

5.1 The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism, reproduced below, shows Christian Zionism as an increasingly significant political and theological force and this section of the report, as part of a wider consideration of current developments in Israel/Palestine and the Middle East, is in part a response to that declaration. It also draws on the report on *The Theology of Land and Covenant*, presented to the General Assembly in 2003.

THE JERUSALEM DECLARATION ON CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Statement by the Patriarch and Local Heads of Churches in Jerusalem

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

Christian Zionism is a modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace within Palestine and Israel. The Christian Zionist programme provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today.

We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation.

We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organizations with elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently imposing their unilateral pre-emptive borders and domination over Palestine. This inevitably leads to unending cycles of violence that undermine the security of all peoples of the Middle East and the rest of the world.

We reject the teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these policies as they advance racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ. Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from the ideologies of militarism and occupation. Instead, let them pursue the healing of the nations!

We call upon Christians in Churches on every continent to pray for the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are suffering as victims of occupation and militarism. These discriminative actions are turning Palestine into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusive Israeli settlements. The establishment of the illegal settlements and the construction of the Separation Wall on confiscated Palestinian land undermine the viability of a Palestinian state as well as peace and security in the entire region.

We call upon all Churches that remain silent, to break their silence and speak for reconciliation with justice in the Holy Land.

Therefore, we commit ourselves to the following principles as an alternative way:

We affirm that all people are created in the image of God. In turn they are called to honour the dignity of every human being and to respect their inalienable rights.

We affirm that Israelis and Palestinians are capable of living together within peace, justice and security.

We affirm that Palestinians are one people, both Muslim and Christian.

We reject all attempts to subvert and fragment their unity.

We call upon all people to reject the narrow world view of Christian Zionism and other ideologies that privilege one people at the expense of others.

We are committed to non-violent resistance as the most effective means to end the illegal occupation in order to attain a just and lasting peace.

With urgency we warn that Christian Zionism and its alliances are justifying colonization, apartheid and empire-building.

God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently but non-violently.

"What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

This is where we take our stand. We stand for justice. We can do no other. Justice alone guarantees a peace that will lead to reconciliation with a life of security and prosperity for all the peoples of our Land. By standing on the side of justice, we open ourselves to the work of peace - and working for peace makes us children of God.

"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5:19)

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5.2 What is Christian Zionism?

5.2.1 Christian Zionism is a relatively modern theological and political stance, dating from the late 19th century. This section of the report will treat the two matters separately but they are closely intertwined, the political implications being a direct consequence of the theological belief. We should be aware, however, that not all those who would call themselves Christian Zionists, or others who would like to see some fulfilment of prophecy in the creation of the modern Israel, would make the leap from the theological belief in the fulfilment of prophecy to political consequences involving expulsion, domination or oppression.

5.2.2 The term Zionism refers to a political Jewish movement for the establishment of a national homeland in Palestine for the Jews that have been dispersed. On the other hand, a Christian Zionist is a person who is more interested in helping God fulfil His prophetic plan through the physical and political Israel, rather than helping Him fulfil His evangelistic plan through the Body of Christ (1).

5.2.3 Christian Zionism is an ideological belief that sees the return of the Jewish people to the Holy Land, and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, as being in accordance with – perhaps even in fulfilment of – biblical prophecy (ie, a political and theological aspiration perceived to be the desired will of God). The modern State of Israel is thus seen as deserving of political, financial, and religious support (2). It holds that it is necessary for the Jewish People to return to ‘The Holy Land’ in order to put in train the events which will lead to the Second Coming of Christ. The belief is not necessarily sympathetic to the Jewish People or to Judaism, because it holds that once the Jewish People have gathered within modern Israel, a significant number will accept Christ as the Messiah while the others will be wiped out. Many Christian Zionists are supporters of Jewish Zionism, but only as a means to hasten the end times.

5.2.4 Christian Zionism can trace its roots to people such as Thomas Brightman, an Anglican clergyman in the sixteenth century, and Henry Finch MP in the seventeenth century. It began to gain in popularity with the millennial speculation at the end of the eighteenth century. Louis Way, another Anglican clergyman, took up the themes of the necessary return of the Jewish people to Palestine to prepare the way for the messianic age. It was, however, John Nelson Darby, an Irish Anglican, who did most to spread these ideas in regular trips to the United States of America in the nineteenth century. Darby added some of his own innovations (for example, that “born again” Christians would be swept up to heaven prior to Jesus’ return). Perhaps the greatest advance in the popularity of this thinking was occasioned by the publication of the *Schofield Study Bible* in 1909. The Christian Zionism of its day was popular with, among others, Lord Shaftesbury, David Lloyd George, and Lord Balfour. It may not have been insignificant that these theories coincided neatly with British imperial ambitions, and they came together in Balfour’s famous speech in 1919:

For in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country ... The four great powers are committed to Zionism, and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit the ancient land.” (3)

5.2.5 As they seek to deal with the inheritance Christian Zionism has passed down through history, the Patriarch and Local Heads of Churches in Jerusalem describe it as a “worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ’s love and justice today.” (4) Christian Zionism, therefore, and those who promote it, clearly represent a very serious challenge to the churches and to the communities that make up that land which we (rightly or wrongly) call “holy”.

5.3 Theological critique

5.3.1 This modern theological and political movement embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, and thereby poses some very significant theological and biblical problems for Christians and for Jews. Scripture, and the interpretation of it, is at the heart of these issues. The report on *The Theology of Land and Covenant*, reminds us that: “There is not, and never has been one agreed interpretation of Scripture in either Jewish or Christian traditions.” (5) Nonetheless, how we view Scripture and how we interpret it will determine our theological understanding of the current and ongoing situation in Palestine/Israel and, consequently, colour our political analysis and engagement.

5.3.2 Christian Zionism is not, of course, the only theological response to the current situation in Palestine/Israel, but it is particularly worrying – for Jewish people especially. Whilst many would view the Christian Zionist approach to be *sympathetic* to the Jewish cause (especially in the USA), nothing could be further from the truth. Many Christian Zionists believe that, for biblical prophecy to be fulfilled, a significant number of Jews must accept Jesus as their Messiah; the rest will be destroyed. Uri Avnery is the leader of Gush Shalom, an Israeli Peace Group. He considered this particular issue in an essay in 2002, and wrote: “According to its theological beliefs, the Jews must congregate in Palestine and establish a Jewish state on all its territory so as to make the second coming of Jesus Christ possible ... [They] don’t like to dwell openly on what comes next: before the coming [of the Messiah], the Jews must convert to Christianity. Those who don’t will perish in a gigantic holocaust in the battle of Armageddon. This is basically an anti-Semitic teaching” (6)

5.3.3 Christian Zionism, therefore, goes one horrific step further than Replacement Theology (or Supersessionism). It seeks openly to use the Jewish Zionist cause in order to achieve its own theological and political reality, with dire consequences. To claim that God favours one people, at the expense of others, lays waste to the claim that, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus.” (7) Such racial and religious exclusivity leads to dispossession and, ultimately, destruction.

5.3.4 The theological and biblical implications are obvious. The Christian Zionist worldview has cataclysmic consequences for a religiously integrated and lasting peace in Palestine/Israel. It attempts to build barriers rather than bridges between communities. It paints a picture of a God who chooses only one people at the expense of others when, in reality, the biblical picture of God in Christ is one who chooses *all* people. Christian Zionism portrays an unjust God, with an unjust people.

5.3.5 For a lasting peace, with justice, in Palestine/Israel, tolerance of difference and respect for the other needs to be at the top of any theological agenda – for Jew, Christian and Muslim alike. Christian Zionism seeks to exclude and expel and, arguably, eliminate whatever is perceived to be alien to its cause.

5.4 Political implications

5.4.1 Many within the Republican Party in the USA are believed to have Christian Zionist leanings, and this has undoubtedly been influential on the policies of George W Bush. Broadly speaking Christian Zionism promotes uncritical support for the state of Israel and opposes those who are critical of or objective about Israel. This support, not just of its existence but also of its policies, has been particularly vocal when the right wing (Likud Party) has been in power in the Knesset. Among the policies of the Israeli government which have been seen as

particularly worthy of support has been the policy of occupation, as Christian Zionism emphasises that the Jewish People must have sovereignty over the whole Eretz Israel, that is the whole of the land identified as being promised by God in the Old Testament, sometimes characterised as being “from the Nile to the Euphrates”.

5.4.2 Christian Zionism has become significantly more prominent in the last 20 years, since the establishment of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, and in particular since 11 September 2001. Perhaps the main annual focus for the work of the International Christian Embassy is the Feast of Tabernacles, a week-long event coinciding with the Jewish festival of Succot. The week offers seminars and teaching, worship and public demonstration. “Up to 5,000 Christians from over 100 countries have come up to Jerusalem each year (regardless of the current political climate) to stand with Israel. This event has become the largest and most popular annual tourist event in Israel, taking place in the International Convention Center Jerusalem and other venues across Jerusalem.”(8)

5.4.3 Coupled with this support for Israel is a lack of concern for and indeed hostility towards the Palestinians within Israel. Their presence, it would be argued, is of no relevance in the eschaton. This lack of concern leads to a complete disregard for the indigenous Christians, because of the belief that God will bring about the final consummation of creation through the land rather than the Church. In practical terms, Christian Zionism legitimises the oppression of Palestinians in the name of the gospel. The doctrine does not promote harmony between Jewish and other residents in Israel/Palestine and actively views Muslims as enemies of Israel and of Christ.

5.4.4 Christian Zionists also profess themselves to be eager for the series of wars which, they believe, will presage Jesus’ return. This clearly has important, not to say dangerous ramifications for the whole of the Middle East as a build up of military capability and subsequently wars themselves are welcomed. Christian Zionists in America are influential in ensuring the continued massive military aid which funds the IDF as the superior army in the region. It is this force which maintains the occupation of the Occupied Territories. While this continues, there will be no justice for the Palestinian people and therefore no peace with Israel’s neighbours.

5.4.5 “The Christian Zionist program, with its elevation of modern political Zionism, provides the Christian with a world view where the gospel is identified with the ideology of success and militarism. It places its emphasis on events leading up to the end of history rather than living Christ’s love and justice today.” (9)

Notes to Section 5

1. Louis Bahjat Hamada, *Understanding the Arab World*. (Nashville, Nelson, 1990), p. 189. quoted by Rev. Dr. Stephen R. Sizer in *Christian Zionism: A British Perspective* www.christianzionism.org
2. Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: *Defining Christian Zionism* (www.christianzionism.org)
3. quoted by Donald Wagner in an article for the US newspaper, the *Daily Star*, 22.1.07
4. *The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism*, The Patriarch and Local Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, August 22, 2006.
5. *The Theology of Land and Covenant*, A Report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (Paragraph 1.4), 2003.
6. Uri Avnery http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_isra.htm
7. Colossians 3:11
8. International Christian Embassy website
9. Middle Eastern Council of Churches document quoted by Rev. Dr. Stephen R. Sizer in *Christian Zionism: A British Perspective* on www.christianzionism.org