



Zionism, Christianity, and the Plight of Gaza

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SYNOPSIS

Events in Gaza prompt a sober analysis of the factors enabling the dehumanisation of a group of people. This includes a renewed reckoning with the ideology of Zionism, especially its right-wing component, and its (in)compatibility with equality and justice for all persons. At the same time, some Christian groups have also advanced their own interpretations of the Bible and the way forward in Gaza.

COMMENTARY

With a sense that we are witnessing something of historical significance, it is fitting to begin with an assessment of the situation in Gaza. Conditions are somewhat opaque because Israel does not allow international media into Gaza. Still, it has been estimated, independently of the Gaza Ministry of Health, that between October 2023 and January 2025, there were [approximately 84,000 deaths](#) resulting from the Israeli military assault on Gaza. More than half of those were women, children, and the elderly. By now, we can reasonably expect the number of casualties to be much higher.

The International Order

Mass suffering has happened, and continues to happen, elsewhere. Still, one astonishing thing that appears to set the Gaza crisis apart is the apparent complicity of states that claim to be beacons of democracy. The late twentieth and early twenty-first century claim of global and middle powers to uphold a liberal democratic order underpinned by respect for international law, including humanitarian law, seems to have finally lost all credibility.

As a driver of [radicalisation](#) and political violence, the atrocities in Gaza may prove to be unmatched, and this will affect not only Muslims. We must also ask why there are

states which show such disregard for the human lives lost in Gaza. For some, the volume of media coverage of the suffering of Palestinians at the hands of Israel prompts “whataboutism” to deflect the issue, but it lacks humanity and compassion. There is little doubt that we are witnessing both war crimes and crimes against humanity on a massive scale. There have been grave violations of international law as most educated individuals can see.

The Historical Context

It is important to [recognise the history](#) of persecution that shapes the Israeli national psyche and the role that the Holocaust has played in informing the conduct of Israel’s American and European allies. An understanding of this history helps us to comprehend why, despite opinion polls showing rapidly [diminishing support](#) for Israel from abroad, the Israeli public still largely supports its government’s actions in Gaza.

This context does not justify Israel’s conduct and is just a small part of a bigger picture. But evidently, the failure to take seriously the history and rights of the Palestinian people has contributed to their dehumanisation with awful consequences.

Zionism

For those for whom the idea of a state for Jews seemed entirely reasonable – a place of self-determination and protection from oppression – the events in Gaza have prompted a re-assessment of the impact of at least some strains of Zionist thought.

Criticism of Zionism has been labelled as antisemitic, meaning anti-Jewish, partly because Zionism is widespread among Jews and covers a broad spectrum, including even liberal Zionists who are [critical](#) of Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians.

Antisemitism remains a genuine problem, and Jews are currently even more vulnerable. However, we must also recognise that allegations of antisemitism have been increasingly used to silence criticism of Israel, as some critics of the [IHRA \(International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance\) definition](#) foresaw.

Given the events in Gaza, we ought to question any ideology which may enable or permit such destruction of life and infrastructure. With regard to Zionism, if we can agree that all people in a state ought to enjoy the same rights regardless of race or religion, then the ideal of a religio- or ethnostate of any variety must give us pause. Israel is no exception to this principle.

There are legal privileges for religious or racial groups in the constitutions of many states worldwide, and history as well as ethics have taught us to reject or be sceptical of those tending towards unjust outcomes. Of course, justifications for such differential treatment have been made, which may be agreeable where affirmative policies are needed to uplift marginalised groups.

In the case of Israel, self-determination for the Jewish people has come at the expense of the Palestinian people. This is not to question Israel’s right to exist; apart from anything else, Israel, as a nuclear-armed state, has the power to ensure its own existence. But even Palestinian citizens of Israel do [not enjoy genuine equality](#) with

their Jewish countrymen. This is evident in the land allocation policy, among other issues. The situation in the West Bank is worse, with ongoing disposessions of Palestinian lands unhindered by the state, and the plight of those in Gaza speaks for itself.

Apologists for the conduct of Israel in Gaza must reckon with the continuing tragedy and should also interrogate the ideologies which have been informing that conduct. Israeli ministers from the Religious Zionism party and the Otzma Yehudit party have been [sanctioned](#) for inciting violence against Palestinians, and they appear to have done so within a framework of Jewish supremacy. These politicians have advocated for the complete Israeli takeover of Gaza and the West Bank, in flagrant disregard for international law.

The views of such Israeli ministers may not be from the mainstream, but they influence public opinion in and out of Israel.

The Christian Right

There are some diplomats and officials who use the antiquated language of “[Judea and Samaria](#)” to refer to the West Bank. This betrays an under-appreciated factor in the support for Israel emanating especially from the United States, which is the influence of Christian right-wingers.

Fundamentalist Christians in particular, but also many other Christians too, have repeatedly tried to interpret events depicted in the New Testament’s Book of Revelation as contemporary events, especially the apocalyptic narratives concerning Israel.

Theological interpretations of the significance of Israel may be quite different for right-wing Jews and right-wing Christians. Still, in any case, to understand the support for Israel, the role of right-wing Christians should not be ignored, as they have also been an influential voice. The tragedy of Gaza prompts a reckoning with right-wing Zionism and Christian theological dogma. Practically, urgent action must be undertaken by all having the ability to do something concrete on a humanitarian basis to stop the killing of civilians in Gaza.

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