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Apartheid then and now – where are we heading? The case of Israel[1]

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Abstract

Arguments that the State of Israel practices apartheid are contested by many. In recent years debates on the secular State of Israel's oppression of Palestinians gained prominence also in ecumenical circles. Several stark ecclesial differences prompted this review of Israel as an apartheid regime, and the implications for reformed theology.

Christian Zionist beliefs fall short of living up to religious moral high ground because of uncritical support for a country with a scurrilous record for flagrant disregard of human rights. An understanding of ethnic cleansing, occupation, settler-colonialism, and apartheid as defined in international law, are crucial in examining the nature of Israel's regime. The task of reformed Christians – in churches, church bodies, theological schools and in public life – in response to ideologies and theologies of empire and exclusivity is to be united in acknowledging complicity in injustice and in fostering an ethos of honesty, inclusive dignity, equality, and compassion.

Keywords

Apartheid; Christian division; Israel; Palestine; reformed theology; renewal in faith; Zionism

1. Introduction: divided church positions

Over the years, different terms have been used to describe Israel's human rights transgressions. More recently the term "Israeli apartheid" has gained

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prominence – also in ecumenical circles. In Asia, Christian theologians from 21 countries in alliance with all religious communities and civil society movements in the Asia-Pacific region, asserted that the practices of Israel's regime fall within the scope of the international definition of "apartheid" and resembles a crime against humanity. They called for decisive action "to address the brutal and horrific situations of the continuing Nakba that the Palestinians have been facing for more than seven decades" (Global Kairos Asia Pacific Palestine Solidarity 2022). In the United States, statements by several churches mark a significant departure from American churches' longstanding hesitations about criticizing the State of Israel. The Presbyterian Church in the United States, in its 225th General Assembly, for example, overwhelmingly passed a resolution that recognises Israel's laws, policies, and practices as apartheid against the Palestinians (PC Biz 2022). The United Church of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the American Friends Service Committee, the service branch of the Quaker church, the Episcopalians and the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church followed (Wright 2022b). Though not indicative of a consensus among American Christians, these churches all name the Israeli government's laws, policies, and practices as "apartheid". Closer to home, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) issued statements, including a call upon the international Lambeth Conference (ACSA 2021), that refer to Israeli practices of "apartheid".

Arguments that the State of Israel has an apartheid regime are contested by many. The General Manager of the South African Friends of Israel (an organisation that engages with faith-based and others in the interest of support for Israel), for example, refers to ACSA's views as "extreme" and "biased". These views, she states, are not only "out of sync with the more constructive position of its parent body, the Church of England" but also "at odds with the fundamentals of Christian doctrine" (Ngubane, 2022). Friends of Israel is one of many well-funded international organisations that offers sponsored tours and other opportunities to convince Christians of the moral legitimacy of Israel's agenda (South African Zionist Federation, n.d.). While the tone and manner of these organisations often come across as reasonable and empathic, their arguments deliberately mask the reality of Israel's "constant asymmetric battle with Palestinians" (Stanley 2015:105).

In September 2022, the depth of the division between Christians on whether or not Israel has an apartheid regime, was palpable at the Eleventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe. Widespread support of reformed and other churches for a need to discern on the matter of Israeli apartheid contrasted with vocal opposition and actions to not only suppress the voices of Palestinians but also to prevent member churches from tabling the issue. The Anglican Church of Southern Africa, with the formal support of fifteen churches from the Global South and the Global North, wanted to table a proposal to discern on Israeli apartheid at the Public Witness Committee of the WCC. South African churches that formally supported this initiative included the Uniting Presbyterian Church, the Moravian Church, and the Methodist Church. The Uniting Reformed Church and the United Congregational Church pledged support informally on email. The Presbyterian Church of the USA also planned to ask the global church community to study, and respond to, recent in-depth reports on Israeli apartheid. However, neither the Anglicans from South Africa nor the Presbyterians from the US were allowed to present their respective proposals. Instead, the Public Witness Committee prepared its own proposal. During the ensuing group discussions the inclusion of the word "apartheid" elicited vigorous opposition, especially from delegates of the Evangelical Church in Germany (Kairos Palestine Solidarity Network in Germany 2022). In the end, the WCC Assembly's resolution acknowledged studies of international, Israeli, and Palestinian human rights bodies with evidence of Israeli apartheid. Yet it concluded that "some churches and delegates strongly support the utilization of this term as accurately describing the reality of the people in Palestine/Israel and the position under international law, while others find it inappropriate, unhelpful and painful" (World Council of Churches 2022).

These stark ecclesial differences prompted the writing of this article. The questions churches face is whether or not Israel has an apartheid regime, and how to respond. My aim is to critically assess the possibility of Israel as an apartheid regime and to construct knowledge for critical theological discernment. The interdisciplinary research in the field of theological ethics offered here starts with a brief overview of the influence of Zionism on theological views. I then contextualise the concepts "ethnic cleansing", "occupied" and "settler-colonialism" to argue that Israel's treatment of

Palestinians represents a system of state violence. Against this background, I consider the possibility of Israeli apartheid as defined in international law. In the last section, I examine the responsibilities of reformed churches in view of the implications of Action 55 of the 26th General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (2017).

2. Zionism in Christianity

Ideologies based on racial supremacism, oppression, the confiscation of property or resources, and a purported divine right to divide and rule, are incompatible with the Christian faith and its core message of compassion, dignity, and justice for all (Corrado 2013, Sizer 2021, Vosloo 2015, De La Torre & Raheb 2022). Whether these practices pertain to European colonialism, slavery, racist segregation in the United States or Canada or Australia, the Armenian and Rwandese genocides, Germany's National Socialism, apartheid, a transnational Russian identity which assumes ownership of other states, or any other context: discrimination, imperialism and state violence are immoral and illegal. To use the Bible to justify or normalise any of these crimes goes against the grain of Christianity's inclusive values. Yet today millions of Christians all over the world embrace the ideology of Zionism.

The Jewish Zionist movement was established in 1897 as a secular political organisation in Europe under the leadership of Theodor Herzl, with the intention to colonise Palestine (Shavit 2013:3-22, 388). At the time, European Zionist Jews had different ideas. Some wanted to settle among the locals in Palestine, others wanted to control all the land, and not all moved to Palestine. By the time that Herzl established this secular movement, an agricultural colony of European Jews – most of them religious – had already settled peacefully in Palestine with no desire to change the local socio-political structures. Yet this idea of harmonious cohabitation in Palestine was soon overtaken by the imperialist ideals of other European Jews who fled from war-torn Europe (Ellis 2014:28-49). Zionism as a state project has dominated ever since.

Christian Zionism, a theological doctrine with roots going back to the Protestant Reformation in Britain, is a religious movement underpinned by an "ultra-literal and futurist hermeneutic" (Sizer 2002:3) that has exerted

a powerful influence on Christian belief and practice in the twentieth century. Christian Zionists conflate the biblical Israel with the modern State of Israel and regard all Jews as direct descendants of the Israelites of the Bible. Jews are considered God's chosen people, Jerusalem is regarded as the eternal capital of the Jews, and there is the expectation that the temple will be rebuilt. Other tenets include that God promised the land to the Jewish people, and that all Jews have to return to a mythical Greater (Eretz) Israel with undefined borders, promised by God to the "people of Israel" (Fontaine 2008:13). Moreover, God has a special plan for Jews, and God blesses those who bless Israel and curses those who curse Israel. Christians who embrace Zionism understand "Jewishness" primarily as a religious identity and view their unwavering support for a Jewish-only State on Palestinian land as a core Christian responsibility. The lives and livelihoods of the indigenous Christian, Muslim and other Palestinians are not deemed part of God's plan for Israel and Palestine.

Many Christians who do not subscribe to the apocalyptic eschatology of Christian Zionism also regard the modern State of Israel as exempt from international human rights laws because of nostalgia or feelings of guilt about the persecution of European Jews. That this haven is on Palestinian land and that Palestinians pay the price for Europe's antisemitism is considered unfortunate but necessary for Jewish survival. Zionism is seen simplistically as an ethical salvation movement, and criticizing Israel and Zionism is regarded unjust and antisemitic.

Many well-meaning Christians identify with Zionist claims without realising that religious and secular claims of an everlasting connection between Palestinian land and Jews are misleading in several ways. First, not all Jews are religious. To qualify as "Jewish" in Israel and to receive full civil rights does not require a person to practise Judaism or to have ancestral ties with the land. Moreover, not all Jews in Israel and elsewhere support Zionism or the State of Israel. Thirdly, the modern State is not the same entity as ancient or biblical Israel. Fourthly, the often-mentioned myth of "a people without a land for a land without a people" suggests the existence of a pure or a homogenous group identity over millennia. It considers neither the fluidity and changes in territorial boundaries over centuries, nor the history of different rules in the region that shows that Israel's purported rights to the land cannot be legitimised through claims

of historic occupancy (Sand 2010; Spangenberg & Van der Westhuizen 2018:95–137).

To prioritise the rights of Jewish lives over those of Christian, Muslim and other Palestinians implies that the Imago Dei – a key principle in all three Abrahamic faith traditions of each person's inherent worth and dignity – is dishonoured. This hermeneutic strategy lacks the "empathetic or participatory imagination" that enables one to consider how the world looks from the perspective of someone from another cultural, ethnic, or religious orientation (Claassens 2015:155). Thus, Christian Zionism or any other theology that uses the Hebrew Bible to privilege or exclude any nation, race, culture, or religion at the cost of another within God's universal economy of grace, opposes a contextual reading where God is in a relationship with believers, other human beings, and creation (Snyman, 2021:655–568).

3. Israel's discrimination: three interlinked terms

On 14 May 1948, Zionist leaders unilaterally declared 78% of Palestine as the State of Israel. By that time the broad Zionist paramilitary movement had dispossessed, destroyed, and depopulated hundreds of Palestinian villages and most urban areas. The Palestinians' loss of land, property, banks, natural resources, courts, and civil rights did not seem to matter to a world that pledged "never again" after World War II. As the years pass and Israel declassifies more government papers, the picture of what happened when 85% of the population living in the area that became the State of Israel were turned into refugees, becomes clearer.

Ethnic cleansing

Jewish historian Ilan Pappe, Benny Morris and other Jewish Israeli historians used declassified military documents to meticulously reconstruct the mass dispossession and exodus of 1947–1948 under leadership of David Ben-Gurion. Pappe (2013:247) defines these events as an intentional Zionist strategy of "ethnic cleansing" to establish and maintain a Jewish majority at all costs. Since 1948, the confiscation of land, and the attempts to minimise the presence of Palestinians and to eradicate Palestinian memory, have continued relentlessly. Today the term "ethnic cleansing" remains relevant

to the Palestinians' ongoing Nakba or Catastrophe (El-Kurd 2020, Seedeen 2021). In Gaza civilians are starved, shot, bombed, and denied specialist medical care. In the West Bank civilians are shot, evicted and their homes, churches, mosques, clinics, roads, businesses, water sources, equipment and farmland are vandalised, demolished, and confiscated. In the Sheikh Jarra neighbourhood of East Jerusalem Jewish settlers evict Palestinians from their houses, move in, and display Israeli flags as proof of ownership.

Occupied

The term "occupied" is the official term used by the United Nations and global bodies to refer to the status of Palestine. In 1967, Israel captured the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, along with the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. This brought the remaining 22% of Palestine also under Israeli occupation. Again, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled, worsening the refugee crisis that had begun in 1948. According to Article 42 of the *1907 Hague Regulations*, a territory is considered "occupied" in international law when it has been placed under the authority of the hostile army where "such authority has been established and can be exercised". Yet an occupier has no sovereignty over the occupied territory and any occupation is meant to be temporary (International Committee of the Red Cross 2004). The *Hague Regulations* (arts. 42-56), the *Fourth Geneva Convention* (IV, arts. 27-34 and 47-78) and other legal aspects specify the duties of an occupying power. For example, an occupying power may not confiscate private property or settle parts of its own civilian population on the occupied territory. It may also not use collective punishment or take people as hostages, and it must respect cultural property and ensure sufficient hygiene and public health standards, food, and medical care to the occupied population. Israel's repeated violations of all these aspects in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem are documented in monthly and annual reports by the United Nations (available: https://ochaopt.org/).

Israel controls all Palestinian borders, coastal waters, airspace and the flow of goods, people, and money. In their public call, *A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* (Kairos Palestine 2009), generally known as the Palestinian Kairos Document, Christian Palestinians use the term "occupation" almost

thirty times to refer to the ravaging and confiscation of Palestinian land, the arbitrary demolition of their homes and structures, as well as the restrictions on access to educational and health facilities, places of worship, and courts. They also speak of cruel, degrading treatment, discriminative laws and collective punishment (indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks) on civilians, and other violations of international human rights laws. The authors assert that the military occupation of Palestinian land is "a sin against God and humanity", and "any theology that legitimizes the occupation and justifies crimes perpetrated against the Palestinian people, lies far from Christian teachings" (Kairos Palestine 2009).

Settler-colonialism

The conquest of Palestine is also described in terms of "settler-colonialism" (Ayyash 2020, Bseiso & Whittall 2021, Cook 2019, De Jong 2017), a concept that differs markedly from "colonialism". In colonialism, a foreign power arrives in another country to exploit resources and labour, mainly for economic reasons. The colonists frequently rationalized their resource grab and self-assumed rights to violently force the indigenous population to submit to the rule of the coloniser, through religion or ideas of "civilisation" such as bringing education to the locals.

In settler-colonialism the coloniser tries to eliminate the local population by exterminating, displacing, or driving them into ghettoes, Bantustans or reservations where they are deprived of rights and access to resources. In their place, and over time, an invasive settler society develops a distinctive identity and gains sovereignty as happened, for example, in the United States, Canada, South Africa and Australia (Barker & Lowman n.d.). Since 1948, Palestinians have suffered waves of forced displacement. By the end of 2008, "there were an estimated 7 million Palestinian refugees and more than 110 000 internally displaced Palestinians, representing 70% of the entire Palestinian population worldwide (10.1 million)" (EAPPI 2009:11).

Today no Palestinian – whether living in Israel or in the enclaves of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem – has access to civil courts and full civil rights. They may not choose where to live and travel, and whom to marry. As second-class citizens they have to make way for Jewish immigrants who gain full citizenship – regardless of being religious or having ancestral ties with the land. Yet a large number of Christians who

declared themselves as Jews gained full citizenship in Israel. Israel has over 50 laws and other mechanisms that regulate Arab Israeli citizenship, based on ethnic and religious identity (ADALAH n.d.). Some scholars describe Israel as an "ethnic democracy", or as an incomplete or a low-grade democracy (Sand 2010:295). Others argue that the State of Israel is not a democracy at all, because it discriminates against parts of its population (Jeena 2012:5). These perspectives point out that a Jewish-only democracy is not open and inclusive or willing to coexist with indigenous groups on a basis of equality (Sand 2010:305).

In 2018, the Jewish national identity officially became part of Israel's collection of foundational rules. The *Jewish Nation-State Basic Law of 2018* makes explicit that more than seven decades of de facto discrimination against Palestinians is now openly acknowledged as a constitutional principle. By affirming the natural, cultural, religious, and historical rights of Jews to sole ownership of the so-called Greater Israel, and that Jewish settlements on Palestinian land are a national asset, this law affirms the settler-colonialist, and undemocratic nature of the State of Israel.

To summarise: Israel's take-over of Palestine is implemented in multi-faceted ways. The ongoing eradication and displacement of Palestinians, the discrimination against Arab citizens of Israel, and the military occupation of the Palestinian territories are intertwined with the rapidly expansion of settlements in the West Bank and the Judaization of East Jerusalem. These tactics are part of a comprehensive State-sanctioned strategy to cement Jewish superiority at the cost of Palestinians and to maintain economic and socio-political dominance.

4. Apartheid in international law

On which grounds do grave, structural discrimination qualify as "apartheid"? This term was coined in South Africa during the country's former discriminatory racial regime with its separate and unequal land division, exploitative labour practices, and restrictions on access to public facilities and interracial marriages. However, this does not mean that the South African case may serve as the baseline to establish whether or not apartheid exists in another context.

To prove or disapprove apartheid in a particular context cannot be determined through simplistic statistical or content comparisons, or by using one catastrophe as a benchmark for another. The geo-politics, the history, the parties involved, the duration and the depth and the scale of discrimination and other factors may all differ in various contexts. When Human Rights Watch (2021a) and the United Nations (Charbonneau 2019; McCarthy 2019), for example, mention apartheid crimes by Israel and Myanmar, they do not use comparative analysis or try to prove parallelism, because these contexts neither replicate South African apartheid exactly, nor yield quantitatively accurate similarities. International law, through two customary international laws and the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court,* define the universal features or meta-dynamics of "apartheid":

- *The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid* adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 30, 1973, defines "apartheid" as "inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them." This UN Convention came into force at the height of South African apartheid, and it offers the moral logic and the instruments for identifying apartheid also in other contexts (Dugard 2008).
- According to Article 85, 4c in Addition Protocol 1 to *The Geneva Convention* of 1977 "apartheid" is a war crime with "degrading practices involving outrages upon personal dignity, based on racial discrimination" and a grave breach of the Protocol (International Committee of the Red Cross 1977).
- The *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (United Nations 2002) specifies "apartheid" as "a crime against humanity" and as "inhumane acts … committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime."

The concept of "race" is part of all three these definitions. In South Africa, skin colour was used as the determining factor to legalise discrimination.

Black South Africans were bombarded with messages of being inferior in every respect – intellectually, spiritually, physically, and aesthetically. Such reductive use of "black" remains controversial and a source of pain and distress in South Africa and I use it here only to refer to those who suffered unjustly under South African apartheid. The term is not indicative of biological and phenotypical labels, and it does not denote an observable feature that can be used for classification. In fact, Amnesty International (2022) highlights that international courts now recognise "race" and "racial group" more broadly as subjective or perceived constructs of "group identity". While victims from time to time claim these subjective categories, the categories are most often used by perpetrators since the latter is in the position to determine who is to be victimized. Therefore "racial groups" is now understood to refer to those who are perceived as being different and possibly inferior by other groups on account of particular physical, cultural or other attributes. This position can be summarised as follows: "the question of race is connected to the labelling and stigmatisation of members of a group, singled out by the perpetrator as targets of his criminal acts. The perpetrator dominates a group he considers and treats as inferior" (Amnesty International 2022). Thus, any systematic denial of basic rights linked to distinctions, exclusions, restrictions and limitations (or any institutionalized regime of oppression and domination) based solely on skin colour, descent, religion, culture, or national or ethnic origin would constitute the international wrong of apartheid.

The crime of apartheid consists of three elements: (a) systematic oppression; (b) inhumane, degrading acts committed as part of that project; and (c) the intention to maintain the system of domination (Charbonneau 2021). Over the years several international bodies have linked the Israeli regime to apartheid. In 2012, the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination found Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories "tantamount to Apartheid" and stated that "many state policies within Israel also violate the prohibition on apartheid as enshrined in Article 3 of the Convention" (Erakat & Madi 2012). In 2011 and 2012, similar findings were made by the Russell Tribunal in Cape Town. Likewise, a team of scholars and practitioners of international public law from South Africa, the United Kingdom, Israel, and Palestine examined Israel's laws, policies, and the facts on the ground. They concluded that Israel has violated, and

continues to violate, prohibitions in international law to colonialism and apartheid (Human Sciences Research Council 2009:277).

Despite all these extensive reports, Human Rights Watch (2021b) points out that until recently reference to Israel as an apartheid regime has mostly been "in a descriptive or comparative, non-legal sense, and often to warn that the situation is heading in the wrong direction". This changed in 2021 and 2022 when three prominent human rights organisations, including the Israeli organisation B'Tselem, a recipient of several international awards, issued in-depth studies detailing evidence of Israeli apartheid in accordance with international law. The reports of B'Tselem (2021), Human Rights Watch (2021a) and Amnesty International (2022) confirm that Israel claims Jewish supremacy and privilege over Palestinians and labels, stigmatises, targets, and treats them as lesser human beings with lesser rights. Second, they found Israel's oppression through collective punishment, neglect, force, and other human rights violations, as systematic, institutionalised and intended to be permanent. Third, the physical, psychological and emotional harm is inhumane and degrading.

These findings apply to Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories, and in Israeli sovereign territory (Human Rights Watch 2021a, B'Tselem 2021). Moreover, Israel's regime with regard to all Palestinians, including the millions of refugees who are disallowed by Israel to return to their homes – constitutes apartheid as defined in the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* and in the *1973 United Nations International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid* (Amnesty International 2022). Thus, Israeli apartheid differs from South African apartheid, specifically in that Israel not only minimises the rights of Palestinian or Arab citizens but aims to minimise their presence. Today approximately 14 million people, roughly half of them Jews and the other half Palestinians, live on what is known as Israel and Palestine. In effect, all are ruled by the State of Israel who has sole power over the population registers, land allocation, voter rolls, immigration, and civil rights (or the denial thereof). The findings in the three reports were criticised by many as "antisemitic", but to date no-one has been able to provide scientific evidence that countered the findings of these reports.

5. A reformed perspective

Theological and ecclesial support for Zionism brings Christianity to a crisis which reminds one of the complicities of the German Evangelical Church in antisemitism, and churches in justifying South African apartheid. The impact of Zionism as a political and theologically based ideology in contemporary world affairs has immediate and urgent significance for the mission and the integrity of the Christian faith, and the crisis of ideology and ethics faced by the world. Many churches have not yet embarked on formal processes to examine their explicit or implicit views on Israel and the Palestinians in relation to their values, beliefs, world views and praxis.

In 1982, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declared apartheid to be a heresy. Today the former WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council constitute the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). In 2017 the General Council – the highest decision body of the WCRC that represents 100 million Christians from 105 countries – was the first global church body to acknowledge that blind loyalty to Israel is not only a crisis for Palestinians, but also for Christianity. Action 55 of 2017 affirms that regarding the situation of injustice and suffering in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, "the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake" when it is used to justify the marginalization of Palestinians (WCRC 2017:354). The introduction to the resolution states as follows:

> We acknowledge and confess that the Christian faith has been used to justify the injustice against the Palestinian people. Any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth. All who suffer share in the groaning of the Holy Spirit for the liberation of all peoples and their joining in one spiritual communion. The ongoing condition of occupation, and the continuing denial of Palestinian rights has cast a shadow over generations of Jewish Israelis who have borne the social, psychological, and spiritual burdens of the role of occupier. (WCRC 2017:354)

The General Council encouraged reformed churches to critically "examine their mission, education, and investment relationships with Israel and

Palestine in light of the witness of Palestinian Christians and to respond as they understand the Reformed Communion's commitments to human rights and the protections of international law". Moreover, the General Secretary was tasked to collect, collate, and make available material to member churches to equip them to study, discern, and critique any theologies that legitimate the oppression of the Palestinians, "recognizing that such a study might result in the need for prophetic action." (WCRC 2017:354). In response, the WCRC published an open-source handbook in three parts with educational information, statements and links to additional sources, graphics, and videos. The third section features apartheid as one of the prominent "systems of sin" implemented by Israel (Cunningham & Framke 2021:61-65).

Five years later, in Karlsruhe, Chris Ferguson, former General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, in reflecting on the events of the World Council of Churches, remarked that the German church leaders failed to close the door on the call to study evidence on Israeli apartheid. Yet Ferguson and Philip Woods, Associate Director of Presbyterian World Mission, were alarmed that the German church leaders reframed the suffering of Palestinians as a question of church unity rather than justice. In other words, the difference in opinions between members of the WCC did not lead to justice or a pastoral concern for the marginalised, but to a concern for the self. "It is a sad and shameful situation that undermines our witness, our authenticity and our credibility" lamented Woods (Wright 2022a).

Christians who disagree on the relevance of empirical evidence that proves state violence – and apartheid – portray asymmetric injustice as an even-handed conflict. The task of reformed Christians in response to ideologies and theologies of empire and exclusivity is to acknowledge complicity in injustice, and to uphold an ethos that actively fosters inclusive dignity, justice, mercy, equality, and compassion. In an exploration of Israeli apartheid we need to analyse the convergence of the political and the religious to reflect on what we have learned from the past and if and how there is a need to reform and renew policies and practices.

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