

Christian Palestinianism

Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

Paul Wilkinson, a British Christian Zionist, recently included a chapter in his book *For Zion's Sake*¹ about a movement that is the polar opposite of Christian Zionism he termed "Christian Palestinianism." He defines it as "a relatively new, largely intellectual, professedly Christian, anti-Zionist movement [that] has sprung up alongside [Christian Zionism], which I have classified as Christian Palestinianism."² "Naim Ateek essentially founded Christian Palestinianism in 1994 when he launched the Palestinian Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center known as Sabeel."³

Sabeel, at its Fifth International Conference in Jerusalem in 2004 entitled "Challenging Christian Zionism," advanced a leftist agenda against Christians who support the modern state of Israel. Some of those who claim to be evangelicals who attended and spoke at the conference include Stephen Sizer, Donald Wagner, Marc Ellis of Baylor University, and Gary Burge of Wheaton College. Demonstrating its alliance with Islam, the highlight of the conference for many was a meeting by the entire group with Yasser Arafat in his compound at Ramallah. The final statement issued at the conference included the following: "we warn that the theology of Christian Zionism is leading to the moral justification of empire, colonization, apartheid, and oppression."⁴

WHAT THEY BELIEVE

Christian Palestinianism is basically a system of thought that opposes Christian Zionism. Philip Saa'd, a Palestinian Christian who lives in Haifa, Israel says, "In recent years a phenomenon of palestination has also occurred among the Christian Arabs who live in Israel." Saa'd describes these recent developments in the following way: "liberation theology," "amillennialism, Replacement theology and the Covenant of Grace theology." It also includes a "strong rejection of dispensationalism and of a literal interpretation of the Bible."⁵ He notes that some Christian Palestinians "do not use the Old Testament as a source for their theology" and that "some writers still use the Old Testament but selectively," while he characterizes them as all using "a spiritual hermeneutic."⁶

Bat Ye'or, an Egyptian scholar, has an entire chapter in her recent book *Eurabia* about the Islamization of Christianity.⁷ It is breathtaking to read her well-documented chapter in which she says, "Palestinian Marcionism (Palestinianism) paves the way for the Islamization of the Church as it prepares mentalities for an Islamic replacement theology."⁸ How do they attempt to reach this goal? Palestinianism "presses for the removal of the Gospels from their Judaic matrix and their grafting onto Arab Palestinianism, thus bringing them closer to Islam."⁹ After citing some of the organizations advocating such things, she notes: "The process of Islamization of Christianity is rooted precisely in this separation from Judaism and the Arabization and Palestination of the Jewish Jesus."¹⁰ "Many Christian Palestinians, like Muslims, do not admit to any historical or theological link between the biblical Israel, the Jewish people, and the modern State of Israel."¹¹

Melanie Phillips, a British Jew, has written a book entitled *Londonistan*,¹² warning England that Islam is taking over their country and culture, mainly because the church has become pro-Islamic and against historic Christianity. She notes the rise of Christian Palestinianism as follows:

So when Arab Christians reinterpreted Scripture in order to delegitimize the Jews' claim to the land of Israel, this kick-started replacement theology, which roared back into the imaginations, sermons and thinking of the Anglican Church.

This revisionism held that Palestinian Arabs were the original possessors of the land of Israel. The Anglican bishop of Jerusalem, Riah Abu el-Assal, claimed of Palestinian Christians: "We are the true Israel. . . ."¹³

This new breed of replacement theology or supersessionism not only replaces Israel with the church, but it is moving the church toward Islamic subjugation. Ye'or declares that the Palestinian Christian movement is guilty of "'de-biblicizing' the Bible," expelling "the Jews from their own Scriptures," and reinterpreting it "from the viewpoint of the Qur'an."¹⁴

Donald Wagner tries to argue that about half of the population in Israel at the time of Christ was not Jewish, so that he can bolster his pseudo-claim that Arab Christians are racially descended from the original church in Acts 2 in Jerusalem.¹⁵ There may have been a few Arab proselytes to Judaism at the birth of the church, but the emphasis is clear that the earliest church was primarily Jewish. In fact, Eusebius (about 263–339) tells us in his famous *Ecclesiastical History* "that up to the siege of the Jews by Hadrian [A.D. 132–135] the successions of bishops were fifteen in number. He said that they were all Hebrews by origin . . . For their whole church at that time consisted of Hebrews who had continued Christian from the Apostles down to the siege at the time when the Jews again rebelled from the Romans." Eusebius then lists their names starting with James, the half brother of Jesus. He concludes his comments on this matter as follows: "Such were the bishops in the city of Jerusalem, from the Apostles down to the time mentioned, and they were all Jews."¹⁶ Wagner's attempt to disestablish the role of Israel and to exalt Palestinians into their place is typical of the movement.

It is common for those involved with the Palestinian Christian movement to demonize their counterparts—Christian Zionists—as "racists,"¹⁷ "a heretical interpretation of Scripture," a "deviant heresy,"¹⁸ and a "heretical cult."¹⁹ Palestinian Christians commonly believe that Christian Zionists are anxious for Armageddon²⁰ when in reality we are anxiously waiting for Christ and His return for us at the rapture.

EVANGELICALS

Such a movement would be somewhat easier to understand if it were composed of only liberals, however, many within the Palestinian Christian movement claim to be evangelical in their theology. It is amazing to see someone like Gary DeMar director of American Vision, who normally espouses a conservative theology and values, repeatedly give voice to the Christian Palestinian movement. DeMar has had Stephen Sizer on his radio program recently to discuss the evils of Christian Zionism and recommends his books. He also promotes and sales the books of Colin Chapman.

Hank Hanegraaff of the Christian Research Institute has had on his daily national radio show, "The Bible Answer Man," most of the prominent spokesmen for the Palestinian Christian movement. Hanegraaff has had on his program Englishmen Stephen Sizer and Colin Chapman, as well as Gary Burge and Brother Andrew. In his non-fiction book on eschatology *The Apocalypse Code*, when Hanegraaff deals with the issue of the current state of Israel, he primarily refers to Palestinian Christian advocates to make his case. It is because of his Palestinian Christian mindset that he labels Tim

LaHaye and myself as racists because we believe the modern state of Israel has been brought into being by God.²¹

REWRITING HISTORY

Hanegraaff further displays his Palestinian Christian mentality when he accuses Israel of “the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.”²² He cites as his authority discredited and revisionist Israeli historian Benny Morris who said, “‘We must expel the Arabs and take their places’ said David Ben-Gurion.”²³ Hanegraaff is most likely unaware that Morris’ statement about Ben-Gurion is a total fabrication. It is hard to learn this kind of information when surrounded by Palestinian Christian advocates. Nevertheless, such is the case.

Efraim Karsh in the introduction of his book, *Fabricating Israeli History*, tells us about how he first suspected Morris’ fabrications: “The text in question was a book on the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem by Israeli academic Benny Morris. . . . While leafing through the book’s English-language version, I came across a quote from a letter, written by David Ben-Gurion to his son Amos in 1937, stating ‘we must expel Arabs and take their places’. This rang a distant bell. Having read the book’s Hebrew edition several years earlier, I recalled the letter as saying something quite different. Indeed, an examination of the Hebrew text confirmed my recollection. It read as follows: ‘We do not wish, we do not need to expel Arabs and take their place . . . All our aspiration is built on the assumption . . . that there is enough room in the country for ourselves and the Arabs.’”²⁴ Karsh goes on to examine Morris’ overall body of research and concludes: “To my bewilderment I discovered that there was scarcely a single document quoted by Morris which had not been rewritten in a way that distorted its original meaning altogether.”²⁵

The Bible teaches Zionism (Psalm 132). It is becoming clear that when one rebels against God’s Word on this point, it opens them to not only replacement theology, but to an increasing acceptance of Islamic viewpoints. As issues clarify, there is no place for neutrality where one can hide. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion’s Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2007), xix, 308 pages.

² Wilkinson, *For Zion’s Sake*, p. 48.

³ Wilkinson, *For Zion’s Sake*, p. 49.

⁴ Information about the conference taken from a non-published report by Paul Wilkinson who attended the conference.

⁵ Philip Saa’d, “How Shall We Interpret Scripture about the Land and Eschatology? Jewish and Arab Perspectives” in Wesley H. Brown and Peter F. Penner, editors, *Christian Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2008), p. 114.

⁶ Saa’d, “How Shall We Interpret,” p. 115.

⁷ Bat Ye’or, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), pp. 211–24.

⁸ Ye’or, *Eurabia*, p. 213.

⁹ Ye’or, *Eurabia*, p. 214.

¹⁰ Ye’or, *Eurabia*, p. 214.

¹¹ Ye’or, *Eurabia*, p. 214.

¹² Melanie Phillips, *Londonistan* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), xxv, 237 pages.

¹³ Phillips, *Londonistan*, p. 152.

¹⁴ Ye'or, *Eurabia*, p. 215.

¹⁵ Donald E. Wagner, *Dying in The Land of Promise: Palestine and Palestinian Christianity from Pentecost to 2000* (London: Melisende, 2003), pp. 41-50.

¹⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, translated by Kirsopp Lake, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), vol. I, pp. 309-11.

¹⁷ Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), p. 205.

¹⁸ Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, pp. 22, 259.

¹⁹ Donald E. Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon: A Call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Christians* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), p. 111.

²⁰ Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon*, (book title).

²¹ Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), pp. xxii-xxiii.

²² Hanegraaff, *Apocalypse Code*, p. 166.

²³ Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 25, cited in Hanegraaff, *Apocalypse Code*, p. 167.

²⁴ Efraim Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History: The 'New Historians'* (New York: Frank Cass, 2000), p. xvii.

²⁵ Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History*, p. xvii-xviii.

Accusations against promoters of Christian Palestinianism rose when the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement emerged around 2005. BDS illustrates the recognition of the Palestinian cause and the criticism of Israel in churches and Christian organizations. Keywords: BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions), Christ at the Checkpoint, Christian Zionism, Dispensationalism, International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, Kairos Palestine, Naim Ateek, Palestinian Liberation Theology, Paul Wilkinson, Sabeel.