

The following remarks are from presentation by Reverend Alex Awad at the Kairos Puget Sound Coalition 2019 annual conference. These reflections are his experiences as a Palestinian meeting people who are Christian Zionists.

“A Response to Christian Zionism”

Rev Alex Awad

Oct 5, 2019, Seattle WA

Palestinians Encountering and Countering Christian Zionism

I am here participating in this symposium because millions of people have been severely and negatively impacted as a result of the political thrust of Christian Zionism. The passion of Christian Zionists to bring Jews to the Holy Land and create a Jewish state and their success in achieving their goal was accomplished

through piling layer upon layer of wars, massacres, bloodshed, ethnic cleansing, political manipulations and pain. Millions of Palestinians, Jordanians, Lebanese, Syrians, Iraqis, Egyptians and Jews have suffered death and destruction. This has been in large part due to the theological convictions and political activities of Christian Zionist leaders combined with the political might of secular Zionists and the religious zeal of Jewish settlers. Were Christian Zionism confined to theology and theological assumptions alone, I wouldn't be so concerned about it and I wouldn't be as driven as I am in exposing the harmful consequences of its teachings. The reality is that Christian Zionism has negatively and enormously impacted lives of Palestinians in so many ways. Before I make a list of the ways that Christian Zionism impacted me and my people negatively, I want to make clear that I am not against Christian Zionists but rather I have issues with their theology and the political

application of their theology/eschatology.

Following is my list:

1. There would not have been a British Mandate over Palestine from 1919-1948 had it not been for the maneuverings of Christian Zionist leaders.
2. The Nakba (what happened to Palestine and Palestinians in 1948) and the ethnic cleansing of Palestine wouldn't have taken place if it wasn't for the endorsement of CZ.
3. History books would not have a 6-Day War (1967) to report if it wasn't for CZ allowing and encouraging said war to happen.
4. The settlement movement in the West Bank would not have succeeded without the direct and indirect support of Christian Zionists. ***Mega Charismatic churches donate millions of dollars to Jewish settlers and settlements in the West Bank.***
5. The first and second Palestinian intifadas (uprisings) wouldn't have seen the light of day if it were not for the accumulation of injustices against Palestinians encouraged by Christian Zionist leaders.
6. The blockade of Gaza and the death and injury of thousands in Gaza along with the additional strangulation of 2 million Gazans wouldn't continue without the approval and silence of Christian Zionist leaders.
7. Christian Zionist leaders are partly to blame for the rise of fundamentalism and radicalism among Palestinians and Arabs due to long years of oppression, humiliation and frustration.
8. The economic collapse and political turmoil of Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Yemen is happening with the endorsement of Christian Zionist leaders.
9. The economic strangulation of Iran and the policy of pushing Iran to the brink of

war with the US is hailed by Christian Zionist leaders. ***John Hagee openly called on Obama to attack Iran.***

10. The fact that the UN and the US failed to reconcile Israelis with Palestinians and hence resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is partly due to political pressure exerted by Christian Zionist leaders.

Simply said, CZ leaders have blocked the chances of peace in the Middle East. For that and all the other reasons mentioned above, CZ must be exposed and therefore this symposium is vital.

There is another side of the harm that CZ is causing, and that is the harm on the minds and hearts of many Christians around the world and especially Palestinian Christians. I will illustrate this unfortunate fact through stories of true encounters of Palestinians with Christian Zionists. Some of these stories are of my own first-person encounters with CZs, while others

are stories, I relay from friends I worked with at BBC. Some are old and some are as recent as last Sunday.

Dr. Bishara Awad

“I remember an incident with Sister Freda Lindsay, director of Christ For the Nations in Dallas, Texas.

I was invited to Jerusalem to a meeting with her tour group of about 40 people. She wanted to me to sit with her on the stage since I was part of her fund-raising strategy. She told the group from Texas, “Today we are going to raise \$175,000 to help Israel buy an armored tank and we want to help train ministers at Bethlehem Bible College.”

Sure enough, she raised the full amount for buying the tank in less than one hour.

Later that day, she praised the Bible College and our work in training Christian leaders. Charles Kopp, her local representative, was with me

when she asked me if I believed that the Bible sites 700 instances that the land, (Holy Land) belongs solely to Israel.

I expressed my objections to her statement, and to my surprise she immediately said, “We cannot support your Bible College.”

It became obvious to me then that Freda Linsey believed supporting the Israeli Defense Forces was much more important than training pastors to share the good news of God’s love.

Hanna Katanacho

When I was a new follower of Christ, I met some messianic Jews in Jerusalem. After asking them to tell me about their background, I shared with them that I am a Palestinian Christian. They said, “There is no such thing.”

“Why do you say that?” I asked.

“The word Palestinian is from the devil,” one of them said.

They proceeded to tell me that Yasser Arafat cannot be my leader if I’m a Christian and a follower of Christ because he is a terrorist.

“He needs your prayers,” I said.

“We will never do that,” another of them said.

“Then you need to repent,” I said.

Grace Arteen

I particularly remember a Dutch group with whom I shared a presentation about the Palestinian Church. They were all amazed and inspired by what they heard. Before this they had no idea that a Palestinian Church even existed.

Their local Israeli tour leader, however, was upset with what I had shared and felt the need to stand and oppose what I had said with her own narrative.

At the end a man approached me afterwards with tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry," he said. "I thought it was a mistake to pray for Arabs."

I often find that people support the Zionist narrative because they don't know better. It is good to share the Good News of what God is doing in Palestine regardless of the challenges!

Salim J. Munayer

At the end of the 70s, I became a believer. At that time there were not too many believers in Lod, the area near Tel Aviv where I lived.

I was involved in small group Bible studies, particularly one we started at Tel Aviv University. During one such Bible study I had my first encounter with a group of young Christian Zionists from the United States. They were students at a Bible College in Texas and were in Israel volunteering at a kibbutz not far from my home.

Considering the small number of believers in the country at that time, along with the fact that I was in the same age group as these students, I was happy to have met them. They invited me to join events on their kibbutz, especially prayer and worship meetings, and we became friends.

During this time period two alarming events happened. First, the kibbutz management found out I was coming to the worship and prayer meetings. I was an Israeli citizen, so there were no restrictions for me to be there, but I was also an Arab-Palestinian. The kibbutz leaders told my friends that I wasn't allowed to come anymore, and my friends were complicit with their request. In other words, it didn't create an ethical issue for them. It's interesting to note that this kibbutz was built on confiscated Palestinian land.

The second incident happened during the same time when I asked this group if they would be

willing to help me in the youth ministry I started in my hometown, as we were renovating a building for it. I asked if during their spare time on the weekends, they'd be willing to help me. They politely declined and said it was not part of their mission.

They were lovely, friendly people, even coming from time to time to visit me at home and eat my mother's famous Arab-Palestinian cuisine. But with this friendship, there was this detached aspect to it, to our reality of life, like a dark cloud hanging over it that became more and more prominent over time. They were unwilling and refused to accept the story of my family and what happened to us in 1948, especially as the city of Lod had experienced a massacre during the time the city was conquered and most of the Palestinian inhabitants of the city had been ordered out of town.

I saw that my friends became uncomfortable when sometimes I'd state historical facts or ask them certain theological questions. Their replies excused and justified what had happened. But I could see on their faces that they didn't believe my family's story.

Years later, I had a third encounter with Christian Zionism I'd like to share. A dear friend, Joseph Ben Eleazer, came to visit me at the Musalaha office. Joseph is a Jewish man who grew up in Europe and experienced persecution during the Second World War. He escaped the Nazi regime and found himself in Palestine toward the end of the British Mandate, at the beginning of the fighting between Jews and Palestinians. He joined the Jewish forces and was one of the soldiers who conquered my hometown, witnessing first-hand many of the atrocities that were committed there. While enlisted, Joseph reached a point in which he became disheartened with the atrocities being

carried out. This led him to leave the country, become a believer in Jesus and seek reconciliation with the Germans. Later he expressed his grievances for what atrocities he had committed in my hometown. He approached my father about it apologetically and it was very touching to see such acts of repentance and forgiveness.

One day as Joseph was visiting my office, my Christian Zionist friend from Texas came by for a surprise visit. As we were sitting there, Joseph began to share the story that I had told my friend many times before. I turned to him and said, “Until now you’ve only heard the story from me, but now you also hear it from one of the soldiers who participated in conquering my hometown.” You could see through my Texas friend’s facial expression and body language the discomfort he experienced, physically causing him to recoil. At the first opportunity, he got up

and left. I never heard from him again, even though I know he still visits the country often.

He represents, for me, many Christian Zionists’ unwillingness to accept who we are as Palestinian Christians and what has happened to us. We were able to develop a strong friendship for many years, but many of these friends ultimately chose to reject our history and who we are, instead breaking genuine fellowship with us. Either they denied our story, or we became collateral damage to the fulfillment of prophecy.

Rev. Nihad Salman: {Video}

My Encounters:

Last Sunday:

After church last Sunday, I went to meet a person at another church in Eugene. After I arrived at the church, I was escorted to a Bible Class. After the class I had to introduce myself in order to connect with the person that was

supposed to meet me. I discovered later, that the person that I was supposed to meet did not make it to church. Some in the church became curious when they found out that I am from Jerusalem and especially when I said that I am a Palestinian. One man said, “I read that there is no such thing as Palestinians”. I said, “You can believe what you see with your eyes (he was looking at me, a Palestinian) or keep listening to the propaganda you have.” He said, “You are right!” and he continued, “I am going to put that book in the trash”.

Another brother from the same congregation jokingly asked, “Do you have explosives on you?” I said, “No! Not this Sunday! I bring my explosives to church every other Sunday”. They all laughed. Nevertheless, it really hurts how many in our churches have negative perceptions of Palestinians.

Brazil

Once when I was still serving at BBC, I was invited along with a Messianic Jewish brother to speak at a Christian conference in Brazil. At the conference, near Sao Paulo, I was shocked upon entering the conference hall to see that there were no Christian symbols at all--not even one cross. But there were huge round posters with the Star of David printed on them. They were placed all around the auditorium and there was a huge Menorah (candle sticks) right on the stage. At the outset of the service they had a procession. Men who dressed up like Old Testament Jewish priests carried a replica of the Ark of the Covenant –painted in golden colors - and paraded towards the stage. Along with them were women who also dressed in long white robes and marched as they sang hosannas and waved palm branches. Seeing all of this, I was totally disturbed. I went to the leader who invited me, and I told him I was

ready to go home. He genuinely asked, “What is wrong?” I said, “I thought I was coming to a Christian meeting but everything around me here tells me that I am at a Jewish religious festival. I don’t see any Christian symbols, not even a cross.” He replied, “We are not Catholic.” I said, “Yes, but you’re also not Jewish.” This leader apologized with all humility and said, “Alex, you are right. You are here to teach us, so tell us what we should do.” I suggested removal of some of the Jewish symbols and adding at least one Christian symbol. He did! After that, I was freely able to share with his people.

Canada

In 2006, World Vision Jerusalem, invited me to speak at a workshop for an Evangelical Conference in Canada called Mission Fest. The head of the Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, Malcolm Hedding, was invited to be a keynote speaker at that conference. World Vision

thought it would be good for the people of the conference to get a Palestinian Christian point of view. I arrived in Toronto, Canada before the conference with excitement about the opportunity to share. But a day before the conference began, David Tyson, the representative of World Vision in Canada, called me and asked me if I would consider uninviting myself from speaking at the Conference. The reason given was that one of the major sponsors of the conference threatened that he and his people would pull out if I shared. Of course, I did not want to force my way and speak at a conference where I was not welcome, and I agreed to attend the conference but not to speak. Evidently, someone searched my name via Google and read some articles I wrote which caused this Christian leader to raise a red flag. The people at that conference heard only one view. You can imagine which one.

How to counter Christian Zionism

I. We need to understand the mindset of a Christian Zionist. Here is what I have learned from interacting with numerous Christian Zionists over the years:

1. Most CZ don't know the ideological deceptions and corruptness of Christian Zionism.
2. Most CZ don't even know that they are CZ.
3. While most CZ are in conservative Evangelical churches, you can find CZ in almost all denominations.
4. Most CZs are not aware of the political implications of Christian Zionism.
5. Most Christian Zionists are not aware of the harm that Christian Zionism is inflicting upon

Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims, Jews and on the church.

6. Except for quoting a few passages from the Bible, most CZ are not able to biblically or rationally defend CZ.
7. Go to www.christianzionism.com.

II. Be ready to use the Bible when speaking with Christian Zionists

1. Christian Zionists are taught that the Bible is the basis for CZ
2. Ironically, the New Testament is the best defense against CZ
3. The Bible clearly calls us directly to do justice but there is nowhere in the Bible that God calls his people to go about fulfilling Biblical prophecy
4. Chart: Enlargement Theology

III. Do all with grace, love and humility