

A Night to Honor Israel?: Christian Zionism and Jewish Community

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On Sunday, May 6, Christians United for Israel (CUFI) will host A Night to Honor Israel, which will take place at the Overture Center at 6:30pm. CUFI is a national Christian evangelical organization whose mission is to build Christian support for Israel and to lobby the U.S. government on security and land issues concerning Israel. A Night to Honor Israel is part of their effort to create alliances with the Jewish community and promote their political positions.

CUFI is a leading Christian Zionist organization. Christian Zionists are Protestant fundamentalists who believe that the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of a Biblical mandate and that the land from the Euphrates to the Nile belongs exclusively and eternally to the Jews. They support the extreme right-wing in Israel who wish to reclaim all of Biblical Israel by driving several million Palestinians from their homes.

Many Christian Zionists yearn for apocalyptic, nuclear war in the Middle East because they believe this will trigger the Rapture, the time when believing Christians will be transported to heaven and the majority of the Jews living in Israel will be slaughtered. The remaining Jews, the righteous “remnant,” will convert to Christianity. As CUFI board member, George Morrison, stated, “Great wars will begin to take place. Those wars are going to involve nukes...It’s another Holocaust, if you will” (*Colorado Springs Independent*, July 17, 2003).

Throughout the country rabbis have been struggling with how to respond to CUFI. Some have been very supportive and have promoted the organization’s events in their congregations. These rabbis believe that any support for Israel is important. Even though they may not agree with the organization’s theology, they argue that coalitions are important; they can work with each other without agreeing on religious ideology or even domestic policies. They also feel reassured that CUFI’s stated mission is not to proselytize to Jews. Finally, these rabbis recognize that CUFI is a very powerful political force and has a great deal of influence in Washington. They believe that working with them can help Jews by increasing U.S. support for Israeli policies.

Other rabbis, including myself, generally support building bridges with other communities. Yet we recognize that there are some groups with whom we should not align ourselves or support in any way. If creating a sustainable peace in the Middle East is important to us, then we cannot support an organization that advocates attacking Iran and launching the region into further chaos. As Pastor John Hagee, founder and national chair of CUFI, stated, “The United States must join Israel in a pre-emptive military strike against Iran to fulfill God’s plan for both Israel and the West... a biblically prophesied end-time confrontation with Iran, which will lead to the Rapture, Tribulation [...]and Second Coming of Christ” (CUFI’s Washington, DC inaugural event, July 19, 2006).

Furthermore, if we believe in reproductive freedom, gender equality, acceptance of gays and lesbians, separation of church and state, and stem cell research, giving support to an

organization like CUFI legitimates and strengthens the religious right, which can only hurt American Jews and undermine the work of liberal organizations. It is a betrayal of women, gays and lesbians, Jews, and people with life-threatening diseases to support an organization whose leaders are virulently anti-choice and anti-gay and who wish to diminish religious freedom and ban certain forms of bio-technological research.

As Rabbi Jonathan Biatch of Temple Beth El stated in his sermon explaining why he too does not support CUFI, “Politics do make strange bedfellows, but sometimes it is just wrong.”

On May 6 at A Night to Honor Israel, Jewish residents of Madison will make different statements. Inside the Overture Center, the Madison Jewish Community Council will publicly accept a check from CUFI. Outside, members of A Jewish Voice for Peace will protest the event. Temple Beth El will be having a program on climate change – what they consider to be a much more important issue. As members and friends of Shaarei Shamayim, I encourage you to educate yourselves on Christian Zionism and make an informed decision about what, if any, of these events you will be attending on May 6.

For further reading, please visit the following websites:

www.cufi.org

Christians United for Israel

www.aipac.org

American Israel Public Affairs Committee (supports CUFI)

www.jewsonfirst.org

defends the first amendment (Jewish perspective)

www.christianzionism.org

challenges Christian Zionism (Christian perspective)