

Write a critical review
of "with god on our
side" essay sample



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Write a Critical Review of “ with God on Our Side” Essay Sample

Over the course of this essay I will be critically reviewing the 2010 documentary “ With God on Our Side”. To do this I will assess the film's political stance by looking at its portrayal of Christian Zionism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general. “ With God on Our Side” does have a very clear and open agenda that has both political and religious elements. From a political point of view the film is criticising the unconditional support that many American evangelical Christians have for Israel. From a theological point of view, the film is attempting to present a biblical alternative to Christian Zionism which as the film's website states “ does not favour one people group over another” and that “ promotes peace and reconciliation for both Jews and Palestinians”. Indeed, the whole premise of the film was inspired by the verse, Joshua 5: 13-14a. In this verse an angel makes it clear to Joshua that he isn't on the side of either the Israelites or the Canaanites, but is the commander of “ God's army”. The target audience of the documentary is significant. Most films which are critical of Christian Zionism and Israel are created by non-Christians and cater to a mostly secular audience.

The 2009 documentary “ Waiting for Armageddon” like “ With God on Our Side” also deals critically with the spiritual and political views of Christian Zionists. The film was written and directed by three non-Christians who are critical of the “ potentially explosive” alliance between Christians and Jews. The film focuses its attention exclusively on Christian Zionists and doesn't present alternative Christian stand points. Christianity Today has accused “

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Waiting..." of assuming that "all evangelicals hold Christian Zionist convictions". The fact that the only Christian view represented is the one that the program is criticising heavily suggests that this film was intended for a secular audience. "With God on Our Side" on the other hand was directed by an evangelical pastor, Speakman Jr. The primary focus of his film is to challenge the many pro-Israeli evangelicals to reconsider their position. Before Speakman Jr. decided to make it into a feature length documentary, "With God..." was originally a 20 minute "orientation for church groups" who were preparing to visit the region.

Therefore "With..." was always intended to target Christians. Speakman Jr. draws on a range of experts from various backgrounds to support the film's message. A number of these experts have religious backgrounds. Several of them clearly come from the same theological standpoint as the director: evangelical, yet still highly critical of both Christian Zionism and Israel. The program features Stephen Sizer, a Church of England priest who has written several anti-Christian Zionist books most notably "Zion's Christian Soldiers?". This book is largely similar to "With..." in content as it both criticises Christian Zionism and presents an alternative biblical view that does not promote one nation over another. Gary Burge is a professor at Wheaton College. In the film Burge states that western Christians like himself are fed "a jaundiced view of Palestinian life" by Israel. In his book "Whose Land, Whose Promise" he writes about the need for Christians to sympathise with the plight of the Palestinian people.

He has received a highly negative reaction from many pro-Israeli

evangelicals. Malcolm Lowe has accused Burge of subjecting his students to <https://assignbuster.com/write-a-critical-review-of-with-god-on-our-side-essay-sample/>

a “ one-sided indoctrination in the Palestinian “ narrative””. Another key contributor in the program is Salim J. Munayer, a Palestinian Christian. He is founder and director of Musalaha, a ministry aiming to seek reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. Not all the experts in the film have a religious background. One featured expert, political scientist Norman Finkelstein, described himself in his 2009 film, “ American Radical”, as an “ avowed atheist”. Ilan Pappé, an Israeli historian, provides the film with historical context. In the film he alleges that following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the Palestinians in Israeli occupied territory were forcibly evicted by the Israeli Defence Force in what he has referred to as a “ Judazing” of Palestinian territory.

He too clearly holds a highly critical view of Israel having argued that Zionism is more dangerous than Islamic militancy and calling for an international boycott of Israeli academics. “ With...” also provides current ‘ on the ground’ perspectives from Gaza. Ben White is a journalist who has extensively covered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Much of his reporting involves giving the perspectives of local Palestinians. He has written several books such as ‘ Israeli Apartheid: A Beginner’s Guide’ in which he describes Israel’s political system as being based upon “ structural racism, separation and dominance”. Such criticism has resulted in him being labelled an “ anti-Israel activist” by The Jerusalem Post. Risa Zoll, the international relations director of the Israeli human rights organisation B’TSelem, also gives a perspective on the human rights violations committed against Palestinians in the occupied territories.

Her organisation is one of those condemned by Israeli foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman as “ aiding terror groups”. Whilst the majority of experts interviewed in the film are strongly critical of Christian Zionism or Israeli policy, Speakman Jr does give the other side a chance to air their opinion. Leading Christian Zionist, John Hagee, is first presented in the program shouting pro-Israeli rhetoric at a large rally. This is arguably the kind of sensationalist style material presented in other films critical of evangelical movements. However Hagee is then interviewed allowing him to articulate his position. The former director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, Malcolm Hedding, is also allowed a fair amount of interview time throughout the film. An interview with Kimberly Troup, a member of Christian Friends of Israeli Communities, gives an on the ground impression from a pro-Israeli angle.

It is clear that experts in the documentary are highly polarized. They are either highly critical of Israel or they are devout Christian Zionists. None of the featured interviewees take a neutral or entirely objective stance. This could be viewed as a flaw in the film. In conclusion, the film appears to contradict its attempts of promoting a theology that “ does not favour one people group over another” by giving an almost exclusively Palestinian take on the situation. No Israelis living in the settlements were interviewed in the film. However, Speakman Jr. has stated himself that the film isn’t “ the whole story” of the Israeli-Arab conflict, but the story of “ what’s not being told”. The aim of “ With...” is explicitly to air the less heard Palestinian view. The film is certainly negative in its portrayal of Christian Zionism with the majority of interviewees taking a highly critical view of the movement.

However, the fact that Speakman Jr. does allow the leading Christian Zionists to express their views certainly makes it a more balanced documentary than many.

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