



**Wednesday 16 July 2025**

## **An open letter to the Archbishop of York**

To: The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Stephen Cottrell

*"Now by chance a priest was going down that road..." (Luke 10:31)*

Your Grace,

Your Grace may not yet be aware of our work at CONFESS. It is in its germinal stage, but the work is urgent. We are a Christian body speaking truth to power, and advocating for victims of genocide and other crimes against humanity in the lands that cradled the Abrahamic faiths, in particular in Israel and Palestine.

The State of Israel has been in constant breach of international law and United Nations resolutions for decades. Since 7 October 2023, these breaches have intensified exponentially, and Israel now finds itself before the International Court of Justice facing a plausible case of genocide. The provisional measures demanded by that tribunal have been flagrantly disregarded almost daily since they were ordered in January 2024. Aid has been blocked, bringing an entire population to the brink of starvation. At the present time, most of Gaza is being ethnically cleansed, as people are corralled into the new Rafah concentration camp. Life expectancy has fallen from 75 years to 39 years. According to UNICEF, Israel has killed an average of **27 children every day for the last 650 days**.

Meanwhile in the occupied West Bank, attacks by military and settlers continue apace, including sustained assaults on Christians and church property in Taybeh. In this regard, we – along with Archbishop Hosam in his speech to the Synod yesterday – welcome the letter from four bishops published in the Guardian on Monday (why only four?), reminding the UK government of its responsibility to address settler violence which *"threatens not just the peace of the region but the continued presence of Christians in this Holy Land."*

Israel has, at times in the past, had governments that have been prepared to explore a path to justice and peace. However, the current far-right regime appears to know no path other than violence and extremism, and no language other than that of racist supremacism. It is right and proper that its leaders are currently wanted by the International Criminal Court.

Given this context, we were dismayed to note that the Church of England General Synod this week did not debate the long-awaited Carlisle Motion on Israel/Palestine. This was, we aver, a grave error. A strong message from the Church of England is now woefully overdue; not one which brushes over atrocities or which lapses into false equivalence, but which expresses unequivocal solidarity with Palestinian Christians in this time of great danger, and which stands firmly against the horrors of daily war crimes and the threatened erasure of Gaza and of a viable life for Palestinians throughout their historic homeland.

We note further, and with deepest unease and irony, that the Church's silence (or at best occasional Laodicean pronouncements) not only betrays Palestinians, but also our countless courageous Jewish brothers and sisters around the world who are being gaslit by the current government of Israel, and who

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are finding it increasingly challenging to dissociate themselves from that government's policies and actions in a climate where criticism of the same is often labelled *"antisemitic."* We will never be in a position to counter the current rise in antisemitism, if we conspire with a conflation of the policies of the Israeli government and Jewish identity. Such confusion unwittingly peddles the *"dual-loyalty trope"*, and leaves us toothless to combat antisemites who see *"the Jews"* as responsible for Israel's atrocities. As Professor Avi Shlaim and others wrote to Archbishop Justin Welby last September, the church must *"widen the range of Jewish organisations that it listens to and meets with"*, because *"the British establishment's support for Israel, despite the steadily mounting evidence of genocide, strengthens the impression of sinister Jewish power."*

Of course, we well understand, and are in sympathy with, the role that the State of Israel as such plays in many Jews' understanding of themselves and of Judaism: as a place of refuge, as a place where family members live, and as a sign of religious hope. We have no quarrel with this, at this level of abstraction (or theology even). We limit our criticism to the policies and actions of the current government of the State of Israel, which involve brazen – often openly signalled and celebrated – crimes against humanity.

Another Jewish professor, the Israeli cultural historian and political scientist, Ilan Pappé, recently noted that *"when it comes to Israel, some of the most sophisticated articulate people become imbeciles."* Has the Church of England lost its prophetic courage and integrity to such an extent that it has now fallen into this same trap? We hope not.

Finally, Your Grace will be aware that the Revd. Sue Parfitt was recently arrested under the UK's terrorism laws, for taking part in a protest in support of Palestine. Some months ago, Sue gave a speech in which she quoted Archbishop Justin Welby, who said – in regard to climate change – *"if it is interfering to seek to avert catastrophe... then let us interfere. I call it humanitarian care."* We respectfully suggest that such *"interference"* is a Gospel imperative, not only in relation to climate change, but in relation to the world's first live-streamed genocide, and to the erosion of our own civil liberties.

Our mandate surely, Your Grace, is to be interferers, not imbeciles. It's time to stop passing by on the other side. We therefore call upon Your Grace to:

- i. Endorse the Five Tenets of our new movement, CONFESS;
- ii. Endorse publicly – now – the statement from the World Council of Churches dated 24 June, which recognizes and denounces *"the system of apartheid imposed by Israel on the Palestinian people, in violation of international law and moral conscience"*, and which calls for *"consequences for violations of international law, including targeted sanctions, divestment, and arms embargoes"*;
- iii. Pledge to engage with a wider and more representative range of Jewish voices and organisations, including *Na'amod*, *Jewish Network for Palestine*, and *JJP*;
- iv. Heed the request of the church in Taybah to send field missions to document the damage and the worsening situation;
- v. Issue meaningful and open challenges to the British government in regard both to its ongoing complicity in Israel's crimes, and its flagrant misuse of terrorism laws;
- vi. Offer unequivocal support to the Revd. Sue Parfitt, and to all our brothers and sisters who are following Christ's path of peaceful, civil disobedience.

Yours faithfully,

Jeremy Frost

on behalf of CONFESS

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