consulted.

There are two theological positions opposing each other. The first says that a permanent distinction must be made between Israel and the nations. God goes his own way with Israel and God's covenant with Israel includes the land. The establishment of the State of Israel is seen as a sign of the beginning of the blossoming of redemption. The second position rejects this and says that there is an essential unity between Israel and the nations in and through the coming of Christ. Advocates of this line, especially coming from or influenced by the circle of church and diaconal workers working in Israel and Palestine, mainly stand up for Palestinians.

Changes to the church order 1991

In the meantime, both the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands are working on changes to the church order. In 1991, the Dutch Reformed synod decides to adjust the church order by declaring that the church confesses that it fulfills its apostolic mission in the world 'sharing in the expectation given to Israel of the Kingdom of God'. There is no reference to Jodenazing (mission to Jews). In the same year, the phrase 'called to give shape to the unrelinquishable connectedness of the church of Christ with the people of Israel' ('geroepen gestalte te geven aan de onopgeefbare verbondenheid van de gemeente van Christus met het volk Israël') appears for the first time in the church order of the Reformed churches.⁴ That formulation, slightly modified, eventually ends up in the church order of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. The Lutherans, through the Lutheran World Federation, were already pioneers in the rejection of mission among Jews.

IP-nota (IP memorandum) 2008

In 2003, the joint board of the Samen-op-Weg churches (Dutch Reformed Church and Reformed Churches combined) accepted the policy paper "Het Israëlisch-Palestijns-Arabisch conflict. Bijdrage tot de meningsvorming in de SoW-kerken" (The Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict. Contribution to opinion formation in the SoW churches). A rewritten version was accepted by the synod of the Protestant Church in 2008.⁵ The call to give shape to the unrelinquishable connectedness with the people of Israel, the ecumenical calling and the diaconal calling are applied to the Jewish and Palestinian Christian communities in the Middle East. This policy paper contains a context analysis and outlines theological principles. The chapter also examines the policies concerning mission and diaconal work. All this culminates in a policy

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4. In 1973, after the Yom Kippur War, the synod of the Reformed Churches (Gereformeerde Kerken) spoke for the first time about solidarity with the Jewish people. 'The General Synod of the Reformed Churches, based on faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, expresses her solidarity with the Jewish people, now that their existence is once again under threat.' The term 'unrelinquishable' first appears in a statement of the Reformed Synod in 1979: 'The congregations should be informed, in particular in the Proclamation of the Word, of the unrelinquishable connectedness of the Church with the Jewish people and to bear witness to this.' There had certainly already been in-depth reflection in the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk) on the relationship with the Jewish people, but the terms 'unrelinquishable connectedness' are calibrated in the Reformed Churches contributions.
 5. 'Het Israëlisch-Palestijns-Arabisch conflict. Bijdrage tot de meningsvorming in de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland' (The Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict. Contribution to opinion formation in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands), 2008. The theological input of André Drost, Bart Gijsbertsen en Henk Vreekamp can be reread there. The editors were Marieke den Hartog, Feije Duijm and Leo Koffeman.

framework.⁶ Kerk en Israël (Church and Israel) and Kerk in Actie (Church in Action) work closely together in the implementation of this policy.

Meervoudig verbonden (Multi-connected) 2012

A book with numerous reflections was published in 2012, edited by the then general secretary Arjan Plaisier and professor of Old Testament Klaas Spronk: 'Meervoudig verbonden. Nieuwe perspectieven op vragen rond kerk, Israël en Palestijnen' (Multi-connected. New perspectives on questions about church, Israel and Palestinians). Here too, an effort is made to hold the two previously mentioned approaches together and to address them through the lens of multiple connectedness, with the aim of transcending their contradictions.⁷

1.2 In broader context: international

World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has several times spoken out critically about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as well as about anti-Semitism. 'Anti-Semitism is a sin against God and humanity,' the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam declared in 1948. This statement was reaffirmed by the World Council of Churches on 20 January 2020: 'Anti-Semitism is incompatible with the confession and practice of the Christian faith.' In 2002, the WCC started a campaign against the unlawful occupation of Palestine in order to achieve a just peace in the Middle East. This led to the creation of the EAPPI program: the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. Since 2006, the WCC has been calling for a 'World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel' in September.

'Zur Erneuerung des Verhältnisses von Christen und Juden' (To Renew the Relations of Christians and Jews) 1980

Internationally, some other churches also speak out about Jewish-Christian relations, among other addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The German churches, like the Dutch, have a relatively long tradition in this regard. In 1980, the churches in the Rhineland came up with the synod decision '*Zur Erneuerung des Verhältnisses von Christen und Juden*'. It states, among other, that Israel has lasting salvation-historical significance, and that the continued existence of the Jewish people, the return to the land, and the establishment of the State of Israel are signs of God's faithfulness to his people.

Twelve Points of Berlin (ICCJ) 2009

The International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) has drawn up important guidelines for Jewish-Christian encounter in the Twelve Points of Berlin (ICCJ, 2009), formulated as objectives addressed to Christians and Jews, and to the Christian and Jewish communities jointly.⁸ There is a call for Christians to fight all forms of anti-Semitism, to promote dialogue with Judaism and to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. A call is made for the Jewish community to acknowledge and value the Christian initiatives toward renewed relations, to distinguish between anti-Semitism and criticism of the State of Israel. Both are called to foster interfaith friendship and cooperation, to promote social justice in the global community, and to collaborate in caring for creation.

Kairos Document 2009

The Palestinian Kairos document was released in 2009. The document confronts Western churches with a critical reflection, calling on them to seriously examine and engage with the lived

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6. A few relevant points of policy: The Church rejects any form of replacement theology and opposes anti-Semitism. The Church sees international law and human rights defined in international treaties as the primary point of orientation for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that religious arguments with regard to territory should be tested according to international law. The Church expresses her concern about the militarization of both the Israeli and Palestinian society.
 7. We mention this publication because of the contribution by the general secretary (scriba). Of course, there are also other publications and critical contributions from various sectors of society, but here we are mainly concerned with official church statements.
 8. In Seelisberg, Switzerland, 65 Jews and Christians from 19 countries gathered shortly after the Shoah, to express their commitment to pursue a new relationship between Jews and Christians. This gave rise to the 'Ten Points of Seelisberg'. It became the beginning of the ICCJ, the International Council of Jews and Christians. These Ten Points were updated in a new document, the Twelve Points of Berlin, during the international meeting of the ICCJ in Berlin in July 2009. For a Dutch translation, see: <https://nl.protestant.link/de-12-punten-van-berlijn-juli-2009/>.

realities and suffering of Palestinians. And also to critically question their own theology, in particular the theology about Israel: to what extent has it contributed to daily injustice? There is also a call to stop this injustice and do everything possible for a society in which everyone can live in peace and security. The Dutch translation, *'Het Uur van de Waarheid'* (*The Hour of Truth*), was presented on 22 December 2019 in the Dom Church in Utrecht and given to various church representatives and leaders, including general secretary Arjan Plaisier, who also gave a speech. In a statement, the Raad van Kerken in Nederland (Council of Churches in the Netherlands) shared that it supports 'the call on Israel to end injustice and be a partner in the peace process'.⁹

'God's Unfailing Word' 2019

In the English-speaking world, reference should be made to the report 'God's Unfailing Word. Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian-Jewish Relations' (Church of England, 2019). The relationship between Christians and the Jewish people is described as entirely unique. Judaism can be seen as a 'sacrament of otherness': there is kinship and there is difference. There is the recognition that the Jewish people have a unique relationship with God, which has consequences for the idea of mission. Mission is understood as participating in God's mission, which has five characteristics.¹⁰ The report states that Jews, Christians and Muslims share in a common mission in the sanctification of God's name. With regard to the land of Israel, there are the following principles: 1) that for most Jews Zionism is part of their identity; 2) that the State of Israel has the right to exist within secure and recognized borders under international law; 3) that international law also guarantees the rights and security of the Palestinian people; and 4) that the present-day moral impasse raises great moral difficulties and is ultimately untenable.

'Israel-Palästina. Leitgedanken und erläuternde Thesen' (Israel-Palestine. Guiding Principles and Explanatory Theses) 2021

In 2021, five German regional churches 'an Rhein und Ruhr' (on the rivers Rhine and Ruhr) published a vision paper titled 'Israel-Palästina. Leitgedanken und erläuternde Thesen'.¹¹ The first 'Leitgedanke' (guiding idea) states the connection with Judaism as well as the connection with worldwide Christianity. The second thesis mentions the Jewish self-understanding and, alongside it, the Palestinian-Christian self-understanding. That Christians feel closely connected to the State of Israel is motivated by the fact that for most Jews Israel is a place of refuge and home. At the same time, the pursuit of political autonomy by Palestinians is also recognized and supported. The well-being of Israel ('Schalom') is close to the authors' hearts and, at the same time, also applies to Palestinians. There is a call for peace and justice.¹²

Hope for the Future 2023

The Lutheran World Federation presented the study report 'Hope for the Future' in Krakow. A Study Document for Renewing Jewish-Christian Relations' (2023). In this comprehensive document, numerous theological explorations are made: how the Jewish people can be understood and how they understand themselves; what the unique relationship is between Jews and Christians. The wounds that affect Jewish-Christian relations are identified: the fraught history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. Various internal and external obstacles to Jewish-Christian dialogue are described. The most important one is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is a very polarizing topic that must be addressed with care, caution and calm consideration. The Lutheran World Federation sees no way for itself to begin formulating a solution to this problem. That is not

9. 'Brief over het Kairosdocument' (Letter about the Kairos document), Raad van Kerken (Council of Churches in the Netherlands), 12 February 2010, <https://www.raadvankerken.nl/nieuws/2010/02/brief-over-kairos-document/>.

10. Five marks of mission: 1. Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom; 2. Teaching, baptizing and nurturing new believers; 3. Responding to human need in loving service; 4. Seeking to challenge unjust structures in society and 5. Striving to safeguard the integrity of creation.

11. With the subtitle: *Ein Gesprächsimpuls aus den fünf Landeskirchen Baden, Hessen und Nassau, Pfalz, Rheinland sowie Westfalen* (A prompt for dialogue from the five regional churches Baden, Hesse and Nassau, Palatinate, Rhineland as well as Westphalia).

12. 'Wir bekräftigen die Zusage, dialogbereite und versöhnungsaffine Akteure und Initiativen in der Region zu fördern und zu stärken. Wir glauben, dass Gottes Weisung im Kern auf Gerechtigkeit und Frieden aus ist für alle Menschen', (p. 10) (We reaffirm our commitment to promote and strengthen actors and initiatives in the region who are willing to engage in dialogue and have an affinity for reconciliation. We believe that God's instruction is essentially aimed at justice and peace for all people.)

the role of the church, but of the State of Israel, the Palestinian people and their leaders. However, churches and the international community can express their agreement with international law and the resolutions of the United Nations, including those on security and the protection of human

rights. Directions are given on how to look hopefully at the future and future relationships. Christians and Jews have different visions of the kingdom of God, but the very expectation of that kingdom that can also bring together and keep hope alive.

II Theological concepts related to the encounter with Judaism

Below we highlight some theological memoranda in the dialogue with Judaism, as a brief elaboration of the theological questions mentioned in section 4.2.

Permanent meaning of the covenant of God with the people of Israel

As a church we have turned away from the position that has often been held, namely that the church has replaced Israel. This could have far-reaching consequences in relations with Jews, from anti-Judaism to even anti-Semitism. A rediscovery coming from the Jewish-Christian encounter and reflection thereupon is that God's covenant with Abraham and Moses was not canceled with the coming of Jesus, but rather was confirmed. Romans 9-11 is a constant reminder to the church that the Jewish people are not written off. This does not resolve all questions. In our encounter, there is still much room to grow - both toward one another and closer together.

Interpretation of the Land Promise

Different views exist on the land promise. One view draws direct lines from God's promise to Abraham and the people of Israel to live in the (promised) land to the present-day situation. The existence of the State of Israel is then seen as the (nascent) beginning of redemption. Emphasis is placed on Israel as the apple of God's eye (based on Zechariah 2:12). Others are much more critical, referring to the prophets and pointing out that God's promises are conditional: it is tied to faithfulness to the Torah and living according to God's guidelines. It has everything to do with law and justice.

The power of the Bible is that God remains faithful to Israel, but can reject Israel's behavior. Even then, there remains room for conversion to justice and mercy, and a promising future.

Palestinian theologians also deal with these questions from their own specific context and ask penetrating questions about what law is and oppression.¹³ It is clear that the State of Israel is an integral part of the identity of the Jewish people. It is important to distinguish between theological reflection on the land promise and its political translation, between theological and legal arguments. And to be very reluctant to use (or abuse) biblical texts and religious arguments to justify international-law boundaries.¹⁴ In recent decades, more attention has been paid to the colonial past and its effect on state formation, also with regard to the State of Israel and its previous history.¹⁵ In all of this, the right to exist of the State of Israel (enshrined in international law) is not in dispute, as far as the Protestant Church is concerned.¹⁶

View on the meaning of the Torah, Law and Gospel

From the Jewish-Christian encounter, understanding has grown that Torah and Gospel are not opposites and do not cancel each other out, but speak each other's language. It is clear that the Torah has a different meaning and liturgical function in Judaism than in the Christian tradition. Instead of seeking controversy, it is the task of the church to listen profoundly and engage in dialogue.

13. For example, Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth. A Christ-Centered Biblical Theology of the Promised Land*, 2015. At the Dutch presentation of *De andere kant van de muur. Een Palestijns perspectief* (The other side of the wall. A Palestinian perspective), 2023, in Rotterdam on 9 May 2023, general secretary (scriba) René de Reuver gave a speech.

14. IP memorandum, 2008, p. 44. In the policy section (Beleidskader) of the IP memorandum is stated: 'religious arguments must be assessed against international law'.

15. Reflection on the colonial past within the church is still in its early stages. That is why the explanation about this in the policy paper is quite limited. The church sees it as its task to work on this in the coming period.

16. The IP memorandum briefly reflects on the theological significance of the State of Israel. 'The following can be stated about this, based on the Protestant Church's own theological history. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands cannot see the return of the Jewish people to Palestine separately from God's faithfulness to his covenant people. She also realizes that the State of Israel is an integral part of the identity of the people of Israel. For her, these motives reinforce the fact that the State of Israel, according to international law, has a claim to an independent political existence and security. (IP memorandum, p. 44)

Significance of Jesus

For the Christian church as a Christ-confessing faith community, the person of Jesus Christ is central. At the same time, the realization has grown that Jesus cannot be understood separately from his Jewish background. What exactly this means is a subject of discussion, between Christians and Jews and also among Christians. Moreover, in this understanding, the context is equally important. It does matter whether you address something in Christology from a lived Western experience or from a Palestinian Christian context. It doesn't change the fact that Jesus was Jewish, but it does introduce interpretations that shape the dialogue differently. From a Palestinian Christian perspective in the West Bank, the word 'Jew' may first and foremost bring to mind Israelis, with the association of army, occupier, oppressor. Words that do not immediately come to mind when coming from the Dutch context. So not only the Jewish-Christian dialogue about Jesus is of importance, but also the ecumenical dialogue and the context of the reader.

From mission among Jews to missio Dei, God's mission

The Protestant Church and her predecessors have undergone a radical movement. In brief: from mission among Jews to dialogue. Not so long ago there were agencies for mission among Jews. The Second World War and in particular

the Shoah provided a strong impetus to think differently about the relationship with Jews. International movements emerged, such as the International Council of Christians and Jews. The Christian kibbutz Nes Ammim in Galilee is also a clear example of a completely different approach: no mission but presence, listening, dialogue and encounter. Profound theological reflection has taken place in the Dutch context. All this has also been translated into the church orders of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and ultimately the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. The key word is dialogue. This does not mean that the church must hide her own identity as a Christ-confessing faith community. The dialogue about this continues.¹⁷ The term *missio Dei* (literally: God's mission) has been helpful in thinking about mission. In the context of *missio Dei*, mission carries a very different connotation than in the concept of 'mission among Jews'. It is no longer about conversion to the Christian religion, but about the invitation to join God's mission. *Missio Dei* theology can be understood in terms of four key shifts: from a more static to a more dynamic image of God; from church as central to church and world in dialogue; from a focus on the past (passing on tradition) to a greater focus on innovation viewed from the future; and from a narrow reading of Scripture to a new appreciation of all of Scripture.

17. The Center for Israelstudies (Centrum voor IsraëlStudies, CIS) uses three words for this: *luisteren, dienen en getuigen* (listening, serving and witnessing).

III Declarations about anti-semitism, terror and the situation in Israel and Palestine¹⁸

The Protestant Church has made many important statements in the past decade, both about anti-Semitism and the situation in Israel and Palestine. Many statements are about the encounter with Judaism. In light of the growing tensions, escalating violence, and ongoing war in the Middle East, a number of recent statements have sought to respond to this particular situation.

Repudiation of Luther's anti-Jewish statements 2016

In the run-up to the commemoration and celebration of 500 years of Protestantism, the Protestant Church, represented by the president of the Lutheran Synod, distanced herself from Luther's anti-Jewish statements on April 11, 2016. 'Luther has an unsavory side. What he said about Jews is absolutely unacceptable. It is not enough to say that anti-Semitism is rooted in a long European history. Luther played a nasty role in this. We therefore strongly reject his ideas about Jews.'¹⁹ Much earlier, in 1984, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) distanced itself from Luther's anti-Jewish writings.

'From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017'

The board of the Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference offered this report as an important resource for thinking through the meaning and content of a joint commemoration of the beginning of the Reformation. Paragraph 229 states: 'Lutherans will take this opportunity to also remember Martin Luther's hateful and derogatory statements against the Jews. They are ashamed and deeply regret them.'

Joint declaration with the Roman Catholic Church 2019

In June 2019, both churches issued a joint statement against anti-Semitism. 'Both the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands see with great concern that anti-Semitism is growing stronger. There are continually incidents that can create an unsafe climate for the Jewish community in the Netherlands. That is unacceptable. The ongoing dialogue with the Jewish community in the Netherlands is of great importance to the churches.'²⁰

Declaration Recognition and Responsibility 2020²¹

On 8 November 2020, during the Kristallnacht commemoration in Amsterdam, general secretary René de Reuver made this statement about recognition of guilt and responsibility. Guilt was confessed with regard to the Jewish community in the Netherlands. The intention was expressed to 'do everything possible to further develop Jewish-Christian relations into a deep friendship of two equal partners, among other allied in the fight against present-day anti-Semitism.' In line with this statement, synod moderator Marco Batenburg called anti-Semitism a sin.²²

Palestinian Christians on anti-Semitism: 'This is where we stand' (2022)

In this publication, the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, partner of Kerk in Actie, explores what anti-Semitism is in the context of life in Israel and Palestine. The authors are clearly reflecting critically on their own context, with instances of antisemitism being acknowledged within Palestinian communities and the Arab world. Besides, there is a growing examination of what Zionism is and

18. See <https://protestantsekerk.nl/verdieping/protestantse-kerk-over-bestrijding-antisemitisme/>.

19. file:///C:/Users/EeuwoutKlootwijk/Downloads/Verklaring%20Luther%20en%20de%20Joden_Protestantse%20Kerk%20Nederland%2011%20april%202016.pdf

20. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/rooms-katholieke-kerk-en-protestantse-kerk-komen-met-gezamenlijke-verklaring-tegen-antisemitisme/>

21. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/verklaring-van-de-protestantse-kerk-tijdens-kristallnachtherdenking-2020/>

22. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/verdieping/protestants-perspectief-antisemitisme-is-zonde/>

how it impacts others. Why this specific focus on antisemitism? According to the report, there is a similarity in the basis of the struggle against the oppression of Palestinians and the struggle against anti-Semitism. In both situations it is about the struggle for human dignity.²³

Synod board: great concern about situation in Israel and Gaza (2021)

On 21 May 2021, the synod board responds to the tense situation in Israel and Gaza. 'As a church we pray for peace in Jerusalem. This peace seems impossible if justice is not done and the traumas of both Jews and Palestinians are not listened to.'²⁴

Congratulation 75 years State of Israel (2023)

On 26 April 2023, the board sends a congratulatory message to Jewish partners to congratulate them on the 75th anniversary of the State of Israel.²⁵ In an additional article, general secretary René de Reuver provides some additional thoughts. 'We hope and pray that the prophetic dream of peaceful coexistence will apply to all residents.'²⁶

75 years Nakba: 'The Nakba is still our daily reality' (2023)

On 15 May 2023, the Palestinian partners of Kerk in Actie are asked what meaning the 'Nakba' has for them and how its memory lives on in their daily lives.²⁷

Statements of the board on and after 7 October 2023

On the day of Hamas's terrorist attack on Israel, the board addressed the shocking images and reports emerging from Israel and called for prayer. 'The wounds that are being made now are heartbreaking. As a church, we are committed to both Jews and Palestinian Christians who suffer from these terrible acts of violence. We sympathize with the pain of Jews, Palestinian Christians, Muslims and other residents of the country.'²⁸ Two days later, a message of condolence was sent to the Jewish community in the Netherlands. 'We have seen the terrible images of the past few days with great

dismay and horror. Waves of terror are washing over Israel, leaving very deep wounds in both the Jewish population in Israel and the Jewish community in the Netherlands. We realize that many of you have family and friends in Israel and that you are deeply concerned about their fate and future at this time. We share in your devastation and pain. We extend to you our deepest sympathy and condolences. These are days of deep mourning, where words fail.'²⁹

Protestant Church sends message of compassion to Israeli and Palestinian partners (2023)

In a letter dated 17 October 2023, general secretary René de Reuver expressed his condolences to the partner churches and organizations of Kerk in Actie in Israel and Palestine. 'We realize that the war between Hamas and Israel has a major impact on the work of your organizations. Work that has become increasingly complicated in recent years. It can feel like everything you have built up in recent years has been knocked out of your hands.'³⁰

Statement of the general synod against anti-Semitism (2023)

On 18 November 2023, the General Synod spoke out unequivocally against the rise of anti-Semitism, as a direct result of the Hamas terror attack on 7 October and the subsequent war between Israel and Hamas, in response to the speech of the National Coordinator for Combating Anti-Semitism Eddo Verdoner in the synod meeting.³¹ 'As Protestant Church in the Netherlands, we hereby express our deep sympathy with the Jewish community. Our hearts weep at the terrible wounds that are now being inflicted. It is unacceptable that fellow Jewish citizens do not feel safe.'

Protestant Church underlines importance of just peace for Jews and Palestinians (2024)

On 23 January 2024, general secretary René de Reuver responded on behalf of the board, to the petition presented by Kairos Sabeel Nederland. 'Who wouldn't cry, seeing what is happening now in Israel

23. *This is where we stand. A Sabeel Reflection on Antisemitism*, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Center, 2022.

24. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/moderamen-grote-zorgen-over-situatie-in-israel-en-gaza/>

25. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/gelukwens-75-jaar-staat-israel/>

26. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/verdieping/overwegingen-bij-gelukwens-75-jaar-staat-israel/>

27. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/75-jaar-nakba-de-nakba-is-nog-steeds-onze-dagelijkse-realiteit/>

28. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/moderamen-escalatie-en-verbijstering/>

29. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/boodschap-van-medelevan-aan-de-joodse-gemeenschap-in-nederland/>

30. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/protestantse-kerk-stuurt-boodschap-van-medelevan-naar-israelische-en-palestijnse-partners/>

31. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/generale-synode-spreekt-zich-uit-tegen-antisemitisme/>

and Gaza. Who is able to speak wisely on this subject? From this sense of embarrassment, we recognize our calling as a church to uphold human dignity - after all, every human child is (equally) precious in the eyes of God - just peace and peaceful coexistence.³²

Political trenches stand in the way of solutions and emergency aid Palestine and Israel (2024)

On Good Friday, 29 March 2024, general secretary René de Reuver and Kerk in Actie director Jurjen

de Groot write that persistence in political views does not contribute to alleviating the suffering of Jews, Palestinians and others who are directly or indirectly affected by the war in and around Gaza. 'Only when we can look each other straight in the eye, a healing process can begin. As far as the situation in Palestine and Israel is concerned, this may seem further away than ever. It is therefore important to learn to touch each other's wounds.'³³

32. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/protestantse-kerk-onderstreept-belang-van-rechtvaardige-vrede-voor-joden-en-palestijnen/>

33. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/politieke-loopgraven-staan-oplossingen-en-noodhulp-palestina-en-israel-in-de-weg/>

IV Relations with Jews

In this chapter we provide an elaboration of the relations with Jews and Jewish communities, as discussed in section 4.2. In addition to a brief outline of the history of the complex relationships between Jews and Christians, we emphasize the Jewish wounds that have been caused by these relationships.

Parting of the ways

Both the Christian traditions, churches and movements as well as the rabbinic traditions have their origins in the colorful period of the Second Temple period, culminating in the diverse Judaism of the 1st century. Both Jews and Christians invoke the Scriptures of Biblical Israel. Some of the Holy Scriptures are shared, although different names are given to them (Tanakh or Old/First Testament) and the organization of their contents are different. Both traditions are branches with the same roots or, in another image: Christians and Jews come from the same womb.

In and after the 1st century, the paths gradually and in a complex manner diverged: Christian traditions followed paths different from the rabbinic traditions that crystallized in the Talmud. The (partly) same holy books are read and interpreted differently. Divergent liturgical traditions also emerged. Some festivals, such as Passover and Easter, are celebrated very differently, although the common roots and origins are continually rediscovered.

Contemporary Judaism and partner relations

Contemporary living Judaism is extremely colorful and diverse: religious in different hues, culturally

diverse. Who is Jewish is a subject of discussion among Jews themselves. There are halachic approaches: Jewish is whoever has a Jewish mother. But there are also liberal movements in which a Jewish father also makes someone a Jew (father-Jew). There are Jews who are not religious (agnostic or atheist), Jews for whom Zionism is part of their identity, and non-Zionist Jews.³⁴ In short, it is extremely complex, and also food for historians.³⁵ Especially important for the church is, that Christians gain an awareness of the roots of their own faith in their encounter with Jews; that Jews and Jewish communities want to be seen in their individuality and not exclusively in their significance for the Christian church, and that important lessons can be learned and new insights can arise from the Jewish-Christian encounter. In the Netherlands, there are relationships with Jewish dialogue partners³⁶ and through Kerk in Actie, in addition to the partner relationships with Palestinian Christian organizations and churches, there are also relationships in Israel with Jewish organizations, such as the Rossing Center and Rabbis for Human Rights.

Wounds and traumas

There is the wound of the centuries-long history of anti-Judaism and anti-Jewish imagery in Christian traditions, theology and liturgy. This is deep-rooted in Christian theology. It is a painful history of alienation and search for identity, which was mainly sought in contradictions, all with disastrous consequences. The church was seen as the legitimate successor to Judaism. The Jewish people had ceased to be a significant factor, the church had replaced Israel. Various forms of

34. For the Dutch context, Ido Abram has identified the following five factors that are important for a Jewish identity: 1) religion and tradition, 2) the bond with Israel and Zionism, 3) war, persecution and survival, 4) personal history, 5) the interaction between Jewish and Dutch culture. Dan Cohn-Sherbok distinguishes seven expressions of Judaism: 1. Hasidism, 2. Orthodox Judaism, 3. Conservative Judaism, 4. Reform Judaism, 5. Reconstructionist Judaism, 6. Humanistic Judaism, 7. Messianic Judaism. This last category is often not accepted by the other movements. See: Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, 2000, p. 12.

35. An illustration of the complexity is a historian like Shlomo Sand, who examines national myths (the stories that unite peoples) regarding the nation of Israel, e.g. in his book *The Invention of the Jewish People*.

36. Such as with the Centraal Joods Overleg (Central Jewish Consultation, CJO), Nederlands Israëlitisch Kerkgenootschap (Dutch Israelite Religious Community, NIK), Verbond voor Progressief Jodendom (Union for Progressive Judaism), Joods Maatschappelijk Werk (Jewish Social Work, JMW), Centrum voor Informatie en Documentatie Israël (Center for Information and Documentation Israel, CIDI) and Jewish-Christian consultative bodies, such as the OJEC (Conversation Platform of Jews and Christians), Sja'ar (publishing company), Comité Joods Nederland and others.

replacement theology were developed. These anti-Jewish theological approaches could contribute to a breeding ground in which the seeds of anti-Semitism and hatred could grow. Partly because of the Jewish-Christian relations, we as a church are becoming increasingly aware of these derailments.

The proclamation of the State of Israel in 1948 was of great significance for Jews worldwide. That many hundreds of thousands of Jews were expelled or fled from Arab countries in the following years is a painful wound. For many, the State of Israel has been a refuge. The wars and 7 October 2023 bring a change in this.

Certain forms of Christian Zionism may have a political-religious agenda, in which Jews serve to bring the kingdom of God closer: when all Jews live again in the land and are brought back, Jesus will return as Messiah. In fact, Jews are then instrumental to Christians. The study report 'Hope for the Future' by the Lutheran World Federation states that the elaboration of this way of thinking has consequences for Jewish-Christian relations: Jews feel used. But also consequences for the Palestinian Christian presence in the Holy Land: they have no role to play in this line of thinking.

The adoption of specifically Jewish traditions in the Christian liturgy at least raises questions or can be seen as a form of annexation. For example, by celebrating a seder meal in church or by introducing the Feast of Tabernacles in the church. Jewish festivals are thus placed in a Christian context.

From the Dutch context, there is the wound of the ambivalent attitude of society and churches towards the Jewish community in the Second World War. And the failure of society and churches to take care of Jews who returned after 1945. Of all the countries in Western Europe occupied by the Nazis, the Netherlands had the most victims of persecution of Jews, both in percentage and in absolute numbers. This unimaginable fact still impacts the small Jewish community in the Netherlands until this day. During the annual Kristallnacht commemorations, organized by the Centraal Joods Overleg (Central Jewish Consultation); the 4/5 May commemorations; the Yom HaSjoa commemorations, this is contemplated upon and seen in relation to the present. In addition, the Anne Frank Foundation, the Westerbork Foundation and others keep the memory alive. It has also clearly characterized the contemplation on and

reorientation with regard to Jewish-Christian relations after the war. In Christian theology this is called 'Theology after Auschwitz'.

The terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023 has had a very deep impact on the Jewish communities in Israel, in the Netherlands, worldwide. That civilians, including many young people and children, were brutally murdered or taken hostage, came as a deep existential shock. From the Jewish side we hear anger, grief, dismay, resistance, no longer feeling safe in their own country, fear and resilience, seeking each other out, looking for allies. They experience October 7th as a deliberate attack on everything that is Jewish and what Judaism stands for. Jews have the feeling that they are not allowed to exist. It reminds them of previous pogroms and the pain of the Shoah.

Partly as a result of the polarization surrounding the war between Israel and Hamas, anti-Semitism is increasing. Reference can be made to the growing insecurity felt by Jews - for instance, the reluctance to wear a kippah in public, the increased security and occasional closures of Jewish schools, and the unsafe climate experienced by Jewish pupils in schools and students at universities. Of course, criticism of Israel, the government or the army is not as such anti-Semitism, but it can take those forms. For example, when Jews in the Netherlands are judged or held accountable because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All this requires careful discernment.

A (large) number of Jews continue to long for their own safe haven in a world that is experienced as very unsafe due to the persistent anti-Semitism. For many Jews in the Netherlands, the State of Israel plays an important role here. The insecurity in Israel due to the terrorist attacks and the threat from surrounding countries, is experienced as a deep wound. At the same time, there is great concern about recent developments in Israel (in addition to the long-standing tensions and deep conflicts between Jews and Palestinians, there are internal Jewish tensions about the future of Israel as a democratic constitutional state).

There is distrust and the feeling or experience of being abandoned by society, the world community and sometimes also by the churches. This varies among Jews in the Netherlands, but some feel misunderstood and as though they are being held accountable for the actions of the Israeli government or military. Jewish Dutch people do not

want to be constantly asked about what is happening in Israel. At the same time, the State of Israel plays an important role in their identity and Israel is (or was?) seen as a safe haven. The Jewish community has family and/or friends there. There is sometimes the feeling that the State of Israel should not exist and that is - rightly - experienced as a form of anti-Semitism. This is therefore somewhat ambivalent.

Resilient Judaism

The Jewish community cannot and does not want to be reduced to a community with traumas and wounds. The community wants to be understood as a living, contemporary, resilient Judaism (broadly understood). In the synagogue and the liturgical prayers (*siddur*), the longing for the land and for Jerusalem plays an important role. They often see themselves as a continuation of the Biblical nation of Israel, with an inseparable bond with the land. For many, this has been given a concrete translation in the State of Israel.

Relations with Messianic Jews

Messianic Jews often have a difficult position: Judaism often does not recognize them as Jewish, and Christian churches do not always seriously regard them as Christians. For a long time there was also a reluctance to build relationships with them, so as not to upset the fragile relationship with the Jewish community in the Netherlands.

For most of them, the Jewish origin is important, because they see themselves as belonging to the Jewish people. Belief in Jesus plays an important role, but the way they view Jesus and confess Him can differ greatly. They also differ in their opinion on what weight and attention should be given to the Jewish identity and the question whether elements

of Judaism can be adopted, such as the rabbinic interpretation of the Torah. In this way, they search for their own identity and place in relation to the church and the Jewish people. This leads not only to considerable tension between different sides, but also within the community itself.

So there is great diversity. Various organizations in the Netherlands are active in this field.³⁷ In Israel this concerns a small but growing number of congregations. Some fall under the Roman Catholic Church as Hebrew-speaking Catholics. Others form separate, sometimes Protestant, congregations.³⁸ The Caspari Center (Jerusalem) has released a study that critically examines the (own) Messianic movement. The number of Messianic Jews in Israel is estimated at between 15,300 and 20,000 (depending on the definitions).³⁹

Jewish members of the church are specifically mentioned in the church order of the Protestant Church.⁴⁰ Yet, to date, Messianic Jews (Jewish Christians or Jewish followers of Jesus) have not had a clear place in the policy and executive work of the Protestant Church. Only recently, there have been cautious contacts with organizations such as Hadderech.

There is homework here for the Protestant Church. How do we want to relate to Messianic Jews? What could a relationship with them look like? How can the church give attention to Jewish followers of Jesus? Their voice can play a role, whether it concerns reflection on the relationship between Israel and the church, insight into and combating anti-Semitism, or equipping congregations to encounter Israel. And apart from that, it is about meeting them as they are.

37. Such as the Stichting Steun Messiasbelijdende Joden (Foundation for the Support of Messianic Jews) and Hadderech, the Dutch association of Yeshua HaMashiach confessing Jews.

38. See also Kees Jan Rodenburg, *Joodse volgelingen van Jezus. Een overzicht in 40 vragen en antwoorden* (Jewish followers of Jesus. An overview in 40 questions and answers), 2010; G.J. Mink, *Messiasbelijdende Joden in Israël: een beknopte verkenning* (Messianic Jews in Israel: a brief survey), 2016.

39. David Serner & Alexander Goldberg, *Jesus-believing Israelis: Exploring Messianic Fellowships*, Caspari Center, 2021. An extensive discussion in *Mishkan*, no. 86, <https://www.caspari.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Mishkan-86.pdf>.

40. Ordinance 1.2: 'The general synod ... hereby has the particular task of: ... promoting attention for the place of Jewish members of the church.'

V Relations with Palestinian and other Christians in Israel and Palestine

For a long time, little or no attention has been paid to relations with Palestinians and Palestinian Christians among them. That has changed in recent years, but we are still exploring and listening. Below is an elaboration of what was mentioned earlier in part I about ecumenical relations (section 4.4).

Partner relations

Through Kerk in Actie there are partnerships with Palestinian Christian organizations and churches in Israel and Palestine, alongside partner relations with Jewish and other institutions.⁴¹ These are not only diaconal but also church-ecumenical relationships. In particular, the Protestant Church has a direct ecumenical relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL): through the Lutherans we are members of the same church family. There is cooperation with ecumenical organizations, such as Sabeel, in the field of Bible study programs among Palestinian Christians. The work among young people and students in the West Bank is supported through the Palestinian Bible Society.⁴² An ecumenical youth program in Galilee is made possible through DSPR (Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees).

At one with the Palestinian people

While we continually focus here on relations with Palestinian Christians, we must be careful not to drive a wedge between them and other Palestinians. Palestinian Christians themselves often feel at one with the Palestinian people. Palestinian Christians are unknown to a large number of Dutch churches and Christians. Awareness of Palestinian Christians

has increased among clergy, according to research after October 7th.⁴³ Many tourist and pilgrimage trips focus on visiting the places associated with the life of Jesus, and overlook the shrinking Christian communities on the ground. The most glaring example of this is visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem without visiting the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, and visiting the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem without realizing that there is also a Lutheran congregation there (the Palestinian Christian Christmas Church). It is a task and mission of the church to bring about change here, to give more attention to Palestinian Christians in the coming years and to share their stories.

Rich diversity of denominations

Although the number of Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land is small and decreasing (approximately 1% of the population in both Israel and Palestine), there is still a rich diversity of Christian denominations. Many of them are Arab or Palestinian. Arab can refer to residents and citizens of Israel, Palestinian to residents and citizens of Palestine. But they are also used interchangeably. Arab Christians in Israel itself can call themselves Palestinians. There are Christian communities in both Israel and Palestine: in Nazareth, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Taybeh and many other places. In Israel there are about 125,000 Palestinian Christians, in Palestine (including Gaza) about 50,000, but their numbers are rapidly decreasing. The number of Palestinian Christians who have emigrated or are considering emigration has increased enormously after October 7th. Young people in particular want to leave. Broadly speaking, these Christians can be divided

41. At present these are: Sabeel, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), Nes Ammim, Sadaka-Reut, YWCA Palestine, Mossawa, Palestinian Bible Society, Rossing Center, DSPR (Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees), Rabbis for Human Rights, KavLaOved, Tent of Nations. And Assaf is supported together with the Joods Humanitair Fonds (Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund).

42. Three Bible societies are active in Israel: the Bible Society in Israel, which focuses on the Messianic Jews (Jewish Christians) in Israel; the Arab Israeli Bible Society, which focuses on the Arab Christians in Israel (including Christian Palestinians who do not live in the Palestinian territories); and the Palestinian Bible Society.

43. 'Sympathy for the Palestinians is growing among Christian clergy in the Netherlands. One in six currently especially supports the Palestinians, although most pastors and priests do not want to take sides,' states an article in the *Nederlands Dagblad* of 27 October 2023. The newspaper conducted a survey among 750 pastors (75% of whom are from the Protestant Church).

into four families: the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Catholic churches (Latin, Maronite, Melkite and others); the Oriental Orthodox Churches (Coptic, Armenian, Syriac) and the Protestant Churches (Anglican, Evangelical, Evangelical Lutheran and others).⁴⁴

Resilience and pride

Many Palestinian Christians proudly talk about their ancestors, who have kept the Christian faith in the Holy Land since the feast of Pentecost ('We kept the land holy'). Efforts are made to build good relations with Muslim-Palestinians. Sometimes that works; the occupation by Israel creates solidarity. Sometimes there are great tensions; for example, when Christians are favored by Israel over Muslims. There is a lot of resilience and faith, and there are many concerns: about the emigration of young people in search for a better future, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the war in Gaza, the increasing number of settlers in the West Bank, and the consequences for their own communities. They are genuinely concerned about the disappearance of the Christian community in Gaza but also in the West Bank.

Other marginalized Christians

Alongside these Palestinian Christians, there are also other and often marginalized groups of Christians in Israel. For example, Christian migrants from the former Soviet Union, mostly Russian Orthodox, or Ethiopian Orthodox Christians (about 35,000). In addition, there are migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers with a Christian identity from countries such as the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Eastern Europe, Eritrea and Sudan (about 150,000). There are also Christians with a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers), whose number is unknown. They live side by side. There is no local council of churches.

Wounds and traumas

By far the greatest wound among Palestinian Christians in Palestine is the occupation by Israel. The aforementioned Kairos document from 2009 is, in addition to a cry for justice, a theological exposé rejecting Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory and criticizing so-called Israel theology insofar as it

provides arguments that justify this occupation. This painful issue is also brought to our table in recent dialogues with Palestinian Christians and leaders. Many of them talk about apartheid. Some people prefer not to use this word, but they experience it as such. Amnesty International's 2022 report speaks plainly about apartheid, as do various reports from Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations. Some therefore want Israel to be designated as an apartheid state and for the churches to support this.⁴⁵ A number of churches have also done this, such as the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. What the argumentation is essentially about is that an administrative, legal and economic system is in force in Israel, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza that ensures that one group (Jewish Israelis) is privileged over another (Palestinians). There is a different legal system for each group, Jews and Palestinians, even though they live in the same area. This creates a situation where one group is given a superior status and the other group an inferior one. Moreover, in some serious cases there are human rights violations (such as torture, forced displacement and denial of basic freedoms). This situation is not temporary, but is being maintained and further expanded by the Israeli government. Over the past 15 years, the situation for Palestinians (in Israel, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza) has deteriorated.

For many Palestinians and Palestinian Christians, the Nakba has become the Palestinian narrative for the daily experience of exclusion, expulsion, injustice and occupation. Between 1947 and 1949, more than 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes, partly prior to the proclamation of the State of Israel and partly during the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. From a Palestinian perspective, this period is called the 'Nakba' (disaster or catastrophe), which is commemorated annually on 15 May.

The often unconditional Christian expressions of support for the State of Israel, while overlooking the situation in which the Palestinian people find themselves, is painful. In 2023, there was an open letter from Palestinian Christians to Western church leaders, in which this very point was specifically made. The letter was therefore also addressed to us,

44. Fuad D. Farah, Christian Presence in the Holy Land, 2011; *The Forgotten Faithful. A Window into the Life and Witness of Christians in the Holy Land*, 2007.

45. Amnesty International, *Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians*, 2022; Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution* (2021).

as a call to conversion.⁴⁶ The pain is expressed that the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are not being recognized: the decades-long occupation and humiliation of Palestinians. Christians in Canada have sent a response to this letter and, in so doing, dare to look in their own mirror.⁴⁷ There is despondency about the attitude of some churches: 'we are left to our own fate'. Palestinian Christians want churches to speak out more clearly in standing up for them. That certainly affects the Protestant Church.

Palestinian Christians frequently feel that they are overlooked or ignored by tourists and pilgrims. The small and vulnerable Christian communities in Israel and Palestine are often not visited by the large flows of visitors to the Holy Land. That hurts and is not understood.

Palestinian Christians proudly talk about their age-old bond with the land. 'We have always been here,' they say, and for them this means an existential bond with the land of Jesus and with the Christians of the first hour.

There is the daily experience of being second-class citizens in Israel compared to Jews. The same rights and freedoms granted to Jewish citizens are not available to them. They experience it as discrimination that the Jewish Law of Return provides everyone with (partial) Jewish descent the right to settle in Israel and obtain Israeli citizenship. Palestinians do not have these rights. The Nation-State Law of 2018 makes Palestinian residents of Israel de facto second-class citizens. Jewish symbols such as the flag, national anthem, Hebrew calendar, Shabbat and Jewish holidays are enshrined. From then on, Hebrew is the only official language of Israel. Arabic becomes a language with an unspecified 'special status'. According to this law, Israel is the state of and for Jews, the other citizens are not mentioned.

The deprivation and daily humiliations in the West Bank are accompanied by land expropriations and restrictions in mobility and access to natural resources. There is aggression and discrimination at the checkpoints. The situation in the West Bank is considered occupation under international law. The intricate mix of Areas A, B, and C has produced a fragmented and confusing territorial patchwork that complicates Palestinian claims. Jewish settlers pose a daily threat in the West Bank. They claim more and more land, and violence is not avoided. We see the impact of this very concretely in the situation of the Nassar family of Tent of Nations, an Evangelical Lutheran family that has been involved in a decades-long lawsuit to have their land re-registered.⁴⁸

In 2023, Palestinian church leaders sounded the alarm about violent attacks against Christian clergy and buildings (churches, monasteries, cemeteries) by extremist Jewish settlers. Christians are spat on and humiliated by ultra-Orthodox Jews.⁴⁹ The Rossing Center's new report provides harrowing details.⁵⁰

Failing Palestinian leadership and corruption, increasing extremism and gun violence among Palestinians themselves aggravate the situation in which Palestinian Christians find themselves. It intensifies the pressures experienced by Christians living as a minority within a Muslim-majority environment.

The recent war between Israel and Hamas has had devastating consequences for Gaza, the Palestinian civilians and the infrastructure. For years, Gaza has been seen by them as an 'open-air prison', where two million people are locked up without any prospects. The recent war and the ongoing bombings are destroying many lives and making life and living together a hopeless and desperate situation. It has an impact on Palestinians and

46. <https://www.change.org/p/an-open-letter-from-palestinian-christians-to-western-church-leaders-and-theologians>

47. <https://www.change.org/p/open-letter-to-palestinian-christians-from-christians-in-canada>

48. <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/palestijnse-christenen-hebben-dringend-hulp-nodig>

49. *Trouw* 9 February 2024: 'Why ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem spit on Christians': 'Bullying and excluding Christians fits in with a long tradition of struggle for the land,' says Wallet. 'The largest landowners in Israel are the historic churches and monasteries, including Roman Catholics and Armenian Orthodox. Groups within the settlers and ultra-Orthodox Jews want to change that.'

50. 2023 Annual Report Attacks on Christians in Israel and East Jerusalem <https://rossingcenter.org/escalating-hostilities-against-christians/>

Palestinian Christians throughout the region. From our Palestinian Christian partners we hear their anger about and resistance to all the destruction and dehumanization, fear of what is to come, and a cry for justice.⁵¹ The war also has major consequences for life in the West Bank: people are losing their jobs (without income for months), tourists are staying at home (that's where many Christians get their income from), increasing violence is being used by both the army and settlers, and permits are no longer issued to enter Israel. Many people are considering emigration. There are great concerns about the future of the church in both Gaza and the West Bank. People are afraid that soon there will be no more Christians left.

In addition, there are other wounds that require further explanation and clarification. Like the wound of the colonial past (guilt of the West). And the wound of 'white supremacy'. Arabs feel disadvantaged by the West: 'Our deaths do not matter to you.' And: 'You have double standards: everyone is rallying against Russia's occupation of Ukraine, while you remain silent about Israel's occupation of Palestine.'

As said before: the Palestinian (Christian) communities do not want to be reduced to this history of pain and wounds. They too have resilient (church) communities. Palestinian Christians and others (including many Jews) have a deep desire for a society in which all residents can live together with dignity, in equality and security.

51. On 23 January 2024, Kairos Sabeel Netherlands presented a petition to the board, calling, among other, for a ceasefire. See: <https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/protestantse-kerk-onderstreept-belang-van-rechtvaardige-vrede-voor-joden-en-palestijnen/>

Protestantse Kerk in Nederland

P.O. box 8504, 3503 RM Utrecht

(030) 880 18 80

info@protestantsekerk.nl

protestantsekerk.nl