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ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL
VOLUME 2, NO. 1, SPRING 2014, PP. 26-43.

Published by:
Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project,
Center for Race and Gender, University of California, Berkeley.

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“Violent Islam is true Islam.”

This statement by Walid Shoebat (2010: 137) encapsulates a view of Islam which is commonly presented by leaders of American Christian Zionism, a subsection of American evangelical Christianity which emphasizes unwavering support for the nation of Israel. Reflecting the Orientalist tendency of constructing degrading monolithic caricatures of Islam and Muslims, these leaders construct essentialist depictions which play a powerful role in shaping Christian Zionist laypeople’s conceptions of Muslims in general and Palestinian Muslims in particular. Seeking to gauge Christian Zionism’s place within the landscape of American evangelical Christianity, it is difficult to determine the actual number of Christian Zionists in the United States. Shortly before his death in 2007, Christian Zionist pastor Jerry Falwell claimed that this figure exceeded 100 million, but Norton Mezvinsky claims that the number in 2009 was probably in the range of 50-60 million (2010: 41-42). Although Falwell’s amount was most likely exaggerated, Mezvinsky’s estimate demonstrates a significant Christian Zionist presence in the United States, and therefore a large number of Americans who are regularly exposed to anti-Islamic discourse which can strongly affect their views about Palestinians.

A major emphasis in Christian Zionist teaching is eschatological, focusing on future events. Despite variations in the specific details of what exactly will transpire, a fundamental Christian Zionist belief is that Jesus will take his true believers into heaven during the rapture and will subsequently return to earth, but only after Israel, especially Jerusalem, is completely under Jewish control and contains a majority Jewish population. Palestinians are the adversary, since their presence and influence in the region must be greatly diminished, if not obliterated, for the desired eschatological events to occur. Presenting this apocalyptic view, Christian Zionist leaders provide their congregations and readers with a sense of personal purpose, as their choice to support Israel rather than Palestinians takes on cosmic importance, advancing these eschatological events. Moreover, negative portrayals of Palestinians function importantly within Christian Zionist eschatology in order to uphold foundational tenets regarding the justice of God. Constructing Palestinians as irremediably prone to violence and other forms of evil, Christian Zionist leaders suggest there would be no reason to question the belief that God will destroy them in the end times. Albeit directly responsible for the annihilation of a multitude of Palestinians, God is exonerated in Christian Zionist eyes.

Instead of examining the eschatological element of American Christian Zionism, however, I will concentrate instead on a major facet of this movement which emphasizes the present rather than the future. I will explore Christian Zionist leaders’ use of the biblical verse Genesis 12:3, “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse”

(NIV). For these leaders, God's words to Abraham are God's words to 21st century Americans, who will experience dire consequences if they curse rather than bless the nation of Israel. I will examine the use of this verse within what I call the American Christian Zionist "Genesis 12:3 narrative," drawing particular attention to its Islamophobic discourse. This narrative is grounded in fear, raising the specter of imminent catastrophe if American Christians do not respond to the warning of Genesis 12:3 and pledge unconditional support for Israel against the threat of purportedly fundamentally evil, violent Islam. Especially because of its basis in fear, this narrative can exert a powerful influence upon the way in which Christian Zionist laypeople view Palestinians, leading these Christian Zionists to oppose their land claims, to fail to recognize their human dignity, and to justify violence against them.

Pastor of 19,000-member Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, John Hagee is one of American Christian Zionism's chief Genesis 12:3 narrators. Hagee started "A Night to Honor Israel" in 1981, responding to what he viewed as unjust world condemnation of Israel after its bombing of a nuclear reactor in Iraq. According to his *In Defense of Israel*, at his first "A Night to Honor Israel" Hagee declared, "Israel, you are not alone; Christians support you, and America supports you. We love you, and we shall stand by you," and since 1981 this event "has given encouragement, inspiration, and comfort to people who often felt alone. A Night to Honor Israel has also raised millions of dollars to support charities and resettlement of world Jewry in Israel" (2007: vii-viii). Indeed this financial support has been abundant, with John Hagee Ministries donating \$8 million to Israel in 2007 alone for immigration and other assistance. Hagee's Global Evangelism Television has broadcast programs worldwide on 150 stations, and his books amass a large number of readers, such as his *Jerusalem Countdown*, which has sold over 800,000 copies. Hagee has also shaped American foreign policy decisions, especially through Christians United for Israel (CUFI), which he began in 2006. Stephen Spector writes that CUFI features a network of activists who "flood Capitol Hill with e-mails, faxes, and phone calls on issues of immediate concern to the Jewish state" (2008: 168). In CUFI's first lobbying effort, in July 2006, over 3400 Christian Zionists from all 50 states came to Washington, DC and participated in 280 meetings with congressional representatives, and on the day of the CUFI banquet the House of Representatives passed a strongly pro-Israel resolution by a vote of 410 to 8 (Spector 2008: 169).

In addition to Hagee, ideas of three other prominent Christian Zionist leaders will be highlighted in this article. Michael Evans is the founder of the Jerusalem Prayer Team, whose members have included Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Franklin Graham, and other well-known pastors, as well as major political figures such as U.S. Representative Dick Armey and former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Evans's books proudly display his receipt of the Ambassador Award from the Israeli government and his advisory positions to many prime ministers of Israel and mayors of Jerusalem. Though not as connected politically or prolific of an author as Hagee or Evans, pastor Chuck Missler has nonetheless shaped the worldview of numerous Christian Zionists through his daily Christian radio program 66/44 and his Internet ministry Koinonia House, which claims to bring "the world into focus through the lens of Bible prophecy" (www.khouse.org). Missler encourages readers of his book *Prophecy 20/20* to sign up for a weekly eNewsletter which summarizes "which parts of the news are Biblically relevant" (2006: 261). Finally, Walid Shoebat has achieved popularity through books he has authored or co-authored and even more so through appearances on conservative media outlets such as the Fox News Channel. Although the *Jerusalem Post* and other sources have challenged the veracity of his claim,

Shoebat describes himself as a former Palestinian Muslim terrorist, thereby purportedly giving him a former insider's view to substantiate virulently anti-Islamic remarks, such as his assertion in *God's War on Terror* that "it is with absolute sobriety that I declare that this book will establish the fact that Islam is the religion of the Antichrist" (2010: 25).

While analysis of these four leaders' presentation of the Genesis 12:3 narrative forms the core of this article, I will first discuss another narrative with significant similarities. Like the Genesis 12:3 narrative, what I label the "19th century narrative" is also shaped by American interest in the Middle East and is also rife with degrading essentialist depictions of Islam and its Palestinian followers. Furthermore, this narrative promotes a denial of Palestinian possession of land and dehumanization of Palestinians, similar to the Genesis 12:3 narrative. Importantly, however, the 19th century narrative does not involve justification of violence against Palestinians. This difference is the major reason for examining the 19th century narrative in this article, as I seek to highlight that the Genesis 12:3 narrative's basis in fear, a disposition not emphasized in the 19th century narrative, leads not only to denial of possession of land and dehumanization but also to justifying and even calling for violent actions against Palestinians. Thus the presence of fear within degrading constructions of Islam and Muslims can have especially deleterious effects, creating a climate in which violence against Muslims may be exonerated and desired.

19TH CENTURY ISLAMOPHOBIA

The 19th Century Narrative

Contrary to the Genesis 12:3 narrative's basis in fear, the 19th century narrative is grounded in confidence, embodying the notion of American exceptionalism. America's potency and vitality are on the rise, exemplified in this narrative by America's newfound influence in the Middle East and by America's putatively clear superiority to Islam and its Palestinian followers, portrayed as essentially evil, ignorant occupiers of the mythical Holy Land. Prominent within this narrative is the metaphor of America as the "new Israel," specially blessed and chosen by God for a unique providential mission, similar to the biblical people of Israel. Rooted in America's colonial past, especially among the Puritans of New England, this metaphor implies that just like the freeing of the Israelites from Egypt, emigrants to America were led by God out of bondage in Europe to a glorious promised land, where colonists and early Americans viewed their lives as typological reflections of the biblical Israelites. Although the "new Israel" metaphor continued to influence American self-definition throughout the 19th century, a notable development occurred regarding its connotation, as many Americans focused not only on their own nation as the second Israel but also on the actual, physical land of biblical Israel due both to newly acquired commercial, diplomatic, and military connections in the Middle East as well as to increasing religious fervor amidst the Second Great Awakening (Sha'ban 1991: 149). John Davis discusses this new American emphasis, writing, "As the second chosen people, they assumed it only natural that they should 'inherit' the land of the first favored race" (1996: 37). As a result, many Americans traveled to Palestine, with some establishing permanent settlements in the region.

A more complete examination of the 19th century American connection with Palestine would consider a variety of aspects such as the Palestine Exploration Society, dedicated to strengthening Christian faith and biblical understanding through the study of Holy Land geography, or Palestine Park on the shores of Chautauqua Lake in New York, a

popular destination with topographical landmarks, buildings, and actors which sought to provide an “authentic” Holy Land experience. My focus, however, will be upon statements from 19th century Americans who traveled to Palestine. Throughout their letters, memoirs, books, and sermons, these Americans venerated what they commonly called the “Holy Land.” William Cowper Prime extols this land because of its seemingly incontrovertible proof of the veracity of the Bible. Prime declares, “Every step that I advanced on the soil of Palestine offered some new and startling evidence of the truth of the sacred story. Every hour we were exclaiming that the history must be true, so perfect was the proof before our eyes. The Bible was a new book, faith in which now seems to have passed into actual sight, and every page of its record shone out with new, and a thousand-fold increased lustre” (1857: 314). For well-known Presbyterian minister Thomas De Witt Talmage, Jerusalem is especially praiseworthy because it is the city of heaven, unique among all cities in the world. He exclaims, “O Jerusalem! O Jerusalem! Greatest city on earth, and type of the city celestial. After I have been ten thousand years in heaven, the memory of that first view from the rocks on the afternoon of December 2nd, will be as vivid as now” (1893: 35).

Importantly, such encomiums were shaped by idealized pictures created within travelers’ minds prior to arrival in Palestine. Talmage reports, “All my life I have heard of Palestine and I had read about it, and talked about it, and preached about it, and sung about it, and prayed about it, and dreamed about it until my expectations were piled up into something like Himalayan proportions” (1893: 7). Travelers retained these romanticized conceptions in their minds despite the fact that what they actually encountered often diverged sharply from these images. Jonathan Sarna writes that the symbolism of the Holy Land was far more important to these Americans “than was the reality. Indeed, those who visited the Holy Land were sometimes disappointed. The Holy Land that existed in their mind’s eye was inevitably far more appealing than the Holy Land they later beheld” (1986: 346). Like Talmage, however, this reality did not cause American travelers to jettison their idealized view of the Holy Land, as Gershon Greenberg describes in commenting on Prime’s *Tent Life in the Holy Land*. According to Greenberg, although the images which were solidified within Prime’s mind in America “conflicted with the reality he encountered in the Holy Land,” he overcame this tension “by transcending his own reality and immersing himself totally in Scriptural drama” (1986: 356). Other American travelers did the same, steadfastly embracing their idealized images of the Holy Land no matter what they actually encountered during their Palestinian sojourn.

Although these travelers continually glorified the Holy Land, this attitude was not extended towards those who inhabited this land. American travelers commonly exhibited a sense of superiority over, and often disdain for, Palestinians, especially because of their Islamic faith. Like the Genesis 12:3 narrative, the 19th century narrative presents Islam in strongly unfavorable essentialist terms. To a large extent this negative appraisal of Islam arose out of pre-existing American sentiments towards Islam and Muslims. Noting that many Americans in the late 18th century were exposed to biographies which depicted Muhammad as the founder of an evil religion as well as to reports which described atrocities faced by Americans during warfare with North African pirates, Douglas Little remarks, “The revolutionary statesmen who invented America in the quarter-century after 1776 regarded the Muslim world, beset by oriental despotism, economic squalor, and intellectual stultification, as the antithesis of the republicanism to which they had pledged their sacred honor” (2002: 12). Building on this perspective, the 19th century narrative emphasizes the themes of violence, indulgence, and ignorance when portraying Islam and Muslim inhabitants of Palestine.

An inextricable link between Islam and violence appears in this narrative. In his description of “Mohammedans,” traveler J.V.C. Smith declares, “The conceived infraction of a single law that emanates from the Koran rouses them to fury; and the first thought is, to slaughter those who have dared to frown or ridicule upon the sacred institutions of Moslemism” (1852: 330). Henry Harris Jessup also connects Islam fundamentally with violence, professing, “Whenever Islam holds the sword it uses it for the oppression and humiliation of all infidels” (1879: 34). In addition to violence, the theme of sinful indulgence appears frequently in travelers’ descriptions of Islam. Smith asserts, “Morals are certainly at a low-water mark in every country where Mohammedanism is in the ascendant; consequently in Palestine and throughout Syria, the sins most abhorrent and abominable are as common as the instincts of its followers are depraved and beastly” (1852: 118-119), and elsewhere he claims that “Mohammedanism ... permits and regulates indulgences in such a way to satisfy the deceived believer that he is piously doing his duty, while gratifying the selfish and low propensities of his nature” (1852: 330). Another example of the association of Islam with indulgence comes from *Earthly Footsteps*, a book of photographs of various Palestinian sites. The caption for a photograph called “Military Mosque, Damascus” reads as follows: “Mohammedanism is thought by many who have studied it well to be but organized sensualism. Its subjects move languidly from the harem to the bath and from the bath to the mosque” (Davis 1996: 87). Furthermore, according to the 19th century narrative, Islam is also characterized by ignorance. Citing a newspaper article which alleged that Muhammad intentionally sought to keep Muslims in “abject ignorance,”¹ Sha’ban states that many 19th century Americans believed that Muhammad tried to perpetuate the ignorance of Muslims by preventing the advancement of science and education (1991: 37). Reflecting this mindset, Jessup declares that Islam is “in direct conflict” with modern civilization, and in “the conflict between civilization and barbarism Islam must be the loser” (1879: 94). Similarly, Talmage recalls the difficulty he faced while attempting to land ashore in Palestine, proclaiming, “Mohammedanism is against easy wharves, against steamers, against rail-trains, against printing-presses, against civilization. ... ‘Leave those rocks where they are,’ practically cries the Turkish Government: ‘we want no people of other religions and other habits to land there; ... away with your nineteenth century, with its free thought and its modern inventions’” (1893: 9-10). Comparing what they saw in Palestine with American customs and institutions, Talmage and other travelers found the former to be grossly inferior to the latter. While influenced by the notion of American exceptionalism, this judgment was simultaneously shaped by a belief in the supposedly corrosive effect of Islam.

Products of the 19th Century Narrative: Denial of Palestinian Land Possession and Dehumanization of Palestinians

Because of this alleged violence, indulgence, and ignorance, many travelers believed that Muslims were unworthy of living in the Holy Land. Edward L. Wilson laments that near the Sea of Galilee he encountered “repulsive” peasants, stating, “Not a ‘good Samaritan’ of the old school is discoverable in the whole posse of them. They are entirely out of harmony with the character of the land” (1890: 265). Corresponding with this idea that Palestinians were woefully beneath the grandeur of the Holy Land was a belief that Americans instead were truly entitled to this territory. An American magazine writer in 1855 boasted, “We know far more about the land of the Jews than the degraded Arabs who hold it” (Davis 1996: 5).² Harboring such a conviction, American travelers believed that they, not the actual inhabitants, had an authentic claim to the Holy Land. According to Sha’ban, Palestinian

natives were viewed as “deluded intruders in a land which the American traveler considered his own possession” (1991: 132), and Davis writes that “Americans became convinced that the Palestinian landscape was (or should be) unconditionally ‘available’ to them” (1996: 48). Davis illustrates this mindset by quoting William M. Thomson, who avers that although the Holy Land was given to the patriarchs, “I mean to make it mine from Dan to Beersheba before I leave it” (1880: 24). Consistent with this presumption, some travelers conceived of Palestine as their true home. J. F. Packard declares, “You come to the Holy Land with something of the feeling that you come to your home. Somehow you always belonged here” (1880: 316). The 19th century narrative promoted the mindset that Americans, not Palestinians, genuinely belonged in the Holy Land. Cast as an unwanted people in the place where they lived, Palestinians were regarded as alien occupiers of an idealized land to which violent, indulgent, ignorant followers of Islam had no legitimate claim.

Framed in this manner, the 19th century narrative also promoted a lack of recognition of Palestinians’ humanity. To an extent this involved virtually rendering Palestinians invisible. Burke Long writes that 19th century American travelers attempted to “skim the dross and extract the purely biblical, the ‘real’ Holy Land, from its distasteful contemporary trappings” (2003: 96), exhibiting the tendency to ignore the existence of Palestinians in order to ensure that their presence would not tarnish travelers’ idealized conceptions of the Holy Land. What appears to have been far more common, however, as shown in preceding paragraphs, was for travelers to acknowledge Palestinians’ existence but to disparage it and cast it as an affront to American interests in Palestine, especially because of the avowedly evil nature of Islam, the religion followed by most Palestinians. This mindset was demonstrated at times through travelers expressing antipathy towards local Muslims. Sha’ban reports that many travelers were denied entry into holy sites in Jerusalem, which “aroused feelings of resentment and called forth expressions of hatred against the Muslem population,” as these travelers protested “against this Muslem ‘intrusion’ on ‘their’ rights” (1991: 134). Travelers may have acknowledged Palestinians’ existence, but they were nonetheless loath to do so, viewing Palestinians not as people with whom they shared human dignity but rather as followers of a malignant religion who were rivals in their quest to possess the Holy Land. Importantly, however, this dehumanization and sense of rivalry did not translate into expressions of justifying and desiring violence against Palestinians. While it cannot be ruled out definitively that travelers may have held such a desire, it does not appear in their writings. For these travelers, Palestinians may have been repugnant rivals to American interests, but they were not threats to American security and survival. Seen through the lens of the Genesis 12:3 narrative, on the other hand, Palestinians are exactly such a threat and therefore may need to be exterminated.

AMERICAN CHRISTIAN ZIONIST ISLAMOPHOBIA

The Essentialist Construction of Islam

Similar to 19th century travelers, American Christian Zionist leaders connect Islam categorically with violence. Hagee announces, “Islam not only *condones* violence; it *commands* it. A tree is known by its fruit, and the fruit produced by Islam is fourteen hundred years of violence and bloodshed around the world” (2007: 68). In order to support such an allegation, Hagee remarks that the Qur’an requires the amputation of a hand or foot of someone who resists Islam, saying, “In America, cutting off someone’s hand or feet because he would not accept your religion is unthinkable – but the Islamic Bible commands it”

(2006: 32). Christian Zionist leaders are especially apprehensive about the presence of an alternate message concerning Islam, namely that it is a religion of peace, and so they attempt to refute this idea. Shoebat writes, “Imagine how I feel as a former Muslim to hear some ignorant Western commentator tell me that Islam means ‘peace.’ Yeah, and someday a unicorn riding on a cotton candy rainbow will come and take us all to Michael Jackson’s Neverland where we will all live together in unity” (2010: 26). Additionally, Christian Zionist leaders challenge the notion that Islamic terrorism is an aberration in relation to mainstream Islam. Hagee declares that “Islamic terrorists are not *fanatics* – but *devout followers of Muhammad* who are following his example and doing what their Islamic Bible teaches them to do” (2006: 33). Mirroring this belief, Shoebat maintains that Islamic terrorists “are indeed behaving in an Islamic way. They are behaving like Mohammed and his successors. While it is often said that the terrorists have hijacked Islam, in reality the so-called moderate Muslims are trying to change the true teachings of Islam.” (2010: 137).

Within this theme of violence, the concept of jihad generates substantial discussion from Christian Zionist leaders, who assert that violent jihad is mandatory for all Muslims. According to Evans, the Qur’an requires “the waging of *jihad*, or holy war, against all non-Muslims. As holy war was an integral part of Islam at its onset, so it remains to this day. ... According to Islamic law, *jihad* will never cease – it will last to the Day of Judgment” (2003: 48). Missler agrees that violent jihad is binding upon every Muslim regardless of time or place. Conspicuously demonstrating a timeless essentialist construction of Islam, Missler proclaims, “Since its inception, *jihad* has been waged by Islamic warriors to spread their religion of violence and hatred. Islam does not change: examine any of the countries in which Islam is in control” (2006: 148). Of the four Christian Zionist leaders discussed in this article, Shoebat devotes the greatest attention to the concept of jihad. Claiming privileged personal knowledge as an alleged former Muslim terrorist, Shoebat disputes the ideas that Muslims consider jihad primarily to signify an internal spiritual struggle rather than a call to violence and that Muslims condone jihad as an act of violence only in the case of defense. Shoebat protests, “When Western Muslims claim that the various verses that speak about Jihad are only about ‘overcoming adversity of injustice,’ they are serving up afresh the kool-aid of Jim Jones fame. What is so sad, however, is to see so many Westerners gobble up this poisonous nonsense down” (2010: 110), and elsewhere he declares:

The concept of Jihad in Islam is to literally attack unbelievers for the purpose of converting them to Islam, ‘by persuasion or by force,’ ‘even when they have not started it.’ This is quite clear; Mohammed and then his successors ... all attacked the surrounding nations offensively to spread Islam. These were not defensive wars. They were offensive wars whose goal was to force the victims to submit to Allah or be ‘crushed,’ plain and simple. So what part of ‘Jihad,’ ‘fight,’ or ‘kill’ do Westerners not understand? (2010: 104)

Citing numerous Qur’anic verses, Shoebat insists that jihad, specifically in the form of a violent offensive campaign to bring non-Muslims to Islamic faith, is an obligation for all Muslims in the past, present, and future.

According to Christian Zionist leaders, this mandate for offensive violent jihad galvanizes Muslims’ determination to achieve world domination, so that every inhabitant of every nation will follow Islam. Missler states, “The intractable goal of Islam is the subjugation of the entire world. It intrepidly aspires to the forceful elimination of all non-Muslims” (2006: 147). Missler links this aspiration with teachings of the Qur’an, which he

describes as “a warrior code committed to global conquest – by the sword, if necessary” (2006: 144). Hagee evinces a similar view of the Qur’an, claiming that it requires Muslim nations to fight against any non-Muslim nation, no matter how powerful, in order to advance the cause of Muslim domination of the world (2006: 36). Shoebat also has much to say about world domination, declaring, for example, that the “eventual conquest and complete Islamization of the earth is as natural an expectation for most Muslims as the rising of the sun. Muslims have a sense of entitlement, feeling as if world domination is simply their destiny” (2010: 449). Because of their monomaniacal focus on world domination, Muslims allow themselves to commit all sorts of atrocities according to Christian Zionist leaders. Missler proclaims, “The Western mind cannot grasp the ethic that *anything* that advances the cause of Islam is to be extolled: murder, lies, deceit, etc.” (2006: 149). Muslims are constructed as the personification of evil, not only condoning but celebrating sinful, violent actions.

While a desire for world domination is presented as an essential component of Islam, of even greater relevance for the Genesis 12:3 narrative is the assertion that this desire focuses intensely upon the nation of Israel. Christian Zionist leaders emphasize that Muslims throughout the world are wholeheartedly committed to Israel’s obliteration. Claiming that Muhammad dreamed of Islamic world domination, Hagee warns, “The first step in fulfilling Muhammad’s dream is the destruction of Israel” (2006: 42). Missler magnifies this threat by declaring that one of Islam’s “primary goals” is to:

wipe Israel and the Jews off the map. ... This legacy of hate that focuses on the Jews – and includes the Christians – has always been the obsession of Islam, and this clearly identifies it as satanic. Islam’s agenda is the same as that of the Pharaoh who slaughtered the babies in the book of Exodus; Haman’s attempts in the days of Esther; Hitler’s pursuit of the ‘final solution’; and it will continue with the final world leader pursuit at Armageddon. (2006: 148)

An argument which Christian Zionist leaders commonly express is that Muslims are consumed by a longing for Israel’s annihilation because the veracity of the Qur’an would be undermined if Israel is not destroyed. Hagee writes, “Islam believes the prophet Muhammad taught absolute truth – that it is God’s (Allah’s) will for them to rule the earth. Therefore, if Islam does not defeat Israel, Muhammad and the Quran were wrong – and that’s absolutely unthinkable. Therefore, they must defeat Israel. ... If Israel survives, then Islamic theology is not true” (2006: 35). Shoebat offers this argument as well, concluding that “Allah is not God” for Muslims if Israel continues to exist (2010: 38). According to Christian Zionist leaders, the stakes could not be higher for Muslims to seek the destruction of Israel, since the foundations of their religion would irreparably crumble if this destruction does not transpire.

The Genesis 12:3 Narrative

Importantly, these leaders maintain that the stakes are just as high for Americans, because their nation too may be destroyed if they do not support Israel against Palestinians. Based on their exposition of Genesis 12:3, these leaders exhort congregations and readers to support Israel and therefore receive God’s blessings instead of God’s curses. According to Hagee, the “Word could not be plainer: if you want the blessing of God upon your life, you must *bless* Israel, not *curse* it with hatred, persecution, and murder” (2006: 63-64). Hagee

quotes Genesis 12:3 and declares, “Entire books could be written on how that blessing and cursing have dramatically impacted human history. It is an undeniable fact that the man or the nation that has blessed Israel has been blessed of God, and to the man or the nation that cursed Israel the judgment of God came in spades” (2007: 111). Hagee follows this quotation with numerous biblical stories, seeking to demonstrate an irrefutable pattern of God’s blessings upon those who have assisted the people of Israel and God’s curses upon those who have harmed them in some manner. Christian Zionist leaders contend that this pattern is just as certain during any time period as it was during biblical times. Shoebat writes, “What was promised to Abraham, ‘I will curse those who curse you and bless those who bless you’ still stands. It has no expiration date” (2010: 52). It is noteworthy that Shoebat reverses the order of the words in Genesis 12:3, placing the idea of cursing before blessing, since like other Christian Zionist leaders he warns of curses more frequently than speaking of God’s blessings. Shoebat tells his readers that God’s commitment to curse those who harm the people of Israel is “a proven law with much historical evidence that no logical man can deny. Nothing could be more self-fulfilling” (2010: 52), and he exemplifies this claim by citing numerous historical examples including the death of Hitler. Significantly, Christian Zionist leaders proclaim that America is currently receiving such curses from God. Evans makes the startling statement that there is “absolutely no question that God’s hedge of protection was lifted from America. September 11 was a curse on our beloved nation, but worse is the fact that most Americans don’t understand why it happened. I believe it will happen again, and again and again, and much worse, if Americans do not wake up to the truth” (2005: 14). Thus the Genesis 12:3 narrative proposes the following message: As demonstrated categorically by biblical examples and by recent history, America must support Israel lest an event even more devastating than September 11 will occur.

Intrinsic to this message is also the idea that whether or not Americans support Israel is a choice characterized by urgency. Christian Zionist leaders profess the omnipotence and sovereignty of God, yet these divine attributes are not believed to preclude God from giving humans the responsibility to make choices which could have tremendous historical consequences. Noting biblical precedents such as God’s desire to allow Abraham to intercede for inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah before these cities’ destruction, Evans writes, “While many may think that the fulfillment of biblical prophecy is a sovereign act of God, the Scriptures themselves indicate that we can choose to be on the blessing or cursing side of prophecy” (2005: 29). Not all Americans, however, are capable of making this choice according to Christian Zionist leaders. In the context of quoting Genesis 12:3, Evans declares, “God-fearing Americans must stand up now before it is too late” (2005: 212), since they alone are equipped to make the requisite choice for the sake of America as a whole.

Considering the urgency of this choice, the Genesis 12:3 narrative especially emphasizes kairoic time, in which the present is accentuated as a moment in history when American Christians must make an existential decision bearing incalculable significance. Evans declares, “There has never been a more urgent time for Americans to act with moral clarity than today, yet there has also never been a time in which we have seemed more duplicitous. The future of our nation, as well as our world, hangs in the balance between our action and our apathy” (2005: 20-21). Hagee also displays this kairoic dimension of time, uttering, “America is at the crossroads! Will we believe and obey the Word of God concerning Israel, or will we continue to equivocate and sympathize with Israel’s enemies?” (2006: 193). Constructing Islam, the religion of most Palestinians, as essentially evil and violent, Christian Zionist leaders seek to make this choice extremely obvious, as if there were

no need whatsoever to even question the position that the United States should support Israel rather than its malignant Palestinian “enemies.”

A Product of the Genesis 12:3 Narrative: Denial of Palestinian Land Possession

Christian Zionist leaders aim to provide no doubt that American Christians must choose to support Israel. Recognizing the vagueness of this directive, however, the question must be raised regarding what exactly this support might entail. Victoria Clark addresses this question, quoting Genesis 12:3 and then stating that “blessing” Israel has involved many Christian Zionists “in opposing any peace process, in supporting the continued building of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, in funding those internationally outlawed settlements and in backing an extreme right-wing Israeli plan to ‘transfer’ the Palestinians to neighbouring Arab states” (2007: 12). Most prominently, Christian Zionist leaders have demanded that the United States must not urge Israel to give up any land or sign peace treaties with Palestinian authorities. According to these leaders, God promised the land of Israel to the Jewish people not only for biblical times but forever. Hagee asserts that “God gave the Jewish people the land of Israel by divine covenant. (See Genesis 15:17-21; 17:7-8.) That covenant is a blood covenant; it is eternal and unbreakable” (2007: 53), and he references numerous biblical passages to maintain that the creation of the nation of Israel in 1948 was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy (2006: 35). In addition to claiming that Israel has a divine mandate for the land it currently possesses, Christian Zionist leaders assert that Palestinians have no right to any land, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Hagee writes that Palestinians have no right to the land of Israel, because it was given to Abraham’s descendants through the lineage of Isaac rather than Ishmael, the “father of Arabs” who “was excluded from the title deed to the land in Genesis 17:19-21” (2006: 196). Hagee also maintains he has historical support for his position, stating:

The land of Israel has never belonged to Palestinians. Never! It was labeled Palaestina by the Roman emperor Hadrian in A.D. 130, but there has never been a land called Palestine. There is no Palestinian language. Before 1948, the people now called Palestinians lived in Egypt. They lived in Syria. They lived in Iraq. They moved into the land of Israel when they were displaced by the war of 1948, which the Arab nations started, but Israel is not occupying territory these people now call home. Referring to Israel as ‘occupied territory’ is propaganda. (2007: 58-59)

Missler challenges Palestinian possession of land with a similar argument, declaring that “there has never been a country of Palestine ruled by Palestinians” (2006: 130). For Christian Zionist leaders, Israel has no reason to relinquish any land and must not do so since this would violate the will of God.

These leaders proclaim that the United States will experience dire consequences if it plays a role in Israeli loss of land. Hagee declares that any nation “that forces Israel to ‘divide the land’ will come under the swift and certain judgment of God” (2007: 53-54), a fate which he portends for the United States if it asks Israel to withdraw from territory or enter into treaties with Palestinians. In order to prevent this scenario, Hagee implores his readers to place pressure on members of American government, saying, “Every Christian in America has a biblical mandate to stand in absolute solidarity with Israel and demand that our leaders in Washington stop recommending Israel’s withdrawal as the solution to every conflict that arises in the Middle East” (2007: 53-54). Furthermore, Christian Zionist leaders especially

warn against American involvement in land deals linked to peace treaties with Palestinians, because followers of Islam allegedly can never be trusted to uphold their terms of a treaty. Shoebat contends, “To the Muslim mind, treaties are not binding agreements, but rather opportunities to grow stronger while buying time or to appear peaceful while preparing for war. But make no mistake; making peace treaties with the infidels simply for the sake of peace is never the ultimate goal. The only goal of Islam is victory over the whole world” (2010: 120). Missler turns to the beginning of Islamic history to illustrate this allegation, claiming that Muhammad made a peace treaty with his own tribe, the Quraysh, but then violated the treaty and killed his fellow tribesmen after gaining military strength two years later. According to Missler, this event “is not just historical incident: it is *celebrated* to this day” (2006: 149). Because of this purported Islamic attitude towards treaties, Shoebat admonishes his readers not to adopt misguided optimism about Palestinian involvement in peace agreements, announcing, “This is 1938 all over again” (2010: 456). Raising the fearful specter of Hitler and his scorning of attempts to effect peace, Shoebat suggests that tragedy of Holocaust-like proportions will result if Americans trust Palestinians to faithfully uphold any treaty with Israel.

Consistent with their application of Genesis 12:3, Christian Zionist leaders emphasize that such a tragedy may affect not only Israel but the United States as well if America pressures Israel to give up land or enter into treaty agreements with Palestinian authorities. Hagee declares, “America is very vulnerable to terrorist attacks in the future, whose consequences could be much more severe than the three thousand lives lost on 9/11. This is not a time to provoke God and defy Him to pour our His judgment on our nation for being a principal force in the division of the land of Israel” (2006: 194). Reflecting its enormous importance for Christian Zionists, Jerusalem appears especially prominently in these warnings, as Christian Zionist leaders condemn any plan to divide the city. Evans proclaims that the “nations that divided Jerusalem will be cursed beyond their ability to comprehend. If that happens, no amount of prayer or repentance will reverse the curse on that nation” (2005: 167). Evans then focuses specifically on the United States, warning, “If America divides Jerusalem, there will be no forgiveness. America will tragically end up on the ash heap of history” (2005: 167). Conjuring images of the events of September 11, Christian Zionist leaders encourage their congregations and readers to imagine the occurrence of something much more cataclysmic if they do not actively oppose the division of Israel, especially Jerusalem.

A Product of the Genesis 12:3 Narrative: Dehumanization of Palestinians

Occasionally Christian Zionist leaders refer explicitly to Palestinians in order to claim they are not an actual people group. Hagee makes this position extremely clear, stating that “the Palestinians have *never* existed as an autonomous society” (2007: 176). For Missler, Palestinian identity is not simply called into question; it is expressly denied and transferred to Jewish inhabitants of Israel. He writes that the “Jewish people are the real Palestinians. They have a documented three-thousand-year history in that land” (2006: 130). Such statements which explicitly deny Palestinians’ existence as a people group can powerfully affect Christian Zionist laypeople’s conception of Palestinians. What is not as readily apparent, however, is that this conception may also be dramatically shaped by the implicit treatment of Palestinians inherent within the Genesis 12:3 narrative. For the most part, throughout this narrative Palestinians are an unnamed people, subsumed under the reified label “Islam.” In addition to obfuscating the fact that not all Palestinians are Muslims, this tendency to discuss

“Islam” rather than “Palestinians” may effectively make Palestinians invisible in the Genesis 12:3 narrative, similar to the writings of 19th century travelers. While the humanity of Americans and Jewish inhabitants of Israel takes center stage in the Genesis 12:3 narrative, since their existence hangs perilously in the balance due to potential imminent destruction, the humanity of Palestinians is not brought to light.

Melani McAlister draws attention to an analogous phenomenon in the *Left Behind* series, a set of novels and movies which achieved tremendous popularity among Christian Zionists during the 1990s and first decade of the 21st century. Noting that no Palestinian Arabs play a role in the series even though much of its action takes place in or near Jerusalem, McAlister concludes that Palestinians “are simply outside the representational possibilities of the *Left Behind* world. Dick Arme’s suggestion that the Palestinians should be removed from the West Bank and Gaza, and Pat Robertson’s insistence that Israel should never compromise one bit of land, are enacted within the novels as wish fulfillment: there is no Palestinian problem on the evangelical map” (2003: 791-792). Similar to the *Left Behind* series, the Genesis 12:3 narrative tends to remove Palestinians from Christian Zionist consciousness, maintaining its focus on reified Islam instead. Concentrating on Islam rather than Palestinians befits post-September 11 America, since Christian Zionist leaders build upon widespread associations between Islam and violence to augment the sense of impending threat they desire to create. As a result, not only does Islam become more sinister in the minds of Christian Zionists, but the existence of Palestinians continues to remain in the background, if acknowledged at all.

Furthermore, for those Christian Zionist laypeople who encounter the Genesis 12:3 narrative and nonetheless recognize Palestinians’ existence, the Genesis 12:3 narrative promotes an additional dehumanizing effect, namely an inability to recognize the human dignity of Palestinians. Due to the Genesis 12:3 narrative’s thoroughly unfavorable depiction of Islam, Palestinian Muslims are implicitly cast as essentially violent and evil, lacking human dignity. Moreover, they are implicitly presented as absolute foils to Jewish inhabitants of Israel. As illustrated by Hagee, Christian Zionist leaders regularly proclaim that “the religious beliefs of Islam and Israel remain in total opposition to each other” (2006: 42). Lauding the virtue of Jewish inhabitants of Israel while simultaneously denigrating Palestinians, Shoebat declares, “Jews love peace. In fact, when I speak at Jewish events I always quote Golda Meir: ‘We will have peace when the Arabs love their children more than they hate us.’ Their faces shine at such a phrase, they love Golda’s wisdom” (2010: 100). Hagee also extols Jewish inhabitants of Israel in distinction to their Muslim neighbors, insisting that the Israeli system of government, crafted by Jews, stands alone as a regional exemplar. According to Hagee, Israel “is the only true democracy in the Middle East. It is an island in a sea of radical Muslims screaming for the death of every *infidel* (non-Muslim)” (2007: 174).

Employing this Manichean mindset, the Genesis 12:3 narrative dehumanizes Palestinian Muslims. As Charles Strozier and Katharine Boyd argue, this type of dualistic thought causes one to “see others in very partial terms – as part-objects,” so that one loses “the ability to imagine the inner world and humanity of others” (2010: 14), especially of those characterized on the nefarious side of this dualism. Reflecting upon Edward Said’s analysis of Orientalism, Douglas Little asserts that such bifurcated understanding concerning Israel and Palestinians promotes the mindset that Palestinians “represent ‘terrorism’ and little beyond it” (1993: 260-261). Inhibited from imagining the inner world of Palestinians, viewing them uniformly as terrorists and adherents of a malevolent religion, Christian Zionists who encounter the Genesis 12:3 narrative are conditioned to disregard Palestinians’ human dignity. While this potential effect should not be deemed inevitable, as if all Christian

Zionists will inexorably adopt such a mindset due to the Genesis 12:3 narrative, its possibility to become actualized must be acknowledged. As I will discuss in the following section, such acknowledgement is especially important because whereas Christian Zionists are exhorted to devote their energy, prayers, and resources to rescuing the Jews of Israel as well as themselves from imminent destruction, lack of regard for Palestinians' human dignity may manifest itself in Christian Zionists desiring Palestinians' destruction.

A Product of the Genesis 12:3 Narrative: Justification of Violence against Palestinians

As numerous authors have addressed, when one group fails to recognize the humanity of another, a desire for and justification of violence against this other group may readily ensue. James Waller presents what he calls the "psychological construction of the other," arguing that people are much more likely to kill others if they are conceived as fundamentally dissimilar from oneself (2007). Amin Maalouf considers the tendency to believe, once dichotomized categories of us and them have been constructed, that "[w]hatever happens 'the others' will have deserved it" (2001: 27). Roderick Hart also discusses this matter, proposing that every community identifies an "uncommunity," a group which has "mindfully chosen a course different from our own and pursued it with abandon." According to Hart, "By invoking the uncommunity – graphically, athletically – society's leaders get us to take risks we otherwise would not take. They make us see the Other in his full depravity, and they embolden us as a result" (2008: xxv). This boldness may take the form of violence against the other community, which the perpetrators and their allies condone since the victims are viewed as wicked beings who deserve these actions.

Such approval of violence against Palestinians can be linked to the Genesis 12:3 narrative, as demonstrated by the staunch advocacy of Israeli military action against Palestinians which is expressed by all four Christian Zionist leaders discussed in this article. Hagee proclaims, "It's time, as friends, for us to say, 'Israel, we stand with you – and enough is enough! You have the right to attack your terrorist enemies just as America has the right to attack ours!'" (2007: 82). Evans insists that "America will have to allow Israel to fight their war against terrorism that has never been fought" (2005: 9), and Missler declares that "Israel has the God-given right to defend itself against terrorism" (2006: 135). Additionally, Shoebat entreats readers to support what he identifies as a divinely ordained Israeli "war on terror" against Palestinians (2010: 52). Even though these leaders may not endorse direct American military action against Palestinians, similar to Evans's call in his 2003 *Beyond Iraq* for American preemptive strikes against Iraq, they nonetheless clearly desire for violent actions to be carried out against Palestinians by Israeli forces.

Importantly, two tendencies of Christian Zionist leaders may lead laypeople to uncritically accept these leaders' ideas, thereby increasing the likelihood for laypeople to justify and desire acts of violence against Palestinians. First, Christian Zionist leaders commonly present an ethos of unique personal authority, which seeks to negate any doubt regarding the veracity of their claims. Remarkably similar to comments made by Evans, Hagee boasts, "I have been going to Israel regularly since 1978 and over the years have developed a network of highly qualified and strategically placed confidential sources that have a very clear and certain focus on critical geopolitical developments in Israel and the Middle East" (2006: 13). Shoebat is especially noteworthy in this regard, as he regularly emphasizes his status as "a former Palestinian terrorist" to generate a sense of definitive personal authority. In *God's War on Terror*, he tells readers that they:

will find an extensive course on the subject of Islam as predicted in the Bible. I will provide you with a fresh understanding of Biblical prophecy from an Eastern perspective and insight into the Bible as viewed by an ex-Muslim terrorist. I realize that these are not the greatest qualifications, particularly because I am not even a seminary graduate – but neither were many of Jesus’ disciples. He chose Paul, a terrorist against Christians, and He transformed him into one of the greatest Christian ambassadors that has ever lived. Like Paul, I persecuted God’s people, and like Christ, I was born in the same village as the King of Kings. (2010: 23)

Placing himself in such mythic proportions, Shoebat aims to create an aura of authority similar to what his readers would attribute to the Bible. Second, uncritical acceptance of Christian Zionist leaders’ ideas may result from their tendency to impute divine mandate upon their narrative, as if obedience to God requires acceptance of whatever they say. In order to accentuate this sense of divine mandate, Christian Zionist leaders occasionally contend that the events which they describe are not a matter of politics, which is ultimately a human affair, but rather of divine providence. Evans proclaims, “The Scriptures call on us to speak out. The battle being fought over Jerusalem is not politics – it’s prophecy. It’s not a foreign policy battle, but a heavenly battle!” (2005: 145). Along these lines Evans recounts his role in a 1981 meeting with American president Ronald Reagan’s staff and American generals and admirals regarding the sale of military planes to Saudi Arabia, a proposal which Evans identified as contrary to God’s will. In response to being asked, “What does God know about foreign policy?” Evans exclaimed, “He is foreign policy!” (2005: 15). This type of assertion seeks to quash disagreement and doubt, suggesting there is no need to even consider alternative viewpoints since God has already settled the matter.

While these two tendencies may play a significant role in stimulating a desire by Christian Zionist laypeople for violence against Palestinians, the sense of fear created by the Genesis 12:3 narrative plays an even greater role. Unlike the 19th century narrative, which was grounded in American confidence, the Genesis 12:3 narrative, with its threat of cataclysmic American destruction, promotes a desire to prevent this destruction through acts of violence. Such eagerness for violence in response to a sense of threat is characteristic of a contemporary American attitude towards fear, highlighted by Peter Stearns. For 20th and 21st century Americans, fear is “unacceptable, an emotion that, if it cannot be prevented, legitimizes both lament and retaliation” (2006: 114). Arguing that they have been socialized to overreact to fear “from a combination of inexperience, learned resentment, and a quest for reassurance,” Stearns states that contemporary Americans “respond to fear as a highly individual emotional affront ... which someone, somehow should both punish and assuage” (2006: 114). With the Genesis 12:3 narrative identifying Islam and its Palestinian followers as an ominous threat to Israel and therefore to America, Christian Zionists may respond to this perceived threat with a longing to punish it. In addition to this contemporary American attitude towards fear, a feature of the Genesis 12:3 narrative itself connects this narrative with a desire for violent actions against Palestinians. As J. Robert Cox explains, the likelihood of committing and justifying acts of violence against another group increases greatly when this group is considered to be a threat against something viewed as irreparable. Cox argues that in such situations “actors may feel justified in going to extreme lengths to block or forestall the loss of something rare, precious, or unique. ... [T]he locus of the irreparable may be said to warrant ‘extraordinary’ measures – actions which go beyond the usual, customary, or what most people would approve” (1998: 152). Emphasizing the presence of imminent danger to Israel and the United States, nations depicted by Christian

Zionist leaders as “rare, precious, or unique,” the Genesis 12:3 narrative can easily spur Christian Zionist laypeople to approve of “extraordinary measures” of violence against Palestinians, since they are held responsible for this threat to the irreparable. Thus the advocacy of military action against Palestinians becomes no longer merely the desire of a few Christian Zionist leaders but a shared conviction held by a substantial number of Christian Zionist laypeople.

CONCLUSION

According to philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, authentic communication involves dialogue, a “game of giving and taking” (1977: 56) between a self and another which leads to the enrichment of that self through what is disclosed in the dialogue. Absorbed in the back and forth movement of dialogue, one gains new insight into one’s existence in the world as well as that of others. Crucial to this process is openness to another person or a text through asking questions, which allows one to be addressed and influenced by something other. Gadamer writes, “To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled” (1975: 326), thereby necessitating the asking of more questions. For Gadamer, dialogue features an ongoing interplay of questions and answers which call for new questions to be posed, enabling someone and another person or text to come to mutual understanding. This understanding is continually provisional, however; Gadamer’s conception of dialogue is an open-ended process which does not seek total comprehension but rather pushes for ever greater understanding.

Contrary to Gadamer’s model of dialogue, the mindset undergirding the Genesis 12:3 narrative does not welcome open-ended questioning and provisional understanding. Answers are already settled in this dichotomized good vs. evil worldview which shuns any acknowledgement of ambiguity in Israeli-Palestinian relations. Jason Bivins states that this type of worldview is endemic to a “religion of fear,” which “asks us to see not only political life but human existence as fixed and settled; it contends that a single, irrevocable choice (us or them, in or out, identity or a self adrift) can serve as a surrogate for the messy indeterminacy of public life. ... The religion of fear has slowly constructed a frame through which public life is seen in terms of conflict rather than cooperation and dialogue” (2008: 233-234). While “conflict” may arguably be an appropriate label to characterize contemporary Israeli-Palestinian relations, the fear-based mindset infusing the Genesis 12:3 narrative effectively obstructs Christian Zionists from even considering this relationship as an opportunity for cooperation and dialogue rather than an insoluble conflict. Furthermore, within this mindset, cooperation and dialogue with Palestinians are viewed as preposterous since they are antithetical to the binary thought in which this mentality finds security.

As Stuart Croft points out in his analysis of the American “war on terror,” when the enemy is viewed as “evil,” this enemy “cannot be accommodated, it can only be destroyed” (2006: 104). Considering Christian Zionist leaders’ intolerance to accommodate the Palestinian “enemy” through cooperation and dialogue, a desire for their destruction may very well be seen as the only viable option. In his 2002 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, former American president Jimmy Carter proclaimed, “The bond of our common humanity is stronger than the divisiveness of our fears.” Christian Zionist leaders may be correct that American Christians face an urgent choice. However, instead of the decision whether or not to support Israel as presented by the Genesis 12:3 narrative, the more

pressing decision appears to be whether to embrace the fear-conquering mentality outlined by Carter or the fear-based perspective inherent in this narrative.

ENDNOTES

¹ “Our Arabian Visitors,” *New York Morning Herald*, August 5, 1840.

² “The Dead Sea, Sodom, and Gomorrah,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 10 (1855): 187-93, 187.

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