

The Ideology of Christian Zionism As an Obstacle to Israeli-Palestinian Peace

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Abstract

Christian Zionism has become one of the most influential religious-political ideologies shaping Western support for Israel, particularly in the United States. This article examines how Christian Zionist beliefs have contributed to the persistence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by providing theological and political legitimacy for unconditional support of Israel. Employing a qualitative literature review and historical analysis, the study traces the origins of Christian Zionism from the Protestant Reformation through nineteenth-century dispensationalism and explores its theological foundations, including Biblical Zionism and Dispensationalist Zionism. The findings demonstrate that Christian Zionist interpretations of biblical prophecy encourage political mobilization, financial assistance, and lobbying efforts in support of Israeli policies while reinforcing anti-Islamic narratives that deepen polarization and hinder prospects for peace. The study argues that the fusion of religious doctrine with foreign policy has transformed a territorial dispute into a broader religious and ideological confrontation, making conflict resolution increasingly difficult. It concludes that sustainable peace requires reframing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a political and territorial dispute rather than a theological struggle, while reducing external ideological intervention that perpetuates mutual hostility. This analysis highlights the significant role of transnational religious ideology in influencing international politics and the dynamics of protracted conflict.

Keywords; Ideology, Palestine, Israel, Peace, Christian Zionism, Root of Conflict

1. INTRODUCTION

The formation of the State of Israel in 1948 was historically inevitable thanks to the support and contributions of several Western parties such as Britain and America. This fact has also been elaborated in the second meeting of the "Religion and Ideology" class on the Impact of The Arab-Israel Conflict in The Middle East to The Modern Worldwide Political Map, which states that there are several Christian groups that believe in the ideology of Christian Zionism and that these groups theologically and politically support the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem. Clear evidence of this support can be seen in the Balfour Declaration, which promised support for achieving the goal of establishing the State of Israel. There are even those who think that the Zionist movement will only become mere ideas if it does not get the intervention of influential British politicians (Tuchman, 2011).

Until now, the State of Israel continues to receive support and assistance from Western countries, especially the United States. Israel has been the primary recipient of U.S. foreign aid since World War II. The U.S. has provided \$115 billion in bilateral financial assistance to Israel, with almost all of it in the form of military aid (Sharp, 2015). In 2007, the United States, under the Bush administration, signed an agreement with Israel that included a 10-year military aid deal worth \$30 billion (Sharp, 2015).

Some of the above facts are examples of support from the United States for the sustainability of Israel in the land of Palestine, not only the government supports but also several other community groups, for example, the action of Christian United for Israel (CUFI) spearheaded by Father John Hagee in Texas, with several other Christians who are fighting to support Israel (Munir, n.d.). In addition to CUFI, there is another Christian community that has expressed its support for Israel, namely the Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC), which facilitates relations between adherents of Christian Zionism in the United States and in Jewish settlements in Jerusalem (Mohr, 2013a). This paper will explain how the ideology of Christian Zionism in the United States has an impact on the prolonged conflict between the State of Israel and Palestine that has been going on since the establishment of the State of Israel until now has not yet achieved peace (Mohr, 2013a).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology with an explanatory orientation. Qualitative research is intended to generate an in-depth understanding of social phenomena by exploring participants' experiences, meanings, and interactions, particularly in situations where quantitative or statistical approaches are insufficient to capture the complexity of the phenomenon. Rather than emphasizing measurement, qualitative research seeks to understand processes, contexts, and the construction of reality through rich empirical data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Furthermore, this study adopts an explanatory approach to investigate the relationships among relevant concepts and to explain why a particular phenomenon occurs by drawing upon existing theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. The explanatory orientation enables researchers to develop logically grounded interpretations of causal mechanisms underlying the phenomenon under investigation (Babbie, 2020)

3. HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Essentially, what is meant by the ideology of Christian Zionism is the support of Christians, especially Protestants, for the Zionist movement. Based on the narration of Grace Halsell, the message drawn through Christian Zionism is as follows: *"Every act taken by Israel is orchestrated by God, and should be condoned, supported, and even praised by the rest of us"* (Halsell, 1988). Thus, adherents of this ideology believe that every attempt made by Israel to return to the hold of Zion is the will of God that they must forgive and support; if these efforts are not fulfilled, then they are just as opposed to God's will and commands.

The emergence of the Zionist movement, articulated by Theodore Herzl in his 1896 *Der Judenstaat*, which a year later held its first Zionist congress, influenced the views of several Christians such as Edward Irving, Lewis Way, Joseph Wolff, and Henry Drummond. These figures then contributed both through writings and other activities in support of the Zionist movement (S. R. Sizer, 2004). But historically, the emergence of the idea and ideology that Christians should help the Jewish people return to Jerusalem has existed long before the political movement of Zionism.

The ideology of Christian Zionism began with the Protestant Reformation which later revived interest in the Old Testament and the covenant made by God with the Jewish nation (S. Sizer, 2021). There was a puritanical eschatology at that time which believed that the gathering of the Jewish nation would bring blessings to all the world in the future. In 1621 Sir Henry Finch, a lawyer and member of the English Parliament, published a book entitled "The World Great Restoration (sic) or Calling of the Jews, (and with them) all The Nations and Kingdoms of the Earth to the Faith of Christ," (Venema, 2000) which contained puritanist beliefs among Protestant Christians. This thought dominated American and European Protestant Christians in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The belief they believe is that the millennial time has come and that the gospel will then triumph over the demons of the world, and that the gift of peace and prosperity from God depends on the gathering of the Israelites, which is considered the first step before the return of Christ or Jesus Christ (S. Sizer, 2021).

Later in the early 19th century, some of the aforementioned Protestant figures such as Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby, made a major contribution to the development of Christian Zionism. They then held several prophetic conferences held in England and Ireland between 1826 and 1833 (Newman-Norton, 2005). At the first meeting in 1826, an English banker and politician named Henry Drummond opened his home in Alburk Park as a place to discuss the issue of "the immediate fulfilment of prophecy", an attempt to fulfill biblical prophecies about the return of the Jews to Palestine and the search for some lost Jewish tribes, this conference continued until the 1830s in Ireland under the influence of John Nelson Darby (Newman-Norton, 2005)

John Nelson was the figure who played the most significant role in the development of the Christian Zionist ideology (Wagner, 1995). It is because he succeeded in establishing the Church in Germany, Switzerland, France, and the United States, John Nelson Darby also translated the entire contents of the Gospel into English and his friends instilled the ideas of Christian Zionism in Africa, Australia, and New Zealand and finally in North America. The influence of Darby's ideas later further influenced evangelical leaders such as James H. Brookes, Dwight L. Moody, William Blackstone and C.I. Scofield. These ideas dominated Evangelists and Fundamentalists in the United States between 1875 and 1920. It was Darby who then developed the idea of Christian Zionism in America, especially dispensationalist Zionism (Wagner, 1995)

2.1 Theological Root of Christian Zionism

Many Christian Zionists have theological reasons for supporting Israel, but they personally have varying degrees of support. There are two groups of Christian Zionists, the first is the biblical Zionists, who support the Zionist movement because of the literature in the Bible. And the other group is called dispensationalists who believe theologically that Israel is closely related to the return of Jesus the Messiah to earth.

2.1.1 Biblical Christian Zionist

The group used several references from the Bible to support their beliefs about Israel. Here are some of their biblical references:

“ And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee, and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Grüneberg, 2003)”

The biblical Zionist group interprets Genesis 12:3 as a direct message from God that shows that the Jews are God's chosen people to be supported. Those who defend the Jews will also be blessed by God and vice versa, those who curse the Jews will be cursed by God. This then led to the emergence of voluntary support from adherents of biblical Christian Zionism who hoped to receive God's grace.

Coupled with an explanation of the relationship between the Jewish nation and the land of Israel based on Genesis 15:18 which reads:

“In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates (Römer, 2012).”

Genesis 15:18 is believed by biblical Zionists to be a justification for what Israel did in the land of Palestine, because it is stated in this passage that God gave the land to the Jewish people that stretched from the Nile to the Euphrates River which is an area that includes the modern state of Egypt, Jordan and also the State of Iraq. Both biblical texts provide the basis for biblical Zionists to justify that the land is inexorably a right of the Jewish nation acquired as a gift from God whose nature is permanently valid

2.1.2 Dispensationalist Christian Zionist

While this group theoretically emerged from England in the 19th century which was introduced by John Nelson Darby. The dispensationalist group is built on biblical literature that states that the Jews are God's chosen people and are no longer a group that is not recognized by, but they will always be blessed by God (Friedman, 2009). This view is in stark contrast to that of conventional Christianity, which believes that the Jews lost their status as the elect when they failed to accept Jesus as their Messiah, and that it was Christians who inherited God's covenant with Abraham. This Christian Zionist ideology then brought the Jewish nation back to the position they wanted and was full of light and rejected with the so-called substitute theology (Mohr, 2013b)

The main goal of this group is to ensure their safety to face the events of Armageddon, Tony Campolo as one of the main followers of Darby's belief states that for Armageddon to occur and Jesus' return to earth, several things must happen (Campolo, 2005):

1. The state of Israel must be rebuilt
2. The Jews had to return to the holy land and become the main inhabitants of the area.
3. The Jewish temple that once stood on Mount Zion must be rebuilt and the sacrificial temple in ancient Israel must be restored to its original state.

All dispensationalists believe that when the above conditions are met, Jesus the Savior will soon come and the joy for Christians will begin, but not all dispensationalists believe that the temple should be rebuilt. The main belief for Zionist dispensationalists is that Israel plays an important role in the return of Jesus and the end of the world.

What is meant by the joyful time above is *"God will remove all of this true believers from earth... and all God's true followers will vanish in an instant and their souls will ascend to heaven where they will join Jesus."* (Haija, 2006)"

Dispensationalists believe that the 144,000 Jews will save the world and help them face the Anti-Christ, after which there will be the end of the world (Campolo, 2005), According to their view the Jews will eventually enter Christianity, this fight between the Jews and the Anti-Jews is then called the event of Armageddon, after the Jews are victorious and they convert to Christianity. Jesus will come and imprison all demons, then establish the Messianic Kingdom in a period called the Millennium (Campolo, 2005). It is this dispensationalist belief that dominates the current Christian Zionist ideology, especially in the United States (Pawson, 2014)

3. THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM ON THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Many scholars who have written about Christian Zionism contain criticism of the activities of this group, even one of them, Campolo, stated that the emergence of Christian Zionism is the main obstacle to the realization of peace in the Middle East, especially between Israel and Palestine (Campolo, 2005). This opinion is based on the allegation that the ideology of Christian Zionism contributes to the nature of causing the emergence of fundamentalist Islamic groups (Friedman, 2009). In addition, another thinker who studies the problem of Christian Zionism, Davidson, stated that foundationalist Christians had a great hatred for Islam long before the formation of the Zionist movement (Davidson, 2011).

So that by associating Christian values with Zionism, it increases anti-Islamic views in the world, this is inseparable from the thesis conveyed by Samuel Huntington which states that Western civilization will experience a clash with Islam (Brog, 2006).

One of the proofs of Christian Zionism's hatred of Islam can be seen in the statement of the Chairman of American Christian Zionism who categorized Islam as violence, "Islam not only condones violence, it commands it, a tree is known by its fruit, and the fruit produced by Islam is fourteen hundred years of violence and bloodshed around the world. (Hagee, 2007) ". This view clearly shows the position of this movement in viewing Islam as the religion of the majority of Palestinians, the growth and development of the ideology of Christian Zionism in parallel with the growing hatred of the world, especially the United States, towards Islam and Palestine, plus the growing influence of Christian Zionism in the United States.

The Christian Zionist community today is very large, almost 25% of all registered voters in the United States are Protestant Christians, this figure is four times greater than non-religious voters and 12 times higher than Jewish voters (Martin, 1999) . About 10% of these U.S. voters declare themselves Christian Zionists, an estimated 31 million Americans compared to the Jewish population in the United States which is only 2% of the population. 6 million people (Haija, 2006) . Their large population has the potential to generate tremendous power both politically and massively, coupled with the fact that not all Jews are supporters of the Zionist movement. According to data from AIPAC (The American Israel Public Affairs Committee), only 100,000 Jews support the Zionist movement (AIPAC, 2016), while the largest Christian Zionist organization in the United States, CUFI, has 10 times as many members as AIPAC's 1 million members. This large number of members is a force for Christian Zionist groups to influence U.S. foreign policy, and is also a great source of funding for Israel (AIPAC, 2016)

Another example of support from Christian Zionist groups is the financing of the transportation of 40,000 Jews to Israel from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s by the ICEJ (International Christian Embassy Jerusalem). The controversy is that ICEJ allegedly linked efforts to the return of Jews to Jerusalem in an attempt to hasten the arrival of the Messiah by taking over the Dome of Rock and destroying the Islamic Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem (Diamond & Barsamian, 1996).

When Islam is seen as a threat to Israel's survival in the land of Jerusalem, Islam is also considered an enemy of Christian Zionism, and they even discriminate against Muslims living in the United States. This is evidenced by the story of a 63-year-old Muslim man who went to a subway restaurant in Louisiana with his wife, then he was prevented from entering the restaurant door by a female worker who asked if he was a Muslim, after answering that he was a Muslim, then the man and his wife were not allowed to enter the restaurant and the door of the restaurant was locked (Fink, 2015).

The hatred instilled in Islam will certainly provoke the same hateful reaction from Islam against America and the West which is considered to always support the State of Israel. So that the peace process between Israel and Palestine has gone through a long and convoluted process. This was then conceptualized into the terminology of religious fear by Jason Bivins, which is a type of worldview that sees human existence as something

fixed and certain, which contains certainty (us or them) as a substitute for uncertain circumstances in public life. This fear then constructs a framework of public life that tends to be conflictual and does not prioritize cooperation and dialogue (Bivins, 2008)

4. CONCLUSION

The facts mentioned above have indicated that the ideology of Christian Zionism has a theological interest in helping the formation of the State of Israel and supporting the continuation of the State to realize the prophecies in the Bible. The ongoing conflict for many years cannot be based solely on internal conflicts between the two sides fighting for the same land. This conflict then becomes complicated and difficult to describe because of the many actors involved and interested in this problem.

In addition to directly involving the two semitic religions in the world, namely Islam and Judaism, it turns out that the role of Christianity cannot be separated from the long twists and turns of the peace journey between Israel and Palestine. Compared to other interests such as economics, politics, ideological and theological interests, it is much more rooted and old-fashioned, even though the initiators of these ideologies have died, their thoughts and ideas are still developing in the midst of society. The same is true of the ideology of Christian Zionism.

The extraordinary intervention of Western countries, especially the United States, which has the largest Christian Zionist organization in the world, to the problem of Israel and Palestine has contributed to the formation of this conflict which was initially a security issue (occupation of Palestinian land by Israel), turned into a conflict of struggle for the holy land of Jerusalem by two religions, namely Jews and Muslims, so that the scope of the conflict and hatred became greater and more complex.

The State of Israel established in 1948 was not a state that stood on the basis of a theocracy, because the founding father of the State was not a rabbi, and Herzl, who is considered the father of the Zionist movement, did not mention in his view that the State of Israel was a State based on Halakha or the laws of Judaism. The majority of the figures from the founders of the State of Israel were Askehnazis, Jews who lived in the United States and Europe for a long time who were also influenced by the values of secularism that separated religion from politics.

So the return of the Jews to the land of Palestine can be concluded that it is not essentially a religious ritual to carry out prophecies from the Bible, but actually an effort to survive in the face of discrimination that occurs in exile. The hatred of Islam that was later developed through the ideology of Christian Zionism led to the emergence of radical Islamic movements that also voiced the same hatred of the West and Jews. So that this problem becomes more complex and complicated, as time goes by, the spread of hatred is also widening to all corners of the world.

The peace solution that the author can offer to the conflict between Israel and Palestine is to hand over this conflict to the two countries, without involving the role and intervention of any country including the United States and other Arab countries, because with the increasing number of parties involved, the potential for conflict becomes greater so that the path of peace through negotiation and diplomacy is difficult to achieve.

In addition, there needs to be an awareness to change the perspective in seeing the conflict between Israel and Palestine as a conflict between two countries fighting for the same territory, not as two semitic world religions, namely Islam and Judaism that are in conflict over the holy land of Jerusalem, because when theological problems are the main focus in this conflict until at any time the path of peace will not be achieved. In essence, the majority of Israel's Jewish population today is Mizrahi, which is a Jewish people who live and come from Islamic countries such as Arabia, Asia and Africa who have historically been accustomed to coexisting with Muslims. This indicates sociologically that these two brothers, Palestine and Israel, have the potential to coexist peacefully.

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