

Is Christian Zionism anti-Christian?

Zionists claim that Zionism is the same as Judaism. Its critics, including substantial numbers of Jews, disagree, pointing to its socialist humanist ideological beginnings. It may be of interest philosophically to discuss whether an ideology i.e. Marxist has the necessary elements of a religion: but I am not a philosopher. Treating Zionism as equivalent to Judaism, as the British Chief Rabbi insists means we must examine it as a theology.

In her [op-ed for the Washington Post](#), Rabbi Jill Jacobs (executive director of [T'ruah](#), which mobilizes 2,000 rabbis and their communities to protect human rights in North America, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.), identifies the use of the term 'Zionist' as one of her '5 markers' for where criticism of Israel crosses the line into antisemitism. It is, she claims, 'used ... as a code word for "Jew" or "Israeli"'. She writes:

The "Zionist" label attempts to reduce a state full of living, breathing humans to a simplistic political notion. It's common for Palestinians and their supporters to refer to "Zionist occupation forces" instead of the "Israeli army," or to the "Zionist entity" instead of "Israel." At a demonstration I walked by this past week, protesters held signs mourning 70 years of "Israel," in quotes.

It is tempting to ask, what difference it would make to say 'Israeli army' instead of 'Zionist occupation forces'. So, let's ask it. Would it be no longer a hidden kind of antisemitism, and if so, doesn't that make it open antisemitism? In which case I struggle to see how Palestinians or their friends may protest the occupation; it seems they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. They certainly seem to be damned because, whatever they do, whether their protests are peaceful or violent the response is the same.

At its beginning Zionism had been treated with disdain, abhorrence, distrust, even anger by rabbinic Judaism, the Jewish theologians. Even 130 years on, and despite modern Israel's apparent success, the presence of for instance, the 'True Torah Jews' tells us that things are more complex than Ephraim Mirvis would have us believe. Christians, still apologising for the Nazi Holocaust, even though we were not directly responsible, are told that we have to accept what Jews say about themselves. That is a received wisdom that apparently applies only to the Zionist version. The wisdom of Other Jewish voices must be discounted when it doesn't fit what Zionism wants to say.

So what happens when we treat Zionism as theology? More particularly what are we Christians to make of it? For, if Zionism equals Judaism it must be anti-Christian. That is very clearly so from the viewpoint of observant Judaism. If Jesus is not their Messiah then Christianity is not merely mistaken, it is blasphemous. We Christians are worshipping a false god: Possibly even 'false gods'.

Idolatry is not only clearly condemned in God's commands to Israel, "*you shall have no other gods beside me*", it is punished in practice. Jacob's history of compromise with local gods is shown by Israel's prophets to contribute to Israel's exile and to the destruction of God's holy place, the Jerusalem temple. So why is Zionism so appreciative of Christian Zionists, especially given Christian Zionism's antisemitic outlook on the Jewish future?

If Zionism is Judaism then the theology of Judaism is the theology of Zionism. How does that work when for 1800 years Rabbinic Judaism has declared “we must wait for the Messiah”? Zionism said “there’s no point in waiting, we can and must work out our own salvation”. To quote Rabbi Jill Jacobs again,

‘Zionism’s revolution came not in creating a new connection between Jews and the land of Israel, but in suggesting that a return to the land could be achieved through modern political means, rather than by waiting for the messiah.’

(she does undermine her case by referring to the ‘expulsion [of Jews] by the Romans in 70 A.D.’, which is so obviously historically inaccurate it doesn’t need further comment). And isn’t it rather odd that a rabbi, one presumes a believing Jew, seems to minimise the theology with only a brief, passing reference to ‘the messiah’?

Zionism claimed “we secular humanist socialist inspired Eastern European Jews can piggy-back on empire and colonise Palestine, (yes, they knew what it was called, and they did use the term ‘colonise’). That rather contrasts with what, through the prophet, God declared “*I will restore ... I will be ... I will make ...*” and eventually, “*I looked but there was no helper ... so my own arm brought me victory*”

In Old Testament prophecy Empire is universally bad news. Syria, Egypt, Babylon – then Persia, Greece and Rome, not forgetting the appalling Antiochus Epiphanes.

Some empires may seem more benign than others, usually only after giving plenty of evidence of how malign they can be. By contrast the return expected by Israel’s prophets was always characterised by fruitfulness, righteousness and justice. That was why Nehemiah was so upset: the people were back but they weren’t being good. Exile had ended in theory, but unrighteousness continued.

Whichever way we view it, Zionist theology or Rabbinic Judaism are not merely at odds with Christianity, they contradict it. The cross is anathema to Judaism. Judaism denies that The Cross of Christ can have anything to do with their Messiah. And that places Christian Zionism in a very dangerous space. Christian Zionists may be good at preaching the gospel, but not when Jews are concerned. No doubt they are pleased if Jews convert but that is not their ‘main thing’. Christian Zionists would certainly not be as welcome in Israel as they are if they took Jesus and Paul seriously and went “*to the Jew first*”. As far as I can tell scripture provides no expiry date for taking the gospel to Jews. Every year there’s a fresh generation who need to know that Jesus is Messiah, **their** Messiah. For so long Jews have seen Jesus as ‘bad news’ but he isn’t. If they’re going to reject the ‘good news’ let’s make sure they’ve heard it properly first.

So, if Christian Zionism supports Zionism which equates to Judaism it follows that Christian Zionism is anti-Christian. Even if Zionism does not equate to Judaism – and it doesn’t – that doesn’t make Christian Zionism any less harmful to Christian Faith. A ‘gospel’ that delights in power, in expressions of military might, in oppression, is not ‘good news to the poor’. The early church believed that the Cross changed everything, even though it took them a while to work out what that actually meant. We’re still working on that, by the way! But apparently, for Christian Zionism, the ‘New Covenant’ in Jesus blood does not deal with the ‘Old Covenant’ problems; it’s a separate covenant, never previously disclosed in scripture. It is now mainly for

Gentiles; so that we can go to heaven, while Israel rules on earth. Therefore, all those things that Jesus and the first Christians said about ‘fulfilling the law and the prophets’ didn’t mean what for 1900 years we thought they meant.

So, here’s the real question, bottom-line: Is the New Covenant Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus; the kingdom confirmed in his blood and affirmed by his resurrection; is it the fulfilment spoken of by Israel’s prophets – or is it not?

If it is, then Christian Zionism is looking for the wrong kind of kingdom in the wrong kind of place with the wrong kind of people, people whom Paul the apostle spoke of and identified as ‘Israel after the flesh’; and presumably their Gentile equivalent.

But if it is not, then, as that same apostle also said, “*we are of all people most to be pitied*”. Because we have to dismiss most of our New Testaments as wrong, and rip out whole sections from the gospels, especially those 100 or more that specifically refer to those Old Testament prophets. When on the day of Pentecost Peter said, “This is that” and quoted from the prophet Joel, he was either kidding or badly mistaken.

Either way, and this must now be obvious, Christian Zionism is at best a blind alley, at worst an evil pit, a distraction from the mission of God’s people. That mission was only local initially in order to ultimately go global; only specific in order to become general, the calling to bless one in order to bless many through righteousness and justice. The Good Creator will only redeem his Good Creation through his Gathered People who together model his servant nature and show the world His Love. And Christian Zionism cannot do that.