

Commentary: A Palestinian Christian's call to confront Zionism

April 3, 2024

As the echoes of the Easter Resurrection continue to reverberate within us, our hearts resonate with a poignant blend of sorrow and hope, navigating the intricate labyrinth of faith amid the relentless storms of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

This sacred season of rebirth holds profound significance for Palestinian Christians like myself, both religiously and culturally, guiding us as we traverse the turbulent waters where faith intersects with politics in the Holy Land.

In the vast landscape of religious belief, particularly within the intricate tapestry of Christianity, the subtle hues of conviction often blur, revealing a kaleidoscope of interpretations and ideologies. Nowhere is this more poignantly illuminated than in the fervent dialogues swirling around the Middle Eastern crucible of conflict.

Recent exchanges among individuals grappling with Christian identity and its implications for the Palestinian-Israeli strife cast a searing light on the multifaceted nature of belief and its profound consequences.

Critically, the ceremonial aspect of political events, such as the solemn inauguration of officials swearing upon the sacred Bible, often underscores a pervasive shallowness in the embrace of Christian identity, detached from a profound, soul-stirring connection to the teachings of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

Problem of Christian Zionism

Like a bolt of lightning on this journey of resurrection, the contentious theological stance of Christian Zionism ignites fierce debate, asserting the establishment and preservation of the modern state of Israel align with ancient biblical prophecies.

Under this banner, many proponents boldly entwine religious fervor with political fervency, deeming such union sacrosanct. They cheer for conflicts across the Middle East, lauding trials in Israel, all while turning a blind eye to the excruciating suffering of our Palestinian brethren.

They justify this travesty under the false belief such tumult hastens the glorious return of our Redeemer. Yet, this perspective stands in stark contradiction to the very essence of the Easter message of redemption, renewal and restoration.

This leads us to a pivotal question: Why do Zionist Christians, particularly within the Baptist and Evangelical traditions, struggle to empathize with innocent Palestinian civilians—children, babies, the elderly—who endure unimaginable hardships, from starvation and homelessness to relentless bombings?

Should not the resurrection of our Savior instill in us a deeper wellspring of compassion and empathy, especially for those who suffer?

Critics of Christian Zionism passionately implore the Christian West to recognize the profound distinction between Christianity and Judaism as separate faiths with disparate teachings.

These critics argue supporting a Christ-rejecting Israel is not a Christian imperative, asserting the widespread ignorance among many American Christians perpetuates the ongoing suffering of Palestinians.

Christian Zionism, with its distorted theology conflating the modern state of Israel with biblical promises, has wrought immeasurable suffering and injustice upon the Palestinian people. This egregious distortion of Scripture has fueled the ruthless dispossession of land, the merciless demolition of homes, and the systemic denial of basic human rights to millions of Palestinians living under the heavy yoke of occupation.

A Palestinian Christian critique

We, Palestinian Christians, unequivocally reject the notion Zionism represents the fulfillment of biblical prophecy or divine mandate.

While we fervently affirm the rights of Jewish people to live in peace and security anywhere, we unequivocally must differentiate between Judaism, a sacred faith tradition, and Zionism, a destructive political ideology wreaking havoc upon our beloved land and people.

Our critique of Zionism is not a condemnation of Judaism or Jewish people. Rather, it is an impassioned rejection of political ideologies that sow division, hatred and violence under the guise of religion.

As followers of Christ, we unequivocally are called to embody love, compassion and empathy for all who suffer, irrespective of their religious or ethnic background.

The distortion of Christianity finds its roots in the emergence of Dispensationalism in the mid-1800s. This theological aberration gained momentum after the American Civil War, severing Christianity from its rich historical and theological tapestry.

Instead of embracing Christianity as the New Covenant, adherents of Dispensationalism relegated it to a mere footnote in time, divorcing it from its profound historical and theological roots.

Amidst these impassioned theological debates, we must not lose sight of the profound human suffering entangled within the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Innocent civilians, including precious children, vulnerable elderly and countless others, are ensnared in an unending cycle of violence and despair.

It is our sacred duty as American and Palestinian Christians to transcend theological differences and fervently advocate for a just and peaceful resolution that prioritizes the inherent dignity, security and well-being of all those embroiled in this tragic conflict.

May the sacred echoes of the Easter Resurrection inspire us to deepen our understanding, cultivate empathy and work toward a future where compassion and justice prevail in the Holy Land.

Jack Nassar is a Palestinian Christian based in Ramallah. He holds an MA in political communications from Goldsmiths University in London and possesses expertise across sectors, driving positive change. The views expressed in this opinion article are those of the author.