



Scottish Council of  
Jewish Communities

## Jewish Community Concerns about the Church and Society Report

*“The Inheritance of Abraham? A report on the ‘promised land’”*

### Background

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC)<sup>1</sup> regrets that our attempts to continue dialogue with the Church of Scotland have been rebuffed during the last few years, although we have not known why. For many years previously, we used to meet as much as four times a year with the Church and Society Council to discuss a wide range of issues of mutual interest. In addition, we used to make a courtesy call on each new Moderator early in his or her term of office. The topics that used to be covered in these dialogues, included, amongst others, education, religious observance in schools, the various “assisted dying” Bills that have been introduced into the Scottish Parliament, religious hatred including sectarianism, antisemitism, and islamophobia, and the impact of the situation in the Middle East on community relations in Scotland. With regard to the last of these, it should be noted that the Church has previously produced very many reports about the situation in the Middle East, most of them critical of Israeli Government policy, but these have not affected dialogue.

SCoJeC’s remit is the Jewish community in Scotland, and we do not have a formal position on Middle East geopolitics, on which opinion in the Jewish community is probably as varied as in the general population, although of course the return to Zion has featured in our prayers for 2000 years of exile, and most of us have family and friends in Israel and are therefore naturally concerned about their welfare. When, however, events relating to the Middle East impact on the local community, those become our concern.

Last year we were funded by the Scottish Government, to carry out a qualitative survey of people’s experience, both positive and negative, of “Being Jewish in Scotland”<sup>2</sup>. Although there was no question about the Middle East, more than 80% of respondents, from the Borders to the Shetlands, raised the issue, and the vast majority told us that the nature and level of anti-zionist activity in Scotland made them feel unsafe, threatened, and alienated. Some even said they felt compelled to hide their Jewish identity. The General Assembly’s rejection of dialogue, and approval of an unbalanced report, have added to this unease.

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. The Council advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, by providing information and assistance to educational, health, and welfare organisations, representing the Jewish community in Scotland to Government and other statutory and official bodies, and liaising with Ministers, MSPs, Churches, Trades Unions, and others on matters affecting the Jewish community. The Council also provides a support network for the smaller communities and individuals and families who live outwith any Jewish community, and assists organisations within the Scottish Jewish community to comply with various regulatory requirements. SCoJeC also promotes dialogue and understanding between the Jewish community and other communities in Scotland, and works in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders to promote equality, good relations, and understanding among community groups.

For more information about the Council see our website [www.scojec.org](http://www.scojec.org)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.scojec.org/news/2012/12vii\\_bjis/bjis.html](http://www.scojec.org/news/2012/12vii_bjis/bjis.html)

### Concerns about the Report<sup>3</sup>

At merely 8 pages of text, the report is not a reasoned academic discussion of either theology or politics, but a tendentious and biased polemic. It seeks to prove that Jews and Judaism are the problem and that Christianity is the solution. This is very different from a political critique of Israel; it is simply undisguised supremacism, full of selective quotation and biased narrative, fundamental misrepresentations of both Judaism and Zionism, supersessionist “replacement theology”, and offensive mis-characterisation of mainstream Jewish belief. It is also remarkable for what it does not mention, including 2000 years of Jewish prayerful longing for return to the land of Israel, terrorism against Jewish – not Israeli – targets throughout the world, the persecution and consequent flight of Jews from almost all middle-eastern countries, the near disappearance of Christians from the Palestinian Territories, and the statement in the PLO constitution that "Claims of historical or religious ties of Jews with Palestine are incompatible with the facts of history" (facts of which the very existence of the Christian New Testament is proof!), and the classical antisemitic language employed by Hamas. It is hardly surprising that almost all online support for the document has been from the extreme left and the extreme right, including Aryan supremacists in the USA.

We would not presume to make comment on matters of Christian theology and did not do so when commenting on the report; our intention was to correct deep-seated errors in the original report's perception of Jewish belief, emphasise shared themes in Christian-Jewish dialogue, and draw attention to the increasingly hostile contemporary experience of Jewish people in Scotland. However this report does not scruple to comment on matters of Jewish theology, arguing that the Jewish concepts of 'Israel', 'temple', 'Jerusalem', and 'land' need to be radically reinterpreted. There can be no clearer statement of supersessionism. This contrasts starkly with the statement in the Church of Scotland's previous report on the *Theology of Land and Covenant* (May 2003) that:

"As Christians we must be sensitive and accept that we have no right to dictate to Jews how they ought to respond to their traditions; whether, for example, they should be Zionists or non-Zionists, religious or secular. Such issues are rightly part of a lively inner Jewish debate."

### The revised report

In response to widespread public concern, the Council of Christians and Jews convened a meeting at the Church of Scotland headquarters at 121 George Street, attended by senior representatives of both the Church and the Jewish community. At that meeting the Church “agreed that the drafting of the report published by the Church and Society Council for discussion at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has given cause for concern and misunderstanding of its position and requires a new introduction to set the context for the report and give clarity about some of the language used.”

Sadly, however, the revised report merely removed some of the more obviously biased language, but still misrepresented mainstream Jewish views, and we continue to have very grave concerns about the lack of balance in the document's approach to the Middle East conflict, and its selective misrepresentation of Jewish opinion. For example, it makes much of the Jewish origins of one Mark Braverman (which ought to be as irrelevant as whether “some of my best friends are Jewish”), but fails to mention that he is a convert to Christianity and an employee of the campaigning organisation Kairos USA. The Church's

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.scojec.org/news/2013/13v\\_cos/cos.html](http://www.scojec.org/news/2013/13v_cos/cos.html)

representatives in Israel were not consulted. This can hardly be anything other than bad faith, and the unacceptable underlying message of the report remains unaltered. For that reason, it is unlikely to be embraced by any mainstream opinion in the Jewish community, and we do not consider that it will advance the cause of the peace in the Middle East that we all, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, so fervently pray for.

In particular:

- No support or sources are offered for many of the contentions, and the 'scholars' that they cite are all politically or religiously partisan and tainted.
- The sheer arrogance of the reinterpretation of Jewish theology would be offensive even if it were not a totally false, defamatory caricature.
- The document depicts the 'Palestinian theological position' as Kairos Palestine, which it represents as universalist and inclusive. This is a ridiculous assertion, given that (a) most Palestinians are Muslim, and more importantly (b) the idea of a universalist theology of peace could not be further from the Hamas charter (which represents itself as a religious manifesto).
- The report does not even mention Palestinian terror at any point, such as the indiscriminate rocket fire into civilian areas. In its dogmatism, these 'inconvenient truths' are simply omitted.
- Even the revised document continues to conflate the Israeli state, the Israeli government, Israeli citizens as individuals, Jews, and Judaism. It also fails to distinguish between ethnic Palestinian Israeli citizens and the population of what would be, under the two state solution that the Church purports to support, citizens of another country. It therefore ignores the fact that 20% of Israeli citizens are ethnic Palestinians (and as high as 80% in the Galilee), who voted in the recent election, have full access to public facilities such as hospitals, make up c.50% of the student body of some universities, hold senior positions in all walks of life, including the High Court judge who sentenced a former President, Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, Ministers, diplomats, etc.
- The document talks about the Church acting as a peace-maker, but its credibility to do so seems dubious, given the report's apparent attitude to Jews and Judaism, and its failure to offer even minimal comfort to the Jewish community either here or in Israel.
- Despite its professed concern for the Palestinians, there is not a single word of comparison with their position in neighbouring countries. No-one denies there are problems in Israel that need to be confronted, but the fact remains that Palestinians are barred from 52 professions in Lebanon, denied citizenship in Jordan, and are amongst the main victims of the mayhem in Syria, where some 6 million people have been displaced, and the death toll this year alone far exceeds all the casualties in the entire history of Arab-Israeli conflict since the UN partition resolution in 1947.

### **Dialogue and the General Assembly**

We welcomed the concern, in some cases incredulity, expressed by a number of Commissioners at the fact that there had been no dialogue with the Jewish community during the production of the report, and were saddened by the evasive and misleading responses from the Convener, who first admitted in reply to Rev Charles Finnie that "In the past year we have not had ongoing conversations with the Jewish community", and then referred in her summing up to "a very good dialogue".

In fact our overtures for dialogue have been rebuffed for some time. Last year we wrote objecting in the strongest terms to the Church's sponsorship for a conference whose keynote speaker was one Rev Stephen Sizer, a Church of England clergyman who has been condemned by the Council of Christians and Jews and has been subject to disciplinary action for linking his website to openly antisemitic and Holocaust-denial websites; instead of offering to discuss our concerns, the response from the Principal Clerk was to dismiss them out of hand in terms copied directly from Sizer's website, and then to refuse even to correspond further.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting that Sizer has condemned the revision of the report as "depressing", and has posted the original on his website.

Earlier last year, we welcomed Andrew Maclellan's proposal, as Convener of the Board of World Mission, that the Kirk's hotel in Tiberias, could be used "to bring together two communities who did not know each other to begin the longest journey". We twice proposed meeting to discuss how this could be taken forward but received no response. We have also heard nothing further about our proposal to arrange a second joint pilgrimage, as we did in 2008.

Sadly, it is against that record that we have to assess the debate at the General Assembly. We welcomed the proposal of a commissioner to "Instruct the Council to engage in further dialogue with the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities with a view to bringing a new report to the General Assembly of 2014," and were disappointed when no-one even seconded a second proposal to add these words without deleting the other clauses of the Deliverance. We were then extremely disturbed that this attempt to restart dialogue was overwhelmingly rejected by the General Assembly, which, equally overwhelmingly, endorsed the report.

## Summary

We regret that the Church and Society Council appears not to have given any thought to the impact of its report on Jewish people here in Scotland. The two Commissioners who spoke most strongly against the amendment said respectively, "[This report] is a critique of the situation in the State of Israel and its current policies. It is not a report about the Jewish communities in Scotland or the United Kingdom, and we have to hold those two things separate," and "We can at times regret the formulation of words that sometimes we appear to put out, but we should never apologise for having the opportunity to discuss the injustice and inhumanity that this report highlights." Sadly, it is precisely that disregard for "regrettably" immoderate forms of words that prevents us keeping "those two things separate", by fuelling the sense of vulnerability, hostility, and alienation that the vast majority of our community report to us.

As the umbrella representative body of the Jewish Community of Scotland, SCoJeC has, on a number of occasions, drawn the attention of the Church to the findings of our recent Government-funded "Being Jewish in Scotland" project mentioned above, and are saddened that the Church has not seen fit to meet us to discuss how they could contribute to better relations between communities in Scotland, but instead has issued a document that contributes to the unease expressed by so many of our respondents.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.scojec.org/news/2012/12/xi\\_cos/cos.html](http://www.scojec.org/news/2012/12/xi_cos/cos.html)

## **Appendix:**

Comments in the media on the Church and Society report:

### **Press reports and comment:**

[www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/leaders/article3760693.ece](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/leaders/article3760693.ece)

[www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/life/article3761686.ece](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/life/article3761686.ece)

[www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/106939/scottish-church-debate-jewish-right-land-israel](http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/106939/scottish-church-debate-jewish-right-land-israel)

[www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/columnists/107278/a-damaging-document](http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/columnists/107278/a-damaging-document)

[www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/church-of-scotland-jews-do-not-have-a-right-to-the-land-of-israel.premium-1.518932](http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/church-of-scotland-jews-do-not-have-a-right-to-the-land-of-israel.premium-1.518932)

[www.haaretz.com/opinion/the-church-of-scotland-s-parody-of-judaism.premium-1.525350](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/the-church-of-scotland-s-parody-of-judaism.premium-1.525350)

[forward.com/articles/175926/church-of-scotland-denies-jewish-claim-to-land-of/](http://forward.com/articles/175926/church-of-scotland-denies-jewish-claim-to-land-of/)

### **A Christian commentary:**

“The Inheritance of Abraham - a report on The Promised Land” – Response by the Emmaus Group.

<http://www.emmaus-group.org/the-inheritance-of-abraham-a-report-on-the-promised-land/>

### **Other commentary:**

[www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3741/church-of-scotland-inheritance-of-abraham](http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3741/church-of-scotland-inheritance-of-abraham)

[www.ccj.org.uk/Articles/354531/Council\\_of\\_Christians/News/Church\\_of\\_Scotland.aspx](http://www.ccj.org.uk/Articles/354531/Council_of_Christians/News/Church_of_Scotland.aspx)

[blog.thecst.org.uk/?p=4350](http://blog.thecst.org.uk/?p=4350)

[blogs.timesofisrael.com/3-justifications-for-an-anti-jewish-screed/](http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/3-justifications-for-an-anti-jewish-screed/)

[thisongoingwar.blogspot.co.il/2013/05/3-may-13-scotland-weighs-up-jews-and.html](http://thisongoingwar.blogspot.co.il/2013/05/3-may-13-scotland-weighs-up-jews-and.html)

[www.dennisprager.com/columns.aspx?g=9e369c85-74f3-432e-88f1-0ea0a4d3869b](http://www.dennisprager.com/columns.aspx?g=9e369c85-74f3-432e-88f1-0ea0a4d3869b)

[archbishop-cranmer.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/church-of-scotland-report-denies-jesus.html](http://archbishop-cranmer.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/church-of-scotland-report-denies-jesus.html)

[www.christianstogether.net/Articles/357023/Christians\\_Together\\_in/Esther\\_414/The\\_Church\\_of.aspx](http://www.christianstogether.net/Articles/357023/Christians_Together_in/Esther_414/The_Church_of.aspx)

[myrightword.blogspot.co.il/2013/05/the-untheologicalism-of-church-of.html](http://myrightword.blogspot.co.il/2013/05/the-untheologicalism-of-church-of.html)

[mondoweiss.net/2013/05/scotland-controversial-israelpalestine.html?](http://mondoweiss.net/2013/05/scotland-controversial-israelpalestine.html?)

[www.americanthinker.com/2013/05/the\\_church\\_of\\_scotland\\_vs\\_israel.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2013/05/the_church_of_scotland_vs_israel.html)

[www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2276](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2276)

### ***Being Jewish in Scotland***

Scottish Government funded study into the experience of Jewish people in Scotland today:

[www.scojec.org/jewishinScotland.html](http://www.scojec.org/jewishinScotland.html).