Journal of Religion & Society Volume 9 (2007)
The Kripke Center ISSN 1522-5658

Next Year in Orlando

(Re)Creating Israel in Christian Zionism[1]

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Abstract

An Orlando based ministry called Zion's Hope seeks to shape Christian identity in a two-prong approach. The first prong is the creation of an American Christian pilgrimage site. During a trip to this theme park cum pilgrimage center, visitors are exposed to two central aspects of a desired Christian identity – a love of Christ and a love for Israel. The second phase or prong of this identity construction effort is a magazine that reinforces the first two points and adds anti-Arab, anti-Islam sentiments. This paper explores these efforts and their role in promoting the "clash of civilizations."

Introduction

[1] An Evangelical Christian ministry called the Holy Land Experience (HLE), a Biblical "living museum," is set up to create a transformative experience, to leave a deep heartfelt change on the visitor. For the non-believer, it is faith in Christ. But for the believers who make up the majority of visitors, it is a clear and favorable impression of Judaism and a love for Israel. These goals are achieved through many of the elements of medieval pilgrimages and passion plays. Those who are moved by the experience to purchase an annual

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2004 American Anthropological Association meeting. The research was funded, in part, by an UNF Undergraduate Research Grant that joins students and faculty in original research. The authors thank Andrea Henderson, Julie Ingersoll, Emmelia and Ronan Lukens-Bull, Michael Nash, Dave and Matthew Ray, Richard Phillips, and the JRS reviewers for their insights and assistance. They would also like to thank the staff members at Holy Land Experience who welcomed the project with open minds and hearts.

membership receive a quarterly magazine, *Zion's Fire*.[2] The pages of this publication take up the two themes of the park and advance a third theme for those already committed to Christ and to Israel – an apocalyptic Christian Zionism with a strong dose of antagonism toward Islam. Together, the park and the publications constitute a two-prong approach to tying Christian identity with neo-conservative politics (cf. Urban). The ministry takes the powerful potential of pilgrimage and uses it to advance a religious-political agenda.

Background and Methods

[2] The Holy Land Experience is an Orlando based Christian attraction that includes characteristics of both modern and medieval pilgrimage sites; indeed, it serves as a substitutional pilgrimage, an alternative to traveling to war torn Israel. The park resembles other Orlando area themed attractions, but is characterized by biblical themes that include daily crucifixions.[3] The park also promotes a positive perspective towards Judaism and Israel through recreation of an imagined Jerusalem and reenactments of Jewish rituals. Through varieties of religious education, reconstructions, and reenactments, the site is not only a venue for learning and entertainment but also attracts those deeply concerned with furthering their Christian faith. In an email sent to the Holy Land Experience, for example, a visitor wrote about their experience at the site and stressed its Christian significance:

> What a fantastic idea! I think that this park is a true blessing. It is a fantastic way to show our society about the Bible and teach today's children about Christianity in a fun and exciting way. This is more than a park it is a place of miracles."

[3] Of the three kinds of pilgrimage in the American landscape (Campo), religious pilgrimages are generally less important and less common than civic ones (e.g., to places like Mt. Rushmore and various monuments in the nation's capital) and cultural pilgrimages (e.g., to Graceland, Disney World, and major bike rallies like Sturgis and Daytona; cf. Bryant). The few religious pilgrimages in the United States are limited largely to Catholics, Mormons, and Hindus (Campo: 4). American Protestantism has few if any pilgrimage traditions, though several major Christian conferences, Christian music festivals, and Jim and Tammy Faye Baker's Heritage USA (until it closed in 1997) have functioned in this way (Belk and O'Guinn). Many churches and other religious groups have offered tours to Israel and other biblical lands, but these trips take the pilgrim out of the American context and so are not "American pilgrimages." In this context, the Holy Land Experience is unique.

[4] Intensive on-site research was conducted from January to May 2004 with follow-up visits up to December 2004 and on-going communication until August 2005. Participant observation was conducted by joining museum tours, historic biblical seminars, ministry presentations, passion dramas, and musical performances. Interviews were conducted with several staff members, including costumed vendors, performers, and managers. Holy Land Experience staff gave us access to guest emails and other guest comments sent to the

[2] Annual subscriptions are also available without the membership.

[3] The crucifixion of Jesus is reenacted all year except during the Christmas season when the focus is on the birth of Jesus.

ministry. On-site research was supplemented by communication via phone and email. Further data was gleaned from publications such as the *Jerusalem Gold Quarterly* (a newsletter available to annual members), *Zion's Fire* (a bi-monthly magazine published by the Zion's Hope ministry), daily schedules of events, Holy Land Experience related web sites, and other newsletters, product advertisements, and brochures sent by mail.

A Biblical Theme Park and Pilgrimage Site

[5] Today, when driving down Interstate Four, one sees a large white and gold replica of Herod's Temple that would seem strikingly out of place anywhere other than in the theme park capital of the world. One of the world's leading independent entertainment design and technology companies, ITEC Entertainment Corporation, was responsible for the design and production of the Holy Land Experience project (HLE Website). The 15-acre facility is adjacent to Interstate Four, across from the Mall of the Millennium, near Universal Studios, and five miles southwest of downtown Orlando.

[6] The Holy Land Ex

the time of Jesus. Throughout the park, the visitor encounters these characters as well as Jewish Priests and other denizens of this imagined Jerusalem.

[12] Even the cafeteria strives to contribute to the biblical atmosphere. In November 2006, the menu was changed from a grill menu to a serving line menu. Previously, the food was mostly western with biblical names such as Goliath Burger, Bedouin Beef, Jaffa Hot Dog, Arab Chicken Wraps, and Caesar's Delight for desert. After the change, the food includes a choice of rice or noodles with meat and vegetable dishes that to the uninitiated might seem to be Middle Eastern cuisine. The portion sizes are called "Paul's Platter" (large) and "Hannah's Helping (small). The tacit goal for the cafeteria is to put the visitor into a teachable mindset.

[13] After passing through the market, one comes to the physical and symbolic center of the park, the Calvary Garden Tomb exhibit, which is made of a lower dirt floor stage with a large, sand-colored, artificial rock wall at the center of the exhibit. An eight-foot high arched entrance in the middle of the wall is meant to resemble the entrance to the tomb where Jesus was buried. To the left of the opening is a circular, artificial stone with an estimated eight-foot diameter. Two permanent wooden crosses are positioned at the top of a grassy, twenty-foot hill directly above the tomb. During the *Behold the Lamb* performance, a third, larger cross is erected with an actor playing Jesus mounted to it. Tropical vegetation, sporadic palm trees, and a variety of plants surround the exhibit completely.

[14] In addition to the passion play, a "historical lecture" is given at the Garden Tomb exhibit, which discusses burial practices of A.D. 33 and the two possible burial sites found in the real Jerusalem. In the lecture, the speaker concludes that the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem is the more serene of the two sites, but gives no further explanation for why the park has chosen to replicate that site rather than the traditional site at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Perhaps the most intriguing part of the exhibit is that when it is not being used for lectures or performances, visitors line up (for as long as 15 minutes) to view the empty tomb marked with a sign declaring, "He is not here, He is risen." Seemingly, visitors draw real inspiration from the replica tomb (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The Tomb

[15] Walking from the Garden Tomb, one encounters an unfinished Dead Sea Qumran Caves exhibit made of artificial boulders in the shape of a small, twenty-foot high mountain. A large, natural looking cave opening is set about ten feet high. Here the path forks. Taking the path to the right, one encounters a simple faux mud building in which the *Wilderness Tabernacle* performance is found. In this theater, performers costumed as Aaronic priests show the audience the structure and ritual function of the tabernacle tent used by the Israelites during their 40-year

sojourn in the desert. Just beyond this building and behind the gift shop is the children's area that includes a 40-foot tall climbing rock.

[16] Returning to the Qumran Caves exhibit and moving further east along the path, one encounters the Temple of the Great King, a one-third-scale replica of Herod's Temple. The entrance to the structure consists of two, fifteen-foot high, Roman style, white marble columns. This is another stage for outdoor musical dramas and performances throughout the day.

Figure 3. Shofar Auditorium

[17] Continuing on, a large pond with a single fountain in the middle is seen on the left. On the opposite side of the pond facing the park, the landscape greenery spells, "HE IS RISEN." Past the pond, the Shofar Auditorium is a two to three story building outlined in landscaped trees and plants (see Figure 3). The auditorium resembles the interior of a modern church designed to fit about four hundred people. Another room in the building contains a scaled model of ancient Jerusalem (see Figure 4), and it opens into a large gift shop. The final building, past the Auditorium, is a three to four story building called the Scriptorium, surrounded by well-kept landscape. This building is used as a museum of ancient and Biblical texts, a few of which date over 2000 years old (e.g., cuneiform tablets).

[18] The opportunity for the pilgrim to interact with the staff, most of whom wear costumes depicting Old and New Testament characters, provides the chance to learn and share pious beliefs on a personal level rather than through observation and lectures. Though few of the staff are ordained ministers, they are all Bible believing Christians with a desire to share the Gospel. In almost all of the interviews, the staff express that a benefit of working at the Holy Land Experience is the opportunity to share their Christian faith. For example, one respondent said, "I'm being used as God's servant to minister here (Holy Land Experience)." The eagerness of the staff to converse about their religion facilitates the pilgrim's inner transformation leading to an increase in personal devotion and faith.

Figure 4. Jerusalem A.D. 66 Model

[19] The costumed staff members further create a biblical atmosphere for the park. It is possible for a pilgrim to experience an inner transformation by accepting the physical

> member asked, "Would you like to know this Christ?" The teenager replied, "yes," so the two joined hands and prayed . . . and her life is now forever changed. Please pray that doors be continually opened for us to share Christ's love as we minister to our guests (*Jerusalem Gold Quarterly*, January-March 2004).

This story illustrates HLE's goal to minister in a variety of ways while attempting to make life changes in the visitors through drama and personal interaction.

[22] Other dramas are performed at The Plaza of Nations in front Temple of the Great King (see Figure 6), the replica of Herod's Temple. For the audience, there are rows of wooden chairs estimated to seat roughly 250 people. The dramas performed here include *Come to the Manger* (at Christmas), *Pilate's Verdict* (a dramatization of Jesus trial before Pontius Pilate), *Ancient Festival of the Biblical World* (a musical review of major Jewish festivals with a Christian interpretation), *Centurion* (a dramatic telling of Jesus' encounter with a Roman commander whose servant was ill), and *Moses* (a musical performance about Moses' mother at the time that Pharaoh orders the deaths of all Hebrew baby boys). From a side entrance to the building, one enters the Theatre of Life to watch the short film *Seeds of Promise*, which was filmed in Israel and summarizes "God's plan for redemption" by highlighting key biblical events in 25 minutes.

Figure 6. Herod's Temple,
or the Temple of the Great King

[23] Other important teaching tools include the scale model of ancient Jerusalem in the Shofar Auditorium and the exhibits in the Scriptorium. Lectures are given daily about life in A.D. 66 around the model city. Through a guided presentation of the model, combined with the experience of walking among the life size replicas of Jerusalem in the park, a visitor can imagine what Jerusalem was like during the time of Jesus' ministry.

[24] The Scriptorium is a museum of ancient and biblical texts. According to a member of the park management:

> The Scriptorium is meant to show its visitors the accurate preservation of this one piece of literature [the Bible] over so many thousands of years! It also is meant to show visitors the authenticity and authority of the Bible. I feel that the Scriptorium does a great job of that.

Guests pass through the hour-long, audio-directed tour, moving from exhibit to exhibit by following directions given by both audio and visual cues. At one point, the path ends in the workshop of John Wycliffe, whose animatronic avatar is busily writing during the narration about the artifacts on display in this room. Then the animatronic Wycliffe looks up from his work and tells the audience how his attempts to distribute the Bible in the English

vernacular are opposed by the Church. The audience hears the sounds of an angry crowd supposedly just outside the room. Wycliffe then enjoins the audience to take copies of the Bible and leave through the fireplace that swings opens to a secret passageway. The visitor is encouraged to imagine that they are participating in the early efforts of Protestantism.

[25] Another exhibit discusses the establishment of the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts and by extension, the United States, as a great leap forward for religious freedom and the distribution of the Bible. In the last room of the Scriptorium, curtains slowly raise to reveal portraits of hale, hearty, and often quite muscular biblical patriarchs. In turn, each is hailed as a great person of faith and obedience. The tour ends with a taped narrator proclaiming: "This is the message of the Bible. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth were realized in Jesus Christ (John 1:17)." The doors of this final chamber then open and release the visitors into a gift shop.

[26] Phil Cosineua argues that the lessons learned on pilgrimage are the greatest benefit brought back from any pilgrimage. However, pilgrimages have long included physical reminders of the journey and the lessons learned upon it. In medieval pilgrimage, these were icons, ampoules, and other items used en route. Although there are no authentic relics on the HLE premises, visitors line up outside of the replicated Garden Tomb to see the empty tomb and abandoned shroud.

[27] The primary goal that the Holy Land Experience hopes to achieve for its guests is life changing experiences and lessons learned. Because the visitors exit the site through the Jerusalem Street Market, visitors retrace their steps on the way out. This is important for two reasons: One, this allows the pilgrim to see for a second time the sites where pious education or changes within oneself were made, thus relating to the activity that surrounds the geography. Two, the retracing provides the pilgrim the opportunity to view performances that were missed the first time through and/or the chance to see the performance again.

[28] Walking through the market on the way out, the visitor can purchase any number of items including toy swords and Roman soldier costumes, children's books, HLE videos, souvenirs from the Middle East, as well as wall hangings which blend Jewish and Christian symbolism. In a sense, piety becomes a commodity; religion becomes something that can be bought and sold (Lukens-Bull and Calbeck: 306-7; Starrett). This is a universal characteristic of pilgrimage sites of both medieval and modern eras. Medieval pilgrims sought phials of the Virgin's milk, portions of her hair, and enough pieces of the "True Cross" to build a ship (Turner 1978: 196). Contemporary Indonesian pilgrims to Mecca bring back a number of items including zam-zam water, prayer beads, and even View Master sets with slides of the Hajj. Though some of these items do not represent traditional religious icons, they do symbolize specific religious virtues of the pilgrimage.

Judaic Influence

[29] A primary ideological goal of HLE is the creation of a pro-Judaism, pro-Israel perspective among its Christian visitors. The Jewish character of the park is manifested by staff members who use Hebrew stage names and inflection while at the park, the recreation of Jewish festivals such as Hanukkah and Rosh Hashanah, and Hebrew prayers used in several of the presentations. This approach has drawn occasional protest from the Jewish

community (Canedy). Further, some Orlando area rabbis have expressed concern that blending Jewish and Christian themes and theology distorts Jewish history and that the theme-park setting trivializes Judaism (Brabant).

[30] The first author stumbled upon the depth and significance of "Jewishness" at Holy Land Experience when his six year old, in pursuit of character signatures to add to those of Mickey Mouse, Cinderella, and other characters, asked a biblically garbed vendor to sign her autograph book. A manager in the uniform polo shirt told the vender to sign with his Jewish name. When asked if everybody had a Jewish name, the manager replied that they did for use when they were in costume. In the performance of a personal Jewish identity, the workers find their connection with the ancient faith from which Christianity descended.

[31] Jewishness is also emphasized in several of the plays. For example, *Ancient Feasts of the Bible* involves a large cast that extends well beyond the regular actors. During this show, vendors and others involved with the more mundane operations of the park, have the opportunity to perform as biblical-period Jews. A central purpose of this particular performance is to explore the rich Jewish heritage of Christianity. The representation of one of the highlighted festivals, Yom Kippur, blatantly avers that Christianity cannot be separated from its Jewish roots. At the climax of this festival, a live lamb is brought to the altar for sacrifice (and then led away by the animal keeper), then the performers pull out of the altar a blood-red cloth that unfolds to become a 20 foot long cross.

[32] One telling element of the Holy Land Experience passion play is the complete absence of the role of Jewish leaders in the crucifixion. This is in marked contrast to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of The Christ*, which many critics feared would spark anti-Jewish sentiments (Waxman). The conspicuous absence of characters representing Jewish leaders in the passion play also contrasts with other dramas in the park. Moreover, priestly characters wander the site interacting with guests between dramas, but they deliberately withdraw for the passion play. The Jewish leaders' absence from the play can be seen as a deliberate attempt to edit them out of the crucifixion story.

[33] Clearly HLE is trying to present a very positive view of Judaism. Ordinarily, such an effort would only be marginally interesting. However, as we will explore further below, this effort is part of a general campaign to shape opinions about the Middle East peace process and interfaith relations in general. In a letter sent to annual subscribers, Rosenthal wrote:

> Events in Israel in recent days have not dominated the news as much as they normally do. Israel has been pushed off the front page by America's conflict with Iraq. What America has faced since going into Iraq, Israel has faced since 1948. But the pressures and problems in the Holy Land have not ceased and no optimism for a genuine, enduring peace appears to be on the horizon (2004).

Jerusalem As It Should Be

[34] During the times when Muslims controlled Jerusalem, the church often "replicated" and "replaced" the lost shrines of Palestine and other parts of the Near East. For example, the Church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul is a model of the Holy Land. At the eastern end is an

icon of Jesus that is referred to as the "Mount of Olives" because of its resemblance to the icon at that place. At this icon, one can experience water seeping from the holy wounds. A fountain in the main sanctuary is said to have miraculously appeared from the River Jordan and is still connected to that river and so is named after it. Finally, the stone table of Abraham is claimed to have been brought from the place where the angels appeared to him. Additionally, the church has a myriad of other relics. A journey through this church was thus a substitute for traveling through the holy land (Coleman and Elsner: 122). Another example of a medieval substitutional pilgrimage is found in the Chartres Cathedral, which contains a labyrinth called the "Chemin de Jerusalem" or the Road to Jerusalem. When either the Crusades or poverty made Jerusalem unattainable, pilgrims to Chartres could complete the eleven-circuit labyrinth and have it serve as the spiritual equivalent of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Herold: 32; Artress). The widespread use of relics in Medieval European churches was another way to bring pilgrims into contact with the people and places of biblical Jerusalem.

[35] The HLE seems to serve a similar purpose for contemporary American Christians. For example, in an email a visitor reflected on the role of the park as a substitution for Jerusalem:

> I have told my church family and all my Christian friends about this place and we are a planning group trip . . . we will continue to spread the word about the Holy Land Experience to our friends so they can come and feel what we felt . . . Thank you for providing this wonderful experience for those who can't travel to Israel.

By going through the layout of the Holy Land Experience, the pilgrim is surrounded by biblical structural replicas within a garden of lush tropical vegetation, clean walkways, and friendly staff in costume, ready to converse. The air is clean and the sounds range from instrumental middle-eastern recordings to outdoor performances. The landscape clearly represents an ancient Jerusalem that not only acts as an alternative to visiting Israel, but also symbolizes a Jerusalem in a pure, true form.

[36] The Holy Land Experience not only serves as a contained site that has become sacred, but represents an *imago mundi,* or a microcosmic model of how the world, or at least, Jerusalem, should be (Eliade). The pilgrim is encompassed by a Jerusalem atmosphere of highlighted biblical attractions, safety, comfort, and cleanliness. In a way, this site can offer more than an alternative to traveling to Israel. Of course, for some a visit to HLE may be the first step since Zion's Hope ministry also offers guided tours of Israel.

[37] Biblical attractions at the Holy Land Experience such as the Calvary Garden Tomb appear to have a pure and peaceful aura due to the park's emphasis on cleanliness and beauty. Compared to the actual site in Jerusalem, the Holy Land Experience displays their A.D. 66 interpretations as maintained, attractive shrines rather than genuinely replicating what the site may have looked like in antiquity or what it looks like today. Moreover, it is an attempt to remake a Jerusalem that edits out intervening history. Unlike a visit to the real Jerusalem, visitors do not see the Wailing Wall, the al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, or the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Holy Land Experience attempts to display a utopian Jerusalem versus the modern day reality by choosing to replicate only those features conducive to its mission.

[38] Through the use of replicas of sacred objects and the staff's representation of biblical characters by name, accent, dress, cleanliness, and music, the Holy Land Experience not only provides an alternative to visiting modern Israel, but also represents a religious utopia blended with ancient Jerusalem. Those features of the biblical and modern Jerusalem that are replicated seem to reflect primarily Protestant sensibilities. Therefore, the park can represent for its Protestant visitors perhaps a more perfect Jerusalem than the actual Jerusalem has ever been.

Moving Beyond the Park

[39] The Holy Land Experience draws on the power of sacred travel and sacred drama to communicate several key messages. According to park staff, the first message is simply the Christian Gospel. However, given that most of the visitors are already Christian, significant effort is directed to the related goal of reinforcing and intensifying the visitor's commitment to Evangelical beliefs. The second major message concerns Judaism and Israel. Between the HLE's (re)construction of an imagined Jerusalem, its presentation of imagined ancient Jewish ritual, the conspicuous absence of the Jewish leaders during its version of the passion, and the use of Jewish symbols throughout the park, visitors are guided to a fond feeling for Jews and for Israel that borders on Christian Zionism. As the park has set up the experience, true Christian identity necessarily involves both a commitment to Christ and a love for Jerusalem and by extension, Israel. In the publications sent to annual subscribers, readers are enjoined to engage a form of Christian Zionism.

[40] Visitors who are particularly fond of the park may become annual Jerusalem Gold members. In addition to unlimited park admission, Jerusalem Gold members receive *Zion's Fire: A Christian Magazine on Israel and Prophecy.* Here, we examine two sources of articles from this publication. The first is the hardcopies received from January 2004 until January 2006. The second is the article archive found at the ministry's website. The articles in this archive date back to 1990.

[41] In addition to the articles of general evangelical Christian belief there are three categories of articles: the Apocalypse, Israel past and present, and Islam and the Middle East. Obviously these categories overlap significantly and several articles could be placed in two or even three of them. As a whole, the magazine takes subscribers from the basic messages of the park to a specific Christian Zionist identity.

The Apocalypse

[42] None of the exhibits in the park deal with the end of time and the return of Jesus. The apocalyptic teachings of the Zion's Hope ministry manifests itself in the park simply through books on the subject by founder Marv Rosenthal and like-minded theologians. In *Zion's Fire,* articles with apocalyptic themes are evenly distributed through the fifteen-year run of the magazine. Examples of them include, "Here Comes the Son," "A New Heaven, A New Earth, A New Jerusalem," "Five Straw Men: Evaluating a Critic's Attempt to Discredit Pre-Wrath Rapturism," and "The Lady of the Night," which concerns Babylon both in the metaphorical sense explored in the book of Revelation and in a concrete historical sense as the forerunner to modern Iraq. It is clear from these articles that the ministry is committed

to the Pre-Tribulation Rapture version of contemporary Christian Pre-Millennialism. This particular form of Pre-Millennialism holds that the church will be "caught up" to meet God in heaven before the seven-year rule of the Anti-Christ, which precedes the final battle between God and the forces of evil.

[43] Through his various writings, Rosenthal emphasizes two preconditions for the end of time. First, Israel must be physically reconstituted, which was accomplished in 1948 (see also, Bennis and Mansour). Rosenthal is not alone in this assumption. Several major Evangelical leaders have interpreted the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 as "one of the momentous events in all human history" and have worked against attempts to divide the land with the Palestinians (see Shindler: 164). Rosenthal argues that the Jews neither deserved nor earned the restoration of Israel, but God bestowed it upon them through grace. He cites the book of Ezekiel, which states: "Thus saith the Lord God: I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy names sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, wither ye went" (36:22; Rosenthal 2001a: 3).

[44] The second condition for the return of Jesus is that the reconstituted State of Israel will be invaded by its enemies. Rosenthal repeatedly associates the ancient peoples mentioned in the Book of Revelation with modern states including Iran, Ethiopia, Libya, Turkey, and Arabia (2001a, 2006). This apocalyptic vision of Rosenthal directly influences the HLE and Zion's Hope's presentation of Israel, Islam, and the Middle East. Rosenthal goes as far as to say in an interview that any attempt to reach an accommodation between Israel and the Arabs will not lead to peace. Instead, he argues that it will be "a road map to the emergence of the Antichrist" (Ettinger: 8).

Israel Past and Present

[45] In the park, a visitor learns the importance of Israel in the salvation drama thus far. They learn how God presaged the sacrifice of Jesus through the rituals of Israel, and they learn how important Israel has been for Christianity in the past. The articles on Israel are also found more or less evenly distributed throughout the run of *Zion's Fire* magazine. They can be further divided into those that focus on religious issues and those that focus on political issues. The religiously focused articles include "Israel's Spring Festivals," "Jewish and Twice Born," and "Temples of Israel" (in six parts). These essentially reiterate the lessons found in the park's dramas. The more politically oriented articles include "The Middle East: A History in Search for Peace" (a five-part series), as well as "Israel and the Nations in Conflict." In these, the reader learns about the place of Israel in the final chapter of the salvation drama, the Apocalypse.

[46] Rosenthal frames his arguments about Israel in terms of millennia old anti-Semitism, which he attributes to "Roman soldiers, Islamic fanatics, 'Christian' Crusaders, Spanish Inquisitors, Russian Cossacks, Nazi S.S. troops, and in recent years, Palestinian terrorists" (1993: 1). He spins the tragic tale of Jewish suffering through the centuries to engender sympathy for the establishment of the modern State of Israel.

Islam and the Middle East

[47] Although articles on the Middle East in general are found throughout the 15 year history of the magazine, articles specifically focused on Islam as a threat to Israel and its role in the apocalypse on the side of the Anti-Christ emerge after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. These articles include "Islam and Israel in Conflict," "Roadmap to Peace, or Highway to Anti-Christ and War," "The Islamic Peril," and "Babylon/Iraq: Do Unfolding Events in Iraq have Prophetic Implications." Framing the relationship between Israel and Islam, Rosenthal depicts Muhammad as a false prophet who took elements of Judaism and Christianity and "added his own 'revelation' and wrote the Koran . . ." (1993: 2). Rosenthal argues that under the rule of Muslims, "the plight of the Jew would once again be difficult." (1993: 2). Contrary to Rosenthal's conclusion, Princeton historian Bernard Lewis, who is by no means an apologist for Islam or Muslims, states:

> Until the rise and spread of Western tolerance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they [Jews] were better off under Muslim than under Christian rule in most significant respects (2).

Rosenthal's reading of history is affected by his theology, leading him to propagate among Christians the erroneous view that Jews and Muslims have been bitter enemies for millennia.

[48] This emphasis on Israel and hostility to Islam is not unique to Rosenthal. It is a common thread in evangelical Christian millenarianism (Urban: par. 19; McAlister: 776). Another, more famous, Baptist minister, Jerry Farwell, felt the support of Israel by Christians to be so important that he made it one of the founding principles of the Moral Majority (Strober and Tomczak: 167), a fact that led to several visits to Falwell by various Israeli leaders including Benjamin Netanyahu in 1998 (Bennis and Mansour: 17, 43). Christian Zionism is by no means new, but dates back to nineteenth century revivalism (Bennis and Mansour: 18; Bar-Yosef; Ariel). In the Christian support of Israel, the religious and the political become inextricably intertwined. Some Israeli politicians have actively sought the support of U.S. Christians, but have been criticized for it because that support often stems from Christian Zionism – that is, the support of Israel for expressly Christian reasons and purposes.

[49] Many American Evangelicals see themselves embroiled in a religious war against homosexuality, abortion, pornography, secularism, and false religions. In Timothy LaHaye's *Left Behind* books, the American led Tribulation Force leads this religious war to its inevitable conclusion: an Armageddon located in Israel and triggered by an invasion of Israel by New Babylon (i.e. Iraq) (Urban: par. 5, 9, 11). LaHaye has used his popular *Left Behind* series to spread a pro-Israel political agenda. Hugh Urban connects this series to the foreign policy agenda of neo-conservatives such as Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld. Urban avers that in the person of the late-in-life, born again Christian, George W. Bush, neoconservatives were able to garner support for their aggressive politics in the Middle East (par. 15-31). Neither Urban nor we argue that Evangelicals are neo-conservatives, but that their view of the Middle East and of Israel allows neo-con policies to find popular support. However, since Christian Zionists played policy-shaping roles leading to the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel (Ariel: 77-78), it is natural that Christian Zionists have continued to shape public policy (Shindler).

[50] In the February 2006 article "Clash of the Kings," the title of which seems to allude to Huntington's "Clash of Civilization," Rosenthal describes the prophetic importance of the re-gathering of Israel, which he links here and elsewhere both to Ezekiel's vision of dry bones coming back to life (Ezekiel 37) and to the history of the modern Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel. He then lists the ten nations prophesized to invade Israel. About these ten nations, he states:

> Of great significance is the fact that each of the nations or regions mentioned above is Islamic. And Zechariah wrote his prophecy more than a thousand years before Mohammed established the pagan religion of Islam in A.D. 722 (sic). In other words, before Islam even existed, Ezekiel, in Chapter 38 describes an attack against Israel in the last days by Islamic nations" (2006: 9).

In this brief statement, Rosenthal clearly articulates his ministry's hostility toward Islam. In response to President Bush's dismissal of a "few terrorists" who stand in the way of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Rosenthal states that within the Islamic world, tens of millions of Muslims have "an in-depth, insatiable hatred for the Jew and for the Jewish state" (Ettinger: 4).

[51] In November 2001, following the events of 9/11, Rosenthal clarified his understanding of Islam as he compared it with "True Christianity" in a brief article entitled, "The Islamic Peril":

- True Christianity is spread by love and choice. Islam is spread by the sword and coercion.
- True Christianity worships the eternally self-existent God who spoke the world into existence. Islam worships a god who is not eternal, not self-existent, and who created nothing.
- True Christianity worships Jesus Christ . . . marked out as the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead (Romans 6:4). Islam follows a prophet who died and is still sealed in the grave.
- True Christianity provides salvation and heaven to those who come to God by faith in Christ. Islam teaches that the quickest way to heaven is through martyrdom (suicide bombings), where 70 virgins await these martyrs with the promise of eternal sensual pleasure.

Each of these claims is subject to significant debate and many are clearly based on Rosenthal's received folk models. Although our purpose is not to give a full refutation here, it should be noted that Islam frequently spread by peaceful means and was no more violent in the medieval period than was Christianity (although, I am sure, not "True Christianity"). What is particularly telling is that Rosenthal's use of the term "True Christianity" acknowledges variation in the unmarked category called Christianity. At the very least, in Rosenthal's schema, there are true and false versions. Rosenthal grants no such diversity to Islam and paints the entire history of the religion and its 1.2 billion living followers with one brush. In an interview with David Ettinger, he states:

> According to the clear teaching of the Islamic religion – and I'm concerned because politically the attempt is not to condemn the entire Islamic world, but to make a distinction between the extremists and peace-loving Islamic people – the reality is that there are tens-of millions of fundamentalist Muslim who, by virtue of their religion, have a hatred of the Jewish People. . . . It's a deep-seated, widespread hatred. This hatred is spiritual in nature and stands in opposition to the true and living God and to His Son, the Lord Jesus (Ettinger: 5).

Conclusion

[52] The Holy Land Experience is a working, fundamental tool for Zion's Hope ministries in that it promotes, educates, and spreads beliefs that range from preaching the Gospel to supporting a political ideology. These beliefs and values are proclaimed to those who visit the site. Zion's Hope provides the material expressed in the daily activities at the HLE. In other words, Zion's Hope is the brain and the HLE is the body; together the pair are effective in gaining support for their specific beliefs. For the ministry of Zion's Hope to be easily recognized and widely heard, a city needed to be chosen capable of generating large numbers of visitors to the HLE. Marvin Rosenthal wisely chose Orlando, "The Tourist Capital of the World."

[53] The HLE is similar to many of Orlando's attractions in characteristics such as entry packages, souvenir shops, food stands, but most importantly, a central theme. The theme is what grasps the public eye that essentially generates the business needed for the attractions to survive. As with most of the attractions, including the HLE, the subject of the site is saturated throughout the premises in fine detail. Everywhere one looks the theme is displayed. Icons, costume, landscape, and events are all centered on one main idea. This is an obvious characteristic that also separates the HLE from the other Orlando attractions. It is not the particularity of the theme but the potential power of which it is capable that makes HLE unique. While other businesses decided to go with cartoon characters or killer whales, the HLE decided upon a religious and political message: the Gospel of Jesus and the promotion of Israel. This message is powerful enough to affect the lives of the park's visitors in many ways.

[54] What makes the HLE so interesting is that it camouflages itself against Orlando's tourist reputation. The HLE willingly became another tourist attraction in order to generate the interest needed to gather a twenty-first century crowd. Orlando provides the HLE with a basic sales strategy needed to spread their messages. This strategy goes as follows: the more contacts that are made, the more the sales pitch will be made, and the more the product will be sold. In this case the contacts are the daily visitors to the park. The "sales pitch" is the messages one witnesses throughout the park during a visit. The HLE is the initial contact and the beginning sales pitch for the Zion's Hope ministry. The wonder of the HLE gets people in the door, curious to discover what it is all about. The more people who visit the HLE allows for more people to witness the teachings within. It is a rather effective growth strategy when compared to a ministry without a modern attraction attached.

[55] Orlando allows for the HLE and Zion's Hope to grow in many directions. Financially, the site prospers through entry fees, advertising, and items sold both on and off site – similar to the way other tourist attractions generate money on a daily basis. The other direction entails educating the visitor and then receiving his or her support for the ministry's views and objectives. This education comes through the teachings, guided tours, performances, and lessons learned from visiting the HLE. Educating the visitors and spreading the messages of Zion's Hope appears to be the primary objective of the site. In turn, the ministry itself gains wealth through expanding and laying a solid foundation for their specific religious values.

[56] The park is the public, open manifestation of the Zion's Hope ministry. Less publicly known are the publications and mailings of the ministry. These are sent to those who have indicated an interest or who have subscribed to an annual membership. Since these writings are intended for the in-group, Rosenthal and other writers may be more frank. And this is perhaps the greatest significance of the Holy Land Experience in understanding the nature of clashing civilizations. What starts as a pleasant sunny afternoon in an Orlando theme park ends in essays fomenting antagonism toward Islam. Visitors to the park do not see or hear this anti-Islamic position. They hear and see the Gospel of Christ, and they see the importance of Judaism and Israel to Christianity both in the past and in the prophetic future. The more they learn from the Zion's Hope ministry, the more they learn about the beauty and importance of Judaism and Israel (both ancient and prophetic). Finally, the more they learn about Jesus and his return as it relates to Israel, they learn that Jesus and Israel have a true and mortal enemy in Islam. Yet because this adversarial approach to Islam is so closely bound up with a message of love for Israel and for Jesus, as well as with the anxious anticipation of Jesus' soon return, it may be hard for believers to refute or maybe even see.

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