



Major Issues: Christian Zionism



Millions of Christians in the United States see supporting the modern State of Israel as a religious responsibility. This religious commitment reinforces the general American attitude of support for the State of Israel over and against Palestinians. A [Gallup poll](#) in 2013 found that, in the United States, 64% of Americans say their sympathies are with Israelis while just 12% are more sympathetic to Palestinians.

Christian Zionism can be defined as “political action, informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now containing Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.” This is the definition offered by ELCA Global Mission staff member Robert Smith in his [recent study on the topic](#). While it is an important topic for understanding how Christian attitudes shape approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Christian Zionism is also a lens for understanding the dynamics of politics and religion from the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation.

Christian Zionism is a Major Concern for Palestinian Christians

Our Palestinian Christian companions are deeply concerned about Christian Zionism. In the [Kairos Palestine](#) document, released in December 2009, the authors appeal to western churches to “revisit theologies that justify crimes perpetrated against our people and the dispossession of the land” (page 3). Additionally, in the confidence that “God is love,” the authors ask their “sister Churches not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustice we suffer, for the sin of the occupation imposed upon us” (page 14).





Long before the Kairos Palestine document, in 2003 Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and now President of the Lutheran World Federation, declared Christian Zionism to be a heresy.

I hereby declare that Christian Zionism is not only a sick theology but it is a heresy, right along with Arianism and Nestorianism and others. I believe it is time we named this misinterpretation of Christ and the gospel for what it is."

ELCJHL Bishop Munib Younan, speaking to a Danish newspaper in 2003

Furthermore, in an ELCJHL newsletter in the same year, Bishop Younan identified three objectionable aspects to Christian Zionism:

- its promotion of Jesus "not as the Savior but as a military general,"
- its treatment of Jewish people simply as "characters . . . in the so-called final battle,"
- it is "anti-justice, anti-peace and anti-reconciliation."

Bishop Younan was one of the four signatories of the [Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism](#), issued in August 2006 by the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem. In May 2007, Bishop Younan published a [major article](#) on the theological and political implications of Christian Zionism in [The Journal of Lutheran Ethics](#). Bishop Younan seeks to proclaim his understanding that "My Jesus is never the Jesus of the sword. My Jesus is the Jesus of the cross."

The Lutheran magazine looks at Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism is an animating force for American attitudes regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The June 2009 issue of The Lutheran contains a set of articles and resources geared toward equipping Lutherans with tools to understand and respond to the movement:

- [Christian Zionism: It challenges our Lutheran commitments](#)
- [Christian Zionism Free Resources](#)
- [How do we respond?](#)
- [Key terms](#)



Lutherans on Christian Zionism

A February 2009 study, [The Religious Beliefs and Practices of Lutheran Lay Leaders in the ELCA](#), done by the ELCA Research and Evaluation Department shows that Lutherans are divided on their perceptions about the theology related to the Holy Land and the biblical understanding of how the State of Israel relates to biblical Israel. (See page 16).

For an additional Lutheran perspective, read "[Toward a Lutheran Response to Christian Zionism](#)" by the Rev. Dr. Smith.

For a critique of rapture theology from a Lutheran pastor and biblical scholar, read [The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation](#), by the Rev. Dr. Barbara Rossing. See also her Bible study for the Presbyterian Church USA, [Journeys Through Revelation: Apocalyptic Hope for Today](#).

National Council of Churches Brochure

The Office of Interfaith Relations at the National Council of Churches produced a brochure entitled "[Why We Should Be Concerned About Christian Zionism](#)." Available in English and Spanish, the brochure gives a quick overview of what Christian Zionism is, why it should concern us and how we can respond.

Resources

In addition to the resources mentioned above:

- [Justice and only Justice](#), Naim Ateek – A look at Palestinian liberation theology
- [With God on Our Side](#) is a DVD with a 7-part discussion guide that is ready made for an Adult Education series at your church.

Act Now

The ELCA is committed to theological reflection and raising awareness about Christian Zionism and its negative effects on our Palestinian Christian sisters and brothers and on peace with justice for Palestine and Israel. Therefore, we ask you to devote time individually and in your congregations to:

- Read and Discuss the Palestine Kairos document to hear the voices of Palestinian Christians;
- Choose one of the additional resources and learn more about it;
- Devote adult education time or special events to learn about Palestinian Christians, Christian Zionism and its effects using the above books, articles or DVD series.
- Consider engaging other churches and/or local synagogues and mosques to learn more about the theologies and realities surrounding Palestine and Israel.
- Contact the Peace not Walls team at (800) 638-3522, Ext. 6466 or peacenotwalls@elca.org for more information and to find speakers and presenters for events.