

DISPENSATIONAL CHRISTIAN ZIONISM:  
A STRANGE BUT ACCEPTABLE ABERRATION  
OR A DEVIANT HERESY?

PHILIP A. F. CHURCH

I. *Introduction*

The Fifth International Conference of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre in Jerusalem, held in April 2004, ended with a statement which included the following: "We reject the heretical teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support . . . extremist policies . . . [which] advance a form of racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> Nine months earlier, in a paper presented to the July 2003 Tyndale Fellowship Triennial Conference at Nantwich, England, Colin Chapman commented that although he was highly critical of Christian Zionism in its support for Israel's unjust treatment of the Palestinian people, he hesitated to describe it with the word "heresy."<sup>2</sup> Chapman was reluctant to "unchurch" an estimated seventy million North American Christian Zionists.<sup>3</sup>

*Philip A. F. Church is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Theology at Laidlaw College in Auckland, New Zealand.*

<sup>1</sup> "The Fifth International Sabeel Conference Statement 'Challenging Christian Zionism,'" Online: <http://www.sabeel.org/documents/5thConfStatementfinal.htm> (accessed 23 July 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Other writers who call Christian Zionism "heresy" include Stephen Sizer, "Christian Zionism: The New Heresy that Sways America," Online: <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article12516.htm> (accessed 23 July 2008); and Donald Wagner, "Donald Wagner Addresses PAC [Palestinian American Congress] Banquet on Christian Zionism," Online: [http://www.wrmea.com/archives/July\\_Aug\\_2004/0407056.html](http://www.wrmea.com/archives/July_Aug_2004/0407056.html) (accessed 23 July 2008). Bishop Munib Younan, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, called Christian Zionism a heresy in 2003 (Munib A. Younan, "January 2003 Newsletter," Online: <http://www.elcjh.org/resources/newsletters/03/03jan.htm> [accessed 23 July 2008]), and again in 2005 (Younan, "Here We Stand: Palestinian Lutherans Rooted in Holy Ground," Online: [www.holyland-lutherans.org](http://www.holyland-lutherans.org) [accessed 5 November 2007]). See also Gershon Nerel, "Anti-Zionism in the 'Electronic Church' of Palestinian Christianity," Online: <http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/nerelprinter.pdf> (accessed 5 November 2007), 20. James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 196, argues, "It can scarcely be doubted that dispensational doctrine is heretical and should count as such, if the term 'heresy' is to have any meaning. If dispensationalism is not heresy then nothing is heresy." While dispensationalism is not to be equated with Christian Zionism, most dispensationalists would identify with Christian Zionism. According to Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel* (McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion 1.16; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 46, the WCC declared heretical "any attempts to use theology to justify the existence of Israel." However, a search for the words "heresy," "Zionism," and "Israel" on WCC websites disclosed no such declaration.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates of the numbers of Christian Zionists in North America vary. The seventy million may have come from a full-page advertisement in the Washington Times, January 27, 1992, cited by Gary M. Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the*

This article examines the underlying hermeneutics of Christian Zionism and some of its outcomes, with a view to expressing an opinion on whether it should be called a deviant heresy, whether it is an acceptable aberration, albeit strange, or whether it should be described in some other way. In this article I pass no judgment on the rightness or wrongness of (Jewish or Political) Zionism *per se*; rather, I am solely concerned with Christian support for Zionism on Christian theological grounds.

Hans Dieter Betz gives a useful working definition of heresy as “an arbitrary deviation by a minority from a doctrinal norm represented and safeguarded institutionally by a majority,”<sup>4</sup> although to that definition should be added the qualification that the doctrinal norm in question ought to be central to Christian belief rather than peripheral. Heresy impacts such central beliefs as the deity of Christ or his resurrection.<sup>5</sup> An aberration, on the other hand, is a divergent understanding of something peripheral. An example of an aberration might be a member of a baptistic congregation proposing that the congregation adopt paedobaptism.

## II. Defining Zionism

Zionism is the “Jewish nationalist movement to establish a homeland in Palestine.”<sup>6</sup> The term was coined late in the nineteenth century by Nathan Birnbaum (1864–1937), and the Zionist cause was advanced by the secular Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) following encounters with anti-Semitism in Vienna in 1878 and again in Paris in 1894.<sup>7</sup> He considered anti-Semitism to be an issue that could only be solved by the emigration of Jews from Europe to a land they could call their own.<sup>8</sup> In 1896 he published *Der*

*Palestinians* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 240. Burge notes that the advertisement, signed by thirty-three Christian leaders, was headed, “Seventy Million Christians Urge President Bush to Approve Land Guarantees to Israel.” Wagner is reported as estimating the number at about twenty million (see Wagner, “PAC Banquet”). Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now! The Premillenarian Response to Russia and Israel since 1917* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 12, conservatively estimates the number of “American premillenarians” at eight million, although thirty years later the number would be considerably higher. In the *Time* cover story for July 1, 2002, Nancy Gibbs cites a TIME/CNN poll as finding that “59% [of Americans] . . . believe the events in Revelation are going to come true, and nearly one quarter think that the Bible predicted the Sept. 11 attack” (Nancy Gibbs, “Apocalypse Now,” *Time*, July 1, 2002, 2, Online: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,100-2759,00.html> [accessed 23 July 2008]).

<sup>4</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, “Heresy and Orthodoxy in the NT,” *ABD* 3:144.

<sup>5</sup> See R. P. C. Hanson, “Orthodoxy,” in *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (ed. Alan Richardson; London: SCM Press, 1969), 246. Hanson defines heresy as a deviation from “a central and consistent tradition of Christian doctrine and practice, very little affected by the extremes of denominational or factional variation.”

<sup>6</sup> “Vocabulary,” Online: [http://regentsprep.org/Regents/global/vocab/topic\\_alpha.cfm?topic=z](http://regentsprep.org/Regents/global/vocab/topic_alpha.cfm?topic=z) (accessed 23 July 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Brenda E. Brasher, “Millennialism in Contemporary Israeli Politics,” in *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (ed. Kenneth G. C. Newport and Crawford Gribben; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006), 69.

<sup>8</sup> “Theodor (Binyamin Ze'ev) Herzl,” Online: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Herzl.html> (accessed 23 July 2008).

*Judenstaat*,<sup>9</sup> in which he argued for the creation of a Jewish State. Herzl initially wondered whether this proposed Jewish state should be in Argentina or Palestine, and while he wrote that “the Argentine Republic would derive considerable profit from the cession of a portion of its territory to us,”<sup>10</sup> he finally decided on Palestine.

Palestine is our ever-memorable historic home. The very name of Palestine would attract our people with a force of marvelous potency. If His Majesty the Sultan were to give us Palestine, we could in return undertake to regulate the whole finances of Turkey. We should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism.<sup>11</sup>

While Palestine had been under Turkish control since 1516, Jewish Zionists did not need to wait for the Sultan of Turkey to give it to them. Turkey capitulated in the 1914–1918 war and was driven out of Palestine, which then came under the British Mandate awarded by the League of Nations. This Mandate empowered Britain to “place the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home . . . and also for safeguarding the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race and religion.”<sup>12</sup>

### III. *Christian Zionism and Dispensationalism*

Christian Zionism is support for Zionism on Christian theological grounds. Christian Zionists read God’s promises in Genesis, and particularly those concerning the “promised land,” as though they apply to the modern State of Israel, whose citizens they consider to be the descendants of Abraham.

Many Christian Zionists would also describe themselves as dispensationalists. A variety of millenarianism, dispensationalism is a hermeneutical system that privileges a literal reading of the one-thousand-year reign of peace in Rev 20:1-6, and conforms the rest of the Bible to that reading.<sup>13</sup> All the other biblical writers, and especially the OT prophets (among whom dispensationalists include Daniel) are believed to refer to “the millennium,” and to have written about it, albeit in ways that are not immediately obvious to other readers. Dispensational Christian Zionists believe that the Jewish temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and that there will be a resumption of at least some aspects of the

<sup>9</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (Berlin and Vienna: M. Breitenstein’s Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1896), n.p., Online: [http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/germanica/Chronologie/20Jh/Herzl/her\\_ju00.h.tml](http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/germanica/Chronologie/20Jh/Herzl/her_ju00.h.tml) (accessed 23 July 2008) (ET: Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* [trans. Sylvie D’Avigdor; The American Zionist Emergency Council, 1946], n.p., Online: <http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/6640/zion/judenstaat.html> [accessed 23 July 2008]).

<sup>10</sup> Herzl, *Jewish State*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cited by Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?* (3d ed.; Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2002), 24.

<sup>13</sup> Other key texts in the dispensational intra-canonical canon include 1 Thess 4:17, said to refer to the “rapture”; Dan 9:24-27; Ezek 37-39; 40-48; and Matt 24-25. Rev 20:1-6, which refers to the so-called “millennium,” is primary in this canon and these other texts are always subordinated to it.

OT sacrificial system.<sup>14</sup> They consider the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 to signal that the “last days” have arrived. Jesus will soon return in secret to “rapture” the church, and after seven years of tribulation, culminating in the Battle of Armageddon, he will return to earth again, this time publicly, to rule the world for one thousand years, sitting on the throne of David in Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup>

Much of the critique of Christian Zionism in what follows is also a critique of dispensationalism, which represents the theological under-pinning of Christian Zionism. Christian Zionism and dispensationalism go hand in hand, with the latter nearly always leading to the former.

#### IV. *The Roots of Christian Zionism*

Sizer traces the roots of Christian Zionism to the Puritan period. He refers to two strands of “Proto-Christian Zionism”—covenantal Christian Zionism, based on the belief that God must give the land to Israel since he has bound himself in a covenant with Israel which includes possession of this land, and the more common dispensational Christian Zionism.<sup>16</sup> The present article is concerned

<sup>14</sup> See Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 138-56; and Randall Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 2005), 22-24, 32, 44, 187-324, and *passim*. In his University of Texas Ph.D. thesis Price argues that the NT “affirms the eschatological promise of salvation and national and cultic restoration to Israel” and predicts that this will entail a third physical temple in Jerusalem with Israel fulfilling “their historic destiny to bring the knowledge of the glory of God to all the earth” (Randall Price, “The Desecration and Restoration of the Temple as an Eschatological Motif in the Tanach, Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and the New Testament” [Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1993], 617).

<sup>15</sup> This description is of the pre-tribulation rapture, pre-millennial dispensational eschatological timetable. This is the most common of a number of different timetables proposed by dispensationalists. For a description of the various views of the “rapture” see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing, 1958), 156-92, and for his arguments for a pre-tribulation rapture see *ibid.*, 193-217.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Sizer, “The Promised Land: A Critical Investigation of Evangelical Christian Zionism in Britain and the United States of America Since 1800” (Ph.D. diss., University of Middlesex, 2002), 26. Peter Toon, “The Latter Day Glory,” in *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology, 1600 to 1660* (ed. Peter Toon; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1970), 26-32, discusses the work of Thomas Brightman, whose commentary on the Apocalypse was published in 1615 under the title *A Revelation of the Revelation*. Toon relates that Brightman read the closing chapters of Revelation in terms of “an earth filled with the glory of God . . . in which Jerusalem is wonderfully restored and has become the centre of true religion” (30). Toon writes that in his commentary on Daniel, Brightman explained how “the Jews will return from the areas North and East of Palestine to Jerusalem and how the Holy Land and the Jewish Christian Church will become the centre of the Christian world” (30). For other examples of popular exegesis of Revelation in the period 1550-1900 see Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Apart from Brightman and Joseph Sutcliffe (1762-1856), who expected Jews to be found in Jerusalem again in 1865 (Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, 101), the other interpreters Newport discusses do not see a place for the Jews in their schemes. Robert D. Wilken, “The Restoration of Israel in Biblical Prophecy: Christian and Jewish Responses in the Early Byzantine Period,” in “*To See Ourselves as Others See Us*”: *Christians, Jews and “Others” in Late Antiquity* (ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 450-53, refers to Apollinarus, Bishop of Laodicea (d. 390 C.E.) as an early Christian theologian who identified with

with dispensational Christian Zionism, and leaves covenantal Christian Zionism to one side.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the key figure in the origins of premillennial dispensationalism is John Nelson Darby (1800–1882),<sup>18</sup> who formulated the system in the first half of the nineteenth century,<sup>19</sup> although dispensationalists usually argue that it is a much earlier phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> Darby was a curate in the Church of Ireland, who

Jewish Messianic hopes and anticipated the rebuilding of the temple in 432 C.E., a date calculated with reference to Dan 9. According to Wilken, Theodoret of Cyrus in Northern Syria expressed amazement at “the folly of Apollinarus” (453).

<sup>17</sup> Covenantal Christian Zionism was originally concerned with the evangelization of Jews, and considered that both Jews and Christians would together bring blessing to the world. See Sizer, “Promised Land,” 37; and Gary L. Nebeker, “John Nelson Darby and Trinity College, Dublin: A Study in Eschatological Contrasts,” *Fides et Historia* 34 (2002): 96–97. The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) describes itself as “the forerunner in developing wider Christian understanding of Biblical Zionism . . . [and] the world’s largest international network of Christian supporters of Israel” (“Position,” Online: <http://www.icej.org/articles/positon> [accessed 30 July 2008]). This organisation claims to be of largely covenantal Christian Zionist persuasion. A link on their website accesses a paper by David Parsons, “Swords into Ploughshares: Christian Zionism and the Battle of Armageddon,” Online: <http://icej.org/data/images/File/News/swords.pdf> (accessed 30 July 2008), which does not contain the word “temple.” But Parsons’s explanations of his theology are confused and confusing. On p. 18 he suggests that while ICEJ is “Pre-Millennial,” it is not dispensational; on pp. 40–41 he critiques dispensational views of the Battle of Armageddon and the expectation that it will entail the extermination of two-thirds of the Jews; on p. 42 he notes that “ICEJ still believes in and faithfully awaits the Rapture of the saints”; and on p. 43 he anticipates that “humanity’s rebellion against God” will culminate “in the Battle of Armageddon.” His paper contains a major section entitled “Covenantal Theology: The Foundations of Biblical Zionism” (pp. 18–35), where he argues for the return of Israel to the land on the basis of God’s faithfulness to his covenants. Donald Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon: A Call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Churches* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1995), 100, claims that virtually all of those who established the ICEJ “subscribed to the futurist premillennial dispensational eschatology.” While there seems to be no place for the rebuilt temple and the resumption of sacrificial activity in the thinking of ICEJ, it does promote an annual pilgrimage of Christians to Israel to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (see “Feast of Tabernacles 2008: The Lion of Judah,” Online: [http://www.icej.org/articles/feast\\_of\\_tabernacles](http://www.icej.org/articles/feast_of_tabernacles) [accessed 30 July 2008]).

<sup>18</sup> Nebeker, “Darby,” 87, describes Darby as an “obscure, yet pivotal figure of nineteenth-century British and American evangelicalism.” Given the popularity of premillennial dispensationalism to this day and its ongoing influence on American foreign policy (see below), Nebeker is probably correct in his judgment. The influence of Darby on the past 200 years in the Christian church has been enormous, yet very few know the details of his life, and his voluminous *Collected Writings* are found on very few bookshelves.

<sup>19</sup> Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 59–80. Whether premillennial dispensationalism started with Edward Irving or with Darby is debated. For arguments linking it to the former see Mark Peterson and Andrew Walker, “‘Our Unspeakable Comfort’: Irving, Albury and the Origins of the Tribulation Rapture,” *Fides et Historia* 31 (1999); and for the latter see Nebeker, “Darby.”

<sup>20</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 68–70, finds the roots of dispensationalism in the writings of Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine, although he does recognize that these were not “dispensationalists in the modern sense of the term” (70). He considers that these theologians recognized that God dealt differently with people in different periods of history; for example, Jerome notes that Enoch and others pleased God, although they were not circumcised and did not keep the Sabbath. Ryrie seems to claim anybody who uses the word “dispensation” for his cause. But this does not make one a dispensationalist. On pp. 71–73 he discusses dispensationalism in the writings of Pierre Poiret (1646–1719), John

concluded that both the established church and the dissenting churches were apostate. Nevertheless, there remained a faithful "remnant" of true believers in the church, who would be removed from the earth at the rapture, leaving the established church to face the judgment of God. He also had a positive picture of Israel, which he considered to be more important in God's purposes than the church of Jesus Christ. Ultimately the church will be removed from history and replaced by Israel, restored to the land promised by God to Abraham.<sup>21</sup>

Edwards (1639–1716), and Isaac Watts (1674–1748). Of these, only Poiret presents a systematized dispensationalism with an earthly millennial reign of Christ, according to Ryrie who depends on Arnold D. Ehlert, "A Biography of Dispensationalism," *BSac* 101 (1944): 448-50. Ehlert's article is one part of a nine-part series that claims that most of the key figures throughout the history of the church were to some extent dispensationalist in their thinking. Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202) divides the history of the human race into three dispensations (see Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, 7-8). Other early Christian millennialists include Tertullian, Irenaeus, Victorinus, and Lactantius (Wilken, "Restoration," 450); however, whether they were also Christian Zionists is doubtful. Ehlert, "A Biography of Dispensationalism," 200-203, lists Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Lanctantius, Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers, and Augustine (who, he recognizes, changed his mind and became an amillennialist) as millennialists, but not as Christian Zionists. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 374-75, cites George H. N. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952), 1:482-83, who expands this list considerably to include the Apostles Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, John, Matthew, as well as Aristio and John the Presbyter, all of whom he claims to be "exponents of premillennialism." Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1999), 112-15, find a reference to the pre-tribulation rapture in the writings of Morgan Edwards in 1742 and Pseudo-Ephraim (either Ephraim of Nisibus, 306–373, or Pseudo-Ephraim, 565–627). On p. 115 LaHaye and Jenkins claim that "no doubt there must have been other Bible students who also discovered the teaching about the Blessed Hope [of the pre-tribulation rapture]."

<sup>21</sup> Christian Zionists often accuse their opponents of "replacement theology," which is defined either as the church replacing Israel, or Christians replacing Jews. Neither caricature is valid. Their own brand of replacement theology goes the other way with Israel ultimately replacing the church, and Judaism replacing Christianity. Iain Hamish Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: Banner of Truth, 1971), 187-99, details the beginnings of this theology in 1825, and estimates that by 1845 there were seven hundred English Anglican clergy who considered "that Christ's coming must precede His kingdom upon earth" (197). Murray also discusses Darby and the rise of "the Brethren," and notes that unfulfilled prophecy "was one of the main foundations of the whole system" (197-98). Premillennial dispensationalism did not flourish only in Britain. Murray discusses Darby's influence on Henry Moorhouse, who in turn influenced D. L. Moody. As Murray points out, Darby also influenced C. I. Scofield, whose *Reference Bible* "had vast influence in making Darby's prophetic beliefs the norm for evangelicals in the English speaking world" (198). In the U.S.A., W. E. Blackstone first published *Jesus Is Coming* in 1898. This book, which went through several "revisions," presented an apology for the premillennial viewpoint. Blackstone proposes that the return of the Jewish people would initially be "in unbelief" (W. E. Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming* [3d ed.; Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1932], 210-13, 34-41). In 1891 Blackstone initiated "The Blackstone Memorial," a memorandum addressed to President Benjamin Harrison urging his support for the establishment of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine (see Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* [Studies in Cultural History; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992], 100). For the text of the Memorial and the list of signatories see "The Blackstone Memorial," Online: <http://www.amfi.org/blackmem.htm> (accessed 30 July 2008).

Sizer traces the influence of Darby on a number of influential British politicians.<sup>22</sup> One of these was Lord Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, 1801–1885), who had been reared in a conservative Christian home. He became convinced that the Jews would return to Palestine in the last days, and in 1840 petitioned the British Parliament to that effect.<sup>23</sup> In the *Quarterly Review*, vol. 63 (January/March 1839) he wrote, “The Jews must be encouraged to return in yet greater numbers and become once more the husbandman of Judea and Galilee. . . . [They are] not only worthy of salvation but are also vital to Christianity’s hope of salvation.”<sup>24</sup>

On 4 November 1840 he took out a full-page advertisement in *The Times* headed “Restauration [*sic*] of the Jews,” which included these words, “A memorandum has been addressed to the Protestant monarchs of Europe on the subject of the restoration of the Jewish people to the land of Palestine. The document in question, dictated by a particular conjunction of affairs in the East, and other striking ‘signs of the times,’ reverts to the original covenant which secures that land to the descendants of Abraham.”<sup>25</sup>

Shaftesbury’s theology had convinced him that his Jewish contemporaries had a God-given right to the land God had promised to Abraham’s descendants. Since he supported the return of the Jews to Palestine on Christian theological grounds, he could be called a Christian Zionist.<sup>26</sup>

Almost eighty years later, on 2 November 1917, the Foreign Secretary of England (formerly Prime Minister), Arthur James Balfour, wrote what is known as “The Balfour Declaration” on behalf of the British Government to the Jewish Zionist Lord Lionel Rothschild: “His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours 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 existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”<sup>27</sup>

On the face of it, this sounds fine, but there is another, more sinister, side to this story, for in a letter dated 11 August 1919 Balfour wrote these words: “In

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2004), 55.

<sup>23</sup> Ariel Yaakov, “An Unexpected Alliance: Christian Zionism and Its Historical Significance,” *Modern Judaism* 26 (2006): 74. See also Barbara Tuchman, *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 175–207.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Cited by Donald E. Wagner, “Reagan and Begin, Bibi and Jerry: The Theopolitical Alliance of the Likud party with the American Christian ‘Right,’” *Arab Studies Quarterly* (1998): 6. Online: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2501/is\\_4\\_20/ai\\_54895469](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2501/is_4_20/ai_54895469) (accessed 30 July 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (London: Valentine, Mitchell, 1961), 137–46, discusses the influence of Lloyd George, British Prime Minister from 1916 to 1922, another British politician with Christian Zionist leanings. Stern writes, “It was not for nothing that bound up with the memories of his [Lloyd George’s] childhood were the prophecies which foretold the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land” (143).

<sup>27</sup> Arthur James Balfour, “The Balfour Declaration,” Online: <http://www.yalc.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/balfour.htm> (accessed 30 July 2008).

Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country. . . . The four great powers are committed to Zionism, and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land."<sup>28</sup>

The source of Balfour's interest in Zionism is debated, with some writers considering that he had come under the influence of dispensational theology, and others considering that he was influenced by Christian anti-Semitism. It is agreed that he had been reared in a conservative Christian home, and that this had in some way been formative in his thinking. He was a Christian and a Zionist, and he clearly felt that the Jewish people had a more valid claim on Palestine than the existing Palestinian Arab population.

Whatever the source of this interest, it is clear that Christian Zionist sympathies had some part to play in British politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leading up to the Balfour Declaration.<sup>29</sup>

### V. *The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism*

Dispensational hermeneutics are based on the principle of the literal, or so-called "normal," interpretation of Scripture, and in particular of the OT prophetic literature.<sup>30</sup> This literal or "normal" hermeneutic is not understood as wooden literalism; so, for example, the expression "the four corners of the

<sup>28</sup> This paragraph is cited in Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 159-61, from *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, First Series* (London, H. M. S. O.), 4, no. 242, p. 345.

<sup>29</sup> Regina S. Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism: Its Roots in Western History* (London: Zed Press, 1983), 78, notes that Balfour "was reared within the tradition of Scottish Protestantism with all its affection for the Old Testament and a strong belief in the restoration of the Jews as heralding the Second Coming of Christ." Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 63, agrees, noting that Balfour had come under "the influence of dispensational teaching." See also Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon*, 93, who refers to Balfour's "simple, layperson's version of the premillennial dispensational theology"; and Donald E. Wagner, *Dying in the Land of Promise: Palestine and Palestinian Christianity from Pentecost to 2000* (2d rev. ed.; London: Melisende, 2003), 99, who refers to Balfour's and Lloyd George's predisposition to Zionism as a result of "their Evangelical Christian backgrounds." On the other hand, Gorenberg, *End of Days*, 86, states flatly that "[Balfour] was no millennialist." Gorenberg is probably following Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 158, who comments that Balfour "was not moved by any mystical ideas about the return of the Chosen People to the Holy Land"; rather he seems to have had a lifelong interest in the Jewish people, and was deeply influenced by Christian anti-Semitism. Balfour's biographer, Blanche E. C. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour, First Earl of Balfour, K.G., O.M., F.R.S., Etc.* (2 vols.; London: Hutchinson, 1939), 1:325, refers to his lifelong interest in the Jews originating in "the Old Testament training of his mother." She recalls that in his childhood he "imbibed the idea that Christian religion and civilisation owes to Judaism an immeasurable debt, shamefully ill repaid" (*ibid.*). Dugdale also notes, "His view of the expediency of acknowledging the historic right of the Jews to a special position in Palestine was a long range view, stretching further into the past and the future than was the case with some of his colleagues" (2:159). She reports a conversation with Chaim Weizmann who told Balfour, "Jerusalem was our own when London was a marsh" (1:326).

<sup>30</sup> See Sandeen, *Roots*, 107-12. For a classical dispensational defense of the literal interpretation of prophecy, see Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 9-20, 59-64. Thomas Baurain, "A Short Primer on



earth” is not considered to mean that the earth is square and flat.<sup>31</sup> Rather, it is based on the “code model” of interpretation. Writers or speakers encode their thoughts in words, and readers or hearers decode these words, expecting to reproduce the thoughts of the writer or speaker in their minds. As Baurain explains, “The interpreter’s task is really quite simple. He must come to an understanding of . . . the . . . author’s intended meaning . . . The meaning of any biblical passage . . . resides in the text being examined and is determined by the author of the text, not by the interpreter. The interpreter’s function is to uncover by careful and diligent examination the meaning that the author intended to communicate to his original readers.”<sup>32</sup>

The shortcomings of this approach will be readily apparent to anyone with the most basic acquaintance with the study of pragmatics and semiotics.<sup>33</sup> The exclusion of the presuppositions and the context of the reader from the reading process and the assumption that the author’s intention is readily apparent are utterly simplistic, and when combined with the (often unstated) presupposition that a literal reading of Rev 20:1-6 has a privileged place in the interpretation of any part of the Bible, the contention of Baurain is probably true: “Normal hermeneutics . . . consistent literalism . . . applied to the entire Bible leads the interpreter to Normative Dispensational Theology.”<sup>34</sup>

### VI. *The Distinction Between Israel and the Church*

This so-called “normal” interpretation leads to a rigid distinction between Israel and the Church.<sup>35</sup> For dispensational readers the “normal” referent of the word “Israel” is the people of Israel, that is the OT people of God, and the “normal” referent of the word “church” is the NT people of God. Murray cites Darby as saying, “I deny that the saints before Christ’s first coming, or after his second, are part of the church.” Murray adds, “With breath-taking dogmatism . . . [Darby] swept away what had previously been axiomatic in Christian theology.”<sup>36</sup>

Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 10 (2006): 41-42, claims three dispensational distinctives: the literal or normal interpretation of Scripture, a distinction between Israel and the church, and “the ultimate purpose of God in the world to be bringing glory to himself.”

<sup>31</sup> Baurain, “Hermeneutics,” 42.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>33</sup> See the critique of the “code” model of interpretation in Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 5-7. Anthony C. Thistleton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 80-81, briefly discusses semiotics, drawing examples from the Apocalypse to demonstrate the danger of misinterpreting the code and distorting the sense of the text. David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” *ThTo* 37 (1980): 37, comments that “the notion that a text means only what its author intends is historically naive.”

<sup>34</sup> Baurain, “Hermeneutics,” 48.

<sup>35</sup> See Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 132-40; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 201-2. Sizer, “Promised Land,” 136, notes that the rigid distinction between Israel and the church found in Darby’s writings was based on his commitment to literalism.

<sup>36</sup> Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 200.

Ryrie notes that Rom 9:3-4, "written after the beginning of the Church is proof that the Church does not rob Israel of her blessings. The term Israel continues to be used for the natural . . . descendants of Abraham after the Church was instituted, and it is not equated with the Church."<sup>37</sup> His point is that while there may have been a believing element within Israel and included within the church at the time envisaged in Rom 9:3-4, Israel as a nation still existed, and is not to be equated with the church. This is not in dispute, and Ryrie is not alone in his suggestion that the NT does not apply the epithet "Israel" to the church.<sup>38</sup> However, it is one thing to recognize this distinction but quite another to assert that the OT promises of blessing are restricted to the then nation of Israel, and it is something else again to assert that the present-day political entity in the Middle East called Israel is also the exclusive recipient of these promises. In Christian Zionist thinking this political entity is believed to have a divine right to the land promised by God to Abraham, and the Palestinian Arab population of that land is considered to be an impediment to the outworking of God's purposes for his earthly people.<sup>39</sup>

While the application of the term Israel to the church in the NT is debated, it is clear that Christian believers are seen in the NT to inherit much of what is predicated of Israel in the OT. The promises to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3 are frequently cited by Christian Zionists, overlooking that this text is consistently interpreted in the NT with reference to the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God (e.g., Gal 3:7: "All who believe are descendants of Abraham"). As Longenecker notes, "Paul found Gentiles at the very heart of the Abrahamic covenant."<sup>40</sup> And on the string of OT texts cited in Rom 15:9-12, Longenecker comments, "Paul found God's saving purpose toward Gentiles everywhere in the Old Testament. . . . He wants his Gentile converts to know that they were in the mind and purpose of God when God gave his covenant to Abraham."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 138.

<sup>38</sup> R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990), 297, makes this point in a discussion of the hotly debated expression "the Israel of God" in Gal 6:16, citing Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 358, and Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (SNTSMS 10; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 80-81. Longenecker concludes that this expression refers to Paul's opponents at Galatia, who may have referred to themselves in these terms. Both Burton (*Commentary on Galatians*, 358) and Richardson (*Israel*, 82-83) consider that the expression refers to a remnant within Israel who "are going to come to their senses and receive the good news of Christ" (Richardson, *Israel*, 82). On the other hand, Sizer argues strongly that this text refers to Christian believers (Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldiers: The Bible, Israel and the Church* [Nottingham: InterVarsity, 2007], 48-50).

<sup>39</sup> For definitions of the words Israelite, Hebrew, Jew, and Israeli, see Reed Lessing, "A Lutheran Response to the Left Behind Series," Online: [http://www.issuesetcarchive.org/issues\\_site/resource/archives/lessing2.htm](http://www.issuesetcarchive.org/issues_site/resource/archives/lessing2.htm) (accessed 30 July 2008). Lessing concludes, "What these four definitions mean is that it is accurate to speak of certain people who are alive today as Jews and Israelis—it is inaccurate to say that there are any Israelites or Hebrews living today. This inaccuracy pervades the theology of *Left Behind*, and by failing to make this distinction the authors identify modern-day Jews and Israelis as the Old Testament recipients of God's promises. Yet the Bible teaches that the promises made to Israelites and Hebrews in the Old Testament find their fulfillment not with Jews or Israelis, but rather with Christ and his Church."

<sup>40</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, 115.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

It is evident that the NT is to be read not as restricting the Abrahamic promises of blessing to Israel alone, but as widening these promises to include Gentiles in the people of God. In such texts as Eph 2:11-22, where the division between Jew and Gentile is said to be abolished, and 1 Pet 2:9-10, which applies epithets addressed to Israel in Exod 19:6 to the church, it is clear that the NT authors considered Christ to inherit the promises made to the OT people of God, and that the church inherits the blessings of Israel through Christ. By concentrating on the use of Israel for the physical descendants of Abraham, Ryrie and others have missed these references. And while they accuse those who disagree with them of "replacement theology," as Christopher Wright argues, a more appropriate term would be "extension theology": "The realities of Israel and the Old Testament . . . [are taken] up into a greater reality in the Messiah. Christ does not *deprive* the believing Jew of anything that belonged to Israel as God's people; nor does he give the believing Gentile anything less than the full covenantal blessing and promise that was Israel's."<sup>42</sup>

### VII. *The Rebuilt Temple*

This "normal" hermeneutic also leads to the belief that the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and that Jewish sacrifices will again be offered there.<sup>43</sup> Randall Price argues for this in both his 1993 doctoral thesis for the University of Texas at Austin, and in his later monograph.<sup>44</sup> Price starts with the understanding that Ezekiel envisaged the post-exilic restoration of temple worship,<sup>45</sup> but since the Second Temple was quite different from the temple Ezekiel envisaged, the real restoration must be still in the future, that is, in the millennial age announced in Rev 20.<sup>46</sup> Price finds support for this in several NT texts.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher Wright, "A Christian Approach to Old Testament Prophecy Concerning Israel," in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God* (ed. P. W. L. Walker; Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1994), 19.

<sup>43</sup> Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 512-17. See also Merrill F. Unger, "The Temple Vision of Ezekiel (1)," *BSac* 105 (1948): 418-29. Unger locates the rebuilt temple not in Jerusalem, but in "the . . . central portion of the land . . . [which will be] converted into a 'very great valley' . . . from Geba, about six miles northeast of Jerusalem, to Rimmon . . . some thirty miles south of Jerusalem [when Christ stands on the Mount of Olives at his Second Coming, setting up] the exalted location and unique construction of the millennial seat of worship" (425). Unger's three-part article is a fascinating study of the application of "normal" hermeneutics as he explains in minute detail the location, structure, and purpose of Ezekiel's "millennial" temple.

<sup>44</sup> Price, "Desecration and Restoration"; Price, *Temple*.

<sup>45</sup> Price, "Desecration and Restoration," 290-95.

<sup>46</sup> Price's "normal" hermeneutic leads him to expect a one-to-one fulfillment of prophetic predictions. Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 29-40, sees the failure of prophecy as the source of the reinterpretive activity that can be detected in the OT prophetic literature. This also happens in the NT. For example, James interprets words taken from Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:14-19 in terms of Gentile believers being included in the people of God. Basing his study on the work of Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), Carroll (124-28) speaks in terms of "cognitive dissonance" giving rise to new interpretations of prophecy.

In his treatment of the Johannine account of the temple cleansing he reads the Fourth Gospel in a grid established from his reading of the Synoptics, where he finds nothing to indicate that Jesus had anything but a positive view of the temple.<sup>47</sup> Since Jesus only viewed the temple in a positive light in the Synoptics, he must view it in the same way in John, for “there is no textual reason to suggest that the Fourth Gospel is not in agreement with this perspective.”<sup>48</sup> He then turns to the saying, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19), rightly explaining that Jesus refers to himself as “the dwelling place of God.”<sup>49</sup> But he continues,

As death “destroyed” Jesus’ physical body, so the resurrection (by the power of God) would “rebuild” his body physically, adding a new spiritual dimension. The metaphor, then, would be drawn from the literal reality of a coming destruction of the physical Second Temple, which would one day, by the power of God, be “resurrected” (i.e. restored) as a physical building with a new spiritual dimension (i.e. inviolability). If this is the author’s intent, then rather than having Jesus announcing the Temple’s replacement, he was affirming its eschatological restoration.<sup>50</sup>

Price’s “If this is the author’s intent” is a rather large “if.” John 2:19 is ambiguous: the Jews in Jesus’ audience understood him to be referring to a new building, but the editorial comment in v. 21, “he was speaking of the temple of his body,” corrects that misapprehension. The claim of v. 22 that the disciples recalled this “after he was raised from the dead” clarifies the “three days” and disambiguates the statement of Jesus. He was indeed referring to himself as the dwelling place of God, but nothing in John 2:12-23 can be read as suggesting that he (or the author/editor of the Fourth Gospel) envisaged that “the temple

The same principle seems to be at work in the dispensational literal hermeneutic. The OT prophetic oracles of salvation for Israel are approached with the presupposition that there must be a literal fulfillment. When this did not eventuate after the exile, the fulfillment is deferred to a later date (when God again starts working with Israel in the millennium). The same phenomenon is evident in popular dispensational writing, such as Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth*, which has been regularly updated, revising the expected date of the rapture, as the previous date “prophesied” by Lindsey passes. Crawford Gribben, “After *Left Behind*—The Paradox of Evangelical Pessimism,” in *Expecting the End*, 114, notes, “As the example of Lindsey illustrates, prophetic failure can always be explained, and explanations for the failure often continue to sell to the faithful.”

<sup>47</sup> Price, “Desecration and Restoration,” 464-93. J. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (2d ed.; London: SCM Press, 2006), 49-51, gives evidence for Jesus’ positive attitude to the temple, but Dunn also raises a number of questions. Jesus had a “cavalier” attitude to purity issues (58), he took upon himself the priestly prerogative of announcing forgiveness “without the authorisation of the temple authorities and without reference to the cult” (62), he cleansed the temple as a “prophetic critique” (65), and spoke of the destruction and rebuilding of the temple.

<sup>48</sup> Price, “Desecration and Restoration,” 493.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 493-94. Price repeats this analysis in his later monograph (*Temple*, 273), claiming the support of E. P. Sanders (Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 71-119). While Sanders certainly discusses the restoration of Judaism and Jewish hopes for a new temple, he says nothing that would suggest that Jesus expected that a new physical temple in Jerusalem would later replace the temple of his body.

of his body” would one day be replaced with a physical temple in Jerusalem. On the contrary, the Fourth Gospel is to be read as proclaiming that Jesus is the fulfillment of the temple, and that he replaces the temple. Clearly a “normal” hermeneutic does not guarantee the most appropriate reading.

### VIII. *A Critique of Dispensational Christian Zionism*

Criticisms can be directed at Dispensational Christian Zionism, on both ethical and theological grounds. One side of the ethical issue is the matter of justice for the Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza and the West Bank, who face daily harassment from the Israeli Defense Forces carrying out the Zionist agenda, and also for the 4.3 million Palestinian refugees displaced from their land in 1948 and 1967, still living in refugee camps in their own and surrounding countries.

Political Zionism seems always to have closed its eyes to the existence of the people who inhabited Palestine before the time of the Balfour Declaration and since.<sup>51</sup> Herzl wrote in his diary for 12 June 1895,

We must expropriate gently the private property on the state assigned to us. We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it employment in our country. . . . Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and circumspectly.<sup>52</sup>

While the situation is complex, and while there have been wrongs on every side of the conflict in Palestine, there is no doubt about the oppression of the Palestinian people. This is seen most blatantly in the eight-meter-high “security fence” built on Palestinian land, separating people from their livelihoods; in the numerous checkpoints throughout the occupied territories; in the Jewish settlements in these territories; and in the horrors of life in Gaza.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Melani McAlister, “Prophecy, Politics, and the Popular: The *Left Behind* Series and Christian Fundamentalism’s New World Order,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102 (2003): 792, notes that the *Left Behind* books completely ignore the Palestinian people. She comments, “The very notion of ‘Palestinian’ is made invisible, impossible, . . . they are simply outside the representational possibilities of the *Left Behind* world: . . . there is no Palestinian problem on the evangelical map.” LaHaye and Jenkins, *End Times*, 45, refer to Israel as “a little country of five million people in the Middle East.” They are clearly ignoring the Arab population. In 1995 there were 4.5 million Jews and 3.5 million Arabs, and in 2005 5.3 million Jews and 5.1 million Arabs, giving totals of 8 million and 10.4 million respectively (see “Israeli-Palestinian Population Statistics,” Online: <http://israelipalestinian.procon.org/viewresource.asp?resourceID=636> [accessed 2 August 2008]). In *End Times* on p. 47 LaHaye and Jenkins refer to the five million as “five million Jews,” and on p. 52 they give population figures between 1917 and 1999, again showing the “five million” to include ethnic Jews alone.

<sup>52</sup> *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl* (ed. Raphael Patai; trans. Harry Zohn; 5 vols.; New York: Herzl Press and Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 1:88 (entry for 12 June 1895); cited by Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–2001* (New York: Random House, 2001), 21–22.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 67–68, discusses the injustices meted out on the Palestinian people with the support of George W. Bush, whom he identifies as a dispensationalist. As Northcott shows, American foreign policy in the Middle East will ultimately serve to “perpetuate the ‘war on terror.’” On the

A short time before his death in February 1970 Bertrand Russell wrote,

The tragedy of the people of Palestine is that their country was 'given' by a foreign power to another people for the creation of a new state. The result was that many hundreds of thousands of innocent people were made permanently homeless. With every new conflict their numbers increased. How much longer is the world willing to endure this spectacle of wanton cruelty?<sup>54</sup>

Contrast this with people who claim to be the followers of Jesus Christ, but who are blind to the injustice in their ideological support for the State of Israel.<sup>55</sup> Ironically, these people, so interested in the fulfillment of OT prophecies, have failed to notice Mic 6:8 where the Lord is said to require his people to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with him.<sup>56</sup>

Another side of this ethical issue is the suggestion that Christian Zionist support for the State of Israel represents "a worldview where the Gospel is identified with an ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, some Christian Zionists believe that through their efforts, and with the assistance of the United States of America, the State of Israel will establish the Kingdom of God on earth through its military might.<sup>58</sup>

Christians United for Israel was formed in February 2006 as "a national Christian movement focused on one issue: supporting Israel." Its website includes a blog by David Brog, whose entry for 17 May 2007 reads,

other hand, Michael Stallard argues strongly that dispensationalism is not at all inimical to American Middle Eastern foreign policy (Michael Stallard, "Is Dispensationalism Hurting American Political Policies in the Middle East?," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 10 [2006]: 5-18). See also Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 131-48; and Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 86-92.

<sup>54</sup> This is from Russell's February 1970 speech to the International Conference of Parliamentarians (Bertrand Russell, "Palestinian Refugees Today," Online: <http://www.palestinehistory.com/issues/refugee/reftoday.htm> [accessed 3 August 2008]). Merkley gives several reasons for what he calls "the justice of Israel's regime," but completely overlooks the injustice perpetrated against those who have been living in refugee camps, in some cases for sixty years (Merkley, *Christian Attitudes*, 218). According to Peter Biggs, Merkley is an ICEJ Board Director (Peter Biggs, "Critics Welcome New United Church Stance on Middle East," Online: <http://www.canadianchristianity.com/cgi-bin/na.cgi?nationalupdates/060824stance> [accessed 3 August 2008]).

<sup>55</sup> To be fair some Christian Zionists have expressed concern for Palestinian human rights and have called for fairness in Israel's treatment of the Arab population. See Yaakov, "Unexpected Alliance," 80-81. John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 19, acknowledges that the refugee problem has "continued to be an open sore." See also Wilson, *Armageddon Now*, 196-98.

<sup>56</sup> Parsons proposes that Christians should pray for and love Palestinians. But he also places limits on support for their agenda to the extent that it "seeks to deny Israel a place in the land promised to Israel" ("Swords," 39), although on p. 38 he also implies that Palestinians are suffering the deserved judgment of God.

<sup>57</sup> Michel Sabbah et al., "Palestinian Church Leaders' Statement on Christian Zionism," *Holy Land Studies* 5 (2006): 211.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Donald E. Wagner, "Marching to Zion," *Christian Century*, June 28, 2003, 21: "Christian Zionists have traded the mantle of biblical prophecy for an idolatry of militarism and the nation state." For the influence of the religious right on American foreign policy, and in particular in connection with Israel, see William Martin, "The Christian Right and American Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 114 (1999): 72-73, 78-79; and Northcott, *Angel*, 163: "American premillennialists hope to bring forward the end of history by supporting a war in the Middle East."

It has become clear that we're facing nothing less than a threat to the survival of Judeo-Christian civilization. And in this struggle Israel is a crucial outpost of our civilization that we dare not allow to fall. If militant Islam poses the greatest threat, then standing with our ally Israel as it fights our common enemies becomes our greatest priority. Once we ensure the survival of Judeo-Christian civilization, we can return our primary focus to the work of increasing the influence of our Judeo-Christian values within this civilization.<sup>59</sup>

Not only do such people look to the future millennial kingdom, centered on the land of Israel, but they also seek to actively bring it about by militaristic and nationalistic endeavors, itself an act of unbelief in the promises of God.<sup>60</sup> It is ironic again that people so interested in the fulfillment of OT prophecy have failed to notice the prophet's invective against those who "abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong" (Mic 3:9-12).

The inability of dispensational Christian Zionists to see these ethical issues is rooted in the way that the OT prophetic literature is appropriated to serve the Christian Zionist agenda. Stallard claims, "Dispensationalists believe in Israel's right to the land by embracing the biblical prophecies about Israel's land in a straight-forward way."<sup>61</sup> By this he means that God has promised this land to Israel in perpetuity, and the modern State of Israel is to be identified with the Israel that the OT prophets addressed in their prophetic oracles of salvation. Later he claims, "It is God's prerogative to bring the rapture, tribulation, Second Coming of Christ to earth, and the kingdom in His own timing and His own way in keeping with His revealed Word. Dispensationalists understand that there is a bigger player on the field who gets to bat more often."<sup>62</sup> And he concludes, "Dispensationalists know that Messiah will one day give the entire land promised to Abraham to Israel at the beginning of His coming kingdom. Therefore, there is no need to posit some theological need to pursue conquest in the present hour. Current dispensationalists, no doubt in harmony with President Bush, only wish for the Arabs and other Moslems to leave Israel alone."<sup>63</sup>

The suggestion that Israel might be oppressing the Arab population of Palestine is subordinated to this all-encompassing agenda; aggression by Israel is reclassified as self-defense, and charges of Arab aggression against Israel are brought up with the implication that the Palestinian Arabs are hindering God's

<sup>59</sup> David Brog, "Brog's Blog," Online: [http://www.cufi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about\\_brog\\_blog#Falwell](http://www.cufi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_brog_blog#Falwell) (accessed 3 August 2008).

<sup>60</sup> Murray Rac, "Forgiveness as Foreign Policy," *Stimulus* 15 (2007): 11, writes, "Forgiveness theologically conceived, therefore, is an act of trust in the victory of Christ. The alternatives—revenge, retaliation, a war on terror—are expressions of doubt that Christ will overcome all evil. They are each founded on the supposition that the victory will not be secure until we exercise vengeance, until we repay. That . . . is an act of unbelief." Northcott, *Angel*, 99, refers to the address by George W. Bush on 14 September 2001 where he expressed his intention to "rid the world of evil," adding that this was "an intent to which not even Jesus Christ ever laid claim."

<sup>61</sup> Stallard, "American Political Policies," 7.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

plan to give the land to Israel, in the fulfillment of prophecy.<sup>64</sup> The original issue of the land of the Palestinian people being “given” to Israel by another country is either passed over in silence or explained away as being of benefit to the Arab population.<sup>65</sup>

### IX. *Sacrifice in the Rebuilt Temple*

Dispensational Christian Zionists anticipate a third temple being built in Jerusalem. Aside from the very real issue of how this will be brought about without instigating something like the Battle of Armageddon its proponents anticipate (given that the site is a particularly holy place in Islamic thought),<sup>66</sup> there is the question of the purpose of the rebuilt temple, that is, the renewal of Jewish sacrificial activity.

Dispensational Christian Zionists base their belief in the rebuilt temple on Ezek 40–48, and when they look closer at these chapters they discover numerous references to sacrificial activity.<sup>67</sup> Since they read Ezekiel’s visionary temple as the rebuilt millennial temple, they conclude that sacrifices will again be offered there. They then face the issue of how to read such NT texts as Heb 10:1–18 which argues that the unique, self-offering of Christ has replaced the former sacrificial system.<sup>68</sup>

Two answers have been given. The traditional answer is that the proposed millennial sacrifices are memorials of the sacrifice of Christ. Just as “the Old Testament sacrifices were offered in anticipation of the death of Christ . . . the millennial sacrifices are brought in appreciation of that death and what it provides for those who believed in it.”<sup>69</sup> The view is supported with the analogy of

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–15.

<sup>65</sup> Stallard claims that “in the 1800s the land of Palestine was a largely uninhabited and deteriorating region,” and that at that time the Jews were welcomed for the benefits they could bring (*ibid.*, 10–11).

<sup>66</sup> Price, *Temple*, 417–42, surveys the activities of Jewish activist organizations seeking to “liberate the temple mount,” and on pp. 443–70 discusses possible scenarios resulting from this, including the eruption of the Battle with Gog and Magog, the Battle of Armageddon, and the Great Tribulation.

<sup>67</sup> Price, *ibid.*, 439–40, lists Ezek 40:46–47; 41:22; 42:13–14; 43:13–27; 44:10–11, 15–16, 24, 29; 45:17, 25; 46:2–4, 11–15, 23–24; 48:11, 22, as referring to altar and sacrifices in the millennial temple.

<sup>68</sup> Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 517, finds predictions of the renewal of sacrificial activity in the millennium in Ezek 43:18–46:24; Zech 14:16; Isa 56:6–8; 66:21; Jer 33:15–16; and Ezek 20:40–41, and notes the “alleged inconsistency” between this interpretation of these texts and the NT teaching about the finished work of Christ. His response is that millennial expectation is based not on the Mosaic covenants but on the Abrahamic, Davidic, and “Palestinian” covenants (518; the so-called “Palestinian” covenant is extrapolated from Deut 30:1–10, see pp. 96–99). He considers that while the texts in Ezekiel bear strong similarities to the Mosaic cult, they are significantly different (the temple has different dimensions and furniture, some aspects of the old order are deleted and there are new features added [520–24]), and argues that millennial sacrifices will be legitimate because they are not expiatory (no animal sacrifices ever were) and will be memorials of the sacrifice of Christ (524–27). Any contradiction with Hebrews is explained away as only arising “when one fails to see the distinction, dispensationally, between God’s program for the church and his program for Israel” (527).

<sup>69</sup> John Mitchell, “The Question of Millennial Sacrifices,” *BSac* 110 (1953): 345; Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy*, 125–26. The *Scofield Reference Bible* (1917 ed.) notes with reference to Ezek 43:19: “Doubtless these offerings will be memorial, looking back to the cross, as the offerings under the old covenant were anticipatory, looking forward to the cross. In neither case have animal sacrifices power to put



the Eucharist, said to be a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ for the so-called "church age" and the future sacrifices being a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ for the "millennial age."<sup>70</sup>

Hullinger, who rightly rejects this proposal as inadequate,<sup>71</sup> replaces it with his own ingenious explanation. He notes that in the OT, certain events rendered a person ritually and ceremonially unclean and consequently unqualified to approach God in worship. He then argues that the millennial sacrifices, rather than dealing with sin, will deal with ritual uncleanness on the part of "nonglorified individuals who can be a source of communicable contamination."<sup>72</sup> These are individuals who do not possess resurrection bodies, having been admitted to the kingdom after surviving the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46).<sup>73</sup> Hullinger then notes that in Hebrews the sacrifice of Christ is presented as dealing with sin and not with ceremonial impurity,<sup>74</sup> and concludes, "Because the cross was not intended to deal with . . . [ceremonial impurity], it will be necessary to reinstitute the Levitical offerings."<sup>75</sup>

away sin" (C. I. Scofield, "Scofield Reference Notes, 1917 Edition, Ezekiel Chapter 43," Online: <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/ScofieldReferenceNotes/srn.cgi?book=eze&chapter=43> [accessed 3 August 2008]). In the 1967 edition the editors added to this the suggestion that the references to these sacrifices might actually be symbolic, "regarded as a presentation of the worship of redeemed Israel, in her own land and in the millennial Temple, using the terms with which the Jews were familiar in Ezekiel's day" (*The New Scofield Reference Bible* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1967], 888). This concession, if adopted, would result in the crumbling of the edifice of "literal, normal interpretation."

<sup>70</sup> Jerry M. Hullinger, "A Proposed Solution to the Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40-48" (Th.D. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993), 7.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>72</sup> Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Divine Presence, Uncleanness, and Ezekiel's Millennial Sacrifices," *BSac* 163 (2006): 410-22.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 410. Hullinger appears to follow Eugene W. Pond, "The Background and Timing of the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats," *BSac* 159 (2002): 214, who reads Matt 25:31-46 in harmony with Rev 19-20 and posits that the judgment referred to takes place at the beginning of Christ's millennial reign. Pond, "Who Are the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25:31-46?," *BSac* 159 (2002): 301, identifies πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (all the nations) in Matt 25:32 as "Gentiles who may or may not have believed [but whose] works will reveal whether they are believers"; and τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων (the least of these my brothers) in Matt 25:40 as "believers slain for their faith during the tribulation and who will return with the risen Lord at His second coming" (Eugene W. Pond, "Who Are 'The Least' of Jesus' Brothers in Matthew 25:40?," *BSac* 159 [2002]: 448). These, according to Hullinger, will have "non-glorified" bodies (i.e., unresurrected bodies; see 1 Cor 15:35-57), and could be a source of communicable contamination during the millennium. Pond's three-part essay is a further example of how Rev 20:1-6 controls the interpretation of a text from another part of the Bible. By relegating the application of Matt 25:31-46 to a future millennium, Pond misses the ethical challenge it contains for all people to care for those in need. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew 19-28* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 422-23, 28-29, identifies πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Matt 25:32 as "all humanity" and τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων in Matt 25:40 as "everyone in need." Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 214-21, restricts τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων to believers.

<sup>74</sup> Hullinger, "Proposed Solution," 230-32.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

It is difficult to formulate an adequate response to these ideas. As soon as the notion of a millennial kingdom with a rebuilt temple is envisaged, all sorts of hermeneutical gymnastics are necessary to fit everything into the scheme. As Barr suggests in a discussion of the sources of the Pentateuch, "The distinctions and separations of critical scholarship are models of clarity, simplicity and naturalness when compared with those of dispensational or other millennial schemes."<sup>76</sup>

As noted above, the dispensational Christian Zionist hope for a rebuilt temple and the resumption of sacrificial activity is based in part on a literal reading of Ezek 40–48. Hullinger gives the arguments for this view in his 1993 Dallas Theological Seminary doctoral thesis. He argues that Ezek 40–48, "will be literally implemented on earth during the visible reign of Christ,"<sup>77</sup> since (among other things) Ezekiel announces a time when the Dead Sea will be transformed to a freshwater lake (Ezek 47:8-10), something that has not yet occurred.<sup>78</sup> He cites Allen's *Word Biblical Commentary on Ezekiel* in support of his views, not noticing that Allen also writes, "To resort to dispensationalism and postpone [Ezekiel's oracles] to a literal fulfillment in a yet future time strikes the author as a desperate expedient that sincerely attempts to preserve belief in an inerrant prophecy."<sup>79</sup> Hullinger ignores any suggestion that Ezekiel's vision might be of the heavenly temple; he dismisses the view that it refers to the Second Temple on the basis that it strips the supernatural issues of any reality (whatever that is supposed to mean), and the view that it refers to the church on the basis that this reduces the text "to the whim of the interpreter" and that "it would have absolutely no meaning for the reader's [*sic*] of Ezekiel's day."<sup>80</sup> What meaning a millennial temple would have for Ezekiel's assumed readers is not stated. Finally, he dismisses the view that Ezekiel's vision was of the new heavens and the new earth of Rev 21, as not taking into account the contradictions between Ezekiel and the author of the Apocalypse.<sup>81</sup> Hullinger assumes that Ezekiel was aware of the millennial kingdom mentioned in Rev 20, and that Ezekiel understood it in the same way that he does.

<sup>76</sup> Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 195.

<sup>77</sup> Hullinger, "Proposed Solution," 26.

<sup>78</sup> See Mark L. Hitchcock, "A Critique of the Preterist View of the Temple in Revelation 11:1-2," *BSac* 164 (2007): 229-36, for a similar view.

<sup>79</sup> L. C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48* (WBC 29; Dallas: Word, 1990), 214. Hullinger often cites other (non-dispensational) scholars in support of his views. Mostly these scholars are quoted out of context and made to say things that they are not saying at all. This citation of Allen is a case in point. Allen discusses Ezek 47:8-12 and describes Ezekiel's vision of the impact of the river on the Dead Sea, including the incongruous suggestion in the text that while it will become a "freshwater lake able to sustain an enormous abundance of fish" (Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, 279) there will also be sufficient salt water for cultic and human needs. Hullinger supports his own suggestion that Ezekiel saw "circumstances that have never taken place" with a quote from Allen. But Allen nowhere suggests that the events described by Ezekiel have never taken place, nor does he anywhere suggest that they will one day eventuate (Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, 279-80).

<sup>80</sup> Hullinger, "Proposed Solution," 23.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. He argues that there is no temple in the new heavens and new earth of Rev 21–22, and that while Ezekiel sees the river flowing from the temple, Rev 22:1 sees it flowing from the

Hullinger might have fared better had he noticed how Ezekiel's vision was read in the Second Temple period, and in particular, in the NT. In some places in this literature Ezek 40–48 is read as a reference to the heavenly temple and in other places as a reference to the community of God's people. Davila demonstrates how the "macrocosmic temple" envisaged in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice was established by an exegesis of Ezek 40–48.<sup>82</sup> Other documents from Qumran use this part of Ezekiel in developing the notion that the Dead Sea community itself was the "temple." In the Damascus Document (CD 3:19–4:6), Ezek 44:15 is applied to the community, and in 4Q174, 1:15–17, Ezek 44:10 appears.<sup>83</sup> The implication in both of these documents is that "Ezekiel's eschatological temple already exists as a metaphysical reality."<sup>84</sup>

The same phenomena appear in the NT where a variety of allusions and echoes establish that NT writers were reading Ezekiel the same two ways. With reference to the community of God's people Foster finds echoes of Ezek 43 in Eph 3:19,<sup>85</sup> and Fee suggests intertextual echoes of Ezek 43:9 and 47:1–12 in the expression "you are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you" in 1 Cor 3:16.<sup>86</sup> Paul's claim that the Christian community is the "temple of the living God" in 2 Cor 6:14 is supported by a catena of texts including Ezek 37:27, a text included in the dispensational arsenal of texts supporting the return of Israel to the land in the last days.<sup>87</sup> As for the heavenly temple Hurst finds echoes of Ezek 40–42 in Heb 8:5,<sup>88</sup> a NT text that describes the wilderness shrine constructed by Moses as a preliminary outline of the heavenly things, the eschatological realities introduced with the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God. Similarly, it seems clear that the term "the temple of God" in Rev 11:1–2

throne of God. Consequently, Ezekiel must have been referring to a temple in the millennial kingdom envisaged in Rev 20:1–6. Hullinger seems not to have noticed that no temple appears anywhere in Rev 20, and that in some texts from the Second Temple period the throne of God is located in the heavenly temple (see, e.g., Heb 8:1–2; 1 En 14:8–23; T. Levi 5:1).

<sup>82</sup> James R. Davila, "The Macrocosmic Temple, Scriptural Exegesis, and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice," *DSD* 9 (2002): 5–7. Davila finds other OT texts used in these Songs as well, including Exod 25 and 1 Chr 28. See also Carol Newsom, *The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (HSS 27; Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 51–58; Steven S. Tuell, "Ezekiel 40–42 as a Verbal Icon," *CBQ* 58 (1996): 359–60; and G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 17; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 338.

<sup>83</sup> Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament: A Comparative Study in the Temple Symbolism of the Qumran Texts and the New Testament* (SNTSMS 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 30–42, 81–84.

<sup>84</sup> C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "The Temple Within: The Embodied Divine Image and Its Worship in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish and Christian Sources," *SBL Seminar Papers, 1998* (SBLSP 37; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 406. See also R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 36–38; and Beale, *Temple*, 318–19.

<sup>85</sup> Robert L. Foster, "'A Temple of the Lord Filled to the Fullness of God': Context and Intertextuality (Eph. 3:19)," *NovT* 49 (2007): 90–91, 93–96.

<sup>86</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 147.

<sup>87</sup> See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 117, 444, 490, 514.

<sup>88</sup> L. D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought* (SNTSMS 65; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 14–17.

with its allusion to the measuring stick of Ezek 40 refers either to the heavenly temple or to the Christian community itself.<sup>89</sup> As Caird notes "It is hardly too much to say that in a book in which all things are expressed in symbols, the very last things the 'Temple' and 'holy city' could mean would be the physical temple and the earthly Jerusalem."<sup>90</sup> But Price argues that it is the restored millennial temple, using such reasoning as, "While some New Testament passages use the Temple as a metaphor for the spiritual composition of the Church and the Christian, all other references to the Temple in the New Testament, taken in their normal sense, refer to the literal Temple of the Jews (or its archetype in heaven) . . . [and] the θυσιαστήριον ('altar') has no corollary to the Church nor the Church age, and therefore would make no sense as a symbol of anything Christian."<sup>91</sup>

Price gives no criteria to distinguish those texts which refer to the physical temple from those which use temple as a metaphor for the people of God, and he seems not to have noticed the claim of Heb 13:10 that the Christian community does indeed have a θυσιαστήριον.

These arguments are all based on taking the words of Revelation in their so-called "normal, literal" sense, and expecting a one-to-one fulfillment of them in the millennium. But symbolic language such as is found in Revelation does not "work" literally. Beale notes that "the very nature of the analogical use of the OT in the Apocalypse involves application of OT images not in a thoroughgoing manner but with varying degrees of awareness, depending on the Apocalypse's own purpose at each point."<sup>92</sup> And later he argues, "The futurist literal perspective is implausible because of its misreading of John's visions, which contain heavenly symbols and not photographic images with a one-to-one identity to earthly realities."<sup>93</sup>

Hullinger thinks he has solved the problem that presents itself to those who read the Bible from a dispensational perspective, that is, given that the temple will be rebuilt and the sacrifices reinstated what is the status of the sacrifice of Christ? But a more rigorous reading of the NT would suggest that there is no

<sup>89</sup> For arguments that Rev 11:1-2 refers to the heavenly temple see Michael Bachmann, "Himmlich: Der 'Tempel Gottes' von Apk 11.1," *NTS* 40 (1994): 474-80; and Charles Homer Giblin, "Revelation 11:1-13: Its Form, Function and Contextual Integration," *NTS* 30 (1984): 438-40. Those who see a reference to the Christian community as the temple include Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 213; P. W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 246-47; and Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 272-73, 400-401. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 556-72, has a comprehensive discussion of these two verses, arguing that they refer to the community of God's people (558-61), although he also implies that it is possible to read here a reference to the heavenly sanctuary.

<sup>90</sup> G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John the Divine* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1966), 131. See also Robert H. Gundry, "The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People," *NoT* 29 (1987): 254-64, on the New Jerusalem in Rev 21-22.

<sup>91</sup> Price, "Desecration and Restoration," 592.

<sup>92</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 559.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 568.

support anywhere for the notion of a rebuilt temple in a coming millennium. The dispensational reading arises from reading Ezekiel as though the NT had not been written, and then squeezing the NT into the mold of Ezekiel. The notion needs to be dispensed with. While dispensational Christian Zionists do not usually consider the possibility, it seems clear that Ezek 40–48 concerns a heavenly journey around a heavenly temple, read in the Second Temple period either as the community of God's people among whom God has taken up residence, or as the heavenly temple itself.

Once the notion of a millennial temple is dispensed with, there are no millennial sacrifices to explain. The deeper issue, however, is that any suggestion of millennial sacrifices, whether for sin or for ritual or ceremonial impurity, detracts from the centrality of Jesus and his sacrifice. If the temple stood for the place where God is encountered and where sin and uncleanness are dealt with, then all this has been fulfilled in Christ. It seems clear that when Ezekiel wanted to refer to the ongoing relationship of God with his people, he spoke in terms of what he knew, that is, the sacrificial system which maintained this relationship. This is transcended in the NT, specifically in Hebrews which shows that this system, valid as it was in the past, is now superseded with the sacrifice of Christ and his exaltation to the right hand of God.<sup>94</sup>

#### X. Conclusion: Christian Zionism, Aberration or Heresy?

The question posed at the outset of this article was posed starkly: Is Christian Zionism an acceptable aberration, albeit strange, or is it a deviant heresy? The serious ethical and theological issues outlined demonstrate that it is more than a strange but acceptable aberration. But is it a deviant heresy? As also noted, some continue to call Christian Zionism heresy, and from the point of view of its defective ethics and defective Christology one is tempted to concur.

However, other considerations need to be taken into account in discussing whether a position might be classified as heretical. The first question concerns the identity of those who would judge Christian Zionism in this way. Caution is needed, and it seems that any such judgment should be the considered opinion of an ecclesiastical authority, rather than of an individual. It is pertinent to note that in 2006 the Palestinian church leaders revised and reissued the 2004 Sabeel statement on Christian Zionism. Significantly, they removed the word "heretical" from the sentence: "We reject the heretical teachings of Christian Zionism."<sup>95</sup> In addition, the website *Challenging Christian Zionism* includes statements on Christian Zionism from eight different denominations, none of which

<sup>94</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 561, comments in connection with the allusions to Ezek 40–48 in Rev 11:1–2: "Ezekiel's expectation is interpreted as beginning fulfillment in this unexpected way because of Christ's death, which has brought the redemptive, historical turn of the ages. Christ's work is now the dominant interpretive lens through which one understands OT expectations."

<sup>95</sup> See Sabbah et al., "Palestinian Church Leaders' Statement," 211–13. Given that these people lead churches that are most affected by Christian Zionism, their judgment should be carefully considered.

uses the word "heresy" to describe it.<sup>96</sup> This should give pause to those who would make too hasty a judgment.

An alternative category could be that of "unacceptable diversity," a category explored by James Dunn in a reflection on his 1977 work *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*.<sup>97</sup> In his more recent essay Dunn affirms his earlier judgment that "diversity which abandons the unity of the faith in Jesus the man now exalted . . . [and] diversity which abandons the unity of love for fellow believers" is unacceptable.<sup>98</sup> To the extent that Christian Zionism looks for a rebuilt temple to one day supersede the work of the exalted Christ at the right hand of God, to the extent that it ignores the cries of suffering humanity in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, some of whom are followers of Jesus Christ, and to the extent that it supports grand schemes to bring in the kingdom of God using military force, to that extent it goes beyond the limits of acceptable diversity as Dunn describes it.

A second alternative is suggested in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, which refers to a continuum of heretical opinions. At one end there is "pertinacious adherence to a doctrine contradictory to a point of faith clearly defined by the Church." This it calls "heresy pure and simple."<sup>99</sup> Further along the continuum is the classification of an opinion as "erroneous in theology," described as "a doctrinal proposition . . . [not] directly contradicting a received dogma, [but which] may yet involve logical consequences at variance with revealed truth."<sup>100</sup> Apparently, the Catholic Church has never declared Christian Zionism to be at variance with "a point of faith clearly defined by the Church."<sup>101</sup> On the other

<sup>96</sup> See "Churches Speak Out on Christian Zionism and *Left Behind* Theology," Online: <http://www.christianzionism.org/churchesN.asp> (accessed 6 August 2008). This page includes statements from the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church Commission on Theology and Church Relations, April 2004; the Presbyterian Church of the USA, National General Assembly, July 2004; the Reformed Church in America National Annual Synod, June 2004; the United Church of Christ National General Synod, July 2003; the Mennonite Church of the USA MCC Peace Office Newsletter, July 2005; the Chicago Metropolitan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, June 2005 (which cites Bishop Younan who does call Christian Zionism a heresy; see n. 2 above); the United Methodist Church Illinois Conference, June 2005; and the Diocese of Chicago of the Episcopal Church, November 2004.

<sup>97</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

<sup>98</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, "Has the Canon a Continuing Function?," in *The Canon Debate* (ed. Lee Martin MacDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 565.

<sup>99</sup> J. Wilhelm, "Heresy," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (15 vols.; New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), 7:256, Online: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07256b.htm> (accessed 6 August 2008).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> See the discussion of "official" Catholic attitudes to the State of Israel in Anthony J. Kenny, *Catholics, Jews and the State of Israel* (Studies in Judaism and Christianity; New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 43-65. Kenny notes the silence concerning Judaism in *Nostra Aetate* (1965), the Catholic statement on relationships with non-Christian religions. The *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Document "Nostra Aetate"* (1974) do not mention Israel (Kenny, *Catholics*, 48), while the *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* (1985) do, but in terms of "the biblical tradition," rather than "any contemporary religious interpretations." Kenny continues, "The authors of the *Notes* demonstrate that they are not prepared to cede

hand, the logical consequences of Christian Zionist hermeneutics, particularly the defective Christology, could be regarded as being "at variance with revealed truth."

The serious concerns surrounding Christian Zionism are more the logical outcome of its faulty hermeneutic than the result of an "arbitrary deviation by a minority from a doctrinal norm represented and safeguarded institutionally by a majority."<sup>102</sup> Its deficient literal hermeneutic leads to inadequate readings of the Old and New Testaments, which in turn lead to unacceptable ethical and theological consequences.

"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.<sup>103</sup>

Dispensational Christian Zionism needs to be confronted and strongly critiqued. It is more than a strange but acceptable aberration, but to describe it as heresy is unhelpful, and probably excessive. The confrontation and critique, however, need to be done not stridently, with charges of heresy and the like, but sensitively and with understanding, recognizing that many of its adherents will be quite unaware of the logical outcomes of their beliefs, and will never have heard that there is another lens through which to view the State of Israel, the Palestinian people, and the land.

Engagement on the hermeneutical issues is, however, unlikely to be fruitful. As Barr notes, "There seems to be no satisfactory methodological or hermeneutical ground on which millenarianism can be combated. . . ."<sup>104</sup> Those who would engage with Christian Zionism at this level usually find themselves talking at cross-purposes. The dispensational hermeneutic is based on different presuppositions, and operates with a different canon within the canon. There is little common ground upon which to base any discussion.<sup>105</sup>

a theological recognition to Israel as an expression of the contemporary reality of Jewish being, but only to a theological notion" (50). He goes on to discuss comments by Pope John Paul II concerning Israel, and notes that the constant call by Jewish leaders for full recognition of Israel by the Catholic Church has had no significant response from the Pope (53-55).

<sup>102</sup> Betz, "Heresy and Orthodoxy," 144.

<sup>103</sup> In a personal communication dated 3 October 2007, Christopher Marshall commented, "The term 'heresy' is . . . problematic, and perhaps should be avoided given its baleful historical legacy. But there may be occasions when its use serves a helpful rhetorical purpose. I would be reluctant to deem Christian Zionism a heresy without qualification. But what other term is available for expressing its fundamentally erroneous and dangerous beliefs? Arguably it is more heretical than the theology of apartheid or prosperity teaching (which so flatly contradicts the teaching of Jesus), because it involves a defective christology. So I wonder how we can best alert people to its distortions without resorting to labels like 'heresy.'"

<sup>104</sup> Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 204. Barr's sentence continues ". . . by fundamentalists who deny its validity." However, this statement also applies to anyone wanting to combat a dispensational hermeneutic.

<sup>105</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 67, discusses the difficulty of engaging with dispensationalists and notes that in his experience two particular texts stand out as being helpful. These are Heb 12:22-24 and 1 Cor 15:51-53. Later he

On the other hand, there may be opportunities for engagement over the issue of justice for the Palestinian people.<sup>106</sup> Not even the most ardent exponent of a so-called “normal” hermeneutic could overthrow the claims of both the OT and the NT that God is a God of justice. In particular, God calls on those who hold his land to hold it with justice and with concern for the marginalized, particularly the resident alien.

Ezekiel 40–48 is prominent in the Christian Zionist canon, and Ezek 47:21–22, appearing as it does in the context of the division of the land among the tribes after the return from the exile, is pertinent: “So you shall divide this land among you. . . . You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you. . . . They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel” (NRSV).<sup>107</sup>

Endorsement of the modern State of Israel in its treatment of the Palestinian people runs directly counter to this biblical injunction. Consequently, the Israeli refusal to allow these people to inhabit their cities and villages and to live their lives in peace becomes an attack on the OT, ignoring as it does God’s clear call for justice.

comments that “the Book of Hebrews is the single most important text to consider in any discussion of dispensationalism [because] it reflects explicitly and at length on the crucial question of the relation of the Old Testament to the New Testament.” According to Heb 7–10, the death of Jesus and his exaltation to the right hand of God fulfill and supersede the OT sacrificial system, so that any future localization of temple and sacrifice in present-day Palestine would entail a return to what God has declared to have been set aside (Heb 10:9–10). As we have seen, some readers who approach Hebrews from a dispensational perspective go to extraordinary lengths to explain how this cannot be the case.

<sup>106</sup> As mentioned previously, some Christian Zionists have already expressed reservations over Palestinian refugee camps (see n. 55 above).

<sup>107</sup> Some supporters of Israel may respond that what is described in this text reflects precisely the treatment of Arab-Israeli citizens of the Israeli State. Surely this call (if it is to apply to modern-day Israel, which is of course debatable) also applies to the more than five million Palestinians who inhabit the Occupied Territories of “Judea and Samaria” (the anachronistic name given by some modern Israelis and their supporters to the West Bank) and Gaza. See, e.g., Haim Gvirtzman, “Maps of Israeli Interests in Judea and Samaria Determining the Extent of the Additional Withdrawals,” Online: <http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/books/maps.htm> (accessed 17 August 2008).



Copyright of Westminster Theological Journal is the property of Westminster Theological Seminary and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.