VOLUME 7
NUMBER 1
2011

IS CHRISTIAN ZIONISM BASED ON BAD THEOLOGY?

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The current criticism of Christian Zionism comes from many quarters: secularists (both Jews and Gentiles), many religious Jews, Christian Arabists, and Islamists (Hamas cleric Ahmed al-Tamimi identified Christian Zionism as "the greatest danger to world truth, justice, and peace").[1] Ironically, Christians are among the most vociferous critics of Christian Zionism. An evangelical critic of Zionism, Hank Hanegraaff, writes: "Much of American Middle East policy is influenced by a huge voting bloc of evangelicals who are taught not to question Israel's divine right to the land… fueled in part by bad theology."[2] Anglican theologian Stephen Sizer maintains that a distinctive theology embraced by many evangelical Christians, known as dispensational premillennialism, is foundational to Christian Zionism and a root cause of the deadlocked Israel-Palestinian Arab conflict. He writes, "Bad theology is probably the reason why many Christians don't seem to care…. They hope to be raptured to heaven and avoid suffering the consequences of the coming global holocaust" that the policies they support will ignite.[3] This caricature is unfair to Christian supporters of Israel and a distortion of dispensationalism. Evangelical Gary Burge has deployed theology to undermine biblical support for Jewish territorial sovereignty. Christian Palestinian Mitri Raheb, on the other hand, vigorously challenges such a reading of the New Testament on the grounds that it devalues the importance of the land in Palestinian theology and Jewish and church history.[4] The fact that some people claim to find theological justification for bad political policies does not necessarily indicate bad theology; bad policy more often springs from bad interpretations of history and contemporary events, interpreted with bad applications of ethics and theology.

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1. Jerusalem Newswire Editorial, "Hamas: Christian Zionism is Our Enemy," *Jerusalem Newswire*, August 22, 2005, http://www.jnewswire.com/article/527.June_5_2007.

2. Hank Hanegraaff, *Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible Really Says about the End Times and Why It Matters Today* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), xx–xxii.

3. Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldiers?* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2007), 136–37, see also Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon?* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

4. Gary Burge, "The New Testament and the Land: How Early Christianity Challenged Ethnic Territorialism," and Mitri Raheb, "Contextual Palestinian Theology as It Deals with Realities on the Ground," papers presented at the Christ at the Checkpoint Theology of the Land Conference (Bethlehem Bible College, Bethlehem, Israel, March 1–17, 2010); available at http://www.christatthecheckpoint.com/lectures.html.

What is Dispensational Theology?

The distinctive theological tenets of *dispensationalism* include belief in the authority of the Bible and a philosophy of Providential history framed within respect for the prophetic writings in the Bible, in which the unique past, present, and future role of the nation of Israel occupies a central role in God's plan.[5] The term itself seems to imply that what is distinctive about this theology is its division of human history into distinct "ages" or "dispensations," stretching from the creation of man through the future millennial age. However, all Christian theologies hold to *some* division of history into different eras, and Christians holding to traditional orthodox doctrine also affirm the authority of Scripture and historical Providence as well as distinctive historical periods in biblical history. What is *mos*t distinctive about dispensationalism is its belief in a *future* literal fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, including the restoration of the Jewish nation in the Holy Land during the Millennial Age.

Other systems of theology hold that God's covenant with Israel was transferred to the Christian church, which became the *new Israel* at Pentecost. Sizer says, "(Christian Zionism) errs most profoundly because it fails to appreciate the relationship between the Old and New Covenants and the ways in which the latter completes, fulfills and annuls the former."[6] In his view, the "bad theology" of dispensationalism leads to blind support for the modern Jewish state of Israel and its "unjust" and "racist" policies. Sizer argues that the *ethne*, or People (Hebrew: '*am*) of Israel has no continuing theological significance during the Church Age, including no continuing or future role in Providential history, nor a continuing valid connection to the land of Israel. Instead, in this view, there is no theological reason for the Jews to exist as a separate people, or nation, because individual Jews (like individual Gentiles) find fulfillment of their covenants and calling in Christ and His church, in which they gain a new identity in Christ. Thus, they are no longer Jews, but Christians.

Following the Holocaust, the Catholic Church articulated important theological statements concerning Israel and the church in order to affirm that the Jewish people has a continuing significance in God's plan. Similarly, some non-dispensational theologies give recognition to an enduring promise and blessing

5. The brief and remarkably helpful booklet by Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths* (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2008) provides a helpful overview and reference to leading theological studies of dispensationalism and alternative views of eschatology. Contemporary treatments on dispensationalism include: Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965); Craig Blaising and Darrel Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-to-Date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational Thought* (Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint, 1993); Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).

6. Stephen Sizer, "An Alternative Theology of the Holy Land: A Critique of Christian Zionism," *The Churchman* (June 1999): pp?.

for Israel, believing the Kingdom of God as not fully realized until Christ's future Second Advent when the redeemed from all of the nations, including the Jewish people, will be united in the Millennial Age. Other theological views are more explicit regarding Israel's *replacement*, or *fulfillment* in Christ, and the "Kingdom of God" instituted in the church and completed progressively in history. In 1907, during the heyday of Progressivism, liberal theologian Walter Rauschenbusch spoke confidently of helping "to build the coming Messianic era of mankind" through a social gospel of the Kingdom.[7] Similarly, many Jewish theologians, while rejecting the notion that God had *replaced* Israel with the Gentile church, view the "Messianic Kingdom" as an activity of human progress, rather than the future accomplishment of Israel's Messiah.

After the horrors of the World War I, some social gospel progressives questioned their optimistic and triumphalist teleology. One of these, Reinhold Niebuhr, considered to be the foremost political theologian of his day, formulated his sober perspective of "Christian Realism" during the decade leading up to World War II and the Holocaust. While not a dispensationalist, Niebuhr shared their view of human nature and history, writing that: "Various apocalyptic visions point to an interpretation of history in which there is no suggestion of a progressive triumph of good over evil, but rather a gradual sharpening of the distinction between good and evil." [8]

Current Concerns about Christian Zionism

According to a 2005 survey commissioned by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, evangelical Protestants are significantly more likely to believe that "God gave the land of Israel to the Jews" (72 percent) and that "Israel fulfills the Biblical prophecy about Jesus' second coming" (63 percent).[9] Many critics of Christian Zionism object that any faith in the literal fulfillment of prophecy is dangerous in and of itself, that "anticipation of the inevitable," makes apocalyptic catastrophe more likely.

For example, evangelical critics of contemporary Christian Zionism have produced a feature length documentary film decrying evangelical support for the State of Israel, entitled *With God on Our Side*, which was screened at Christian colleges and other public venues around the country this fall. To its credit, the documentary serves to educate its generally uninformed audience about Israeli

7. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 352.

8. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Europe's Catastrophe and the Christian Faith* (London: Nisbet, 1940), 35–36.

9. Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *American Evangelicals and Israel: Public Opinion on Religion and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, April 15, 2005; http://pewforum.org/Christian/American-Evangelicals-and-Israel.aspx.

policies in the West Bank. It provides powerful visuals and highlights compelling Palestinian Christian voices about the realities of injustice and suffering that they have experienced in the occupied territories, as well as their unhappy experiences with American evangelicals who have no understanding of the existence of Arab Christianity. Throughout the film, thoughtful Christians offer important perspectives on Christian reconciliation work in Palestine and Israel, most notably Matthew Hand of Reconciliation Walk, and Salim Munayer of Musalaha. Importantly, Munayer condemns the way in which "we (Israelis and Palestinians) have triangled [*sic*] the church from outside into our conflict.... As a result, we lose our distinct calling and vocation to be a bridge between the people, so instead of helping these two distinct groups of people to resolve their problem, or promote peace, reconciliation...we are adding oil to the fire." The film directs well-earned criticism at the politicized biases and prejudices often exhibited by contemporary Christian Zionist leaders and their followers. These aspects of the film are helpful and commendable.

Regrettably, the historical, political, and theological messages of the film are ultimately unhelpful for helping Christian audiences to understand the realities of the Israel-Arab conflict. The film's summary of its history is one dimensional and anti-Israel. With no reference to Arab and Palestinian failures in the realm of politics and government, the contemporary Israeli perspective is represented by images of Jewish religious extremists parading through Arab East Jerusalem screaming "Death to the Arabs," and fanatics waving pictures of the Third Temple, followed by a newsreel blast of a nuclear explosion. Two of the most radical Jewish anti-Zionists (Ilan Pappe and Norman Finkelstein) charge Israel with ethnic cleansing during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and violations of international law following the 1967 Six-Day War. Their comments fail to address the complex bundle of human rights and land tenure issues resulting from the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, the establishment of the British Mandate by the League of Nations, or Jordanian policies regarding Jewish properties in the West Bank that came under their control in 1948, including the Old City of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jewish Quarter and its synagogues. Moreover, the ongoing acts of violence, terror, and ethnic hatred committed by both parties involved in the conflict, and the failures of outside parties to mediate the dispute are also ignored.

The main message of the film *With God on Our Side* is theopolitical. Burge and Sizer deliver two messages: first, the modern state of Israel has no historical or natural rights claims to legitimacy, but is an unnatural invention of Western colonialism and theological imperialism; and second, the idea of the modern state of Israel was initiated by and continues to be supported by a politicized and racialized theology, dispensationalism. Sizer describes the union of dispensational theology with political Zionism as "a system that believes that Jews have the right to much of the Middle East, and it gives preference to Jewish people over others who may have

been born in that particular piece of land."[10] Burge sees Christian Zionism as but the latest manifestation of politicized eschatology: "This has happened over fifteen hundred years. We are millennial as a religion, that means that Christians have always anticipated the end of the world in their time frame…We have examples again and again throughout Christian history in which the church has been asked to adopt a political agenda for the world, and the world has always lived to regret it."[11] Burge cites examples of Byzantium, the Holy Roman Empire, the Crusades, etc., in support of this argument.

To us, it seems ironic that dispensationalism—a theological perspective which has been historically the most critical of the political pretensions of "Christendom," and which for generations has been shunned by social justice critics as "too heavenly minded" because of its pessimistic worldview—should be so charged. Sizer and Burge accuse Christian Zionists of viewing the conflict solely through the "lens of prophecy" rather than the "lens of justice." This "leads them to ignore human rights excesses…and they (Israelis) are given a free pass for that because they are 'God's chosen people'."[12]

Others see less reason for alarm, appreciating Christian Zionists' participation in the ongoing dynamic process by which contending perspectives check and balance each other, keeping American foreign relations grounded in our core values. Walter Russell Mead comments that for most evangelical Protestants, the "preservation of the Jews and their return to Israel is seen as proof that God acts in history—a very reassuring thought for people concerned about the dangers of modern life." Mead notes that while some Christian Zionists may have their political judgment disoriented by apocalyptic speculation, "there are many others for whom it means just the opposite…. (that) this God is still around, still faithful to his promises, and still guiding humanity through the dangers that surround us. To be pro-Israel is to be pro-hope."[13]

Well, if mainstream Christian Zionists are relatively benign, how dangerous are the most zealous? The political philosopher Eric Voegelin warned of the dangerous desire to actualize eschatological events, describing this as the attempt to "Immanentize the Eschaton" by transfiguring reality through esoteric deeds, rituals, or violent practices.[14] Dispensationalism's eschatological seriousness has

10. "Sizer Commentary," *With God On Our Side*, DVD, dir. by Porter Speakman, Jr. (Rooftop Productions, LLC. 2010); http://www.withgodonourside.com.

11. "Burge Commentary," *With God On Our Side*.

12. "Sizer Commentary," *With God On Our Side*.

13. Walter Russell Mead, "Why AIPAC Is Good for The Jews — and for Everyone Else," The American Interest Online,CMS http://blogs.the-american-interest.com/wrm/2010/04/05/why-aipac-is-good-for-the-jews-and-for-everyone-else/# (accessed April 5, 2010).

14. Eric Vogelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 120.

led some *errant* adherents to become infected with a pathology that overrules or even violates their faith in Divine prophetic fulfillment. A few extreme outliers may attempt to use their own power to implement policies or create conditions to initiate the apocalypse. Responsible religious leaders need to guard against this deceit and guide their congregations toward a rational and normative obedience to the moral law and the gospel.

Today, the most visible of the Christian Zionist organizations, Christians United for Israel (CUFI) and the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ) provide necessary advocacy to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, promote Israel as a liberal democracy, and support Israel's legitimate security needs. As Christians, they are motivated by a sense of shame about the Holocaust and Anti-Semitism, and indebtedness to the Jewish people for the faith of their Patriarchs, and their transmission of Holy Scripture to mankind. However, to varying degrees these organizations have lost the sober bearings of earlier Christian Zionists and *normative* dispensationalists, who accepted the brute reality that Israel (like all states, churches and people) is fallen, with a capacity to violate rights and commit acts of injustice—the very sins condemned by the Hebrew prophets—and that such violations of God's eternal moral law could never be justified by the necessity for prophetic fulfillment.[15] Examples of our areas of concern are summarized below.

Territorial Compromise and Peace Negotiations

Christian Zionist media channels frequently send out dire warnings over any threatened loss of occupied territory. Strategic defense, civilian safety, and security measures are factors for legitimate concern; it is another thing for some Christian Zionist leaders to view the territories currently under Israeli occupation as Jewish by right of divinely ordained conquest, causing them to view territorial compromise as unbiblical, opposing diplomatic negotiations that might lead to Palestinian self-government. Over the centuries, the three monotheistic faiths have battled over the sacred spaces in the Holy Land. Israeli fundamental law is committed to maintain the peaceful shared use of the holy sites, so some compromises over sacred geography must be acknowledged, rather than strenuously opposed by extreme Christian Zionist leaders.

Many dispensationalists have spoken out to guide their followers away from these dangerous positions. The full extent of the land promised to Abraham's seed (Gn 15:18), expounded further by the prophet Ezekiel (Ez 47:15–20), has *never* been

15. We acknowledge the valuable contribution to this perspective found in Prof. John S. Feinberg's paper "Dispensationalism and Support for the State of Israel" delivered at the Christ at the Checkpoint Conference in Bethlehem, Israel, March, 2010; available online at http://www.christatthecheckpoint.com/lectures.html.

under the control of a sovereign Jewish state. While the people of Israel are re-gathering and their homeland is re-established, the territorial restoration of the Jewish nation, and their service to their King and Savior Jesus Christ, is a future eschatological event. The late Louis Goldberg wrote in 1997, "All of the land which God has provided cannot be a current concern for negotiation. Some Israelis lay claim to the land now, but it will only be a reality when … an entire generation of Israelis, in the midst of frightful pressures, call upon the Lord in their land … then, and only then, will Israel take title to all the land God promised through His prophet Ezekiel."[16]

Although most dispensationalists believe that in the last days Israel will enter into a peace treaty for seven years, later broken after three and a half years, marking the beginning of the catastrophic events of the Tribulation, they understand that no peace treaty made by men lasts forever, and many treaties are preferable to no treaty. No one can be sure this or that treaty is the end of days treaty mentioned in Daniel 9:27. Dispensationalist theologian Arnold Fruchtenbaum expressed a pragmatic view: "I am not against Israeli withdrawal from either the Gaza Strip or from segments of the West Bank. It may save Jewish lives…concerning the roadmap for peace…whatever peace is attained through human effort will be temporary at best."[17] The Israeli people and their government are in the best position to make pragmatic policy decisions concerning negotiations with the Palestinians, and their Christian friends should support their diplomatic efforts.

Christian Zionism and Compassionate Justice

Many Christian Zionist leaders view the humanitarian and political crisis of the Palestinian Arabs as self-inflicted, and some would even mention divine retribution for their opposition to the State of Israel. Whatever truth may lie in this perspective, it is no excuse for indifference toward the suffering of innocents and failure to support programs for Palestinian education, development, and reconciliation. Christian Zionist organizations fund West Bank Jewish settlements, ignoring projects that seek to strengthen civil society and public safety in the West Bank and Gaza. Fortunately, there are a few Christian organizations, like Seeds of Hope, in Jericho, that empower Palestinians with education and micro-business projects that bring hope and healing to both Jews and Palestinians.[18] Christian Zionist leaders have also failed to advocate for full religious and political rights for Christian Palestinians and Messianic Jews. Christians who want to show their

16. Louis Goldberg, "The Borders of the Land of Israel according to Ezekiel," *Mishkan* 1, no. 26 (1997): 37–40.

17. Arnold Fructenbaum, "Gaza & West Bank Withdrawal," August 31, 2005; http://www.ariel.org/answers.

18. http://www.seedsofhopeinc.org/aboutUs.html.

love for the Jewish people should be willing to share about the One who loves us so much, and to defend the rights of those who do. Indeed, local Israeli Messianic and evangelical Arab congregations are among the groups most actively involved in reconciliation ministries.

Dr. Mark Bailey, President of Dallas Theological Seminary, considered the preeminent center of dispensationalist theology, notes that Ezekiel's prophesy of Israel's return is to a land with non-Jewish peoples, including their ancient Arab kin: "You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel." (Ez 47:21–22). He urges, "We act most like Christ when we seek to bring God's perspective and peace to a situation."[19]

Was Early Christian Zionism Different?

Dispensationalism did not produce any heavyweight political ethicists or international relations theorists like Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Ramsey, or neo-Christian Realist Jean Bethke Elshtain. Nevertheless, dispensationalists are clearly more (though not entirely) *futurist* regarding the Kingdom of God and fundamentally in agreement with the pragmatism of the *realists,* who recognize as operating principles the need for deterrence and restraint of evil, activated by an ethic of compassionate justice for a suffering world.

The politicized form of Christian Zionism that has risen to prominence today differs greatly from the earlier perspectives of a century ago. Proto-Christian Zionism emerged out of the Protestant Reformation, drawing from both Hebrew Scriptures (the *Tanakh*) and the early church. These interpretations of prophecies focus on the re-gathering and *restoration* of the people of Israel to their ancient homeland, as well as the spiritual *redemption* of the nation which will enable them to practice their spiritual calling on behalf of all the nations of the world.[20] As many recently published historical studies have documented, the early perspectives varied significantly, some focusing on the spiritual *redemptionist* aspect of large masses of individual Jews turning to faith in Jesus as Messiah; others focused on the *restorationist* miracle of Jewish preservation and their modern re-gathering in their ancient homeland. Most held to elements of both.[21]

19. Mark Bailey, "The Lord's Land Policy in Israel," *Veritas* 2, no. 2 (2002).

20. For a fascinating historical overview of Jewish proto-Zionist movements in the medieval and early-modern period, see Arie Morganstern's "Dispersion and the Longing for Zion: 1240–1840" in *Azure* (Winter, 2002); also accessible online at http://www.jafi.org.il/education/culture/dispersion.html.

21. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christian, Jews & the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Paul C. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism: 1891–1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy: America in the*

Political Zionism arose only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nearly all Jewish leaders opposed the movement, as did quite a few dispensationalist Christians.[22] Support for *political* Zionism gradually emerged across a broad spectrum of Anglo-American Christians and Conservative and Reformed Jews, largely motivated in response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the expulsion of millions of displaced Jews by the rising forces of nationalism and anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe.

In 1878, Chicago businessman and dispensationalist William E. Blackstone wrote a bestselling theological book, *Jesus is Coming*, outlining the Biblical prophecies concerning the restoration of national Israel as a preparation for Jesus' second Messianic return. He did not become a Christian Zionist activist until ten years later, when he witnessed and compassionately responded to the mass expulsions of over two million poor, stateless Jews from the Russian *Pale of Settlement*. In 1891, Blackstone drafted and circulated the historic "Blackstone Memorial Petition" proposing an international conference to establish a refuge for homeless Jews in Palestine.[23] Signed by over four hundred of America's leading citizens, statesmen, and religious leaders, the petition addressed issues of humanitarian justice and natural rights, opening with the words, "What shall be done for the Russian Jews?" The petition urged the European and American heads of state to convene an international conference addressing the following: expulsions and property seizures in Europe, immigration/emigration to Palestine, and territorial issues leading to "security and autonomy in self-government." It noted that the equitable resolution of these issues involved a bundle of competing rights and claims—but it contained no theological statement concerning prophetic fulfillment. The only religious connection was to acknowledge and seek to repair the long history of Jewish persecution in the Christian nations by appealing to an appreciation of their shared Biblical heritage.

Middle East, 1776 to the Present (New York: Norton, 2007); Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007).

22. In July1897, the Central Conference of American Rabbis passed a formal resolution stating: "Resolved, that we totally disapprove of any attempt for the establishment of a Jewish State. Such attempts show a misunderstanding of Israel's mission, which from the narrow political and national field, which has expanded to the promotion among the whole human race of the broad and universalistic religion first proclaimed by the Jewish prophets," quoted in "Zionism in the United States," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Fred Skolinik and Michael Berenbaum, eds. (New York: Keter Publishing House, 2007), 21:605. In 1891, Cyrus Hamlin, a Presbyterian educator and missionary to the Middle East, published a scathing critique of Christian support for political Zionism, listing eight reasons to oppose it. Evangelicals and even dispensationalists were in agreement with some or all of his arguments. Cyrus Hamlin, "International Aid for the Jews," *Our Day* 8 (July, 1891): 1–8.

23. William E. Blackstone, *Palestine for the Jews: A Copy of A Memorial Presented to President Harrison*, 5 March, 1891 (Oak Park, IL), *Papers of William Eugene Blackstone* , Collection 540: 6, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.

The principles laid out by Blackstone were remarkably similar to those of the Balfour Declaration and League of Nation's Mandate for Palestine three decades later. This is why Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, leader of the American Zionist Movement, asked William Blackstone to reissue his Memorial Petition in 1916, believing it incorporated the principles upon which a just and humanitarian Jewish homeland movement could be founded. Brandeis believed that Blackstone's Petition, "ante-dating as it did Theodore Herzl's own participation in the Zionist movement, [was] destined to become of historical significance" and called Blackstone "the true founder of Zionism."[24]

Early Christian Zionism and the Arabs

Other early dispensationalists were similarly grounded in realism, clearly appreciating the rights and hopes of the Arabs in Mandatory Palestine (in this period, it was the Jewish residents of Palestine who were called "Palestinians." After 1948, the usage shifted as they became "Israelis" and their Arab neighbors in Israel and the places they were scattered began to be called "Palestinians"). Jewish Christian Rev. Sabbtai Rohold, founder of the evangelical Haifa Mission in 1920, wrote: "I believe with all my heart and soul in the absolute, full restoration of the Jew, and I believe also at the present time in the partial return of the Jew to Palestine, but there are many difficulties…. Modern Zionism is the result of anti-Semitism, but six hundred thousand Arabs cannot be brushed aside…. As for the great plans and pretenses, good offices, and the sympathy of the nations, that is beautiful; but let me tell you, and I repeat it emphatically, that the undercurrents are too many."[25] Rohold was adamant that his Haifa Mission School, Jewish immigrant shelter, and medical clinic would maintain warm and supportive relations with his Muslim and Christian Arab neighbors. In Rohold's school, Jewish immigrants would learn Arabic first, and then Hebrew. His Hebrew congregation would celebrate the Biblical feasts and also join with the Christian Arab congregation for Christmas Eve and Easter Morning worship. The clinic and school staff were a mixture of Arabs and Jews. Rohold pursued his pragmatic program of humanitarian refuge, reconciliation, and gospel witness through each difficult day and week from 1921, through the Arab riots of 1929 and the ensuing years of violent resistance to Jewish immigration, up until his death in 1931.

24. A letter from Nathan Straus to W. E. B. dated May 8, 1916 reads: "It would have done your heart good to have heard (Mr. Brandeis) assert what a valuable contribution to the cause your document is. In fact he agrees with me that you are the Father of Zionism, as your work antedates Herzl." Also see David D. Brodeur, "Christians in the Zionist Camp: Blackstone and Hechler," *Faith and Thought* 100, no. 3 (1972–3): 271–298, accessible at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_faith-and-thought_02.php.

25. S. Rohold, "Zionism: Past, Present, and Future," *The Latter Rain Evangel* 10, no. 5 (February 1918): 15.

Bible scholar David L. Cooper, whose classic works of dispensational theology shaped several generations of theologians and Christian Zionists, wrote in 1939 on the growing tensions between Arabs and Jews in Palestine:

> Those who know God and His Word have a sympathy and love for every race, tribe, tongue, and people. Especially so, the Arabic people because they too are descendants of Abraham….These people have a right to live in the land because of the history of the past one thousand years…. To them this is their home.… The birthright of every individual coming into the world grants him an opportunity to live and pursue peace and happiness…. No man or group of men are able … to harmonize the conflicting claims of the Jews and Arabs in Palestine…. Thus with ill-will toward none, but with the kindliest feelings toward all parties concerned, we shall pray very earnestly to God to have His will in this matter and to unravel the difficulty for the advancement of His cause among men.[26]

Blackstone, Rohold, and Cooper were among the most widely known dispensational Bible teachers in America, yet their pragmatic foreign policy and international relations views were remarkably consistent with those expressed a generation later by the Christian Realist and Zionist, Reinhold Niebuhr. The more liberal Niebuhr scorned the prophetic literalism of evangelical revivalists, stating, "We feel as embarrassed as anti-Zionist religious Jews when messianic claims are used to substantiate the right of the Jews to the particular homeland in Palestine." Nevertheless, he shared with other early Christian Zionists a case for Zionism framed in the language of justice. Niebuhr's clear response to the anti-Semitism of Europe and the racial policies of the Nazis was to affirm that "many Christians are pro-Zionist in the sense that they believe that a homeless people require a homeland." [27] Ten years after its dramatic establishment, Niebuhr wrote, "History is full of strange configurations. Among them is the thrilling emergence of the State of Israel."[28] Dispensationalists viewed these events as fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Nevertheless, their faith did not fundamentally overrule their profound pragmatic realism nor deter them from following an ethic of compassionate justice.

Tony Maalouf presents a scholarly interpretation of the interwoven history and Biblical prophecies concerning the shared destiny and blessing of the Jewish and Arab peoples in his book, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel*. Maalouf, an evangelical Arab theologian, and self-described progressive dispensationalist, views the current divide between many evangelical Christian Zionists and anti-Zionists as

26. David L. Cooper, *Prophetic Fulfillments in Palestine Today* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1940), 26–27.

27. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Relations of Christians and Jews in Western Civilization," quoted in Paul C. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism: 1891–1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 141.

28. Ibid.

"a crisis of interpretation of history and theology." Maalouf counsels Christians to prioritize "the redemptive mandate over the political agendas…and invest in the spiritual awakening predicted among both the Arabs and the Jews. Removing unwarranted biases against Arabs, which neither Bible nor history sustains, would play a healing role in the Middle East conflict."[29] The crisis of contemporary Christian Zionism is not *bad theology*, but *bad praxis*. The faithful gospel witness and ethic of compassionate justice demonstrated by the early Christian "lovers of Zion" is a model that can restore this movement to be a pragmatic, constructive, and healing partner.

29. Tony Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel: The Unfolding of God's Prophetic Plan for Ishmael's Line* (Grand Rapids: Kregal Academic, 2003), 233.