

ITEM C.102
FOR ACTION

<i>FOR PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE USE ONLY</i>			
	A. Finance	E. Corporate Property, Legal, Finance	J. Board Nominating & Governance Subcommittee
	B. Justice	F. PC(USA), A Corporation	P. Plenary
X	C. Leadership	G. Audit	
	D. Worshipping Communities	H. Executive Committee	

Subject: Comment to the 221st GA (2014) - Overture 051 “On Distinguishing Between Biblical Terms for Israel and Those Applied to the Modern Political State of Israel in Christian Liturgy”

Recommendation:

That the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board approve the following comment on Overture 051, “On Distinguishing Between Biblical Terms for Israel and Those Applied to the Modern Political State of Israel in Christian Liturgy —From the Presbytery of Chicago” to the 221st GA (2014).

Comment:

Integral to the narrative of salvation history in the Scriptures is particularity. Christians have long dealt with the so-called “scandal of particularity” that roots God’s relation with humankind as one mediated through particular individuals and peoples, most importantly through Jesus of Nazareth. This unfolding of salvation history means that God’s covenant with Israel cannot be dispensed with by contemporary Christians. *Israel* is part of our spiritual and theological vocabulary.

At the same time, the General Assembly has articulated a number of times that Christians should distinguish between the people Israel in the Scriptures and the modern state of Israel. The distinction between ancient Israel and the modern State of Israel is important, one that helps us make sense of our faith and its relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people.

The importance of these distinctions was recognized and articulated by our denomination in the document “A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews,” which was commended by the 199th General Assembly (1987) for study and reflection. That document makes the distinction in this way: “Both Christianity and Judaism claim relationship with the ancient people Israel; the use of the ‘Israel’ in this study is restricted to its ancient reference. When referring to the contemporary State of Israel this document will use ‘State of Israel.’” (Section on “Definitions and Language”) In 2004, the 216th General Assembly adopted a resolution on Christian Zionism that expressed that “Christian Zionism does not represent the majority of American Christians and the faith of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” [<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/global/resolution-confronting-christian-zionism/>]. Among other things, Christian Zionism is the belief that Christians are required by their faith to support the policies of the modern state of Israel.

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At the same time we must also be careful not to claim that God's covenant is strictly limited to *ancient* Israel. While it is a danger to confuse the biblical narrative of Israel with the modern state, there is also a danger in declaring that God's particular relationship with the people Israel ended in the time of the New Testament.

In our present situation congregations and individual Presbyterians will hear the language of "Israel" in multiple different ways. In some cases, "Israel" will be understood to be the present day State of Israel. In other cases, talk about "Israel" and the Old Testament narratives of the people of Israel will be a way of entering into God's work of deliverance from oppression, living life as sojourners, and God's promise of entry into a place of abundance.

This Overture is a call for educational help in having a clear understanding of important distinctions, the distinctions articulated in "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews." The distinctions made in that document can help Presbyterians speak of "Israel" (both as an ancient people and a contemporary nation) with clarity, insight, and faithfulness. Any additional educational materials on this subject would need to be contextually sensitive to congregations and their particular conversation partners.