
Bethlehem Steel

David Brog
**Standing With Israel:
Why Christians Support the
Jewish State**

FrontLine, 2006,
285 pages.

Reviewed by Dan Gordon

On the third day of the recent fighting between Hezbollah and Israel, I left my home in Los Angeles, flew to Tel Aviv, and then drove to the Lebanese border as a captain in the IDF Spokesman's Unit. Over the next four weeks I witnessed a confounding phenomenon: I received numerous phone calls and e-mails from my Christian friends in America, who told me of how they were praying for me personally and for the people of Israel. I received many more calls from them, I noticed, than from my Jewish friends. Outside Kiryat Shmona, I had the pleasure of meeting Walt Jordan, who in his day job is a SWAT team member in the Beverly Hills police department, and is a devout

Christian. When the war broke out he, too, flew to Tel Aviv and drove to the Lebanese border, where he volunteered as a paramedic. When he was informed that the rescue services had all the paramedics they could use and that his lack of Hebrew would be an impediment, Walt filled his car with groceries and set about distributing them to Israeli families living in the bomb shelters of the city that suffered the most Katyusha rocket attacks of any in Israel. He did this at no small risk to his own life, and in so doing he lifted the hearts of not only every soldier in my unit, but every Israeli soldier and civilian with whom he came into contact.

My anecdotal experience of Christian Zionism was by no means an aberration. In recent decades, American evangelical Christians have become some of the most dedicated and outspoken supporters of Israel in the world, often more so than American Jews. In *Standing With Israel*, David Brog has written a book that seeks to explain Christian Zionist support of Israel to Jews, and Jewish ambivalence for that support to

Christians. It is at once insightful, informative, and healing.

The dramatic tension of the work lies between two quotes, the first from the Reverend Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition: “I made a solemn vow to the Lord that whatever happens, however unpopular it may be, whatever the consequences, that I personally, and those organizations I was in charge of, would stand for Israel.”

On the other end of the spectrum is a Jewish suspicion of Christian theological motives imprinted by two thousand years of dispersion, pogroms, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Holocaust. Brog quotes author Gershom Gorenberg: Christians “don’t love real Jewish people. They love us as characters in their story, in their play.... And we never auditioned for that part, and the play is not one that ends up good for us.... The Jews die or convert. As a Jew, I can’t feel very comfortable with the affections of somebody who looks forward to that scenario.” Both quotes are heartfelt. One is an expression of faith; the other, the result of a sober look at history.

Taking the perils of Christian treatment of Jews seriously, Brog traces the roots of Christian anti-Semitism as they grew out of early Christian theology with the evolution

of something called “Replacement Theology,” in whose DNA one can discern the genetic markers of the Holocaust. Replacement Theory quite literally postulated that God had “replaced” the children of Israel, who did not accept Christ as the messiah, with the Church, which did.

One of the leading theologians of the mid-second century was Justin Martyr, a Gentile who converted to Christianity and claimed Israel for the Church.

We [Christians] have been led to God through this crucified Christ, and we are the spiritual Israel, and the descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham.... You [Jews] are sadly mistaken if you think that, just because you are descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, you will share in the legacy of benefits which God promised would be distributed by Christ.

The ascendance of this theology meant the cooption of everything promised to the Jews—indeed, of Judaism itself—by the Church.

It became literal Church doctrine that God had not only “replaced” the Jews with the Church, but shunned them and in fact acquiesced to their persecution. As Saint John Chrysostom the Bishop of Antioch set down in 387, Jews not only were replaced, they were guilty of deicide. “For Chrysostom,” Brog recounts,

“deicide was the ultimate Jewish crime, and he made it a central plank of Replacement Theology.” Chrysostom asserted:

It is because you killed Christ. It is because you stretched out your hand against the Lord. It is because you shed the precious blood that there is now no restoration, no mercy anymore and no defense.... That is why you are being punished now, worse than in the past.... When animals are unfit for work they are marked for slaughter and this is the very thing which the Jews have experienced. By making themselves unfit for work, they have become ready for slaughter.

Brog traces the codification of Replacement Theology in the Church alongside the violence of the Crusades and the Inquisition, leading up to the Holocaust itself. “Centuries of Christian anti-Semitism prepared Europe to so readily and enthusiastically embrace Nazi anti-Semitism,” he writes. “According to a survey conducted in 1939, 95 percent of Germans belonged to a Christian church. None of the many Catholics in the Nazi leadership, including Hitler himself, were excommunicated by the Catholic Church during or after the war.” Ideas have consequences, and Replacement Theology created one of the most important ideological justifications for the persecution of Jews in Europe for more than a millennium.

Little wonder, then, that today Jews are skeptical of a Christian embrace. But Brog posits that that skepticism may spring from Jewish ignorance of the evolution of Christian theology as well as from the horrors of Jewish history. Few of those Jews who most question Christian support for Israel are familiar with the name John Nelson Darby, let alone the Dispensationalist Theory he fathered, which has come to supplant Replacement Theology within America’s Christian community.

Dispensationalism began in the early nineteenth century, after Darby had been seriously injured in a horseback-riding accident. “Darby spent a prolonged recuperation immersed in a close study of the Bible,” Brog recounts. “To Darby, a reference to the ‘descendants of Abraham’ or ‘Israel’ meant the literal, biological descendants of Abraham—the Jews. Accordingly, Darby believed that all of the promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament would be fulfilled in the Jews.” In other words, not only had God not *replaced* the Jewish people with the Church, but the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, with the Jews returning to their homeland and re-establishing the State of Israel, would be seen as proof of God’s word not only in the Old Testament but

in the New Testament as well. The superseding of Replacement Theory with Dispensationalist Theory among evangelical Christians paved the way for Christian Zionism as surely as the latter theory had paved the way for violent anti-Semitism.

Contemporary evangelical support for Israel has its foundation, then, in Christian faith in the Bible—and not in sinister ulterior motives. In particular, Genesis 12:3 has become fundamental to evangelical Christian theology: “God promised Abraham that I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you...” This passage, to a Dispensationalist, practically commands philo-Semitism and Zionism. This sentiment has been repeatedly articulated by the most prominent evangelical leaders. “Evangelical Christians support Israel,” Pat Robertson declared, “because we believe that the words of Moses and the ancient prophets of Israel were inspired by God.” Or as Jerry Falwell said: “The Bible clearly prophesied that after more than twenty-five hundred years of dispersion, the Jewish people would return to the land of Israel and establish the Jewish nation once again.”

Another reason for the new Christian affection for Jews and Israel is a sense of gratitude. “Today, anger at the Jews over the Crucifixion is rapidly

giving way to gratitude to the Jews for providing Christians with Christ and the other fundamentals of their faith,” says Brog. In this vein, John Hagee, one of the most prominent American evangelical pastors, speaks often and passionately about the Christian debt to the Jews. “As Christians we support Israel because we have a debt of gratitude to the Jewish people. The Jewish people gave us the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The prophets, Elijah, Daniel, Zachariah, etc.—not a Baptist in the bunch.”

As to the Armageddon scenario, Brog notes the “wonderful irony” of the secular critiques of Christian Zionism. “These critics, of course, don’t actually believe that there will be a Second Coming of Christ,” Brog notes. “If there will be no Second Coming, then there will be no mass conversion or death. So what exactly are these critics worried about?”

Without saying it, Brog alludes to the fact that for many American Jews, their politics, primarily liberal, have either become their religion or become inexorably entwined therein. According to Rabbi David Saperstein, the Reform movement representative in Washington:

If the American Jewish community buys the support of the religious Right [for Israel] by its acquiescence [to the religious Right] on domestic

policies, that would damage our religious freedom and our tradition of pluralism and tolerance. It will be a disaster for America and for Jews.

Brog replies that “Evangelical Christians already support Israel—no one has to buy their support. Furthermore, Christians have not asked the Jewish community for anything in return for their support of Israel—not even a thank you.”

David Brog concludes with the hope that the American Jewish community can look past the cultural and political differences that separate Jews from evangelicals in America. American Jews, he argues, must “do the hard work of sorting people by

their actions instead of their group affiliations. In judging these actions, they must have the humility to recognize acts of love and grace despite a lingering discomfort with the motives which produce them. The Jewish community should go ahead and scratch the surface of some Christian Zionists. They will not find a Spanish inquisitor lurking beneath. Instead, they may very well find a righteous Gentile.”

Dan Gordon is a captain in the IDF Spokesman's Unit and a Hollywood screenwriter whose most recent credits include The Hurricane and The Celestine Prophecy.