

WHY WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

(From: <http://www.christianzionism.org/> Accessed 14 March, 2011)

Christians are troubled when injustice is committed. We are especially troubled when it is perpetuated through the appropriation of Christian theology for ideological purposes. One such misappropriation is commonly referred to as Christian Zionism.

What is Christian Zionism?

Christian Zionism may be defined either broadly or narrowly. Broadly speaking, it designates any Christian support for the national revival movement of the Jewish people realized through the establishment of the modern State of Israel (historically known as Zionism). More narrowly defined, Christian Zionism is an ideology grounded in beliefs which consider the State of Israel to be divinely ordained and scripturally determined with a central role in ushering in the end of history, where unconverted Jews and unbelievers (including Christians who are considered to be of questionable status) are judged by God's wrath. It is the narrower form that causes immediate concern.

Why should we be concerned?

There are a number of reasons why this narrow ideological form of Christian Zionism raises concerns for the member communions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Among these are the following:

1. It is a movement with negative consequences for Middle East peace

Christian Zionism, in its narrow ideological form, encourages political advocacy committed to preserving control over all of historic Palestine for Jewish people alone, including the West Bank and Gaza strip, to ensure the realization of the movement's own end-times hopes. This ideological approach rejects any peace process built on a negotiated settlement towards a two-state solution to the conflict. Leading advocates of this ideology have formed themselves into oftentimes very public and well-funded political action groups whose aim is to prevent any negotiations that may lead to a two-state solution to the conflict.

2. It fosters fear and hatred of Muslims and non-western Christians

Prominent spokespersons for Christian Zionism are known for promoting negative stereotypes of Muslims and Middle Easterners, including Middle Eastern Christians. They often accuse these Christians of siding with Muslims against the US and the State of Israel in a cosmic battle of good and evil, thus questioning their Christian faithfulness. Rather than fostering understanding and cooperation with neighbors, ideological Christian Zionism often teaches Christians in the US

to harbor suspicion and enmity towards Muslims and non-westernized Christians. When it does so, the movement negates Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39).

3. It can lead to the dehumanization of Israelis and Palestinians

Because Christian Zionism bases support for the State of Israel on its supposed role in the end of history, its adherents tend to treat Israelis and Palestinians not as neighbors to be loved, but as pawns in a cosmic drama of divine vengeance and retribution. The conclusion of this drama involves the death of all non-Christians, including Jews, through apocalyptic warfare or divine judgment. Given these beliefs, even many Jews wonder if the movement promotes proper Jewish-Christian relationships and question the nature of the movement's support for Israel.

4. It is not based on traditional teaching or doctrines of the Church

Christian Zionism and its theological presuppositions are nineteenth-century innovations in Christian doctrine. The most prominent spokesperson for these beliefs was John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). Although the advocates of Christian Zionism and its underlying theology sometimes claim to base their beliefs on ancient understandings, generally scholars recognize these to be recent innovations.

5. Evangelical Christians are concerned

Ideological Christian Zionists sometimes claim that they speak on behalf of all American evangelicals. This is not so. Many evangelicals in the US do not want to be identified as ideological Christian Zionists. Several prominent evangelical spokespersons have spoken out strongly against this ideology, recognizing how it contradicts the central commitments of Christianity to justice and peace-making. Many question its theological assumptions.

How should we respond?

Christians in the West must ask themselves questions about the influence of Christian Zionism on US public opinion. It grieves the member communions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA to note that many Christians visiting the land of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection are not even aware of the existence of Arab Christians, and do not have opportunities to interact with local Christian communities. One step toward addressing this concern is for Christians in the West to become better aware of Christian Zionism and its effects, including the history, theology, and forms of biblical interpretation underlying this ideology. Please take the time to learn what this movement is all about, get involved, and continue to 'pray for the peace of Jerusalem' (Psalm 122:6).