

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM: PROPHECY AND PUBLIC OPINION

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In America, popular support for Israel has been persistently strong over the decades and has shown relatively little fluctuation, given the periodic crises in the US-Israeli relationship (Stember, 1966; Adams, 1982; DeBoer, 1983; Public Opinion, 1983; Martire and Clark, 1982). It is the thesis of this paper that a major factor in that support is that religious doctrine commonly called Christian Zionism.

Christian Zionism centers upon the belief that the emergence of a Jewish state in Palestine in 1948 was the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. There is a corollary assumption that that event is somehow linked to God's plan for the fulfillment of human destiny. Christian Zionism has recently come to public attention because evangelical presidents (most recently Ronald Reagan) and television evangelists (such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson) have used it to explain their support for Israeli policies. Its significance, however, goes beyond theological rationalizations for policy. It is an important aspect of American thinking, closely integrated into a unique view which Americans have of their origins and of their ultimate national destiny. It is not the theological oddity or the lunatic-fringe pathology sometimes seen by its critics. It is an important component of how Americans—especially evangelical Protestant Americans—view Israel, Jews, and their own country.

This paper will analyze Christian Zionism as a concept and as a public opinion phenomenon. The public opinion data consist of interviews with a purposive sample of 746 Michigan residents. To measure Christian Zionism respondents were asked the following question:

In 1948 Israel became a nation once again. Many people believe that that event was the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Others say that while Israel is a country governed

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by Jews, its existence has nothing to do with Biblical prophecy. Which of these points of view seems more correct to you? Is Israel the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy or is it not?

Forty-six per cent agreed with the Christian Zionist position; less than one per cent declined to answer. Analysis suggests that Christian Zionism is a mainstream phenomenon firmly rooted in those religious and cultural groups from which it historically sprang, but also transcending them. In the policy realm it is associated with social positions of a conservative nature, but is otherwise not easily classified. It is also linked to positive sentiments about Jews and Israel.

THE IDEA OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Zionism—as the word is commonly used in the political realm—is rooted in a belief that Jews are not merely a religious or ethnic group but are a national people living in temporary exile and awaiting an ultimate return to their homeland. According to one classic definition, it is a movement “looking toward the segregation of the Jewish people upon a national basis” (Jewish Encyclopedia, 1905:666; see Herzberg, 1977 for other definitions). The movement emerged in the late 1800s as the result of deteriorating Jewish security in Eastern Europe and the rise of political anti-Semitism in Western Europe. Christian Zionism predates these events by 300 years; as an organized force in America it predates the fledgling Zionist movement by about two decades. As Rausch (1978) shows, “prophecy conferences” calling for the recreation of a Jewish state were commonplace by the 1880s, at least a decade before Herzl wrote *Der Judenstaat* (1896) and two decades before there was a Jewish nationalist presence in North America.

The historic roots of Christian Zionism lie in the challenge of 16th-century West European Protestants to Catholic authority. Prior to that time, Christian perspectives on ancient Israel, the Jews, and Biblical prophecies followed Saint Augustine. Augustine believed that the Church represented the Kingdom of God, and any expectation of a coming earthly kingdom was based on misinterpretation. Contemporary Jews, in his view, were not legitimate heirs to the Hebraic tradition but were an unrepentant remnant. Biblical passages which referred to the return of the Jews to their Homeland were either directed to those Jews once living in Babylonian Exile who ultimately *did* return, or were spiritual in intent. “Israel” meant “People of God” and “returning to Israel” meant returning to the Fold of God, that is, the Church.¹

1. In *The City of God* Augustine wrote of the End of Time and of “that last persecution which is to be made by the Antichrist.” Those who claim knowledge of when this will come about “use human conjectures and bring forward nothing certain from the Canonical Scriptures” (Book 18,53). Regarding “Israel” Augustine distinguished between Spiritual Israel and carnal Israel. Of Spiritual

The Reformation changed this. Social upheaval, the emergence of capitalism, the translation of the Bible into popular tongues, and the emphasis on believer interpretation of scripture altered the way Protestants in particular viewed themselves, Jews, and the future. Luther's defiance of Rome was linked to his insistence on the Bible as the basis of authority (*sola scriptura*) and his conviction that any believer could correctly interpret scripture when inspired by the Holy Spirit (Porter, 1974). These doctrines lent themselves to a fundamentalist modification which took on faith that the words of the Bible spoke directly and literally to any believer (a doctrine sometimes called "lay biblicism"). It was inevitable that a literalist reading would be applied to the "prophecies" of Isaiah, Daniel, and Revelation, and to passages in the Epistles and the Synoptic Gospels which seem to anticipate an imminent Second Coming.

In America, the doctrine which emerged was different in certain ways from its European antecedents. While European history had seen various movements with millennial, apocalyptic, or messianic ideologies (Cohn, 1957) such movements were primarily salvationist in that they focused on the liberation of the societies of which they were a part. With American Christian Zionism the focus was not primarily on the aspirations of the originating nation, but on *Jewish* national aspirations. In other words, non-Jews came to believe that in some pre-ordained way the liberation of the Jews would be the way to their own deliverance and to the deliverance of all humanity. This is quite possibly the only case on record where the fulfillment of another nation's destiny is the center of a widespread national folk ideology.

Furthermore, in European prophetic doctrines, Jews either played an inconsequential role or were viewed in a negative light (Cohn, 1957, 1967). Jerusalem was to be liberated *from* the Jews, not *for* them. In some cases their national extinction through conversion was even seen as a step in bringing about millennial fulfillment (Sculd, 1978). Christian Zionism in contrast is ideologically philo-semitic. Jews play not only a central role but an elevated one. They are not merely religious dissidents to be tolerated but are admired as a people whose very national existence is a central event in human history. It is as if the original creation of the Jewish nation (the Abrahamic covenant) and the recreation of that nation (modern Israel) are somehow guideposts that lead humanity through time to an unfolding destiny. While other pro-Jewish movements have focused upon freeing Jews from personal or religious persecution, Christian Zionism focuses

Israel (those who accept Christ) he said, "this same people of the Gentiles is itself spiritually among the Children of Abraham, and for that reason is rightly called Israel." Carnal Israel refers to those "now unwilling to believe in Christ" (Book 18, 28). According to Augustine, Isaiah's prophecies on the future of Israel were "about Christ and the Church, that is, about the King and that city which he founded" (Book 18, 29). Prophecies regarding the Jews and their dispersion were obviously true, for they were seen in reality. But God protected the Jews from final destruction even though they were "blinded" so as to show the Church "in her enemies the Jews the grace of His compassion" (Book 18, 46).

upon liberating and restoring the Jews *as a nation*. It is a central tenet of Christian Zionism that until the Jewish nation is free, humanity will continue repeating the endless errors of history.

At first this Restorationist logic may seem inconsistent with the American myth of national origin (Bellah, 1975; Berkovitch, 1975).² Americans saw themselves as a covenant people who recapitulated in their own existence the experience of the ancient Hebrews. They were a nation created out of many nations and were welded together by a covenant with God. Like the Hebrews, they crossed a desert (the Atlantic), went into the wilderness, encountered native "Philistines," periodically apostatized from and renewed the covenant, but ultimately emerged as a world force. That this happened was not the result of "objective" factors alone (according to this interpretation), but was the result of God's blessing and the "covenant" relationship.

But this myth has not made American ideology competitive with or hostile to Jews. On the contrary Jews were seen as a special people with a parallel but not competing covenant. While they had yet to acknowledge the Messiah, their selection by God and their faithfulness to that selection gave them a unique and elevated status. In a cultural sense, American thinking was always characterized by "Hebraism," an interest in the Hebrew kingdom, its customs, its history. Americans named their children and their cities after Hebrew people and places, and Hebrew images infiltrated American speech. In the 18th century, America became the first country in the modern age where Jews were completely free from any special provisions or restrictions and in the late 19th century, when pogroms drove two and a half million Jews out of Eastern Europe, over two million came to the United States for refuge. By 1899 a national assembly of rabbis was so enamored of America's openness to Jews that one speaker declared "America is our Palestine and Washington our Zion" (Blau, 1973: 390).

This predisposition towards certain common interpretations of American and Jewish historical experience would be primarily of domestic interest were it not for changes in the world power structure. With the rise of nation states in the 1800s, re-establishing a Hebrew entity became a possibility in the minds of many people, Jews and non-Jews alike (Grose, 1983). As early as 1799, during his conquest of Palestine, Napoleon called upon the Jews of the world to join him in recreating a Jewish state (Scult, 1978:81). Fifty years later, as Europeans continued to penetrate the Middle East, Western powers sought out dissident minority peoples within the Ottoman Empire with whom they could form alliances so as to enhance their influence in the region. Armenians, Chaldeans, Jews, and Maronites were among those whose often-legitimate complaints and aspirations were used as weapons in an international power struggle (Grabill, 1971).

2. The Afrikaaners of South Africa also consider themselves inheritors of the Hebraic tradition. See DeKlerk (1976).

At the end of World War I President Wilson suggested an American protectorate over "Armenia," politically a Christian region of eastern Turkey, but extending culturally into Russia (Hovannisian, 1982). Amid much bitterness in a divided nation, the proposal was defeated by the United States Senate. After World War II, America again aligned with a minority people—this time the Jews—and in 1948 the United States became the first nation to recognize the Israeli state. This time both Congressional and public responses were positive. Although geopolitical considerations surely played a role in shaping American Middle East policy, then and now, the *de facto* US-Israeli alliance which emerged in the next three decades could not have been so successfully pursued without popular support. Post-holocaust sympathy for survivors may have been an aspect of this support for a while, but evidence suggests it was a minor factor (Stember, 1966). An explanation of American attitudes must go beyond sympathy for Nazi victims.

THE LOGIC OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

The "Eschatological Discourse," reported in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 in slightly different versions, is critical to the doctrine of Christian Zionism. In this narrative, Jesus and his disciples were visiting the Temple in Jerusalem and noting the finery of priests and worshippers. In Luke's version they had just seen a poor widow drop two coins into the offering box. Commenting on her charity, Jesus compared the riches of the spirit with the less enduring riches the world had to offer. In all three versions Jesus pointed to the majestic temple and told his disciples that a time would come when the building would be no more, when not a single stone would stand on top of another. Later some disciples came to him in private and asked "when is this going to happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3). Jesus warned them not to be deceived by those who would manipulate their faith. Such people say they know "signs" and cite "wars and rumors of wars" as evidence. Such events are not signs at all, but are the normal events of human history. Those who cite them are false prophets and their signs are false signs. The time of the coming of God is something known by "the Father only" and in any case no sign will be necessary. It will be obvious to all, "like lightening striking in the east and flashing far into the west" (Matt 25:27). There will be no advanced warning and no seer will be able to divine it.

As written, this passage seems to preclude any re-readings which would turn contemporary events into "signs." However, near the end of the Lukan Discourse Jesus refers to the liberation of Jerusalem and the end of "the time of the gentiles" (*KJV*). Those alive then will see "nations in agony . . . men dying in fear . . . they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:26-28). Jesus concluded this description with powerful words: "I tell you

solemnly, before this generation has passed away all will have taken place" (Luke 21:32).

To Christian Zionists "this generation" clearly refers to those who would see the liberation of Jerusalem in 1948 (or 1967, in some readings). The generation of prophecy is the one that would see the chief sign—the long-awaited rebirth of Israel.

There are two contemporary Americans—Hal Lindsey and the Reverend Jerry Falwell—whose views can serve as models of how Christian Zionism is sometimes presented. Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), was the top-selling nonfiction work of the 1970s. The first of several Lindsey bestsellers, it outlined in detail his interpretation of the Last Days and the role Israel would play in those events.

The Lindsey Model: Lindsey's writings represent a maximalist interpretation of prophetic texts. Many Christians accept that Jesus will return to earth in a Second Coming, that time as we know it will end, and that the peace of God will terminate the cycle of human error seen heretofore. Beyond this, there is little agreement as to exactly how these things will occur and in what sequence. Lindsey claims—along with others—that a careful reading of the Bible reveals a specific scenario of events.

According to Lindsey the "paramount prophetic sign" of the Bible is that "Israel had to be a nation again in the Land of its forefathers" (p. 33). Once this happened we began the "countdown," a ticking off of events clearly outlined over the centuries by various prophets. These events will center upon a world power struggle for control of the Middle East. They will end with a battle on the plains of Megiddo in northern Israel, a battle called Armageddon. This battle and the events surrounding it will precipitate a nuclear war, divine intervention, and the establishment of a world-wide messianic state.

Lindsey says the scriptures speak of four international coalitions which will successively invade Israel. These four power blocs are the Northern Coalition, led by Russia, an Afro-Arab bloc, led by Egypt, the Common Market Federation, led by Italy, and the Eastern Alliance, led by China. A seven-year war will see Russia destroyed by natural cataclysms, the emergence of a world government led by a leader called the Anti-Christ, the voluntary acknowledgement by 144,000 Jerusalem-based Jews that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, an ecumenical world religion, a False Prophet who will support the Anti-Christ, and the bloody destruction of the Chinese army.

A critical figure in all this is the Anti-Christ, a miraculous leader who will come to power on a wave of chaos and anarchy. His policies will initially be so beneficial that godly people will follow him on the false assumption that he represents righteousness. Ruling from Jerusalem, he will institute an integrated world economic system in which those without numerical authorization (the famous 666 code) will be denied the right to a livelihood. After seven years, Jesus

will personally lead an army against him. The Anti-Christ and the False Prophet will be killed in battle and Satan (who sponsored his rise to power) will be imprisoned. The millenium—a one thousand year reign of peace and justice—will follow.

The Falwell Model: Falwell, a staunch supporter of Israeli causes, has linked his Christian Zionist beliefs to his support for Israel. In *Listen, America!* (1980) he quotes Genesis 12:2-3 (“I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee”) as evidence that Christians are obligated to support Jews and Israel, and he affirms his belief that “God has blessed America because America has blessed the Jew” (p. 113). In discussing “That Miracle called Israel” he explains how “the Bible clearly prophesied that after more than twenty-five hundred years of dispersion, the Jewish people would return to the land of Israel and establish the Jewish nation once again” (p. 107). The Palestine Liberation Organization in contrast are “murderers” who would “blackmail” the United States into abandoning Israel, an action that would “trade her position of world leadership for a place in the history books alongside of Rome” (p. 113). On whether there is the potential for close ties between the US and the “Arab-Moslem” nations, Falwell suggests there is not because those nations “accept totalitarian values,” “deny our basic way of life,” and are “alien” to our democratic Judeo-Christian traditions (Simon, 1984:71-72). Elsewhere, he adds his belief that “Genesis 15 sets the boundaries of Israel” (Falwell, 1981: 215). Genesis 15:18-19 of course contains the following statement: “I give this land to you and your descendents from the wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the River Euphrates.” This “Nile to Euphrates” boundary would encompass much of Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt,* including the cities of Amman and Damascus.³

Presidential Viewpoints: At a presidential level, American leaders have frequently viewed Jews as a “people of the book” and have seen Jewish nationalism in that framework. Franklin Roosevelt spoke of retiring in 1948 and dedicating his life to negotiating the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine (Grose, 1983: 128-158). More recently, Jimmy Carter commented that “The establishment of the modern state of Israel is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy” (Michaelson, 1977: 3). Though Carter came from an evangelical tradition, as President he did not elaborate extensively on any Christian Zionist beliefs nor explain his policies using that framework. In his presidential memoirs, Carter did say that his Southern Baptist heritage had given him an “affinity” for Israel. “The Judeo-

*Note: The “river of Egypt” (the more common translation of Genesis 15:18-19) is often taken to designate the Nile, but “the border of Egypt is elsewhere (e.g. Num xxxiv 5; Josh xv 4, 47) demarcated by a wadi or brook (Heb. *nahal*), modern Wādi el-‘Arīsh. There is reason to assume, therefore that an original cons. *nhr* was misread in this instance as *nhr* ‘river.’ ” Anchor Bible, *Genesis* E. A. Speiser, ed. See also the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971), Vol. 6, p. 503, Ed.

3. Some Israelis still hope to expand Israel’s borders east of the Jordan River and even to the Genesis 15 limit. See Isaac (1967).

Christian ethic and the study of the Bible were bonds between Jews and Christians which had always been part of my life . . . I considered this homeland for the Jews to be compatible with the teachings of the Bible, hence ordained by God" (Carter, 1982:274).

In contrast, Ronald Reagan frequently used Christian Zionist imagery to discuss the Middle East. One comment which got much attention was made to Thomas Dine, head of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a pro-Israel lobbying body.

You know, I turn back to your ancient prophets in the Old Testament and the signs foretelling Armageddon, and I find myself wondering if—if we're the generation that's going to see that come about. I don't know if you've noted any of those prophecies lately, but believe me, they certainly describe the times we're going through (Dugger, 1984).

CRITICISMS OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

It would be a mistake to think that all conservative Christians share common interpretations of Biblical texts. There are many who accept the doctrine of the Second Coming but feel that political figures such as Falwell have become entangled in political disputes and are in danger of reducing Christianity's most sacred doctrines to justifications for secular or national policies. Carl Henry, a senior evangelical theologian, writes of Falwell's tendency to confuse Christian teaching with partisan positions. He says "the commitment on Israel should be guarded against any implication of support for 'Israel—Right or Wrong.' To insist that Israel be answerable to international justice as fully as any other state is not anti-Semitic" (Henry, 1981: 31). Wes Michaelson of the evangelical journal *Sojourners* goes even farther in his reservations. He says that "many evangelicals have unabashedly provided a theological justification for Zionism, granting divine sanction to and even glorifying the violence of modern Israel." He condemns those who suggest that "God has a vested interest in the amount of real estate controlled by the state of Israel" and bemoans the tendency to "sanctify contemporary Israeli nationalism and aggrandizement with spurious interpretations of Old Testament 'prophecy.'" He adds that "Modern Zionism is as foreign to the heart of Judaism and the biblical message as the violent schemes of the Zealots were in Christ's time" (Michaelson, 1977).

A second set of criticisms seem little more than Mencken-type assaults upon conservative Christianity itself. These frequently imply that inherent in Christian Zionism is a Dr. Strangelove-type pathology which generates a millennial-inducing madness. Such critics sometimes suggest that policy-makers who accept Christian Zionist doctrines are secretly planning to provoke nuclear war so as to hasten the millenium. Critics from this school look with horror upon references to America

as a covenant nation and link such beliefs to militant nativist or ethnic chauvinist views of the world.

An example of such a statement is that of Union Theological Seminary professor Tom Driver in *Christianity and Crisis*, a liberal Protestant journal. Mentioning Jerry Falwell by name, Driver says "there is little room for doubt that right-wing evangelical Christianity in this country is deeply anti-semitic . . . they are anti-Jew, anti-black, anti-feminist, anti-communist, and anti-Third World." It is also a "great and frightening irony" that "the most pro-Israeli group in American Christianity is also the most anti-Semitic." To Driver, the reason for this is clear if one looks at how Falwell and others see Jews and Israel. To them, being pro-Jewish means

they would be glad to convert any Jew to Christianity. They do *not* mean that they like Jews as neighbors or that they believe them to be equal under God. They *do* mean that it is Israel's providential role to protect American interests. Israel is viewed by them as an instrument of America's manifest destiny. By this sort of Christian *realpolitik* the Jews are to be kept in their place and used for an end not of their own but that of a zealous, fanatical and self-righteous Christian mission which cannot tell the difference between Jesus Christ and the American nation. This bigotry proposes a marriage of convenience with a certain kind of Zionism—a kind which cannot tell the difference between Yahweh and the state of Israel (Driver, 1980:325+).

Comments of this type have also been directed to the presidential level. Ronald Reagan's conversation with Thomas Dine, for example, provoked journalist Ronnie Dugger to ask in the *Washington Post* whether Reagan, "almost all-powerful on questions of war, peace and 'pushing the button'—is personally predisposed by fundamentalist theology to expect some kind of Armageddon beginning with a nuclear war in the Middle East . . . If a crisis arises in the Middle East and threatens to become a nuclear confrontation, might President Reagan be predisposed to believe that he sees Armageddon coming and that this is the will of God? Might his religious beliefs affect his willingness to use nuclear weapons?" (Dugger, 1984). Later that year in a presidential debate, NBC correspondent Marvin Kalb linked US defense policy to President Reagan's religious beliefs in the following question: "You've been quoted as saying that you do believe deep down that we are heading for some kind of biblical Armageddon. Your Pentagon and your Secretary of Defense have plans for the United States to fight and prevail in a nuclear war. Do you feel that we are now heading, perhaps, for some kind of nuclear Armageddon? And do you feel that this country and the world could survive that kind of calamity?" (NYT, 10-22-84:A24).⁴

A third set of reactions come from the Jewish community. Jewish leaders have been warm to pro-Israeli sentiments but some have expressed concern about

4. Martin (1982:35-36) raises the specter of a prophecy-believing politician or general who might "regard his finger on the button as an instrument of God's eternal purpose."

possible anti-Jewish impulses inherent in the doctrine. Perhaps the sharpest statement of this type came from Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and a prominent figure in Reform Judaism. Schindler suggested a link between Christian Zionism and acts of violence against Jews. Speaking from a California pulpit, he referred to Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson by name and said it was

no coincidence that the rise of rightwing Christian fundamentalism has been accompanied by the most serious outbreak of anti-semitism in America since the end of the Second World War . . . When the head of Moral Majority demands a 'Christian Bill of Rights' . . . there should be no surprise at reports of synagogues destroyed by arson and Jewish families terrorized in their homes. We who love Israel seek allies among all Americans. But we cannot be blind to the fact that the deepest reasons for backing given to Israel by evangelical fundamentalists are theologically self-serving. They believe Jesus cannot return for the second coming until the Jews are regrouped in their biblical homeland and then converted to Christianity. They believe further that even devout Jews are not welcome in heaven. So let us welcome all those committed to Israel's security and survival. But let us not deceive ourselves as to the reasons for their support (*JTA*, November 24, 1980).

Schindler's remarks produced a storm of reaction from other Jewish leaders. Rabbi Abraham Hecht, President of the Rabbinical Alliance of America, an Orthodox body, called the comments "scurrilous and inane" (*JTA*, November 28, 1980). Nathan Perlmutter of the Anti-Defamation League added that "there are good Christians and bad Christians, good Jews and bad Jews. To hear some of the talk lately we'd also have to say there are foolish Christians and foolish Jews" (*ibid.*).

A different Jewish perspective comes from Irving Kristol in *Commentary*, published by the American Jewish Committee. Kristol fears that if a crisis occurred in the Middle East the American public might hesitate to commit troops. He suggests that Jews work out an alliance of expediency with the New Religious Right to counter such sentiments. According to Kristol "the support of the Moral Majority could, in the near future, turn out to be decisive for the very existence of the Jewish state. This is the way the Israeli government has struck its own balance vis-a-vis the Moral Majority, and it is hard to see why American Jews should come up with a different bottom line" (Kristol, 1984:25).

A third Jewish viewpoint came from Rabbi Arthur Herzberg, former President of the American Jewish Congress. Herzberg fears that Christian Zionists might ultimately move to expell the Jews from America and says that as a Jew he is "not cheered by the support for Israel expressed by some of the major figures of the new right." He says many Nazis were pro-Zionist in the 1930s and that such sentiments can quickly turn against Jews. Traditionally Christians who "have been certain that the end of days is near or that they could at least help it to come about, have imagined that helping the Jews go to the Holy Land was the preamble

to the Second Coming and the conversion of the Jews." To such people "The Jews belong in the Holy Land—and not in America" (Herzberg, 1981).

An Assessment of Criticisms

It is easy for someone outside the evangelical tradition to misunderstand Christian Zionism. Its roots lie deep in cultural assumptions not easily comprehended by an outsider. But putting aside misunderstandings, it appears that those who are hostile to conservative Christianity sometimes use exaggerated misinterpretations of the doctrine to defame and discredit those who come from that tradition. Jimmy Carter was subjected to attacks of this type, as was Ronald Reagan, and as are others.

David Rausch, an academic specialist on conservative Christian traditions, has questioned some of these criticisms and especially the hypothesis that Christian Zionism is anti-Jewish. He suggests that the commitment to evangelization (frequently cited by critics) is modified by two additional doctrines: premillennialism (a belief that the course of history is in the hands of God, not humans) and an understanding that Jews will return to Israel in "unbelief." Thus Christians are obligated to present the gospel to Jews out of love of the Jews, but their conversion will only come in totality when the Messiah appears and they (along with all other peoples) finally acknowledge him.

According to this view, the Jewish people would return and strengthen the nation of Israel in *unbelief*. The Fundamentalist believed that the large majority of the Jewish people would not accept Jesus as Messiah *until* he returned. Thus, seeing the Messiah in person would change the majority of the Jewish community's mind according to this particular view, not evangelism or any other ploy. Therefore, the Fundamentalist was obligated to *tell* the message, but was not to *force* the message upon the Jewish people . . . biblical literalism was crucial here as well . . . The Bible told him that God had not forsaken the Jewish people and that God had a special place for his people in his plan of the future . . . The early Fundamentalist's view of the Bible led him: to support evangelism *and* to support Jewish peoplehood; to believe in the Second Coming of Christ *and* to believe in the right of the Jewish people to possess Palestine. One may not agree with the logic of such support and yet the support is there (Rausch, 1981:145).⁵

In his book on prejudice, Allport explains the logic of negative stereotyping by describing a conversation between an anti-Jewish bigot and another person. The bigot comments that Jews only think about themselves and money. The other person questions whether that can be true since Jews give so much to charity. The

5. Neuhaus (1985:45) suggests the end-of-time conversion of the Jews be seen in the following way: "Jews will be fulfilled in their Jewishness in welcoming their long-awaited messiah, who will turn out to be Jesus of Nazareth."

bigot's answer is simple: that shows how tricky they are in trying to buy favor (Allport, 1958: 13-14).

A similar logic sometimes seems at work among those hostile to conservative Christians. When such Christians question or criticize Israeli policy it is because they are secretly anti-Semitic and are attacking Israel as a means of covertly attacking all Jews. When they support Israeli or Zionist policies, it is because in their anti-Semitism they look to the millenium when Jews will be driven from America and will be forced to abandon their faith. Given such logic all evidence supports a conclusion, even contradictory evidence.

To understand the role Christian Zionism plays in America and the impact it has on American thinking we must proceed in a cautious scientific manner that puts aside polemical assaults, misunderstandings, bizarre statements by fringe personalities, and self-serving interpretations by those with ulterior political motives. The remainder of this paper is quantitative and the method of analysis is that of the empiricist. The focus is upon clearly-stated, testable hypotheses and upon survey data, which either support or refute those hypotheses. To the author's knowledge, this is the first effort to define Christian Zionism empirically and to examine it as an aspect of public opinion.

WHO ARE THE CHRISTIAN ZIONISTS?

Public opinion studies consistently single out religio-cultural identity as a key factor in structuring attitudes towards Jews and Israel. According to these studies, conservative Protestants (those who consider themselves evangelical or Born Again) tend to be more supportive of Israel than other groupings. They are followed in declining order by mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Blacks (DeBoer, 1983; Martire and Clark, 1982; Schneider, 1978). Attitudes toward Jews show a somewhat different pattern (Rosenfield, 1982; Martire and Clark, 1982; Quinley and Glock, 1979; Schneider, 1978; Glock and Stark, 1969; Stember, 1966). Pro-Jewish sympathies are strongest among mainline white Protestants, followed by Catholics; conservative Protestants are less positive, and Blacks are least supportive of all.

Our initial expectation based on these empirical studies is that Christian Zionism will have a religio-cultural base, for, as Schneider says, "sympathy for Israel does have religious roots in American society" (p. 109). The doctrine should be linked to Protestantism, especially to Protestants of the conservative tradition. This expectation is supported by our data in Table 1. Within our sample, Protestants are 22 percentage points more likely than Catholics to accept a prophetic interpretation of the events of 1948, even though 35 per cent of all Catholics are also Christian Zionists.

A further breakdown into evangelical Protestant, non-evangelical Protestant, Catholic, and Black reveals a more complex pattern, however. Acceptance of

Table 1: *The Christian Zionists.*

	Per cent who are Christian Zionist*	Is the difference significant?***
Religion		
Protestant	57	
Catholic	35	yes
Consider self Born Again		
Yes	77	
No	33	yes
Consider self evangelical		
Yes	69	
No	35	yes
Cultural group		
Catholic	32	
Non-Evangelical Protestant	35	
Evangelical Protestant	68	
Black	78	yes

*Based on response to the question posed on pages 224-5.

**Chi Square is used throughout to test significance.

Christian Zionism is significantly higher among white, self-identifying evangelicals than among Catholics or non-evangelical Protestants, who are nearly identical in their support levels. Blacks are the most Christian Zionist of all, reflecting the Protestant-evangelical-southern influence which pervades Black religious culture.

Politically the patterns are mixed (Table 2). Christian Zionism is not significantly linked to ideological self-classification, to vote patterns, or to degree of like or dislike for partisan personalities such as Lyndon Johnson, Walter Mondale, or Ronald Reagan. However, it *is* linked to two items that might be called New Religious Right, specifically to support for political candidates who make religious appeals and to above average support for Jerry Falwell. Regarding Falwell, it is important to note that while 73 per cent of Christian Zionists overall have neutral or negative feelings towards this controversial personality, 27 per cent *do* support him and that is 2½ times the level among non-Zionists. Clearly the fact that Falwell is a Christian Zionist should not be simplistically interpreted to mean that Christian Zionists are also Falwellians. On the contrary, this and subsequent data seem to support the thesis that Christian Zionism is a cultural theme that cuts across political groupings.

In a different vein, two religious-type variables—belief in the creation story and evaluation of Billy Graham—are also significant. Neither should be surprising. Belief in the creation story is similar to Christian Zionism in that both take a literalist approach to Biblical texts. Likewise, the widely-respected Graham—a political moderate and sometime critic of Falwell—is a prominent mainstream

Table 2: *Christian Zionism and the Public Arena.*

	Per cent affirmative		Is the difference significant?
	CZ	Not CZ	
Political Items			
Identify self as conservative	39	35	no
Voted for Reagan in 1980	51	56	no
Planned to vote for Reagan in 1984	50	48	no
LBJ Scale*	30	26	no
Mondale Scale*	26	25	no
Reagan Scale*	61	58	no
Religious-type items			
Falwell Scale*	27	11	yes
Graham Scale*	55	35	yes
Would support religious-talking candidate	46	21	yes
Believe creation story	72	38	yes

*Reported is the per cent who responded positively (5-7) when asked to place individuals on an Evaluation Scale of 1-7.

evangelist who frequently writes and speaks of Biblical prophecy (Graham, 1981). It is logical that his theology would endear him to Christian Zionists of all political persuasions.

Some Common Hypotheses

The earlier discussion suggested certain common hypotheses about Christian Zionists. We can state these hypotheses in a formal, testable manner as follows:

- H1: Christian Zionists are anti-Black.
- H2: Christian Zionists are anti-Catholic.
- H3: Christian Zionists are anti-Jewish.
- H4: Christian Zionists are anti-Arab.
- H5: Christian Zionists are militaristic.
- H6: Christian Zionists anticipate a coming nuclear war.

Table 3 examines hypotheses one through four (five and six are examined later). It is clear that there is no support for either hypothesis one or hypothesis two. White respondents who accept and those who reject Christian Zionism are essentially indistinguishable where attitudes to Catholics and Blacks are concerned.

On Jewish and Israeli issues the pattern is more complex. Christian Zionists, compared with the remainder of the sample, are moderately more pro-Jewish

Table 3: *Christian Zionism and Cultural Preferences (whites only).*

	Per cent affirmative		Is the difference significant?
	CZ	Not CZ	
Black Issues			
Blacks Scale*	39	35	no
M. L. King Scale*	64	60	no
End busing now	74	73	no
Integrate schools	50	56	no
Catholic Issues			
Catholics Scale*	62	52	no
John Paul II Scale*	61	60	no
Jewish-Israeli Issues			
Jews Scale*	50	39	yes
Israel Scale*	43	24	yes
Arabs Scale*	18	16	no
PLO Scale**	5	6	no

*Reported is the per cent who responded positively (5-7) on an Evaluation Scale of 1-7.

**Sympathy for the PLO is very low. Comparable 4-7 totals (thus including "neutrals" are 25 and 27.

($p = .02$) and noticeably more pro-Israeli ($p = .0000$). This is consistent with the finding of Rausch that conservative Christians have in their culture positive attitudes towards Jews as a people. It is, however, somewhat at variance with those empirical studies which have found conservative Protestants more anti-Jewish than average. If the findings in this study are valid, and if previous empirical studies are also correct, then this table seems to suggest that conservative Protestant self-identity and Christian Zionist views do not entirely overlap. (Remember that in Table 1, 32 per cent of evangelical Christians rejected Christian Zionism and 35 per cent of Catholics accepted it). The absence of negative effect for Arabs and the PLO also suggests that support for the doctrine is not primarily rooted in an orientation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁶

Given the apparent difference between how respondents see Israel and Jews, I would suggest the following explanation: many Americans know Jews from their personal acquaintance. Because of this a multitude of factors shape their views. Religious ideology would be one such factor but others—ethnicity, region, class— might be equally important. Christian Zionism thus may explain some, but not much, of the attitudes toward Jews.

Attitude toward Israel, however, operates on a different level. Few Americans know Israel in a personal sense. For most, Israel is an abstraction, something

6. Slade (1981) discusses American attitudes towards Arabs. The reader should remember that most interviews in the present study were done in the Detroit area where there are substantial Jewish and Arab populations.

in the Bible or something in the news. In this case, where evaluation is detached from experience, Christian Zionism plays a much more significant role in shaping opinion. Simply put, for Americans influenced by a Christian Zionist perspective, opinion of Israel may have little to do with present-day Israel. "Israel" becomes an abstraction not necessarily connected to the Israeli state, its policies, or its characteristics. When asked about specific issues (policy on the West Bank or treatment of Palestinians, for example) public opinion shows a predictable range of pro and con sentiments, linked to the overarching dimensions of which these specific issues are logically a part. Thus, those who favor a US arms buildup tend to favor military aid to Israel and those who have doubts about US involvements overseas tend to have doubts about an inordinate US involvement with Israel. But when the question does not deal with specifics but focuses on "Israel" versus "the Arabs" (as is frequently the case in both public opinion polls and public debate) then we move into the realm of myth and metaphor and elicit a response pattern which does not necessarily reflect preferences on specific narrower issues.

One can only speculate on how American opinion would be different if in 1948 Zionist leaders had called their state Judea. As it is, the name Israel almost exempts the state from the need to be evaluated, since for many its territorial claims and its dominant position are presumed to be natural. In a sense, the "Israel" of prophecy and the Israel of reality operate on separate dimensions. Christian Zionists support "Israel" without holding other positions that would logically go with such a commitment; this was seen in Table 3 by the fact that Christian Zionism was not statistically linked to hostility for the reputed enemies of Israel, the Arabs and the PLO.

Christian Zionism and the American Nation

This article is part of a wider study of the New Religious Right and the Falwell ideology. A previous paper from that study found a cluster of nine beliefs and policy preferences that seem to constitute an integrated political ideology that might be described as New Religious Right.⁷ While Christian Zionism is one of the nine, it exhibits a high level of statistically erratic behavior relative to the other eight. Its locational profile is conservative but not New Right.

Table 4 shows that Christian Zionists hold a view of America different in critical ways from the direction society has been moving over the past few

7. The nine items showed high association with the 1-7 Falwell Evaluation Scale. The average gamma of Christian Zionism with the other eight items was an exceptionally low .15. The eight additional items are the following: Husband/father leadership; favor or oppose Equal Rights Amendment; men and women should be drafted into military service on an equal basis; the government should give a tax break to parents who send their children to religious or private schools; homosexuals should be allowed to hold any job, even in the schools; abortion position; response to candidate who speaks of God; creation story literalism. The full analysis is reported in Stockton (1985).

Table 4: *Christian Zionism and the American Nation.*

Dimension/Item	Per cent affirmative by whether respondents are. . .		Is the difference significant?
	CZ	Not CZ	
America's Nature			
America has unique destiny	93	84	yes
America must be good to be great	77	65	yes
There is a danger of soulless leaders	58	45	yes
There is a danger of moral weakness	73	60	yes
America & the World			
USSR threat to world peace	87	86	no
USA threat to world peace	40	52	yes
Military strong enough to defend US	52	54	no
Increase defense budget	22	19	no
Fear nuclear war	41	33	yes (weak)
Family Issues			
Father should lead family	57	41	yes
Favor fulltime mother	89	78	yes
Concern about divorce rate	73	56	yes
Support spanking	77	64	yes
Crime Issues			
Favor maximum penalty	86	76	yes
Favor death penalty	71	74	no
Social Welfare			
Cut programs	51	51	no
Jobs now exist for all	56	52	no
Guarantee medical care	19	18	no
Taxes on the rich too high	25	26	no
Socio-Moral Issues			
Favor easy abortion law	47	57	yes
Favor homosexual job rights	55	63	yes

decades. If these findings are correct, then the significance of Christian Zionism goes beyond the assertion of a traditional religious folk dogma. Let us summarize what this table shows about Christian Zionists:

They have a "covenant" view of America's existence. They believe that America is unique among nations, and that it has a special obligation to pursue "righteous" policies domestically and to serve as a "light unto the nations" in the international arena. While they view US involvement overseas benevolently they do not support the military buildup which would facilitate that involvement. Rather they feel that America's influence is rooted in its moral strength, and fear that that moral strength has been eroded by ineffective leadership and internal weakness.

They are slightly but not dramatically more concerned about the danger of nuclear war within their lifetimes.

They are committed to preserving the family as an institution and are concerned about the high divorce rate; they believe fathers should assume responsibility for family leadership and that children should have careful motherly supervision during their formative years; they believe that parents have a responsibility for disciplining and punishing children.

They are concerned about neighborhood safety and favor strict punishment for those who assault homes or families. They are not disproportionately supportive of the death penalty.

They are not inordinately concerned about or indifferent to welfare programs, health care programs, or unemployment issues. Again it is worth noting that these items are linked in the wider study to the New Religious Right ideology.

They are not more or less sympathetic than other Americans with the tax burdens of the rich. Since this is a fundamental New Religious Right concern its non-significance here reinforces the earlier suggestion that Christian Zionism is only a peripheral aspect of that ideology.

They are concerned about abortion but are only mildly more conservative than average on homosexual issues. These are two of the most volatile and intensely-felt socio-moral issues in America today. Both are key components of the New Religious Right ideology defined in the broader study.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis suggests that Christian Zionism—while associated in certain peripheral ways with the New Religious Right—deviates in major respects from that movement. It is particularly significant that while the New Religious Right is a partisan political movement, Christian Zionism is more a mainstream cultural theme linked to American self-identity and to perception of America as a moral community. It is definitely not the pathological perspective of an extremist fringe, as sometimes portrayed by its detractors. While Christian Zionism is disproportionately associated with the evangelical Christian base from which it historically sprang, the survey data indicate that it transcends these origins and has support in all religious, ideological, and political strata.

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