

DEBATABLE Should Reform Jews Engage with Pro-Israel Fundamentalists?→ **YES**

Rabbi Norman M. Cohen

There are many good reasons to have a relationship with fundamentalist Christians who consistently advocate pro-Israel positions in the political sphere.

Our Jewish tradition teaches us to say “thank you” and reciprocate with a positive gesture of our own—certainly not to turn our backs on those who extend a hand in friendship.

When our youngsters are bombarded on college campuses with anti-Israel rhetoric and demonstrations, who comes to their defense?

Christians who share their love for the State of Israel.

And when Israelis are killed and wounded in terrorist attacks, which organizations raise thousands of dollars to provide needed assistance and relief for the victims? Organizations such as Christians United for Israel.

Keep in mind, too, that not all fundamentalist pro-Israel Christian groups try to convert Jews or claim that Jews have been replaced by Christians as God’s chosen people. Christian United for Israel, for example, has denounced such proselytizing philosophies as inappropriately triumphalist.

In maintaining a relationship with Christian fundamentalists, we also have the opportunity for dialogue and influence—to persuade them of Israel’s need to compromise for peace, to make them aware that the Jewish community is not monolithic about politics or social issues, and to offer them new Jewish connections with us.

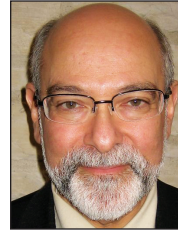
Reform Jews need to face head-on the bigotry and prejudice many of us have against conservative Christians. We need to publicly acknowledge that they have been among the strongest supporters of Israel at a time when some of our liberal Christian allies on social justice issues have led the charge against Israel through their divestment resolutions and repeatedly fail to condemn Arab terrorism. It is time we give thanks to Christians United for Israel and similar groups who help preserve the safety and the future of the Jewish state.

Rabbi Norman M. Cohen is spiritual leader at Bet Shalom Congregation in Minnetonka, Minnesota.



Let us thank those who help the Jewish state.

Rabbi Jonathan Biatch

NO ←

Before we engage in alliances with pro-Israel Christian fundamentalists, we must ask: Do their actions help Israel?

Regrettably, the dominant Christian-Zionist organizations advocate policies that undermine Israel’s security and the chances for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For example, Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC) actively supports Jewish settlements in the occupied territories as part of “God’s plan for the Jewish nation.” Such encourage-

Christian Zionists undermine Israel’s security.

ment provokes conflict among settlers and Palestinians, impeding progress toward a two-state solution, a

policy goal explicitly advocated by the Union for Reform Judaism.

A second such group, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), also opposes territorial compromise. At its 2007 conference, CUFI board member Gary Bauer disparaged the notion of a two-state solution, stating, “We are praying that they [the settlers] never give up...even one centimeter of territory.” Further, CUFI founder and chairman Pastor John Hagee has called for pre-emptive military strikes against Iran that “would trigger nuclear conflict and devastating war and destruction between the Jewish people, God’s chosen people, and the Islamic world.” Such an “end of days” bloodbath is hardly in the interest of Israel or any nation.

Moreover, how can we overlook Hagee’s vehement attacks on the dignity of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, his derision of American Muslims as unpatriotic, and his explicit condemnation of liberal Jews as “poisoned” and “spiritually blind” (see www.jewsonfirst.org)?

Common interests and goals, such as support for Israel, can certainly unify people with otherwise divergent views. But when the values of potential political bedfellows clash so fundamentally with our own, we must reject their advances. CFOIC and CUFI are two such unwelcome suitors.

Rabbi Jonathan Biatch is spiritual leader of Temple Beth El in Madison, Wisconsin.

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