

AN ALTERNATIVE VOICE TO CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Submitted by: First Congregational United Church of Christ, Naperville, Illinois

Summary

In recent years, media coverage of the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine has increasingly been influenced by the theology of Christian Zionism. Christian Zionism equates the actions of the government of Israel with the word of God as it is revealed in the Bible. Christian Zionist teachings have been endorsed by some current U.S. government officials and influence U.S. foreign policy. We believe that the tenets of Christian Zionism neither reflect the intention of the teachings of Jesus and the prophets nor promote peace in the Middle East and respectfully recommend that the General Synod of the United Church of Christ take concrete steps to promote an alternative voice to this theology.

Introduction

Christian Zionism has several tenets based on selected scriptures. A key tenet is that Jewish control of “greater Israel” and the rebuilding of the temple is a harbinger of the second coming of Christ. A second is that God gave the land to the Jews, and therefore they should have it all, and the Arab population should be essentially expelled. A third tenet is that the United States will prosper only by its full support of the government of Israel. A result of these beliefs is unquestioning support of the Israeli government policies on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Christian Zionism is regarded today by many in the U. S. mass media as representative of the Christian perspective on the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Christian Zionist viewpoints are regularly featured on *CNN*, *ABC’s Nightline*, *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Christian Zionists actively lobby the U.S. government to support their positions.

Christian Zionism calls on Christians to support the policies of the government of Israel financially and politically. Some of these policies violate the Geneva Convention by endorsing the colonization of occupied territory, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, the targeting of civilians as combat-

ants, the use of banned weapons, and the collective punishment of noncombatants. We believe that these policies violate the teachings of justice and peace as taught by Jesus and the prophets. We lament the apparent inability of denominations such as the United Church of Christ to effectively publicize a viewpoint that is an alternative to Christian Zionism and believe that this narrowing of the theological spectrum leaves many Christians perplexed as to how they should respond to this conflict.

We are hesitant to voice our concerns about Christian Zionism, since we fear that our position might somehow be perceived as anti-Jewish. We fully endorse the longstanding efforts of the United Church of Christ to combat the terrible legacy of anti-Semitism. We deeply deplore the Palestinian suicide bombings that target civilians, which are also violations of scripture and the Geneva Convention. In addition, we affirm the decision of the United Church of Christ in 1987 to support the Israeli government in its attempt to enforce secure borders and live in peace with its neighbors. Yet we note that many in the Jewish community, while accepting the political support of Christian Zionism, reject the theology that is the basis of the Christian Zionists support. In addition, many in the Jewish community are also sharply critical of the Israeli government positions on Palestine. We hope that our resolution will encourage a dialogue with the supporters of Israel and the Jewish people who share our concerns.

Biblical and Theological Rationale

The word of God, though written in specific historical times and places, still speaks to us in our present condition. The book of Micah, written during and after the terrible times of exile and destruction for the Hebrew people, has much to tell us in these times of suffering for the people of Israel and Palestine. As we seek to understand what it means to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8), we offer the following alternative perspectives to the tenets of Christian Zionism:

A. Do not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:34)

1 For a third of Christian Zionists, Jewish control of
2 “greater Israel” and the rebuilding of the temple in
3 Jerusalem is a harbinger of the Second Coming of
4 Christ (Rev. 7:4–8, 11:2). Doing things that they
5 feel will facilitate this is of paramount importance
6 to them.
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8 We believe that scripture teaches us to be wary of
9 predictions about the future. The prophet declares,
10 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are
11 your ways my ways, says the Lord” (Is. 55:8–9).
12 Jesus points out, “An evil and adulterous genera-
13 tion seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to
14 it except the sign of Jonah” (Mt. 16:4) and “It is
15 not for you to know the times or periods that the
16 Father has set by his own authority” (Acts 1:6–7).
17 It is the essence of biblical humility to follow the
18 Bible’s consistent message calling us to actions that
19 further justice and peace, and not to assume that
20 God’s will is manifested through our inevitably
21 flawed interpretation of world events and their sig-
22 nificance.
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24 B. The Bible does not sanction taking additional
25 land away from the Palestinians
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27 Christian Zionists believe that the secular nation
28 of Israel is the embodiment of God’s chosen people
29 and as such is entitled to the land it claims (Gn.
30 12:1–3; 17:1–8).
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32 We affirm wholeheartedly God’s steadfast love for
33 the descendants of Abraham and reject any theol-
34 ogy, such as so-called “replacement theology,”
35 which holds that God’s promises have been taken
36 from the Jewish people and given to the church. At
37 the same time, we emphasize the book of Jonah’s
38 message of God’s love and justice for all peoples,
39 Gentiles and Jews alike. In Micah, God judges both
40 Israel and the countries that oppress it for their cru-
41 elty and violence. The prophet Ezekiel proclaims
42 to the Israelites returned from exile, “You shall al-
43 lot [the land] as an inheritance for yourselves and
44 for the aliens who reside among you. They shall
45 be to you as citizens of Israel” (Ez. 47:22). Doing
46 prophetic justice involves both tenderness towards
47 peoples and scrutiny of their governments’ poli-
48 cies.
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50 We also believe that it is important to distinguish
51 the modern nation of Israel from the Israel that is
52 comprised of the followers of God (Rom. 2–4). The
53 patriarchs and matriarchs valued faithfulness to
54 God over the promise of land (Heb. 11:13–16, 39–
55 40).
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57 C. As Christians we will prosper with God if we
58 follow the Bible’s message of justice and peace
59 and also encourage others to follow this message

Christian Zionists, however, assume that the United States will prosper only if it supports all the poli-
cies of the Israeli government. Christian Zionists
base this on God’s words to Abraham, “I will bless
those who bless you, and the one who curses you I
will curse” (Gn. 12:3).

We believe that to love and bless Israel means to
also hold Israel accountable, as did God, to the
teachings of justice and peace. Speaking through
Malachi, God says, “Then I will draw near to you
for judgment, I will be swift to bear witness against
. . . those who oppress the . . . widow and the or-
phan, against those who thrust aside the alien . . .”
(Mal. 3:5). We believe that to “love kindness”
means to follow the Great Commandment given
by Jesus: to love God with all one’s being and to
love neighbor as self (Mt. 22:34–40). The apostle
Paul writes, “For [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh
he has made both groups into one and has broken
down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility be-
tween us” (Eph. 2:14). Because in Christ, “There
is no longer Jew or Greek” (Gal. 3:28–29), we are
called to show such kindness toward all of God’s
people.

Resolution

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has af-
firmed its concern about the ongoing conflict in
Israel and Palestine in the following resolutions:
“Bringing Justice and Peace to the Middle East”
(1999), “Jerusalem City of Life” (1997), and “Pal-
estine/Israel” (1997), and

WHEREAS, the government of Israel has violated
numerous United Nations resolutions, as well as
the Geneva Convention with respect to the trans-
port of Israeli citizens to the West Bank and Gaza
Strip, the transport of Palestinians out of the West
Bank and Gaza Strip, the collective punishment of
Palestinians, and use of banned weapons, and

WHEREAS, the Palestinian resistance movement
has violated the Geneva Convention by support-
ing the use of suicide bombers to kill innocent ci-
vilians, and

WHEREAS, influential members of the current
U.S. government endorse Christian Zionist posi-
tions as a basis for U.S. foreign policy. According
to **House majority whip Tom DeLay**, “**All of the
West Bank belongs to Israel.**” According to **Sen.
James Inhofe**, “**Israel should keep the West
Bank because God said so.** This is not a political
battle at all. It is a contest over whether or not the
word of God is true.” According to **Retiring
House Majority Leader Dick Armey**, “**I’m con-
tent to have Israel grab the entire West Bank. I**

1 **happen to believe that the Palestinians should**
2 **leave,” and**

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4 **WHEREAS**, Christian Zionism encourages Chris-
5 tians to support financially and politically policies
6 of the government of Israel that conflict with the
7 justice and peace teachings of Jesus and the proph-
8 ets, and

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10 **WHEREAS**, the Just Peace Pronouncement that
11 was adopted by the General Synod in 1985, as well
12 as updates and similar proclamations of other de-
13 nominations and like-minded groups, has received
14 insufficient publicity within our denomination, in
15 the mass media, and among U.S. government offi-
16 cials;

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18 **THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED**, that the
19 General Synod of the United Church of Christ rec-
20 ognizes the diversity of biblical perspectives on the
21 question of a Jewish homeland but affirms that any
22 such perspectives should be grounded in the mes-
23 sage of justice and peace taught by Jesus and the
24 prophets, and

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26 **LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the
27 General Minister and President of the United
28 Church of Christ will write a letter to the President
29 of the United States, other leaders in our govern-
30 ment, and the leaders of the state of Israel and the
31 Palestinian Authority informing them that this
32 General Synod asks all parties to agree uncondi-
33 tionally to abide by the Geneva Convention and
34 enter into immediate peace negotiations, and

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LET IT BE FINALLY RESOLVED, that the
General Minister and President of the United
Church of Christ will, in consultation with the ap-
propriate ministries, develop an overall communi-
cation plan. Considering the human suffering and
the political urgency of the ongoing conflict, we
would hope the first elements of this plan could be
implemented by fall 2003. Elements of this plan
might include:

1. Issuing to all churches in the United Church of Christ a pastoral letter on Christian Zionism and the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine.
2. Continuing to develop the United Church of Christ educational program about the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine and include material that enables Christians to respond with a biblical basis to the tenets of Christian Zionism. The result of this educational program should be that members of the United Church of Christ would be encouraged to become more active on this issue.
3. Informing current government officials of the Christian alternatives to Christian Zionism.
4. Cooperating with other denominations and like-minded groups to challenge Christian Zionism in the mass media.

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

Resolution of Witness: Requires a 2/3 vote for passage.

