

Handout 3.2

Theology Matters: Session Three

Christian Zionism

“Christian Zionism is a movement in Christian theology that has enjoyed popular support in churches. Appearing in a number of forms, it has had an impact on Christian thinking and theology in modern history, even influencing the actions of governments, including our own. Traditional Christian Zionists maintain that the Jewish possession of the Holy Land presages the End Times. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was, in their view, the next step toward the fulfillment of God’s plan as is foretold in the Bible. Indeed, belief in the Jewish people’s special tie to the land can be found across the Christian theological spectrum. Many Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians today grant the Jewish people a special claim to the land linked to their election by God for a special role in history. The establishment of the State of Israel continues to take on a clearly biblical cast; the emergence of the Jews from the horror of the Nazi era into the miracle of the Jewish state evokes the triumphalism of the exodus and the conquest as depicted in the Old Testament narrative. In this view, Israel’s military victories in 1967 and 1973 were further confirmation of a divine hand at work in history.”

Discussion Questions:

1. What experiences have you had with Christian Zionism, as defined here?
2. Did you/do you hold some of these beliefs yourself?
 1. Have you engaged others who hold this view?
 2. Have you observed this view influencing conversations about Israel-Palestine in your church or denomination?

“We maintain that it is theologically, historically and politically incorrect to equate biblical Israel with the modern State of Israel. We reject Christian Zionism in all its forms because it supplants God’s gracious presence in all the world with a territorial theology and with the promise of land to one particular people, a promise that leads inevitably to the oppression and even dispossession of other peoples. We reject the idea that God’s ongoing covenantal faithfulness to the Jewish people (Romans 11:28-29) can be legitimately bound up with such claims. We believe that a role for the Jewish people will include their participation with all peoples in a new order of justice, equality and universal peace that Jesus calls the realm of God. In embracing this vision, we are not taking the land away from the Jews or in any way denying to the Jewish people their fundamental right to live in peace and security and to express themselves as a people and a culture. Nor in this are we challenging the reality of the Jewish people’s special tie to the land in their own experience and in the view of many Jewish as well as Christian theologians. But we believe, in the words of the Kairos Palestine document, that the land “has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of

the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land.” (2.3)”

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the problem with Christian Zionism?
2. What specifically is being rejected by KUSA about this? What alternative view is being put forward? Why?
3. Do you with this alternative view? Why or why not?

Replacement Theology

“We are aware that in denying a theology of entitlement that gives the Jewish people exclusive rights to the Holy Land, we risk the charge of reviving the Christian doctrine known as replacement theology (sometimes known as supersessionism). In this view, the Church takes the place of Israel in God’s purposes, denigrating Judaism itself and condemning the Jews to suffering for rejecting the Gospel. Christians have rightly wished to distance themselves from this destructive and divisive doctrine. We repudiate the anti-Semitic legacy of the church’s past and the theology that undergirds it.

Our core Christian belief is that God’s promise in the Gospel is a promise to all nations. This means that God’s kingdom work in Christ is a promise to everyone regardless of race. We believe that the Church has found in Christ a fulfillment of all that God promised in Abraham, and that both Jews and Gentiles have been invited equally into this promise of a world renewed in love and compassion. The Church does not replace Israel. Jews continue to have a place in God’s plan for the world. In Christ, all nations can be blessed (Genesis 18:18, 22:18; Galatians 3:8). In these times of growing international conflict and cultural mistrust, this is a significant promise. Theologies that privilege one nation with political entitlements to the exclusion of others miss a central tenet of the Gospel and inspire increased conflict.”

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the problem with what has been called replacement theology or supersessionism?
2. What specifically is the document rejecting about replacement theology? What alternative view is being put forward? Why?
3. Do you agree with this alternative view? Why or why not?