

---

# An Earnest Effort Falls Short

## The 2017 “Seeking Peace” Resolution of Mennonite Church USA

John Kampen

The 2017 resolution of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) “Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine” was the logical development of Mennonite interactions and experience with the peoples of the Middle East. It set the course for subsequent engagement with the people of the area since October 7, 2023.<sup>1</sup> Of the 548 delegates who voted on July 6, 2017, only 10 opposed the resolution and 2 abstained. The persons who lined up on the conference floor to speak to the resolution were overwhelmingly in favor. “I could not support the resolution two years ago. It was too simplistic,” Mennonite World Conference president Nelson Kraybill said, speaking in support of the motion during comments at the microphones and appearing to reflect the viewpoint of many. “I commend the committee for their thorough work.”<sup>2</sup> Presumably the majority of the delegates

---

*John Kampen is a Distinguished Research Professor at the Methodist Theological School in Delaware, Ohio. His area of specialty is Jewish History and Literature of the Greek and Roman periods, particularly the Dead Sea Scrolls. He is former VP and Dean of Academic Affairs of Bluffton University. He has written articles on various aspects of Mennonite-Jewish Relations. The following article is, in part, an adaptation (by permission) of previous research published in “Assessing the 2017 Mennonite Resolution on Israel/Palestine,” in Peace and Faith: Christian Churches and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, eds. Cary Nelson and Michael C. Gizzi (Philadelphia/Boston: Presbyterians for Middle East Peace/Academic Studies Press, 2021), 296–316.*

1 “Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine: A Resolution for Mennonite Church USA,” 2017, <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/IP-Resolution.pdf>.

2 “Mennonites Choose ‘Third Way’ on Israel and Palestine,” July 6, 2017, <http://mennoniteusa.org/news/mennonites-choose-third-way-israel-palestine/>. For the 2015 resolution that was narrowly defeated, see “Resolution Israel-Palestine: For Consideration by the Delegate Assembly at KC2015,” accessed October 18, 2024, [https://mennopin.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/israel\\_palestine\\_resolution\\_2015april08.pdf](https://mennopin.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/israel_palestine_resolution_2015april08.pdf). Note the further discussion of this resolution below.

were in agreement with the sentiment of the MC USA press release on that date titled “Mennonites Choose ‘Third Way’ on Israel and Palestine.”<sup>3</sup>

Since the prior resolution tabled in 2015 did not include the section on anti-semitism, it is this addition that made the designation “Third Way” possible. What was less clear in the rollout of the resolution and the resulting publicity, however, was the precise meaning of the phrase. The level of consensus in the final vote suggests that the delegate body believed Mennonite Church USA was adopting a new approach to the conflict in the Middle East. What the majority of the delegates believed was a very even-handed resolution was celebrated as a tremendous victory by many who had a particular interest in supporting the Palestinian cause, even though there were those who thought anything less than a full and unambiguous endorsement of BDS (Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions campaign)<sup>4</sup> was inadequate.

Of greater significance was the rejection of the resolution as a sincere effort to reach out to the Jewish community of North America and Israel, as evident in the reaction of the Jewish press and even earlier in the response of a Jewish representative invited to read a draft of the resolution in formation. Later in this paper I discuss this problem as an instance of false equivalence. While it is tempting to resort to the old canard that if a statement is opposed by both sides of an argument there must be some truth to the claim, such a sanguine conclusion is not justified in this instance. Some analysis of the wording of the resolution itself and the process of its development, as well as its context in the history of Mennonite engagement with the area since 1949, demonstrates its problematic nature and its inadequacy as a basis for response to last year’s October 7 murders and subsequent events.

The MC USA resolution of 2017 is the outcome of a long history of engagement with the Palestinian people and of theological development within the Mennonite church, particularly that portion of the church that has the most interest in social justice and peacemaking. As a graduate of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and an ordained member (credentials now retired) of MC USA, I understand the logic undergirding the resolution and have some appreciation of

---

3 The “third way” has been a popular label for designating a distinctive approach to theological and religious issues in recent Mennonite and Anabaptist traditions. The label is an outgrowth of an approach to these questions inspired by the perspective of Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo: Conrad, 1973). The metaphor has been employed in various ways in subsequent decades such as to designate an approach different from both a socially conscious liberal Protestantism and an individualistic “biblical” piety.

4 “The BDS Movement (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) was launched in 2005 by 170 Palestinian civil society organizations calling for economic, 40 cultural, and academic boycotts of Israel” (lines 38–40, “Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine” resolution).

the experiential background informing its development. This is true not only in general terms but also informed by regular, some prolonged, periods of time spent living in East Jerusalem since 1992. In addition, I am informed by a different set of perspectives and experiences beginning in 1975, when I enrolled in the PhD program at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. Ever since that time, I have been privy to the ongoing conversations about Israel within the Jewish communities of the United States and Israel, particularly those informed by the liberal Zionism of Reform Judaism. I remain involved with Hebrew Union College and Reform Judaism in a variety of positions. My studies in Second Temple Judaism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament informed a growing understanding of the history of antisemitism and its implications. Regular travel to Israel/Palestine for research and academic engagement since the early 1990s also informs my perceptions.

These experiences call for an examination of the content of the resolution and the assumptions undergirding it. While not on the writing team for the resolution, I was part of the larger reference group that provided periodic consultation for its formation. I had indicated to that body that I would not support the resolution in its final form.

## Mennonites in Israel/Palestine<sup>5</sup>

The Mennonite Board of Missions (now Mennonite Mission Network) became engaged in Israel/Palestine in the 1950s. The Messianic Jewish movement was a consistent focus of the organization for the next half-century.<sup>6</sup> The establishment of what became Israel College of the Bible, described as the seminary of the Messianic Jewish movement in Israel, was an ongoing project, with Mennonites serving as faculty members earlier in its development. Roy and Florence Kreider were sent to Israel as missionaries by the Mennonite Board of Missions in 1953, and Roy studied at Hebrew University as part of his assignment.<sup>7</sup> During the

---

5 See the summary of this period in Lisa Schirch, “Anabaptist-Mennonite Relations with Jews Across Five Centuries,” *Mennonite Life* 74 (2020): 42–46. Also online at <https://ml.bethelks.edu/2020/07/09/anabaptist-mennonite-relations-with-jews-across-five-centuries/>. A pdf version runs to 109 pages, and the page citations in this article are from that downloaded version, hence only approximate. See also John Kampen, “Words Matter! Reorienting Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Studies with Attention to Antisemitism,” *Antisemitism Studies*, forthcoming.

6 Marie Shenk, *Mennonite Encounter with Judaism in Israel: An MBM Story of Creative Presence Spanning Four Decades, 1953–93*, Mission Insight 15 (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 2000).

7 The messianic mission to the Jews is clearly articulated in Roy Kreider, *Judaism Meets Christ: Guiding Principles for the Christian-Jewish Encounter* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1960). Roy and his wife, Florence, were the major staff persons in Israel for the Mennonite

1970s and 1980s, Roy was also engaged with the interfaith organizations in Israel. The placement of staff with Nazareth Hospital began in the 1960s and continued for decades. One result was the creation of Nazareth Village, with Mennonite involvement central to its formation. The establishment of this tourist center, which opened in the year 2000, has been a good source of employment for and engagement with the Arab community of lower Galilee. This history of Mennonite missions involvement had a minimal impact on the developments that led to the resolution adopted by MC USA in 2017.

Mennonite experience with Palestinians goes back to 1949 when MCC responded initially in the Gaza Strip, then in Lebanon and Jericho, to the needs of the Palestinian refugees from the war of 1948.<sup>8</sup> MCC actively engaged in the distribution of food and began to coordinate the distribution of clothing to Palestinians for other church agencies as well. Material assistance continued in Jericho until 1966.

In 1954 MCC began distributing American surplus food through the US Title III program, so that in the space of a decade it dispensed 26,254,935 pounds of cheese, butter, oil, dried milk, and bulgur wheat. Primary distribution sites for these materials were the schools MCC had begun in Beit Jala and Hebron. Food was also handed out through women's society contacts and to welfare cases identified by the Jordanian government.

Of long-term significance was the sewing program begun in 1951 in Ein el-Sultan refugee camp near Jericho. This program was rapidly absorbed into the needlework program—established in Bethlehem in 1952—which became a visible symbol throughout North American Mennonite churches of MCC's involvement in the region and a significant source of income for some Palestinian families. Here traditional Palestinian embroidery patterns were utilized in the production of products for the North American market, still sold today in Ten Thousand Villages stores.

Upon the initiative and advocacy of MCC staff working in the West Bank, the organization began a rural development program that ran from 1976 to 1988. This program was initiated out of a desire “to push MCC in the direction of greater solidarity with Palestinians in the face of Israeli occupation.”<sup>9</sup> Desirous of a more active role in advocacy rather than continuing the traditional Mennonite stance of nonresistance, these North American staff members sought opportunities to become advocates for the Palestinian people and the issues they faced.

---

mission to the Jews from 1953 to 1985. See Roy H. Kreider, *Land of Revelation: A Reconciling Presence in Israel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> This history is available in greater detail in the volume by Alain Epp Weaver and Sonia K. Weaver, *Salt and Sign: Mennonite Central Committee in Palestine, 1949–1999* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Weaver and Weaver, *Salt and Sign*, 55.

These rural development programs made possible the addition of Palestinian staff members, some of whom were involved in other initiatives that brought more attention to the issues among foreign press and international agency personnel.

On the minds of many was the question of whether MCC had a peacemaking role in the area. In this case, the peacemaking role refers to a program of conflict resolution that would make a contribution to an eventual peace in Israel/Palestine. Frank Epp, a historian and later president of Conrad Grebel College (now Conrad Grebel University College) in Waterloo, Ontario, was sent to Israel and the West Bank to evaluate the potential for a peacemaking initiative. He eventually authored three volumes on the region—one more historical and the other two the results of interviews with Palestinians and Israelis.<sup>10</sup>

Yet there is little evidence that MCC staff in the region were interested in developing such a program or even that such a program was possible. It is rather attention to the occupation that has characterized the efforts of MCC related to the region from that time until the present day. Peace efforts largely centered around documenting and challenging various aspects of the occupation. MCC has remained an engaged and active presence in the Palestinian communities, continuing to the present and including projects in the Gaza Strip. As its own literature states:

Through the years, MCC has accepted invitations from Palestinians to walk alongside them as they search for justice, peace and freedom. MCC has worked with Israeli partners since Israel's occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in 1967. MCC supports the efforts of both Palestinians and Israelis committed to nonviolence and to a future of peace, justice and reconciliation for both peoples.<sup>11</sup>

The most important initiative for peacemaking was the development of the peace library in Jerusalem, called the Peace Resource Center, which operated until 1997. As a Palestinian national consciousness began to build in the 1970s, MCC began to provide training in methods of nonviolent struggle. These efforts included the translation of materials on peacemaking and nonviolence—such as the writings of Gene Sharp—into Arabic. This center made available to both Palestinians and Israelis thousands of volumes on the themes of peace and justice, along with videos and periodicals.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the entire period of MCC engagement in the Middle East, workers have considered their interpretive role as very significant. MCC volunteers have

---

10 Frank H. Epp, *Whose Land is Palestine? The Middle East Problem in Historical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970); Frank H. Epp, *The Palestinians: Portrait of a People in Conflict* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976); Frank H. Epp, *The Israelis: Portrait of a People in Conflict* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1980).

11 [https://mcc.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/mcc\\_palestine\\_israel\\_booklet.pdf](https://mcc.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/mcc_palestine_israel_booklet.pdf).

12 Weaver and Weaver, *Salt and Sign*, 87–88.

made themselves available to the multiple Mennonite tourist groups and study tours by Mennonite agencies and educational institutions that have impacted whole generations of students and church leaders. A total of 177 volunteers served in these programs from 1948 to 1999. Included in this list are many who became faculty members at Mennonite colleges and seminaries as well as persons serving in influential positions of denominational and Mennonite agency leadership.<sup>13</sup>

The impact has been a comparatively widespread understanding of the Palestinian perspective among the leadership of MC USA, MC Canada, and MCC. There is ample evidence of the tremendous impact that the time of service in Israel/Palestine had upon the lives of the volunteers and the life of the denomination.<sup>14</sup> This impact has countered some of the dispensationalist views and other Christian Zionist perspectives that were influential in some segments of these Mennonite churches.

Among the volunteers listed are members of the Awad and Kuttab families—Palestinians who remain connected with the Mennonite world and were leaders in the development of organizations and strategies of peaceful resistance to Israeli occupation. The impact of this work is apparent in the life of Mubarak Awad, who in 1983 founded the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence. He had learned about nonviolent resistance during his years of study at Bluffton (Ohio) College (now University). His promotion of resistance attracted the attention of Israeli authorities, so he was deported in 1988 to the United States, where he became a citizen. Adjunct Professor of Peace Studies at American University in Washington, DC, Mubarak was recognized by *Newsweek* magazine as the “Palestinian Gandhi.”<sup>15</sup>

This continuing impact in Palestine is apparent in the work of Mubarak’s brother, Bishara Awad, the founder of Bethlehem Bible College, and his nephew, Sami Awad, the founder of the Holy Land Trust and also a prominent activist in the tradition of nonviolence. Another brother, Alex Awad, is a charter member of the Board of Trustees and faculty of Bethlehem Bible College. He is also regarded as a founder of the influential Christ at the Checkpoint conferences. Senior pastor of the East Jerusalem Baptist Church, he advises the United Methodist Church’s Board of Global Ministries and the Mennonite Palestine Israel Network (MennoPIN) on issues regarding Palestine and Israel. Mubarak Awad and Jonathan Kuttab are co-founders of Nonviolence International. Kuttab is a Mennonite Palestinian who also was involved in the founding of the Palestinian Center for Nonviolence. With an office in East Jerusalem he has been

---

13 Weaver and Weaver, *Salt and Sign*, 135–40.

14 Weaver and Weaver, *Salt and Sign*, 111–28.

15 Jeff Stein, “The ‘Palestinian Gandhi’ Who Still Believes Non-Violence Is the Answer,” *Newsweek*, August 12, 2014, <https://www.newsweek.com/2014/08/22/palestinian-gandhi-who-still-believes-non-violence-answer-264041.html>.

engaged in Human Rights issues with agencies of the United Nations and has a substantive international presence. His brother Daoud is a prominent Palestinian journalist. As discussed below, members of these families have remained a regular source of information and counsel for various Mennonite bodies engaged in the issues of Israel/Palestine.

A new initiative that developed in large part out of the history of the MCC experience was the involvement of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT, now Community Peacemaker Teams) in Israel/Palestine.<sup>16</sup> Begun in 1986 by leadership from the Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, and the Church of the Brethren, and later joined by Friends meetings, CPT established a program in Israel/Palestine at Hebron in 1995 and continues its presence in that city.<sup>17</sup> This presence has included patrols that accompany Palestinian children to school, monitoring settler violence and soldier home invasions, and working against home demolitions. It supports Palestinian-led nonviolent resistance to Israel's military occupation and educates people in North America. At various times it has also attempted other projects that were more short-lived. It endorsed the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign in 2010.<sup>18</sup> Itineration in Mennonite churches by present and former CPT volunteers is commonplace.

It is this growing and sustained engagement with the Palestinian community over a period of seventy-five years that made possible the development of a resolution considered by MC USA in 2015 and the subsequent adoption of a resolution by that same body in 2017, as well as the resolution adopted by MC Canada in 2016. It is this history that informs not only the adoption but also the perspective and content of these resolutions. Similarly, support for the resolution as well as its perspective and content has been informed by the failure to develop within the Mennonite staff and constituency a deep understanding of the nature of Israel, its importance to the worldwide Jewish community, and its history, as well as the challenges to its well-being and survival. Thus, the Mennonite leadership, staff, and constituency has not over the past seventy-five years developed

---

16 Kathleen Kern, *In Harm's Way: A History of Christian Peacemaker Teams* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 93–228.

17 <http://cptpalestine.com/>.

18 “Brief History of Mennonite Involvement in Palestine-Israel,” prepared by Timothy Seidel and André Gingerich Stoner, MennoPIN, accessed October 18, 2024, <https://mennopin.org/brief-history-of-mennonite-involvement-in-palestine-israel/>; “The Impact and Importance of the BDS Movement: What Is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement Mobilizing For? What Are Their demands?,” CPT Palestine, accessed October 18, 2024, <https://cpt.org/2024/07/09/the-impact-and-importance-of-the-bds-movement>; Ameera Al-Rajabi, “The Power and Complexity of BDS: Insights from an Interview with Human Rights Advocate Hisham Al-Sharbati,” CPT Palestine, accessed October 22, 2024, <https://cpt.org/2024/04/08/the-power-and-complexity-of-bds>.

a network of relationships that would permit them to understand the nature of Jewish life in Israel and abroad. So the denomination, its staff members, and its constituency were ill-equipped to draft a comprehensive resolution addressing both Israeli Palestinians and Jews in an informed and empathetic manner, much less the concerns of the worldwide Jewish people.

## The Origin and History of the 2017 Resolution

The resolution of 2017 had its origin in an Executive Board decision of MC USA to send a delegation of its “leaders from across its agencies to visit Palestine-Israel with the purpose of engaging the discussion on divestment.”<sup>19</sup> In light of what they described as “these disconcerting realities”—observations confined primarily to the occupation and its impact most particularly on Palestinian life—they returned with recommendations that were circulated in a June 2007 letter to all the churches of the denomination, calling for pastors and leaders “to visit both Israel and Palestine and to deepen their understanding of the current situation in the region.”<sup>20</sup> They did call on “all parts of the church to strengthen our commitment to bridge-building between the alienated factions in this region,” a noteworthy attempt to address the complexities of peacemaking in the region.

In December 2009, Palestinian Christians released the Kairos Palestine document. This provided a new and more focused context for the denomination’s interest in the area. The response came in the form of a letter dated October 5, 2011, addressed to “Dear sisters and brothers in Christ in Palestine.”<sup>21</sup> In this letter signed by Ervin Stutzman, the Executive Director of the denomination, the situation of the Palestinians was recognized: “We open our hearts when we

---

19 “Brief History of Mennonite Involvement in Israel-Palestine,” prepared by Timothy Seidel and André Gingerich Stoner, accessed October 22, 2024, <https://mennonpin.org/brief-history-of-mennonite-involvement-in-palestine-israel/>.

20 “An Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations: Becoming Peacemakers in Israel/Palestine, June 2007,” Mennonite Church USA, accessed October 18, 2024, <https://mennonpin.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/mc-usa-2007-open-letter-becoming-peacemakers-in-israel-palestine.pdf>. I responded to this letter already at that time: “Mennonites, Judaism and Israel-Palestine,” *The Mennonite* (online), July 23, 2007. My response is no longer available on the website, but it is cited in the blog post by Tim Nafziger, “A Window into Antisemitism and Nazism Among Mennonites in North America, Part 1,” *The Mennonite* (online), July 27, 2007, <https://anabaptistworld.org/window-antisemitism-nazism-among-mennonite-north-america-part-1/>.

The letter also encouraged the study of books such as that of Alain Epp Weaver, ed., *Under Vine and Fig Tree: Biblical Theologies of Land and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2007).

21 Ervin Stutzman (Mennonite Church USA Director), Letter, October 5, 2011, [http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/KairosLtr\\_2011Oct5.pdf](http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/KairosLtr_2011Oct5.pdf).



again hear of the suffering you experience in an occupied land as homes are taken from you, families and communities are separated by walls and checkpoints, and countless large and small indignities and humiliations are visited upon you each day.” Later in that letter, the Palestinians’ situation is compared to that of Christ: “We hear in your call the appeal of Christ to us.” Pledges for continuing to send persons to see the situation firsthand and for continuing study were included in the letter. It provided the genesis of the extensive “Come and See” tours—the coordination of trips to Israel/Palestine for at least 110 participants by April of 2017. For a relatively small denomination of now approximately 62,000 members—in 2007 around 135,000 members—this included a good deal of the national and local leadership.

In 2013 an organization called MennoPIN (Mennonite Palestine Israel Network) grew out of this rather large investment of time and resources in this effort, spurred on by the interest and energy level of many persons engaged in these trips, the decades of work by Mennonite Central Committee, and the educational opportunities for travel to and study in the area supported by all of the Mennonite colleges and seminaries. “MennoPIN has given particular attention to the Kairos Palestine call, producing a study guide for Mennonite congregations, and creating space for advocacy and action on the issue of boycott, divestment, and sanctions within Mennonite Church USA.”<sup>22</sup> The study materials are an adaptation of those produced by the Presbyterian Church. As is well known, the statements of the Presbyterian Church about Israel/Palestine have been the source of conflict with major organizations of the Jewish community.<sup>23</sup> While MennoPIN is independent of any formal denominational connection with MC USA, Mennonite Church Canada PIN (Palestine and Israel Network) is a volunteer organization that operates within the organizational structure of Mennonite Church Canada.

The other major connection for the leadership of MennoPIN has been Sabeel, the Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center formed by Naim Ateek, former canon of St. George’s Episcopal Cathedral in Jerusalem, and the author of *Justice, and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*<sup>24</sup> and other books. A number

---

22 *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth*, Four-Week Congregational Study Plan, accessed October 18, 2024, [https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/kairos\\_studyguide\\_mennopin.pdf](https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/kairos_studyguide_mennopin.pdf).

23 Note the critique by Ted A. Smith and Amy-Jill Levine in “Habits of Anti-Judaism: Critiquing PCUSA Report on Israel/Palestine,” *The Christian Century* 127, no. 13 (June 29, 2010): 26–29. The case of the deteriorating relations between PCUSA and the Jewish community is regularly noted as a significant development in discussions of the recent history of Jewish-Christian relationships.

24 Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice, and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).

of leaders in MennoPIN are also heavily involved with FOSNA (Friends of Sabeel North America), the North American arm of Sabeel. Its executive director is Jonathan Kuttab, mentioned above. This organization is heavily engaged with the support of and advocacy for the BDS movement in North America.

It is largely through the concerted planning, organizing, and strategizing of MennoPIN that a resolution on Israel/Palestine was considered at the biannual convention of MC USA in 2015.<sup>25</sup> Representatives from contacts in the Palestinian community were present at the convention, engaging in a variety of discussions and leading workshops, as were leaders from MennoPIN. The resolution failed to pass because of the efforts of a few who pointed out the rather limited view of the conflict that was assumed in the resolution, described as simplistic by Nelson Kraybill in the press release quoted above in the first paragraph of this article. Some ambiguity with regard to procedural issues within the assembly probably also contributed to its defeat. The delegates passed a resolution requesting further work and a resubmission for the 2017 assembly.

Denominational and MennoPIN leadership perceived the need for a more extensive educational process in the directions indicated in the earlier correspondence to the denomination in 2007 and 2013. Leadership for the development of the new resolution was delegated to André Gingerich Stoner, then Director of Holistic Witness and Interchurch Relations for MC USA. Jonathan Brenneman, with a master's degree in Peace Studies from Notre Dame and a North American Mennonite father and an ordained Mennonite mother born in Bethlehem, was appointed to a voluntary service position as coordinator of the educational efforts in this field. Now speakers of Palestinian background were itinerated among the churches, district conferences, and schools to educate persons about the situation of the Palestinians from the perspective of Kairos Palestine.

For example, for two months the Jewish and Palestinian Voices for Peace tour traveled to over twenty Mennonite venues across the country. Jonathan Kuttab, the well-known Palestinian Mennonite human rights lawyer mentioned above, shared the stage with members of local Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) chapters.<sup>26</sup> JVP is the only Jewish organization that was involved in these educational tours, or who was invited to present at the convention. It would surprise most leaders of major Jewish organizations and movements to learn that JVP could be seen as a representative voice of the Jewish community and its concerns in these matters or that it would be the only Jewish voice consulted by a major religious body drafting a resolution on Israel/Palestine. Alex Awad, consultant to MennoPIN and mentioned above, was invited to speak at various events in preparation for

---

25 "Mennonite Church USA Kansas City 2015 Resolution on Israel-Palestine," February 27, 2015, <https://mennopin.org/2015/03/22/resolution/>.

26 "Reflections on the Jewish and Palestinian Voices for Peace Tour," June 19, 2017, <http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/reflections-jewish-palestinian-voices-peace-tour/>.

the 2017 MC USA convention and was present for discussions and workshops in both 2015 and 2017.<sup>27</sup>

André Gingerich Stoner created a broader, more consultative process for the formation of the new resolution. A three-person writing team was appointed and a broader reference council invited to respond on a periodic basis to the drafts produced.<sup>28</sup> When the process was somewhat advanced, a draft was also posted on the denominational website, inviting comment. It was presented at the 2017 convention with wide endorsement and, as mentioned in the introduction above, passed with an overwhelming majority based upon the widespread belief that it had taken adequate account of the concerns of both the Palestinian and Jewish people through adequate consultation with both.

## The Structure and Content of the Resolution

The overarching perspective of the 2017 resolution is stated in its first few lines: “As followers of Jesus and his gospel of reconciliation, we long for peace, security, justice, and the flourishing of all people living in Israel and Palestine.”<sup>29</sup> This statement provides the context for an attempt at a more comprehensive approach to the issues being addressed than was apparent in the proposed resolution of 2015. While one paragraph in the Preamble of the latter proposal addresses the history of Christian antisemitism, the “injustice of the current Israeli occupation of Palestine” is its focus.<sup>30</sup> The same orientation is apparent in the Preamble to the 2016 resolution of Mennonite Church Canada: “This resolution emerges largely in response to the plea of Palestinian Christians that the global church come alongside the Palestinian people as they suffer under Israel’s 49-year military occupation of their lands: the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.”<sup>31</sup>

Immediately following the opening lines of the 2017 resolution are two sentences that establish the parameters of the initial, more comprehensive statement as they focus on “the cry for justice of Palestinians . . . living under oppressive military occupation for fifty years” and “antisemitism and violence inflicted

---

27 Proposals for representation from Jewish agencies with experience in interfaith relations were rejected.

28 I was a member of that broader reference council and responded to successive drafts on a regular basis. I also made it possible for some feedback from Jewish agency representatives. As the draft neared its final form, I made it clear that I could not support the resolution in public presentation nor would I provide any written endorsement.

29 “Seeking Peace,” Summary, lines 2–3.

30 “Resolution: Israel-Palestine; For Consideration by the Delegate Assembly at KC2015.”

31 “A Resolution to the Mennonite Church Canada Delegate Assembly July 2016: Resolution on Palestine and Israel,” accessed October 22, 2024, [https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/23828/2016\\_Assembly\\_Resolutions\\_Summary\\_Israel\\_Palestine.pdf](https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/23828/2016_Assembly_Resolutions_Summary_Israel_Palestine.pdf).

upon Jews in the past and the present.”<sup>32</sup> These two foci form the structure of the two-section resolution:

- (1) “Opposing Military Occupation and Seeking a Just Peace” and
- (2) “Opposing Antisemitism and Seeking Right Relationship with Jewish Communities.”

While the resolution appears to reflect the concerns of both bodies, the concerns addressed were selected by the writers and do not reflect a concerted attempt to identify the issues most important to the people involved. The structure of each section consists of an introduction—“Confession and Lament”—and “Commitments.” This structure is rooted in the methodology of restorative justice, an approach that has been championed by the academic programs in restorative justice, conflict management, and peacebuilding within the Mennonite colleges and universities and utilized widely in programs of the denomination and its agencies.<sup>33</sup>

So does the content of the resolution support the rhetoric of its literary structure? Does it reflect the genuine “third way” proposed in the denominational press releases accompanying its adoption? An examination of its content demonstrates the inadequacy of the “balance” proposed for its formation. A probe into the history that precedes it and the process of its development provides some explanation for this inadequacy, yet also explains why the overwhelming majority of representatives who voted for its adoption found it convincing in its claims.

## Assessing the Resolution

The preceding description of the resolution provides the outlines of an earnest attempt to bring a different perspective rooted in the Mennonite tradition into the contested and often tragic relationship of Israelis and Palestinians of the Middle East. It also demonstrates the experiential, historical, and theological limitations of this Mennonite attempt to provide the outlines of such a “two-handed” approach<sup>34</sup> to the people of the region and the issues that impact their welfare by “both speaking clearly against any injustice and violence and also extending a hand of understanding and relationship to all parties.”

What is most apparent is that the parallel rhetorical structure of the resolution is based upon a false equivalence. The direct connection between Palestinian suffering at the hands of Israel on one side of the “scale” and the history of the Jewish experience with antisemitism on the other is not apparent. Nor is it a helpful way of characterizing either of these problems, or of attempting to address them.

---

32 “Seeking Peace,” Summary, lines 4–5.

33 “Seeking Peace,” Clarification #7, lines 68–75.

34 “Seeking peace,” Clarifications, line 70.

On the one hand, the parallel structure deflects attention from the fact that there is a real conflict over land that is at the heart of the issue being addressed in this statement. There is a very real struggle here between and within two groups of people with claims to the land that remain unresolved.<sup>35</sup> By making this assertion I by no means assume a simple definition of either Israel or Palestine that looks to political terms defined primarily by geography and history or to broader cultural and/or religious terms.

Emphasis on the term “occupation” has legitimacy with regard to land brought under the control of Israel in 1967 and assumed to be temporary, a situation made more troublesome by the West Bank settlements. However, “occupation” as the only term used to define the issue of land in a more comprehensive manner is problematic. It is rather the case that legal, historical, and religious claims to the land all are brought to bear on a present political reality in which almost all parties feel imperiled and marginalized by some portion of the international community. Only a more comprehensive approach to all of these claims can bring about a just and sustainable life for all of the parties inhabiting this limited piece of land.

The view of the land informing the resolution and recommended for further study in the document to MC USA is “Kairos Palestine.” This document provides the definitive interpretation of the political situation informing the resolutions of both 2015 and 2017.<sup>36</sup> There is no indication of its limitations or of critiques of it. One such critique can be found in an official response from the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in their “CCAR Resolution on the 2009 *Kairos* Document” adopted April 15, 2010.<sup>37</sup> In that resolution, the CCAR notes the continuous use of supersessionist language; ambiguity regarding the nature of the occupation and thereby ultimately rejecting the notion of a Jewish state; failure to acknowledge the violent Arab resistance to the establishment of a Jewish state; and failure to acknowledge the later violence against Israeli citizens, simply regarding it as acts of resistance.<sup>38</sup>

---

35 For the recognition of what this means for Mennonite peacemaking see Lisa Schirch, “Improving Mennonite Support for a Just Peace in Israel and Palestine,” *Anabaptist World* 5, no. 6 (June, 2024) 20–22.

36 The central document recommended for study by Mennonite Church USA in preparation for both conferences was *Kairos Palestine* and remains the definitive document recommended by the denomination for congregational and individual study.

37 <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-resolutions/ccar-resolution-2009-kairos-document/>.

38 Certainly elsewhere the CCAR has supported the two-state solution and continues to be engaged in a variety of human rights initiatives within Israel, including those of the Arab citizens of Israel, and arguing for fair and humane treatment of Palestinians. The diversity of views throughout the Reform movement is apparent in the volume of essays it published intended to provoke discussion about Israel and its future. See Stanley

While neither the Kairos document nor these critiques should be endorsed simplistically or uncritically, the failure to recognize the critiques is a problem. To ignore totally the issues raised in this and other critiques while utilizing the Kairos document as a primary source of information and publicizing it exclusively in that manner is a failure on the part of the resolution's promoters to provide an adequate context for its use by those who were to vote on its adoption or for those who used it for educational purposes after the convention. The Kairos document is a statement of the Palestinian Christian churches and cannot be accepted as an attempt to provide a holistic or comprehensive view of the situation representing all the major groups of the area. Use of this document as the primary resource for information and education conveys the impression that all criticism of the viewpoint advanced in the document is illegitimate and simply reflects a general Jewish/Israeli rejection of Palestinian claims and aspirations. The opportunity for supporting/facilitating a broader discussion about how the peoples who presently inhabit the land might find some mode of coexistence is not made possible in this basic resource; hence, the opportunity is not presented in the resulting resolution. Similarly, in her critique of the Kairos document, Jewish New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine extensively engages in various aspects of Jewish-Christian dialogue, points out the document's weaknesses and what she terms mistakes, and highlights the manner in which compositions of this nature form an obstacle toward the formation of alliances between Jewish and Palestinian advocates for a peaceful solution.<sup>39</sup>

Among the confessions listed in the second part of the 2017 MC USA resolution is "Failing to understand the significance of the State of Israel for many Jewish people and the diversity of perspectives and understandings among Jews related to Israel and Zionism."<sup>40</sup> Noteworthy is the fact that this failure is included in the second portion of the resolution focusing on antisemitism, not in the first part where the major underlying issue is the land. This is another instance obscuring the recognition that there are two major narratives justifying claims on the land that need to be central to any attempt at peacemaking.

---

M. Davids and Lawrence A. Englander, eds., *The Fragile Dialogue: New Voices of Liberal Zionism* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2018). Note also David Fox Sandmel, "The *Kairos Palestine Document*, Anti-Semitism, and BDS," in *Peace and Faith: Christian Churches and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, eds. Cary Nelson and Michael C. Gizzi (Philadelphia/Boston: Presbyterians for Middle East Peace/Academic Studies Press, 2021), 277–95.

39 Note the argument of Amy-Jill Levine, "Un-Christian Responses to the Middle East," ABC Religion and Ethics, July 21, 2010: <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/un-christian-responses-to-the-middle-east/10102228>.

40 "Seeking Peace," lines 124–25.

Furthermore, the emphasis on “diversity of perspectives” is misleading and raises a different issue. Recognizing that Jewish Voice for Peace was a significant partner in the educational campaign leading up to the adoption of the resolution demonstrates the intent of these words—to indicate that the Jewish world is not as unified in its support of Israel as popular perception might suggest. The recognition that there is considerable diversity on what this means for the Jewish people, the state, its policies, and its politics is important and means that this deep commitment to the welfare of Israel is not tied to any particular government or its policies. The widespread demonstrations in Israel in the past two years are evidence of this diversity. Many Israelis who awoke on October 7 intending to go out and protest against the judicial overhaul attempted by the Netanyahu government instead without hesitation donned their uniforms and left home to join their reserve units, indicating both the diversity and the basic commitment to the welfare of the state.<sup>41</sup>

The recognition of diversity does not alleviate the need for the Mennonite community to take responsibility for the first half of the statement—for recognizing that considerably more effort should have been expended to understand the history and significance of Israel throughout Jewish history and contemporary Jewish life before ever attempting to create a resolution on the matter for the church as a whole. The acknowledgment of failure in this regard in the confession is noteworthy. However, the lack of any willingness on the part of the drafters of the resolution to begin to address this failure within the body of the text was problematic and perhaps indicative of its intended direction.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the response of the worldwide Jewish community to the October 7 massacres as an attack both on Israel and the worldwide Jewish community demonstrates Israel’s centrality to Jewish life.<sup>43</sup>

While one might wish for a clearer statement recognizing the failure of Mennonites to bring some understanding of “the land” in post-biblical Jewish

---

41 This was the response relayed to me by academic colleagues in Israel prior to and during my visit to Israel January 1–7 with a Jewish Studies Faculty delegation to colleges and universities in Israel. Dr. Nir Kedar, President of the Sapir College in Sderot, one-half mile from the Gaza border, indicated his total lack of trust in President Netanyahu and the government bureaus affecting the life of the college and its students. There was a wide acknowledgment that President Netanyahu’s term would end with the end of the war. Coupled with that response was broad support for the necessity of the war effort itself. Note the commentary by Anshel Pfeffer, “One Month Into Gaza War, Israel Is Experiencing a Moment That Transcends Politics - Israel News - Haaretz.com” (November 8, 2023).

42 I can verify that representatives of major Jewish organizations were willing to meet with a Mennonite delegation on these matters or even to attend the Mennonite convention.

43 This was affirmed by my visit to Israel as a part of a Jewish Studies faculty from the United States during the first week in January (John Kampen, “Since Oct. 7, Israel Will Never Be the Same,” *Anabaptist World* 5, no. 4 (April 2024): 23.

literature and thought to bear upon the question,<sup>44</sup> it must be recognized that Mennonites and other Protestant academics who engage the issue of the land frequently do so from the perspective of the Hebrew Bible, and in some instances the New Testament, read from a Christian “universalizing” perspective.<sup>45</sup> Of course, a recognition of the role of Israel in post-Holocaust Jewish life and thought also is necessary. Failure to attempt to understand the meaning of the land in Jewish religious and cultural life makes a “third way” approach to the question of the land impossible.<sup>46</sup> What is missing in both the resolution and in the earlier Mennonite history sketched above is substantive engagement with the Jewish community of Israel and the United States about understandings of Israel, as a political reality as well as a center of religious aspiration and imagination. This is a failure both at the congregational and the academic level.

Basic to the narrative of the Kairos document and carried throughout the Resolution is the displacement of 750,000 Palestinians in 1947–48, the “Nakba.”<sup>47</sup> This reality is important and catastrophic, as acknowledged in the lament of Yossi Klein Halevi: “As we Israelis celebrated our reclaimed sovereignty and achieved one success after another, your people exchanged homes and olive orchards for the scorched earth of refugee camps, where you raised children without hope, the unwanted outcasts of the Arab world. I mourn the lives wasted in the bitterness of your despair against my joy.”<sup>48</sup>

But there are a few things missing from this picture. This is apparent in the next succinct words of Halevi: “But I cannot apologize for surviving. What almost any Israeli Jew will tell you is that if the Palestinian and Arab leadership had accepted compromise instead of declaring a war to the death, the Palestinian

---

44 This question was already addressed in Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 1993, reprint of 1909 and 1961 eds.), 80–115. For a collection of textual references, see Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds., *The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha-Aggadah. Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. William G. Braude (New York: Schocken, 1992), 359–73. See also W. D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Isaiah M. Gafni, “Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series* 21 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

45 Marlin Jeschke, *Rethinking Holy Land: A Study in Salvation Geography* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2005). See also the influential works by Walter Brueggemann: *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); Walter Brueggemann, *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015).

46 For a survey of the history of views of the land in Jewish and Christian perspectives, see Adam Gregerman, “Land of Israel,” in *Encyclopedia of Jewish-Christian Relations Online* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019–), here 2024.

47 “Seeking Peace,” lines 13–15, 56–57.

48 Yossi Klein Halevi, *Letters to my Palestinian Neighbor* (New York: Harper, 2018), 84.



tragedy would not have happened.” This is a reference to the rejection in 1937 by the Arab nations of the first proposal for the division of the land into two entities—a proposal that had been reluctantly accepted by the Zionist Congress because of the Jewish disappointment that their portion of the territory was considerably smaller (less than half of the territory) than they had hoped for.<sup>49</sup>

And then Halevi lists “another reason why Israeli Jews refuse to be cast as criminals in 1948. At least half of Israel’s population is rooted in the Jewish communities of the Middle East.” There is no acknowledgement in the resolution of the displacement of 830,000 Jews from the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa during those same years.

Jews either fled violent anti-Semitism—a form of expulsion—or left of their own will, partly out of fear of anti-Jewish outbreaks and partly out of love for Zion. Anti-Jewish pogroms throughout the 1940s—in Baghdad and Benghazi and Aleppo and other Arab cities—took hundreds of lives and created the atmosphere of terror that led to mass flight. Jews were stripped of their property, imprisoned, and hanged.<sup>50</sup>

In 1948 nearly one million Jews lived in the Muslim world, today 40,000.<sup>51</sup> The diverse cultural composition of the Israeli population is not merely the result of more recent immigration patterns but rather the product of complex factors that for at least a century have driven Jews from around the world to relocate to their ancestral homeland.

The second half of the resolution is not a response to the call of the Kairos document but one aspect of the delayed response of the Mennonite churches to the chain of events that resulted in the Holocaust. This delayed response is another result of limited ongoing relationships with the Jewish communities of our world, particularly those of North America. On the one hand, Mennonites have been an integral part of Western history, thereby bearing their share of the blame for the atrocities of the Holocaust. Where MC USA departs from many of the major Protestant denominations is that it has not, in any formal manner, grappled with the issue of its responsibility for the Holocaust.<sup>52</sup>

Many denominations have issued statements and even adopted study guides and other such materials to provide guidance on the topic of antisemitism and

---

49 Daniel Gordis, *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn* (New York: Ecco [Harper Collins], 2016), 121–23, 145–49.

50 Halevi, *Letters*, 85.

51 Halevi, *Letters*, 85.

52 John Kampen, “Mennonites, Jews and the Land: Preparing for a Discussion,” *The Mennonite* (online), June 10, 2016, <https://themennonite.org/opinion/mennonites-jews-land-preparing-discussion/>; John Kampen, “Our Commitment to Jewish Dialogue,” *The Mennonite* 21, no. 3 (March, 2018): 32; John Kampen, “We Need to Engage the Jewish Community,” *The Mennonite* 19, no. 5 (May, 2016): 31.

the issues of Jewish-Christian relations, but MC USA does not have a history of such engagement. While one venue for these conversations has been the National Council of Churches (NCC)-National Council of Synagogues dialogue, MC USA has been an observer only at the meetings (not a member of the NCC) and, up to that point, had taken no initiative to reach out to the Jewish community and its agencies to invite input and conversation.<sup>53</sup> Only recently, for the most part since 2017, have concerted efforts to address this question begun to enter into the public discussion, even though some rather isolated academics have been researching this field for some time.

What is apparent in this research is not only that Mennonites share their portion of blame in the participation of these events in the societies of which they were a part but also that they were active perpetrators, in some places, of the atrocities whose purpose was to eliminate the Jewish people. The record of Mennonite participation in the German army, complicity with the Nazi movement, and support for the Nazi cause is rather extensive and encompasses major centers of Mennonite population such as Germany, Prussia (present-day Poland), and the Ukraine.<sup>54</sup> Extensive evidence of support for the Nazi cause among the Mennonites of Canada and South America is also apparent.<sup>55</sup> Addressing our own history of complicity in all of its intricacies is a necessary step in coming to terms with Jews and Judaism. The same is true for the antisemitism in our theology and religious teaching.

Coming to terms with the implications of the Holocaust for the Western world has provoked intense theological scrutiny among major Christian traditions. This issue, however, has not received sustained attention in the Mennonite church, and only now in the wake of the 2017 resolution has it begun to become a more central concern among limited segments of MC USA. Since so much of Anabaptist Mennonite theological attention has centered on the reading and interpretation of scripture, reappraisal begins here.

---

53 I was an official observer representing MC USA to that dialogue from 2016 to 2018. Most denominational statements and resources were developed independent of, in many cases prior to, the limited confines of that dialogue, even though it may have had an influence on some.

54 Ben W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiessen, eds., *European Mennonites and the Holocaust* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020); Lisa Schirch, "How Mennonites Reckon with Our History in the Holocaust," *The Mennonite*, March 26, 2018, <https://anabaptistworld.org/mennonites-reckon-history-holocaust/>.

55 Frank H. Epp, Frank H. "An Analysis of Germanism and National Socialism in the Immigrant Newspaper of a Canadian Minority Group, the Mennonites, in the 1930s," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1965); John D. Thiesen, *Mennonite and Nazi? Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933-1945*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 37 (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora, 1999).

There are also two aspects of this issue that require attention: First, Western theology has been developed and nurtured by an anti-Jewish reading of the Bible, which could be used to support an explicitly antisemitic theology that was basic to a good deal of twentieth-century church teaching. For example, what are now almost self-evident issues, such as the negative portrayal and use of the Pharisees in preaching and teaching or the perception of Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus, have not received sustained treatment in popular Mennonite publications. Second, there are also questions that derive from particular Anabaptist emphases that have become mainstream in Mennonite church teaching. Most prominent for further evaluation would be the idea that Jesus taught a new law that superseded prior revelation. Does a supersessionist theology inform some of the uncritical Mennonite acceptance of the Kairos document and its claims?

## The Impact of the Resolution

The false equivalence between the two sections of the 2017 MC USA resolution is apparent in the respective presentation of the “Commitments.” While the first section on military occupation highlights accountability, the section on antisemitism is more aspirational. Although both sections stress relationship building in North America and Israel, there are more specific actions of advocacy and accountability in the first half. The resolution asks Everence, the financial services organization of the denomination, to periodically convene representatives of Mennonite-related agencies and organizations to “review investment practices for the purpose of withdrawing investments from companies that are profiting from the occupation.”<sup>56</sup> There are no aspects of advocacy specified, or even mentioned, in the second half of the resolution with regard to countering antisemitism or acting on behalf of the Jewish people.

The higher level of specificity in accountability in the first section is not surprising given the history of the denomination’s engagement with Israel/Palestine and its people. Noteworthy also is the extent to which BDS was an integral part of the history of the resolution—formally endorsed by both CPT and FOSNA-Sabeel—and one of the three major links on the home page of MennoPIN website. This attempt to isolate Israel economically, culturally, and academically in the world of nations is not a strategy that can, in any manner, be understood as the basis for a “third way” approach to Israel/Palestine.

Kairos Palestine also calls for economic boycott and divestment. While BDS is not formally endorsed in the 2017 MC USA resolution, the reliance of the denomination on organizations such as MennoPIN and CPT for continuing education on matters related to Israel/Palestine and on their members for advice and leadership in its advocacy work point to the continuing influence the BDS

---

<sup>56</sup> “Seeking Peace,” lines 97–100.

impulses have among the Mennonite leaders and advocates involved in these matters. The mandate for advocacy with the US government, while emphasizing nonviolence, betrays no hint of a third way for peace in Israel/Palestine but rather simply supports the Palestinian cause.<sup>57</sup>

The impact of the resolution on Mennonite church engagement in these issues since 2017 demonstrates the continuing problematic in developing a genuine two-handed approach. Relationships at the individual and congregational level have received more attention than was previously known or more broadly acknowledged. Interested individuals formed a Mennonite Jewish Relations Working Group that continues to address issues of Mennonite-Jewish relations and antisemitism within the denomination; however, it is composed totally of volunteers without any formal connection to either denominational offices or staff. Its work has not been endorsed or supported by the denomination or any of the Mennonite agencies.

Two important conferences were convened, supported in part with grants solicited by the staff responsible for drafting the 2017 resolution. The first conference, “Mennonites and the Holocaust,” was held at Bethel College (Newton, Kansas) in March 2018 and drew about two hundred participants. The resulting volume of essays provides significant new research for transforming Mennonite understanding regarding widespread complicity in those tragic events.<sup>58</sup> The second conference, on “Reading the Bible After the Holocaust,” was held May 8–10, 2023, on the AMBS campus. It was MC USA’s first attempt to explicitly address the question of biblical interpretation related to the Holocaust.<sup>59</sup>

The implications of the resolution for continuing Mennonite engagement with Israel/Palestine is evident in the formation of the Mennonite Action Network in response to the tragic murders by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and the resulting Hamas-Israel war. In its explanation of “Why We Take Action,” the Mennonite Action website points out that “Mennonite Central Committee, Community Peacemaker Teams, MennoPIN and other Mennonite groups and congregations have been present in Palestine for decades.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, the same history of engagement that informed the 2017 resolution. A few sentences later, “In 2017, MCUSA passed a resolution committing to oppose Israel’s military occupation of Palestine, in addition to actively opposing anti-semitism.”

---

57 “Seeking Peace,” lines 85–89.

58 Jantzen and Thiesen, *European Mennonites*.

59 “AMBS Symposium Unites Jews and Mennonites to Counter Antisemitism: Event Breaks New Ground in Mennonite-Jewish Dialogue,” *Anabaptist World*, June 2, 2023. There were no published proceedings of this conference.

60 “How Can Mennonites Be Public Peacemakers in This Moment?,” Mennonite Action website, accessed October 18, 2024, <https://www.mennoniteaction.org/call-to-action>.

There is no evidence here that these Mennonite groups and their leaders have attempted to broaden their perception of the issues or that they will suggest to the Mennonite church as a whole that there are other people and viewpoints that must be brought into the conversation.

While the immediate goal of these actions is a ceasefire, the long-term objective is “a lasting peace.”<sup>61</sup> To think that Mennonites could contribute to that long-term goal in a meaningful manner without having developed a deep understanding of and experience with both dominant narratives, much less their multiple variations, is illusory. Nor does such thinking reflect the principles of restorative justice, said to be basic to the resolution.<sup>62</sup> While the resolution attempts to account for its privileging of one narrative with regard to the land by citing the dynamics of a power imbalance within that specific geographical location, it fails to give any acknowledgement of the difficult broader context for the existence of the state of Israel within the remainder of the Arab and Muslim Middle East.

The problematic nature of the resolution “Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine” adopted by MC USA in 2017 is the logical outcome of Mennonite engagement in the area that has focused primarily on supporting the Palestinian cause for the past seventy-five years and sets the course for future engagement in the area by various bodies within the broader Mennonite world, including its denominations and its agencies. Both the history of this engagement and the theological commitments it brings to those experiences prohibit MC USA, and presumably other portions of the worldwide Mennonite body, from embracing the broader peacemaking role it aspires to claim it is called upon to carry out. Israelis, Palestinians, and the Mennonite church all stand to lose from this failure.

A recent volume collects official reports of international and national Mennonite encounters with Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, and Seventh-day Adventist bodies as well as a broader representation of churches related to the Radical Reformation.<sup>63</sup> Volumes of papers from Shi’i Muslim Mennonite Christian dialogue sessions are also available.<sup>64</sup> No corresponding record of substantive encounter with representation from the Jewish world is

---

61 <https://www.mennoniteaction.org/goals>. The underlining is in the original text.

62 “Seeking Peace,” Clarifications, lines 68–75.

63 Fernando Enns and Jonathan Seiling, eds., *Mennonites in Dialogue: Official Reports from International and National Ecumenical Encounters, 1975–2012* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015).

64 Harry Huebner and Hajj Muhammed Legenhausen, eds., *Peace and Justice: Essays from the Fourth Shi’i Muslim Mennonite Christian Dialogue* (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2011); Harry Huebner and Hajj Muhammed Legenhausen, eds., *On Being Human: Essays from the Fifth Shi’i Muslim Mennonite Christian Dialogue* (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2013).

available. This is a major gap when the church continues to take actions that directly impact not only the hopes but also the welfare of the Jewish people.

This omission could be corrected. Relationships with the religions and traditions noted above have been the result of work by the educational institutions of MC USA and MC Canada, Mennonite World Conference, in some instances MCC, as well as the denominational bodies and related agencies. A similar initiative with the denominations and agencies of the Jewish world is quite possible. This is of great importance if the church continues to work at resolutions and advocacy that have a direct impact on the welfare of the worldwide Jewish community.

The nascent efforts of the Mennonite church in the past decade with regard to Jewish-Mennonite relations are important, and the work on the resolution of 2017 and its aftermath have made a significant positive contribution to these developments. Addressing antisemitism is important, for the Jewish people and for the Mennonites. The historical and theological analysis of Mennonite beliefs and actions related to their impact on Jewish life and welfare is important. So a deeper relationship is called for, one in which Mennonites not only begin to see the problem of antisemitism but also develop a more comprehensive understanding of the threats to the welfare and livelihood of the Jewish people and of the strengths that are important for Jewish survival and contribution to the common good. Within the context of the resolution, this includes a better understanding of the importance and role of Israel for Jewish life.