

Why Some Jews Will Never Trust Evangelical Christians

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As someone who has spent the last 20 years of my life at the intersection of Jewish and Christian communities worldwide, I have been asked countless times by Jewish friends: "Why do evangelicals possess such love for the Jewish people and the land of Israel?"

The question is usually presented with a mixture of perplexed amazement when a Jew first encounters this unwavering support along with an often unspoken skepticism attempting to uncover the real reason for this phenomenon and this unique offer of friendship. The skepticism is due, of course, with concerns regarding the evangelical agenda, the proselytization of the Jews, or relating an awareness of an apocalyptic theory that all Jews must return to Israel before the Second Coming of Christ.

The skepticism is well understood. Christian history has not been good for the Jews, and though many Jews welcome this commitment of friendship, nonetheless, it comes with deserved suspicion.

Pundits who would write off evangelical support to a cloaked, conspiratorial strategy for mass proselytization or wide-eyed hyper-apocalyptic theories simply do a vast disservice to reality. Reporting evangelical support for Israel as such is willful ignorance and shoddy journalism at best. It is blatant misleading of the public at worst.

Consider the brief history of evangelical support. It can be argued that modern organized Christian Zionist movement has

found its structure and voice only over the past 35 years or so. Without question, the movement was profoundly catalyzed and impacted by rebirth of the State of Israel.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Bible-believing Christians, those who maintain a high view of Scripture as the inspired Word of God, viewed the rebirth of the State of Israel as perhaps the greatest prophetic fulfillment of Scripture since the birth of Jesus. It should be understood that the great majority of the Scriptures which evidence this are found in the Hebrew Bible, not so much in the New Testament.

Thus, Christians were amazed and rejoiced to witness the fulfillment of a prophetic promise from the Bible coming to pass in front of their eyes. It gave rise to a sense that Christians of today were living in prophetic times, and perhaps the return of Christ was at hand. The same Jewish texts that foretold the regathering of the Jews often made reference to the Messianic Age.

While this may have been the emotional, spiritual milieu into which the modern Christian Zionist movement was established 35 years ago, it is incorrect and borderline ridiculous to think that the movement has not grown and matured over the ensuing years. Indeed, especially those of us in its leadership, have wrestled with and as a result deepened our theology and have grown in our understanding of the sensitivities that exist in the newly established Jewish-Christian friendship and cooperation. While certainly still informed by the miraculous (even by agnostic standards) re-birth of Israel, today, my experience is that evangelicals, while maintaining their view of Scripture and their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, are largely motivated in standing with Israel and the Jewish people worldwide by three certainties.

First, evangelicals feel an enormous sense of gratitude towards the Jewish people. There is a solid and increasing sense of appreciation for the Jewish foundation of the

Christian faith. The Scriptures, the prophets, the Ten Commandments, the Mosaic foundation of Western law, the Jew Jesus, the early Christian leaders, who were all Jewish—these are all an absolute, a byproduct of Jewish fidelity to Jewish identity, which often came at the ultimate price of persecution or martyrdom of the Jews. Evangelical Christians stand in awe and are profoundly grateful that we in the West live in an ethical monotheism that is the result of Jewish faith and perseverance.

Secondly, evangelicals have a tremendous sense of repentance—tshuvah—for the past horrors perpetrated against the Jewish people, especially those done under the banner of Christianity. It should be noted that evangelicals do not relate to crusaders or more modern Christian expressions of anti-Semitism as even remotely Christian.

Indeed, this a significant disconnect from Rome-based Christianity, for an evangelical has validation in history and the current day. Like the Jews, Proto-evangelicals were often persecuted in times such as the Inquisition. Moreover, today, there is great tension and even animosity between Catholicism and evangelicalism throughout Latin America, as, for example, evangelical growth often results as Catholics abandon Catholicism for evangelicalism.

Simply put, evangelical Christianity is distinctly philo-Semitic in its theological orientation, while historic Rome-based Christianity has not been so, the blessed progress of Nostre Aetate, and the graciousness of John Paul II notwithstanding. Thus, evangelicals feel a tremendous sense of pain and sadness for what has been done in ancient and modern history to the Jews in the name of Christianity, coupled with a profound sense of wanting to help right that wrong.

Finally, there is undeniably an exponential increase of Christian martyrdom at the hands of jihadi Muslims around the world. There is a growing sense that much of the more liberal,

mainline versions of Christianity are drying up and may soon cease to exist. Yet today, evangelicalism is experiencing exponential growth. That growth tragically has come with increasing persecution, especially at the hands of Islamists. Evangelicals understand intuitively that radical Islam is a threat to the Jewish people, the State of Israel, evangelicals and, in reality, the modern, civilized people of every background.

Evangelicals understand the need to forge alliances in light of this threat, and that the future existence of our world may well depend on how we bond together.

Evangelicals are natural allies of the modern State of Israel at a time when identifying and cultivating these supporters is crucial. We as a community have demonstrated unwavering support for decades in every way imaginable.

Continuing to buy into media stereotypes for evangelical motivation does a great disservice to this important relationship and slows progress towards mutual goals. In short, the Jewish community would do well to be as welcoming in reaching out and developing relationship with the evangelical community as they have with mainline Christian denominations and other interfaith groups.

Sometimes, people just want to be your friend.

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