The Raheb-Herzog Affair

04.05.2012 | Malcolm Lowe

When the German concern Media Control announced the four winners of its 2011 German Media Prize (Deutscher Medienpreis) on January 13, 2012, the choice of the fourth, Lutheran Pastor Mitri Raheb of Bethlehem, provoked a storm of hundreds of protests.

Why such a fuss? After all, even the Nobel Peace Prize is a nonsense prize if you can get it for giving a speech in Cairo. There is a website in Germany, Kulturpreise.de, that catalogues hundreds of such awards; Raheb already held some of them.

The primary cause of the protests was that a former federal German president, Prof. Roman Herzog, had agreed to come and laud the prize winners on February 24. More generally, the affair brought into the open the seething conflict between two contradictory tendencies in churches worldwide, but especially in German Protestant churches.

While on the one hand, many of these churches have issued official statements deploring the Christian history of denigration and demonization of Jews, on the other, they foster and fawn upon Palestinian clerics who denigrate and demonize the State of Israel.

Often, of course, it is distinct groups within a church that promote the one tendency or the other. When the same individual does both, it requires a considerable measure of cognitive dissonance or hypocrisy. The Raheb-Herzog Affair has provided a defining moment in this struggle.

Some Main Players

Raheb (b. 1962) is the Bethlehem pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. Despite claiming three thousand members, the church numbers hardly 900, including some 220 in Raheb's congregation, but it boasts a bishop and six pastors. A hundred or more members are church employees. It is massively funded by Lutheran churches elsewhere, where 900 members would not be entitled to a single pastor. The funding has helped Raheb to build up a business consortium in Bethlehem. He also heads his church's synod and is the most likely successor of the present bishop, Munib Younan.

Herzog (b. 1934) was a law professor who headed Germany's Federal Constitutional Court before serving as federal president during 1994-1999. The Roman Herzog Institute in Munich was founded by admirers and seeks to promote his ideals.

Hans-Jürgen Abromeit (b. 1954) is the bishop of the Protestant Church of Pomerania in northeast Germany. This small church (94,000 members) is due to vanish on Pentecost 2012 in a merger with other churches and the post of bishop will itself vanish in 2018. On January 5 last, in one of its final acts, the synod reelected him to that post until then amid much controversy, which continues. For thirty years, he has been the biggest – though far from the only – promoter of Raheb in Germany. Already before Raheb's prize was announced, Abromeit had scheduled a festive day on February 19 for Raheb in the main Berlin churches, also not without resistance. So this festival was dragged into the controversy.

In Germany there is a network of 52 German-Israeli friendship associations (DIG: Deutsch-

Israelische Gesellschaften). Its roof organization in Berlin is also called the Deutsch-Israelische Gesellschaft and its president, known as the DIG Präsident, is Reinhold Robbe, a highly regarded Social Democrat politician. He himself received a prestigious prize (Europäischer Kultur-Kommunikationspreis) on February 7, with praise from the German federal defense minister, Thomas de Maizière. The prize was awarded for Robbe's earlier work as the Wehrbeauftragter (Ombudsman) for the German armed forces on behalf of the federal German parliament.

There is also a network of 83 Christian-Jewish cooperation groups. Its roof organization is the Deutscher Koordinierungsrat (German Coordinating Council), whose Protestant co-president is Pastor Ricklef Münnich, an expert in the history and theology of the relations between Christianity and Judaism. This network organizes the annual Woche der Brüderlichkeit (Week of Fraternity) between Christians and Jews. During this year's Week (March 11-17), the Raheb-Herzog Affair seems to have been a hot topic of conversation. We shall read more about it as the lectures then given are written up and published. Raheb's views have already been used as an example for current worldwide antisemitism.

Raheb's Critics

The critics concentrated on writing to Herzog, asking him to refrain from praising Raheb. Many also wrote to Karlheinz Kögel, the chief of Media Control, who later confessed that he had received hundreds of protest emails. Among the earliest critics were three major international Jewish organizations. B'nai B'rith International (January 27) and the Simon Wiesenthal Center (February 5) also issued public statements. Both organizations have hundreds of thousands of members worldwide. The American Jewish Committee at first just wrote privately to Herzog; its Berlin office went public on February 17.

The award ceremony was due to take place in Baden-Baden in the province of Baden. When contacted, the Jewish community of Baden said that "the award was felt like a slap in the face by all who concern themselves for interreligious and intercultural dialogue" (January 27). The Jewish community of Berlin also protested publicly (February 16). The *Jüdische Allgemeine*, the main German Jewish weekly, reported critically (February 9). In Israel, the evolution of the affair was closely followed by articles in the *Jerusalem Post*; one of them mentioned the displeasure of the Israeli Embassy in Berlin (February 9).

The central council of French Jews reported (February 6) that "a former German president wants to honor an antisemitic pastor." Likewise, the Jews of the south of Brazil reported (February 7) that Herzog had agreed to praise a pastor who claims that Jews have no right to be in Israel.

Many of the protests in Germany naturally came from the two networks mentioned. They include pastors and theology professors, so many wrote individually in addition to the protests sent by the boards of associations. Eventually, on February 15, the DIG Präsident and the presidium of the Deutscher Koordinierungsrat separately protested to Herzog. Significantly, both roof organizations enjoy the official patronage of whomever is the current federal German president, so Herzog was reminded by the Koordinierungsrat that he had been their patron in his time. On February 24, the Koordinierungsrat issued a detailed explanation of its reasons for criticizing Herzog's intention to praise Raheb.

Although numerous criticisms reached the Internet, there were many more. It would require a doctoral thesis to document them all; someone should write one. Here the criticisms will be divided collectively into two groups. On the one hand, it was urged that Raheb did not possess the attributes cited by Media Control for his prize. On the other, Media Control had ignored other aspects of Raheb's life and activities.

What Raheb Is Not

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Previously, the German Media Prize had been given to heads of state and other international celebrities. For 2011, however, Media Control decided to award it to four "quiet peacemakers," as it called them. In the press statement announcing the prize, Raheb was cited as a "quiet peacemaker" on two grounds. It was claimed that he had worked for "understanding between Christians, Muslims and Jews" and that he had created "a whole infrastructure of schools, health centers and places of encounter" in Bethlehem. The critics pointed out that the first statement was absurd and the second greatly exaggerated.

The English Wikipedia article on Mitri Raheb does list a number of institutions and programs in his name. On closer inspection, however, it turns out that he has *one* health center which houses *one* school on its ground floor. He also has a small college (about 300 students) teaching "fine art, multimedia and tourism studies." The "fine art" includes tourist souvenirs. Further, he has a conference center, a hotel, a restaurant and a coffee shop. This account suggests that Media Control's talk of "schools, health centers and places of encounter" – all in the plural – was unjustified.

For a decade, out of security concerns, the Israeli authorities have forbidden Israeli Jews from visiting Area A of the West Bank, which includes Bethlehem. More recently, there has been a strong Palestinian campaign to deter all Palestinians from any kind of "normalization" (*tatbîʿ*) with Israel. That means: no meetings with Israeli Jews. Maybe Raheb does meet occasionally with Jewish anti-Israel activists like Evelyn Hecht-Galinski, Felicia Langer or some professor from Beer Sheba who defies Israeli regulations and goes to Bethlehem. But that does not entitle Media Control to describe him as promoting "understanding between Christians, Muslims and Jews."

Raheb could better be described as a successful business man, engaged mainly in tourism, who also runs a church and three communal institutions. He is said to be the second largest private employer in Bethlehem and he has made some contributions to the Palestinian cause. To call that "peacemaking," however, is to abuse the term.

Compare Raheb, for example, with Prof. Sari Nusseibeh. Besides Al-Quds University, of which he is president, Nusseibeh has founded several charitable institutions. Nusseibeh has participated in genuine shared initiatives with Israelis. He has also risked unpopularity and threats for telling Palestinians that for the sake of peace and independence they cannot expect a "right of return" to Israel. That is what makes a peacemaker; Raheb's activities do not.

What Raheb Is

Raheb is also far from "quiet." He tours abroad frequently and he receives many visitors. So some of the critics recounted horrifying examples of meetings with him.

An example is Gunnar Schupelius, whose article in the popular newspaper *BZ-Berlin* was subtitled "Roman Herzog honors a Palestinian whose hostility to Israel I encountered." Said Schupelius: "I visited him in Bethlehem in his office. Without being asked, Raheb poured over me an hour-long tirade against Israel. I had expected to meet a brother in faith. Instead, I met a man with a wild expression, whose tone was hard to distinguish from hatred. His words corresponded to half-truths or no truths at all." And so on.

A similar conclusion was posted on Internet as a comment by Prof. Ekkehard Stegemann of Basel. "Years ago I was with a Swiss delegation in Bethlehem – at Pastor Raheb's. He said to us that the Israelis had cut off the water to the hospital. Straight away we sought out the hospital, which told us that that was nonsense, there was no problem with water. Then it became clear to me what Pastor Raheb, in the attempt to instrumentalize us against Israel, was ready even to give out as the truth."

More often, however, the critics started from two documents that anyone can read. Raheb was a co-author of the so-called Kairos Palestine Document of December 2009 and he also gave a peculiar lecture at the March 2010 "Christ at the Checkpoint" conference in Bethlehem, which can be both read and heard on Internet.

Many people, including myself, have pointed out the problematic features of Kairos Palestine. That Raheb was just one of several authors is beside the point. Raheb expressed similar views, for instance, in a Christmas 2011 interview in *Der Freitag*: he claimed that Israel was turning into an apartheid state based on racism, blamed Israel for all Palestinian problems, and urged boycotts of Israel.

Although the Kairos Palestine Document was originally sponsored and then heavily pushed by the World Council of Churches, and enthusiastically spread by some Protestant bureaucrats in Germany, all the church leaderships there have declined to endorse it. Several leading scholars have taken the trouble to expose its theological defects. Even Bishop Abromeit is on record as emphasizing reservations about it. More forceful reservations were expressed by the roof organization of German Protestant churches (EKD) and its commission for the Middle East (EMOK) in an official statement.

The criticism was cautious at first in Germany because Bishop Younan, too, was originally listed as an author. After Younan demanded that his signature be removed from the document, criticism could be less inhibited.

On January 17, 2012 a high-level conference was organized in Berlin by the Deutscher Koordinierungsrat together with Robbe's Deutch-Israelische Gesellschaft and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Its purpose was to discuss the relationship between "the Christian churches and the State of Israel." The proceedings were published as a pamphlet on February 14, just as the Raheb-Herzog controversy was in full swing. The Kairos Palestine Document occupied a large part of the agenda.

Detailed papers were presented by the two leading churchmen present: Heinrich Mussinghoff, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Aachen, and Nikolaus Schneider, the Präses (Moderator) of the Protestant Church of the Rhineland. Schneider is also the president of the council of heads of Protestant churches in Germany. Raheb was not mentioned, but views like those expressed in his recent interview in *Der Freitag* were firmly rejected by both speakers.

Mussinghoff's contribution stressed that the theology of Kairos Palestine was "irreconcilable with the development of Catholic teaching," while noting that the document had "so far hardly found a resonance in the Catholic Church." Schneider's contribution dwelt upon the history of the Rhineland Church's support for and investment in Israel, going back to the pathbreaking declaration of its synod in 1980. Of course, both speakers added that they could disagree with specific Israeli policies and they outlined familiar concepts of a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Thus Raheb's critics could hardly be faulted for emphasizing his role in Kairos Palestine. Now let us turn to Raheb's lecture of March 2010.

In this lecture, Raheb proposed a "new way of thinking" according to which today's Palestinians, but not Israelis like Netanyahu, are to be identified with the people of the Bible, whereas the State of Israel corresponds to "Rome of the Bible." I have commented on his lecture elsewhere and that article of mine was translated into German, so here I shall just quote the salient passages from his lecture. He introduced his idea in these words:

"Actually, Israel represents Rome of the Bible, not the people of the land. And this is not only because I'm a Palestinian. I'm sure if we were to do a DNA test between David, who was a

Bethlehemite, and Jesus, born in Bethlehem, and Mitri, born just across the street from where Jesus was born, I'm sure the DNA will show that there is a trace. While, if you put King David, Jesus and Netanyahu, you will get nothing, because Netanyahu comes from an East European tribe who converted to Judaism in the Middle Ages... And being born just across the street from where Jesus was born, I always loved to say that most probably one of my grand, grand, grand, grandmas used to babysit for Jesus."

And he came back to the same idea repeatedly, with elaborations:

"Actually, the Palestinian Christians are the only ones in the world that, when they speak about their forefathers, they mean their actual forefathers, and also the forefathers in the faith." "So, that is the reality of the peoples of the land. Again, they aren't Israel. This experience I'm talking about, it's only the Palestinians who understand this, because Israel represents Rome." "It was our forefathers to whom the revelation was given..."

Note that he did not say that "the Israeli occupation of the West Bank" corresponds to Rome. No, it is the State of Israel as such that he identified with Rome of old. As his critics saw immediately, he meant that Israel is a foreign European body that has no justification for its presence in the land.

So what is "new" in Raheb's "new way of thinking"? "Replacement theology," the replacement of Jews by Christians in the divine scheme, was taught in the churches for centuries and repudiated by Catholics and Protestants only after the Holocaust. Nor is disqualifying Jews on racial grounds new; the self-styled "German Christians" (Deutsche Christen) of the Nazi period claimed that Jesus was an Aryan. Raheb's mentor, Naim Ateek, already used theological sleight of hand to turn the Palestinians into the new "chosen people."

New is just that Raheb has juggled with those predecessors in order to make Palestinian Christians the only authentic ones: their ancestors wrote the Bible and they alone understand it, so theirs alone is the land. Along with Israeli Jews, Raheb has also disqualified his own Christian admirers.

Raheb's Defenders

It is remarkable that apart from Abromeit, nobody seems to have tried to justify Raheb's dubious views. Even Abromeit, as we mentioned, does not wholly subscribe to the Kairos Palestine Document, but he attempted to explain away Raheb's "new thinking" in a letter to Herzog. His letter and my response are now available on Internet.

Abromeit claimed that Raheb was merely alluding to the views of Shlomo Sand in a controversial book and advised Herzog to look up the relevant Wikipedia article. Now, the article does survey the controversy started by Sand in 2008, who claimed (like Arthur Koestler in 1976) that many European Jews were descended from converts and (like previous ethnologists) that many Palestinian Arabs could be descended from converted Jews. The genetic evidence available today suggests that the claim about Jews is unlikely, while the claim about Palestinians is unproven. The real point, however, is that nowhere in the Wikipedia article on Sand is there anything like Raheb's claim that "Israel represents Rome of the Bible." This is not an ethnological thesis, it is a theological assertion made by Raheb and a thoroughly reprehensible one. Unfortunately, the bishop did not notice a theological assertion when he met one.

Curiously, there were several defenses of Raheb that applauded his views. Besides the Palestinian Diplomatic Mission in Berlin, naturally, there was a statement in *Der Israelit*, the journal of a tiny anti-Israel Jewish fringe group that claims to speak for "authentic Judaism." In comments appended to that statement, however, its author seems to have realized that Raheb was not such a good friend as he had imagined.

The statement in *Der Israelit* was echoed in *Die Rote Fahne*. This is a communist nostalgia journal, created after the disappearance of East Germany, whose masthead says it all: "Founded in 1918 by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, in 1992 by Stephan Steins."

Raheb was also applauded by ICCO and by Pax Christi. The former is a Dutch NGO that finances such bodies as Electronic Intifada; Raheb chairs its regional committee for the Middle East. This connection, too, was cited by Raheb's critics. Pax Christi is the militant Catholic "peacemaking" organization that has embraced the Kairos Palestine agenda. Thus it is one of Bishop Mussinghoff's rare exceptions.

Apart from the above, the typical response of Raheb's defenders was on the lines of "we have known him for a long time and he is a jolly good fellow." That is, they gave character references. The lawyer Herzog could have told them that character references have no bearing on guilt or innocence; they can merely influence the sentence given to the guilty.

An example is the indignant statement of DINO, the "German Initiative for the Near East" (Deutsche Initiative für den Nahen Osten), on February 10. This is a club of retired politicians and diplomats who believe that they still have something to contribute. In order to be credible, they needed Palestinian members; unfortunately for themselves, they picked on Raheb. They should have been content to have Sari Nusseibeh, their other Palestinian member.

Similar was the joint letter of six US Protestant churchmen on February 20; they included the Lutheran Bishop Mark Hansen, another long-time patron of Raheb. The virtues that they ascribed to Raheb, however, had nothing to do with peacemaking; they also misspelt the award as the "Medienpries." They claimed to represent fifteen million Christians, but in fact many of their church members detest their Palestinian bias. This has been a factor in the constant decline of their membership numbers. Hansen's church is now losing nearly a hundred thousand members yearly. Precisely Hansen's defense of Raheb provoked further vexation.

Another example was the "unanimous statement" put out by the Jerusalemsverein on February 18, the outfit that Abromeit had chosen to stage his Rahebfest on the following day. In church circles, "unanimous" can mean that some people prefer job security to opening their mouths. It is easier to be a totally silent peacemaker than to let slip some home truths about the Palestinian situation and have to earn forgiveness by making a string of pro-Palestinian statements.

The only other German Protestant church leader who defended Raheb before the award ceremony was Ulrich Fischer, Bishop of Baden. This earned him an open letter of protest from church members. They remarked that a pastor in his church would be dismissed for propounding Raheb's race-based "new thinking." They also reminded him that in October 2010 the synod of his church, fully aware of Raheb's authorship (Raheb was present there), had expressed clear disagreement with the Kairos Palestine Document. (The Church of Baden then also sent the authors of Kairos Palestine a corresponding letter, which politely but severely criticized the document.)

After the award ceremony, Präses (Moderator) Alfred Buss of the Westphalian Church (a former mentor of Abromeit) congratulated Raheb. There was also a statement of congratulations from the Rhineland Church. Writing in *Die Welt* on March 11, the veteran journalist Till-R. Stoldt asked how it was possible for Nikolaus Schneider, as the head of that church, both to express such warm feelings for Israel and to congratulate Raheb. The other eighteen German Protestant heads of churches seem to have made to no public comment on the affair.

The occasion of Stoldt's article was the plan to award Schneider the Buber-Rosenzweig Medal that same day in the opening ceremony of the Week of Fraternity. In an interview, Schneider had indeed just expressed warm feelings toward Israel. It is not clear, however, that Schneider had anything to do with the congratulations for Raheb issued in the name of his church, which

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appeared on its website without any name appended. Maybe some official or committee issued it without asking for higher authorization. In any case, no further fuss was made and Schneider received his medal.

Herzog's Encomium

The Media Prize ceremony, as usual, was broadcast on primetime television. Typically, one is shown the arrival of the audience of celebrity guests in their flashy suits and skimpy dresses. The prize winners are led in down the aisle and take their seats on the stage. Snippets from their lives are shown on film, they are presented with the prize, an abstract ceramic doll, and they make acceptance speeches. Then an invited notability delivers an encomium in their honor.

Thus all kinds of interests were threatened by the brewing storm over Raheb. On February 21, however, Media Control affirmed that the ceremony would take place as planned and that Herzog would make his speech. This discouraged further speculation about whether Herzog would play the impartial judge or the lawyer getting the best deal for his client.

Significantly, it was reported that the usual celebrities hardly appeared this time. We do not know whether they stayed away because of Raheb or because all the prize winners were social inferiors. A television news clip suggests that the most distinguished guests were a former provincial prime minister of Baden-Württemberg and the current mayor of Baden-Baden.

Out of his allotted fifteen minutes, Herzog spent half the time on an abstract discussion of the respective roles of organizations and the individual in modern states. He then briefly mentioned the man from the Congo and the lady from Afghanistan before discussing Raheb and the Russian. The whole ceremony was later put on Internet by Media Control and the official text of Herzog's encomium by DINO. This text, however, is significantly different from what Herzog actually said; it contains both additions and omissions. Fortunately, there is also on Internet a transcript of what he said about Raheb on the night. I have checked the transcript against the video and found it thoroughly accurate. So let us see how Herzog approached the conundrum.

Herzog introduced Raheb as "Dr. Mitri Raheb from Bethlehem, who has committed himself to understanding between Jews, Christians and Muslims and also runs a whole chain of schools, health centers and places of encounter." That is, Herzog simply repeated the original citation of Media Control, although he had been informed by the critics that Raheb speaks only to the few Jews who agree with him and that he does not have a "chain" of "schools," etc., in the plural, but just one school and one health center in the same building.

With these words, Herzog showed already that he was not prepared to pay any attention to any objections. He then admitted that he had received many requests not to come and praise Raheb, but – he claimed – even more statements in favor of just that. So, he said, it was a "pleasant virtue" ("eine angenehme Tugend") to stick to his decision to come because "one does not need to think afresh" ("weil man nicht neu denken muss"). This embarrassing sentence is missing from DINO's text, but was said to laughter and applause ("Gelächter, Beifall") on the night, as the transcript records.

Herzog then explained that he had stuck to his decision on two grounds. First, in the controversy some "smallish Jewish-Christian groups" were opposed to some "smallish Protestant groups." Thus the transcript; in DINO's version the former are expanded to "smallish Jewish groups and parts of German-Israeli associations," but this is not a great improvement. The international Jewish organizations, with their hundreds of thousands of members, are hardly "smallish Jewish groups." But maybe the nearly octogenarian Herzog, like many Germans of his generation, does not take English speakers seriously. (Even Austrians and Swiss Germans are only half-serious for some, as they speak German with funny accents.) The six US Protestant churchmen did not merit a mention.

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Continued Herzog: "There are therefore obviously strong theological impulses – and the liberal state in principle does not participate in theological controversies: the times have passed in which emperor, kings and princes exerted an influence on theological decisions." Thus DINO; in the transcript he adds that it applies to presidents, too, and that those times will not return with him.

This is a breathtaking cop-out. Herzog was saying, in effect: "Since Raheb is said to be a theologian, I refuse to consider whether Raheb's views are racist." By the same logic, a German neo-Nazi could escape censure, provided that he claimed to derive his racism from the Bible.

"Second," said Herzog, "in the whole discussion obviously also strong elements of the philosophy of history play a role, such as the question how long a people in the course of history can at all be identical with itself. But I accept philosophy of history neither from the one nor the other side, because it always hides in itself the lure of a *petitio principii*." (That is, you assume what you want to prove.) Here Herzog is saying that he finds Raheb's "new thinking" a lot of nonsense, so never mind that Raheb uses it to delegitimize Israeli Jews. Well, Nazism was a lot of nonsense too, but Jews who ignored it on that ground paid a high price.

Therefore, said Herzog, he looked at the letters again to see if any of them could survive his two principles of elimination. And this allowed him to make two observations. First: "As a German politician – in virtue of the terrible past – I can do nothing other than support Israel's right to life." And second: "That, however, cannot hinder me from honoring the representative of a small Christian territory who seeks practically to help his fellow citizens in overcoming the problems that indeed appeared in Palestine in the second half of the century."

Yes indeed, once all the criticisms of Raheb were excluded from consideration by Herzog's two stratagems, there remained only the letters claiming that Raheb is a jolly good fellow. Thus Herzog's encomium itself was a fine example of *petitio principii*: decide what conclusion you want, eliminate all objections to it on principle, however dubiously, and the conclusion follows effortlessly. It is hard to believe that Herzog, as President of the Federal Constitutional Court, would have accepted such specious reasoning from any lawyer, but who knows?

Herzog will doubtless hope that others will forget this occasion as quickly as he does. More likely, however, it will serve as an example of the gaps between the noble principles expressed in one context – his speeches as president and patron – and the practical implementation in another. Nor was it a great advertisement for the Roman Herzog Institute.

Raheb's Self-Justification

In various newspaper interviews, Raheb sought to justify himself. How wisely or not we shall see from some examples. The lawyer Herzog could have reminded him of his right to silence; self-justification is sometimes self-incrimination.

Mainly three interviews are relevant. One appeared in three daily newspapers: the Frankfurter Rundschau and the Berliner Zeitung on February 17 and in a slightly different version in the Badische Zeitung on February 24. A longer interview appeared in the Berlin church newspaper, Die Kirche, on February 22 and a shorter one in the church newspapers of central Germany on February 27.

The last of these interviews is of interest because the interviewer posed the plain question: "You are supposed to have said in a lecture that Jesus was a Palestinian and no Jew." Raheb's answer: "No, no, no. That you can read nowhere. That is a false understanding of history. That is a slander." It is correct that the sentence "Jesus was a Palestinian" did not occur in his lecture of March 2010. But, to say the least, the sentences quoted above from the lecture do imply that claim in the strongest manner. Raheb did insist repeatedly that both Jesus and the people of the Bible in

general are the forebears of today's Palestinian Christians and not of today's Israeli Jews.

The interview in the daily newspapers began with an equally plain question: "Mr. Raheb, what do you say when you are called an antisemitic liberation theologian?" Answered Raheb: "Those are naturally slanders. People throw concepts around without actually being able to prove anything. They do not want to discuss objectively. Also most of the objections came not from Jews but from Christian Zionists. They do not want a Palestinian to get such a prize in Germany."

What he said here about the source of the objections is totally false, of course. Among the earliest objectors were the international Jewish organizations, who already knew him well; few of the other objectors could be called "Christian Zionists"; and he was criticized not from a Christian Zionist viewpoint but as summarized above, on the explicit basis of his own recorded statements.

The interviewer questioned him about both the Kairos Palestine Document and its sequel, the "Bethlehem Call," which was issued at a conference held in December 2011 by most of the authors of the former document. I have written about the Bethlehem Call elsewhere, also in German. According to the version of the *Badische Zeitung* (but missing from the other two newspapers), Raheb answered: "I am not a supporter of the Bethlehem Call."

Speaking to *Die Kirche*, Raheb likewise claimed that the critics were a "marginal group of Christian Zionists" who "adopt extreme right Israeli positions." If he was not deliberately lying, we must assume that he had made no attempt to discover who had criticised him or on what grounds. He added: "What is going on here is a culture of incitement that brought Jesus to the cross and silenced Martin Luther King, Yitzhak Rabin and many other freedom fighters."

At such a statement one can only laugh. Nobody had threatened to kill Raheb or cause him any physical harm. Many had not even called for him to be denied the prize. They had just asked Herzog not to come and shower him with praise. Reading such statements as the above, Gunnar Schupelius and Ekkehard Stegemann will doubtless see their estimates of Raheb's truthfulness confirmed.

Among other oddities of the interview was Raheb's complaint that he was not allowed to enter Israel and so had to fly to Europe from Jordan, not Tel Aviv. "That costs time and some 300 to 500 Euros more." One wonders: Given his aspiration to set Palestinians free from Israel, why does he claim the right to use Tel Aviv? A quick check shows that a return flight from Amman to Frankfurt with Lufhansa costs about 650 Euros; there are no flights from Tel Aviv for 150 Euros. Once again, Raheb was being economical with the truth.

A week before the interview in *Die Kirche*, this newspaper withdrew at the last minute an article critical of Raheb by Pastor Münnich. A week after that interview, it published a "for and against" by Abromeit and Münnich respectively. As a commentator noted, Abromeit concentrated on listing things that Raheb had not said while Münnich made his case by quoting things that Raheb indeed had said. "Sometimes," added the commentator, "these quotations stand in clear contradiction to what Bishop Abromeit claimed as 'not said.'"

Internet Links for the Raheb-Herzog Affair

Many of the reports listed here were also listed on other websites, often many times. Only in a few cases, where there was some significance to the repetition, has the same report been listed more than once. EPD stands for "Evangelischer Pressedienst"; the web pages of this news agency lack dates for stories, so the dates have been supplied from copies on other sites. All dates given are for 2012, unless otherwise noted.

- Kulturpreise.de: Deutscher Medienpreis – Fakten

- Der Freitag (interview with Raheb), December 25, 2011: Das Westjordanland wird betoniert
- Media Control, January 13: Deutscher Medienpreis 2011 – Pressemeldung
- EPD, January 13: Deutscher Medienpreis für herausragende Symbole der Menschlichkeit
- Deutscher Koordinierungsrat, January 17: Präses Nikolaus Schneider – Die evangelische Kirche und der Staat Israel
- Deutscher Koordinierungsrat, January 17: Bischof Dr. Heinrich Mussinghoff – Die katholische Kirche und der Staat Israel
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, January 22: Palestinian Lutheran Pastor to Receive "German Media Award"
- Audiatur Online (Albrecht Lohrbächer), January 23: Deutscher Medienpreis an Mitri Raheb – Ein Brief an Bundespräsident a.D. Roman Herzog
- Christliches Medienmagazin Pro, January 24: Pfarrer aus Bethlehem erhält Deutschen Medienpreis
- Gatestone Institute, January 24: Former German President to Praise Anti-Israel Theologian , subsequently (February 7) translated into German
- Israelnetz (U. Sahm), January 25: Kritik an Ehrung von Mitri Raheb
- Evangelische Vereinigung in Baden, January 25: Betroffenheit über Ehrung eines umstrittenen Palästinensers
- B'nai B'rith International, January 27: B'nai B'rith Urges German Media Prize Committee To Reconsider Rev. Mitri Raheb as Recipient
- Goodnews4Baden-Baden, January 27: Wirbel um Deutschen Medienpreis für Pastor Mitri Raheb aus Bethlehem
- Pfarrer Klaus Beckmann, January 28: Brief an Roman Herzog
- JTA, January 29: B'nai B'rith decries German media prize to Palestinian pastor
- DIG Rhein-Neckar, January 31: Protestbrief an Roman Herzog
- DIG Freiburg, February 3: Schreiben an Herrn Prof. Dr. Herzog
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