

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM IN AFRICA



Edited by
CYNTHIA HOLDER RICH

Foreword by
WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

Christian Zionism in Africa

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Cynthia Holder Rich

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Foreword

Cynthia Holder Rich has assembled a most able company of expositors who discerningly comment on the organizing issue of this fine book *Christian Zionism in Africa*. The experiences and perspectives of these several expositors are rich and varied. But these several chapters cohere in compelling ways to elucidate the theme, which is loaded with the most dangerous theological and socioeconomic potential.

The three terms of the topic help to us to focus our attention and energy. “Zionism” is the propelling identity of the state of Israel that proceeds with immense military force to advance its land grab in the “Holy Land.” While the founding generation of leaders who advocated for the creation of the state of Israel had no particular interest in theological matters, since then this ideology of Zionism has deftly grafted onto its movement an appeal to the biblical notion of the promise of the land. The interpretive trick of Zionism is to articulate a complete and matching identity between the ancient covenant community and the modern state of Israel. While there are of course some connections and continuities between the two, the complete match of identity between the two is an imaginative act of interpretation upon which the entire enterprise depends. Like every ideology, the biblical claims for the modern state of Israel require cherry-picking of the old tradition in careful ways. It is fair to say that the identity of Zionism itself is not the theme of this book; it is, however, the baseline from which advocacy and dispute can be mounted.

A particular form of Zionism that equates ancient Israel and the modern state of Israel is “Christian” Zionism, the theme of this book. Christian

Zionism is the willful and uncritical embrace of Zionism by Christians who easily connect ancient Israel and the modern state, and thereby grant to the modern state of Israel the privileges and priorities accorded to the ancient community of Israel. That practice of Christian “innocence” about the state of Israel is grounded in and justified by a curious account of “dispensationalism” that has imposed upon the Bible a narrative and a time line that has no serious rootage in the Bible itself. Once that beguiling, goofy narrative of dispensationalism is accepted, then “Israel” has a distinct role to play in the full coming of the reign of Christ. Such an odd justification pays no attention to the actual reality that the claims of Zionism profoundly contradict the claims of Christian faith. But because Zionism (and therefore Christian Zionism) is presented in a perverse ideological way, it is possible to construct a coherent, self-contained justification that takes seriously neither the ancient biblical tradition nor the actual historical facts on the ground.

It is however the third term of our topic that draws specific attention, namely, “African” Christian Zionism. Most of the contributors to this collection of chapters are Africans who bring their history, faith, and lived experience to these expositions. Thus we are instructed with some political cultural ecclesial specificity about the ways in which African churches have all too readily embraced Zionism.

In Ghana, Christian Zionism is propelled by Pentecostal churches committed to the narrative of dispensationalism.

In East Africa, Zionism entered church imagination through the use of gospel songs that easily appropriated the imagery of the ancient people of Israel. Those songs, moreover, were a gift of the missionaries.

-In Tanzania, we are faced with the conclusion that Christian Zionism is a “heresy,” because it is a narrative devoid of Jesus. Obviously Christian faith without the centrality of the compassion of Jesus is a false teaching that has no claim to faith. That negative verdict here pertains precisely to the Lutheran Church that is too readily accepting of Zionism.

The editor’s own chapter concerns the *Belhar Confession*, a manifesto of black South Africans in the Dutch Reformed Church, concerning God’s compassionate commitment to the poor and left behind, a clear refutation of the claims of the “good and powerful” to which Zionism appeals. And because the manifesto is from black South Africans, that compassionate concern of the gospel of God pertains to people of color in South Africa and elsewhere.

The tricky interface between the claims of Zionism and the actual practice of the state of Israel is given careful scrutiny in this volume. The state of Israel thrives on Christian Zionism but at the same time insists on exclusionary racism in a way that discriminates not only against blacks but especially against black Jews who are unwelcome in Israel. This simply exhibits the fact

that the practice of racism intensely prevails in Zionism, and in Israel, in a way that might give pause to Africans.

It is most instructive that Genesis 12:3 has been an organizing principle for much of African Christian Zionism. In that verse Abraham is promised that God “will bless those who bless you.” From that it follows that it is important to “bless Israel,” so that the God of the promise in turn will bless the nations of Africa who “bless Israel.” Such transactional specificity serves the state of Israel very well, even though it is not evident that the other side of the equation has any force.

While this book is deeply grounded in African reality, it is published in the United States and is addressed to U.S. readers. The reason that U.S. readers must be concerned with this African reality is because the United States is deeply implicated in African reality. Much of the resourcing for such thinking has come from Western missionaries. And of course the United States—both through governmental policy and through unthinking Christian support—has been uncompromisingly committed to Israel in its policies and its practices. The claim of Israel’s *chosenness* that lies behind Zionism has its counterpoint in U.S. claims of *chosenness* (*exceptionalism*) that is deeply fixed in American imagination. Since the magisterial framing of the matter by Cotton Mather in 1702,¹ the imaginary of the United States has been a reiteration of the chosenness of ancient Israel. For this reason, it is easy enough for Americans to morph the ideology of the state of Israel back to the covenantal claims of ancient Israel.

A knowing reader of this important book will be invited to rethink the pernicious effect of chosenness as it operates in the easy alliance between Christian faith and U.S. exceptionalism. A consideration of the ideology of African Zionism is important for its own sake, as the linkage has immense geopolitical implications. Beyond that we are summoned to a critique of the oft-repeated mantra that “anti-Zionism is per se anti-Semitism.”

Given the force of this ideology of chosenness in both Africa and the United States, it is certain that the presence of Palestinians (not so often explicit in these chapters) is front and center to the focus of this exposition. The Palestinians are the primary victims of Zionism in this most shameless slow-moving genocide in modern history. Nothing said about Christian Zionism can be taken seriously if the future of Palestinians is not centrally on the table.

On all counts, the good news of the gospel of Christ has been preempted, distorted, or eliminated in the ideology of Christian Zionism. This book is a sobering instruction that we have much urgent work to do, both in terms of the witness of the Christian community itself and in terms of U.S. policy toward Israel and the Palestinians. The work requires clear theological

thinking that refuses the obfuscations on which the ideology thrives. We may be most grateful to Cynthia Holder Rich and her colleagues for their brave testimony concerning the claims of the gospel and the pernicious betrayal of that good news, that does severe damage to Judaism, as it does to the church.

Walter Brueggemann
Columbia Theological Seminary
April 2, 2020

NOTE

1. Mather, Cotton, *Magnalia Christi Americana, or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England / from Its First Planting in the Year 1620. unto the Year of Our Lord, 1698. In Seven Books*. London: T. Parkhurst, 1702.

Preface and Acknowledgments

When I moved to Arusha, Tanzania, in 2017 and began to see Stars of David and Israeli flags in a city and country with almost no Jewish community, my curiosity was piqued and the researcher in me was interested. The journey from there has offered much learning, growing relationships with thoughtful scholars across the continent, and time to reflect with and learn from many people about the multiple meanings and intersections of race, power, theology, and past, present, and future forms of economic, political, and religious colonialism in Africa. I have come to understand some about how a movement that emerged in Europe from a people's understandable goals of survival and a place to live in peace; how that movement was nurtured in Great Britain and the United States by strange ideological twists, exegetical contortions, ideas of empire, and desires for power; and how that movement, aided by history, theology, poverty, and racism external and internal, traversed the globe, seeking support for a message that has proven very attractive in the postcolonial and resource-poor contexts of the African continent.

I am grateful to the scholars who have taken part in this book project and others who have generously offered their time as conversation partners, here in Africa, in North America, and in Israel and Palestine. Thank-you to each one. Special thanks to my academic home, Tumaini University Makumira, and particularly to lecturers across the three faculties who have encouraged, contributed, and offered support to this book project.

Thanks to Philip Woods, associate director for World Mission, Presbyterian Church (USA), who found funds to help bring scholars together for research. I am thankful for the impressively speedy read-and-review skills of the Rev. Dr. R. Ward Holder, Saint Anselm College, and to Dr. Walter Brueggemann for accepting my invitation to author the book's foreword.

This project and I have been blessed by ever helpful and present direction and advice from Dr. Neil Elliott, senior acquiring editor, and Ms. Gayla Freeman, assistant editor, Lexington Books/Fortress Academic. Thank-you for seeing the worth in this project and for your prompt answers to my overflowing list of questions.

The good members of the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA) have enthused, asked questions, and offered help in spreading the word about the book. Thank-you, friends! I am grateful to be with you in the struggle. Particular gratitude is offered to Noushin Framke, tireless advocate for peace and justice, avid reader, incredibly skilled generator of ideas, and true friend.

I am grateful to be coming to the end of this project, not only because it is good for projects to have an end point, but because this book is different than those I have previously written or edited in one important way. Due to many of the issues outlined in the chapters here, people are suffering hurt, disempowerment and imprisonment, hardship, and death. This has made this work sobering and given me a sense of urgency about getting the work of the articulate authors included into print and available for readers and educators.

I am grateful for the grace of God in Jesus, which makes all I do possible, and for the tangible evidence of that grace to me in the person of the Rev. Dr. Mark Rich, husband, colleague, and dearest friend.

In this Easter season, I look for the resurrection that comes surely after death for those who have witnessed the deaths of an overwhelming number of development programs, peace plans, justice initiatives, and leaders invested in the right. May those witnesses remain stalwart, unbowed, and hopeful in the work toward a new life of peace with justice and a safe and good place to call home for all the peoples of Israel, Palestine, and Africa.

Cynthia Holder Rich
Eastertide 2020

Abbreviations

AICs	African Initiated Churches or African Independent Churches
AII	Africa Israel Initiative
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
APR	African Primal Religions
AU	African Union
BDS	Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction movement
CMEP	Churches for Middle East Peace
CUFI	Christians United for Israel
DCI	Defense of Children International
DRCSA	Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa
EAPPI	WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel
ECD-ELCT	Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ELCT	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania
GIA	Ghana Israel Alliance
GIPFA	Ghana Israel Parliamentary Friendship Association
GPCC	Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council
HBCUs	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
HOP	House of Prayer-Tanzania
IAF	Israel Allies Foundation
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICEJ	International Christian Embassy Jerusalem
IGFA	Israel Ghana Friendship Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund

JPB	Jerusalem Prayer Breakfast
KLNT	Kingdom Leadership Network Tanzania
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCCOP	National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine
NPP	National Patriotic Party (Ghana)
OAU	Organisation for African Unity
PAT	Prayer Action Tanzania
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PA	Palestinian National Authority
SACC	South African Council of Churches
TBN	Trinity Broadcasting Network
TIBIF	Tanzania-Israeli Business and Investment Forum
UN	United Nations
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNIA-ACL	Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WCRC	World Communion of Reformed Churches

Part I

HISTORY, LAW, AND POLITICS

Chapter 1

Onward Christian Soldiers

An Historical Overview of Christian Zionism

John M. Hubers

"ZION'S CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS"

On October 6, 2002, the popular American investigative TV program, *60 Minutes*, introduced its viewers to Christian Zionism in a segment they entitled "Zion's Christian Soldiers." Outspoken former Moral Majority founder, the late Rev. Jerry Falwell, was the primary guest. Correspondent Bob Simon interviewed Falwell, asking his opinion on a variety of subjects related to Middle Eastern affairs. How he replied astonished many and infuriated many more. By week's end, his words would be published and republished in every major news venue around the world, most notably in those countries where Islam is the dominant faith: "I think that Muhammad was a terrorist," he said. "I've read enough of the history of his life, written by Muslims and non-Muslims, to say that he was a violent man of war."¹

Those who looked beyond the controversy caused by Falwell's words to the theme of the show itself learned that millions of American Christians—seventy million was the figure Falwell used²—gave unqualified support to the modern state of Israel. This was based largely on a belief that it came into existence as the fulfillment of biblical promises that set the stage for the now-imminent second coming of Christ.³

They learned, too, that Christian Zionists represented a powerful political force in America. Simon noted, as just one example, a letter-writing campaign organized by Falwell and others in April of 2002 that took President Bush to task for asking the Israeli government to withdraw their tanks from the West Bank city of Jenin following one of the most violent weeks of the intifada (Arabic for "uprising" or "rebellion," in this case against the Israeli occupation). Over 100,000 letters and e-mails flooded the White House.

While it can't be determined for sure whether this is what made the difference, what *is* sure is that soon after the letters arrived President Bush backed down.⁴ "There's nothing that brings the wrath of the Christian public in this country down on this government like abandoning or opposing Israel in a critical matter," noted Falwell.⁵

This program highlighted something that Israel watchers had long known: the political clout of those who call themselves Christian Zionists—even though the numbers at that time were not as large as Falwell maintained. The numbers, however, were less important than the clout this movement carried both then and now in terms of influencing American political policy toward the Middle East, primarily as this policy has related to the Israel/Palestinian conflict. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the majority of American Christians who give uncritical support to Israel today have been influenced in one way or another by the tenets of Christian Zionism, whether they buy the package or not.

Given this influence, it's important that any discussion of this phenomenon include a basic understanding of how this movement came to have the influence it does on American political policy.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

The development of the Christian Zionist movement can best be understood as a drama unfolding in three acts.

- *Act 1* begins in Great Britain with the marriage of premillennial eschatology (a way of interpreting the Bible which posits a thousand year [millennial] reign of Christ on earth preceding the final day of Judgment) with nineteenth- to early twentieth-century British imperialism.
- *Act 2* moves to America when dispensationalist teaching becomes widely disseminated and assimilated primarily through conferences on prophecy, the ministry of Moody Bible Institute and other institutions modeled on it, and the widespread distribution of the Scofield Reference Bible which would become the study Bible of choice among a whole generation of conservative American Christians. In this act, Christian Zionism becomes less a political movement than a spiritual reference point.
- *Act 3* picks up the earlier political orientation of Christian Zionism, shifting to America as its primary base of operation. It coincides with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the expansion of its borders after the 1967 war, the two historical touch points for the Christian Zionist movement.

It is important to note as we look at these three “acts” that the actors are not necessarily in full agreement on all points. Dispensational premillennialism provides the foundational theological grounding, but not all who call themselves Christian Zionists accept or even know the classic dispensationalist doctrines. New Testament scholar Gary Burge notes that today’s Christian Zionists “have shed much of Dispensationalism’s theological program . . . even though they have largely . . . kept its eschatology.”⁶ Burge summarizes their foundational beliefs as follows:

1. The Covenant: God’s covenant with Israel is eternal and unconditional. Therefore, the promises of land given to Abraham will never be overturned. This means that the church has not replaced Israel and that Israel’s privileges have never been revoked despite unfaithfulness.
2. The Church: God’s plan has always been for the redemption of Israel. Yet when Israel failed to follow Jesus, the church was born as an afterthought, or “parenthesis.” Thus, at the Second Coming, the church will be removed and Israel will once again become God’s primary agent in the world. We now live in the “time of the Gentiles” which will conclude soon. This means that there are two covenants now at work: one given through Moses and the other covenant of Christ. But the new covenant in no way makes the older covenant obsolete.
3. Blessing Modern Israel: We must take Gen. 12:3 literally and apply it to modern Israel: “I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.” Therefore, Christians have a spiritual obligation to bless Israel and “pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” To fail to bless Israel (defined as failure to support Israel’s political survival today) will incur divine judgment.
4. Prophecy: The prophetic books of the Bible are describing events of today and do not principally refer to events in biblical times. Therefore, when we look at, say, Daniel 7, if we possess the right interpretive skills, we can see how modern history is unfolding.
5. Modern Israel and Eschatology: The modern state of Israel is a catalyst for the prophetic countdown. If these are the last days, then we should expect an unraveling of civilization, the rise of evil, the loss of international peace and equilibrium, a coming antichrist, and tests of faithfulness to Israel. Above all, political alignments today will determine our position on the fateful day of Armageddon.⁷

This summarizes the current belief system of those who would identify themselves as “Christian Zionists.” How they got to this point can best be understood when we take a brief look at the development of the “three acts.”

Act 1: Early Developments in Britain

Medieval Christian attitudes toward Jews were largely defined by “replacement theology” that relied on a heavily allegorical reading of the Old Testament to give credence to a belief that the church had replaced Israel in God’s salvation plans. In the usual medieval take on this teaching, Jews were considered to be under God’s curse for their failure to accept Christ as their Messiah, and therefore were forever condemned to exile or worse.⁸ Christian Zionists (and Jews) are quick to point out the disastrous consequences of this teaching for Jews: there is no doubt that it was at least partly responsible for the long, tragic history of anti-Semitism in Europe.⁹

Dissenting voices appeared, particularly among Calvinists in the seventeenth century, who rejected allegorical interpretation in favor of a more literal reading of scripture. This made it easier for Protestant Christians, particularly Calvinists, to look at Jews in a more favorable light. Rosemary and Herman Reuther attribute this shift at least partly to the democratization of biblical scholarship during the Reformation:

Bible reading in the vernacular, among Protestants, created a new identification with the people of Hebrew Scripture. The prophets and heroes of Hebrew Scripture replaced the Catholic saints as the figures of Christian story and self-identification. The Promised Land of the Hebrew Bible was understood as the actual historical land of Palestine, not as an allegory for a transcendent realm. Jews came to be seen less as a rival religion and more as another nation vis-à-vis the European nations.¹⁰

This shift occurred during a time of great anxiety, caused by political upheavals related to the religiously motivated wars of the era. With this anxiety came a new openness to speculative premillennial schemes, which popular religious figures were happy to provide. Numerous “end-times” pamphlets and books were produced in Great Britain during the English Civil War by popular Puritan preachers and “prophets.” They were also found to a lesser extent among the writings of Dutch Calvinists, French Huguenots, and Pietists in Germany and Denmark.¹¹ One Danish thinker, Holder Paulli, suggested that European Christian nations “should undertake a new crusade to free the biblical land from the Muslims so that it could be given to its rightful owners, the Jews.”¹² He shared his scheme with the Dutch king, William III, who was at the time sitting on the English throne. Paulli indicated that undertaking such a campaign would make King William equal to the Old Testament Persian king Cyrus, whom God anointed to return his people to the Promised Land. William did not take Paulli’s advice.

Despite the proliferation of this kind of predictive premillennial material in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, no organized movement developed

around it.¹³ That didn't happen until the mid-nineteenth century, when an Irish pastor named John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) developed a unique variation (some would say “deviation”) of premillennial teaching that would come to be known as “dispensationalism.”

John Darby's Dispensationalism

Stephen Sizer describes John Darby as “the most influential figure in the development of . . . Christian Zionism.”¹⁴ This is so not only because of what he taught but because of the missionary zeal with which he propagated it. Over a long sixty-year period of ministry he would take his dispensationalist message to audiences in Great Britain and continental Europe as well as America, doing so in such a convincing way that he would convert many key evangelical leaders to his unique twist on biblical interpretation.

Darby was one of a number of conservative evangelical leaders in Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century who were challenging what they saw as a liberal drift in biblical scholarship, a leaning away from a more literalist interpretation of scripture. They also rejected the optimism of postmillennialism¹⁵ that had supplanted premillennialism as the preferred outlook of the evangelical community in Britain during the eighteenth century.¹⁶

The American and French revolutions, combined with the Napoleonic Wars of 1809–1815, had caused people to question postmillennial optimism. Darby and his fellow premillennialists picked up the spirit of the times:

After the troublous times of the American Revolution and its aftermath, and especially after the devastating effects of the infidelic French philosophy, men turned again to the Bible for light, especially the prophesies of Daniel and Revelation. They were seeking a satisfying explanation of the prevailing irreligion of the time and to find God's way out of the situation.¹⁷

Darby's contribution to premillennial thought was controversial—then and now. His teaching, says Don Wagner, was an “adaptation of earlier forms of historic premillennial theology with various novel doctrines” with the following assumptions:

- The scriptures must be interpreted in a literal and predictive fashion.
- While there are two separate covenants between God and his people (Israel and the Church) the covenant with Israel with its focus on land and national identity should be interpreted as being “eternal and exclusively for Jews.”
- “The true Church” (those born again in Jesus Christ) will be brought to heaven (raptured) when Jesus returns to meet it in the clouds (cf. 1 Thess. 5: 1–11) at which point the people of Israel (now defined as those Jews

who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior) will become the recipients of God's historical promises. All unbelieving Jews will be annihilated.

- There are seven "dispensations" (defined as an historical epoch) that mark the entirety of history.¹⁸

Political Ramifications

If Darby's teaching and that of others who shared his perspective had remained simply a topic of debate among Christians over how to interpret the difficult apocalyptic passages of scripture, it would have had little impact on world affairs. As it was, it had great influence: Darby's teaching came to influence key nineteenth-century British political figures at a time when the British Empire was still in full sail.

The most important of these figures was Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper, seventh Earl of Shaftesbury.¹⁹ Lord Shaftesbury was an influential figure among evangelicals of his day. He also had the ear of powerful British politicians including the British foreign minister, Lord Palmerton. Shaftesbury became a tireless advocate for the dispensationalist take on biblical teaching both in his work with the church and on the political scene. He was, says Wagner, the most influential figure of his age in terms of what he did to advance the Christian Zionist cause:

Through his writings, public speaking, and lobbying efforts, Lord Shaftesbury did more than anyone before him to translate Christian Zionist themes into a political initiative. In addition to influencing British colonial perceptions of the Near East, Shaftesbury also predisposed the next generation of British conservative politicians favorably toward the World Zionist movement, which led eventually to British support of the Jewish state.²⁰

Ironically, British Jews met the effort that Shaftesbury made to encourage the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine with a cool reception. Having suffered in the past from forced deportation from other European countries, they suspected this to be yet another attempt to get rid of them. The American Jewish community had a similar reaction to a later attempt on the part of Christian Zionists to convince the then U.S. president, Benjamin Harrison, to support Jewish immigration to Palestine. Meeting in Pittsburgh in 1885, the conference of Reform Rabbis (who were the dominant voice of American Judaism at that time) said, "We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state."²¹

This sentiment would gradually change, at least for some, under the influence of a Jewish writer and journalist from Hungary named Theodor Herzl.

His book, *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*), and the movement it spawned, would convince a growing number of Jews in the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century that the establishment of a Jewish state was in their best interests.

Herzl was a secularized Jew. His zeal to establish a Jewish nation had nothing to do with the millennial schemes of Christian Zionists or the messianic hopes of religious Jews. It was for him a practical solution to the degradations, humiliations, and violence of anti-Semitism that had, in his view, become so endemic in European society that there was no other way to deal with it.

Herzl's original plans did not necessarily call for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. He was willing to consider other options. A Jewish colony in Uganda was an option to which he gave serious consideration. But the sentiment of the larger Jewish community convinced him that Palestine was the only viable option, even though he recognized the difficulties this would pose with regard to the Arab population currently occupying the land. In a diary entry for January 12, 1895, he would make a note of this difficulty and advance a possible "solution" which would anticipate the conflict that continues to bedevil Israeli-Palestinian relations today:

We must expropriate gently the private property on the estates assigned to us. We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the borders by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country. . . . Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and circumspectly.²²

Herzl was not the first Jewish thinker to propose the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. There were others such as Moses Hess and Leo Pinsker who discussed the issue, as Herzl did, from a secular perspective. And there were those such as Yehudah Alkalai and Zvi Hirsch Kalisher, who made the case from an Orthodox perspective. All had made similar proposals in the early 1880s.²³ But Herzl was the organizing genius who put the idea into motion. In 1897 he brought together over 200 Jewish delegates from primarily Eastern European countries for a meeting in Basel, Switzerland. There they established the World Zionist Organization, which would serve as the foundational body for the realization of Herzl's dream. The stage was now set for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

It is not within the scope of this chapter to examine developments within Jewish Zionism that would culminate in the establishment of the modern state of Israel. What is important to note is how Jewish Zionism and Christian Zionism came together to set things in motion. Both were necessary ingredients in advancing the cause. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the

formulation of a document that would afford Zionists the political justification they needed to make a Jewish state possible.

In 1905–1906, Chaim Weitzman, who had assumed leadership over the World Zionist Organization after Herzl’s death, met several times with a man who was at the time the leading member of Britain’s Conservative Party, Lord Arthur James Balfour. Weitzman’s aim was to try and persuade Balfour, as he had tried to persuade other British politicians, to throw the weight of the empire behind the Zionist cause.²⁴ It wasn’t hard in Balfour’s case. He had been raised in an evangelical home where dispensationalism was a defining motif. “He subscribed,” says Wagner, “to a simple, layperson’s version of the premillennial dispensational theology.”²⁵

Weitzman had chosen to use his persuasive gifts on the right man. Eleven years later, Lord Balfour, now the British foreign secretary, would write the words that would serve as the political green light for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, the Balfour Declaration:

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 this 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.²⁶

It is important not to overstate the case here. Balfour’s declaration had as much to do with British imperialistic designs on the Middle East as it did with Christian Zionist sympathies. The language he uses is that of political diplomacy rather than dispensationalist theology, which is far more absolutist in its claims for Jewish rights to the land. But there is no doubt that a Christian Zionist perspective shaped his, as well as the sympathies of other British politicians, in favor of the Zionist claim.

Act 2: Christian Zionism Comes to America

Darby and his disciples made a number of “missionary journeys” to America in the mid- to late nineteenth century, where they were frequent guests at prophecy conferences and evangelical meetings. A key convert to Darby’s dispensationalism during this time was the influential Presbyterian preacher and writer James Brookes, the man whom John Gestner identifies as “the Father of American Dispensationalism.”²⁷ Brookes met Darby during five visits Darby made to St. Louis in 1864–1865. There Brookes also introduced Darby to a young Bible student named C. I. Scofield, who would in turn go on to author the notes for the popular dispensationalist Bible which bears his name.

One of Darby's disciples, the British evangelist Henry Moorehouse, introduced Darby's teaching to Dwight Moody, who became a devotee as well. Through his Bible Institute and others modeled on it, dispensationalism became a normative interpretive approach to Bible study in many evangelical circles:

Although not the first of such schools, Moody's Institute in Chicago became the prototype. Since Moody had imbibed a fair dose of dispensationalism in a rather typical unstructured form, and his colleague and successor R.A. Torrey in a more systematic way, naturally the burgeoning Bible school movement, with a few exceptions, should follow this line of thought. Because many of the theological schools opted for divergent views, the Bible Schools unintentionally became training centers for evangelical ministers and Darby's prophetic teaching became more widely accepted than ever.²⁸

Darby's influence on a whole body of fundamentalist/evangelical teaching in America during this era and stretching into the twentieth century was impressive. Gary Burge notes that "throughout the '20s and for the next 40 years, Dispensationalism tied to Israel and prophecy became the litmus test for evangelical orthodoxy."²⁹

The difference between dispensationalism in America and Britain during this period was the absence of an overtly political agenda. This was due to a number of factors, not least of which was the largely apolitical nature of American fundamentalism. One notable exception was the political advocacy undertaken by a Darby disciple, William Blackstone. Blackstone was the author of the first dispensationalist best seller, *Jesus is Coming!* (1887).³⁰ Blackstone was also politically well-connected and, like Lord Shaftsbury in Britain, felt he should use those connections to advocate for a Jewish state. In March 1891, Blackstone collected the signatures of 413 business, church, and political leaders, among them the mayor of New York City, several congressmen, a chief justice of the Supreme Court, and John D. Rockefeller, on a petition calling for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, which he presented to President Benjamin Harrison and his Secretary of State James G. Blaine. Among other things, the petition stated the following:

Why not give Palestine back to them [the Jews] again? According to God's distribution of nations it is their home, an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force. Under their cultivation it was a remarkably fruitful land, sustaining millions of Israelites, who industriously tilled its hillsides and valleys. They were agriculturalists and producers as well as a nation of great commercial importance—the centre of civilization and religion. Why shall not the power which under the treaty of Berlin, in 1878, gave Bulgaria to the Bulgarians and Serbia to the Serbians now give Palestine back to the Jews?³¹

There is no evidence that Harrison paid much attention to this petition. But it set the stage for Act 3 where, in the early twentieth century, Christian Zionists in America would find their political voice, much as the Christian Zionists in Britain had at the end of the nineteenth century.

Act 3: Christian Zionism Revisited

It is interesting and instructive to note that the most vocal and politically active American Christian supporters of a Jewish state in Palestine in the period around the implementation of the 1947 UN Partition Plan were not Christian Zionists but liberal Protestant theologians and church leaders who had no sympathy for dispensationalist eschatology. The Christian Council on Palestine was established in 1942 by mainstream theological heavyweights, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Daniel Polling, and William Albright, who used it as a vehicle to promote Jewish immigration to Palestine.³² Their support was primarily based on humanitarian concerns. Given what was being revealed to the world about the horrors of the Holocaust and a determined campaign on the part of the World Zionist Organization to promote a Jewish state in Palestine as the only legitimate answer to the anti-Semitism which produced it, their response is no surprise. What *is* surprising is a statement Niebuhr made in behalf of this council to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry in 1946, betraying a lack of similar humanitarian concern for Palestinian Arabs. What he said, quoted here, would later become a standard Christian Zionist assertion.

The fact that the Arabs have a vast hinterland in the Middle East, and the fact that the Jews have nowhere else to go establishes the relative justice of their claims and of their cause. . . . Arab sovereignty over a portion of the debated territory must undoubtedly be sacrificed for the sake of establishing a world Jewish homeland.³³

It should be noted that the situation of the Jews having nowhere else to go was largely due to Western countries, including the United States, having restricted Jewish immigration during and after World War II.

The dispensationalist camp in America was amazingly quiet about Israel during the years building up to the partition,³⁴ despite the Balfour Declaration and subsequent British mandate having put in place the means necessary to create a Jewish state. Sizer attributes this in part to the fact that conservative Christians in America were preoccupied with the great fundamentalist-liberal theological battles of the early twentieth century with heated debates swirling around the nature of biblical inspiration.³⁵ Whatever the case, this would soon change partly due to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, but even more

to what Christian Zionists would call the “miracle” of the Israeli victory over her Arab enemies in the 1967 war, which gave the Jewish people sovereignty over Jerusalem for the first time in over 2,000 years.

It is noteworthy in this respect that a revision of the Scofield Bible was produced in 1967, by a team of American dispensationalists that included a man who would become one of the most prominent voices in “renewed Christian Zionism,”³⁶ Dallas Seminary’s John F. Walvoord. The revised Scofield Bible drew peoples’ attention back to the dispensationalist agenda at a time when dispensationalists believed world events were validating one of the key tenets of their belief system.

Billy Graham’s father-in-law, Nelson Bell, who was at that time editor of *Christianity Today*, summed up how many dispensationalism-inclined evangelicals felt at the time when he wrote, “For the first time in more than 2,000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews gives a student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible.”³⁷

Hal Lindsey and a “Renewed” Christian Zionism

In 1969 an otherwise unknown Dallas Theological Seminary graduate named Hal Lindsey published *The Late Great Planet Earth*,³⁸ which spelled out the dispensationalist agenda in a sensational way. His timing couldn’t have been better, not only because of the recent Israeli victory but also because of what was happening at the time in America.

Social and political unrest in nineteenth-century Britain had created fertile soil for Darby’s teaching. A similar climate prevailed in America when Lindsey’s book appeared. *Daily News*, with televised images, provided a disturbingly bloody picture of America being brought to her knees by a ragtag guerilla army at the cost of thousands of young American lives. There were urban riots and a cultural revolution on American campuses. Young people were questioning traditional morality and religious faith. All of this produced an unease among Americans that made Lindsey’s end-times speculations appear plausible. In particular, biblical literalists found his reasoning hard to resist, though most knew nothing about the dispensationalist theology that informed his thought. All of this helped make *The Late Great Planet Earth* the best-selling nonfiction book of the decade.³⁹

Lindsey’s book was a popular presentation of classic dispensationalist themes, beginning with what it said about Israel. In Lindsey’s perception,

The same prophets who predicted the worldwide exile and persecution of the Jews also predicted their restoration as a nation. It is surprising that many could not see the obvious: Since the first part of these prophecies came true we should have anticipated that the second part would come true, also.⁴⁰

Now that there was a Jewish state in place, reasoned Lindsey, we should expect to see a whole string of other biblically predicted events falling into place: the Temple would be rebuilt in Jerusalem. There would be widespread apostasy in the institutional church. Earthquakes and famine and social disintegration would accompany the appearance of the Antichrist, who would be cleverly disguised as an apparently benign ruler of a ten-nation coalition that would act as an instrument of Satan. All this would lead up to the day when born-again Christians would be raptured to heaven to pave the way for the Second Coming of Christ. The Messiah would return as a warrior king who would lead those Jews who would turn to Him in faith to total victory in the mother of all battles: Armageddon. With victory assured, the millennium would begin. Jesus would rule over a Messianic Jewish kingdom of peace and prosperity like none the world has ever seen before.

What was unique in Lindsey's presentation of the dispensationalist case was the way he confidently tied biblical references together with current events and political alignments, a tendency which has become a hallmark of today's Christian Zionism. One can see this in the numerous "end-times" books that fill the shelves of Christian bookstores like the dispensationalist blockbuster *Left Behind*⁴¹ series. And it all hinges on one objective reality that is there for everyone to see: God's chosen people, Israel, once again established after years of exile in the land that God gave them as an eternal inheritance.

The Late Great Planet Earth and the "miracle" of the 1967 war would signal the reentry of Christian Zionists in the United States into the political arena as an inevitable by-product of their confident assertions about Israel's central purpose in God's salvation plans. Jerry Falwell would become politically active around this issue at this time, and he was soon joined by many others.⁴² Within the next ten years, U.S.-based Christian Zionist organizations would become an important source of financial and political support for the Israeli government.⁴³

More recent years have seen the continuation and consolidation of Christian Zionist political influence, particularly through the establishment of a well-funded political lobby group known as Christians United for Israel (CUFI), started by the fiery American televangelist, John Hagee. Officially launched in 2006, CUFI boasts a membership of over seven million, most of whom are drawn from politically conservative American evangelical congregations. CUFI describes itself as "the largest pro-Israel grassroots organization in the United States" which "transform(s) millions of pro-Israel Christians into an educated, empowered, and effective force," striving "to act as a defensive shield against anti-Israel lies, boycotts, false theology, and political threats that seek to delegitimize Israel's existence and weaken the close relationship between Israel and the United States."⁴⁴

CUFI's influence is hard to measure, as its active membership may be far less than claimed, but politicians on the right, as well as influential Israeli political figures, have made a point of appearing at CUFI rallies to show their support over the years. U.S. secretary of state Mike Pompeo was a featured speaker at the Washington, DC, rally in 2019,⁴⁵ which drew thousands to the nation's capital. Vice President Mike Pence spoke in 2017.⁴⁶ Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the 2010 gathering by video conference.⁴⁷ Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman were guest speakers in 2008.⁴⁸ And they have been joined by numerous other political and military luminaries over the years.

Whatever the level of their political clout, it is clear that the political manifestation of Christian Zionism, rooted as it is in nineteenth-century British dispensational eschatology, continues to make an impact on the political scene in the United States.

NOTES

1. Bob Simon, June 8, 2003, "Zion's Christian Soldiers," Available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/10/03/60minutes/printable524268.shtml>.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., and also Gary Burge, *Christian Zionism, Evangelicals and Israel* <http://www.hcef.org/hcef/index.cfm/ID/159>. See also Donald Wagner, "A Heavenly Match: Bush and the Christian Zionists," in *The Daily Star*, 12 October 2003. See <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2003/Oct-11/93262-a-heavenly-match-bush-and-the-christian-zionists.ashx> for a more detailed description of the campaign.

5. Burge, *op. cit.*

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Herman J. Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 69–70.

9. Clarence H. Wagner, *The Error of Replacement Theology*. 2003. <http://www.ldolphin.org/replacement/>.

10. Ruether and Ruether, *op. cit.*, 70.

11. Ibid., 73–74.

12. Ibid., 74.

13. Donald E. Wagner, "The Alliance between Fundamentalist Christians and the Pro-Israel Lobby: Christian Zionism in US Middle East Policy," *Holy Land Studies* 2.2 (March 2004), 169.

14. Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Its History, Theology, and Politics*, Chapter 4: John Nelson Darby (August 1998). <https://www.stephensizer.com/articles/darby1.html>.

15. Postmillennialism is a way of reading what the Bible says about the millennium symbolically as the era inaugurated by the first coming of Jesus Christ, the one in which we are currently living. Postmillennialists of that era believed that the Kingdom of God would be realized on earth by the spread of the Gospel message and the blessings of Christian civilization.

16. Wagner, 2004, *op cit.*, 169.

17. Froom 1954: 137—quoted in Wagner, 2004, *op. cit.*, 169.

18. Wagner, 2004, *op cit.*, 171.

19. Ruether and Ruether, *op. cit.*, 77.

20. Don Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1995), 92.

21. Ruether and Ruether, *op. cit.*, 83.

22. Rafael Patai, *The Complete Diaries of Theodore Herzl Vol I* (New York: Herzl Press, 1960).

23. Ruether and Ruether, *op. cit.*, 46–47.

24. Wagner, 1995, *op. cit.*, 93.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 94.

27. John Gestner, 1991. *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991), 38.

28. Ian S. Rennie, 1977. *Nineteenth Century Roots in Handbook of Biblical Prophecy*, ed. Carl E. Armerding and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 57.

29. Burge, *op. cit.*

30. Sizer, *op. cit.*

31. The complete text plus signatories can be found at www.amfi.org/blackmem.html.

32. Ruether and Ruether, *op. cit.*, 84.

33. Sizer, *op. cit.*

34. Sizer, *op. cit.* (citing the detailed work of Erling Jorstad).

35. Ibid.

36. Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes towards the State of Israel* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), 163.

37. Sizer, *op. cit.*

38. Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).

39. Sizer, *op. cit.*

40. Lindsey, *op. cit.*, 48.

41. *Left Behind* is a series of sixteen best-selling religious novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins published by Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL between the years 1995 and 2007.

42. Sizer, *op. cit.*

43. See Wagner, 2004, *op. cit.*, 178–187 for an excellent summary and analysis of the post-1967 links between Christian Zionists and the pro-Israel lobby in America.

44. From CUFI's official website: <https://www.cufi.org/impact/about-us/>.

45. Barbara Boland, "Holy War? Pompeo Preaches to Pro-Israel Christian Confab," *The American Conservative*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/holy-war-pompeo-preaches-to-pro-israel-christian-confab/>.
46. Emily Jones, "Mike Pence to CUFI: I Support Israel Because I Am a Christian," *CBNNews.com*, 18 July 2017, <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2017/july/mike-pence-to-cufi-i-support-israel-because-i-am-a-christian-nbsp>.
47. A. Bach, "Inside the Christians United for Israel Summit in Washington, D.C., 20–22 July 2010," *Journal of Palestine Studies*. Vol. 40, No. 1 (Autumn 2010), 78–93. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2010.XL.1.078>.
48. Bill Moyers, "Christians United for Israel (CUFI)," *pbs.org*, March 7, 2008, <https://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/03072008/profile.html>.

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Chapter 2

Historicizing Zionism from Gospel Songs in East Africa, Late 1980s to the Present

Samwel Shanga Mhajida

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the history of the Christian Zionist movement in East Africa, using gospel songs from the region as a reference point. Since the late 1980s when Christian gospel songs started running viral as commercial hits, both millennial and futuristic messages became significant in popular understandings of Christian faith. The interpretive genres of such messages are historically very intriguing, as they evolved the African perspective of Zionism while interrogating the future. This chapter views the evolution of Christian Zionism in East Africa as a very old historical imagining of the future and the end-times. Gospel singers and songwriters drew their inspirations from biblical passages, which resonated with how singers understood any evil or transgression. The passage of time evoked in the lyrics envisioned the unfolding of an African Jerusalem and Zion. This chapter draws historical connections and parallels between the East African Christian Zionist messages as communicated in the gospel songs with other African Zionist movements, dating from the 1920s Zionist movement of Southern and Central Africa. There are continuities between the messages from gospel songs and the long history of what has been conceived by the oppressed as redemptive gospel, which will be revealed at the end of the age.¹

It is difficult today to view African Christianity apart from global Christian movements. In other words, Africa does not command a very different image of Christianity in the realms of theology. However, there are some forms of imagining which are globally acceptable but have taken a uniquely African face. I want to consider particularly the cosmological variations which have

distinctively positioned African Christianity, differentiating between what Michael Tillotson describes as colonial Christianity and African spirituality.² Among many Christian movements, Zionism has found a home in many African intellectual debates. The term “Zionism” is ubiquitously rooted in African spirituality and has been acceptable in Africa as a useful tool of the underdogs from the beginning of the last century.³ Although Zionism is rooted in Jewish histories of self-identity and nationalism, Africans claimed the messianic and millennial messages to express their marginalization under different colonial regimes. The African understanding of Zionism therefore fits what Edward Said calls the other Zionisms.⁴ These other Zionisms in Africa come from many roots, ranging from Kimbanguism, Rastafarianism, to independent African church movements.⁵ Such movements are widespread across Africa and have remained ingrained within the gospel of liberation.

Scholars agree that there are three routes through which African Zionist ideas entered the African realms of thought. The first is the African American path. According to Jaroll Roll, Peter Wood and Emma Wild-Wood, and Claudius Fergus, this path developed concurrently with the global forces of slavery, colonialism, and racism.⁶ Roll in particular has an open discussion of the ways in which African Americans produced Zionist idea that “God had chosen black Americans to carry out a master plan, a sort of black manifest destiny, for the salvation of Africa.”⁷ In particular, the role of Marcus Garvey in the establishment of millennialist thinking is important. Garvey was born in 1887 in Jamaica during a time when racial tensions were high among the black communities.⁸ His background as a child of lower income amid frustrated blacks made him from early on start to challenge the status quo. He led strikes and soon he was known all across Jamaica. The most important were his travels in London, where it is said he came to learn about the plight of the black race.⁹ In this respect, Garveyism in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL), and other resistance movements positioned themselves as advocates of African liberation, especially from 1920 to 1936. Theologically, Garveyism went beyond “this worldly” intentions and spoke concretely of the eschatological redemption—that is, redemption for individuals and for the community of black people, members of the race who would in a millennium achieve a climax of history by bringing earthly peace and prosperity.¹⁰

The second is Ethiopianism, which departs from the recent interpretation of Ethiopia as a land of sorrow. According to William Scott, ancient Ethiopia has always been considered special to African Americans:

Ethiopia traditionally symbolized for African Americans a mythical space, an idealized place of singular black power and special promise. From slavery times

to the modern era, black Americans commonly saw Ethiopia as a site of special significance, a sacred land, the center of ancient black power and prestige second only perhaps to dynastic Egypt. Favorable scriptural and historical mention of the ancient African state had made that nation, however defined geographically, an icon of black capability, potency, and sovereignty for generations of racially persecuted black Americans.¹¹

So “Ethiopianism” dates a bit far back in time. The term was used by the Tswana separatist churches in South Africa since the 1890s. But in terms of scholarship, the term was first used in 1970. There have been several strains of Ethiopianism as used by scholars. The first is millennial Ethiopianism (redemption thought). This thought is positioned in the pan-African millennialism where “a future black golden age” will be unfolded.¹² The second is cultural Ethiopianism. Scott mentions the protagonists of this strand, which includes the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, the playwrights J. A. Shipp and Alex Rogers, and, lastly its greatest champion, W. E. B. DuBois.¹³ All of these have jointly contributed to what has been called Ethiopian expressionism. The act which cemented this orientation is connected to the historic victory of the Ethiopian army against the Italians in 1896 at Adwa.¹⁴ Connected to this was a contribution of Ras Makonen, also known as Emperor Haile Sessie. His long reign, one of the longest monarchical reigns, epitomized African independence and freedom.

There is not a single agreeable point in which both Garveyism and Ethiopianism affected African Zionism. Those who have sought a connection between Garveyism and the emergence of Zionism in Africa have viewed it concurrently with the ways independent church movements emerged in many parts of Africa in the 1920s. The first case which is cited regarding this connection is the formation of a separatist church in Malawi by John Chilembwe in the 1920s. Chilembwe was born in 1871 to a Yao father and a Mang'anja slave.¹⁵ He grew up in a time which was very volatile, as his people suffered from a combination of colonialism, slavery, and missionary competitions. In 1891, Chilembwe met Joseph Booth (who was a missionary Baptist from the United States) and the two became friends, and subsequently Chilembwe was baptized in 1893. The two traveled to the United States for fundraising for the church in Nyasaland. In the United States, Chilembwe met the radical Zulu missionary John L. Dube from South Africa, Dr. Lewis Garnett Jordan of the Negro National Baptist Convention, and many others. Chilembwe came back to Nyasaland in 1900 and founded the Providence Industrial Mission. His radical ideas about European colonialism began to spread through his independent churches and schools. However, there were also church separatists who came from South Africa and spread the messages of Zionism as far north as south Tanzania.¹⁶

Another equally significant issue in African Zionism is its representation both in African songs and other cultural genres. Sean Redding and Marcia Wright correctly indicate that African messianic and Zionist movements gained momentum in the first decades of the twentieth century in what they call the prophetic moments.¹⁷ The early African prophets were Christian leaders such as John Chilembwe, or at other times they were ordinary Africans like Kinjenkitile Ngwale of southern Tanzania who was a spiritual flag bearer for the Maji Maji uprising. In other African countries like Zimbabwe, the most common names are Mukwati, Mbuya Nehanda, Chaminuka, and Sekuru Kaguvi, who were responsible for the Mwari cult that was a spiritual and ideological guide that instigated the Chimurenga war in late nineteenth century in Southern Rhodesia.¹⁸ What became even more pronounced was the impact which they brought, especially after such prophetic acts began to circulate in different genres, including songs and narratives.

Gospel songs cannot escape such historical antecedents. Gospel songs in the form of evangelistic choir anthems are as old as Christianity in Africa. According to Jean Kidula, recorded choir music in East Africa began in 1953 with the establishment of a studio dedicated for this type of work.¹⁹ Music from this time remained completely evangelistic with little commercialization.

GOSPEL SONGS AND THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Songs express any human state, whether sadness, grief, or happiness. Songs are also expressions of how human beings interact with beings higher than themselves. Hence, before the commencement of Christianity in East Africa, singing was part of East African spirituality. Before Christianity, singing in Africa followed East African ethnic practices. In this they were completely localized, and their message was event-centered. If a song was used in exorcising an ailing person, the singing would only be that which targeted that issue.

However, colonialism and the coming of new regimes of power completely transformed the use of songs. Across cultures, the adoption of colonial education transformed the target, the locality, and the themes of what was sung. Big rebellions like the Chimurenga in Southern Rhodesia, the Maji Maji in Tanzania, or Nandi Resistance in Kenya were contributing factors in transforming the East African cosmology of singing.²⁰ This does not suggest that the localized messages disappeared or were overtaken by what was brought by the colonial situations. Instead, the colonial presence largely upset the message of the African singing, and Christianity impacted singing even more.

In East Africa, songs today express the indigenization of Christianity in many societies. In East African countries, Christianity is more than two

centuries old. What does this mean? In terms of impact, the religion is now indigenous, and many of its appearances except the theological part reflect solely the African dimension. To understand what exactly this means, I want to pay attention to two documents which have been developed by historians and theologians in East Africa. The first proof that Christianity in East Africa, though part of global culture, is increasingly becoming indigenized is from history. Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo in 1999 edited a volume titled *East African Expressions of Christianity*. In the introduction Thomas Spear states the following:

Africans interpreted and appropriated Christian scriptures, practices and institutions for own purposes within the context of their own values and needs. Confronted with new epidemic diseases, natural disasters and widespread political and economic destruction in the wake of colonial conquest, Africans sought new concepts to regain moral control over their lives.²¹

In other words, Christianity in Africa is not just expressed but invented to fit into the social and political realities of East Africans. But indigenization is not limited to the social and political uses of Christianity as Spear puts it. It is about *uenyeji* (locality) or assertions of belonging, as argued by Felicitas Becker.²² In short, Christianity came as a foreign religion in many East African communities, and so the early evangelization period was dominated by missionary activities. Thereafter, and especially from the postcolonial period, Christianity went into a second period which Barz calls the post-missionary period.²³ This last period is important as Christianity in East Africa is slowly becoming old with African theologians and pastors. In some ways East Africa is also sending missionaries elsewhere including Europe. This is a second way of indigenization, which the Swahili call *ukristo ni dini ya wenyeji* (Christianity is a local religion).

In the context of songs, the first hymns in East Africa were brought by Christian missionaries in the turn of the nineteenth century.²⁴ Along the East African coast, Bishop Edward Steer translated the first European hymns into Swahili.²⁵ Others did the same in other indigenous African languages.²⁶ Early Christian songs were mostly translations of European hymns, and therefore the message was the same, though the language was different. In many African colonies, especially in Southern Africa, Christianity was indigenized more rapidly. The proclamation of the gospel continued with African pastors and prophets replacing Europeans, creating African churches in their midst.²⁷ Church preaching reflected African ethics and cosmologies. The music and hymns reflected existing frameworks of African church leadership. The most significant change was how Christianity took African cultures and blended them within church music and singing in general.²⁸

In the development of African Christianity, nothing has been as powerful as the decades that followed 1920. The church in Africa was maturing, and national political and social conditions were part of the forces behind Christian maturity. Two important transformations were taking roots in Africa. The first was the influence of African American Christian culture. African pastors who went to study in the United States brought a different Christian experience back home to Africa. The case of John Chilembwe from Malawi is always interesting to cite. Since his American experience brought an interpretation that resisted colonialism, and at the same time, embraced forms of Christianity which were considered African. However, Chilembwe's version of Christianity did not so much carry Zionist elements as the separatism that was characteristic of the African American Christian traditions.²⁹ Some were homegrown prophets who received Christianity and fused it with African traditions of disease and healing. Some of these traditions, like the one brought by Simon Kimbangu in the lower Congo valley, were millennialistic, yet tended to carry more African values than European theological ones.

East African Christianity to a large extent changed significantly after 1920s. Many changes were especially registered after 1940s with the rise of Pentecostal churches, and so evangelization became very spontaneous. As regards to Christian songs, hymns continued but improvised songs (*nyimbo za rohani*) became popular. The significance of these changes is such that we have to discuss this in detail. According to Jean Kidula, it is obvious that the first recording studio was opened in Kijabe in 1953. While evangelical Pentecostalism emerged across East Africa, Kenya became specifically a center for the first recorded Christian music in East Africa. This was significant because the availability of a recording studio produced effects especially in the replication of church music in the beginning of what has been called town choirs.³⁰ Mwanza was the first town choir in Tanzania that included good singers, mostly from the African Inland Church (AIC). Such choirs became popular and emerged also in other cities in East Africa such as Kisumu, Arusha, and Mbeya.³¹ These choirs grew stronger by the decision to give Christians opportunity to listen and buy such recordings. The Mwanza town choir recorded its signature vibes, spreading the tradition to many other towns for similar groups of singers. The Christian message presented by these choirs penetrated deep and wide in East Africa. However, the recordings made in this in the 1950s to the early 1980s do not seem to have carried Zionist messages.

Gospel music in East Africa primarily sprang up and matured in Tanzania and Kenya. Within the East African context, these two countries have a shared history of political stability and Swahili is widely spoken by people on both sides of the border. This enables cultural materials to be exchanged

very easily. As has been argued earlier, gospel music is relatively old in the two countries, though commercial gospel only became popular in the early 1980s. This time period is significant for two reasons. There was a political shift, which in my opinion explains many events—not only those pertaining to Christianity but things related to pluralistic societies and market-driven economies. For Tanzania, the shift from a socialist-run economy began on November 4, 1985, when President Julius Nyerere gave up his power. The next day, his successor Ali Hassani Mwinyi took the oath as the new president of the United Republic. This was a defining moment for Tanzania. This change was not the usual kind of political succession. In fact, it was a transition from one historical era to the next. Nyerere was known for his socialist and conservative economic ideals, which kept Tanzania out of the global liberal economy. As if to usher in the new era, the same day after the oath a major newspaper had a big headline that said “Tanzania pledges talks with IMF.”³² Many times, President Mwinyi described his coming metaphorically as the coming of a new age—which also ushered in an age that led to the writing of its own history.³³

In the context of Christianity and Christian gospel music, the same can be said. The liberalization of the economy in Tanzania brought a whole new era in the proliferation of Christianity and the concept of street gospel, where individual pastors and prophets used the occasion to open their own churches and sponsor both choirs and individual singers in their ministries. The urban context became very important, because liberalism led to massive migrations of people to big cities. With them came more preachers, talented gospel artists, and choir teachers, all working to use the new opportunities to share their messages in urban areas.³⁴

Salome Gregory has helped to put this history of gospel music in a proper context. She observes that the music was not initially highly regarded. Though choir groups led all evangelical ministries, their significance remained at the altar of the ministries. According to Gregory, “By the mid-1990s, gospel music was not a genre that moved the masses. The genre was underrated. Anyone venturing into this area of music was frowned upon or regarded as mediocre.”³⁵ I find this to be nearly correct. Gregory argues that gospel music in the era was scorned because the musicians were not especially talented. This is partly true but too sweeping. Gospel music in East Africa, before it became completely commercial and trusted, underwent a transformation.

Although I have used the term “gospel music” in this chapter, that was not its original name. Before the commercialization of Christian music in East Africa, the popular name was Christian music. Kidula believes that the transformation in popular usage of the name “gospel music” was part of this commercialization.³⁶ I believe this explanation is too simple. I agree with others who have strongly argued that gospel music did not come into being by sheer

luck. It was a story of blood, sweat, and tears.³⁷ We have to understand that gospel music was rising against the backdrop of a challenging atmosphere in East Africa. Gospel music rose in East Africa when Zairian music was hitting hard with very talented musicians that Africa had never had before. In the context of secular music, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Zaire as it was known after 1966 was at a high point as far as secular music is concerned.³⁸ Zaire under President Mobutu Sese Seko produced a huge impact in the secular music. Most singers in East Africa reproduced many of the songs sung in Lingala into Swahili. What was important about this music—particularly those by TP Ok Jazz under Franco Lwambo Machiadi and his successor Madilu Systeme—was that they were giant musicians whose effects were felt from Lagos to Nairobi, Accra to Dar es Salaam.³⁹ By late 1990, Zairian musicians still monopolized the market of the music industry. So when gospel music was rising in this Zairian dominance, many could not match the two. That is why it is true as noted earlier, gospel music was somehow looked down upon since its musicians were not talented enough to match those of the most established Zairian musicians. But it is also important to note that Zairians had a positive influence on gospel musicians. Since the playing of the guitar was key in Zairian secular music, the same seemed to have been replicated in many early town choirs. Some famous secular musicians of Zairian background, after converting to Christianity, entered gospel music and became huge in their own right. Three particular examples can be registered: Angel Chibalonza, Charles Chidumule, and Remmy Ongala Mtoro. All of them were renowned secular musicians, and when they converted they brought their Lingala music to gospel.

To really put the above into a proper historical context, it is important to follow what happened in the United States from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Jackson considers three stages in the development of African American gospel music in the United States.⁴⁰ The first began in 1900 to 1929. This was a time of great migrations of blacks from the rural south to different cities. During this time, African American gospel music was rudimentary in terms of instruments used and there was a lack of talented musicians. The second transition began in 1930, the time when most of the American citizens were in poverty and deprivation. However, in terms of gospel music, this was one of the most productive times in the development of American gospel music. The last period started in the post–World War II, from 1946 onward. This was the time when gospel music was commercialized and became a big business.⁴¹ Comparing this to East Africa, there are striking similarities in many ways. The factors that really propelled gospel music into becoming a big business in America are almost the same as in East Africa. On the American side there was the rise of purchasing power after World War II; the rise of recording companies; the presence of the radio,

promotion companies, independent recording companies; and the rising of independent soloists.⁴² All these factors applied to East Africa from after the mid-1980s, though that happened several years later.

One thing which set the situation in East Africa a bit back was the economic and political systems. Before the mid-1980s, the media was still controlled and state-owned.⁴³ This was true in Kenya as well as in Tanzania. But from the mid-1990s, the liberalizing of the economy changed all that. For the first time, private radio stations, the television, and the general pluralistic culture made it possible for experimentation in new music styles, including gospel music.

The first gospel singers who exploited this opportunity came from all over the country. Mapigano Ulyankulu Choir, composed mostly of Burundian refugees living in Tabora in western Tanzania, introduced their album *Sisi ni barua* (“We are letters”) in 1989.⁴⁴ This was the beginning of the first wave of gospel musicians. The impact of this group was unparalleled at the time. *Kwaya ya Ulyankulu* was among the fortunate to come right at the beginning of the neoliberal period in Tanzania. The production of both video and audio cassettes that were directed and shot by the *Redio Habari Maalum* brought a Christian message to a wide East African audience. One of their artists, singer Bliphus Mabona, was a brave lead singer, coming from a humble background but very committed to the preaching of the gospel.⁴⁵ For the first time, vocalists and choirs brought the message with a mixture of pictures from the video, which brought different scenes that resonated with the message. Videos brought the concept of God, glory, and Jesus as a real person, who lived and died just like anybody else, to life.

The *Jesus* film⁴⁶ changed the way messages in gospel music were delivered. Similar groups, like Mtoni Evangelical Choir, Kijitomanya Upendo Group, and New Life Crusade Tabata, were appearing with many popular gospel songs. These were all from Dar es Salaam. In Kenya, groups like the IFC Choir (from the International Fellowship Church) started commercial gospel, first as a brand that came from different traditions across Africa. Other groups in Kenya were Embu Town Choir and similar choirs across Kenya. The groups that were centered in urban areas had influence both from local music and international cultural music that ranged from Lingala (Congo), Kwela (South Africa), Nigerian, and Ghanaian highlife.⁴⁷ As stated in the case of Lingala and Zairian music, African music and gospel in particular had many such connections with the rest of the African musical traditions.

The interest in and acclaim of gospel musicians in choirs in East Africa remained strong until 2000. Within such choirs, talented individual singers began to rise. Some other individual singers not involved in choirs also emerged. According to Gregory, such individuals were quite talented. Their coming boosted gospel music to greater prominence. Singers like

Bahati Buku, Neema Kilahiro, Neema Mwaipopo, Rose Muhando, Angela Chibalonza, and many others brought a revolution to gospel music. The revolution to which we are referring here is the fact that such singers took gospel music from scorn to big business. One particular example is given by Gregory. In 2016 one promotion company responsible for protecting the work of gospel artists captured pirated works worth more than forty million dollars. It is not surprising that, apart from such pirating, artists were becoming extremely rich.

We must remember, however, that there were other singers in this category who came much earlier than these. Faustin Munishi, who migrated from Tanzania to Kenya in the 1980s, was one of those singers who began singing solo long before the coming of the second wave of solo gospel artists. Munishi is a unique figure who projected a truly East African image. He sang in Swahili throughout his career, and his songs “Niko chini ya mwamba,” “Malebo,” “Mageuzi na injili,” and many others are still popular. As said earlier, there is a huge connection between the neoliberal era that began in the mid-1980s and the Christian messages shared during the time. Early gospel musicians like Munishi were affected by the politics and debates about plural multiparty democracy and the geopolitics discussed in East African urban settings. In his most celebrated song “Mageuzi na injili”⁴⁸ Munishi recaptured the moment and the debates on whether East Africans could embrace multiparty politics or remain single-party democracies. For Munishi gospel music was only relevant if it connected with the community it intended to serve. The song took the *mageuzi* (the evolution, from a single-party to multiparty politics) as not something new in the history of humanity, because the Bible tells us that it was Satan who brought the first *mageuzi*, the first evolution:

Usishangazwe na mageuzi ya vyama vingi, yalikuwepo toka mwanzo huko mbinguni. Shetani ndiye mwanzilishi wa mageuzi, alianzisha chama chake cha mageuzi Na Mungu Baba hakupendezwa na mageuzi, alimfukuza huyo shetani toka Mbinguni Akaanza kuwa ndugu na wanadamu

*Itubu dhambi . . . mh . . . usamehewe . . . nasema uandikishwe chama kimoja, Yesu . . . Yesu ni njia, kutufikisha mbinguni.*⁴⁹

(Do not be surprised by the debates about multipartyism, this has been there since the beginning in the heavens. Satan is the first architect of multipartyism. He began his own party for change.

And God the Father was unhappy about Satan’s idea, and for this He removed him from Heaven. He began then to be a close friend to human beings. Repent of sin and forgive, I say that you must enroll in one party, the party of Jesus . . . Jesus is the way to heaven.)

The song continues, saying that the first person to be registered in the Satan political party was Eve and her husband Adam. From there, a competitive politics between Satan's party and that of God the Father continued. The song says that the battle and campaigns between Satan's party and that of God the Father still lingers on. Satan is still registering members in his political party. The most important part in the song is Munishi's personal conclusion about politics, where he saw that Africans in the 1990s still had committed political parties which brought them independence. His opinion was that such political parties should be allowed to continue and should not forget to urge its members to register in the true party, which is Jesus Christ. These remarks register one important conclusion of the politics of the 1990s. Tanzania, unlike Kenya, had a tough debate at the time of transition between political systems about whether multiparty politics should be allowed or the ruling party should be reformed and then allowed to continue. Munishi's song resonated with the demands of people at the time.⁵⁰

The group of many new solo artists singing gospel music came with a new wave of recording studios, gospel music promoters, and Christian-led radio stations. All these provided a substantial impetus for the emergence of an age of gospel music artists who became completely immersed in the music, taking it not as part-time work but as professional careers in which they were paid not only for the concerts but also for videos which were promoted by companies through contracts, giving the artists impressive incomes.⁵¹ It is at this moment that the music graduated from its low ebb and gospel artists became familiar in Christian concerts. They even performed regularly in secular events like government activities, meetings, and political rallies.

GOSPEL MUSIC AND ZIONIST MESSAGES

Writing about the Tanzanian choir (*kwaya*) in 2003, Gregory Barz saw the gospel messages as drawing inspiration from several sources: European harmonies brought by the missions, traditional Tanzanian cultures, new postindependence "invented" choral traditions, the African American choral repertoire, and pan-African musical traditions.⁵² These strands didn't stand on their own—they either went together or one aspect became more dominant than the others. Among these sources of inspiration were traditional African musical styles where dance improvisation, emotional and musical delivery of sermons and prayers, and verbal and nonverbal gestures are important and most prominent. Additionally, the uses of repetitive texts incorporating African songs about work, marriage, or ritual were also important. All these draw their vocabularies from the Bible, phrases from preachers, and everyday

street life experiences.⁵³ Though gospel music was first and foremost a Christian message, sometimes song lyrics gravitated toward social and political aspects of life. Munishi's song is one example.

In terms of Zionism, I borrow definitions from Richard Landes and Christina Zanfagna.⁵⁴ Their first definition of Zionism is a biblical one where Zion is "a historic land of Israel symbolizing the Jewish people. More specifically, it is the Canaanite hill fortress in Jerusalem."⁵⁵ Another meaning of the term concerns the city of David becoming a religious focus for all believers, and metaphorically it is heaven: "the final place of true believers or any idealized, harmonious community."⁵⁶ Another meaning of Zion or Jerusalem is related to messianic kingdom or millennialism—a belief in a climactic, God-wrought conclusion to history in which the good are rewarded and the evil suffer.⁵⁷ The last definition views Zion as a place of memory. I want to discuss all these in connection with how gospel artists imagine and interpret Zion in their genres as they carry the Christian message to their listeners.

Many gospel artists, both in the choir groups and soloists, have a strong theological and personal connection to the biblical and historic ideas of Zion. Pastor Lusekelo (also known as *Mzee wa Upako*),⁵⁸ on many occasions before he preaches in his church in Riverside in Dar es Salaam, sings the song "Sayuni, Sayuni" (Zion, Zion—mostly improvised):

Sayuni, Sayuni . . . oh . . . sayuni (Zion, Zion . . . oh Zion)

Mji wa ibada . . . oh . . . sayuni (the city of prayer . . . Oh Zion)

Mji wa mababa . . . oh . . . sayun (the city of the our ancestors—spiritually)\

Taifa teule . . . oh sayuni (the chosen nation . . . oh Zion)

Nyumba itunzwe . . . oh sayuni (the house should be protected oh Zion).⁵⁹

Though Pastor Lusekelo is not a gospel artist, his pre-preaching song is regularly used in his popular television program *Tutashinda* (we will win). Other pastors who have television shows also regularly use these kinds of songs. Pastor Pius Muiru of the Maximum Miracle Centre in Nairobi and Pastor Mama Lwakatare in Mikocheni Assemblies of God, known as *Mlimawa Moto* (the Hill of Fire), are two examples. In these cases, Zion is understood as a city, a house, and a nation, but in the most symbolic way as a general and ultimate place of worship to which the believers are called. A more elaborate version of this is a song from Jennifer Mgendi. Her song "Zayuni" (Zion) comprises some of the following stanzas:

Sayuni mji wa bwana (Zion the city of the lord)

Sayuni mji wa raha (Zion the city of luxury)

Sayuni mji wa Mungu (Zion the city of God)

Sayuni mji mtakatifu (Zion the holy city)
Haya mama, twende kule (mother, let's go there)
Haya baba twende kule (father let's go there)
Haya kaka twende kule (brother let's go there)
Haya dada twende kule (sister let's go there)

Mgendi's concept of Zion is the same because she invokes it as the city of the Lord, the city of luxury, and the holy one.⁶⁰

Another gospel artist using Zionist images in her songs is Rose Mhando.⁶¹ In 2005, when she emerged on the gospel music scene, she had many hit songs.⁶² Rose is one of the gospel musicians who revolutionized the genre through improvisation and the use of African dance styles, combined with rumba and Lingala dancing styles. In the song "Jerusalem," Mhando sings about the biblical Jerusalem and calls upon Jesus and the Lord God to rebuke Jerusalem (which can be taken as congregation of believers) for not listening:

Mimi iiii Mimi iii (x 2) (I, I, I, I)
Mimi ni bwana ninayesema nawe . . . eee (I am the Lord who talks with you)
Mimi ni bwana Yesu ninayesema nawe . . . eee (I am
the Lord Jesus who is talking to you)
Mara ngapi nimekuwa msaada wako wewe . . . eee
(How many times have I saved you?)
Mara ngapi nimekuwa suluhisho kwako mama eee? (How
many times have I become your reliable solution?)
Sasa nimechoka kusilizisha sauti yako . . . ooo (Now I am tired of listening to you)
Niseme neno gani uniamini mwanangu mimi . . . iiii (What
word should I say so you can believe?)⁶³

This song is biblical and does not go beyond that. However, the dancing aspect and improvisation are uniquely African. In Barz's categories of what inspires gospel artists, it is important to note the significance of a unique style of personification of the word of God. It is especially important to note how the gospel artists stand between God and human beings. I think there is a particularly confusing phenomenon as regards to the aspect of personification itself. It is difficult for a listener to distinguish between the lord's voice in the singers and the person.

Examining another song by Embu Town Choir from Kenya, the image of Jerusalem that singers project to their listeners is important. First, there are two distinct ideas of Jerusalem in the song. One is the old one, signifying the old life, the life before conversion. It is pre-Christian life.⁶⁴ This Jerusalem is a dull phenomenon and is less inspirational. Singers in East Africa rarely sing

about this category. Their emphasis is on the New Jerusalem. The first stanza of the Embu Choir's song is important.

Yerusalem Mpya

Ndugu tunaalikwa na Yesu

Makao ni mbinguni, Mji Yerusaaalem mpya tutaishi milele (x 2)

Mungu atafuta machozi ya washindi, wateule wa bwana, hawataona kifo

Uchungu na mambo ya kale

Yatakwishakabisa (x 2)

Mji umejengwa mraba

Na umejaa utukufu, una milango kumi na mbili

Kuta zake zapendeza (x 2)⁶⁵

The singers proceed to explain the geography of the New Jerusalem. First, the city is square-shaped with twelve entrances in the south, north, west, and east. The city is full of tranquility and peace, and the paths leading to it are golden paved. Its light comes from the Lamb of God, so it does not need either the sunlight or moonlight, and those who have been called in are those written in the eternal book of life.⁶⁶ The eschatological images used are those of millennial theology.

These kinds of images of the New Jerusalem come mainly from theologies preached in the AICs and the Pentecostal churches in East Africa. The theological understandings preached in these churches emphasized the personal God. It is this personal articulation which is very vivid in a song by the New Life Crusade Choir Tabata, Dar es Salaam. The song "Sipati picha" (I don't get the picture) is led in their version by lead singer Neema Mushi.⁶⁷ This is a particularly pointed example of the personification and glorification of the New Jerusalem in the song. The song was produced during the peak times of the town choirs especially in the late 1990s and reproduced by HOT MEDIA video producers. The lead singer imagines the coming of the Messiah in glory. The coming is envisioned as a completely personal encounter, where God will descend from heaven while receiving ululation from the angels. Neema imagines God sitting beside her with all the glory and grandeur of heaven around her. God the Father becomes a personal father talking with her and holding her. This picture is how Neema imagines how she will embrace the happiness of that meeting. In another example, Neema Mwaipopo sings "Shalom Shalom Israel" *wewe ndio mbarikiwa wa bwana, chemchem za Baraka zetu* (thou art the blessed of the Lord, the fountain of our Blessings) Shalom Israel."⁶⁸ The song is completely about Mwaipopo's personal admiration of Israel, a country she had visited. Her pictures of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, both of which she understands as part of Israel, are used as background images in the video version of the song.

IMAGINING THE FUTURE AND ZION IN GOSPEL SONGS

East African gospel musicians who have sung about Zion and about the end of times can be categorized within several distinct periods. Between the late 1980s and late 1990s, gospel music was transiting from evangelical singers and gospel singers (commercial singers). This period was a time of social, economic, and political crisis and transition. Economically, it was a challenging period. The market economy was slowly growing in Tanzania, as in their music. Zionism in Africa has consistently been associated with the oppressed. The emergence of evangelical churches is at the center of all Zionist singing. The evangelical churches emerged in the 1940s as underground and protest movements.⁶⁹ Since they were not part of the mainstream historic churches, they had to invent themselves through a liberating theology where the word of God was understood and preached as personal liberation from political persecution, as well as the movement toward institutionalization of churches in which individuals believed. This connection between Zionist messages and the political arena has not appealed much to scholars today.

Those singers who view Zionism beyond the spiritual realm are Christians who sympathize with the nation of Israel. These gospel singers sing gospel messages that are not connected to the geographies of conversion but connected to the history of the nation of Israel.⁷⁰ To understand this in concrete terms, one needs to explain one mismatch. In 2018, when the president of Tanzania decided to reinstate diplomatic relations with Israel, he was quoted as saying, “We cannot be tied to what happened in history, we have to open up our diplomatic relations with Israel as soon as possible.”⁷¹ A few months later, diplomatic relations broken in 1965 were reinstated. But this simple political action did not have a significant impact as far as a Christian view about Israel was concerned. While Tanzania had distanced itself politically from Israel, its Christian believers continued to embrace Israel as a spiritual center for all Christians. The song “Shalom” typifies this idealization of Israel.⁷²

Connected to the idealization of Israel there are other physical attestations that are beyond the gospel songs. Driving in the streets of Dar es Salaam in recent years one would not be surprised to see people with flags of different nationalities. Israel’s flag is among these, that mainly Christians proudly hang in their cars and on their motorbikes. This is one of the indications of physical admiration of the nation. Israel is admired as a place of memory and worship.⁷³

Another type of Zionism that appears in the gospel music is connected to a kind of nationalism which Iman Sanga calls “imagined communities.”⁷⁴ In this case, such singers “identify themselves as belonging to one nation even though that nation included people beyond the boundaries of a true ethnocommunity.”⁷⁵ In other words, this community is created in a social space which

can be a physical, mental, and lived space. In the songs mentioned earlier, the representation that songs carry with them embodies a collective future for such an imagined community. The lived experiences of individuals like Neema in the song “Sipati picha” takes the listener into a mental journey to the future, where God the Father personally embraces the saved.

Finally, the question about the connection between Zionism and earlier Zionist or independent churches is also pressing. I find the argument made by Terence Ranger on African Independent Churches in East Africa convincing.⁷⁶ For him, Zionist churches and the revivalist churches are not connected with any political consciousness but should be understood in their own right. To elaborate Ranger’s concept, we can say that singers are driven by many things in their art. Some are pushed by feelings or faith and some just by circumstances around them. The impulse to a certain course in life may be due to a larger philosophical connection which can be a connection to long historical independent churches like Kimbanguism,⁷⁷ Christian industrial societies,⁷⁸ or any East African religious revival should be understood as a “response to cultural and psychological tensions and not as expressions of political antagonism.”⁷⁹ But such comments cannot rest without qualification. As far as music is concerned, ideological issues cannot be avoided. It is with this in mind that we have to take Carl-Erik Sahlberg’s argument into consideration, that to exclude independent churches in the history of the church in East Africa cannot be fair. To show that African independent churches have grown up, today the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by Simon Kimbangu is now a member of the World Council of Churches.⁸⁰ The independent churches have infused into their worship and ministries aspects like anti-Europeanism, pro-Africanism, symbolism, and aspects of sacred sites. The song “usiabudu America” (don’t worship America) was sung by Munishi after the Iraq war in 2003.⁸¹ In this song Munishi sees all the problems in Africa—the war in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo, or Rwanda—as being problems caused by America. While Munishi sings against America other singers have only praise songs about Israel irrespective of its actions of violence in Palestine. This is the case because Israel is understood among East African Christians as a site of worship, and so it is a sacred place. The same can be said of the symbolism portrayed in many Zionist songs which have been shot as videos. The concept of Heaven is powerfully represented by the descending clouds, indicating how dear the heavens will be.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have discussed three main issues regarding Christian Zionism as portrayed in East African gospel songs. First is how Christianity

and Zionism have emerged in Africa. Both are foreign to Africa in terms of origin but over the years have matured and therefore have become indigenous. Coupled with this is the fact that Christian songs as popular music began in the 1950s, and later became commercialized from the 1980s. The revolution in the political and economic areas had direct repercussions in Christian music. This music, which began slowly, has grown into a big business. The last thing which was core to this discussion is how Zionism is understood and imagined by Christian gospel singers. As discussed here, the meanings of Zion are both biblical and personal. Gospel singers are flexible as far as Zionism is concerned. Part of this flexibility comes from how evangelical Christians have borrowed the philosophy and attitude of early independent church movements. The uses of traditional dances, symbolism, and improvisations have made the translation of Zionism particularly interesting.

NOTES

1. I thank Mr. Philemon Mtoi for introducing me into this book project. I also appreciate the efforts and encouragements made by Dr. Cynthia Holder Rich of Tumaini University Makumira.

2. Michael Tillotson, "A Critical Location of the Contemporary Black Church: Finding a Place for the World Church Formation," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (May 2010), 1017.

3. Here the concept of African redemption is the most powerful see, for instance, Jarod Roll, "Garveyism and the Eschatology of African Redemption in the Rural South, 1920–1936," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter 2010), 27–56. About the African context, see Sean Redding, "'Maybe Freedom Will Come from You': Christian Prophecies and Rumors in the Development of Rural Resistance in South Africa, 1948–1961," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 40, Fasc. 2 (2010), 163–191.

4. Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (London: Times Books, 1979), 79.

5. Matthew Kustenbauder, "Believing in the Black Messiah: The Legio Maria Church in an African Christian Landscape," *Nova Religion: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (August 2009), 11–40.

6. Peter Wood and Emma Wild-Wood, "'One Day We Will Sing in God's Home': Hymns and Songs Sung in the Anglican Church in North-East Congo (DRC)," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 34, Fasc. 1/2 (Feb–May, 2004), 145–180. Also Claudius Fergus, "From Prophecy to Policy: Marcus Garvey and the Evolution of Pan-African Citizenship," Vol. 4, No. 2 (Fall 2010), 29–48.

7. Roll, Op. Cit., 43.

8. Chief Nangoli, *No More Lies about Africa: Here is the Truth from an African* (Washington: A. H. publishers), 139.

9. Ibid., 140.

10. Roll, Op. Cit., 29.

11. William Scott, "The Ethiopian Ethos in African American Thought," *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter/Spring 2004), 41.
12. Ibid., 41.
13. Ibid.
14. James Quirin, "W. E. B. Du Bois, Ethiopianism and Ethiopia, 1890–1955," *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2010–2011), 8.
15. More details from Catherine Roth, "John Chilembwe (ca. 1871–1915)," <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/chilembwe-john-c-1871-1915/>.
16. Ashura Jackson, "African Independent Churches as a Threat to the Survival of Historical Churches in Mbeya," Piotr Cichocki and Maciej Ząbek, eds., *Development in East Africa Cultural Shift in East Africa: Developments, Biographies, (Im)materialities* (Wrocław: WDR, 2018), 245–270.
17. Sean Redding, "Maybe Freedom Will Come from You," 172, also Marcia Wright, "Maji Maji: Prophecy and Historiography," in David M. Anderson and Douglas H. Johnson (eds.), *Revealing Prophets: Prophecy in Eastern African History* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995), 139.
18. John Kaoma Kapya, "African Religion and Colonial Rebellion: The Contestation of Power in Colonial Zimbabwe's Chimurenga of 1896–1897," *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2016), 58.
19. This is an interview on Afropop Worldwide's Siddhartha Mitter "Hip Deep" series with Jean Kidula on the evolution of gospel music, January 11, 2008. See <https://afropop.org/articles/jean-kidula-on-the-rise-of-the-religious-music-industry-in-kenya-gospel-from-roots-to-rap-interview>.
20. Peter Simatei, "Kalenjin popular music and the contestation of national space in Kenya," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2010), 430.
21. Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo (eds.), *East African Expressions of Christianity* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 3.
22. Felicitas Becker, *Becoming Muslim in Mainland Tanzania, 1890–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 205–206.
23. Gregory Barz, *Performing Religion: Negotiating Past and Present in Kwaya Music in Tanzania* (New York & Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 87.
24. Carl-Erik Stahlberg, *From Krapf to Rugambwa: A Church History of Tanzania*, Evangelical Publishing House, Nairobi, 1986, 35; Imani Sanga, "Composition Processes in Popular Church Music in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania," *Ethnomusicology Forum*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Nov. 2006), 247.
25. Stahlberg, Op. Cit., 35.
26. Stahlberg also views the Universities Mission to Central Africa as one of the first people to indigenize the gospel through the translation of gospel into Swahili as early as 1879. See more in Stahlberg, Op. Cit., 40.
27. The reference here is to the role of the first African ordained pastors in Kenya. See more in Dickson K. Nkonge, "The Church Missionary Society's Burden: Theological Education for a Self-Supporting, Self-Governing, and Self-Propagating African Anglican Church in Kenya 1844–1930," *Anglican and Episcopal History*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (March 2014), 22.

28. Imani Sanga, "Music and Nationalism in Tanzania: Dynamics of National Space in Muziki wa Injili in Dar es Salaam," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Winter 2008), 52–53.

29. Jane Linden, "John Chilembwe and the New Jerusalem," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1971), 629–632.

30. Stahlberg, Op. Cit., 247.

31. Afropop, Op. Cit.

32. *Daily News*, "Mwinyi Pledges Talks with IMF," November 5, 1985, 1.

33. In some accounts, President Mwinyi has used the Arabic term *likullinajal-lin kitab* (Arabic for "every generation has its book"). See also Elias Msuya, "Kufa Azimio la Arusha: Nyerere alivyotofautianana Mwinyi," *Mwananchi Daily*, May 1, 2013.

34. Afropop, Op. Cit.

35. More details on the history of gospel music in Tanzania, <https://www.musicinafrica.net/magazine/gospel-music-tanzania>

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. There is a very informative discussion by Eyamba G. Bokamba, "Authenticity and the Choice of a National Language: The Case of Zaïre," *Présence Africaine*, Nouvelle série, No. 99/100 (3e et 4e trimestres 1976), 104–142.

39. Alex Perullo has a detailed discussion of this. See Alex Perullo, "Rumba in the City of Peace: Migration and the Cultural Commodity of Congolese Music in Dar es Salaam, 1968–1985," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring/Summer, 2008), 299ff.

40. Joyce Marie Jackson, "The Changing Nature of Gospel Music: A Southern Case Study," *African American Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (1995), 190.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 192.

43. Afropop, Op. Cit.

44. See more in <https://www.musicinafrica.net/magazine/gospel-music-tanzania>.

45. There is very scant information published on the Ulyankulu group, but as a young man growing up in central Tanzania, I knew every song by the group. The introduction and the conclusion of every album were followed by a short talk from the lead singer. Through this, Mr. Bliphus became known as a singer and preacher.

46. The film *Jesus*, produced in the 1970s and then reproduced by different filming companies at various moments later, has had a significant impact in gospel video production in East Africa. Since the film was released, many of the scenes of the life of Jesus from the film have been used by singers as background images, enhancing the gospel message throughout time.

47. <https://www.google.com/search?q=Jean+Kidula+Interview&oq=Jean+Kidula+Interview&aqs=chrome..69i57.6439j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>.

48. Ibid.

49. The original song can be watched at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egt2fb_62Sk&feature=youtu.be.

50. Ayub Rioba, *Media in Tanzania's Transition to Multiparty Democracy: An Assessment of Policy & Ethical Issues*, Licentiate Thesis, University of Tampere (November 2008), 22–26.

51. Afropop interview, Op. Cit.

52. Barz, Op. Cit., 87.

53. Christina Zanfagna, “Beyond Babylon: Geographies of Conversion,” *Hip Hop in the City of Angels* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 2017), 93.

54. Richard Landes, “The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography, Medieval and Modern,” *Speculum*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (January 2000), 97–145; see also Zanfagna 2017, 82–105.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. For a typical pre–preaching Zion song from Pastor Lusekelo, view <https://youtu.be/y8Q4fLnFdHM>.

59. Ibid.

60. The text is transcribed from YouTube <https://youtu.be/64-fPxx1zRs>.

61. More details can be accessed in <https://peoplepill.com/people/rose-mhando/>.

62. Today, a hit song is mainly defined as a song that has many viewers in social networks. See Mickias Musiyiwa, “Hit Songs and the Dynamics of Postcolonial Zimbabwe: A Study in Popular Music Trends, 1980–2009,” *African Music*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2013), 60.

63. The song can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/mGNnMUz9ixY>.

64. More details at <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/jerusalem/>.

65. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ihp_zK4q6dw.

66. Part of the words and references as regards to the concept of New Jerusalem as sung in the song can be found in the Revelation “Then I, John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,” Rev. 21: 2.

67. This song is accessed at <https://youtu.be/8EJq8pbZWj8>.

68. The song at <https://youtu.be/KE32bAzEroA>.

69. The distinction between historical and independent church is mainly used by Ashura Jackson see, Jackson, 2018, Op. Cit., 45ff.

70. Those who admire Israel seem to be tied by the biblical demands, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee” (Ps. 122:6).

71. President Magufuli’s speech about Israel: <https://youtu.be/6tbc6EtkYCY>.

72. The geography of conversion is a term used by Zanfagna, Op. Cit., she says,

Holy hip hop practitioners, through their music practices and discourses worked with and on what I refer as “living architecture” of the city to create a site of gospel rap production. Gospel rap artists perceived and perform place as a converting body and site for the potential conversion of religious subject: conversion as both a spiritual transformation and spatial practice. (91)

73. The question of collapsing people and place is well addressed by Zanfagna, 83.

74. Imani Sanga, 2008, Op. Cit., 57.

75. Ibid.

76. Terence O. Ranger, "Religious Movements and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (June 1986), 53.

77. Simon Kimbangu rose as prophetic and messianic pastor in Lower Congo in 1921. After supposedly healing an ailing woman in his village and subsequently developing a huge following from his village and beyond, Simon who was considered the holy one sent by the Lord Jesus, started to worry the colonial authorities. After only five months of service, he was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment, where he died in 1951. His church is now part of the World Council of Churches as stated in Stahlberg, Op. Cit., 146. See also <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/church-of-jesus-christ-on-earth-by-his-special-envoy-simon-kimbangu>.

78. Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo, Op. Cit.

79. Ibid.

80. Stahlberg, Op. cit., 146.

81. The interview with Faustin Munishi: <https://youtu.be/AxRZmPU-IgU>.

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Chapter 3

Assessing the Legal Realities of Zionism in Africa

Benjamin J. Parsalaw and Sara Ryan

In contemporary secular society,¹ law has been the normative baseline hailed as the primary mechanism prescribing social control.² However, it is important to acknowledge that besides law, social control is further underscored by both morality and religion.³ Therefore, it is important to critically review and analyze the intersection of these concepts, both domestically and internationally.

Undoubtedly, the connection between law and religion is noticeable within all societies. Both law and religion are instruments of social ordering which pose ethical and normative standards for their followers.⁴ Whether a state is a theocracy or a democracy, religion and its underlying lessons of morality permeate all spheres of society regardless of whether governments acknowledge their presence. It is difficult to overlook the influence of religion and its interface with various aspects of our legal community.⁵ Religion has a significant utility in highlighting the various moral principles which match legal prescriptions.⁶ A notable similarity between law and religion hinges on the fact that both aspire to regulate human behavior in public and private spheres.⁷

While law and religion share many similarities, the departures between the two are also evident. They are complementary as sources of lawmaking and adjudication but distinct in enforcement.⁸ In secular states religious rules lack the force of law provided by a government to impose penalties.⁹ A break in the similarities of law and religion is also evident where the two philosophies divide on certain issues of morality and justice. This conflict between law and religion is especially apparent through international law, which is distinctly secular.¹⁰ A prime example of this disharmony is the Zionist movement and the creation of the State of Israel.

In the most simplistic terms, Zionism is a movement that seeks to foster the establishment of a Jewish state, founded on the idea that all Jews globally comprise a single people.¹¹ This contrasts with South Africa's Zionism, which features an independent indigenous movement of faith healing.¹² This analysis will focus solely on the former.

Even though Judaism has not been part of Tanzania's religious genesis, Zionism has managed to permeate Tanzania's social, economic, and political spheres. Zionism currently impacts Tanzania. Therefore, it is important to analyze the benefits and downfalls of the current Zionist structure within the state, to provide legal solutions that might allow a more positive role for Zionist beliefs, maintaining freedom of religion and the right to self-determination for all of Tanzania's citizens.

Zionism is often viewed solely as a religious movement. But the clear Zionist goal is legal recognition of a hegemonic land that creates domestic and international benefits authorized under law for those who live within its borders. Zionism specifically relies on the recognition of the legal tenants of freedom of religion and the right to self-determination, and stands upon hope for the codification of these legal underpinnings within international and domestic laws.

Freedom of religion and the right to self-determination are inalienable rights preserved within laws internationally, continentally, and domestically.¹³ Tanzania is a member of the United Nations (UN) as well as the African Union (AU).¹⁴ As such, Tanzania is bound to the standards set forth in the UN Conventions regarding human rights as well as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.¹⁵ Tanzania is also bound to the legal concepts held within the UN Declaration on Human Rights after embedding the rights held within the declaration into its domestic constitution.¹⁶

The rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion are recognized in most national constitutions or by law.¹⁷ Freedom of religion is universally understood as a human right to be protected by all governments. The UN set forth in its Declaration on Human Rights that every human has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This included the right to change these beliefs as well as practice in public and private settings.¹⁸ Regionally, the continent of Africa also protects the right to freedom of religion within the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. Article 8 of this charter not only enshrines humans' freedom to choose and practice each individual's religion but also imparts a duty of protection by the state from restrictions of exercise of this freedom.¹⁹ Domestically, the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania codified the right to freedom of religion.²⁰ In *Hamisi Rajabu Dibagula v. Republic*, the Tanzanian Court of Appeals described freedom of religion: "The freedom of religion enshrined in Article 19 of the constitution includes the right to choose and profess, practice

and propagate religion, since profession, practice or propagation of religious faith, belief or worship is also a form or manifestation of a person's expression."²¹

The main difference between the international understanding of the freedom of religion and Tanzania's domestic enshrinement of this freedom is that the Tanzanian constitution provides a clawback clause in which the government can limit this law for the purpose of the protection of other rights within the constitution or for the promotion of national interest.²² While Zanzibar is subject to the union constitution, the island has its own president, court system, and legislature.²³ Zanzibar is a unique land in that the island is part of mainland Tanzania and subscribes to the domestic laws but is also semiautonomous in nature. For example, legally, Zanzibar subscribes to the majority of mainland Tanzania's domestic laws; however, Zanzibar still allows certain cases to be adjudicated within Islamic courts.²⁴ Since Zanzibar has this semiautonomous power, it is important to note that the island also allows for a clawback clause pertaining to the right to freedom of religion. This clause allows this right to be limited "if such a limitation is necessary and agreeable in the democratic system."²⁵ The Tanzanian Court of Appeals has held that clawback clauses must be strictly construed or else constitutionally guaranteed rights could be rendered meaningless.²⁶ While this legal holding sounds like an upholding of an inalienable right, the ruling unfortunately still allows for the clawback clauses to continue. The allowance of a clawback clause in the domestic codification of the right to freedom of religion is a significant departure from the substance of the right guaranteed by international laws.²⁷

Similarly, the right to self-determination can be found in Article 1 of the UN Charter on Human Rights and Article 20 of the African Charter and Human and Peoples' Rights. Self-determination is a cardinal principle in which individuals are able to freely determine their own futures through political association in a sovereignty of their own choosing. Within Africa, this also includes freedom from the bonds of domination through colonization and oppression. This freedom is associated with the right to pursue economic and social development contained within these choices.²⁸ This has especially been important in the decolonization of the African continent and the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples.

While Zionists rely on these and other legal rights to create a state free of oppression and interference with these rights, the current model of the Zion State stands in violation of these principles. A legal analysis of the current State of Zion (Israel) and any future Zionist states is important to understanding how the international community can fully protect the human rights of those most vulnerable.

From a legal standpoint, the attraction of Zionism to all Africans is self-evident. Africans understand Jews' oppression, displacement, and mistreatment

by the outside world. When the word “diaspora”²⁹ is used, it is generally in conjunction with either Jews or Africans as a description of individuals who were forced from their homeland. Europeans negatively impacted Jewish and African homelands, socioeconomic structures, and cultures. It makes sense that there is mutual understanding and a bond between Jews and Africans. Therefore, when Jews preach the ideal of a Zion, whether a physical land or not, of course that utopia is going to strike a chord in the hearts of Africans and instill a hope that they too can achieve a place where their rights and freedoms are fully protected.

Initially, Zionism was a basic tenet of the Jewish faith based in the Torah wherein Jews held the belief that Zion is a utopic afterlife within the borders of heaven as well as the belief that Jewish people maintain an eternal bond with the land of Israel.³⁰ As Jewish peoples emigrated and were forced from Israel, they faced discrimination, oppression, and holocaust. These horrific actions led to the creation of the current Zionistic movement in which Zionism is no longer solely a religious tenant but a political movement with its own structures which combines Jewish religion and nationalism. “We know that opposing Zionism, or even discussing it, can be painful, can strike at the deepest trauma and greatest fears. . . . We have come to see that Zionism was a false and failed answer to the desperately real question many of our ancestors faced of how to protect Jewish lives from murderous antisemitism.”³¹ While analyzing Zionism can be sensitive, it is necessary to understand the legal ramifications Zionism can have within Africa for peoples who have faced similar horrors to the Jewish people.

Theodor Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism, established that Zionism was more than a religious discourse about an ideal home but rather a set of actual institutions and practices. The current Zion, Israel, was created legally and aided by the drafting of legally binding documents at the hands of imperial powers with international supremacy. The Balfour Declaration within the British Mandate for Palestine and the support for the partition of Israel by both the United States and the UN supported the creation of this land.³² While Zionism has evolved since the political philosophy’s inception, it is important to understand its roots to evaluate the impact and effects it can have within Tanzania and the African continent.

Jewish philosopher and political scientist Hannah Arendt, who opposed Zionism from its very early stages, stated that Zionism rests on the belief that “a people without a home need a home without a people.”³³ No such land currently exists or even existed at the time of the creation of Israel. Zionism differs from most national movements which occur when a group uses their right to self-determination to seek independence. Instead, Zionism emerged from peoples scattered across the globe with no full consensus about what constituted home but rather a bond to a historical land.³⁴

Zionism as it currently stands is a settler-colonial movement in which Jews have more rights than others within the state. One of the practices of the religious-based political movement of Zionism founded by Herzl and set forth at the Second Zionist Congress was the colonization of Palestine in order to “uproot” non-Jewish inhabitants.³⁵ The colonial attitude of Zionism is inherently opposed to the right to self-determination, as well as basic rights of equality to deter discrimination. Jews as a minority do not hold enough political-legal power within the world to maintain autonomy within the Zionist state. Therefore, resettlement efforts and Zionism’s legality rely on the need for sponsorship from more powerful states to validate the Zionist states’ legitimacy.³⁶ These sponsorships often take the form of supporting Christian Zionist sentiments, seen currently in U.S. and British support for Israel.³⁷

Even though Zionists claim to have evolved past Herzl’s original colonial machinations, laws passed by recent governments in Israel have shown this argument to be fiction. In 2018, Israel passed a contentious “nation-state law,” which established three controversial concepts: (1) the right to exercise self-determination is unique to Jewish people, (2) Hebrew established as Israel’s official language, and (3) Jewish settlement as a national value.³⁸ This law emphatically asserts that the right to self-determination is exclusively conferred only to Jews.³⁹ While Jews are entitled to the enjoyment of this right, the law establishes that domestically, non-Jews such as Palestinians and Muslim citizens of Israel don’t enjoy the same right.⁴⁰

The nation-state law disintegrates any semblance of equality and fairness between Jews and non-Jews that live within the state.⁴¹ The declaration of Hebrew as the official language further disenfranchises Arab citizens of Israel, who face various hardships in voicing and communicating with the government.⁴² By default, the nation-state law has declared non-Jews second-class citizens.⁴³

This new law contravenes *the rule of law*, which is one of the most influential legal doctrines of the twentieth century.⁴⁴ A. V. Dicey writes that three pillars uphold the rule of law: (1) supremacy of law, (2) equality before the law, and (3) fairness in the application of the law. Israel’s nation-state law calls into question all three of these pillars. When examining equality, Dicey emphasized the quality of legal rights, powers, and capacities.⁴⁵ The Israeli law devised a legal mechanism that has engendered a great deal of asymmetry in terms of powers and rights between Jews and non-Jews. When a government observes the rule of law, it demonstrates that all individuals are valued.⁴⁶ Ignorance of the rule of law demonstrates the arbitrary, capricious, and discriminatory nature of Israel’s current governmental power.⁴⁷

Non-Jews are faced with a dilemma regarding the discriminatory nature of the nation-state law. There are two fundamental questions that deserve attention: Is there a duty to obey unjust laws? And, should unjust laws be

disobeyed for a higher ideal?⁴⁸ While these questions warrant extended debates, the fact that laws must be tempered and assessed in light of equity to dictate standards of justice remains irrefutable.⁴⁹ Neglecting the prescriptions of the rule of law eventually leads to an elitist state.⁵⁰

Beyond the colonial dogma that is intrinsic in current Zionism, a legalized caste system of sorts, rampant with segregation and human rights violations of sects of Jews within Israel, exists. Judaism is like any other religion: it is not as monolithic as Zionists assert. Within Judaism there are branches. These include Orthodox and Reform Jews, Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, Hasidic Jews, European and African and Arab Jews. Each of these clusters should, in theory, enjoy all the privileges afforded by the State of Zion (Israel). Unfortunately, history has shown this is not the case. International monitoring organizations have regularly criticized Israel for affording more protections and benefits for European and Israeli-born Jews, while creating essentially a second-class status for Arab and African Jews.⁵¹

Unfortunately, Israel does not currently stand as the State of Zion for Africans, even those who identify as Zionists. Many Africans have felt slighted and even betrayed by Israel. Israel has tried to entice African support by promising similar benefits to the continent and its inhabitants as the imperial colonial powers offered throughout the post–World War II period. Israel, especially under Netanyahu, has a pattern of asserting bold promises to African countries on international platforms and then claiming to not have the budget to fulfill these commitments.⁵² These enticements have included resources to expand Africa's capabilities, Israeli-funded NGOs bringing improved services such as solar energy and clean water, humanitarian aid to help impoverished communities and post-disasters, the building of research and training institutions, and the financing of African economic development.⁵³ Instead of receiving such aid, Africans have been met in recent years with arms sales to oppressive groups, forced deportations from Israel, bribery by Israeli corporations, and less-than-positive technical and developmental support.⁵⁴ These revoked promises echo tactics European colonizers used throughout Africa for centuries.

The government of Israel has also refused to become a home for African Jews. These Africans wandered through a desert (Sinai), seeking asylum from Eastern Africa (mostly Eritrea and Sudan),⁵⁵ where they have faced violence and oppression similar to the current and historic residents of the physical Zion State (Israel)—a story echoing biblical narratives. Israel recognizes less than 5 percent of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers as refugees.⁵⁶ Most attempts at asylum have failed, as many Africans have been forcibly returned after detainment and maltreatment within Israel. For a short period of time, Israel granted temporary protected status to certain Eritreans and Sudanese at the request of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Even though

certain migrants were allowed within their border, the government of Israel called these asylum seekers “infiltrators” and considered the African asylum seekers a financial burden to the state.⁵⁷ The Zion State’s government even tried to force African migrants to leave the state by withholding salaries and detaining migrants.⁵⁸ However, Israel maintains one of the highest GDPs in the world and holds a role as one of the wealthiest countries in the Middle East.⁵⁹ If any country in the region were able to take in asylum seekers, Israel would be at the top of the list. In January 2018, Israel’s own Supreme Court found that the government of Israel was wrongfully interpreting the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and should reexamine their practice regarding African asylum seekers. However, to date, little has changed.⁶⁰

In 2018, the government of Israel gave African migrants within Israel a choice: either take \$3,500 and a one-way plane ticket to either Uganda or Rwanda by April 2018, or face detainment and deportation. Israel shared with all African migrants that upon arrival in Rwanda or Uganda, they would be safe, and would be provided with resident status as well as work permits. This turned out to be untrue. NGOs within Rwanda and Uganda noted that when African migrants arrived in these “safe third countries,” the migrants were met with irregular migration status without work permits, and were often forcibly returned to their unsafe country of origin.⁶¹ The UNHCR has publicly criticized Israel’s treatment of East African asylum seekers within the county. This shows that even though Africans can religiously support Zionist ideals, maintain shared experiences with Jewish Zionists, and identify as Zionists, the physical State of Zion in Israel does not always uphold its invitation to everyone who believes in its efficacy within its borders.

Israel has not only failed Africa under international law but failed through the government’s own domestic law. In Jewish law, there is a “Law of Return” called aliyah. Jews within Morocco, Eritrea, and Sudan have been promised aliyah by the Israeli government; however, most Africans who aspire to immigrate to Israel to live under the protections of Zion have been met by a “wall of rejection.”⁶² Israel has for years asserted that financial hardship is the cause of this prevention.⁶³ In practice, aliyah has caused new issues. Families have been separated through the acceptance only of healthy children while leaving parents behind. In other cases individuals have been accepted only after tragedy has occurred, and international outcry has forced acceptance into Israel.⁶⁴

Since the original physical Zion is not truly Zion for Africans who believe in its protections, Zionists within Africa could seek to create hegemonic Zionist states for individual groups of self-determined peoples. The legalization of Zionist states in this manner is not the answer. Giving legal recognition to all hegemonic self-determined peoples would be in opposition of jus cogens⁶⁵ and create violations of a multitude of international laws. A creation

of this sort would create at worst an opening for genocidal dispossession and at best a new age of legalized segregation.

The legalization of the political practice of Zionism is detrimental not only to the inhabitants of the land where the new “Zion” is created but also to the people who were there before that creation occurred. Zionism is essentially a legalized isolation of people from the rest of humanity based on fear from prior oppression and the belief that such oppression exists in perpetuity.

The current legal State of Israel is a failed experiment in the protection of the international human rights for all Jews and especially non-Jews still living within its borders. Within Israel, multiple peoples live, each with the right to self-determination, including gentile Palestinians. This inalienable right has been denied to all but certain Jews within this political territory. In fact, Zionism has constitutionalized Jewish supremacy and has resulted in massacres of Palestinian people, high rates of death for Jews fighting for what they believe to be their land, destruction of ancient sites in conflict zones, and the creation of second-class citizenry for sects of Jews within Israel.

Similar practices can and have happened in Africa. A review of the history of Rwanda is a haunting example of the troubles legalization of Zionism could create. The Hutu and the Tutsi were both indigenous, self-determined groups that inhabited the same land. The backing of a more powerful state is what ultimately determined who had the “right” to occupy the land. Instead of creating a safe land for both peoples, one people massacred and forcibly removed the other in order to create a hegemonic land.⁶⁶ If Zionist states are created, who decides who has ultimate rights to the land? Would indigenous peoples not within that group be forcibly removed? Where would their “Zion” be? What protections will be enforced to protect minorities within the hegemony, such as the Arab and African Jews within Israel?

On an international level, the legalization of Zionist states violates a multitude of rights and freedoms of people living within new borders who are not part of the hegemonic group, as well as those in minority sects of the hegemonic group. At a very minimum, a codification of this sort would violate the following articles of the UN Charter on Human Rights: the right to equality, freedom from discrimination, the right to recognition as a person before the law, freedom from exile, the right to free movement in and out of country, the right to nationality, the right to own property, freedom of religion, freedom of association, the right to participate in the cultural life of community, and freedom from state interference in all rights of the charter. On a regional level, similar rights and freedoms would be violated. According to the Banjul Charter,⁶⁷ the following rights and freedoms would be violated: freedom from discrimination, the right to equality, freedom of association, protection of vulnerable groups, the right of all peoples to equality of rights, the right to self-determination, and the right to national peace and security.

Legalized Zionist states are not the answer. The legal answer lies within our current systems. Arendt wrote that the success of the assimilation of Jews in both the United States and Russia after World War II shows that “melting-pot” countries are more of a legal solution than Zionism.⁶⁸ The arbitrary borders created by colonial powers in Africa post-World War II are unjust and detrimental; yet, redrawing borders based on groups of self-determined peoples today would create a whole new wave of legal issues and conflict zones. Instead, countries should strive to be legal Zions for all of the peoples within their borders, where every person can live their lives freely in safe communities based on the concept of equality. To do so, governing bodies have several solutions. State governments can create temporary protective status for minorities who are facing oppression and conflict. Branches of government throughout the African continent can work on removing clawback clauses within their laws. Countries within Africa can create mechanisms whereby hegemonic groups can create their own working groups that would report to the government on areas of improvement for the realization of legal rights for each group and monitoring systems that would ensure compliance domestically.

Zionists have provided an idea for the guidelines which should be instituted within states to protect the rights of freedom of religion and self-determination and prevent discrimination against peoples in violation of their human rights for any reason. A set of laws which creates a Zionist state where all inhabitants are able to fully enjoy the freedoms and rights afforded by both international and domestic law, without any clawbacks, is one to aspire to within our current borders.

NOTES

1.

The term secularism was first used (circa) 1850 by G. J. Holyoake to denote a system that seeks to interpret and organize life on principles taken wholly from the world, without recourse to any religious belief. Since then, there has been intense debate concerning the precise meaning of the word secular when applied to liberal democratic states in the West. Jose Casanova, for example, has distinguished between three different connotations: Secularization as the decline of religious beliefs and practices in modern societies. (b) Secularization as the privatization of religion, often understood both as a general modern historical trend and as a normative condition, indeed as a pre-condition for modern liberal democratic politics. (c) Secularization as the emancipation of the secular spheres (state, economy, and science) from religious institutions and norms.

For more: see, Brenda Watson, “Can we Move beyond the Secular State?” in *Religions* (2015), 1457–1470; ISSN 2077-144, www.mdpi.com/journal/religions.

2. See John W. Morden, "An Essay on the Connections between Law and Religion" in *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 2. No. 1 (1984), 7–39; 8.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid. at 639.

5. See Mashood A. Baderin, 'Religion and International Law: Friends or Foes?' in *European Human Rights Law*, Vol. 5, pp. 637–658, 2009.

6. See Morden, An Essay on the Connections, *supra* note 2 at 11.

7. See Gad Barzilai, *Law and Religion* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 11 at xi.

8. Ibid.

9. See Aernout J. Nieuwenhuis, *State and Religion, a Multidimensional Relationship: Some Comparative Law Remarks* (Oxford University Press and New York University School of Law, 2012), 158.

10. Ibid., 638.

11. See J. H. Moore, ed., *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism* (Macmillan Reference, 2008), 240.

12. See Christoffer H. Grundmann, "Heaven Below Here and Now! The Zionist Churches in Southern Africa," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* Vol. 6, No. 3 (October 2006), 256–269; 256.

13. An "inalienable right" is one that is absolute and unable to be forfeited. An inalienable right cannot be morally or logically voided or delegated. Terrance McConnell, "The Nature and Basis of Inalienable Rights," *Law and Philosophy* Vol. 3, No. 1 (1984), pp. 25–59. See United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *International Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief*. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/Standards.aspx>. See also Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organizations, *Self-Determination* (September 2017). <https://unpo.org/article/4957>.

14. United Nations, *United Nations Member States* (July 2003). <https://www.un.org/press/en/2006/org1469.doc.htm>. See also, African Union, *Member States*, https://au.int/en/member_states/countryprofiles2.

15. National Commissions for UNESCO of France and Germany, *Claiming Human Rights in the United Republic of Tanzania*. <http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/urtanzania.html>.

16. Hurst Hannum, *The Status of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in National and International Law* (Tufts University: The Fleischer School of Law and Diplomacy) 374.

17. See Arcot Krishnaswami, "Study of Discrimination in the Matter of Religious Rights and Practice," *United Nations Publications*, Catalogue No. 60. XIV. 2 (1960), 14.

18. United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948, Article 18. See also, United Nations, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 1966, Article 18.

19. African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter)*, 1981, Article 8.

20. *Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania*, Article 19.

21. *Hamisi Rajabu Dibagula vs. The Republic of Tanzania*, Criminal Appeal No. 53 of 2001 (Court of Appeal of Tanzania at Dar Es Salaam, 2001).

22. “Tanzania 2018 International Religious Freedom Report” (Washington, DC: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2018).
23. Ibid.
24. Bahame Tom Nyanduga and Christabel Manning. *Guide to Tanzanian Legal System and Legal Research* (New York University: Hauser Global Law School Program, 2006), https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Tanzania.html#_Judicial_System_of_the%20Revolutionar.
25. Tanzania 2018 International Religious Freedom Report.
26. *Kukutia Ole Pumpun and Another v. Attorney General and Another*, Civil Appeal No. 32 of 1992 (Court of Appeal Tanzania at Arusha, 1993).
27. The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights allowed for clawback clauses in contradiction to international law. This allowance at the regional level has provided a space in domestic African laws to do the same. See, Loveness Mapuva, “Negating the Promotion of Human Rights Through ‘Claw-Back’ Clauses in the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights,” in *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, Vol. 51 (2016), 1–4.
28. African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, *African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (Banjul Charter)*, 1981, Article 20.
29. Diaspora is defined as “the movement, migration, or scattering of people away from an established or ancestral homeland.” “Diaspora.” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2020), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.
30. Rafael Medoff and Chaim Waxman, *The A to Z of Zionism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009).
31. “JVP’s Approach to Zionism.” Jewish Voice for Peace, <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/zionism/>.
32. Medoff and Waxman, *The A to Z*, 234–246.
33. Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*. Edited by Jerome Kohn and Ron Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2008), 433.
34. Medoff and Waxman, *The A to Z*, xxxii.
35. Sultany Nimer, “Against Appeasement: What’s Wrong with Zionism?” *Critical Legal Thinking* (27 August 2018). <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2018/08/27/against-appeasement-whats-wrong-with-zionism/>.
36. Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*.
37. Medoff and Waxman, *The A to Z*, xxx, 20, 180.
38. See Susan Hattis Rolef, “Basic Law: The Nation State of the Jewish People,” Unofficial Translation, <https://knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/BasicLawNationState.pdf>.
39. See Miriam Berger, “Israel’s Hugley Controversial ‘Nation-State’ Law, Explained” (Updated July 31, 2018). <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/7/31/17623978/israel-jewish-nation-state-law-bill-explained-apartheid-netanyahu-democracy>.
40. Ibid.
41. See Tamara Cofman Wittes & Yaël Mizrahi-Arnaud, “Is Israel In Democratic Decline?” In *Democracy & Disorder: Middle East and West Asia* (March 2019), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FP_20190318_israel_decline_wittes_mizrahi-arnaud.pdf
42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. See Michael L. Principe, "Albert Venn Dicey and the Principle of the Rule of Law: Is Justice Blind? A Comparative Analysis of the United States and Great Britain," in *Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review*, Vol 22, Issue 3 (01 June 2000), 359, <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ilr/vol22/iss3/2>.

45. See Hilaire Barnett, *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, 4th Ed. (London: Cavendish Publishing Limited, 2002), 93.

46. Principe, Albert Venn Dicey and the Principle of the Rule of Law, note 32, 371.

47. Ibid.

48. See Barnett, *Constitutional and Administrative*, note 34, 87.

49. Ibid.

50. Principe, Albert Venn Dicey and the Principle of the Rule of Law, note 32, 371.

51. Asad Ghanem, "Israel's Second-Class Citizens," in *Foreign Affairs* (24 January 2020), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/israel/2016-06-08/israel-s-second-class-citizens>.

52. Yosef Abramowitz, "The Soul of Israel's Schizophrenic Africa Strategy" in *The Jerusalem Post* (25 October 2019), <https://www.jpost.com/Magazine/An-enlightened-Africa-strategy-605550>.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Rebecca Furst-Nichols and Karen Jacobsen, *African Migration to Israel: Debt, Employment, and Remittances* (Boston: Tufts University, January 2011), <https://fic.tufts.edu/assets/migration-israel.pdf>.

56. "Israel: Deportation of African Asylum-Seekers Is a Cruel and Misguided Abandonment of Responsibility" (Amnesty International, 26 March 2018), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/israel-deportation-of-african-asylum-seekers-is-a-cruel-and-misguided-abandonment-of-responsibility/>.

57. Ibid.

58. Daniel Estrin, "Israel Gives African Asylum-Seekers a Choice: Deportation Or Jail," *National Public Radio* (22 February 2018), <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/02/22/587858424/israel-gives-some-asylum-seekers-a-choice-deportation-or-jail>.

59. Ibid.

60. See Amnesty International 26 March 2018.

61. Ibid.

62. Daniel Ben-Simon, "Selection and Heartbreak: The Aliya of North African Jewry," in *Haaretz* (20 September 2013), <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-selection-and-heartbreak-n-african-aliya-1.5337449>.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Jus cogens is "The Certain Fundamental, Overriding Principles of International Law," *Jus Cogens*. Cornell School of Law Legal Information Institute, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/>.

66. Mahmood Mamdani. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

67. The Banjul Charter is the colloquial name for the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The charter got this name because the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the organization that drafted the charter, operates in Banjul, Gambia.

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68. See Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 335 and 447.

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Chapter 4

Apartheid and Christian Zionism

Jonathan Kuttab

The phenomenon of apartheid originated in South Africa toward the end of the colonial era. It was a unique combination of white settler privilege together with European colonialism and resistance to the movements for freedom and self-determination. It created a system of separation and segregation, buttressed by laws and regulations that governed the lives of black and “colored” natives which controlled where they lived and what rights they had. It also had theological and legal bases which are worthy of examination.

The theory behind apartheid was that each racial and color group had distinct features and qualities, and so each deserved to be treated differently and separately. The goal all along, of course, was domination by white Europeans and their descendants over the African indigenous people of the country. The system was enforced by detailed regulations and a pass law system, as well as vigorous law-enforcement mechanisms that treated those who opposed it as terrorists, criminals, and outlaws. Within the framework of a Western-style “democratic” system, whites legally preserved their privileges and ruled over the entire country. While this system was originally supported by Western and European powers, the world community eventually rejected apartheid and its components. As decolonization spread and colonized countries obtained freedom and self-determination, the international legal system also repudiated apartheid, insisting that this system does not constitute a legitimate form of government but rather a crime against humanity. A convention against apartheid and all forms of racial discrimination was enacted and signed by most of the countries of the world and apartheid as a system was pronounced illegal and illegitimate.

To determine whether the current system propagated by Israel and the Zionist movement actually constitutes the crime of apartheid, it is important to study the matter with some degree of scholarly objectivity, away from

emotional passion or political bias. The object is not to show parallels to the South African regime under apartheid, though many comparisons can be made. The situation in each country is necessarily unique and different. In fact, comparisons are often unfair not only to Israel but often to South Africa, as the situation prevailing in Israel/Palestine is on some matters far worse than the situation that prevailed in South Africa until liberation.

What is needed is to outline the elements of the crime of apartheid, study the situation in Israel/Palestine, and apply the criteria objectively.

The crime of apartheid was specifically prohibited and defined in three legal documents:

1. The *International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid* adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 30, 1973, states the following in Article II:

For the purpose of the present Convention, the term 'the crime of apartheid,' which shall include similar policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination as practiced in southern Africa, shall apply to the following inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group.¹

The article goes on to describe a variety of ways in which apartheid is practiced, and the various inhuman acts which are prohibited, including

. . . c) any legislative measures and other measures calculated to prevent a racial group or groups from participation in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the country and the deliberate creation of conditions preventing the full development of such a group or groups, in particular by denying to members of a racial group or groups basic human rights and freedoms, including the right to work, the right to form recognized trade unions, the right to education, the right to leave and to return to their country, the right to a nationality, the right to freedom of movement and residence, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; d) any measures, including legislative measures, designed to divide the population along racial lines by the creation of separate reserves and ghettos for the members of a racial group or groups, the prohibition of mixed marriages among members of various racial groups, the expropriation of landed property belonging to a racial group or groups or to members thereof.²

2. The *Geneva Conventions* were intended to govern the behavior of occupying powers and protect the civilian populations who fall under the authority of another army as a result of military hostilities. They were enacted at the end of World War II and were gradually adopted by the

vast majority of the countries of the world. Protocol 1 of the *Geneva Convention of 1977*, which was signed by 169 countries including most African countries, designated apartheid as a war crime and a “grave breach” of the convention.³ This is significant because grave breaches cannot be justified by necessities and will be considered crimes carrying universal jurisdiction, which can be prosecuted in any country.

3. The *International Criminal Court (ICC)* was established by the Treaty of Rome of 1998. It lists in Article 7 that its jurisdiction covers the crime of apartheid, which it describes as follows: “The ‘crime of apartheid’ means inhumane acts of a character similar to those referred to in paragraph 1, committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.”⁴

A thorough analysis of these instruments provides a clear picture of the three elements of the crime of apartheid. These elements are

- a. a regime of separation or segregation on the basis of race, creed, ethnicity, of one group or groups by another group;
- b. the use of a legal, structural system and legislative measures for enforcing such separation for the purpose of domination of the oppressed group(s);
- c. the commission of inhuman acts and violations of human rights and denial of freedoms in the process of enforcing this segregation for the benefit of the dominant group, including torture, denials of freedom, restriction of living and movement, and forcing the oppressed group into separated reserves or ghettos.

It is to be noted that mere violations of human rights and commission of illegal acts do not by themselves constitute the crime of apartheid unless all three elements exist: separation, a legislative scheme, and the violations committed in enforcing that scheme.

The analysis must deal with the fact that several legal schemes exist in Israel/Palestine, and the analysis of each of them must be separate. In this chapter, I will first consider whether the situation in the West Bank fulfills the above criteria and constitutes the crime of apartheid. Later, I will consider the question of whether the entire state of Israel, which is gradually extending its formal authority over the entire area of Palestine (West Bank and pre-1967 Israel), also constitutes an example of apartheid.

The situation of the West Bank today consists of an area occupied by Israel during the 1967 war, extending from what was called the Green Line, which



Map 4.1.

marked the armistice line with Jordan when the state of Israel was created in 1948, up to the Jordan River (see Map 4.1).

Israel has been in control of this area since the 1967 war, and controls its borders, airspace, water and land resources, and governance. It created a military government and a civil administration. In 1994 Israel negotiated with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) an Interim Agreement creating a Palestinian authority that was thought to be a precursor to Palestinian statehood. That agreement has not been honored by Israel, and Israel continues to dominate the area. Jewish Israeli civilians have been moved into the West Bank and created a number of Jewish settlements, and there are no plans to remove them at the present time.

THE SITUATION IN THE WEST BANK

Israel has introduced into the Occupied Territories about 700,000 civilian Jewish Israelis who are now living permanently in these territories as settlers. Much has been written about the illegality of these settlements under international law, and I will not be addressing this issue here. The fact that these settlements are illegal, and that those settlers are living on land stolen from the Arab Palestinian inhabitants, is a separate issue. The reality on the ground, as I will describe however, is that the entire settlement project constitutes a form of apartheid which clearly fits the definition of apartheid, even if the whole area was sovereign Israeli territory, and even if the movement of civilians into that territory was legal, and the taking of land legitimate. I will be laying out the facts which show this and describing the legal and administrative system which exists today in the West Bank in support of my conclusion.

When Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967, Jordanian law prevailed. The first military order issued by the occupying forces announced that the Israeli military commander in the area took unto himself all legislative, executive, and judicial functions, and that all existing laws and regulations in force at the time would continue to be in force until changed by him. He and his successors proceeded then to issue over 1,700 military orders that affected all functions of government, legislation, planning, and land laws, with a view to creating an entirely different system which facilitated the creation of exclusively Jewish settlements in the West Bank, transferred large swaths of land to these settlements, and set up a separate structure governing their lives and the lives of the Palestinians.⁵

Today, over fifty-two years later, the situation in the West Bank is that two separate and distinct populations exist in the West Bank: Jewish settlers and Arab Palestinians. The two groups live in separate areas and are strictly

segregated and separated from each other. An entirely different system of governance applies to each group.

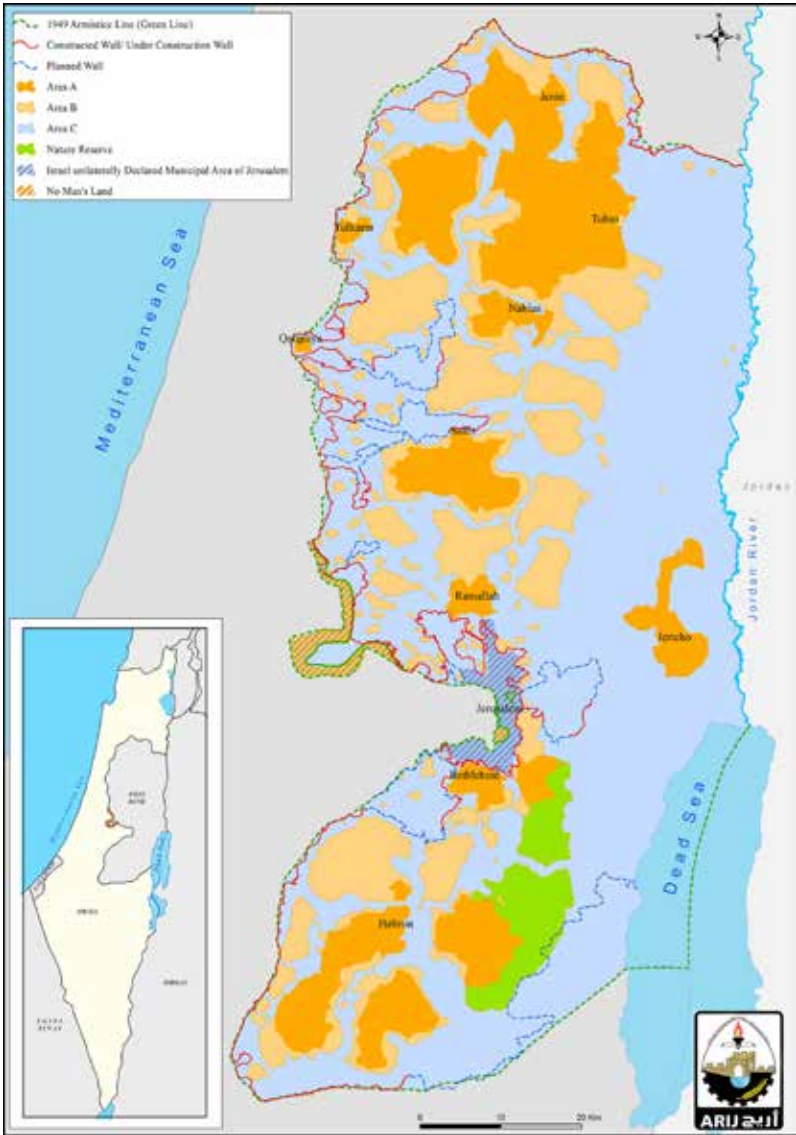
In 1994, the Oslo Agreements were signed between Israel and the PLO. A follow-up and implementing agreement was signed in Cairo on April 1994 and became known as the Gaza /Jericho agreement. It created a Palestinian National Authority (PA) and was supposed to be a precursor to a Palestinian state. The agreement divided the West Bank into categories labeled A, B, and C categories. Category A consisted of heavily populated city centers, which were to be managed in the interim by the PA under the terms of the agreement. Category B consisted of village areas that were also populated by Palestinians, who were supposed to be governed jointly by the PA and the Israeli army, with the PA taking primary responsibility for civilian affairs and the army maintaining security control. Areas in Category C contained the Israeli Jewish settlements, the army camps, and everything else in between. This category continued to be under full and direct Israeli control. The plan was to gradually reclassify more and more portions of Area C into B and A so that Area A would eventually expand into a full-fledged state by the end of the five-year Interim Period. Indeed, two such expansions took place before Israeli prime minister Rabin was assassinated and Benjamin Netanyahu (who had opposed the Oslo Agreement) came into power.

Since that time, progress on the peace process has practically become frozen and the Interim situation has stretched into a semipermanent state of affairs. Jewish settlements have continued to expand, and the processes of separation have become more solidified and confirmed into permanent structures. Movement between the different portions and categories of land in the West Bank, and between and among the Palestinian enclaves within, have become more and more restrictive. The Separation Wall (translated literally from its name in Hebrew) was built and new checkpoints and physical barriers were erected, further enshrining the separation and restricting movement between the different areas. Furthermore, a system of roads that serve the Jewish settlers exclusively has been constructed, linking the settlements to each other and to Israel, and cutting off the continuity and access of Palestinian areas from each other, often separating people from their lands. Map 4.2, from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, shows these restrictions (Map 4.2).

The resulting situation should now be examined objectively to see if the criteria of apartheid applies to it:

1. Separation and Inequality

- Separate residential areas: Jews in the West Bank live in totally segregated gated communities where Arabs are not allowed to live, or even to enter without a permit issued by the Israeli authorities. These areas, considered illegal under international law, started out as



Map 4.2.

outposts and secluded areas from which Arabs are prohibited. They have been expanding, while the areas where Arabs can reside, build, or even enter are contracting. All areas not populated, or sparsely populated by Arabs, are continually encroached upon, and now the Arab areas are looking increasingly like ghettos and reserves, and all

other areas are designated for current or future expansion of settlements. Such areas are now under direct Israeli army control, having been organized into “regional councils” with their own administrative structures. For example, the Ramallah district, which includes over ninety Arab villages, has been subsumed and supplanted by the Benjamin Regional Council, which includes about twenty-seven Jewish settlements and all the areas between them.⁶

- **Applicable law:** Jewish settlers, as well as Israelis or foreigners visiting the settlements, are governed by Israeli civilian law, while Arab residents and visitors are governed by Israeli military law, in addition to the Palestinian civil laws, which consist of the Jordanian Law as it existed in 1967, as amended by both Israeli military orders and, more recently, by Palestinian legislation and “presidential decrees.” Such laws and decrees are not binding on Israelis or Jews but only on Arabs, while Israeli military orders apply only to Arabs.
- **Courts:** Not only does a separate system of laws apply to each of the two communities, but the courts applying them also have separate jurisdictions. Israeli military courts as well as the Arab courts located in the large cities in Area A have no jurisdiction over Israelis or Jewish settlers. Only Israeli courts and local civilian settler municipal courts have such jurisdiction. Arabs, however, are still subject to both Israeli military and civilian courts, as well as the Arab courts.
- **Police:** Palestinian police have authority to stop and arrest Arabs but have no right to stop, search, or arrest Jewish settlers, other Israelis, or foreign visitors to settlements. If actually caught in the act of committing crimes, Palestinian police are theoretically allowed to temporarily stop and hold in place a Jewish settler (e.g., if he is actively shooting at others), while they call the Israeli police and promptly turn him over to them. This is only theoretical, as no Arab policeman dares to stop a Jewish settler or an Israeli car. Every Israeli soldier, however, is authorized to stop, search, and arrest any Palestinian Arab and take him/her into custody, even in Area A, which is supposed to be under Palestinian authority. Israeli patrols often come at night and arrest individuals in Area A, and the Palestinian police dutifully withdraw and stay inside their police stations to avoid any contact with the army. On February 22, 2020, a Palestinian policeman was shot and killed while sitting inside the Palestinian police station by an Israeli patrol that entered the area to make some arrests.⁷ While they have significant power over Palestinians and even over the Palestinian police, Israeli soldiers cannot arrest Jewish settlers; only Israeli civilian policemen can do so.

- Rights and privileges: Jewish settlers enjoy all the rights and privileges of Israeli laws and institutions, including voting for the Israeli Knesset, having different Israeli ministries provide services to them on a preferential basis (as development towns) as well as generous subsidies for infrastructure, roads, electricity, amenities. Palestinian Arabs have no such privileges.
- Education and health systems: Jewish settlers have a separate educational and health system (Kupat Holim) from the Palestinians around them, as well as national security benefits. Palestinian Arabs do not enjoy these services. They have their own vastly inferior system of services and social benefits, as well as medical facilities and schools.
- Roads: Jewish settlements are connected to each other and to Israel by a modern, convenient system of roads, most of which are exclusive to them, and Arab vehicles are not allowed on these roads without a permit, which is almost never given. Palestinian vehicles carry distinctive license plates so that they can be easily identified and stopped, and most villages abutting the modern system of Jewish “settler-only” roads have cement blocks or physical obstacles blocking Palestinian access. In certain locations, where the roads or the Separation Wall cut off access to villagers’ lands, there are gates, which are controlled by Israeli soldiers, where it may be possible at specified times for Palestinians to go through the checkpoints to their lands or destinations. Such access is strictly regulated and not always assured.
- Identity cards: All Palestinian Arab residents of the West Bank must carry identity cards issued by the Israeli authorities at all times and must show and surrender their cards to any soldier who demands it. A soldier can then keep the card, and the Palestinian is effectively detained until the soldier decides to return the card, without which the Palestinian cannot move around or carry any of the normal life functions. Cases of sadistic and humiliating behavior by soldiers at checkpoints are common and have been well reported by Israeli, Palestinian, and international human rights organizations. The relevant point for the argument in this article is that the requirement to have and to produce on demand one’s identity card does not apply to Jewish settlers, who cannot be stopped at all by Israeli soldiers or Palestinian policemen, but only by Israeli civilian policemen, and only for proper cause, as is the case in any normal society.
- The Separation Wall: A twenty-nine-foot wall was built inside the West Bank surrounding certain Arab towns, including Bethlehem and Jenin, and snaking around other areas inside the West Bank.

This wall, labeled in Hebrew the Separation Wall (*Geder Hafrada*), was ruled by the International Court of Justice to be illegal in a 2004 decision by fourteen out of the fifteen judges.⁸

It seems clear then that the element of separation and segregation in the international definition of apartheid is clearly met by the situation in the West Bank.

2. Legislative Element

The separation system described previously is not the result of a natural or voluntary action of different communities preferring to live closer to members of their own race or ethnicity but are the direct result of laws, military orders, and legislation, all of which are enforced by the courts of the dominant society. These have been enacted and are enforced by the authorities in question for the purpose of domination of one group over another group, in the interests of the dominant society. As was the case in South Africa under apartheid, and as required by the definition of apartheid, the structures and practices described previously are mandated by publicly known rules, legislation, regulations, and military orders that have the force of law. The internal structures and governance of the Jewish settlements are clearly spelled out in legislation issued and published in Hebrew and Arabic by the Israeli Ministry of Defense, and constitutes, with respect to them, “the law of the land.” It is also clear that the intent of these legislative acts and provisions is to enable control over the population and the land resources in favor of the dominant group and to advance its agenda of settling and acquiring control over the area. It may be argued (and is argued) that much of the legislation is “security”-related, but the fact that such legislation relates to land, water, taxation, economic life, as well as to the separate treatment of Jews from non-Jews, puts the lie to this claim. Many of the military orders are intended for population control, but the purpose of that control is to promote and advance the agenda of the occupier. This issue is described in detail by Raja Shehadeh,⁹ where military orders and the role of military courts are specifically analyzed in terms of how they advance a Zionist agenda of gaining control of the land and of advancing Jewish settlement of the West Bank.

This is an important element, because the crime of apartheid at its core is not the nefarious racist or discriminatory behavior of individuals but the legal structure of an oppressive society that is enshrined in laws and regulations that anyone can see and read. The state of Israel does not deny any of this. Instead, Israel has offered a number of justifications which the international community has never accepted for its Jewish settlements. The state of Israel uses its power and influence to impose these rules, and relies on its friends abroad, particularly the United States, to prevent the international community from applying its values, laws, and strictures to Israel. At the UN, the United

States routinely vetoes attempts to impose international law on Israel and has declared its intentions to punish the ICC and its personnel if they undertake actions against the state of Israel.

It is particularly unfortunate that Christian Zionism, for its own theological or ideological reasons, often supports such behavior and is hostile to attempts to label such behavior as illegal apartheid. Some Christians have gone as far as to use the concept of “Chosen People” in the Old Testament to justify giving Jews privileges and immunities from the strict requirements of international law and common decency that reject racism and discrimination.

INHUMAN BEHAVIOR AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS TO IMPOSE THE APARTHEID SYSTEM

The above-described system has been carefully structured since the beginning of the occupation in 1967 to achieve the goals of the Zionist movement, which holds that the West Bank, which they call “Judea and Samaria,” is really a part of the Jewish patrimony and should not be given back to the Arabs—nor should it be governed in the interest of its own inhabitants but in the interest of the Zionist movement, which plans to use the land and its resources for the benefit of the Jewish people. This is openly discussed as “public land” or land which can successfully be labeled as communal or public (as opposed to private land) and which is routinely given to the exclusive use of Jewish settlements. As occupying power, the Israeli army and the state of Israel have full use and control over such public land, as well as any land it confiscates and places into the public domain, whether this is done under the pretext of military necessity, public need (expropriation), or other forms of legal acquisition.¹⁰

To enable this function and to suppress any resistance, Israel has established a number of practices which violate human rights and international law. While the apartheid system of South Africa used Pass laws, Emergency regulations, and “homeland” designations to enable their system, Israel has used different tools to accomplish its purposes. Among the tools used are the following:

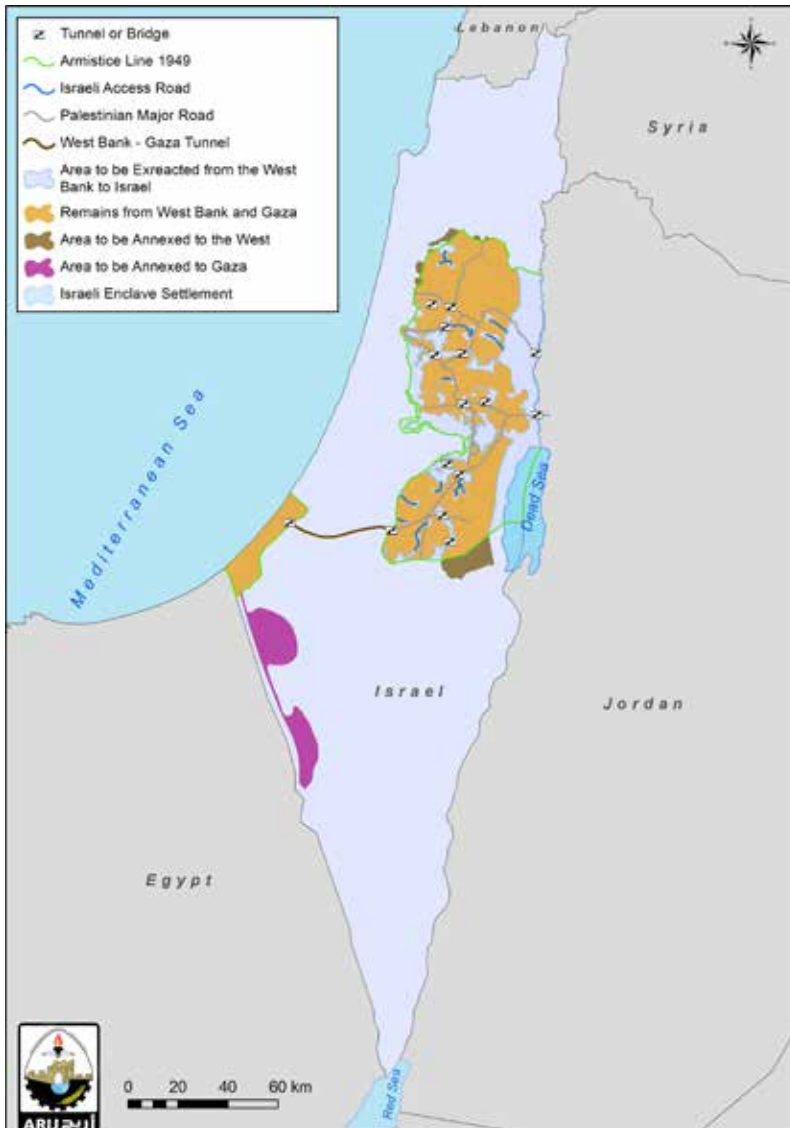
- Identity card system: All residents of the West Bank are required to have identity cards with a designated number and picture which are used for all transactions and which can be demanded and taken by any soldier at every crossing, checkpoint, or encounter with the local residents. Loss of such a document, or its confiscation or cancellation, renders someone a person without status. These documents need to be maintained in current status, and newborn children must register and obtain such an identity card by age sixteen.

- “Closed areas”: Military Order no. 283¹¹ authorizes the area commander and anyone he appoints to designate any area to be a closed area requiring an individual or collective permit issued by him for any person to enter or leave the area. This order is used to designate particular villages or towns, as well as all of the West Bank, or specific areas within as “closed areas” and prohibit movement in and out of them.
- Permit system: Almost every activity in the West Bank is subject to the permit system. Specific permits are needed to carry out most normal daily activities. These permits are given or denied at the sole discretion of the military commander. Palestinians complain that even when the military government has no interest in denying a permit, the occasion of asking for a permit is often used to recruit informers, punish political behavior, suppress a particular individual or class of individuals, or to oppress residents of a particular village or area. These permits include permits for travel or movement into or from the Occupied Territories; to import, export, dig wells, and construct any structures in Areas C and B; to travel for work, medical treatment, worship, or any other reason in Israel or East Jerusalem or any of the settlements. Permits are also required to travel between Gaza and the West Bank, as well as for living with one’s spouse if one person in the married couple is a foreigner, an East Jerusalemite, an Israeli, or a West Banker, while the other spouse belongs to a different category or classification. There is a provision for granting a family reunification to the couple, but it is discretionary and subject to the approval of the Israeli authorities.
- Administrative detention: At the discretion of the military commander, an individual can be held in administrative detention without charge or trial for a period of six months, renewable. There is a process for challenging this administrative detention, but it is held *in camera*, and secret evidence is used. Since no charges are made and no trial is held, it is virtually impossible to succeed in these challenges, as they rely solely on the discretion of a military commander who deems it “necessary for the security of the area” to detain a person. In March 2020, there were about 3,500 such administrative detainees, some of whom have been held for years. A similar law permits deportation as an administrative measure, but it has not been used extensively in recent years.
- Military courts: Palestinians are subject to military courts where, in over 95 percent of the cases, the sole evidence is a signed confession written in Hebrew, taken during an initial period of detention and interrogation, where the suspect is kept in isolation and subjected to extensive pressure until he “confesses.” Credible testimony from Israeli, Palestinian, and international organizations has shown that torture and mistreatment is routinely used to obtain confessions during interrogations.¹² Prisoners who refuse to confess, even under torture, can still be tried and convicted based on the

“confessions” of other prisoners, or can be simply turned over to administrative detention—which requires no charges and no trials.

- Torture: Torture usually occurs during interrogation, while a Palestinian is isolated from his/her lawyers and other prisoners, and it usually ends in a signed confession to be used in military courts. Palestinian, Israeli, and international human rights organizations have documented and described the methods of torture used, and its systematic use and role in the functioning of Israeli military courts. Even the Israeli High Court has acknowledged the use of torture, and attempted to regulate it under secret guidelines that describe what methods of physical pressure and psychological pressure should be allowed in obtaining confessions and information during interrogations.¹³
- Midnight arrests and house searches: The Israeli army often invades houses at midnight or early hours of the morning to conduct searches, during which furniture and food supplies and clothes are all thrown around, and children are traumatized. Individuals, often including children, are then arrested, blindfolded, and taken to an army base for interrogation as described previously. Military orders permit the arrest and detention of children as young as twelve, though many cases are documented with videos on the internet showing children as young as nine years old being arrested in the streets.¹⁴ According to Defense of Children International, arrests and detentions are most frequent in areas adjacent to Israeli settlements.¹⁵
- House demolitions: Military orders and Emergency Defense regulations permit the commander to demolish any house or building resided in or used by a person accused of a security offence. No proof, charges, or trial are required. Thousands of Palestinian homes have been destroyed through the use of this order as a measure of punishment or deterrence. This order is carried out as an administrative measure undertaken at the discretion and judgment of the military commander. Thousands more houses have been demolished, not for alleged security reasons, but for being built without a permit. This largely occurs in Areas B and C where Israelis refuse to give permits, and individuals build anyway.

All these methods and tools have been in place for decades. After over half a century of occupation, it is clear these are not temporary measures but part of an ongoing permanent regime of control supporting a system of separation, oppression, and control of Arabs by the Israeli government. “The Deal of the Century,” announced in early 2020 by U.S. president Trump, confirms these realities and allows Israel to annex the Jewish settlements and much of the surrounding land into the state of Israel, restricting the promised Palestinian entity to specific enclaves surrounded by areas annexed into Israel.¹⁶ The prime minister of South Africa joined with fifty former European leaders,



Map 4.3.

including six prime ministers and a large number of foreign ministers, declaring that the plan attached to Trump’s proposal is clearly an apartheid plan akin to the Bantustans once proposed for South Africa.¹⁷

Based on the above, it is impossible to deny that all three elements of the crime of apartheid exist in the West Bank. A state of apartheid exists in the

West Bank. This raises the interesting question of whether the entire state of Israel is an apartheid state—a question that for limits of time we cannot address here. Africans seeking to be thoughtful observers of international relations and international law are called by this evidence to reflect on their own history and how it compares to what has happened and is happening in Israel and the West Bank.

NOTES

1. *International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid*. G.A. res. 3068 (XXVIII), 28 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 30) at 75, U.N. Doc.

2. Ibid.

3. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)*, 8 June 1977, 1125 UNTS 3, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36b4.html>.

4. UN General Assembly, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (last amended 2010), (17 July 1998), ISBN No. 92-9227-227-6.

5. Raja Shehadeh, *Occupiers' Law: Israel and the West Bank* (Institute of Palestine Studies, 1985).

6. See B'tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, *Land Grab: Israel's Settlement Policy in the West Bank* for more information on the development of regional councils (May 2002), https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200205_land_grab.

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8. *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, www.icj-cij.org (July 2004).

9. Shehadeh, *Occupiers' Law*.

10. Isabel Kershner, "In West Bank, 99.7% of Public Land Grants by Israel go to Settlers," *The New York Times* (17 July 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/17/world/middleeast/west-bank-public-land-israel-palestinians.html>

11. *Military Order No. 5 (Order Concerning Closed Areas)* of June 6, 1967. This order was subsequently replaced by *Military Order No. 378, Art. 90* of April 20, 1970.

12. Detailed studies about torture are found at the website of the Israeli human rights organization B'tselem: <https://www.btselem.org/>.

13. High Court of Justice, 5100/94, *Public Committee Against Torture in Israel v. Israel* (09 September 1999) 26, available at <http://www.derechos.org/human-rights/mena/iot.html>.

14. "Israeli Soldiers Arrest Palestinian Boy in School," *CNN Video* (31 March 2019) [www.cnn.com > videos > world > 2019/03/31 >](http://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2019/03/31)

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Chapter 5

“Brand Jesus”

Pro-Israel Messaging through Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in Ghana

Suraya Dadoo

INTRODUCTION

Facing an international backlash for its entrenchment of a brutal, half-century military occupation of Palestine that is increasingly being compared to apartheid South Africa, Israel has had to look beyond its traditional Western allies for support. Benjamin Netanyahu’s regime has turned to sub-Saharan Africa in an effort to build new alliances, fight off a global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, and win support at the United Nations (UN). In Ghana, Israel is using Christian evangelicals to spread its propaganda, neutralize criticism of Israel’s human rights violations, and gain sympathy and loyalty in Ghana. Israel’s partnership with Ghanaian churches, particularly those from the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, forms part of a continent-wide diplomatic effort, aimed at dissolving Africa’s traditional support of Palestinian self-determination and justice. This chapter explores the means and extent to which the Israeli state and its partners are using churches in Ghana to garner support, and assesses if fervent evangelical backing for Israel in Ghana has shifted Ghanaian foreign policy, translating thus into political and diplomatic support for the Israeli occupation at multilateral forums such as the African Union (AU) and the UN.

In June 2019, Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, hosted its annual prayer breakfast (JPB) in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Prayer Breakfast (JPB) is a prayer movement that brings together government leaders, politicians, and influential Christian leaders from all over the world to—according to the JPB website—“answer God’s command and the Knesset’s call to the nations to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the prosperity of Israel.”¹ Ghana’s

minister for finance, Ken Ofori-Atta, was invited as a special speaker to the event in Israel. This invitation came after Ghana hosted the first JPB to be held on African soil in September 2018.² Ofori-Atta called it “both a joy and a privilege” to represent the Ghanaian government at the Knesset, and went on to state that the call to pray for Israel “resonates with our own conviction as a government that ultimately, it is the Lord—the God of Heaven—who will prosper us!”³

Ofori-Atta quoted Isa. 2:2–3 and Ps. 122 in his address, reminding the gathering that all nations shall flow to Jerusalem and of the promise to nations that those who love Israel and heed the call to pray for Jerusalem “shall prosper.” He was expressing a common belief of many Christians—particularly from Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches—that the State of Israel is special to God and a fulfilment of biblical prophecy.

According to this Christian Zionist narrative, the state currently occupying Palestine is regarded as biblical Israel. Any criticism of Israel for its occupation and human rights violations against Palestinians is regarded as criticizing God’s will, which will incur God’s wrath. By contrast, anyone praying for Israel will receive God’s blessings and prosperity.

The Ghanaian finance minister also took the opportunity to ask the Israeli government to help fund the construction of Ghana’s National Cathedral, a controversial Christian faith-based nation-building effort initiated by Ghanaian president, Nana Akufo-Addo. The Cathedral would be, according to Ofori-Atta, “a living monument to mobilize Africa to eternally, look East, and pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”⁴

Ofori-Atta’s remarks at the Knesset sparked outrage and condemnation from some quarters in Ghana. Coming in the aftermath of Donald Trump’s unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, critics and commentators like Oli Rahman labeled Ofori-Atta’s statements as provocative, reckless religious declarations with far-reaching diplomatic and religious consequences in Ghana. Rahman wrote,

Jerusalem is a sore point religiously and politically, best left to the UN. Could Ghana’s Finance Minister be sending hints to the world that Ghana would follow US President Donald Trump to move our Mission from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem? His foray into a portfolio he has no constitutional authority to dabble has compromised our [Ghana’s] non-aligned foreign policy in relation to Jerusalem and the entire Mid-East region.⁵

Others argued that Ofori-Atta’s participation at the prayer event was the promotion of a personal religious belief that blurred the lines between church and state, and undermined Ghana’s constitutional integrity as a secular state where policy issues are discussed using nonreligious discourse.⁶

There were also concerns that Ofori-Atta's promotion of a Christian Zionist position—in his official capacity as a Ghanaian government minister—could strain Christian-Muslim relations in a largely peaceful country, insulated from the religious conflicts that have plagued many of its neighbors.⁷ Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach note that Ghana's politicians have been careful to ensure that their public appearances and statements are religiously plural in order to pay equal attention to the major religious groups in the country.⁸ In Israel, Ofori-Atta had deviated from this norm.

Offori-Atta's statements at the Knesset also revealed the extent of the impact that Christian evangelicals have had in Ghana to win support for Israel. Had religion seeped into Ghana's government policy so much so that Ofori-Atta was leading prayers for Israel—a country that had been previously condemned by Ghana's government for its violations of international law and human rights?

THE RISE OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Christianity was first brought to Ghana (then the Gold Coast) by Roman Catholic missionaries in the fifteenth century with Portuguese traders.⁹ Through missionary schools, hospitals, and social welfare programs, Catholicism, and later, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches became dominant and grew in popularity throughout the British colonial period and in the postindependence era. More than 70 percent of Ghana's twenty-eight-million-strong population currently identifies as Christian.¹⁰ However, the face of contemporary Christian faith in Ghana has dramatically changed. Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Protestant, and Anglican churches have rapidly declined in numbers and influence. The decline of Orthodox churches is mainly due to the mushrooming of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Ghana, influenced by a wave of American-exported evangelicalism in the 1970s and 1980s.¹¹

Featuring ecstatic worship and belief in a God of miracles, worship at Pentecostal and Charismatic churches is characterized by drumming, singing, dancing, and ecstatic utterances that members see as coming from the Holy Spirit. Many of the services take place in informal settings like open fields, schools, and homes. The services are loud, entertaining, and make faith and prayer attractive and compatible with Ghanaian culture.¹²

"Pentecostal religion promises breakthroughs. . . . You tithe, you pray and you will get [what you want]," observes Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu.¹³ Sermons often focus strongly on financial, business, and career success. The "prosperity gospel" is central in the messages of these churches, appealing to social aspirations. Asamoah-Gyadu calls prosperity gospel "the gospel of

materialism,” and argues that the emphasis on attaining material wealth has led to “the commercialization or commodification of Christianity.”¹⁴ The extravagant and flamboyant lifestyles of Charismatic and Pentecostal church leaders are used to illustrate the success of prosperity gospel and God’s blessings.¹⁵

Although independent, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches are regulated by the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), churches who voluntarily subscribe to the council subject themselves to its authority. The GPCC has become a powerful voice in Ghana, and its leaders are often invited to state functions.¹⁶

Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Ghana are also evolving. An increasing number of people are breaking away from formal Charismatic churches to form their own congregations. Claiming to be prophets, these “one-man” churches charge steep consultation fees and promise to alter destinies through the use of anointing oil and holy water which must be purchased from the prophet.¹⁷ A 2014 report estimated that there were 10,000 faith-based groups identifying as Christian in Ghana.¹⁸ That number is now likely to be much higher, as many of these churches and groups have expanded since the report’s publication, and established multiple branches in various locations across Ghana.

Regardless of what type of church service Ghanaians attend, there is no question about the prominence and personal importance of Christian faith in everyday life across rural-urban and socioeconomic divides. Manifestations of Christianity permeate through almost every facet of Ghanaian society. Prov. 3:6 says, “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” Ghanaians follow that scripture to the fullest extent.

For instance, in Ghana’s Ashanti region, Yomi Kazeem notes that “there are possibly as many churches as gas stations.”¹⁹ Small and medium-sized businesses have Christian-inspired names and include the words “Jesus,” “God,” or a biblical reference. Examples include The Answering God Enterprise, Christ the Almighty Plumbing, Psalm 23 Catering, Thank You Jesus Hardware, and By His Grace Boutique. In Lower Manya Krobo, in the Eastern Region of southern Ghana, one can find Yaweh Joy Ventures, My Enemies Are Not God Stores, If God Says Yes Who Can Say No Enterprises, Mount Zion Kline Water, and Anointed Hands Beauty Care.²⁰

In Ghana’s large cities like Accra and Kumasi, the author has observed people studying the Bible on the bus. Public servants and office workers keep open Bibles on their desks. Pastors attain celebrity status with towering billboards lining the streets advertising their next prayer meeting. Weeknight church services and all-night prayer vigils are common. Messages like “Vote for Jesus” are plastered across the sides and rear windows of thousands of tro tros—the privately owned minibus taxis that are the main form of public

transport for Ghana's commuters. There are multiple television channels and radio stations devoted to Christian worship, praise, and preaching.²¹

ISRAEL IS THE PATH TO PROSPERITY

Material prosperity is a central message of Charismatic and Pentecostal churches in Ghana.²² At the heart of this message is Gen. 12:3, in which God tells Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you." Through their understanding of this verse, thousands of churches have a committed belief in the importance of supporting and praying for the State of Israel. The messages for Christians are simple: pray for Israel and you will be blessed because the State of Israel is special to God and a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Criticize Israel, and you will be cursed by God. Israel's blessings will result in personal prosperity for the individual and for the nation as a whole through Israeli agricultural and water technology, cyber-tech, development assistance, trade and investment. Christians must align themselves with the nation of Israel in order to benefit from Israel's blessings.²³

This conclusion is reached through particular readings of Gen. 17:8, where God's covenant with Abraham is recorded. This verse is often used as the biblical mandate to pray for Israel's continued existence on occupied Palestinian land.²⁴ "The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, 'And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.'"

According to Christian Zionist readings of the Bible, to which most churches within the Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations subscribe, it was in this covenant that God chose Abraham to birth a nation through which He could redeem the world. To do this, He gave them a land on which to establish this chosen nation. This verse is seen as a national calling to Israel, promises her future restoration to the land after a period of exile, and speaks of her spiritual renewal and redemption bringing light unto the world.²⁵

According to the Old Testament narratives, the ancient Jewish kingdom of Israel, usually referred to as "Ancient Israel" and sometimes called the United Monarchy of David and Solomon, is said to have existed from about 1000 to 922 BC. The United Monarchy was allegedly the most powerful and prosperous state in the eastern Mediterranean at that time, exercising sovereignty from the Euphrates in Syria to Wadi al-Arish in northern Sinai. These borders, in what is now the Middle East, coincided with those of the promise God is said to have made to Abraham and recorded in Genesis.²⁶

Starting from this understanding of geography, without asking themselves what the covenant consisted of, to whom the promise had been made, or if the

Lord's choice was unconditional, some of Israel's leaders and their Christian allies have proclaimed that the Bible was their mandate and Palestine was given to them by God.²⁷ By this reasoning, the State of Israel—which is currently occupying Palestine—is God's Chosen Nation. So, in the eyes of many Ghanaian Christians, Israel is God's Nation and Israelis are God's People.

Israel is central in Ghanaian understanding of Christianity, and the author has observed the Israeli flag flying outside many churches in Ghana's major cities. Israeli flags can also be seen dangling from the rearview mirrors of tro-tros, taxis, and private cars. For many Ghanaian Christians, praying for Israel is central to obtaining God's blessings and achieving prosperity. This belief forms the core of Israel's propaganda strategy in Ghana and is propagated by evangelicals across the country.²⁸

BRAND JESUS IN GHANA

In September 2011, Israel reopened its embassy in Ghana, thirty-eight years after mutual ties between the countries were severed following Israel's October 1973 war against a coalition of Arab states resisting Israel's occupation of Egyptian, Syrian, and Palestinian land.²⁹ In the aftermath of what is commonly referred to as the "Yom Kippur War," twenty-one African states cut diplomatic relations with Israel.³⁰ At the reopening ceremony, Israel's ambassador to Accra, Sharon Bar-Lee said, "Israel has two major brands in Ghana—Golda [Meir] and Jesus."³¹

Brand Golda refers to Israeli foreign minister Golda Meir who was instrumental in establishing an Israeli embassy in newly independent Ghana and who had cordial relations with Ghana's first president and pan-African hero, Kwame Nkrumah. Israel and Ghana enjoyed friendly relations, with Israel providing Ghana with development assistance in construction and training projects until 1973.³²

While Brand Golda is rooted in the past, Brand Jesus is the present and future of Israel advocacy in Ghana, tapping into Ghana's fervor for a Christian faith where love for Israel is a central tenet. With reference to Brand Jesus, Bar-Lee added, "There is true religious love and friendship for Israel [in Ghana]."³³ She is correct. A BBC World Service survey found that Ghanaian public opinion was overwhelmingly sympathetic and in favor of Israel, almost tripling between 2012 and 2014, as evangelical influence in the country increased.³⁴

Keen to build on this preexisting groundswell of pro-Israel sentiment, Israel's advocates launched a Christian-based advocacy campaign in Ghana in May 2014 called the Africa Israel Initiative (AII). AII was formed with the aim of lobbying and advocating for Israel to counter a growing global boycott

movement against Israel. According to AII’s mission statement, “It is crucial for the churches to raise the importance of the state of Israel and the Jewish people to the community.”³⁵

AII’s mission statement is prefaced by Zech. 8:13: “Now I will rescue you and make you both a symbol and a source of blessing!”³⁶ According to AII, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 was a fulfilment of prophetic word. Israel’s technology, innovation, development, and security expertise—that it has been offering to African countries as part of a diplomatic charm offensive on the continent—is viewed as a blessing to the whole world. AII calls on people to “join with God’s people and release into Africa the riches and blessings that God decided to submit to the world through this people [Israel].”³⁷

AII denies that its programs and projects are funded by the Israeli government, claiming on its website that its funding comes from within Africa through partnerships with African and Jewish interests on the continent. Tithing and offerings from African churches also form part of its income. AII calls its pro-Israel advocacy an “endeavor of achieving progress, prosperity, freedom and peace” and “a tool of positive development.”³⁸

With a mission statement focusing on blessings and peppered with biblical references, AII has adopted a Christian identity and claims that its objective in Ghana specifically—and Africa in general—is about bringing Israel’s technological blessings to the continent to bring prosperity. There are, however, politically motivated ulterior motives behind its advocacy work.

THE POLITICS BEHIND ISRAEL’S “BLESSINGS”

Rev. Gilbert Apreala was AII’s Ghana coordinator between 2014 and 2017. He outlined the real motive behind the group’s courting and partnership with Ghanaian churches. Speaking ahead of AII’s 2016 conference in Accra, Apreala condemned African governments who have supported votes critical of Israel’s occupation at the UN. “We want Africans everywhere to stand up and support Israel,” he said, adding that AII also engages African governments to help secure and sustain votes for Israel at the UN.³⁹ Apreala reiterated AII’s political advocacy in 2017: “The Africa-Israel Initiative is an advocacy group for Africa-Israel relations. . . . We want African countries to support Israel at the United Nations level, and for Africa to be blessed by the God of Israel for supporting Israel.”⁴⁰

Israel’s diplomats are capitalizing on pro-Israel sentiment among Ghana’s Christians. AII is being used to strengthen Israeli diplomacy and public support, in an attempt to shift Ghanaian foreign policy—particularly its record of supporting UN resolutions critical of Israel’s occupation of Palestine. Apart from UN votes, Israel is also seeking African partners—Ghana in

particular—to lobby the AU to grant Israel observer status. Gaining observer status at the AU will enhance Israel’s relationship with African states and allow it to influence their voting at multilateral institutions such as the UN.

According to AII president Erik Selle, Christians in Sub-Saharan African countries see the blessings of Israel as “the most Biblical and natural thing to do for a Christian.”⁴¹ Israel has also incentivized political support with offers of “blessings” of water and agricultural technology, security, and industrial investments around the continent. When Israel’s prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu met Israel’s ambassadors to African countries in February 2017, he explained that the priority was “to dramatically change the situation regarding African votes at the UN and other international bodies from opposition to support.”⁴² AII, and its work in Ghana, is an integral component to achieve Netanyahu’s goal.

“THE BATTLE IS THE LORD’S”

Faith-based, pro-Israel diplomacy initiatives like AII have intensified and expanded since Nana Akufo-Addo took office as Ghana’s president in January 2017. A devout Christian, Akufo-Addo’s faith featured strongly in his election campaign. Representing the center-right, liberal conservative National Patriotic Party (NPP), Akufo-Addo adopted “The battle is the Lord’s” as his campaign slogan, thereby cementing the links between the NPP and its Christian voters. The use of this slogan is also an indication of how Ghanaian politicians are appropriating the religious fervor that is shaping the identity of their constituents, in efforts to win votes. Akufo-Addo even thanked Prophet Owusu Bempah, the founder and general overseer of the Glorious Word Power Ministries International, for the “spiritual help” that Bempah provided that ensured the NPP victory.⁴³ According to Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach, this reveals “the ever-less-hidden links between the President and certain Pentecostal/Charismatic leaders.”⁴⁴

Akufo-Addo has publicly proclaimed a strong bond and love for Israel, even praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 2012, prior to his previous, unsuccessful, presidential bid. According to Akufo-Addo’s adviser, Adi Timor, Akufo-Addo’s connection to Israel, like that of most Ghanaians, comes from a “deep religious [Christian] conviction.”⁴⁵ Akufo-Addo’s victory was also a victory for Israel. “[President-elect] Nana [Akufo-Addo] is a strong supporter of Israel and I think as president he will be a close supporter of Israel for the Israeli government. [Israel] has a serious friend in West Africa,” Timor said.⁴⁶

On June 4, 2017, Akufo-Addo, along with fourteen other West African leaders, met with Netanyahu, at a summit of the Economic Community of

West African States (ECOWAS) in the Liberian capital, Monrovia. “We want to help your soil become more fertile, your water reusable, your cities safer,” Netanyahu promised ECOWAS leaders, as part of a strategy to strengthen ties and win friends in West Africa. Netanyahu’s development pledges in Monrovia tied in neatly with Akufo-Addo’s electoral campaign promise of a self-sufficient, prosperous “Ghana Beyond Aid.”

In one of his most pro-Israel actions, Akufo-Addo agreed to speak in March 2018 at the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the most powerful pro-Israel lobbying organization in the United States. Akufo-Addo’s trip to the Washington conference was cancelled as he returned to Ghana to respond to a domestic crime wave. However, his intention to participate at AIPAC’s conference demonstrated his pro-Israel inclination. In an attempt to secure God’s blessings, faith-based pro-Israel advocacy has flourished during Akufo-Addo’s tenure, and relations with Israel are at an all-time high.

In August 2018, Israel opened a new commercial trade office within its embassy in Accra. The Israeli government administers a variety of training and development projects in Ghana through its Foreign Ministry’s Centre for International Cooperation (Mashav). Israel was involved in building a trauma center in Ghana’s second-largest city, Kumasi.⁴⁷ The University of Ghana Medical Centre, 3K Water Project, the Accra Tema Metropolitan Area Rural Water Rehabilitation Project, and the Prabon Greenfields Estates in Kumasi are some of the results of Ghana-Israel cooperation.⁴⁸ Israel’s private sector is heavily involved in the Ghanaian cyber-technology, construction, agriculture, dairy farming, and fisheries sectors. On February 12, 2020, the Israeli Embassy in Ghana (@IsraelinGhana) tweeted that a double taxation avoidance agreement was being negotiated between Israel and Ghana to encourage Israeli trade and investment in Ghana.⁴⁹

Publicly, Netanyahu’s Ghana-based diplomats are working hard to portray Israel as a generous nation that cares about Africa and its people. Israel promises economic opportunities, technologies, and development and this messaging fits hand in glove with the narrative that Israel is a nation of blessings. In a country where much of the population lives on less than a dollar a day and 60 percent of people are engaged in subsistence agriculture, these messages and projects have a powerful impact.

According to Caren Holmes, Israeli propaganda in Ghana fuses nationalism with religious indoctrination, especially among evangelical Christians.⁵⁰ Israel is central to their understanding of Christianity. As Ghana embraces the Christian faith with a zeal that is increasingly shaping its national and political identity, Akudo-Addo’s government is viewing Israel’s technological and development assistance through an Evangelical Christian lens of God’s blessings. Israel, in turn, portrays its “generosity” through the Jewish concept

of *tikkun olam*: acts of kindness performed to repair the world—rather than as propaganda tactics designed to win African friends that is reminiscent of apartheid South Africa’s African propaganda strategy. In an attempt to buy support for its apartheid policies, the South African apartheid regime developed a policy of “helpfulness” toward poorer African nations, offering to share its agricultural and mining know-how.⁵¹ Most refused, and ultimately formed the frontline of resistance against South African apartheid.

Individual members of Akufo-Addo’s NPP government have also demonstrated their love and friendship for Israel. In December 2017, Speaker of Parliament Mike Oquaye, while on a tour of Israel, expressed support for US president Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In an interview with Israeli media, Oquaye said Ghana would abide with Israel’s wishes on the standing of Jerusalem, because “whatever Israel wants, we in Ghana will go by.”⁵²

In July 2018, a member of Ghana’s Parliament, Rev. Ntim Fordjour, called on Ghanaians to stand in solidarity with the people of Israel, after the country was globally condemned for killing over sixty Palestinian protesters during a peaceful protest in the besieged Gaza Strip in a single day.⁵³ The AU “condemned the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli army.”⁵⁴ Fordjour, who is also a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Ghanaian Parliament, appealed to the international community, particularly the UN, AU, and Ghana, to “rise in solidarity with Israel.”⁵⁵

In November 2018, while on a visit to Israel, Ghanaian foreign minister Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey “assured” Avraham Neguise, chairman of Israel’s governing coalition party, Likud, that her government would be assisting Israel to gain observer status at the AU.⁵⁶ In February 2020, Ghana’s ambassador to Israel, Hannah Ama Nyarko, made the same promise to Israeli president, Reuven Rivlin.⁵⁷ AII is also working closely with the Ghana Israel Parliamentary Friendship Association (GIPFA), which was formed in 2014, to lobby members of parliament to adopt a pro-Israel stance. Initially subdued and quiet, GIPFA’s work has been reinvigorated both by AII and the pro-Israel sentiment of Akufo-Addo’s administration.

AII has become a global player in the Israel advocacy movement, and has inspired the rise of smaller, faith-based pro-Israel advocacy groups in Ghana. In an effort to consolidate the efforts of the various pro-Israel Christian advocacy groups in Ghana, the Israel Ghana Friendship Association (IGFA) was established in Accra in March 2020. The IGFA serves as the official umbrella body of pro-Israel Christian advocacy groups in Ghana, with the objective of promoting the prosperity of Israel and to solidify the Israel-Ghana friendship.

The IGFA inauguration was attended by Israel’s ambassador to Ghana, Shani Cooper, who was joined by several prominent Pentecostal and Charismatic Ghanaian Christian leaders, including Nicholas Duncan-Williams, archbishop

of the Action Chapel International (ACI) Ministry; Dr. Lawrence Tetteh, founder and president of Worldwide Miracle Outreach; Dr. Joyce Aryee, founder and executive director of Salt and Light Ministries; and the Rev. Sam Korankye Ankrah, apostle-general of Royalhouse Chapel International. All pledged to support the advocacy efforts of the Israeli embassy in Ghana through their ministries and congregations.⁵⁸

Within days of the IGFA inauguration, the Israel Allies Foundation (IAF) appointed its first African regional director to mobilize support for Israel primarily through faith-based diplomacy and to expand pro-Israel parliamentary activity throughout the continent.⁵⁹ The appointee, Bishop Scott Mwanza, has been active in uniting and coordinating other African IAF caucuses throughout Africa, including Ghana. "First and foremost, I want to thank God for this appointment and I wish to use this appointment to effectively coordinate the current African Caucuses to achieve the desired mandate to fight the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement and to support the State of Israel, including at UN votes," Mwanza said.⁶⁰

AFRICA IS THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY

Africa is currently home to more Christians than any other continent. By 2060, six among the ten countries with the largest Christian populations on earth will be in Africa.⁶¹ The size of the Christian population in Nigeria alone—already the largest on the continent—is projected to reach 170 million by 2060. As the number of church denominations and structures across urban centers and rural areas continues to increase exponentially, Ghana finds itself central to the wave that puts West Africa at the heart of global Christianity.

As the future of Christianity moves to Africa, the Christian Zionist movement is also undergoing a transformation, both theologically and geographically. White, American evangelicals used to dominate Christian Zionism, but not anymore. There has been a broader shift within the Christian Zionist movement, and Israel is now devoting more resources to fund Christian advocacy groups within Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations in Africa. This is resulting in a proliferation of groups in the same mold as AII, IGFA, and the IAF, as Christianity's majority becomes African, and in particular, West African.

Israel sees Ghana as the cornerstone of its West African diplomatic and propaganda strategy, and it is replicating its American Christian Zionist strategy in Ghana. Christians United for Israel (CUFI), the Christian Zionist organization led by Texas pastor John Hagee, is enjoying remarkable access to the Trump administration. Christian evangelical leaders in Ghana are highly regarded and respected, and they enjoy an intimate relationship with

the political elite in Ghana. Israel hopes it can influence policymakers in the same way that CUFI has influenced the Trump administration's foreign policy positions on Israel.

TRANSLATING INTO GOVERNMENT POLICY?

The main aim of Israel's Christian-based advocacy in Ghana is to change government policy, particularly Ghana's voting patterns at the UN on resolutions critical of Israel. While pro-Israel sentiment is high in Ghanaian churches, and Israel is winning the war of public opinion on the Ghanaian street, faith-based Israel advocacy groups are not succeeding in shifting Ghana's position at international forums. So far, Ghana—historically a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause in Africa—has not allowed evangelicals or Israel's promises of economic development and prosperity to neutralize it at the UN.

In December 2017, Ghana joined 128 nations and voted against recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital at the UN.⁶² Responding to criticism from pro-Israel Christian groups and Israeli diplomats in Ghana, Martha Ama Pobe, Ghana's permanent representative to the UN, stressed that Ghana's vote was in accordance with "relevant UN and AU resolutions."⁶³ Citing biblical texts, a small group calling itself "Concerned Christians" labeled Pobe's Jerusalem vote "a gross error of judgment" and appealed to the Ghanaian government to change the vote and move its embassy to Jerusalem. "We will like to state unequivocally, that government's vote is totally unacceptable to the Ghanaian Christian community who believe in the prophecies concerning Jerusalem in Zech. 12:1-9," said Dr. Samuel Ofori, the spokesperson for the group.⁶⁴ "Jerusalem has been and is a divinely chosen religious and political capital of the Jewish people." Ofori said the divine position of Jerusalem as an indivisible city chosen by God for the Jewish people is incontrovertibly made clear in Ps. 122:3-4.

To the author's knowledge, Concerned Christians was the only Christian group that opposed Ghana's Jerusalem vote at the UN. The author was unable to locate any public statements issued by the leadership of the Ghana Christian Council, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, Ghana Catholic Secretariat, Anglican Diocese of Accra, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, or any other officially sanctioned Christian group calling on the Ghanaian government to change its voting at the UN concerning Israel, or recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.⁶⁵

The Ghanaian government also distanced itself from Parliament speaker, Mike Ocquaye, who indicated Ghana's willingness to move its embassy to Jerusalem. Ghanaian foreign minister Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey said that Ocquaye's statement was his personal view and did not reflect Ghana's

foreign policy.⁶⁶ No Ghanaian representatives attended the opening of the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem in May 2018.⁶⁷

At the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, Ghana has consistently supported statements issued by the fifty-four-member Africa Group during debates on Item 7 of the UNHRC agenda, which deals with the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories.⁶⁸ These statements have regularly condemned Israel's occupation of Palestinian land, its ongoing construction of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, siege of the Gaza Strip, and Israel's human rights violations of Palestinians. Through these actions, the Ghanaian government is saying that while it wants to receive Israel's blessings, it will not go against international law and global consensus. This is in spite of AII's Ghana coordinator, Rev. Gilbert Apreala, issuing a stern warning to the Ghanaian government in 2016 that it "should not sell our collective conscience to nations of the world. The enemies of our friends must not also be our enemies and the friends of our friends must not also be our friends."⁶⁹

Apreala condemned African governments which follow international consensus and vote against Israel in crucial votes at the UN. Israel's bid to gain observer status at the AU has yet to feature on the agenda at the AU Summit, despite assurances from Ghanaian government representatives that the country would lobby other African nations on Israel's behalf in its bid to gain observer status at the continental body.

The Ghanaian government has not moved from its supportive stance on Palestinian self-determination and freedom. Palestinian freedom fighter, Yasser Arafat, was invited to Ghana by President Jerry Rawlings in 1986. A Palestinian embassy was opened in that year, and continues to operate until today.⁷⁰ Ghanaian government officials regularly attend events at the embassy which highlight Israel's occupation of Palestine, and the embassy continues to enjoy a supportive relationship with the Ghanaian government.⁷¹

Christian-based pro-Israel advocacy groups in Ghana have, however, achieved some success in countering pro-Palestine solidarity in Ghana. According to Ghanaian pro-Palestine activist, Ras Mubarak, expressions of pro-Palestine solidarity, or any criticism of Israel's human rights violations, are often labeled "anti-Christian." "You cannot criticize Israel for its apartheid-like policies against the Palestinians, or call out Israel's anti-African racism against asylum seekers and migrants, without being called anti-Christian. This is an attempt to conflate Christian values with support for Israel," said Mubarak.⁷² The "anti-Christian" charge in Ghana, argue Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach, "is typical of Pentecostal rhetoric."⁷³ While accusations of anti-Semitism are effective in countering pro-Palestine solidarity in the West, pro-Israel advocates in Ghana have recognized that "anti-Christian" is a much more potent term within the Ghanaian context. Such an offensive

accusation would touch a raw nerve in a country where Christian faith plays such a central role in everyday life.

The anti-colonial nature of the Palestinian cause and liberation struggle has also been largely removed from discussions on Palestine in Ghana, and the occupation of Palestine is generally discussed only within biblical and religious parameters. This is a deliberate ploy by pro-Israel Christian advocacy groups to separate Ghana's own decolonization and liberation history from the anti-colonial struggle and resistance of the Palestinians. By removing the colonial context of Israel's occupation, pro-Israel advocates are able to dilute the support for the Palestinian liberation struggle, with which many Ghanaians would ordinarily identify.

CONCLUSION

The construction of the National Cathedral has raised issues about the merging of church and state in Ghana, leading many to ask if Ghana's religious independence is under threat. Specifically, the project has highlighted the political links and role of Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors. "Are we seeing a Pentecostalization of the Ghanaian republic?," ask Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach, referring to the widespread concern about the state becoming too enmeshed with the Christian elite, particularly the Pentecostal and Charismatic elites.⁷⁴ Simply put: Has religion hijacked politics in Ghana? This is an important question within the context of Ghana's foreign policy positions on the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Church leaders—whether bishops, archbishops, reverends, prophets, overseers, pastors, or deacons, all benignly referred to as "men and women of God"—are powerful. Their teachings have a wide reach, beyond their own congregations. They have the means and potential to become influential voices on a range of issues.

Drawing on this capital and legitimacy, Israel has co-opted Christian evangelicals, particularly from the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, to spread pro-Israel messaging and win support for Israel in Ghana. The intention is to influence Ghana's foreign policy and, ultimately, its voting at the UN and the AU.

With support for Israel as one of its central tenets, Ghana's fast-growing Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are entrenching injustices against the Palestinians by using the Bible to justify Israel's occupation. Take the Israel Ghana Friendship Association (IGFA) as an example. The group's pro-Israel advocacy work is endorsed by some of Ghana's most popular and influential Pentecostal and Charismatic church leaders, all professing their unequivocal support for the Israeli regime. "Any association that seeks to build relationship with Israel, should not just be welcomed, but encouraged and supported.

That is why we seek to rally together all dispensational believers, friends of Israel, and supporters of the cause of Israel for the purpose of identifying with the nation," said Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams, the presiding archbishop and general overseer of the Action Chapel International (ACI) Ministry at IGFA's launch in March 2020.⁷⁵

Dr. Lawrence Tetteh, an international evangelist and the founder and president of the Worldwide Miracle Outreach, said his church will participate in Israeli Embassy events and programs that seek to advocate for Israel. Dr. Joyce Aryee, founder and executive director, Salt and Light Ministries, said God had set aside some people who would stand with Israel, stating that "we are proud to be members of the Israel Ghana Friendship Association."⁷⁶ Rev. Sam Korankye Ankrah, apostle general of Royalhouse Chapel International, said God would bless people who stand with Israel and pray for the peace of Jerusalem.⁷⁷

Having itself emerged from a history in which the Bible was used first to enable the enslavement of Africans and then to defend colonialism, it is unthinkable that Ghanaian churches are now using the Bible to support a regime that has been found to have committed war crimes,⁷⁸ and to defend an illegal occupation that contains elements of apartheid and colonialism.⁷⁹

Given the increasing influence and growing relationship between church leaders and the Akufo-Addo administration, these messages are important, as they have the potential to shape government policy. These statements also point to a bigger story about the church in Ghana today, and the messages that some of its influential leaders promote about justice. These "men and women of God" are political and religious advocates for Israel—an occupying power whose human rights violations and policies against Palestinians are increasingly being compared to apartheid South Africa.

Ghanaian churches have, historically, been much more than just religious spaces, and have played an important role in the processes of liberation, decolonization, democratization, and justice.⁸⁰ However, the message emerging from the pulpits of Ghanaian churches today, particularly Pentecostal and Charismatic church platforms, is one of injustice when it comes to the question of Palestine. In keeping with the focus on prosperity gospel, much of the current discourse focuses on Israel as a source of material blessings.

Israel promises Ghana prosperity with offers of agricultural assistance, cyber-technology, innovation, trade and investment. As Ghana's political and Christian leadership confronts the challenges of poverty, unemployment, economic liberation, and creating a better future for the Ghanaian people, it must also honor Ghana's own legacy and history of decolonization and support those who have yet to achieve their liberation, and yet to begin their journey of decolonization—including the occupied and colonized Palestinian people. As Pentecostal and Charismatic evangelicals play a greater role in

government, will Ghana continue to uphold the principles of international law and justice on which its own freedom was based? This will be difficult in the face of an increasingly influential evangelical movement that sees support for Israel as the center of its faith. Ghana's leaders must continue to resist the advances of faith-based pro-Israel advocates, retain its historical support of Palestinian self-determination and human rights at the UN and the AU, and call on the Israeli government to end its illegal occupation of Palestine.

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Part II

**BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL
ASPECTS AND IMPACTS**

Chapter 6

Christian Zionism

An African Theological Critique

Nehemia G. Moshi

INTRODUCTION

The practice of Christianity in Africa has been significantly influenced by what may be considered uncritical employment of the biblical motif of Israel. Pilgrimages to Israel and the use of items like water, soil, and oil from Israel have become common for some African Christians. This trend has gone hand in hand with the association of one's blessings with Israel. As a result, the state of Israel has found wholesale support from these circles of Christians. Zionism, therefore, holds uncritical support from many Christian communities in Africa.

African Christians are not alone, and are not the first, in subscribing to Israel. As will be seen later, the history of Christianity is soaked with both atrocious and wonderfully exaggerated relations between Christians and Israel. Such relations seem to emerge from the church's desire for self-preservation.

On the one hand, associating Christianity with physical Israel finds justification in the occurrence of the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the geographic region of what is now the land on which the State of Israel is lodged. Jesus Christ, from whose title (*Messiah – Christ*) Christians draw their name (cf. Acts 11:26), was born, raised, and did his earthly ministry in a Jewish context. Christianity was, therefore, born in the cradle of Judaism. Therefore, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity offers significant justification for Christian dealings with Israel. In addition, God's promises to Israel to be a blessed people echo in the ears of Christians.

On the other hand, wholesale acceptance and endorsement of whatever the state of Israel is doing waters down the concept of Israel as the elect. God's

election of Israel as a people in his mission is purposeful. The election is based not on merit on the part of Israel but on God's intention. That Israel can and has erred and sinned finds manifold support in the Torah and the prophetic tradition. It is, therefore, contended in this treatise that the position some Christian circles in Africa take regarding Zionism is precipitated by the lack of a theology of Israel. Such a deficiency strips some African Christians of the realization that they too are heirs of God's blessings mediated through Christ.

This work analyzes the Zionist inclinations in the practice of Christianity in Africa and attempts a theological response from an African perspective. This chapter is written with the awareness that Zionism has been significantly influenced by atrocities perpetrated by, among others, the Nazi onslaught on European Jewry.¹ This is in addition to awareness that the complexity of the situation in the Middle East does not afford a simplistic blame-favor attitude to either of the concerned parties. This chapter, therefore, does not turn a deaf ear to the historical grievances of Israel and those who are sympathetic to her. This chapter is not prescriptive; it is a passionate attempt to analyze the position of Israel's well-wishers in Africa from an African theological stance. In doing so a critical analysis is adopted with the expectation that a balanced stance will ensue. The need for a critical appraisal is prompted by the ambivalence of history. According to Helander and Niwagila, the legacy of history need not render one a passive victim of the past.² A critical appraisal of history is also welcome, considering the injustice the present may be doing to the past.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN CHURCH-ISRAEL RELATIONS

Christianity—born in the cradle of Judaism—has identified itself with Israel in various ways. The relationship has not always been smooth. As such, the history of Christianity is imbued with contrasting dynamics of Church-Israel (Judaism) relations. Two extremes characterize such relations. At the one end is the church's tenacious identification with Israel. On the other end are attempts by the church to disown Israel while at the same time using her as a stepping-stone. The two streams are described briefly later. But before embarking on this, the concept of Israel is discussed in brief.

According to Sandmel, "Israel" for Jews has three interrelated meanings: (1) a people descended from the patriarchs and matriarchs, (2) this people having a special covenant with God—first established with Abraham and subsequently renewed at Sinai, and (3) a people given a specific land by God—the land of Israel.³ Sandmel sees in the second meaning of "Israel"

the root cause of the Jew-Christian split. He writes, “Perhaps more than any other difference between Judaism and Christianity, this claim to be God’s covenantal partner has defined the tragic history of relations between Jews and Christians.”⁴ As we shall see later, this second meaning relates to “Israel according to spirit” (κατα πνεῦμα) as opposed to “Israel according to flesh” (κατα σάρκα).⁵ This conception of Israel according to spirit has been among the avenues through which the church has claimed identity with Israel.

The brief discussion above points to the fact that the concept of Israel is something with which both Jews and Christians have strived to identify. In fact, the Jews could rightly be seen, from some perspectives, as Israel itself. Sandmel puts this argument thus, “The word ‘Jew,’ however, is not our original name. . . . Our oldest name is *Yisrael*, Israel; we call ourselves ‘*am Yisrael*, ‘the people of Israel,’ and *benei Yisrael*, ‘the children of Israel.’”⁶ Having touched on the struggle to identify, we now turn to the trends in the church’s identification with Israel.

It can be argued that at the core of the church’s identification with Israel is the concept of the church as the New Israel. This concept has gone through nuanced stages. It is worth noting that the process is not over and that African Christians have contributed to the concept.⁷ The nuances of the two streams of the church’s identification with Israel are mentioned here.

Identification that Replaces Israel

This stream views Israel as inferior. Some ideas which could precipitate such an inclination include the misreading of following verses:

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

Perhaps basic to the understanding of this verse is the phrase “the father of lies,” that is, the Jews were following the thinking of that “father”—not that they had the DNA of the devil.

The superiority the church is considered to have over Israel in this stream of thought offers foundation to the belief that Israel has to be, or has been, replaced. This amounts to Supersessionism—the belief that the church has replaced Israel. Such a belief contributed to the *Shoah*—the inhumane treatment of Jews in the history of Christianity. The Holocaust was surely extreme. The disastrous results of thoughts that Israel has to be replaced have led to at least “official” abandonment of this approach, leaving another approach to take the upper hand.

Identification without Replacing Israel

Here the church identifies with Israel without replacing it. The church understands itself as having been grafted onto Israel (Rom. 11:17). This is more welcome than the first understanding, but it calls for reflection. The mere fact that Israel is not replaced does not, however, mean necessarily that Israel is given due respect. The rendering “Church as New Israel” leaves a lot to be desired. The very qualification “new” renders the other “old” and the tendency of the inferiority of the other lingers. Those who use this language have something they want to communicate, and the terminology chosen betrays this.

Using the analogy of “foundation” for the old use of Israel in the way that Paul uses the term as something on which to graft the new—which implies that the “old” is necessary for the existence of the new—is more legitimate. This validates the “old” and creates a sense of interdependency. It may be enough to say at this point that the church, after the Holocaust, has leaned more on the second approach. There is, also, continuing need for going deeper to iron out continuing prejudices.

Historical developments in relationships between Jews and Christians have swung from atrocious hatred to efforts to clear such hatred. This is a commendable development. However, as alluded to above, the process is not over. The pendulum is prone to swing to the other extreme. There is therefore a word of caution, since Christian Zionism may lead to an exaggeration which renders Israel beyond reproach. A balance then is required for Christians in handling the concept of Israel.

The history of Christianity strongly suggests that “Israel” is there to stay—in the final analysis Israel lingers. And this, as noted earlier, can be justified. What then, ideally, should the church make of Israel? What has the church made of Israel in reality? In one example, which is the main concern of this chapter, some in the church have turned to Christian Zionism to approach and relate to Israel. Our main concern is Christian Zionism in Africa, to which we now turn.

ANALYSIS OF ZIONIST INCLINATIONS IN AFRICA: SOME THOUGHTS

The question is: Why Zionism? What lies at the core? The following section attempts an analysis of the position African Christians and African churches take vis-à-vis Israel. The analysis begins by a treatment of what “Africanness” entails, followed by an account of the sources for Zionist thinking, ending with a summary of the core issues in Christian Zionism in Africa.

John Mbiti, in his book *African Religions and Philosophy*, highlights the importance religion has in the life of Africans. He argues, “Africans are notoriously religious.”⁸ Mbiti may here be critiqued since this saying may be considered a variant of the saying, “Man (human beings) is incurably religious.”⁹ Mbiti’s argument, however, carries weight, as he stresses, “Everything tends to find explanation in this religious system. Religion finds expression in every aspect of tribal life; determining people’s thoughts, words and deeds.”¹⁰

What then is this religion to which Africans are seen to cling so tenaciously?

“African Religion” refers to the indigenous religions of the African people often contrasted with the “exotic” religions, for example, Christianity, Islam, and others. Considering the religious and demographic profiles in Africa, I here explore the situation in sub-Saharan Africa. The important characteristics of religions in this region include, among other features, prophecy, sacrifices, priests, and ancestral veneration.¹¹ Whether the plural “religions” or the singular “religion” should be used in describing the different religious practices in Africa is a matter of perspective. Some scholars, including Africans, considering the variability of cultures among Africans, think that it should be the plural. Others think and insist that it is singular, while admitting to different practices in the religion. To them, even Lutheranism, leave alone Christianity, even when used in the singular, presents an assortment of views and practices. I think to the supporters of the “singular,” the idea of the origin of the religion takes the upper hand. Islam and Christianity are exotic to sub-Saharan Africa. The use of the singular in this chapter is, therefore, a matter of preference—based on the similarity of the beliefs and practices—more than one of ignoring variability.

Renowned church historian Bengt Sundkler sees something more than mere religion in African religion. He describes African religion thus, “It was an all-pervasive reality which served to interpret society and give wholeness to individual’s life and community. The village world and the Spirit world were not two separate realms: there was a continuous communication between the two. Religion was totality, a comprehensive whole.”¹²

Worth mentioning here—in a short detour—is that African religion bears much resemblance with the Old Testament. Africans feel at home with the stories, characters, and practices in the Old Testament.¹³ This could in part explain the affinity to Israel.

Coming back to the core of “Africanness”—Mbiti’s stress on the permeation of the life of an African with religion implies that the precepts of religion are adhered to tenaciously. Further, adherence to religious precepts is mediated in part by the interconnectedness of the different aspects of life, because

in Africa, the secular-religious divide is absent. Ndemanu also observes that the African worldview is influenced by religion.¹⁴ The African worldview is based on its own ontology and constitutes a continuum in which the inanimate, animate (humanity included), the departed, and God relate in a special way. This in turn defines such concepts as wisdom and ethics.¹⁵ Community is thus an important ingredient of “Africanness” and is hence an attribute in defining Africans. We now turn to the sources of Zionist thinking in Africa.

Since the kind of Zionism that concerns us is Christian, we need to briefly address the nature of Christianity in Africa. Christianity in Africa is in large part a result of foreign missionary work. This assertion should, however, not trivialize the significant contribution of Africans in bringing Christianity to Africa. The planting of Christianity in Africa is reckoned in three phases. The first phase was in North Africa and covered the first five centuries. The second stretched from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries and covered areas such as Congo, West Africa, and some parts of East Africa. The third is the nineteenth-century mission activity.¹⁶

Some readers of African church history tend to dwell on the third phase of Christianization of Africa. Such readers are justified in the fact that this phase is the most significant when it comes to the statistics of Christian membership in Africa. What may escape the attention of these readers is that the first two phases have an influence on African Christianity, which, though statistically narrow, are quite important in terms of depth and identity. It is significant, for instance, that some Africans in the Horn of Africa put stress on tracing their ancestry in Israel. Their roots are deep and stretch to the encounter between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba narrated in I Kings 10. According to some traditions, the Ethiopian Jewish community traces its roots to Menelik, the son of Solomon by the Queen of Sheba.¹⁷

The initiatives of Africans in the Christianization of Africa are, therefore, an important consideration in addressing the nature of Christianity in Africa. Such initiatives are not limited to the first phase of the Christianization of Africa. They stretch through the three phases. Sundkler and Steed stress that the first missionaries were not first. According to them, the gospel message was not brought by foreigners but was carried home by people—young men who had received it elsewhere.¹⁸ Africans, therefore, contributed to the Christianization of Africa and must have given Christianity a different flavor vis-à-vis that which was presented by foreign missionaries.

It is, hence, pertinent to note that Africans remained Africans during the Christianization of Africa and have not grown weary of being African even when a significant part of the population has become Christian. This, in turn, must have a bearing on Zionist thinking.

Even with the above, the fact that foreign missionaries have contributed significantly to Zionist thinking in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Simon

Maimela tackles the mindsets of some white missionaries in Africa, contrasting two uses of the concept of Israel. To him, the symbol of Israel is a double-edged sword, which can be used religiously but also politically.¹⁹ Maimela analyzes the nationalistic mindset and practices of British missionaries and the Afrikaner people in South Africa from the perspective of the image of Israel. According to him, the use of “Israel” in both British White Theology and White Afrikaner Theology leaned more on the political side.²⁰

What Maimela notes in British and Afrikaner Theology can, with some exceptions, be generalized to foreign Christian missionaries in Africa. This is partly seen in the denominational and national divisions exhibited among foreign missionary societies in Africa. When a group of people set out “unaided” to evangelize people in far-off lands, the religious and political symbols of Israel tended to come along on the journey. The religious symbol of Israel, as a marginalized people granted hope by God, is, however, likely to become dominant. However, when either success or resistance ensues in the mission field, the political symbol of Israel is prone to overtake the religious.

It can be argued that African Christians groomed in a system inclined to the political symbol of Israel had three basic alternatives: either a wholesale adoption of the missionary mindset, or a downright rejection of the same, or an amalgam—made in Africa—of the two extremes.

It may be hard to paint a general picture of the situation in Africa with regard to which of these three alternatives has been the most popular. But considering that Africans have not grown weary of being African even with the onset of Christianity, the last alternative—the amalgam of the foreign and African mindsets—has become the most feasible in describing the situation.

When, for instance, an average African Christian reads texts like “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! ‘May they prosper who love you!’” (Ps. 122:6) or “I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (Gen. 12:3), both the missionary and African mindsets are likely to play a role in interpretation. The missionary-political image of Jerusalem is juxtaposed with African tendencies toward and openness to images of prosperity—blessing-seeking and curse-avoidance. The interpretation that elevates Israel is met by desire for blessedness and fear of curse. We will come back to this in the next section.

African Theology’s Response to Zionism

The current standing of Zionism in Africa calls for a theological critique—an analysis of what we do—how we view, relate, or identify with Israel, lest we succumb to the uncritical perpetuation of history. It would be expected that an African theological response to Zionism should stem from what is at the core of this theology. Thus, in order to feel the gravity of African Theology’s

response to Zionism, it is important to cast some light on the core issues of the theology.

African Theology is basically a response—a critique. This response is mainly twofold. The first stream of this theology sprang as a reaction to the mindset of some nineteenth- and twentieth-century foreign missionaries who considered it necessary to “clear the slate”—doing away with as much of the cultural aspects of the recipients of the gospel message—before the seed of the gospel was sown. This notion, which violates the incarnational nature of the gospel, was criticized by African Christians and even by some foreign missionaries. The position of early architects of African Theology was that the cultural milieu of Africans bore attributes necessary for genuine propagation of the gospel.²¹ Such attributes include some aspects of the African Religion which is always in the background of life for Africans. The inclusion of African culture in theologizing, therefore, saw the birth of the inculturation/indigenization wing of African Theology. African cultural heritage is, therefore, among the important aspects of African Theology.²²

The second stream of African Theology is partly a reaction to the first stream. The criticism leveled at the first stream—the indigenizing stream of African Theology—was that it tended to be satisfied with the cultural adaptations of the gospel message and change of “faces,” that is, from foreign leaders to African. With its insistence on cultural identity the first stream tended to overlook the social context, which the second stream set out to address. It is important to state that both streams of African Theology are important as sources of critique to Zionism.

Wholesale support of Zionism in Africa is opposed to African Theology for several closely interrelated reasons. These reasons are discussed briefly here.

To begin, it can be argued that Christian Zionism in Africa is in part a result of an imposed (borrowed) form of Bible reading and interpretation. Although Christian Zionism in Africa finds support for reasons which are deeply African, for example, the issue of blessing and curse addressed earlier, the point of departure for such support, namely the political symbol of Israel, is foreign to Africa. As we noted earlier, pre-Christian Africa was not a religious tabula rasa.²³ This African religious background informs the African worldview, and thus interpretation of different concepts, and defines what is understood as ethical. According to Bujo, the starting point of African ethics is the idea of community—the main goal of this ethic being life itself.²⁴ That which goes against the idea of community or disrupts life—and in this respect, any interpretation following this line—is unethical from the African perspective, and cannot, therefore, be an integral part of the ideals of African Theology. As we shall see below, an analysis of the wholesale support of Israel—like that exercised by Christian Zionism in Africa—points to elements that are disruptive.

From the foregoing discussion it can also be argued that Christian Zionism in Africa bears selfish elements. In other words, the “practitioners” of Zionism in Africa, knowingly or unknowingly, aim at serving their own selfish ends. The selfishness addressed here can be termed “self-preservation”—to be diplomatic—and has characterized Church–Israel relations in the history of Christianity. If Africans are inclined to Zionism in order to be blessed (or to be prosperous) and avoid being cursed, they are prone to trample on the rights of others. This is so considering that as they fix their gaze on the goal, they may not pay attention to what they are stepping on. This may amount to a dirty philosophy in which case “the ends justify the means.” This, again, is opposed to the African ethic of community and value of humanity. The likelihood that Christian Zionists may be trampling even on fellow Christians’ entitlements is illustrated by a modest observation narrated below.

In 2011, I attended a six-week course on “Land, Peoples, Theology and Sustainability” organized by the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem. During our excursions we had talks with Israelis and Palestinians who shared altruistic attitudes of the other. One Palestinian Christian, who seemed to not be pushing for permission to go to Jerusalem, said it was some years since he last visited the city. It seemed to me that this Christian would have cherished going to Jerusalem if the situation had not been hostile. Noteworthy in this connection are Israelis, who reported to us that they were not comfortable with the restrictions at the checkpoints.

The course—including lectures, seminars, and field trips—enlightened me about the Israel–Palestine situation. Even with this exposure I cannot claim mastery of the situation in the Middle East. I still consider my knowledge far from sufficient to prepare me for prescribing a solution to the situation. One thing, however, is clear. That is, when a fellow human being suffers, we should be concerned. We should incline ourselves to and at least be willing to listen to their cry—whatever the source—be it a result of oppression or their own misdoing. This concern abrogates wholesale support for any of the parties in and agents of the suffering—in this case, those who support and promote Zionism.

When African Christians flood to Israel for pilgrimage—which I consider by no means necessary, cf. John 4:21–24—they should bear in mind that there are fellow Christians in the vicinity who cannot afford this ease. This alone should not make them abandon their support for Israel but should at least make them give a second thought to wholesale and uncritical support of Zionism—their own and that of others.

One of the marks of the church is its oneness. This mark resonates with the African view of the value of person—I am because we are, I am related therefore we are²⁵—which negates and prohibits all attempts to downgrade a person or group of people for personal gains. African moral values rest on the

fact that a person should not be used as a means but as an end in herself or himself. Among the models that have been used to describe the church at the local level is that of the church as a family of God. This in turn points to the African concept of *ujamaa* (familyhood)²⁶. In his address to religious leaders, Tanzania's first president Nyerere characterized *ujamaa* as a relationship that honors the other. According to him, *ujamaa* does not contradict God—for it is against exploitation—and God is not an exploiter.²⁷ When some African Christians ignore the plight of fellow Christians in the course of pursuing prosperity they are contradicting the *ujamaa* character of the church. The selfishness of Christian Zionism in Africa is, however, not only limited to downplaying the plight of fellow Christians. Such selfishness extends to the “abuse” of Israel. Israel was set apart neither on its own merits nor for its own sake. Israel was set apart because of God's intention for the sake of the world, as is strongly suggested in “. . . and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (Gen. 12:3b). If Israel is sidetracked, she has to be corrected. The Bible warns against indifference to an erring brother (Ezek. 3:18). When Christians push for blessedness while disregarding the missional concept of Israel, one wonders where their love for Jerusalem is, and whether there is any prosperity attached to it.

It is clear that the principle of love given to the church by her Lord negates all attempts by Christians to gain benefit by being indifferent to an erring or suffering sister/brother who is created in the image of God. The command of love challenges the global Christian community to revisit its Zionist inclinations, that is, whether the inclination is rooted in concern and sympathy both for Israel and Palestine, or is driven by selfishness or ignorance. The church in Africa is particularly challenged here. This is so, considering that in the past the church has remained silent to atrocities perpetrated on the African continent. The challenge is well-illustrated in Emmanuel Katongole's quote from Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*: “Has the Savior you tell us of any power to save us from rubber trouble?”²⁸ King Leopold of Belgium is known for his brutality in Congo. He used the indigenous people to collect natural rubber for export. It was during this time that his officials perpetrated atrocities which are hard to imagine. Those who failed to meet their rubber collection quotas were punished severely—villages were decimated, and millions of Congolese people were killed.

What is discouraging is that these murderous acts were carried out during the missionary era. What did the missionaries do to stop such a grave exploitation? The quotation above then pictures a church in mission—preaching Christ. The missionized inquire about the possibility of *mission* addressing the problems which beset them. Couldn't the same be said of the failure of the church in Africa today in being salt in the midst of damaging Zionist inclinations both in the religious and secular spheres?

CONCLUSION

Christian Zionism in Africa raises questions regarding its practitioners' understandings of the concepts of Israel, love, blessedness, and Zionism itself. The symbol of Israel cherished in Africa tends to be, by and large, the political one. This is so considering that African Christians, in their support for Israel, are inclined to focus on the blessings—prosperity expected from such support. This may not be wrong in itself, as the idea of Israel being set apart by God goes with the blessings resulting from Israel's commitment to God's call. The problem lies in the tendency of some African Christians insisting on the latter at the expense of the former. The call, and commitment to it, are foundational to the concept of Israel, and thus to any expectation of genuine blessing.

This flipped emphasis raises questions regarding the understanding of love among Christian Zionists in Africa. Love is concern! When indifference reigns—whether regarding those who are suffering or the ones who inflict such suffering—love cannot be said to exist in such an environment. The great commandment (Mark 12:31) calls Christians to love the neighbor—to be concerned! This commandment does not seem to have permeated the minds and practices of Christian Zionists.

Zionist inclinations, albeit bearing inherent contradictions to the Christian command of love, raise questions regarding the understanding of Zionism among those inclined to Zionism itself. Considering the exotic elements and anti-communitarian elements of Christian Zionism in Africa, African Christians are called to treasure the communitarian values inherent in Africa and reflected in African Theology. It is, therefore, important for Christians in Africa to share with and educate fellow Christians about the importance of such values as a brace against the influx of exotic influences and indigenous temptations which come in the name of blessedness.

NOTES

1. Benny Morris, *One State, Two States: Resolving the Israel/Palestine Conflict* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 161.
2. Eila Helander and Wilson Niwagila, *Partnership and Power* (Usa River: Makumira Publications, 1996), 68.
3. David Fox Sandmel, "Israel, Judaism and Christianity" in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, (Colorado: Westview Pres, 2000), 159.
4. Ibid.
5. See Simon Maimela, "The Concept of Israel in White Theology: A Theological Critique" *Africa Theological Journal* vol. 15 no. 2 (1986), 80.
6. Sandmel, "Israel, Judaism and Christianity," 159.

7. See Joel Tishken and Andreas Heuser, “‘Africa Always Brings Us Something New’: A Historiography of African Zionist and Pentecostal Christianities” *Religion* Vol. 45, No. 2 (2015).
8. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: SPCK, 1969), 1.
9. See Charles Samuel Braden, *The World’s Religions: A Short History* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), 15.
10. Mbiti, *African Religions*, 1.
11. M. T. Ndemanu, “The Traditional African Religions and their Influence on the Worldviews of Bangwa People of Cameroon: Expanding the Cultural Horizons of Study Abroad Students and Professionals” *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* vol. XXX no. 1 (2018), 74.
12. Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed. *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 91.
13. Ndemanu, “The Traditional African Religions,” 74.
14. Ibid.
15. Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*. Translated by A. Rubbens (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959), 33.
16. Helander and Niwagila, *Partnership and Power*, 77.
17. Kassim Shehim, “Israel-Ethiopian Relations: Change and Continuity” *Northeast African Studies* 10, no. 1 (1988), 25. www.jstor.org/stable/43661168.
18. Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church*, 89.
19. Maimela, “The Concept of Israel in White Theology,” 81.
20. Ibid., 82–85.
21. Kwame, Bediako, “The Roots of African Theology” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* vol. 13 no. 2 (1989), 58–65.
22. Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in its Context* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1986), 15.
23. Bediako, “The Roots of African,” 58.
24. Bénédet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*. Trans. Brian McNeil, (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2003), 19–20.
25. Ibid., 22.
26. Onwubiko Oliver Alozie, *The Church in Mission in the Light of Ecclesia in Africa* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2001), 27.
27. Julius Nyerere, “Ujamaa wa Tanzania na Dini” [Tanzanian Socialism and Religion] Hotuba aliyotoa Rais Julius K. Nyerere Siku ya Kufungua Semina ya Viongozi wa Madhehebu Mbalimbali za Dini huko Tabora (Kiuta: Dar es Salaam, 1970), 2.
28. Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, (Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 1.

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Chapter 7

Describing Christian Zionism as Heresy

Mark Rich

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

This is not merely an academic exercise in defining terms the better to debate them. One of the problems Christian Zionism presents to an analyst is its protean character—part ideology, part hate group, part madness, part performance, a strange mixture of Bible and lies and abusive love. So, the academic impulse toward definition and precision can actually mislead by endowing the movement with more integrity and definition than it actually deserves. Novelistic description is better suited to this stuff than academic definition.

For example, here is Robert O. Smith's definition: "political action, informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now comprising Israel and Palestine."¹ There can be no doubting Dr. Smith's commitment toward the struggle against Christian Zionism; yet his clear definition sounds, in the style that academics normally adopt, quite rational and therefore understandable, possibly acceptable and perhaps even honorable. There's nothing of madness and bloodshed in it. Yet we know that the least little descriptive pressure on the phrases "specifically Christian commitments" and "promote or preserve Jewish control" would soon cause them to cave in, revealing both madness and bloodshed.

On the other hand, there is Rosemary Radford Ruether's charge, leveled but not argued for in an article so named, that Christian Zionism is a heresy.² Such a serious charge needs a lot of theological analysis and definition. The burden of this article is to reason out and argue for that charge. The question is whether Christian Zionism is actually Christian, even though its adherents consider themselves to be super-Christians, qualified to look down on the rest of us mere Christians.

An Example of Heresy

The word “heresy” is obviously a very loaded one, easily thrown and therefore easily abused. In order to use it seriously it must be used carefully, with full awareness of its meanings and uses, its history of uses and abuses. We don’t have the space here for a history of the uses and abuses of the term, but an example may be instructive.

I write this chapter as a lifelong Lutheran and a scholar, aware that the charge of heresy was quickly deployed against Luther and the movement around him. This early charge (in 1518) against Luther and his colleagues, and their corresponding countercharges against the papacy and its defenders, became one of the key causes a century later of the devastating Thirty Years War, which could be considered the first of the modern wars among Christian Europeans over ideology—wars which claimed tens of millions of lives through the twentieth century.³ Here is a clear example of the charge of heresy, followed by excommunication, which contributed very much to death and disaster.⁴ It is worth noting that some wisdom has returned to the Christians of Europe, who have learned from that disaster to largely abandon their enmity, as the charge of heresy has been largely abandoned (although Luther’s excommunication has still not been repealed!).⁵

THREE RULES ABOUT HERESY

This example leads to the first lesson or rule about the charge of heresy. The charge of heresy within the church can lead to ex-communication from the church. Further, when these happen in the context of imperial power, these in turn can far too easily lead to death. Therefore, it matters very much who is leveling the charge and how. The social, economic, and political locations of both those who make the charge and those who are being charged matter greatly. Is the charge being used to build up imperial power, or popular power? Is the charge being used against those who divide and conquer, or against those who include and empower? Is it being used for death or for life?

This raises another question that leads to another lesson or rule: why should inclusive popular power be preferable to exclusive imperial power? What divine warrant is there for this presumption? The answer is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here is a non-comprehensive list of characteristics of the gospel, demonstrating its choice of God’s presence among the powerless:

- Jesus’s proclamation of the jubilee, including release of debts, slaves, and private ownership of property;⁶
- his subversion of the Judeo-Roman tax system;⁷

- his subversion of the honor/shame culture that supported the patriarchal and imperial systems;⁸
- his explicit ministries with Gentiles;⁹
- his transformation of patriarchy into egalitarian sharing;¹⁰
- his conflicts with religious leaders connected with Roman imperial power;¹¹
- his explicit denial of the emperor's divinity;¹²
- his attack both on the sacrificial system in the Temple and on the power and legitimacy of the Roman-appointed Jerusalem priests;¹³
- his program of free healings/exorcisms for the poor;¹⁴
- his call to poverty for the rich;¹⁵
- his principle that rulers must serve those they rule rather than be served by them;¹⁶
- his acceptance of the power of crucifixion and resurrection and his explicit denial of the power of the sword.¹⁷

This brief list of the ways that power is used in the gospel of Jesus Christ prove that in general, power must be used by Christians in life-giving and inclusive ways. We must say that indeed the gospel is a specific proposal for the use of power to give life and to defeat the powers of death.¹⁸ So then, in a possibly heretical question, it is central to ask whether the use of power that is under suspicion is dominative and exclusive or life-giving and inclusive.¹⁹ This principle holds true for both the activity or message that is in question of being heretical and also for the charge of heresy itself. The gospel is always and only the latter form of power. Any other use of power must forfeit the claim to be Christian.

This leads to the third rule that relates to the matter of heresy. Within the church, the only possible standard for the truth is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and not the Bible on its own apart from the gospel.²⁰ It shouldn't be necessary to state this, but it is so. First, let us observe the obvious, that the Bible is not one unified book. It is a collection of more than sixty texts, many of which are themselves collections of earlier texts. To be sure, while there is a great deal of intertextuality to these scriptures, nonetheless the Bible does not speak with one voice nor one theology nor one use of power.²¹ Second, some of those voices and theologies are flatly opposed to each other. There are voices who include the foreigner and stranger and those who exclude them. There are voices who argue for a sacrificial system and those who argue against such a system and for justice and righteousness instead.²² The only way for Christians to navigate the Bible seeking moral wisdom is to do so with the gospel as explicit goal and guide.²³ We know that slavery is wrong because of the gospel. We know that the sacrificial system of the Temple is wrong because Jesus showed us this is so. We know that war is wrong because Jesus taught us to love our enemies and refused to kill his own.²⁴ We know that patriarchy is wrong because Jesus showed us the better alternative.²⁵

It is therefore both foolish and misleading to claim any authority for truth or power based on “the Bible” alone. Those who do so are either ignorant of the Bible or they are misusing the Bible’s name and authority to hide their own evildoing or both. The modern and particularly American heresies of race-based slavery and now Christian Zionism have both taken their warrant for truth from a literal approach to the Bible—in order to bury the gospel.²⁶ To put it another way, the Bible is being used to sabotage the gospel. This cannot stand; this cannot be accepted. This is heretical.

Another way that Christian Zionism is opposing the gospel is in its embrace of just one version of Zionism, a version specifically opposed by Jesus. This is probably a result of the massive ignorance among Christians generally of how Jesus radically redefined Israel because of his radical redefinition of property possession and use. I would like to call Christian Zionism’s naïve nationalism heretical, but there are so few Christians (scholars included) who take Jesus’s political economy seriously enough that they could even understand that particular charge. I will nonetheless go into this matter here because (1) Christians should understand the gospel they preach and (2) this may hold out some hope of reconciliation within Israel and Palestine.

Jesus’s approach to the land has been receiving some welcome attention from several scholars recently. They point out correctly that concern for the land was necessarily bound up with concern for the redemption of Israel from the miasma of imperial domination.²⁷ What they have failed to notice is two key and connected points that are unique to Jesus’s approach to land and all possessions, which in turn affect his redefinition of redeemed Israel.

At the very beginning of his ministry Jesus proclaimed a form of the jubilee, which included release of debts and slaves (per Deut. 15, Lev. 25, and Isa. 61) and also possessions (per Lev. 25 somewhat).²⁸ What has been insufficiently understood is that this radical and programmatic release necessarily entailed the abandonment of patriarchal and tribal structures, both in Israel and in the nations. His teachings about marriage and about property sharing demonstrate this clearly.²⁹ That’s the first point.

The second point is that we see Jesus also carry out this radical change in his formation of the Twelve followers who are appointed by him *without any reference at all to tribes!* It is clear that the structure of twelve must be a reference to Israel, but the complete and shocking lack of tribal identifications of those twelve indicates that this is now a new *non-tribal* Israel—something that had never before existed, but which could definitely come to exist in an eschatological age.³⁰

Patriarchal families, clans, tribes, and empires are all interlocking mechanisms for controlling and passing along land, persons, and possessions within a dominant male-serving culture and society. Simple arithmetic says that any society which supports polygamy then must have an excess number of men

who fail to rise to the honor of having wives. Such men must either leave the community or be subject to the dominant, honorable men who have several wives. Determining and preserving ownership of lands, persons, and possessions among dominant men is literally the central function of all four structures.³¹ So when Jesus did away with patriarchal marriage particularly (Mark 10:2–9) and patriarchal ownership generally (Mark 10:28–31), that was all part of establishing the Reign of God in place of the Reign of Rome, and there was simply no further need of a tribal Israel—nor of tribes among other nations either.

This approach to land possession in turn made Jesus's gospel uniquely able to travel beyond Israel, because it was relevant to the transformation of all patriarchal clan- and tribe-based cultures—which was all of them around the Mediterranean and the Middle East.³² But it also does not mean that for Jesus Israel just disappears into a happy new international communalism. Even the eschatological Israel remains Israel, just now non-tribal and non-patriarchal.

How Does This Apply to Contemporary Israel/Palestine?

As Paul pointed out in Romans 9 written 2,000 years ago, so also now most of Israel continues to reject Jesus as Messiah. So, does anything from Jesus apply to modern Israel? Yes, it might, in two ways: one historical and one theological.

First, history: it's common to recognize that modern Israel is not the same as biblical Israel, and there's a lot of sense to that. Modern Israel is not organized politically and economically by tribes and clans, ruled over by a king. Women are full citizens with full political and civil rights. It is organized like most parliamentary representative democracies in the world, and I don't know of any political party within modern Israel that proposes to change that. Likewise, its economy is a modern capitalist one, as befits such a political system. What is not as well recognized is that the Palestinian people are also not the same as the idolatrous pagan neighbors of Israel in the Bible. The modern Palestinians are Muslim and Christian—that is, they are radical monotheists,³³ a theology which they received historically from Israel, and which both religions are quite clear about acknowledging. What they do with that heritage is another question, but our basic point right now is incontrovertible: this is an argument among radical monotheists, all in the tradition of Abraham. Hence, Israel's approach to them must be modeled radically differently from the biblical model of Joshua.

And then, theology: Jesus's eschatological reordering of possessions and power was not wholly unprecedented within the scriptures of Israel. It particularly seems relevant to the first creation story of Genesis, which follows quite well the political-economic logic of radical monotheism. This logic is

as follows: radical monotheism doesn't only mean that there is only one God, but also and just as importantly that there is only one creation, and that there is only one egalitarian humanity created by this one God, *equally and jointly* sharing this one creation, and finally that there is also one truth³⁴ revealing and governing the relations of them all, which is also *equally and jointly* available for all humanity to share under the rule of this one God, whom all humanity likewise shares. All these other unities—creation, humanity, and truth—follow necessarily from the creative unity and power of God, and all four of these unities are equally and jointly shared. The divine unity creates and sustains the other unities; the divine unity is never solipsistic.

The authors of Genesis 1 understood this logic. In Gen. 1:28f, the original gift of property by God to a single non-patriarchal humanity (vv. 26f) is universal and jointly shared. All humans share in the possession and use (never the ownership!) of the whole earth. There is no private property at all; all possession and use of the whole earth is common to all humanity together.

The fuller meaning of this insight is that all is sharing: God shares all things with us humans—world, humanity, truth, and God's self. We in turn must therefore share as well—world, humanity, truth, and God. The whole dynamic of the whole system is sharing. The fruit of this sharing is universal righteousness and peace. There is no killing (even of animals!) in this creation depicted in Genesis 1. There is no need for it, since the whole earth is available to the whole of humanity, and that earth is abundantly fecund.

Whether you're a Jesus-follower or not, this divine political economy should mean something, and all the more so if the argument is taking place among fellow Abrahamic believers in the one God who made and continues to own the heavens, the earth, and the seas. It should mean something both in the ways we use the land and relate to our fellow humans, that is, in the kinds of power we employ in determining those uses and relations.

However, we humans now live knit together in a worldwide political-economic system based, bizarrely and ironically, on separation: separate sovereignties, loyalty to one nation or even one corporation above and apart from all others. Likewise, contemporary North American and British capitalism insists on the supremacy of private property, even to the poverty of millions, the debasing of democracy, and the destruction of our common heritage, the earth.³⁵ No wonder that the great "leaders" of the modern age find themselves utterly unable to stop climate change and heal the earth! The will and desire to choose to separate from the rest of the earth and humanity in order to become privately powerful and wealthy is the idolatry of the modern world, and Christian Zionists have swallowed this poison wholesale and puke it up retail. The message they give out is not of a single non-imperial and non-idolatrous nation amid all the other idolatrous empires of the world—the biblical view of Israel and the nations. Rather, they are just serving up the

standard modern political-economic worldview, with an anachronistic dash of Genesis flavoring. There is nothing actually Christian in what they preach.

Modern Israel has been made in the image of all the other nations of the earth, and some Israelis prove that by avidly oppressing their Palestinian cousins.³⁶ But is that the will of God being done, or just the playing-out of the modern curse of Christian nationalism,³⁷ with Christian Zionists providing the accompaniment? Is this really the image of God? Is that what God has made humanity and Israel for? Is this really God at work?

Jesus's gospel is the eschatological return to that formative unity and sharing of God's creation, abolishing death and the tools and systems of death. So we his followers must do our duty and declare that the so-called "Christian" ideology that supports and encourages the oppression of others, who happen also to be our cousins in the family of Abraham, is indeed heresy and is not an authentic Christian theology and preaching. This must be publicly so declared. Such a declaration may be easily scorned by the modern-day *Schwärmerei*³⁸ of Christian Zionism, but it should be made nonetheless.³⁹

GOING BEYOND THE CHARGE OF HERESY

There are two distinct questions here, whether the charge of heresy is true and whether is it effective and useful. Let's look briefly again at that charge of heresy leveled against Luther. That charge has served at least three evils: first, to separate Christian sisters and brothers; second, to prevent them from even considering re-instituting fellowship (because that would require renouncing the original charge, which in turn would require admitting that the Pope was fallible, which Catholic conservatives would never allow); and third, to reinforce the papacy's delusions of imperial authority and power. So that charge itself has not accomplished anything of the gospel.

There's good reason to believe that a similar charge made against Christian Zionists would accomplish little. They see themselves as divine authorities unto themselves, spirit-led and therefore needing no approval from historical churches, seeking only the approval, partnership, and service of conservative and racist political leaders and wealthy funders. They would probably take such a charge of heresy as a badge of honor for them, and in classic bully fashion would simply turn the charge back on those who made it.

A different charge than *heretic* or *bully* might actually be more effective and true: *virus*. Christian Zionism is a spiritual and theological *virus*, foreign to the gospel itself and to the body of the church. Like a virus it continues to infect the church, overtaking the normal functions of the church that consist of faith, hope, and love, and forcing the church to reproduce more of the virus itself, which consists of fear, greed, and death. It takes the normal life-giving

life of the church and perverts it into the death-dealing and oppressive poison of Christian Zionism.

We also know how to deal with viruses. They require a combination of genetic sequencing and study, sequestration until a vaccine can be developed, and then the vaccine itself. The vaccine, of course, is nothing other than the same medicine the church has always had, the only one it has always had—the gospel of Jesus Christ. This approach might also help us to go beyond the invidious processes of mutual accusations and recriminations that heresy charges trigger when used by themselves. It is the whole church that needs to be healed of the sin of nationalism, and not just Christian Zionists. The whole church needs the medicine of immortality of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

NOTES

1. Robert O. Smith, “Christian Zionism, American Modernity, and the Trump Declaration on Jerusalem,” *Contending Modernities* (January 08, 2018), <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/global-currents/christian-zionism-american-modernity-trump-declaration-jerusalem/>.

2. Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Christian Zionism is a Heresy,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 69 (December 1989): 60–64.

3. Of course, ideologies alone have never been the sole and sufficient cause of wars, but they have been a necessary one since at least the Crusades. Ironically, the nonviolence that is fundamental to the gospel has forced Christians to develop ideological reasons for their killing, which they have been zealous to do on many occasions.

4. I am not claiming that all this death and destruction could or should be blamed on the one charge of heresy against Luther. As with all complex series of events, wars and series of wars have many causes and many kinds of causes. Yet I do claim that within the doubly imperial context of the medieval papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, that charge of heresy followed by excommunication did contribute signally and fatefully toward this plague of religious wars across Europe and not just within the Holy Roman Empire.

5. This example about the use of the charge of heresy from the Lutheran movement leads to a corollary example from East Africa, one with which many African Christians still struggle to deal. This was the tendency of some early missionaries to tell Africans that they simply had to abandon their traditional beliefs and practices as being entirely evil, and then adopt wholesale the beliefs and practices of the white missionaries as being entirely good. The term “heresy” wasn’t used against the traditional beliefs because they made no claim to be Christian. However, it is clear that that missionary practice came from the same imperialist impulse to banish or destroy whatever didn’t fit into their imperially informed religion. The better approach was that of the early church and some later missionaries, which was far more judicious and multiformed in its missionary outreach to the pagan Mediterranean cultures.

6. These are the first public words of Jesus in each of the synoptic gospels: Matt. 3:15, Mark 1:16–20, and Luke 4:16–21. Luke’s version is the one that is most obvious and tends to get all the scholarly attention, but in fact each synoptic author makes the same point about the beginning of Jesus’s ministry, each just telling the same message with a quite different story. I judge that this adds to the historical veracity of the proclamation rather than detracting from it.

7. This is specifically the calling of the toll collector to be his disciple, and later (according to Matthew) one of the Twelve: Mark 2:14; Matt. 9:9 and 10:3; Luke 5:27f.

8. This happens in many ways in the gospels, but the most salient is the juxtaposition of the twin healings of the shameful woman with the flow of blood and the honorable synagogue ruler with the sick, then deceased, daughter. Jesus publicly honors the shameful woman after healing her, and then sends away everyone who could celebrate and honor the raising of the daughter of the important man and orders the remaining witnesses to keep quiet: Mark 5:21–43.

9. The healing of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1–20) and the whole complex of stories from Mark 7:24–8:9 and again from 8:27–9:1, including the crucial stories where Jesus’s identity is revealed along with the discussion of the centrality of taking up one’s cross.

10. Charles McCollough, *The Non-Violent Radical: Seeing and Living the Wisdom of Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 146, argues correctly that Jesus subverts patriarchy by refusing to recognize his own family as family in Mark 3:33–35, but identifying his family instead as those who listen to him and follow. The content of that following comes, then, with the teachings in Mark 10:2–9, with the re-invention of marriage as covenantal partnership between husband and wife, away from patriarchal marriage as a contract between two men; and also in Mark 10:28–31, the explicit and unmistakable replacement of patriarchal, patrilineal property ownership with communal possession and use. Along with these goes his saying from Matt. 23:9 “Call no one your father on earth, for you have a father in heaven.”

11. In Mark’s gospel this begins immediately after Jesus begins to subvert the tax system, at 1:18 with the question about fasting, then quickly escalates with the controversies about harvesting on the sabbath (1:23–28) and healing on the sabbath (2:1–6). It goes on further in chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10, until it breaks out into the open at 11:15–18 when Jesus attacks the sacrificial system and the chief priests and scribes determine to kill him.

12. The examining of the denarius and the declaration, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17) directly denies the claim to deity for Caesar that the coin made.

13. Mark 11:15–18. See Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics and Violence in Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) and also Paul Neuchterlein, “The Bible and Sacrifice: A ‘Text in Travail’ Illustrated by the Bible’s Confrontation with Sacrifice.” Accessed 4/14/2020. <http://girardianlectionary.net/learn/neuechterlein-bible-sacrifice/>

14. See John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 124 and 184.

15. Mark 10:17–27.

16. Mark 10:42–45.

17. Mark 8:31–9:1 and also the confrontation with the authorities at night in the garden on the Mount of Olives, when his disciples offer him the option of armed struggle but he refuses it: Mark 14:47–50; Matt. 26:47–56; Luke 22:47–53; John 18:3–12. All four gospels frame this confrontation a bit differently, but all of them make sure to include it. Jesus's explicit refusal of violence extends also to his teachings: Matt. 5:38–48 *et parr.*

18. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/1* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 386:

In the relations and events in the life of his people, God always takes his stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly; against those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it.

19. For the use of power, see Warren Carter, “Sanctioned Violence in the New Testament,” *Interpretation*, 71(3) (05 June 2017): 284–297, especially 285:

Violence is the sanctioned or unsanctioned destructive assertion of power against the will and interests of others. It violates the personhood of individuals and/or groups to their physical and/or psychological/emotional detriment and harm. Violence can be expressed in interpersonal as well as structural/systemic and societal realms. It can take multiple forms—physical, rhetorical, psychological, emotional, legal, military, institutional, administrative, symbolic, ideological, religious, etc.

What Carter calls violence is what I am calling dominative and exclusive power.

20. This is obviously a different definition from that of our fundamentalist siblings, for example, Matthew Barrett, “The Authority and Inerrancy of Scripture,” *TGC*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/authority-inerrancy-scripture/>. For a more intelligent reading of authority within the church from a Catholic perspective, see Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority? Foundations for Understanding Authority in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018). For a view somewhat closer to my own, see Steven G. Ogden, *The Church, Authority, and Foucault: Imagining the Church as an Open Space of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2017).

21. A seminal early resource on intertextuality and the Bible is George Aichele and Gary Phillips, eds., *Semeia 69/70, Intertextuality and the Bible* (Society of Biblical Literature/Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1995).

22. In favor of the Temple-based animal sacrifice system: Leviticus 1–16; Ezra 43–46; Malachi 1. Opposed to the same: Amos 5:21–25; Mic. 6:6–8; Hosea 6:6; Isa. 1:12–17; Jer. 7:21–23; Ps. 40:6–8; Ps. 50:7–15; Ps. 51:15–17. Please note the question in Amos 5:25 and the statement in Jer. 7:22. In Amos, the Lord asks whether the Israelites brought sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, with the presumed answer clearly being “no.” Three centuries later, to Jeremiah, the Lord states outright: “For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.” All of these prophets, but especially Amos and Jeremiah, challenge the

very truthfulness of the sacrificial code in Leviticus 1–16, stating that this did not come from God. In the Temple, Jesus acted on that prophetic tradition and stopped the sacrificial system.

23. I realize that this statement, which seems perfectly obvious and sensible to me, will strike many Christian scholars and leaders as foolish nonsense exactly because I don't make the text of the Bible the foundation of the church and the church's moral reflection, but rather Christ—following Paul in 1 Cor. 3:11, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." It is normal in contemporary Western churches to skip over Christ in order to make the New Testament or the whole Bible the basis for moral wisdom, which to me means that we are continually building on sand. See, for example, Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament—Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996). Hays's work is notable in that, although he assumes that the text of the NT is the basis for Christian morality, he recognizes the real moral differences between different NT texts and that we have to make choices between them in order to follow Jesus (although I think he does not adequately see the starkness of many of those differences). In Douglas Moo's review of Hays ("A Review of Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 [1999]: 271–276) he demonstrates the craven willingness of Christian conservatives to abandon utterly the imitation of Christ as soon as it goes against the political agenda of Christian nationalism:

Jesus' prime mission was to suffer redemptively—a unique activity, as of course Hays agrees. Jesus' actions are not, then, always to be imitated. The biblical authors will often have narrowly historical reasons for narrating certain events. We can only know what is paradigmatic and what is not by the biblical authors' commentary on these narratives. And so, it seems to me, we are back to the crucial evidence of teaching passages. Now Hays insists that Jesus' call to his disciples to follow him in taking up the cross—a call renewed, in other terms, by other biblical authors—is a call to nonviolence. But at the most the summons is to suffer persecution for the sake of the gospel willingly and submissively. The renunciation of violence in general cannot be read out the narrative of Jesus' sufferings. Moreover, it stands in conflict, I think, with Rom. 13:4.

See how Moo neatly subverts and denies the gospel call to imitate Jesus and to hear his call to nonviolence through the use of a bad—that is, a Christian nationalist—misinterpretation of Rom. 13.

24. The teaching is in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21–26, 38–39; 7:12–14) and also the exhortation to take up one's cross (Mark 8:31–37); the example is Jesus's arrest (Mark 14:43–50 *et parr*), crucifixion, and resurrection.

25. See note 10.

26. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to demonstrate this statement, but it may be that the case for slavery made from a literal reading of the Bible led to the case for Christian Zionism made likewise from a literal reading of the Bible. They share the same monkey-see, monkey-do literalism. We see a few verses in the Bible, therefore we have to believe them and do them, or allow others to do them. See Adrian Thatcher, *The Savage Text: The Use and Abuse of the Bible* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

I differ from him in specifying that Jesus rather than God is the principle on which Bible readings should be differentiated and divine truth established, but otherwise I much agree with him. His principles for a peaceful reading of the Bible, 152–166, are particularly apropos.

27. See W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) and Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land” Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), especially his section “Thinking Christianly about the Land.”

28. The standard reference here is Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and The Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). Her use of the word “images” in the title signifies her reticence in claiming that Jesus historically did proclaim and enact a form of the jubilee. I think the evidence is actually much stronger than Ringe argued. A more recent reflection is *Towards a Better Distribution of Land: The Challenge of Agrarian Reform*, by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_12011998_distribuzione-terra_en.html.

29. To be as brief as possible: at Mark 10:2–9 Jesus changes the definition of marriage from patriarchal—a contract agreed to by two men for the exchange of goods and a woman/girl—to covenantal, entered into by the woman and man who are marrying. Then, after the failure of Jesus’s call to discipleship of the wealthy man, Peter claims (10:28), “Look, Lord, we have released [*aphēkamen*] everything and followed you.” Jesus responds with two lists (10:29–30): There is no one who has released [*aphēken*] house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive [*labē*] a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields . . . This economic exchange of seven things released for six things received very conspicuously omits fathers from the received persons and things of the gospel community. This is the transformation from patriarchy into the Reign of God.

30. Mark 3:13–19 *et parr*. It’s obvious in reading the synoptic accounts that the three don’t agree on all the names of the Twelve, but I’m unable to find any scholar who has noticed that these names are listed without tribal identifications. This can’t be accidental, for at least two reasons. First, the clear OT parallel is Num. 1:1–16, which takes great care to list each man by tribe and to note that this is the culmination of the enrollment of all the men of Israel by tribe, clan, and patriarchal household. Second, the calling of the Twelve in Mark is immediately followed by Jesus’s repudiation of his own blood-related family in favor of the family created by the will of God. This new Israel is a non-tribal, non-patriarchal one—which, by the way, also happens to be similar to the political structure of modern Israel. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Twelve and the Discipleship of Equals” in *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993). Schüssler Fiorenza brilliantly analyzes the non-patriarchal character of the Jesus movement, but fails to notice this detail about the Twelve that actually corroborates her larger thesis about the Jesus movement and the early churches.

31. I am insisting on using the qualifier “dominant” because all the patriarchal structures are quite good at dominating weaker males along with women. They aren’t

only systems for dominating women; they are also systems for dominating socially weaker men. “Feminism, as I understand it, arises in resistance to the gender binary enforced by the patriarchy, an injustice that is as harmful to men as it is to women, as we can see in the long history of unjust wars, rationalized by patriarchy, in which men have fought and been killed and injured and traumatized.” David A. J. Richards, *Resisting Injustice and the Feminist Ethics of Care in the Age of Obama* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 143. Of course, unjust wars are only one salient manifestation of this oppression of men by men. The concept of interlocking patriarchies has particularly been useful in development studies, for example, Karen Kapadia, ed., *The Violence of Development: The Political Economy of Gender* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

32. I agree with Mary C. Boys, “Patriarchal Judaism, Liberating Jesus: A Feminist Misrepresentation,” *Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review* 56/3-4 (2003): 48–61, that it is far too easy to make “Judaism” the problematic other to which Jesus is then the solution. The structures which Jesus criticized and reformed were never solely Jewish; they had analogues and colleagues throughout the empire.

33. I attach the qualifier “radical” to “monotheism” in imitation and homage to H. Richard Niebuhr’s usage in *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper, 1960).

34. This truth may have different names, such as Torah, Gospel, Qur’an, Logos, Reason, etc. The point here is that from this theological vantage point all the names are pointing to the same knowledge that pervades and expresses the truth of the whole universe and its Creator, knowledge of which humans may graciously partake.

35. See Thomas Piketty’s comments in “A property crisis: interview with Thomas Piketty,” *New Philosopher* (25 April 2018), <https://www.newphilosopher.com/articles/a-property-crisis-interview-with-thomas-piketty/>.

36. See Jeremy Wildeman and Emile Badarin, “Rethinking the Nature of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict,” *Middle East Eye* (11 April 2019), <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/rethinking-nature-israeli-palestinian-struggle> for a concise history of the conflict and oppression. See also Tony Campolo, “Christian Zionism: Theology That Legitimizes Oppression,” *Sojourners* (19 May 2010), <https://sojo.net/articles/christian-zionism-theology-legitimizes-oppression>.

37. See Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), for an in-depth analysis of how this nationalism is working in the United States. In “Living in the Hour of Restoration: Christian Zionism, Immigration, and Aliyah” in Göran Gunner and Robert O. Smith, eds., *Comprehending Christian Zionism: Perspectives in Comparison* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 161–178, Faydra Shapiro argues that “in contrast to the Christian nationalism that McDaniel and his colleagues [Eric McDaniel, Irfan Nooruddin, and Allyson F. Shortle, ‘Divine Boundaries: How Religion Shapes Citizens’ Attitudes Toward Immigrants,’ *American Politics Research* 39(1) (2011): 205–233] argue is at the heart of American evangelical ambivalence toward immigrants, Christian Zionism is defined by its transnationalism, in which the exceptionalism of America is superseded only by the exceptionalism of Israel.” I do not disagree with Shapiro, but I am saying that the reverse is also true, that modern Israel is also *not* exceptional in its political and ideological formation;

that it shares nearly all the same features of modern nationalisms, especially the more aggressive ones such as the United States, Great Britain, and apartheid South Africa. We need to be able to distinguish between what is performative in ideologies and what is constitutive. As Shapiro describes in her article, American Christian Zionists breathe deeply the fumes of their own historical fantasy of helping create God's plan of the *aliyah* (return). But I am saying that we should also not confuse the historical fantasy with historical realities and their accompanying nightmares.

38. The word *Schwärmerei* (literally, Swarmers) is familiar to Lutherans and probably no one else. Luther used it to defame the radical reformers of the sixteenth century such as Karlstadt and Müntzer who went further in their reforms than Luther. The latter wished only to reform the church; the radical reformers wished to reform all of society, using the same principle of Christian liberty that Luther himself had so bravely proclaimed, but taking it much further than he wanted or dared.

39. I am deliberately agreeing and disagreeing with Philip A. F. Church's opinion in "Dispensational Christian Zionism: A Strange but Acceptable Aberration or a Deviant Heresy?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009): 375–398. He writes, "'Unacceptable diversity' maybe, but not heresy; 'erroneous in theology' maybe, but not heresy. No good is served by labeling Christian Zionists heretics, for one no longer needs to engage with 'heretics,' and perhaps more than anything Christian Zionism calls for engagement." The first thing to note about Church's judgment here is that circumstances in Israel have changed drastically. In 2009 Benjamin Netanyahu again became prime minister of Israel, but now with a vastly more aggressive set of policies than during his first tenure. Whatever was oppressive before in the politics of modern Israel toward the Palestinians has now become supercharged, with far more aggression, so much so that even the option of a Palestinian state now looks increasingly impossible. So the political context of this whole debate has changed, and all its terms have become supercharged. At this point Church's rather fine distinctions between "unacceptable diversity" and "erroneous in theology" versus heresy have become meaningless. He is entirely right that Christian Zionism calls for engagement, but we are too late now for fine distinctions.

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Chapter 8

Paul's Inclusive Christianity as a Means against Xenophobic, Anti-Semitic, and Anti-Immigrant Ideologies in the Twenty-First Century

Faustin Leonard Mahali

Globalization has enhanced quick movements of capital, skilled labor, and information technology through liberalized social and economic systems, but it has restricted migration of people from one country to another.¹ Some leaders, and some people, in developed countries are concerned that poor and displaced people from developing countries will become a burden to them, while most people from developing countries see foreigners as imperialists, parasites, and a cause of all sorts of misery, including economic poverty.² Neoliberalized economic policies have increased economic competitors locally and globally. This has led to increased unemployment in many contexts, and the attendant use by political actors of people's economic fears to increase difficulties for opposition parties and social reformers.³ The increasing fear and hatred of foreigners have become a global phenomenon. In Africa it is coming to replace the traditional and cherished value of African hospitality to strangers, which has been part of many African cultures for centuries.⁴

Christianity has contributed to globalization through its missionary objective of reaching the whole world.⁵ Unfortunately, Christianity has been prejudicially identified with Western imperialist motives and actions of the nineteenth century forward, and the neoliberalist agenda that has become prominent today, to the extent that it is hard to remember that it has also brought about significant contributions to liberation from both individual and systemic sin.⁶ Thus, the use of Christianity by colonialists and imperialists has blinded some theologians to the constructive possibilities for engaging Christianity as an agent of inclusivity to confront global ethnocentric perspectives, as advocated in the letters of Paul.

This chapter identifies biblical-theological resonance on Christian inclusivity as a tool to unmask and confront anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant ideologies and cultures, to move toward the building of a more positive global community. We explore the ideas of Paul on the interactions of diverse people and communities, not only as a missiological end but also to move toward the goal of peaceful social and cultural coexistence among people of different nations. The Pauline goal of global interaction can work with local norms of reciprocal hospitality found in many African contexts, and also can serve to detach the ideologies and agendas colonial and neoliberalist actors have attempted to affix to the gospel. We first discuss the theology on which African cultures and contexts have become part of global players in the understandings and practices of Christianity. Second, we discuss key elements of Pauline theology regarding inclusivity and its use in building ideas of global citizenship. Third, Paul's ideas will be synthesized and applied to the current situation in Africa, where fear and hatred of foreigners are increasing, as part of Christian responsibility to confront and work against xenophobia.

AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES CONFRONTING ETHNOCENTRISM

Christianity as a global religion has its roots in God's purpose of saving humanity and creation from sin.⁷ This originates from the understanding that a human being is created in the image of God⁸ and God created everything and saw that it was good.⁹ The foundation of human relationship with God is in the divine promise and interactive trust between them that extends to all nations.¹⁰ God became incarnate in the historical and divine Jesus Christ to save the whole world regardless of their race, gender, culture, nationality, and geographical area.¹¹ Thus, God's Christological incarnation needs to be taken seriously by disciples in order for Christianity to be disconnected from ethnocentrism.

For almost a century Africans have struggled to identify themselves with Christianity as their true religion. New models interpreting Christianity in and for African contexts have been developed which mark a clear detachment with the Western missionary Christianity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A great number of models—including adaptation,¹² indigenization,¹³ incarnation,¹⁴ inculturation,¹⁵ liberation,¹⁶ Black theology,¹⁷ feminist theology,¹⁸ and postcolonial criticism¹⁹—have been developed, all seeking ways to internalize Christianity in African communities. All these concentrated on unhooking African Christianity from Western-dominated theologies and practices. They used the same Bible to reconstruct African Christianity, working to free it

from contamination with the Western imperialism that brought a form of Christianity to the continent which they understood as civilization.

Some inculturated Christological interpretations have employed new metaphors and symbols to help Africans identify with Jesus as Lord and Savior. The consideration of Christ as the Proto-Ancestor²⁰ has found a wide support among African theologians; however, the use of ideas in the metaphor regarding kinship and the ways in which the metaphor shows gender-bias²¹ have decreased its use for African Christians and have limited international recognition.²² The reason is simple: the model promotes kinship and ethnicity, as each ethnic group has particular ways of identifying with ancestors.

With the contextualizing of African Christianity, two realities have become clear: (1) Western models of Christianity that emphasize the universality of Western contexts in understanding Christ have been shown to be lacking in usefulness outside the west and (2) African domestication of Christ as an ancestor has not led to a fruitful encounter of Christianity with African contexts.²³ The incarnational model should be given more attention, particularly as it can be used in global understandings of Christianity in the work of confronting racism and xenophobia. I argue that it is only on the theological renewal of incarnation, in which God in Jesus Christ completely renews his relationship with the whole of humanity and maintains the promise of salvation through him, that global Christianity should be founded and maintained.²⁴

The basis for the incarnational Christological Model is God's purpose of redeeming all human beings from the plight of sin. All human beings are included in God's plan, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, gender, color, race, or context. Incarnational Christology also generates ethical dimensions of love inherited from God's love in Jesus Christ. This love allows people of different nations to gain unconditional love and solidarity for and from each other. Human failures to understand how the relationship of God and creation in Jesus Christ has been reinterpreted have led to Christian sectarianism, and in the tragedies of Christian participation in colonialism and slavery, anti-Semitism, xenophobic violence, and discrimination based on gender, economic status, and other factors marginalizing people and groups. Early Christianity addressed such failures by providing directives that appealed to Christian communities to maintain peaceful coexistence, despite differences in ethnicity and geographical origin.

PAULINE PROMOTION OF GLOBAL COEXISTENCE AND SOLIDARITY

The hermeneutical key to Paul's understanding of the gospel is the faithfulness of God, who has been revealed to all humanity in Jesus Christ.²⁵

Christ, who according to the gospel narratives is God incarnate, is the person and content of the gospel preached by Paul.²⁶ From the beginning of Paul's letters, the inclusive nature of the gospel centered in the faithfulness to God in Jesus Christ is used as a transformative paradigm of God's promise of salvation.²⁷ The promise of salvation, according to Paul, is to all humanity. Without neglecting his Jewish identity,²⁸ Paul devoted his life to the mission to the Gentiles.

Paul links all nations included in God's promise of blessing and salvation through Abrahamic faiths.²⁹ His belief in God's gracious saving event for all humanity created mistrust of his mission for both Jews and Gentiles. In such a context, Paul established a theological thrust against any denial of the universality of Christianity and its common good for all. Paul's inclusive Christianity, grounded in the newness of the creation in Christ, has been suppressed by imperialistic civilization since the nineteenth century. This climaxed with the Holocaust during World War II, due to anti-Semitic ideologies and rhetoric based on misinterpretations of Paul's preference of faith against works of the law—as if he was totally against his own culture. The postwar discourse about reparations needed to address the violent anti-Semitic paradigm that emerged, which does not do justice to Paul's intercultural inclusiveness of Christianity.

To illustrate the thrust of Paul's theology it is important to point out some latent and obvious conflicts in his mission to the Gentiles. The conference in Antioch with apostles from Jerusalem, detailed in the letter to the Galatians,³⁰ indicates that Jewish Christians wanted to accept Gentiles in a mode of proselytes to Judaism: that is, that they should undergo circumcision according to Jewish law. Paul, on the other hand, sees that Gentiles (inclusive of all other nations) could be part of the covenant without fulfilling the demands of the Jewish law. While this law is important for the Jews, for others, there is another law written in their hearts.³¹ The Jewish-Gentile encounter in Christ sets parameters for other nations. When Paul bitterly admonishes Gentile Christians not to boast because they are the beneficiaries of God's covenant with Israel, and likewise Jewish Christians that they should not think they are more than Gentiles because of being custodians of the covenant, he actually interpreted what he believes is God's love in Jesus, that should penetrate the hearts of all people of all nations and transform them into good citizens of the new creation, now and in the life after temporal life.³²

Paul goes further to not only include all ethnic groups but also touches other institutions such as family and labor. Paul thinks that as long as anyone has been baptized in Christ, he is a consecrated person and stands equally privileged before God and before others.³³ The whole creation enjoys God's

newness and providence in Christ, and in Christ there is no one who is more valuable than the other. Everything and all are renewed in the image of God.³⁴ The inclusivity of nations, men and women, slaves and free has to be always discussed from the framework of the incarnational Christological love manifested by God in Christ. While this will automatically encounter attempts at justification of discrimination against slaves and women, since the renewal of these creatures of God being created in the image of God they have been given a new and righteous identity. Thus, even Paul's emphasis to women to obey their husbands and men to love their wives should be understood from this perspective. In fact, obedience here is not that of the obedience between a slave and a master from an imperialistic point of view. One has to read between the lines. Who has the more difficult responsibility, between the one who has to love the other or obey the other? Normally, the responsibility of the man to love the women is considered erotically, rather than of the love originating from God himself—from a literal point of view, agape love is more demanding than any other love. This is what Paul emphasizes in his love hymn in 1 Cor. 13. This lays the foundation for every action that a Christian undertakes.

Last but certainly not least, Paul integrates the gifts of the Holy Spirit as the outcome of anyone who is in Christ.³⁵ God through Christ imparts different gifts to all, that complement each other with a purpose of building the body of Christ. This builds a world where all, regardless of identity, location, or station, will coexist and share in the abundance of creation. This is where Christianity interprets its theological inclusivity and Christians have a moral imperative to be agents of change in all fields of life for the common good.

PAUL'S HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLE OF INCLUSIVITY AS A TOOL FOR ENCOUNTERING ANTI-SEMITISM, ANTI-IMMIGRANT FEELING, AND ETHNOCENTRISM IN AFRICA

It can be deduced from the previous discussion that engaging with Paul's thinking about the gospel as something that includes all people from all nations, as long as they are faithful to God in Christ Jesus for the reception of salvation through Christ. The situation challenges our mindset that Christianity is for a special sect and that God accepts our achievement at the cost of others. There are statements that make obvious that Paul's mission was global. It has to be taken seriously that when Paul preached the good news to people in the Roman Empire, he did it in the context he knew very well, since he was a citizen of that empire.

This premise of Paul's citizenship of the empire has to be deconstructed before it is applied in our context. Missionaries who came to evangelize in Africa were from the so-called civilized world, and Africans were considered uncivilized and savage people. Paul brought good news to the people of the Roman Empire, who were in some ways superior to the Jews. Therefore, Christianity emerged from an inferior culture, according to the standards of Greco-Roman context, and it struggled against and influenced the empire. Christianity in the beginning suffered persecution, but its expansion through Constantine brought its global impact up to today in both difficult and good times.

Paul's Christianity was not only liberating but also encouraging people of different groups to harmoniously coexist. Reading Paul's letters, you see a theological will to engage people in dialogue, and not use their problems to benefit socially and economically, but to discuss issues that both build and threaten their life from a Christian point of view. The ideas of inclusive Christianity discussed previously could be applied to mitigate problems going on now in the world. They could renew the confidence in Christianity as a religion of love, peace, and sustainable prosperity for the whole of humanity.

While Christians brought and nurtured racism, colonialism, and discrimination against women and children to Africa, an overemphasis on African cultures in the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries brought other dimensions. Discourses on the African Renaissance brought dissatisfactory rhetoric, especially from ruling elites who had not met the demands of the poor, and that disrupted the establishment and existence of the rainbow as a symbol of mutual coexistence of different nationalities and ethnic groups in the whole of Africa. The xenophobic behaviors and racism that exist in all continents today have their roots in past events of colonialism and discrimination according to race, gender, color, and economic status. They can only be mitigated if Christianity resumes its role of being a religion that challenges and encounters all cultures and provides avenues for people to come together to talk and reconcile. In Paul's theological foundation of social interaction, Christians can claim a positive legacy for addressing xenophobic rhetoric and violence by building values of social and economic inclusiveness based on reciprocity instituted in the love of God in Jesus Christ, who calls us to be stewards of his whole creation.³⁶ This is the basis of what the Lutheran World Federation has called holistic mission and diaconal engagement, whereby Christianity is engaged through its diversified spiritual, physical, mental, social, legal, and other related gifts in making sure that this world remains God's creation of all humanity regardless of their geographical location and time. This engagement will give hope and revive other African values, such as hospitality,

which is key in the making of Christianity to be part of the process in bringing well-being to people of all and in addressing the challenge of violent xenophobia.

CONCLUSION

Xenophobic behavior is neither Christian nor African but is a result of multi-faceted factors including social and economic imbalances that have occurred as a result of unjust socioeconomic systems worldwide. African culture traditionally promotes hospitality and could be integrated into a Christian ethos of love in the promotion of inclusive coexistence among people of different races, genders, ethnicities, and economic statuses.

Christianity has been mislabeled an agent of imperialism. However, looking deep from the perspective of Paul, Christianity is liberating, setting human beings free from sin, and providing avenues for the promotion of coexistence between members of different groups. It is also a place where people can build social networks and take community and social responsibility for each other.

The link between African hospitality and the Christian ethos of love and respect of creation could provide a theological thrust in work against anti-Semitism, xenophobia, racism, gender inequity, and discrimination against marginalized peoples.

NOTES

1. Ronaldo Munck, "Globalisation and Migration," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 7 (2008): 1233–1237, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20455107>.

2. Cf. D. C. Ukwandu, "Reflections on Xenophobic Violence in South Africa: What Happens to a Dream Deferred?" *African Journal of Public Affairs* 9, no. 9 (2017): 45, https://journals.co.za/docserver/fulltext/ajpa_v9_n9_a4.pdf?expires=1583768287&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=8CEF78A050230D484A537E2BF6369EB1.

3. Kelvin C. Dunn, "'Son of the Soil' and Contemporary State Making: Autochthony, Uncertainty, and Political Violence in Africa," *Third World Quarterly* 30 no. 1 (2009): 118.

4. Bénédet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications, 1998), 161–165.

5. In this respect I have argued that "disciples [of Jesus] are commissioned to go and empower the world with God's life giving message," Faustin Mahali, "A Biblical Perspective on Mission Amidst Unsustainable Livelihoods in Africa," *Mission Continues: Global Impulses for the 21st Century* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010): 31.

6. Etim E. Okon, "Christian Missions and Colonial Rule in Africa: Objective and Contemporary Analysis," *European Scientific Journal* 10, no. 17 (June 2014): 207, <https://ejournal.org/index.php/esj/article/viewFile/3557/3397>.

7. John 3:16; Rom. 6:22–23.

8. Gen. 1:26–27.

9. Gen. 1: 31.

10. The Abrahamic faith manifested in Gen. 22:18 lays the foundation of the promise that makes its fulfillment in Christ in whom all nations will be saved and liberated from unbelief and evil (Acts 17: 24–31).

11. John 1:14.

12. A. Ngindu Mushete, "An Overview of African Theology," *The Paths of African Theology*, ed. R. Gibellini (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994): 17.

13. On the explicit genesis of this model see John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1995), 10–11.

14. John Mary Waligo, "Making a Church that is Truly African," *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*, ed. John Mary Walligo, et al. (Kampala: St. Paul Publications-Africa, 1986), 11.

15. For a detailed meaning of inculturation see Ary Roset Crollius, "Inculturation: Newness and Ongoing Process," *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*, ed. John Mary Walligo, et al. (Kampala: St. Paul Publications-Africa, 1986): 32–36.

16. Unlike Latin America liberation theology that deals strategically with economic liberation, different view has been taken by Bénézet Bujo, who captures liberating tones in African culture as a prerequisite of establishing bringing relevant Africa Theology in such a context, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992): 17–36.

17. Cf. Simon S. Maimela, "Black Theology of Liberation," *The Paths of African Theology*, ed. R. Gibellini (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994): 182–183.

18. In this context of liberation theology, in the first place, its discourse almost at the end of the classical theologies, and that is why, Mercy Amba Oduyoye calls women who are struggling against sexism/gender discrimination in African context as doubly exploited, since after the slavery caused by imperialism, its burden comes twice to women who are oppressed by fellow black men, "Feminist Theology in an African Perspective," *The Paths of African Theology*, ed. R. Gibellini (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994): 166.

19. Stephen D. Moore, "'And So We Came to Rome': Mapping Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," *Empire and Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006): 10.

20. Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology*, 71–80.

21. Although this cannot be quickly taken as her point of view, Mercy Amba Oduyoye implicitly links gender-bias against women in many aspects of African worldview when she notes, "The social character of the self in the African worldview seems more entrenched in women than in men, for while women operate always on the principle of persons-in-relation, the African man's autonomy may lead him to independent action that tends to separate him from the unit," in her work, "Feminist Theology in an African Perspective," *The Paths of African Theology*, 175.

22. Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi, "Christ Also Ours in Africa: A Consideration of Torrance's Incarnational, Christological Model as Nexus for Christ's Identification with African Christians," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): 2–3, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38:1.1679>.

23. This passage from Kā Mana shows how the kinship or ancestral Christological model has been in crisis since the Rwandan genocide, as he says,

Christ shows at the heart of our grove that the worm was in the very fruit of the principle of separation, insofar as this principle introduced an order based on soil and blood, on totemic identification in a territory given to a social group united to an Ancestor, forgetting the law of the Creator who, nonetheless, is a real as the common [Father].

In *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and Building a New African Society* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 43.

24. Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi, "Christ Also Ours in Africa: A Consideration of Torrance's Incarnational, Christological Model as nexus for Christ's Identification with African Christians," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): 8–11, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38:1.1679>.

25. Faithfulness to God has no temporal competitive dimension among nations as indicated in Rom. 1:16. This temporal competitive dimension is denied by Jesus himself when he gives the metaphor of a landlord who pays equal wages to all day workers, some who came even at the eleventh hour (Matt. 20: 1–16).

26. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16 NRSV).

27. The righteousness of God entails the promise of salvation when people believe in Jesus Christ. This verse can be interpreted as a fulfillment of faith in every ethnic group accompanied by customs and traditions (in the case of the Jews guided by the law, Gal. 3:24) toward complete faith in Jesus Christ.

28. Paul still sees as part of his Jewish culture that has transformed and molded him into being a faithful Christian (2 Cor. 11:22–33, Phil. 3:4–9; in relation to the Law, Rom. 7:12; Gal. 3:24). Especially in 1 Cor. 11: 22–33 he indicates that in his mission he was challenged by all people regardless of their ethnic group, even more from his own people.

29. "For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13 NRSV).

30. In this case, Peter and James are representative of the Jewish Christians, see Gal. 2:11–21.

31. His defense of the Gentile in Galatians and the explanation on why Gentiles could be Christians without undergoing the demands of the law (Rom. 2:14–15; see also Rom. 3:27–31) sets a breakthrough in his inclusive theology. This should be understood from the paradigm of engaging God's creation with God's purpose of making it anew, rather than missiological discourses of converting, concurring, and civilizing the nations.

32. Rom. 9–11. I regard this part as admonition against both Gentiles and Jews, to still emphasize that both have equal chance to be part of the covenant through faith

in Jesus Christ, rather than regarding Paul to be a sectarian preacher, cf. Alan. F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul and the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990): 281.

33. Gal. 3:27–29.

34. 2 Cor. 9:17, cf. Gal. 6:15.

35. 1 Cor. 12.

36. Cf. Some have discussed on religion and social responsibility, but in Christianity it is more than that. It is being created in the image of God. We become stewards of God's creation through the love and salvation given to us freely in Jesus Christ. It has also been emphasized that "in view of these arguments around social responsibility, ethics and hospitality, we wish to argue that religion as social capital, social institution and belief system can provide multistrand entry points into the debates about the politics of belonging, which dispenses hospitality and social responsibility," see Federico Settler and Buhle Mpofu, "Social Responsibility with Respect to Religion and Migration in South Africa," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 30, no. 2 (2017): 12–31, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26489062>.

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Chapter 9

Race, Power, and Theology

A Christian Appraisal of Christian Zionism in Africa

Cynthia Holder Rich

The assumption and fervent eschatological hope of Christian Zionism is founded at least in part in the belief in the necessity of the State of Israel, and the people of Israel—the Jews—holding ownership of and residence in Jerusalem, for Christ to return. This understanding and this hope operate in the work of Christian Zionist organizations in Africa, a context significantly different racially, historically, and economically than those where Christian Zionism emerged. This chapter explores how understandings and approaches to whiteness concerning the interplay of race, power, and theology come together in Africa and Israel in Christian Zionist work. In *The Confession of Belhar*,¹ a Christian faith statement that emerged during the apartheid era in South Africa, the truth of the Gospel is affirmed and foundational untruths that empower whiteness in church and society are named and rejected. *The Confession of Belhar* will be used to frame this discussion.

RACE

... separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered ...

... we reject any doctrine which ... sanctions in the
name of the gospel or of the will of

God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in
advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and
experience of reconciliation in Christ.

The Confession of Belhar, articles 2 and 3²

Various ideas, both positive and negative, about Jews and Judaism have operated in white Christian theology and spaces throughout Christian history. A multitude of understandings of race, and specifically about blackness, have in a like fashion operated for white Christians for at least 500 years. Jewishness and blackness have intersected in Africa with whiteness, sparking subconscious, or unconscious, conversations about who is white, what whiteness, Jewishness, and blackness mean and how they operate. These ideas are dynamic, evolving, and relevant in the growth and spread of Christian Zionist thought in Africa. The long history of European Christian anti-Semitism and Christian acceptance and promotion of anti-Semitic government action,³ a sense of Christian guilt (for some white Christians) about these, and colonial goals of empire based on ideas of chosenness⁴ all helped build a sense that moving Jews out of Europe—and specifically to the “Promised Land,” where ancient Israelites lived—would serve a number of ends.⁵ These ideas and goals helped Christian Zionist thought persevere as a minor player in wider Christian theological constructs for centuries.⁶ The rise of the German National Socialist Party changed the conversation. The Nazi government, assisted by many in the German Church,⁷ made empire-building and brutal and bloody anti-Semitism state policy, initiated the practice of gathering Jews and others not understood as “Aryan” in camps, and ultimately executed millions, actions now called the Holocaust (or Shoah). This left many white Christians in Europe and North America struggling later with both horror at the number of lives lost and with guilt. Western governments’ denial of refugee status for European Jews, decisions based at least in part on anti-Semitism, resulted in terrible losses and consequent guilt.⁸

After World War II ended, the depth of the tragedy wrought by the Third Reich, aided by European and North American anti-Semitism, became apparent. More than six million European Jews had been killed. Those who survived had lost homes, property, and family. The safety of Jews in Europe had been proven—once again—to be at risk. This led to much-increased support for Christian Zionist thought. Notable U.S. theological leaders, including Paul Tillich, William Foxwell Albright, and Reinhold Niebuhr, and the influential mainline Protestant journal *The Christian Century* were all vocal in their support of the formation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine,⁹ in large part responding to what the Holocaust had done to the Jews.

But scholars have noted that authentic sympathy for the suffering of the Jews was not the only, nor perhaps the primary, impetus for the surge of Christian Zionism after the war. Rosemary Radford Ruether identifies mainline Protestant support for Christian Zionism, of which Tillich, Albright, and Niebuhr were major mid-twentieth-century voices and the *Century* a major organ, as dangerous, misguided, and complex, and argues that this was “deeply entwined with Western Christian imperialism toward the Middle

East”—both the British and the U.S. empires—who shared self-understandings as elect nations.¹⁰ Ruether identified “a deep intertwining of American political and religious identity and interests” in its support of the new State of Israel.¹¹ The lack of international concern for the rights of the people who lived in the area and were set aside for the new state, the majority of whom were Arab and Muslim¹²—people not understood as “white” nor able to gain access to the powers and privileges of whiteness—demonstrates some of the ways that European and North American whiteness, when coupled with empire, operated.

The new government in Israel quickly looked to make alliances in Africa, with a particular focus on East Africa, with whom they shared security concerns, both in confronting terrorism and protecting maritime traffic.¹³ Israel wanted both to help newly independent nations on the African continent and to gain friends who would stand with Israel in international forums. Early initiatives seemed promising in building good relations. However, the 1967 Six-Day War, when Israel defeated its Arab neighbors and extended its territory by taking over land the United Nations had set aside for the Palestinians, harmed and set back progress in these efforts.¹⁴ For Africans who had experienced colonization, Israel’s actions seemed all too familiar. Empathy for the Palestinians followed, with many African nations formalizing relations with the Palestinian Authority. President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania spoke for many African leaders when he shared with a visiting Palestinian delegation, “We lost our independence; you lost your country.”¹⁵

Israel, shut out of formal relations with many member states of the Organization of African Unity (the Organisation of African Unity OAU, succeeded in 2002 by the African Union, the AU), sought and made strong relationships with South Africa and Rhodesia, two nations also struggling to find international partners due to their policies of race-based separation and government by the minority white population. It is painfully, shockingly ironic that Israel, populated by survivors of state-sponsored genocide based on race, would come to form strategic alliances with white minority governments whose racial policies echoed those of the Third Reich. This would seem to represent a betrayal of Jewish modern memory, which, when it coalesced with colonial African memories, served to reinforce and strengthen the resolve of many African leaders in their rejection of formalized relations with the State of Israel in the early years of African independence.¹⁶

Newly independent African nations struggled to emerge from often-brutal colonial rule. For nearly a century, most Africans had been understood by white Europeans and North Americans as people who needed to be controlled, living on land that was valued for what it could produce for the colonial powers. Economic, education, and trade systems were built on racist and colonial foundations. On winning their independence, African nations faced

a significant need for allies, investors, and help. Over time, Israel, eager to make alliances, was welcomed by African governments who had initially been put off by Israel's policies toward the Palestinians, but who now found Israel's offers of development assistance irresistible. Israeli assistance came with significant strings attached. Israel's desire for allies in international forums, including the UN, has been made painfully clear to African nations who speak out for Palestinian rights or recognize Palestine. Israel has withdrawn development assistance from African governments who have supported Palestine. The withdrawal is instructive about the cost required for Israeli investment, military resources, and development support.¹⁷

The friendship offered to Africans by Israel does not extend, evidently, to understanding them as people who could be understood as Jewish, and thus, people who should be welcomed to emigrate to Israel. A case in point is the Jews of Ethiopia, called Beta Israel ("House of Israel"). In the midst of civil war and famine in the 1980s and 1990s, many Ethiopian Jews sought to move to Israel based on the Law of Return, a statute passed in Israel in 1950 that theoretically made it possible for Jews from anywhere in the world to emigrate to Israel.

The policy was highly problematic from the outset. The first problem is ideological. The belief that all Jews have a relationship with the state of Israel because of an imagined relationship with *ancient* Israel is politically charged. Some analysts have named this "imaginative geography," echoing Palestinian scholar Edward Said.¹⁸ A second problem is geographical. Israel is placed on a very small sliver of land, an insufficient area for every Jew on the planet to take up residence. This energizes both the settlement policy, in which Israel has taken land designated for and owned by Palestinians by force for new Jewish settlements, and the possibility of armed conflict with Israel's neighbors, all of whom are Arab states, toward the goal of increasing the landmass Israel controls. It also raises the question: Is the Law of Return only for Jews from Europe who experienced the Holocaust?

That leads to discussion of a third problem: race. Ethiopian Jews who have emigrated to Israel have struggled to find legitimacy in their new home. Jewish commentators, in Israel and internationally, have called the reception Ethiopian Jews have received in Israel racist.¹⁹ Severe limits have been placed on Ethiopian immigration to Israel since the 1990s, and questions have been raised about whether or not Ethiopian Jews are Jewish.²⁰ Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has celebrated the ways in which relations between Israel and African governments have grown,²¹ has also named African refugees and asylum seekers in Israel "savage" and "infiltrators."²² Israel has reportedly been in somewhat-covert conversations for some time with the governments of Uganda and Rwanda, working toward an agreement for the African nations to accept African asylum-seekers in

return for money or arms assistance. This has not improved Israel's racial equity profile.²³

This history has raised questions about race both for and about Jews. To be Jewish does one have to be understood and viewed as white? Can a Jew be African? Can a Jew be black? To be a Jew, does one have to have European roots?²⁴ And cogently for this discussion: Are Jews white? Is Israel a white nation?²⁵

These questions require an effort to define whiteness—a construct that changes over time and on which there is no agreement among scholars. Whiteness suggests the power, and even the right, to dominate—economically, educationally, militarily, and culturally. Through human history, notions have emerged that skin color is an acceptable criterion on which to categorize and understand people, that people with lighter skin tones are innately superior to those with darker skin tones, that lighter-skinned people are inherently more civilized and reasonable than darker-skinned people—meaning that darker-skinned people are constitutionally, genetically dangerous, so that people with lighter skin tones have the right and the responsibility to subjugate, oppress, and control them. White acceptance of these ideas has led to the creation of white minority governments in the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Asia. To be in the minority and to control majority populations requires coercive threat and a willingness to use violence. Hence, whiteness has also come to be understood as the willingness to use violence and bloodshed to uphold white dominance, which is, in this way of understanding life and the world, an effort to maintain order (which is white) and control chaos (which is not white). Whiteness includes protection, status, and privilege—a sense that one is nonracial, or that one's race is the standard, regular race, and so unremarkable. This manifests itself in the manner persons are described. Whites from the United States are often described simply as "Americans," while people from the United States of skin tones not understood as white are seen to require more descriptors. The list of these descriptive terms is long, and includes African American, Asian American, Latino- or Hispanic-, and Native American.

So: Are Jews, particularly Israeli Jews, white?²⁶ Popular approaches to this question have changed, particularly since World War II, and they illustrate how understandings of race and religion overlap. Whiteness and being white suggests power—specifically, power over others. That European Jews are and have been a persecuted and powerless minority group of outsiders throughout much of their history is undisputed. This would suggest that the answer is no—Jews are not white. And, some Jewish people in Europe and North America have become economically and educationally very successful—that is, they have adopted and adapted to some markers that can be read as white. So, perhaps some Jews *are* white.²⁷ However, if so, this status comes with a

caveat, in that it has not protected them, nor granted them the privileges that many non-Jewish white people receive as a birthright. In one pointed example, many cities in the United States maintained racially restrictive covenants in their statutes for many years after World War II.²⁸

Virulent and often-violent anti-Semitism persists in white spaces today. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that Jews were the targets of nearly 60 percent of all hate crimes in the United States in 2018.²⁹ The number of hate crimes against Jews each year has risen significantly in the United States and Europe since 2016.³⁰ These crimes are in part a criminal response to the understanding held by anti-Semitic actors that Jews are not white and should be punished for acting as “faux whites” that taint “truly white” spaces.³¹ Ideas of whiteness, formed in Europe and North America, operate in Israel as well. Most Israeli government leaders have been Jews of European background (Ashkenazim), and members of parties dominated by Ashkenazi politicians, throughout much of the state’s history.³² Whiteness impacts the response of the Israeli government to Ethiopian Jews, to Palestinians, and to its geopolitical neighbors.

Africa is a continent where the vast majority of people do not identify as white and are not understood as white by others, and where most residents experienced colonization by people understood as white. The fact that Christian Zionist actors and organizations active in Africa, most of whom are white or led by white people, do not raise the question of race colors all they do. The track record of some Christian Zionist organizations in Africa is marked by racist, condescending, paternalistic approaches and understandings that nurture internal African racism and self-hatred.³³ Unconscious, unexamined conceptions of whiteness have infected Christian Zionist organizations in their work in Africa at levels that approach epidemic.

For Christian white people entering Africa it is imperative to understand the history of white-on-black violence and oppression in Africa and the understandings of whiteness that have been manifested in the colonizing, enslaving, trafficking, massacring, raping, and theft of property and life from Africans in order to carry out just and faithful ministry. The choice by Christian Zionists to leave Israeli racism—and their own racism—unchallenged while inviting Africans to join their movement requires denial of African personhood.

Respect for the personhood of others is foundational for human relationship, and essential for the relationship to which disciples are called in Jesus, wherein race, religion, status, and gender no longer exist as barriers to community (Gal. 3:28). *The Confession of Belhar*, crafted in a time of state-mandated violent racial separation in apartheid South Africa, confronted this denial, in both society and church. The framers of the confession, members of the “colored” church formed by the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa

(DRCSA), knew firsthand the destructive power of whiteness and the damage it does to Christian witness as it works to obstruct and weaken efforts toward the reconciliation to which Christ calls us. Proclaiming the Gospel requires repentance from the sin of racism, “which Christ has already conquered,” and the rejection of policies that “separate peoples on the grounds of race.” As long as Christian Zionist organizations and actors lack the will to repent from the sin of racism in their work in Africa, to ignore the racist policies of their Israeli partners, and to reject their own racist policies and practices, their efforts cannot be called Christian, and Africans should reject the message they bring.

POWER

We believe . . . that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged; that God calls the church to follow him in this, for God brings justice to the oppressed

and gives bread to the oppressed;

that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need;

that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice;

that the church . . . must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged;

that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the Gospel.

The Confession of Belhar, article 4

Africans know colonialism. For many Africans, it is a thing of living memory. For all Africans, the actions of the colonizers continue to impact life, in the society as well as the church. Colonizers came to Africa because they recognized the power that could be gained through control of the resource-rich continent. They took what they found, leaving the indigenous population impoverished by theft of the wealth of the land and sea and desecration of the natural environment.

Historically, the colonial era signified the military takeover of African peoples and occupation by colonial powers, with decisions made outside Africa to benefit non-Africans. Since independence, neocolonialism—the practice of bringing economic, political, cultural, or other pressures to bear on former colonies in order to influence policies—has become standard practice in many parts of the continent. Many Europeans live, own property,

or have business interests in Africa, often in countries colonized by their countries of citizenship. European countries and the United States continue to act in colonial and neocolonial ways in Africa. Some of the colonized have learned well from their colonial masters, and now act in colonial ways with other nations on the continent. Colonialism and neocolonialism continue to hold power in many African countries, while new forms of these practices emerge.

China is a major player—perhaps the major player—in the new era of African colonialism.³⁴ While many Chinese people live and work in Africa, in this new form of colonialism, occupation and taking over governments are not primary strategies. This new form operates by offering the elites of African countries what they desire, often paid for by non-elites, and making clear what the investing (colonizing) country needs in return; thus, the investments made are not primarily for the benefit of Africans—and at times, not at all so.

The young State of Israel sought friendships and alliances in newly independent African nations. A 1972 Israeli military report outlined Israeli goals for this work as follows: “to achieve a proper blend first of altruistic aspirations, (i.e.) the wish to help and second of our own legitimate advantage—gaining friends, furthering political information and advancing economic objectives.” Israeli officials openly admit that the emphasis on altruism has greatly diminished over time.³⁵ Israel is in Africa mainly to further its own interests: access to needed resources, and, perhaps more importantly, reliable allies in international forums like the UN. In 2018, Yoram Elron, deputy director general and head of the Africa desk at Israel’s foreign ministry, was interviewed on Israel’s interests in Africa. He explained, “We would like to see more countries disengage from the positions of the African Union and vote against anti-Israeli resolutions in international forums. This is work in progress, this is not something that happens overnight, but the trend is positive.”³⁶

Work toward this end has sometimes involved a rewriting of history and the grafting of the history of ancient Israel onto the history of the modern State. In June 2017, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu attended a meeting of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) held in Monrovia, Liberia. In addressing conference attendees, Netanyahu stated that “Africa and Israel share a natural affinity. We have, in many ways, similar histories. Your nations toiled under foreign rule. You experienced horrific wars and slaughters. This is very much our history.”³⁷ Touting Israel’s historical “affinity” may not have proven convincing to African leaders present, whose statements since African independence on the practices of Israel in the Palestinian territories testify to a different understanding of history. Signs of this include the recognition of Palestine by the OAU in 1988,³⁸ and

the continuing denial of something Israel has been requesting: nonmember observer status in the African Union, a status granted to Palestine.³⁹

In both older and emerging forms of colonialism in Africa, Africa's poverty, a product at least in part of having been intentionally underdeveloped by European colonial powers,⁴⁰ has been important to those who sought power on the continent. It is far easier to overtake and control those who lack power. This reality is also important to Christian Zionist organizations active in Africa. Operating in poor contexts means that the offering of "free" gifts helps make one's message attractive to people who have little access otherwise to such benevolences. One common strategy of Christian Zionist organizations is to offer "free" all-expenses-paid trips to Israel to African pastors. Many thousands of African pastors take part in these trips each year. The Israeli government partners with Christian Zionist organizations, supporting the pilgrimage programs. Often, the Israeli president or prime minister addresses pilgrims.⁴¹ The trips are designed to teach particular understandings of the sites visited,⁴² and to increase the number of Christian faith leaders who support these understandings in their teaching, preaching, and political work within their home countries.

This practice makes plain the power differential between the Christian Zionist hosts and the pilgrims who participate. African pastors serve in contexts influenced by Prosperity Gospel preaching, which teaches that those who are truly blessed by God can be identified through seeing how much wealth they have accumulated.⁴³ Leaders of the hosting organizations are, in Prosperity Gospel thought, highly favored by God. They can offer the gift of international travel and make meetings with very powerful people happen. African pastor pilgrims' only role is to receive the gift of seeing what trip hosts want them to see, and to take home their new understandings: a reinforced and strengthened sense of the seamless continuity between ancient Israel, home of the patriarchs and Jesus, and modern Israel, where Christ will return.

There is evidence that this power differential is used to advance Israeli interests not only in Africa but also in the United States. A report from a conference for global African studies professors revealed the strategy of offering "free" trips to Israel in use among professors at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the United States. In June 2019, the African Studies Centre at Oxford University in the United Kingdom hosted a conference on "Racialization and Publicness in Africa and the African Diaspora," which was attended by African studies scholars from around the globe. The stated goal of the conference was to discuss how people in Africa and of African descent are "racialized." Some conference participants reported that at least part of the goal of some conference sessions was to legitimize Israel's settlements policies. Two of the twelve panels during the

meeting were organized by an advocacy group called The Institute for the Study of Global Anti-Semitism and Policy,⁴⁴ which has the goal of combating the nonviolent protest strategies of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) movement. Several panelists in the two panels serve as professors at HBCUs. They shared that they had been invited by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to attend meetings in Washington, DC, and to take part in trips to Israel.⁴⁵ This presents problematic power issues, as African American scholars serving on the faculties of HBCUs are paid much less than most faculty serving at other institutions,⁴⁶ and thus have less access to professional travel. AIPAC's generosity, with strings attached, was shown to tip the balance of academic discourse in this case.

Much of the work promoting Christian Zionism in Africa is done by organizations and companies created and based in the United States. These organizations and U.S. government action are crucial to the maintenance and advance of Christian Zionism. Two U.S. broadcasting companies, the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) and Daystar Broadcasting, broadcast Christian Zionist messages to Israeli homes and globally from Israel, with permission from and with the support of the Israeli government. The networks use their considerable influence to promote and shape Christian Zionist ideology. Matt Westbrook argues that while both networks focused in the past on "watching for biblical prophecies to be fulfilled," they now engage in "prophecy fulfillment," that is, both stations are unapologetic and enthusiastic about promoting their political aims. Westbrook states that they can accurately be described as "the foreign policy arm of the Religious Right" in the United States.⁴⁷

The largest and most powerful Christian Zionist organizations are based in the United States. One of these, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ), has invested heavily in African development and recruiting, opening many new offices in countries across the continent and holding large conferences. Many articles on the group's website tout their African initiatives and celebrate how Africa is opening to Israel.⁴⁸ Both TBN and Daystar Broadcasting maintain strong relations with ICEJ, and ICEJ staff members often appear on both networks' shows.⁴⁹ ICEJ reports often about the power of the organization in promoting Israel's interests internationally, sharing the work of the organization in blocking African nations' recognition of Palestine and encouraging support for Israel among African politicians.⁵⁰ U.S.-based Christian Zionist organizations clearly see both political support for Israel and blocking criticism of Israel as important aims of Christian Zionist work.

Many powerful actors in both the Israeli and U.S. governments support the goals of Christian Zionist actors and organizations, while often demurring from the faith claims of the movement. Under U.S. president Trump,

U.S. policy toward Israel moved quickly in ways that could not have been foreseen just a few years before. The move of the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018 shocked many international observers. It was followed by statements of support for the Israeli settlement policy in 2019,⁵¹ a significant change from decades of prior U.S. policy, coupled with the signing of an executive order to make discrimination against Jews a violation of law. At the time, analysis viewed this as a strategy to facilitate combating anti-Israel protests and BDS work on college campuses by naming those as discriminatory and thus illegal.⁵² Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and close adviser, discussed the order in *The New York Times*, opining that "anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism."⁵³ The transformation in U.S. Middle East policy under President Trump was welcomed by Israel's government. These power moves by Israel and the United States have been hailed by Christian Zionists.

Some African analysts disagree with Kushner's view of anti-Zionist work. South African journalist William Shoki argues that just as opposing Afrikaner nationalism was not the same as opposing Afrikaner people, opposing Zionism should not be understood as opposing Jews or being anti-Semitic. Shoki encourages Israel to move toward what he calls "The South African Alternative," based on the movement from white minority rule in South Africa to the rainbow nation led by the first postapartheid president, Nelson Mandela. "Israel in its current Zionist form must be opposed," he states, but that does not mean that Jews and Israel have no right to exist. Noting that South Africa changed after realizing that the future was impossible without reversing course, Shoki sees a similar future for Israel as the only viable option.⁵⁴

The Confession of Belhar emerged at a time when the official stance of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRCSA) supported the powerful in the country—the white minority government who had come to power and introduced *apartheid*, state-mandated racial separation policies, in 1948. But racial separation in church and society in South Africa did not begin then. In 1829, a congregation of the DRCSA asked the governing board, or Synod, of the church whether "born-again" (white) members should have to commune at the Lord's Table with "heathen" (persons of color) baptized and confirmed members. The question was not new, having simmered below the surface for years before a congregation made the inquiry public. The Synod responded that separate administration of the sacraments would make the church theologically unviable. The Synod stood for unity at the Table till 1857, when leaders of the church caved to white pressure. The Minutes of the 1857 meeting of the Synod include this memorable section:

Synod regards it as desirable and Scriptural that our members out of Heathendom should be accepted and incorporated within our Congregations wherever this is

feasible; but where this measure could obstruct the advance of the cause of Christ as a result of the weakness of some, then congregations consisting of heathen converts, which are formed or which may still be formed, shall enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate building or setting.⁵⁵

The twist in this action is that those named “weak”—white South African Christians—were actually the powerful within the society and the church. With this step, the DRCSA began the policy of “separate development”—development of separate congregations and denominations for white, colored, black, and Indian members.⁵⁶ The church bowed, taking an unjust and disempowering action that “legitimated injustice.” In taking this fateful step, the DRCSA failed to resist the false doctrines that led them to worship and collude with power.⁵⁷

Throughout its history, the church has struggled with the issue of power—what power it has, how to recognize power, how to faithfully use it, and how to avoid its abuse. To understand and accept *The Confession of Belhar*’s claim that disciples of Jesus serve a God who “is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged” has proven hard for many, particularly Christians who seek or hold power. In Germany in the 1930s, the self-styled “German Christians” sought closeness to the leaders of the Third Reich, because they had power. In South Africa, the DRCSA sought closeness with and supported the National Party, because they had power. In both cases, and in many others throughout Christian history, the church, attracted to human power, has denied God and engaged in sin. Power is seductive. Christian Zionist actors and organizations know this; they use this truth in their work in Africa and with Africans to attract people to their message and encourage acceptance of it as truth.

For Christian Zionist organizations, the choice to partner with Israel’s very powerful government in order to achieve “Christian” goals presents problems for followers of Jesus. The government of Israel uses its power to oppress people, steal their property, and even kill people who are “destitute, poor, and wronged.” Palestinians, who have had more of their land taken every year, have to struggle to get basic foodstuffs while the occupying military blockades their harbor, and have lost more rights over time while watching their children being attacked, arrested, and killed, and their fields being poisoned and burned by Israeli settlers. All of this happens while the Palestinians are named by both Israel and the United States as the problem. As Rafeef Ziadah, Palestinian scholar, poet, and activist, shares in her spoken word poem “We Teach Life, Sir,” “When the bombs were dropping on Gaza, I got the kind of question Palestinians always get: ‘Don’t you think it would all be fine if you stopped teaching your children to hate?’”⁵⁸ Denying the reality of Palestinian suffering—suffering caused by the power of Israel in partnership with the

power of the United States—will not make it disappear, no matter how singularly one focuses on the belief that ancient Israel and modern Israel are one and the same, and that one's blind and uncritical support of Israel is required in order for Jesus to return. Jesus, who said no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, when the end will come (Mark 13:32), will not be moved to return through human machinations, no matter how powerful. To partner with the powerful who oppress others cannot be part of following Jesus.

This is particularly true when Christians seek to present their message among deeply poor people. Christian Zionist organizations active in Africa typically come from places of power and enter spaces that have been systematically and intentionally disempowered. Working with people who are disempowered requires sensitivity and care. Disciples of Jesus are called to strive to see Jesus in others, particularly "the least of these" (Matt. 25:34–40). Calling deeply impoverished people to open their hearts to Israel and to bless and pray for Israel while not seeing their poverty and suffering as a call to action is not "standing where the Lord stands."⁵⁹ To enter Africa as a powerful follower of Jesus demands that one be aware of one's own power, and what that means and how it operates to and with self, others, and God. Powerful disciples must keep their eyes open to see poverty, how it impacts all components of life, and its root causes in Africa. Inevitably, seeing in this way will lead followers to view those who are "powerful and privileged" as "selfishly seek[ing] their own interests, thus controlling and harming others."⁶⁰

Power dynamics in Africa, especially between white agents and black Africans, are incredibly complex. There are often myriad things happening in conversations and relationships, many of which are subterranean and so require sensitivity. Christian Zionist organizations have come to Africa with an agenda. To bear the name Christian should mean that the agenda always includes acknowledgment of sins, past and present, repentance, the lifting up of the oppressed, and work for the justice to which Christ calls. The Gospel demands these as a baseline.

THEOLOGY

We believe:

that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another;

that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker;

that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and peace among people;

that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger . . . and blocks the path

of the ungodly;

that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right.

*The Confession of Belhar*⁶¹

Christians have struggled with their relationship to Jews for millennia. Jesus's very earliest followers, all of whom were Jewish, saw no problem—until Gentiles started to emerge as a majority without the expected consummation of the age that their inclusion should have signaled. At some later points, like the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal (which was later imported to the “New World”), the presence of Jews in predominantly Christian nations was felt as a problem intense enough to require an extreme solution: force them to convert, or kill them in the name of Jesus. The horrors of the Holocaust moved many North American and European white Christians to reflect after the fact on anti-Semitic understandings they harbored, often unconsciously, and on what it meant to share the so-called “Judeo-Christian”⁶² heritage with the Jewish community.

Part of this reflection has been on the status of the Jews as the chosen people, and of the “Holy Land” having been promised, through Abraham, to the Jews. These theological convictions created theological sympathy for initiatives that helped make the establishment of the modern State of Israel possible. The unquestioned right of Jews to the land of Israel provided the foundation of best-selling novels like James Michener's *The Source*⁶³ and Leon Uris's *Exodus*.⁶⁴ Both had theopolitical themes that cast the new state of Israel and Jews in a very positive light while sharing less sympathetic views of the residents of Palestine and their government. These influential volumes helped solidify a favorable sense of the new state and of its rightful residents in the popular imagination. The theme song from the movie version of *Exodus* begins, “This land is mine; God gave this land to me.”⁶⁵ For many moviegoers and book readers, and many Christian theologians as well, there seemed no question at the time about the veracity of this claim.

In bringing Christian Zionism to African countries and churches, absolute clarity about Israel's rightful claim to the land and the continuing promises to the Jews has been central to the message. In this narrative, Israel's chosenness trumps anything Israel does, and makes anything the Palestinians do moot. A Nigerian Christian, interviewed as part of reporting about Christian Zionism in his country, spoke for many African Christian Zionists, telling the reporter that “nothing the Palestinians could do would make God break his promise to his chosen people.”⁶⁶

African Christians have been invited by U.S.-based Christian Zionist organizations to take part in praying for, blessing, and supporting Israel, thus developing an Israel-centric ecclesiology. A few examples illustrate.

- Return Ministries asks Africans to assist Jews in “returning” to Israel.⁶⁷ Their approach in Africa includes a call to repentance. The organization reports that African Christians believe that all Africans are descended from the ancient Egyptians who enslaved the Israelites, that all Africans have been punished since the time of Moses for this sin, and thus must repent.⁶⁸ True repentance will include work to bless Israel.
- Africa for Israel celebrates the growing relationship between Israel and African countries and the avoidance in most African nations of BDS strategies or other protests of Israeli policies.⁶⁹ The group promotes pan-African forms of Christian Zionism.
- ICEJ notes the growth of support for Israel among African Christians, which should lead, they report, to a bright future for Israel in international forums like the UN. Decisions to support Israel and block international recognition of Palestine are credited to the work of ICEJ in Africa, through the organization’s message that countries that bless Israel will themselves be blessed.⁷⁰

These examples raise theological and ecclesiological questions. In that these are Christian organizations, thus bound by Jesus’s Gospel, how is God’s concern for the poor reflected in their operations in Africa? How do these build up the church and grow its capacity to proclaim the good news? What is the role of Jesus’s disciples, in Africa or anywhere in the world, in ensuring the protection of the Israeli government and its strategic geopolitical alliances? Where is the primacy of justice and peace in these understandings of God and the church?

Answers to these questions perplex those exploring the theological and biblical foundations for the work of Christian Zionist organizations in Africa. In this section, I lay out perspectives on these foundations, seeking both answers and clues toward directions forward.

Reviewing Christian Zionist literature and websites quickly reveals the primacy of Gen. 12:3, which is quoted over and over, as it has been in several articles referenced already in this chapter. The verse is part of the narrative about the call of Abram to leave his home country and go to a land the LORD would show him. It says, “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

The use of this verse by Christian Zionists is not surprising. It shows textual evidence that blessing Israel, the nation that arose from Abram/Abraham and his family, is commanded by God. It includes a warning of curses for those who do not bless the nation of which Abram/Abraham was the progenitor, ancient Israel. In contexts where blessings and curses are central to

religious understandings—contexts like those found across Africa—this text resonates and is readily perceived and integrated within religious cultures.

It is also perhaps not surprising that verse 2 of the chapter is not emphasized in Christian Zionist publications. Verse 2 says, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”⁷¹ This is echoed in verse 3, where the LORD says that through Abram “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” In both verses, the LORD is clear that the point is to bless everyone on the planet. Commenting on this text, Hebrew Bible scholar Siegbert Riecker names Abram’s family a “mediator of blessing.” Riecker identifies the opening to Genesis 12 as a new beginning, a point of starting over, after the disaster of the flood (Chapters 6–10) and the choice of God to scatter the world’s peoples and confuse their languages (Chapter 11). The promise to Abram is that the blessing he carries for all the people of the earth will be real and effective, “if he stays obedient.”⁷² Riecker asks the following question: “How will Abraham and his descendants manage to mediate the blessings of God to the families and nations that they are going to meet?”⁷³ He answers this question, sharing examples from the rest of Genesis of blessings to the houses of the patriarchs, the relatives of the patriarchs, and for the inhabitants of the land. Riecker argues that the central takeaway from this text is the job Abram is to carry out through moving to a new land and growing his family there, to be the agent of God’s blessing for every person on the earth through his obedience. M. Daniel Carroll concurs, noting that the people of God “were promised blessings in order to be a blessing,” and that Abram’s work to bless those he encountered was counted to him as righteousness.⁷⁴ This point—the responsibility placed upon Abram and his descendants—is neither emphasized nor even voiced in much of Christian Zionist work.

Commonly heard preaching and teaching that God is on one side—the side of Israel⁷⁵—in conflicts between Israel and Palestine, and in relations between Israel and other nations in the Middle East, centers on interpretations of the opening of Genesis 12, and particularly on verse 3. Israel is understood in these readings as the nation of God, and to take the side of Israel against the Palestinians or any other enemy is equated with taking the side of God. This renders the Palestinians as “the other” and makes violence against them acceptable.⁷⁶ Dividing the world into those who are right—on the side of God *and Israel*—and those who are wrong—against God *and Israel*—creates a message that is simplistic, easily integrated and remembered, and readily preached and taught.

It also creates a situation where the victim is named as the villain. To criticize or even mention Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians, the level of suffering; bloodshed and death; the theft of property and homes; the wholesale bombing of hospitals, clinics, community centers, and schools;

the choice to deprive Palestinians of water, of permits to build, of freedom of movement—to criticize Israel for these or to mention them at all is called anti-Semitic. Israel is the nation of God. To criticize Israel is to criticize God. Palestinians, suffering under occupation and violent oppression, have the divinely granted role in this drama of being the threat, the criminal, the maker-of-chaos, the terrorist.⁷⁷ Those who curse Israel will be cursed. In this reading, Palestinians and Israelis are never equivalent in the lives they get to live, in the suffering the situation has caused them both, and in the relative freedom they each possess to make it better. In this worldview, Palestinians deserve the curses under which they live by choosing to criticize—which is read as cursing—Israel.

Palestinian Christian leader and scholar Mitri Raheb sees this dismissal of the Palestinian people, even Palestinian Christians, as part of a theological obsession on the part of Christian Zionists “with a God that shows his strength over and over again in history,” a central part of Christian Zionist worship of “God the warrior.”⁷⁸ While Christian Zionists partner with Jews and with Israeli leaders, Raheb argues that their dismissal of Palestinians and demonization of Muslims is matched by their lack of care, ultimately, for Jews and Israel. In fact, as Raheb points out, Christian Zionism’s partnership with Jews and Israel while regarding them as means to an end is central to the scandal of the movement: “[Christian Zionists] are interested in [Jews] only as part of the divine plan, an instrument in God’s end-time scenario,”⁷⁹ an understanding of God’s outline for salvation in which the role given the Jews ends in their destruction. Violations of human rights, and even violence and death, do not matter, however, in Christian Zionist theology, because, as Raheb reminds us, “Divine rights supersede human rights.”⁸⁰

This view of God and God’s relationship with and care for the people God has created flies in the face of the biblical narrative, including the opening of Genesis 12. Abram is sent and called to be a blessing and to mediate blessing to others. This was true in ancient Israel, and even if we believed that ancient Israel and modern Israel are one and the same (a belief promoted by both the Israeli government and Christian Zionist organizations),⁸¹ the requirement of Israelis and their government to be a blessing and mediate blessing would still stand. This is an understanding of God, a scripture-based theology, in which biblical scholars would find coherence.

Conversely, to understand and proclaim God, the way God works, and God’s will for creation and for people in simple terms of one nation being blessed and all others having to bless that one nation, or else be cursed(!), no matter what that one nation does—this is both theologically and biblically incoherent. To drag God into the role of divine sovereign for a tyrannical government bent on creating an evermore ethnically pure and geographically extensive nation, giving divine approval to the construction of a military-industrial

complex that dominates and oppresses the stranger, the poor, the widow, the orphan, and those who suffer injustice is to do theological violence.⁸² Ruether condemned this form of theological ideology as “heresy,” asking whether the time had come, by 1989, “to recognize Christian Zionism as an integral part of this same ideology that condones ethno-nationalist superiority of Jews over Arabs in Israel and allows this state to expropriate Palestinians of basic human rights in the name of a divine ‘plan of redemption’?”⁸³

The Confession of Belhar has much to say about blessings and being blessed. Believers are “obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be . . . a blessing to one another”; the church is blessed “because it is a peacemaker”; and God’s blessings include bringing “justice and peace” and supporting and helping the downtrodden, the poor, and the stranger.

In much of the Hebrew Bible and in many African cultures, blessings are related to fertility, to growth, to increase. When we are bid in many Hebrew Bible texts to bless someone, or read and hear that God blesses someone, that is a wish or a promise that their capacity to reproduce, through the growth of human families, fields and flocks, or wealth, might flourish and expand. This understanding of blessing works well for many in Africa. On a continent where agrarian economies dominate many countries, where much of the farming is still done by hand, and where drought, flooding, desertification, and locusts are regular risks to life, the prayers and rituals heard at weddings and other community celebrations aimed at ensuring the blessings of fertility of families, fields, or herds make sense.

In the New Testament, Jesus transforms the concept of blessing. As a celibate adult man with no wife, nor children, nor business, the increase Jesus gives in blessing is not tied to reproduction—of people, herds, crops, or wealth. Jesus speaks of and offers blessing in the form of the whole realm of heaven, comfort, mercy, righteousness, becoming children of God and seeing God, inheriting the earth, and the promise of great reward when being persecuted for Jesus’s sake (Matt. 5:3–12). These blessings are harder for many to understand and integrate. They are less tangible and less tied to human understandings of what it means to be blessed—and what it means to be persons of wealth. They specifically fly in the face of Prosperity Gospel understandings and any who partner with or use them. And these are the kind of blessings which are part of the confession of faith in the *Belhar*. Those crafting the confession had Jesus’s transforming blessings in mind.

To understand and live out Jesus’s understanding of blessing in our theologies makes it impossible to avoid seeing and tending to the poor, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the downtrodden. To live into Jesus’s sense of blessing is to pledge oneself to bring justice to the world, and to work with God to block ungodly, unjust actors, institutions, and ideas. It calls followers to commitment to peacemaking wherever they find themselves. To be part

of the blessing movement of Jesus is to have one's life, the goals of life, the trajectory of life utterly changed.

The guiding theological ideologies of the Christian Zionist movement are not consistent with this second way of understanding and living out blessing to which Jesus calls us. It is curious, then, that the name of the movement includes the name claimed by followers of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is Lord.

The Confession of Belhar, article 5

The Confession of Belhar concludes with one of the oldest and most enduring confessions of Christian faith. As with any confession, the meaning of this creedal statement must be explored before it can be confessed.

To name Jesus as Lord is to say that it is Jesus who is central, the only one to whom our allegiance as disciples is due. To confess Jesus as Lord means that it is Jesus—the person, his life and ministry, crucifixion and resurrection, and his continuing action in the world—who is essential and fundamental to life.

To name anyone, or anything, as Lord is to say that all others are not. To say that Jesus is Lord signifies that others—other entities, other people, other desires, other causes—do not and will not receive our worship. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the original signers of the *Theological Declaration of Barmen* (the structure of which was borrowed and adapted for use in *The Confession of Belhar*), preached on this truth to young people at their confirmation in 1938.

Your “yes” to God requires your “no” to all injustice, to all evil, to all lies, to all oppression and violation of the weak and poor, to all ungodliness, and to all mockery of what is holy. Your “yes” to God requires a “no” to everything that tries to interfere with your serving God alone, even if that is your job, your possessions, your home, or your honor in the world. Belief means decision.⁸⁴

This is what it means to say “yes” to God. This is the cost of saying that Jesus is Lord.

I am perplexed, as I conclude this appraisal, with the absence of Jesus and his Gospel in the arguments made by Christian Zionist actors and organizations. During my years living and teaching theology in Africa, I have been blessed to witness deep and abiding faith in the power of Jesus to save, to heal, and to transform life. This witness has often been made in

the most trying of circumstances: in the midst of civil strife, poverty, lack of opportunity, or deep grief. To those who give this witness, Jesus is central, fundamental, and essential. Using this understanding, Jesus is called Lord by millions of African Christians. Not hearing the Gospel in the work of Christian Zionists, particularly in Africa, where Jesus is praised as the only refuge in life, is confusing.

And then again, perhaps it is not so confusing after all. The good news of Jesus does not support violence and oppression. Although many have tried, the gospel cannot be twisted in such a way to make it say that persecution of the poor pleases God, nor that theft by the powerful is righteous. It would be a very convoluted exegesis of Jesus's message to find support there for what is happening, and has happened for decades, in the Occupied Territories. As Jesus lived in a land occupied and governed by a government willing to be violent to achieve its ends and ready to murder—so to silence—those who spoke for the poor and against ill-gotten wealth, the Gospel narratives give more solace and support for those living in Gaza and the West Bank than to the occupying government which controls life there. Jesus knew firsthand how bloodstained the Romans were willing to get in order to achieve their ends. Indeed, he was among those whom Rome tried to silence through murder. The parallels with the situation in Israel and Palestine today should give anyone claiming the name "Christian" pause.

When Christians from outside the Middle East collaborate today with such a government, they do so at the peril of the "Christian" message they aim to bring. When they do so in Africa, a continent filled with people who have known enslavement, colonialism, and theft, Christian Zionist actors and organizations continue a centuries-long trend of white Christians in Africa coming with goals and agendas unrelated to the people they approach. Africans are used to white Christians seeing them and using them as pawns in agendas external to the continent and its people. This, in Africa, is common. Something being common, however, does not make it right. Naming something Christian does not mean it proclaims Jesus as Lord.

We live in an era where authoritarian governments and white supremacist movements are on the rise. As in other like times, anti-Semitic violence has risen with the rise of fascism and white supremacy. Jews are being terrorized by attacks on houses of worship, businesses, and homes around the globe. In our time, as in all times, following Jesus and naming him as Lord requires deep reflection on what his Lordship means. As Christians seek to approach and be in relationship with Jews, Muslims, Israelis, Palestinians, and Africans in ways consonant with Christian faith, proclaiming Jesus as Lord grounds and centers work, assists disciples in professing that which is right and true, and strengthens and equips them for rejecting any and all ideologies that deny Jesus and his good news.

NOTES

1. Office of the General Assembly, *The Confession of Belhar, 1986*, in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, The Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 2016), 299–306.

2. Ibid.

3. For a more fulsome analysis of this history, see John M. Hubers, “Onward Christian Soldiers: An Historical Overview of Christian Zionism,” in this volume.

4. See Walter Brueggemann, *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 18–21. Brueggemann discusses the issue of chosenness, whether God’s choosing is revocable, and who is chosen.

5. While relocation for Europe’s Jews in Palestine was the goal of Jewish Zionism, it is important in the context of this book to remember that the idea of giving part of East Africa to the Jews for a homeland was floated by the British government in the early twentieth century. Theodore Herzl considered and was open to the idea, termed “the Uganda Plan.” Controversy about the idea within the World Zionist Organization ultimately doomed any progress toward the development of a European Jewish colony in Africa. Alona Ferber, “This Day in Jewish History//1903: Herzl proposes Kenya (not Uganda) as a Safe Haven for the Jews,” *Haaretz*, 26 August 2015, <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/1903-herzl-proposes-kenya-as-jewish-home-1.5391077>

6. For analyses of this history, see Donald Lewis, “A Very Short History of Christian Zionism from the Reformation to Today,” *Crux*, vol. 51 no. 3 (Fall 2015): 2–11; Yaakov Ariel, “From the Institutum Judaicum to the International Christian Embassy” in Göran Gunner and Robert Smith, eds., *Comprehending Christian Zionism: Perspectives in Comparison* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2014), 199–229; and Hubers, “Onward Christian Soldiers.”

7. *The Theological Declaration of Barmen*, written in 1934, was a response to the “errors of the ‘German Christians’ of the Reich Church.” Drafters of *The Confession of Belhar* took the form of the declaration as a model for their own work. Office of the General Assembly, *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, The Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 2016), 279–284.

8. Many scholars have researched this. See Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals, and Israel* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Robert F. Drinan, “The Christian Response to the Holocaust” in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 450 (July 1980), 179–189; Andrew Tix, “The Failure of Christian Love in the Holocaust” in *The Table*, Biola University Center for Christian Thought (May 4, 2016), <https://cc.t.biola.edu/failure-christian-love-holocaust/>.

9. Mae Elise Cannon, “Mischievous Making in Palestine: American Protestant Christian Attitudes towards the Holy Land, 1917–1949,” in Gunner and Smith, eds., 2014, 231–256.

10. Brueggemann, *Chosen? Reading the Bible*.

11. Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Christian Zionism and Mainline Western Christian Churches” in Gunner and Smith, eds., 2014, 179–190.

12. Demographic information about Palestine, at the time the modern State of Israel, was established is difficult to find and highly contested. Many researchers suggest that the population at that time was majority Arab, a majority of whom were Muslim and some who were Christian, and included a substantial number of Jews, most of whom were from Europe.

13. Michael Bishku, "Israel's Relations with the East African States of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania—From Independence to the Present" *Israel Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1 (01 March 2017), 76–100.

14. See Bishku, "Israel's Relations with the East"; Yousef Khalil, "Benjamin Netanyahu's Government Loves Israel" in *Africa is a Country* (webzine) (12 December 2017), <https://africasacountry.com/2017/12/benjamin-netanyahu-loves-africa>; and Tania Kraemer, "A History of Africa-Israel Relations" in *Deutsche Welle* (18 April 2018), <https://www.dw.com/en/a-history-of-africa-israel-relations/a-43395892>.

15. Khalil, "Benjamin Netanyahu's Government Loves Israel."

16. Bishku, "Israel's Relations with the East," 79–86.

17. See Ramzy Baroud, "Israel's Scramble for Africa: Selling Water, Weapons, and Lies" *Al-Jazeera* (23 July 2019), <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/israel-scramble-africa-selling-water-weapons-lies-190722184120192.html>; Hassan Isilow, "Israel's increasing ties with Africa a concern: Experts" *Anadolu Agency* (26 February 2019), <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/israel-s-increasing-ties-with-africa-a-concern-experts/1402813#>; and Kraemer, "History of Africa-Israel".

18. Hadje Cresencio Sadje, "Dezisionisation of Christian Eschatology in a quest for the emancipation of Palestinians" *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2017), 53–69, quoting Palestinian scholar Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978, particularly Chapter 1 section II, "Imaginative Geography and its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental," 49–73.

19. Editors, "Ethiopian Jews, Once Hailed, Now Cast Aside." *Jewish Week/The Times of Israel*, 31 July 2019; Sam Sokol, "After Ethiopian-Israeli Kindergarten Scandal, Ministry Vows End to Segregation," *The Times of Israel* (15 December 2019), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/after-ethiopian-israeli-kindergarten-scandal-ministry-vows-end-to-segregation/>.

20. Maria Gerth-Niculescu, "Ethiopian Jews: Hoping to Leave for Israel" *Deutsch Welle* (06 November 2019), <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopian-jews-hoping-to-leave-for-israel/a-51120806>.

21. Kraemer, "History of Africa-Israel"; David Parsons, "Africa Opening Up to Israel: New ICEJ Tanzania Branch shows Africa's Heart to Bless Israel," *International Christian Embassy Jerusalem* (15 December 2016), <https://int.icej.org/news/special-reports/africa-opening-israel>.

22. Khalil, "Benjamin Netanyahu's government loves Israel."

23. See Maayann Lubell, "African migrants in limbo as Israel seeks Uganda deportation deal," *Reuters* (11 April 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-africa-migrants/african-migrants-in-limbo-as-israel-seeks-uganda-deportation-deal-idUSKBN1H11U3>; Sharon Harel, "UNHCR concerned about Israel's refugee relocation proposals," *UNHCR News* (17 November 2017), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us>

/news/press/2017/11/5a0f27484/unhcr-concerned-israels-refugee-relocation-proposals.html.

24. Bishku, "Israel's Relations with the East."

25. Emma Green's discussion of what it means to be white and whether Jews are in that racial category raises some of the issues inherent in the question. "Are Jews White?," *The Atlantic* (05 December 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/12/are-jews-white/509453/>.

26. Because of the great number of Jews expelled from other nations when the State of Israel was established, many Israeli Jews do not identify as white. Hen Mazzig, "No, Israel isn't a country of privileged and powerful White Europeans," *Los Angeles Times* (20 May 2019), <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-mazzig-mizrahi-jews-israel-20190520-story.html>.

27. Scholars have documented what has been called the "whitening" of the Jews. See Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says about Race in America* (Rutgers NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

28. See "What are Covenants?" on the website of the *Mapping Prejudice* project of the University of Minnesota, <https://www.mappingprejudice.org/what-are-covenant-s/>; Julian Zelizer, "Trump Needs to Demilitarize his Rhetoric," *The Atlantic* (October 29, 2018), <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/10/americas-long-history-anti-semitism/574234/>; and Larry Santucci, *How Prevalent were Racially Restrictive Covenants in 20th Century Philadelphia? A New Spatial Data Set Provides Answers* (Philadelphia: Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, November 2019).

29. adl.org, "Anti-Defamation League Urges Action After FBI Reports Jews Were Target of Most Religion-Based Hate Crimes in 2018" (09 November 2019), [tps://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-urges-action-after-fbi-reports-jews-were-target-of-most-religion-based-hate](https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-urges-action-after-fbi-reports-jews-were-target-of-most-religion-based-hate).

30. Ian Lovett, "Rise in Anti-Semitic Incidents Goes Beyond Recent Violent Attacks," *wsj.org* (17 December 2019), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/rise-in-anti-semitic-incidents-goes-beyond-recent-violent-attacks-11576611407>; Vivienne Walt, "Europe's Jews Are Resisting a Rising Tide of Anti-Semitism," *Time* (20 June 2019), <https://time.com/longform/anti-semitism-in-europe/>.

31. Green, "Are Jews White?."

32. Lev Grinberg, "Israel's Ashkenazi Elites won't let Mizrahim lead the left," *+972 Magazine* (16 September 2019), <https://www.972mag.com/ashkenazim-mizrahim-israel-elections/>.

33. Adam Berkowitz, "Egypt Repenting for Enslaving the Hebrews" in *BreakingIsraelNews* (21 October 2018), <https://www.breakingisraelnews.com/115512/115512/>.

34. See Nick Van Mead, "China in Africa: win-win development, or a new colonialism?," *The Guardian* (31 July 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/jul/31/china-in-africa-win-win-development-or-a-new-colonialism>; Emily Feng and David Pilling, "The other side of Chinese investment in Africa," *The Financial Times* 27 March 2019), <https://www.ft.com/content/9f5736d8-14e1-11e9-a581-4ff78404524e>.

35. Bishku, "Israel's Relations with the East."
36. Kraemer, "History of Africa-Israel."
37. Baroud, "Israel's Scramble for Africa."
38. Bishku, "Israel's Relations with the East."
39. Khalil, "Benjamin Netanyahu's government loves Israel"; Kraemer, "History of Africa-Israel". See also Brueggemann's exploration of the ways in which Israel makes claims to the "land promise of the Bible in order to justify the geopolitical claims of Israel." Brueggemann states plainly, "Critical faith will resist a direct line from ancient text to contemporary claim." Brueggemann, *Chosen? Reading the Bible*, 36–37.
40. Walter Rodney's 1972 work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Bogle-L'Ouverture Books, London) is the standard text for understanding this part of colonial history in Africa.
41. Curtis Hutt, "Christian Zionist Pilgrimage in the Twenty-First Century: The 'Holy' In the 'Holy Land,'" in Gunner and Smith, eds., 2014, 137–160.
42. Ibid.; Hutt notes that Christian Zionists have "substituted new Christian pilgrimage destinations" for old ones (138) and that pilgrimage trips have been designed to demonstrate and encourage "explicit support of the Israeli government" (148).
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56. Cynthia Holder Rich, *Being Reformed: Faith Seeking Understanding: The Confession of Belhar* (Louisville, KY: Congregational Ministries Publishing, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 2011), 34–35.

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59. *The Confession of Belhar*, article 4.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., from articles 2, 3, 4.

62. Two reasons for this are the use of the term to suggest an automatic and universal progression from Judaism, the older sibling, to the "new improved" version—Christianity, and the use by extreme right voices and actors, including some who use and promote white supremacist ideas. See Michael Sean Winters, "Mark Silk on the history of the term 'Judeo-Christian,'" *National Catholic Reporter* (15 April 2019), <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/distinctly-catholic/mark-silk-history-term-judeo-christian>, and Udi Greenberg, "The Right's 'Judeo-Christian' Fixation," *The New Republic* (14 November 2019), <https://newrepublic.com/article/155735/rights-judeo-christian-fixation>.

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76. Sadje, "Dezionisation of Christian Eschatology."
77. Ibid., 53-55.
78. Raheb in Gunner and Smith, eds., 2014, 191-198.
79. Ibid., 197.
80. Ibid., 198.
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Part III

MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

Chapter 10

Christian Zionism in Tanzania

A Case Study from the Evangelical Lutheran Church

Modestus Lukonge

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the influence of both Christian and political Zionism in Tanzania. Christian Zionism has made deep inroads in the religious matrix of Tanzania because of two aspects. One of those is cultural, which has led to religious sympathies on the part of Tanzanians. The other is economic, for both Tanzania and Israel. The first part of this chapter outlines foundations for support for Christian Zionism in Tanzania. The second is a case study from the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ECD-ELCT), which illustrates many of the points made in the prior section.

THE EMERGENCE OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM IN TANZANIA

Zionism refers to a modern Jewish movement aiming at resettlement of Jews in the area of the ancient land of Israel and the revival of an independent Jewish nation.¹ Christian Zionism is a religious belief among Gentiles of the Christian faith that the return of the Jews to the Holy Land and restoration of physical Israel is in accordance with biblical prophecy, and that this has to do with the Old Testament prophecies about the end- times.² The term “Gentiles” is used here to mean all non-Jewish people irrespective of their religious beliefs. The concept of “Gentile” has its roots in the Old Testament and was adopted by Paul in his epistles, particularly where he discusses the

relationship between Jews and non-Jews in salvation history (e.g., in Rom. 10:12).

Political Zionism is a movement started in the late nineteenth century, with the aim of establishing Jews in their own homeland. The movement can be traced to Theodor Herzl's Jewish nationalism,³ which was given impetus by European anti-Semitism of the period. The movement was concerned with the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state. Christian Zionists support and gather support for the modern state of Israel in their own countries and globally.⁴

The earliest clear connection between Tanzania and the new state of Israel was in 1963, when diplomatic ties were established between the two countries.⁵ These ties were severed in 1973.⁶ According to Keinon, writing for *The Jerusalem Post*, this occurred "under intense Arab pressure."⁷ However, that observation may be deliberately masking the facts for the sake of political correctness within Israeli society. A viable explanation is that diplomatic ties were severed due to Tanzania's stance in actively supporting the Palestinian cause and its close relationship with Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The political and diplomatic position taken by Julius Nyerere, then president of Tanzania, ensured that the country stood on the side of the oppressed wherever they were in the world: Western Sahara, Uganda under Idi Amin, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) under Ian Smith, and black South Africa under minority white rule.⁸ It was Nyerere's belief that "total African liberation and total African unity are basic objectives of our Party and our Government," and that "we shall never be really free and secure while some parts of our continent are still enslaved."⁹ Tanzania's position on the Palestinian question followed this same approach of fostering solidarity with the oppressed.

Tanzania's position on Israel would remain the same until after Julius Nyerere retired. Efforts to re-establish diplomatic ties began in the period of President Mkapa (1995–2005)¹⁰ and continued during the era of President Kikwete (2005–2010). In May 2018, Tanzania reopened its embassy in the Israeli city of Ramat Gan—not Jerusalem, a choice apparently made for political reasons. The embassy was opened because Tanzania, having spent years struggling for the liberation of Southern Africa and supporting Sahrawis, Palestinians and others, undertook a paradigm shift toward economic diplomacy:

In an *All Africa News* article published in October 2016, Mahiga outlined the Tanzanian approach of "economic diplomacy," which involves principled, pragmatic, and constructive engagement. "This approach and the other principles of independence, human dignity, mutual respect, and cooperation will enable us to implement more successfully our foreign policy of economic diplomacy," he said.¹¹

Christian Zionism, hand in hand with political Zionism, has been instrumental in efforts to reopen Tanzania's diplomatic ties with Israel. Circumstantial evidence may lend credibility to this contention. Two conferences of the Tanzania-Israeli Business and Investment Forum (TIBIF)¹² held in March and May 2014 were organized jointly by the two governments, the Tanzania Private Sector Foundation (TPSF), and an organization known as the Kingdom Leadership Network Tanzania (KLNT).¹³ The organization's name and its own 2019 posting on Facebook give a clue: "Kingdom (of God), the harbinger of which, for Christian Zionists, is the nation of Israel."¹⁴ A reasonable estimate based on trends in the United States¹⁵ is that this platform fostering the establishment and growth of Christian Zionism in Tanzania was prepared at about the same time Christian Zionism gained influence in the United States, from the late 1980s onward. This apparently occurred through gospel campaigns and teachings that included dispensationalist Bible teaching and preaching.¹⁶ The process was not abrupt, taking decades to grow and evolve. Koshy¹⁷ notes that preachers and teachers in the United States are disseminating dispensationalist theology, even though they do not know the terms Zionism and Christian Zionism. This holds true equally in Tanzania, as we will see below.

There are three other institutions that may have had overt and considerable influence on the Israeli-Tanzania relationship. One is MANA, led by a self-styled Bible teacher,¹⁸ Christopher Mwakasege,¹⁹ at one time a senior officer at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania headquarters. The other two are WAPO Mission International and BCIC,²⁰ both led by Bishop Sylvester Gamanywa, a bishop of a major Pentecostal church in Tanzania, who identifies himself as a "writer and mobilizer for the relationship between Tanzania and Israel."²¹ On the same Facebook page, Gamanywa goes on to state the reasons for his organization's support for Israel, which are clearly Christian Zionist including statements like: "Jesus was a Jew," "The Holy Spirit descended on earth at Pentecost via Jerusalem," "Jesus is known as the lion of Judah even now in heaven" (Rev. 5:5). In response to these arguments, such views are rather heavily Old Testament-based interpretations, which do not address exegetical considerations or Hebrew idiomatic expressions. For instance, when the Bible says YHWH²² is the God of Israel, it does not reduce YHWH to a tribal God of one nation, as Gamanywa's line of thinking concludes. Rather, it simply emphasizes that YHWH is Israel's God in stark contradistinction with the idols and false gods of their neighbors. YHWH remains the God of all flesh, as stated elsewhere (Jer. 32:27ff.). Or, when the Holy Spirit descended "via Jerusalem" as Gamanywa puts it, that did not confine YHWH from being the God who acted through the whole world at the same time even on that date, for had that happened, YHWH would have lost several of His immutable or non-communicable attributes, with

far-reaching ramifications to the Godhead and the stability of the entire creation. Gamanywa and Mwakasege's approaches cast a lot of questions about Orthodoxy when we consider the relationship between God and humanity viewed in relation to the character and nature of God. For instance, Jesus being born a Jew does not elevate Jews above other races, but rather, it elevates all humanity from hubris and eternal damnation. Viewing Jews as special because of the promises of God to Abraham, or because Jesus was a Jew, obviously and logically lead Gamanywa and Mwakasege into the danger of philosemitism, as opposed to the opposite danger of anti-Semitism. (I discuss these two extremes later on in this chapter.) Consider, for example, the fact that there are scriptures that consign all humanity to one category, namely that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and there is therefore no longer Jew nor Greek (Rom. 3:23, Gal. 3:28). A reading of the scripture in the fashion of Gamanywa, Mwakasege and other Christian Zionists would "vindicate" Christians with little sympathy for Israel if the latter group adopted anti-Semitic stances after reading the following texts: Jer. 23:39, Matt. 27:25, and Acts 4:10. Similarly, a reading of Isa. 1:10 would likely lead to the same anti-Semitic position. Commenting on Isa. 1:10, Kidner²³ writes,

To be addressed as *Sodom* was virtually a charge and sentence in one. As a disaster site, Sodom meant all that Pompeii and Hiroshima have come to signify to us; hence v 9. For ill repute it stood alone, until Isaiah spoke v 10. He was supported by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 16:48) and by our Lord (Matthew 11:23), who measured (and still measures) our guilt by opportunity.

In other words, a casual reader may risk taking individual texts, isolating them, interpreting them without balance, and going on to build a whole theological system. A balanced reading with proper exegesis would therefore, I suggest, reject either position, both the Christian Zionist and the anti-Semitic one, since focus and emphasis should be placed on "a new order of things" based on peace, love, and the message of salvation availed to all, Jews and Greeks.

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM'S USE OF THEOLOGY AND DOCTRINE AS METHOD

The theological and doctrinal methods that Christian Zionism uses generally take the same pattern, even though they vary from place to place. Some of the methods used in Tanzania include the following:

- Making use of already available influential individuals, usually theologians, the clergy, politicians and believers who hold the view that modern Israel is special before God and central to the last days.²⁴

- Creating front institutions that are openly pro-Israel to the point of being openly anti-Palestine.²⁵
- Using the two above to interpret the Bible in ways that dehumanize Palestinians and overstate the image of Israel as a nation among others.²⁶

A survey of the contents on MANA, WAPO Mission International, and BCIC internet sites, as well as the sites listed in the end notes and identified as pro-Christian Zionist, fits well the pattern I have outlined above.

Christian Zionism's Use of Compliant Theologians and Congregants in Its Agenda

A study by the Pew Research Center in 2010²⁷ illustrates. The study shows that when it comes to sympathy toward Palestinians or Israel, the global South generally indicates more support for Israel than Palestine, with sub-Saharan Africa leading at 58 percent in support of Israel against 32 percent in favor of Palestine. The reasons why sub-Saharan Africa is on top of the table supporting Israel need to be investigated further, but it may partly be explained by certain similarities in the two societies. One is the similarity between traditional African cultures and ancient Jewish culture. The other may be the similar but not congruent historical patterns between the two societies, of being under oppression, alienation, colonization, and dispossession of ancestral land.²⁸ Mugambi outlines the cultural and religious affinity between life in Africa and the Old Testament settings.

There is a puzzling but exciting affinity between African religious heritage and the way of life which the OT presupposes and takes for granted. This affinity is evident throughout the continent. . . . How can this affinity be explained?. . . . The indebtedness of Hebrew to Africa is acknowledged throughout the OT, from the perspective of religion, economics, politics, military history, aesthetics, ethics, and kinship.²⁹

Pomerville³⁰ argues that we all see things with cultural lenses (and thus end up seeing them not as they are, but as we are):

Cultural bias has both a selective and blinding effect when we approach scriptures; it may cause us to focus-in on our fundamental interests, even to read them into scriptures, and it may blind us to other truths, causing us to focus-out or ignore what does not agree with our values.

Pomerville made these points as a cautionary note to American culture in its intercourse with Zionism.³¹ However, the remarks are equally valid to Africa.

Similar aspects between African and Semitic cultures can easily lead some Christians to a selective reading of the scriptures, focusing on the Old Testament and less on the New Testament. It will not be an overstatement to argue that typical Christians, including pastors, will sometimes be forced to consider questions about Israel when reading the Old Testament:

Wasn't Jesus a Jew? Doesn't God promise to bless those people and curse those who oppose them? Isn't it only a miracle that this people suffered centuries of injustice more than any other, and yet survived as a race? Why are Jews on top of the list in the sciences, philosophy, and business, if not by virtue of providence?

For an African Christian, further questions arise: "Aren't the Old Testament texts and narratives more in line with my own culture in matters of marriage and respect of elders than the New Testament texts and narratives are?" These are valid, existential questions which need not necessarily lead into extremes of love or hate. Rather, they may have economic, sociological, psychological, and anthropological explanations that need not lead to polarizations.

Whatever position one takes in the discourse on the role and place of Israel, it is important to avoid three dangers that may emerge. One of these is *anti-Semitism* (more appropriately, being against Jews, as Arabs are Semites too). Anti-Semitism is hatred of Jews—to the point of relegating them to the level of subhuman or wishing them harm. This happened in antiquity and in more recent human history. It has been perpetrated by world rulers and the church in different ways across the centuries.

The second danger is *philosemitism*, a love of Jews at the expense of all others—even ourselves, to the point of seeing no evil even where it is committed by modern, political Israel and instead justifying the evil as divinely ordained by God as part of God's plan for humanity. Christian Zionists and those who see eschatology as an end-time game played between Israel and the rest of the often fall into this group. As stated above, Gamanywa and Mwakasege are among the Tanzanian leaders who take this approach.

The third danger is *allosemitism*, not necessarily directing love or hatred toward Jews, but nevertheless viewing them as completely different, special, or a people too complex to be clearly understood. Bauman writes specifically on allosemitism as "the Gentile practice of setting the Jews apart from all the rest as people radically different from all and any other people and therefore needing separate concepts in order to describe or comprehend, as well as special treatment in all or most social and cultural situations."³² Experience and behavioral sciences teach us that all human individuals, let alone communities, are very complex. Setting Jews apart as complex or shrouded with

mystery as a group may lead to analyzing the Jewish community and its individuals in problematic terms.

Bauman argues further that allo-Semitism is the root cause of both anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism, as it is an ambivalent attitude that can easily lead to either intense hatred or intense love and respect. Examples of philo-Semitism and allo-Semitism abound in Tanzania, in the form of unquestioning Christian support for Israel. Before Tanzania re-established diplomatic relations with Israel, it was being claimed by pro-Israel Christians. Within the ECD-ELCT parishes, the verbal claim that Tanzania would never make economic strides economically unless it re-established diplomatic ties with Israel is often heard, especially within Christian circles. Texts like Gen 12:1–3 are read literally by those who hold such beliefs and immediately ascribed to modern, political Israel.

Ateek offers an alternative theology regarding the same questions of the land.³³ This alternative reading is thought-provoking, coming from a Palestinian Christian who has lived under a situation of oppression. He argues that while Abraham was promised the land in Gen 12, the Apostle Paul employs the same text in Rom 4:13, but talks of the world (*kosmou* in Greek) instead of the land (*eretz* in Hebrew). It is possible therefore to take an enlarged view that contextualizes and extends the promise to a much larger entity than the land that constituted ancient Israel. The Swahili Union version of the Bible follows the same pattern, translating *eretz* as “land” in the Genesis texts, and *kosmou* as “the world” in Rom 4:13. In Swahili, “land” may be translated as *ardhi* or *nchi* while *kosmou*, world, is translated as *ulimwengu* (which may mean both “world” and “earth/whole globe”). Ateek suggests that if we accept these translations, then the promise in Genesis is limited to a piece of land or a country, while Paul’s interpretation and use of it applies to the entire world.³⁴ Someone reading the Bible in Swahili³⁵ is therefore not likely to be confused by the two terms as applied in the two texts, except where the reader chooses to confine him or herself to a selective interpretation that gives undue preference to the Old Testament without contextualizing it in the light of the New Testament interpretation.

While researching for this chapter, I observed that the belief in the specialness of Israel and the role of support of Israel in the success and safety of other nations has prompted many Tanzanian visitors to Israel in recent years to bring back bags of mud from the Dead Sea. The mud is understood to have two uses. One is therapeutic: the mud is said to heal many skin infections. However, the other is more curious: to “spice the land back home.”³⁶ The practice of “spicing” the local earth makes a distinction between Israel and other countries, making the former sacred and others profane. Luther’s theology teaches that the profane (like public works or entertainment that does not

border on extremes of sensuality) is sacralized and the sacred (like geographical space) is arguably secularized.³⁷ As Lutz observes:

Yes, for Christians the gospel has indeed “shattered the geographical locus of our preoccupation with this land.” Any special religious meaning for the land called holy is, for the New Testament people, significantly qualified. In Christ, there is a universalizing of God’s love, extending it to Gentiles as well as Jews. In Christ, all land becomes equally holy. Or . . . [i]n Christ there is a secularization of both space and time. Any time, even the Sabbath, can be used for doing good works [or for worship]. And any place can be sacred if it is where we meet God.³⁸

It is important therefore to note that Christians cannot hold both positions at the same time. They cannot accept that all space is sacred if it is where we meet God, and at the same moment maintain that Israel is more sacred. Christian Zionism holds the latter position and its claims therefore perennially clash with those who hold the former position.

Christian Zionism’s front institutions in Tanzania

In making inroads in Tanzania, a number of Christian Zionist front organizations have been employed. One of these is Prayer Action Tanzania (PAT). According to an informant in another organization (House of Prayer [HOP]), PAT was initially an interdenominational prayer association. With the passage of time, PAT arguably showed a clear Pentecostal orientation, which disenchanted some of its non-Pentecostal members. The disenchanted members soon formed a splinter organization called HOP. Both organizations have prayers for Israel as core activities, as shown from a survey of the prayer item pamphlets distributed by PAT. The pamphlets for September and December 2019 listed prayer items like: “Pray that God will repay Israel’s enemies for the persecution they are inflicting on women and children,” “Pray that God will remove from Israel the shame of all the insults with which nations are scorning Israel,” and “Pray that the Israel Defense Force would defeat its enemies.”³⁹ A senior leader of the HOP who accepted being interviewed in confidence stated that they pray for Israel because it is stated in the Bible that “pray for Israel, for its peace is your peace.”⁴⁰

Another institution with perceived Zionistic theological and political outlook is the KLNT.⁴¹ One of its founders (now deceased) remarked to me in 2016 that it was crucial for Tanzania to reopen an embassy in Israel if Tanzania was to see prosperity at all. The problem with such an approach is that domestic conditions like the problems of corruption and a lack of critical national political self-reappraisal tend to be eclipsed by an intense concern

to be right in the eyes of God through having “a proper relationship” with God’s chosen people.

Theology, Text, and Expedient Interpretation

An illustration of how interpretation of the sacred text combines with already-existing convictions among Christians is found in some Tanzanian tourism businesses. It can be argued that until around the 1990s, pilgrimages to any sacred place played a very diminutive role or none at all in faith and practice among many Protestant Christian denominations in Tanzania. For Lutherans in particular, the idea of a geographical holy space or land has for a long time been unacceptable or at least redundant. However, in recent years, tours to Israel have acquired an elevated status. Some Christian FM radio stations in Tanzania have been observed to broadcast the tours as “pilgrimages” to Israel. Engberg has considered the responses of Israelis to the great number of pilgrims.

Faydra Shapiro has argued that Israeli responses to Evangelical Zionist Organizations, while diverse, has often been guided by a pragmatic approach: “We need all the friends we can get.” . . . While for many orthodox Jews Christian donations are a religious question [being offered by Gentiles], most Israeli Jews on the liberal end of the religious spectrum view the Evangelicals primarily through the lens of politics. What matters to them is the ministries of Zionism, not their conservative Christianity which is mostly treated as a “(hopelessly) harmless quirk.”⁴²

The quest for diplomatic achievements plays an important role in Christian Zionism, even when political Zionism can’t agree with the former on strategy, or when political Zionists see Christianity as misguided or even gullible. This has arguably been the case in Africa, a fact which partly explains the growth in the influence of Christian Zionism on the continent. Engberg goes on to elaborate his point, where he records a more in-depth analysis of the Israeli guides’ perception of the pilgrimages, hidden from the pilgrims, including both fascination and being drawn to Christianity mixed with disgust toward Christians, demonstrated in the need to undertake ritual purification after the tours.⁴³ This gives the impression that while pilgrims feel what they are doing is scriptural and a serious religious duty, at least some observant Jews look at the pilgrims disdainfully.

Despite these major differences within the Zionist movement and Israeli society, the movement has been very successful in the diplomatic arena in Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa through the strategy of making use of a basic resource at its disposal: a great number of Christians with a strong

belief in dispensational theology, including an emphasis on Israel's central role in the unfolding and culmination of the *eschaton*. For our purposes here, Christians who are so fascinated by Israel to the point of ignoring what is wrong, like the oppression of Palestinians and alienating them from their lands, may be regarded as either *philosemitic* or *allosemitic*. It is possible to be Christian, be disgusted by various Israeli governments' treatment of Palestinians, and *not* hate Israel or Jews. Political and Christian Zionism tends to project a rather lopsided view that if you say anything critical of Israel, even when that has to do with justice and peace, then you are actually anti-Semitic. The claim by Lutz that Christian Zionism tends to play the Holocaust guilt card as a ploy against Christians who speak critically against Israel is well-founded.⁴⁴ But African Christians tend to side with Israel not because of Holocaust guilt, but rather more because of three factors: cultural affinities to the Old Testament⁴⁵ that partly lead to a specific theology of the land, a strong influence of dispensationalist theology,⁴⁶ and economic or mercantile interests fuelled by the prosperity gospel and quest for ecclesiastical power.⁴⁷ We will look at each of these briefly below.

Christian Zionism and Theology of the Land

It has been proposed that Christian Zionism is preoccupied with land to the point of caring less about people.⁴⁸ Pomerville argues that dispensationalism treats God like an economist who has tried six different theories and has yet to implement one that works, the seventh.⁴⁹ Both political and Christian Zionism employ the biblical text to justify and validate their positions on the land question and even its violence against Palestinians and other neighbors.

However, we agree with those who hold the opinion that the question of the land is not even Christian, but has roots in Post-Exilic Judaism.⁵⁰ The preoccupation with the land to the point of negating valid, humane needs and aspirations of one's neighbor runs counter to both Christian values and those of the Old Testament. The Old Testament includes commands to treat the sojourner kindly (e.g., in Lev. 19:33).

Some dispensationalists hold that there are two distinct plans of redemption—one for Israel, the other for the church.⁵¹ Pomerville critiques that according to that theological view, "The recipients of Jesus' redemptive work—the church—merely stands in for Israel until God restores the Jewish nation. Supposedly, Christ's reign and his kingdom are postponed and the church age becomes a parenthesis."⁵² He continues that such an approach to theology demeans and devalues Christ's present reign in heaven now and that his reign lives in Christians' lives now. He therefore regards dispensationalist arguments as a betrayal of the gospel.

African Culture as a Driving Force for Christian Zionism in Tanzania

That many African Christians tend to identify with the Old Testament more than they would possibly do with the New Testament is hardly surprising. The Jewish religious text (the TaNaK) evolved from a Semitic, agricultural setting with strong communitarian roots:

In this kind of family group the grandfather had complete authority, not just in practical matters, but in religious ones, too. When he died, his eldest son took over by right of birth. The leader's word was law. . . . If they treated one another badly, they broke God's law. Things had to be put right between them, and between them, and a sacrifice was needed to put them right with God. (Lev. 6:1–6)⁵³

The New Testament, for its part, was born in Jewish settings but strongly influenced by Greek culture and thought systems, as writers made efforts to reach the Gentile world: "The classic meeting of Christian with Greek took place in Athens itself. It was still a university town . . . Paul found it a city full of religious images . . . Paul spoke in terms they would understand. He quoted their poets. He dealt with the arguments of the Stoics and Epicureans."⁵⁴

Africans often find more similarities to their cultures, religious and sacrificial systems⁵⁵ and probably history in the Old Testament than they would in the New Testament. Consider the question of land. Western capitalism, and apparently the Greco-Roman setting before it, have taken land to be a commodity fully and permanently transferrable by way of sale. Jewish and African traditional values see any permanent sale of land as a betrayal of the ancestors and a giving away of the family's heritage.⁵⁶ In traditional Africa, land did not generally have a market value, but functioned more as required for economic sustenance. Its further values were social, cultural, recreational, and anthropological, including religious activities, remembrance of ancestors, and healing processes.⁵⁷ It could not therefore be effectively disposed, but could be loaned (usually free of charge, or with a token portion of the harvest in return). The Sukuma of northern Tanzania have a proverb: "Treat the earth well, as it was not given to you by your parents, but was loaned to you by your children."⁵⁸ This underlines the value of land in African cultures, a pattern echoing that of ancient Israel. Both Jews and Africans have been uprooted from their lands in different periods. Their shared experiences often leads to African sympathy to the Jewish cause.

Another similarity is in the system of offerings and rites of passage. The Old Testament prescribed many of these for various purposes and specific needs. It is my argument here that African Christians are likely to understand

the Old Testament sacrificial system more easily, contextualize it or even adopt it as a syncretistic part of Christian religious practice. Regarding rites of passage, many African ethnic groups circumcise boys around puberty. Examples are the Maasai (Tanzania and Kenya) and Akamba (Kenya).⁵⁹ Another aspect is in practices around death, seen in both settings as a process in which the deceased joins the ancestors—in *sheol* for Jews and “the underworld,” in the “underground” or some other defined place for Africans.⁶⁰ To the present day, being buried in one’s place of origin is still important for many Africans, particularly within the sub-Saharan region. This is based on observations of Christians and traditional religionists in Tanzania and neighboring countries, but not Muslims, who follow the guidance of the Quran and the sunnahs of the Prophet Muhammad in these matters.

THE ELCT-ECD, CHRISTIAN ZIONISM, AND MERCANTILE INTERESTS

In May 2017, over 100 pastors of the ELCT-ECD toured Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, and Lebanon. Participants shared publicly in a Sunday service upon their return that the visit was to “five holy lands.” The purpose of the tour was designated as a *ziara ya mafunzo* (study tour). This tour was offered by a travel agency at significant cost. Some of the pastors who took part have gone on to lead tours, from which they are making significant income. With a majority of pastors in the diocese taking part in this tour, it has had significant impact on how they understand Israel and on their theologies, preaching, and teaching.

As a pastor in the diocese I gathered some information while the tour was being arranged. Tour sponsors touted benefits that would come from participation, including being able to see with one’s own eyes the Lord’s land and important sites, and “getting connected,” in the sense of being in close connection with God. It has to be noted here that religious pilgrims, no matter the faith, give similar reasons for going and reports of experiences. Muslims are said to feel a sense of awe before the Ka’bah, or while doing the other rituals of the pilgrimage to Mecca,⁶¹ in a similar way that a devout Hindu might feel standing before the Ganges to pour the ashes of a cremated relative. The reported experiences may be merely psychosocial or having to do with a psychology of religion. Those who are interested in making profit from religious people understand these phenomena and work to use them to their advantage.

It has become clear that those who led this initial tour had a number of goals, at least some of which were mercantile. Some of the clergy who took part have become leaders of tours to the “holy lands” as well, touting the spiritual benefits of touring these “holy lands.” We have to question,

therefore, whether abuse of trust is happening within the diocese, and whether pastors in the ELCT-ECD are still faithful to the theology of the Reformation (which can be said to be a universally shared theological position among all Lutherans), or have departed from it, and the theological implications of such a departure. We will examine these issues in the next paragraphs.

Understanding of Christian Zionism within the ELCT

In doing research for this chapter, I interviewed a number of pastors who are members of the ELCT. Thirteen pastors of the ELCT-ECD accepted my invitation and made themselves available for interviews. The ELCT-ECD has around 120 pastors, so this was taken as a reasonable sample size. Those in the sample who could not be immediately available for phone interviews were given an opportunity to respond by e-mail on the same set of structured interview questions. Follow-up questions were asked later for those who responded by e-mail where this was deemed necessary.

Findings from respondents indicated that there is a clear split in theological and doctrinal understanding on the role and place of Israel, as well as clear political stances on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The majority felt that Israel has a special place in their salvation and that that is biblical, while a few named the place of Israel as merely historical. The majority of the respondents were not aware of the terms Zionism nor Christian Zionism, nor did most respondents have awareness of the two movements. This implies that they could possibly unwittingly participate in acceptance and promotion of political Zionist and Christian Zionist ideas in their parishes. The lack of awareness among the pastors of these terms is due at least in part to the fact that organizations that propagate Christian or political Zionism in Tanzania do not use these terms to identify themselves.

On the Israel/Palestine conflict, a few respondents said they did not support either side and would prefer a lasting peace. But most respondents said that they support Israel for scriptural and Bible prophecy reasons. One respondent added that no country can be economically successful if it did not support Israel. Asked on their views of the treatment of Palestinians by contemporary Israeli governments, most felt it was unacceptable. Three respondents suggested that it should be possible for Jews and Palestinians to share the land together as two nations, as both nations have human needs that can be only gotten off the land. A few felt it was the right of Israel to defend itself against Palestinians.

Informants were asked about the connection between national economic achievements and a country's stand in respect of Israel. A few felt there is a connection between a country's prosperity and its relationship with Israel, while the majority shared that modern economic order followed completely

different rules and what matters is hard work, innovativeness, and trusting God, who controls matters in the whole world.

Respondents were asked about similarities between their own cultures and the ancient Israelite culture they find in the Old Testament. Many found striking similarities in the two cultures in beliefs in an almighty God, respect of elders, marriage arrangements, communal ties, and the rite of male circumcision. Only one informant indicated absence of circumcision in the corresponding ethnic group. Regarding the promises of God to Abraham, the majority felt they now apply to all believers. A few saw them only applying to the modern State of Israel.

Another question asked was on whether Christians should aim at converting Jews. All informants responded with a “yes,” citing the great commission of Matthew 28. However, two qualified their answers, arguing that Christians should not aim at mass evangelism campaigns, but should use the model of evangelizing by example of holy living and acts of love.

The last question was whether informants saw clear political aims in Christian Zionism. Responses were complicated by a lack of understanding of the term. The majority of those who understood what the term meant said they did see political aims in the movement, while a few said they did not. However, of the total, only a minority said they understood the terms. Those who responded positively to this question formed less than half of respondents.

It is apparent that many of the informants do not understand the meaning or goals of either Christian or political Zionism. This is rather surprising considering the amount of dispensationalist theology and pro-Israel teachings and exhortations⁶² on internet sites⁶³ and sermons that have been taking place in pulpits on numerous Sundays in the ECD-ELCT. It is as if Christian Zionism is in the sitting room of the ECD-ELCT, with the host unaware that there is a visitor in the house. While the paradox may be due to several reasons, three possible explanations are (1) a conviction among some pastors and preachers that dispensational theology is sound theology; (2) mercantile interests among pastors and preachers; and, (3) insufficient understanding by pastors and preachers of Christian Zionism, its aims, and methods.

Cultural affinities with certain Old Testament texts were also clearly noted in responses. For instance, some respondents mentioned the respect of elders and family ties as identifying their ethnic societies with what they read in the Old Testament. However, a minority of the informants expressed both discomfort with the wholesale support of Israel on the basis of Old Testament texts, even while peace is proving elusive and there are suffering Christians in Palestine.

In summary, findings of this research support the contention that the ECD-ELCT has in recent years, albeit unofficially, become more pro-Christian

Zionism than it has been in the past, even if there was a minority of pastors interviewed who indicated awareness of the movement and its trends, saying they do not support it. This calls for a reappraisal on the part of both the ECD-ELCT and the ELCT at the national level, since such matters call for making a clear stand for both political and theological reasons. The split in outlook on the value of tours to Israel was heavily manifested in an article in my own investigation on the matter. The same split was noted by the author of an article in a blog owned by the diocese.⁶⁴ In my investigation, undertaken immediately after the tour and continued through informal discussions with a number of pastors, nearly all of whom participated in the tour, differed on the values of the tours. A number of members of the ELCT and other churches who participated in later tours complained of having been impoverished and forced to become indebted to banks after they were forced to borrow to take part in a tour.⁶⁵ They were promised that their economic and health problems would be over once they set foot on “the land of God.” It can be argued therefore, that while on the one hand there are front organizations like PAT and HOPE that have fostered increased tendencies among Christians to be pro-Christian Zionism even when they do not know the term and the movement, there is on the other hand an increased tendency within the ECD-ELCT in particular for pastors and parishioners to harbor pro-Christian Zionism beliefs, again even where the individuals have no clear understanding of what Christian Zionism is. Evidence from the paradox is noted in the ECD-ELCT blog.⁶⁶

THE ELCT AND ZIONISM IN THE FUTURE: CONTEXTUAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

This chapter ends with an exploration of the role of context in engaging Christian Zionism. The point of departure, I propose, is to see both Jews and Palestinians as people with concerns like any other. Humans on both sides of the conflict should be encouraged to feel the need to connect, like this Jewish lady quoted in a meeting between Jewish settlers and Palestinians:

I am looking for roots. I know with utter certainty that I am in my homeland, but the red roofs of the settlements are not enough to transmit the feeling that we are rooted here. The Palestinians are not just passing through. When I go into their homes it invokes in me a desire to connect. If only I could use them to put down roots. Not in the sense of exploitation. In the sense of something that would sprout, bringing new growth.⁶⁷

If a biblical text seems to run counter to the ideal of human connection, reinterpretations can be sought. Martin Luther provides a valuable insight to the

problem of text and context.⁶⁸ Luther notes that if God said that Israel had to kill all Amalekites,⁶⁹ it would not be fitting for Christians today to designate certain people as Amalekite, and seek to destroy them, or support those who sought to destroy them. Instead, Christians should be guided by the requirement to seek peace with all people insofar as it is within their capability, and to help in peace-making. In the case of the Israel/Palestine conflict and efforts by Tanzanian Christians to understand this conflict, this could entail working toward a meaning that edifies both the reader and those around him or her: refugees, the poor, children, women, those in distress and all those understood as “other,” since we are all in the image of God, Africans, Europeans, Asians, and all the rest of God’s children.

One way of achieving this is through Bible study programs. These could take the form of the hermeneutic circle.⁷⁰ The hermeneutic circle calls participants to reject prepackaged theologies that do not take into consideration context and social conditions in the local environment and the complicated histories of two sides of a conflict. Instead, the text of the Bible has to be viewed in both the light of the conditions of the oppressed and of the desire for enduring peace; on this count liberation theology offers the right approach to assist in moving in this direction. No text of the Bible should be employed in ways that subjugate any group. We also see this approach in Palestinian liberation theology.⁷¹

It is necessary that such an approach must begin with abandoning the currently fashionable “man/woman of God” style of expounding the Bible text within the ELCT-ECD and other churches. In the “man/woman of God” approach, a certain “prophet,” “apostle,” or “Reverend Bishop Dr. so and so” is the sole or final authority.⁷² A paradigm shift is needed, one that demands sincere, communal⁷³ engagement with the biblical text. It would require in-depth preparation of analytical skills for all Bible study moderators (for that is the role the pastor or Bible teacher would need to adopt in this approach). This means that preparation of pastors and evangelists in the ELCT and in other churches needs to be revolutionized to meet current challenges. These include an understanding of contemporary geopolitics, contextual theologies, political theology, the ethics of globalization, international relations, aspects of conflict resolution, political history and political philosophy, and biblical understandings of illness, poverty, and other contemporary challenges facing Tanzanians.⁷⁴

Evidence presented above clearly indicates that Christian Zionism has made deep inroads in the ECD-ELCT and arguably, into other dioceses of the ELCT and other Christian denominations in Tanzania. The future of the ECD-ELCT in terms of core teaching and theological stands partly depends on articulating a clear stand on Christian Zionism. This calls for the need to work for peace for the land and peaceful coexistence of the two peoples

of the lands of Israel and Palestine without necessarily having allegiance to either side. Instead, it is possible to choose justice, mercy, peace, and love rather than either Palestine or Israel. Rather than being called to long for and catalyze “the apocalypse” in which *Eretz Yisrael* plays a central role, we as Christians are primarily called to be ambassadors of peace and of the good news.

NOTES

1. T. Ice, *The Case for Christian Zionism: Why Christians Should Support Israel* (Green Forest: New Leaf Press, 2017), 28.

2. N. Koshy, “Christian Zionism” (2008). https://www.globalministries.org/mee_resources_christian_zionism_koshy.

3. G. R. McDermott, “Introduction” in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, Ed. Gerald McDermott (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 16.

4. Koshy, 2020.

5. Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “Tanzania Opens Embassy in Israel” <http://www.israel.org/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook10/Pages/Foreign%20Ministry%20Communique%20on%20Resumption%20of%20Diplo.aspx>.

6. Ibid.

7. H. Keinon, “Tanzania Opens Embassy in Ramat Gan.” *The Jerusalem Post*, December 7, 2018. <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Tanzania-opens-embassy-in-Ramat-Gan-554862>.

8. See Anthony Bogues, “Radical Anti-Colonial Thought, Anti-Colonial Internationalism, and the Politics of Human Solidarities” in Robbie Shilliam, ed., *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism, and Investigations of Global Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 197–214.

9. C. Legum, and G. Mmari (eds.) 1995. *Mwalimu: The Influence of Nyerere*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 164. See also <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/tanzania-and-its-support-southern-african-liberation-movements>.

10. Israeli Foreign Ministry. “Communique: Tanzania Opens Embassy in Israel.” <http://www.israel.org/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook10/Pages/Foreign%20Ministry%20Communique%20on%20Resumption%20of%20Diplo.aspx>

11. Thebusinessyear. “Tanzania 2017.” <https://www.thebusinessyear.com/tanzania-2017/freedom-unity/review>.

12. Kingdom Leadership Network Tanzania “About Us.” https://web.facebook.com/pg/KLNT2012/about/?ref=page_internal.

13. Ibid. That KLNT is a pro-Zionist and pro-Israel organization cannot be noted from the Facebook posting. I gathered the fact on this clear stance from personal communication with one of its key past leaders (now deceased).

14. Ibid.

15. Koshy, op. cit. Koshy argues that Christian Zionist theology has influence even in mainline churches not only in the USA but in many parts of the world. This is true of India too where “end-times” interpretation is made by Pentecostals and Evangelicals defending and justifying all actions of the state of Israel, through preaching and writing reflecting Christian Zionist theology, though the term Christian Zionism may not be familiar to them. Such theology finds expression even in mainline churches. His conclusions bear with my own findings in the case of Tanzania.

16. See, for example, A. Eade, *The Panorama Bible Study Course*. Trans. Helmut Graf, 1990 (Tunduru: Kanisa la Biblia Publishers, 1947). This book, very well illustrated and clearly dispensationalist in theology, has been used by at least one untrained Bible teachers in a number of ELCT-ECD Parishes.

17. Koshy, op. cit.

18. C. Mwakasege, “Huduma za MANA: Israeli pamoja Nasi” <https://www.mwakasege.org/index.php/huduma/soma/israeli-pamoja-nasi>.

19. Jamii Forums. “Israeli Yamzawadia Mwalimu Mwakasege.” <https://www.jamiiforums.com/threads/israel-yamzawadia-mwalimu-mwakasege-kwa-huduma-yake.659782/>. 2020. According to this site, the (self-styled) teacher Christopher Mwakasege was awarded a medal by Israel. The medal was awarded on Israel’s sixty-sixth Independence Day, at the Israeli Embassy in Dar es Salaam, in recognition of Mwakasege’s ministry. The motive is arguably curious when one takes into account the fact that Israel as a nation and society can hardly be regarded as a keen supporter of Christian ministry. The real motive however may be the openly Christian Zionist stance that MANA (the ministry he owns), has taken. A posting on MANA’s site (<http://www.mwakasege.org/index.php/huduma/soma/israeli-pamoja-nasi>) illuminates more (my translation):

In the year 2007 in the month of December God spoke with us while we were in Israel, on exhorting people to join themselves to Israel in biblical terms. Through doing that, they will be blessing Israel, which is part of God’s command to the whole world. That instruction was part of the measures God gave us in connection with the *growth of the ministry God has given us in Tanzania* and in other countries of the world. This is why we are asking you to join us in blessing Israel. *We know* that there is no person who will bless Israel and not be blessed in return by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (emphasis mine).

The quote clearly has the growth of Mwakasege’s ministry and support for Israel as central, not the efficacious work of Christ on the cross, not the gospel freely given to all sinners: Jews and Greeks. It is a purely Christian Zionist position that may explain the motive for the award he received from Israel.

20. To learn more about WAPO Mission International and BCIC see <https://wapo.or.tz/portal/> and <https://bcic.wapo.or.tz/>.

21. S. Gamanywa. “Kwa Nini Tnamshukuru Mungu kwa Uhusiano na Israeli?”. <https://www.facebook.com/Bishopssylvestergamanywa/posts/kwanini-tnamshukuru-mungu-kwa-uhusiano-na-israeltarehe-1382017-jumapili-hii-kua/1507081495979127/>.

22. YHWH is an English transliteration of the tetragrammaton, the four-letter name of God in Hebrew. See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tetragrammaton>

23. D. Kidner, "Isaiah" in *New Bible Commentary*, eds. D. A. Carson, G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer and R. T. France (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 629–670.

24. Koshy, op. cit. An example is the influence of Christian Zionism on American politics and defense policy, both of which Koshy briefly discusses. Koshy says this about Jerry Falwell:

An important milestone in the history of Christian Zionism occurred in 1979: the founding of the Moral Majority. Founded by Rev. Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority was an organization made up of conservative Christian political action committees that succeeded in mobilizing like-minded individuals to register and vote for conservative candidates. With nearly six million members, it became a powerful voting bloc during the 1980s and was credited for giving Ronald Reagan the winning edge in the 1980 elections. One of the Moral Majority's founding principles was "support for Israel and Jewish people everywhere." Falwell disbanded the Moral Majority in 1989 but there are a number of organizations in the USA which are oriented to Christian Zionism committed to unwavering and unconditional support for Israel.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. A. Engberg, *Walking on the Pages of the Word of God: Self, Land and Text Among Evangelical Volunteers in Jerusalem* (PhD Thesis, Lund University, 2016), 86.

28. J. Mugambi, "Introduction" in *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, Ed. Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zinkurature (Nairobi: Acton, 2001), 7–8.

29. Ibid., 16.

30. P. Pomerville, *The New Testament Case against Christian Zionism: A Christian View of the Israel-Palestinian Conflict*. (n.p., n.pl.: 2014), 158.

31. Ibid.

32. Z. Bauman, "Jews and other Europeans, Old and New." *European Judaism. A Journal for the New Europe* 42, no 1. (2009), 121–133.

33. N. S.Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (New York: Orbis, 2008), 61.

34. Ibid.

35. Here I follow the *Swahili Union Version*, 1952 edition.

36. Several colleagues, including some who took part in the trip described in the latter part of this chapter and others who have shared critiques of that trip with me, have shared about these beliefs. Some of those who have shared with me accept the beliefs about the uses of mud from the Dead Sea.

37. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* Vol. 44, Ed. James Atkinson. "Treatise on Good Works" (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1966), 24, 34–37. In the "Treatise" Luther argues that were every believer with a strong faith, everyone would be free to do what they want (as their deeds and works of leisure would be in God's will due to their strong faith), and that there would in consequence be no need of churches and monasteries or special days of worship. He therefore argues that these are still needed for the sake of the weak in faith.

38. C.P. Lutz, “What is so Special About this Space?” in Lutz, C.P and R.O. Smith, *Christianity and the Land Called Holy: How we Can Foster Justice, Peace and Hope* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 20.

39. Prayer Action Tanzania (PAT) prayer item pamphlets for September and December 2019.

40. Interview with “A,” senior leader of the House of Prayer (HOP) on March 4, 2020. In the interview “A” continued that “some people commit the error of equating praying for Israel and wishing it peace as a matter of Christianity against Judaism.” Asked a further question as to whether the HOP prayer activities include prayers for Palestine, he responded,

Palestinians can be regarded as an encroacher in the question of peace for Israel. Our perspective is that the view about Palestine is that we see them as having encroached on the land of Israel. We do not pray for Israel as a matter of Christianity but as a matter of obeying the clear instruction to pray to Israel.

41. Kingdom Leadership Network Tanzania, *ibid*.

42. Engberg, *op. cit.*, 82.

43. *Ibid*. In the footnotes, Engberg comments in more detail on the attitude of Jewish tour guides toward Christian pilgrims.

44. Lutz, *op. cit.*, 30–1.

45. Mugambi, *op. cit.*, 7–8.

46. <https://www.globalministries.org> *op. cit.*

47. F. Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel* (Nairobi: WordAlive and Zondervan, 2011), 38 and 56.

48. Lutz, *op. cit.*, 20.

49. Pomerville, *op. cit.*, 13.

50. Pomerville, *op. cit.*, 171–172.

51. W. Grudem, 1994. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press and Zondervan, 1994), 859–860.

52. P. Pomerville, *The New Testament Case against Christian Zionism: A Christian View of the Israel-Palestinian Conflict*, np., n.pl., 2014.

53. R. Gower, “Home and Family Life in the Bible” in *The Lion Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Ed. Pat Alexander, John Drane, David Field and Allan Millard (Sydney: Lion Books, 1987), 161.

54. *Ibid*.

55. J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1969), 58–59. See also L. Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1997), 181–183.

56. M. Lukonge, *The Quest for an Ethical World Trade Organization: An Investigation Based on Elizabeth Gerle’s Global Ethics Model*. MA Thesis, Open University of Tanzania., 2012, 149–150.

57. *Ibid.*, 150.

58. L. P. Kimilike, *Proverbs in the Book of Proverbs: An African Transformational Hermeneutic of the Book of Proverbs* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 103.

59. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, 158.

60. Ibid., 122–126.

61. J. Pahl, 2019. *Fetullah Gülen: Why a Muslim Scholar in Pennsylvania Matters to the World* (New Jersey: Blue Dome Press, 2019), 106–109.

62. C. Mwakasege, op. cit.

63. The sites that are pro-Christian Zionism include those on the following links: 1) <https://strictlygospel.wordpress.com/2014/07/04/ombea-taifa-la-israel/>; 2) <https://youtu.be/HEMf-Mu9KFc>;

3) <https://championsdiary.wordpress.com/2018/10/27/israeli-na-mataifa-m-engine/>; 4) https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://m.facebook.com/permalink.php%3Fstory_fbid%3D1224059877722330%26id%3D364720016989658&ved=2ahUKewjYz5KlYPoAhVFilwKHCrWBK4QFjAAegQIARAC&usg=AOvVaw3epYPNyrJN-UXhkUUEss4K&cshid=1583405794338; 5) <https://www.instagram.com/p/BpcrpvrhLVc/?igshid=1jra3ax9noesz>; 6) <https://www.mwakasege.org/index.php/huduma/soma/israeli-pamoja-nasi>; 7) https://youtu.be/Afnm_TIMQhY; 8) <https://youtu.be/VLZ0SILWwFY>; 8) <https://diraelimu.blogspot.com/2016/10/uhusiano-wa-kanisa-na-israel.html>;

9) <https://www.jamiiforums.com/threads/uzi-huu-maalum-kwa-ajili-ya-kuib-ariki-israel-taifa-la-mungu.1373663/>; 12) <https://www.jamiiforums.com/threads/israel-yamzawadia-mwalimu-mwakasege-kwa-huduma-yake.659782/>

64. E. Kimweri, “Safari za Israeli Kizungumkuti.” KKKT DMP (ECD-ELCT) blog. <http://www.kkktdmp.or.tz/sw/dmp-blog/safari-za-israel-kizungumkuti>. Part of the article reads (my translation):

Claims on tours to Israel to visit important Christian historical sites are now raising questions among adherents of the Christian faith particularly those who have participated in those tours. . . . Contrary to the claim that everyone who sets foot on the land of Israel will get “special blessings,” the truth is that there are some who have been suffered loss and pain after spending money and selling other possessions in order to finance their own tours to Israel, to the point of running bankrupt. Some of the faithful have been pressed to visit Israel under the belief that Israel mentioned in the Bible is “God’s [chosen] nation”. . . . However, some believers, among them pastors . . . say that the whole idea is concocted by organizers of the tours with the aim of getting clients. . . . Pastor [name and parish supplied] . . . argues that among the organizers are charlatans who use faith as a means of conning others. . . . [He said] “Some have gone as far as arguing that once you arrive there every door will be opened for your success in work, education, business. That is a blatant lie.” On his part, Pastor . . . [name supplied] argued that there was some value in the visits if one took it as a matter of faith, such that it was alright to sell properties in order to participate in the tours . . . [Name supplied] complained that he ran bankrupt after spending all his savings and taking a loan from a bank to fund his tour of Israel. However, another participant [name supplied] reported that he was cured of a serious skin disease which had defied every form of treatment when he visited the country and used the mud from the Dead Sea.

65. Ibid.

66. E. Kimweri, op. cit.

67. Bar G. Livnoy and R. Meron, “Not All Settlers and Palestinians Want Each Other to Disappear,” *Ha’aretz*, February 1, 2010.

68. Martin Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses" in *Luther's Works* Volume 35. Trans. Theodore Bachman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

69. Ibid., Luther makes his own translation of Exod. 17:8–17 in *Treatise on God Works*, perhaps basing it on verse 16, in which God is recorded as vowing to have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

70. J. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*. Trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976), 7–38.

71. Ateek, op cit.

72. Adeleye, op. cit., 37–38.

73. L. Jonker, "Towards a 'Communal' Approach for Reading the Bible in Africa" In Getui, Holter, and Zinkurature 2001 op. cit., 78 and 83–84. While Jonker focuses his approach to biblical scholars, my recommendation here is to have the reading and discourse taken further away from the "men and women of God," and thus, in a sense, demystifying Bible reading at parish-level Bible study programs. The role of the teacher then becomes more of a facilitator and guide from extremes of theological errors, rather than that of the "expert."

74. Current training of Pastors in Tanzania is of two forms. One is at the level of university degree in theology. That level, I suggest, needs beefing up in the areas mentioned above. The second form is through Bible schools that offer two years (certificate) or three years (diploma) in theology. This level needs a critical outlook, since there is clear indication that the quality of recruits for these levels is often questionable and there is little effort to offer opportunities for continuing education to this group. While I concede here that this is a sensitive topic in the whole of the ELCT, a viable and realistic alternative would not be scrapping these Bible School-level programs, but to combine them with theological education by extension such that there is Continuing Pastor Education (CPE) which will equip candidates with the additional skills needed for dealing with the challenges facing the church in our contemporary era.

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Chapter 11

The New Christian Zionism in Africa

A Critical Analysis from a Missiological Perspective

Jörg Zehelein

THE “NEW CHRISTIAN ZIONISM” IN AFRICA

Writing about Christian Zionism in Africa from a missiological viewpoint, we encounter a phenomenon that parallels what is widely recognized as a “shift in gravity” in global Christianity.¹ As the Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako maintains, the single center of Christian faith is no longer found in the Western world, but in a plurality of centers in the Global South, like Latin America, Asia, and particularly Africa.²

The acceptance of Christian Zionism, Daniel Hummel argues, has undergone similar changes worldwide.³ Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, support of Christian Zionism particularly thrived in the context of white American Evangelicals.⁴ Hummel calls this type of Christian Zionism the “old” one, which he defines as mostly “American, white, English-speaking, [. . .] and concerned about the end of history.”⁵ The new face of Christian Zionism, however, is more international with a much less white American phenotype. Hummel illustrates his argument by observing the mixture of visitor nationalities at a recent annual meeting of the influential Christian Zionist organization International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) in Israel. The ICEJ gathers thousands of Christians worldwide for its yearly Feast of Tabernacles celebration in Jerusalem. In 2017, white Americans constituted just a fraction of those gathered at the celebration.⁶ Many of the visitors were from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. It is particularly in these regions that the ICEJ has recently opened many new branches for expanding its global presence and influence.

According to Hummel’s analysis, the most fertile ground for the New Christian Zionism in the Global South is Pentecostalism.⁷ This is of particular

significance, as the Pentecostal movement in the Global South is not just a marginal phenomenon. Rather, it is experiencing rapid and extensive growth.⁸ As part of global Pentecostalism, the New Christian Zionism in Africa is much less influenced by apocalyptic theology than that of the original American brand.⁹ The “old” Christian Zionists from the United States often held strong dispensationalist beliefs as a particular interpretation of apocalyptic eschatology. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 is considered in this reading as a sign of the arrival of those last days before the thousand-year reign of Rev. 20:1–6.¹⁰ However, according to Hummel, the New Christian Zionism in the Global South is mainly shaped by Pentecostal beliefs, particularly patterns of the so-called prosperity gospel.¹¹ Although prosperity gospel cannot be reduced to Pentecostalism, it nevertheless originated there, developed some distinctive “generated meaning,” and finally also spread out to Africa.¹² Roughly, prosperity gospel is about spiritual but “in most cases [also] material” promises of affluence and wealth on the basis of religious well-doing.¹³ Although the prosperity gospel pattern is generally known for being related to individual success, it also embraces the idea that whole communities or nations can be transformed.¹⁴ In this respect Hummel sees a link between Christian Zionism and the prevalence of prosperity gospel within Pentecostalism in Africa: a whole nation can expect significant spiritual and material growth if it is loyal to the modern state of Israel, for this state is believed to represent the chosen people of God according to the Hebrew Scriptures. In Africa, where the issue of poverty is a constant challenge for many nations and peoples, strategies that promise an effective mitigation of a nation’s poverty are especially attractive. Central for this kind of prosperity gospel theology is Gen. 12:3, which is read as a call to support and bless the people of Abraham in order to receive blessings in response.¹⁵ There is also a narrative about Africa being cursed for the sin of enslaving Israel in biblical times. Some Africans identify themselves with the ancient Egyptians, considering their present hardships and poverty as a punishment from God. They understand that they are cursed, both because of the former oppression of Israel by “Africans,” and because they do not support the modern state of Israel. Only through repentance and a commitment to the well-being of the State of Israel will African Christians and nations recover and receive the blessings of prosperity.¹⁶

AFRICAN CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND THE POLITICS OF ZIONISM

The emergence of the “New Christian Zionism” is, like the “old” Christian Zionism, a religious idea that is inextricably linked with political Zionism.

The latter aims at the restoration, protection, and general support of the Jewish people in Palestine, what is understood as Israel, the “homeland” of the Jews.¹⁷ Unlike the African Independent “Zionist churches” in South Africa (which have no connection to political Zionism, as they spiritualize the reference to Zion and relocate it from historical Jerusalem),¹⁸ New Christian Zionists are supporters of Jewish political Zionism. According to position statements of the ICEJ, Christian Zionism is defined as the “belief that the land of Canaan, for the purposes of world redemption, is the everlasting possession of the Jewish people” (Gen. 17:7–8).¹⁹ In this vein, the Assemblies of God in Southern Africa are mentioned by the ICEJ as a body that “sees and acknowledges the hand of God in Israel’s modern day restoration.”²⁰ It is noteworthy that in ICEJ’s objectives, “compassion for the Arab peoples of the region” is commended. However, this appears just as a marginal note. The flow of arguments and statements on the website (int.icej.org) emphasize the primary importance of being loyal to Jews, the Zionist idea, and the modern state of Israel.²¹ This brings clarity to why four Palestinian Christian church leaders clearly stand against the idea of Christian Zionism as a “heresy.” According to their statement, the primal concern for the state of Israel does not promise the blessings of Gen. 12:3 for the non-Jewish population in Palestine, but a policy of perpetual war and conflict.²²

The biblical promises about the land are relevant for Zionism. Additionally, the history of anti-Semitism, which reached its most brutal peak in the horrendous and tragic catastrophe of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, plays a role. For African Christians, narratives about Africa being cursed because of Israel’s enslavement may cut closer than the historical account of the Holocaust.²³ But from a structural point of view, the inherent line of argument of the two narratives is similar in one sense. Anti-Semitism and all forms of oppression or aggression toward Jews by other nations are to be opposed, and the modern state of Israel is to be protected as the attempt of establishing freedom and security for the Jewish nation. In this respect, it is indicative of the missing historical empathy of (African) Anti-Zionism, and a disregard of the danger of anti-Semitism when the historical evidence of the Holocaust is downplayed as Zionist manipulation.²⁴ One blatant example of this flawed attitude appears in a statement of an African Anti-Zionist, saying that Zionists “manipulated the Holocaust to establish an ethno-nationalist colonial-settler state in Palestine, called Israel as an alleged haven for Jews.”²⁵

Nevertheless, the fight against anti-Semitism does not seem to be the major driving force for African Christian Zionism. Above all, the most important rationale is rooted in the prosperity gospel pattern. Although this theological strand perceives spiritual issues as causes of hardships in theory,²⁶ in practice promoters of Christian Zionism would not refrain from welcoming the “blessings” of economic and political cooperation between Israel and African

nations. This attitude is obvious in a report about the opening of a new ICEJ-branch in Tanzania/Arusha. In this report it is stated that many Africans who attended the official launch “were very excited to learn more about modern Israel and its many innovations.”²⁷ Those Africans may have thought of Israel’s know-how and technologies like water purification, drip irrigation, or life-saving medical devices.²⁸ In the same report many also “proudly spoke of how the government of Tanzania is preparing to open a new embassy in Israel in order to improve relations between the two countries.”²⁹ Those improved political relations could be beneficial for a country like Tanzania that can expect political and developmental support from Israel.

A good relationship with Israel is desired not only from the standpoint of Christian Zionists, but also Israeli politicians and media recognize the potential of the emerging Christian Zionism in Africa. It is considered to be an asset for strengthening the global support network for Israel, as it connects Africa’s nations and Israel through economic, development, and political cooperation.³⁰

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM IN AFRICA FROM A MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In writing a missiological essay about Christian Zionism in Africa, the voice of African theologians have to take center stage. According to Andrew Walls’s hermeneutics of the “shift in gravity,” theology has to unfold from the multiple centers of Christianity. One of these is Africa. I live in Tanzania as a *mgeni*, a guest and a foreigner. I try to listen humbly and to present the voices of African theologians, to connect them with my heritage of acquired theological knowledge. Through this I try to critically analyze Christian Zionism in Africa. As a German, knowing my nation’s violent and genocidal anti-Semitic history, I exercise even more caution, as Christian Zionism cannot be separated from Zionism in its actions of protecting Jews and humankind from all kinds of dehumanizing anti-Semitism.³¹

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM IN AFRICA IN INTERRELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

African Christian Zionism belongs to the Christian formation of the religion. For Christian Zionism in general “is support for Zionism on *Christian* theological grounds.”³² Zionism, however, originated from Judaism.³³ Thus, missiological analyses of Zionism and Christian Zionism need to take an interreligious perspective. People of Jewish faith are in the minority in Africa.

Nevertheless, as the South African scholar Tessa Freeman points out, inter-religious dialogue with Jews (which account for less than 1 percent of the population in South Africa) is commendable and possible.³⁴ The Ghanaian missiologist Kwame Bediako also supported the necessity of dialogue, though not focusing on the relation of Christians to Jews, but to the African Primal religions (APR). Bediako called for a “deep and authentic dialogue between the Gospel and African tradition.”³⁵ Although Bediako’s interest was in the identity of African Christian theology, the hermeneutics underlying his method are promising for approaching the issue of Christian Zionism in Africa. The distinctive feature of Bediako’s approach is an attitude that encounters the other religion in a non-possessive way, on a principally equal level. He commends categorizing other religions not by Christian idioms, but rather by authentic terms and ideas of the other. Only after the dialogue with the authentic other may certain concepts of APR and Christianity be merged in terms of a truly contextual expression of Christian faith.³⁶

In light of Bediako’s hermeneutics, African Christian Zionism, seen as “support for Zionism on Christian theological grounds,”³⁷ would have to respond to particular questions. To what extent is the support for Zionism to be considered a consequence of an open-minded encounter of African Christians with Jewish Zionists? Is Zionism embraced after an attempt of listening and mutual understanding of the religious claims of the other, or rather a one-way, paternalistic embrace of Jewish Zionism by Christians?³⁸ To what extent should the biblical account of the connection of the Jewish people and the “promised land” be acknowledged—especially in the special relationship of Christians and Jews?³⁹ Are only Jews involved in the dialogue, or are people with other religious affiliations, such as Muslims, who also live in or share relationships with people living in the Middle East?

Raising the issue of interreligious dialogue, however, leads to a crucial problem when it comes to the New Christian Zionism emerging from Pentecostal Christianity in Africa. For this branch of Christianity, according to Nigerian scholar Marius C. Iwuchukwu, a dialogic attitude is rather strange—if not despicable. “Verbal abuse and a resentment of those who are religiously different are at the heart of the message Pentecostals preach.”⁴⁰ Thus, interreligious dialogue is rather a desideratum for the future than it is a reality in the present. In the case of Christian-Muslim relations, Iwuchukwu comments: “There is a mutual resentment that is becoming normative, especially where they have to share the same geographical space. [. . .] The tension built up by such resentment more often than not escalates into violence and counterviolence.”⁴¹ Against that vicious circle of growing tensions and violence, Iwuchukwu commends an attitude and readiness for dialogue with the aim of establishing peaceful coexistence in a multireligious environment.

Interestingly, the argument of Iwuchukwu reveals a parallel between the situation in the Middle East and in some African countries.⁴² To share the same geographical space in a multireligious situation can be a serious challenge for peaceful, nonviolent coexistence. However, to win Pentecostals for the case for dialogue is not done by posing demands and recommendations. At its best it would be helpful if there is a rationale for dialogue that would not counter universalist views, as are widely held by Pentecostals, but rather employ such universalism for a way toward peace and a dialogic attitude. Miroslav Volf, who grew up in a small Pentecostal church in the former Yugoslavia,⁴³ could provide a viable theoretical approach to the religiously different. He unfolds a path toward peaceful coexistence of people with different religious affiliations “under the common global roof.”⁴⁴ The distinctive feature of his contribution, which he shares with missiologist David Bosch,⁴⁵ is not trying to overcome the universalism of truth claims inherent to particular religions. He rather seeks for the potential within the religions’ traditions for realizing respectful coexistence with people of other faiths.⁴⁶ In the case of Christians, Volf refers to “the key mark of the Christian faith [as] love of neighbor” which would include attitudes like respect and tolerance.⁴⁷ For Pentecostalism with its stark truth claims, the way Volf suggests could be a viable alternative to a non-dialogic, repudiating way of relating to the religiously other. Embracing a dialogic attitude, Pentecostals, like other Christians in Africa as well as around the world, would have to attempt an open-minded dialogue with Jewish Zionists and their ideas. They would furthermore try to include also Jewish non-Zionist, Muslim or Christian Palestinian voices in such a dialogic enterprise,⁴⁸ and they would employ a dialogic attitude in order to take steps toward more peaceful living in this world. From a missiological perspective this would finally enable both—a loving relationship to neighbors and a witness to the Christian Gospel that does not run counter to its own message of love, peace, and reconciliation.

AFRICA AND THE LIBERATION OF THE JEWS

Besides the interreligious perspective, the phenomenon of Christian Zionism in Africa calls for a reflection in terms of liberation theology. Scholars from Africa, including missiologist David Bosch and feminist theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye, have promoted and reflected on the significance of liberation for mission.⁴⁹ Liberation in this respect is understood as the struggles against all kinds of oppression that are displayed in unjust structures and dehumanizing actions in the world.⁵⁰ Strikingly, the “undisputed theological paradigm for liberation theology” would be Israel’s liberation from slavery.⁵¹ From

the perspective of liberation, this paradigm would function as a call to support liberation movements, not only those of Christians or Jews, but of any oppressed and marginalized people. In this vein the modern Zionist movement could be interpreted as a liberation movement, as it is understood in the multifaceted work of Albert Memmi.⁵² The Jewish nation as a “people without land” for centuries,⁵³ suffering from anti-Semitic oppression and violence, would legitimately call on the world’s empathy, solidarity, and support.

However, whenever we speak of liberation there is a certain ambivalence and danger. Chielozone Eze, a scholar of postcolonial studies who grew up in Nigeria, critically refers to the story of Robert Mugabe. Africans have to face the potential tragedy in the history of liberation, as Mugabe was a fighter for independence in the beginning but finally turned out to be a brutal dictator.⁵⁴ Paulo Freire, Latin American educator writing about emancipation theory, keenly analyzed this ambivalence of liberation: “The oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors.”⁵⁵

Addressing the question of support for Zionism, Christians should thoroughly and carefully analyze what kind of liberation the different interpretations of Zionism and the current policy of the state of Israel display. When we listen to the above-mentioned Palestinian Christian leaders, they would oppose the “ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism” that is connected with a certain interpretation of Zionism and “elements in the government of Israel” that would inevitably lead “to unending cycles of violence.”⁵⁶ Boldly condemning such violence, voices like Albert Memmi try to provide an idea of Zionism that would still embrace the national movement of Jews as liberation and at the same time commit to overcome the oppression of “all the suffering” in the world.⁵⁷

Whatever the outcome of a thorough and careful analysis of modern Zionism, a reference to liberation in missiology has to be aware of both: the necessity of liberation and its danger of becoming oppressive.⁵⁸ Therefore, Christians in Africa and throughout the world have to carefully perceive and differentiate which kind of Zionism they want to promote and which way of achieving liberation and freedom for *all people* in the Middle East deserves support.

JEWS AND THE LIBERATION OF AFRICANS

The foregoing section cannot be the final word from a liberation theology perspective on Christian Zionism in Africa. It would be superficial to challenge Christian Zionism only by addressing the issue of the liberation of the Jewish people. For the rationale of the “New Christian Zionism” also implicates the liberation of another people—specifically Africans. The embrace of the

promise of prosperity for all who support the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:3) can be considered a symbol for the craving of African people to escape poverty. That is to say, Christian Zionism is not just embraced for the sake of a people far away in the Middle East but also for one's own sake—that is, mitigation of poverty and significant development on the African continent. African Christian Pentecostals would “refuse to die in poverty”⁵⁹ as they embrace patterns of prosperity theology in terms of the New Christian Zionism in Africa.

Surprisingly, a significant number of those responding to this message are not extremely poor, but middle-class and upper-middle-class Africans.⁶⁰ However, not only for poor Pentecostals but also for the wealthier ones the fear and problem of poverty is functional, as they all are affected by the economically precarious situation of the African continent in general.⁶¹ Christian Zionism as an aspect of prosperity gospel would then function either as a spiritual strategy for overcoming poverty or as a way of maintaining middle- or upper-class well-being. Together with economic and political cooperation with the state of Israel, the way would finally be paved for Africa's prosperity.

Critical analysis of such promises must be done carefully, particularly when, as in this case, the analyst-author is from Western Europe and from an economically privileged background. A critical stance regarding the prosperity gospel present especially in the Global South is all too easily given from the wealthy ones who can afford to know it better.⁶² Thus, a critical approach to prosperity gospel in the shape of the embrace of Christian Zionism has to be differentiated and to pose questions, rather than quickly arriving at all-too-smooth conclusions.

A first critical question is to what extent prosperity theology and its embrace of Christian Zionism contributes to the “victimiz[ation] of the poor.”⁶³ The message of Christian Zionism on prosperity theology grounds could be heard to say that poor Africans and their poverty would be their own fault and, because of their lack of faith and support of Zionism, would be well deserved.⁶⁴ The same question would also function in reverse, as a rich Christian could be praised as the *homo faber* who makes his own life. This seems contradictory to the concept of grace at the center of Christian faith.⁶⁵

Second, African Christian Zionism and prosperity theology would have to reflect about their understanding of what is relevant for combating poverty. A critical remark is provoked by the idea of bringing about economic and political progress by essentially spiritual means. Is that not a kind of “magical manipulation of God?”⁶⁶ The above-mentioned narrative about Africans as those who enslaved Israel would be a primarily spiritual explanation for economic hardships. Of course, spirituality can be a factor in coping with poverty,⁶⁷ but the question is if the broader spectrum of the multifaceted causes of poverty is integrated, or rather overlooked.⁶⁸

However, beyond a primarily spiritual explanation it seems that Pentecostalism in the Global South has a non-spiritual relation to poverty, too. That is to say, prosperity is not only prayed but also trained for. Tacitly Pentecostal preaching seems to promote the alignment of believers with “the requirements of modern capitalism.”⁶⁹ Within that pattern, it may be understandable why African Christian Zionists would welcome tangible economic and political cooperation with the state of Israel. Furthermore, one can encounter teachings within Pentecostalism in Africa that encourage business activity and empower people to embrace economic success optimistically.⁷⁰ Even those who do not experience such success are being considered. In terms of welfare—especially in the African context—a significant commitment to “social outreach programs” can be monitored. These deal with health care (including especially HIV prevention programs and care for those infected), education, food, and shelter for the poor.⁷¹ With it there is some relief for those who are not (yet) empowered and trained enough for being part of the capitalist dream.

However commendable these attempts are, the very problem of this way of relating to poverty is the absence of an attitude that would challenge capitalism and its exploitative nature. Claims of the need for structural and systemic changes for which liberation theology legitimately call are missing to a significant extent.⁷² The mission of the church should not simply conform with the demands of capitalism, but rather “denounce the economy of greed and [. . .] participate in and practice the divine economy of love, sharing and justice.”⁷³

In this respect, the issues of mutuality and sharing could be a valuable perspective for Pentecostal interpretations of prosperity. The Kenyan scholar David Kodia in *Poverty in Grace* challenges the idea of capitalist competition and exploitation, promoting a model of cooperation and partnership instead.⁷⁴ In the same vein, Tanzanian scholar Faustin Mahali calls for a *common* commitment of rich and poor toward the reduction of poverty.⁷⁵ This would focus less on the individual person or nation striving for success, and more on the common responsibility of a local or global community to reduce poverty.

Pentecostalism in Africa as the most fertile ground for Christian Zionism is represented not only by the poor, but also by the “middle and upper-middle-class people—men and women who are able to pay regularly their tithes.”⁷⁶ Thus, Pentecostals like other Christians in Africa could be encouraged by such African voices to engage in communal sharing. They could continue with their efforts in social outreach programs, embracing not only the message of prosperity for the strong and faithful, but for the whole community—in the church, in their homes, and in the world. Rather than disconnecting the poor and the rich, we should acknowledge the “interdependence of all creation.”⁷⁷

AN AFRICAN VISION OF COMMUNITY AS NEIGHBORHOOD

In conclusion, a model of community as neighborhood shall be imagined, rooted in African tradition and liberation theology and suggested by Oduyoye. This genuinely African voice and approach touches many questions and issues raised in the discussion of Christian Zionism in Africa. It promotes an attitude and vision of neighborhood as a model for the mission of the church that embraces a more inclusive way of life in community than Christian Zionism does.⁷⁸

In Oduyoye's vision, neighborhood is employed as a crucial pattern. Her starting point is the biblical account of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), and the command to love your neighbor as yourself.⁷⁹ It is striking that this story displays a transgression of boundaries in order to relate to and care for someone in need. This inclusive trait is mirrored in Oduyoye's interpretation of her own Akan/Ghanaian heritage. The notion of community as a fellowship of all creation is centered around God, the Supreme being, and as a web it links all together as interdependent and mutually accountable neighbors.⁸⁰ Neighborliness comprises nature, animals, and human beings with all their different ethnic backgrounds, classes and religions, and it reaches beyond the geographical people "next door."⁸¹ No people is favored above any other.

Neighborliness rather brings *creatures in need* to the fore—nature, animals, and people who are threatened with annihilation.⁸² Oduyoye refers to the effects of the dehumanizing power of money in a world that features blatant asymmetry in the sharing of global and local resources. Persons in such systems, she argues, "are not neighbors, they are tools, instruments, objects for feeding the ego of the neighbor who can 'pay' for the services of others who have no bargaining powers."⁸³ In the context of these challenges, the model of neighborhood calls for a transformation of paradigms. "In Africa, hardship continues to have its ripple effect, while the wealthy become increasingly unneighborly, ridding themselves of the African culture that obliges them to share."⁸⁴ Neighborliness doesn't promote the rules of a competitive win-lose game in local and global economies. Rather, it is about communities that are liberated so that they can share concern with the weak and suffering. In this model, the unacknowledged neighbors, the invisible poor who are hidden behind societal fences, will be seen and acknowledged.⁸⁵

Besides liberation from poverty, peace is of particular relevance in this African model of neighborhood. Oduyoye employs the Hebrew term *shalom* to symbolize the joint concern and action toward a peaceful living in this world.⁸⁶ This peace is not to be mistaken for harmony. Oduyoye refers to a saying of Gloria Chun from Taiwan: "When people in power put harmony

before peace, they stand ready to kill for their ideas, but not to work for the *shalom* of all.”⁸⁷ Confronting the use of ideology or religion to promote violence, people in the world should work for “dynamic learning and affirming neighborhoods.”⁸⁸ In such a dialogic and respectful manner, people in Africa, in the Middle East, and in the rest of the world would relate to the religiously other in an open-minded, trustful manner. They would foster peace and mutual understanding, rather than enforcing frontiers and mistrust.⁸⁹ Oduyoye’s vision does not place any ethnos, or religion, or individual, or nation first. Above all an embrace of neighborliness means to live out the calling of a “demonstration of compassion, on the model and the pattern of God.”⁹⁰

NOTES

1. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

2. Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*, Theology in Africa Series (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 3.

3. See Daniel Hummel, “The New Christian Zionism.” *First Things* (June 2017). <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/06/the-new-christian-zionism>, and Emma Green, “White Evangelicals Used to Dominate Christian Zionism, but Not Anymore.” *The Atlantic* (2019), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/feast-of-the-tabernacles/543378/>

4. Peter Pettit, “Christian Zionism from a Perspective of Jewish-Christian Relations.” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 7, no. 5 (May 2007), thesis no. 6. https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/511?_ga=2.162159604.959323052.1569263905-852632449.1568011924.

5. Hummel, “The New Christian Zionism.”

6. Emma Green talks of a fraction of only 10 percent (cf. Green 2017).

7. See Hummel, “The New Christian Zionism.”

8. See Hummel, “The New Christian Zionism,”; Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 9.

9. Philip A. F. Church, “Dispensational Christian Zionism: A Strange but acceptable aberration or deviant heresy?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009), 377.

10. Ibid.

11. See Hummel, “The New Christian Zionism.”

12. Andreas Heuser, “Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel: An Introduction.” In *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond*, edited by Andreas Heuser, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang (2015), 16f.

13. Ibid.

14. See Giovanni Maltese, “An Activist-Holiness Kenneth Hagin? A Case Study of Prosperity Theology in the Philippines.” In *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond*, edited by Andreas Heuser (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 65. See also Gregory Deacon, “Kenya: A

Nation Born Again.” *PentecoStudies* 14, no. 2 (2015), 219–240. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2646766.

15. Cf. Hummels, “The New Christian Zionism”; International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. “Objectives: The ICEJ’s founding principles.” Official Website of the Christian Zionist Organization ICEJ (2019). <https://int.icej.org/about/objectives>.

16. Cf. Rivkah Adler, “African Christians Being Called To Support Israel.” *BreakingIsraelNews: Latest News Biblical Perspective* (2019) <https://www.breakingisraelnews.com/122456/african-christians-called-support-israel/>. See also Hummel, “The New Christian Zionism.”

17. Cf. Jewish Virtual Library: A Project of AICE. 2019. “Zionism: A Definition of Zionism.” A pro-Zionist website of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2019. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/a-definition-of-zionism>.

18. Cf. National Zion Board Ministries: *Defending the Ancient City of Zion*. 2019; Steve Hayes, “Zionist Christians and Christian Zionists.” In *Khanya* (11 November 2012). <https://khanya.wordpress.com/2012/04/11/zionist-christians-and-christian-zionists/>.

19. Malcolm Hedding, “Position Statements: The ICEJ’s Core Beliefs.” Official Website of the Christian Zionist Organization ICEJ (2019). <https://int.icej.org/about/position-statements>.

20. Ibid.

21. Cf. International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (2019). “Objectives.”

22. Michel Sabbah et al. “The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism.” *Institute for Middle East Understanding, A Pro-Palestine NGO* (22 August 2006). <https://imeu.org/article/the-jerusalem-declaration-on-christian-zionism>.

23. In fact the research on Christian Zionism in Africa shows little reference to anti-Semitism or the Holocaust.

24. Cf. Pettit, “Christian Zionism from a Perspective,” thesis no. 20.

25. Cf. Jon F. Hodgson, 2019, “Against Zionism: The moral drama of the Israeli occupation plays out at a South African school.” *Africa Is a Country*, an independent information channel from a left perspective. 13.03.2019. <https://africasacountry.com/2019/03/against-zionism>.

26. Cf. Maltese, “An Activist-Holiness Kenneth Hagin?,” 66f.

27. David Parsons, “Africa Opening up to Israel: New ICEJ-Tanzania branch shows Africa’s heart to bless Israel.” Official Website of the Christian Zionist Organization ICEJ (12 December 2016). <https://za.icej.org/news/special-reports/africa-opening-israel>.

28. Cf. Rolene Marks, “The Steady Rise of African Zionism.” *The Algemeiner* (17 April 2014). <https://www.algemeiner.com/2014/04/17/the-steady-rise-of-african-zionism>.

29. Parsons, “Africa Opening up to Israel.”

30. Marks, “The Steady Rise”; Sheldon Gellar, “Africa and the Revitalization of the Zionist Dream.” *The Jerusalem Post* (24 July 2016). <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Africa-and-the-revitalization-of-the-Zionist-dream-462252>.

31. Cf. Church, “Dispensational Christian Zionism,” 376f.

32. Cf. Church, “Dispensational Christian Zionism,” 377 (emphasis added by the author).

33. Cf. Church, “Dispensational Christian Zionism,” 377, where he subsumes Christian Zionism under the broader movement Zionism.

34. Cf. Tessa Freeman, “Theology of Religions: Models for Interreligious Dialogue in South Africa.” *Perspectives on Theology of Religions, HTS Theological Studies/Teologiese Studies* 12, 73 (6) (2017), 204–208. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i6.4842>.

35. Cf. Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 58.

36. Ibid.; see also David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 485.

37. Church, “Dispensational Christian Zionism,” 377.

38. Cf. Pettit, “Christian Zionism from a Perspective,” thesis no. 27-28.

39. Cf. Ibid., thesis no. 29; Jürgen Moltmann, *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes: Ein Beitrag zur messianischen Ekklesiologie* (München: Christoph Kaiser Verlag, 1975), 170f.

40. Iwuchukwu, “Pentecostalism, Islam, and Religious Fundamentalism in Africa” in *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, ed. Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 54.

41. Ibid.

42. Iwuchukwu mentions “Algeria, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Tanzania, the Sudan, Tunisia, and so on” (49). A more in-depth analysis would be needed to explore the extent of extremist influence and the extent of peaceful coexistence.

43. Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 6–8.

44. Volf, *Flourishing*, 19.

45. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 484f.

46. Cf. Volf, *Flourishing*, 19f.

47. Ibid., 104.

48. In this respect there are attempts of groups such as Telos and Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) that arrange meetings with a variety of Israelis and Palestinians—in both cases, groups meet with people ranging from Jewish settlers to business leaders to Palestinian activists (cf. Miri Kirk, “Countering Christian Zionism in the Age of Trump.” *Merip magazine* (08 August 2019) <https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/exploring-the-political-role-of-christian-zionism/>.)

49. Cf. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 432–447; Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, (Maryknoll, New York: 2000), 108.

50. Ibid., 104.

51. Cf. Ibid., 445.

52. Cf. Susie Linfield, *The Lions’ Den: Zionism and the Left from Hannah Arendt to Noam Chomsky*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), 165-196.

53. Cf. Pettit, “Christian Zionism from a Perspective,” thesis no. 20.

54. Cf. Chielozona Eze, *Postcolonial Imagination and Moral Representations in African Literature and Culture* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2011), 71–84.

55. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos (New York and London: Continuum, 2000) 45.

56. Cf. Sabbah et al., "The Jerusalem Declaration."
57. Cf. Linfield, *The Lions' Den: Zionism*, 166.
58. Cf. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 442–445.
59. Michael Biehl, "To Prosper and to Be Blessed: Prosperity, Wealth and 'Life in Abundance' in Ecumenical Debate." In *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond*, edited by Andreas Heuser, 131–146 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 131 (footnote 2).
60. "This is one of the distinctives of the message of Enoch Adeboye from Nigeria, leader of the mega-church The Redeemed Christian Church of God."
61. Cf. Rainer Teztlaff, "Political Architecture of Poverty: On Changing Patterns of 'African Identity.'" In *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond*, edited by Andreas Heuser (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 38.
62. Ibid., 36–39.
63. Cf. Biehl, "To Prosper and to Be Blessed," 140, where the critical issue of the privileged ones who condemn Prosperity teachings is presented by outlining conflicts revolving around the Lausanne Movement Cape Town conference of 2010.
64. Ibid., 145.
65. Ibid.
66. Rudolf von Sinner, "'Struggling with Africa': Theology of Prosperity in and from Brazil." In *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond*, edited by Andreas Heuser (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 117–130, 155.
67. Ibid.
68. Jens Köhrsen, "Pentecostal Improvement Strategies: A Comparative Reading on African and South American Pentecostalism." In *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond*, edited by Andreas Heuser (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 49–64, 56, where he acknowledges the impact of "spiritual improvement techniques" as providing self-control, hope, and with it some transformation of life.
69. Cf. David H. Kodia, *Poverty in Grace: Social Responsibility of the Church and Society in War against Poverty* (Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House, 2005), where the author addresses sociocultural (27ff) and sociopolitical factors (44ff) of poverty.
70. Ibid., 58.
71. Cf. Köhrsen, "Pentecostal Improvement Strategies," 58.
72. Ibid., 59f.
73. Ibid., 60.
74. Biehl, "To Prosper and to be Blessed," 2015, quoting *Together towards life*, the new mission affirmation of the World Council of Churches, 143.
75. Kodia, *Poverty in Grace*, 107f.
76. Cf. Faustin Mahali, "The Contribution of the Church to Poverty Reduction Policies in Tanzania: A New Theological Agenda." In *Society and Church in African Christianity*, edited by Benjamin Simon (Makumira Publications 18, Neuendettelsau: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2008), 55–79, 71f, 74f.

76. Rainer Tetzlaff, "Political Architecture of Poverty: On Changing Patterns of 'African Identity'" in *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond*, ed. Andreas Heuser (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015) 33–48,

77. Cf. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands. Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa*. Theology in Africa Series (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 62.

78. Oduyoye's vision is one possible approach here. Other models of community would also be enriching, such as the perspective of *Ubuntu*, particularly vivid in South African contexts (cf. Mahali, "The Contribution of the Church," 74), the concept of *convivence* of the German missiologist Theo Sundermeier (Theo. Sundermeier, *Konvivenz und Differenz: Studien zu einer verstehenden Missionswissenschaft* (Erlangen/Germany: Verlag der Ev-Luth. Mission, 1995), which itself shares lots of ideas with the grand Jewish philosophical thinkers Buber and E. Levinas and their focus on the relational aspect of human existence and the importance of empathically acknowledging the other. For thoughts on Levinas from an African perspective cf. Eze 2011, 97.

79. Cf. Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, 45f. 55f.

80. Ibid., 45.

81. Ibid., 46.

82. Ibid., 46.

83. Ibid., 54.

84. Ibid., 52.

85. Ibid., 54.

86. Ibid., 43.

87. Ibid., 42.

88. Ibid., 53.

89. Ibid., 52.

90. Ibid., 56.

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Chapter 12

Empire and African Initiated Churches

The Cost of Israel's Lies

Marthie Momberg

INTRODUCTION

My perceptions about the State of Israel were shattered on an evening in 2010. Yakov Rabkin, a Jewish historian from Canada, spoke at a series of public lectures on Palestine at Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Theology. That evening, he told us that not all Jews support nor even associate with the State of Israel, and that there is a profound difference between Judaism and Zionism. Listening to him, I cringed with shame about my error of classifying all Jews as "good" and all Palestinians as "bad." In subsequent months, the stories of visiting Palestinian Christians and other eyewitnesses chipped away at more of my dearly held "truths" on Israel and the Palestinians.

About a year later, I sat at my laptop in the village of Yanoun, located in the territory of Palestine occupied by Israel since 1967, searching for words to type. The four colleagues with whom I was sharing a house were already asleep, but I wanted to finish my blog post¹ before going to bed. The five of us had volunteered to serve in Team 41 of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).² We were stationed for three months in Yanoun and its farming community. From there we monitored also the surrounding villages, the adjacent Jordan Valley and the city of Nablus, and rotated among EAPPI placements in Bethlehem, Hebron, Jerusalem, Tulkarm, and the South Hebron Hills. Each night, we submitted detailed lists of human rights violations, with photos, to the office in Jerusalem. Without exception, all the incidences were of Israel's activities designed to uproot, dispossess, and destroy the lives and livelihoods of Palestinian civilians—both Christian and Muslim. Images intermingled with the body language and voices of civilians flooded my mind—of injuries, killings, land confiscation and demolished dams, cisterns, fountains, olive

groves, houses, tents, schools, roads, clinics, churches, mosques, and animal shelters. The silent screams in people's eyes, the twisted shoulders of a teenage boy who watched the confiscation of his family's land of six generations, the mother who did not know how to console her child who returned from school to a heap of rubble—these and so many other vivid impressions kept me awake at night. Time and again, in horrendous suffering, the Palestinians told me, “If things could change for you in South Africa, they can change for us too. *Inshallah*.”³

How could I convey in words what I had experienced? I realized that evening that what I witnessed was not a “conflict” between two equal parties, but Israel's disregard of the very human rights laws agreed upon by the international community after the genocide of Europe's Jews and other marginalized groups in World War II.⁴ I knew also that hardly anyone in my circles back home suspected this reality and that many would question my views. Without realizing it at the time, my journey of scholarly activism had begun. In this chapter I draw on my subsequent doctoral and post-doctoral research and my ecumenical engagement to highlight some of the myths and falsehoods that mislead millions of Christians in Africa. While my examples and arguments on what it means when Christians in Africa partner with Zionist Israel are by no means exhaustive, I aim to problematize the notion of Israel as a benign partner in Africa with reference to Reformed and African Initiated Christianity.

ISRAEL'S QUEST FOR NEW FRIENDS

In the more than seventy years since the declaration of the Jewish state on Palestinian land in 1948, things have worsened for the Palestinians.⁵ Both the demographic balance and the physical map of Israel and occupied Palestine continue to be transformed due to the ongoing loss of Palestinian land, lives, and freedom.⁶ Global bodies⁷ filmmakers,⁸ historians, theologians, and legal, social, and political scientists—including some Jewish scholars⁹—have produced in-depth reports, books, articles and documentaries on Israel's systemic discrimination against Palestinians where whiteness is used “to elevate Israeli Jews at the expense of Arabs.”¹⁰ They provide proof that settler colonialism, racial discrimination, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and incremental genocide have been and remain at the center of Israel's Zionist project. Thus, Israel wants all the land, but *without* the indigenous people whose ancestral presence in historical Palestine¹¹ (the current occupied Palestine and Israel) reach back over centuries. According to Zionist Israel, non-Jews may not have full citizenship and human rights in Israel and in occupied Palestine. At the time of this writing, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* published various reports on

Israel's discrimination against its Arab citizens in addressing the Covid-19 pandemic.¹² Zionism is not just an exclusivist ideology or realized through ad hoc practices of racial and religious discrimination. It is embedded in Israel's laws on the highest possible level.¹³ The systemic discrimination impacts all Palestinians, including the millions of refugees and their ascendants who may not return to their family homes after fleeing for their lives in the events leading up to the declaration of the Israeli state.

In our era, the term "Zionism" is commonly used in Israel and amongst its supporters to refer to attitudes and narratives that aim to justify Israel's land confiscation and its discrimination against Palestinians. The political or state dimension of Zionism tries to transform various transnational and extraterritorial notions of being Jewish into one exclusivist national identity as a critical component of the project to establish socio-political and economic control over historical Palestine. Since before the inception of the Zionist state in 1948, Israel has been pursuing the removal of Palestinians to replace them with Jews, many of whom have no ancestral ties to the land, as I explain later. Approximately 80 percent of Palestinians became refugees in 1948,¹⁴ and for those who stayed the horror continues. As one of the twenty-one activists whom I interviewed in my doctoral study remarked, Israel currently "squeezes" the remaining Palestinians out by "the gentle under-funding" of their clinics and schools, "limiting their water supplies . . . or just refusing permission to extend their homes, or just bombing the hell out of them, bombing them out of existence."¹⁵

Due to concerted efforts by the Palestinians and transnational activists including a growing number of conscientious Jews, the past decade has seen an increasing public awareness of Israel's crimes and lies. However, the United States has always been Israel's main ally in the United Nations (UN). U.S. taxpayers, through government action, have given more money to Israel than to any other country since World War II.¹⁶ With its power to garner the support of other countries and to veto UN resolutions, the United States has inhibited the international community's ability to hold Israel accountable. Yet on December 23, 2016, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2334 on the matter of illegal Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories. The UNSC members passed the resolution in a 14–0 vote and China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom, who also have veto power, voted in support. In a surprising step, after all the disappointments during the Obama administration, the United States abstained and for once refrained from using its veto power.¹⁷ Still, in her address, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power emphasized the continued support of the United States to Israel in light of what she called "the double standards" applied by the UN in respect of Israel. Her argument implied that Israel is a victim, who also had been violating international law for decades through its expansion

of settlements. Less than a month later, Donald Trump was inaugurated as U.S. president. His administration has accelerated efforts by the United States to strengthen Israel's lawlessness and dishonesty, but it has failed to garner support from most other members of the UN. In 2018, only the United States and a few other countries voted against each of the six resolutions on Palestine at the UN General Assembly.¹⁸ Later that year, U.S. ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley stood alone in voting against an investigation into possible Israeli war crimes in Gaza.¹⁹

The vote of every country counts on the international stage. Africa is the continent with the largest number of countries in the world.²⁰ In recent years, Israel has embarked on a search for new friends on this continent that used to be united in its condemnation of the racist nature of Zionism. Resolution 77 (XII) of August 1975 by the Organization of African Unity, for example, highlighted the metanarrative of racism in Palestine, South Africa, and in Zimbabwe. "That very solution served as a major frame of reference in UN Resolution 3379 of November 1975 that determined that 'Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination,'" notes Baroud.²¹ But Africa's solidarity with the Palestinian struggle is changing, due to Israel's sharpened efforts to foster alliances on the continent. On opening an Israeli embassy in Rwanda in March 2019, *The Times of Israel* announced that Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "has made expanding diplomatic ties in Africa one of his *key foreign policy objectives*"²² (author's emphasis). The article mentioned that "Israel already has strong ties across East Africa, especially in Uganda and Kenya, but is expanding its diplomatic presence on the continent" to countries such as Chad, Mali, and Niger.²³ Yuval Rotem, the director-general of Israel Foreign Affairs reiterated, "we are returning to Africa."²⁴

SELLING LIES IN EXCHANGE FOR VOTES

In its strategic drive to obtain the loyalty of African countries, Israel claims kinship based on a shared history of suffering. At the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the Liberian capital, Monrovia, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke of "a natural affinity" between Israel and Africa, because "(w)e have, in many ways, similar histories. Your nations toiled under foreign rule. You experienced horrific wars and slaughters. This is very much our history."²⁵ At the opening of an embassy in Rwanda's capital of Kigali in April 2019, Israeli official Rotem described the relationship between Rwanda and Israel in terms of familial ties and heroism. "We are both small countries which have suffered greatly. I believe it is fair to say that we have both risen from the ashes in all of our history," he said.²⁶ The response from Richard Sezibera, Rwanda's Foreign Affairs Minister, creates

the impression that Israel's misleading portrayal of being a force for the greater good of humanity fell on fertile ground. "The strength and resilience shown by both countries to overcome tragedy will continue to bring our people and leaders together in our common determination to build a more just global order,"²⁷ remarked the Rwandese politician.

Experiences of suffering by no means guarantee alignment in current agendas or values between parties. It is simply wrong to deduce that two parties who both suffered will be honest and respectful in their relations with one another and that both will pursue inclusive compassion, equality, and justice for all of humanity. Similar former experiences do not necessarily imply a shared future. Victimhood does not automatically lead to honesty, justice, or compassion for others. In invoking the image of Israel as an underdog, Netanyahu failed to mention that Israel is a military superpower that is strengthened, funded, and protected by the United States. He said nothing about the Israel who has confiscated the land of Palestinians and has continued to legitimize discrimination on the basis of race and religion. Netanyahu's claim of kinship on the basis of shared suffering is an insult to Africans, to Palestinians, and to Jews and citizens of the United States who value honesty, equality, justice, compassion, and human dignity. As Baroud remarks, "Netanyahu attempted not only to cover the ugly face of Zionist colonialism and deceive Africans but also rob Palestinians of their history."²⁸

In the same month that the Israeli embassy opened in Kigali, South Africa permanently withdrew its ambassador from Tel Aviv in a first step to downgrade its diplomatic ties with Israel.²⁹ This followed after several failed attempts over a period of years to engage with Israel within the framework of international human rights laws. According to Na'eem Jeenah of the Afro Middle East Center, South Africa had simply had enough of Israel's violence against unarmed civilians. "The feeling now," Jeena concluded, "is that Israel has taken South Africa's efforts for granted, that Israel has in fact exploited those efforts in order to fulfil its own agenda—strengthen trade links, etc.—while not [being] willing to accept any [mediation] role by South Africa."³⁰ South African president Ramaphosa, 2020–2021 Chairperson of the African Union (AU), has made it clear that a shared history of suffering does not qualify Israel as a friend of Africans. In his first address as chairperson of the AU, Ramaphosa told African leaders in Addis Ababa that the Israeli/U.S. Peace Plan of early 2020 with its proposed isolated pockets of land for Palestinians "brought to mind a horrible history" of South African Apartheid in which "a Bantustan system" was imposed "on the people of South Africa without consulting them."³¹ In short, to claim kinship with Africa on the basis of a shared history of suffering with Israel misrepresents history, masks the present unjust and asymmetric reality, and omits Israel's Zionist imperialism and its disregard of Palestinians' human rights and dignity.

Moreover, to partner with Israel has nothing to do with a “common determination to build a more just global order”³² as suggested by Sezibera. Since 2016, Israel has focused on countries such as South Sudan, Chad, Niger, Mali, Nigeria, and Cameroon through the sales of armaments and sharing of military and security expertise.³³ Israel also pursues African political partnerships in contexts of corruption:

Kenya is one of Israel’s success stories. In November 2017, Netanyahu attended the inauguration of Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, who supposedly received an astonishing 98% of votes in the last elections. While Kenyans rose in rebellion against their corrupt ruling classes, Netanyahu was seen embracing Kenyatta as a dear friend and ally. Netanyahu’s strategy in Kenya—and the rest of Africa—has been based on the same logic, where Israel would use its security technology to support corrupt and undemocratic regimes, in exchange for their political support.³⁴

The official Israeli narrative of victimhood, innocence, and peaceful intentions cannot be taken at face value. Its attempts to win the trust of African states by offering investment, trading and tourism opportunities, and development aid in the form of solar, water, and agricultural technology must be viewed critically. In fact, Israel lies to its own Jewish citizens and to other Jews. Every Jewish respondent in my doctoral research protested against Israel’s sharing of disinformation.³⁵ One of the key insights that triggered them to campaign for inclusive rights was their understanding that the tension between Israel and the Palestinians is not a clash between peers, but “a systemic, political and militaristic oppression which benefits Israel and in which the Palestinians suffer the most.”³⁶ An Israeli who spoke of the massive gap between reality and what he was led to believe exclaimed, “I’m furious and angry. We were lied to. . . . On religious and spiritual and existential levels I don’t want to live a lie. I lived a lie growing up and I’m furious about it!”³⁷ Expressing similar emotions, another Israeli felt turmoil and was “upset with the system, with the commanders, the teachers, my parents and everyone. I felt lied to. I felt that everything is a big lie around me. I felt that they turned all of this generation into murderers.”³⁸ In fact, all the research respondents—whether Jewish or not—objected to the plethora of misinformation that skews discussions to hide inequalities and the fact that Israel, who holds the power, has no intention of granting Palestinians a just peace in line with international law.³⁹

The abuse of both Judaism and Christianity to justify the wholesale oppression of Palestinians was another major reason why the respondents in the study became activists. Like the Jewish respondents, the Christians felt that the proverbial rug was ripped from under their feet when they realized modern Israel’s true nature and agenda. “Israel, who are meant to be the light to

the world according to the Old Testament . . . have become darkness to the world, represented God as a man, a God of no justice,” remarked a deeply religious South African struggle veteran. In his view, the “God of Christianity . . . has been so dragged in the mud by first the Israeli State—the Zionist state, but also by the Christian Western Zionism and the complacency of the rest of the Christian world.”⁴⁰ But for Israel and its supporters, the demographic significance of Christians in Africa and their influence on politics is a strategic opportunity to offer development support wrapped up in lies about the identity and agenda of Israel in exchange for the loyalty of African states.

AT STAKE: THE INTEGRITY OF CHRISTIANITY

Africa’s dominant religions are Islam and Christianity. Most Christians in Africa do not distinguish between the people of Israel of the Bible and the modern state of Israel. This was clear, for example, in 2017 at the twenty-sixth General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). Representatives of over eighty million Christians from all over the world gathered in Leipzig. WCRC members include churches from Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Reunion, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In plenary and other discussions, most African delegates spoke of the Bible’s people Israel and the modern Zionist state as if they are one and the same entity.

In their in-depth historical and critical analysis of land promises and the history of occupation, South African scholars Spangenberg and Van der Westhuizen found no clear evidence in the Bible of exactly where the borders of the so-called Promised Land would run.⁴¹ Their detailed analysis shows that “Israel’s purported right to the territory cannot be legitimized through claims of occupancy,” because Arab people have been in control of the region for far longer than any other group.⁴² The authors described and meticulously graphed who lived in the area and when. In short, Israelites, Jews, and Israelis occupied the region for almost 500 years, namely from 930–587/6 BCE, again from 142–63 BCE and finally from 1948 until today. Christians and Muslim groups occupied the region for more than 1,400 years. The authors conclude that arguments that Israel has all the right to all the land for biblical, religious and historical reasons are ungrounded and mask Israel’s neo-colonial advancement of “Western white geopolitical control over the Middle East.”⁴³

Spangenberg and Van der Westhuizen also highlight that Abraham's descendants evidently cannot be some pure Jewish race thousands of years later.⁴⁴ Likewise, Israeli historian Shlomo Sand unpacks historical, social, religious, genetic, and territorial myths to explain why the notion of one pure Jewish race is scientifically impossible. The precise meaning of what it means to be "Jewish" was neither clear at the inception of the Jewish state nor can be proven genetically. "As of today, no study based on anonymous DNA samples has succeeded in identifying a genetic marker specific to Jews, and it is not likely that any study ever will."⁴⁵ "Just as Israel was unable to decide on its territorial borders" since its inception, it has been struggling for decades "to draw the boundaries of its national identity."⁴⁶ The myth of a homogenous Jewish people that has existed for four thousand years ignores religious conversions, interfaith marriages, and other forms of integration. According to historical evidence, most modern Jews actually descend from converts whose native lands were spread across the Middle East and Eastern Europe,⁴⁷ and hence notions such as "Eretz Israel" and *aliyah* are ideological inventions to promote Zionist imperialism.⁴⁸ Likewise, to claim that the world's Jews are the authentic descendants of Abraham or the "children of Israel" are inventions that aim to rationalize the confiscation of Palestinian land. To embrace this claim is to reject contextual theology and the inclusive spirituality of the Gospel, turning the Bible into a "book of secular history"⁴⁹ fixed into linear time and space to elevate and privilege Jews over all others. Embracing this myth of might and superiority ignores the non-hierarchical, cosmic bond between all people, opposing Palestinian and other Christians' beliefs in a compassionate God who values all human beings equally, and denying the *kairos* quality of time that calls Christians to prophetic action when faced by crises and injustice.

After much interaction on the topic and lengthy debates, the WCRC's General Council adopted a resolution⁵⁰ affirming that "with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake." The resolution specified six action steps, including instructing the WCRC Secretariat to initiate a study and discernment program to educate Christians on the matter. It further encouraged churches to evaluate their "mission, education and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine in light of the witness of Palestinian Christians." The Council urged churches to respond, "as they understand the Reformed Communion's commitments to human rights and the protections of international law." In recognizing the need to hear and meet with Palestinian Christians, the General Council asked its Executive Committee "to encourage and support (with practical help from member churches) delegations to visit the region to connect with the present-day Christian community" generally known as "the living stones of the Holy

Land” to witness the situation of Palestinian Christians and to “express support for their desires for freedom and self-determination.”

While the historic resolution was adopted unanimously by a show of color-coded cards from the delegates at their respective tables, most delegates from Africa (with the notable exception of South African delegates) abstained from voting. The South African clergy who made valuable contributions in the debates, and who voted in favor, revealed in private discussions that many if not most of their fellow Christians in Africa also confuse the biblical Israel with the modern state and conflate the Israelites of the Bible with contemporary Jews. Indeed, on many occasions I have listened to South African Christians who accept that the fulfilment of biblical prophecies means that contemporary Jews should return to the State of Israel. God, they believe, has a special plan for Jews, and because this path is ordained by God, Christians may not judge it. This literalist, causal logic is underpinned by the myth of Jews as a homogenous people. For many to be on the side of Jews is to be on the side of God, and those who bless Israel are assumed to be blessed by God. These and other tenets of Christian Zionism are held along a wide spectrum of Protestants, from progressive to the most conservative⁵¹ (see also Braverman in this volume). Many Christians who do not associate with apocalyptic Zionism also associate with Zionist myths.

When these Christians discover the unjust and asymmetric reality by visiting Palestine or by attending workshops or seminars, most are deeply shocked. In December 2012, for example, I accompanied a group of twelve South African Christian church leaders to Israel and occupied Palestine. The delegates included the Southern African heads of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, the Secretary General of the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa, senior members of the Roman Catholic and the Dutch Reformed Churches and a representative of South African youth. Upon their return the Group of Twelve expressed some of their discoveries as follows:

We did not expect the extent to which Israel violates international laws to oppress the Palestinian people. Our exposure to East Jerusalem and the West Bank was overwhelming, one which traumatised us. However, even though we experienced that the Palestinians live in open-air prisons, they were still able to inspire us with their dignity and their commitment for a just peace based on human dignity for both themselves and the Israelis. “We want more than human rights,” they told us, “we want our human dignity and reconciliation.”

Being South African, it felt like walking into another apartheid ambush. We witnessed violations of the international human rights law and the international humanitarian law on so many levels—the multiple house demolitions, the discriminatory legal system, the daily intimidation, the Apartheid Wall and

its associated regime of restrictions on movement and access, the damage to olive groves, the imprisonment of a large percentage of Palestinians including children, the confiscation of water and land, the closure of previously bustling streets and businesses, separate pavements and a system whereby the colour of Palestinian vehicles' number plates restrict them to certain roads.

[. . .]

What we have discerned is in alignment with what the Palestinian Christians propose in their document called "A Moment of Truth: a word of faith, hope and love from the heart of the Palestinian suffering." This urgent appeal to the international community proposes resistance to Israel's occupation as an act of love.

[. . .]

We are conscious how a literal reading of the Bible, one where the Israel of the Old Testament is confused with the State of Israel, can result in the oppression of people. We confirm that the crisis in the Holy Land is in essence not a religious conflict, but a political crisis brought about by the violation of international law. As South Africans we believe we have a moral obligation to speak up and to stand with the oppressed. We do not want to side against the Israelis, but we do want to uphold international law and fight against any form of injustice.⁵²

In another example, the Deputy General Secretary of the Council of African Independent Churches expressed his horror after a visit with the South African Council of Churches in 2017, as follows:

The church leadership found Israeli abuses of Palestinian human rights to be appalling! Israel has mastered well from the South African apartheid regime and actually surpassed its architect, Hendrik Verwo[e]rd, through its design and application!

[. . .]

What else to say save to plea with the Israeli community to refrain from diabolic acts of apartheid towards Palestinians! Question is, how much holy does the Holy Land still possess???

Every effort including BDS boycott of Israel programs should and must be pursued to dismantle this Israeli Apartheid! I urge the South African government to lead from the front. One of the first acts must be the withdrawal of our flag and symbols from the so-called South Africa Forest built by Israeli supporters in and on the destroyed Palestinian village of Lubyah!!!⁵³

The myth and lies of political and secular Zionism mixed with Christian Zionism and biblical hermeneutics devoid of contextuality is a dangerous

combination that was turned into a powerful propaganda tool to rationalize and sanctify the death of Palestinians and their dispossession from their land. The superiority of Israel has been hailed for decades at the cost of the Palestinians, and Israeli violence has been reframed as a necessity sanctioned as the fulfilment of divine will. As phrased by Spangenberg and Van der Westhuizen, the relentless “destruction of Palestinians becomes normalized as something of their own making as ‘lesser human beings’ who do not qualify for land or citizenship, and against whom violence is acceptable.”⁵⁴ Without realizing these realities, millions of Christians in Africa have been misled to pledge loyalty to the Zionist state.

AT STAKE: THE SPIRIT OF AFRICA

Through their misguided loyalty to the Zionist state, millions of Christians in Africa act in support of a global dispensation that violates not only the integrity of the Christian faith, but also indigenous spiritual understandings of what it means to be human.

Africa has fifty-four countries, of which forty-seven are in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁵ Christianity as the dominant religious tradition in sub-Saharan Africa includes Catholic, Protestant, African Initiated, Orthodox, and other denominations.⁵⁶ The heterogeneous and umbrella identity of African Initiated Churches with its thousands of churches represents substantial parts of the population in many countries with networks that reach into remote areas. To be “African Initiated” means to deliberately identify with “African solutions.” These churches were founded in Africa, by Africans, and expressly for Africans to dissociate with European and North American mission influences.⁵⁷ Being one of the largest and fastest-growing religious communities on the continent, about a third of Africa’s Christians are members of African Initiated Churches.⁵⁸ However, due to the highly dynamic and fluid nature of African Christianity, substantial shifts between denominations can occur within relatively short periods of time. Moreover, many members of Catholic or historical Protestant Churches are affiliated also with African Initiated Churches, although this is not reflected in official statistics. Another factor that contributes to an underestimation of membership in official figures is the lower degree of institutionalization, especially among the thousands of smaller African Initiated Churches.

Given this fluidity, Öhlman, Gräb, and Frost⁵⁹ use a historical lens to distinguish broadly between three developments in African Initiated Churches. In the first, the *Independent or Nationalist Churches* gained ecclesial independence from mission churches, starting in the 1880s. The next two developments are the *African Independent Churches* that originated since

the start of the twentieth century, and the *African Pentecostal* or *Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches* that originated in the 1970s.⁶⁰ Both share a history of institutional and financial independence from the global North and both are demographically significant. Both also resist being usurped by “mechanistic worldviews originating by Western Enlightenment cultures of modernity.”⁶¹ They differ in the extent to which they associate with indigenous African culture, traditions and cosmology:

- (a) As a grassroots response to Christianity, the African Independent Churches fully reclaim indigenous African culture, traditions, and cosmological symbols in their praxis. For non-Africans the emphasis on the agency of the spiritual realm and ancestors for everyday life tend to stand out. But to own Christ’s message in the context of one’s own cosmology is an empowering and authentic act of identification. Bowers-Du Toit⁶² asserts that African Independent Churches’ conceptualizing of Christianity represents a socio-cultural protest against the colonizing of Africa that suppresses and devalues African solutions to life. After centuries of abuse the choice for an African-centered Christianity resists outside influences that disregard, disrespect, or exploit Africans’ identity and dignity.
- (b) The more recent development of urban-centered and prosperity-preaching Pentecostals is inspired by North American televangelism. African Pentecostalism should not be confused with the North American movement. As with African Independent Churches, they are “African” and “independent” of Western mission denominations. They are “indigenous both in leadership and resource mobilization” and they too incorporate cosmological symbols that relate, for example, to the power of the spirit world and its mystical causality.⁶³ Thus, although they seem culturally less traditional than the African Independent Churches, they also resist being shaped by forms of Western imperialism that devalue Africans’ agency and dignity.

In both movements the notion of development is not just a material concept, but a deeply spiritual concept that is intertwined with the material reality.⁶⁴ Daniel Okoh, the Nigerian Bishop and International Chairman of the Organization of African Instituted Churches which is the largest umbrella body of African Initiated Churches, explained as follows:

People from Sub-Saharan Africa . . . are highly religious, and anything that touches the religion of the people, they take it very seriously. And because of our colonial history, there is a way that people look at secular things. . . . They look at it as government and government is still seen as something that is very

far away. But if it is religion, people take it to heart. And so, when you are talking about bringing the spiritual and the . . . the social, it is important because, it is only by doing that, that you can actually engage the active participation of the people. And the people would come into it and say, “this thing, God is in this thing, you must be very, very careful.” That is how you can get something positive in transparency, in accountability and all that, because of the spiritual aspect. . . . So, for Africa, because of the religious nature, you’ll always find a way of using it to get the . . . commitment of the people to the project, whatever it is. If it is water, it must be explained spiritually. If it is [an] agricultural project, it must be explained spiritually. . . . Honestly, if you don’t do that, you will lose it.⁶⁵

Whether Pentecostal or African Independent, the praxis of African Initiated Churches espouses a dynamic relation between the seen and the unseen realms to encompass all aspects of being human in a monistic view of all that is out there. The Holy Spirit and ancestors are understood as part of a vital life force with direct impact on the social fabric of daily life. As Öhlman *et al.*⁶⁶ highlight, “development is part of religion.” From this spiritual perspective development is sustainable if it respects and improves not only material and social dimensions of life, but benefits also the ecological, political, spiritual, individual, and any other dimensions relevant to enable access to abundant life.⁶⁷ There is an intertwined reciprocal relation between the individual and the communal. The Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, for example, use the term *Ilosiwaju* to refer to holistic social improvement that advances the human character. For them individual character development is encapsulated by *Omoluabi*, which is associated with dignity, integrity, humility, respect and other culturally approved standards of behavior that transform an individual to a person of honor and promote community well-being.⁶⁸ The South African understanding of the dynamic relation between the individual and the communal that permeates every aspect of life is known as *Ubuntu*. Being human through others carries existential value. When positioned positively, social coercion is expressed through love or humanism, but when it is used negatively or reveals its dark side, it instills fear and the desire for consensus and inclusivity is derailed into an oppressive collectivism or communalism. Therefore, a healthy and dignified positioning of *Ubuntu* incorporates respect and hence both distance and relation. It never reduces the other to any specific attribute.⁶⁹ Without such connectedness with all that represents human flourishing, development has no spiritual contribution—and without spiritual meaning, development is perceived to disrespect the African consciousness and view of reality. Put differently, development initiatives not woven into the spiritual fiber are viewed as mechanistic, fractured, unintegrated, and forced. If the support comes from a non-African party, such assistance is

viewed also as imperial. If development is to have moral integrity, it should not be a means to an end or merely instrumental, but it must benefit both the seen and the unseen realms, as both are equally relevant and the one cannot improve without the other.

If one considers, for example, the partnership between Israel and Ghana, it seems—at least at first glance—as if Israel acknowledges the local Christians' spirituality. Yet a closer look reveals that Israel's respect for values such as honesty, transparency, human dignity, and community well-being, as well as the integrity of the partnership itself, raise questions.

The Ghanaian population totaled twenty-six million in 2012, of whom 69 percent were Christian. Of these, 44 percent were African Initiated Christians, 22 percent were Catholic, 21 percent were Protestant and the remaining 13 percent associated with other denominations.⁷⁰ As noted earlier, the boundaries between Christian denominations in Africa are not rigid and there is some movement and shared belonging between African Initiated Churches and other Christian traditions. In March 2018, President Akufo-Addo unveiled plans for a new interdenominational cathedral that was envisioned as a "physical embodiment of unity, harmony and spirituality" for people of all faiths in Ghana. According to Akufo-Addo, the building would embody "national purpose." In addition to being a house of service and prayer, it would serve also "as the venue for formal state occasions of a religious nature, such as presidential inaugurations, state funerals and national thanksgiving services."⁷¹ However, the construction of an extravagant cathedral has been heavily criticized. Critics are concerned about the ecological impact, the huge costs, that other infrastructural needs will not be addressed, and that the cathedral is a way of promoting the position of Christianity in Ghana's identity. "The Christians are feeling a bit upstaged by what they consider a minority religion," noted Kwasi Prempeh, executive director of Ghana's Center for Democratic Development. "The Christians are saying, 'We have to flex our political muscles.'"⁷²

Ghana's current political leadership has close relations with Israel and the latter has positioned itself in this relation as a partner who is sensitive to the intimate connection between spirit, matter, and development in Africa. The Ghana Israel Alliance (GIA), which offers bi-lateral trade and relations "for cultural, *religious* and economic exchange" (author's emphasis), overtly links development support and religion.⁷³ Invoking Christian Zionist language, it refers to itself as a "much-needed" cultural pillar that is "a blessed initiative and those in it will be blessed."⁷⁴ In a ceremony on March 5, 2020, Akufo-Addo laid the foundation stone for the new cathedral in Accra.⁷⁵ The stone hailed from Jerusalem, and it was a gift from Shani Cooper, Israeli Ambassador to Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. According to Cooper, the stone's special spiritual properties will sanctify the new cathedral and protect its foundation and the land on which it will be built, because for Christians,

Jerusalem is the holiest of cities and Israel's involvement in the construction will strengthen ties between the two countries.⁷⁶ The Ghanaian president, in turn, spoke of the prestigious value of the cathedral that "will be an iconic infrastructure for national, regional and international pilgrimage and tourism. It will be a monument to religious liberty. Its construction deserves the full support of the nation."⁷⁷

Neither the ambassador nor any of the media articles covering the event mentioned Israel's systemic oppression of Christians in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jericho, Hebron, Haifa, Nazareth, and elsewhere in Israel and Palestine. While the State of Israel was portrayed as a dignified friend, the President of Ghana supports this narrative by here suggesting that the bond with Israel is honorable and will promote community well-being. How Israel's civil, political, cultural, racial and religious discrimination against non-Jews can inspire "religious liberty," or sanctify a Christian cathedral, is not addressed; indeed, these questions are completely denied.

Africans who fall for the lies of Israel and its supporters compromise their personal and communal honor and their spiritual well-being. To willfully use the spiritual language of an African view of life to mislead Ghanaians and any other Africans lacks integrity. It does not promote the greater good, and it is not sustainable. To trust Israel and its supporters without scrutiny is to put the spirit of Africa at stake.

CONCLUSION

Zionism is not limited to the geopolitical entities of Israel and Palestine. Nor is it simply a matter of systemic racial discrimination against Arabs nor an attempt to create a safe haven for Jews. Rather, Israel's Zionism is a project of dehumanization and neocolonialism that is transcending the borders of Israel-Palestine and has set its sights on Africa and its churches. Many countries may foster ties with others to pursue their agendas on the international stage, but Zionist Israel may be the only national entity today to have abused the Bible for more than seven decades to silence or rationalize the wholesale oppression of a people. To accept Israel's development aid violates also the continent's indigenous spirituality that seeks authentic spiritual and material wellbeing. The short-term gains of accepting Israel's development aid return the shackles of slavery and the clamps of colonialism to this continent through a religious endorsement of neo-imperialism. It is as if Christ is crucified again—this time in Africa.

We as Christian Africans cannot allow this. We have to educate ourselves, seek out those Jews and Christians who will be our allies in opposing this betrayal of our values as human beings and followers of Jesus, and step forward boldly as global drivers of social justice and moral leadership.

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3. Inshallah is the Arabic for "God willing."

4. International law here refers to all the laws deemed applicable by the United Nations Human Rights Council in respect of the relation between Israel and the Palestinians. It consists of International Human Rights Law which governs respect, protection, and the advancement of the full range of social, economic, cultural, civil, and political human rights; treaties and rulings by the United Nations Security as well as other frameworks and principles applicable.

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Chapter 13

Zionism, the Palestinian Call, and the Meaning of the Land

A Challenge to the Church

Mark Braverman

In 2015 clergy and church officials from across the denominational spectrum gathered in Johannesburg for a workshop on Israel and Palestine organized by the South African Council of Churches (SACC). Most came with little knowledge of the history of the Zionist movement, the colonial settlement and ethnic cleansing of Palestine, and the current situation for five million Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and the State of Israel. The morning session opened with an exhortation from the head of the SACC to heed the cry of the Palestinian Christians to witness their suffering and to stand with them in their call for justice. They heard a Palestinian theologian talk about the role of land in the New Testament as a place of peace and reconciliation for all people. They heard the testimony of South Africans who had served in the World Council of Church's Ecumenical Accompaniment Program, defending the human rights of Palestinians at the checkpoints, villages, and cities of occupied Palestine. I was asked to speak as a scholar and activist about my transformation, as a Jew raised as a Zionist, upon witnessing the oppression and humiliation of the Palestinians while visiting the West Bank. I shared what I had learned from Palestinian Liberation Theology about Jesus as a Palestinian Jew living under Roman occupation. I described how I learned from the Palestinian Christians about the Jesus who, grieved by how the fundamental principles of the Torah were betrayed by the Jewish leadership in league with Rome, invoked the Hebrew scriptures' message of compassion for the poor and the prophetic value of the equality of all humankind. I shared my realization that Jews and Christians alike, in confronting the reality of modern Israel, were facing a spiritual and ethical crisis no less urgent than that faced by Jesus in the Palestine of 2,000 years ago.

It didn't take long for the message to register with these South Africans. In a breakout session, the bishop of an apostolic church turned to me said, "What we heard today has turned us around. We need to re-read our Bibles!" He had realized that this was not only a human rights issue—that we were standing on a theological battleground, and that our understanding of the Bible itself was at stake. And then the bishop did something even more extraordinary. Turning to the young pastor who served as his assistant, he asked, "How can we bring this back to the people in our churches? They are going to say that by questioning the actions of the State of Israel and the divine right of the Jewish people to possess the land, *we are going against the Word of God!*" In that moment I realized that this was the task before us—how were we going to equip clergy, teachers, and church leaders to educate their parishioners, their students, and their colleagues, not only on behalf of the suffering Palestinians, but for the sake of their Christian faith?

At the conclusion of the workshop I was besieged by pastors and church leaders, asking if I could come to their churches with this message—and were there materials and resources available? Christians recognize a *kairos*, a moment of urgency and opportunity. They knew that the integrity of their faith was on the line. They knew that they had to go back and reread their Bibles.

A HUMAN RIGHTS DISASTER

Modern political Zionism was founded by Jews in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century as a movement of liberation from millennia of slaughter and marginalization. But for the Palestinian people, the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine has been an ongoing catastrophe of dispossession and loss of fundamental human rights. Still regarded by the great majority of the world to be an ethically, historically, and biblically justified ideology, Zionism has in fact produced a project of settler colonialism that not only had no place in the twentieth century, but that, appallingly, continues to this day.¹ By the 1949 ceasefire that established the *de facto* borders of the State of Israel, three-quarters of a million Palestinians had been expelled from their villages and farms and from the vibrant communities they established in the cities and towns. Their descendants now number close to six million, in the refugee camps of Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, and Lebanon, and in the diaspora. Since the conquest by Israel of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights in 1967, the annexation and colonial settlement of remaining Palestinian lands has continued, in violation of international law and with the diplomatic and financial support of world powers. Palestinians in those territories live under various levels of military and administrative restriction on

movement, commerce, and growth. Palestinians remaining inside the de facto borders of Israel are consigned to second-class citizenship.

The appeal of the Palestinian people for the restoration of their homeland and their human rights has brought this issue to the attention of the world at large through successive and persistent waves of resistance, including the 2005 Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), and calls to the churches on a global and ecumenical level from the Christians of Palestine.² In December 2019, Palestinians and international supporters gathering in Bethlehem called attention to the increasingly brutal and aggressive nature of Israeli actions against the Palestinians, including the murderous suppression of the March of Return in Gaza, the increase in Israel's relentless and illegal settlement project, and, most recently in the political realm, U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the legitimization of West Bank settlements.³ Finally, the State of Israel's recent adoption of the Nation State Law, declaring Israel to be the nation-state of the Jewish people and officially relegating non-Jews to secondary status in the words of the conference statement "clearly reveals that de facto apartheid has become de jure apartheid."⁴

A MODERN HERESY

With roots going back to the English Reformation, Zionism has exerted a powerful pull on Christian belief and practice, justifying settler colonialism and culminating in the twentieth century with the embrace of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.⁵ In the Christian Zionist reading of the Bible the identity of the ancient Israelites is transferred directly to Jewish Israelis and indeed to all Jewish people today. The Jewish claim to the land and the establishment of the State of Israel is understood as the fulfilment of biblical promises. The Bible has thus been called into the service of the ethnic-nationalist agenda of the State of Israel. This eschatology was strengthened by the 1967 conquest, in which the occupation of all of Jerusalem by the State of Israel was seen as a signal of the imminent return of Jesus.

Many Christians who do not ascribe to these end-times beliefs about the State of Israel still accept the Old Testament promise of land as literal and in force. In the aftermath of the genocide of European Jews by the Nazis, Zionism became firmly established in mainline Christianity because of the deeply felt Christian responsibility for Jewish suffering at the hands of Christian Europe over the millennia.⁶ As a result, mainline Christians tend to accept unquestioningly the equation of criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, effectively granting the Jewish people a right to the land on the basis of their past suffering and conferring innocence to the Jewish people for any sins

committed in claiming that privilege. Unwritten rules dictate that although Jews and non-Jews alike may pay lip service to the cause for Palestinian rights and to the concept of a Palestinian state, they may not advance any arguments or efforts that challenge fundamental Zionist assumptions. Christian Zionism today represents a challenge for the church. In both its fundamentalist and liberal forms, it is heretical and unbiblical because it negates the core of gospel teachings against territoriality and ethnic triumphalism. Nevertheless, until recently it has remained unchallenged across the ecumenical spectrum and has powerfully influenced political support for Israel's colonialism and expansionism at the expense of Palestinians.

A THEOLOGY OF LAND

The biblical narrative of chosen people and land promise has been used throughout modern history as justification for colonialism in its various forms, including settler colonialism, ethnic cleansing, and chattel slavery. There is therefore a moral, political, and theological case to be made for a critique of biblical scholarship and hermeneutics with respect to Zionism and the various themes, concepts, and doctrines bound up with it. The question asked by the bishop on that day in Johannesburg thus remains to be answered: What can we offer as an alternative to the reading of the Bible and the theologies, virtually universally accepted, that serve to grant the Jewish people a superior right to Palestine? And so we must pose the question: what is the meaning of the biblical land promise?

In 2008 in Bern Switzerland, American theologian Harvey Cox addressed the World Council of Churches (WCC) Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum conference on "Promised Land":

What do we really mean by "promised land?" How has the term been hijacked and used for various political reasons, when maybe that is not the significance of the texts at all? Ancient Israel is often confused with modern Israel. They are not the same. We can talk about an integral relationship which must be there theologically between Christians and the Jewish people. Jesus was Jewish; the whole background of Christianity comes from the Jewish people, but the Jewish people and the modern State of Israel, though they overlap in certain ways, are not the same, and therefore we have to be thoughtful and self-critical about how that theme is dealt with.⁷

The fact that land has been connected directly to faith and divinity itself in Western history renders even more urgent the requirement for church leaders, clergy, theologians and educators to revisit a theology of land as they

confront the challenge presented today by the oppression of the Palestinian people. Heeding Cox's cautionary words, we must be willing to challenge the view that the land promise is frozen in the divine promises of Genesis.

AN EVOLVING CONSTRUCT

The biblical concept of land follows an evolutionary trajectory, beginning in Genesis and continuing through Revelation. The Genesis narrative sets in motion the drama of a transition from the tribal to the universal—from a concept of a territory promised, conquered, and lost to that of the establishment of a global order of social justice where place is transformed from territory into metaphor. Land in the Old Testament is inextricably related to the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann describes the land as a stage upon which the drama of the divine-human relationship is enacted.⁸ Although earlier in his writing Brueggemann appeared to grant the Jewish people a special, albeit conditional, entitlement to the land, more recently he has brought his theology of promise into conversation with contemporary events. “This ideology of land entitlement,” Brueggemann points out, “serves the contemporary State of Israel. . . . It is clear that the modern State of Israel has effectively merged old traditions of land entitlement and the most vigorous military capacity thinkable for a modern state . . . the same ideology of entitlement has served derivatively the Western powers that have used that claim as a rationale for colonization. . . . *That is, land entitlement leads to land occupation*” (emphasis in original).⁹

Kingdom of God 1.0

In the Old Testament narrative, the land plays a central role in the unfolding of the covenantal relationship. God chooses one family to begin the process of creating a society based on compassion and lovingkindness. This family, soon to grow into a tribe and then into a nation, is special, *kadosh*—literally, set apart—from other peoples. The grant is unequivocal: “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram,” saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.” (Gen. 15:13–14, 18–21). It is thus clearly acknowledged that the territory is already inhabited by other tribes. Further in the narrative the program of conquest and ethnic cleansing is laid out: “I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to

the Euphrates River. I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out before you” (Exod. 23:31). The possession of the land through conquest, ethnic cleansing and the establishment of monarchy/theocracy is recounted in detail in the books of Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings. This is Kingdom of God 1.0.

Kingdom of God 1.5

The promise of a land is central to the narrative, but it is not static, and it is not unconditional. The drama continues in the prophetic tradition, which, in addition to calling out the abuses and hypocrisy of the Temple cult, the prophets issue cautions with respect to hegemonic, territorial identity. In I Samuel, the people demand a king. God tells Samuel to warn the people that a king will effectively subvert the covenant: he will regard the land as his personal possession, distribute resources unfairly, disrupt community and family life, and ultimately bring the wrath of God down upon the entire people (1 Sam. 8:4–22). This is precisely what happens—ultimately the kingdom falls and the people are vomited out of the land, just as the Levitical and Deuteronomic warnings predict. But even through these changes, the particularistic frame of the original covenant persists. Throughout, the People of Israel retain their special relationship with God and with that the primary claim to the land. Although the Israelites are enjoined to treat them justly, non-Israelites are “strangers,” or “resident aliens” as the word *ger* is sometimes translated. All through the vicissitudes of the divided kingdom, the destruction of the northern kingdom, the sacking of Jerusalem, the exile and the return, this primary tie of people, God and land is maintained—the promise of restoration is never withdrawn. The return recorded in the Book of Jeremiah and chronicled in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is a *restoration*. *The Temple in Jerusalem is to be rebuilt—this is never in question.*

Kingdom of God 2.0

In its original proclamation, the Kingdom of God was specific—the expression of what Catholic priest Michael Prior has termed a myth of origin—“a genre encountered in virtually every society . . . deployed in the service of particular ideologies.”¹⁰ Fast forward to first-century Palestine: the historical frame is the Roman Empire—the ultimate expression of tyranny and greed. The Temple is still standing. Jerusalem is ruled by a client government serving that empire. This is the context of Jesus’ ministry, which is a direct response to the evil of that arrangement and the frame in which his revolutionary concept of Kingdom of God is proclaimed. The Old Testament, redacted between the sixth and eighth centuries during the Judean monarchy,

serves as a national epic—a group establishing its identity and its claim to peoplehood and territory. In radical contrast, the gospels were created in the context of indigenous resistance to the tyranny of an occupying power. Theologian Walter Wink writes about Jesus' statement "my Kingdom is not of this world." Wink points out that in the Gospel of John the Greek word translated as "world" is *kosmos*—which translates as *order* or *system*.¹¹ This world, Jesus is saying, this system of empire which seeks only to increase its own power and reach at the expense of communities, families, human health, and dignity, this world order will give over to the Kingdom of God—something completely different.

Some progressive Christian theologians, themselves staunch supporters of justice for Palestinians, argue for the presence of a universalist strain in the Old Testament that finds its full expression in the New Testament.¹² But the argument for continuity across the scriptures with respect to this dimension discounts the theological and historical earthquake of Jesus' radical challenge to Jewish particularity and exceptionalism. The Old Testament is a study in contrasts. It is without doubt a revolutionary document, a radical break from the ancient worldview in which humans were powerless against arbitrary, amoral forces. But it is at the same time the vehicle for the transmission of a tribal myth of origin, a narrative in which the exceptional nature of the Jewish people plays a central role. On the one hand, the monotheistic revolution represented by the Old Testament elevated human agency and the imperative for social justice—"there shall be no poor among you!" (Deut. 15:4). But on the other hand, it firmly maintains the concept of a beloved, special people—it is "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" that is charged with the mission to carry out God's plan for a just society (Exod. 19:6). Society must be just—but there remains always the "other"—the "stranger" from whom one must vigilantly preserve one's specialness and over whom one must exert political and social dominance. Even the prophets never step out of this framework of exceptionalism, theocracy, and political hegemony. Significantly, the final words in the last book of the Old Testament (as it is organized in Jewish tradition) is Cyrus's proclamation that the exiled Jews may "go up" to Jerusalem, returning from exile to a restored Temple and monarchy (2 Chron. 36:23).

The power of the gospels lies in this contrast. The New Testament places compassion for all, especially the most vulnerable, above the power and privilege of one group over another, and devotion to the one God above nationalistic, territorial, or tribal strivings. Jesus's vision of the Kingdom of God dispenses, finally, with the concept of God's indwelling in the land, and of a particular location as the place where God is to be worshiped. In Jesus's Kingdom of God, both land and peoplehood lose their specificity and exclusivity. The idea of God dwelling in a house built by a tribe or nation has been eclipsed. The land clause in the covenant has disappeared, as has the concept

of a favored, beloved people. In his vision of the Kingdom, Jesus jettisons the concept of *Am kadosh*—a people, literally, “set apart.” The special privilege of one family/tribe/nation separated from the rest of humanity is over. One could say that, having served its purpose, it has been allowed to lapse so that humanity could move forward with a new vision of universal love. It is a vision in which, as recounted in the story of Pentecost in the book of Acts, the apostles were sent forth, having been granted the power to speak all the languages of the world, saying no to borders and to divisions between nations, ethnicities, and faith traditions, going out into the wide world proclaiming: *this is for everyone*. Kingdom of God, 2.0.

Theology is not frozen in time. Doing theology means examining what is demanded of us in every historical era—as Jesus instructed, “interpreting the present time” (literally, *the kairos*). The *kairos* of the Palestine of 2,000 years ago resonates powerfully in the political, sociological, and theological challenge presented by today’s Palestine. Expressing the urgent need for a “new hermeneutic of liberation,” theologian Mitri Raheb enjoins us to read the Bible “through the eyes of the Palestinians.” Raheb directs us to the transformative vision of land contained in the gospels. The New Testament, he writes, “introduces a new lens . . . challeng[ing] the then-existing exclusive national and religious narratives . . . instead of identifying with one people over against the others, which is the traditional way of forming one’s identity.”¹³ New Testament scholar Gary Burge argues that “the New Testament relocates the properties of the Holy Land and discovers them in Christ himself. . . . For a Christian to return to a Jewish territoriality is to deny fundamentally what had transpired in the incarnation.”¹⁴

SET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER

The church in the second half of the twentieth century played an important role in the fight against racism at national, global, and ecumenical levels. Born in the African American churches, the civil rights movement in the United States radically changed the political and social landscape of America. Theologians and clergy in South Africa played a leading role in the anti-apartheid struggle, ultimately mobilizing the churches on a global level to move governments to bring an end to the racist system. The ecumenical movement, born after World War I in an effort to prevent future wars, and revived after World War II in the form of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in the 1960s acknowledged racism as the challenge of the times. In the face of withering condemnation by some churches and governments (the most common charge was that the WCC was supporting terrorism), the WCC established the Program to Combat Racism, which lent direct material support to anti-colonial struggles in Africa. But a countercurrent, expressed

in the commitment to privilege, exclusivism, and power on the part of the church has persisted. When the church threw in with the Roman Empire in the fourth century, Christianity was reprogrammed to accept a reversion to the archaic, exceptionalist view of land that was supposed to have ended at Pentecost. Taking possession of the Holy Land through the Crusades was one manifestation of this shift, presaging the nationalism that would flower in Europe centuries later and which represents one facet of Christian Zionism. The Jewish Zionist movement that began at the end of the nineteenth century actively sought and gained the support of Christian Zionists. Today, the State of Israel attempts to exploit the Zionism embedded in the theology and attitudes of both churches and governments in Africa in pursuit of its neocolonial agenda. In this volume's essay "Empire and African Initiated Churches: The price of Israel's lies" Marthie Momberg describes how Israel's economic colonialism masquerades as economic aid, facilitated by claims of historical and spiritual commonalities between the peoples of Africa and Israel; and Sara Ryan and Benjamin Parsalaw's "Assessing the Legal Realities of Zionism in Africa" exposes the white Eurocentric basis of political Zionism, describing Israel's renegeing not only on promises of aid but on the offers of asylum and "homecoming" to Israel for African Jews.

Irish priest and theologian Michael Prior, having witnessed first-hand the ethnic cleansing and oppression of the Palestinians, devoted the last decade of his life (he died in 2004) to making the connection between Zionism, colonialism, and the Bible. "The absence in biblical scholarship of concern for 'the natives,'" he wrote in 1999, "reflects the deeply ingrained Eurocentric, colonialist prejudice which characterizes virtually all historiography, as well as the discipline itself." Prior admonished his colleagues in the academy, calling on church institutions and seminaries to address oppression and racism as their primary responsibility as scholars and leaders: "Biblical scholarship must set its own house in order. . . . I can think of no circumstance in which such activity is not incumbent on a Christian exegete, *qua* Christian. . . . When the sacred pages are manipulated by forces of oppression, biblical scholars cannot continue to release themselves from the obligation of engaging in contemporary discourse. An exegesis which is not sensitive to the dispossessed people is an accomplice by act of omission to the act of dispossession."¹⁵

A KAIROS CALL

Prior's words were not heeded by the seminaries or the churches at denominational and national levels. But in 2009 a call emerged from the Christians of the Holy Land that was impossible to ignore. Entitled *A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering*, written by Palestinian clergy, theologians and civil society leaders from across

the ecumenical spectrum. Also known as *Kairos Palestine*, it clearly and boldly presented the signs of the times: a brutal and worsening occupation that was the continuation of a program of ethnic cleansing that had begun with the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. The document articulated a theology that required nonviolent resistance to the evil of occupation: “resistance with love as its logic.” Naming the Israeli occupation as sin, it called out to the international community, reserving its final appeal for the church itself: “What is the international community doing? What are the political leaders in Palestine, in Israel, and in the Arab world doing? What is the Church doing?”¹⁶ The document summons the church to its core mission:

The mission of the church is prophetic; to speak the Word of God courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events. If she does take sides, it is with the oppressed, to stand alongside them, just as Christ our Lord stood by the side of each poor person and each sinner, calling them to repentance, life, and the restoration of the dignity bestowed on them by God and that no one has the right to strip away.¹⁷

The theology is straightforward and contextual:

We declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice.¹⁸

How we understand land is the key to the authors’ opposition to the misuse of theology to justify dispossession and conquest:

Our land is God’s land, as is the case with all countries in the world. It is holy in as much as God is present in it, for God alone is holy and sanctifier. It is the duty of those of us who live here to respect the will of God for this land. It is our duty to liberate it from the evil of injustice and war. It is God’s land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love. This is indeed possible. God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God’s land: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”¹⁹

The Palestinian call has given birth to a global movement. It has been commended for study by congregations and denominations worldwide and has spawned *kairos* documents from church movements in Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Whereas the Palestinian document is the cry of the oppressed, the statements originating from the global church are the confessions of the complicit: powerful expressions about how their churches—sometimes in open collusion with governments—have supported tyranny and oppression. *Call to Action: U.S. Response to the Kairos Palestine document* was published in June 2012. It acknowledges the central role of the U.S. government in its unqualified and massive support for Israel: “As individuals and as church institutions, we have supported a system of control, inequality and oppression through misreading of our Holy Scriptures, flawed theology and distortions of history. We have allowed to go unchallenged theological and political ideas that have made us complicit in the oppression of the Palestinian people.”²⁰ Like the 1985 South African document that challenged the “church theology” that supported the unjust system, *Call to Action* directly addresses key theological and ecclesial issues that bear on a U.S. Christian response to the Palestinian call. It pledges to “[e]xamine flawed biblical interpretations and unexamined theology that have shaped attitudes and perceptions leading to and allowing the present injustice to continue unchallenged.”²¹

The U.S. document was followed in 2013 by *Time for Action: A British Christian Response to “Moment of Truth, the Palestine Kairos Document.”* It couples a critique of historic Christian Zionism with acknowledgment of “the unique historical responsibility of our nation for the present injustice visited on the Palestinian people. . . . This tragedy, which has led to 11 million Palestinians living in exile, in refugee camps, or under Israeli occupation, has its roots in Britain’s colonial past, and Britain’s self-interested pursuit of power and influence in the world.”²²

Responses to *Kairos Palestine* have also emerged from the global South, from nations where the struggle against colonial oppression is recent memory, if not ongoing. These documents express an acute sense of how the church has failed to fulfill its mission to stand with the poor and oppressed and how the Bible has served as an instrument of oppression. Published in 2011, *A Philippine Response to Kairos Palestine* delivers a bold declaration:

Not unlike the ancient Israelites who were too often rebuked by the prophets for failing to write the law in their hearts, most of contemporary Christianity have failed to grasp what is at the heart of Judeo-Christianity, and of the “Abrahamic” faith. We have walked unashamedly with an oppressive empire, unkindly and heartlessly walked past the victims of the violent politics of occupation, and consented to injustice with our silence.

“We repent from leaving them isolated for so long and for the absence of our commitment and unceasing prayers,” the declaration continues. “We will not accept that all Palestinian people continue to be debased, robbed of their honor and their divine image.”²³ *Kairos Palestina Brasil* followed in 2012. “The Bible,” asserts the document, “served as a guide for the colonial domination in Latina America and still today we feel the consequences of Christendom allied to imperial power. We reject any pretension to the use of the Bible as a weapon of discrimination and justification for abuse, dispossession and subordination of the Palestinian people.”

GOSPELS THAT FEAST ON DEATH

These confessional statements are powerfully grounded in the contextual realities of their authors. In the case of Brazil and the Philippines, the vivid memories of the colonial past and the continuing struggle against the cultural, economic, and political subjugation of indigenous peoples are explicitly stated. The document calls for an evaluation of how the Bible has been read and used: “We are committed with the critical reading and the overcoming of those readings and their cultural modes in our churches and communities” states *Kairos Brasil*.²⁴ The authors of the Philippine document express themselves on this topic with unrestrained passion: “Imperial discourses masquerading as ‘theologies’ and ‘gospels’ need be exposed for what they are: theologies and gospels that feast on death.” The comparisons drawn are raw and immediate:

The use of the Bible to justify occupation and ethnic cleansing must be exposed for what it is, an anti-biblical, anti-Christian theology that does nothing but instigate and perpetuate a theopraxis of unrestrained genocidal violence . . . a god-logic that easily buys on the crusader idea of a clash of civilizations—and the need for it to take place in “Megiddo,” including the latter’s spatial appropriations in places like Muslim Mindanao. It has not been unusual for Fundamentalist Christians in the Philippines to lump Palestinians with the Moros’ of Southern Philippines together.²⁵

Like the Philippine authors, the writers of the Brazilian document understand the Palestinian crisis in the light of past and present abuses of the Bible in the service of imperial strivings:

The prolonged Palestinian crisis demonstrates the sophistication with which the empire has been casting its deathly shadow on every nook and cranny of this planet. This included the empires’ co-optation of religious language; its

forming a theological language for conquest and occupation; its ability to build a religious consensus for silence if not support for crusader religious discourse. For many decades now, the occupation has thrived on the perverted militancy and neo-crusader ethos of right wing Christianity, and on the macabre silence of much of the world's religions.²⁶

Immediately following the release of *Kairos Palestine*, theologians, clergy, church leaders, and activists in Southern Africa responded from their own experience of colonialism. "From our own experience of apartheid," they wrote in the 2010 *A South African Christian response to the Palestinian Kairos Document*, "we can clearly and without equivocation say that your situation is in essence the same as apartheid and in its practical manifestation even worse than South African apartheid. Yours is also, in our view, a typical colonial situation whereby the colonizers claim the lives and land of the colonized."²⁷ The South Africans, whose theology half a century before had emerged from the crucible of apartheid, come straight to the point:

Christian Zionism, the theological justification of the establishment of the State of Israel based on a particular understanding of the Bible and of the Christian faith and its relation to Judaism, can only be described by us as a modern-day heresy. This kind of Christianity rejects all modern scholarship of Biblical interpretation and chooses to make the Christian faith a servant of an evil ideology, similar to what happened with the theological justification of apartheid.²⁸

The Palestinian call has evoked the lessons of the recent past and reminds us of the power of and necessity for theology. And as is always true with what has come to be called Public Theology, this can put those who take a stand for justice in conflict with the institutional church.

CHURCH STRUGGLE, GLOBAL MOVEMENT

As the examples of the South African anti-apartheid struggle and the civil rights movement, and now the struggle for justice for Palestine demonstrate, in taking a stand against tyranny and injustice, church leaders often find themselves pitted against the very institutions of which they are a part. In *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, South African theologians John and Steve de Gruchy write,

The church is called to bear witness to the Kingdom of God in the world. . . . This being so, *a faithful church will always find itself in tension with society*. For this reason, the church desperately needs the presence of prophetic

movements . . . for these movements provide the critique that forces the church to a new assessment of itself. Such movements are part of God's way of renewing the church in every generation and situation²⁹ (emphasis added).

The awareness of the ever-renewing nature of this struggle is experienced most acutely by those at the sites of historic colonialism. In March 1967, the Third Afro-Asian Writers' Conference held in Beirut passed a resolution on Palestine declaring Israel to be "an imperialist base and tool used for aggressive purposes against Arab states in order to delay their progress toward unity and socialism, and as a bridgehead which neo-colonialism relies on in order to maintain its influence over African and Asian states."³⁰ This statement remains as accurate now as it was half a century ago. Fifty years later, we hear the same cry from the Palestinian church. In June 2017, the Christians of Palestine intensified their call to the churches of the world. "We stand at an impossible moment," declares the open letter of the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine: "While we are grateful for the 'costly solidarity' articulated in the Amman Call³¹ and exercised by many churches around the world, we are concerned that some churches have weakened their positions in the last ten years. Many still hide behind the cover of political neutrality, not wishing to offend their religious dialogue partners. We need you now more than ever. We need your costly solidarity. This is no time for shallow diplomacy, Christians!"³²

The quality of self-critical reflection, leading to an awareness of the responsibility to act not only within but outside our own context, is central to the *Kairos* movement. Liberation theologian and antiapartheid activist Professor Allan Boesak describes *Kairos* consciousness in this way:

A *Kairos* consciousness is a critical consciousness. It discerns and critiques the situation in which we live. . . . The crisis we are facing is not just economic, social and political, it is a moral crisis. . . . Certainly choices are made on empirical evidence—social, political, economic analysis, and an understanding of the ways in which power and powerlessness work. But just as certain a *Kairos* consciousness makes these choices on the basis of faith. Much more than only the liberation of the oppressed is at stake here. Because Christians oppress others claiming faith in the God of Jesus who came to establish justice upon the earth, that faith, the integrity of the Gospel, and the credibility of the witness of the church are at stake here.³³

THIS IS BIGGER THAN PALESTINE

The church was born to this struggle. It was born *in* this struggle. At local, national and ecumenical levels, churches will be critical in bringing to an end

the system that is destroying Israeli society, has hijacked the Jewish faith, perverted the soul of the gospel for billions of Christians, continues to fuel global conflict, and has produced one of the most systematic and long-standing violations of human rights in the world today. The cause of the Palestinian people and the fight against the pernicious effects of Zionism reach far beyond one people's struggle for liberation. South African theologian and coauthor of the 1985 South Africa Kairos document Charles Villa-Vicencio puts it this way: "This is bigger than Palestine. It's the fault line running through Western civilization, the point of split in the first century between the followers of Jesus and those who clung to their Rome-granted power base in Jerusalem."³⁴ Witnessing the dispossession and colonization of Palestine we encounter not only the human rights struggle of one people but the crisis of human survival and the future of the planet itself. Unpacking the theological and political nexus of Zionism exposes the white supremacy and colonialism inherent in the neoliberal order and the ethos of human domination of the creation lies at the root of the planetary catastrophe that is now upon us.

The theological implications of globalization emerged as an urgent concern for the ecumenical movement and for the Reformed Church in the twentieth century, owing chiefly to the voices of the churches of the global South. In 2004 Steve de Gruchy cited the Southern African Alliance of Reformed Churches meeting in Kitwe, Zambia in 1995. In his words, it was "a searing indictment of global capitalism from a Christian perspective." "The African reality of poverty," reads the conference statement, "caused by an unjust economic world order has gone beyond an ethical problem and become a theological one. It now constitutes a *status confessionis*. The gospel of the poor is at stake in the very mechanism of the global economy today."³⁵ De Gruchy also noted the language adopted in the 1998 Harare Assembly of the World Council of Churches:

The vision behind globalization includes a competing vision to the Christian commitment to the *oikumene*, the unity of humankind and the whole inhabited earth . . . an *oikumene* of faith and solidarity. The logic of globalization needs to be challenged by an alternative way of life of community in diversity. Christians and churches should reflect on the challenge of globalization from a faith perspective and therefore resist the unilateral domination of economic and cultural globalization.³⁶

An oikumene of faith and solidarity. In his last appearance to the disciples as recounted in the final chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus, encountering his terrified and perplexed followers on the third day after his crucifixion, explains to them the meaning of his ministry: "Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his

hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Look at my body, Jesus is saying, look at my wounds, consider my physical pain. Hear that I need to eat, that I am hungry. Don't you understand that this has always been about my humanness, that I suffer as our people suffer from being beaten, persecuted, starved? Are you looking for God? Do you want to know the Father? My ministry, this story that you have been part of since the beginning is about that suffering and about the mind and the heart of God who feels that pain and experiences that hunger. Look at my wounds, know my pain, feed my hunger! And then go and do this for the least of these, meaning those suffering under the boot of oppression. This is what God wants, this is Torah.

The call of the Palestinians, like the call of colonized and oppressed Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans in the twentieth century, is the call to all of humanity to feel the pain, see the wounds, and, as individuals and communities, to respond with compassion, care, and courage. Today as then, we look to the global South as we challenge the heresy of Zionism that perverts the mission of the faithful in Africa and throughout the world and in combating the corrupting influence of Israel's economic colonialism. Again, it is the church that will lead—reading the Bible with the eyes of the Palestinians, claiming its precious legacy of fighting for a world free of racism and tyranny.

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11. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 52.

12. Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989); Don Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon*, Rosemary Ruether and Herman J. Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestine Conflict*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002).

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14. Gary Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land Theology”* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

15. Prior, *Zionism and the State of Israel*, 182.

16. Palestine, *Moment of Truth*.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. *Call to Action: US Response to the Kairos Palestine Document*, <https://kairosusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Kairos-USA-Call-to-Action.pdf>

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33. Allan Boesak, "Kairos Consciousness," 25 March 2011, <http://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com/kairos-consciousness/>.

34. Charles Villa-Vicencio, in conversation with author, April 2011.

35. de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle*, 249–250.

36. Ibid, 252. The process begun in Harare continued with the 23rd General Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in Debrecen, Hungary in 1997, which said: "We now call for a committed process of progressive recognition, education and confession (*processus confessionis*) within all WARC member churches at all levels regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction." This culminated in the WCRC (successor to the WARC) in the 2004 *Accra Confession*, calling for a faith stance on the economic and ecological destruction brought about by globalization, impacting the people of the south in particular. *Accra Confession*, <http://wrc.ch/accra>.

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