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The World Zionist Congress and the Christian bogeyman

• By PESACH WOLICKI

In 1897, when the First World Zionist Congress was held in Basel, Switzerland, in attendance, as a non-voting representative, was Rev. William Hechler, a Christian clergyman and close friend of Theodor Herzl.

Hechler wrote extensively on the topic of the biblical importance of the modern Zionist enterprise. He was instrumental in the early days of the Zionist movement, introducing Herzl first to the Grand Duke of Baden and ultimately to Kaiser Wilhelm II, both of whom became important supporters of the Zionist cause.

While Hechler grounded his Zionism in his faith in the biblical prophecies of the restoration of Israel, the secular Herzl referred in his diary to Hechler as “a naive visionary,” writing that “Hechler declares my movement to be a biblical one, even though I proceed rationally in all points.”

That a non-Jew recognized the biblically prophetic significance of Zionism while the Jewish founder of the movement did not should not surprise anyone who reads the Bible. Consider the words of Psalm 126:

“When the Lord restores the returnees of Zion, we were like dreamers. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyous song. Then they said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’ The Lord has done great things for us. And we are glad.”

In this passage, the people of Israel’s own recognition of God’s hand in our redemption is preceded by that of the nations. And this verse is not an outlier.

Throughout the biblical prophecies of the restoration of the Jews to our land, there are multitudes from the nations who

play an active and supportive role in the process. Isaiah foretold that the nations will “bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders” (Isaiah 49:22) – non-Jews actively facilitating the aliyah of Jews to the Land of Israel.

Simply put, the active participation of Bible-believing gentiles in the Zionist project is not only politically expedient, it is part and parcel of the way the redemption of Israel is meant to play out.

I write this as the World Zionist Congress elections are in full swing. From March 10 to May 4, Jews are casting their votes for representatives who will determine the direction of billions of dollars of funding for Zionist education, institutions, and projects both in Israel and abroad.

Israel365 Action, which I am honored to lead, is running a slate in this election. And we have come under attack for walking in the footsteps of Herzl himself, soliciting the non-voting participation of Christians who love and support the State of Israel.

Israel365 Action has been accused of “a hidden Christian agenda” and of secretly encouraging Christians to vote in the election. Let me be clear. There is nothing hidden about our agenda. We are proud of our relationships with leading Christian supporters of Israel. We engage in these relationships openly out of our firm belief that cooperation with Christians who believe in the truth of the Bible is essential for the success of the Zionist project.

The source of the attacks on Israel365 Action is the Left, which fears a right-wing takeover of the Zionist institutions that they have long dominated. And herein lies the irony behind their attacks. According to polling by Pew Research in 2013, 30% of

Reform Jewish households have Christmas trees each December.

If there is any movement that is welcoming and encouraging non-Jews to vote in the World Zionist Congress elections, it is those movements that have played fast and loose with Jewish identity for decades. A century of conversions that require neither faith in God nor observance of Torah has welcomed millions of Jews who still participate in a holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus. Yet Israel365 Action is the one encouraging non-Jews to vote?

As for Zionism, just last month, the Reform movement put out a statement opposing Mike Huckabee’s appointment as the US ambassador because he is opposed to a Palestinian state.

Considering that not one Jewish member of Knesset opposed a resolution in July rejecting a Palestinian state, one has to wonder if we can still call the Reform movement Zionists. Are they pro-Israel, or pro a theoretical, nonexistent Israel, a figment of their progressive imaginations?

Isaiah referred to the Temple of the future as “a house of prayer for all nations” (56:7). This is not merely prophetic hyperbole. Even Maimonides ruled that Christians may bring an offering in the Temple (Laws of Sacrifices 3:2).

We at Israel365 Action pray for the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem. The irony is that when the Temple is rebuilt, it will be Christians and Jews who believe in the Bible who will serve God in that house, while the barely Zionist Jews of the American Left will sit around their Christmas trees, still calling for a two-state solution.

The writer is executive director of *Israel365Action.com* and host of the *Shoulder to Shoulder* podcast.



MIKE HUCKABEE speaks during a ceremony marking the construction of a new housing complex in Efrat, in 2018. The Reform movement opposes Huckabee’s appointment as US ambassador, the writer notes. (Amir Cohen/Reuters)