

The Liberal Rejection of Christian Zionists

by [Matthew M. Hausman](#) (August 2012)

Although Evangelical support for the State of Israel is on the rise, liberal Jews tend to regard Christian Zionists with intense distrust. There are certainly valid reasons for initial suspicion in light of the history of Christian antisemitism and missionary excess, but progressive discomfort has little to do with this history. Rather, it stems from the association of conservative Christians with values that conflict with the liberal political agenda. Ironically, liberals are perfectly comfortable with “policies of inclusion” that accommodate Arab-Muslim interests opposed to the very existence of a Jewish State, and have no problem dialoguing with Islamists who promote religious intolerance, antisemitism and a rejection of western values. They apparently prefer the political company of Islamists who deal in doctrinal Jew-hatred and *taqiyya* (i.e., religiously-mandated dissimulation to deceive “infidels” and advance the cause of jihad) than of those Christians who actually support Israel for reasons of history and justice.

Not all Christians who support Israel do so because they believe the Jews must return to their homeland in order to be converted and usher in the “Rapture.” Indeed, many of them have come to support Israel because they acknowledge the validity of Jewish history, belief and practice. Some Evangelical faith communities, including Premillennial Dispensationalists, accept Hebrew scripture on its own merit without the need to recast the text in Christological terms. Members of the Apostolic and Pentecostal denominations, for example, are conversant with Jewish history and are strict textual literalists. They understand that Jewish identity has national, ethnic and religious components, that the Jews’ ancestors originated in the Land of Israel, and that Jews continued to live there even after the Dispersion. They also recognize that Jewish identity is intertwined with the ancient homeland.

This is not to say that all Christians support Israel, or that all Christians who do are motivated by theologically pure reasoning. The Catholic Church has a long history of antisemitism that continues to influence its uneasy relations with the Jewish State. Likewise, many mainline Protestant churches, including the Presbyterian, Methodist, Mennonite and United Church of Christ, are institutionally antisemitic, as evidenced by their efforts to harm Israel economically through Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (“BDS”) activities and their dogmatic promotion of the revisionist Palestinian narrative. Their antipathy has nothing to do

with honesty or fairness, but is very much rooted in classical Christian antisemitism and replacement theology. In constantly vilifying Israel, these churches use language that evokes the vehemence of the blood libel; and their shrill denunciations stand in stark contrast to their failure to condemn terrorism against Jews or the oppression of ethnic and religious minorities that is so common in the Arab-Muslim world.

Moreover, not even all Evangelicals are philosemites or supporters of Israel. Groups like the Southern Baptist Convention, for example, have long targeted Jews for theological attack and missionary harassment. Not surprisingly, these denominations are limited in their understanding of Jewish history and text to the point of ignorance. Then there are those Christians who claim to support Israel, but who do so only because they believe the Jews must return to their homeland as a prerequisite to Armageddon and their ultimate conversion in the end of days. Although these Christians claim that Hebrew scripture supports their apocalyptic vision, their eschatology is predicated on a perversion of Jewish textual sources and has no basis in Tanach.

These views were once common among many Pentecostals, Apostolics and mild Charismatics; but their understanding of Judaism evolved with an increasing knowledge of Jewish text and history, and since the 1980s they have become staunch supporters of Jewish institutions and the State of Israel. Indeed, many Evangelicals today believe in the integrity of Jewish religion and national identity. These people have a keen admiration for Hebrew scripture and an astute awareness regarding the bonds between Jewish culture and American society. They do not proselytize to Jews because they understand the contextual relationship of the Jewish and Christian traditions. They know, for example, that Christianity could not exist without Judaism as an antecedent, but that the existence of Christianity is irrelevant to Jewish belief, practice and continuity. They also understand that Judaism has no missionary impulse because its observance is incumbent only on the Jewish People through their ancestry and unique covenant with the Almighty. Unlike Christians who believe in replacement theology, these Evangelicals acknowledge that the covenant between G-d and Abraham remains unbroken and that, accordingly, there is no need to "save" Jews through conversion to Christianity.

Liberal Jews have difficulty accepting support from conservative Christians, regardless of their motivations, although they continue to maintain alliances with mainline Protestants who are clearly anti-Israel. Despite their endorsement of policies that seem antisemitic, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, among others, are deemed politically acceptable because of their allegiance to liberal priorities. Though the reflexive antipathy of these denominations for Israel is rooted in classical antisemitism and replacement theology, liberal Jews are loath to criticize them because they are ideological fellow travelers. In fact, these

churches' positions on Israel are often similar to those of left-wing organizations like J Street and the New Israel Fund, whose policies and actions show a cynical disregard for Israel's security, sovereignty and continuity as a Jewish state.

Perhaps even more troubling, however, are the liberal compulsion to dialogue with Muslim groups that have Islamist connections and the left's affinity for political Islam in general. This attraction is bizarre considering that Sharia is incompatible with the democratic principles, egalitarian values, and individual rights and freedoms that liberals claim to hold dear. However, those who advocate such dialogue generally know little about Islamic doctrine, having abdicated any responsibility to perform due diligence before entering into questionable political alliances. Instead, they accept as true the *taqiyya* that is recited to them by the very people they should be vetting. This is about as useless an exercise for evaluating Islamist claims of moderation as employers performing background checks by simply asking prospective employees if they've ever been arrested, and then accepting their word when they say they have not.

Those who argue that Islam is a religion of peace display little or no understanding regarding its history of conquest and subjugation. They seem unaware that Islamist doctrine eschews democracy and has no respect for freedom of speech or religion, or that relations with "infidels" are predicated on theological supremacism and dissimulation. Likewise, they refuse to acknowledge that Sharia prohibits permanent peace with a Jewish State (or any *dhimmi* nation), or to question a Palestinian narrative that is based on myths, distortions and lies, and which constitutes a repudiation of Jewish historical claims.

The myth of Islamic tolerance is regurgitated without question by partisan naïfs who fail to understand that jihad continues to influence relations with the non-Muslim world. With no objective knowledge of Islamic text, they apologetically define jihad as "inner struggle," ignoring that its sole purpose is the expansion of the faith – whether through cajolery, deception or force. They ignore the devastation and destruction that jihad brought to India, Europe, Africa, the Mideast and Asia, where Muslim invaders subjugated indigenous peoples, destroyed their sacred places, and exterminated those who refused to submit to Islam.

The history they choose to disregard is replete with stories of bloody conquerors who converted churches to mosques as they overran Christian Europe and built mosques over Jewish holy sites throughout the Levant, including the cave of Machpelah, Rachel's Tomb and the remains of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque were not built in Jerusalem because the city had any significance in Islamic tradition; indeed, the Quran contains no mention of the ancient Jewish capital. Rather, the mosque in Jerusalem was built

to show that the Jews had been subjugated and were now considered *dhimmis* in their own land. The impetus for building a mosque on the Temple Mount was the same as that which compelled Umayyad Caliph al-Walid to rebuild the Church of St. John in Damascus as a mosque in the year 705, and the Taliban to destroy the ancient Buddhist shrine of Bamiyan in Afghanistan in 2001.

Secular apologists make no effort to undertake critical study of the Quran, Ahadith, or Islamic commentaries, which make no pretense regarding the meaning of jihad. According to *"The Reliance of the Traveler,"* the term "jihad" refers specifically to war against the "kuffar" (non-Muslims), and is derived from the word "mujahada," which means warfare for the purpose of spreading the faith. Traditionally, it has no other meaning. (*The Reliance of the Traveler* is the classic manual of religious law certified by the decisors of al-Azhar, the most authoritative institution in the majority Sunni sect.) Of the forty-one references to jihad contained in the Quran itself, all but one regard it as an obligation for expanding the borders of Islam – by force if necessary. Historically, subjugated minorities in the Islamic world existed at the discretion of dictatorial overlords who were obligated to coerce submission to Islam by force if all other methods failed.

Jews were specifically designated for horrific treatment in Muslim society, where they were often confined to ghettos and denied basic human rights. Since the early Islamic period, when Jews were forced to wear distinctive clothing and were often physically branded, they have been subjected to harassment, pogroms and massacres. The "Golden Age of Spain" was not so golden for Jews living under Muslim rule, but was characterized more by the experiences of Maimonides and his family, who chose exile from their native Cordoba in 1148 when the conquering Almohads gave the Jewish community the choice of conversion to Islam or death.

In spite of this history, and despite the antisemitism ingrained in Islamic society, liberal Jewish organizations continue to portray conservative Christians as a greater threat, and to establish relationships with Muslim groups that have never clearly repudiated doctrinal intolerance. In 2008, for example, the Union for Reform Judaism ("URJ") announced an alliance with the Islamic Society of North America ("ISNA"), claiming that the latter had renounced terrorism. ISNA has never recognized Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, however, and reported incidents at its annual conferences suggest that its "renunciation" was perhaps equivocal at best. Moreover, ISNA was one of many organizations identified by government prosecutors as "unindicted co-conspirators" in *U.S. v. Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development*, a criminal prosecution of an Islamic charity with ties to Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. Other organizations on the unindicted co-conspirator list included the Council on American Islamic Relations ("CAIR"), the North American Islamic Trust ("NAIT"), and the

Islamic Association for Palestine.

No less alarming are the relationships forged with such groups under the guise of “interfaith dialogue” by institutions like the Jewish Theological Seminary (“JTS”), the bellwether of American Conservative Judaism. In October 2010, JTS participated in a program entitled, “Judaism and Islam in America Today: Assimilation and Authenticity,” which included a panel moderated by a representative of ISNA. Though ISNA’s background was made known to JTS, it nevertheless proceeded with the program, without any discussion of the surreptitious Islamist influences found in some Muslim groups claiming to be moderate. Unfortunately, this failure seems to reflect a wider policy of downplaying the existence of doctrinal antisemitism.

Concerns regarding JTS’s involvement with such groups were exacerbated recently when it announced its participation in a Muslim-Christian-Jewish interfaith program at the Hartford Seminary – a liberal theological institution with a history of accommodating Islamist sensibilities. According to a report in Canada’s National Post last year, for example, the Seminary’s Chair of Islamic Studies was endowed with \$2 million from the Muslim Association of Canada (“MAC”) and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (“IIIT”) in Virginia, organizations alleged to have Islamist influences. (See [*“Taking a closer look at Islamic Studies,”*](#) Barbara Kay, October 18, 2011.) Perhaps more topically, the Hartford Seminary has been criticized for maintaining ties to the Al-Fatiha Islamic Academy in Damascus, which is supported by the embattled Assad family dictatorship. (The full story was reported in the Connecticut Jewish Ledger by Stephen Schwartz, in a piece entitled, [*“Hartford Seminary’s Shameful Ties to Syria’s Dictator.”*](#))

Ignoring the issue of whether it is even appropriate for rabbinical students to study at a Christian seminary, it would seem irresponsible to partner with an institution that maintains relationships with groups reported to have Islamist ties. The participation of JTS in programs at such an institution suggests that it has little understanding regarding core elements of doctrinal Islam, including anti-Jewish hostility and the mandate to engage in dissimulation (*taqiyya* or *kitman*) with “infidels.” A real learning opportunity would be to engage in analytical deconstruction of such programs, but in order to do so JTS would need students or faculty with adequate Arabic language skills and critical knowledge of the entire corpus of the Sunna, including the Quran, Ahadith, Sirat, and all other Islamic commentaries.

The Anti-Defamation League has also engaged in interfaith apologetics by devoting resources to condemning “Islamophobia,” even though law enforcement statistics show that there are very few incidents of discrimination – and virtually no violence – against Muslims in America. While the ADL is also concerned about the dramatic increase in antisemitic violence, it ironically

seems to ignore the role of doctrinal Islam in nurturing and spreading Jew-hatred. Instead, the ADL persists in exhorting against an anti-Muslim bias that statistically seems not to exist, going so far as to cooperate with CAIR in lobbying against proposed legislation in Florida that would have provided state constitutional protections against the adoption of foreign laws, including Sharia, by state courts. Similar to JTS, the ADL seemed unconcerned about its involvement with a group identified as an “unindicted co-conspirator” in the Holy Land Foundation trial.

A common strategy for those who downplay the Islamist threat is to claim that Christian radicalism is far more menacing. Such comparisons, however, are intellectually dishonest. If Christian radicalism can be identified with anti-abortion extremism, a review of law enforcement statistics shows that attacks on abortion clinics are not comparable to Islamist terrorism, and often involve criminal mischief or crimes against property. Though there have been arsons and bombings directed at property and, since 1993, eight murders in the U.S., anti-abortion activities pale in number, frequency and severity to the acts of terrorists who kill and maim Jews, Israelis, Westerners, and even their own people, and who routinely target men, women and children. Moreover, extreme violence against abortion providers is generally condemned by American Christians, whereas terrorism against Jews and the West is lauded throughout the Arab-Muslim world. To say that harassment of abortion providers is the same as Islamist terrorism is a faulty syllogism at best.

Although there are still Christians who dislike Jews and Israel, they do not engage in terrorism, and no longer prosecute holy wars as matters of religious imperative. In contrast, jihad and hatred of Jews remain core elements of doctrinal Islam. So it is disingenuous to claim that Christian fundamentalism is a greater threat to Jews than Islamist extremism. Nevertheless, liberals continue to argue thus because: (a) they fear that conservative Christians are making electoral inroads among those for whom Israel remains a priority; (b) conservatives today generally have better voting records on Israel; and (c) many Evangelicals support Israel for the right reasons and with no ulterior motives. It remains to be seen whether this divide-and-conquer strategy will prove successful in the upcoming election, and whether mainstream Jewish organizations and institutions will continue their apologetic quest for dialogue with those who still believe in conquest and subjugation.

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