

## **Doorkeepers of the House of God**

Christian Zionism is a way of looking at the future, and mapping out God's plan for the world. In the view of those who espouse Christian Zionism, the settlement of the land of Israel by the Jews has considerable significance—has critical significance—in the bringing about of God's final purposes for humanity.

Now, of course, in the twentieth century, first of all, there was the founding of the state of Israel in 1948; and then, in 1967, the Seven Days War, that resulted in Israel occupying various territories, and creating quite a number of refugees, who are since, among other places, in the Gaza Strip. And the process of settlement, as we know, continues in various places of what is called the "West Bank".

Well, Christian Zionists, those who espouse that view, see this as a sign of the End, a sign of the End Time. God is bringing his people to their homeland; God is bringing the Jews to their homeland. And that war of 1967, which expanded—shall we say—the grasp of the State of Israel further awakened them or galvanized them to the sense that God was acting decisively in this time, to bring about the final moments of history.

In fact, because of these events, there are some Christian Zionists who have actually actively participated in the support of the settlement by Jews in these occupied territories. And, of course, we hear that one of the sticking points to any peace process is the ceasing of such settlement; and that has been stated repeatedly. However, the process of settlement by Jews on the West Bank continues.

Now, according to the view of those who espouse Christian Zionism, all this may well lead to a great conflagration, a great word catastrophe, which culminates in the battle of Armageddon. And, as a consequence of that last battle, Christ will come in glory.

I may have over-simplified the schedule that is presented by Christian Zionism. But there it is, and certainly, one could not accuse such people of being inattentive to the hope of the coming of the Messiah, the coming of Christ once again.

However, we are conscious that, in the holding of such a view, certain persons like Palestinians—including, of course, Palestinian Christians—

do not receive a great deal of attention. And, one could even say that Jews themselves, who come back, who make the move to Israel, to settle in the occupied territories, are just part of the bigger picture, the cosmic drama that God is bringing about.

So, although one might regard those who espouse Christian Zionism as being keenly oriented toward the future, the future of God for the world, one might also question whether this is really the picture that God wants for the world. And, perhaps, we might even question whether they are going too far in not only setting the timetable but also how all this is to take place.

There are other ways, I would suggest, of being prepared for the coming of the Lord— perhaps more humble ways, perhaps less dramatic ways, from our perspective. But they have to do with what we have already received. And, of course, we have received, through the person of Christ, the gift of faith, the gift of the Christian community, the gift of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the gifts of the sacraments, the gift, of course, of the Holy Spirit. And so, any hope that we have for the future must surely take these into account, including the commandments that Jesus has left us, to love our neighbour as ourself, to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

The parable of the absent lord, who leaves his slaves in charge, and also a doorkeeper to watch— can speak to us as the Church.

Now the Church, we may think, is a pretty humble reality. And so people might think of the Church as a pretty non-consequential, inconsequential, reality. But, in fact, God in Christ has left us the Church. In a way, this is God's household; this is God's domain, which we are responsible for, in the absence of the risen Lord. Of course, we have the Spirit of God with us. But, in the absence of the final coming, we have this responsibility, which is the domain which God has left us, which, in fact, is this humble— sometimes humble— reality we call the Church.

Now, the Church, as we know, suffers all sorts of pressures upon itself; and sometimes, these pressures have been understood more keenly in past times. For example, in the book of Common Order that many Presbyterian ministers used in the past, at the communion service, there would be the so-called fencing of the table; and what that meant was that it would be stated, up-front, that “this table is not for those who cherish self-righteousness in their hearts or who are out of charity with their neighbour, but who come in humble repentance... (or words to that effect).” So that was an acknowledgement that the Church's integrity

needs to be protected.

Now, this past week, I was at a meeting in Toronto. We were discussing, among several other things, the matter of communion via internet or television. Now, of course, communion via internet or television can be a significant blessing for some people. For example, the daughter of one of the committee members lives in Dubai. There is certainly no Presbyterian Church there; I don't know if there is a church nearby where she could participate. In any case, the internet provides an opportunity for her to take part in a service—however remote the connection may be.

But, as we know, with any technology, there are problems as well as benefits. And so, it was noted by one committee member that he went and visited a person who was “shut-in”, so to speak. But this person had her own car; she was fully physically able; and she took communion via television from St. Andrew's in Kitchener. She didn't go to her own church for that. So, is technology a benefit there? Or has it become a problem?

Just another little anecdote. Linda and I met someone whom we hadn't seen for a while, who is in charge of the residence at Knox College in Toronto, and also the booking of rooms, etc. This person remarked that the current—this is obviously a generalization, but—the current crop of students— (Now we “old folks” tend to regard newer generations with a bit of questioning sometimes; Daniela, although she is somewhat younger than I am or that Linda is, is perhaps in the same category.)— she remarks that although “they” (i.e. the current crop of students) get anxious or upset when they do not receive a text-message from her very quickly, they have very great difficulty—many of these young people—in solving the matter face-to-face. So, technology is a benefit. A number of things can get done, connections can be made, by technology. But perhaps there are also problems associated with the use of technology—the fragmentation of society into its various units, its various individuals—so that people cannot relate to one another as closely as they ought to.

In the Church, as doorkeepers of the domain of God in Christ, we need to do our part in reaching out—perhaps with technology—but recognize that, ultimately, God calls us into community with one another and with God; and that is part of the integrity of the Church which must not be sacrificed.

Now, as slaves or as servants of God's domain, which is the Church, through Christ, we, of course, have a positive role as well. And the positive role

includes being involved in a relationship with God through Christ, abiding in Christ, by the various means that God has provided for us—Scripture, prayer, fellowship with one another, the sacraments. It also means—speaking positively—being attentive to the commands that Jesus has given us, which include loving one another, making known the message of the gospel to the wider world, and offering prayers on our behalf and on behalf of others.

That doesn't sound very dramatic, does it? It doesn't sound like something you could make a movie about. But the sometimes very humble reality of the Church is, in fact, something for which we are responsible—in retaining its integrity, as much as we are able to do so, and promoting its well-being, as an attentive body to the life by the Spirit that God has given us in Christ, and that life expressive of love to neighbour.

So there is certainly more than one way of being “awake”, being attentive to the future that God is bringing. I hold out to you this way—the way of responsibility for the Church, that God has given us—to hold in our care, in its integrity, and to promote its well-being, now and always. Let that be, certainly, our preparedness, as we await the coming of Christ, as the hymn has said, “Christ will come again.” Let us be awake. Let us be responsible for what he has left in our care.