

# Imperial Occupation Can Never Bring Peace

by Michele Steinberg

On Nov. 21, at a day-long conference of The Palestine Center in Washington, panelists representing a broad spectrum—Republicans, Democrats, Muslims, Jews, and Christians—condemned the Bush Administration’s policies of imperial invasion and occupation of Iraq, and blind, unconditional American support for Ariel Sharon’s war against the Palestinian people. If there was one clear message of the conference, it is that an American Empire can *never* bring either peace or democracy to Iraq, or anywhere else.

The meeting took up a question that is rarely discussed at public conferences in Washington: how a radical, alien ideology called “neo-conservatism,” in league with a fringe religion known as “millennial dispensationalism” (a.k.a. Christian Zionism), have hijacked American foreign policy to launch a religious war against Islam.

“Christian Zionism” was discussed in back-to-back presentations by theologian Donald E. Wagner and Dr. Clifford Kericofe, an adjunct professor at Virginia Military Institute. Christian Zionism was not only exposed in theological terms as a decidedly *non-Christian* belief structure, but a challenge on it was delivered clearly to traditionalists in the Republican Party.

“The Republican Party must come to its senses, and moderate Republican leaders must insist on changes in the Bush Administration,” said Kericofe, who had spent years on Capitol Hill as a senior aide to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. That requires “principally, the elimination of Christian Zionist and neo-conservative influence on our Nation’s foreign policy.” American foreign policy must promote peace and justice, he said, “through international cooperation and the rule of law, not the rule of force. We must insist on a just solution to the Palestine question, and we must insist on a halt to our own neo-imperial occupation of Iraq.”

The pernicious effect on U.S. policy of the neo-con coup that has taken over the Bush Presidency was well-documented by Don Wagner, who was the co-founder, in 1986, of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, and has led campaigns for Palesinian Human Rights for the last two decades. Wagner, who holds degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary and McCormick Theological Seminary, says that the Christian Zionists are a heresy, and actually reject the teachings of Jesus Christ that emphasize love of fellow man. Instead, they are bigoted and wrap their hatred of Islam in a religious excuse—that Islam is “the Anti-Christ.”

Christian Zionism is actually the parallel to the Wahabi extremists of Saudi Arabia, and other brands of “radical Islam,” which the neo-cons are so fond of denouncing, said Wagner. In this belief structure, the only thing that matters is the State of Israel, which they consider the *literal* fulfillment of prophecy, and which is necessary to bring about the End Times through an Apocalyptic war. To this end, they relish Israel as a war state, and insist it is a violation of the Bible that a Palestinian state exist on “the land of Israel.”

Wagner illustrated the zealotry by showing an excerpt of an Oct., 2002 segment of CBS-TV’s 60 Minutes, where at a conference in Israel, the Christian Zionists adulated Sharon, their guest speaker. They treat Sharon as a “rock star,” said Wagner.

But the history of Christian Zionism, going back to its originator, John Nelson Darby, a defrocked Anglican priest who was deployed to the United States between 1859 and 1872 for evangelizing tours, shows that it is nothing more than the tool of a 150 year-long imperial design, originating with the British Empire. That empire policy, the speakers showed, is thoroughly “anti-American.”

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## ‘Christian Zionism: A Foreign Policy Challenge’

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*Following are excerpts from Dr. Kericofe’s speech.*

“Owing to the Bush Administration’s preventive war with Iraq, and failure to constructively address the Palestine Question, confidence in America has collapsed in the Arab and Muslim world, not to mention Europe.

“In my view, the ‘passionate attachment’ of American Christian Zionists to the moderate State of Israel, and their inveterate antipathy toward the Arab and Muslim world, impairs the United States’ capacity to properly defend our national interest. Christian Zionist influence in the Executive Branch, and in the Congress, poses a serious challenge to the formulation and implementation of American foreign policy.

“The Bush Administration’s reckless foreign policy in the Middle East—preventive war against Iraq, blank check for Zionist expansion, and crusade against the Arab and Muslim world—is not the result of any ‘intelligence failure.’ Rather, it is the result of a national policy failure . . . a direct result of the actions of politicians and their advisors in the Executive Branch and in Congress who are under the influence of the Zionist lobbies, ‘Christian’ and Jewish alike.” Kericofe described three aspects of Christian Zionism”: as a “tool of Imperialism”; its connection to the Israeli right-wing; and the Republican Party.

“The use of Christian Zionist support to promote imperial policy in the Middle East is nothing new. In fact, the technique was developed in early Victorian England by Lord Palmerston. President Bush’s neo-imperial policy today parallels the old British imperial policy of Lord Palmerston.

“Back in 1839 and 1840, Palmerston, as Foreign Secretary, devised a Middle East policy for the British Empire that promoted a Jewish entity in historic Palestine linked to the Ottoman Empire as a counterweight to Egypt and Russia.

“Today, taking a page from Palmerston, Bush’s neo-conservative advisors call for a U.S.-Israel-Turkey axis in the Middle East. Their policy of active destabilization of the Arab world, cloaked under calls for ‘democratization’ and ‘modernization,’ is designed to tighten the U.S.-Israel-Turkey axis. . . .

“Now let’s take a look at the situation in recent years. Christian Zionist ideology is aggressively promoted by ‘fundamentalists’ who are politically allied to the most militant extremist elements of the Israeli political spectrum. . . . [These allies include] a range of the extreme right Messianic Jewish circles in Israel including the *Gush Emunim*, the ‘Settlers’ movement’ (which aggressively seizes Palestinian territory, declaring it part of ‘Greater Israel’), and the old-line Jabotinsky right-wing nationalists of Begin’s Herut Party.”

Kericofe recounted that in February 1985, the first National Prayer Breakfast for Israel was organized by the Christian Zionist lobby. It was addressed by Benjamin Netanyahu, then the Israeli Ambassador to the United States.

In August 1985 . . . the first International Christian Zionist Congress was held in Basel, Switzerland. . . . The meeting was held, symbolically, in the same hall Theodor Herzl used for his own first Zionist Congress at the end of the 19th Century.

“The 1985 Christian Zionist Congress in Basel declared ‘that Judaea and Samaria are . . . and by Biblical right . . . ought to be part of Israel.’ The Congress also called for the censure and punishment of ‘any incidents of anti-Semitism in any form, including anti-Zionism and anti-Israel activity.’

“Several weeks ago . . . Israeli Tourism Minister Benny Elon, who is linked to the most extreme elements in Israeli society such as the Moledet party, made a special trip to the United States to interface with key Christian Zionist circles. In Memphis, Tennessee, he met with the well-known evangelical leader Ed McAteer, and a number of key Christian Zionist leaders McAteer had organized for the visit. . . . The Elon-McAteer political partnership plays a key role in lining up Christian Zionist support in the United States for the extremist proponents of Greater Israel in Congress and in the Executive Branch.”

“Any doubt about the pervasive influence of Christian Zionist ideology in the U.S. Congress was erased by the former leader of the Republican Party in the House of Representatives. On May 1, 2002, Texas Congressman Richard Armey, on national television, bluntly told MSNBC talk show host Chris Mathews that he supported the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Israeli-occupied Palestine.

“Dick Armey’s protégé, and now House Majority Leader Tom DeLay openly espouses Christian Zionist ideology using such coded terms as ‘Judaea and Samaria’ to describe a portion of today’s occupied Palestine. Speaking to the Israeli

Knesset on July 30 of this year, DeLay emphasized that ‘The common destiny of the United States and Israel is not an artificial alliance dictated by our leaders.’ DeLay was reportedly hosted by the ‘Christian Embassy’ on his visit.

“Christian Zionist influence over Republican Congressmen and Senators has reached such a level that Republicans in Congress routinely introduce and vote for inflammatory, irresponsible resolutions and bills opposed to U.S. national interests and security requirements in the Middle East. The recent passage of the “Syria Accountability Act” is a case in point. Activity relating to Sudan is another example.”

“Quite simply, we as a Nation must return to our traditional principles of foreign policy. We must begin to rebuild our international position on the basis of ‘good faith and justice toward all nations, to use George Washington’s phrase.

“The Republican Party must come to its senses, and moderate Republican leaders must insist on changes in the Bush Administration. . . . Principally, the elimination of Christian Zionist and neo-conservative influence on our Nation’s foreign policy. All persons of good will—who oppose the extremist policies of the Christian Zionists and neo-conservatives—can work together on a broad front. We must support a non-partisan foreign policy that promotes peace and justice in today’s world through international cooperation and the rule of law, not the rule of force. We must insist on a just solution to the Palestine Question, and we must halt our own neo-imperial occupation of Iraq.”

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