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RESEARCH PAPER

HOW PALESTINIAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY CONFRONTS

THE FALSE POLITICAL-RELIGIOUS NARRATIVE

EASTERN CHURCHES IN THE FACE OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

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Introduction:

In his seminal study of Christian attitudes toward the State of Israel, Paul Charles Merkley demonstrates that Christian support for Israel was never a broadly shared ecclesiastical position nor a natural extension of the historical Christian tradition. Rather, it is a relatively recent phenomenon that emerged within a specific American political and cultural context after the Second World War. This conclusion is fundamental to understanding the distinction between the Eastern churches and Christian Zionism, as it strips the latter of any claim to representing Christianity as a whole and re-situates it within its narrow historical framework, as an expression of an American evangelical current rather than a global ecclesiastical consensus.

Merkley notes that the traditional churches, Catholic and Orthodox alike, approached the establishment of the State of Israel with a high degree of theological and political caution. This caution did not stem from hostility toward Jews, but from a deep historical awareness of the dangers inherent in binding sacred scripture to political sovereignty. The Vatican, for example, refrained for many years from granting official recognition to Israel, not for purely political reasons, but because such recognition would have implicitly entailed acquiescence in a religious reading of the conflict that marginalizes the Christian presence and historical continuity in the Holy Land. As Merkley explains, this position closely parallels the sensitivities articulated by the Eastern churches, even if the language and circumstances differed.

By contrast, Merkley shows that American Christian Zionism arose outside this cautious tradition and developed in an environment that had not historically experienced the consequences of sacralizing power or transforming sacred texts into instruments of governance. Within the American context, the establishment of Israel was framed as a “prophetic event” rather than as a moral or legal question open to

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debate. This shift turned the Israeli state into an object of religious belief rather than a political entity subject to accountability, a transformation that helps explain the profound gap between Christian Zionism and the Eastern churches, which regard the state—any state—as a temporal entity open to critique.

Despite this, the balance of influence within global Christianity was reversed. While the historical churches, including those of the East, continued to adhere to a balanced moral language in addressing the conflict, Christian Zionism succeeded, through its political and media weight in the United States, in imposing itself as the most prominent "Christian voice" on Israeli affairs. This distortion in representation later prompted Palestinian Christian theologians to adopt a more confrontational discourse, in an effort to counter a narrative that had come to be presented globally as the natural expression of Christian faith.

Merkley's thesis also provides a framework for understanding developments within the Eastern churches themselves. Their critique of Zionism did not emerge in a vacuum, but as a response to the dominance of a Western Christian discourse that redefined land, holiness, and history through a closed prophetic lens, while excluding the lived Christian experience in Palestine from the picture. In this sense, Palestinian liberation theology represents an attempt to restore an Eastern voice within a global Christianity that had been reduced to a single American reading.

The Eastern churches have never viewed Christian Zionism as merely a theological disagreement within the Christian family, but rather as a serious deviation in the understanding of sacred scripture and a dangerous slide of religion into the heart of a modern political-colonial project. With the war in Gaza, this position has ceased to be an expression of historical concern or an old intellectual objection, and has instead become a clear and explicit discourse, reflecting a sense that what is unfolding can no longer tolerate theological politeness or moral ambiguity.

By virtue of their geographical and historical origins, the Eastern churches belong to a Christianity that was born in place and never engaged with text in isolation. They did not approach Palestine as a symbolic idea or as a stage for awaiting the end of times, but as a living society shaped by successive peoples, religions, and cultures, in which Christians have been an integral part of the social fabric since the earliest centuries. For this very reason, Christian Zionism, from its emergence in the Anglo-Saxon context, appeared as a reading detached from context, severing sacred text

from history in order to serve the aim of dispossessing a people of their land and transforming it into an abstract promise. Eastern theological traditions have never embraced the notion of "national salvation" that came to dominate certain modern Protestant currents. Christianity in the East evolved within multiple empires and under shifting political systems, without ever linking faith to sovereignty, land, or religious supremacy. Consequently, the literalist reading of Torahic prophecy that tied the establishment of the State of Israel to the return of Christ was not received in the East as a legitimate theological interpretation, but as an arbitrary separation between faith and ethics.

Since the 1970s, the Eastern churches have articulated this rejection in an increasingly organized manner. The 1986 statement issued by the Middle East Council of Churches marked the first clear collective position to place Christian Zionism under explicit theological scrutiny. The statement did not confine itself to criticizing support for occupation; rather, it addressed the core of the idea itself, warning against a theology that grants religious legitimacy to injustice and redefines the divine as a party to a political conflict, rather than as a moral reference for justice on earth.

Subsequently, with the escalation of the First Palestinian Intifada, what may more precisely be termed a "theology of Palestinian experience" began to take shape. In this context, the writings of three Palestinian figures—Naim Ateek, Mitri Raheb, and Munther Isaac—emerged from within a daily reality shaped by occupation, siege, and discrimination. This theology was not a reactive or emotional response to voices that legitimize dispossession, but a coherent reading of the Bible that rejected the reduction of the Old Testament to a political narrative and reaffirmed the ethical and human dimensions of the sacred text. The 2009 Kairos Palestine document constituted a pivotal moment in this trajectory. Its significance lay not only in its content, but also in its language. It did not address the world through the register of grievance, but through the language of faith itself, explicitly describing Christian Zionism as a theology that distorts the message of the Gospel. The document did not seek sympathy; it asserted responsibility and called on Western churches to reassess their relationship to scripture, power, and the other.

The aftermath of the most recent war on Gaza represented a moment of stark moral exposure. Widespread destruction, the targeting of civilians, and the devastation of churches and medical institutions placed the Eastern churches before an ethical

test that could not accommodate silence. Statements issued by the Council of Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in 2023 and 2024 were sharper and more explicit than ever before. Notably, these statements did not separate the humanitarian catastrophe from the intellectual structures that justify it, pointing clearly to the role of certain Western religious readings in creating a political climate that tolerates violence and overlooks catastrophe.

Alongside these historical churches, Palestinian evangelical churches emerged as a distinctive case, confronting Christian Zionism from within the evangelical family itself. This current did not limit itself to political criticism of occupation, but offered a profound theological deconstruction of Western evangelical discourse, exposing the contradiction between claims of faith and the moral justification of violence. The work of Palestinian liberation theologians, together with documents such as Kairos Palestine, marked decisive milestones in transforming this rejection into an organized and influential discourse within global Christianity.

In this context, criticism of Christian Zionism has ceased to be a purely internal theological matter and has become part of a broader discourse on the ethics of war and the limits of using religion in politics. The Eastern churches have argued that Western silence cannot be separated from a long history of sacralizing the conflict, in which Palestinians are reduced to obstacles in a supposed “divine plan,” rather than recognized as human beings with rights, lives, and histories.

Positions articulated by the Vatican, particularly during the pontificate of Pope Francis and later Pope Leo XIV, have added an important moral dimension to this debate. Despite differences between Catholic language and that of evangelical Protestantism, the emphasis on protecting civilians and rejecting the transformation of war into a religious narrative clearly converges with the stance of the Eastern churches. This convergence has provided the Eastern discourse with moral support within global Christianity, without eliminating the deep rift with Christian Zionist currents in the United States.

The World Council of Churches, for its part, reaffirmed after Gaza that the Christian presence in the Middle East is not a historical footnote, but a living witness to the dangers of reducing religion to politics. Its statements and declarations rejected the deliberate conflation of criticism of Israeli policies with antisemitism, a conflation long employed by Christian Zionist currents to silence moral objection. The Eastern

churches maintain that the true danger of Christian Zionism lies not only in its unconditional support for Israel, but in what it does to Christianity itself. It strips faith of its ethical dimension, transforms it into an instrument of political mobilization, and redefines Christ as a witness to violence rather than its critic. In this sense, the struggle with Christian Zionism becomes a struggle over the meaning of Christianity in the modern age, rather than over a single political position.

In the post-Gaza phase, the Eastern churches have begun to move beyond the confines of formal statements. There is a growing awareness of the importance of sustained intellectual engagement through structured theological dialogues, partnerships with churches in the Global South, expanded media presence, and a continuous effort to articulate a Christian narrative of Palestine grounded not in prophecy, but in history and human experience. These efforts are not aimed at winning a swift battle, but at restoring balance to a religious discourse that has long been captured by the logic of power. The stance of the Eastern churches toward Christian Zionism, particularly after Gaza, is no longer a defense of self or of a besieged community, but a defense of the very essence of faith itself. When religion is used to justify killing, opposing such use becomes a theological obligation before it is a political position. This lies at the heart of the contemporary Eastern discourse, which insists that faith cannot serve as false witness to injustice, nor as a partner in reproducing it in the name of God.

This paper does not approach Eastern Christian churches as marginal religious actors in the debate surrounding Palestine and Israel, but rather as one of the central keys to understanding the complex entanglement of theology and politics in the Middle East, particularly in confronting Christian Zionism. These churches are neither migrant communities nor imported theological extensions; they are the product of a long historical process shaped within the very geography over which the conflict unfolds. They have lived through imperial transformations, colonial rule, and the construction of the modern nation-state as witnesses and participants, not as distant observers. From this perspective, the study seeks to develop a precise analytical map of Eastern Christian churches, their diverse positions toward Israel, and their near-universal rejection of Christian Zionism, with particular emphasis on the shifts that have occurred in this stance in the post-Gaza period.

First

Christian Zionism as a theological and political problem:

Why have the Eastern churches found themselves in a position of confrontation?

In discussions surrounding Christian Zionism, the global Christian landscape is often reduced to the dominant American evangelical voice, as if the Eastern churches—with their deep theological, spiritual, and existential roots in the Mashriq—were absent or silent. In reality, this absence is not the absence of a position, but rather the absence of representation within a media and theological space dominated by narratives originating outside the East. The Eastern churches, despite the diversity of their ecclesial families and theological traditions, hold a coherent and deeply rooted position on Christian Zionism—one shaped through centuries of life in the Holy Land and through direct engagement with the meanings of land, humanity, and justice, rather than through readings grounded in abstract prophecy or modern political projections.

At its core, Christian Zionism is a theological-political phenomenon that emerged within the modern Western Protestant context, particularly in nineteenth-century Britain and later in the United States, where dispensational interpretations of scripture intersected with projects of power, colonialism, and hegemony. This phenomenon did not originate in the East, nor did it ever express the theology of churches that have lived in Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt since the earliest centuries of Christianity. On the contrary, the Eastern churches view Christian Zionism as a deviation from historical Christian faith, insofar as it transforms divine promise into a political contract and empties the Gospel message of its salvific and human dimension, in favor of a nationalist and exclusionary reading of sacred scripture.

The Eastern Orthodox churches—Greek, Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian alike—ground their rejection of Christian Zionism in the theology of the Incarnation. The belief that "the Word became flesh" signifies that salvation, after Christ, is no longer bound to a specific land, but to the human person wherever he or she may be. Land, in this understanding, is neither an object of worship nor a locus of salvation, but a space of witness. Accordingly, these churches reject any theology that seeks to "re-sanctify geography" after the Cross and the Resurrection, or that grants a people or a state a permanent divine privilege at the expense of another. From this perspective, the Orthodox churches regard the linkage of the modern State of Israel to literal biblical prophecies as a conflation of salvation history with political history, and of divine revelation with human conflict.

The Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, despite the political and historical complexities of its position, has repeatedly articulated this stance, albeit at times in cautious language. The Orthodox Patriarchate does not adopt a confrontational political discourse, yet its official positions consistently affirm that the Holy Land is sacred to all its inhabitants, and that justice and peace constitute the ethical standard for any political arrangement. This position places it in structural opposition to Christian Zionism, which justifies occupation and settlement as the fulfillment of divine will, while disregarding the Arab Christian presence as a mere "detail" within a larger narrative.

The Eastern Catholic churches, foremost among them the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Eastern Catholic churches in communion with Rome, have

developed a more explicit discourse in their critique of Christian Zionism. This discourse draws on Catholic social theology, which links faith to justice, human rights, and the dignity of peoples. Vatican documents since the Second Vatican Council have rejected any theological interpretation that legitimizes injustice or exclusion, emphasizing that scripture must be read in the light of the entire Gospel, not through the selective appropriation of texts used to entrench an unjust political reality. From this standpoint, Catholic churches view Christian Zionism as a form of the "politicization of theology" that damages Christian-Jewish relations and undermines the prospects for peace.

Arab evangelical churches, although they formally belong to the Protestant family, occupy a position fundamentally distinct from that of Christian Zionist evangelicals in the West. These churches emerged within an Arab-Palestinian context and developed in confrontation with colonialism rather than under its protection. As a result, many of their leaders have, since the 1970s, articulated an explicit critique of Christian Zionism, viewing it as a theology alien to Eastern traditions and to the message of Christ. This critique reached its apex with the emergence of Palestinian liberation theology, articulated by Christian thinkers and clergy who identified Christian Zionism as a form of "colonial theology" that sacralizes power and disregards the suffering of the oppressed.

The Eastern position on Christian Zionism may be distilled into three interrelated principles. First, the rejection of transforming the Bible into a political program. Second, the affirmation of the centrality of the human person and justice within Christian faith. Third, the defense of the plural character of the Holy Land and the right of all its inhabitants to live in dignity. These principles are not improvised slogans, but an extension of an Eastern theological tradition that understands Christianity as a universal message of salvation, not a project of religious or national domination. From this perspective, examining the stance of the Eastern churches toward Christian Zionism is not a marginal addition to the literature on the conflict, but a key entry point for understanding the deep divisions within contemporary Christianity itself. It reveals a struggle between a theology that sanctifies power and a theology that sanctifies the human person; between a reading of scripture used to justify reality and a reading employed to hold it accountable. In this struggle, the Eastern churches, with the weight of their history, suffering, and witness, stand firmly on the side of a faith that refuses to allow religious belief to serve as a cover for injustice or the Gospel as a pretext for war.

The American context

The emergence of Christian Zionism in the American public sphere was not an isolated religious development, but the product of the convergence of three major dynamics: a selective literalist reading of biblical texts, the rise of a conservative evangelical current within American society, and Israel's transformation into a fixed pillar of United States political and security strategy after the Second World War. This convergence endowed religious discourse with a direct political character and turned belief into a tool of electoral mobilization and institutional pressure, enabling its impact to extend beyond the United States and into the Middle East itself.

From the perspective of churches in the Middle East, the primary danger has not been religious sympathy for Israel per se, but the conversion of a political conflict into closed theological interpretations. Christian Zionism does not merely support the policies of a modern state; it grounds that support in an interpretive framework that treats the establishment of Israel and its control over Palestinian land as part of a "divine plan" immune to political or moral scrutiny. In this sense, occupation is placed outside history, and Palestinian suffering is stripped of moral significance, reduced to a "detail" within what may be described as a cosmic salvation scenario.

This transformation places the Eastern churches before an existential dilemma. They are churches that emerged and developed within a historical context that understands Christianity as a message of ethical and human salvation, not a project of territorial control. They also inhabit the very space that Christian Zionism reduces to an abstract symbol, and they experience daily the consequences of this religious instrumentalization of politics: restrictions on movement, attacks on church property, threats to the Christian demographic presence, and the transformation of Jerusalem from a city of multiple identities into a closed arena of religious conflict.

The problem, therefore, is not limited to political outcomes, but extends to the redefinition of Christianity itself. Christian Zionism advances a theological model that shifts the center of gravity from the Gospel's message of love, justice, and reconciliation to a narrative built on "exclusive election," "national chosenness," and the "inevitability of confrontation." The Eastern churches view

this model as a dangerous slide toward sacralizing violence and reproducing Old Testament logic outside its historical and theological context, in ways that contradict the essence of the New Testament.

Accordingly, churches in the Middle East have not treated Christian Zionism as a legitimate theological difference within global Christianity, but as a structural distortion of Christian faith when it is invoked to justify the denial of another people's rights. This position is not the product of abstract academic theorizing, but the cumulative outcome of a long historical experience with colonialism, followed by the establishment of the State of Israel, and then by the transformation of Western support for Israel into an institutionalized commitment, at times grounded in a religious discourse that marginalizes the local Christian presence itself.

Moreover, the Eastern churches recognized early on that Christian Zionism does not marginalize Muslims alone; it also sidelines Arab Christians, treating them as a "historical anomaly" in a land that some seek to reduce to a Jewish–American evangelical binary. In this context, defending the Palestinian Muslim becomes, indirectly, a defense of the Palestinian Christian, and defending Christian presence becomes a defense of a broader conception of human justice that transcends religious affiliation.

Second

The American roots of Christian Zionism:

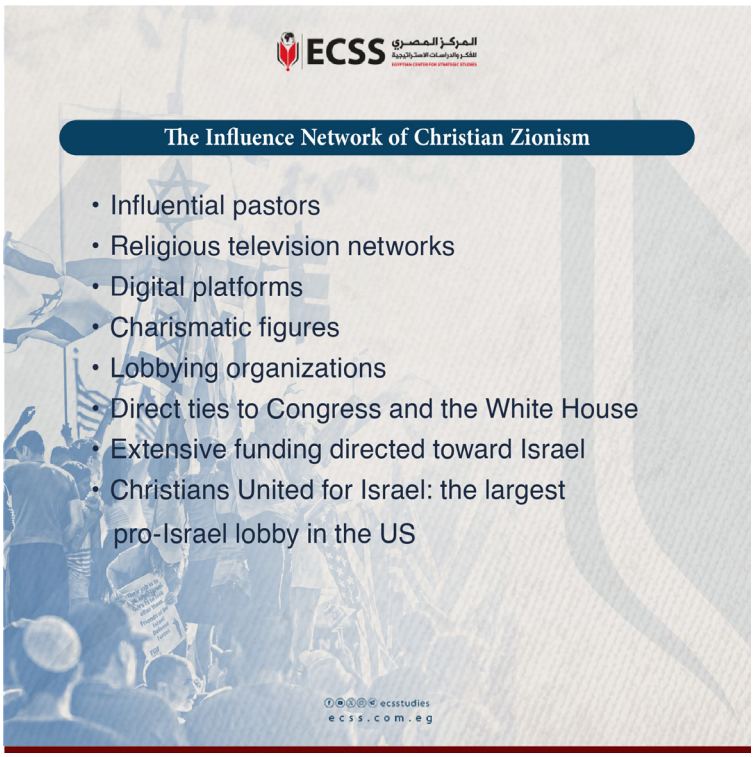
From a marginal theological reading to a political pressure force

To understand why churches in the Middle East perceive Christian Zionism as a genuine threat, it is insufficient to describe it merely as a "conservative religious current" in the United States. What matters more is tracing how it evolved from a narrowly circulated theological interpretation into an institutionalized structure of political influence, capable of exerting direct impact on decisions of war and peace, recognition, and funding in the Middle East. In its early roots, modern Christian Zionism can be traced to an intellectual development within evangelical Protestantism in the nineteenth century, particularly in Britain and later in the United States, with the rise of what came to be known as dispensational theology. This current divided sacred history into distinct divine "dispensations" and held that the return of Jews to Palestine was a prerequisite for fulfilling prophecies related to the end times and the return of Christ. Although these ideas were not dominant within traditional Christianity, they found fertile ground in American Protestant society, which was receptive to a simplified, literalist, and certainty-laden reading of salvation and history.

The decisive turning point came with the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909. This was not merely a translation of the Bible, but a text accompanied by interpretive annotations that presented dispensationalism as an almost authoritative reading of scripture. These annotations, which explicitly linked Torahic prophecy to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, gradually permeated popular church education and, over time, became part of the taken-for-granted religious assumptions of millions of American evangelicals. At this moment, Eastern churches began to realize that their geographic future was being debated and shaped in interpretive manuals taught in seminaries thousands of miles away.

Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, this theology acquired a new dimension. The political event was presented as the "fulfillment of prophecy," rather than as the outcome of a colonial conflict or an international decision. After the 1967 war and the occupation of East Jerusalem, this logic was further reinforced, as Israeli control over Jerusalem came to be framed as a decisive theological moment. At this stage, Christian Zionism was no longer a discourse that merely anticipated deferred prophecy, but a framework for the immediate interpretation of unfolding events, granting it enormous mobilizing power within American society.

The most consequential transformation, however, was not theological alone, but political. Beginning in the 1970s, with the rise of the evangelical right as an organized electoral force, Christian Zionism moved from the church pulpit into electoral campaigns. Figures such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson played a central role in fusing evangelical faith with foreign policy, casting support for Israel as a test of both religious and political loyalty. By the 1990s, such support had become part of the ideological core within the Republican Party.



In this context, the Eastern churches were no longer confronting a religious discourse alone, but a comprehensive network of influence: prominent pastors, religious television networks, lobbying organizations, direct access to Congress and the White House, and substantial financial flows directed toward Israel. The establishment of Christians United for Israel in 2006 represented the culmination of this trajectory, bringing together mobilizing theology and political organization, and presenting itself as the largest pro-Israel lobby in the United States in terms of popular base.

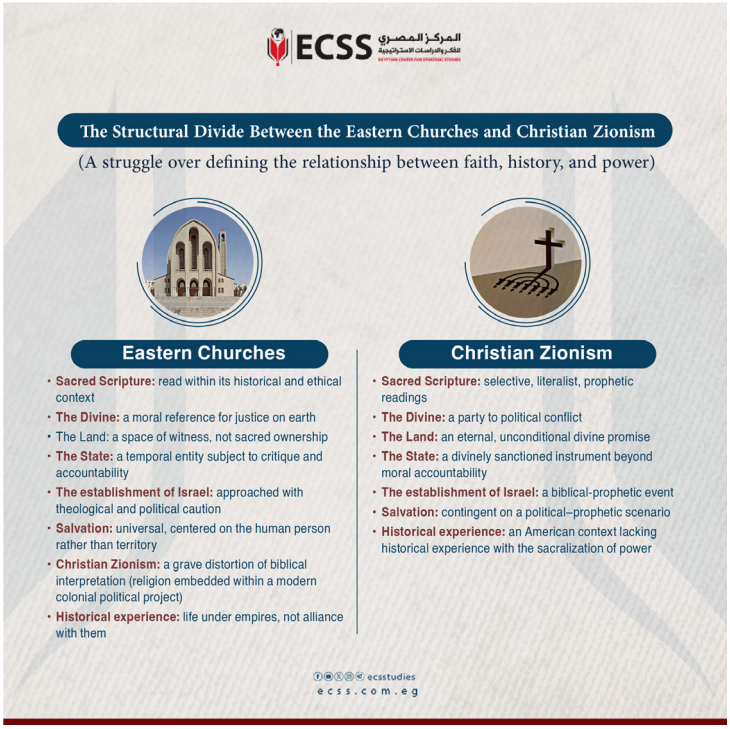
For churches in the Middle East, this transformation was deeply revealing. Christian Zionism was no longer simply an erroneous biblical interpretation that could be addressed through calm theological debate; it had become a direct political actor shaping decisions that affect land, population, Jerusalem, and holy sites. More troubling still, this current spoke in the name of Christians within American politics while effectively excluding Middle Eastern Christians themselves from representation or consideration. Eastern churches also observed that this movement had forged a close alliance with Israel's nationalist and religious right—an alliance grounded in mutual interest rather than genuine theological convergence. While evangelicals viewed Israel as an instrument for fulfilling prophecy, the Israeli right regarded evangelicals as a source of unconditional political and financial support. This pragmatic alliance contributed to hardening Israeli positions and weakening prospects for a just settlement.

It was at this juncture that Eastern ecclesial awareness crystallized around the understanding that the confrontation was not with the United States as a state, nor with Western Christians as such, but with the hijacking of Christian faith in service of a geopolitical project. This realization would later lead to the production of collective ecclesial documents and to addressing Western churches in language that was at times deliberately unsettling, asserting that what is presented as "biblical faith" is, in reality, a modern ideology cloaked in religious language.

Third

The Eastern churches and Christian Zionism:

Breaking down the theological and historical divergences



The disagreement between the Eastern Christian churches and American Christian Zionism is not confined to positions on Israel or to assessments of a particular war. Rather, it reflects a profound divergence in theological imagination and in the understanding of the relationship between sacred text and history, faith and power, land and holiness. It is this structural divergence that explains how two discourses can depart from the same Bible and arrive at radically opposed visions of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

Historically, the Eastern churches took shape within a long imperial context in which the church did not occupy a position of sovereignty or alliance with imperial power, but one of witness, endurance, and adaptation. This historical location left a clear imprint on their theology, binding faith to daily

life and rooted presence rather than to the justification of control over land. As a result, a cautious awareness developed within these churches toward any religious discourse that links holiness to political authority or transforms sacred scripture into a tool for legitimizing domination. From this perspective, the Eastern churches view Zionism not merely as a Jewish nationalist movement, but as a modern model of instrumentalizing religion in the service of an exclusionary project—one they have encountered historically in various forms of imperial rule.

By contrast, American Christian Zionism emerged in a fundamentally different context. It is a direct extension of the settler Protestant experience in the New World, where belief was intertwined from its earliest stages with notions of "chosenness," "blessing," and historical success. Within this framework, land was not understood as an ethical trust, but as a divine gift bestowed upon those who succeed in taking possession of it. This conception paved the way for reading modern Israel as the literal fulfillment of Torahic promise, rather than as a state subject to moral accountability.

This divergence is especially evident in approaches to scripture. Christian Zionism relies on a literalist–prophetic reading that treats the promise of land to the Jews as an eternal and unconditional covenant, unaffected by political conduct or ethical behavior. History, in this view, unfolds as a closed divine script to which the believer must align, not interrogate or morally assess. The Palestinian does not appear as a bearer of rights or history, but as a temporary obstacle on the path to prophetic fulfillment.

In contrast, the Eastern churches approach scripture as a historical and ethical discourse, not as a deed of ownership. In this understanding, the promise of land is inseparable from justice and bound to human conduct. Land loses its sacred meaning when it becomes an instrument of injustice or exclusion. This perspective does not deny Jewish history, but it firmly rejects transforming that history into an open-ended mandate for contemporary political domination. Occupation, regardless of the actor, thus becomes a direct negation of holiness.

Politically, Christian Zionism views the Israeli state as both a religious and strategic ally, and as part of a cosmic struggle between good and evil. This outlook turns military power into evidence of legitimacy and security

superiority into proof of divine favor, leading to the justification of wars as moral necessities or inevitable stages in a sanctified historical process. The Eastern churches, by contrast, operate from a different conception of the state. Any state, without exception, is a temporal human entity subject to accountability and devoid of inherent religious sanctity. Borders are not sacrosanct, and violence cannot be morally justified in the name of faith. This position is deeply rooted in an Eastern Christian tradition that understands the “Kingdom of God” as irreducible to a nation-state, and faith as something realized through justice rather than political domination.

This divergence reaches its apex in differing understandings of the Holy Land itself. In Christian Zionism, the land functions primarily as a stage for future prophecy, its ultimate value lying in its role within an end-times scenario, even at the expense of the people living on it today. For the Eastern churches, the land is a place of life, historical memory, prayer, and burial. Its holiness cannot be understood apart from the dignity of its inhabitants, nor can stone be separated from human existence.

This fundamental difference is starkly reflected in responses to war, particularly in Gaza. While Christian Zionism tends to interpret war through the lenses of security and prophecy, the Eastern churches see it as a moment of moral exposure, in which appeals to divine promise ring hollow amid the destruction of daily life and the crushing of civilians. From this standpoint, the conflict in Eastern ecclesial discourse becomes, above all, a struggle over the meaning of justice before it is a dispute over land.

From the very outset of their engagement in confronting Christian Zionism, churches in the Middle East recognized that the most dangerous aspect of this current lay not only in its unconditional support for Israel, but in its ability to blur concepts in a manner that renders any political or human rights–based criticism indistinguishable from religious hostility or racial hatred. For this reason, a clear conceptual distinction between Judaism, Zionism, and Christian Zionism became an essential prerequisite for any responsible ecclesial discourse, and an ethical safeguard protecting churches from falling into the trap of religious polarization.

By virtue of their long history of coexistence, Eastern churches do not view

Judaism as a "religious enemy." On the contrary, they regard Judaism as a major monotheistic faith and an integral part of the region's religious history; Christianity itself, after all, emerged within a Jewish context. Accordingly, ecclesial documents have repeatedly emphasized that the conflict in Palestine is not a conflict between religions, and that recasting it as a religious confrontation constitutes a deliberate distortion of reality that serves only those who benefit from prolonging the conflict.

Within this framework, the churches have drawn a clear distinction between Judaism as a religion and Zionism as a modern political project that emerged in late nineteenth-century Europe within a nationalist and colonial context, rather than a religious one. This distinction was not merely semantic, but analytical. The churches have stressed that Zionism is not a natural extension of Judaism, and that within Judaism itself there exist religious and intellectual currents that reject Zionism or criticize the policies of the State of Israel. In this sense, criticism of Zionism constitutes a legitimate political position, not an expression of religious animosity.

Christian Zionism, however, is viewed by Eastern churches as a fundamentally different phenomenon, insofar as it represents the politicization of Christianity itself. It does not arise from Jewish concerns or historical Jewish experience, but from an American Christian reading that projects its theological assumptions onto a conflict experienced by others. More troubling still, this current selectively deploys texts from the Old Testament outside their historical and theological contexts, while effectively disregarding the centrality of the New Testament and Christ's teachings on justice, love, and mercy.

This tripartite distinction—between Judaism, Zionism, and Christian Zionism—enabled churches in the Middle East to dismantle the moral blackmail narrative that equates any criticism of Israel with antisemitism. This position is articulated with particular clarity in the Kairos Palestine document, which condemns antisemitism as a moral sin while simultaneously condemning occupation as a political and spiritual sin. The dual condemnation is not a contradiction, but an affirmation that justice is indivisible, and that defending Palestinian rights does not require denying historical Jewish suffering, nor justifying present injustice in its name.

Eastern churches went further by asserting that Christian Zionism harms not only Palestinians, but Jewish–Christian relations themselves. When Jewish identity is reduced to a functional element within a prophetic scenario culminating in war and destruction, interreligious dialogue is stripped of its human substance, and the other is transformed into a means rather than an end. In this sense, rejecting Christian Zionism also constitutes a defense of Jewish dignity as that of persons, not symbols within a violent salvation narrative.

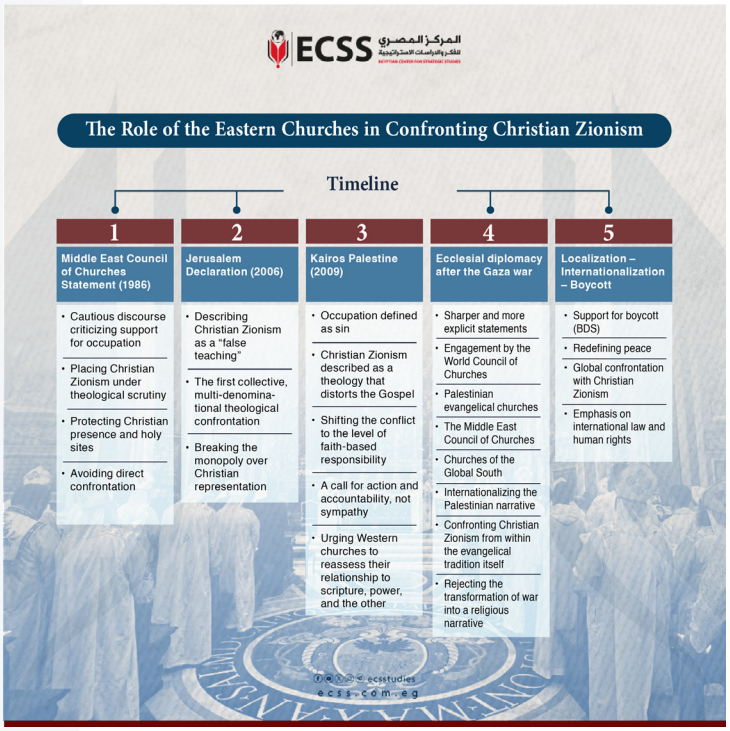
Politically, this distinction enabled churches to address Western public opinion in a rational rather than emotional register. Instead of engaging in sterile religious polemics, ecclesial discourse focused on international law and human rights, while maintaining moral clarity in rejecting all forms of racism, including antisemitism. This approach afforded the churches a measure of credibility within ecumenical and academic circles, even if its impact remained limited within political decision-making arenas.

This path, however, came at a cost. Churches that insisted on maintaining this distinction continued to face media attacks accusing them of politicizing religion or of bias, despite the far more blatant religious politicization practiced by their opponents. Nevertheless, Eastern churches concluded that abandoning this distinction would mean falling into a false binary: either silence or accusations of hatred. They therefore upheld it as a final line of defense for preserving the ethical meaning of Christianity.

Ultimately, this distinction became a practical tool that enabled the churches to sustain confrontation without sliding into hate speech or religious conflict. It also paved the way for the next phase, in which churches moved from conceptual deconstruction toward the formulation of collective positions and foundational documents that institutionalized this distinction and gave it formal ecclesial expression.

Fourth

Churches in the Holy Land and the production of foundational documents



Gaza in particular, are among the oldest Christian communities in the world. Their roots predate the formation of the modern nation-state, and indeed precede any Christian political conception of land and sovereignty. Historically, these churches emerged within shifting imperial frameworks rather than within a religious state, which shaped a practical theology grounded in continuity and witness rather than possession or control. Across centuries of Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, and Ottoman rule, these churches learned that political authority is transient, and that binding faith to power invariably leads to the erosion of the church itself.

After 1948, and again after 1967, this historical legacy confronted a modern settler project that instrumentalized religion to justify assaults on geography. It was in this context that what may be termed a "theology of survival" took shape—one that rejects the sacralization of land or its transformation into a

tool of exclusion. Within this framework, the bombardment of the Church of Saint Porphyrius in Gaza and the targeting of the vicinity of the Holy Family Church were not perceived as isolated incidents, but as extensions of a historical logic these churches know all too well: when the symbol is sanctified, the human being is erased. For this reason, the rejection by local churches of any religious discourse that justified war after Gaza was an existential stance rather than a political one, rooted in a long historical experience with the sacralization of violence.

Until the early years of the twenty-first century, churches in Jerusalem and the Holy Land tended—by virtue of their sensitive position—to adopt what might be described as "silent witness." Church leadership historically prioritized safeguarding Christian presence, administering endowments and holy sites, and maintaining channels of communication with successive authorities, while avoiding overt intellectual or political confrontation with currents originating beyond the region. This approach was neither cowardice nor moral neutrality, but a careful calculation within a complex environment where a word could cost existence, property, or access to holy places.

The rise of Christian Zionism as an effective political force in the United States, and its transformation into a supporter of Israeli policies that directly affected Jerusalem—particularly after the Second Intifada, the expansion of settlements, and the closure of the city—forced churches in the Holy Land to reconsider this silence. The challenge was no longer limited to managing an imposed reality; it had become a challenge to their theological identity and historical role as churches living in a place that was being religiously redefined from the outside.

This shift unfolded gradually with the increasing visits of American evangelical delegations to Jerusalem, presenting themselves as "friends of Israel" and "defenders of Christianity," while completely disregarding the local Arab Christian presence. This disregard was not a mere protocol oversight, but an expression of a theological vision that views Middle Eastern Christians as secondary—or even inconvenient—to a prophecy-centered narrative. At this point, Eastern and Jerusalem churches realized that silence was no longer an option, and that persisting in it meant allowing others to speak in their name.

Statements issued by the Council of Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem after Gaza, voiced by figures such as Patriarch Theophilos III and Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, reflect this historical transformation. The church no longer speaks as an administrative guardian of holy sites, but as a moral witness convinced that neutrality ceases to be a virtue when it becomes a cover for violence.

The position of the Catholic Church after Gaza cannot be separated from its long and complex history with political power. Catholicism is the church that experienced alliance with empires, exercised authority, and later paid the moral and spiritual price of that entanglement. This historical memory is what led the Vatican, particularly since the Second Vatican Council, to adopt a radically cautious stance toward any discourse linking religion to war. After Gaza, the statements of Pope Francis and later Pope Leo XIV represented a continuation of this trajectory: an absolute rejection of the targeting of civilians and an explicit warning against turning religion into a tool for legitimizing violence, without entering into direct political alignment. Scholars of Eastern Christian history note that this position is not an exercise in ambiguity, but an expression of historical awareness grounded in the conviction that when the church blesses power, it loses its capacity to hold it accountable.

Gaza reactivated this tension in a particularly stark manner. Non-evangelical Protestant churches found themselves facing a test similar to those they had confronted in earlier historical moments, such as colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. The renewed invocation of the Kairos Palestine document after Gaza was therefore not coincidental, but a deliberate return to a reformist root that insists faith must call power to account rather than merge with it.

Jerusalem Declaration 2006

In 2006, a decisive response took shape in the form of the “Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism,” issued by the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, with the participation of a broad spectrum of Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and local evangelical churches. The significance of this declaration lies not only in its content, but in the fact that it constituted the first explicit collective ecclesial stance to emerge from the heart of the Holy Land describing Christian Zionism as a “false teaching” that distorts the message of the Gospel and legitimizes injustice inflicted upon the Palestinian people.

The declaration marked a qualitative shift in ecclesial discourse. It did not limit itself to condemning occupation or calling for peace, but confronted the theological core of Christian Zionism itself. It asserted that any reading of the Bible used to justify the confiscation of land and the exclusion of an entire people stands in direct contradiction to Christ's teachings on justice and reconciliation. The clarity of this language was unprecedented, precisely because it stripped Christian Zionism of its most powerful claim: the assertion that it represents "authentic biblical faith."

Equally significant was the fact that the declaration did not emanate from a single church, but from a multi-denominational ecclesial body. In a city long emblematic of historical theological divisions among churches, this convergence conveyed a powerful message: the threat posed by Christian Zionism transcends traditional confessional boundaries and touches the very core of shared Christian existence in Jerusalem. From a political standpoint, the Jerusalem Declaration was a carefully calibrated step. It avoided ideological rhetoric and maintained a clear distinction between Judaism, Zionism, and Christian Zionism, while firmly rejecting all forms of antisemitism. At the same time, it explicitly linked Christian faith to respect for international law and human rights, enabling the document to circulate beyond ecclesial circles and enter Western political and human rights discourse as a religious text with ethical and legal relevance.

From the perspective of local churches, the declaration also carried an internal message addressed to Christians in the Holy Land themselves. It conveyed the sense that their spiritual leadership was no longer content with merely managing daily crises, but was prepared to defend publicly the meaning of their presence and the significance of their role. In this sense, the declaration was not simply an outward-facing statement, but a redefinition of the local church as a moral witness that cannot be reduced to the administration of holy sites.

At the same time, reactions to the declaration revealed the limits of this transformation. The document was met in the West with campaigns of skepticism, accusations of politicizing religion, and attempts to minimize the weight of its signatories. Nevertheless, the very issuance of the declaration broke a long-standing silence and opened the door to a new phase, one that would take more radical and influential form three years later with the

publication of the Kairos Palestine document in 2009.

This moment may be understood as a transition from defense to initiative. The churches of Jerusalem no longer confined themselves to reacting to imposed policies or imposed interpretations, but began producing texts that actively contested the definition of Christianity itself within the contemporary political context. This shift would eventually expand the scope of confrontation from Jerusalem to the global Christian arena as a whole.

Five

Kairos Palestine: From a local ecclesial document to a global Christian discourse confronting the theology of occupation

If the Jerusalem Declaration of 2006 marked the breaking of silence, the 2009 Kairos Palestine document represented the moment of truth, constituting the deepest structural transformation in the role of Middle Eastern churches in confronting Christian Zionism. What emerged was no longer a statement of protest or a defensive theological response, but a comprehensive intellectual and theological project that redefined the relationship between faith, justice, and politics under conditions of occupation.

The document emerged from within the lived experience of Palestinian Christianity and was endorsed by pastors, theologians, and church leaders representing a broad spectrum of churches in the Holy Land. The choice of the term “Kairos” was deliberate. In Christian theology, it denotes a decisive moment in time, when human history intersects with moral responsibility. In this sense, the title itself declared that silence was no longer an option and that the church stood before an ethical test no less grave than any defining moment in its history.

The core transformation introduced by Kairos Palestine lay in shifting the conflict from the realm of political dispute to that of theological responsibility. The document described the Israeli occupation unambiguously as “a sin against God and against humanity,” a formulation unprecedented in its moral boldness, as it stripped occupation of any ethical neutrality and placed it in direct confrontation with the essence of Christian faith. Within this framework, the defense of justice ceased to be a political preference and became a matter of faith-based obligation.

In its engagement with Christian Zionism, the document offered a decisive

theological deconstruction. It explicitly rejected any biblical interpretation used to justify control over land or the exclusion of another people, affirming that the Word of God cannot be an instrument of injustice. Notably, Kairos Palestine did not engage in technical exegetical disputes; instead, it reframed the central question: what constitutes the criterion of authentic theology? The answer was clear and uncompromising: any theology that does not lead to justice and human dignity is a false theology, regardless of the texts or prophecies it invokes.

Kairos Palestine also moved beyond the traditional ecclesial discourse centered on abstract calls for peace. It drew a clear distinction between a "false peace" imposed by force and requiring the victim to adapt to injustice, and a "true peace" that can only be built upon ending occupation and guaranteeing rights. This distinction was crucial, as it constituted an implicit critique of Western religious discourses, including some Christian ones, that morally equate the parties while ignoring the profound asymmetry of power.

The broader impact of the document became evident in its transformation into a global Christian reference point. It was translated into multiple languages and adopted by churches and ecumenical organizations across Europe, North America, Africa, and Latin America. For the first time, Palestinian Christians possessed a text that spoke in their name within international ecclesial forums and addressed Western churches in direct ethical language, asserting that one cannot support a theology that legitimizes injustice while claiming neutrality.

The document also opened a sensitive debate within Western Christianity regarding the limits of separating faith from politics. Whereas Western churches—particularly Protestant ones—had long practiced a relative detachment between theology and foreign policy, Kairos Palestine argued that such detachment itself can become a form of complicity when faced with a prolonged occupation.

At the same time, Kairos Palestine maintained a carefully calibrated moral line. It categorically rejected antisemitism and affirmed respect for the historical suffering of the Jewish people, while insisting that such suffering cannot confer legitimacy upon new forms of injustice. In this sense, the document extended the conceptual distinctions established by Eastern churches, but elevated

them from a defensive posture to an effort aimed at reshaping global Christian discourse on Palestine.

Equally important is that the document did not present itself as a final statement, but as an open call to action. It urged global churches to translate moral conviction into concrete policies, including reassessing forms of unconditional support for Israel, endorsing nonviolent boycott initiatives, and strengthening the presence of Christians in the Holy Land.

Predictably, Kairos Palestine faced fierce attacks from circles aligned with Christian Zionism, which accused it of incitement and of politicizing faith. Yet these attacks themselves underscored the document's impact: the confrontation was no longer confined to local statements, but had become a struggle over the definition of Christianity and its role in a world where belief and geopolitics are deeply intertwined.

It can thus be argued that Kairos Palestine marked a point of no return in the stance of Middle Eastern churches. After its publication, it was no longer possible to rely on generic language about peace or to limit responses to defensive reactions against Christian Zionism. The document established what may be understood as an alternative theological model—one that binds faith to liberation and justice as integral dimensions of Christian witness.

Six

The role of the Middle East Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches in internationalizing the counter-discourse to Christian Zionism

In the aftermath of the Kairos Palestine document, confrontation with Christian Zionism ceased to be a local matter confined to the churches of Jerusalem or Palestine alone, and moved to the level of regional and global ecclesial institutions. At this stage, both the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) played a decisive role in transforming a locally grounded moral stance into an international ecumenical discourse endowed with institutional legitimacy and the capacity to influence global Christian public opinion.

The Middle East Council of Churches, established in its modern form in 1974, stands among the earliest ecclesial frameworks to have addressed the phenomenon of Christian Zionism at an early stage. Long before it became a prominent subject of global media attention, the Council issued a seminal document in 1986 addressing what it described as "Western fundamentalist Christian Zionism," warning of its dangers to Christians in the region and to the credibility of Christianity itself. The significance of this position lies not only in its early timing, but also in its analytical depth. Bringing together churches from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq, the Council approached Christian Zionism as a cultural extension of Western colonialism rather than as an authentic expression of Christian faith. This linkage between theology and colonial politics endowed the ecclesial discourse with a critical dimension that extended beyond Palestine and situated the phenomenon within a longer history of sacralized domination.

The Council further affirmed that Christian Zionism not only undermines prospects for peace, but also erodes the very presence of Arab Christianity, by creating a religious alignment that marginalizes local Christians and renders them strangers in their own land. This early diagnosis later proved

instrumental in shaping a unified regional ecclesial discourse and in providing the conceptual groundwork for subsequent documents such as the Jerusalem Declaration and Kairos Palestine.

If the Middle East Council of Churches functioned as the regional moral conscience, the World Council of Churches—bringing together more than 350 churches representing hundreds of millions of Christians worldwide—provided the international platform that amplified this conscience and translated it into global influence. Since the early 2000s, the Council has issued a series of statements and reports warning against the use of the Bible to justify occupation and violence, and explicitly linking Christian Zionism to a distortion of the Gospel message. Notably, the Council did not frame the issue as an external political dispute, but as a theological crisis within Christianity itself, one that directly affects the credibility of faith in a plural and multi-religious world.

In its statements on Christian presence in the Middle East, the Council stressed that supporting any political project in the name of God at the expense of another people's rights stands in direct contradiction to the core of Christian belief. It also convened international theological consultations dedicated to examining Christian Zionism and its political and spiritual consequences, contributing to the entry of the term itself into academic and ecclesial discourse well beyond the Middle East.

One of the most significant achievements of this institutional trajectory has been the reframing of Palestine within global Christian consciousness. Rather than being presented as a "complex Middle Eastern issue," it has increasingly been articulated as a moral test of the churches' commitment to justice and human dignity. Influenced by the spirit of Kairos Palestine, the World Council of Churches has adopted more explicit language in recent years, particularly in statements affirming that occupation violates international law and that churches cannot maintain moral neutrality in the face of a prolonged system of domination and discrimination. This shift in language is consequential, as it reflects what may be described as a transition of the global church from the role of neutral mediator to that of moral witness to one of the gravest injustices of the modern era.

Limits of impact and contradictions within the Western sphere

Despite these developments, it must be acknowledged that internationalizing ecclesial discourse has not automatically altered political power balances. Western churches—particularly in the United States—remain deeply divided, with major evangelical churches operating outside the ecumenical framework of the World Council of Churches and therefore less responsive to its statements and positions. Yet notwithstanding these limitations, this trajectory has achieved a significant outcome: it has broken Christian Zionism's monopoly over claiming to represent the global Christian voice. In the presence of clear positions and documents issued by the world's broadest ecclesial body, Christian Zionism can no longer plausibly present itself as the Christian position without contestation.

In sum, both the Middle East Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches have succeeded in moving the confrontation with Christian Zionism from a narrow local arena into a broad international space, where the issue has become part of a global conversation on the relationship between faith and power, religion and justice, scripture and human rights.

Seven

Theological teaching as a political-ethical action

One of the common misreadings of the role of churches in the Middle East is the assumption that their confrontation with Christian Zionism has remained confined to texts and statements. The reality is far more complex. Aware of the limits of their direct political influence, churches have developed a set of practical tools aimed at translating theological positions into tangible impact, without transforming themselves into partisan political actors or becoming entangled in polarizations that could undermine their spiritual legitimacy.

A significant path pursued by these churches has been what might be termed “quiet ecclesial diplomacy.” Rather than relying solely on media statements, church leaders in Jerusalem, Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt focused on building direct channels of communication with the Vatican and its diplomatic institutions, with historic Protestant churches in Europe and North America, with Western parliaments through religious and human rights committees, and with United Nations–related and faith-based human rights organizations. In these engagements, the issue was not framed as a political dispute, but as a distortion of religion when it is employed to legitimize injustice. This approach proved relatively effective, particularly within Catholic and liberal Protestant circles, where some Western churches began to reassess their relationships with Christian Zionist evangelical organizations.

Churches also recognized that theoretical discourse alone was insufficient to counter a powerful narrative such as Christian Zionism. For this reason, they supported programs that brought Western clergy, theologians, and church-based activists to witness firsthand the realities of life under occupation. These visits—organized by institutions such as the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center and local church networks—were not forms of

solidarity tourism, but knowledge-based initiatives designed to dismantle the stereotypes promoted by Zionist religious propaganda. Many participants returned to their home countries with markedly altered perspectives and later contributed to shifts in the positions of their ecclesial institutions.

Despite limited media resources compared with American evangelical movements, churches also sought to develop an alternative media discourse grounded in ethical narrative rather than propagandistic confrontation. In recent years, statements by the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, for example, have focused on documenting attacks on Christian towns and holy sites and situating them within a clear legal and human rights framework. The aim was to strip Israel of the automatic sacralization it enjoys in Western religious discourse, without descending into demonization or hate speech. Here, credibility rather than noise was the central wager.

Within a framework influenced by Kairos Palestine, some churches and ecumenical organizations adopted boycott and divestment as nonviolent, ethical pressure tools rather than punitive or retaliatory measures. This step was highly sensitive, as it placed churches in direct confrontation with accusations of "politicizing faith." Advocates of this approach emphasized, however, that boycott was not directed against a people or a religion, but constituted a historically grounded moral tool previously employed by churches, most notably against apartheid in South Africa. The objective was not punishment, but the encouragement of political change incompatible with injustice.

Another path, slower yet deeper in its impact, was educational. Churches came to understand that Christian Zionism feeds primarily on widespread theological ignorance within Western societies. Consequently, churches opposing Christian Zionist interpretations focused on integrating the realities of Palestine and occupation into theological curricula, supporting critical research on Christian Zionism, and encouraging biblical reading grounded in historical and ethical context. Such efforts do not yield immediate results, but they address root causes rather than surface symptoms.

A recurring question arises: why did churches not escalate their confrontation to the level of direct political action? The answer lies in their awareness of the

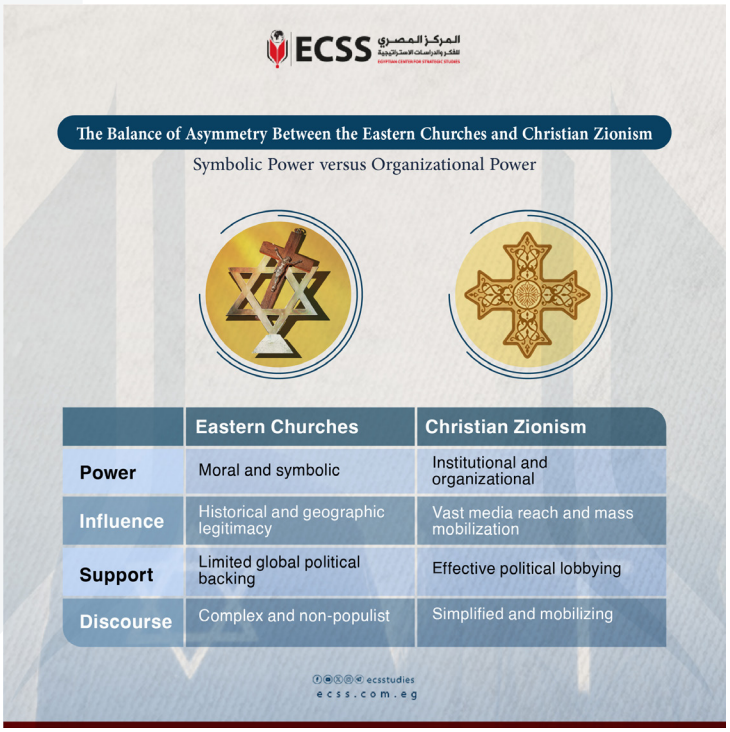
limits of their role. Churches rightly fear that transforming themselves into partisan political actors would erode their capacity to appeal to conscience and entangle them in polarizations that consume ethical discourse. They therefore chose a more demanding path: influence without control, pressure without coercive power, and witness without guarantees of success.

Taken together, these tools demonstrate that churches did not confine themselves to a theoretical rejection of Christian Zionism. Rather, within the limits of their role, they sought to dismantle its influence, expose its contradictions, and cultivate an alternative Christian space that binds faith to justice rather than to domination.

Eight

Why does the confrontation with Christian Zionism appear structurally unequal?

Despite the theological clarity, ethical depth, and historical legitimacy of churches in the Middle East, their confrontation with Christian Zionism has remained—and continues to be—structurally unequal on both the political and media levels. This imbalance does not stem from the weakness of their arguments so much as from the fundamentally different forms of power involved: symbolic moral authority on one side, and consolidated organizational and political power on the other.



The first limitation lies in the absence of direct political leverage. By virtue of their geographic location and demographic weight, Eastern churches lack meaningful pressure tools within American decision-making centers, where Christian Zionism is deeply embedded in the conservative electoral coalition. In the American political system, the capacity for electoral mobilization and financial backing is rewarded, not the strength of ethical discourse. As a result,

even the most coherent and principled ecclesial documents struggle to gain traction within policy circles.

The second limitation is the vast media gap. Christian Zionism operates within an expansive media ecosystem that includes religious television networks, digital platforms, mass conferences, and charismatic figures who communicate in simple, definitive language. By contrast, Eastern churches rely on written statements, limited-reach interviews, and human rights reports that cannot match the mobilizing force of a populist religious narrative grounded in certainty, fear, and prophecy.

A third constraint lies in the nature of the discourse itself. Eastern ecclesial language is complex, cautious, and ethically nuanced, inclined toward distinction and critical deconstruction. It is intellectually robust, yet weak in mass appeal when set against a sharply binary discourse that divides the world into “absolute good” and “absolute evil.” Christian Zionism offers easy answers to a complex world, whereas the churches pose unsettling moral questions that find little resonance in a highly polarized political environment.

There are also structural limits within Western Christianity itself. Most evangelical churches supportive of Christian Zionism operate outside traditional ecumenical frameworks and do not recognize the authority of the World Council of Churches or the documents it issues. This means that global ecclesial discourse, however expansive, does not automatically reach the grassroots constituencies that form the backbone of this movement. Added to this is the ever-present accusation of antisemitism. Despite the Eastern churches’ consistent insistence on distinguishing between Judaism and Zionism, this distinction is often marginalized in Western public debate. Any religiously grounded criticism of Israeli policies is sometimes read as religious hostility, placing churches in a perpetual defensive posture and constraining their capacity for intellectual critique.

Another internal tension arises from the churches’ dual responsibility: defending justice while simultaneously safeguarding their own fragile presence. Escalating rhetorical confrontation can have immediate repercussions for their congregations, properties, and freedom of movement and worship. This delicate balance between moral witness and material

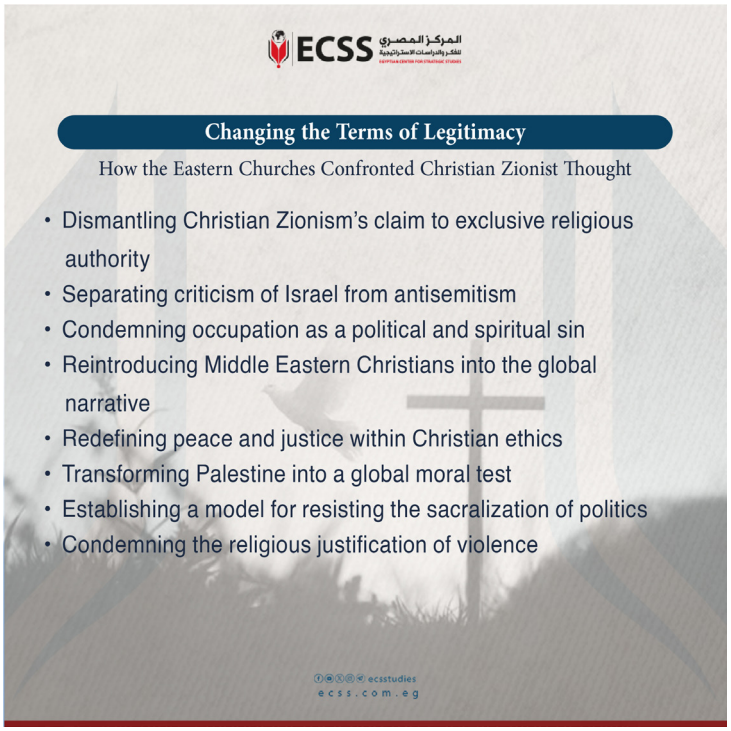
survival imposes practical limits that cannot easily be exceeded.

Yet this apparent weakness does not amount to an absence of influence. The churches understand that their role is inherently long-term. They do not compete in the arena of rapid decision-making, but in a field shaped by history, memory, and legitimacy. Many shifts within Western churches have not resulted from direct political pressure, but from a slow accumulation of moral critique that has gradually rendered the religious justification of occupation an increasingly uncomfortable position within broad Christian circles.

In this sense, asymmetry does not negate the value of the ecclesial role; it defines its nature. Churches do not possess coercive power, but they wield a rare capacity to strip moral legitimacy from a discourse that cloaks itself in sanctity. This capacity, though limited in its immediate effect, may prove to be the most enduring in the long run.

Nine

Overall assessment and future implications



After tracing the historical, theological, and institutional trajectory of the churches in the Middle East in confronting Christian Zionism, the decisive question is not whether the churches have "won," but rather what kind of victory is even possible in a struggle of this nature. The comparison here is not between two projects equal in tools or objectives, but between a moral–symbolic force embodied by the Eastern churches and a political–mobilizational force represented by Christian Zionism. If success is measured by weakening the political influence of Christian Zionism within the United States, the sober answer is that the churches have not achieved this goal. The movement remains active, influential in Congress, embedded within powerful electoral coalitions, and still capable of presenting itself as what might be termed the "Christian voice" in American foreign policy. From this

angle, the confrontation appears unresolved, and perhaps unresolvable in conventional terms.

Yet this very metric may be misleading. The role of the churches was never to compete for power, but to compete over meaning. From this perspective, the evaluation shifts fundamentally.

The first substantive achievement of the churches has been the dismantling of theological monopoly. Prior to the intervention of the Eastern churches, Christian Zionism operated within a moral vacuum and was often presented in Western, particularly religious, media as the "natural" Christian interpretation of support for Israel. Today, that claim can no longer circulate unchallenged. There now exist official documents, ecumenical positions, and a written and widely disseminated liberation theology that clearly identifies this current as a distorted political interpretation rather than a Christian consensus.

The second achievement lies in reinserting Middle Eastern Christians into the global narrative. Before this confrontation, the Palestinian Christian was largely absent from the Western religious imagination. Through the Jerusalem Declaration, Kairos Palestine, and platforms such as those of the World Council of Churches, the churches redefined Christians in the Holy Land as historical actors rather than silent witnesses or residual figures from a fading past. This epistemic shift is significant, as it undermines the psychological foundation of Christian Zionism: speaking about the land while disregarding its indigenous inhabitants.

The third achievement has been the transformation of Palestine into an internal moral test within Christianity itself. The issue is no longer merely an external political file, but a mirror exposing the gap between faith and practice. This shift has unsettled wide sectors of Western churches, particularly those long accustomed to what might be called "comfortable neutrality." Today, silence itself has become subject to theological scrutiny.

At the same time, the limits of this role must be acknowledged with clarity, without justification or embellishment. The churches have not succeeded in penetrating the broad popular base of Christian Zionism in the United States, nor have they produced a fundamental shift in the positions of major evangelical churches. Their discourse, by virtue of its ethical precision, has

remained less mass-appealing than a mobilizing narrative that promises certainty and rapid redemption.

Here, however, a paradox emerges. What weakens the churches in mobilizational terms is precisely what grants them historical strength. Christian Zionism, as a religio-political discourse, is tied to a particular moment of American power and to a specific cultural context. The discourse of the Eastern churches, by contrast, is one of long memory, grounded in historical and geographical continuity that cannot be easily erased. From this vantage point, it can be said that the churches have not defeated Christian Zionism, but they have stripped it of moral innocence. The phenomenon no longer passes without naming or scrutiny. It is no longer merely an "alternative reading," but has become the object of documented and public critique within global Christian theology.

The most significant future implication lies in the model the churches have established for confronting the sacralization of politics. Not through violence, nor through partisanship, but through the deconstruction of meaning and the rearticulation of faith around the value of justice. This model may not yield swift victories, but it lays down a standard that will endure whenever any force—religious or political—seeks to appropriate sacred scripture in the service of domination.

In the final analysis, the cumulative impact of the ecclesial role may be summarized in a single sentence: the churches did not alter the balance of power, but they altered the terms of legitimacy. In conflicts of this kind, changing the terms of legitimacy may well constitute the deepest achievement, even if its dividends are slow to materialize. The war on Gaza was not merely a violent eruption within a protracted conflict; it rapidly became a revelatory moment within global Christianity itself. The war did not confront churches with a passing political question, but reopened profound historical issues concerning the relationship between faith and land, authority, and violence. What followed Gaza did not so much generate new positions as expose long-standing ones, rooted in each church's history and in its experience of power and vulnerability.

The renewed invocation of the Kairos Palestine discourse after the Gaza war

was therefore not a simple reminder of a document issued in 2009, but an expression of that discourse entering a new phase of moral maturity and ethical sharpness. The war—through the scale of destruction it revealed and the direct targeting of civilians and of Gaza's social and religious fabric—placed Christian churches once again before what may be described theologically as a "second kairos moment": a moment that does not allow for the language of appeal or caution alone, but demands direct moral accountability for silence and for retreat behind claims of neutrality.

In this context, Kairos was not recalled as a historical text, but as a living ethical standard tested in the present. The central question within global Christianity became less about the interpretation of texts and more about the responsibility of faith when religion is used to justify violence or to cloak injustice. In this sense, Kairos after Gaza was transformed from a reformist appeal addressed primarily to Western churches into an instrument of moral reckoning—one that exposes the gap between professed belief and political practice, and reopens a fundamental question: can Christianity credibly claim fidelity to its ethical mission while remaining silent in the face of a war legitimized in the name of God or justified through systematic theological readings?

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