



The Church of Scotland

Office of the Principal Clerk

The Church of Scotland
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29 October 2012

Dear Ephraim,

The content of your letter of the 26th October is disturbing on a number of levels. It makes serious allegations against both the Balfour Project and the Rev Dr Stephen Sizer. Additionally you have noted that the “Board of Deputies is preparing a formal disciplinary complaint” against Dr Sizer and you have attached a dossier of allegations against Dr Sizer.

The level and extent of the allegations are such that over the weekend we been in touch with some of those who are accused of such heinous mischief. Firstly, Professor Roger Spooner, who has been organising the Edinburgh conference, has noted that the Balfour Project is hosting the Edinburgh conference to open up a debate and discussion about the historic circumstances of the Balfour Declaration and of the British Governments promises to both Jewish and Arab communities a century ago. The Church of Scotland World Mission Council’s part in this has been to help with some ground arrangements for the Edinburgh meeting. The Balfour Project does not have a predetermined course and is seeking contributions from all parties with an interest in the subject, and the voice of your organisation would be welcome in the debate over the coming 5 years. Secondly, he also notes that while Stephen Sizer is a member of the steering group for the Balfour Project, he is only one speaker amongst many; so, we cannot accept a judgement such as “the ‘Balfour Project’ is simply a front for Sizer”

We believe too that the level of criticism entitled Dr Sizer to a right of reply, so we have also been in touch with him and put your allegations to him. He has written back to highlight his refutations to the allegations made by you, and others earlier. He shared with

us a letter from the distinguished academician and expert on anti-Semitism, Rabbi Professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok, and other Jewish rabbis and academics, who have offered him support. (<http://www.stephensizer.com/2012/04/six-jewish-rabbis-academics-and-activists-respond-to-ccj-statement/>).

Rabbi Sherbok's letter points out that the laws in the UK are very robust in pursuing anti-Semitism, but that he is very clear in his view that, "*Stephen Sizer...is in no sense anti-Semitic. He writes: "No doubt Stephen Sizer's detractors are acting in good faith, and I agree with them that anti-Semitism must be confronted. But they are regrettably misguided in their allegations about Stephen Sizer. He is in no sense anti-Semitic, and instead is fully in sympathy with those who seek to eradicate all forms of Jew-hatred in the modern world."*

The Jewish Chronicle also reported that Dr Sizer has been supported by his Diocesan Bishop, the Rt Rev Christopher Hill, who is quoted as saying Dr Sizer, "*repudiates anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial.*"

Dr Sizer provided further information in the following links, as well as pointing us to his own comments in his blog and books:

- Church Times: [Vicar is not Anti-Semitic](#)
- Church Times: [Rabbi Clears Vicar of Anti-Semitism](#)
- Church Times: [Dr Sizer is Cleared](#)
- Jewish Chronicle: [:Bishop: anti-Zionist vicar 'no antisemite'](#)
- Jewish Chronicle: [Sizer: I am ready to meet the Board of Deputies any time](#)
- <http://stephensizer.blogspot.com/2011/12/sheep-in-sheeps-clothing.html>
 - lamented the suffering of Christians under Islamic rule [here](#) and [here](#).
 - repudiated suicide bombers and terrorism [here](#) and [here](#).
 - repudiated holocaust deniers [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
 - repudiated anti-Semitism [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
 - repudiated racism and the British National Party (BNP) [here](#).
 - distinguished anti-Zionism from anti-Semitism [here](#).
 - advocated a diplomatic solution to resolving tensions with Iran [here](#) and [here](#).
 - advocated for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by peaceful means based on the implementation of international law [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

He also referred us to these reputable sources as being able to vouch for him:

- [Dr Mark Braverman](#), Author of the Fatal Embrace
- [Anne Clayton](#), Coordinator, Friends of Sabeel UK
- [Rabbi Professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok](#), University of Wales
- [Jeremy Corbyn MP](#), Islington North
- [Professor Scott Elias](#), Royal Holloway, University of London
- [Tony Greenstein](#), Founding Member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign
- [Professor Mary Grey](#), Patron, Friends of Sabeel UK
- [Dr Jeff Halper](#), Co-founder of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions
- [Canon Garth Hewitt](#), Founder of the Amos Trust
- [Dr Ghada Karmi](#), Exeter University
- [Venerable Michael Lawson](#), Rector of St Saviour's, Guildford
- [Jeremy Moodey](#), Chief Executive, Biblelands
- [Diana Neslen](#), Jews for Justice for Palestinians
- [Professor Ilan Pappé](#), Exeter University

- [Rabbi Dr Stanley Howard Schwartz](#), Hospice Chaplain and retired Army Chaplain.

Dr Sizer has also expressed his openness to meet with members of your organisation to discuss your allegations.

On the basis of the above information, that Dr Sizer is in no way anti-Semitic, that he is only one speaker out of a number in the upcoming conference, that the day conference had an open registration process and is open to all to seek insights on how to mark the years running up to the centenary of the Balfour Declaration, and you or other members of the Jewish Community would be free, indeed welcome, to share your thoughts, we cannot agree with the analysis in your letter.

The Church of Scotland has very close ties with the Church of England and we would not presume to adjudge matters which rightly belong to them. The allegations you have compiled should be placed in the hands of the Church of England and perhaps even in the hands of the police and it will be for them to decide on their merits. We, for the time being, accept the judgement of Dr Sizer's superiors and we are satisfied by his own public position statements. Our modest involvement in the Balfour Project Conference will continue, but at one and the same time we hope we can overcome this difficult moment and seek to move forward in developing our good relationship.

As you are no doubt aware we have received a number of notes of concern as a result of your own circular email containing the note of allegations about Dr Sizer; we are therefore, sharing this response with those who make enquiries of us.

Yours sincerely,

Rev John C Chalmers
Principal Clerk