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## **Imminent Immanence of Judeo-Evangelical Nationalism**

### **American Christian Zionists and Israel as the Future Redeemer Nation and State**

For tens of millions of American evangelical Christians, the eschatology of God's plan for a Chosen People and a Chosen Landscape is essential to explaining the contemporary relationship between the United States and Israel. Time and space here merge as prophetic time manifests itself in prophetic space. Judeo-Christian nationalism lies not in America as the redeemer state, but rather in Israel as future prophetic time becomes immanent as "signs" of an imminent apocalypse are imagined to take place. The hyphenation of Judeo-Christian is key to developing a future, dualist memory territorially dividing what is "ours" and "theirs" in simplistic geopolitical divisions drawn up between Jews and Christians on the one hand, and everybody else (especially Muslims) on the other.

**I**N THIS paper I explore a parochial manifestation of the "Judeo-Christian tradition." Rather than addressing broader questions as to the term's inception, its modern cultural and political rhetorical usage, or the historical

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relations between Jews and Christians,<sup>1</sup> this paper addresses a group of Evangelicals and Pentecostals commonly referred to as American “Christian Zionists.” Numbering as many as twenty million, their size and political clout have helped redefine the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and between Israel and America.<sup>2</sup>

I instead trace how Christian Zionist identities are constructed through reference to an imagined past and allusions to a future eschatology. I argue that Israel is performed within an eschatological narrative as being on a moral ascendancy while America is in decline, thus shifting the spaces of national allegiance from America to Israel as prophetic time progresses. By including Israel as a future homeland—as part of the religious territory of the United States—Christian Zionists perform what is more accurately thought of as a “Judeo-Evangelical” identity.<sup>3</sup> Using theories of religious nationalism, I emphasize space and imaginations of the future as underdeveloped but essential elements to the modern discourse surrounding the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the final section I give a brief illustration of the ways this nationalism has been publically performed by some of its popular voices. Central to the formulation of this Judeo-Evangelical nationalism is the performative definition of a common national enemy, that of Islam, which denies the possibility of an ecumenical Abrahamic “tradition” or more pluralistic civil religiosity.

This move from American to Israeli is made possible through a sense of *imminent* geographies of *immanence*—or anticipation of a future homeland. That is, the *imminent* or impending future projection of God’s prophecy onto the earthly and profane or *immanent* world. To Christian Zionists, Jews are the Chosen People of Earth in this dispensation who reach closer to Heaven than the lay Christian by having an elect role to carry out God’s will.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Mark Silk, “Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America,” *American Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1984): 65–85 and Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 9 and John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> This is not my term, although I use it differently here to refer to this form of religious nationalism, see Zev Chafets, *A Match Made in Heaven: American Jews, Christian Zionists, and One Man’s Exploration of the Weird and Wonderful Judeo-Evangelical Alliance* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> This eschatology, often referred to as “Premillennial Dispensationalism,” was first theorized by the Anglo-Irish preacher, John Nelson Darby, in the mid-nineteenth century. He divided history into a series of prophetic “dispensations,” or epochs, which culminate at the

Similarly, Israel is once again the center of the world, brought back from its transmutation into history and the Bible, to once again be seen and idolized as sacred space.<sup>5</sup> This imminent future apocalypse suggests a national devotion to a foreign country, one that is not *theirs* but is nonetheless central to a reciprocal construction of both identity and territory. They can neither be citizens of Israel nor be part of the ethno-Jewish nation. Israel, I demonstrate, is the redeemer nation of the future.<sup>6</sup> Christian Zionists practice a particular form of diasporic or extra-territorial ethno-religious (as opposed to “civic”) nationalism that challenges notions of nationalist exclusivity.<sup>7</sup>

### Making Judeo-Evangelical Nationalism after 1967

With the Six Day War of 1967 and growing Arab hostility against Israel throughout the mid-twentieth century, Christian Zionists increasingly focused on the role of Israel within their prophetic End Times scenario. Both the establishment of Israel as a state and the Six-Day War that saw the unlikely defeat of Arab forces by a smaller Israeli army, convinced many American Evangelicals that the wheels of prophecy were moving once again.<sup>8</sup>

end of history in an event called the Rapture where all Christians are lifted to Heaven, followed by a seven-year period of “Tribulation” where the Antichrist rules the earth, the apocalypse, Christ’s return, and his millennial rule. For this series of events to begin, however, it is believed that all Jews first need to migrate to Israel and Israel needs to expand its borders to their biblical extent from the Euphrates to the Nile. It is this apocalyptic vision that is generally shared by Christian Zionists. See Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon?* (Leicester: IVP, 2004) and Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (1978; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (1968; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Concerning “extra-territorial nationalisms,” see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). On ethno-religious nationalism, see Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). On civic nationalism, see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). On civil religion, see Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1976): 1–21.

<sup>8</sup> Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); “What do we mean by ‘Judeo-Christian’?” *Religion Dispatches*, January 21, 2011, [http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/3984/what\\_do\\_we\\_mean\\_by\\_judeo-christian\\_](http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/3984/what_do_we_mean_by_judeo-christian_).

Dan Cohn-Sherbok points to America's bicentennial year, 1976, as a time when several issues coalesced to a modern form of Christian Zionism, which included the outgrowing of mainstream Protestantism, the election of southern, born-again Jimmy Carter as President, and the election of Menachem Begin as Prime Minister of Israel.<sup>9</sup> American Christian Zionism became more politically involved from the early 1980s for many reasons that culminate coincidentally at this time.<sup>10</sup> It is in part the perceived decline of American Christian values that brought single-issue value voters to the polls.

This shift is made possible by accepting an apocalyptic vision of the future and a religious adoption of Jews as legitimate biblical actors, indeed the Chosen People of Earth. Prior to the early 1970s, Evangelical imaginations of Israel and Jews were often fraught with anti-Semitism that saw Jews serving a functional role in the End Times.<sup>11</sup> It was not until American Evangelical culture became more accepting of a wider range of immigrants, ethnicities (especially Jews), and socio-economic backgrounds that a possible "Judeo-Evangelical" hyphenation blurred American Christianity with Israel and Judaism. As one recent Christian Zionist defined the historical distinction, unlike the nineteenth-century Christian pilgrims to Palestine who were "friends of the Jews," today we are "full partners in fulfilling His eternal promises to regather His beloved people."<sup>12</sup> Mike Huckabee, for example, was also quoted expressing his "Judeo-Evangelical" nationality saying, "I worship a Jew! ... I have a lot of Jewish friends, and they're kind of, like, 'You Evangelicals love Israel more than we do.' I'm, like, 'Do you not get it? If there weren't a Jewish faith, there wouldn't be a Christian faith!'" This allegiance with Israel and reverence for Jews has redefined the popular meaning of the Judeo-Christian tradition in America.

### Judeo-Christian Tradition vis-à-vis Judeo-Evangelical Nationalism

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's celebrated edited collection, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), argues that tradition is a politically motivated

<sup>9</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse: The History and Influence of Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 165.

<sup>10</sup> Steve Bruce, *The Rise and Fall of the Christian Right: Conservative Protestant Politics in America 1978–1988* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*; Naomi W. Cohen, "Antisemitism in the Gilded Age: The Jewish View," *Jewish Social Studies* 41, nos. 3/4 (1979): 187–210.

<sup>12</sup> Jürgen Bühler, "The History of Christian Zionists: An Ancient and Noble Tradition Now Flourishes," in *The Lion of Judah 2008 Feast of Tabernacles Conference Program* (Jerusalem: International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, 2008), 53.

entrepreneurial invention, most times consciously constructed through “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, that seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, not only are traditions invented, they are often modern, relying on repeated performances of narratives and representations that enter modern practice and memory concerning a place. I take issue, however, with Hobsbawm and Ranger’s use of the term “invented” because it suggests traditions are rational, manipulative, and orchestrated. I argue instead that traditions, however mythical, operate as emergent and performative forms of discourse that can be used and abused for political ends by virtue of loose networks of normative performances. While traditions may have traceable authors, the content and circulation of those traditions in cultures are under constant performative revision and are often used for purposes that are divergent from their authors’ intentions. The “Judeo-Christian tradition” is no different and was certainly overlooked by Hobsbawm and Ranger’s collection.

The term “Judeo-Christian” is often used as a tool in American electoral politics to refer to American solidarity and an imagined American history. Its use attempts to transcend exclusion and is used to mark the shared aspect of each religion, namely the Tanakh. This interpretation was suggested by Jack Hexter’s *The Judaeo-Christian Tradition*.<sup>14</sup> However, American theologian and novelist Arthur Cohen responded to Hexter’s book, “Christian and Jew divide before the same Lord; it is the sameness of the lord which establishes our connection, but it is the breach of our understanding of him that makes all use of the significant word ‘tradition’ hopelessly irrelevant.”<sup>15</sup> Cohen’s point echoes Hobsbawm and Ranger, pointing out the selective and political nature of employing the word “tradition” that acts more as a term of forgetting than of historical accuracy.

More importantly for the purposes of this paper, Cohen observes that the “myth” of the hyphenation “Judeo-Christian” is one seated in eschatological expectations. He writes, “the Judeo-Christian tradition is an eschatological myth for Christians who no longer can deal with actual history, and a historical myth for Jews who can no longer deal with the radical negations of escha-

<sup>13</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Jack H. Hexter, *The Judaeo-Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

<sup>15</sup> Arthur A. Cohen, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 66.

tology.” Christians, for Cohen, rely on Jews for redemption in an eschatological scenario where Jews are integral to the evolution of imminent prophetic developments, therefore explaining what they perceive as an immanent world of moral, political, and economic decline.<sup>16</sup> For Cohen, the Judeo-Christian “tradition” is, therefore, a modern attempt by Christians and Jews to explain historical developments as prophetic. While this is certainly not always the case, Cohen’s assessment accurately describes the Christian Zionist interest in Judaism. Cohen adds, however, that “such terms as continuity, coalescence, and relation describe the disposition of objects in space, whereas the essential character of Jewish and Christian connections is a relation of filled time, time in which events are numbered.”<sup>17</sup> I reject the “essential” temporal character Cohen attributes to each religion. By framing the “Judeo-Christian” axiom as a cultural function of time, Cohen misses how this hyphenation is held together by sacred space. In other words, the Christian Zionist performance of “Judeo-Christian” is cemented to a shared, celebrated, and revered sacred space. For tens of millions of American Christian Zionists, the eschatology of God’s plan for a Chosen People and a Chosen territory is essential to explaining the contemporary relationship. What is missing is the clear dependence of this national relationship on the *territory* of Israel.

## Territory and Apocalypse

Visions of an imminent/immanent apocalypse have provided just such binding territorial exceptionalism many times throughout history, from Munster in 1534–35 to the English Puritans who migrated to New England. The latter marks the beginnings of what historian Stephen Stein calls “the Americanization of the apocalyptic tradition.”<sup>18</sup> The Puritans serve here as a brief example of a millennial attachment to place. As Avihu Zakai explains of the Puritan reverence for America’s shores, their

attitudes towards [New England] space according to eschatology and apocalyptic visions, or according to prophetic imagination ... [led to a] desacralization of England as a sacred place in providential history, [which] reveals their goeschatologic

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, *Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition*, ix.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1992), 68n8.

and geoapocalyptic awareness that England was not elect but rather represented apostasy within the course of the history of salvation. And geoeschatolic and geoapocalyptic consciousness gives evidence as well of the sacralization of an alternative place within the eschatology and apocalyptic drama of salvation and redemption.<sup>19</sup>

Here, we can discern that England to the Puritans was, prior to migration, seen as sacred space but that sacredness was eventually moved to New England.<sup>20</sup> The New England Puritan interpretation of America's shores, as Sacvan Bercovitch succinctly argued, turned "geography into eschatology."<sup>21</sup> This illustrates how eschatological commitments have influenced the shifting of territorial allegiances.

Post-Cold War Christian Zionists are largely disillusioned with the assumption that God's divine providence is devoted to America and the search for a new terrestrial space to live out God's holy life.<sup>22</sup> Playing on Hal Lindsey's best-selling book of doom, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Mark Hitchcock for example, has entitled his recent book with a specific national focus, *The Late Great United States*. In the book, Hitchcock details the inevitable decline of the United States, the ascendant prominence of Israel, and the prophecies to be imminently fulfilled there.

Assisting this transition for Christian Zionists is the fact that their ethno-religious nationalism is committed to God. In a recent poll, 42 percent of Christians saw themselves as Christian first and American second.<sup>23</sup> As such, their love and allegiance for/to Israel is a religious commitment based on future history that sees a moral, religious, economic, and political decline in the United States and an ascendancy in these domains in Israel, culminating in the Rapture. John Hagee, for example, has often said that the "the laws

<sup>19</sup> Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 72.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>21</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 41–42.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *The Late Great United States: What Bible Prophecy Reveals About America's Last Days* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Muslims in Europe: Economic Worries Top Concerns About Religious and Cultural Identity," *Pew Research Center*, July 6, 2006, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2006/07/06/muslims-in-europe-economic-worries-top-concerns-about-religious-and-cultural-identity/>.



of God transcend the laws of the United States government and the U.S. State Department.”<sup>24</sup> In so far as the United States plays a role in this script, it is to support and protect Israel. In his 2006 book *Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World*, Hagee suggests former President George W. Bush’s support for Israel “fulfills a biblical injunction to protect the Jewish state” which is leading to “a pivotal role in the second coming.”<sup>25</sup>

Common among Christian Zionists is the assumption that dissension or criticism of Israel is synonymous with criticizing God: Israel is God’s work. For Christian Zionists, America still holds a moral voice and is respected as a homeland through civic nationalism, but America takes second place to the moral light of Israel and Jews. Israeli foreign policy is performed as infallible and inerrant while American foreign policy is sinful if it challenges Israeli policy. In other words, Israel always trumps America. William Koenig, a former third-party presidential candidate on the Christian Right, has recently published a book entitled, *Eye to Eye*, in which he argues that both Hurricane Katrina and September 11, 2001 were God’s responses to wavering American support for Israel.<sup>26</sup> Koenig argues that all major catastrophes on American soil in recent history were God’s vengeance for the US asking Israel to hammer out a peace plan with Palestine.

To give a second example of this national slippage from America to Israel, Victor Mordecai, a Messianic Jew who is well known in Evangelical circles for his adamant anti-Islamic thought, argued that “Christianity is going out of style in America in favor of ethnic diversity represented by many immigrant groups and other faiths.” There is a “fading Judeo-Christian ethic in America,” as the title of his article laments, America is in decline, then, not just economically or politically, but at its moral core. Mordecai’s perception of a decline in the “Judeo-Christian” foundation of America is centered on evidence that Muslims today outnumber Jews by four to one in America. Those who are to blame for this undercutting of America’s foundation, built by the “Pilgrims” and Founding Fathers, are those who support progressive politics. He writes, “Obama represents a synthesis of Muslim and ultra-left radical-

<sup>24</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 150.

<sup>25</sup> John Hagee, *Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World* (Lake Mary: FrontLine, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> William R. Koenig, *Eye to Eye: Facing the Consequences of Dividing Israel* (Phoenix: About Him, 2006). See also, Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 252–55.

ism of the 1960s, both of which are inimical to the values of Judeo-Christian America and Israel.”<sup>27</sup>

This territorial identification with Israel and the national ethno-religious identification with Jews is one set against a racialized exclusion of Arabs and Islam. But such acceptance is limited and continues to reject any religion outside an imagination of core civil national American values. These values are imagined and performed to be founded on Judaism and Christianity. Islam, therefore, is not accepted into this plurality.

## Conclusion

The establishment of modern Israel is read by Christian Zionists as a miracle created by the hand of God. It is considered one of the most important signs of Christ’s return since the resurrection, culminating in *imminent* end times in the *immanent* modern state of Israel. Time and space here merge as prophetic time manifests itself in prophetic space. And the hyphenation of “Judeo” and “Christian” is key to developing this future, dualist Manichean memory, that divides what is inside—“ours”—and outside—“theirs”—in often simplistic geopolitical divisions drawn up between Jews and Christians on the one hand, and everybody else (especially Muslims and the Arab world) on the other. This “Judeo-Evangelical nationalism” is important precisely because it seeks to redefine politically the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and Israel and America. As Boyer explains in his magisterial and commanding book on American Christian expectations of the apocalypse, such expectations are not merely reflections of other realities. Rather, “apocalyptic cosmologies have functioned dynamically, helping to mould political and social ideology and thus influencing the course of events.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Victor Mordecai [Avi Lipkin], “Fading Judeo-Christian Ethic in America,” *Israel Today*, no. 137 (2010): 12. For a critical exploration of this, see Jason Dittmer, “Obama, Son of Perdition? Narrative Rationality and the Role of the 44th President of the United States in the End-of-Days,” in *Mapping the End Times: American Evangelical Geopolitics and Apocalyptic Visions*, ed. Jason Dittmer and Tristan Sturm (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 73–98.

<sup>28</sup> Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 78.