



ISRAEL/PALESTINE MISSION NETWORK *of the* PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, U.S.A.

peacemaking through partnerships, education and advocacy

FAQ: Frequently-Asked Questions about *Zionism Unsettled*

1. What is *Zionism Unsettled: a Congregational Study Guide*?

Zionism Unsettled is a 74-page illustrated study guide with free companion DVD. The publication was developed by the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and released in January, 2014. It is designed for use either as a stand-alone resource or to accompany *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*, a book of nine essays on Jewish and Christian Zionism, scheduled for publication by Wipf & Stock in late 2014. Each section of *Zionism Unsettled* is a condensed and edited version of a chapter in the book. Additional focus pages unique to *Zionism Unsettled* expand on the themes introduced in the essays.

2. Why was *Zionism Unsettled* published?

Zionism Unsettled is designed to challenge and stimulate its readers with thought-provoking perspectives from a wide variety of sources – Jewish, Christian, Muslim, American, Israeli, and Palestinian. Although *Zionism Unsettled* and its companion DVD are suitable for individual use, the resource is designed primarily for guided group study in churches, synagogues, mosques, and other forums. A leader's guide, multi-week curriculum plan, and tips for managing conversations about controversial topics empower groups to explore fresh ways of looking at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is not the purpose of the book to present information that confirms the readers' preexisting opinions, but to challenge readers by presenting multiple perspectives, some of which challenge the prevailing assumptions.

3. How can I order copies of *Zionism Unsettled*?

Online: <http://store.pcusa.org>
Phone: 800-524-2612
Item No. 26466-14-001

4. What is the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the PC(USA)?

The Israel/Palestine Mission Network (IPMN) is one of more than 38 geographic networks doing mission work through the PC(USA). Each mission network relates faithfully to Presbyterian World Mission and its guiding principles. Unpaid volunteers – members of local Presbyterian congregations – staff the church's mission networks, where they are charged to serve as the church's "eyes and ears." Network volunteers, motivated by special knowledge of and affinity for a particular region, report to the wider church about the welfare of Christians and others in regions around the globe, including Cameroon, Congo, Haiti, Honduras, Thailand, and Vietnam and many more. IPMN is the only network established by action of the PC(USA)'s 216th General Assembly in 2004.

5. What is the relationship between the Israel/Palestine Mission Network and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?

IPMN does not represent the church nor is it a spokesperson for PC(USA) policy. Instead, the network is mandated to speak "to and not for" the church. IPMN is programmatically independent from the denomination and the relationship between IPMN and the PC(USA) is transparent and clearly stated in all media produced by the organization. IPMN's annual budget is funded by pledges from members who according to its by-laws must be members of PC(USA) congregations or presbyteries.

6. Why is the publication called *Zionism Unsettled*?

Zionism Unsettled examines Zionism, one of the primary historical drivers in the Palestinian-Israeli struggle for land and rights. The central premise of the publication is that Zionism is a manifestation of "exceptionalist religious ideology... fused with political power." (ZU, p. 7) (*Zionism Unsettled* also lists Constantinian Christianity and Political Islam as instances in which political movements or entities founded on religious exceptionalism deviate from the foundational ethical tenets of the religion and become an oppressive force to people outside those faiths.) While *Zionism Unsettled* recognizes the historical presence of various strains of Zionism, the focus of the resource is on Political and Religious Zionism – the forms that have eclipsed all others and have dominated Israel's politics and policies during the many decades of Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands.

7. Is *Zionism Unsettled* balanced in presenting all sides of the issues?

It is impossible within a 74-page publication to cover all aspects of a complex issue, and *Zionism Unsettled* does not attempt to do so. Instead, *Zionism Unsettled* presents important perspectives that are excluded from the dominant narrative to which most people in the West have been exposed and on which they base their opinions. *Zionism Unsettled* undertakes the difficult but essential task of exploring many facets of the issue that are often overlooked or excluded from the discourse – Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and secular.

8. Why are IPMN’s publications considered controversial?

As a network committed to advocating for justice within a conflict that arouses passionate and partisan engagement, IPMN accepts that its positions and publications will inevitably draw condemnation from those who disagree with their content. The willingness of IPMN to take a firm stand for justice and human rights in the face of inevitable harsh criticism falls within the best traditions of the Christian church. In particular, IPMN draws inspiration from a resolution passed by an overwhelming margin in 2012 at the church’s 220th General Assembly in Pittsburgh, which called on members to “recognize with joy and thanks to God the historic stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in pursuit of justice as a central mandate of our church, a mandate that calls us to uphold the need to be faithfully partisan in situations of injustice and to speak truth to power, wherever necessary as we pursue justice, without fear of retribution or the delay of deflection.”

9. What is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s approach to controversial issues?

The PC(USA) does not shy from controversial issues. The church confronts all the divisive issues of our wider society—including for instance attitudes toward homosexuality and same-sex marriage and the role of women as leaders in the church. In 1838 the Presbyterian church experienced a painful schism over the issue of slavery. IPMN celebrates the diversity of viewpoints within the PC(USA) as a strength of our denomination, where varied groups can harness the energies of committed church members and engage with the wider world. We applaud the church’s February 13, 2014 press release in which Presbyterian Mission Agency executive director Linda Valentine explains that “our church has a long history of engaging many points of view when it comes to dialogue on critical issues facing the world around us – it’s who we are, part of our DNA.”

10. What kind of media attention has *Zionism Unsettled* received?

Most of the media coverage related to the publication of *Zionism Unsettled* has focused on the superficial sensationalism of public mudslinging, giving disproportio-

tionate attention to critics of the book and giving minimal space to the many who have praised the publication. Journalists have repeated negative characterizations of the book’s contents without challenging their accuracy. Most seriously, writers have failed to even touch on the substantive political and human rights issues integral to the project.

11. Why have establishment Jewish organizations condemned *Zionism Unsettled*?

The publication of *Zionism Unsettled* has indeed been met with indignation and condemnation from several major American Jewish organizations. Since those same organizations function as pro-Israel advocacy agents and attack any activity perceived to be a threat to Israel’s public image, the strident response to *Zionism Unsettled* is not surprising and was, in fact, anticipated by IPMN. As a target of condemnation by major Jewish organizations, IPMN finds itself in excellent and plentiful company. It is never easy to be on the forward edge of a movement, but IPMN is called to be there.

12. What do American Jews think about Israel and Zionism?

The American Jewish community is far from monolithic and has a cherished tradition of deep intellectual ferment, strong opinions, and vigorous public debate. Increasingly, polls of American Jews report that the Jewish organizations that claim to speak for the American Jewish community are increasingly out of touch [link: bit.ly/1f2LQXE] with the attitudes of American Jews. Opinion surveys find that, year by year, American Jews feel a decreasing sense of connection with Israel [link: bit.ly/MRvrtx]. Respondents attribute this decline to their deep discomfort with Israel’s human rights abuses and their frustration with the lack of open and critical conversation within American Jewish institutions about where Israel is headed. *Zionism Unsettled* reports at length about the irrepressible and fast-burgeoning conversation among American Jews about Israel, Zionism, and Jewish identity. These important voices are actively rebelling against the constraints placed on acceptable speech by the same old-guard communal organizations that have attacked IPMN.

13. Hasn’t the publication of *Zionism Unsettled* strained Christian-Jewish interfaith relationships?

Not surprisingly, relationships between mainstream Jewish organizations and their Christian dialogue partners are strained any time criticism of Israeli policy is introduced, no matter how justified. *Zionism Unsettled* challenges the broken model of interfaith dialogue in which the Christian prophetic tradition of justice is subordinated to the appearance of interreligious harmony through conflict-avoidant “dialogue.” It is inaccurate to reduce the controversy about *Zionism Unsettled* to a bickering match between Jews against Christians, as the reality is much more complex and hopeful. *Zionism Unsettled* lifts up the strong new partnerships currently being formed based not on religious and ethnic affiliation, but shared beliefs about equal rights and democracy.

14. Does *Zionism Unsettled* advocate for the destruction of Israel as some critics claim?

No. *Zionism Unsettled* says nothing about Israel’s existence, which is an incontrovertible geopolitical fact, but raises important questions about Israel’s character and identity. The publication asks (as do many concerned Israelis, Palestinians, and others), how can a self-defined “Jewish state” confer equal rights on Jews, Christians, and Muslims? At the current time, census data show that fully half the population in areas under Israeli control is not Jewish. For Zionists committed to the preservation of a Jewish-majority state, the demographic threat posed by non-Jews to the ethno-religious character of the state leads inevitably to discriminatory practices, both within Israel proper and the occupied territories, and *Zionism Unsettled* identifies many of those practices.

15. Does *Zionism Unsettled* advocate for positions that deviate from PC(USA) policy supporting a two-state solution?

Zionism Unsettled does not take any position on possible future political outcomes. However, contributors to *Zionism Unsettled* provide ample evidence that the metastatic growth of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories has changed the physical landscape or “facts on the ground” on which the Presbyterian

Church's historic positions are based since they were first articulated. In warning of the imminent or past demise of the two-state solution, *Zionism Unsettled* merely echoes the widely-accepted view that Israel's government-backed settlement project has succeeded over the years since 1967 in its goal of making the occupation irreversible. It is to be hoped that the church's position will be reviewed regularly over time to assess its feasibility given changed demographic circumstances.

16. How does *Zionism Unsettled* characterize the relationship between Judaism and Zionism?

Zionism Unsettled identifies Zionism and Judaism as distinct and separate, and in doing so quotes a wide range of Jewish scholars and theologians spanning the spectrum from ultra-Orthodox to secular. To the many attributions included in the publication itself, one can add those of Orthodox Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz, (nicknamed "the conscience of Israel"), who wrote in his 1995 book, *Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State*, "One instance of idolatry, prevalent among religious Zionists today, is to ascribe inherent holiness to the land and even to the state," and Rabbi David Hartman, influential founder of Jerusalem's Shalom Hartman Institute, who declared in a published 2011 interview that "Religious Zionism is dead," and "Love of Israel is not love of the land; it's love of the people living in the land. There is no holiness in earth." Likewise, Palestinian Christian theologian Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek in a March 5, 2014 defense of *Zionism Unsettled*, stated that "the way this Zionism has been practiced by the government of Israel reflects a false and distorted Jewish theology....the Zionism practiced by the settlers with the active encouragement and support of the right-wing Israeli government is a betrayal of any authentic religious faith, including that of authentic Judaism."

17. Does *Zionism Unsettled* deny the role of Jews as the heirs of God's covenant with Abraham?

No. *Zionism Unsettled* appropriately treats various perspectives on the interpretation and political uses of covenant ideology as essential to understanding historical and contemporary relations between Palestinians and Israelis, as

well as the pursuit of a just and equitable resolution to the conflict. *Zionism Unsettled* warns of the short ideological distance between the Religious Zionists' covenant-based sense of land-entitlement and their rejection on *religious* grounds of any Palestinian right whatsoever to the land "they and their ancestors have inhabited for generations." (ZU, p. 31) Given the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their ancestral homeland since 1948 and the parallel expropriation of Palestinian land and resources by Israel, the matter is far from theoretical.

18. Is *Zionism Unsettled* anti-Semitic?

No. *Zionism Unsettled* strongly condemns anti-Semitism. Charges of anti-Semitism are commonly used to discredit and intimidate critics of Israeli policy. In observing that "the Zionist solution to the Jewish question has created a whole new set of problems which it has so far proved incapable of solving," (Shatz, ZU, p. 6) *Zionism Unsettled* does not demonize Jews as Jews, but raises essential challenges to the policies of the state of Israel.

19. Is *Zionism Unsettled* pro-Palestinian?

No. *Zionism Unsettled* is pro-peace, pro-justice, and pro-love – conditions that we in the tradition of Christ do not wish upon any single nation, ethnicity, or religious group over another. But the establishment of a Jewish safe-haven in Palestine, while understandable from the perspective of Jews traumatized by persistent anti-Semitism in Europe, was experienced by the indigenous Palestinian people as a form of foreign domination, exploitation, and dispossession much like the European colonization of other lands around the globe. Just as it is necessary to understand the Jewish history of persecution and drive to self-preservation as a key ingredient in the intractable conflict over land and rights, it is necessary to understand the Palestinians' unaddressed sense of betrayal in having paid the price for crimes against the Jewish people committed by Christians in faraway Europe. It does not contribute to the resolution of the conflict – or, for that matter, interreligious relations – to give voice to the perspective of the victor and silence the perspective of the vanquished.

20. How does the controversy about *Zionism Unsettled* relate to the international call for boycott and divestment?

Many individuals around the world reasonably refuse as a matter of conscience to purchase products manufactured in Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. An overture supporting such a boycott was overwhelmingly passed at the church's last General Assembly in 2012 and continues in force. Moving forward, at the 221st General Assembly in Detroit this year, concerned Presbyterians will seek to withdraw church pension-fund and foundation investments from corporations that contribute to and profit from the growth of the Israeli settlement infrastructure and the oppressive military occupation that controls Palestinian's lives east of Israel's internationally-recognized border. (The General Assembly defined it in 2008 as "profiting from non-peaceful pursuits.") The church's Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) committee has recommended divestment from three American corporations that have failed over the course of ten years of engagement with MRTI to rectify their business practices in Palestine to conform with existing General Assembly guidelines for ethical investment.

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