

Presenter: Petra Heldt, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Title: **“From a Designer God to Palestinism; From Zionism to the State of Israel as a Role Model: Contemporary Christian Church Attitudes Toward the State of Israel. Strategies Against Anti-Semitism”**

Panel: Bible, Christianity and Anti-Semitism

The analysis identifies four fundamental variants of Christian Church attitudes toward the State of Israel and proposes strategic actions against anti-Semitism rooted in such attitudes

Variant 1: The Churches of the Reformation in the West (Europe and Anglophone countries) are run by bureaucrats often interested in anti-Israel agendas. Following the trajectories of the Enlightenment’s move to a *Designer God* and the *Modern Moral Order* (Charles Taylor), Church bureaucrats tend to manipulate pro-Israel synod statements, to side-line pro-Israel clergy and laity, and to permeate the Christian faith with anti-biblical and anti-Semitic Gnostic tenets. Frequently, that bureaucratic moral order appears to follow a dualism in which Israel becomes the villain and Palestinians the victim. That often self-appointed leadership acts against Israel by means like the *Durban Strategy* (2001) that invented an imaginary Israeli “racism,” “apartheid,” and “occupation” out of the concepts of Zionism and the Jewish State. The Geneva-bound World Council of Churches sees itself as a Protestant Church bureaucratic superstructure, acts according to those pre-modern parameters and promotes a new religion of *Palestinism*, as it were (Gisele Littman).

Variant 2: The Western Churches of the Reformation that represent Bible-believing Christians, with connections often detached from the former leaderships, investigate the various notions of Zionism from the time of the Reformation and translate biblical and theological insights into support for the modern State of Israel (cf. The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem). Those Christians sometimes call themselves Christian Zionists. While that Christian approach to Jewish return to Eretz Israel is occasionally connected to eschatology, as it might be in relevant Jewish circles, there are also those Christians that, biblically, delineate favor for the State of Israel without an explicit eschatological tenet (cf. “Reflections on the Problem Church-Israel,” the Swiss Protestant Church Federation, 1977). Based on uninformed reading strategies of Holy

Writ, Christian missionary attempts to Jews develop and cause irritation in Israel and exploitation of Christians in favor of Israel.

Variant 3: The Catholic Church committed itself in the Second Vatican Council in 1965 to a new theological relation with Judaism and the Jewish People. While theological issues developed, the State of Israel remained eclipsed. The Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel (1993) regulates diplomatic relations between the two states. The political approach remains aloof from the theological one. When the Vatican signed a treaty (2015) with the “State of Palestine,” Israel pointed out that the document ignores the historic rights of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel and to the places holy to Judaism in Jerusalem. The splitting regarding Israel as a people and a religion on the one hand and as a statehood on the other fails to see Israel as an interconnected whole.

Variant 4: The Orthodox Churches in the Middle East face the genocidal law of the Dhimma for more than a millennium. While speaking in favor of the State of Israel has been nearly impossible within their otherwise anti-Semitic environments, Orthodox Church leaders, in a different context, often position Israel as the safe place for Christians in the Middle East (cf. the Orthodox Church Summit on Persecuted Christians in Budapest/ Hungary in October 2017). Contemporary Maronite Lebanese Christians in Israel and Arab Christians in Galilee/Israel (*Christian Empowerment Movement, Nazareth/Israel*) point to the State of Israel as the role model for Christians in the Middle East.

The study proposes four strategies to combat anti-Semitic thinking that develops from those Church attitudes.

First, a commission of church-external strategists should be established and tasked with the modernization of Protestant ecclesiastic bureaucracy with the aim to redirecting a church rationale free of Anti-Semitism.

Second, a policy should be developed for strongly promoting the currently sidelined biblical Christian theology that delineates biblical promises regarding Israel as part of Protestant theology.

Third, curricula need to advance the study of a traditional Mediterranean ethno-religious policy that is characterized by the endorsement of land, state, religion and language as a fourfold unit that functions within the parameters of particularity and universality. Such context prevents separating the State of Israel from its religion.

Fourth, Western churches need to learn from orthodox churches, in particular from, but not only, the Greek, Maronite, Coptic, or Ethiopian Orthodox churches about their positive approaches to modern Israel. The development of extensive educational and social cooperation between Western and Middle Eastern Churches will become a key element in successfully fighting Anti-Semitism in Protestant church settings.