

## THE ANTINOMIES OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

### Antinomije hrišćanskog cionizma

*APSTRAKT Hrišćanski cionizam se u ovom članku definiše kao konzervativna hrišćanska podrška državi Izrael, te kao uticajna politička snaga, osobito u Sjedinjenim Državama. U radu se razmatraju četiri antinomije koju takav stav povlači. Prvo, hrišćanski cionizam tvrdi da predstavlja čisto teološki stav, da sledi Božju volju bez obzira na politiku, dok je klasični cionizam nedvosmisleno politički stav; međutim, mi tvrdimo da je takvo podvajanje nemoguće: klasični cionizam ne može izbeći uticaj političkog programa hrišćanskog cionizma. Drugo, iako klasični cionizam nastoji da iskoristi hrišćanski cionizam za vlastite ciljeve, kako bi uticao na bliskoistočnu politiku SAD, to je zapravo igranje vatrom, jer hrišćanski cionisti žele da preobrate ili unište sve Jevreje. Treće, hrišćanski cionizam je krajnja verzija antisemitizma, pošto želi da se oslobodi najpre Arapa (kao prepreke cionističkom projektu), a potom i Jevreja (budući da su i Arapi i Jevreji po definiciji semiti). Najzad, pošto su hrišćanski cionisti istovremeno hrišćanski fundamentalisti, oni bukvalno shvataju reči iz Starog i Novog zaveta. No, pošto je takav stav neodrživ, oni nastalu tenziju mogu da razreše jedino pribegavajući nasilju krajnjeg sukoba, Armagedona.*

*KLJUČNE REČI hrišćanski cionizam, Izrael, SAD, antinomije*

*ABSTRACT Defining Christian Zionism as conservative Christian support for the state of Israel, and an influential political force, especially in the United States, this article outlines four antinomies of such a position. Firstly, although Christian Zionism argues that it is purely theological, that it follows God's will irrespective of any politics, and although mainstream Zionism is resolutely political, we argue that such a separation is impossible. Indeed, mainstream Zionism cannot avoid being influenced by Christian Zionism's political agenda. Secondly, despite the efforts by mainstream Zionism to use Christian Zionism in order to influence US foreign policy in the Middle East, mainstream Zionism is playing with fire, since Christian Zionists wish to convert or annihilate all Jews. Thirdly, Christian Zionism is the ultimate version of anti-Semitism, for it wishes to get rid of Arabs (as hindrances to the Zionist project) and then dispense with Jews. (Both Arabs and Jews are by definition Semites.) Finally, since Christian Zionists are fundamentalist Christians, they must take the Old and New Testaments at their word. However, this position is impossible to hold, and in order to resolve the tension they must resort to the violence of the final conflict, Armageddon.*

*KEY WORDS Christian Zionism, Israel, United States, antinomies*

## Introduction

We define Christian Zionism as Christian support for the Zionist program of the establishment and maintenance of the state of Israel. Christian Zionism is therefore part of the wider movement of Zionism, which has its versions of left and right, religious and secular. Christian Zionism is a standard position among the religious right, especially in the United States. In a nutshell, it holds that the key events of the end of history, as interpreted through the New Testament, will take place quite soon in modern Israel. These events involve the arrival of the anti-Christ, Jesus' return to destroy the forces of evil in the final battle of Armageddon and then his rule on earth. A crucial factor here is that during these events a certain number of the Jews will be converted to Christianity and the remainder annihilated.

On this rare occasion, perhaps Jerry Falwell can say it best. After the anti-Christ (in Babylon) and seven years of tribulation, Armageddon in Israel will be the scene of the final battle, after which come 1000 years of peace. Preaching at the outbreak of the first Iraq war, Falwell told us what to expect when the end comes, which it will, sooner rather than later:

While the dead are buried over a seven-month period of time during the Kingdom Age that has just begun, our Lord Jesus with the Saints will sit down upon the Throne of David in Jerusalem and for one thousand years will rule in perfect peace upon the earth... God still has one thousand and seven years of use for this planet. The seven-year Tribulation period, the thousand year Kingdom Age (cited in Harding 1994: 73).

Most of you will no doubt find this rather ludicrous, and it would be all too easy to make fun of such a system of thought. What we propose to do then is tease out the antinomies in the rhetorical, political articulation of the doctrines of Christian Zionism. Let us name the antinomies before exploring each one:

1) The antinomy of religion and politics: Christian Zionism wants to stay biblical and theological, whereas mainstream Zionism wants to stay political.

2) The antinomy of *Realpolitik*: this is the problem of Zionists using Christian Zionism to influence US policy.

3) The antinomy of anti-semitism: Christian Zionism is the only full realisation of anti-semitism, for the proponents of Christian Zionism want to obliterate Arabs first, and then they want to annihilate the Jews.

4) The antinomy of this version of biblical liberalism: unable to hold onto the tension between 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament', Christian Zionism must resolve it through violence.

## Background

Before examining these antinomies, a few comments on the background of Christian Zionism. The first linking of the conservative view of the Christian apocalypse with the “ingathering” of Jews in Palestine goes back to at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Wagner 2002: 51; Epstein 1984: 7-8), prefiguring Herzl’s Jewish political Zionism by 300 years. Now, both mainstream Zionism and Christian Zionism developed largely independently, but there have been significant periods of cross fertilisation. For example, the committed Christian Zionist Arthur Balfour made the connection in his notorious eponymous declaration – the Balfour Declaration – at the time of the British mandate (Wagner 2002: 52). Now, there is a near-total integration of apocalyptically-minded Christian Zionist theological rhetoric in the mainstream of political Zionism, fostered by the State of Israel.

But why does Christian Zionism find such fertile soil in the United States among Christians? A crucial feature is what Burke Long calls *geopiety*, “the curious mix of romantic imagination, historical rectitude, and attachment to a physical place” (Long 2003: 1). Afflicting both large swathes of the US public and its politicians, geopiety is conjured up above all by the phrase “The Blessed Land” or “The Holy Land.” Geopiety is as much a feature of popular culture as it is of political positioning. The one can hardly take place without the other. Let us give two examples, Leon Uris’ *Exodus* and the rise of Holy Land theme parks and tours.

The novel and then especially the film *Exodus* are, as Edward Said points out, the most influential sources for popular opinion concerning Israel and Zionism in the United States (Said 2004: 101; see also Weissbrod 1999). Both Leon Uris’ novel (1958), which has gone into more than 80 reprints in the USA, and then Otto Preminger’s film of the same name in 1960 were inspired by Ruth Gruber’s journalist dispatches, collected in *Destination Palestine: The Story of the Haganah Ship Exodus 1947* (Gruber 1947, 1999). Gruber’s book concerns a particular ship, originally called the *President Warfield* but renamed *Exodus* when it left France for Palestine carrying “illegal” refugees – many of them holocaust survivors – to Palestine (still under British mandate), only to be turned away and towed by the British to Germany. Needless to say, Gruber’s reporting created much sympathy around the world for the Zionist cause. The evocative name of the boat, the emerging consciousness of the gas chambers just at the war’s end, Gruber’s newspaper reports and the high-handed behavior of the British who saw their empire collapsing around them, all made for a highly charged and passionate atmosphere. Following Gruber’s book, Leon Uris’ novel *Exodus* and Preminger’s movie may be seen as thoroughly deliberate pieces of myth making, or rather re-making. Indeed, when Paul Newman, playing the character Ari Ben Canaan, says “this land is mine”, he utters one of the finest expressions of US geopiety.

Our second example of geopiety does claim that “this land is mine”. These are the Holy Land theme parks that began dotting the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century along with the touring audio-visual displays and models that sought to bring the Holy Land to the people. As Burke Long shows (2003), for those who could not afford the time or expense to tour the actual sites of Palestine and Israel, these theme parks set out to recreate in careful and scaled detail the geography of that countryside, but now within the United States. From Palestine Park in Chautauqua in up-state New York to New Holy Land in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, these sites were part of a larger process of imagining and claiming the “holy land” for the United States, a process that included some of the most prominent Christian and Jewish biblical scholars such as W.F. Albright and Max Margolis. In various ways one could and can follow in the footsteps of major moments in the Bible, for geographical knowledge was, after all, essential for salvation. If you can’t actually get there, then it is here anyway. In fact, that is the implicit claim – that the Holy Land is in fact here and not there; or that there is a small extension of here.

### **Antinomy 1: Religion and Politics**

Christian Zionism wants to stay religious, not political. As long as the focus remains on the weird aspects of the rhetoric – Christ’s return, Armageddon and so on – then the concrete political aims and achievements of the Christian Zionists are overshadowed. Jerry Falwell embodies such a position, urging that the USA adopt a “biblical position” regarding Israel (McAlister 2005: 295). It is indeed a constant line: politics be damned, since they’re following God’s will. For example, Oklahoma Republican Jim Inhofe demanded in 2002 that Israel retain control of the West Bank “because God said so... look it up in the book of Genesis... This is not a political battle at all. It is a contest over whether or not the word of God is true” (Inhofe 2002). Or, as Kay Arthur of Christian Zionist Precept Ministries points out, “But see, *I’m* not saying it; *God’s* saying it” (Simon 2002).

When asked, Christian Zionists often deny the explicit linking of their theology to their political actions, and until the mid-90s, they were taken on their word. When fundamentalists would dismiss the material consequences of their beliefs, as “just politics”, that was often accepted (Harding 1994: 59). However with the near-total integration of Christian Zionism into mainstream political Zionism, and the flexing of political muscles within a compliant administration, the division between theological and political rhetoric has largely been abandoned. But this is quite different from fully accepting the ethical and political accountability that should accompany political rhetoric, albeit religiously-inspired political rhetoric.

Indeed, the key question in Christian Zionism is how God will *use* the Jews to fulfil Christian prophecy (see Strozier 1994: 199). Not only is there an abandonment of individual discretion and ethics, but also a bad-faith denial of political agency.

The death of millions of Jews – all but 144,000 who are to convert and be saved in most accounts, though the number gets as high as 1/3 – can be mechanically abstracted to the point that supporting such a doctrine poses no ethical dilemmas. We can all conveniently lay the responsibility at God’s feet, and he is, after all, above ethics. For example, when prominent Christian Zionist John Hagee denounced the prospect of sharing Jerusalem, he said, “not because I dislike Arab people or Palestinians, but because the Word of God says it is God’s will for Jerusalem to be under the exclusive control of the Jewish people until the Messiah comes... That’s not my viewpoint, that’s God’s opinion! God doesn’t care what the United Nation’s thinks” (cited in Chapman 2004: 120). Indeed, Christian Zionist dispensationalism places all individuals at the mercy of grand, historical events beyond human control and understanding (Harding 1994: 63-4). Ironically, it strikes us that this places believers in a position rather similar to wartime refugees, such as those in Lebanon, failing to understand how two kidnapped soldiers could have led to such destruction in the recent invasion. There’s a need, then, to reassert the politics – and the political immediacy – of Christian Zionist discourse, if for no other reason that to disrupt the theological schema for denying political accountability.

For this reason, we would rather focus on the material consequences of Christian Zionist support for so-called “settlers” in the West Bank, where the Settler regime has effectively lead to an apartheid regime in the occupied territory. Analysis needs to follow the gaze of mainstream Zionists, focusing less on the theology than on the material political support. And that support runs deep in US politics. Christian Zionism has been influential in mainstream US politics from Harry Truman comparing himself to the Emperor Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1), because of his support for Israel (Anderson 2005: 1), to Lyndon Johnson who, in the style of Sunday School stories of biblical heroics, conflated Israelis with the Texan frontiersmen who fought off the Mexicans (Davidson 2001: 220). Or, more recently Nancy Pelosi, the new (Democrat) leader of the House after the 2006 elections, locates the USA deep within the biblical text. Here she is before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in May 2005:

As Israel continues to take risks for peace, she will have no friend more steadfast than the United States.

In the words of Isaiah, we will make ourselves to Israel “as hiding places from the winds and shelters from the tempests; as rivers of water in dry places; as shadows of a great rock in a weary land.”

The United States will stand with Israel now and forever. Now and forever (Pelosi 2005).

The biblical quote is from Isaiah 32:2, but what happens through Pelosi’s words is not so much a merging of the USA with Israel as a step by the USA *into the biblical text*. The USA becomes, in other words, not merely the protector of modern

Israel but also the protector of biblical Israel. We can sense the deeper wish: had the USA been there in the time of the Bible – “now and forever” goes backwards in time as well as forwards – then Israel would have been saved from imperial incursions. No Egypt or Babylon or Assyria or Persia or Rome would have touched Israel. Nor indeed will their modern successors.

If we shift focus to the modern state of Israel, then the claims of Christian Zionists to be theological rather than political start to sound a little hollow. For in Jerusalem, the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem has hosted every Israeli Prime Minister at its Feast of the Tabernacle celebration. Their agenda is quite clear, “preparing the way of the Lord and the anticipated Reign from Jerusalem” (Cohn-Sherbok 2006: 167-8). Now, the only difference, we suggest, between the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem and the proposed intergalactic embassy that the Eurotrash UFO cult the Raelians wish to build, to usher in the return of alien masters, is the political influence of Christian Zionists. When the Raelians claimed to be pursuing human cloning, the world was rightly outraged, and yet, far more politically troubling undertakings are being conducted by Christian Zionists.

### **Antinomy 2: Realpolitik**

The second antinomy is that mainstream Zionism wants Christian Zionist support, without actually being influenced by, or connected to, Christian Zionism. This position is best summed up one of the members of the America Israel Public Affairs Committee: “until I see Jesus coming ‘round the mountain, I’m not going to worry about their theology.” Or, as journalist Bob Simon put it, “Israel is in such dire straits that [it] need[s] to get support from whatever quarter” (Simon 2002).

The relationship between mainstream Zionism and Christian Zionism is a like the man who keeps telling his girlfriend, “It’s just sex. It’s just a physical thing. No I don’t want to meet your family. No I don’t want to go on a ‘real’ date.” But she feels there’s chemistry, it’s a spiritual connection type thing and we’re soul-mates. She keeps hoping he’ll really fall in love with her if she keeps putting out. Similarly, the mainstream Zionists are happy to take the support (tourists, money, votes in Congress, political pressure) of the Christian Zionists, but they want to maintain an ironic distance from the actual ideology behind it. It is not difficult to find a whole series of quotes of mainstream Zionist leaders who laughingly dismiss the theology.

We argue that it can’t work, that mainstream Zionism can’t help but be affected by the company it keeps. As moderate/liberal support from Zionism continues to melt away, and mainstream Zionism is more reliant than even now on the Christian Zionists, the point may come when they realise the Christian support isn’t as unequivocal as they thought. They will find that just as Christian Zionist

*theology* can coexist with Zionist politics *to a point*, so also Christian Zionist *policy* reaches a point at which the two doctrines are actually incompatible. Of course, in the theological schema, this problem is resolved by killing or converting all the Jews. This problem hasn't escaped Jewish commentators, such as Gershom Gorenberg, who states, "The Jews die or convert... it's a five-act play in which the Jews disappear in the fourth act... I can't feel very comfortable with the affections of somebody who looks forward to that scenario" (Simon 2002). How this far more real conundrum will manifest itself in the policy sphere remains to be seen. Equally, since Christian Zionism is essentially a rhetoric of *use* – i.e. how can God *use* the Jewish people to fulfil His (essentially political) ends – will we see the same sort of callousness in the rhetoric of mainstream Zionism that we see from Christian Zionism, where individuals are sublimated to grandiose political and religious ends?

### **Antinomy 3: Anti-Semitism**

Quite simply, Christian Zionism is the most complete realisation of anti-Semitism, and thereby shows up the antinomies of that position. It wishes to obliterate Arab Muslims and Arab Christians (who are written out of the rhetoric) and Jews, keeping alive only fundamentalist Christians. Indeed, the influential author of *Israel in prophecy*, John Walwood predicts that the battle of Armageddon will be, quote, "a holocaust in which at least 750 million people will perish" (cited in Chapman 2004: 127). They have no doubt who will comprise the 750 million.

This antinomy has a number of features to it. First, it shows the hidden truth of anti-Semitism, which, despite its usage in focussing exclusively on the Jews, applies in purely etymological terms to all speakers of Semitic languages, indeed to all people of Semite descent. This of course includes Arabic along with Hebrew (as well as Aramaic, Amharic, Tigrinya and Soqotri and so on). With the border crossing between language and ethnicity, if the term Semitic applies to Arabs as much as to Jews, so also does the term anti-Semitism. Perhaps Arab-American comedian Ahmed Ahmed put it best when he said, "Jews and Muslims have more in common than any religion, ever... Both Jews and Muslims don't eat pork. We don't celebrate Christmas. We both use 'ccchhh' in our pronunciation. And we're both hairy creatures of God" (Ahmed Ahmed, quoted in Kassim 2004).

The second feature is that Christian Zionism strongly believes that Islam and Arabs in general constitute one of the great threats to Christianity, so much so that the Crusades in the Middle Ages were a good thing. On a more specific level they hold that all Palestinians should be expelled from their homeland. On this last point they are at one with mainstream Zionism. In the final battle of Armageddon, Muslims and Arabs are expendable. Unless of course, you happen be a convert to Bible-based Christianity...

The third feature is that they combine a “great love for Jews while talking numbly of their annihilation” (Strozier 1994: 208). Thus, it is significant how many of the Christian Zionist organisations use the word ‘friendship’ in their name: the Christian Friends of Israel, the Christian Friends of Israeli Communities, The America-Israel Friendship House, the Friends of Israel Gospel Ministries, etc. And that friendship, or indeed passionate love, is expressed in the desire for the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. A good illustration comes from Tim La Haye and Jerry Jenkins’ ridiculously popular *Left Behind* series (over 65 million copies sold), features an Israeli Jew, subtly called “Tzion Ben-Judah”, who converts to Christianity and becomes a guide to the “Tribulation Force” (McAlister 2005: 291). One might wonder how such an obviously contradictory position can hold together, how the love for and annihilation of the Jews can be uttered in one breath. The solution is disarmingly simple: it applies to all people, for if you or I don’t convert, then we’re headed for destruction. It matters little whether that annihilation takes place in some grand battle or when we calmly die at the end of a long life.

#### **Antinomy 4: Biblical Literalism**

For the final antinomy, we argue that Christian Zionism is a brutal outcome of reading the Bible ‘literally’, that is, in a selective fundamentalist fashion. Since it must hold the whole Bible to be inerrant, it is bound to take both Old and New Testaments at the same level. Ultimately the tension between the two is impossible to hold together, so its only solution is to wipe out one side of the antinomy, namely, those who claim one part of the Bible – the Hebrew section – as sacred scriptures as well. It is a little like those Hollywood films that can only resolve a bad plot in a bloodbath.

Let us say a little more about this tension. Christian Zionists combine absolute devotion to Christ (New Testament), but they don’t want to replace Yahweh’s promises to Abraham and Israel (Old Testament). So the only way to combine the two is to hold them together in tension for a while – hence absolute support for literal readings of the Old Testament, giving the Jews all the land between Mediterranean and Euphrates.

Despite the tradition of dispensationalism with its attendant supersessionism (wherein the Christian Church takes the place of the Israel of the Hebrew Bible, with a strong sense of the punishment of the Jews for rejecting Christ), among Christian Zionists superficial literal readings of the Hebrew scriptures abound in the reintegration of Jews into the realm of divine favour, specifically as the apocalyptic agents of change (see Cohn-Sherbok 2006: 188). Indeed, Melanie Phillips (2002), in a front-page article in the bastion of British conservatism, *The Spectator*, accused all mainstream churches who fail to maintain a literal reading of the ‘Old Testament’ promises of land to Israel as anti-Jewish. For her, Christian Zionists are not



violently-minded fundamentalists, but merely those, “who passionately support the state of Israel as the fulfilment of God’s Biblical promise to the Jews” (2002: 14).

Thus, Christian Zionists take the passages from the Hebrew Bible, especially those concerning the promise of a full occupation of the land of Canaan (Lev 26:44-5, Deut 7:7-8), as referring to the present day ‘return’. It matters not whether these texts refer to some mythical escape from Egypt, wandering the wilderness and invasion of the land, or if they refer to an equally legendary exile to Babylon after the destruction of the temple. Rather, they read these texts as the need to solidify Israel’s occupation of Jerusalem’s Old City, especially through the move of the American Embassy there, as well as supporting the Knesset’s internationally-ignored resolution declaring sovereignty over the undivided city.

However, such an approach can only be maintained up to a point, which is of course the end of the world. The catch is that the scenario of the end of the world is also constructed around literal readings of the Old *and* New Testaments, which enables them to ‘solve’ the conundrum by having the Jews become Christians or die. This is where we find a complete narrative that strings together a whole series of biblical texts equally drawn from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. Thus, that well-known “Rapture”, when Jesus simply whisks away the faithful at any moment, comes from 1 Thess 4:15-17 (and Matt 24:40-1), especially the last verse: “then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” 1 Thess 5:1-11, with its depiction of the day of the Lord coming “like a thief in the night” is also important, and even from the time when the doctrine of the “Rapture” was first developed by John Nelson Darby the ‘ingathering’ of Jews in Palestine and the recreation of the state of Israel has been central to it.

Throw in the seven seals from Revelation (6:1-17 and 8:1-5) and you get the seven years of tribulation after the Rapture (Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 also help, especially with the term ‘Tribulation’ itself). As for those who will be saved, the 144,000 Jews come from Revelation 7:1-8, the battle of Armageddon, located at its old site in Israel at Mt Megiddo, comes from Rev 16:16, and the armies of Jesus and those of the Beast engaged in the final conflict appear in Rev 17: 12-14 (along with Danie 7 and 11). If we thought that Paul might have escaped most of this, he comes in with Romans 11:11-27, which becomes the prophecy of the conversion of the Jews (144,000 or thereabouts).

Now, all of this lies in the (not too distant) future, for the Rapture has not happened just yet. Instead, there is a ferocious concern with signs, a key one being the claim to Jerusalem as a Jewish city. As Jerry Falwell notes, “there are hundreds of references to Jerusalem in both the Old and New Testaments but God made no reference to Tel Aviv” (quoted in Anderson 2005: 123). The move of the US Embassy to Jerusalem and the declaration of sovereignty that we noted earlier are

taken as the first signs of such a development. And why Jerusalem? It is to be the site where the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven (Rev 21:2).

Indeed, the difference between these ‘signs’, biblical ‘prophecies’ and politics becomes ever more difficult to maintain (Harding 1994: 66). They may well have collapsed, with signs – everyday news from the region – interpreted in real time according to fundamentalist interpretations of Biblical prophecies, all of which inform very immediate political events, such as the 100,000 near-instantaneous emails Falwell was able to mobilise from his followers to have Bush reverse his call for Israeli withdrawal from reoccupied Palestinian territory in 2002, and the infamous correction, “Ariel Sharon is a man of peace” extracted from the Whitehouse after the most minute of criticism.

However, Jerusalem is also the site of the temple, for another pre-requisite for the Rapture is that there must be a restored Jewish temple before the Rapture can take place (Chapman 2004: 118). Jesus’ apocalyptic sayings in the synoptic gospels, held by scholars to refer back to the destruction of the temple, from the perspective of the communities responsible for the gospels, are read so as to predict the *future* destruction of the temple which would require the temple to be rebuilt. Matt 24:15 and 2 Thess 2:3-4 come into service to show that there should be a restored Jewish temple at the time of the Rapture, since this is where the anti-Christ must take his seat during the seven years of Tribulation.

All of this is rather exciting, as we can see from Hal Lindsay’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*, one of the biggest selling books on the 1970s. He wrote:

Obstacle or no obstacle, it is certain that the Temple will be rebuilt. Prophecy demands it... With the Jewish nation reborn in the land of Palestine, ancient Jerusalem once again under total Jewish control for the first time in 2600 years, and talk of rebuilding the temple, the most important sign of Jesus Christ’s soon coming is before us... It is like the key pieces of a jigsaw puzzle being found... For all those who trust in Jesus Christ, it is a time of electrifying excitement (cited in Chapman 2004: 118).

Now, we are perversely proud of the fact that Australia has its place in the history of this little venture. Already back in 1969, Christian Denis Rohan plotted the destruction of the existing *al Aqsa* mosque so that the temple might be rebuilt. All he wanted was for “sweet Jesus to return and pray in it” (Chapman 2004: 119).

Sweet Jesus notwithstanding, the material implications are absolutely brutal. While we might find the work of Christian Zionist leader Harold Willmington and his students rather quaint, it is predicated on the calm expectation of mass slaughter. Willmington and his students placed bibles in the caves of Petra, Jordan in 1974, with the inscription, addressed to those he expected may stumble across it after the nearby battle of Armageddon, “Attention all of Hebrew background... We respectfully urge [this Bible’s] finder to prayerfully and publicly read the following

Bible chapters. They are Daniel 7 and 11; Matthew 24; II Thessalonians 2; Revelation 12 and 13” (Harding 1994: 64).

They are certainly not the only people who seem to expect such an outcome. Here we simply juxtapose firstly the words of Ed McAteer, the so-called Godfather of the American Christian Right, and Ronald Reagan. McAteer is first:

I believe we are seeing prophecy unfold so rapidly and dramatically and wonderfully and, without exaggeration, [it] makes me breathless (Simon 2002).

Here is Reagan, speaking to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee:

You know, I turn back to your ancient prophets in the Old Testament and the signs foretelling Armageddon, and I find myself wondering if – if we’re the generation that is going to see that come about. I don’t know if you’ve noted any of these prophecies lately, but believe me, they certainly describe the times we’re going through (Wagner 2002: 55).

## **Conclusion**

Christian Zionism is a dangerous fellow-traveller. It is, if you like, the maverick in the ranks. At one level, we can see that Christian Zionism is but one part of broader Zionist discourse, geared towards a particular audience. Thus, it seems to take its place alongside other forms of Zionism, such as the image of a cultural oasis in a sea of barbarism, or the embattled frontline in the war on terror, or the foothold of democracy in the Middle East, or a queer utopia. Each variety of Zionist discourse employs different rhetorical strategies to the same immediate political end: the unquestioned continuation of western support for the policies of the government of the state of Israel. There is, however, one crucial difference with Christian Zionism – it supports Israel for the purpose of annihilating it. Most readers would agree that there are many things we’d rather do – such as base jumping or Russian roulette – than have a friend whose ultimate and explicit desire is to do away with us.

We can go even further. Christian Zionism shows up a certain truth value of mainstream Zionism, especially the violent refusal of the presence of its others. Thus, both Christian Zionism and mainstream Zionism seek to remove or deny the presence of Palestinians in Palestine. The catch is that whereas for mainstream Zionism the state of Israel and the removal of Palestinians are necessary for the survival of the Jews (a deeply flawed position in itself), for Christian Zionists this ethnically pure state is only the precursor for their own story. The Palestinians, and indeed the Arabs, are but the first step to the conversion and/or destruction of the Jews themselves.

Christian Zionism might be written off as the fervent speculations that come out of that strange mix of American geopiety and biblical myth-making, but it has a

thoroughly material political ideology that it expresses through money, votes and lobbying pressure. One can only hope that the apocalyptic prophecies of the Christian Zionists will not be fulfilled through their own actions (such prophecies have a knack of doing so if the resources are available). Instead, perhaps the antinomies will begin to break up Christian Zionism from within. Perhaps the politics will swamp the theology and they will annihilate themselves before anyone else.

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