The Church of England's Complicity in the Gaza Genocide

"Gaza today has become the moral compass of the world",[1] insisted the Reverend Dr. Munther Isaac in his 2023 Christmas sermon, entitled, "*Christ in the Rubble*."[2] After his sermon went viral, his words were subsequently quoted by UN Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed.[3]

Lamentably, many Christian leaders in the USA and Europe have stood by, silent and complicit, unwilling to criticise Israel for what is increasingly recognised as a genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people.

This article will analyse the Church of England official statements about Gaza since 7th October 2023, together with criticisms, and provide an assessment of the Church's moral integrity in its stance on Gaza.

1. The Context: The Church of England Before 7th October

Just as the Hamas attacks on 7th October 2023 did not happen in a vacuum, but rather after 75 years of Israeli military and settler colonial occupation, so there is at least a decade long setting for the church's anaemic response. One pertinent example prior to 2023 illustrates this.

1.1 Archbishop Welby Regrets Synod's EAPPI Vote: March 2013

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) is an international programme coordinated by the World Council of Churches founded in 2002. It brings internationals to the West Bank to serve for three months as human rights monitors. EAPPI's mission is to witness life under occupation, engage with local Palestinians and Israelis pursuing a just peace, and work to change the international community's involvement with the conflict, urging them to act against injustice in the Occupied Territories:[4]

> *"We use the internationally recognised model of "accompaniment" as the framework for what we do. This model is guided by International Humanitarian Law and requires both a strategic local presence and international pressure in order to be effective. It is also seen by EAPPI as a biblical model for acting justly in the way of Christ… First and foremost, our EAs witness life under occupation. They are on the ground 24/7 and are often the first to respond to human rights violations. EAs live with local communities and participate in daily activities. EAs monitor and report human rights violations, bringing eyewitness accounts to the world's attention."*[5]

On 28th March 2013, the *Church Times* reported on an interview Archbishop Welby had given to the *Jewish News* that week:

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[1] https://www.commondreams.org/news/christmas-sermon-gaza
[2] https://www.redletterchristians.org/christ-in-the-rubble-a-liturgy-of-lament/
[3] https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/humanity-lost-moral-compass-on-gaza-says-un-official-5412715
[4] https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/eappi
[5] Ibid.,

"The Archbishop of Canterbury has said that he should have voted against a General Synod motion that endorsed the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).

Archbishop Welby abstained on a private member's motion on Palestine and Israel that was passed by the Synod last year. The Board of Deputies of British Jews objected to the motion's calling for the Synod to "affirm its support" for EAPPI. It said that EAPPI's "ecumenical accompaniers", who monitor human-rights abuses of Palestinians, had "almost no grasp of the suffering of normal Israelis".

In an interview with The Jewish News, published on Thursday of last week, Archbishop Welby, who is scheduled to visit Israel in June, said: "On reflection, I'd have voted against. I wasn't quite up to speed when I went into that vote. I think the situation in the Holy Land is so complicated . . . and I don't think the motion adequately reflected the complexity."[6]

Expressing regret at the archbishop's views, Dr John Dinnen, the member of General Synod who had proposed the motion, responded:

"The Measure was carefully drafted with the advice of Archbishop Rowan [Williams] and it was passed by a large majority by General Synod. It was also strongly supported by many British Jews and Jewish groups, such as Jews for Justice for Palestinians and the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions."[7]

The *Church Times* article went on to observe that the archbishop had told *Jewish News* that he was "really pleased" to discover evidence of Jewish ancestry and hoped to meet distant relatives on a planned visit to Israel later that year.

1.2 An Open Letter to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York: April 2023

In April 2023, the Campaign against Misrepresentation in Public Affairs, Information and the News (CAMPAIN[8]) delivered an open letter to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, signed by over 1,300 people, challenging the Church of England over its stance on Israel/Palestine, and persistent failure to talk with, let alone advocate for, the indigenous Christian community in Palestine.

The letter included the following:

"In Palestine, conditions have become increasingly severe since the beginning of 2023, with 75 Palestinians killed and 276 injured by the Israeli military up to 13 March, and there is now a new Israeli government composed of far-right and ultra-Orthodox parties, including several Ministers who openly express racist and violent views.

We are deeply troubled that you have provided so little public support for Church leaders in Israel-Palestine who predicted these outcomes in the Kairos Palestine

[6] https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2013/28-march/news/uk/welby-regrets-synod-s-eappi-vote
[7] Ibid.,
[8] https://www.campain.org

document in 2009, and Cry of Hope in 2020. They declared that "the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God." Why have you ignored their plea for so long?"[9]

Kairos Palestine and Sabeel Jerusalem represent a broad ecumenical coalition of Christian denominations in Palestine. The Kairos documents '*Moment of Truth*' (2009)[10] and '*Cry for Hope'* (2020)[11] called upon Western churches to show solidarity with the Palestinian Christian community which is now close to extinction. Sadly, this call from Palestinian Christian leaders was met with complete silence from the Church of England and still is.

The open letter went on to question:

- why the archbishops were anxious to placate the Zionist lobby by adopting the discredited International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, "*without it seems, taking legal advice or seeking the endorsement of General Synod*;"
- why Archbishop Welby had endorsed the Chief Rabbi Mirvis's "warning about Jeremy Corbyn" - thereby taking sides in the 2019 General Election campaign - and without reference to readily available factual evidence on the topic;
- why neither Archbishop had spoken out openly against Christian Zionist doctrines, that caused "untold damage to the Palestinians and to the prospects for middle eastern peace".

The letter concluded that the Church had too often taken the path of least resistance in the face of pressure from the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BoD) and had not paid due attention to the diversity of opinion among British Jews (many of whom were not Zionist). The letter ended by pointing out that:

"Christians inside and outside South Africa played a significant role in challenging apartheid and eventually defeating it. The Church of England should be challenging the practice of apartheid in Israel-Palestine today. Twenty years ago in 2002, in an article in the International Herald Tribune, Archbishop Desmond Tutu drew a parallel between South Africa and Palestine and the struggle against apartheid: "If apartheid ended (in South Africa), so can this occupation, but the moral force and international pressure will have to be just as determined. The current divestment effort is the first, though certainly not the only, necessary move in that direction".[12]

When representatives of CAMPAIN delivered the letter, to Lambeth Palace (in London) and Bishopthorpe Palace (near York) representatives of the archbishops met with them and engaged in conversation. However, despite entreaties, neither archbishop was willing to enter a face-to-face conversation about the issues raised in the letter.

1.3 Embrace the Middle East Annual Lecture: September 2023

[9] https://www.campain.org/open-letter-to-the-archbishops
[10] https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document
[11] https://www.cryforhope.org
[12] https://www.campain.org/open-letter-to-the-archbishops

In September 2023, Archbishop Welby spoke at the Embrace the Middle East annual lecture on "Reconciliation in the Middle East".[13] Several people attending were highly critical of the archbishop's presentation. Alan Mackie, in a letter sent to the Church Times, which was subsequently posted on the CAMPAIN website, complained:

> *"Archbishop Welby's homily on Israel/Palestine at St Martin-in-the-Fields on September 6 was extraordinary. It was as though he was talking from another planet which, given it set the tone of the meeting made it well-nigh impossible to engage… The archbishop's quaint distinction between South African apartheid, which, he said, was constitutionally enshrined where Israel's segregation isn't, begs the fact that Israel has no written constitution, only Basic Laws, and its most recent one defines Israel as an apartheid state. To add to the archbishop's discomfiture Rev Su McClellan flatly contradicted her boss and gave vivid examples of apartheid in action in the West Bank."*[14]

In another unpublished letter to *Church Times*, David Cannon, chair of the Jewish Network for Palestine observed:

> *"Welby's refusal to use the term apartheid was specifically contradicted by the two other speakers. Welby's weasel words were utterly shameful in the face of so much evidence provided by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and B'Tselem… Welby is on the wrong side of history and an apologist for apartheid which makes him actively complicit."*[15]

Linda Ramsden, director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) challenged the archbishop during the Q&A and at the reception after the event:

> *"During the Q & A, Linda asked the archbishop whether in the light of the important work that the Church did during the apartheid years in South Africa, he would re-examine his position on Israel's apartheid, mentioned by Daniel and in reports from Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, B'Tselem and others. In his reply he refused to do so, rejecting the evidence that Israel is practising apartheid and he referred to Israel's constitution. Within Daniel Munayer's measured response he stated that Israel doesn't have a constitution – it has laws thus yet another correction to statements from the archbishop."*
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> *"During the reception which followed, Linda spoke to the archbishop and asked if he would meet with Jeff Halper when he is in London this autumn because as an Israeli Jew, he has spent nearly 30 years specifically working in support of Palestinians. She was shocked and embarrassed by his discourteous response. The archbishop drew near to her face, looked her directly into her eyes and said, "No. I have no time in my diary." He then turned away."*[16]

The open letter of 25th April raised a series of issues, but his denial of the existence of Israeli apartheid, placed him at odds with the views of his mentor, the late Archbishop

[13] https://stmartins.digital/his-0609/
[14] https://www.campain.org/post/welby-s-homily-doesn-t-cut-the-mustard
[15] Ibid.,
[16] https://icahd.org/2023/09/08/icahd-uks-director-confronts-the-archbishop-of-canterbury/

Tutu[17], with the Anglican Church of South Africa[18], renowned international and Israeli human rights organisations[19], the church in Palestine[20] and indeed, even the hosts of the conference[21].

1.4 A Survey of Church of England Bishops: October 2023

In early October 2023, a coalition of ten Jewish, Muslim, Christian and secular organisations[22] wrote to 107 bishops, asking them their view on the matter.[23] Concerned with the position of the Church of England on Israel-Palestine under the leadership of Archbishop Welby, the letter referred to Archbishop Desmond Tutu's assertion that Israel is practising the crime of apartheid against Palestinians and to his support for boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) as a peaceful means of bringing an end to Israeli apartheid.

The letter, also referred to the momentous decision of the Provincial Standing Committee of the Anglican Church in South Africa who, just the week before, had passed an historic resolution "*declaring Israel an Apartheid State*".[24] Archbishop Thabo Makgoba observed in a subsequent statement:

> *"When black South Africans who have lived under apartheid visit Israel, the parallels to apartheid are impossible to ignore. If we stand by and keep quiet, we will be complicit in the continuing oppression of the Palestinians."*[25]

The letter to Anglican Bishops concluded by asking:

> *"Please let us know if you accept their assessment. If you do not, it would be helpful to know your considered reasons."*[26]

Significantly, the letter was written before 7th October, and the primary question was solely about apartheid. After a reminder was sent to all the bishops who had yet to reply, the findings were published in November 2023.

> *"Our most important finding is that none of the 102 serving and retired Bishops provided a reasoned rebuttal to Archbishop Tutu et al.'s assessment of Israeli apartheid. None of them argued in favour of Justin Welby's strongly pro-Israel*

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[17] https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/archbishop-canterbury-pays-tribute-archbishop-desmond-tutu
[18] https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2023/10/03/anglican-church-of-south-africa-declares-israel-an-apartheid-state/
[19] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/
[20] https://www.globalministries.org/sabeels-cornerstone-israel-an-apartheid-state/
[21] https://embraceme.org/blog/christmas-in-bethlehem
[22] Campain, Sabeel-Kairos UK, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions UK (ICAHD), Jewish Network for Palestine (JNP), Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL), Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), Convivencia Alliance and Peacemaker Trust.
[23] https://www.campain.org/survey-of-cofe-bishops
[24] https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2023/10/03/anglican-church-of-south-africa-declares-israel-an-apartheid-state/
[25] https://anglican.ink/2023/10/09/cape-town-archbishops-statement-in-support-of-labeling-israel-an-apartheid-state/
[26] https://www.campain.org/survey-of-cofe-bishops

viewpoint on the matter. It is also notable that no serving bishop (zero out of 95) expressed a view on the existence, or otherwise, of apartheid in Israeli/Palestine. We find this unacceptable given the Anglican Church's and charities' deep and long-term involvement in Palestine, and the existence of a clear definition of apartheid under the 2002 Rome Statute. Indeed, their low response rate vis-à-vis retired bishops may in part reflect an unwillingness to contradict the Archbishop of Canterbury."[27]

While it was inevitable that the horrific events of 7th October would have coloured the views of those consulted, it is nevertheless significant that none currently serving as diocesan bishops chose to reply.

2. Consequences: The Church of England After 7th October

2.1 Archbishops' Statement on Violence in Israel and Gaza: 8th October 2023

While the leaders of the Church of England had consistently refused to engage with the Palestinian Church for more than a decade prior to 7th October, the very next day the Archbishops of Canterbury and York published a statement condemning the attack:

"We are grieved and deeply concerned at the violence in Israel and Gaza, and we unequivocally condemn the attacks by Hamas. We pray for those who are mourning, those who are injured, and all those fearing for their safety. We pray for restraint on all sides, and renewed efforts towards a just peace for all. The way forward must be for both sides to build confidence in a secure future through which Israel and its people can live in security within its internationally recognised borders, and Palestinians have their own state and live in their lands in security, and with peace and justice."[28]

The statement called for a *"just peace"* but referred to Palestinians who "*live in their lands…"* plural. This could simply mean both Gaza and the West Bank but could, without further clarification, indicate acceptance of the fragmented "*Palestans*" which exist today, much like the Bantustans of apartheid South Africa, rather than a single, independent, autonomous, contiguous Palestinian state based on the internationally recognised pre-1967 borders.

Furthermore, in referring to "*both sides*" the statement further implied Israelis and Palestinians were equal partners, not occupier and occupied. Significantly, it also failed to acknowledge the context for the surprise Hamas attack, namely the previous 75 years of Israeli military occupation and inexorable settler colonialism which violates international law, denies Palestinian self-determination and basic human rights, and precludes the possibility of a Palestinian state.

The following day, Archbishop Welby also wrote to the CEO of the Board of Deputies, to express his "*deep sense of solidarity*". In it he wrote,

[27] Ibid.,
[28] https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/latest-news/statement-violence-israel-and-gaza

"if there is anything you wish to ask of me that may be helpful, do not hesitate to do so. Please convey these sentiments to those in Israel who you will be meeting…"[29]

This probably explains why the archbishop made a visit to Israel two weeks later to meet relatives of those killed or taken hostage. The archbishop does not appear to have written any similar letters to leaders of the Muslim community in the UK, or church leaders in Palestine, who have both been impacted by Israel's destruction of Gaza.

2.2 Statement by the Archbishop of Canterbury: The Most Revd Justin Welby

A subsequent (but undated) statement by Archbishop Welby, published shortly after, gives further evidence of his continued bias toward Israel:

> *"Our grief and shock only grows greater as more devastating news and images emerge from the abhorrent terrorist attacks in Israel. The agonising suffering endured by those who were targeted and their families can scarcely be imagined. Our hearts are broken open by the grief of Israelis and our Jewish brothers and sisters around the world, for whom this trauma and loss stands in the dark and terrible shadow of the worst days of their history…*
> *But in the face of a ground offensive in Gaza, I plead that the sins of Hamas are not borne by the citizens of Gaza, who themselves have faced such suffering over many decades. The price of evil cannot be paid by the innocent. Civilians cannot bear the costs of terrorists. International humanitarian law recognises that, for the sake of everyone's humanity, some acts can never be permissible in the chaos of warfare. I pray that Israel does everything it can to limit the harm caused to innocent civilians.*
> *Over two million civilians in Gaza, half of them children, are facing a catastrophe. A humanitarian corridor and convoy are needed as rapidly as possible, as set out in the Geneva Conventions. I pray particularly for the Anglican-run Ahli Arab Hospital and all those caring for the injured, who need medical supplies and generator fuel.*
> *I join with the US Secretary of State and others in urging the Israeli government to exercise their right of defence with the wisdom that might break the cycles of violence under which generations have struggled. Amidst the chaos and confusion of war, and as much as is possible, I join the calls for Israel's military response to be proportional and to discriminate between civilians and Hamas."*[30]

Several observations may be made. While acknowledging Palestinians in Gaza "*have faced such suffering over many decades*", there is no recognition of why, namely 75 years of ruthless military occupation and blockade by Israel, which has denied Palestinians in Gaza their fundamental human rights and turned Gaza into the world's largest open prison. The archbishop also failed to recognise the fact that since the early 20th century the Zionist leadership of Palestine had been committed to the 'transfer' of the native inhabitants out of Palestine to make way for the ingathering of Jews from around the World, i.e. ethnic cleansing.

The archbishop failed to acknowledge the causes for the "*catastrophe*" Palestinians in Gaza face nor why they are denied access to "*humanitarian*" and "*medical supplies*". The

[29] https://twitter.com/BoardofDeputies/status/1712097958424936924?s=20
[30] https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/archbishop-canterbury-statement-israel-and-gaza

archbishop further repeated the falsehood that Israel has the "*right of defence*". In international law an occupying power has no right of defence. It is those occupied who have that right, and indeed, the right to resist their occupiers by the use of force.

2.3 Archbishop of Canterbury's solidarity visit to Israel: 22nd October 2023

Two weeks after 7th October, Archbishop Welby made a controversial visit to Israel to meet with Israeli families of those killed and taken hostage. Whether of his own initiative or more likely facilitated by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the archbishop's visit was carefully managed. During his visit to Israel, Archbishop Welby's comments occasionally went beyond merely endorsing an Israeli perspective including the use of inflammatory language.

For example, on 22nd October, the *Times of Israel* interviewed Archbishop Welby and reported on his visit in an article entitled, "*Archbishop of Canterbury: Accusing Israel of hospital blast is 'blood libel'"*[31] In the article, Archbishop Welby denounced the Hamas attack as "*evil*" and again failed to acknowledge the context, instead suggesting:

> *"This is like a volcano breaking out, it is evil in its most extreme form. and I'm so glad you've named it for what it is." He said that his first reaction on hearing about the attacks on October 7 was anger, "because it's the throwing away of life. It's the throwing away of hopes for the region, it's the beginning of throwing away of an awful lot of other lives that are going to be caught up in this disaster."*[32]

The bombing of the Ahli Anglican Hospital in Gaza had occurred just a few days before. Archbishop Welby maintained that there was no reason to assume Israel was responsible, insisting that spreading such an accusation was a "*blood libel*":

> *"What I have said to people, publicly, is: 'Don't assume it's Israel. You have no proof that it's Israel. Many people have made a clear case it's not. At the very best, do not start propagating another blood libel,'"*[33]

Reuters also covered the story pointing out that "*Blood libel*" is a term historically used for false accusations of atrocities committed by Jews that sometimes fuelled violent antisemitism and pogroms against Jewish people.[34]

Archbishop Welby should have known better than to allege a *blood libel*, a medieval concept that is irrelevant to contemporary thinking about Israel. The superstitious idea that Jews ritually sacrificed Christian children at Passover to obtain blood for unleavened bread enjoyed support in Western Europe in Medieval times, and notably in 12th and 13th century England. Heightened religious fanaticism was legion at that time and was evident in the Crusades, notably the French Crusade against the Cathars, which led to the liquidation of the followers of an entire religion. The concept lacks resonance

[31] https://www.timesofisrael.com/archbishop-of-canterbury-accusing-israel-of-hospital-blast-is-blood-libel/
[32] Ibid.,
[33] https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/uk-church-leader-warns-against-assuming-israel-behind-gaza-hospital-blast-2023-10-22/
[34] Ibid.,

in the contemporary UK or among Palestinians, though supporters of Israel sometimes use it to label as "antisemitic" any suggestion that Israelis are shedding the blood of Palestinians. Archbishop Welby should have had the good sense to avoid lending his weight to a term that is frequently misused for propagandistic purposes.

Archbishop Welby even went on to criticize those participating in the national demonstrations in London calling for an end to the genocide in Gaza, which included many Jews as well as members of Christians for Palestine[35]:

> *"You have no understanding of what you're saying… Wait, think. listen, mourn, cry out for peace. Look for ways that nobody need go to bed fearing their house broken into and their children butchered, their relatives taken hostage. Cry out against that. Cry out against people dying in airstrikes."*[36]

In his conversations with the families of Israeli hostages, the archbishop once again insisted *"Israel is a legal state, it is entitled to self-defence,"* without acknowledging that, as the occupying power, Israel has no such right in international law, whether in Gaza or in the Palestinian Territories according to the UN.[37] The archbishop should know that in Gaza it is the Palestinians who have the right of self-defence not the Israelis.[38]

2.4 Archbishop of Canterbury clarifies remarks on 'blood libel'" 23rd October 2023

The archbishop inevitably faced considerable criticism for charging those accusing Israel of bombing the Ahli hospital of spreading a "*blood libel"*. The day after the *Times of Israel* article, the archbishop made an apology to clarify his use of the term:

> *"As I have consistently said I am not capable of making judgements about military actions where the facts are contested. Truth is always lost in such emotional and terrible events, and my attention is on those who suffered and are suffering. For this reason, I have been calling for protection and humanitarian access corridors to all places of sanctuary, and making clear that all attacks on civilians in this war are wrong.*
>
> *"I regret the use of the phrase 'blood libel' in that interview. There is so much suffering in this terrible war, and so many competing accounts of countless acts of violence, that two things are essential: that we do not rush to judgement, and that we choose our words carefully. I was attempting to articulate that many Jewish people are deeply conscious of a long history of accusations that trace back to the darkest times of their history. That must be borne in mind when we respond to events in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. Especially here in Europe,*

[35] https://www.facebook.com/p/Christians-for-Palestine-UK-61555041637853/
[36] https://www.timesofisrael.com/archbishop-of-canterbury-accusing-israel-of-hospital-blast-is-blood-libel/
[37] https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/15/un-special-rapporteur-israel-cant-claim-right-of-self-defence
[38] https://www.analystnews.org/posts/does-israel-have-a-right-to-self-defense-in-gaza-legal-experts-say-no; https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2023/12/7-10-the-question-of-israels-right-to-self-defense-under-international-law

the vast increase of the profound wickedness of antisemitism must be resisted, and that must involve being aware of that history."[39]

While apologising for making the "*blood libel"* allegation, the archbishop nevertheless justified his motivation because, he claimed, "*the profound wickedness of antisemitism must be resisted."* To ensure the semblance of balance in his statement, the archbishop went on to encourage empathy with Palestinians suffering in Gaza:

> *"At the same time, the people of Gaza, and all Palestinians, must be able to express their trauma, anger and horror at the profound suffering being endured by innocent people living under Israeli bombardment and siege. There must be space for that trauma and grief to be expressed and heard. We must not silence it, dismiss it or rush to judge it. As those who are not directly involved, we need to hold space for the suffering of all innocent people to be expressed, and to grieve with them.*
>
> *"It is essential that we concentrate on those who suffer, seek peace and pursue it. I continue to pray that the evil of war is overcome, and that the peoples of the region will find the lasting justice, security and peace they deserve."*[40]

While the archbishop referred to the "*Israeli bombardment and siege"* and recognised the need to allow Palestinians the right to express their anger and horror, he avoided expressing any criticism of Israel despite the mounting evidence of war crimes and genocide.

In his last paragraph while empathising with those "*who suffer"* he selectively quoted only half of Psalm 34:4, "*seek peace and pursue it*." The verse says, *"Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."* There is no indication that the archbishop believed Israel's actions are "*evil*" or that they need to "*turn from it*". Nor is there any reference theologically to justice being a precondition for peace, nor of the repeated breaches of international law by Israel. His emphasis instead was on the consequences not the causes of Palestinian suffering.

2.5 Archbishop of Canterbury's speech in Lords debate on Israel and Gaza

A day after issuing his press statement on the 24th October, Archbishop Welby gave a speech in a House of Lords debate on the situation in Israel and Gaza.[41] The archbishop began by claiming:

> *"I thank the Noble Lord, the Minister, for his eloquent and powerful opening speech. In it he set out the complexity of the situation that is being faced. And one of the great dangers of such complexities is we seek to find simple answers, and there are none."*[42]

[39] https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/archbishop-canterbury-clarifies-remarks-blood-libel
[40] Ibid.,
[41] https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/archbishop-canterburys-speech-lords-debate-israel-and-gaza
[42] Ibid.,

Many would argue that there is indeed a simple answer – namely the end of Israeli apartheid and settler colonialism responsible for depriving Palestinians of their basic human rights. In referring to his visit to Israel the previous week, the archbishop described the Hamas attack of 7th October controversially and emotively as a "*pogrom*". A word derived from Russian which describes "*a mob attack, either approved or condoned by authorities, against the persons and property of a religious, racial, or national minority*"[43] but especially Jews.

Whatever else the motives of Hamas were, (and this is not a justification or defence of any terrorist actions) it was not aimed at massacring or expelling Jews because they were Jews.

The archbishop then spoke of a British soldier serving in the Israeli military who was killed on 7th October:

> *"He gave his life against overwhelming odds as wave after wave of terrorists sought to kill people in one of the kibbutzim. I wonder if the Government is considering, given he is a British citizen, what official recognition of his supreme courage can be offered."*[44]

The archbishop appears unwilling to recognise that Israeli troops (including British citizens serving in the Israeli military) are responsible for the illegal military occupation of Palestine and have repeatedly been accused of committing war crimes in Gaza. So much so, that in November 2023, the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) asked the UK Foreign Office for urgent clarification on whether such enlistment by British citizens was lawful. They made the request:

> *"In light of the catastrophic situation currently unfolding in Gaza, with clear evidence that war crimes and crimes against humanity may already have been committed in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the real risk that further mass atrocity crimes may be imminent."*[45]

The archbishop went on to refer to his hopes that peace would be achieved "*after a military victory*" by Israel against Hamas, fearful however that:

> *"The hopes of peace and reconciliation are set not only after a military victory, but also by how that victory is achieved. The more heavy the casualties, the less chance there is of a renewed peace, and Gaza has gone from level to level of violence over the last 15 years."*[46]

Archbishop Welby appears to suggest that before 7th October there was "*peace*" in Gaza and that it can only be "*renewed*" after an Israeli victory against Hamas, as long as civilian casualties are not "*heavy*". As the largest open-air prison in the world, Gaza may

[43] https://www.britannica.com/topic/pogrom

[44] https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/archbishop-canterburys-speech-lords-debate-israel-and-gaza

[45] https://www.declassifieduk.org/british-fighters-in-israels-military-is-it-legal/

[46] https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/archbishop-canterburys-speech-lords-debate-israel-and-gaza

have been pacified by a military blockade before 7th October, but it has never experienced "*peace*" as the word is normally understood, politically or theologically.

Later in his speech, the archbishop described the international pressure on Israel to get 50 lorries of aid into Gaza as "*a huge success*" despite that being less that one tenth of the minimum required on a single day, according to the UN.

Addressing the consequence of the damage to the Ahli Anglican hospital, Archbishop Welby acknowledged that *"The hospital cannot get children out of Gaza for chemotherapy, let alone for the wounds they've received"* and asked:

> *"Can there be a corridor of sanctuary at least on a temporary basis to enable them to get the treatment without which they will die, very rapidly. It is difficult. The call for a formal ceasefire is probably beyond hope. But can there be that humanitarian action, for the children with autism and with other extreme disabilities?"*[47]

Again, the archbishop does not appear willing to admit that responsibility for the deaths of these children lies solely with the Israeli government in refusing them access to medical care, which is a war crime. Calling for a temporary "*corridor of sanctuary*" merely exposes his unwillingness to hold the Israeli authorities accountable for its obligations as the occupying power under international law.

2.6 Church Times article citing Palestinian Christians: 24th October 2023

Not surprisingly, Palestinian Christians were quick to call out the archbishop's deference to the Zionist lobby. The same day he was giving a speech in the House of Lords, an article was published in the *Church Times* citing a letter to Archbishop Welby from Palestinian Anglicans living in Ramallah and Birzeit. Entitled, "*We wanted stronger backing from Welby, Palestinian Christians say*"[48], the article began:

> *"Palestinian Christians living in the West Bank have said that they are "utterly perplexed" by the Archbishop of Canterbury's public statements about the "situation in Palestine", which they describe as "a genocide of the Palestinian people and a serious threat to extinguish the Christian presence". Their complaints focus on Archbishop Welby's strong condemnation of Hamas attacks, without — in their view — sufficiently articulating the context of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory.*[49]

The letter continued:

> *"It has become clear to us that our voices as Palestinian Anglicans are not being heard in Canterbury and our interests are being relegated… Our community is small but extremely significant. As members of our Palestinian society, we Anglican*

[47] Ibid.,
[48] https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/27-october/news/world/we-wanted-stronger-backing-from-welby-palestinian-christians-say
[49] Ibid.,

> *Christians are fighting for our identity which, along with the Palestinian identity, has been under constant attack ever since the onset of the Israeli State…*
>
> *We would expect that our existence and struggle for justice and liberation as Palestinians, Christians, and Anglicans would be accurately portrayed and more publicly supported from your side."*[50]

Observing that the archbishop referred to them rather tortuously as "*Anglicans in the West Bank, Israel and Gaza*", rather than as Palestinians, they suggested that:

> *"domestic British ecumenical and political considerations have been prioritised in the Archbishop's pronouncements on the conflict, at the expense of an accurate recognition and implementation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in general, and of the Anglican Palestinian community in particular".*
>
> *"These matters might, for some, seem as mere semantics, but for us directly concern our identity and the steadfast struggle to fend off against attempts to ethnically cleanse our presence from Palestine,"*[51]

Once again, by his use of language, the archbishop does not appear to recognise the present status of Palestinians as an occupied and dispersed people living under an apartheid regime.

2.7 Statement from the House of Bishops on the war in Gaza: 31st October 2023

On 31st October 2023, after more than a month's silence, with Israel's continuous and indiscriminate bombing of Gaza resulting in a significant rise in civilian deaths as well as mounting evidence of hospitals, schools, universities, civic buildings and infrastructure being targeted, the House of Bishops issued a deeply troubling "*joint statement*".[52]

It began with the obligatory condemnation of Hamas and "*their terrorist actions*". However, what followed seemed to have been lifted straight from an Israeli press release given the inflammatory language, unsubstantiated allegations and plain falsehoods that it contained:

> *"As Bishops of the Church of England we condemn the terrorist actions of Hamas on 7th October. Hamas has killed civilians without mercy, defiled their bodies, treated the most vulnerable brutally and taken hostages. Its continued indiscriminate rocket attacks against Israeli targets puts civilian structures and individuals at risk. All this is built on its denial of the right of Israel to exist. Hamas has oppressed the people it was originally elected to serve and has put them in harm's way by using them as human shields. Its actions are a violation of international law."*[53]

To correct one obvious error, (without in any way defending, or justifying, the actions of Hamas), at no point has Hamas ever advocated the killing of Jews for simply being Jews.

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[50] Ibid.,
[51] Ibid.,
[52] https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/statement-house-bishops-war-gaza
[53] Ibid.,

Although the term "*Jews"* and "*Zionists*" are often used interchangeably in the Hamas 1988 Covenant (as they often are intentionally by Israel) the Covenant makes clear that "*under the wing of Islam followers of all religions can coexist in security and safety*"[54]

Significantly, and the bishops should have known this, the Hamas Charter was revised in 2017. Article 16 explicitly states:

> *"Hamas affirms that its conflict is with the Zionist project not with the Jews because of their religion. Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine."*[55]

The bishop's statement also alleged, without evidence, that:

> *"Hamas has oppressed the people it was originally elected to serve and has put them in harm's way by using them as human shields."*

The allegation that the high casualty rate in Gaza is due to Hamas cynically using civilians as human shields is regularly made by Israel. However, this has been repeatedly denied by human rights organisations monitoring the situation. In 2008 and in 2014, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Breaking the Silence as well as the UN, found no evidence that Hamas was deliberately using civilians as human shields. However, they did find evidence that Israel itself had used Palestinian civilians as human shields.[56]

In the next paragraph, the bishops insist erroneously, not once but twice, that Israel has the right to self-defence:

> *"We affirm absolutely Israel's right to self-defence. We wholly support the duty of the Government of Israel to protect its citizens. We echo the concerns raised by President Biden about understandable anger and deep trauma not determining strategy and actions. Israel's right to self-defence needs to be exercised in adherence to the key principles of international humanitarian law."*[57]

While acknowledging the "*huge number of civilians killed in three weeks of bombardment*" their statement makes no criticism whatsoever of the Israeli military, preferring instead to describe this as "*a humanitarian catastrophe*" as if it were akin to a natural disaster.

In their closing appeal, they call upon "*Hamas to release all hostages unconditionally and unharmed*" while refusing to demand Israel also release the many thousands of

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[54] https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp
[55] https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/hamas-2017-document-full
[56] Human Rights Watch 'Rockets from Gaza' Report (2009) pp 22, 24; Amnesty International 'Amnesty International, Operation "Cast Lead": 22 Days of death and destruction (2009), pp. 3–4, 47–50, 64, 74–77; Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict ('The Goldstone Report') paragraphs 35, 452, 475, 482–88, 494, 1953; Breaking The Silence: Soldiers' Testimonies from Operation Cast Lead, Gaza (2009) p7-8, p107.
[57] https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/statement-house-bishops-war-gaza

Palestinians held hostage in administrative detention since 7th October. Still refusing to call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, the bishops instead call for,

> *"Immediate humanitarian pauses that will enable the wounded and the most vulnerable to be evacuated under ICRC or UN supervision, holding out hope for a ceasefire in the longer term."*[58]

Presumably this was because, believing in Israel's right to self-defence, they were convinced that a permanent ceasefire would only be possible after the defeat of Hamas, rather than by imposing sanctions on Israel for the numerous and well attested war crimes and other breaches of international law that had by then been committed.

2.8 Statement from the House of Bishops on the ongoing War in Gaza: 13th December 2023

After two month's silence, the House of Bishops published a second statement, in which the language and emphasis had begun to change, subtly but significantly.[59]

Instead of beginning with the obligatory condemnation of Hamas (now found in the fourth paragraph), the statement began by expressing their "*dismay*" at the "*violence, death and destruction*" in "*the place of our Saviour's birth*", something of a generalisation since Gaza was not mentioned until the fourth paragraph.

The emphasis, perhaps because this was an Advent/Christmas message, was on children who had suffered. However, reference to the disproportionate deaths of Palestinian children, was placed within the context of Israel "*exercising its right to self-defence*". And significantly, whereas the number of Israel child deaths was listed, those of Palestinian children were only "reportedly killed" (a tacit nod to Israel's claim that the figures are exaggerated) and were merely given as a percentage, leaving the reader to calculate the actual number:

> *"Of the 1,300 people killed in the abhorrent terrorist attacks of Hamas on 7 October, 33 were children. Of the 250 hostages taken, 34 were children. In Israel's exercising its right to self-defence, more than 18,000 people have reportedly been killed, over 40 per cent of whom were children. Thousands more have been injured."*[60]

It may also be observed that while Israeli casualties resulted from the "*abhorrent terrorist attacks",* Palestinian casualties were a consequence of Israel exercising its '*right to self-defence'.*

In the fourth paragraph the bishops offer a mild criticism of Israel's devastating bombardment and siege of Gaza, insisting it cannot be "*morally justified*". However, this is prefaced by their reaffirmation of their statement of 31st October that,

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[58] Ibid.,
[59] https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/statement-house-bishops-ongoing-war-gaza
[60] Ibid.,

> *"there is no equivalence between the atrocities of Hamas against Israeli civilians, and the right and duty of Israel to defend itself."*[61]

The statement continued to use generalised terms, for the exact location and who was responsible for the death and destruction, carefully avoiding referring to Israel. While they had insisted in their October statement that Hamas had acted "*in violation of international law*", Israel's actions were now only "*inconsistent with international* law":

> *"The nature and scale of death and destruction we are witnessing across the region is horrific and is inconsistent with the obligations of international humanitarian law as affirmed most recently by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2712 (15 November 2023)."*

Despite nearly three months of mounting and irrefutable evidence, it is surely inexcusable that intelligent and well-briefed Christian leaders were still refusing to use legal terms such as "*genocide", "war crimes*" or "*ethnic cleansing*", to refer to Israel's destruction of Gaza, in stark contrast to the UN[62], Amnesty International[63] and other human rights organisations.

Instead, their statement used terms such as "*war*" and "*battle*" suggesting two opposing and equal forces, which was leading to a "*human catastrophe*". Without any acknowledgement of the 75 years of brutal military Israeli occupation and ethnic cleansing, the bishops naively:

> *"…appeal for the bloodshed and destruction to stop. An alternative strategy needs to be found that closes down on attacks on Israel from Gaza and ends the violence and blockade undertaken by Israel… Intensified diplomatic efforts should seek to secure the release of all remaining hostages, the protection of civilians and full humanitarian access to Gaza, alongside steps to establish a reinvigorated political track to address the overarching conflict."*[64]

As if desperate to avoid naming the elephant in the room, namely Israeli ethnic cleansing and apartheid, rather than add their voice to those calling for the implementation of UN resolutions, the imposition of sanctions on Israel, a ban on arms sales, or even support for war crimes investigations, the bishops offer an imaginative, if rather naïve alternative:

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[61] Ibid.. Significantly this statement previously appeared in the Archbishop of Canterbury's contribution to the Joint Presidential Address at the Anglican General Synod of November 2023 https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/speeches/general-synod-archbishop-canterburys-presidential-address

[62] https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/gaza-un-experts-call-international-community-prevent-genocide-against

[63] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-as-israeli-attacks-wipe-out-entire-families-in-gaza/

[64] https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/statement-house-bishops-ongoing-war-gaza

> *"…we call on the British Government to appoint a dedicated Minister or Peace Envoy for the Middle East to work with other nations to focus diplomatic efforts and to signal a long term commitment to support any future peace process."*[65]

In its conclusion, the statement turns to the domestic consequences of the genocide in Gaza, insisting "*there is no place for either antisemitism or Islamophobia*", but then twice refers exclusively to only one of these forms of racism:

> *"We condemn the fresh growth of antisemitism in Europe, a shameful feature of our Western Christian history that needs to be constantly rebuked. In schools, universities, on streets and in places of work and worship, antisemitism has been the root of so much racism."*[66]

In their December 2023 statement, the bishops clearly wanted to remain in step with the British government as well as the Board of Deputies of British Jews, avoiding terms such as "*genocide*" and "*war crimes"*. They also remained unwilling to call for a permanent ceasefire or hold Israel accountable to international law.

2.9 Statement from the House of Bishops on the war in Gaza: 13th February 2024

Exactly two months later, the House of Bishops issued another, albeit much shorter statement. Significantly, they now called for an "*immediate ceasefire*" albeit temporary, as well as the release of hostages:

> *"With the onset of Israel's ground offensive into Rafah, we call for an immediate ceasefire. The relentless bombardment of Gaza and its huge cost in civilian lives and civilian infrastructure must stop. The manner in which this war is being prosecuted cannot be morally justified. We urge Israel to adhere to the ICJ order and to ensure that Palestinians have access to food, water, healthcare, and safety, that have long been denied to them."*[67]

While referring to the "*ICJ order"*[68], the bishops avoid using the term "*genocide*" which was the basis of that order. Furthermore, their statement continued, falsely, to affirm Israel's "*right to self-defence*", and supported the British Foreign Secretary's call for an "*immediate pause in the fighting*" suggesting they were still only supporting a temporary ceasefire or pause in the onslaught rather than a permanent ceasefire.

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[65] Ibid.,
[66] Ibid.,
[67] https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/statement-house-bishops-war-gaza-0
[68] "In its January 26 decision, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Israel to take steps to prevent any acts of genocide in Gaza. The Court required that Israel ensure that it does not commit acts that might fall within the scope of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This includes that Israel takes steps to punish any Israeli who might have individually committed acts of genocide or incited others to commit acts of genocide in Palestine. More broadly, this ruling requires Israel to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza."
https://global.upenn.edu/perryworldhouse/news/explaining-international-court-justices-ruling-israel-and-gaza

Without using the word "*apartheid*" and implying once again there was somehow an equivalence between the "*sides*", the bishop's statement went on to urge:

> *"All sides must begin to imagine a future beyond this conflict: for a just peace for Israelis and Palestinians. This war can't result in the consolidation of a system of occupation that has for too long denied Palestinians their rights and freedoms."*[69]

Once again, it seems, the bishop's concern was primarily with its domestic agenda. While "*horrified by the growing threats and abuses of Jews on university campuses, in our neighbourhoods, and online"* there was no equivalent concern for a similar rise in Islamophobic incidents.[70] For example, the hate crime monitoring organisation Tell Mama reported a 335% increase in Islamophobic incidents reported since 7th October.[71]

The three statements from the House of Bishops published since 7th October 2023, along with those of the Archbishop of Canterbury, display a consistent disregard for the historical context of the attacks of 7th October.

The statements also studiously avoid using terms such as *"apartheid", "ethnic cleansing*", *"war crimes" and "genocide".* Nor is there any significant acknowledgement of, or advocacy for, Palestinian Christians, including Anglican; but instead, a clear deference toward British government policy and, implicitly, the position of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, for example, in condemning antisemitism while ignoring islamophobia.

3. Critics of the Church of England's Position on Gaza

3.1 The Lambeth Witness Group (LWG): January 2024

Having received a wall of silence from Anglican bishops in response to their open letter of April 2023 and then again from their letter of enquiry sent to every bishop in October 2023; in January 2024, CAMPAIN formed the Lambeth Witness Group (LWG) to step up pressure on the Archbishop of Canterbury specifically, by holding vigils in Westminster. The Group set out its key concerns in this statement it mailed to prospective members:

> *"Archbishop Welby has shown support for Israel while claiming neutrality. Notably, he has failed to call out the long-term Zionist project that lies behind the mass destruction of Gaza since October 7th. Worse, he has contributed to the misrepresentation of critics of Israel as antisemitic. By so doing, he has provided moral cover to politicians who have given unequivocal support to Israel. This is no way for the head of the established church to behave."*

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[69] Ibid.,

[70] https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/antisemitic-islamophobic-hate-crime-soars-israelhamas-b2470404.html

[71] https://www.ihrc.org.uk/politicians-fuel-islamophobia-to-conceal-zionist-agenda/

The LWG includes two retired senior CofE clergy, four former Ecumenical Accompaniers (human rights monitors who worked in Palestine with EAPPI), representatives of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), the Convivencia Alliance, the Jewish Network for Palestine (JNP), and the chair of the East London Humanist Group.

3.2 Anglican Primates Come Under Fire (CAMPAIN): 11 February 2024

On 6th February the LWG took its accusations to the heart of the Church of England. Around 50 activists took part in a demonstration outside Westminster Abbey at rush hour. One of those demonstrating, Sharen Green said:

> *"Justin Welby is a disgrace! We have watched ethnic cleansing live on our television screens night after night – indeed the International Court of Justice is looking into the charge of genocide – and all Welby does is go on about Israel's right to defend herself. He is the top churchman in the worldwide Anglican communion and instead of taking a moral lead by standing up for his fellow Christians and their Muslim neighbours he provides a smoke screen for our craven political leaders who support Israel's criminal actions. The archbishop totally ignores the writings of the Zionist fathers who made their intentions abundantly clear. Their first prime minister David Ben Gurion said 'we must expel the Arabs and take their places'. No wonder Palestinian Christians feel betrayed."*[72]

Another organiser, Jonathan Coulter said the demonstrations would continue throughout the spring:

> *"We will leaflet outside the General Synod and hope to persuade Christians to stand with the oppressed and the marginalised, to speak truth to power as they are called to do."*[73]

3.3 Welby would not meet pastor if he spoke at Palestine rally with Corbyn (Guardian): 21st February 2024

During February 2024, the Revd Dr Munther Isaac, pastor of the Christmas Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, was in the UK to fulfil several speaking engagements. Dr Isaac had been highly critical of Israel's bombing of Gaza. In a Christmas sermon which subsequently went viral he said that if Christ had been born today, he would have been born under the rubble of Gaza.[74]

Archbishop Welby had initially indicated his willingness to meet Dr Isaac. However, on 21st February, the *Guardian* reported that the archbishop had withdrawn the invitation because Dr Isaac had been invited by the Palestinian ambassador to the UK, Husam Zomlot, to address a Palestinian Solidarity Campaign rally in London at which Jeremy Corbyn was also speaking.[75]

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[72] https://www.campain.org/post/anglican-primate-comes-under-fire
[73] Ibid.,
[74] https://embraceme.org/news-1/press-release-christ-under-the-rubble
[75] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/21/pastor-says-welby-would-not-meet-him-if-he-spoke-at-palestine-rally-with-corbyn

Dr Isaac told the *Guardian* that the archbishop's aides had advised that if he shared a platform with Corbyn, no meeting could happen. Lambeth Palace does not normally report on private meetings, but the Guardian confirmed the reason:

> *"The archbishop is concerned about the huge increase in antisemitism since October in the UK, and it is believed he feared it would have caused huge problems for the Jewish community if the two were to meet."*[76]

In the *Guardian* interview, Dr Isaac directly rebuked the archbishop:

> *"It's shameful. It's not my type of Christianity not to be willing to meet another pastor because you don't want to explain why you met him. This sums up the Church of England. They danced around positions and ended up saying nothing. They lack the courage to say things."*

Dr Isaac added:

> *"The small Christian community in Gaza has discovered what is hell on earth. Most of them have lost their homes: 45 destroyed completely and 55 partially destroyed. There is no life left for them. This war will most likely bring an end to Christian life in Gaza. Everyone wants to leave.*
>
> *"It is so painful for us to see the Christian church turn a blind eye to what is happening, offering words of concern and compassion, but for so long they have been silent in the face of obvious war crimes. Churches seem paralysed, and they seem willing to sacrifice the Christian presence in Palestine for the sake of avoiding controversy and not criticising Israel. I have had so many difficult conversations with church leaders.*
>
> *"I know from meeting many church leaders that in private, they say one thing, and then in public, they say another thing. I've had the same experience with many politicians and diplomats. This is not a time for neutrality or soft diplomacy. Gaza should be your moral compass."*
>
> *"If it has not become clear to the world that this is a war of vengeance aimed at destroying the possibility of life in Gaza, and not a war on Hamas, I am not sure what more proof people need. The destruction of schools, universities and hospitals is everywhere. The Israeli soldiers brag and joke about it. How is the killing of 12,000 children a war on Hamas?"*
>
> *"If what has happened so far cannot convince people that there needs to be an immediate ceasefire, there is something seriously wrong with our humanity. How much more catastrophic can it get?" Isaac said."*[77]

[76] Ibid.,
[77] Ibid.,

Jewish Voice for Labour added further criticism in a statement entitled "*Archbishop's Snub to Bethlehem Pastor*"[78]

> *"Once again, expressing sympathy for Palestinians facing genocide is portrayed as dangerous to British Jews. Apart from the moral imperative that should guide a religious leader confronted with incontrovertible crimes against humanity, can Justin Welby not understand that Jews are endangered by identifying them with Netanyahu's murderous apartheid regime?"*[79]

Archbishop Welby appeared more concerned with a domestic agenda than with demonstrating solidarity with Christians in Palestine. By appeasing the Israel lobby, the archbishop ironically found himself increasingly criticised by Jews. They argued that rather than helping to reduce instances of antisemitism, he was exacerbating it by identifying all Jews with Israel.

3.4 Sharp Criticisms of Archbishop Welby by Professor Gus John: 22nd February 2024

Gus John is visiting professor of education at the University of Strathclyde as well as the University of Coventry and an honorary fellow of the London Centre of Leadership, University of London. The Grenadian-born Professor Gus was a member of the Church's Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns, from which he resigned in 2019 in protest at Archbishop Welby's support for the Chief Rabbi's demonization of Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour party, just days before the General Election.

In February, Jewish Voice for Labour published a major article by Professor Gus strongly criticizing the archbishop over his hypocritical position on Palestine and obvious desire to appease the Zionist lobby.[80] Commenting on the archbishop's refusal to meet with Revd Isaac because he had shared a platform with Jeremy Corbyn, because "*it is believed he feared it would have caused huge problems for the Jewish community*", Professor Gus observed:

> *"Surely, even His Grace won't go so far as to suggest that Corbyn is responsible for that huge increase in antisemitism, any more than he could be held responsible for the similar increase in Islamophobia and attacks on Muslims, their property and places of worship? No, His Grace is carrying a flag for Netanyahu, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and Keir Starmer.*
>
> *Why on earth should the possibility of the Jewish community being offended that Welby, in his capacity not just as any Christian leader, but a leader of the world-wide communion of the Church of England, the Established Church, met with a pastor from Bethlehem, at this time, who shared a platform with Jeremy Corbyn, cause His Grace to effectively censure Pastor Isaac? Where does His Grace's responsibility as a Christian leader, independent of Judaism, end and his solidarity with the Zionist lobby within British Judaism take centre stage? Who is Welby to*

[78] https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/archbishops-snub-to-bethlehem-pastor/
[79] Ibid.,
[80] https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/his-grace-is-a-disgrace/

determine that Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian ambassador, should 'No Platform' Jeremy Corbyn and deny him the opportunity to stand and speak in solidarity with the Palestinian people? Why should Welby's concern about the Jewish community taking offence or feeling hurt prevent him from engaging with a pastor whose daily experience is of the Christian community in Gaza being annihilated and of the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, including children, of any faith?"

Labour was trounced in the December 2019 elections and the Board of Deputies of British Jews not only claimed Corbyn's scalp, but set about building upon their victory and extracting pledges from those aspiring to replace him as leader of the party. Those pledges included:

- *Provide no platform for those who have been suspended or expelled for antisemitism*
- *The full adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism "with all its examples and clauses and without any caveats"*[81]
- *To engage with the Jewish community via its "main representative groups and not through fringe organisations" such as Jewish Voice for Labour*

One can surmise that Welby's decision to cancel Pastor Isaac may well have been in fulfilment of two of these pledges. The Palestinian ambassador was not bound by the pledge to 'provide no platform', or by Starmer's and the Board of Deputies ostracisation of Jeremy Corbyn. Welby, on the other hand, could show solidarity with the Board of Deputies and the Jewish community by refusing to meet with Isaac who had shared a platform with Corbyn. Isaac may well have been considered antisemitic as defined by the IHRA 'with all its examples and clauses and without any caveats', a definition that includes criticism of the actions of the state of Israel. Isaac had been consistent and forthright in his condemnation of Israel for the daily massacres in Gaza."[82]

Professor Gus concluded:

"It is an utter disgrace that His Grace chose to worship at the Jewish high altar of oppression at the top of the pyramid, rather than demonstrate spiritual and moral leadership and at the very least respect for the right of Jeremy Corbyn not to be gratuitously vilified and demonised. Prelate or not, you cannot profess to 'Stand Up for Jesus' unless, in all things, you 'Stand Up for Justice'."[83]

Given his multiple senior roles in tertiary education, as well as his former role as a consultant to and member of the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns, ironically a committee of the Council of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, his criticisms of the archbishop's unwavering deference to the Zionist lobby added

[81] The UK government's own Home Affairs Committee did introduce caveats as they saw issues with its adoption without qualification. These caveats were adopted at the time by the Liberal Democratic Party. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/136/13610.htm
[82] Ibid.,
[83] Ibid.,

significant weight to the mounting pressure on the archbishop to reflect upon his position.

3.5 Justin Welby must listen to Palestinian Christians (Guardian Letters): 27th February 2024

Three clergy members of Christians for Palestine UK, wrote a letter published in the *Guardian* just days after the paper had reported the refusal of the archbishop to meet Dr Isaac.[84] In it they criticised both archbishop Welby and the House of Bishops:

> *"The Rev Dr Munther Isaac is right to characterise Justin Welby's decision to cancel their meeting as "shameful" (Pastor says Welby would not meet him if he spoke at Palestine rally with Corbyn, 21 February). The people of Gaza are being mercilessly slaughtered and intentionally starved; meanwhile, our archbishop shuns a Palestinian pastor for addressing British crowds alongside one of our own elected MPs.*
>
> *Your article describes the House of Bishops' recent statement on Gaza as "sharply worded". However, in our view, their position remains equivocal and misguided. For example, their statement persists in treating the situation in Gaza as if it were a conflict between two equal sides, rather than – as is becoming clearer every day – a genocidal assault on a whole population. By contrast, Dr Isaac calls Israel's actions what they are, and speaks with moral authority and clarity.*
>
> *Christians believe Jesus lived and died in solidarity with the suffering and oppressed. The archbishop's refusal to listen to Palestinian Christians, as they cry out for justice, is a grave affront to our faith."*[85]

The mounting public criticism of the archbishop was clearly becoming a self-inflicted PR disaster. It is not surprising therefore that within days, the archbishop was forced to offer an unreserved apology.

3.6 Archbishop Welby and Dr Isaac's Statements on X (Twitter) 29th February 2024

Just two days after the *Guardian* revealed that the archbishop had refused to meet Dr Isaac, the archbishop's climbdown began on social media. Early that morning, he wrote on X (Twitter):

> *"Recently I declined to meet with Rev Dr @MuntherIsaac during his UK visit. I apologise for and deeply regret this decision, and the hurt, anger, and confusion it caused. I was wrong not to meet with my brother in Christ from the Holy land, especially at this time of profound suffering for our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters. I look forward to speaking and praying with him next week."*[86]

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[84] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/27/justin-welby-must-listen-to-palestinian-christians
[85] Ibid.,
[86] https://twitter.com/JustinWelby/status/1763119508439326797

3.7 Justin Welby expresses 'deep regret' at refusal to meet Palestinian pastor (Guardian) 29th February 2024

The same day, Patrick Wintour, the *Guardian's* diplomatic editor, referred to the archbishop's statement released on X that morning, implying that the climbdown was the result of their interview with Dr Isaac and the subsequent critical letters published by the newspaper:

> *"The archbishop of Canterbury has expressed his deep regret at his decision to refuse to meet a renowned Palestinian pastor if he shared a political platform with the former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. Justin Welby said in a post on social media he would now meet the Rev Dr Munther Isaac, next week.*
>
> *The pastor of the Christmas Evangelical Lutheran church in Bethlehem, who has been highly critical of Israel in Gaza, saw his Christmas sermon go viral when he said if Jesus Christ was born today it would have been under the rubble. He revealed the archbishop had refused to meet him in an interview with the Guardian."* [87]

The article went on to quote the archbishop's X feed apology together with his initial reasons for refusing to meet Dr Isaac as well as the criticism he had received from Christians for Palestine UK.

3.8 Protest is Working: Justin Welby Expresses Remorse (CAMPAIN) 1st March 2024

On 1st March 2024, CAMPAIN published an article on their website, titled "*Protest is Working: Justin Welby Expresses Remorse*", which summarised the efforts made to persuade the archbishops and Church of England to end its complicity with the pro-Israel lobby and call out the genocide in Gaza:

> *"Today we learned that the cumulative pressure on Justin Welby is beginning to have some effect…"* [88]

Dissatisfied, however, with the archbishop's apology, the article laid out what was required of the Anglican Church to demonstrate moral integrity:

> *"This is a good start, but we have a long way to go to persuade the Church of England to ditch its unreasoned pro-Israel stance. In particular, we want it to:*
>
> - *Call out the ethnic cleansing project that lies behind decades of violence and oppression*
> - *Call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire*
> - *Apologise for Welby's interfering in the politics of this country in the run-up to the 2019 election, by endorsing unsubstantiated allegations of antisemitism, and*

[87] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/29/justin-welby-deep-regret-refusal-meet-palestinian-pastor-munther-isaac
[88] https://www.campain.org/post/protest-is-working-justin-welby-expresses-remorse

- *Publicly call out Christian Zionism for the damage it is doing to the cause of peace and justice in Israel/Palestine."* [89]

The article also revealed that the collusion with Israel was probably much more pervasive within the Church of England, than simply due to the intransigence of the archbishops:

> *"According to an inside source there is within the Synod a strong evangelical/pro-Israel caucus that gets very agitated if people try to discuss Israel/Palestine. This may explain why it was not on the agenda; they wanted to avoid an* uncomfortable *subject that would cause a row! Changing this will require sustained effort by all those concerned."*[90]

In the view of CAMPAIN, the Church of England needs to distance itself from the Israel lobby whose statements continue to give unqualified support to Israeli actions in Gaza.

3.9 Archbishop Welby and Revd Dr Isaac's Statements on X (Twitter) 7th March 2024

The meeting between the archbishop and Dr Isaac did not take place in person but rather via Zoom on 7th March. Clearly influenced by their conversation, the archbishop made his most outspoken criticisms of Israel, although he still avoided using terms such as, "*ethnic cleansing*", *"war crimes*", or *"genocide"*.

> *"I was grateful to speak with my brother in Christ, the Rev Dr @MuntherIsaac, earlier today. In listening to him, I continue to be deeply horrified by Israel's bombardment and siege of Gaza. I condemn the killing of Palestinian civilians, the destruction of homes and neighbourhoods, and pushing people to the brink of starvation – there is no moral justification for this. I renew my call for an immediate ceasefire, for aid to reach all those in desperate need, and for the release of all hostages. I renew my commitment to stand in solidarity with our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters, and with the people of Gaza. I continue to pray for all Palestinians caught up in this terrible violence, and for hostages and their families. I pray for a different path towards a just and lasting peace for all."*[91]

Dr Isaac replied urging "*all church leaders to pressure their governments to put an end to this genocide*."

> *"Today I had a meaningful and honest conversation with the Archbishop of Canterbury @JustinWelby. Our conversation focused on the horrific situation in Gaza and the urgent need for a ceasefire and for humanitarian aid to enter Gaza. We also talked about the plight of Palestinian Christians and the struggles we face. I am grateful for the Archbishop's humility and I join my voice to his voice in calling for a ceasefire, and I urge all church leaders to pressure their governments to put an end to this genocide."*[92]

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[89] Ibid.,
[90] Ibid.,
[91] https://twitter.com/JustinWelby/status/1765746369317237095
[92] https://twitter.com/MuntherIsaac/status/1765774541412819297

While now willing to engage with Dr Isaac and call him "*my brother in Christ*" the archbishop was nevertheless still not willing to describe Israel's actions as "*ethnic cleansing*", *"war crimes*", or *"genocide"*, nor indeed heed Dr Isaac's insistence that he pressure the UK government to end these actions.

3.10 Archbishop Justin Welby, Denounce Ethnic Cleansing in Palestine. Demand an end to British Support (Lambeth Witness Group) 31st March 2024

Through March 2024, the Lambeth Witness Group continued to hold a weekly lobby outside Church House Westminster. In the light of the archbishop's carefully nuanced apology, on 31st March they issued a much stronger statement:

> *"Now, after 5 1/2 months, Archbishop Welby has released a statement holding Israel fully responsible for the humanitarian disaster. This is a welcome change from previous statements where he highlighted Israel's right to self- defence and painted Hamas's violence of Oct 7th as uniquely evil.*
>
> *But he must also call out our government, which shares responsibility for Israel's crimes and what the International Court of Justice calls plausible genocide. HMG has suspended aid while children are starving. It sells arms for Israel to use in killing thousands including hospital patients, health workers and journalists. Britain must put its house in order.*
>
> *We therefore demand that the Church of England:*
>
> *1. insist on an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, that HMG fully resumes aid to UNWRA and takes whatever other actions are required to ensure essential supplies and services to those in need;*
>
> *2. insist that our government immediately stops arms sales to Israel and stops logistical support to US troops through bases in Cyprus, and;*
>
> *3. calls out Israel's ethnic cleansing project that drives the dreadful cycle of violence in Israel and Palestine.*
>
> *Ethnic cleansing has deep roots. Zionist plans to expel native Palestinians go back more than a century and Israel implemented them on a massive scale in 1947-49. Unless the World can challenge this evil project, it may be saving people today, only to be slaughtered tomorrow.*
>
> *To pull its weight the Church needs to distance itself from the Israel lobby and the Chief Rabbi, whose statements give unqualified blessing to Israeli actions in Gaza.*
>
> *By insisting on Israel's right to self-defence, the Church seems to have lost sight of international law. This acknowledges the Palestinians' right of resistance and denies an occupying power (Israel) the right of self-defence against people whose territories it occupies.*

Regrettably, Justin Welby has provided oxygen to the Government's planned clamp-down on demonstrations. Speaking on Radio 4, he claimed they are partly inspired by antisemitism, but provided no evidence for this. The Church needs to do much better."[93]

3.11 For the love of God, this war must stop (Independent) 5th April 2024

After six months silent obduracy, a senior Anglican bishop, the Right Revd Christopher Chessun, the Bishop of Southwark and member of the House of Lords, finally broke ranks from the normal collegiality of the House of Bishops, by explicitly using the term "genocide" and castigating the complicity of the British and US governments in the mass killing of civilians in Gaza.

Whether Bishop Chessun's article published in the *Independent*, was first cleared with, or endorsed by, Lambeth is not known. What is unprecedented, however, was his condemnation of Israel for having crossed "*red lines"* in bombing hospitals, and their "*brutal and uninhibited collective punishment of the Palestinian people",* using language entirely absent from both the previous three Bishop's statements and of the archbishops. Instead of simply calling for a temporary pause or ceasefire, Bishop Chessun insisted, more than once, for an end to the war:

"For the love of God, this war must stop… and it must stop now. The killing of aid workers in Gaza was a wake-up call for those countries still arming Israel.

But by steadfastly refusing to suspend its weapons sales, the British government has brought shame upon us all", says the Bishop of Southwark.

"Some will see the recent and tragic deaths of foreign aid workers in Gaza as the definitive 'red line' that Israel has crossed, signifying that their military action must now cease. But that red line was crossed weeks – no, months – ago when, with the bombing of hospitals, the Gazan people lost access to proper medical care. When they began to starve because of the targeting of critical infrastructure and the inaccessibility of aid routes.

This war must stop and it must stop now. An alternative way must be found that provides security for Israel, justice for Palestinians and peace for all. That journey starts with an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages and sustained humanitarian access for the provision of essential supplies to those most in need.

What began – quite legitimately – as Israel's right to defend its people in the wake of the reprehensible atrocities inflicted upon them by Hamas on 7 October is fast becoming a brutal and uninhibited collective punishment of the Palestinian people. Any ground operation in the south of Gaza will only compound an already intolerable situation."[94]

[93] https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10160334544102893&set=a.10150257274257893
[94] https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/gaza-israel-war-bishop-southwark-b2523941.html

It was also unprecedented that for the first time an Anglican Bishop used the word *"genocide"* and referred to the charges Israel must answer before the International Court of Justice:

> *"We know that the International Court of Justice has found that Israel has a case to answer on whether its actions in Gaza amount to genocide. The scarcity of humanitarian access to and within Gaza and the continued bombardment of civilian areas only add to the case against them.*
>
> *The recent announcement that Israel intends to increase aid deliveries to Gaza, including through the port of Ashdod and the Erez crossing, is welcome. But that decision must be actioned now – and it must result in meeting the target of 500 aid trucks per day into Gaza. The current daily average of 169 is a recipe for famine. The latest casualties – the seven aid workers killed by Israeli drone attacks on 1 April – raise the question that Israel has gone too far in its offensive and are an abrupt wake-up call for those arming Israel."*[95]

Bishop Chessun then went on to castigate the "*shameful*" complicity of the British and US governments for supplying weapons to Israel which were causing the genocide in Gaza.

In contrast, he commended the Canadian government for suspending arms sales to Israel and urged the UK government to do the same and stop accepting Israel's assurances that it was complying with international law when it was clearly lying:

> *"Alongside the US and many European states, our own nation's continued militarisation of the conflict, and its reluctance to call for Israel's restraint, bring shame upon us all and make the prospects of safety for both nations an ever-diminishing hope.*
>
> *Canada's decision to suspend future arms sales to Israel is welcomed. Other countries now need to consider suspending arms transfers in response to the systematic violations of international humanitarian law, both in Gaza and across the occupied Palestinian territories. Given reports that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has received official legal advice that Israel has broken international humanitarian law, the British Government ought no longer to accept Israel's assurances on compliance with its legal obligations as credible. I commend the Foreign Secretary for his unremitting engagement with this very complex nexus of events."*[96]

In expressing his frustration at the failure of the international community to stop the "*atrocities*", a word he used twice in his conclusion, Bishop Chessun insisted:

> *"Nevertheless, we must refuse to give up hope – Gaza is not a lost cause and the international community must not stand by and wring its hands in despair, as if*

[95] Ibid.,
[96] Ibid.,

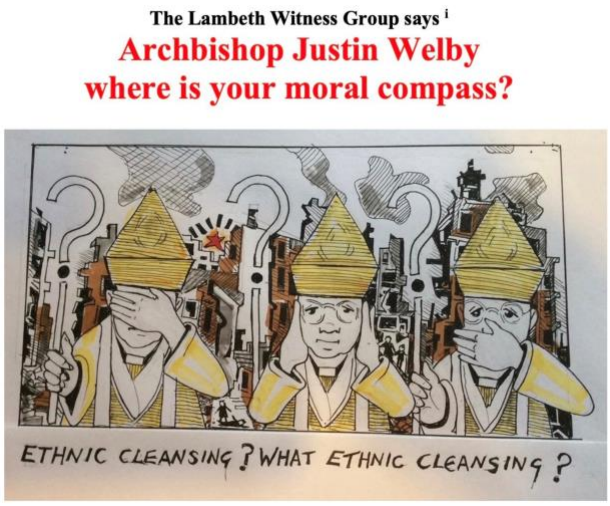
nothing can be done. We can make a difference and we must do whatever we can to bring lasting peace to this region.

Enough atrocities in Gaza; enough violence, enough death, and destruction. This war is fuelled by fear and by hatred, but I pray daily that these impulses will not have the final word. I hold on to the hope that peace is possible, even in the midst of this world's darkest hour. May we no longer be silent in the face of these atrocities. May love triumph. May hope prevail."[97]

It will be significant to observe whether, in any future statements by the House of Bishops, they follow Bishop Chessun's lead, or continue to bring shame on the Church of England through their cowardice.

3.12 Archbishop Justin Welby Where is Your Moral Compass? (Lambeth Witness Group) 20th April 2024

Frustrated at the superficiality and equivocation in the Church of England's position, CAMPAIN's Lambeth Witness Group produced a leaflet for distribution during a march from Lambeth Palace to Church House Westminster, entitled provocatively, "*Archbishop Justin Welby Where is Your Moral Compass?"* The leaflet insists that he needs to call out what the root cause of the cycles of violence, i.e. Israel's long-standing ethnic cleansing project, and to demand that the British Government terminates its complicity:



"As leader of the Church of England, your job involves standing up for human rights, peace, and justice.

But, when it comes to Israel, you never go to the heart of the matter. We are glad you have called out the killing and starvation of Palestinians in Gaza, but you never denounce the root cause, which is Israel's long-term ethnic cleansing programme. Nor do you call out our government's enduring diplomatic and military support for Israel.

As Israel starves, burns and bombs the civilian population of Gaza and the West Bank, you treat it as if it were acting out self-defence, on a higher moral plane from Hamas. We see no rationale for this. Some of Hamas's actions on October 7 were war crimes, and need to be investigated. However, it is Israel's ethnic cleansing project that drives the whole cycle of violence.

[97] Ibid.,

As far back as 1937 the father of the Israeli nation David Ben Gurion wrote: We must expel the Arabs and take their places". And since 1948, Israel has killed, maimed, dispossessed and exiled Palestinians, occupying their land, destroying their homes and infrastructure, and stealing their natural resources. These are war crimes.

Too often, you have denounced British people who stand up for the Palestinians as anti-Semitic, fanning the flames of culture wars. And you have not backed up your assertions with hard evidence.

And when Iran attacked Israel, you tweeted a prayer for Israel – but you didn't denounce Israel's provocative attack on an Iranian consulate, which is a war crime.

As head of the established Church, and with 26 bishops in the House of Lords, you can and should do better. It is time to hold Government to account. So please show moral leadership and demand that the British government immediately:

- *Insist on a permanent ceasefire*
- *End all diplomatic, military and logistical support for Israel's war*
- *End all arms supply to Israel, a move that polls show would have overwhelming public support, and*
- *Renew funding for UNRWA, Gaza's crucial provider of food and humanitarian aid that Israel has dishonestly sought to discredit."*[98]

4 Conclusions

In this article, the three statements by the House of Bishops and the two from the archbishops, issued between October 2023 and April 2024, concerning the genocide in Gaza have been assessed, together with those of groups such as the CAMPAIN, the Lambeth Witness Group, and Christians for Palestine, which have been highly critical of what they perceive to be the complicity between the Church of England hierarchy and the Israel lobby.

There has undoubtedly been what many see as an unhealthily close and long-standing relationship between the leaders of the Church of England with the Board of Deputies of British Jews, who describe themselves, unapologetically, as a pro-Israeli lobby.[99]

This is evidenced from the facts that:

- the CAMPAIN open letter did not lead to any dialogue with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and
- the subsequent letter sent to every serving Anglican bishop, asking about the existence or otherwise of a state of apartheid in Israel, did not receive a single reply[100].

[98] https://www.stephensizer.com/2024/05/archbishop-justin-welby-where-is-your-moral-compass/
[99] https://bod.org.uk/israel/
[100] https://www.campain.org/survey-of-cofe-bishops

This merely confirmed their unwillingness over many years to address this issue, as demonstrated by their refusal to engage with either Sabeel Jerusalem or Kairos Palestine, who represent the indigenous Palestinian church leadership. The core problem is that CofE is unwilling to answer either to Palestinian Christians or to citizens of the UK. The latter is totally out of place in a country like the UK where the CofE enjoys a privileged position at the heart of an elected democracy, one where the views of all citizens, be they Anglican or otherwise, are supposed to count. The least people have a right to expect is that the Church will enter into reasoned dialogue over points of contention.

Archbishop Welby's refusal to acknowledge the reality of Israeli apartheid in Palestine was further confirmed by his presentation and during the Q&A at the Embrace annual conference in September 2023.

Immediately following the Hamas atrocities of 7th October, the archbishops, both in their public statement and in correspondence to the Board of Deputies, demonstrated 'solidarity' with Israel, without any recognition of the 75 years of brutal military occupation which had led to the Hamas attack.

In his visit to Israel soon after, Archbishop Welby naturally empathised with the grieving and traumatised families of the hostages but went on to criticise those in the UK participating in national demonstrations calling for an end to the genocide in Gaza for being ignorant, even accusing those who believed Israel to be responsible for the bombing of the Anglican Ahli hospital, of committing an antisemitic 'blood libel'. The archbishop has yet to comment on the fact that Israel has targeted and destroyed virtually every hospital and medical facility in Gaza.

Significantly, virtually all the statements, press interviews and speeches published by the archbishops and bishops in the last six months, perpetuate the falsehood that Israel has the "*right of defence*". As stated, in international law an occupying power has no right of defence whatsoever. It is the Palestinians who have not only the right of defence, but also the right to resist Israel by the use of force.

When referring to Israeli and Palestinian casualties, they use different terminology. While Israeli casualties resulted from "*abhorrent terrorist attacks"* Palestinian casualties were a consequence of Israel exercising its "*right to self-defence"*, justifying the distinction by claiming there is "*no equivalence"* between the two sides.

According to the bishops, Hamas has acted "*in violation of international law*" whereas Israel's actions have only been "*inconsistent with international* law."

The emotive language used in their statements to describe the actions of Hamas included, "*abhorrent", "atrocities", "pogrom", "terrorist action", "brutality", "human shields"* and *"indiscriminate".* These contrast markedly with words used to describe Israel's actions. Significantly, none of these words were used. Instead, more neutral terms were employed such as *"proportional", "discriminate"*, "*bombardment*" and "*ground offensive"*. The most frequent term used, however, was "*self-defence*", the archbishop even referring to his desire for a "*military victory".*

Despite Zionist and Israeli leaders' long-standing and well-documented aim of ethnically cleansing Palestine of native Palestinians, and the mounting evidence of apartheid, war crimes and genocide being committed by Israel in Gaza and the Occupied Territories, neither the archbishops nor House of Bishops have been willing, as yet, to use these terms in their statements. Nor have they been willing to call for a permanent ceasefire, lobby the UK government to ban arms exports, or endorse the South African submission to the International Court of Justice investigating evidence of Israeli war crimes.

If Gaza is indeed the moral compass of the world, it is evident that the Church of England leadership are relying upon a very different compass – one that steers them to prioritise their relationship with the Israel lobby over genuine moral principles.

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