

DONALD M. LEWIS

Author of *The Origins of Christian Zionism*



A SHORT  
HISTORY OF  
CHRISTIAN  
ZIONISM

FROM THE REFORMATION TO  
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY



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# INTRODUCTION

*Virtually no histories of Zionism, Israel, and the Arab-Israeli conflict have paid much attention to evangelical support of the advancement of the Zionist plan and the Israeli state.<sup>1</sup>*

YAAKOV ARIEL, 2013

THIS BOOK SEEKS TO PROVIDE an overview of the history of Christian Zionism by charting the genesis of the movement and tracing its lineage. Although it is an important contemporary phenomenon whose significance is now being widely acknowledged, its long history is little understood.<sup>2</sup> As Shalom Goldman has observed regarding Zionist historiography, “For the most part Christians do not feature in this narrative except as antagonists.”<sup>3</sup> This book seeks to understand the movement’s lineage, and how and why it has developed as it has. It is not a polemical work, either for or against Christian Zionism. It seeks more to understand than to persuade, in the hope that a fair-minded evaluation of the movement’s history will promote understanding.

## **THE POLITICIZED NATURE OF THE TOPIC**

Christian Zionism is usually examined solely through a political lens. This approach often fails to take the role of theology seriously, which as Faydra Shapiro has argued, “misses a great deal about the culture of Christian

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<sup>1</sup>Yaakov Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>2</sup>On the history of the study of Christian Zionism to 2009, see Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, & the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 15-16.

<sup>3</sup>Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, 1.

Zionism. Focusing overly much on the political does a disservice to the complex and powerful motives and implications of this world view.”<sup>4</sup> Christian Zionism has a political dimension, but its implications are complex and rarely straightforward. It is, as Matthew Westbrook has argued, “a long-developing and complex phenomenon that requires careful delineation and study in its various iterations and contexts.”<sup>5</sup> There have been, and are still, differing “Christian Zionist streams from versions both historical and contemporaneous [that] take various positions on theological issues, each with their own (often significant) social effects.”<sup>6</sup> The theological basis of the underlying Christian Zionist beliefs has kept on shifting over time, which makes tracking its history more difficult.

## DEFINITIONS

Historically, the term *restorationism* was used to designate the belief that the Jews would one day be physically restored to their homeland in the Middle East. It was generally understood that this physical restoration would occur after the mass conversion of the Jewish people to the Christian faith. How that prophetic belief morphed into the political movement that I am defining as “Christian Zionism” is the central narrative of this book. This shift from a prophetic restorationism that envisioned the eventual return of the Jews to a political movement that promoted such a return in the here and now occurred in the nineteenth century.

Defining Christian Zionism is fraught with difficulty. I begin by defining what I mean by *Zionism*. The term was first used only in 1890; the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition is: “an international movement originally for the establishment of a Jewish national or religious community in Palestine and later for the support of modern Israel.”<sup>7</sup> The term *Christian Zionist* can be found as early as 1896, when the Jewish Zionist leader Theodor Herzl referred to William Hechler, the Anglican chaplain to the British Embassy

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<sup>4</sup>Faydra Shapiro, *Christian Zionism: Navigating the Jewish-Christian Border* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 44.

<sup>5</sup>Matthew C. Westbrook, “The International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem, and Renewalist Zionism: Emerging Jewish-Christian Ethnonationalism” (PhD diss., Drew University, 2014), 25.

<sup>6</sup>Westbrook, “Christian Embassy,” 25.

<sup>7</sup>Merriam-Webster, “Zionism,” [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Zionism#h1](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Zionism#h1). This point is important to distinguish traditional Jewish longings for a return to Zion from the new movement that emerged among Jews in the late nineteenth century intent on making this happen.

in Vienna, as a “Christian Zionist” and the following year Herzl again used that term to describe Jean-Henri Dunant, a Swiss banker and founder of the Red Cross, and an observer at the First Zionist Conference.<sup>8</sup> In 1899 Richard Gottheil, professor of Semitic languages at Columbia University, published a Zionist article in which he quoted “a Christian Zionist” (George Eliot) who many years before had written, “The sons of Judah have to choose, in order that God may again choose them.”<sup>9</sup> The *New York Times* used the term *Christian Zionist* in obituaries, and it appears in letters to the editor from about 1903. Nahum Sokolow in his 1919 *History of Zionism: 1600–1918* refers to Lawrence Gawler as a “Christian Zionist.”<sup>10</sup> The earliest use of the term *Christian Zionism* (rather than *Christian Zionist*) appears to have been in 1899, but it was used very infrequently between 1899 and 1905 and then not again until 1939. It became more frequent in the 1980s and 1990s, and much more frequent after the year 2000.<sup>11</sup>

Matthew Westbrook has observed that “no research has posited an ideal type of Christian Zionism from which iterations of the movement can be contrasted and compared.”<sup>12</sup> My definition seeks to take his observation seriously. Thus, I define Christian Zionism across time as *a Christian movement which holds to the belief that the Jewish people have a biblically mandated claim to their ancient homeland in the Middle East*. Today the term *Christian Zionism* is widely used of Christians who hold that the state of Israel’s right to exist is based on biblical teachings. (I qualify this because before the twentieth century many “restorationists” envisioned a “Jewish return” and a Jewish “homeland” but not necessarily a Jewish state.)

Of course, many Christians have believed in Israel’s right to exist without being “Christian Zionists” in the way thus defined. In 1948 many Christians supported the establishment of the state of Israel without a specifically

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<sup>8</sup>Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion’s Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Milton Keynes, UK; Paternoster, 2007), 16. Dunant had a strong Calvinist upbringing, but he based his support on his humanitarian and moral concerns, not on the basis of biblical prophecy.

<sup>9</sup>Richard Gottheil, “Zionism,” *Century Illustrated Magazine*, December 1899, 299. I am indebted to Andrew Crome for this reference. Gottheil does not identify the author, but the passage is from George Eliot’s novel *Daniel Deronda* (1876), chap. 42, 1354.

<sup>10</sup>Nahum Sokolow, *History of Zionism, 1600–1918* (London: Longmans, Green, 1919), 2:410.

<sup>11</sup>The Google Books search engine enables one to track the use of the term over the past two hundred years in millions of printed works.

<sup>12</sup>Westbrook, “Christian Embassy,” 62.

Christian Zionist motivation. One can be a Christian and favorable toward the notion of a Jewish homeland without being a “Christian Zionist”—that is, not all Christians who are Zionists are necessarily motivated by a biblical-theological concern. Yet, to date, there exists no comprehensive history of Christian Zionism that demonstrates a close acquaintance with the nuances of Christian theology.<sup>13</sup> This work hopes to fill this gap and is directed in the first instance to those who are puzzled by Christian Zionism.

Robert O. Smith defines the term in a similar way, only applying it to Christians who have been politically engaged in supporting the idea of a Jewish homeland.<sup>14</sup> Smith is reluctant to use the term of someone like John Nelson Darby, the father of dispensational premillennial theology, because he was apolitical. I agree with Smith’s point. While Darby and the Plymouth Brethren believed theologically in the eventual establishment of a Jewish homeland, Darby did not teach that it would happen in this age but only after the “Rapture,” and was unwilling to lift a finger to help accomplish it.

My use of the term *movement* in speaking of Christian Zionism is deliberate because it captures a sense of its momentum, in that Christian Zionism has always been like the Amazon, starting small with its headwaters in the Reformation but moving more quickly at different times and places—even cascading through pivotal events like the Balfour Declaration, Israeli Independence, and the 1967 Six-Day War—as it moved forward. But it has always been “on the move,” adapting to changing circumstances and new events, morphing to adjust to various theologies and prophetic understandings. Christian Zionists, however, tend to view it as unchanging, forever true, and fixed. Sean Durbin’s observation is appropriate here: “While Christian Zionism and what it means to support Israel has varied (and continues to vary)

<sup>13</sup>A British rabbi has written a helpful overview. See Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse: The History and Influence of Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

<sup>14</sup>Robert O. Smith defines Christian Zionism as “political action, informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now comprising Israel and Palestine.” Göran Gunner and Robert O. Smith, *Comprehending Christian Zionism: Perspectives in Comparison* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 293. See also Carl F. Ehle, “Prolegomena to Christian Zionism in America: The Views of Increase Mather and William E. Blackstone Concerning the Doctrine of the Restoration of Israel” (PhD diss., New York University, 1977), 399. Samuel Goldman follows Spector’s definition of the term *Christian Zionist* “to describe supporters of a Jewish state in some portion of the biblical Promised Land who draw their main inspiration from Christian beliefs, doctrines, or texts.” Samuel Goldman, *God’s Country: Christian Zionism in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 4.



throughout history, this form of Christian identity must be continuously enacted in a given context, as though it were a static thing—in this case a static form of authentic, and hence original, Christian identity.”<sup>15</sup> Within the claim by contemporary Christian Zionists, like John Hagee, that their Christian Zionism is simply “an essential component of authentic Christianity is the further implication that they are the purveyors of a rarefied form of knowledge of the world about which others remain ignorant.”<sup>16</sup>

### **PROTESTANT SUPPORT AND TRADITIONAL CATHOLIC OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIAN ZIONISM**

Until the twentieth century, Christian Zionism was an overwhelmingly Protestant movement and, as will be argued, was closely related both to anti-Catholic and anti-Muslim sentiments.<sup>17</sup> Some well-known Roman Catholics supported Zionism prior to Vatican II, notably the British diplomat Sir Mark Sykes and a few Catholic theologians and writers: Jacques Maritain, the French philosopher who helped draft the International Declaration of Human Rights; and the English writer G. K. Chesterton. (Perhaps it is significant that Sykes, Maritain, and Chesterton were all born into Protestant homes.) More will be said of recent changes in Catholic attitudes in the final chapters of this book, but suffice it to say that until the 1960s the Roman Catholic Church was not part of the story of Christian Zionism. From the time of the First Zionist Congress in 1897, the Vatican had fairly consistently opposed Zionism. Jewish scholars have generally followed the lead of Sergio Minerbi, the Italian Jewish historian who believed “that the Holy See harbored an implacable theological animus against the very idea of a Jewish state in the Holy Land because of the ancient teaching of contempt which held that the temple was destroyed and the Jews exiled from their homeland because of their alleged collective guilt for the death of Jesus.”<sup>18</sup> Even Eugene

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<sup>15</sup>Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles: Religion, Identity, and Myth in John Hagee's Christians United for Israel*, Studies in Critical Research on Religion 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 5.

<sup>16</sup>Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles*, 16.

<sup>17</sup>It has been very rare for an Eastern Orthodox theologian or writer to be supportive of Zionism, although it has been suggested that Lev Gillet (1893–1980), a French Roman Catholic convert to Orthodoxy, was such an exception.

<sup>18</sup>Eugene J. Fisher, review of *Cross on the Star of David: The Christian World in Israel's Foreign Policy, 1948–1967* by Uri Bialer, *Catholic Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (July 2006): 343, accessed January 20, 2021.

Fisher, of the Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, concedes that “this idea was commonly held among [Catholic] Christians before the Second Vatican Council’s declaration *Nostra Aetate* in 1965.”<sup>19</sup> The anti-Muslim impulse will be explored in chapter two, when dealing with the rise of Calvinism, and then in the final chapters of the book, when this concern reemerged.

### RECENT WORKS

I want to acknowledge my debt to a number of historians whose works have appeared since my *Origins of Christian Zionism* was published in 2009. Yaakov Ariel, the leading scholar on Jewish-evangelical relations, published his *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews* in 2013 and continues to produce important writings. Shalom Goldman’s book *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009) was published at the same time as my book, and thus I was not able to benefit from his excellent work. On the American side of things, Samuel Goldman’s *God’s Country: Christian Zionism in America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018) has been especially helpful. Daniel G. Hummel’s *Covenant Brothers* (University of Pennsylvania, 2019) is also excellent, based as it is on extensive archival resources in both the United States and Israel. Sean Durbin’s study *Righteous Gentiles: Religion, Identity, and Myth in John Hagee’s Christians United for Israel* (Brill, 2019) is a fascinating assessment of the theology and culture of the most important Christian Zionist group working to “bless” Israel.

### CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Robert O. Smith’s work *More Desired Than Our Own Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism* (Oxford University Press, 2013) and Andrew Crome’s *Christian Zionism and English National Identity, 1600–1850* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018) have been especially helpful in understanding the British context and its impact on national identity formation. Crome’s observation that “projects to restore the Jews to their ancient homeland, whether expressed as eschatological hopes, utopian schemes, or in practical political

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<sup>19</sup>Fisher, review of *Cross on the Star of David*, 343.



terms, have consistently served as means of national identity construction”<sup>20</sup> is particularly important in understanding both the past history of Christian Zionism, and its many new expressions in the twenty-first century. Crome’s work develops “a model of national identity formation fueled by prophecy, oriented towards the fulfillment of national mission.”<sup>21</sup> It is applicable across the centuries as restorationists and Christian Zionists have often understood their particular nation as an “elect” nation, but not finally *the* elect nation. As Crome has argued, Gentile nations can only ever experience “a form of secondary election,” and they often understand “national identity primarily in relation to their nation’s service to the Jewish people.”<sup>22</sup> In doing so Christian Zionism employs “a form of othering in which identity developed by comparison with an outside group.”<sup>23</sup> The “other” is positively construed. “In fact, the Jews when restored would be superior to the nation aiding them and would return to their place as God’s first nation.”<sup>24</sup> Chosen Christian nations never replace Israel as *the elect nation*, thus complicating the way one thinks about prophecy and national identity.

The central thesis of my earlier book *The Origins of Christian Zionism* was that “evangelical interest in the Jews was part and parcel of a wider process of evangelical identity construction that took a decisive turn in the nineteenth century.”<sup>25</sup> The thread that holds this book together is a further development of this thesis, both backward and forward in time. Restorationism/Christian Zionism has been an important aspect of Protestant identity formation from the time of the second generation of the Reformation up until this present day, a concern that has had profound implications for Christian nations and the Jews.

The “restoration of Israel,” then, has never been simply about the Jews, or “the land,” or even Christian understandings of prophecy; it has been in large measure about how some Protestants have framed and acted out their own identity. Since the Reformation, this identity formation has been hammered

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<sup>20</sup>Andrew Crome, *Christian Zionism and English National Identity, 1600–1850* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2.

<sup>21</sup>Crome, *Christian Zionism*, 2-3.

<sup>22</sup>Crome, *Christian Zionism*, 3.

<sup>23</sup>Crome, *Christian Zionism*, 3.

<sup>24</sup>Crome, *Christian Zionism*, 3.

<sup>25</sup>Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 12.

out on the anvil of their relationship with the Jews. The ethno-nationalism that Christian restorationists fostered in England in the seventeenth century was largely focused on Protestant England's duties toward the Jews, and from there this ethno-nationalism spread to America and in the last few decades has flowed to the ends of the earth. Now any and all nations can be "elect nations" as they choose to "bless Israel." Christian Zionism today is an ever-widening stream and is expanding rapidly in many directions; it is a river that has burst its banks and is flooding new territory. Understanding its genesis and mapping its genealogy are the concerns of this book.

This book questions the significance often given to dispensational premillennialism in the standard narratives of Christian Zionism. While John Nelson Darby (the key formulator of dispensationalism) and his successors have been important, especially in America, this book argues that the influence of this movement is fairly recent in Christian Zionism's long history. While Darby himself cannot be considered a Christian Zionist, it will be argued in chapter eight that others who drew inspiration from Darby and/or dispensationalism became politically active Christian Zionists by significantly modifying Darby's teaching to insist that the restoration of the Jews would happen before the rapture, and they organized politically to enable this to happen. Ironically politically engaged American liberal Protestant supporters were more important to the American Zionist movement up to the 1970s than were the dispensationalists.<sup>26</sup>

This book thus attempts to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of Christian Zionism, which takes seriously its history, theology, and politics. It does so by examining its rise in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, tracing its development and changes over time, and assessing its influence in the modern world. The approach employed is chronological—it begins with the biblical material, the early church, moves on to the Middle Ages and then the Reformation, but then focuses on developments in Puritan England, colonial America, and nineteenth-century British evangelicalism, with particular attention given to the influence of German Pietism. The last section deals with the ways in which the movement has morphed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and now is rapidly

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<sup>26</sup>In this I am echoing similar points made by Goldman, *God's Country*, 6-7.

expanding in the non-Western world as Christianity's center has moved from the North Atlantic world to the Global South.

### AN OVERVIEW OF JEWISH ATTITUDES TO ZIONISM

It is profoundly ironic that the first modern Zionists were Christians, but this is understandable given that the talmudic tradition had long opposed any Zionist impulse. Following the fall of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70, the Babylonian Talmud (Ketubbot 111A) had interpreted the first two of the three abjurations of the daughters of Jerusalem (Song of Songs 2:7; 3:5; 5:8) as involving two tasks given to the Jewish people. The first forbade Jews to return to *'erets* Israel (the land of Israel) “as a wall” meaning “en masse”; the second forbade them from rebelling against the nations in which they were dispersed. The long-standing rabbinic tradition focused on the messianic hope and the expectation of an eventual Jewish return to Zion accomplished by the Messiah alone. As Michael Stanislawski has observed, the rabbis had long opposed apocalyptic speculation: “Jews were forbidden to ‘advance the end’ or even calculate it. The messiah would be chosen by God in God’s good time, and any activism among human beings to intervene in this process was heresy, to be condemned and punished.”<sup>27</sup> Shalom Goldman comments, “Most, but not all, European Orthodox rabbinical authorities opposed Zionist plans for a Jewish political entity in Palestine. Individual or small group settlements were acceptable to these Orthodox rabbis, but any larger political plans contravened the idea that Jewish redemption would only come through divine intervention.”<sup>28</sup>

In keeping with the second abjuration of the daughters of Zion, rabbinic Judaism had adopted a policy of “passive resistance” in the face of anti-Semitism, maintaining that Jews should keep a low profile and not challenge political authorities wherever they lived. This strategy of passivity was reinforced by Jewish religious law (*halakah*). The approach, writes Milton Viorst, “contained a vow on the part of the Jews—for reasons that were not clear—never to organize to return to their ancient home in Palestine. This vow, too,

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<sup>27</sup>Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3. For further details of rabbinic Judaism’s traditional opposition to Zionism, see Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, 4-5.

<sup>28</sup>Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, 10.

became a fundamental tenet of rabbinic Judaism.”<sup>29</sup> As Shalom Goldman has observed, “Until the late nineteenth century, most plans for a Jewish entity in Palestine were Christian.”<sup>30</sup>

The political quietism of rabbinic Judaism was rejected out of hand by the early secular Jewish Zionist leaders. With the rise of ethnic nationalism in the nineteenth century, some Jews began to insist that Jews constituted not a religious group but rather a nation, and this implied a common history, a common language, and a geographically defined homeland. The Zionists stood in stark opposition to the traditional Jewish religious consensus. In 1806 the Great Sanhedrin of European rabbis had declared that the Jews were not a nation but rather a transnational religious group awaiting its messianic hope for transformation at the hands of God, not of humans.<sup>31</sup>

Jewish nationalism predated the widespread outbreaks of persecution in the early 1880s in Russia and the rising tide of anti-Semitism in France and Germany. Zionists applied ideas of Jewish nationalism on their own; they were not simply responding to persecution.<sup>32</sup> By the late nineteenth century, Jewish nationalists were prepared to turn their backs on the rabbinic consensus and take things into their own hands.<sup>33</sup> Although the Russian pogroms in the 1880s aimed against the Jews and growing anti-Semitism throughout Europe undoubtedly led more Jews to support Zionism, these factors facilitated but did not create the movement.

Most German Jews at the beginning of the nineteenth century were religious traditionalists, but by its end most were not. This shift, however, did not bring with it a groundswell of support for Zionism.<sup>34</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, Zionism was rarely entertained, even by liberal rabbis. The avant-garde minority of rabbis who met in 1845 in Frankfurt-am-Main hoping to adapt Jewish ritual and beliefs to the modern age were willing to

<sup>29</sup>Milton Viorst, *Zionism: The Birth and Transformation of an Ideal* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books; St. Martin's Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>30</sup>Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, 3.

<sup>31</sup>Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine, 1914–1918: British-Jewish-Arab Relations*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1992), 32.

<sup>32</sup>Stanislawski, *Zionism*, 9.

<sup>33</sup>Viorst, *Zionism*, 3.

<sup>34</sup>Yaakov Ariel, “Wissenschaft des Judentums Comes to America: Kaufmann Kohler’s Scholarly Projects and Jewish-Christian Relations,” in *Die Entdeckung des Christentums in der Wissenschaft des Judentums*, ed. Görge K. Hasselhoff (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 166.

give up on the traditional hopes of a personal Messiah; for them, “the Jews, instead of waiting to be redeemed by a Messiah, should themselves redeem the world.”<sup>35</sup> They did not think redemption would be accomplished by resorting to a Jewish ghetto in Palestine; Jews should seek to be dispersed “still further into every land in the world till every nation should acknowledge one God alone, in the pure terms of the Jewish tradition.”<sup>36</sup> As Christopher Sykes has observed of the mid-nineteenth century, “In Germany the influence of Moses Mendelssohn and his followers remained strong: the passion to be part of the civilization of the West was more powerful among German Jews than any sense of anger or embitterment.”<sup>37</sup>

Even in the early twentieth century, Zionism was a tiny minority opinion within Judaism, rigorously opposed theologically by both Reform and Orthodox rabbis as well as by many more secular Jews who believed Jewish political emancipation required the integration of Jews into the political life of Western democracies, not identification with a Middle Eastern homeland. Furthermore, there was the pragmatic argument: in the nineteenth century the area known as Palestine had been an integral part of the Ottoman Empire, and the sultan was not disposed to cede territory to Jews. To do so was unthinkable, for he was the acknowledged defender of Islam and its holy sites. The Qur’an forbade the ceding of land taken by Islam. Even after the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 pledging British support for a “Jewish homeland,” most Jews regarded the Zionist ideal as profoundly impractical given the violent opposition of Palestinians to Zionism.<sup>38</sup> In the period between the 1880s and 1945 Zionism was a minority view among Jews throughout the world; most rabbis and lay leaders were unsympathetic.<sup>39</sup>

The secular Jews who gathered in 1897 at the first World Zionist conference were also eager to abandon the messianic hope, but rather than advocate for assimilation they sought a Jewish restoration to Palestine accomplished by secular Jews like themselves. There were a handful of deeply religious Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were

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<sup>35</sup>Christopher Sykes, *Two Studies in Virtue* (London: Collins, 1951), 122.

<sup>36</sup>Sykes, *Two Studies in Virtue*, 123.

<sup>37</sup>Sykes, *Two Studies in Virtue*, 122.

<sup>38</sup>Stanislowski, *Zionism*, 54.

<sup>39</sup>Stanislowski, *Zionism*, 9. See also Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, 68.

in favor of the Zionist cause, but they were a tiny minority.<sup>40</sup> The early Zionist pioneers Theodor Herzl and Israel Zangwill, and the key founders of the state of Israel—David Ben-Gurion, Menachem Begin, and Golda Meir—were resolutely secular Jews who received far more opposition to Zionism from rabbis than they did support.

It is important to acknowledge that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were a few pioneering rabbis who argued that the secular Zionists were unwittingly doing God's will in promoting a return of Jews to Palestine. The key figure who emerged in the messianic Zionist movement was Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), the chief rabbi in the British Mandate period. There was also a small number of Orthodox Jews who were neither secular nor messianic, but rather were seeking a pragmatic solution to the threats of assimilation and anti-Semitism. In 1902 they formed a small party, Mizrahi, within the larger Zionist movement under the leadership of Rabbi Isaac Joseph Reines.<sup>41</sup> But such religious Zionists were very much the exception to the general rule. In fact, before 1945 most religious Jews regarded Zionism with deep hostility, believing that only the Messiah would return the Jews to their ancestral homeland.<sup>42</sup> Thomas Kolsky maintains that even after World War II “Zionism remained a minority movement among Jews.”<sup>43</sup> After 1945 Jewish anti-Zionism was overwhelmed, and opposition to Zionism from religious Jews went into decline; even many pragmatists who had balked at the idea of a Jewish state changed their minds. In all this, it was the Holocaust that persuaded many Jews to embrace Zionism.<sup>44</sup>

The Holocaust brought about a significant change of heart on the part of many religious Jews, and their traditional anti-Zionist sentiments dissipated (but have not disappeared). Many previously hostile Jewish religious leaders came to embrace the establishment of the state of Israel. In view of the revelations of the extent of Hitler's implementation of his “final solution,” a Jewish homeland came to be seen as the only way of safeguarding world

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<sup>40</sup>Most prominent was Joseph Herman Hertz, the chief rabbi of the United Kingdom. Sykes, *Two Studies in Virtue*, 222.

<sup>41</sup>On Reines see Joshua Hovsha, “Clashing Worlds: Religion and State Dualism in Jewish Political Thought” (master's thesis, the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2015), 44–45.

<sup>42</sup>Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, 5.

<sup>43</sup>Thomas A. Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism, 1942–1948* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 16.

<sup>44</sup>Stanislawski, *Zionism*, 54.



Jewry. It is important to appreciate that this was perhaps the greatest U-turn in the history of Judaism, simply breathtaking in its significance but obscured by the narrative recently spun by many that the Zionist achievement was the expected fulfillment of traditional Jewish religious hopes. This abandonment of the traditional expectations of the Messiah led to profound disillusionment and questioning of the whole religious tradition by some Jews and led some to abandon any belief in God. The American Yiddish writer Kadya Molodowsky, who had been raised as a Zionist in Eastern Europe, expressed the profound disillusionment felt by some Jews in the opening stanzas of her poem titled “Merciful God”:

Merciful God,  
Choose another people,  
Elect another.  
We are tired of death and dying,  
We have no more prayers.  
Choose another people,  
Elect another.  
We have no more blood  
To be a sacrifice.  
Our house has become a desert.  
The earth is insufficient for our graves,  
No more laments for us,  
No more dirges  
In the old, holy books.

Merciful God,  
Sanctify another country,  
Another mountain.  
We have strewn all the fields and every stone  
With ash, with holy ash.  
With the aged,  
With the youthful,  
And with babies, we have paid  
For every letter of your Ten Commandments.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Kadya Molodowsky, “Merciful God,” in *Paper Bridges: Selected Poems of Kadya Molodowsky*, trans., introduced, and ed. Kathryn Hellerstein (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999). Used by permission.

It is important to realize that Israel's secular founders envisioned Israel as a secular state and a secularizing state. As Shalom Goldman has observed, "Political Zionism was founded and led by secular Jews, and . . . Israel's ruling elites are to this day secular."<sup>46</sup> Israel's founders wanted a home for Jews, not a homeland for Judaism. As Stanislawski comments, "Ben-Gurion and his minions were tied to a view of Jewish history based on the experience of the Jews in Europe, an expectation that once Jews were exposed to 'modernity,' they would undergo a fundamental transformation: First, they would shed their antiquated religious views and practices in favor of a new, secular worldview and style of life."<sup>47</sup>

Thus the 1948 Declaration of Independence made no mention of Israel as the divinely promised land for the Jews, although it closes with the words "With trust in Almighty God. . . ." The founders hoped the Israeli army and the government school system would work together to ensure that religious Jews coming to Israel would become like themselves—*Haskalah* Jews (or Enlightenment-oriented Jews.) This vision is captured in Naphtali Herz Imber's rousing song, a favorite of the early Zionist movement known as *Hatikvah* (Our hope), first published in 1886. In 2004 it was adopted as Israel's national anthem. *Hatikvah* projects a secular Zionist vision with no mention of God or Judaism, yet it claims the age-old longing for Jerusalem fostered by Judaism as an ethnic and cultural memory, but not as a religious one. A translation of the first stanza illustrates this:

As long as deep within the heart of a Jewish soul beats,  
And to the far reaches of the East the eye yearns for Zion,  
Our hope, the hope of two thousand years, is not lost,  
To be a free people in our land,  
The Land of Zion, Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup>

Ultra-Orthodox Jews, the Haredim, still strongly object to it. American Christian Zionists often sing it at their pro-Israel rallies, and some have incorporated it into the liturgies of their churches. Imber often acknowledged that *Hatikvah* would not have been written, except for the influence

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<sup>46</sup>Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, 3.

<sup>47</sup>Stanislawski, *Zionism*, 68.

<sup>48</sup>Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, 42.

of Laurence and Alice Oliphant, wealthy and eccentric Gentile Zionists who shared his enthusiasm.<sup>49</sup>

But the Jewish secularists' hope for Israel was not realized, for while a loss of faith happened among some Jews (especially in the West), it was not characteristic of many others. As the prophets of secularization theory have had to revise their prognostications about the eventual disappearance of religion in the modern world, so too have those secular Jews who expected that Israel would become an increasingly secular society and turn its back on traditional Jewish belief and practice. In the immediate wake of independence, Israel encouraged unlimited Jewish immigration. The immigrants from places like Iraq and Romania and from other countries that were either communist or Arab were often very devout. By and large, the wealthy (and often much more secular) Jews from North and South America, Western Europe, and Australia did not emigrate to Israel.

The influx of deeply religious Jews displaced from areas of the Arab world in the wake of the Six-Day War in 1967 and the immigration of Russian Jews since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 have contributed to a steady growth of conservative forms of Judaism in Israel (although not, ironically, of the liberal movement known incongruously as Conservative or Masorti Judaism). Concessions made by Ben-Gurion (perhaps as early as 1947) allowing the ultra-Orthodox (the Haredim) to maintain their own schools (apart from the state secular and the Orthodox Zionist systems), exempting their young men who were studying in the talmudic academies from conscription into the Israel Defense Forces, and provision of government subsidies and allowances for Jewish religious groups have set precedents that the ultra-Orthodox have capitalized on. The Chief Rabbinate, an Orthodox Jewish institution, was given great power and considerable financial resources by the government. It regulates issues of personal status such as Jewish marriage, divorce, and adoption. Its religious courts for Israeli Jews are run exclusively by Orthodox rabbis. The Chief Rabbinate has “a monopoly over *kashrut* certification for businesses dealing with food, and a monopoly over conversion to Judaism (which in Israel is also the gateway to full citizenship for immigrants.)”<sup>50</sup> The official days of rest were to be

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<sup>49</sup>On the Oliphants see Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, chap. 1.

<sup>50</sup>Tomer Persico, “The End Point of Zionism: Ethnocentrism and the Temple Mount,” *Israel Studies Review* 32, no. 1 (2017): 115.

Saturday and Jewish high holy days; food in the army and eventually in all state institutions was to be kosher.<sup>51</sup> Tensions today between secular Israeli Jews and the ultra-religious are deep and are a cause of great concern to Israeli policymakers.

Many of the early historians of Zionism were either unaware or dismissive of any significant role for Christians in Zionist history. Ironically, the established Zionist historiography has been dominated by historians who chafed at the suggestion that religion—whether Jewish or Christian—was in any way helpful in the founding of Israel. That has changed. Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly stated that Christian Zionist support was critical in founding the state of Israel in 1948. Netanyahu's view would have been tantamount to heresy to the early historians of Zionism. This book hopes to make sense of the role, the motivations, and the impact of this little-understood movement.

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<sup>51</sup>Stanislowski, *Zionism*, 71.

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