



Promised Land' conference brings about 'constructive confrontation', new views on Israel-Palestine conflict

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A key result of the conference is a better understanding of the question of land in the Bible, in theology and in the conflict. The conferees said decades of violence in Israel-Palestine challenge Christian theologians to work out "life-affirming" responses to the conflict. The Bible "must not be utilized to justify oppression or supply simplistic commentary on contemporary events", the final document said.

The 10-14 September 2008 conference was hosted by the Swiss Protestant Federation and the Reformed Churches in Bern-Jura-Solothurn. The encounter took place as part of the WCC Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum, an inter-church advocacy initiative. The 85 participants came from Europe, the Middle East, the Americas, Africa and Asia.

"Concrete contributions to the discussions from Palestinian Christians helped to significantly change approaches to the issues," the host churches said in a communiqué. "In the controversial and at times passionate debates a constructive sensitivity to the central themes developed."

Scholars from Europe and North America outlined progress made in years of dialogues between Christians and Jews. Recognizing this "Jewish-Christian healing" the conference expressed hope that Christians in Palestine-Israel would be welcomed into such dialogues in future and invited similar dialogues with Muslims as well.

"Let us continue to critically and creatively examine notions of the "Promised Land", rediscovering in the Bible and in our traditions life-giving metaphors for promoting justice, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness for the fullness of the earth and all its inhabitants", said the final document, the "Bern Perspective".

It is particularly important to differentiate between biblical history and biblical stories, the "Bern Perspective" says, and as well to distinguish between the Israel of the Bible and the modern State of Israel.

Nine panel discussions at the conference gave different perspectives on the concept of the "Promised Land" and related issues. Much follow-up work will be needed on the matters raised, including material for use in parishes.

During the meeting participants visited a House of Religions established in Bern after years of relationship-building between the city's Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other religious communities. At the ecumenical service to end the meeting, Palestinian theologian Fr Jamal Khader highlighted the central significance for peace of Jerusalem, as the home of two peoples and three religions. "Peace begins in Jerusalem and shines forth into the world from there."

[Full text of the "Bern Perspective"](#)

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