
Great! Very Informative

Most observers explain evangelical Christians' bedrock support for Israel as stemming from the apocalyptic belief that the Jews must return to the Holy Land as a precondition for the second coming of Christ. But the real reasons, argues Stephen Spector, are far more complicated. In Evangelicals and Israel, Spector delves deeply into the Christian Zionist movement, mining information from original interviews, web sites, publications, news reports, survey research, worship services, and interfaith conferences, to provide a surprising look at the sources of evangelical support for Israel.

Israel is God's prophetic clock for many evangelicals - irrefutable proof that prophecy is true and coming to pass in our lifetime. But Spector goes beyond end-times theology to find a complex set of motivations behind Israel-evangelical relations. These include the promise of God's blessing for those who bless the Jews; gratitude to Jews for establishing the foundations of Christianity; remorse for the Church's past anti-Semitism; fear that God will judge the nations based on how they treated the Jewish people; and reliance on Israel as the West's firewall against Islamist terrorism. Spector explores many Christian Zionists' hostility toward Islam, but also uncovers an unexpected pragmatism and flexibility concerning Israel's possession of the entire Holy Land.

For evangelicals, politics frequently mixes with faith. Yet Spector argues that evangelical beliefs - though often portrayed as unifying and rigid - are in reality various and even contradictory. Spector uses George W. Bush's beliefs about the Bible as a sounding board for these issues and explores
the evangelical influence on his Middle East policies. Evangelicals and Israel corrects much of the speculation about Bush's personal faith and about evangelicalism's impact on American-Middle East relations, and provides the fullest and most nuanced account to date of the motives and theology behind Christian Zionism.

My Personal Review:
In the preface, the author states his aim to respectfully investigate the beliefs, behavior, convictions & motives of Christian Zionists. In this, he has succeeded with this comprehensive and absorbing study based on interviews and info gleaned from publications, websites, newspaper reports and the attendance of many conferences & worship services. All the prominent personalities and organizations are covered, including Christian Friends of Israel, Christians United For Israel, Unity Coalition for Israel, Christian Embassy in Jerusalem and the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews.

Christian Zionism has always been a blend of faith & politics. A conversation with David Stearns opens the book, in which some of the motives of evangelical support for Israel are revealed: empathy with the Jewish people, devotion to a shared religious tradition & a sense of increasing danger as regards the geopolitical trajectory. Stearns is an organizer of the Day of Prayer for the Peace of Jerusalem in which more than 100 000 churches worldwide participate annually.

Surprise surprise! Not ALL Christian Zionists want to `save' Jews, as one interviewee put it: `I do my work supporting Israel and I'm quite content to let God do His.' The absurd, risible notion of these supporters of Israel wanting to `convert' Jews or assemble them in the Holy Land in order to speed up the Second Coming is exposed for the grotesque lie that it is. A further important point is that very few Christian Zionists are `premillennial dispensationalists,' one of those scary-sounding expressions that Christian Antisemites employ in order to smear Christians with a heart for Israel.

They in fact represent a colorful mosaic of denominations & theologies and tend to be radically individualistic. It's impossible to neatly categorize their diverse theological or political convictions or even determine their numbers. People like Sir Isaac Newton, Alexander Pope & John Milton would be considered Christian Zionists today. The author delves into the history of Theodor Herzl & William Hechler, Arthur Balfour, David Lloyd George and William Blackstone, all the way back to the Plymouth Brethren and the Puritans in England.

The reasons for supporting Israel & its children in the Diaspora comprise a complicated matrix of motivations & beliefs, including the promised blessing of Genesis 12:3, love & gratitude to God's people for having preserved the scriptures and remorse at the obscene history of Christian Antisemitism & the abomination of replacement theology, as well as Israel's role as the West's bulwark against terrorism in the Middle East.
Spector presents a vast body of sometimes contradictory beliefs and arguments, effectively refuting the clichés & stereotypes created by the liberal media.

He writes about the opinions of Christian Zionists on the Temple Mount, Aliyah, the Al-Aqsa Intifada, civilizational conflict, Islam, Iran & Ahmadinejad, amongst other ancient & contemporary matters. He also considers criticism of Christian Zionism that emanates predominantly from the liberation theologian 'reverend' Na'im Ateeq and his Sabeel organization and of course from Jimmy Carter & Karen Armstrong with her silly conspiracy theories and Bush Derangement Syndrome.

This well-researched and well-written work concludes with copious notes, a bibliography and index. For further information & other perspectives, I recommend The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948 by Paul Charles Merkley, Standing With Israel by David Brog and The Mountains of Israel by Norma P Archbold. For those who like their reading spiced by humor, the relations between Jews & Christian Zionists are wittily presented in A Match Made in Heaven by Zev Chafets.

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