

A Gift from God: Christian Support for Israel

After 2,000 years of Replacement Theology, the existence of devout Christians who support the Jewish State of Israel is a mind-blowing reality. Both Jews and Christians involved in this world should not take this support for granted.

Careful examination uncovers a number of unexpected things about this phenomenon that most call Christian Zionism. Why are these people remarkable? Who are they? How many are there, really? And in a growing environment of global animosity toward Israel, how should Jewish and Christian Zionists proceed in their common passion, in their common call?

So why are Christian Zionists remarkable?

The fact that a number of Christians support today's Jewish State is remarkable. After a 2,000-year infusion of Replacement Theology into the heart of religious Christianity, it would seem that none should be aligned with Israel, defending and promoting its existence, its life, as a fully sovereign Jewish State among the world's nations. After all, the vast majority of Christian traditions regard the church and Israel as one-and-the-same, a transcendental entity without borders or boundaries in this world.

Accordingly, the real Jerusalem is not regarded as a city here on earth. Instead it is a metaphysical place that exists in a spiritual, heavenly dimension. What's more, it is a place to which the only gate is inside human hearts that, for their part, unlock the entryway with the singular key of believing in Jesus as Divine Messiah and Savior.

Although in differing degrees, these are the interpretive filters through which the Bible is read and understood by all branches of Christianity. Accordingly, unless they convert,

Christianity concludes that the human family of Jews has no biblical claim to the identity of Israel or to the place of Jerusalem.

Even the founder of Protestantism and hero of Evangelicalism, Martin Luther, concluded that these things were obvious. The entire Jewish race, he railed with righteous indignation, is guilty of deicide and cursed by God.

"Either God must be unjust," he wrote in a publication called *Table Talks*, "or you, Jews, wicked and ungodly. For you have been in misery and fearful exile 1,500 years, a race rejected of God, without government, without laws, without prophets, without temple." Thus, "for us Christians," he stated in *On Jews and Their Lies*, Jews "stand as a terrifying example of God's wrath." Five hundred years later, Adolph Hitler concurred, easily justifying Jewish genocide to his fellow countrymen by the doctrinal teachings and social prescriptions of their own spiritual father in the name of Jesus.

For its part, the Synagogue is keenly aware of Christian conduct as a direct consequence of Replacement Theology. It has inspired inquisitions, provoked pogroms, excused expulsion, and authorized theft. Ultimately, it sanctioned the Holocaust, facilitating Jewish genocide.

The Nazis quoted Luther in almost everything they wrote about Jews. At his Nuremberg trial, Julian Streicher, founder and publisher of *Der Stürmer*, declared, "Dr. Martin Luther would very probably sit in my place in the defendants' dock today, if this book [*The Jews and Their Lies*] had been taken into consideration by the Prosecution."

Streicher, found guilty and executed, was right. Luther brought reformation to the practice of Christianity but brought to fruition the anti-Semitism embedded in its DNA. His arguments still resound throughout the church's various expressions. Christianity's anti-Semitism—and all that it

portends—remains.

Who are These People?

There is, however, a unique exception in the Christian world. It appeared about 100 years ago. Depending upon the denominations from which they come, some Christians have turned 90-to- 180 degrees in how they regard Jews and the State of Israel. With origins in Great Britain, these Christian Zionists played a vital role in rebirth of the Jewish State. Their continued support remains vital today. Who are these people?

My own involvement in Jewish-Christian relations began 13 years ago. Knowing almost nothing about the Christian world, I have since followed a specific call to facilitate dialogue between Jews and Christians; most of the time this is between Modern Orthodox Judaism and Charismatic Christianity. The more I learn, the more I am amazed by the exceptional segment of everyday Christians who stand with the Jewish people and their Homeland State.

I am amazed because the more I learn, the more I see for myself how entrenched Luther's articulation of anti-Semitic thought remains in all branches of Christianity, including Evangelical varieties. How is it that some Christians overcome such thoroughly engrained thinking? And yet they do. What's more, the process of stepping away from community consensus means their path is frequently costly, often lonely.

Count and Motivation

How many are there? Popular estimates range from 70 to 100 million in the United States alone. These numbers are mesmerizing. But are they true? There may be that many Evangelicals in America. Perhaps most of these would tell pollsters that they support Israel's right to exist. But it simply is not accurate to say that all of them love Israel.

I believe there are 5 to 7 million, less than 10 percent, have a discernable passion for Israel. This does not mean the majority of Evangelicals are anti-Israel. It does mean, however, that they are mostly indifferent. Israel, Jews and Judaism simply do not appear on their religious radar.

Among the fraction of those who are proactive for Israel, most tend to describe their passion as a “call” or “download from heaven.” Many tell the same story. They were walking in one direction with God—vis-à-vis their Christian faith—when they received a divine interruption, telling them to stand with today’s Jewish State.

What do they do with this call? Most respond with regular prayers. Some give money to Israel-related charities. Others take part in celebratory events or political advocacy. Very few, however, visit Israel, perhaps 80 to 100 thousand each year. Most of these come on what might be called a “Jesus template” tour, visiting various sites but almost never interacting with Jews who call the country home.

Yes, some will visit Yad Vashem (Israel’s Holocaust Museum) and walk through Jerusalem’s Old City. But in the end, the vast majority will completely miss the Divine miracle of our lifetime: God’s restoration of Zion and His elect.

There are a small number of Christian Zionists who come to the land to learn from political leaders, security experts, and business entrepreneurs. A segment of them also come to learn about the Hebraic roots of their faith and are willing to pursue such education from observant Jewish educators with expertise in Jewish-Christian relations.

My point is that, instead of 100 million U.S. Evangelicals who are passionate about Israel, committed to firsthand knowledge of its culture, prosperity and religion, there are, perhaps, more like several hundred thousand. With such a modest number from the United States, it is not unreasonable to estimate

that the population of like-minded Christians elsewhere in the world is smaller still.

Look for part two of this two-part article Friday.

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