



Speaking the Truth. Zionism, Israel, and Occupation, edited by Michael Prior, Interlink Publishing, Northampton, MA, 2005, 254 pp., \$ 17.95.

When the South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu paid his first visit to Palestine, he was shocked by the similarities between his former Apartheid South Africa and the dismal situation under which occupied Palestinians have been living since the establishment of the State of Israel. In his foreword to this outstanding collection of essays, written by 12 internationally respected scholars and experts, he stated: "Now, alas, we see *apartheid* in Israel, complete with the 'Separation Wall' and Bantustans that keep Palestinians rounded up in prisons. History tragically repeats itself. Yet, injustice and oppression will never prevail."

And it can be added: May the oppressor-state and its U. S. patron together with their cohorts of Israel lobbyists and Christian Zionists do whatever they please, their cause is politically, morally and ethically unjust and they know it. That is why they have been fighting mercilessly every deviant opinion expressed by decision-makers.

What makes these essays important and overly worth reading is the fact that several are dealing with the ineffable role played not only by a certain brand of Christianity in their religiously dressed up rhetoric but also especially the juggernaut of the so-called Christian Zionists who are playing an infamous role in legitimizing every action of this dehumanizing occupation enterprise. For example, late reverend Michael Prior challenges in his essay "Zionism and the challenge of historical truth and morality" the "canonical secular Zionist narrative" and the "canonical religious Zionist narrative" head-on. Although the injustices committed by the Zionist colonizer in the course of the establishment of the State of Israel are historically well known and documented, they had been "passed over in much Western discourse. Indeed, in some religious circles the Zionist enterprise is even clothed in the garment of piety (...)" Whereas elsewhere the perpetrators of colonial plunder are objects of opprobrium, the Zionist conquest is widely judged to be a just and appropriate accomplishment, with even unique religious significance." (33/34) According to Prior, the answers to this opinion lay in the bible and its religious authority.

The "ironclad" support by the West of Israel's colonial endeavor is not only propagated among secular lobbyists but is also rooted in the "link between the Bible and Zionism" that is deeply established in the popular mind, writes Prior. Although, biblical research shows no evidence in support of the claim that the Bible provides legitimacy to the "canonical" Zionist narrative for the State of Israel, it seems as if for some Christian sects and the Christian-Jewish dialogue groups the removal of the indigenous people becomes an "object of honor". "It is in the unique case of Zionism that ethnic cleansing is applauded. It would be a pity if mutually respected Jewish-Christian relations demanded the suspension of the moral rules of a universalist morality." (44)

The political and religious intensions of Christian Zionists and the policy of the International Christian Embassy" (ICEJ) in Jerusalem are revealed by author Vicar Stephen Sizer. The ICEJ is probably the most influential and controversial among Christian Zionist institutions. It is located close to the Israeli Prime Minister's office. Ironically, this "embassy's" building had originally been the home of the family of the late Edward W. Said, before being confiscated in 1948 when it was first given to Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher. The ICEJ goes with Israel's colonial land grab policy in occupied Palestine through

thick and thin. Admittedly, it has disavowed preaching the gospel among Jews, in part for pragmatic reasons, since this ensures the support of the political establishment in Israel. Beyond that, it opposes criticism of Israel's policy towards the Palestinians. ICEJ's strange theological interpretation of the Bible does not make missionary work necessary because the ICEJ believes that once the Jewish nation is restored to the Land of Israel, the Jews will collectively acknowledge the Christian Messiah when he returns, writes Sizer. How "sophisticated" the Christian Zionist's intentions are, is shown in an interview with its founder, Jan Willam van der Hoeven, in the "Jerusalem Post" concerning the "covert" Christian missionary. Van der Hoeven denied that ICEJ engages in missionary work and conversion but added: "The Jewish religion must modify itself in the course of time – but on one point only, the identity of the Messiah (...) they must make the modification as a collective entity." Although, the U. S. American and Israeli political establishments probably realize that this position is in fact "anti-Semitic" they closely cooperate with the ICEJ according to the motto: "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Concluding his article, Sizer writes: "The ICEJ, it appears, is a sectarian, pseudo-Christian organization of dispensational origin which has unconditionally endorsed contemporary political Israel as the exclusive fulfillment of God's promises and purposes made under the Old Covenant."

For another author, the Reverend Peter J. Miano, the main problems are not "Jewish Zionists" but "Christian Zionists". Before there were Jewish Zionists, there were Christian ones. "For every Jewish Zionist, there are at least ten Christian Zionists." (126) Miano's article is especially useful because it makes an important distinction between fundamentalist and mainstream Christian Zionism. Where the first is a bizarre and obscure ideology, the later is very well established in the halls of the U. S. Congress, the churches, the Christian academia and the biblical academies.

The fundamentalist Christian Zionist doctrine sees the establishment of the State of Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy occurring in the end time. Accordingly, God has a special role for the Jewish people in their covenanted land, and Christian devotion to God requires support for God's plan of salvation. This religious mythology is being actualized in modern-day Israel. For this special brand of "Christians", the violence associated with the State of Israel and its victims, the Palestinians, is not understood as a struggle between colonizer and colonized, but as necessary birth pangs of a new eschatological age. The struggle between Israelis and Palestinians is interpreted in apocalyptic terms as part of a broader struggle between the forces of good and evil. The final battle will take place on the plain of Armageddon. (129)

On the other hand, mainstream Christian Zionism is "far more pervasive, far more mercurial and far more pernicious. It is also much more difficult to expose and critique," (130) Because Christian Zionists outnumber Jewish Zionists by some one hundred to one, it makes the success of the Zionist agenda much easier to understand, writes Miano. All brands of Zionism possess, however, two characteristics in common: the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel is both a moral imperative and a political necessity. (134) It seems to the reader as if mainstream Christian Zionists resemble the so-called Israeli Zionist Left: They often oppose the Israeli policies in the Palestinian Occupied Territories but they do not mind the violence that took place during the 1948 war. They often recognize the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people for justice even while rationalizing Jewish nationalism by appeal to justice and morality. In addition, mainstream Christian Zionists display no regard for the plight of the Palestinians while staunchly advocating solidarity with the suffering endured by Jews. These wishy-washy Christians pervade "one of the most hallowed precincts of liberal, mainstream Christianity, namely the Jewish-Christian dialogue". (142) According to the author, this in-group revolves around themselves and is

hardly concerned with the suffering of the Palestinians who “experience Zionism as an instrument of catastrophe.” The focus of attention should shift, according to Miano, from the fundamentalist Christian Zionists to mainstream Christian Zionism.

Besides these refreshing articles on the destructive role played by some brands of Christianity in support the Zionist conquest of Palestine, the anthology includes articles by Ilan Pappé, Daniel McGowan, Naseer Aruri, Betsy Barlow, Paul Eisen and others who describe the historical and political implications of the Zionist colonial enterprise for the Palestinian people. The two essays on the meaning of the massacre of Deir Yassin are impressive. For example, Daniel McGowan writes: “Remembering Deir Yassin is for Palestinians what remembering the massacre at Kelcie is for Jews.” (103) On April 9, 1948 a massacre by two Jewish factions, Irgun and the Stern Gang, was committed in a small village on the west side of Jerusalem, only a stone’s throw away from Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust Memorial. The murderers of Irgun and Stern Gang had herded women, children, and the old man into the village school in order to massacre them. This envisaged atrocity was prevented by unarmed Jewish settlers from the adjacent settlement Giv’at Sha’ul. They faced down the murderers of Irgun and Stern Gang and demanded that the lives of the victims be spared. “The true Judaism of these brave people outweighed the extreme Zionism witnessed earlier that fateful day.” (93)

In order to reach a kind of fair agreement between the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples the political cocoon, in which the Zionist mythology is woven in, has to be dissolved. In this endeavor, the Christians can do their bit. They have to shed their self-portrayal of the “Beautiful Israel” or the “light onto the nations” rhetoric and see what Israel really is: a brutal occupying power for the last 45 years that has nothing to do with religion, let alone with redemption. The articles in this book support the thesis that the Hebrew Bible debunks the “canonical” Zionist narrative according to which the Bible provides legitimization for the State of Israel. This claim should pull the rug under the feet of all religious Israel fans. And the secular ones should concentrate on historical facts and not on Zionist fairy-tales. The essay in the book give both groups plenty of arguments at hand to argue for justice and the right of self-determination of the oppressed Palestinian people. All essays are very worth reading.

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