

John Hagee: Christian Zionism's Cause or Effect?

By:
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He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8b)

The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths (2 Timothy 4:3,4)

John Darby (1800-1882), the British father of a fundamentalist school of thought known as Dispensationalism, created a dualism that has since plagued the Christian Church and now threatens the national security of both Israel and, according to many, America. His thesis was that, contrary to the Christian messianic proclamation of the one Kingdom of God, there are two Kingdoms – an earthly, material Kingdom promised to the Jewish people and a spiritual Kingdom promised to Gentile believers in Jesus Christ.

This theme was picked up by the very popular Scofield Reference Bible published in 1909, followed by the Ryrie Study Bible in 1994.

Not all who call themselves Dispensationalists would fully agree with Darby. What they do agree on, however, is the forensic distinction between Israel and the Church. Thus, they would view many or all of the Old Testament prophecies as yet to be fulfilled in the modern nation-state of Israel. This dualism assumes both the dispensation of the Mosaic Law and the New Testament age of Grace to be running concurrently with different objectives. As the Gentile believer cannot be reconciled to God outside the person and work of Jesus Christ, so the Jewish people cannot be reconciled to God outside the land that most Dispensationalists would consider to be Historic Palestine – the land at least from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.

It is to this theology of the land – *Haaretz* – that Christian Zionism, an extreme expression of American Evangelicalism, bows. Because God has a continuing special relationship with and for the Jewish people that stands apart from the Church, Jews have a divine right to possess the land of Palestine.[1] God's promise to Abraham remains eternal.

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...And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God (Gen. 15:18; 17:8, KJV)

According to the Christian Zionist, however, this divine right stretches beyond the promise to Abraham to a command to every Christian believer to unconditionally support the modern nation-state of Israel. In fact, because the Christian Zionist makes no distinction between nation-state and Jew, the following promise of God to Abraham is a litmus test for Christian belief:

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen 12:13, KJV).

A key standard for Christian faith and practice among Christian Zionists, therefore, is one's position on the secular nation-state of Israel. To hold Israel accountable to any international standard other than that wrung out of the Bible in the form of dispensationalist doctrine is to call down God's curse on oneself.

In her book, *God's Profits: Faith, Fraud, and the Republican Crusade for Values Voters*, Sarah Posner explores the impact on American domestic and foreign policy of the Christian Right wing of Evangelicalism, a contingent that is estimated to be in the order of 30 million adherents. The impact of this group on the presidential election of George W. Bush in both 2000 and 2004 is legendary. Coming out of the "prosperity gospel" of the 1990's, this effective "merger" of evangelical faith with the Republican Party has now become so entrenched that neither the GOP nor the Christian Right can separate from the other.

Posner sees this as a "large and growing subculture" under the rubric of the "Word of Faith" movement:

...the Word of Faith movement is continually expanding – and its rising stars have gained more than a measure of respectability. Money-grubbing, authoritarian, and plagued by scandal, they nevertheless seem invulnerable to doubt. Their followers live in a strange subculture of "Hebraic Christianity," en-times prophecy, and constant pressure to send in more money in the hope of healing cancer and saving mortgages from foreclosure. They dismiss negative news reports concerning the lavish lifestyles and dubious conduct of their preachers as works of Satan.[2]

The Word of Faith movement is characterized by revelation knowledge received directly from God.[3] As such, the believer has the power to "name it and claim it," a phrase familiar to most American Christians. According to Posner, it is an "alternative universe" that rejects critical and intellectual thought and scorns the media and science.[4]

Out of this "subculture" has emerged evangelist John Hagee, pastor of the hugely successful Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, TX, boasting a congregation of nearly 20,000. Hagee's international platform is a number of best-selling books and his Global Evangelism Television, by which he reaches millions weekly.

G. Richard Fisher is a Christian who portrays Hagee as a false Christian teacher with a "defective view of a basic and essential issue regarding salvation and the Gospel." He calls that view the "Two Covenant" or "Dual Covenant" theory, whereby Jews and Christians are traveling parallel and distinct paths to salvation.[5]

Hagee has launched himself into the spotlight through his organization, Christians United for Israel. His annual CUFI Washington Summits have attracted such luminaries as former Sen. Rick Santorum, former Speaker Newt Gingrich, Sen. Sam Brownback, former GOP chair Ken Mehlman, former Rep. Tom Delay and Sen. Joseph Lieberman, as well as a video greeting from President George W. Bush.[6]

In my own book, *McChurched: 300 Million Served and Still Hungry*, I posed the proverbial question as to which came first, the chicken or the egg – the pastor or the congregation. Referring to 2 Timothy 4: 3,4, it occurred to me that generations of Americans worshipping the American Dream as God's blessing on a faithful people has left the Christian Right with a faith that is earth-bound, requiring neither sacrifice nor suffering for others. God has become a fast-track to the good life here and now. As such, they can hire teachers and preachers who "suit their own likings," leading to hedonism, materialism, self-righteousness and sexual immorality.[7]

I have traced the rise of the megachurch movement of homogeneous worshippers to a belief that the Christian Kingdom of God is "away," with the agenda being a type of rain dance to bring it to earth. Christian Zionism fits that agenda.

The ethics of the Christian Right are derived from Scriptures-as-law, thus establishing a litmus test for belief...The problem with this is that the standards of virtue are dependent on the interpretation of those who insist that the Bible was dictated and therefore without plenary inspiration carrying forward from the writer to the reader...This is a dangerous ground and consistently leads to interpretations that support predisposed prejudices such as racism...Once the Kingdom is futurized, the King (Christ) also is futurized, or at least "away." That leaves us here to function on our own, which takes us back to the Old Testament law for our standard of behavior.

The Sermon on the Mount becomes relevant only for a future time, and love of neighbor becomes something that is an ideal for a perfect world.[8]

John Hagee, under the influence of what Posner calls "revelation knowledge," gives the impression of straining to get the attention of God by advocating for what he believes is His plan. At the very least, such policies as a nuclear war with Iran and pushing the Palestinian people into Saudi Arabia and Egypt has the appearance of impatiently backing God into a corner. As such, the Battle of Armageddon and the physical return of Jesus to clean up the mess posit self-fulfilling prophecies.

In Hagee's telling, Israel has no choice but to strike Iran's nuclear facilities, with or without America's help. The strike will provoke Russia – which wants the Persian Gulf oil – to lead an army of Arab nations against Israel. Then God will wipe out all but one-sixth of the Russian-led army, as the world watches "with shock and awe," he says, lending either a divine quality to the Bush administration phrase or a Bush-like quality to God's wrath.[9]

Hagee would do well, I think, to take to heart the caution of Micah 6:8 as to what the Lord requires of His people – to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with their God. His nearly manic unbridled support for Israel against diplomacy, human rights violations and international good will belie a humble walk. Becoming God's agent for judgment robs God of the very sovereign rule Hagee intends to incite.

As the Bush administration winds down, Hagee's political agenda has not missed a beat. He recently endorsed John McCain for President, thus anticipating continued influence on American foreign and domestic policy in the event of a McCain win in November 2008.

In violation of both international law and the mandate of Jesus that "As much as you did not do it (feed, clothe or give drink) to the least of these my brothers, you did not do it unto me" (Mat. 25:45), Hagee has raised over \$1 million to help Soviet Jews resettle in Israel and Palestine in what he believes to be a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.[10] In fact, these illegal settlements, largely in Palestinian Territory, require that the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) be stationed to protect the settlers, thus inflaming the conflict.

As the Christian Zionist campaign gains momentum, Hagee is seen to deny basic tenets of the Christian faith. Because he believes that Jews are under a separate and distinct covenant with God, Jesus' words, "No man comes to the Father but through me" (1 John 5:12) apply to everyone but those who have Jewish blood in their veins. To even the cynical press, this is a strange belief. The *Houston Chronicle* had this to say:

John Hagee, fundamentalist pastor from San Antonio and friend of Israel, is truly a strange fish...The man has a mission. He is out to attack anti-Semitism. He also believes that Jews can come to God without going through Jesus Christ.[11]

Fisher traces this "Two Covenant" theory back to the early twentieth century to a Jewish thinker by the name of Franz Rosenzweig. Rosenzweig sought to create a rationale for not evangelizing Jews by arguing that Jews had their own subjective truth inside Judaism, while Christians had *theirs* in Christ.[12] While the truth or non-truth of this theory is certainly subjective, the tenets of both Judaism and Christianity are violated with a proclamation by either that both are true. Christianity's hope is in a Messiah whom Judaism denies is *its* promised Messiah. Both cannot be simultaneously right.

Fisher reminds us that even in the Old Testament, Jews were not saved on the basis of their pedigree to Abraham or even their ability to keep the Law but on the basis of the sacrificial lamb of atonement and its priestly mediation. From a Christian perspective, Hagee is thereby unfaithful to the New Testament in that his is a subtle form of anti-Semitism by putting a gag on evangelism and robbing the Jews of the Good News.[13] It is a gospel of salvation by race rather than grace.

Posner evaluates this movement from a sociopolitical perspective as a Jew and a member of the secular press. She reaches for the missing tenets of the Sermon on the Mount – a natural concern for the poor and disadvantaged among us. Yet, their absence within the ethic of the Christian Right can only be attributed to a Republican political agenda:

As Word of Faith leaders continue to be extolled as prophets, Republicans continue to find an audience favorably disposed to their central economic principles: denigration of a government safety net, a business environment free of government regulation, and the primacy of the individual over the community. The Word of Faith movement plays on people's economic dreams, which are left unfulfilled by Republican economic policy. Through its central promise – that an investment in the ministry of a Word of Faith televangelist will yield a supernatural return – the prosperity gospel offers a faith-driven business opportunity, one with no prospectus, no accountability, and, because of the status of churches, no regulation.[14]

In a word, selfish, greedy people have heaped to themselves selfish, greedy teachers to suit their own likings, thus wandering into myths.

Fisher offers a fitting conclusion from the writings of Jacob Jocz in his 1949 book, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*:

God is no respecter of persons. Before Him, the Holy One, men stand not as Jews and Gentiles but as sinners who are in need of grace. Jesus the prophet may be speaking to the Gentiles, but Jesus the Son of God speaks to mankind. Jesus the martyr may be appealing to some and not to others, but Jesus the Lamb of God challenges the whole human race. God's word is *one* word, and God's way is *one* if it is *the* way of God.[15]

[1] Sizer, *Christian Zionism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), p. 20.

Sarah Posner, *God's Profits: Faith, Fraud, and the Republican Crusade for Values Voters*, PoliPointPress, Sausalito, 2008, p. xi.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] G. Richard Fisher, "The Other Gospel of John Hagee," *Personal Freedom Outreach*, <http://www.pfo.org/jonhagee.htm>, p. 1.

[6] Posner, p. 107.

[7] Moody, *McChurches: 300 Million Served and Still Hungry*, Just Write Books, Topsham, ME, 2006, p. 8.

[8] Moody, p. 205, 206.

[9] Posner, p. 106.

[10] Fisher, p. 3.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[12] Fisher, p. 7

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 10, 11.

[14] Poser, p. 173

[15] Fisher, p. 14.

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