

Christian Zionism and Islamic Eschatology

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Christian Zionists are very aware that their stand for the tiny state of Israel is not universally admired. Christian Zionism is, of course, a movement comprised of individuals, more often than not from a Protestant background, who support the modern state of Israel spiritually, politically, and financially from a Biblically-based worldview. Unique to this worldview has been a recent surge over the past 10 or 15 years, a momentum that has activated Christians from being sideline viewers to take a more active and practical role in supporting the tiny state. With this newfound momentum however, Christian Zionists have found themselves opposed on a variety of fronts.

Among those in disagreement with Christian Zionism are other Christians who ascribe to what is known as “Replacement Theology.” This is a doctrine that maintains that all the Biblical promises to Israel and the covenants of God with Israel have been negated because of Israel’s unbelief. Moreover, those promises and covenants have actually been transferred from the physical state and people of Israel to the Church, which is physical and spiritual body of Christ. Those holding the “replacement” view contend that the Biblical texts with these promises to physical Israel can no longer be taken literally. That means that anyone holding the “replacement” view has to accept or insert or assume that those blessings pronounced in Scripture on Israel have devolved upon the Church away from Israel. This interpretation means that supporting the modern state of Israel is, at best, irrelevant; and, at worst, a tragic misunderstanding of Scripture with catastrophic consequences in the Middle East. The situation

has become even bleaker with the production of various documentaries and the founding of conferences designed to mitigate Christian support for Israel

In addition to these “replacement” adherents in the Church, there are individuals with strong pro-Arab sentiments who also are unsympathetic to those who support Israel. This list is quite a long one, including many, perhaps most, of the media, and also the majority of academia. In fact, the hatred of Israel in colleges and universities has reached truly epidemic proportions and the expression of these anti-Israel sentiments in the academy has reached a record level of vitriol. To this depressing list of those viewing Christian Zionists as an enemy now must be added a previously unidentified group: those in the Muslim world who write and preach regarding the end of the world.

Just as in the West, we have preachers who focus on the end of the age, so too in Islam there are writers and preachers who hold forth on their eschatology and focus on the final battle between their Mahdi (Expected One) and the Antichrist. In their effort to prepare their adherents for the last days, these preachers project scenarios in which the final victory of Islam is illustrated and the actors in the conflict are defined and identified.

In his recently translated book, *Apocalypse In Islam* (2011) Jean-Pierre Filiu gives an overview of this type of literature. In the middle of his discussion of the various eschatological views across the Islamic world with excerpts of each genre, he reports a startling observation. His study of apocalyptic dialogue in the Muslim world shows that the tenor of discourse before the US invasion of Iraq is markedly different from what follows. The dramatic changes center on the projected hierarchy of the enemies of Islam. Prior to the invasion, the portrayals of the end of the world were developed, in Filiu’s words, as an “anti-Semitic species of fiction” because they presented Israel and the “international Jewish conspiracy” as the crucial and most dangerous

enemy the Muslim world, the *umma*, faced. This view was reflected in all writers and across the Middle East and was fairly standard.

After the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the change came, however, when the preaching of Muslim apocalyptic doctrine began to focus on new enemies. In addition to becoming more colorful in attempting to explain the present situation in the world to their listeners, the “prophetic” preachers made new forecasts. In the change, the focus of Islamic attention was amended to spotlight new enemies in a tactic that morphed into “an irrational technique for making sense of a world in which hostile and infidel forces ran wild” (p. 121), something familiar for these writers.

In this new frame of reference, however, with great frightfulness, the depiction of their main enemy veered away from the traditional specters of Israel and the Jews to a new and heretofore unexpected foe. “The characterization of the invasion [of Iraq] as a new crusade met with practically unanimous approval in circles where Christian Zionism was perceived to be a far more formidable enemy than Israel by itself.” A new species of participant had appeared and was predicted to be operating in conjunction with Israel and the Jews in the end. This appreciation is so widespread across the Muslim world that it raises few questions.

In this regard, the extraordinary outbreak of violence against Christians in the Middle East may be directly related to this newly emerging viewpoint. Mass murder in Iraq, burning of churches with the congregants inside; Coptic Christians being murdered on the street in Egypt; Christian boys and girls being raped in Pakistan; these are just a few examples.

As far as the world scene in concerned, the scenarios of the end days began to spotlight the outlook that there is a pre-positioning of forces for the expected assault by the Antichrist on the Mahdi between Khurasan (eastern Iran and Afghanistan) and Greater Syria. This same

forecast has appeared in various places in the Middle East and has wide acceptance and support. Recognizing this puts the situation in Iran and Syria in a different, even apocalyptic, perspective.

More specifically, in Egypt, a book from the author Shaykh Safar al-Hawali targets “Christian Zionism, the most dangerous of all contemporary movements for humanity [for] it has managed to control the minds of the a third of the population of the most powerful nation in the world...” One of the six principles that he proposes is undergirding Christian Zionism is the belief that God will bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse it. It is not indicated if he recognizes this is from the Bible. (p. 107) According to another author: “Jewish and Christian Zionists are presently working hand in hand” to help the Antichrist. Another writer joins in to oppose “worldwide Zionist Christianity” that among other evils helped Ethiopian Jews return to Israel through the Sudan. They all agree that the foundational belief to the Christian Zionists is that the Jewish state is the “key to the permanence of America.” (94-5)

Several points are clear and consistent. One, the strength of the movement known as Christian Zionism is perceived by a variety of sources in the Middle East as powerful--more so than Israel itself--and is regarded therefore as evil. Two, major efforts are being urged by apocalyptic writers to combat this influence and discredit the Christian Zionist leaders, several of whom are named and condemned for specific statements supporting Israel. Three, in the minds of those writing on the Islamic apocalypse and those reading and following these authors, there is no disconnect between Israel and Christians in the U.S. who support her. This is a very important point for remembering. A final note, Christians who support Israel have to be aware that end-times writers in the Islamic world perceive their views as wicked and are determined to oppose them. More to the point, they invest such Christians with more influence and power than most of the Christians themselves have any idea of. Most of the Christians who support Israel see

themselves in a much different light—just plain, ordinary folks standing up for the Biblically-stated, chosen people of the Lord. This startlingly alternate perception of Christian Zionism by apocalyptic preachers in the Middle East is definite basis for these Christians to re-examine themselves; especially to appraise their potential.

In military history, new weapons are more appreciated by those upon whom they were employed, than by those who developed them. Consider the British innovation of the tank in World War I. After the war, they did not really expand their invention or tactics in using it as a weapon. The Germans upon whom it was used were aware of its potential to a much greater degree and took the tank to become the centerpiece of its military.

So Christian Zionists are perceived in the Muslim world as more powerful than the Christians themselves appreciate. A genuine reflection on the status of their influence and ability is called for and a stand against discouragement for those who support Israel. Also Christians need to remember that this presentation of their danger to Muslim end-time viewpoints is leading many in that world to commit to oppose Christian Zionism.

It might be useful for Christian Zionists to remember that many Muslims are trained in the use and implementation of curses against enemies. This is a spiritual issue of some weight and needs to be taken into consideration in prayer and discussion.

People are known by their friends and also by their enemies. The fact that Christian Zionists are being vilified by Muslim end-time preachers is a good sign, one for which Christian Zionists need to praise God, and at the same time, pray with new dedication for Christians in the Middle East.