

Christian Zionists Are Not Christians

by Edward Spannaus

Just as “Christian Zionists” were rallying in Washington, D.C., in support of the Israeli Likud government’s genocidal policies toward Palestinians, and the Bush Administration itself appears to be operating in parallel with these fundamentalist lunatics, the fallacies of Christian Zionism were being thoroughly dissected and exposed at a little-noticed conference, held by Christians from Palestine and their supporters in the Western and Eastern churches. The Oct. 18-19 conference, sponsored by the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF), and held at the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, was attended by over 700 people from 12 countries, and it featured reports on the current circumstances of Christians in Palestine—who suffer under the same brutal conditions of occupation as do all Palestinians—as well as reports on the history of Christian Zionism and its perversion of Biblical teachings.

Christian Zionism was denounced as un-Christian, heretical, and immoral by speakers from the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. A central theme of the conference was that Christian Zionists are not Christians, because they reject Christianity’s call to honor the dignity of every person as created equally in the image of God.

Visa Denied to Palestinian Diplomat

Conference participants rejected the idea of framing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a religious conflict. Michael Tarazi, an adviser to the Palestinian Authority, in discussing the problem of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, raised the possibility that the settlers could become Palestinian citizens, saying that Palestine has never been a place that was only for Jews or Christians or Muslims, but has always been defined by the fact simply that Palestinians—of many faiths—live in it.

The Palestinian General Delegate to the Holy See and to the United Kingdom, Afif Emile Safieh, was scheduled to address the HCEF conference, but he was denied a visa by the U.S. State Department. According to an HCEF report, Safieh’s planned address “criticizes heavily the delirious theology and political stand of the Christian evangelicals.” Safieh, reflecting on his own Christian upbringing, declares that there is no need to support and pursue the colonialist and

criminal policies carried out by Israel, in order to accelerate Christ’s return to Earth. Safieh added that the Christian evangelicals are a source of embarrassment and shame for the Christians of the Holy Land.

Dr. Robert Younes, an official of the HCEF in Washington, told *EIR* that the Bush Administration’s refusal to grant a visa to Safieh—who studied in the United States and has travelled here frequently—reflects the Administration’s new approach to anything Palestinian. Dr. Younes said that although it has been customary for previous HCEF conferences to receive a letter of congratulation for their humanitarian work, the Bush Administration refused to send such a letter this year. “This is an indication of how the Administration approaches the Palestinian question,” Dr. Younes said.

‘Heretics, Not Christians’

His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, focused on the role of the churches in supporting Christians in the Holy Land, and stated that Christians need to “interfere” in Israel’s policies, and to state clearly what is moral and what is immoral. He encouraged Christians to have the courage to say “no,” when all of public opinion says “yes.” He further stated that Christians must demand justice for those who are oppressed, just as Christ did.

Those Christians who call themselves Christian Zionists are heretics and are not Christians, Sabbah said emphatically. Christian Zionists do not follow the teachings of Christ: “Whether Palestinian or Israeli, Christians are equally for all human beings.”

Rev. Dr. Michael Prior, a Roman Catholic scholar from Britain, told the conference that “it is one of the anomalies of recent Church history that while Christians, embarrassed by past association with colonial enterprises, have supported oppressed peoples virtually everywhere else, there has been little protest against the historic injustice perpetrated on the indigenous population of Palestine by Political Zionism, a movement thoroughly at home in the colonial spirit of 19th-Century Europe.”

Describing what he called the evangelical Zionists’ immoral and heretical interpretation of texts, Prior declared that the god of the Christian Zionists is a “militaristic and xenophobic genocidalist, who is not sufficiently moral even to conform to the requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention, or any of the Human Rights Protocols which attempt to set limits to barbarism.”

British Zionism Came First

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner, of North Park University, in Chicago, began by decrying Jerry Falwell’s recent television address, in which Falwell called for the 70 million evangelical Americans to become Israel’s safety net in the United States. Wagner then reviewed the history of Christian Zionism, starting with an Anglican priest who called for the creation of

Jewish state in 1585, so that Biblical prophecy could be fulfilled. By 1800, Christian Zionism had taken root, though it was still not called by that name. At that point, Wagner said, there were a variety of fundamentalist theologians arguing that the Bible must be read literally and taken as the infallible word of God. In Christian Zionism, the Church, and Arabs in particular, are called “a parenthesis that will be removed from history” in the Rapture, when all who will be saved, will ascend into Heaven in a cloud. What has happened, Wagner said, is that the covenant with God has shifted to Israel; it is no longer with the Church of all Christians.

Wagner detailed the British origins of Christian Zionism, and how it came to the United States in the 1880s with the Bible Prophecy Conference Movement. Lord Shaftesbury, adopting John Nelson Darby’s eschatology, coined the phrase “A land of no people for a people with no land” already in 1839. Wagner pointed out the irony that, as he put it, the Christian Zionist lobby existed before the Jewish Zionist lobby. The first Zionist lobby in the United States was created by William Blackstone, a disciple of Darby’s, and it was financed by J.P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller, among others.

Wagner then discussed the revival of the Christian Zionist movement in the United States after 1948, and the effect of the 1967 war, which increased the momentum of the Christian Zionists who believed that the recapture of Jerusalem by the Jews, and the rebuilding of Solomon’s Temple, were necessary to bring on the Rapture.

When the Likud Party came to power in Israel in the late 1970s, Christian Zionists began to adopt the Likud usage of referring to the West Bank as “Judea and Samaria.” They began to visit the Holy Land at the behest of governments led by the Likud, and Jerry Falwell was given his own Lear jet by the Israeli government. Wagner noted that the growing power of the Christian Right was evidenced by the fact that, when Israel bombed the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, the Israeli government contacted Jerry Falwell first, before President Reagan, to explain what they had done!

Dr. Wagner outlined a number of things that Americans should do to counter the strength of the Christian Zionist movement, including educating Muslims that the Christian Right only represents a small, heretical movement of the Christian church, and reaching out to Palestinian Christians as their best allies. Americans must be sharper in Biblical analysis, Wagner urged, and should expose the human rights violations which are committed for the cause of Zionism.

We must assert that our cause is both just and Biblical, he said, and expose the Christian Zionist cause as racist, heretical and ethno-centric. Wagner concluded that Christian Zionism is not a truly Christian movement, since “Jesus calls us to honor the dignity of each person created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), and, as such, our equality within the Kingdom of God.”