

ISCZ

JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

**VOLUME 1
ISSUE 1
SPRING 2025**

www.studychristianzionism.org

JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

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A special note of appreciation to Rev. Joe Roos, a founder of *Sojourners*, for his support in the commissioning of this inaugural issue.

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eISSN: 3068-1502

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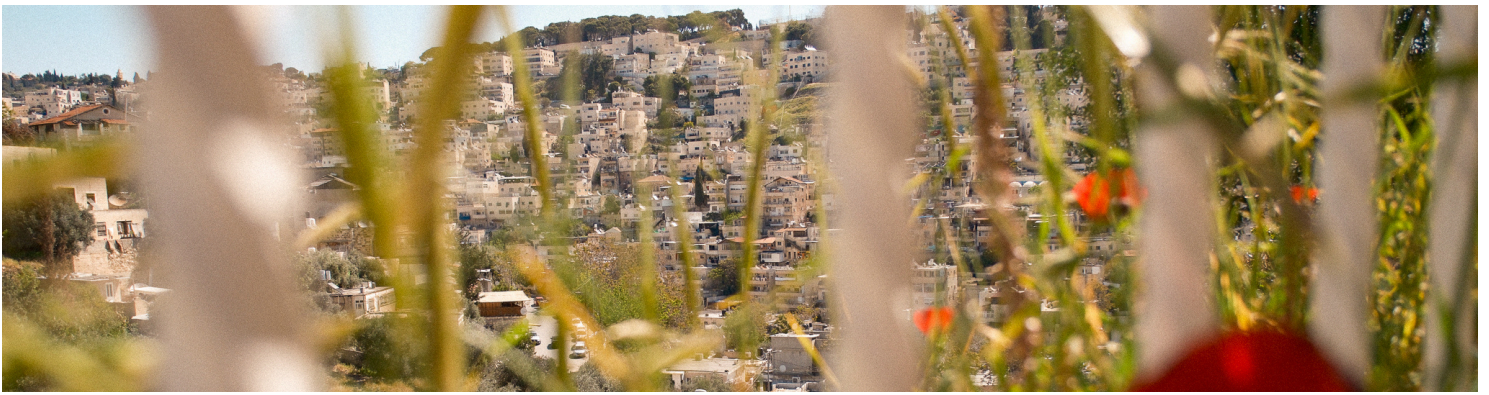
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FROM THE EDITOR

Writing from Washington, DC, several months into the second Trump administration, launching the *Journal for the Study of Christian Zionism* feels all the more vital. While Christian Zionism has always provided cover for or fueled Israeli settler colonialism and apartheid, the level of violence has reached staggering levels, with a genocide underway in Gaza and routine settler attacks against Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Trump 2.0 promises to empower Christian Zionists as much or more than those emboldened in Trump's first term. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, for instance, was recently installed as US Ambassador to Israel. Huckabee, a Christian Zionist, has supported Israeli annexation of the West Bank and denied the existence of Palestinians. Moreover, he has claimed, "There is no such thing as a West Bank. It's Judea and Samaria. There's no such thing as a settlement. They're communities. They're neighborhoods. They're cities. There's no such thing as an occupation."

This journal's critical research aims to expose Christian Zionism and Zionism more broadly for what it is: an ethnonationalist, racist ideology that privileges one group of people over another with appalling consequences for Palestinians, as well as for those who advocate for them.

The *Journal for the Study of Christian Zionism* is housed within the Institute for the Study of Christian Zionism (ISCZ), which currently also features online resources, a blog, and a speakers' bureau. Plans are underway for a webinar series, a comprehensive digital library, and a course on Christian Zionism led by and for Palestinians.

This first journal issue provides essential work by two founders of the Institute, Stephen Sizer and Don Wagner, who address the origins of Christian Zionism in the Anglican Church and the use of the Bible to justify genocide, respectively. Atalia Omer and James Thompson's article demonstrates how such roots and fundamentals of Christian Zionism hinder Black-Palestinian solidarity in the United States.

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Finally, Jesse Wheeler reviews Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb's important latest work, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible*. Upcoming issues will examine Christian Zionism within the second Trump administration and indigenous theological responses to colonialism and settler-colonial theologies.

For more information on the journal, including submission guidelines, please visit <http://studychristianzionism.org/journal>.

In solidarity,

Mimi Kirk
Washington, DC
May 2025



Christian Zionism and the Church of England: Historic Beginnings

By Stephen Sizer

In February 2013, at a ceremony marking the restoration of the historic Montefiore windmill in Jerusalem, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared, “I don’t believe that the Jewish State and modern Zionism would have been possible without Christian Zionism. We value our friends, and we never forget them.”¹

This article explores the history to which Netanyahu refers by focusing on the role that Anglicans played in the birth of the Zionist movement. It first defines Christian Zionism and then traces Anglican support for the ideology from the early nineteenth century to the Balfour Declaration, demonstrating that the pairing of Christian Zionist beliefs with British colonial ambitions paved the way for the creation of a Jewish state.

1. “Jerusalem’s History Montefiore Mill Restored after 136 Years,” *Israel Hayom*, February 26, 2013, <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/news/article/14124634>.

Christian Zionism defined

At its simplest, Christian Zionism is Christian support for Zionism. Contemporary Christian Zionists essentially believe that modern Israel is in some ways a continuation of Biblical Israel and therefore enjoys special status and privileges. Christian Zionism considers that this fulfillment of Biblical prophecy began when European Jews started moving to Palestine in the nineteenth century and accelerated in 1948 when Israel became a nation and in 1967 when it captured and colonized the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including the Old City. This is why Christian Zionists insist it is their biblical responsibility to support the state of Israel and its policies.

Christian Zionists support the political ideology of Zionism, that is, a national movement for the return of the Jewish people to Palestine and Jewish sovereignty over the whole land of Palestine. They therefore see themselves as defenders of, and apologists for, the state of Israel.

Christian Zionism is pervasive among older members of evangelical, charismatic, and independent denominations including the Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, and Southern Baptists, as well as many of the independent mega-churches and among television evangelists. Increasingly aware of its settler colonial roots and the parallels with apartheid South Africa, younger evangelicals are becoming more critical of Christian Zionism.²

The movement is much less explicit, though no less prevalent, within the historic denominations, such as Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, and Presbyterian. Although mainstream churches typically advocate for human rights as well as the rule of international law, as will be shown in the case of the Church of England, when it comes to Israel and Palestine their impartiality and objectivity appear to evaporate.

2. Omar Ahmed, "Young US Evangelicals are Refusing to be 'Useful Idiots' for Israel," *Middle East Monitor*, March 20, 2024, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240320-young-us-evangelicals-are-refusing-to-be-useful-idiots-for-israel/>. See also the Network for Evangelicals of the Middle East: <https://neme.network/about/>.

What may be termed “liberal Christian Zionism” is evident by the reluctance of mainstream denominational leaders and synods to challenge the racism intrinsic to Zionism as well as Israel’s apartheid policies; by their willingness to adopt the deeply flawed and discredited International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which equates anti-Zionism with antisemitism; by their disinclination to engage with, or advocate for, Palestinian Christians; and by their deference toward Zionist organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and Board of Deputies of British Jews.³

The Anglican Roots of Zionism

In *Der Judenstaat*, published in 1896, Theodor Herzl forcefully articulated the aspirations of Jewish Zionists for their own homeland. However, the Zionist dream was largely nurtured and shaped by Christian Zionists a generation earlier, and it was a full century before Zionism was able to inspire widespread Jewish support in the 1940s. At the First Zionist Congress, which Herzl convened in Basel in 1897, the Zionist vision was formulated in a call for a “publicly secured and legally assured homeland for the Jews in Palestine.”⁴ At the 27th Zionist Congress held in Jerusalem in 1968, Zionism was defined in terms of five principles:

- 1) the unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life; 2) the ingathering of the Jewish people in its historic homeland, Eretz Israel; 3) the strengthening of the State of Israel; 4) the preservation of the identity of the Jewish people; and 5) the protection of Jewish rights.⁵

With other European settler-colonial initiatives fused with religious fervor, Anglicans played a strategic role in restorationism, that is, facilitating the restoration or “return” of Jews to Palestine, as well as in the birth of the Zionist movement.⁶ Ironically, this was precipitated

3. Sabeel-Kairos Theology Group, “A Response to Cry for Hope: A Call to the Churches and the WCC Assembly 2022,” <https://www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk/statement-from-the-sabeel-kairos-theology-group/>; Board of Deputies of British Jews, “Archbishop of Canterbury Speaks at Landmark Board of Deputies Event,” July 6, 2023, <https://bod.org.uk/bod-news/archbishop-of-canterbury-speaks-at-landmark-board-of-deputies-event/>.

4. Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “1897: The First Zionist Congress Takes Place in Basel, Switzerland,” May 5, 2015, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/1897-the-first-zionist-congress-takes-place-in-basel>.

5. Uri Davis, *The State of Palestine* (Ithaca Press, 1991), 28.

6. Some of those most active in campaigning for a Jewish homeland at the same time expressed antisemitic views. See Ella Shohat, “On Orientalist Genealogies that Split the Arab/Jew Figure Revisited,” in *The Arab and Jewish Question: Geographies of Engagement in Palestine and Beyond*, ed. Bashir Bashir and Leila Farsakh (Columbia University Press, 2020), 90.

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by the actions of an atheist, Napoleon Bonaparte, in the spring of 1799. During the Syrian campaign of Napoleon's oriental expedition, in which he sought to defeat the Ottoman rulers, cut off Britain from its empire, and recreate the empire of Alexander from France to India, he became the first political leader to propose a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine.⁷ Seeking Jewish support against the British, Bonaparte wrote:

Bonaparte, Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the French Republic in Africa and Asia, to the Rightful Heirs of Palestine. Israelites, unique nation, whom, in thousands of years, lust of conquest and tyranny were able to deprive of the ancestral lands only, but not of name and national existence...She [France] offers to you at this very time, and contrary to all expectations, Israel's patrimony... Rightful heirs of Palestine... hasten!⁸

Napoleon believed that with sympathetic Jews controlling Palestine, French imperial and commercial interests as far as India, Arabia, and Africa could be secured.⁹

Neither Napoleon nor the Jews were able to deliver. Nevertheless, his proclamation "is a barometer of the extent to which the European atmosphere was charged with these messianic expectations."¹⁰ The European powers became increasingly preoccupied with the "Eastern Question." Britain and Prussia sided with the Sultan of Turkey against Napoleon. In 1804, Napoleon was crowned Emperor of the Gauls in the reluctant presence of the Pope. In 1807 he plotted the division of Europe with the Czar of Russia and began a blockade of British sea trade with Europe. Two years later he arrested the Pope and annexed the Papal States. He then began the systematic destruction of the Roman Catholic Church in France, seizing its assets, executing priests, and exiling the Pope from Rome. By 1815, Napoleon's armies had fought, invaded, or subjugated most of Europe and the Middle East, including Italy, Austria, Germany, Poland, Russia, Palestine, and Egypt.

7. Paul C. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948* (Frank Cass, 1998), 38.

8. Cited in Franz Kobler, *Napoleon and the Jews* (Schocken Books, 1976), 55-57.

9. Cited in Franz Kobler, *Napoleon and the Jews* (Schocken Books, 1976), 55-57. See Albert M. Hyamson, *Palestine: The Rebirth of an Ancient People* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1917), 162-163 and Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (Columbia University Press, 1937).

10. Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 327.

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Napoleon appointed his brothers as kings of Holland, Naples, Spain, and Westphalia in what is today Germany. He even gave his own son the title King of Rome. His plan was to create a United States of Europe, each state ruled by a compliant monarch and subject to himself as “Supreme King of Kings and Sovereign of the Roman Empire.”¹¹

With expanding colonies in Africa and Asia and land-based trade routes, British control of Palestine was a strategic imperative. The necessity of preventing French control had led not only to the battles of the Nile and Acre, but also to a British military expedition in Palestine. With the defeat of Napoleon, Britain’s main concern was then how to restrain Russia from similar ambitions. The race was on to control Palestine.¹²

Perhaps not surprisingly a growing number of preachers and theologians were speculating about whether Napoleon was the antichrist, whether the return of Christ was imminent, and what might be the role of the Jewish people in the Last Days.¹³ The first missionary society formed with the express purpose of serving Jewish people was founded in 1809 as the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. The shorter name, London Jews' Society (LJS), eventually proved more popular.¹⁴ At its inception LJS had a fourfold mission agenda:

- 1) declaring the Messiahship of Jesus to the Jew first and also to the non-Jew; 2) endeavoring to teach the Church its Jewish roots; 3) encouraging the physical restoration of the Jewish people to Eretz Israel – the Land of Israel; 4) encouraging the Hebrew Christian/Messianic Jewish movement.¹⁵

11. G. H. Pember, *The Great Prophecies of the Centuries concerning Israel and the Gentiles* (Hodder, 1902), 236-241.

12. Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism, Its Roots in Western History* (Zed, 1983), 54.

13. J. N. Darby, “Remarks on a Tract Circulated by the Irvingites,” in *Collected Writings*, ed. William Kelly (Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, 1962), 2; Andrew Drummond, *Edward Irving and His Circle* (James Clarke, n.d.), 132; Janet M. Hartley, “Napoleon in Russia: Saviour or anti-Christ?,” *History Today* 41 (1991); Richard Kyle, *The Last Days are Here Again* (Baker, 1998), 71.

14. George H. Stevens, *Go, Tell My Brethren: A Short Popular History of Church Missions to Jews* (Olive Press, 1959), 13.

15. Stevens, *Go, Tell My Brethren*.

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The Rev. Lewis Way, who directed LJS in its early years, firmly believed that the restoration of the Jews to Israel would fulfil Bible prophecies and would be linked with the mass conversion of the Jews to Christianity.¹⁶ A growing number of Anglican clergy as well as politicians also believed it was Britain's manifest destiny to facilitate the return of the Jews to Palestine.

On the first day of Advent in 1826, Henry Drummond, a city banker, politician, and High Sheriff of Surrey, opened his home at Albury Park to a select group of some twenty invited guests to discuss matters concerning "the immediate fulfilment of prophecy."¹⁷ In 1828 Drummond published *Dialogues on Prophecy*, in which he asserted that God was about to judge the visible Church and return the Jewish people to Palestine. He predicted, "During the time that these judgements are falling upon Christendom, the Jews will be restored to the land."¹⁸

Those present included Lewis Way and Joseph Wolff of LJS, James Hatley Frere, and Hugh McNeile, the Anglican Dean of Ripon, who in 1830 published *The Prophecies Relative to the Jewish Nation*.¹⁹ Like Edward Irving, the founder of the Catholic and Apostolic Church, and Drummond, McNeile advocated a status for the Jews apart from the Church, within their own "dispensation." He also predicted the imminent repentance and then restoration of the Jews and finally their pre-eminence on earth as a blessing to the whole world. It should be noted that at this time the prevalent notion was that the Jews would repent and be converted before restoration would occur.²⁰

Edward Miller confirms the influence of Lewis Way's biblical literalism on what became known as the Albury Circle:

16. Examples include Genesis 15:18, 17:8; Isaiah 2:2-3; and Luke 21:24.

17. Edward Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism*, Volume 1 (Kegan Paul, 1878), 36.

18. Henry Drummond, *Dialogues on Prophecy* (Nisbet, 1828), ii-iii.

19. Hugh McNeile, *The Collected Works, Vol. II. The Prophecies Relative to the Jewish Nation* (The Christian Book Society, [1830] 1878).

20. McNeile, *The Collected Works, Vol. II*, 431 ff.

The meetings of those people who were interested in the question of the immediate fulfilment of prophecy and were anxious to work out the application, according to the special mode of interpretation then adopted by Irving and his friends, owed their origin to a suggestion made by Mr Lewis Way to Mr Drummond.²¹

Further conferences were held annually during Advent at Albury between 1826 and 1830. Topics included speculation on the fulfilment of biblical prophecy, premillennialism, the imminent return of the Jews to Palestine, and the search for the lost tribes of Israel.

About two thirds of those who attended were, like Lewis Way, convinced Anglicans, including Daniel Wilson, who later became Bishop of Calcutta.²² By 1845, it is estimated that over 700 Anglican clergy supported the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, including Edward Bickersteth, secretary of the Church Mission Society, who came to have a dominant influence in the life of Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, as well as other evangelical Anglican leaders such as J. C. Ryle, the Bishop of Liverpool.²³

Anglican Support for the Proto-Zionist Movement

Zionism would have probably remained simply a political dream were it not for the intervention of a handful of influential aristocratic Anglican politicians who came to share the theological convictions of the Albury Circle and translated them into political reality. One in particular, Lord Shaftesbury, became convinced that the restoration of the Jews to Palestine was not only predicted in the Bible, but also coincided with the strategic interests of British foreign policy.²⁴ Ironically, while Shaftesbury was arguing for the return of the Jewish people to Israel, he was working against them becoming equal citizens of England. For example, along with other leading politicians such as William Gladstone and Robert Peel, Shaftesbury opposed Jewish emancipation in England.²⁵

21. Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism*, 36.

22. Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Banner of Truth, 1971), 36.

23. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 197. There were at the time three main movements within the Church of England: Evangelical, Catholic, and Liberal.

24. Barbara Tuchman, *Bible and Sword* (Macmillan, 1982), 115.

25. Lionel Gossman, "From Expulsion to Emancipation: Jews in England 1290-1858," n.d., <https://victorianweb.org/religion/judaism/gossman11.html>.

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Following the defeat of Napoleon's oriental expedition, Shaftesbury argued for a greater British presence in Palestine and insisted this could be achieved by the sponsorship of a Jewish homeland on both religious and political grounds.²⁶ British protection of the Jews, he claimed, would give a colonial advantage over France for the control of the Middle East; provide better access to India via a direct land route; and open up new commercial markets for British products.²⁷

In 1839, Shaftesbury therefore wrote an anonymous 30-page article for the *Quarterly Review* entitled "State and Restauration [sic] of the Jews" in which he advocated for a Jewish national homeland with Jerusalem the capital, remaining under Turkish rule but with British protection.²⁸ Shaftesbury predicted a new era for the Jewish people:

...the Jews must be encouraged to return in yet greater numbers and become once more the husbandman of Judea and Galilee...though admittedly a stiff-necked, dark hearted people, and sunk in moral degradation, obduracy, and ignorance of the Gospel...[They are]...not only worthy of salvation but also vital to Christianity's hope of salvation.²⁹

When Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary, married the widowed mother of Lord Shaftesbury's wife, Shaftesbury wrote in his diary on August 1, 1840:

Dined with Palmerston. After dinner left alone with him. Propounded my scheme which seems to strike his fancy. He asked questions and readily promised to consider it. How singular is the order of Providence. Singular, if estimated by man's ways. Palmerston had already been chosen by God to be an instrument of good to His ancient people, to do homage to their inheritance, and to recognize their rights without believing their destiny. It seems he will yet do more. Though the motive be

26. Lord Shaftesbury cited in Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948*, 14.

27. Donald Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon* (Herald Press, 1995), 91.

28. John Pollock, *Shaftesbury* (Hodder, 1985), 54.

29. Earl of Shaftesbury, "State and Prospects of the Jews," *Quarterly Review* 63 (1839): 166-192, cited in Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon*, 91. This conviction was based on Biblical passages such as Romans 9-11, which predicts a final "ingathering" of Jews to Palestine at the time of or immediately prior to the return of Jesus Christ.

kind, it is not sound...he weeps not, like his Master, over Jerusalem, nor prays that now, at last, she may put on her beautiful garments.³⁰

Although Shaftesbury lamented Palmerston's unbelief, he nevertheless saw him as God's appointed man to bring about the restoration of the Jews. As a first step, Shaftesbury persuaded Palmerston to appoint the fellow restorationist William Young as the first European vice-consul in Jerusalem. He subsequently wrote in his diary,

What a wonderful event it is! The ancient City of the people of God is about to resume a place among the nations; and England is the first of the Gentile kingdoms that ceases to "tread her down."³¹

Shaftesbury's persistent gentle lobbying of Palmerston proved successful. Palmerston wrote a letter to Sir John Ponsonby, the British ambassador in Constantinople, dated August 11, 1840, concerning the mutual benefit to both Turkey and Britain of allowing Jews to return to Palestine. Palmerston argued that the restoration of the Jews would help maintain the status quo and avoid the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.³²

Fuelling speculation about an imminent Jewish restoration, on November 4, 1840, Shaftesbury took out a paid advertisement in the Times to give greater visibility to his vision:

RESTORATION OF THE JEWS. A memorandum has been addressed to the Protestant monarchs of Europe on the subject of the restoration of the Jewish people to the land of Palestine. The document in question, dictated by a peculiar conjunction of affairs in the East, and other striking "signs of the times," reverts to the original covenant which secures that land to the descendants of Abraham.

Lewis Way had made such an appeal at the Congress of Aix la Chapelle in 1818. Now it was being revived on the grounds of political expediency as well as biblical mandate. Having

30. Earl of Shaftesbury diary entries as quoted by Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury* (London, 1886), 310-311.

31. M.J. Pragai, *Faith and Fulfilment: Christians and the Return to the Promised Land* (Valentine Mitchell, 1985), 45.

32. Palmerston to Ponsonby, Public Record Office, FO. 195/165 (no. 261), November 25, 1840, cited in Tuchman, *Bible and Sword*, 175.

helped achieve the former by securing the appointment of Young as Consul in Jerusalem, Shaftesbury now turned to the latter and advocated the founding of an Anglican bishopric in Jerusalem. This would, he argued, be a means by which God would continue to bless England as well as facilitate the return of the Jewish people to Palestine. The bishopric would, he said, be both

political and religious...a combination of Protestant thrones, bound by temporal interests and eternal principles, to plant under the banner of the Cross, God's people on the mountains of Jerusalem.³⁴

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the sole representatives of Western Christianity in Jerusalem had been the Franciscans and only the Orthodox and Armenian traditions were resident in significant numbers. A Protestant bishopric under joint British and Prussian auspices was founded in 1841 and an Anglican church, Christ Church, near the Jaffa Gate in the Old City, was dedicated in 1845. Despite great expectations, Michael Solomon Alexander, the first bishop and a former Jewish rabbi, did not survive long in the post. He was succeeded by Samuel Gobat, a Swiss Lutheran. The arrangement with Germany then lapsed and the bishopric became solely Anglican in 1881.³⁵

Having secured a sympathetic British consul as well as an Anglican bishop in Jerusalem, the next step in the restorationist agenda was to survey and map Palestine. To this end, the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) was founded in 1865 by a group of distinguished British academics and Anglican clergy, most notably Lord Shaftesbury; British Consul in Jerusalem James Finn; Dean of Westminster Abbey Arthur P. Stanley; and Sir George Grove. Shaftesbury became the founding president. In his inaugural speech at the PEF launch he openly declared their motives.

Let us not delay to send out the best agents...to search the length and breadth of Palestine, to survey the land, and if possible to go over every corner of it, drain it, measure it and, if you will, prepare it for the return of its ancient possessors, for I believe that the time cannot be far off before that great event will come to pass.³⁶

34. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948*, 14.

35. Anthony O'Mahony, "Christianity in the Holy Land, The Historical Background," *The Month*, December 1993, 470.

36. Cited by Derek White, Christian Friends of Israel,
https://zionism-israel.com/Christian_Zionism/Christian_Zionism_history.html.

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The survey of Palestine sponsored by the PEF undertaken between 1871 and 1878 by Claude Conder and Horatio Kitchener, together with soldiers of the Royal Engineers, was the first cartographic survey ever conducted of Palestine. It provided the Zionist movement with invaluable information on natural resources and locations suitable for settlement.³⁷

The influence of Lord Shaftesbury, therefore, in promoting the Zionist cause within the political, diplomatic, and ecclesiastical establishment in Britain was immense. As Donald Wagner claims, “His high political connections, matched by his uncanny instincts, combined to advance the Christian Zionist vision.”³⁸

Indeed, it was probably Shaftesbury who inspired Israel Zangwill and Theodore Herzl to coin the phrase, “A land of no people for a people with no land.” Shaftesbury, a generation earlier, imagining Palestine to be empty, had come up with the slogan, “A country without a nation for a nation without a country.”³⁹ Shaftesbury had likely adapted the phrase from his colleague in the PEF, James Finn, who in 1857, while British consul in Jerusalem, had ignorantly reported, “The country is in a considerable degree empty of inhabitants and therefore its greatest need is that of a body of population.”⁴⁰

Like Moses, Shaftesbury did not live to see his “Promised Land” realized. However, through his lobbying, writings, and public speaking he did more than any other British politician to inspire a generation of Joshuas, such as James Balfour, to translate his religious vision into a political reality.

By 1897, when the first World Zionist Congress met in Basel, Switzerland, Jewish leaders who favored a Zionist state already had sympathetic support from many more senior British political figures. This was largely due to the efforts of one man, William Hechler. The son of LJS missionaries in France and Germany, Hechler was an Anglican priest and became chaplain to the British Embassy in Vienna in 1885, a position of strategic significance for the Zionist movement.⁴¹

37. Christian Friends of Israel, https://zionism-israel.com/Christian_Zionism/Christian_Zionism_history.html.

38. Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon*, 92

39. Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon*, 92

40. James Finn to the Earl of Clarendon, Jerusalem, September 15, 1857, Public Record Office, FO 78/1294 (Pol. No. 36). Finn wrote further that “[t]he result of my observations is, that we have here Jews, who have been to the United States, but have returned to their Holy Land – Jews of Jerusalem do go to Australia and instead of remaining there, do return hither, even without the allurements of agriculture and its concomitants.” Cited in <http://www.eretzyisroel.org/~peters/depopulated.html#18>.

41. David Pileggi, “Hechler, CMJ & Zionism,” *Shalom* 3 (1998).

According to Sharif, “Imbued with evangelical millenarianism, he even formulated his own exact date for the re-establishment of the Jewish State.”⁴² As with Shaftesbury’s slogan, so Hechler’s 1894 booklet, *The Restoration of the Jews to Palestine*, predated Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat* by two years and spoke of the need for “restoring the Jews to Palestine according to Old Testament prophecies.”⁴³

Hechler became Herzl’s chief Christian ally in realizing his vision of a Zionist state, one of only three Christians invited to attend the World Congress of Zionists in 1897. Herzl was not religious but he was superstitious and recorded a meeting with Hechler in his diary on March 10, 1896:

The Reverend William Hechler, Chaplain of the English Embassy here, came to see me. A sympathetic, gentle fellow, with the long grey beard of a prophet. He is enthusiastic about my solution of the Jewish Question. He also considers my movement a “prophetic turning-point” – which he had foretold two years before. From a prophecy in the time of Omar (637 CE) he had reckoned that at the end of forty-two prophetic months (total 1260 years) the Jews would get Palestine back. This figure he arrived at was 1897-98.⁴⁴

In March 1897, the year Hechler expected the Jews to begin returning to Palestine, Herzl described their second meeting at Hechler’s apartment. Herzl was amazed to find books from floor to ceiling, noting “nothing but Bibles” and a large military staff map of Palestine made up of four sheets covering the entire floor of the study:

He showed me where, according to his calculations, our new Temple must be located: in Bethel! Because that is the center of the country. He also showed me models of the ancient Temple. “We have prepared the ground for you!” Hechler said triumphantly...I take him for a naive visionary...However, there is something charming about his enthusiasm...He gives me excellent advice, full of unmistakable genuine good will. He is at once clever and mystical, cunning and naive.⁴⁵

42. Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism*, 71.

43. Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism*, 71.

44. Theodor Herzl, *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl* (Dial Press, 1956) cited in Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism*, 71.

45. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948*, 16-17.

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Despite Herzl's initial skepticism, Hechler kept his word and gained access to the German Kaiser William II and the Grand Duke of Baden, as well as the British political establishment, for Herzl and his Zionist delegation. Although sympathetic to the evangelistic ministry of LJS, Hechler's advocacy and diplomacy marked a radical shift in Christian Zionist thinking away from the views of Lewis Way and like-minded clerics such as Charles Simeon, who saw restoration to the land as a consequence of Jewish conversion to Christianity. Hechler instead insisted that it was the destiny of Christians simply to help restore the Jews to Palestine.

This is clear in a letter he wrote to a missionary in Jerusalem in 1898:

Of course, dear colleague, you look for the conversion of the Jews, but the times are changing rapidly, and it is important for us to look further and higher. We are now entering, thanks to the Zionist Movement, into Israel's Messianic age. Thus, it is not a matter these days of opening all the doors of your churches to the Jews, but rather of opening the gates of their homeland, and of sustaining them in their work of clearing the land, and irrigating it and bringing water to it. All of this, dear colleague, is messianic work; all of this the breath of the Holy Spirit announces. But first the dry bones must come to life, and draw together.⁴⁶

Hechler's arguments appear to prefigure those of contemporary Christian Zionists who, having disavowed evangelism, believe they are fulfilling their Christian mandate by bringing material blessing to Israel. When Hechler eventually resigned from his chaplaincy in Vienna in 1910, the Zionist Organization in London provided a pension for his "loyal" support of Zionism, in accordance with Herzl's instructions. In 1922 Hechler was present when the British Parliament ratified the Palestine Mandate and was convinced that the event was itself, if a somewhat belated, fulfilment of Biblical prophecy.

The Balfour Declaration and Sponsorship of the Zionist State

Probably the most significant British politician of all, however, was Arthur James Balfour, who pioneered the Balfour Declaration in 1917. Like Lloyd George, Balfour had been brought up in an evangelical home and was sympathetic to Zionism because of the influence of restorationist teaching.⁴⁷ Indeed, Balfour allegedly regarded history as "an instrument for carrying out a Divine purpose."⁴⁸

46. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948*, 15-16.

47. Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon*, 93.

48. Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism*, 78.

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From 1905, Chaim Weizmann, then a professor of chemistry at Manchester University, began to meet regularly with Balfour to discuss the implementation of that goal. Following a meeting with Weizmann on January 9, 1906, Balfour wrote to his wife saying that he could see “no political difficulty about obtaining Palestine, only economic ones.”⁴⁹

Negotiations over a British declaration of support for the Zionists began in early 1917 between Lord Balfour (then British foreign secretary), other members of the British government, and representatives of the Zionist Organization. Mark Sykes, the assistant secretary to the War Cabinet, had been given responsibility for Middle Eastern affairs and set about extricating the British from the secret Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, which envisaged Anglo-French administration of Palestine. At Balfour’s invitation, in July 1917 the Zionist Organization offered a suggested draft to Balfour:

1. His Majesty’s Government accepts the principle that Palestine should be reconstituted as the National Home of the Jewish people.
2. His Majesty’s Government will use its best endeavors to secure the achievement of this object and will discuss the necessary methods and means with the Zionist Organization.⁵⁰

Balfour amended this in August to emphasize the prerogative of the British government:

... and will use its best endeavors to secure the achievement of this object and will be ready to consider any suggestions on the subject which the Zionist Organization may desire to lay before it.

At the insistence of Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India and an anti-Zionist Jew, a clause was added to guarantee the status of British Jews, in particular, who did not wish to live in Palestine, since most opposed Zionism.⁵¹ Several further drafts were written before the final version was agreed on by the Cabinet.

In October 1917, Balfour learned that Germany was about to issue its own declaration of sympathy with Zionism and therefore recommended that the British Cabinet pre-empt them.⁵² On November 2, 1917, therefore, Lord Balfour made public the final draft of the letter written to Lord Rothschild on October 31, which became known as the Balfour Declaration:

49. Kenneth Young, *Arthur James Balfour* (G. Bell & Sons, 1963), 256.

50. Doreen Ingrams, *Palestine Papers 1917-1922, Seeds of Conflict* (John Murray, 1972), 9.

51. Ingrams, *Palestine Papers 1917-1922*, 11.

52. Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (Valentine Mitchell, 1961), 516–517; 533–534.

His Majesty's Government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of that object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done, which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish Communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.⁵³

Balfour was in fact already committed to the Zionist program out of theological conviction and had no intention of consulting with the indigenous Arab population. In a letter to Lord Curzon, written in 1919, Balfour insisted somewhat cynically:

For in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country...the Four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires or prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land...I do not think that Zionism will hurt the Arabs...in short, so far as Palestine is concerned, the Powers have made no statement of fact which is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy which, at least in the letter, they have not always intended to violate.⁵⁴

What the Balfour Declaration left intentionally ambiguous was the meaning of a “national home.” Balfour’s draft of August 1917 read, “Palestine should be reconstituted as the national home of the Jewish people.” In the final version in October “the” had become “a,” and it now read, “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” Was this synonymous with sovereignty or statehood and if so, what were to be the borders? Would it occupy all of Palestine or just a portion? What was to be the status of Jerusalem? Furthermore, while it stated that “the civil and religious rights of the existing population” were to be safeguarded and the territory was designated “Palestine,” there was no reference to Palestinians.

As Bishop Kenneth Cragg observed, “They were an actual, but awkward non-identity.”⁵⁵ It was clearly Balfour’s opinion that “the present inhabitants” need not be consulted, either before or after.⁵⁶ That 90 percent of the population of Palestine were Arabs of whom around 10 percent were Christian seemed irrelevant to British politicians and Jewish

53. Stein, *The Balfour Declaration*.

54. Stein, *The Balfour Declaration*.

55. Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian, A History in the Middle East* (Mowbray, 1992), 234.

56. Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, revised edition (Vintage, 1992), 19.

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Zionists alike who had another agenda.⁵⁷ Hence the awkward questions were left unanswered, and it is these ambiguities that have plagued Middle East peace negotiations and divided Christians ever since. This momentous declaration nevertheless gave Zionism for the first time “political legitimacy” and provided the impetus for the colonization of Palestine.⁵⁸

Thus, Arthur James Balfour (an Anglican) and David Lloyd George (a Welsh non-conformist), two of the most influential British political leaders at the beginning of the twentieth century, like Shaftesbury and Palmerston a generation earlier, were both committed to a Christian Zionist agenda. Their support for the World Zionist Movement was a direct result of their evangelical upbringing and the influence of Anglican clergy like Lewis Way and Charles Simeon, as much as from their political desire to break up the Ottoman Empire and ensure British dominance in the Middle East.

Conclusions:

Several key factors led to the rise of the Christian Zionist movement in Britain.

With war and revolution consuming much of Europe and America during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, millennial speculation about the fulfilment of Bible prophecy and the return of Christ increased significantly. The resurgence of premillennialism based on a literalist hermeneutic and futurist eschatology emerged through the influence of those associated with the Albury prophecy conferences.

Several evangelical missionary societies such as the London Jews Society were formed to provide education and humanitarian assistance as well as share the gospel with Jewish people. Through their efforts the idea of active British involvement in the restoration of the Jews to Palestine also took shape.

57. A report to the British Foreign Office in December 1918 revealed that Palestine consisted of 512,000 Muslims, 61,000 Christians, and 66,000 Jews. Ingrams, *Palestine Papers 1917-1922*, 44.

58. Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon*, 94.

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Their theological ideas were translated into political reality through the zealous efforts of British politicians such as Lord Shaftesbury, Lord Palmerston, David Lloyd George, and Lord Balfour, who saw the strategic value of a Jewish presence in Palestine to strengthen the British Empire. The Jewish Zionist movement itself grew in no small measure due to the involvement of Christian restorationists such as William Hechler. Zionism eventually gained international recognition through the Balfour Declaration, which in 1917 finally guaranteed a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Benjamin Netanyahu was therefore correct in acknowledging the fundamental role that Christians (and implicitly Anglicans) played in the birth of Zionism and the founding of the state of Israel.

Challenging Biblical Justifications for Genocide

by Donald Wagner

The election of Donald Trump to a second term as president of the United States included the Republican Party gaining control of both houses of Congress. As Trump began to make recommendations for various leadership posts in his administration, he included a preponderance of far-right pro-Israel personalities, including fundamentalist Christian Zionists who are closely tied to the pro-Israel lobbies, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and Christians United for Israel (CUFI), as well as the extremist settler movement. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu celebrated the return of Trump to the White House as US leadership that will support what the International Court of Justice called a “plausible genocide” in the Gaza Strip, as well as Israeli violence in the West Bank, Lebanon, and beyond.

This article examines how Zionist and Christian Zionist narratives facilitate political policies that undermine international law and ethical values once held sacred by Christians, Muslims, and Jews. As the new US president and Congress are installed, the future stability of the Middle East is at risk of endless wars that could spread beyond that troubled region. Since most of Israel’s military support comes from the United States, despite a majority of voters opposing the latest Israeli aggression, pro-Israel Christian and Jewish Zionists may play a disproportionate role in the Middle East and beyond.¹

1. Connor Echols, “Over 70% of Democrats Support a Ceasefire,” Responsible Statecraft, December 10, 2023. See also Data for Progress, “Support for a Permanent Ceasefire Increases across Party Lines,” May 8, 2024, <https://www.dataforprogress.org/blog/2024/5/8/support-for-a-permanent-ceasefire-in-gaza-increases-across-party-lines>.



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With this global context in mind the article explores Christian Zionism as a political ideology and its growing influence in the United States and the Global South. It also employs the lens of settler colonialism to examine Zionism and analyzes selected biblical and theological arguments that have traditionally supported a Zionist position and considers alternative narratives that question support for genocide.

Israel's Siege on Gaza

On October 9, 2023, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant released a statement making it clear that Israel's military goals included targeting Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip, including women and children. Gallant also called for a complete siege, denying the 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza electricity, food, water, and medicine, stating: "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed." He declared that Israel's goals included blocking humanitarian agencies from deliveries and reducing the number of trucks from a pre-October 7 rate of 500 trucks per day to zero to twelve trucks per day.²

The Biden administration declared its "iron-clad" support of the Netanyahu government and adopted Israel's rationale of "self-defense" with occasional "red lines" urging more humanitarian aid and safe zones for civilians that were promptly ignored by the Israeli prime minister. As massacres increased and demands for a ceasefire were ignored by the Israeli government, the number of Palestinian deaths climbed to more than 48,000, a fraction of the total dead and missing. Until the ceasefire of January 2025, only one brief four-day "pause" interrupted the genocidal war as the United States and several European countries continued to send weapons and military assistance. While polling showed that most US voters supported a ceasefire in Gaza, particularly after January 2024, the Biden administration and both houses of Congress were steadfast in their rejection of a permanent ceasefire and cut in military aid to Israel, the one policy that could have ended Israel's assault.³

2. Emanuel Fabian, "Defense Minister Announces 'Complete Siege of Gaza:' No Power, Food, Fuel," *The Times of Israel*, October 9, 2023, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/defense-minister-announces-complete-siege-of-gaza-no-power-food-or-fuel/.

3. Arab American Institute, "American Attitudes: Palestine and Israel in the 2024 Election," November 4, 2024, <https://www.aaiusa.org/library/american-attitudes-palestine-and-israel-in-the-2024-election>.

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US Secretary of State Antony Blinken shared significant responsibility as he failed to serve as an impartial broker in negotiations, generally defending the Israeli position. Blinken's bias was evident when he provided cover for Israel before a US congressional investigation, claiming that it was not blocking humanitarian aid despite Gallant's blunt declaration, as well as Blinken's own State Department holding evidence from respected international humanitarian agencies confirming that Israel was indeed blocking their humanitarian assistance from reaching the victims.⁴

The Role of Religious Narratives in Justifying the Genocide

An October 28, 2024, press conference with Prime Minister Netanyahu underscored Israel's war of revenge and annihilation of the entire Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip. Netanyahu's speech included the statement, "You must remember what Amalek has done to you...And we do remember."⁵ Most people had no idea who Amalek was or what it did, but two important audiences understood the biblical reference immediately.

Netanyahu's primary audience was in Israel, including the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), with its growing number of young, militant religious Jewish Zionists. Many of these soldiers have strong connections and communities in the United States, a source for their fundraising campaigns. Most are also advocates of an extreme version of religious Zionism articulated by the late Rabbi Meir Kahane and a growing number of rabbis and political leaders. Some are active in militant settlements like Kyriat Arba, built on Palestinian land stolen from families in Hebron. The Kahane brand of Zionism has been embraced by several members of Netanyahu's coalition government, including former Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich.

The Kahane-inspired Kach Party has consistently called for the mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights.

4. Patricia Zengerle, Humeyra Pamuk, and Simon Lewis, "Senators, Protestors Assail Blinken over Biden Administration's Israel Policy," Reuters, May 22, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/blinken-testify-us-congress-under-shadow-israel-policy-divides-2024-05-21/>.

5. "Netanyahu's References to Violent Biblical Passages Raise Alarm among Critics," National Public Radio, November 7, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/11/07/121133201/netanyahus-references-to-violent-biblical-passages-raise-alarm-among-critics>.

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The party has supported the ethnic cleansing of all Palestinians from historic Palestine, starting with those in Gaza. This brand of militant Zionism has also been actively conducting pogroms in the West Bank, chanting “Palestinians must go” and “Remember Amalek” as they burn cars and homes.

Netanyahu’s second target audience was the international movement of Christian Zionists, which in recent years has become a global phenomenon. Christian Zionists’ political clout in the United States was a factor in Trump’s reelection in 2024 and they are loyal followers of Netanyahu. Their leading political organization, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), now claims over 10 million members, a far larger group than members of Jewish lobby organizations or, indeed, Jewish Americans, who number around 7.5 million. CUFI works closely with AIPAC, whose clout in the US Congress with both political parties is legendary. AIPAC can make or break House and Senate elections as it demonstrated in the 2024 election, and it likely also played a significant role in Trump’s reelection.

Netanyahu selected the Amalek theme because it is code for a war of annihilation against Palestinians, whether in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Israel, or Lebanon’s refugee camps. The foundational text is found in Exodus 17:8-16 and claims the Israelites were attacked at Rephidim as they left the Sinai wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. The passage tells the story of how Moses stood on a hill near the battle and as long as he raised his hands the Israelites were victorious. The text includes the statement, “The Lord will be at war with the Amalekites from generation to generation” (v.16). Another important Amalek text is found in I Samuel 15, where the prophet Samuel instructs the newly appointed King Saul to annihilate “every man, woman, child and livestock” of the Amalekites as a test case for his readiness to be the King of Israel. The text is nothing short of a biblically ordained call for the ancient Israelites to commit genocide against the Amalekite tribe. Most biblical scholars doubt the historicity of these texts and believe them to be part of tribal oral history.

Fundamentalist Christians who subscribe to these views, often mistakenly called evangelicals (they are less than 30% of the diverse evangelical movement), interpret these texts with a selective literalism and believe they are based on historical events.

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Christian Zionists lift entire chapters and verses out of context to fit their brand of theology, which ends with an apocalyptic final battle (Armageddon) between good and evil, with Israel playing a major role in Jesus's return to earth. Two thirds of Jews will die in the final series of military encounters, called the "tribulation," but Jesus will return as a military warrior just in time to defeat the evil "Antichrist," save Israel, and establish his millennial kingdom. The surviving Jews will have a choice between accepting Jesus or going to hell. Zionist Jews reject these eschatological ideas but are happy to take Christian Zionists' political and economic support.

An instructive summary of this theology was captured in a "Sixty Minutes" interview with the Israeli journalist Gersom Gorenberg, who was asked for his perspective on the movement. He summarized it in this way:

They don't love the real Jewish people. They love us as characters in their story, in their play, and that's not who we are. And we never auditioned for that part, and the play is not one that ends up good for us. If you listen to the drama that they are describing, essentially, it's a five-act play in which the Jews disappear in the fourth act.⁶

Returning to the "annihilate Amalek" texts, we can conclude they are useful for Netanyahu to convince both militant Jewish Zionists and fundamentalist Christian Zionists to support the genocide. A strong sense of anti-Islamic and anti-Arab racism drives the views of these two movements, as neither group demonstrates any sympathy for Palestinian Christians or Muslims; they are dismissed simply because they are Palestinian.

The late Hebrew University professor and human rights scholar Dr. Israel Shahak traced the sources of Amalek hatred to the Halakhah (Jewish religious laws), which include "commentaries that reflect anti-Gentile themes dating back at least to Joshua's conquest of the land of Canaan." Among them are laws designed to promote Jewish power and supremacy in ancient Canaan.

6. "Zion's Christian Soldiers," reprint of the "Sixty Minutes" transcript, October 6, 2002, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, December 2002, <https://www.wrmea.org/2002-december/zion-s-christian-soldiers-the-60-minutes-transcript.html>.

Shahak summarized how the ancient enmity can be fused quickly into modern support for genocide: “If Jews have sufficient power, then it is their religious duty to expel the Palestinians.”⁷ Shahak added important analysis as to how this school of interpretation has been revived in the contemporary Israeli context following Israel’s conquest and occupation of the Palestinian Territories after the 1967 war. When Israel seized East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights, the conquest was celebrated by religious Zionists, both Christian and Jewish. Both communities interpreted it as an act of God and the beginning of a Messianic era. The extreme wing of Jewish Zionists believed the land had been given to them and their task was to cleanse it of Palestinians.

These views merged with another militant strain of Jewish religious Zionism in the United States that arose and found a home in the fundamentalist religious settlement movement Gush Emunim (“Block of the Faithful”). Rabbi Meir Kahane’s “Kahane Chai (Kach)” movement, which emerged initially in the United States as the Jewish Defense League (JDL), had similar religious and ideological goals: expelling the Palestinians from all of historic Palestine.

In 1994, the JDL was declared a terrorist organization by the US State Department after a series of assassinations of Arab Americans, including Alex Odeh, Director of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee of Southern California. Kahane and several JDL leaders moved to Israel, where they established the Israeli branch, Kahane Chai, that was also banned under Israel’s 1948 anti-terrorism law. However, in 2021 the US State Department removed Kahane Chai from its terrorism list, allowing it to raise tax-exempt contributions in the United States. At that point Kahane followers ran for political office and won seats in the Knesset. Since that time the Kahane militants have become a political force and have gained influence in the IDF. They have also become a significant part of the Netanyahu government since 2022. In 1994, the JDL was declared a terrorist organization by the US State Department after a series of assassinations of Arab Americans, including Alex Odeh, , Director of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee of Southern California.

7. Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion* (Pluto Press, 1994), 91.

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One of many examples of the anti-Palestinian beliefs and Islamophobic enmity driving this movement is what took place on the first day of Purim in 1994, when Dr. Baruch Goldstein, a Kahane disciple, entered the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron with his automatic weapon and murdered 29 Muslims at prayer, wounding another 125 worshippers. Goldstein was killed in the melee that followed and became a martyr and instant hero of the militant movement. Kahane followers from across Israel and its West Bank settlements make pilgrimages to Kyriat Arba and honor Dr. Goldstein's memorial plaque while they draw inspiration from his example in the erasure of Palestinians.

The movement also draws considerable inspiration from the "annihilate Amalek" texts, which have been referenced during the pogroms on Palestinian villages in the West Bank. Recent examples are the May 2023 attacks on the villages of Huwara and Turmusaya, where homes were burned and hundreds of cars torched in a mass revenge after Palestinians killed an Israeli settler. Such pogroms have recently increased, with settlers chanting "they must go" and "expel Palestinians to Jordan." Human rights organizations have observed how the IDF not only protects the settlers but sometimes participates in the pogroms, leaving Palestinians unprotected and completely vulnerable.⁸ It is important to consider alternative interpretations of the Amalek texts by Jewish scholars and rabbis that lead to different conclusions. One alternative message comes from a rabbinic school referring to commentary in the Talmud.

8. Noah Lanard, "The Dangerous History behind Netanyahu's Amalek Rhetoric," *Mother Jones*, November 3, 2023, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2023/11/benjamin-netanyahu-amalek-israel-palestine-gaza-saul-samuel-old-testament/>; see also settlers and IDF chanting in this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qb_oBSAZjDs&list=PL8833333333333333.

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It is important to consider alternative interpretations of the Amalek texts by Jewish scholars and rabbis that lead to different conclusions. One alternative message comes from a rabbinic school referring to commentary in the Talmud. This school focuses on the metaphorical nature of the Amalek texts and calls the faithful to honor the ethical lessons for Jews living in a time of war, such as today's genocide. Rabbi Jill Jacobs of the human rights group T'ruah believes these verses are "a call to stamp out evil intentions within ourselves" and our communities, thus rejecting Netanyahu and Kahane's call to "rage and vengeance."⁹

Jewish writer Maya Rosen draws a similar interpretation, which also applies to the genocide in Gaza and Lebanon:

As Israeli leaders continue to invoke Amalek while killing and injuring tens of thousands in Gaza and starving millions, we are reminded that the confrontation with Amalek requires not the triumphalist logic of clarity but the existential humility of knowing how far we are from God.¹⁰

This brief but powerful statement challenges the use of the Amalek texts by far-right Israeli extremists and Christian Zionists. In a time of genocide, it is vital that these interpretations gain more visibility and influence rather than allow the genocide of an entire people to proceed unchallenged by the major powers in Europe and the United States. The political power of extreme Jewish and Christian Zionist narratives continues to drive Israel's influence in both houses of Congress and the US presidency, a serious concern with Trump again in office and surrounding himself with those touting such views.

The following sections present more evidence and material to challenge these views and their accompanying narratives.

9. Maya Rosen, "Facing Amalek," *Jewish Currents*, March 22, 2024, <https://jewishcurrents.org/newsletter/facing-amalek-newsletter>.

10. Rosen, "Facing Amalek."

These include an understanding of settler colonialism in Israel and more broadly; the use of Palestinian liberation theology to complement a settler colonial analysis; and Palestinian liberation theology's applicability to the modern Zionist state of Israel and the United States.

Israel's Settler Colonial Regime

At the heart of Israel's global mission is its guiding ideology: Zionism. To accurately assess the role of the Bible in contemporary Israeli Zionist and Christian Zionist narratives and political support for Israel, we must evaluate the origins and basic goals of these movements. I have been researching and writing about Christian Zionism for nearly fifty years, but approximately ten years ago I changed my basic critique. My initial writings assumed a correct biblical hermeneutic would correct where Christian Zionism had gone wrong. I no longer hold this view.

My initial approach is inadequate for several reasons. First, both Christian and Jewish Zionism are political ideologies that use the Bible to achieve their goals. Second, Christian Zionism emerged before Jewish Zionism. Given the historical background of the two movements, it is important to trace the political dimension of the two. It becomes clear that Christian Zionism always takes its political cues from Jewish Zionism. Third, a critical analysis of the two movements needs a political instrument that can effectively challenge the core goals and raise essential legal, political, ethical, and religious questions. Settler colonial analysis provides this critical analysis. Fourth, Palestinian liberation theology provides a theological framework that complements settler colonial's political analysis and focuses the theological critique on biblical themes of justice, God's compassion for the poor, and the complementary roles of international law and theological ethics.

Settler colonial studies is a relatively new field of anthropology and is now a recognized academic discipline. Important pioneers used the basic categories of this analysis before it became a recognized discipline, including Faye Sayegh, a Palestinian scholar, diplomat, and author.

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His volume, *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine*, published in 1965, was one of the first Palestinian academic works of settler colonial analysis. In it Sayegh analyzes Zionism as a racist movement centered on ethnonational exclusivity designed to remove and replace the indigenous Palestinian population with Jewish settlers. Sayegh was a primary author of UN Resolution 3379, adopted by the General Assembly in 1975, which stated that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination. (Resolution 3379 was revoked by the UN General Assembly in 1991.)¹¹

Advocates of Zionism vehemently deny they are racist or hold settler colonial ideologies, and they reject the idea that Israel is a settler colonial state. However, their practices, policies, theology, core principles, and values betray their denial. Patrick Wolfe, the father of settler colonial studies, summarizes the academic discipline as follows:

Essentially hegemonic in scope, settler colonialism normalizes the continuous settler occupation, exploiting lands and resources to which indigenous people have genealogical relationships. Settler colonizers do not merely exploit indigenous peoples and lands for labor and economic interests; they displace them through settlements.¹²

In a separate essay, Wolfe claims that Zionism is an ideology of annihilation and negation of the indigenous Palestinians. He states unequivocally that “the question of genocide is never far from the discussion of settler colonialism.” Wolfe cites Theodor Herzl (the “father of political Zionism”) in his original formulations of the ideology as intended to replace the Palestinians with Jewish settlers. Wolfe applies the term *terra nullius* (empty land or land without people) as one of the basic strategies utilized by settler colonial regimes to claim the indigenous people do not exist. This assumption allows settler regimes to target lands and declare them “available” to settler colonial projects.

11. Fayez Sayegh, *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (Palestine Research Center, 1965).

12. Alicia Cox, “Settler Colonialism,” *Oxford Bibliographies*, July 26, 2017, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0029.xml>.

A phrase coined by Christian Zionists in the 1840s became a popular marketing tool for the Zionist enterprise once it became official in 1897 at the first World Zionist Congress. This phrase reveals the ultimate goals, intentions, and mindset of Zionist settler colonialism: “A land of no people for a people with no land.”¹³ This famous phrase is the essence of Zionist ideology.

Another leading figure in settler colonial studies is Lorenzo Veracini, Professor of History and Politics at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. He summarizes settler colonialism’s goals:

Settler colonial regimes seek to extinguish indigenous collectives in a given territory, or at least to extinguish their political autonomy. The methods vary greatly, and they overlap and interact: ethnic cleansing, incarceration, assimilation, forced exile, etc. The idea that somehow the indigenous peoples are no longer indigenous often accompanies and authorizes these other tactics.¹⁴

Veracini anticipated attempts by Israeli Zionists (and by inference Christian Zionists) to claim that Jews are indigenous to the land called Canaan or Palestine while the Palestinians are not indigenous. Israeli Zionists argue they are simply returning to the land of their forefathers and are therefore not practicing settler colonialism. Veracini dismisses this notion as a false argument that is frequently used by settler colonial regimes such as the French in Algeria, who claimed their roots date back to the Roman era. This is patently false, as the indigenous Algerians and Berbers predate the French by two millennia.

Veracini concludes:

Zionism is a settler colonial movement and Israel is a settler colonial state. This is not an insult; it is a statement of fact.

13. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 288, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

14. Veracini as quoted by Abe Saperstein, “A Logic of Elimination,” *Jewish Currents*, January 11, 2022, <https://jewishcurrents.org/a-logic-of-elimination>.

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The Zionists were foreign to Palestine. They aimed to conquer the land and establish their sovereignty...they formalized this conquest in the establishment of the State of Israel. Historically and now, we see in Israel/Palestine a constellation of governing arrangements characterized by a logic of elimination, by the practice of replacement of indigenous Palestinians and, conversely, by a Palestinian determination to resist this practice. This is what settler colonialism looks like, even if the modalities of replacement have changed over time.¹⁵

According to leading settler colonial scholars, Zionism has been a settler colonial project from the beginning. There were several short-lived variations on hardline Zionist leaders, such as the humanist Zionists Martin Buber; Judah Magnes, the first president of Hebrew University; and Albert Einstein. Most of the leaders of this movement supported one binational state or two sovereign states. These variations have been eclipsed by the Ben Gurion ideology of the Labor Party, which has never supported a Palestinian state. More extreme is the Revisionist Zionist movement of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Menachem Begin, Ariel Sharon, and Benjamin Netanyahu. The current far-right Israeli government has taken Israel down the path of systemic apartheid rule and now a genocidal campaign to erase Palestinian lives and existence in the Gaza Strip, with the West Bank and East Jerusalem next.

Netanyahu is the longest-serving prime minister in Israel's history, and he will be remembered as the most corrupt and militant. He has consistently opposed the creation of a Palestinian state and has opted for increased settlements and a campaign of total erasure of Palestinians. As long as Israel continues its genocide, Netanyahu will remain prime minister. And as long as he is prime minister, he will be exempt from charges of corruption that could lead to his conviction and imprisonment. Given the likelihood that the United States will continue its military support, it appears the genocide will continue indefinitely.

15. Saperstein, "A Logic of Elimination."

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Theological Challenges to Christian and Jewish Zionists

Settler colonial analysis remains the most relevant political discipline available to critique Christian and Jewish political Zionism, but it is also important to reflect on certain biblical themes while utilizing this analytical tool. I will briefly examine three biblical and theological themes and suggest alternative interpretations that challenge the Christian and Jewish Zionist narratives.

The God Question: An essential starting point for a discussion on how Christian and Jewish Zionists weaponize the Bible is their understanding of the nature and being of God the Creator. At the heart of the discussion is the question: Is God an inclusive Creator who creates every human being equal, or does God favor some people over others? Biblical scholars tell us the text of Genesis was finalized during the Babylonian Exile (587-522 CE) when rabbinic scholars assembled both oral and written traditions, sometimes placing passages with different sources and theologies next to each other. An example occurs in the first two chapters of Genesis where the first creation account reflects a God (Hebrew Elohim) who creates the world and then humanity “in the image of God” (imago Dei) in which every human being is equal no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. The second creation account begins with God’s name as YHWH (Yahweh), and the theology reflects the God of the Covenant who designates the chosen people through Abraham and the Patriarchs.

These two chapters represent a creative tension that continues throughout the Hebrew Bible. At times God leads the Hebrew tribes into battle to annihilate their enemies (Book of Joshua) and at other times Yahweh sides with the poor farmer Naboth (a Canaanite) when King Ahab and Jezebel arrange to have him killed so they can steal his land. The Hebrew prophets reject exceptionalism and the rich exploiting the poor (Amos, Micah, Isaiah). The message of Jesus continued the Hebrew prophets’ call to the poor and disinherited as in the parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25): “When I was hungry did you feed me, when I was thirsty did you give me drink: Even though you do it to the least of these my sisters and brothers you do it to me.”

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The creative tension displayed in Genesis 1 versus Genesis 2-3 represents a call for us to think carefully and critically about the God we worship and what God requires of us. The God of the prophets and the inclusive Psalm 87 in which Israel's enemies are welcomed to Jerusalem in peace and harmony seems to triumph over the God of Joshua, where genocide is endorsed. Christians, Muslims, Jews, and others can find common ground in the prophetic texts and challenge the genocidal texts that have no place with the God of justice who calls us to radical hope, peace, and equality.

Idolatry Closer to Home: Christian Zionist leaders from Rev. Jerry Falwell to Rev. John Hagee are fond of quoting a clause from Genesis 12:3 to aid in their political campaigning, "God will bless those who support Israel and punish those who criticize Israel." They often add: "The moment the United States becomes critical of Israel or interferes in its military policies God will punish America." This is a clear example of weaponizing the Bible with a false Zionist narrative that is not part of the biblical text.

Context is always important in understanding the meaning of a given text. The context in Genesis 12 includes God (Yahweh) initiating the covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants. The Covenant is a special relationship between Yahweh and the people of God. Though a gift, the Biblical Covenants always include responsibilities, which are spelled out later in the Mosaic Covenant including the Ten Commandments and the Torah's more than 600 laws. The laws include guidelines for the people to honor God first and practice love of neighbor within marriage and with neighbors, including the sojourners (Gentiles) (Lev. 19:33). This category of relationships was often ignored by the Jews who interpreted the laws as designed specifically for justice within the Jewish community.

In the Abrahamic Covenant the land and chosen people are given a special relationship with God, but it is important to note that it is God who gives these gifts as means or instruments for the service of God. The land, chosenness, and the nation of Israel are not ends in themselves. When they become ends rather than means or instruments of faithfulness, the people fall into idolatry and the land and nation can be lost.

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The prophets selected portions of the Torah to warn the people against violating the Torah. A verse in this regard occurs in Leviticus 18-20, where various sins and abuses are listed, followed by this powerful clause: [If you violate these laws] “the land itself will vomit you out” (Lev. 20:22). When Christian leaders such as Mike Huckabee, the new US Ambassador to Israel, states that Israel has a right to all of the West Bank and uses the Hebrew “Judea and Samaria” for the Palestinian territory, he falls into the problem of idolatry. Perhaps worse is his claim that there are no Palestinians.

Idolatry violates the first and most basic commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” The “idols” may be greed, dishonesty, sexual abuse, or placing the state, the land, the military, or the concept of security above God. Christian and Jewish Zionists today risk violations of the First Commandment through their unconditional support for the state of Israel and the IDF in the present genocidal war, the theft of land from Palestinians, and the brutal military occupation and apartheid system.

The Crime of “Unseeing:” Jesus and the Hebrew prophets repeatedly warned their disciples and other followers that “those who have eyes to see, let them see” (Isaiah 6:9-13). On one occasion Jesus delivered a parable but the disciples and larger audience seemed to miss the point. Jesus responded, “Seeing they do not see; and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Matthew 13:13). Jesus was talking about the Kingdom of God, a deeper and higher consciousness where love and justice reign. God’s Kingdom is an alternative dimension of reality that challenges the power of the Roman Empire and its values (and for that matter all empires including the United States) that exploit the poor and powerless.

In today’s haunting climate of Israel’s genocidal war in Palestine and Lebanon, both Christian and Jewish Zionist leaders fail to see Palestinians as human beings. Netanyahu and many Christian Zionists dismiss Palestinians, seeing them as Amalek or the Philistines – or consider every Gazan to be Hamas and expendable. The mainstream media and Western politicians ignore Palestinian humanity, refusing to allow Palestinians to tell their own stories, such as when the Democratic convention did not allow a Palestinian state legislator to speak. Western media, Western politicians, and most Western churches continue the practice of “unseeing” Palestinians.

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The prophetic witness of the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, and the Qur'an reject the practice of deliberate or unconscious "unseeing." Palestinians have names and stories, and they are at risk of total annihilation in the Gaza Strip today. Those who truly hear their cries and take a stand for justice are practicing the values of the Kingdom where truth, dignity, and the value of human life are preserved. Not only have our political leaders failed us, whether in Israel, Europe, or North America, but so have our religious institutions, media, and much of academia.

Judaism, Zionism, and Israel: Understanding the Differences

Zionism is a political ideology that developed in the nineteenth century to articulate Jewish aspirations for a Jewish state. It is a political movement that utilizes religious ideas to advance its political goals. When Zionism emerged in the late nineteenth century, religious Jews did not support it because it violated their Jewish faith. Zionism followed a particular form of nationalism popular at the time called "romantic" or "blood nationalism" (Germany for the Germans). These models of nationalism are based on ethnonationalism, prioritizing a particular ethnic group above others, in this case, Jews over Palestinian Arabs. When Herzl convened the First World Zionist Congress in August 1897, the population ratio in Palestine was 94% Palestinian Muslims and Christians to 5% Palestinian Jews. All three communities, including the relatively small Palestinian Jewish community (Sabras) lived together in peace. They attended each other's holidays and were troubled by the Zionist ideology calling for "a land of no people for a people with no land." It was clear from the outset that for Herzl and his followers to achieve their goal of a Jewish state, they would need to drive out the indigenous Palestinian majority.

Today the nonviolent resistance in the United States to the US-Israeli genocide against the Palestinians is in part led by courageous anti-Zionist Jews. Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow, and other Jewish organizations have led protest movements in many cities. In Chicago, many of the leaders are affiliated with one of the first anti-Zionist synagogues in the United States, appropriately named Tzedek (Justice). Tzedek's mission statement distinguishes it from other synagogues, the majority of which support Zionism:

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Founded in 2015, we are an intentional Jewish congregation based on core values of justice, equity and solidarity. In our educational programs, celebrations and liturgy, we emphasize the Torah's central narrative of liberation, the prophetic imperative to speak truth to power, and an expansive vision of the diaspora as a fertile place of Jewish creativity and possibility.¹⁶

Despite being denounced by leading pro-Israel Jewish organizations as self-hating Jews, or even antisemitic, organizer Elena Stein states: "There is nothing antisemitic about fighting for people's right to live." Stein also discusses the value of mass protest, such as calling for an Israeli arms embargo and an end to war profiteering by companies like Raytheon and Lockheed Martin. "We are filled with horror beyond words and are attempting to embody just an ounce of that refusal," Stein says of the moral urgency of protesting Israel's actions in the Middle East, which she describes as a "war of extermination...done with US cover."¹⁷

The time is long overdue for Christian denominations to follow the lead of Tzedek and Jewish Voice for Peace and officially declare Christian Zionism "out of order," or a "status confessionis," a technical theological term that determines a movement or ideology is incongruent with the historic teachings of the Christian faith. It was applied to Nazi ideology during World War II and to the white, racist apartheid regime in South Africa during the 1970s to the 1990s. Christian denominations and organizations must take a principled stance and reject the dangerous teachings of Christian Zionism and declare it a heresy – a partial truth that has emptied the message of Christianity and masquerades as if it were an authentic representation of the tradition.

I had the privilege of meeting Rev. Dr. John Stott on several occasions in the 1980s and 1990s. He was one of the leading evangelical Christians on a global level and a guiding light of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, the largest international Christian organization of that era. John was an inspiring preacher, author, and leader of people and movements. We sat down during a conference in Chicago and discussed Zionism and Christian Zionism. I asked him to discuss his perspective on the state of Israel, biblical Israel, and the question of Zionism and Christian Zionism.

16. Tzedek Mission Statement: <https://www.tzedekchicago.org/>

17. "'Stop Profiting Off Genocide': 200 Arrested at Jewish Voice for Peace Protest at NY Stock Exchange," *DemocracyNow!*, October 15, 2024, https://www.democracynow.org/2024/10/15/jvp_protest_new_york_stock_exchange.

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Stott responded without hesitation: “I view Zionism and Christian Zionism as being biblically anathema.” He rejected both ideologies as they make false claims and lead to a distorted reading of the Bible. His sermon, “Four Meanings of Israel in the Bible,” describes four different uses of Israel in the Bible, none of which point to a modern state. For example, “Israel” is a name change for the Patriarch Jacob, which means “one who wrestles with God.” Israel is used for the 12 tribes (of Israel) in the pre-monarchy period and later refers to the Northern Kingdom of Israel that fell to the Assyrian Empire. Finally, there is the new Israel, which is a metaphor of the church in the New Testament.

Stott noted the confusion that exists in Christian churches, theological seminaries, and Christian denominations that fail to distinguish Israel in the Bible from the modern Zionist state. He said, “Our hymns, liturgical prayers, even Christmas carols proclaim, ‘O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.’” Most clergy and Christian Zionist organizations and leading Jewish organizations conflate the modern state with biblical Israel, creating the false assumption that they are the same.

Fortunately, some Protestant denominations are beginning to rectify this problem with strong resolutions at their annual assemblies, but to date the resolutions have not filtered down to the local parish or the seminaries and universities. There is a growing body of theological literature including books and statements by Palestinian Christian leaders such as Rev. Mitri Raheb, Rev. Munther Isaac, Rev. Naim Ateek, and organizations like the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem, Christ at the Checkpoint in Bethlehem, and Kairos Palestine, whose Kairos Palestine document of 2009 provides a correct theological analysis.

Conclusion

On October 28, 2024, the South African legal team filed a nearly 5,000-page document with the International Court of Justice documenting how Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. This report provides a factual account, with full documentation, and makes a strong legal case that Israel is committing an intentional genocide. However, the United States, Israel, and some European countries have imposed an intense bullying campaign on the judges and the courts, seeking to silence the ICJ from rendering a final decision. In addition to the pressure on the courts, some US legislators

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continue to support Israel's genocide and encourage present levels of US financial support of the Israeli military, despite polling that shows a majority of the US electorate opposes this use of their tax dollars. Many of the legislators supporting US/Israel approach their decision with some version of the Christian Zionist narrative. For example, US Senator Lindsey Graham told Netanyahu, "We're in a religious war – do whatever the hell you have to do to defend yourself. Level the place." Former presidential candidate and US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, also a Christian Zionist, said to "eliminate" Hamas and Gaza's Palestinians.¹⁸

Rep Bob Good (R-Va.), another Christian Zionist legislator, told the Washington Post that he considers Israel "one of our most important allies on the world stage" and called for Congress to continue to stand with the Jewish state "as it defends itself against this evil."¹⁹ Republican Speaker of the House Mike Johnson said his policy views on Israel come straight from "the Bible off the shelf," which he interprets through a Christian Zionist worldview.

These legislators and many others believe the United States should continue to fund Israel's war on the Gaza Strip and on Palestinians more broadly, as well as its expanding violence into Lebanon, Syria, and beyond. Indeed, once legislators adopt a Christian Zionist interpretive screen it influences how they think about modern Israel and the Palestinians and leads them to the political conclusion that they must support Israeli settler colonial aggression, even if it is declared a war crime and genocide according to international law.

Both Christian and Jewish political Zionists can lead their followers to a form of idolatry that normalizes the modern state of Israel while it is committing genocide. Such is the direction of the Israeli government under Netanyahu, who welcomes the political and economic support of the United States and its Christian and Jewish Zionist leaders. However, these leaders fail to consider the fact that Israel today is one of the least secure places for Jews to live. Moreover, the present genocide is creating a new generation of enemies in Palestine,

18. "Evangelicals are Fed Up with the House GOP's Israel Aid Holdouts," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2024/04/13/evangelicals-israel-gaza-republicans/>.

19. "Freedom Caucus Chair Faces Primary Peril," *Washington Post*, March 28, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/03/28/freedom-caucus-chair-faces-primary-peril/>.

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Lebanon, and across the Arab and Muslim world. Israel will never be safe until it ends its occupation, withdraws from the Gaza Strip and all the territory it occupies, and makes peace with the Palestinians based on a political formula that guarantees justice for all people.

Hanging in the balance today is the testimony of the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, the Prophet Muhammad, international law, and all other religious traditions that teach justice, dignity, and the sanctity of every human life. Equal value of all human life is the foundation for a just peace; otherwise, chaos will reign with repeating cycles of violence and new wars leading to more genocide. Today the international community is at a crisis point where the global world order, based on international law, is at risk of collapse. Authoritarian regimes are on the rise in the United States, Israel, Hungary, Russia, and other parts of Europe. If Israel, and the United States, continue to get away with genocide, all respect for international law will be obliterated.

The genocide in Gaza may be one of the last chances for the nations of the world to unite and take a stand in favor of upholding the body of international law, written after the Nazi Holocaust and in which states declared, “Never again will genocide occur to anyone.” How ironic that the state of Israel, created after the nightmare of the gas chambers and genocide of World War II, is now the nation that violates the international law that was established to end all future genocides. Israel’s primary advocate, the United States, is not innocent and will have to answer for its complicity in enabling the crime of genocide, distinguishing itself as equally guilty.

Could the Palestinians become the harbingers of a future world order that says no to genocide and demands justice for the Palestinians as well as all others who are oppressed, or will this be another missed opportunity to change the present course of history? If we miss this chance to uphold world order the next genocide in the region will be around the corner. It may be the Palestinians in East Jerusalem or the West Bank, where the machine of death has already been set in motion.

Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, the pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Palestine, reminds us of the way forward:

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The irony for us Palestinian Christians, is that Evangelicals with their overemphasis on prophecy, have lost the capacity of being prophetic. You want to prove that the Bible is right? You don't do this by pointing to self-fulfilling prophecies or by pointing to world events as prophecy fulfillment. This is not how you prove the Bible is right. We prove that the Bible is right by radical obedience to the teachings of Jesus – by proving that Jesus' teachings actually work and that they can make the world a better place. Let us love our enemies. Forgive those who sin against us. Let us feed the poor. Care for the oppressed. Walk the extra mile. Be inclusive, not exclusive. Turn the other cheek. And maybe, and only maybe then, the world will take us seriously and believe in our Bible.²⁰

The first step toward realizing adherence to God's laws is ending the genocide in Gaza. Rev. Munther's wisdom from Palestine applies not only to Christians, but to all of us, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, to peoples of any faith or no faith at all. If we are not practicing our respective faith with those who are most at risk, the least of these our sisters and brothers in Palestine and Israel, we are failing God, failing ourselves, and failing to secure a just future for our children and grandchildren.

20. Rev. Munther Isaac, *Facebook*, November 17, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10160892651507893&set=a.10150378725227893>.

Selling Biblical Fantasies:



How Jewish and Christian Zionists Interrupt Black-Palestinian Solidarity

By Atalia Omer and James William Thompson

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“America is a thing you can move very easily, move it in the right direction. They won’t get in [the] way.” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is heard uttering these words in a video recording of an informal meeting with settlers in 2001.¹ These words capture Netanyahu’s attitude and Israel’s approach to public diplomacy or *hasbara*, that is, the political praxis of an array of Zionist organizations and actors but also an official Israeli governmental focus on how to brand (or literally explain) Israel’s actions that appear oppressive toward Palestinians as not only necessary but also reflective of Israel’s essential innocence and goodness.

The effectiveness of Jewish Zionist *hasbara* orchestrated by dedicated Israeli ministries is often underwritten by Christian Zionist agendas. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, and other *hasbara* channels have worked because of the persistence of orientalism, Islamophobia, Christian Zionism, and exclusionary White Christian nationalism, which thrives on White supremacy, anti-Black racism, and evangelical eschatological Zionism. Perhaps ironically, then, the most entrenched *hasbara* channels are predominantly White Christian organizations such as Christians United for Israel (CUFI), with its ten million members.

At the same time, as the “Reject AIPAC” coalition that emerged amid the genocide in Gaza communicates, *hasbara* has eroded because of organic forms of solidarity among marginalized and racialized people. The urgency of the genocidal moment accelerated the intergenerational shifts in the Democratic party (against which AIPAC mobilizes aggressively) as well as among Jews who unlearn their Zionism as they enter Palestine solidarity spaces.²

1. Glenn Kessler, “Analysis | Netanyahu: ‘America Is a Thing You Can Move Very Easily,’” *Washington Post*, October 24, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2010/07/16/netanyahu-america-is-thing-you-can-move-very-easily/>.

2. Akela Lacy, “AIPAC Targets Black Democrats – While the Congressional Black Caucus Stays Silent,” *The Intercept*, September 21, 2023, <https://theintercept.com/2023/09/21/aipac-cbc-progressive-black-democrats/>. One of AIPAC’s targets was Cori Bush (D-MO), who as a result of AIPAC’s meddling lost her primary election. For a speech by Bush after her loss that outlines AIPAC’s involvement, see her interview with Marc Lamont Hill, “Upfront” *Al-Jazeera*, October 18, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neXdcOS4Bt4>. For an examination of Jews unlearning their Zionism, see Atalia Omer, *Days of Awe: Reimagining Jewishness in Solidarity with Palestinians* (University of Chicago Press, 2019).

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This article examines the discursive *hasbara* technologies used to manufacture nonorganic Black American Christian Zionism. Throughout the article we use *hasbara* as a shorthand to denote the convergences of actors, institutions, public diplomacy, and other Zionist agendas or actors who opportunistically benefit from promoting such agendas.

Christian and Jewish Zionist organizations and actors seek to deflate the symbolic, metaphorical power of the liberation of Palestine for formerly and currently colonized and racialized people. Therefore, *hasbara*'s relationship-building programs and advocacy seek to manufacture Jewish-Black solidarity. They do so by circumventing anti-Black racism and clinging to an ahistorical, reenacted biblical fantasy inattentive to historical realities of Palestinian dispossession born out of a political project rooted in Europe. Holy land tourism (such as "birthright" tourism for Jewish youth along with other forms of *hasbara* tourism aimed at different sectors) is a pivotal mechanism for strategic investment designed to control the narrative about Israel.³

Like other marginalized communities in the Global South, Black churches and leaders are targeted for such tourism intended to solidify a commitment to Zionism, connecting it to a depoliticized and ahistorical account of Jewish-Palestinian solidarity during the civil rights movement. Such targeting of marginalized communities globally counters their potential organic links to the Palestinian struggle when framed through categories such as settler colonialism, apartheid, military occupation, and White supremacy, leaving these groups to embrace these ideologies rather than combat them.

Roger Baumann's recent sociological study focuses on divergent Black churches' relations to Palestinian or Jewish Israeli political claims, arguing that the divergence reflects the Black Church itself as a contested relational sociological space.⁴ Indeed, the analysis of Black religion in America should be refracted through an intersectional prism, disrupting any essentializing characterization of "the Black Church." Yet, the study of Black Christian Zionism needs to proceed cautiously with attentiveness to its underlying political economy

3. See, for instance, Shaul Kelner, *Tours that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism* (NYU Press, 2012). For a critical engagement, see Emily Schneider, "Negotiating Indigeneity in Hebron: Criminality, Tourism, and Liberal Settler Colonialism," in *Settler-Indigeneity in the West Bank*, ed. Rachel Z. Feldman and Ian McGonigle (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 153-191.

4. Roger Baumann, *Black Visions of the Holy Land: African American Christian Engagement with Israel and Palestine* (Columbia University Press, 2024).

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and vulnerability to *hasbara* spins rather than simply accepting uncritically as a given that some Black churches harbor Zionist theological and ideological outlooks. In contrast, the Palestinian struggle for freedom resonates with others.

Based on a scrutiny of testimonies and promotional material of Zionist actors targeting Black American sectors, our findings suggest that the more Zionist Black churches and publics are, the less politicized they are on racism in the US context. In other words, it is in the interest of White supremacist agendas to redirect (often through underwriting a variety of Holy Land excursions and other “solidarity” activities) Black churches toward Zionism. Black Christian Zionism then also offers a fig leaf for Jewish Zionists’ convergences with White nationalists and neoconservative forces, specifically through a decontextualized retrieval of Martin Luther King Jr.’s Zionist legacy.

Considering the confluence of Zionism with White supremacy, a narrative spin must be in place for Black publics to support an ethnoreligious supremacist political project as not only redemptive for Jews but also connecting to their own Black American experiences. This narrative spin relies predominantly on selling biblical fantasies predicated on dulling the edges of Black political consciousness and mobilizing accusations of antisemitism to promote a veneer of anti-racism. This spin operates discursively by gaslighting Palestinian experiences of the Nakba, uprootedness, military occupation, apartheid, and geocide as Jewish “self-defense.” Instead of interrogating Zionism’s reliance on White supremacy, *hasbara* seeks to manufacture Jewish-Black solidarity.

In what follows we first examine the collusion of *hasbara* with White Christian nationalisms and neoconservative forces. This convergence points to why, for Israel or Zionism to sustain Black American support, Black-Jewish solidarity must be manufactured. This invention is accomplished through an array of tactics such as appeals to the “prosperity gospel,” a propensity for “mission and charity,” “Mizrahi-washing,” the weaponization of antisemitism, and the creation of an ahistoric sense of “shared values” and “shared experiences” through biblical and Holocaust tourism.

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The Puzzle

If Zionism is increasingly a White Nationalist Christian Issue, how can it also be a Black Christian issue? While seeking to spin itself as anti-racist and progressive, Zionist *hasbara* as the storyline designed to promote Israel's narrative and protect it from demands for policy changes increasingly allies itself not only with White ethnoreligious nationalist forces but also with a neoconservative agenda. The links to conservative forces within the American landscape can be interpreted tactically under the old logic of “my enemies’ enemies are my friends.”

Culture warriors have gained power since abortion was recognized as constitutional in 1973 and have allied themselves over the decades with exclusionary and racist forces, gaining momentum during the first Trump administration of 2016-2020 and subsequent shifts he delivered for neoconservative sectors via the composition of the Supreme Court and the eventual overturning of reproductive rights in 2023 along with a broader assault on gender, racial, and economic justice. That the *hasbara* spin is predicated on orientalism and Islamophobia (with *hasbara* Islamophobic campaigns marking the years of the “war on terror”) intimates its reliance on White supremacy.⁵

This imbrication reached absurdity when Donald Trump said in a reelection campaign speech in March 2024 that Jews who vote for Democrats are “very disloyal to Israel”⁶ and that “any Jewish person that votes for Democrats hates their religion...They hate everything about Israel.” Considering that during his presidency Trump echoed Nazi discourse and surrounded himself with actual Nazi sympathizers with affinities to far-right European movements such as Sebastian Gorka, who has ties to Vitezi Rend (listed by the US State

5. Hatem Bazian, “The Islamophobia Industry and the Demonization of Palestine: Implications for American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2015): 1057–66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43822939>; Santiago Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking* (Springer, 2014).

6. Peter Smith and Tiffany Stanley, “US Jews Upset with Trump’s Latest Rhetoric Say He Doesn’t Get to Tell Them How to Be Jewish,” AP News, March 21, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-jewish-voters-democrats-antisemitism-a43bf6f6266d9c6a4b761b82281aa512>. Shortly after Trump’s remarks, a similar argument was made by longtime Jewish Zionist apologist Alan Dershowitz. Joshua Marks, “‘No Longer Presumption I’ll Vote for Biden,’ Dershowitz Tells JNS,” Jewish News Syndicate, March 27, 2024, <https://www.jns.org/no-longer-presumption-ill-vote-for-biden-dershowitz-tells-jns/>.

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Department as “having been under the direction of the Nazi government of Germany”), along with devout Christian Zionists such as former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who believes that God gave Palestine to the Jews, shows that antisemitism and Zionism are intertwined within the discursive realities of American White nationalist currents.⁷ This is the same Trump who said, “Islam hates us” and who told American Jewish communal leaders: “I love your country,” implying that the US is not really their country and echoing points articulated by Richard Spencer, one of the so-called alt-right’s ideologues.⁸

When laying the groundwork for Trump’s second term, the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank, published Project Esther in its broader Project 2025 playbook, detailing how the second Trump Administration will intersect White Christian supremacy with Christian Zionism in weaponizing the fight against antisemitism as a tool within the broader assault on “wokeness,” Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, and marginalized communities writ large. Activating the anti-terrorism methods developed during the so-called war on terror and its Islamophobic scaffolding, the Christian drafters of the strategy

7. Trump’s advisor Stephen Bannon is also known for his studies of the Nazis’ propaganda playbook. See, for example, J.C. Alexander, “Raging Against the Enlightenment: The Ideology of Steven Bannon,” in *Politics of Meaning/Meaning of Politics: Cultural Sociology of the 2016 US Presidential Election*, ed. J.L. Mast and J.C. Alexander (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95945-0> 8. Regarding echoing Nazi propaganda and ideology, see Peter Wade, “Confronted that His Rhetoric Echoes Nazis, Trump Repeats Racist Attacks on Immigrants,” *Rolling Stone*, March 17, 2024, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/trump-defends-nazi-rhetoric-immigrants-1234989206/>. For a list of instances of invoking Nazi terminology, see Louis Keene and Violent Fearon, “Every Time Donald Trump has Invoked Hitler and the Nazis,” *The Forward*, May 22, 2024, <https://forward.com/fast-forward/615880/donald-trump-hitler-nazi-references/>. On Mike Pompeo’s belief system, see Chris McGreal, “Pompeo Says Israel Has Biblical Claim to Palestine and Is ‘Not an Occupying Nation,’” *The Guardian*, February 16, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/feb/16/mike-pompeo-israel-biblical-claim-palestine-not-occupying>.

8. Jenna Johnson and Abigail Hauslohner, “‘I Think Islam Hates Us’: A Timeline of Trump’s Comments about Islam and Muslims,” *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/05/20/i-think-islam-hates-us-a-timeline-of-trumps-comments-about-islam-and-muslims/>; Oma Seddiq, “‘Textbook Anti-Semitism’: American Jews Condemn Trump for Repeatedly Telling Them that Israel Is ‘Your Country,’” *Business Insider*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/american-jews-condemn-trump-for-saying-israel-is-your-country-2020-9>; Allison Kaplan Sommer and The Associated Press, “White Nationalist Richard Spencer Gives Israel as Example of Ethno-State He Wants in U.S.,” *Haaretz*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/2017-10-19/ty-article/richard-spencer-gives-israel-as-example-of-ethno-state-he-wants-in-u-s/0000017f-db4d-df9c-a17f-ff5df3da0000>.

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appropriate the character of Esther from the Purim story in claiming to “save” Jews, rendering Jewish supporters of Palestinians enablers of a Hamas cabal. Accordingly, White Christian nationalists become the defenders of “the Jews” while dismissing actual Jews.⁹

Further, during the first months of the genocidal assault on Gaza in 2023-2024, Biden articulated a similar Zionist point when he repeatedly said that Jews are only safe because of Israel.¹⁰ This argument generates questions considering the reality of millions of Jewish-American citizens, many of whom became a “*hasbara* problem” due to their intensified Palestine solidarity and anti-Zionism.¹¹ While Trump’s opportunistic antisemitism/philosemitism is grounded in his dog-whistling to White nationalists and Christian Zionists, Biden’s liberal “boomer Zionism” conveys his immersion in a Zionist storyline that conflates Jews with Israel. The implications of their statements are the same, however: Jewish safety and identity depend on and are synonymous with Israel and unquestioning support of its character as a “Jewish state” predicated on ethnic cleansing, settler colonial tactics, and a Jewish Zionist supremacist ideology as enshrined in the Jewish Nation-State Law ratified by the Knesset in 2018.¹²

Identifying, as we do, the coexistence of antisemitism and Zionism in White supremacy, which by definition relies on anti-Black racism, points to the puzzle of Black Zionism. Manufacturing Black Christian Zionism, in other words, depends on an intricate and not organic discursive spin. That solidarity with Palestinians has rearticulated itself as a cornerstone for the global left and a multiplicity of struggles against the ongoing legacies of racism, colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and Islamophobia has turned antisemitism into a

9. For a critical exposition of the strategy outlined in Project Esther, see Jewish Voice for Peace’s Academic Advisory Council, “Rejecting Project Esther: Understanding Christian and White Nationalism as Racism and Antisemitism,” *Contending Modernities*, March 13, 2025.

10. Sophie Hurwitz, “Why Does Biden Keep Making the Same Dangerous Comment about Jews?,” *The Nation*, March 6, 2024, <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/biden-jews-israel-safety/>.

11. See, for an analysis of this current, Omer, *Days of Awe*, and the film “Israelism,” Tikun Olam Productions, co-directed by Erin Axelman and Sam Eilertsen, 2023.

12. For a robust argument that challenges this equation, see Shane Burley and Ben Lorber, *Safety through Solidarity: A Radical Guide to Fighting Antisemitism* (Melville House, 2024); Adalah, “Israel’s Jewish Nation-State Law,” December 20, 2020, <https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/9569>.

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multipronged weapon.¹³ In the hands of White nationalists and neoconservative culture warriors (who we call opportunistic Christian Zionists), antisemitism silences Jewish and non-Jewish critics of Israeli policies and Zionism writ large through the transvaluation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which “prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance,” using it as a convenient weapon to assault minorities and marginalized communities under the guise of fighting against hate, or what Darryl Li calls the weaponization of anti-racism.¹⁴ An aggressive Israeli and Zionist public diplomacy in the US, in other words, erodes the democratic fabric of the American ethos and retools hard-fought legal protection mechanisms such as Title VI to define them not as legitimate criticisms of racist Israeli policies and military occupation and plausible genocide but as censorable and punishable expressions of hate, racism, and discrimination.

At the time of this writing in the early months of the second Trump administration, we see the activation of Project Esther’s legal and legislative strategy of intersecting the weaponization of Title VI with an antecedent anti-terrorism legal infrastructure including the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. Additionally, the promotion of new legislation such as Stop Terror-Financing and Tax Penalties on American Hostages Act, also known as the Non-Profit Killer Bill, promises to revoke the tax-exempt status of any organization that provides “material support” to terrorism. This convergence of weaponized antisemitism and Islamophobic anti-terrorism discourse effectively renders everyone in the pro-Palestine solidarity space a “terrorist,” placing activists and their organizations in legal jeopardy. Opportunistic Christian Zionism also relies on theological Christian Zionist discourse, such as in the introduction of the Judea and Samaria Act by Representative Claudia Tenney (R-New York) in March 2024 and in its recognition by Senator Tom Cotton (R-Arizona) in December 2024. The bill calls for the erasure of the words “West Bank” in government documents in favor of the “Biblical names” of Judea and Samaria.¹⁵

13. The discussion of the significance of Palestine in global social justice mobilization and the legacy of Third World anti-colonial struggles is beyond the scope of this article. For an important contribution, see Noura Erakat, “Geographies of Intimacy: Contemporary Renewals of Black-Palestinian Solidarity,” *American Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2020): 471-496, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/aq.2020.0027>.

14. Darryl Li, “The Rise and Fall of Baby Boomer Zionism,” *Hammer & Hope*, No. 3, Spring 2024, <https://hammerandhope.org/article/boomer-zionism>.

15. Rep. Tenney, Claudia, “Recognizing Judea and Samaria Act,” March 5, 2024, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/7552>; Sen. Cotton, Tom, “Recognizing Judea and Samaria Act,” December 5, 2024, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/5431/titles>.

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Yet regardless of the consolidation of religiopolitical conditions favorable to *hasbara*, the long months of livestreamed genocide in Gaza have shifted American public opinion.¹⁶

Worried about a narrative loss and the organic ties marginalized and racialized Americans experience vis-à-vis the Palestinian struggle, *hasbara*, despite its increased association with White Christian nationalists, seeks to convince Black and Brown (in addition to LGBTQI+) communities around the world that Zionism and Israel embody anti-racism and share an affinity with Black and other struggles of marginalized people. The Zionist spin of aggression and oppression as victimhood and self-defense gaslights Palestinian experiences and manipulates the biblical imagination about Jews.

Biblical Disney

Hasbara's tactics, therefore, include disrupting the organic formation of friendships and coalitions, which also explains why *hasbara* is instrumentalized by White supremacists and neoconservative culture warriors, as evidenced by the formation of opportunistic multidirectional relations between Zionist *hasbara* activists and intellectuals such as the Israeli-American Yoram Hazony and Patrick J. Deneen, a Catholic critic of liberalism and proponent of an embrace of or return to traditionalism and communal bonds to disrupt liberal individualism.¹⁷

Hazony's intellectual work echoes nineteenth century's racialized accounts of nationalism, and his activist work involved the formation of the National Conservatism Conference (NatCon) featuring the work of Deneen, who is also cited as one of the ideologues of the Republican Party under the framework of Trumpism.¹⁸ NatCon featured speakers have

16. To see the sharp decline of support as reflected in polls, see Megan Brennan, "Less Than Half in U.S. Now Sympathetic Toward Israelis " Gallup, March 6, 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/657404/less-half-sympathetic-toward-israelis.aspx>.

17. See, for instance, Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed?* (Yale University Press, 2018).

18. Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (Basic Books, 2018). See also Suzanne Schneider, "Light Among the Nations," *Jewish Currents*, September 28, 2023, <https://jewishcurrents.org/light-among-the-nations>.

Schneider traces how Hazony exports a Zionist/Israeli brand of Judeo-centric supremacist accounts of nationalism to far-right political activists in Italy, France, Germany, the United States, and other sites that deploy a similar neoconservative playbook.

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included Vice President JD Vance, Tucker Carlson (an American conservative political commentator), Josh Hawley (the US Senator from Missouri who endorsed Trumpism and neoconservatism), Giorgia Meloni (Italian prime minister since 2022 and a longtime activist in neo-fascist political circles), Ron DeSantis (the Republican governor of Florida since 2019), and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, among others associated with a global conservative agenda around “family values” and White supremacy. The inclusion of Orbán, whose antisemitism is undisputed considering his active campaigns against George Soros, in NatCon, a network associated with the leadership of the Jewish Israeli American Hazony, is telling of the instrumental character of the relationship between neoconservatives, right-wing populists, and Jewish and Christian Zionists.

Relatedly, *hasbara* activists do not just embrace antisemitic actors on account of their Zionism (who are also, like Orbán, informed by Deneen’s work against “gender ideology”) but also “defenders” of Jews such as Republican Representative Elise Stefanik of New York.¹⁹ The latter has flirted with the racist anti-Black “Great Replacement Theory” in which Jews are instrumental in facilitating a massive demographic shift to replace Whites by people of color.²⁰ This “theory” provided the impetus for the killer in the 2018 mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh.²¹ Stefanik’s aggressive questioning of

19. Eszter Kováts, “Post-Socialist Conditions and the Orbán Government’s Gender Politics between 2010 and 2019 in Hungary,” in *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond*, ed. Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth (transcript, 2020), 75-100, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839449806-005>.

20. Stefanik’s adherence to the racist theory that circulates transnationally among right-wing populists was widely reported on when she spoke about the Democrats flooding the country with immigrants with the intention to accomplish demographic reengineering. For example, see Ryan Bort, “High-Ranking Republican Pushes ‘Great Replacement’ Rhetoric Two Days after White Supremacist Mass Shooting,” *Rolling Stone*, May 16, 2022, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/elise-stefanik-great-replacement-buffalo-shooter-1354054/>.

21. US Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs, “Pennsylvania Man Charged with Federal Hate Crimes for Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting,” October 31, 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/pennsylvania-man-charged-federal-hate-crimes-tree-life-synagogue-shooting>. For an analysis of the role of the “replacement theory” in this mass shooting event, see Ben A. Popp, “The Truth is Everywhere: Reconceptualizing Far-Right Conspiracy Theories in the Information Age,” University of Chicago MA thesis, 2022.

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the three female university presidents in December 2023, presumably in the name of Jewish safety, used *hasbara* talking points that conflate criticism of Israel and legitimate expression of Palestine solidarity on campuses with antisemitism.²²

The post-October 7 moment, therefore, enabled political actors with right-wing anti-Black White supremacist leanings to deploy opportunistically the banner of “defenders against antisemitism” to promote a broader assault on “wokeness” in the academy. The opportunistic Zionism of political actors such as Stefanik, cross-fertilized with neoconservative affinities such as between Deneen and Hazony, exposes why Zionism functions as a convenient fig leaf for White supremacy and neoconservative forces – that is, opportunistic Christian Zionists – and the kind of spin needed to brand Israel and Zionism as a progressive issue.²³

Hasbara formation, too, has relied on “market research,” or an intimate knowledge of the American landscape, including racial and religious terrains. These terrains, along with other margins such as LGBTQI+ communities, have become targets for outreach and *hasbara* as part of a broader “counter-insurgency” strategy in the Global South.²⁴ This *hasbara* targeting is why Black Zionist church communities require a careful tracing of how Black American churches and actors within Black American spaces enact or disrupt the Zionist imagination, especially when it colludes with White supremacy. Because *hasbara* is fixated on controlling narratives rather than on changing policies, *hasbara* strategists have worried about the formation of alliances that threaten the traction of redemptive/innocence or self-defense/victim Zionist narratives.

22. Stefanik’s “press release” on the hearing questioning university presidents on December 5, 2023: <https://stefanik.house.gov/2023/12/icymi-stefanik-questions-college-presidents-on-the-rise-of-antisemitism-on-their-campuses-receiving-funds-from-foreign-entities-and-their-lack-of-support-for-the-jewish-communities-on-campuses>

23. For this affinity, see also Hayim Katsman, “Post-Religious-Zionism: Alternative Ideas of Jewish Statism in the Writings of Moshe Koppel,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 41, no. 2 (2023): 58-79.

24. For a profound analysis of pinkwashing and a nuanced critical engagement, see Sa’ed Atshan, *Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique* (Stanford University Press, 2020).

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Therefore, through calculated strategizing formed in the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Diaspora Affairs in coordination and consultation with various think tanks, research centers, and Christian and Jewish Zionist networks, *hasbara* technologies situate the defense of Zionism in juxtaposition to racial, economic, reproductive, and other justice struggles. This assimilates Jews-qua-Zionism into a broader White nationalism culture wars' exclusionary agenda. At the same time, *hasbara's* interest in narrating Jews-qua-Israel as an eternal victim, activating Holocaust piety to authorize claims for "self-defense," requires manufacturing affinities with oppressed and marginalized communities, including with Black Americans who are otherwise the key targets of the White supremacist discourse with which Zionists ally.

Due to this paradoxical discursive maneuvering, a manufactured Black-Jewish solidarity amounts necessarily to non-organic top-down curated programs and investments in recovering a fantastical vision of Jewish-Black and Jewish-Christian fellowship. Because of the focus on controlling a narrative, *hasbara's* interest is to retain the status of Israel and Zionism on the level of ahistorical and biblical fantasies. The fantasy has entailed the denial and erasure of concrete and historical Palestinian presence and links to the land. Visits to the land itself, one of the mechanisms designed to reinforce Christian and Jewish Zionisms, are curated as tours of a biblical Disneyland almost indistinguishable from the vast array of Holy Land parks in the United States.²⁵ The land as fantasy is also a product of material investments, epistemological forms of violence, and Palestinian displacement and erasure.²⁶

25. See, for instance, Helena Chmielewska-Szlajfer, "'Authentic Experience' and Manufactured Entertainment: Holy Land Experience Religious Theme Park," *Polish Sociological Review* 200, no. 4 (2017): 545-558. See also Sean Durbin, "'It is What It is': Mythmaking and Identity Formation on a Christian Zionist Tour of Israel," in *Christian Tourist Attractions, Mythmaking, and Identity Formation*, ed. Erin Roberts and Jennifer Eyl (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

26. See, for instance, Saree Makdisi, *Tolerance Is a Wasteland: Palestine and the Culture of Denial* (1st ed.) (University of California Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2ks6v99>. See also Jennifer Maidrand, *Excavating Promised Land: The Geopolitics of Scriptualization in Palestine-Israel* (Fordham University Press, forthcoming).

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A prime example is the archeological dig of the “City of David” in occupied East Jerusalem, sponsored mainly by American Zionist settlers’ foundations, not unlike the settlement organizations that also participate in the ongoing displacement of Palestinians from their homes in their city. The weaponization of the science of biblical archeology (itself a science born in the colonial frame) destroys Palestinian presence and history,²⁷ demolishing layers of life in the city²⁸ to make claims of Jewish indigeneity.²⁹ The designs of the city have already transformed its materiality to create a biblical experience that seeks to omit and obscure Palestinian realities. This erasure is accomplished, among other techniques, through constructing cable cars that will take tourists/pilgrims from the Mount of Olives to the “City of David,” rerouting the entrance to the Old City to bypass the site of Palestinian lives. Such weaponization of biblical archeology and urban design operates throughout Palestine/Israel, turning real places into Zionist (biblical) fantasies and Palestinian dislocation and nightmares.³⁰ Yet, biblical tourism also has dimensions that intentionally show the “real” Israel, activating the prosperity gospel and mission discourse, as well as a narrative around shared Black-Jewish values and experiences of suffering. All these discursive tactics serve to populate ahistorical and depoliticized images of Israel, pivotal for manufacturing a narrative about Jewish-Black solidarity. Constructing and maintaining Biblical fantasies, therefore, are the mechanisms for enhancing Black-Zionist affinity and dulling the edges of Black political consciousness.

27. Wendy Pullan and Maximilian Gwiazda, “‘City of David’: Urban Design and Frontier Heritage,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 29, no. 39 (2009), https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jq-articles/39_Pullan_City_of_David_O.pdf.

28. Nadia Abu El Haj, “Translating Truths: Nationalism, the Practice of Archaeology, and the Remaking of Past and Present in Contemporary Jerusalem,” *American Ethnologist* 25, no. 2 (1998): 166–188, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1998.25.2.166>.

29. See also Emek Shaveh, “Wartime Developments in Old City Basin Carry Gave Implications for Palestinian Rights and the Political Future of Jerusalem,” December 21, 2023, <https://emekshaveh.org/en/wartime-developments/>.

30. There is a long history of Jewish secular Zionist fascination with biblical archeology. See, for example, Raz Kletter, “A Very General Archaeologist – Moshe Dayan and Israeli Archaeology,” *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 4 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2002.v4.a5>.

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When Black-American journalist and public intellectual, Ta-Nehisi Coates, traveled to the West Bank in the spring of 2023, he was immediately transported to the memory of Jim Crow America inscribed on his body when he saw roads and streets for Jews only.³¹ For Black pastors to travel in Palestine/Israel and not see themselves and their intergenerational scars in the suffering of Palestinians in empirical realities of domination and racism, confined into ever-shrinking Bantustans, requires a significant contortion accomplished through ahistoric fantastical readings of the biblical script and their own racialized realities.³²

Furthermore, these pastors and, subsequently, members in their congregations back home affirm their solidarity with Israel through extensive and highly coordinated reporting-back ambassadorial and fundraising mechanisms. Each pastor attending free or highly subsidized holy land tours must host dinners to offset CUFI's cost through offerings. Likewise, local Africa Nights to Honor Israel, inaugurated in 2017, raise money for CUFI and emphasize African communities' relationship with Israel. For example, an Africa Night in a midwestern location in 2024 attracted "over six hundred people from multiple Christian and Jewish congregations to join in solidarity with Israel and emphasize the love and connection from the African communities." This gala, one of many across the United States, raised \$25,000 for CUFI's work on campuses and for Israel's Emergency Campaign.³³

Prosperity Gospel & the "Real Israel"

While targeting Black churches and other publics activate biblical fantasies, this formation of Black Christian Zionism differs from the conventional Protestant dispensational theology

31. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Message* (One World, 2024). For Coates' seeing himself in Palestinian realities, see *Democracy Now!*, "Ta-Nehisi Coates Speaks Out against Israel's 'Segregationist Apartheid Regime' after West Bank Visit," November 2, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df_u7yJj3k.

32. For an analysis of how progressive Black Christians who undergo travel to Palestine see themselves as "journeying among the margins," see Roger Baumann and Sara A Williams, "Journeys to and among the Margins: Transnational Religio-Racial Identity on American Christian Palestinian Solidarity Tours," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 91, no. 3 (September 2023), 581-604, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfae016>.

33. For other examples of ubiquitous "love offerings," see CUFI, "December 3 - Israel Is - Collinsville, IL," Christians United for Israel, accessed June 9, 2024, <https://cufi.org/issue/december-3-israel-is-collinsville-il/>; CUFI, "December 10 - Israel Is - Northbend, OR," Christians United for Israel, accessed June 9, 2024, <https://cufi.org/issue/december-10-israel-is-northbend-or/>; CUFI, "November 19 - SWI - Redding, CA," Christians United for Israel, accessed June 9, 2024, <https://cufi.org/issue/november-19-swi-redding-ca/>.

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that has characterized evangelical forms of Christian Zionism. Dispensationalism refers to a theological set of beliefs that consolidated in the nineteenth century though it has deeper roots in the Protestant Reformation.³⁴ It entails a belief in distinct eras of God's intervention in human history. Oriented by eschatological or end time cataclysmic visions of great tribulations, dispensationalist modes of Christian Zionism pivot around the fulfilment of God's prophecy to "return" the Jews to the Land of Zion, apocalyptic violence, and the eventual Second Coming of Jesus as a vengeful warrior at which time Jews will either convert or perish.

Sociologist Roger Baumann examines how Black American Christian Zionist churches downplay racialized experiences and dispensationalism, which characterize White evangelical Christian Zionist theologies, in favor of promoting the prosperity gospel in articulating their support of Israel and rejecting the Black American legacy of Palestine solidarity as misguided.³⁵ The late American-born Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, founder of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, or IFCJ (established in 1983), developed a discursive strategy aimed at "cultivating" Black Americans as Zionists. The IFCJ is a Jewish Israeli-led organization underwritten by American Christian and Jewish donors that promotes a charity approach to marginalized Israelis as part of broader Zionist advocacy "mission" work. It relies on a prosperity gospel frame, complementing but often eclipsing the prophecy-centric frame based on theology that interprets the moment eschatologically.

The prosperity gospel centers on Genesis 12.3 ("If you bless Israel, you will be blessed" as well as the inverse, or "If you curse Israel, you will be cursed"). As a religious current, the prosperity gospel targets impoverished communities with a notion that material prosperity is a function of their piety and that piety is often measured through offerings.³⁶

34. See Robert O. Smith, *More Desired than Our Own Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism* (Oxford University Press, 2013). For a critique from the perspective of a Christian Palestinian, see Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible* (Orbis Press, 2023).

35. Baumann, *Black Visions of the Holy Land*, and Roger Baumann, "Race, Religion, and Global Solidarities: W. E. B. Du Bois and 'The Black Church' as a Contested Category," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 62 (2023): 48-67, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12856>. The prosperity gospel is also operative in poor White evangelical Christian Zionist communities and used cynically by opportunists and *hasbara* actors (see, for instance, its portrayal in Maya Zunstein's "Til Kingdom Come," MetFilm, 2020).

36. For a critical engagement with the prosperity gospel, see Ebenezer Obadare, "'Raising Righteous Billionaires': The Prosperity Gospel Reconsidered," *HTS Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1-8.

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The prosperity gospel, associated with charlatanry, is mobilized to encourage charity actions for impoverished and marginalized Israelis. Black Christian Zionism in America, therefore, especially illuminates how theo-political resources are deployed to render Israel into a fantasy, redirecting Black Americans away from an analysis of racism and their political struggles. This redirection relies on a narrative about Jewish-Black solidarity and the dismissal of Black-Palestinian solidarity as a lie. Reenacted biblical fantasies are sustained through free or highly subsidized tourism.³⁷

Tourism for Black pastors and others includes stops that, on the surface, problematize an image of Israel. On one reported occasion designed by the IFCJ in 2015, a tour itinerary for Black pastors (from the Church of God in Christ, the largest Black Pentecostal denomination and the fourth largest Protestant group in the United States, with over 12,000 members) included meetings in the impoverished South Tel Aviv area with African asylum seekers mainly from Eritrea and Ethiopian Jewish Israelis. Both are racialized, albeit differently, since Ethiopian Jews benefit from a Jewish supremacist regime. Eckstein conveyed that the reason why, in his capacity at the time as IFCJ's president, he included such unpleasant dimensions of Israeli society was to communicate that he was not afraid to show a less-than-perfect picture.

Ironically, showing the “real Israel” contributes to entrenching the fantasy about Israel through activating the prosperity gospel/mission religious praxis engrained in some Black American communities. The visit was a “development” opportunity, too. In practice, seeing “poor Israelis” and helping them through charity proved impactful for Black Christian Zionist tourists. Pastors emerged from this stop in South Tel Aviv with a resolve to help Ethiopian Jewish Israelis, leaving unasked the more penetrating questions regarding the political geography of racialization and how it connects to the history of Zionism as a European movement embedded within an interlinked colonial racialized logic underpinning slavery and ongoing structures of racism in America.³⁸

37. For example, the Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel's PEACE Initiative, which takes pastors and Black young adults to Israel and South Africa, costs \$600 total. IBSI, “Become a PEACE Ambassador,” accessed March 27, 2024, <https://22146571.hs-sites.com/en-us/become-a-peace-ambassador-0-0>. Some agencies that offer similar trips sell them for up to \$4,800. Christians Broadcasting Hope, “Journey to the Holy Land with CBH,” accessed April 1, 2024, <https://www.christiansbroadcastinghope.org/israel-and-jordan>.

38. Ben Sales, “African-American Pastors Meet Israel's African Migrants,” *The Times of Israel*, September 4, 2015, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/african-american-pastors-meet-israels-african-migrants/>.

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Shared Values and Suffering

In addition to mission/charity, biblical fantasies in Black “outreach” are enacted through appeals to “shared values.” For example, the Church of God in Christ boasted in an October 2023 press release that Presiding Bishop J. Drew Sheard of Tennessee was named eighth of Israel’s top fifty Christian allies worldwide. The Israel Allies Foundation recognized him for his work since 2021 when, as a presiding bishop, he became the first to lead an official delegation to Israel intent on “strengthening the bond” between Israel and his church and “promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation.”³⁹ Sheard is the first Black American on the 2023 list, which also includes former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former right-wing populist Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who took first and second place, respectively.⁴⁰ The Israeli Knesset’s members and other officials welcomed with pomp and circumstance Sheard and a large delegation from the Church of God in Christ in 2022, including dozens of bishops, over 150 congregants, and a separate group of Black women in political leadership. In this gathering, Sheard remarked,

Our lots are very similar when it comes to the Jews. Therefore, in order for us to get a greater appreciation for what God is getting ready to do with us, we have to come back home and reacquaint ourselves with the Word of God that has spoken to us prophetically about where we are and where we are going.⁴¹

Sheard’s words telegraph a conception of Israel as a biblical fantasy or “a home” that captures an authentic prophetic (eschatological) divine message for Christians. The program for the event also involved a tokenized Christian-Palestinian interlocutor who urged the visitors to acknowledge and love all the land’s inhabitants and pray for peace. This rhetorical maneuver reflects another depoliticizing twist on the “multicultural washing” of a racialized political geography.

39. Church of God in Christ, “Presiding Bishop Sheard Named to Top 50 Christian Allies List - Church of God in Christ,” October 3, 2023, <https://www.cogic.org/blog/presiding-bishop-sheard-named-to-top-50-christian-allies-list/>.

40. Church of God in Christ, “Presiding Bishop Sheard Named to Top 50 Christian Allies List.”

41. Nicole Jansezian, “Top African-American Pentecostal Bishop Leads Milestone Tour to Israel,” *All Israel News*, September 1, 2022, <https://allisrael.com/top-african-american-pentecostal-pastor-leads-milestone-tour-to-israel>.

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“Race” is invoked abstractly through a reference to slavery and Jewish suffering. Hence, in addition to the motif of “shared values,” which also dominates outreach to White Christian Zionists, activating both the biblical imagination and orientalist undertones of the “Judeo-Christian” American ethos, Black “outreach” taps into a motif of “shared suffering under oppression” by employing a romantic and selective recollection of the civil rights movement of Jewish-American activism.⁴² The cover of one of Eckstein’s *hasbara* pamphlets, for example, features the iconic civil rights movement image of King marching with Abraham Joshua Heschel, an image that is interrogated by contemporary American Jews who resist the deployment of such images to equate the structural experiences of Jews and Blacks (recognizing that there are Black Jews) within the American context.⁴³ Essentially, a storyline that relies on the presumed coming together of two minorities overlooks the different experiences of Jews and Blacks in America.⁴⁴ At the same time, anti-Blackness in the US was always mediated through antisemitic tropes.⁴⁵ However, Eckstein’s introduction in the pamphlet bypasses and denies historical and political nuances. It centers the Jewish-Black civil rights movement after relating a story about how as a young man he shared a room during an organized trip to Israel with an older Black man who saved up all his life to travel to the “holy land.” When Eckstein heard the man pray, he realized, so the story goes, what they had in common: their “shared biblical heritage and our love for Israel.”⁴⁶ This presumed “shared heritage” and “love for Israel” become an affective anchor for interpolation and shifting the gaze from historical to ahistorical terrains.

Discursive Scaffolding

Understanding this move to the ahistorical requires us to recall the discursive and political convergences of White supremacist and neoconservative forces with *hasbara* and Jewish

42. See, for example, Mimi Kirk, “Biden, Palestine, and the Buttreassing of Christian Zionism” *Al-Jazeera*, May 21, 2021, and Halah Ahmad and Mimi Kirk, “The Dangerous Exceptionalism of Christian Zionism,” *Al-Shabaka*, October 3, 2023, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/the-dangerous-exceptionalism-of-christian-zionism/>.

43. See Edward L. Branch and Yechiel Eckstein, *On the Frontlines of Faith: The Historical and Spiritual Bonds Between African-Americans and Jews* (IFJCF, 2016).

44. For a critical interrogation of this narrative, see Marc Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s* (NYU Press, 2024).

45. Eric K. Ward, “Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism,” *Political Research Associates*, June 29, 2017, <https://politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism>.

46. Branch and Eckstein, *On the Frontlines*, 6.

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and Christian Zionist currents as examined earlier. It also demands further analyses of the Islamophobic, orientalist, Holocaust piety, and Judeo-Christian ethos underpinning the hegemonic American cultural landscape. Jewish theologian Marc Ellis has identified an “ecumenical deal” referring to post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian “reconciliation” and Christian “repentance” on the back of Palestinian displacement. The deal, inhabited by “liberal Christians,” goes as follows: “Silence on the Christian Euro-American side [regarding criticism of Israeli policies against Palestinians], no criticism of anti-Semitism from the Jewish side.”⁴⁷ This “deal” has been rearticulated multiple times over the decades. Occasionally, in critical moments, such as during the Israeli genocidal assault on Gaza in 2023-2025, it is mobilized as an overt threat whose force relies on orientalism and Islamophobia in conjunction with the memory of the genocide against the Jews and the long legacy of theological Christian anti-Jewish sentiments.⁴⁸ This “ecumenical deal” offers a cultural explanatory frame to interpret “compulsory Zionism,” informing American consciousness across a spectrum of political positionalities, not only that of explicit evangelical eschatology.⁴⁹

The construct “Judeo-Christian” itself conveys a violent discursive move in which the “Christian” part of the construct supersedes the “Judeo” part. The consolidation of this construct as presumably inclusive of Jews also denotes a history of assimilating Jews into whiteness and a civilizational discourse and bifurcating Jews from Muslims despite long histories of their interwoven communal lives in Muslim majority lands such as during the Ottoman empire.⁵⁰ The assimilation of Jews into the “West” and its “civilizational” project relies on Islamophobia and orientalism. It is predicated on how Jewish communities were

47. Marc Ellis, “Exile and the Prophetic: The Interfaith Ecumenical Deal is Dead,” *Mondoweiss*, November 12, 2012, <https://mondoweiss.net/2012/11/exile-and-the-prophetic-the-interfaith-ecumenical-deal-is-dead/>.

48. Tzvi Novick, “The Catholic Church, the Jewish People, and the Current Gaza War,” *Church Life Journal*, November 28, 2023, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-church-the-jewish-people-and-the-war/>.

49. Umayyah Cable, “Compulsory Zionism and Palestinian Existence: A Genealogy,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 51, no. 2 (2022): 66–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0377919X.2022.2040324>.

50. Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism*; Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*; Ella Habiba Shohat, *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements: Selected Writings* (Pluto Press, 2017); Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton University Press, 2015); Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford University Press, 2006).

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deployed as “buffer communities” within colonial administrative frameworks and continue to function as an instrument for policing post-colonial subjects.⁵¹

The assimilation of the “Judeo” into the civilizational orientalist ethos underpinning the American “war on terror” is central to the discredited “clash of civilizations” thesis popularized by the late Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington.⁵² While discredited for its racism (and cross-referenced with Huntington’s later anti-Latinx xenophobic work), the “clash” thesis’s reliance on a self-perception of a Judeo-Christian ethos and shared values provides a fertile ground for Jewish and Christian Zionist *hasbara*.⁵³ The foundational Judeo-Christian ethos and White nationalist narrative’s rootedness in a self-understanding of America as the “New Israel” or the “New Jerusalem” (a “city upon a hill”), Islamophobia, and an otherwise “compulsory Zionism” connected to Holocaust piety and an ecumenical deal predisposes the American “market” for *hasbara*, which turns diplomacy into public relations campaigns. Black “outreach,” however, downplays the Judeo-Christian “shared values” narrative in whiteness and coloniality.

Within this cultural terrain, the weaponization of antisemitism became an instrument of choice, or what Neve Gordon calls cultural “counter-insurgency,” to shift the discourse from free political speech to hate speech in response to the BDS call by Palestinian civil society in 2005. It is therefore predictable that in a different passage from the Eckstein pamphlet, he introduces the familiar *hasbara* motif of the “rising tide of anti-Semitism in Europe, on college campuses across the US, and in our international media.” This “existential threat” becomes the background for establishing “our African-American outreach” intended “to encourage cooperation between both communities on issues of shared values, to deepen their Christian bonds with Israel and the Jewish people, and to help them understand the Jewish roots of their Christian faith.”⁵⁴ Eckstein’s rhetorical

51. See, for instance, Houria Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews, and Us: Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love* (Semiotext(e), 2017).

52. For a classic critique, see Edward Said, “The Clash of Ignorance,” *The Nation*, October 22, 2001, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/clash-ignorance/> and Mahmood Mamdani, “Culture Talk: Six Debates that Shape the Discourse on ‘Good’ Muslims,” *American Journal of Islam and Society* 22, no. 3 (2005): 95–104.

53. For an analysis of the “Judeo-Christian” ethos, see, for example, Elizabeth Shakman-Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

54. Shakman-Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism*, 7.

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strategy activates the “Judeo-Christian” ethos, the “ecumenical deal,” the weaponization of antisemitism, and an orientalist narrative around “shared values” and “Christian bonds with Israel” to produce an affect of urgency that support of Israel means a more authentic Christian life – thereby theorizing an analysis of American racism out of existence.

Tapping into “shared values” appeals to “Christian authenticity” and a narrative of fear about losing influence on university campuses and among progressives of a younger generation (which, to underscore, predated October 7) is also prevalent in White Christian “outreach.” Yet in addition to deploying biblical fantasies to produce an ahistorical feeling of “shared heritage,” Black “outreach” zooms in on a narrative around shared experiences of oppression as a touchstone for Jewish-Black solidarity. Throughout Black “outreach,” including in its “holy land” itineraries, there is an intentional effort to connect the Holocaust as an expression of Jewish victimhood to the history of Black slavery. This reification of victimhood as Jewish identity was apparent when a Black pastor traveler in one of the CUFI underwritten “outreach” tours remarked upon visiting Yad Vashem,

I felt even brotherhood [with Jews] because of our history – African American history – of being enslaved and persecuted in such an injustice. And when I went to the Holocaust memorial, I felt that kindred spirit of a race that had gone through similar oppression as we went through.

The ahistoric and fantastic moves from a biblical narrative to a depoliticized and metaphorized account of “race” and victimhood results, as Baumann notes, with equating the prophetic legacy of the “Black Church” with Israel’s struggle.⁵⁵

Targeting Black churches and other Black publics (especially youth) in the United States depends, therefore, on the discursive conflation of Jews with Israel, activating further the motif of Jews as “the chosen People.” It is integral to a Global South strategy intent on moving Israel into an ahistorical and decontextualized terrain to obscure the materiality of

55. Quoted in Baumann, “Race, Religion, and Global Solidarities,” 14. This is further echoed in testimonies from Black pastors visiting Yad Vashem witnessing atrocities committed toward Jews during the Holocaust, such as lynching, and tying them to Black-American experiences during the Jim Crow era. See, for example, David Fox Sandmel, “Building a ‘Third Narrative’ with Black and Jewish Religious Leaders in Israel,” ADL, January 7, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/building-third-narrative-black-and-jewish-religious-leaders-israel>.

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necropolitical violence, which racialized people can otherwise identify with intuitive clarity as did Ta-Nehisi Coates.⁵⁶ To continue to feed into an image of Israel as fantasy, thereby consenting to or actively supporting American policies underwriting an Israeli settler-colonial agenda and exclusionary Jewish Zionist discourse (billed as a reclaiming, return, refuge, redemption), *hasbara* depends on biblical grammar and technologies such as the deployment of the prosperity gospel, “shared values,” “shared suffering,” and the “real Israel.”

Hasbara must also transvalue a legacy of Black-Palestinian and Global South solidarity that was explicitly stated in the initial platform of the Movement for Black Lives calling out against the genocide of Palestinians in 2016, years before the Israeli response to October 7. Indeed, such calls show the genocidal upshot of the century-long’s settler colonial project in Palestine also articulated by those in the older generation of Black scholars and activists such as Angela Davis and Cornel West.⁵⁷ Black “outreach” renders this legacy of Black-Palestinian solidarity as a propaganda trap. We now turn to further focus on the organizational actors tasked in manufacturing Black Christian Zionism.

Nonorganic Solidarity; A Selective Reading of King

The Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel (IBSI) frames a legacy of Black American Palestine solidarity, such as Angela Davis’s photos with Yassir Arafat, as somehow a manipulation of racialized sensibilities. For instance, in a short explainer video, a young Black American woman tells her audience that Black Americans have been targeted for various pro-Israel and pro-Palestine agendas with what she recites as “false” expectations that Blacks will support Palestinians. She then retrieves quotes from King, who spoke of his Zionism and the need to alleviate poverty in “the Arab world.” This quote subsequently

56. For a discussion of the spread of Christian Zionism to the African continent, see Marthie Momberg, “Christianity in Africa: The Cost of Loyalty to Zionism,” *HTS Theologies Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 2 (2023), <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/8605/25375>. For one prominent articulation of the necropolitical in Palestine/Israel, see Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, “Necropenology: Conquering New Bodies, Psychics, and Territories of Death in East Jerusalem,” *Identities* (Yverdon, Switzerland) 27, no. 3 (2020): 285–301, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2020.1737403>.

57. Katherine Franke, “#BlackLivesMatter and the Question of Genocide in Palestine,” *The Nakba Files*, November 1, 2016, <https://nakbafiles.org/2016/11/01/blacklivesmatter-and-the-question-of-genocide-in-palestine/>.

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becomes a springboard, activating a host of orientalist tropes, to make a litany of accusations against the Palestinian leadership and social practices, from corruption and impoverishment to using “human shields” to “Christian persecutions,” “honor killings,” and “anti-LGBTQI.”⁵⁸ This is a familiar *hasbara* storyline. The reductive retrieval of King’s Zionism reflects a selective reading of his legacy.⁵⁹ While the later King’s antimilitarism and critique of the American war on Vietnam and capitalism became a touchstone for the prophetic Black tradition, the IBSI extracts King’s Zionism from his broader prophetic journey (including his eventual critique of American militarism) to dismiss Black solidarity with Palestinians as misguided.⁶⁰ IBSI’s trips to Israel are often sponsored by the IFCJ, which too fetishizes King’s Zionism and exploits his legacy through the multi-pronged affective deployment of “shared values” and “shared suffering.”

For example, in a social media post marking King’s birthday, the IFCJ teaches its audiences “how to say segregation in Hebrew,” insinuating not only the Bible as “shared” but also the legacy of suffering and oppression: “Did you know that the Jewish community and African Americans share a historical and spiritual bond in the march toward equality and justice? In honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day on January 15, we will learn how to say ‘segregation’ in Hebrew.”⁶¹ Considering the empirical realities of apartheid, military occupation, and settler colonialism in Palestine/Israel, the *hasbara* spin via the weaponization of King and Jewish participation in the civil rights movement depends on ahistorical biblical “literalism” and affective activation of Black spiritual traditions.

The retrieval of King and the ahistorical move making Jewish suffering and oppression foundational to Black solidarity with Israel depends on this “spiritual bond” as well as biblical

58. IBSI, “Free Palestine from Hamas & the PLO | #FreePalestine from #Hamas and the #PLO, Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel Facebook page, March 24, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/IBSInow/videos/422317993623378/>.

59. IBSI, “Dr. King’s Pro-Israel Legacy (in 5 Minutes),” IBSI, January 30, 2023, <https://ibsi.org/videos/v/n6xm64tjlf5rndhcyxw2fk6648gxx6?categoryId=63d8442f1a1d235bf53a02c3>.

60. For a recent articulation of King’s eventual critique, see Michelle Alexander, “Only Revolutionary Love Can Save Us Now,” *The Nation*, March 8, 2024, <https://www.thenation.com/article/activism/mlk-vietnam-war-speech-gaza-democracy/>.

61. The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, “Segregation – Hafradah,” IFCJ, n.d., <https://www.ifcj.org/learn/holy-land-moments/hebrew-words/segregation-hafradah>.

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narrative. Pastor Dumisani Washington, founder and CEO of IBSI, was a former Diversity Outreach Coordinator for CUFI. Washington authored a book detailing his Black Christian Zionism, explaining that it is hardwired into Black Christian music and spirituals. His Zionist advocacy, accordingly, taps into the spiritual scaffolding of Black religiosity nourished by the Exodus story of the Israelites and its emancipatory force.⁶² In an interview with the Sun-Sentinel, Washington said:

Why would any pastor/Christian not stand with Israel? Christians who understand their faith recognize that King David's declaration to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" is not a request. It is a commandment from God. The Jewish people are God's chosen, and the land of Israel belongs to them from the time God said it to Abraham. Christians receive the blessings of the God of Israel because of our faith in Jesus, a Jewish rabbi. Without Jews and Judaism, there would be no Jesus or Christianity.⁶³

In a characteristic *hasbara* move, IBSI transvalues the meaning of the prophetic Black church to mean Christian Zionist commitments through a selective reading of Black American history. This *hasbara* hermeneutics exposes a dependency of Black "outreach" on a "literal" biblical reading to spin the displacement, occupation, and genocide of Palestinians as a fulfillment of Jewish and Christian destinies. *Hasbara* hermeneutics deploy the particularities of Black American experiences as constituting privilege entry points into recognizing the "truth" that Israel amounts to the fulfillment of their redemption and faithfulness. The production of biblical fantasies, therefore, is a weapon of self-alienation and depoliticization of Black Americans and the erasure, denial, and genocide of Palestinians.

IBSI, under the leadership of Washington, was formed to combat the BDS campaign and especially the impact of the Movement for Black Lives after the protests in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 and the murder of George Floyd in 2020. When Palestinians saw the

62. Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (University of Chicago Press, 2000); Taurean Webb, "Troubling Idols: Black-Palestinian Solidarity in U.S. Afro-Christian Space," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 4 (2019): 33-51, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2019.48.4.33>.

63. Linda Chase, "Pastor Dumisani Washington Addresses Black Solidarity with Israel," *Sun Sentinel*, February 5, 2024, <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/2024/02/05/pastor-dumisani-washington-addresses-black-solidarity-with-israel/>.

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murder of Floyd, they saw themselves and cried “Palestinian Lives Matter” and “Black Lives Matter.” Indeed, Black and Brown and other occupied people who experience state violence see their own experiences in Palestinian lives. This is why *hasbara* must redirect the gaze from the real to the fantastical through activating the biblical imagination and an ahistoric reading of Jewish-Black shared struggles and suffering.

Partnering with the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, IBSI began to develop an advocacy strategy for Black American and African communities to prevent them from being persuaded by BLM’s global intersectional analysis and organic connection to the Palestinian struggle, reactivating the anti-colonial internationalism of the 1960s and the moment of the “World Conference against Racism” in Durban, South Africa in 2001. Embedded within an anticolonial frame, Durban’s declaration that Zionism is racism clarified that the Palestinian struggle is pivotal for and symbolic of an anti-colonial and decolonial ethical and historical narrative.⁶⁴

IBSI, accordingly, understands its task as reclaiming Black solidarity with Israel. This amounts to “restor[ing] the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. and to effectively neutraliz[ing] BLM’s efforts to turn blacks against Israel.” The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs identifies IBSI as part of new “counter-political warfare” directed by Dan Diker, former CEO of the World Jewish Congress. The main argument is that BLM “hijack[ed] the claim of apartheid, racializing Israel’s conflict with the Palestinians when, in fact, it has nothing to do with race.”⁶⁵ Like other Zionist organizations, IBSI classifies the United Nations and especially the UN Human Rights Council and UN Resolution 3379 (1975) defining Zionism as racism as misguided. This legacy renders the UN “an enemy of Israel” and, of course, “antisemitic.”⁶⁶ One board member, connected by family ties to Washington, said that the collaborative project between IBSI and the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs is “redeeming the narrative, the conversation, this relationship with regards to who Israel is,

64. Amos Goldberg, “From a Global War of Narratives to a Binational Framework,” *Society* 59 (2022): 3–11, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-022-00666-3>.

65. Israel Kasnett/JNS, “New Initiative Aims to Change Anti-Israel Discourse among Black Americans,” *Israel Hayom*, July 14, 2022, <https://www.israelhayom.com/2022/07/14/new-initiative-aims-to-change-anti-israel-discourse-among-black-americans/>.

66. UNGA, “Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: Zionism as Racism - GA Resolution,” *Question of Palestine*, November 10, 1975, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-181963/>.

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and what she is about and what she's done on the African continent." This "redemption" of the narrative therefore entails a broad African approach that seeks to deflate the image promoted by BLM by also showing how much Israel has contributed to Africa.

Makeda: An African Approach

IBSI began a Plan for Education, Advocacy & Community Engagement, or P.E.A.C.E., which involves selecting twenty Black Americans and African pastors for an immersive nine-month deep learning program and travel to South Africa and Israel. Participants are sponsored by a religious community leader to ensure the effectiveness of "lessons learned." The initiative is purportedly modeled after "Israel's first ancient diplomatic mission with the Ethiopian queen Makeda 3,000 years ago." The website reads:

IBSI believes it is very significant that ancient Israel's first official friend and ally was the most powerful African nation of that day, and that Africa-Israel solidarity is both mutually beneficial and a divine mandate. Queen Makeda, a biblical figure, is a model for IBSI Ambassadors and IBSI Pastors. IBSI seeks Black clergy with which to partner as we educate others about these historic, biblical, and geopolitical truths that greatly impact our community and the world.⁶⁷

The biblical allusion to Makeda and the story of her conversion by King Solomon reroutes contemporary realities to metaphorical terrain.

Diker from the Jerusalem Center sees such a program as a necessary counterforce to BLM and BDS organizations.⁶⁸ The expenses for individual participants are minimal, revealing a massive investment by Christian and Jewish organizations in counteracting an eroded *hasbara*. Washington understands that such an investment is instrumental in combating efforts to weaponize Black Americans, citing a legacy including Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam's explicit antisemitism but also presumably the PLO and Arafat's intentional outreach to Black Americans since the 1960s "to show the world that Israel [is] indeed a

67. IBSI, "Become a PEACE Ambassador, accessed March 27, 2024, <https://22146571.hs-sites.com/en-us/become-a-peace-ambassador-0-0>.

68. IBSI, "Become a PEACE Ambassador."

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racist regime” and to weaponize “black South Africans in a way to demonize Israel.” Hence, underwritten by the Jerusalem Center and the IFCJ, IBSI’s programming and advocacy promote an integrated legacy of Black-Jewish solidarity and a storyline about an Israel-Africa alliance. The rationale of P.E.A.C.E is to introduce Black Americans and Africans to South Africans who have meaningful relationships with Jews and Israel, with the goal of securing resources to challenge people who deploy the concept of apartheid to describe the reality in Palestine/Israel. After four cohorts of such programs that will include “diversity” itineraries in Israel as described above, IBSI sees itself seeding ambassadors in key American cities. It is in this context of a concentrated effort to “redeem” Israel’s image that King’s Zionism is deployed as an embodiment of “authentic” prophetic blackness.

Similarly, Bishop Glenn Plummer, “Bishop for Israel” for the global, over-century-old Church of God in Christ, deploys King to explain his dedication to Israel as a Black Christian vocation.⁶⁹ Plummer moved to Israel in 2020 intending to build, in partnership with Christian broadcast groups, a media institute for Black millennials to reside in Israel for three months from where they would report Israel’s story to the world. A 2022 Jerusalem Post article features Plummer’s photo beside King’s street sign in Israel. In the piece, Plummer discusses his dedication to fulfilling King’s intention to visit Israel with a delegation of 5,000 Americans, a plan tabled due to the 1967 war and then never actualized due to King’s assassination.⁷⁰ Plummer retrieved a narrative about King’s “Mountaintop Speech” of 1968 when he said: “And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.” Plummer reads King’s allusion to Moses’ inability to cross over to the promised land literally, locating himself as an implementer of King’s vision. Plummer also discusses how of the 45 million Black Americans, 85% are associated with Black churches and are “nurtured with love of Israel.” Noting that Black Christian demographics have been left out of the Holy Land “tourism industry,” his “mission” is to change this situation and show Black Americans the “real” Israel.

69. Rikvah Lambert Adler, “How God, Martin Luther King Brought a ‘Bishop of Israel’ to the Holy Land,” *The Jerusalem Post - Christian World*, February 19, 2022, <https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-697001>.

70. According to an article by a historian at Tel Aviv University, the trip was publicly cancelled due to the Six Day War, but King was in fact concerned that the trip would look as if he was endorsing the annexation of Jerusalem to an international audience, that is, Arabs, Africans, and Asians. See Martin Kramer, “Why Martin Luther King Never Visited Israel,” *Martin Kramer on the Middle East*, January 13, 2013, <https://martinkramer.org/2013/01/13/why-martin-luther-king-never-visited-israel/>.

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Mizrahi Washing

This *hasbara* move also informs CUFI's Mizrahi project, designed initially by Washington in his earlier position as CUFI's Black "outreach" coordinator.⁷¹ The Mizrahi project tells the stories of the "forgotten refugees" from Arab and Muslim lands and how Israel "saved" them and has been a site of "homecoming," "family reunion," or the "ingathering of exiles."⁷² The oral testimonies the Mizrahi Project curates include familiar motifs of antisemitism and Israel as a site of Jewish refuge and redemption. As in the visits to south Tel Aviv, this celebration of Jewish diversity is designed to neutralize an analysis of Palestine/Israel as a racialized geography. As such, it amounts to Mizrahi-washing, or the weaponization of "Israeli diversity," not unlike the rebranding Israel campaign that, predicated on orientalist tropes, weaponizes LGBTQI+ communities.

In addition, framing Mizrahi stories as "forgotten refugees" becomes ammunition against UNRWA and its exclusive dedication to Palestinian refugees. A video published by the conservative media outlet PragerU features Washington conveying this narrative twist. In it, Washington recites the "diversity" storyline: "In Israel, you will see so many colors...because Israel is a nation of refugees." Most of them, he adds, are from Arab and Muslim countries and came with no property. "Contrast these forgotten refugees with the most celebrated refugees in the world. How is it that the Jewish refugees are not even an afterthought, but the Palestinian refugees are the longest-lasting lavishly supported refugee population in the history of the world."⁷³ This specific assault on UNRWA reveals how interconnected IBSI is with the broader Jewish and Christian Zionist landscapes and their longstanding campaign, escalated during the Gaza genocide, against UNRWA as emblematic of Palestinian claims and experiences of the Nakba. The *hasbara* twist is to frame the legacy of a UN agency dedicated to serving Palestinian refugees as an assault on Jews. Further, the fact that such messages are transmitted on PragerU, which was established in 2009 to promote White American "conservative values," denotes the opportunistic convergences of conservative, White nationalist, and Zionist agendas.

71. Christians United for Israel, "The Mizrahi Project," accessed March 27, 2024, <https://cufi.org/the-mizrahi-project/>.

72. The Mizrahi Project, "All the Jews of the World are Going through a Family Reunion' - David's Story," February 11, 2018, <https://youtu.be/7zXJyNUOml4>.

73. Dumisani Washington, "Why are there Still Palestinian Refugees? | PragerU," May 2, 2016, <https://www.prageru.com/video/why-are-there-still-palestinian-refugees>.

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Through a combination of biblical scripts, a retrieval of King's Zionism, and branding Israel as "multiracial" and "real" with its "forgotten refugees," Jewish-Black solidarity solidifies and activates the discourse of the prosperity gospel and of turning Black American relations with Israel into charity, targeting mostly non-Ashkenazi Israeli Jews and African asylum seekers. This maneuver with Black churches intends to redirect attention to fantastic and ahistoric terrains and away from the political and historical colonial legacies and epistemological projects that connect Black Americans' daily and intergenerational experiences of racism and structural violence to Palestinians.

Conclusion

This article illuminates the paradoxical dimensions of nonorganic Black *hasbara* outreach. Transvaluation and branding a wrong as a right is more than an effective public relations campaign. It is predicated on antecedent epistemic, religiocultural, and imperial forms of violence, interests, and affective interpolations. *Hasbara* relies on the assumption that rather than changing policies and redressing Palestinian grievances, Israel needs to come up with a more effective spin on its story. *Hasbara* is effective because of prophecy-obsessed eschatologies, opportunistic Christian Zionisms, the legacy of the ecumenical deal, Islamophobia, and White supremacy. It relies on fetishizing "the Jews" and redirecting the gaze from empirical and historical concreteness to fantastical, apocalyptic, redemptive, ahistoric, and biblical terrains.⁷⁴ Predicated on multiple layers of cognitive dissonance, *hasbara* erodes because of its historical and ethical incoherence and its inability ultimately to erase the massive mountains of empirical evidence that capture Palestinian experiences.⁷⁵

Our study shows that it takes a significant spin to present the oppressors in the context of Palestine/Israel as victims. When this spin targets Black communities, it depends on a biblical imagination that signals the convergence between Christian and Jewish Zionist organizations and their respective agenda. For example, in addition to underwriting IBSI, which collaborates with a variety of Jewish Zionist think tanks and other organizations,

74. See Brian Klug, "Interrogating 'New anti-Semitism,'" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013): 468-482.

75. For the issue of the epistemological crisis, see, for example, Jennifer Lynn Kelly, *Invited to Witness: Solidarity Tourism across Occupied Palestine* (Duke University Press, 2023).

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the predominantly White evangelical CUFI has been hosting dinners for Black pastors focusing on King's "pro-Israel legacy" and arguing that the Black community has been used to promote an anti-Israel agenda as "pro-Palestinian." CUFI also argues that it is the premier organization in which Black pastors' voices can be effectively raised to combat anti-Zionism and antisemitism.⁷⁶ The spin seeks to convince Black Americans (as part of a Global South) to be in solidarity with a force that allies with White supremacist discourses.

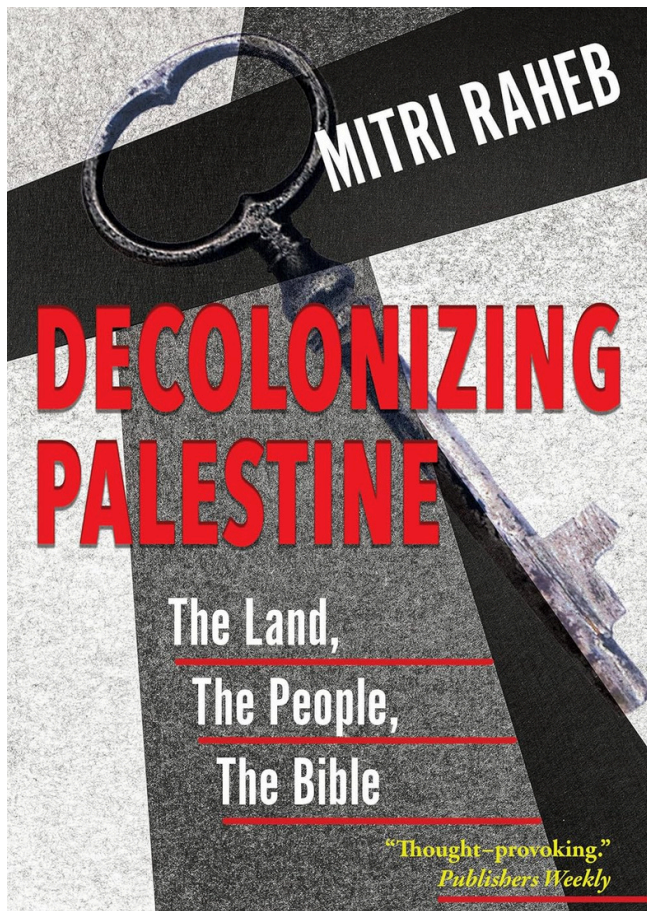
The non-organic nature of this Black "outreach" and its decontextualization of racialization and dismissal of the long history of Black-Palestine solidarity as "a lie" and departure from King's "authentic" legacy began to shake under the weight of its contradictions during the early months of Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza. In January 2024, over 1,000 Black pastors wrote to Biden with an urgent call for a ceasefire.⁷⁷ The pastors responded to their practitioners who, like most people in the Global South, identify with and see and recognize the suffering of Palestinians and their dehumanization. That they did not buy the *hasbara* storyline shows the limits of Netanyahu's brag that "America is a thing you can move very easily."

76. Christians United For Israel, "September 6th East Point, GA CUFI Black Pastors Dinner," *Christians United for Israel*, September 16, 2016, <https://cufi.org/issue/september-6th-east-point-ga-cufi-black-pastors-dinner/>.

77. Maya King, "Black Pastors Pressure Biden to Call for a Cease-Fire in Gaza," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/28/us/politics/black-pastors-biden-gaza-israel.html>.

Book Review:

Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible* (Orbis Books, 2023).



Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible represents the latest offering from Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, the prolific Palestinian theologian, Lutheran clergyman, and president of Bethlehem's Dar al-Kalima University. Taking as a given the problems associated with evangelical and fundamentalist Christian Zionisms, Raheb focuses on what he convincingly argues is the complicity of Western mainline liberal theological traditions in the oppression and dispossession of the indigenous Palestinian people. As such, he refuses to allow "well-regarded, mainstream, and accomplished theologians of many denominations"¹ avoid culpability via their scapegoating of fundamentalist extremism. Through the lens of settler-colonial theory, in dialogue

1. Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible* (Orbis Books, 2023), 8.

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with Raheb's contextual Palestinian theology and "geopolitical hermeneutics," it becomes apparent that Western theologies and theologians of all stripes have much to answer for concerning their role in Palestinian dispossession. Hand in hand with the imperial "hardware" of military conquest and state repression, Raheb employs the metaphor of "theological software" to illustrate "the weaponization of the Bible to drive [the Israeli] colonial project and endow it with a theological grounding [in an effort to] enshrine Jewish supremacy and promote the settler colonization"² of Palestine.

The first of four accessible chapters highlights the intimacy and interplay of imperial politics with western theology and hermeneutics. Raheb reiterates the point that the situation in Palestine-Israel in no way represents a "conflict" between two warring parties in search of an ideal conflict-resolution strategy; rather, it is at its core the product of ongoing settler-colonial aggression, defined as "the permanent settlement of colonists in an occupied land."³

In the second chapter, Raheb examines the topic of Christian Zionism. However, rather than challenging the scriptural or doctrinal foundations of Christian Zionist dogma, as other (primarily evangelical) scholars have done, Raheb argues instead for a complete redefinition of the term. From Palestine to the Pacific Islands, South Africa to Australia, and North America to Algeria, settler colonial violence aims to conquer a given territory, cleanse the land of its present inhabitants, and colonize that land with a new population.

Through it all, the military hardware of conquest is underwritten by theological and ideological software, serving to morally and ethically justify the entire imperial enterprise: persuading the settlers of their indigeneity and/or superiority; portraying the land as empty, unproductive, or ripe for extraction; and demonizing the native peoples as alien— as savages to tame, heathens to convert, or terrorists to eliminate – all the while propping up a repressive and dehumanizing apparatus of social control and apartheid.⁴ According to Raheb, Christian Zionism should be defined as "a Christian lobby that supports the Jewish settler colonialism of Palestinian land by

2. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 8.

3. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 20.

4. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 20.

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using biblical/theological constructs within a metanarrative while taking global considerations into account.”⁵

Doing so, Raheb emphasizes not “what people believe but what they do based on that belief.”⁶ In determining one’s behavior and approach to the situation, he argues for the primacy of one’s emotional commitment to Israel over-and-against the actual content or internal coherence of a specific belief or theological system, as most Christian Zionists utilize *ad hoc* theological rationalizations to buttress a preexisting emotional commitment.

In this way, Christian Zionism is viewed no longer as the sole province of the fundamentalist, but applies to multiple theological dispositions and traditions across multiple geographies and time periods, each contributing to indigenous dispossession and the settler-colonial conquest of Palestine – all the while under the illusion that they are acting in accordance to the will of God or the common good.

Raheb then sets forth his “geopolitical hermeneutic” as he dives into the ever-relevant theological topics of “land” in the third chapter and “chosenness” in the final chapter. In this way he challenges how Western theologians contribute to the ongoing subjugation of Palestine through the ideological reconstruction of what is ultimately an imagined, decontextualized “Holy Land” divorced from both historical and present-day realities. Such theologians, he tells us, “write as if Palestine were an ancient land that exists in a vacuum; they strip it of its sociopolitical context – of its real people – and they rarely think about how this theology has and is being used to enhance settler colonialism.”⁷ Again, Raheb’s primary interlocutor is not the religious fundamentalist, so much as the “refined” Western liberal. Failing to acknowledge the manner in which such decontextualized reconstructions have been “instrumentalized” by Zionists and Christian Zionists, “these colonized minds reinforce the continuing colonization of Palestine.”⁸ Central to the Zionist project from its inception and backed by the hardware of imperial might and software of orientalizing theology has been the violent imposition of a false construction of reality (“a land without a people,” for instance) atop the lived,

5. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 54.

6. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 54.

7. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 77.

8. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 77.

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historically authentic Palestinian experience—an act of indigenous erasure and epistemological genocide. Tragically, as repeated time and again in contexts of settler-colonial violence and now on full display in Gaza, the path to literal genocide is a short one. It is simply unacceptable to read and interpret scripture without adequately contending with contemporary geopolitical realities or considering how a particular reading can be used to reinforce abusive practices and exploitative power relations.

Raheb engages in a brilliantly imaginative prophetic critique, challenging the false imperialist logic inherent not to fundamentalists like John Hagee or Hal Lindsey but progressive darling Walter Brueggemann. In an ironic turn, Raheb's takedown of Brueggemann's "royal consciousness"⁹ on Israel is so thorough that whatever defensiveness or initial reservations one might have quickly dissipate. It can be tempting to praise Brueggemann's *Chosen?*¹⁰ for its willingness to critique Israeli excess and desire to respect Palestinian human rights. Yet, in its failure to deconstruct key Zionist assumptions around the promised land and the people of God, it becomes a perfect example of "liberal Christian Zionism," providing ideological cover for Palestinian dispossession behind a veneer of progressive sophistication. For instance, in framing the Palestinian as "stranger," albeit a stranger in need of protection and welcome in accordance with Mosaic law, Brueggemann merely perpetuates an all-too-common settler-colonial sleight of hand. As Raheb reminds us, "The othering of the indigenous by calling them strangers is an important feature of settler colonialism in which the natives are extraneous and the settlers are cast as natives."¹¹

Ultimately, failure to account for the reception history of a particular passage of scripture and how it has been instrumentalized in support of settler-colonial aggression is at best irresponsible and at worst grossly complicit in the destruction of historic Palestine and its people. In all settler societies, theologies of "land" and "election" have been weaponized in support of colonial violence, bigotry, and apartheid. Using the book of Joshua as an example, Raheb explains,

9. A reference to Brueggemann's own argument in Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Fortress Press, 2018).

10. Walter Brueggemann, *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).

11. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 97.

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The linguistic borrowing of settler colonial concepts from the book of Joshua in Israeli society today sets the stage for lived reality insofar as as figuring the Jewish citizens of Israel as the reincarnation of Joshua's army exalts the male soldier while assigning to the Palestinians the role of the Canaanites. In today's Jewish messianism, settler colonialism is no longer an imperial undertaking but a divine plan that sanctions a holy war and sanctifies military operations.¹²

Election, meanwhile, is contingent upon one's proximity to power, "a promise to those crushed by imperial power, encouragement to those discouraged by the political realities, and consolation to the desperate."¹³

Otherwise, Raheb tells us, "It becomes a dangerous ideology that sanctions religiously based nationalism, settler colonialism, and racial exceptionalism with disastrous ramifications. Palestinians and many other indigenous peoples are paying the price of this ideology."¹⁴

For this reason, the bulk of the third and fourth chapters outline an agenda for what Raheb refers to as a decolonial reading of the Bible. "Theologians," he warns, "must listen to and amplify indigenous voices of the people of the land rather than being an uncensored echo of imperial colonial powers."¹⁵

Decolonizing Palestine is an essential addition both to the study of Christian Zionism and postcolonial theology. A minor critique might involve Raheb's declaration that his book is the first to bring Palestinian theology into dialogue with settler colonialism. I personally remember discussing similar ideas in a 2012 course¹⁶ at Fuller Theological Seminary with Dr. Salim Munayer, founder of Musalaha and former Academic Dean at Bethlehem Bible College. Ideas sparked in this course formed the basis of what would become a 2020 chapter of my own on how "bad theology kills."¹⁷ In fact, John and Samuel Munayer

12. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 90-91.

13. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 149.

14. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 154-155.

15. Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 114.

16. Salim Munayer, "A Christian Response to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," Class Lecture and Discussion, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, Fall 2012.

17. Jesse Wheeler, "Bad Theology Kills: How We Justify Killing Arabs," in *Keeping the Faith: Reflections of Politics & Christianity in the Era of Trump & Beyond*, ed. Sy Hoekstra and Suzie Lahoud (KTF Press, 2020).

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would come to make a similar case in their 2022 monograph, “Decolonising Palestinian Liberation Theology: New Methods, Sources and Voices.”¹⁸ However, this is a relatively minor critique. Raheb has long been among the most influential and respected voices in Palestinian theology. While providing an essential postcolonial corrective, Raheb’s hermeneutic sits comfortably within a mainline liberal protestant milieu, which makes sense given his theological background.

For this reason, I would still point most evangelical readers to scholars in the vein of Colin Chapman, Stephen Sizer, or even Munther Isaac, who can be every bit as piercing in their critiques of settler-colonial theology. Yet, as ineffectual and cowardly as mainline liberal churches have proven to be over the past year of genocide, not to mention decades of Palestinian dispossession and Israeli apartheid, Raheb’s critique is as urgent and essential as it has ever been. Behind a veneer of liberal sophistication, such churches often remain every bit as beholden to American empire, of which Israel is an integral part, and to the maintenance of an ultimately destructive and morally untenable status quo.

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FOSNA

18. Sam Munayer and John Munayer, “Decolonising Palestinian Liberation Theology: New Methods, Sources and Voices,” *Studies in World Christianity* 28, no. 3 (287-310): 2022.

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VOLUME 1
ISSUE 1
SPRING 2025