

“There is No Stronger Supporter of Israel”: Exploring Christian Zionism as A Case Study of Modern Anti-Semitism

In July of 2018, noted Nazi and white supremacist Richard Spencer praised Israel for instituting its nation state law, a mandate which defined the right to exercise national self-determination in Israel as “unique to the Jewish people” (Berger). Spencer wrote on Twitter, ““I have great admiration for Israel’s nation-state law. Jews are, once again, at the vanguard, rethinking politics and sovereignty for the future, showing a path forward for Europeans” (Brennan). Spencer defines himself as a “white Zionist,” frequently applauding Israel for what he views as a great model for the white Christian ethno-state he wants in the United States. He was also caught on tape shouting anti-semitic and racist slurs, endlessly spurts antisemitic ideology and regularly defends antisemitic violence. How then, could he think so highly of Israel? While Spencer is obviously as extreme as they get, there has long been an alliance between American Christian conservatives and Zionists, especially evangelists. The roots of Christian Zionism as a religious idea could be traced back centuries to the Protestant Reformation, but its modern incarnation as a theopolitical ideology was energized in the 1980s by Jerry Falwell and other televangelist empires. It has once again surged in popularity in the Trump era and has been a core tenant of his administration's foreign policy. Some of the largest American Zionist advocacy groups like Christians United for Israel, which boasts over 8 million members, have huge influence in our global political sphere with endorsements on their website from Mike Pence and Benjamin Netanyahu alike. This begs the question, why are Christians so invested in the idea of a Jewish state? Whether motivated by obsession with the idea of an ethnostate, evangelist

religious beliefs, hatred of Jews, hatred of Muslims, imperialism, and/or political self interest, Christian and Right Wing Zionist ideologies are always rooted in the upholding of Christian white supremacy. Thus, regardless of claimed or believed intention, Christian and right wing Zionist ideologies will always be inherently antisemitic.

Christian Evangelists often explain the ideological inspiration for their Zionism as stemming from Bible verses. In his book *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism*, Stephen Spector explains the importance of Genesis 12:3, a verse which states that God will bless those who bless the Jews and curse those who curse them. He writes that “every evangelical Zionist I spoke with, leaders and laity alike, from Jerusalem to Washington, D.C., to Midland, Texas, alluded to this promise of blessing for those who bless Israel” (Spector 2). The other primary scripture quoted is from the Book of Revelation, which states that Israel must be “restored” to the Jews before they convert and redeem themselves for having rejected Jesus. This is a major motivator for Evangelists to be Zionists, as they believe that if all the Jews return to Israel the rapture will be triggered, which will allow all Christians to go to heaven and give Jews the choice between converting and rotting in hell. As Elizabeth Oldmixon, a politics professor at the University of North Texas who studies the alliance between Evangelicals and pro-Israel Orthodox Jews explains, “you have this group of people looking around for signs of the end time, and in the 20th century when Israel was founded, this was seen as a major sign. ... So support for Israel became a really important political position” (Illing). This 20th century evangelist movement was led by famous televangelists like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and Jimmy Swaggart who galvanized the Christians across the nation in favor of Israel through their TV & radio programs and organizations like the Moral Majority. When

journalist Grace Halsell went on a 1983 Jerry Falwell sponsored tour of Israel she was taught extensively about how this armageddon was going to work. In her book *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* she writes that she found her tour guide “loves Israel but does not especially like the Jews. He seems to have little or no remorse for the Jews and others he says would be killed” (Halsell 27). Halsell continues to come to this conclusion about Evangelical Zionists throughout the book, from attending the first Christian Zionist convention to analyzing endless sermons and broadcasts. Through her work and countless other inquiries it is repeatedly evident that Evangelist’s Zionism has always been predicated on the desire that all Jews go to Israel die or convert for their salvation, and thus is inextricably antisemitic.

The effects of Falwell and his contemporaries have lingered in American policy for the last 40 years and have been re-galvanized by the most explicitly Christian Zionist administration in US history. Trump’s cabinet is filled with evangelist ideologues who publicly tout their ideals and Trump constantly stresses his love of Israel. Mike Pompeo, Trump’s current Secretary of State is a fervent Evangelical Christian Zionist who repeatedly stresses his desire for the rapture and acts on the ideas that Falwell and the evangelists of the 80s planted. In 2019 Trump, Pompeo and Netanyahu decided to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a controversial move which angered many Jews and Muslims, and was most universally celebrated by evangelicals (because in their eyes it is another step towards their dreamed rapture). Furthermore, Trump has repeatedly stated that American Jews who vote for the Democratic Party either have a “total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty,” [to Israel] (qtd in Lavin). Statements like these seem somewhat absurd since 7/10 American Jews vote Democrat, but

make more sense in the context that these statements are not for American Jews. This language primarily serves to appeal to the same white evangelicals who comprise a quarter of the US population, substantiate his base (more than 80% voted for him) and are the most supportive of uncritical anti-Palestinian policy. They also reinforce ever present anti-semitic stereotypes that Jews are or should be more loyal to their religion (or to the state that supposedly stands in for their religion) than their country or ideological positions.

Furthermore, from Falwell to Trump Christian Zionists constantly use their support of Israel to defend against accusations of anti-semitism. In a 1981 article from the Washington Post, Martin Schram explains that Falwell used his relationship with then Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin to try to "counter the widespread belief that the Moral Majority membership is rife with anti-Semitism." When asked about a remark that a Jew "can make more money accidentally than you can on purpose," Falwell explained that he was making a joke and that he goes out of his way to express his support "not only for Israel but for Jewish people everywhere" (Schram). This rhetoric has become a staple for the American right every time they are accused of antisemitism; Israel is the escape hatch. Trump has repeatedly proven himself to be antisemitic-- from putting Hillary Clinton's face on a Jewish star, to saying that Nazis/white supremacists marching in Charlottesville included "some very fine people," to making statements on International Holocaust Remembrance Day that neglected to mention Jews to appointing Nazi-linked ideologues like Sebastian Gorka and Steve Bannon (Challenge). However, he can brush away criticism of any of these actions with his Zionism, calling himself "the King of Israel" (@RealDonaldTrump) and touting how much Israelis supposedly love him.

Thus, it is evident that Christian conservatives use their Zionism to mask and excuse their antisemitism, conflating Jews with Israel in order to achieve their political goals.

One would assume that Israel would condemn anti-semitic language and actions in all their forms, but instead the government has continually collaborated with and celebrated Christian Zionists despite their clear and frequent antisemitism because it is politically convenient. While Falwell disputed claims of anti-semitism through his relationship with Begin, Begin built his relationship with Falwell because he saw his audience as a burgeoning power base. Trump and current Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu are each other's biggest political fans, and Netanyahu has also repeatedly forged relationships with European right wing antisemitic populists. Furthermore, everytime an antisemitic attack happens in Europe or the US, Netanyahu and the Israeli right use it to attempt to convince Jews to move to Israel, that it is the only safe place in the world for them. After a series of attacks in France in January of 2015 Netanyahu stated that “this week, a special team of ministers will convene to advance steps to increase immigration from France and other countries in Europe that are suffering from terrible anti-Semitism. We will help you in your absorption here in our country, which is also your country” (Lazaroff). This echoes what Grace Halsell heard over and over at the very first Christian Zionist Congress in 1985: “all the world hates Jews. All through history people have hated Jews. There’s only one solution: the Jews have to live exclusively among Jews and be militarily strong” (Halsell 132). Netanyahu’s scare tactic has existed since the origin of political Zionism and serves anti-semites, evangelists and Zionists alike; everyone except the Palestinians whose land will be occupied/will be displaced and the Jews of the diaspora with roots firmly planted in their own countries.

Thus we reach the inescapable truth: Christian Zionism was and is always motivated by and as a justification for European and American imperialism. While Christian Zionism began as a religious ideology in the 16th and 17th centuries, by the 19th century it was already a political ideology to justify British colonialism. By the mid 1600s, Protestants began writing treaties declaring that all Jews should leave Europe for Palestine, far before Theodor Herzl and what is generally considered the birth of the modern Zionist movement. Grace Halsell explains that “for 150 years, Christians-- for the most part in England, but also in other parts of Europe and later on, to a marked degree in America-- were the only advocates of Zionism. ... For a century and a half, the Christians-- leaders in the movement of Western imperialism-- gained no support from Jews in their non-Jewish Zionism. ... Europe's Jews had little or no desire to leave their native lands and emigrate to Palestine” (Halsell 137). This of course radically shifted after the devastation of both World Wars and the Holocaust, with many Jews deciding to emigrate after the trauma of anti-semitic genocide. In 1983 Jerry Falwell told Tyler, Texas, *Courier Times-Telegram* that he favors Israeli’s taking portions of present day Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan and all of Lebanon, Jordan and Kuwait (Halsell 141). Israeli-American journalist Mairav Zonszein explains that Netanyahu will always support Trump because:

U.S. support for Israel these days doesn't mean just championing the idea of a Jewish state — it means supporting the idea of Greater Israel, the Israeli far right's dream of a single state. ... U.S. policy has shifted to endorsing the reality that Netanyahu's right-wing government has put on the ground: an ethno-national state where Israel retains territories it occupied in the 1967 war, Jews are the sole sovereign from the river to the sea, Palestinians are denied self-determination and international law has no currency. (Zonszein)

This desire for an ethnostate is evident in the policies both Trump and Netanyahu have propagated and enacted in the last couple years, as they have reduced Palestinian territory, refused Palestinian right to return and said that their latest inadequate framework could be "the last opportunity [Palestinians] will ever have" at achieving statehood. Furthermore, while this idea of a Jewish single state is obviously about ownership of land and power, for many Christian Zionists, it is also about waging a war with Islam as a faith. As Stephen Spector explains:

This is beyond terrorism and the wars between Israel and its Arab and Muslim neighbors. ... It is a contest between God and Allah: the Lord God of Judaism and Christianity versus what they view as the dubious supernatural being that Muslims worship. For many evangelical Zionists, this is the divine conflict behind the earthly hostilities in the Middle East. It is the other half of the picture, complementing their scripturally based alliance with the Jewish state. (Spector)

Thus, Christian Zionism was never really about an affinity for Jews, it was just a convenient ideology to espouse in order to further Western imperialism and fight Islam for "Judeo-Christian" (meaning Christian, and Jews until the rapture) values. While this Christian Zionism might benefit Jewish settlers in Israel in the short term, in the long term it only serves to further white Christian supremacy which will always disadvantage Jews in the arc of history.

Through tracing historical and present day Christian evangelical conservative Zionism, we can understand that regardless of their claimed philosemitism or alliance with the Israeli government, Christian and right wing theopolitical Zionisms will always be motivated by a combination of antisemitism and islamophobic imperialism. The Israeli government's engagement with this ideology serves them in the short term, as they are able to find political allies and fearmonger Jews into support or emigration, but in the long term it does not serve the safety or well being of the Jewish people. As Jews we deserve safety and security, but not at the

expense of Palestinian's. We refuse to be a political pawn for evangelicals and conservatives who will always have their own (intentionally or unintentionally) antisemitic interests at heart.

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@realDonaldTrump. "'Thank you to Wayne Allyn Root for the very nice words. 'President Trump is the greatest President for Jews and for Israel in the history of the world, not just America, he is the best President for Israel in the history of the world...and the Jewish people in Israel love him.....like he's the King of Israel. They love him like he is the second coming of God...But American Jews don't know him or like him. They don't even know what they're doing or saying anymore. It makes no sense! But that's OK, if he keeps doing what he's doing, he's good for.....all Jews, Blacks, Gays, everyone. And importantly, he's good for everyone in America who wants a job.' Wow! @newsmax @foxandfriends @OANN.'" *Twitter*, 1 Aug. 2019, 4:34 a.m.,
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Ted Cruz ✓ @tedcruz · 2/19/20

What utter nonsense. Its NAME is "Bloomberg News." He literally owns it. There is no stronger supporter of Israel or foe of antisemitism in the Senate; instead get the House to pass my resolution (passed Senate 100-0) calling out Left-wing antisemitic comments of your colleagues.



Rep. Andy Levin ✓ @... · 2/18/20

Words matter. Owning the media outlet carrying this message is indeed a problem. However, accusing a Jewish candidate of owning "the media" is anti-Semitic.

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Talia Lavin ✓
@chick_in_kiev

Replying to @tedcruz

christian zionism is just antisemitism
with a spicy eschatological flavor

Title inspired by this Twitter exchange: