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“Jesus said, I have the Other Sheep”: The Palestinian (Arab) Christians in Occupied Palestine

One of the forgotten minority groups in the Middle East are Palestinian/ Arab Christians, particularly in Occupied Palestine (East Jerusalem and West Bank). Sadly, Christian churches around the world are not aware (and misinformed) that strong Christian minority exists in the region. When such misinformation persists, Palestinian people will continue to suffer such injustices. Scholars, however, argue that such misinformation is rooted in dispensationalism and Zionist ideology. Dispensationalism believes that the coming of Israel to the land has started the countdown that will end history (Burge, 2017). This article is presented in three parts. The first part discusses the unholy alliance between the Conservative Evangelicals and the Zionist movements. Second part presents Palestinian/Arab Christians as forgotten faithful in occupied Palestine. In the last part, the author gives a short conclusion.

Keywords: Conservative Evangelicalism, Christian Zionism, Dispensationalism, Misrepresentation, Palestinian/Arab Christians.

I have been to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and I have witnessed the racially segregated roads and housing that reminded me so much of the conditions we experienced in South Africa under the racist system of Apartheid

Bishop Desmond Tutu, June 13, 2010

People who call themselves supporters of Israel are actually supporters of its moral degeneration and ultimate destruction

Noam Chomsky, November 12, 2010

I. Introduction

Despite countless opposition, in December 6, 2017, US President Donal Trump declares Jerusalem as capital of the modern State of Israel. Instantly, Trump’s declaration have garnered such diverse reactions, both praise and criticism, as

well as, from the world religious leaders (Jews, Christians, and Muslims). As expected, conservative Evangelicals had praised Trump (*Moore, 2017*). For example, John Hagee, a rigorous Christian Zionist and founder of the largest pro-Israel Christian organisation in US, namely, Christians United for Israel (CUFI). Hagee (*2017*) publicly expresses, "Trump's actions as a "bold and courageous stand" that would be "eternally celebrated." For Hagee, Trump's declaration was a prophetic sign that the world just got closer to the end of the world. In other words, Trump's declaration has linked with biblical prophecy (*Sengupta, 2017*). Some decry over Trump's declaration, particularly the progressive-leaning Evangelical communities that strongly condemned it. For example, Pope Francis, Archbishop Justine Welby, and Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, expresses their grave concerns (*Pullella, 2017; Sherwood, 2017; Tveit, 2017*). Nonetheless, disagreements have occurred over Pope Francis, Archbishop Welby, and Rev. Dr. Tveit public statements come largely among Christian communities.

However, Gary Burge (*2017*), a New Testament scholar, contends,

But other evangelicals—myself included—were cautious, viewing this move as an idea that needs to be left on the shelf. And they are worried now. Despite media portrayals giving the impression that evangelicals have one point of view when it comes to Israel, in reality there is a wide range of perspectives (*2017*).

For Burge, evidently, this entails that among Christian communities, they have no such comprehensive unified view of Israel-Palestinian conflict. Of course, in principle, to have a unified view as long as conservative Evangelicals confronts their own distorted version of eschatology. Craig Michael Nielsen, an executive member of Action for Palestine, expresses criticism toward justification of Zionist colonisation of the Palestine territories. He writes,

I am convinced that, for the sake of creating a Zionist state or any other reason, there is not even the remotest justification in scripture for the dispossession of Palestinian Arabs. I therefor believe that the means by which we should determine the rights and wrongs of the Israeli-Palestine conflict is to examine the history and politics of this one hundred-year-long conflict in the same way that we determine the rights and wrongs of any other conflict in our world. The conflict is no different.

Nielsen suggests conservative Evangelicals, in particular, should examine the history and politics of Christian Zionism, dispensationalist eschatology, and Zionist Jews, in order for them to judge the difference between right and wrong about Israel-Palestine conflict.

Furthermore, Tom Boggioni (*2017*), a Raw Story columnist, writes, "People in the Bible Belt make our (Middle East Christians) lives difficult over Jerusalem obsession." It shows that Christian churches around the Bible belt (Southeastern and South-central region of the United States) or even around the globe are not aware that strong Christian minority exist in the region. Because of this, many people ask, why some Evangelical Christian organisations and individuals strongly supports Trump's declaration? In order to answer this main question, we must first discuss the software (ideological underpin) that supports this destructive Zionist agenda in the Palestine/Israel region.

II. Christian (and) Zionism: The Unholy Alliance

A. Christian (and) Zionism, religious or secular?

For conservative Evangelicals, Jerusalem declaration is about prophecy. Some critics, whereas, sees Trump's declaration as more political gesture than religious. For example, Kim Sengupta (2017), a defence correspondent at the Independence News, argues, "The real reason Trump declared Jerusalem the capital of Israel was because he feared losing his evangelical voter base." Due to overwhelming supports during Trump presidential campaign, Sengupta contends, Trump's declaration was a political statement that motivated for publicity. On the other hand, Norman Finkelstein (2017), a prominent American-Jewish political scientist, hold a different opinion. In the interview, he explains,

But we have to bear in mind, it wasn't just Trump. You know, sometimes the media wants to pile up on Trump. And they forget it's not just Trump. Charles Schumer, the current Senate minority leader, Schumer was constantly attacking Trump, right after he got elected: "Why aren't you recognizing Jerusalem as the undivided capital?" When Trump did recognize it, Schumer, Charles Schumer, he said, "He did it because of me. I was the one that urged him to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital." So that's the Senate minority leader speaking. And for the same reason—if you look at Schumer's money, he gets it mostly from conservative, right-wing Jews and from Wall Street, the same sources of income as Trump, the same streams of income (Finkelstein, 2017).

For Finkelstein, Trump's declaration reveals how influential of the right-wing Jews and the wolf of Wall Street in American politics. However, Nur Masalha (2007), a Middle East scholar, he notes that besides right-wing Jews,

The Christian Zionist lobby is also a major component of the 'Israel Lobby'...The Christian Zionist lobby includes the following advocacy organisations based in Washington DC: Christians' Israel Public Action Campaign, The International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, Christian Coalition, Southern Baptist Convention, Bridges for Peace, Jerusalem Friendship Funds, Jerusalem Prayer Team, Stand With Israel, Christian Broadcasting Network, International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, Family Research Council, Council for National Policy, and Christians for Israel/USA (Masalha, 2007. P. 115–117).

Long before, Masalha suggests, various Christian Zionist lobbyists in United States has been a major factor in US domestic and foreign policy alongside with right-wing Jews and the wolf of Wall Street. Thus, Trump's declaration is a collective political effort that is based on political-theological aspirations of Zionist Jewish and Christian movements.

The origins of nearly all of the 19th century's Zionist movement lie in a new Christian theology (Dispensationalism) developed in Europe, particularly in United Kingdom. Others claim that Zionist movement was inspired by fundamentalist Christian movements in United Kingdom that spreads gradually in the U.S. political sphere (Sizer, 2005. P. 26–30). For example, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) also known as "Armageddon Lobby." Rammy Haija (2006), a sociology professor, explains,

There are many names and titles for the Christian Zionists in the United States. Some call them the 'Armageddon Lobby', others have

referred to them as the 'Christian AIPAC'. These nicknames are minor examples of the motives and unconditional support for Israel among the Christian-Right, which have made it an instrumental actor in a pro-US policy towards Israel. This position has been especially solidified among the powerful elites in US policy. An article published in *Time* magazine following the aftermath of the Israeli Defense Force's infamous incursions into the West Bank in 2002 states: 'Today the most influential lobbying on behalf of Israel is being done by a group not usually seen as an ally of the largely Democratic Jewish community: Evangelical Christians' (2006. P. 76).

Haija contends, the untiring supports of conservative Evangelicals was the cornerstone of the overwhelming success of Zionist Jews in US. However, most of historians suggest, Zionism seems has no religious inclination. Masalha (2007), take for example, argues that secular Zionism is a product of European nationalists and colonialist movements. Masalha (2017) writes,

Political Zionism emerged in Europe in the late nineteenth century as a basically secular movement, with non-religious and frequently anti-religious disposition. The secular movement principally seek to employ the Bible as source of legitimation. The Bible has been utilised by modern secular Zionism as "history" rather than theology or a source of belief (2007. P. 135–145).

Masalha (2007. P. 135–145) goes even further, he argues, the Zionist movements appropriates religious eschatologies, to legitimise their colonisation of the Palestinian region. Moreover, Sizer (2012) contends, the source of this new stream of thought was Lord Shaftesbury (1801–1885), a well-known proponent of Restoration movement and a British politician. According to Sizer,

Zionism would probably have remained simply a religious ideal were it not for the intervention of a handful of influential aristocratic British politicians who came to share the theological convictions of Darby and his colleagues and translated them into political reality. One in particular, Lord Shaftesbury (1801–1885) became convinced that the restoration of the Jews to Palestine was not only predicted in the Bible but also coincided with the strategic interests of British foreign policy. Others who shared this perspective, in varying degrees and for different reasons, included Lord Palmerston, David Lloyd George and Lord Balfour.

For Sizer, Shaftesbury is the man behind the emergence of religious Zionist movement in UK. That time, many European Zionists really take advantage of this opportunity to expand their own political and religious influences. This major shift from secular to messianic Zionism gradually emerges. The premise of this new, messianic Zionist movement is under the guise of "restoration of the Jewish people", the Land of Israel, and protecting the concept of "Jewish people were a chosen people". Eventually, Sizer (2012) argues that these political-theological convictions take up by several European Christian political leaders. Sizer, says, "Of those Christian political leaders to take up the mantle of Shaftesbury and achieve the Zionist dream, a small number stand out." He added, "These include Laurence Oliphant (1829–1888), William Hechler (1845–1931), David Lloyd George (1863–1945) and probably most significant of all, Arthur Balfour (1848–1930)." William Hechler a Christian and Theodore Herzl, take the messianic Zionist movement to the next level. Sizer (2012) points out,

By 1897, when the first World Zionist Congress met in Basle, Switzerland, Jewish leaders who favoured a Zionist State already had sympathetic support from many more senior British political figures. This was largely due to the efforts of one man, William Hechler. The son of LJS missionaries in France and Germany, Hechler was an Anglican priest and became chaplain to the British Embassy in Vienna in 1885, a position of strategic significance for the Zionist movement. 'Imbued with evangelical millenarianism, he even formulated his own exact date for the re-establishment of the Jewish State.

Although Herzl was an atheist, he works closely with Hechler who was a Christian minister. Both Herzl and Hechler encouraged their followers to interpret the Bible for themselves and to act on their interpretation in light of their own understanding based on dispensational theology, regardless of their understanding of fundamental principles of lack thereof. Anyone who did not profess to this new theology was considered outside of the realm of Christian teaching. In this way, dispensationalists and messianic Zionist movements were able to secure a significant following whose legacy continues in one form or another until today.

Gradually from 1839 until today, Christian Zionism (Dispensationalism) and secular Zionist movement were very successful in establishing an "accepted" new theology and the modern Jewish ideology in Christianity and Judaism whose essential characteristic is extreme views and interpretations, as contrasted with Christianity and Judaism teaches. Coming under the guise of reform of the religion, the movement gathered momentum in the last five decades with support from a number of wealthy and political elites around the globe, particularly in US and Europe. As it has grown, the movement mutated and splintered, with the eventual outcome that some groups went to the blind supports towards colonialisation of Palestine and the human rights violations of the modern State of Israel.

B. Dispensationalism: The (Unholy) Alliance between Conservative Christians and Zionist Movements

For religious circles, Trump's declaration has religious implications. For example, Burge (2007) argues that most of the conservative Evangelicals perceives Trump's declaration as a partial fulfilment of the so called, "end-time" prophecy that based on a literal interpretation of the Scripture practices by various Dispensational theologians or Dispensationalists. For example, John Nelson Derby, Samuel P. Tregelles, and Charles Henry Mackintosh. However, John Nelson Derby is considered the father of Dispensationalism (2000). According to Craig A. Blaising, Darrell L. Bock (2000), proponents of the new form of dispensationalism (progressive dispensationalism), Scofield Reference Bible is the key representative of classical dispensationalism (*Blaising and Bock, 2000. P. 22*). Similar to other worldviews, dispensationalism has now been evolving for over forty years and has gone through several changes. As Blaising and Bock argue, dispensationalism can be divided into three clusters: classical dispensationalism, revised dispensationalism, and progressive dispensationalism (*Blaising and Bock, 2000. P. 22–23*).

Among Christian scholars, Stephen Sizer, an Angelical minister, is unlikely to be aware of the ideological content of dispensationalism. He contends,

dispensationalist theology is a widespread eschatological doctrine created by the Western literalist interpretation of the Scripture. Dispensationalists interpret the Scripture based on individual speculations, opinions, and current events to illustrate mankind's proximity to a global catastrophe (*Stahl and Mitchell, 2017*). In the case of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, dispensational theology provides legitimacy, in terms of theological basis, to the existence of modern State of Israel and colonisation of the East Jerusalem and West Bank areas. For instance, Zionist Christians and Zionist Jews employ several biblical languages such as chosen people, daughter of Zion, Promised Land, Davidic covenant, and rebuilding the third temple. Masalha (2007) clearly unveils how it works,

The mega-narrative of Zionism contains several intertwined foundational myths which underlie contemporary Israeli culture. These includes the 'negation of exile' (shlilat ha-gulut), the 'return to history' (ha-shiva la-historia), the 'the return to the Land of Israel' (ha-shiva le-Eretz Yisrael) and the myth of 'empty territory'. The 'negation of exile' allows Zionism to establish a line of unbroken continuity between ancient Palestine and a present that renews it in the resettlement of Palestine (*Masalha, 2007. P. 40*).

For Masalha, the (partial) successes of the Zionist movement in 1948 only proves that religious languages and symbols have been considered to be effective sources of justification for political legitimacy, or even increasing political stability. Furthermore, in his book entitled, *World Empire and the Return of Jesus Christ (2011)*, Simon Downing writes,

Dispensationalism also argues the re-formation of Israel and the return of the Jews to that land is the primary sign of the "imminent" rapture of the Church. The formation of Israel is therefore a sign that the end is truly near. Dispensationalism also accommodates into its teaching the belief that the Jews must rebuild their Temple (*2011. P. 42-43*).

For Downing, however, the heart of dispensationalist theology is the rebuilding of the Third Temple, in the exact location of the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhra). Many political and religious scholars believe that this would be the most dangerous ideas of dispensationalists that supports and galvanises the Zionist agenda in Israel/Palestine region.

Nielsen (2012) notes, (Dispensationalism) It places a very high importance on the State of Israel, its current occupation by Jewish people being understood as an unambiguous portent of the imminent coming of Christ (*2012. P. 58-59*). Politically and religiously speaking, Nielsen firmly believes that there has been always special relationship between dispensationalism and the establishment of modern State of Israel. Moreover, Elizabeth Oldmixon (2017), a political scientist at the University of North Texas USA, sees how religion plays a major role in political formation of the modern State of Israel. Oldmixon observes the exploitation of religious languages and religious discourses that linked to Western colonialism. She also convinces that secular Zionists sees dispensationalism as a useful analytical prism through which to understand the establishment of the modern State of Israel. She explains, "The tenet of Christian Zionism is that God's promise of the Holy Land to the Jews is eternal. It's not just something in antiquity. When we talk about the Holy Land, God's promise of the Holy Land, we're talking about real estate on both sides of the Jordan River." She further describes, "So the sense of a greater Israel and expansionism is really important to this community. Jerusalem is just central to that. It's viewed as a historical and

biblical capital (2017).” Similarly, Gary Burge (2017), a New Testament scholar, notes,

Some conservative evangelicals have built a remarkable theology around the modern state of Israel.” He added, “The key to understanding this perspective is to recognize that these conservative evangelicals are building a bridge from ancient biblical Israel to the modern secular State of Israel. So, promises made almost 4,000 years ago to Abraham apply to the modern Israeli state (2017).

Burge contends, the alliance between the Christian dispensationalist and Zionist Jews movements realises the Zionist’s agenda in Palestine/Israel. This alliance has endured for decades, influencing the various country domestic-foreign policies, particularly US, UK, and some of the European countries with regard to Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Another instance how the alliance works, they also effectively employs religious languages, to discredits religious and non-religious movements who condemned the illegal occupation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank areas. Take for example, the reports of World Council of Churches, Christian Peacemaker Team Palestine, Human Right Watch, The UN Reliefs and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), and Amnesty International reports.

And indeed, historically speaking, the special relationship (unholy) between the American Christian-Right wings and the Zionist Jews produces countless human rights violations without any accountability toward indigenous Palestinian population, including Palestinian/Arab Christians. Unfortunately, along with distorted view of the Christian eschatology, many conservative Evangelicals continually support the Zionist agenda in West Bank and Israel. Besides, most of the Christian communities around the globe, mainly conservative Evangelicals are still unsympathetic to Palestinian/Arab catastrophes (Nakba), while other Christian groups are unawares and misinformed about Palestinian/Arab Christians who have been struggling to cope with unprecedented challenge and to survive in occupied Palestine. As long as the unholy alliance between Christian-Right wings and the Zionist Jews continues, based on the dispensational framework, we cannot help Palestinians to build the future they deserve.

III. How about Jesus’s Other Sheep? The Forgotten Faithful

A. The Local Economy of the Forgotten Faithful: Stealing from the Table of the Poor and Hungry

Located in the western part of the Jordan River, West Bank areas occupy a unique place in the international consciousness. Historically, the ancient Bethlehem city serves as an important bridge between the Judaism, Christianity, and Islamic traditions. For Abrahamic religion, Bethlehem plays a religious significant part of the birthplace of King David and Jesus Christ. Despite its low level of economic development, Bethlehem serves as an essential political as well as economic corridor for Palestine with tourism related activities (*Al-Rimawi and Butcher, 2015. P. 317–318*).

Despite of 50 years of Israel's military occupation as well as Palestinian's exclusion (exclusion zone) from free movement have left West Bank impoverished, a pattern of socio-economic exigencies that are quite similar to those faced by other regions (for example, Hebron,) within the country. According to the B'Tselem, a progressive Jewish human rights activist organisation, report (2017),

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Palestinians' freedom of movement in the Occupied Territories lies completely at the mercy of the state's whims, the instructions given to soldiers at the local (DCO), and the way in which they implement them. This state of affairs forces Palestinians to live in constant uncertainty, making it difficult to perform simple tasks and make plans. A Palestinian leaving home in the morning cannot know whether he or she is going to make it work – on time or at all – or to keep a medical appointment, visit family or catch a movie. She might make it, or she might be delayed at a checkpoint for hours, detained and humiliated by soldiers. She may have to turn around and go back the way she came. She may get arrested.

B'Tselem added,

The restrictions on movement and the uncertainty they generate also bear implications for the Palestinian economy and its development potential. In several reports on the issue, the World Bank found that these restrictions are a major factor impeding economic stability and growth in the Occupied Territories. Reasons include delays in the arrival of goods, non-arrival of raw materials, the separation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the inability to set schedules and meet them.

B'Tselem report shows that the Israeli occupation and Palestinian exclusion zone has direct and detrimental effects on the Palestinian economy. Since the establishment of the modern State of Israel, more than 800, 000 of the population were displacement driven out of their homeland to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, neighboring Arab countries, and other countries of the world. According to Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS),

Thousands of Palestinians were displaced from their homes but stayed within the Israeli-controlled 1948 territory. According to documentary evidence, the Israelis controlled 774 towns and villages and destroyed 531 Palestinian towns and villages during the Nakba. The atrocities of Zionist forces also included more than 70 massacres in which more than 15 thousands, Palestinians were killed (PCBS, 2017).

Moreover, in 2015, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development report reveals, "Palestinians are economically worse off than ever before as the number of Israeli settlers on their land sets records, a new report by the United Nations trade and development agency UNCTAD reveals (2015)." Likewise, Human Rights Watch report (2017) describes, "Israel continued in 2016 to enforce severe and discriminatory restrictions on Palestinians' human rights, to facilitate the transfer of Israeli civilians to the occupied West Bank, and to severely restrict the movement of people and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip." Added to the report (2017), "Also in the West Bank, Israeli authorities destroyed

homes and other property under discriminatory practices that severely restrict Palestinians' access to construction permits and forcibly displaced, as of October 17, 1, 283 Palestinian residents in West Bank areas under direct Israeli administrative control." Sadly, most of global Christian communities overlook the dire poverty in the West Bank areas. To some degrees, pro-Israel conservative Evangelicals become blind supporters and apologists when it comes to Palestinian catastrophes and economic deprivation under the Israeli military occupation of Palestine. Many of them, as the situation get worse, are persistently indifferent to the plight of the Palestinians, including Palestinian/Arab Christians.

B. The Dwindling Population of the Forgotten Faithful

As stated earlier, since the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, the Christian conception of modern State of Israel sees the whole of event as centred on the partial fulfilment of end time's prophecy. The result of Zionist colonialisation plan with the consent of various international players (UN state members), led to a major catastrophe (NAKBA) for the indigenous Palestinians, both Christians and Muslims. In June 2010, the Middle East Monitor (MEM)-Briefing Paper provides an overview of the Christian presence in the Palestine, the estimated number of Palestinian Christian in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem is 51, 710, making the percentage of the Palestinian Christian in the Occupied Territories 2% of the Palestinian population. Demographically speaking, the highest percentage of Christian population in Palestine live in these cities, Bethlehem (43.4%), followed by Ramallah (24.7%), then Jerusalem (17.9%). There is no agreed-on history of early Christian populations in Palestine. This is partly due to the difficulties of re-creating the history of an oral society, and partly because of the distorted representation of Palestinian society and history (*Sadje, 2016*). According to Melanie Lidman, a Jewish journalist, "In 1950, Bethlehem and the surrounding villages were 86 percent Christian. But by 2016, the Christian population dipped to just 12 percent." She added, "Across the West Bank, Christians now account for less than 2 percent of the population, though in the 1970s, Christians were 5 percent of the population." By the same token, Jonathan Cook (2007), a famous British author and journalist reporting from Nazareth on the Middle East, he observes and writes,

Even those concerns, however, relate mainly to fears that the Holy Land's native Christians, once a significant proportion of the Palestinian population, are rapidly dwindling. There are no precise figures, but the Israeli media suggests that Christians, who once constituted as much as 15 per cent of the occupied territories' Palestinians, are now just 2 or 3 per cent. Most are to be found in the West Bank close to Jerusalem, in Bethlehem, Ramallah and neighbouring villages (*Cook, 2007*).

Cook confirms, even Israeli media admits Palestinian/Arab Christians are rapidly dwindling in West Bank and Israel. But, the report does not states the major reasons why Palestinian population rapidly dwindling in the West Bank and Israel. One of the pervasive dominant myths among Western mainstream media is Palestinian/Arab Christians was under attacks (or even persecuted) by radical Palestinian Muslims in West Bank and Israel. Lela Gilbert, an American-Jewish journalist, in her short article entitled, "*The Silent Struggle of Bethlehem's*

Christians" (2016), demonstrate that concrete examples. She vaguely describes why Palestinian/Arab Christians leaves the West Bank areas. According to Gilbert, Christians living under the PA are "accorded sanctity and respect," but, as is the case under all sharia-based systems, Christians are relegated to the status of second-class citizens. Of course, it is illegal to convert from Islam to Christianity. Let's not even mention the fact that sale of land to Jews is a crime punishable by death. Discrimination against Christians under the Palestinian Authority isn't just legal – it's also social. Living as a Christian, one is constantly reminded that he or she is not a member of the majority culture. Bethlehem's Christians are at risk of being detained by authorities based on vague accusations. An "interview" with local officials may lead to stern threats or, even more frightening, to an arrest on trumped-up charges (2016).

Gilbert hastens to inform her readers that Palestinian/Arab Christians leaves occupied Palestine due to discrimination and persecution by such Sharia Law and Palestinian Muslims. Perhaps, this would be one of the most misleading perspectives of Palestine-Israel conflict, Christian population is decreasing due to Islamic fundamentalism or the so called, "persecution of believers" by their Muslim neighbours. Undeniably, Gilbert's article unfounded statements to misrepresent and often undermines any facts on the ground. In fact, Talgha Bendie (2012), an African activist from The Centre for Political and Development Studies (CPDS)-Gaza, observes,

Palestinian Christians have been subjected to brutal military occupation in their homelands. Israel does not differentiate between Palestinian Christians and Muslims when it carries out its occupational policies. Bethlehem is dominated in equal measure by churches and mosques, a symbol of the increased diversity of the region's people. Since 1948 many Palestinian Christians have been living in refugee camps outside the sacred city. The Christian population in Bethlehem now stands at a mere 28% of the total population. Just as other Palestinians they face many challenges moving from one city to another due to Israel's Apartheid checkpoints (Bendie, 2012).

However, the question remains, what is being done about diminishing number of Palestinian/Arab Christians in West Bank and Israel. Timothy Seidel (2006), an American intellectual namely, rejects these unsubstantiated information and distorted representation. According to Seidel, these misrepresentations are unfortunately used to distract the international community from the brutish realities of Israeli occupation in West Bank and Gaza Strip. Seidel argues,

...the plight of the Palestinian Christian is very much connected to that of the Palestinian Muslim in that both, whether in the Occupied Territories or inside Israeli itself, are experiencing daily injustices at the hands of oppressive and discriminatory policies imposed on them by the Israeli government. Palestinian Christians, like their Muslim brothers and sisters, have experienced a long history of dispossession and have not been immune to Israeli policies of occupation and discrimination. If anything, they have felt more strongly the feelings of forsakenness, knowing full well that many Christians in North America and Europe support without question the state of Israel in its oppression of their people. Daily experiences of humiliation at checkpoints, of land confiscation to make way for the separation barrier, the illegal occupation and colonization of Palestinian territory, lack of mobility

and access to basic services, unemployment, poverty, and no sense of hope for a better future for their children have all contributed to this growing emigration of Palestinian Christians from the historical land of Palestine.

In other words, Seidel argues that one of the most significant factors driving the rapid diminishing of Palestinian people is the sense of hopelessness that now prevails among Palestinians, especially the Palestinian/Arab Christians, under Israeli-occupied territories. After 1948 formation of the modern State of Israel, 1967 Six Days War, and with no political or diplomatic breakthrough in sight, their future in West Bank and Israel looks bleak

The sad reality, it seems that no one really cares. As many conservative Evangelicals sees as the fulfilment of so called, “biblical prophecy”, not a political reality. Hans Stehling (2017), a writer from Global Research, he observes,

There are estimated, today, to be in excess of 40 million, mainly white, fundamentalist, Christian Zionists in America, primarily in the South. They believe that supporting Israel is a biblical issue, not a political one and they comprise the largest pro-Israel bloc in the United States which believes that God gave Israel to His ‘chosen people’, the Jews (2017).

It is commonly claims that Islamic fundamentalism, causing a mass disappearance of Palestinian/Arab Christians in occupied territories. However, Stehling argues, American Christian Zionists is to blame for mass disappearance (2017). It is not surprising then, the combination of the distorted Christian eschatology and Zionist ideology made their colonialisation conquest easier. The ‘sacred’ relationship between the conservative Evangelicals and Zionist Jews facilitated the mass exodus of Palestinian/Arab Christians.

c. Misrepresentation of Jesus’ Other Sheep

Today, the gross misrepresentation of the Palestinian people of West Bank and Israel not only reflect the biases of white dominant people against Palestinian/Arab people held by Western mainstream media, they also contribute to the development of feeling of indifferent and culture of silence among Christian churches around the globe. More often than not, Palestinian/Arab Christians has been misrepresents between Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Peter Makari, is an Executive for the Middle East and Europe in Global Ministries for the Christian Church, writes, “For some, it may seem strange to learn that there are Christians in Western Asia and North Africa, also known as the Middle East.” He further notes, “Often forgotten amid the predominant culture of Islam, the Christian community does not garner the same kind of attention when the Middle East is discussed.” Tareq Baconi, take for example, enumerates the misrepresentation of Palestinian issues during his summer intern public lecture at the Palestine Center in Washington DC. According to Kelly Fleming (2017), Baconi points out,

“Far more damaging is the media’s depiction of Gaza as a “terror-state” or “hostile enemy,” Baconi said. The U.S. media use the word “terrorism” to describe organizations as diverse as al-Qaeda, Da’ish and Hamas, he pointed out, ignoring the complexity of the situation and eliminating a discussion of political beliefs.”

For Baconi, often it is not mostly the case that people around the globe, through Western mainstream media, to have misrepresented views of the causes and effects of Israel-Palestine conflict. What we mean by this is that when one looks at for example local Palestinian resistance movement and how it perhaps resists Jewish illegal settlers and Israeli soldiers, immediately the assumption provides by mainstream media is made that Palestinians is at fault. And this seems to be where one of the biggest issues actually lies when it comes to the representation of the Palestinian people.

Contemporary writers, activists, and civil rights groups have struggled to overcome the pervasive effect of these longstanding misleading information, and misrepresentation about Palestinian/Arab Christians or even the Palestinian society and history as whole. Even before, Edward Said (2003), a prominent American-Palestinian scholar, observes and struggles the same way. He writes,

Nine years ago I wrote an afterword for *Orientalism* which, in trying to clarify what I believed I had and had not said, stressed not only the many discussions that had opened up since my book appeared in 1978, but the ways in which a work about representations of "the orient" lent itself to increasing misinterpretation. That I find myself feeling more ironic than irritated about that very same thing today is a sign of how much my age has crept up on me. The recent deaths of my two main intellectual, political and personal mentors, the writers and activists Eqbal Ahmad and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, has brought sadness and loss, as well as resignation and a certain stubborn will to go on (Said, 2003).

Hence, Zionist colonisation and misrepresentation, resulted to the global Christian churches' culture of silence and subservience under the spell of Zionist rhetorics, go hand in hand. The worst case scenario, Said argues, misinformation and misrepresentation campaigns will continue to proliferate. Apart from these, Makari keep reminds us,

It is essential for us to remember that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not, in its essence, a conflict between Jews and Muslims. To think of the conflict in these terms is to ascribe to it a nearly timeless and unresolvable theological struggle, consistent with the idea of a "clash of civilizations." More than that, it erases from the landscape the Palestinian Christian community, a community that has authentically and legitimately remained on the land for centuries. Instead, it is a conflict over land, resources, and human rights, in which power (and the right of presence) is distributed unequally between the two parties: the Israelis and the Palestinians (Makari, 2014. P. 6).

Makari suggests, as long as many conservative Evangelicals continually inclined to believe that the Israeli-Palestine conflict as purely religious war, thus, we fails to see the whole picture. In his short article entitled, "*Christian Zionism and the Myth of America*" John Hubers (2018), a Mission Coordinator for the Middle East and South Asia, writes,

This, I believe, underlies the importance of countering the Zionist myth with the real life story of Palestinians who suffer under the occupation. It is telling that nearly every American Christian who has visited Palestine and had a chance to meet Palestinians in the occupied territory, listening to their stories and enjoying their hospitality, has returned to America with a new found empathy and sometimes militant support for the Palestinian cause. The key is hearing and experiencing the story told in a different way-allowing the voice of those

who lost their homes and suffer under the humiliating weight of the occupation to be heard, primarily the story of Christians whose natural bonds to fellow believers makes it difficult to continue to hold onto the demonizing aspects of the Zionist myth.

Hubers argues, dispensationalist version of American Evangelicalism and Zionist ideology, and their combinations, which were instrumental to the imperial powers, influenced many Western countries. Unless underlies the importance of countering the Zionist myth with the real life story of Palestinians, particularly of Palestinian/Arab Christians under Israeli occupation, those challenges will simply as they are.

IV. Conclusion

It has been argued in the last proceeding discussion, dispensationalism is one of the sources why many conservative Evangelicals led to chilling culture of silence about the suffering of Palestinian/Arab Christians. As culture of silence, obviously the outcome of distorted interpretation of Christian eschatology, a large number of major Evangelical groups prevent to criticise the violations of the Palestinian human rights committed by modern State of Israel. Apart from a distorted version of Christian eschatology, many conservative Evangelicals are misinformed of the existence of Palestinian/Arab Christians who have been struggling to cope with unprecedented challenges to survive in occupied Palestine. Unfortunately, they are still promoting the same idea of classical dispensationalism which the early dispensationalists used, heading the laity and the faithful to accept uncritical dogmas and teachings.

In August 22, 2006, a joint statement entitled, "The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism" issued by a number of Palestinian Christian churches (signed by Roman Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Anglican, and Evangelical Church in Jordan and Holy Land) to refute the distorted teaching of Christian Zionism. Clearly, the document explicitly criticises Christian Zionism. The document states,

Christian Zionism is a modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace within Palestine and Israel. The Christian Zionist programme provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today.

The document reiterates, Christian Zionism is a product of Western ideology, colonialism, and militarism. Westerners develops a Christian eschatology that subjugated, dispossessed, and marginalised Palestinian/Arab people. Obviously, the document initiated to counter-discourse campaign for the liberation of global Christian churches from culture of silence and distorted version of Christian eschatology. Nonetheless, three largest Christian Zionist movements such as ICEJ, Bridges of Peace, and Christian Friends of Israel strongly reject it. In response, they issue a counter document that reaffirms the fundamental tenets of Christian Zionism. A strong concluding part of the document (2006) states,

We find the paper (The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism issued by Palestinian Christians) unbalanced and notably one-sided.

It totally ignores the jihadist goals of the Hamas government and turns a blind eye to terrorism perpetrated by this regime. Everything is attributed to “occupation and militarism”, meaning Israel is the only problem. We think not! This one-sided unbalanced view of the conflict is in fact unhelpful to the peace process and contributing to its failure! So, in closing, we Christian Zionists call upon Christians and Churches everywhere not to remain silent, but to break their silence and speak for reconciliation with justice in the Holy Land. To pray for the peace of Jerusalem, to affirm Israel’s right to live in peace and security, free from the threat of liquidation by Islamic Jihadists who definitely seek to ‘colonize’ the Jewish State by bringing it into the Empire of Islam.

We reject all forms of discrimination.

All over again, Christian Zionists, as one expected, uses biblical languages to reaffirm their untiring support for State of Israel. However, Nielsen offers a balance view with regard to Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He suggests, “The solution to anti-Semitism is not the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the solution to the Palestinian problem is not ethnic cleansing of Israel (Nielsen, 2012. P. 168).” Regardless of our theological orientations, conservative Evangelicals need to get over this unholy alliance with Zionist movement. To protect our Christian faith from misappropriation, global Christian churches themselves have to be vigilant and critical with their own belief system. To combat the destructive results of distorted version of Christian eschatology, Konrad Raiser, a former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, have a piece of advice. He (1996) strongly admonishes,

Peace is not just the absence of war. Peace cannot be built on foundations of injustice. Peace requires a new international order on justice and respect for the God-given humanity and dignity of every person (Raiser, 1996. P. 331).

In a nutshell, if our Christian doctrine, ethics, and form of spirituality do not inspire our moral belief, including our political beliefs, why speak in the name of religion at all? Unless, we stand for justice. We Can Do No Other!

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«Иисус сказал. Есть у Меня и другие овцы»: палестинские (арабы) христиане в оккупированной Палестине

В настоящее время одной из групп религиозных меньшинств на Ближнем Востоке являются палестинские арабские христиане, которые другими христианами несправедливо забыты. Особенно данная тенденция прослеживается в оккупированной Палестине (Восточный Иерусалим и Западный берег). К сожалению, христианские церкви во всем мире не отдают себе отчет в том (и, соответственно, дезинформируют других), что в регионе существует сильное христианское меньшинство. В случае если существующая ситуация, выраженная в отсутствии информированности, сохранится, палестинский народ будет по-прежнему страдать от несправедливости. Ученые, однако, утверждают, что такая дезинформация уходит корнями в диспенсационализм и сионистскую идеологию. Диспенсационализм считает, что в деле возрождения Израиля начат обратный отсчет, который положит конец истории (Birge, 2017). Настоящая статья представлена в трех частях. В первой части рассматривается нечестивый союз между консервативными евангелистами и сионистскими движениями. Вторая часть представляет палестинских (арабов) христиан как забытых верующих в оккупированной Палестине. В последней части автор дает короткий вывод.

Ключевые слова: консервативный евангелизм, христианский сионизм, диспенсационализм, палестинцы, арабы-христиане.