

Confessing our Complicity in Christian Zionism Today

Recommendation:

The Synod/Presbytery of _____ overtures the 226th General Assembly to the PC(USA) 2024 to update and expand on the Resolution confronting Christian Zionism approved in 2004. Specifically, we call upon the General Assembly through the Office of Theology, Formation and Evangelism to:

- A. Reject Christian Zionism in all its forms
 1. See Appendix A - 2004 Resolution on Rejecting Christian Zionism;
 2. Acknowledge the expansion of Christian Zionism in all its forms.
- B. Issue a study document that addresses the expansion of Christian Zionism since our 2004 policy, including the following:
 1. Provides a record of General Assembly Resolutions dealing with Israel and Palestine since 2004;
 2. Covers the ways the heretical views of Christian Zionism have been expanded since our 2004 resolution, notably:
 - a. How mainstream Christianity implicitly and sometimes explicitly links the State of Israel to biblical views of Scripture's "promised land;"
 - b. The Global spread and adoption of Christian Zionism which focuses simply on the State of Israel as the Biblical kingdom; and
 - c. The growing understanding of settler colonialism with reference to the Doctrine of Discovery —rather than a conflict and occupation— showing how mainline Christians and those of other faiths are complicit, though unaware of connections with Zionism.
 3. Points to a biblical theology based on the Ten Commandments (Decalogue), a core requirement of Judaism, as it is found today in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Exodus 20:17 makes it clear that you shall "...not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor 's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." This directly contradicts the ideology that justifies taking land and displacing the indigenous people. All neighbors are to be treated with respect.
- C. Call upon the General Assembly through the office of World Mission to work with our partners across the world, who are also confronting the spread of Christian Zionism in their contexts, and convening spaces where experiences and resources can be shared through networks built to counter the spread of Christian Zionism globally. This would include holding events with partners in the United States, Africa and Asia where Christian Zionism is spreading.
- D. Call upon people of faith to advocate for a just peace with full and equal human rights for all the people in Palestine and Israel.

Rationale

A. Rejecting Christian Zionism. We must reject Christian Zionism in all its forms. This rationale lists the many ways it has developed since 2004 and calls for a Study Document to assist the church in its understanding. Twenty years ago, our denomination denounced as a heresy the theology undergirding Christian Zionism. As summarized by the Stated Clerk, Clifton Kirkpatrick in 2004:

The assembly declared that Christian Zionism is not consistent with the basic values of Reformed theology because it makes use of idiosyncratic interpretations of Scripture to undergird a certain reading of current events, and to generate support for specific political goals that do not bolster work toward peace and potentially endanger Palestinian and Israeli people.^[1]

Kirkpatrick went on to note that the Resolution did not invite comparison of Israeli policies to those of apartheid South Africa and that at that time, the Assembly had not asserted any moral equivalency between the two. That has changed. And our understanding of Zionism and how it relates to “settler colonialism” has also changed. We need new study materials to understand this fully. It would address the issues listed in part B of the Overture, as follows.

B. I. Our History of Complicity in Christian Zionism The theology of Christian Zionism, held by many millions of American Evangelicals, flourishes in many parts of the U.S., Asia, South America, and Africa. It is “gospel” to those who support Israel’s conquest and dispossession of Palestinians at any cost, in order to “return the Jews to the land of Israel and bring about the final battle of Armageddon so that our Messiah can return.” This is pure imperial theology which rose out of the British Empire but was taken to his current heights by US evangelicals.

Today, it is clear that mainline protestants are also complicit in this theology that oppresses and erases Palestinians but also exploits Jews. Here is an overview of the theology:

Christian Zionism (CZ hereafter) is a political and theological entity that uses Christian texts to support the modern nation-state of Israel out of the belief that Israel has a cosmic purpose to bring about the “End Times” which will culminate in the second coming of Jesus and the end of the world. CZ theology holds that Israel must gather all the Jews of the world, enlarge its territory, destroy Muslim holy places, and ethnically cleanse “the holy land” of all non-Jews. About 1/3 of evangelical Christians in the US believe that support for such actions from Israel will help hasten the desired end of the world. While most theologians consider it heresy, many Christians hold this far-right ideology without realizing its implications. ^[2]

B.2. How Zionism has expanded Zionism is a political ideology that has been used by Israel to legitimize its “settler colonial” policies and practices today. It didn’t start out that way, but it is clearly in effect today. Jews needed a safe place to land because of the Holocaust of mass extermination of Jews and others and because Western powers would not admit them as refugees in numbers that would accommodate those fleeing Nazi rule. Christian guilt over its

complicity in persecuting Jews over a long history of antisemitism hastened its agreement to establish their rights to live in Palestine. The Western practice of colonialism (ruling a land temporarily to use its resources) was just beginning to unravel at the end of WW II in 1945, but it did not stop the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.

Since 1967, Israeli leaders have used Zionism to justify taking land from Palestinians. This practice is called “settler colonialism,” the practice of taking land and pushing out indigenous people. This has accelerated since 2000 under the leadership of the current Prime Minister of Israel. The “Manifest Destiny” theme of religious justification is being used to justify the takeover.

B.3. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) The UDHR was adopted in 1948 and calls for equal human rights for everyone. Christians recognize its validity from the Ten Commandments; Exodus 20:17 makes it clear that you shall “...not covet your slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” All neighbors are to be treated with respect.

C. Call on the Office of World Mission to work with partners to confront the spread of CZ Call on World Mission to work with others who are also confronting CZ in their contexts and convene spaces where experiences and resources can be shared to counter the spread of CZ globally. Specifically, such conferences should be held in Asia, Africa, South America and the US.

D. Advocate for a just peace with full and equal human rights for all the people in Palestine and Israel Recognizing the rights of all people and showing solidarity for all, Jewish Voice for Peace concludes their position paper, *Our Approach to Zionism*,^[3] with these words:

Rather than accept the inevitability of occupation and dispossession, we choose a different path. We learn from the anti-Zionism Jews who came before us, and know that as long as Zionism has existed, so has Jewish dissent to it. Especially as we face the violent antisemitism fueled by white nationalism in the US today, we choose solidarity. We choose collective liberation. We choose a future where everyone, including Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, can live their lives freely in vibrant, safe, equitable communities, with basic human needs fulfilled. Join us.

[1] “Statement from the Stated Clerk concerning the 216th General Assembly regarding Israel and Palestine and outreach to Jewish people,” 7.20.2004, an Appendix, published in church and Society, PC(USA), Vol. 95, No. 1

[2] FOSNA.org (Friends of Sabeel North America), an ecumenical group of Christians supporting Palestinian Christians.

[3] “Our Approach to Zionism,” Jewish Voice for Peace.
<https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/resource/Zionism/>

Appendix A

RESOLUTION ON RESOURCES FOR “CONFRONTING CHRISTIAN ZIONISM” 2004

[Upon approval with significant amendment, this overture (or proposal) from the Presbytery of Chicago became a resolution of the General Assembly (GA). Thus the opening language may be read to say that the Assembly approves active opposition to Christian Zionism and the development of a plan... The pastoral letter in item 1 was issued by Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick in January, 2005]

The Presbytery of Chicago respectfully overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to actively oppose Christian Zionism and to develop a plan to communicate the theological and political ramifications it engenders within our denomination, in the mass media, and among U. S. government officials. Specifically, we call upon the General Assembly to do the following:

- 1. Issue to all churches in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) a pastoral letter on Christian Zionism and the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine and make this letter available on the PC(USA) Web site. The assembly requests the following offices to assist the Stated Clerk in the preparation of this letter: The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, Corporate Witness, Interfaith Relations, Middle East, and the Office of Theology and Worship.**
- 2. Inform current government officials that Christian Zionism does not represent the majority of American Christians and the faith of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).**
- 3. Continue to commend and promote the PC(USA) list of resources found in the September/October 2003 issue of *Church & Society*, entitled “Israel and Palestine: The Quest for Peace,” so that Presbyterians can and will become knowledgeable of the present-day Middle East situation and have a better understanding of its history and people. [*Church & Society* ran subsequent Middle East related issues in 2004, 2005, and 2006]**
- 4. Educate Presbyterians about the Reformed principles for interpreting Scripture as affirmed by previous General Assemblies. Specifically, interpreting Scripture as follows:**
 - a. In light of the entire witness of Scripture: “Thus the New Testament’s emphasis on the gospel is not to be understood apart from the Old Testament’s emphasis on the grace of the law; and the Old Testament’s emphasis on the law is not to be understood apart from the New Testament’s emphasis on the grace of the gospel,” Presbyterian**

Understanding and Use of the Holy Scripture (*Minutes*, PCUS, 1983, part I, p.615).

- b. And the rule of love of God and neighbor: “The fundamental expression of God’s will is the two-fold commandment to love God and neighbor, and all interpretations are to be judged by the question whether they offer and support the love given and commanded by God,” Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture (*Minutes*, PCUS, 1983, Part I, p. 615).
5. Direct the General Assembly Council (GAC), through its offices on the Middle East, Interfaith Relations, Theology and Worship, and the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, to develop a brief resource and study guide to assist Presbyterians in understanding how biblical faith and Reformed theology guide our understanding of present realities and possibilities in the Middle East. This resource/study guide is to be mailed to all churches and posted on the PC(U.S.A.) website.
 6. Continue to cooperate with other denominations, church bodies, and like-minded groups to promote peace in the Holy Land.
 7. Urge our Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)-related colleges and seminaries to address this issue.
 8. Commend to the church the following works to better understand dispensationalism and Christian Zionism:
 - a. Our own resources from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):
 - **Between Millennia: What Presbyterians Believe About the Coming of Christ** (PDS 70-420-01-007)-commended by the 213th General Assembly (2001) to the church.
 - “**Eschatology: The Doctrine of Last Things,**” *Minutes of the General Assembly, Journal* (Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1978).
 - ‘**Dispensationalism,**’ *Minutes of the General Assembly* (Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1944), pp. 123-27.
 - **GAC CMD** [General Assembly Council Congregational Ministries Division] **Comment 12-03** from the GAC that lays out the theological context of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism.
 - b. Resources from outside the PCUSA:
 - **Wes Granberg-Michaelson**, “**Christian Zionism Distorts faith and imperils peace,**” <http://www.warc.ch/update/up134/01.html>.
 - **Don Wagner**, *Peace or Armageddon? The Unfolding Drama of the Middle East Accords* (HarperCollins, 2004).
 - **Stephen Sizer**, *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon?* (InterVarsity Press, 2004) Forthcoming.
 - “**Christian Zionists in Their Own Words and Articles on Christian Zionism.**” Sabeel Center.
 - **Gary Burge**, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians* (Pilgrim Press, 2003).

9. Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds as we continue to seek a deeper understanding of God's Word for us and for the world today.

Rationale:

We are called by Scripture to love God and all our neighbors. Christian Zionism promotes a theology that justifies grievous violations of basic rights of people who are also made in the image of God and is contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Its teachings invite contempt for fellow Christians in the Middle East and foreclose decent human relations with many Evangelical Christians in our own American society and in our churches. The implications of this issue need to be understood and to be given much broader attention by our denomination.

The term, "Christian Zionism," is used to refer to the use of passages of biblical prophecy out of context to influence political and religious leaders to accept the State of Israel as a necessary condition of the return of Jesus Christ and the eschatological end of time (Armageddon), when Jews and others will be given the option to either convert or perish.

Christian Zionism fails to relate to or defend Palestinian Christians who are fleeing their homeland because of Israeli occupation, economic closures, continuing confiscation of land and settlement construction, military aggression and now the "Wall." Christian Zionism is anti-evangelical in that it undermines the presence and witness of the indigenous Middle East Christians, whether in the Holy Land itself or throughout the Middle East. Christian Zionism creates a false image of Christianity, one that is militant, western, and Zionist; and the repercussions often affect the continuity of indigenous Middle East Christians. Our Palestinian Christian partners urge us to speak out on this issue, notably the churches of the Middle East, the Middle East Council of Churches, the Sabeel Ecumenical Center, and others, as well as our good friends, the leaders of these bodies: the Reverend Naim Ateek of the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem, the Reverend Riad Jarjour, general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, and the Reverend Mitri Raheb, pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, who last year served as a mission partner in residence on the Worldwide Ministries Division staff of the PC(USA).

Christian Zionism has become a divisive voice in American churches that turn prophetic texts of the Bible into apocalyptic scenarios for the end times in a predictive and reductionist form of prophecy. The Christian Zionist message jams the airwaves every day on Christian radio and television and follows a theological approach to the Bible called "premillennial dispensationalism," a theme that emerged in the early 1800s and was promoted in the U.S. by the Reverend John Nelson Darby. The 1995 novel *Left Behind* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, and the subsequent series of novels that pick up on this view and focus on events leading to the end of history and the return of Jesus, found a profitable market among millions of North America readers, thereby finding popular but largely uninformed support. Influential members of the current U.S. government endorse Christian Zionist positions as a basis for U. S.

foreign policy. Christian Zionists, aligned with the minority Jewish settler group, take positions on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict that are contrary to the position of the Israeli government and of most Israelis, opposing a two-state solution and supporting transfer of all Arabs out of Palestine. Finally, pre-millennialist interpretations that underlie Christian Zionism ultimately exclude any validity of the continuity of efficacy of God's covenant with the Jewish people themselves, and ultimately are anti-Semitic.

Jesus rejected efforts to speculate on the future by saying it was not for them to know the "times or the seasons" that God has chosen (Acts 1:6-11).

Christian Zionism is contrary to the Reformed principles of interpreting Scripture that call us to read Scripture in light of the gospel; and to interpret Scripture in light of the one commandment of God that summarizes all other commandments, love for God and for all our neighbors.

Our denomination is part of a coalition of Christian organizations called Churches for Middle East Peace. Its "Theological Reflection #1" describes the effect of the Zionist claim as the active dispossession of Palestinians of their land. Adding our voice to this specific issue will strengthen our joint efforts.

The 215th General Assembly (2003) reaffirmed the actions of previous General Assemblies that support peace in the Middle East; further, the 2003 resolution urged pastors, lay leaders, sessions and individual members of the PC(USA) to avail themselves of study resources that help them understand the history, nature, and dimensions of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, pp. 622-23). [END]