

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703572404575634813393141110>

HOUSES OF WORSHIP

Presbyterians Against Israel

Liberal Protestants are engaging in historical revisionism concerning Jews and the Holy Land.

By **MARVIN HIER AND ABRAHAM COOPER**

In many ways, the second half of the 20th century was a high point for Jewish-Christian relations. Today, however, the anti-Israel politics of certain powerful Christian bodies hampers interfaith relations and threatens to breathe new life into medieval doctrine that demonized Jews for hundreds of years.

In 2007, the World Council of Churches, an umbrella organization of mostly liberal Protestants claiming a membership of 580 million worshippers, convened the "Churches Together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East Conference." The conference produced the Amman Call, a document that condemned violence and endorsed a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but denied Israel's right to a future as a Jewish state.

It did so by insisting that millions of Palestinians—the grandchildren of those who left and were expelled from Palestine in 1948—have the "right of return" to Israel. As is well known, granting all third-generation Palestinians such a right would mean Israel's quick disappearance and its replacement by another Middle Eastern Mullahcracy or dictatorship.

The Amman Call also labeled the barrier Israel has built to keep out Palestinian suicide bombers—which has effectively saved untold Jewish, Muslim and Christian lives—a "grave breach of international law" that must be removed.

In 2008, the World Council of Churches convened a group of Protestant and Catholic theologians to review the underpinnings of Christian attitudes toward Israel. (No Jews were invited.) The group published the so-called Bern Perspective, which, among other things, instructed Christians to understand all biblical references to Israel only metaphorically.

This understanding denies the connection between today's Jews and Moses, Jeremiah and Isaiah. It marks a return to "replacement theology," the medieval view that the Church has replaced Israel in God's plan and that all biblical references to Israel refer to

the "new Israel"—that is, to Christians. For centuries, that view was the theological basis for denying rights to Jews in Church-dominated Europe.

In 2009, on the first day of Chanukah (which Jews again celebrate this week), a group of Christian Palestinians issued the Kairos Palestine Document, which was immediately published on the World Council of Churches website. The document calls for a general boycott of Israel and argues that Christians' faith requires them to side with the "oppressed," meaning the Palestinians. It speaks of the evils of the Israeli "occupation," yet is silent on any evils committed by Palestinians, including the Hamas terrorists who now govern the Gaza Strip.

The Kairos document also describes the Jewish connection to Israel only in terms of the Holocaust, denying 3,000 years of Jewish domicile. "Our presence in this land, as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, is not accidental but rather deeply rooted in the history and geography of this land," it states. "The West sought to make amends for what Jews had endured in the countries of Europe, but it made amends on our account and in our land."

Most importantly, these Palestinian church leaders declared that there must not be a Jewish state because any religious state is inherently racist. They mentioned in this regard only Israel, of course, ignoring all Muslim states and others with an official state religion.

The Kairos document quickly won accolades from religious groups including from the Presbyterian Church (USA), which has 2.3 million American members and in 2004 was the first mainline American Protestant group to call for divestment from Israel.

This past February, its Middle East Study Committee announced that it would urge the U.S. government to "employ the strategic use of influence and the withholding of financial and military aid" from Israel. While conceding Israel's right to exist, it appended an apology to Palestinians. In the words of one committee member, recognizing Israel's right to exist "is to give Israel a pass on the way Israel was created and denies the legitimacy of the Palestinian people."

The Simon Wiesenthal Center will soon meet with the president of the World Council of Churches to urge an end to its campaign against Israel and the Jewish people. Like anti-Israel diplomatic and academic campaigns, such religious calls and writings won't improve the life of a single Palestinian. But they will certainly embolden terrorists and anti-Semites, and cast carefully nurtured interfaith relations into darkness and disarray.

Rabbi Hier is founder and dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Rabbi Cooper is the center's associate dean.